

Italian radical social movements 1968-78

A critical study of sociological accounts of the politics of radical
social movements in Italy

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical study of contemporary sociological accounts of the politics of radical social movements (RSMs). The study of this class of movement was revitalised by the general political and cultural upheaval across western democracies at the end of the 1960s, and remains relevant now in what is characterised as a movement society. The classical Anglo-American agenda post 1968 was to repopulate the territory of modern politics with a strategic and reasonable radical subject, specifically, one explicable within a framework of political rationalism; however, I contend that two fundamental properties of RSMs complicate this sociological project. Firstly, the practice and theory of radical communities disturb the existing order of society and politics. They exist in a space that is marginal to the political community. They act outside the established standards of behaviour and transgress the conventional limits of representation. Secondly, in so doing, these radical communities undermine the prevailing discourses on the connection of the radical community to politics. That is, RSMs disturb social order *and* the discourses that have that order as their object; therefore, I argue that a consequence of deploying a rationalist framework to model collective action is the effacing of the difference and specificity essential to the radical subject. My hypothesis, then, is that the politics of RSMs (the practice and theory of radical communities) are inexplicable through the aspect of instrumental rationality that indelibly marks contemporary sociological studies, in particular Anglo-American social movement theory (SMT). I defend this thesis in two main ways.

Firstly, I engage the sociological accounts of RSMs in a case study of the Italian social movements 1968-78. This sector involved a diverse field of radical communities including those of the worker, student, counter-culture, and women. Unlike the trajectory of the events associated with 1968 in other western democracies, the Italian situation lasted for over a decade and involved unprecedented levels of political violence. Through the case study I review two established social movement theories, SMT (particularly the work of della Porta and Tarrow) and New Social Movement Theory (NSMT, Melucci), and engage critically with Italian radical thought (IRT, Bologna, Berardi, Negri, and Tronti). I utilise their respective efforts to repatriate the radical community to politics after the tumult of the 1960s, to diagnose and evaluate the rationalist framework in the sociological study of radicalism. The case study facilitates an inquiry into contemporary sociological thought on the nexus of politics and the radical community in western democracies and its implications for explicating the radical subject of the Italian social movements 1968-78.

Secondly, I show that attention to recent movements in European philosophy, against the instrumentalist deficit and identitarian vision of sociological discourse, helps elucidate the logic of politics in the 'age of social movements.' To this end, I will discuss a contemporary aesthetic theory of social movements (Rancière). The intent of this engagement is to show how an alternative way of understanding the formation of a radical community can be put forth that retains essential characteristics of the radical subject (particularity and difference) and respects the epistemological work of this community. I will also outline the limits of such an approach for the analysis of political movements.

Declaration

I, Mark Howard, declare that this thesis contains no material previously accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, this document contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis.

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Abbreviations

AM: Autonomist Marxism

AO: *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers Vanguard)

BR: *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades)

CPM: *Collettivo Politico Metropolitano* (Metropolitan Political Collective)

DC: *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democrats)

FGCI: *Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana* (Italian Communist Youth Federation)

GAP: *Gruppi d'Azione Partigiana* (Partisan Actions Groups)

IRT: Italian radical thought

LC: *Lotta Continua* (The Struggle Continues)

MI: *Indiani Metropolitani* (Metropolitan Indians)

NSM: New social movement

NSMT: New social movement theory

OWA: Organised workers autonomy

PL: *Prima Linea* (Front Line)

PO: *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power)

PCI: *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party)

POS: Political opportunity structure

PPT: Political process theory

PSI: *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party)

RAT: Rational actor theory

RMT: Resource mobilisation theory

SMO: Social movement organisation

SMT: Anglo-American social movement theory

SP: *Sinistra Proletaria* (Proletarian Left)

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Introduction

A social movement is not the movement of a sociological group. It is the movement of subjects, of people who try to find or apprehend an identity as fighters through the very dismissal of their sociological identity, the identity given to them by a social order.¹

Rancière – *The Identity in Question*

During the first half of the twentieth century, interactionism and an image of an irrational activist motivated through deviance or psychopathology guided much of the study of social movements. The resultant marginalising of movement participants was based upon the image of the activist as defective and collective behaviour as outside of reason. Historically, this stream of collective behaviour theory has its beginnings in the protectionist task of the social sciences, born of the work of Gustave Le Bon whose theorising on social action was more a tool of governance than a model of collective action.² However, during a period of social foment in the 1960s, typified by the rise of left-libertarian movements, the dividing line between theorist and activist, intellectual and movement, was often blurred. This generated an empathetic response within the social sciences toward the radical agents at the centre of the events of 1968, such as those of France's May and Italy's *Sessantotto*. Consequently, the field of social movement study shifted away from the protectionist model of collective behaviour that represented the radical community as acting outside the sphere of politics and as irrecoverable to the political community.

While the Italian social movement activity in the second half of the 1960s had similarities to that of social movements in other western democracies, it also stood alone in its level of collective action, intensity, violence, creativity, and longevity.³ As such, the distinctiveness of the Italian situation has particular significance in the sociological discipline of social movement theory, raising questions about how high risk activism was justified and defended by its agents. In Italy, innovative forms of practice and theory, alongside collective violence and the paradoxical practice of 'voluntary marginality', typified a movement sector embodied by a class of movements that railed against the standard place of social movements in politics.⁴ The movements that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in Italy challenged the cogency of the existing analytic frameworks, proving irreducible "to mere variations of the known

¹ This quote is from a discussion at the symposium on multiculturalism and political correctness in New York in 1991 that formed the basis of the collected work, John Rajchman, ed. *The Identity in Question* (London: Routledge, 1995), 87-88.

² McPhail and Tucker provide a concise history of the collective behaviour approach in Clark McPhail and Charles W Tucker, "Collective Behaviour," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 722-723. The key monograph of Le Bon, one of the most influential early works of social psychology, was Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002). Originally published in 1895.

³ For a historical account of this sector, beyond the social theory descriptions that form the body of this thesis, I have relied upon the widely respected work of Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴ Voluntary marginality (for example in the abandoning of the 'official left' and the new proletarian practices such as the 'refusal of work' that separated them from the workers' movement) was an unexpected response to oppression and subordination. Marginality, classically, was a label for the victim of exploitation, not for the radically progressive or politically active.

forms of collective action.”⁵ This has continually prompted the question, ‘Why Italy,’⁶ a query that resonates and persists across universes of thought and disciplinary discourses.

As the polarisation of the political climate faded, the theorists’ empathy translated most prominently into the ascendance of rational choice frameworks of Anglo-American social movement theory (SMT), and into the ‘classical agenda’ of research. The overarching intent was to repopulate the territory of modern politics with a strategic and reasonable radical subject, specifically, one identifiable and explicable within a framework of political rationalism.⁷ Consequently, instrumental rationality, identity, and a politico-institutional sphere provide the invariant core of SMT discourses on the politics of radical social movements (RSMs). The three key aspects of this approach are: firstly, the rational actor invariably populates the territory of modern politics; secondly, social movements are analysed as identitarian, forming around the development of a shared identity with a sense of common purpose⁸ and thirdly, the political dimension of the practice and theory of the radical community discharges *within* the dynamics of social aggregation, building a stronger consensus. The modernist vision of this paradigm is of a political system progressively improved by the presence of social conflict.⁹

The essentially identitarian and instrumentalist framework of SMT rationalises dissent as a mechanism *of* politics. I contend that two fundamental properties of RSMs confound this sociological model. Firstly, the practice and theory of the radical community disrupts the existing order of society and politics. That is, RSMs exist in a space that is marginal to the political community. They act outside the established standards of behaviour and transgress the conventional limits of representation. Secondly, in so doing these movements interrupt established thought on the nexus of the radical community and politics. That is, RSMs disrupt social order *and* the discourses that have that order as their object. Therefore, in the rush to naturalise the radical subject, giving it an identity, assigning it a task, and designating its time and place within contemporary society, theories of social movements submerge the specificity of marginalised groups beneath identitarian, rationalist, and structuralist aspects of social action. The outcome is that the prevailing sociological models of the ‘movement society’, which attempt to *organise* or *politicise* the radical community as a political actor, efface the difference and particularity essential to that community.

This thesis is a critical study of contemporary sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs. It defends the hypothesis that radical politics (the practice and theory of radical communities) are inexplicable through the aspect of instrumental rationality that indelibly marks contemporary sociological studies, in particular SMT. I formulate my position in two main ways. Firstly, I engage SMT, New Social Movement Theory (NSMT), and Italian radical thought (IRT) in a case study of the Italian RSMs 1968-78. The

⁵ Alberto Melucci, "Frontier Land: Collective Action between Actors and Systems," in *Studying Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and R Eyerman (London: Sage, 1992), 239.

⁶ This question has come to represent both the dismay at the terminus of social action during the 1960s and 1970s in political violence, and the treatment of this movement sector as historically anomalous.

⁷ This is the classic agenda of SMT, to hold stable the category of the radical actor to allow its repatriation to western democracies. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2001), 17.

⁸ Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 21; Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981).

⁹ This notion is patent, for example, in the research of Tarrow, an avowed consensus theorist. He judges social protest successful when it strengthens democracy and broadens the political community. The definitive work for reference is Sidney G. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). The introduction to chapter 2 of this thesis highlights this aspect of his work.

practice and theory of this social movement sector presented a unique challenge to sociology, creating an aftershock felt across the range of models employed to explicate social movement radicalisation. I utilise the respective efforts of SMT, NSMT and IRT to repatriate the radical community to politics after the tumult of the 1960s, to diagnose and evaluate the rationalist framework in the sociological study of radicalism. This facilitates an inquiry into contemporary sociological thought on the nexus of politics and the radical community in western democracies and its implications for explicating the marginal communities of the Italian situation.

Secondly, I show that attention to recent movements in European philosophy, against the 'instrumentalist deficit' and 'identitarian vision' of sociological discourse, helps elucidate the mechanics of politics in the 'age of social movements.' To this end, I will discuss Jacques Rancière's 'aesthetic theory' of social movements. Rancière's perspective suggests an alternative understanding of the development of a radical community that retains the nascent sense of formation that is lacking in sociological treatments of collective action. I will argue firstly that this perspective offers a different historical conceptual elaboration of the nexus of politics and the radical community, and, secondly, that it provides a unique response to the contemporary demands placed on political theory that reaches beyond the reasons and explanations of sociology.

1. A critical study of sociological accounts of the politics of radical social movements

SMT defines RSMs as those movements that utilise unorthodox and *illegitimate* means to influence the political institution by rupturing the boundary of legality and negotiation typical to social movement dissent. This class of movement took on greater significance for the field of social movement studies after the general political and cultural upheaval across western democracies at the end of the 1960s.¹⁰ While the fervour of the 1960s faded, social movements, Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani write, "have become a permanent component of western democracies," a 'conventional' element of the 'normal functioning' of society.¹¹ SMT's account of activism builds from the presupposition that social agents are guided by instrumental reasoning, which, deferring to the classical notion of rationality, is focused on the best means of achieving a contingent end. Therefore, SMT's 'strategy-oriented' modelling of the processes and conditions of social movement *radicalisation* concentrates on how collective actors do things with the available resources. SMT connects social movements to the political process, and in doing so roots RSMs within the institutions of the political system. Sidney Tarrow, a leading exponent of SMT and expert on the Italian situation, argues that the power of collective action depends upon the "strategic position of protesters within institutions (...)."¹² As such, the disruptive, disorderly, and innovative activities of marginalised communities are theorised as means to gain voice

¹⁰ A good introduction to the influence of the upheavals of the late 60s upon the field of social movement study is Nick Crossley, *Making Sense of Social Movements* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002). More specific to the Anglo-American stream is the highly regarded J. Craig Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983). This article provides extensive referencing to similar material. For the effect upon the European frame, typified by NSMT, see Steven M Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1995). Finally, Cleaver's work on the revival of Marxism during this period is a useful text for understanding the radical thought of Italian revolutionary politics. See Harry Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, First ed. (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979). See in particular the section on 'Autonomist Marxism', especially pages 51-63.

¹¹ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 1-2. This text is regarded as one of the most thorough single volumes on the field of contemporary social movement studies.

¹² Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 345.

and achieve *visibility* through *persuasion* or *coercion*, attracting public attention, which, when successful, activates the support of organisations within the political arena.¹³

The project of SMT – to substantiate the role of social movements in the ‘proper’ functioning of society – appears inadequate to the explicating of the range of conditions and processes associated with radical politics. This is evident in the collapsing of the multi-faceted Italian movement sector of the 1970s into the singular form of political violence, a purported outcome of the decline of social movement organisations (SMOs). The rationalist framework that dominates the effort to repatriate the radical subject to modern politics, part of the attempt to normalise the study of social movements, comes at an unacceptable cost to our understanding of the nexus of politics and the radical community. The theoretical reserve of this approach occurs at the expense of ‘something else’, namely, the difference and particularity of the radical subject.¹⁴

On one hand, modesty in our theories of RSMs risks forgoing the marked difference and non-homogeneity of this community, replacing it with custom. This escalates the significance of the banal or cliché of radical action, firstly by restricting analysis of RSMs to their contribution to the modernisation of the politico-institutional sphere, and secondly by comparing radicalism with conventional political engagement. This holds the radical subject in a strategic relationship to the political system and state apparatus. On the other hand, modesty risks conflating RSMs with other marginal communities, such as the extremist, fundamentalist, terrorist, and so on. When gathered together beneath the umbrella term of ‘radical’, with its specificity homogenised in the notion of its being culturally unsanctioned (illegitimate), the result is indifference toward the particular practices and theories of the radical subject. Reduced to ‘blatant generalities’ and a set of indistinct or abstract processes, radicalism equally designates other communities alienated from the political solidary.¹⁵

Alain Touraine, representative of the theoretical shift post ‘68 in the European paradigm of social movement study (NSMT), argued: “the concept of social movement is useful when it helps one to rediscover social actors (...) buried beneath either structural Marxist or rationalist theories of strategies and decisions.”¹⁶ Marxism and Functionalism, he believes, subordinate the theory and practice of the radical community to programmatic and organised forms of politics. This makes collective action an exercise in the search for rational solutions to systemic conditions of oppression and exploitation, or exclusion. This is common to the sociology of the politics of RSMs, where an organisational intent and explanatory purpose occludes the subjectivity of the radical community and expropriates it from its knowledge of social struggle. While Touraine was a prominent thinker of NSMT, his reflection on the

¹³ Donatella della Porta, "Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts," in *Conference of the Nordic Sociological Association* (Aarhus2008), 1-2.

¹⁴ A relevant discussion of the threat of ‘political modesty’ is available in Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1999), 136. I look at this further in Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Rancière, as I subsequently discuss, states that the multiplication of the discourses of struggle in France post 1968 prompted the theoretical retrieval of the radical subject in political theory through the utilisation of ‘blatant generalities’. The attempt to unify “a revolt breaking away in every direction” saw a return of political philosophy, a renewal of the discourse on the universal subject. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 119-120.

¹⁶ Alain Touraine, "An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements," in *Social Movements: A Reader*, ed. Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nicola Montagna (London: Routledge, 2008), 216. Touraine, however, stands accused of a similar recuperation of antagonism in a rationalist vision of political contestation. As he states in the aforementioned article, social movements, as a special class of social conflict, must be *organised* and have *instrumental* ends (p 212).

study of social movements resonates beyond this framework, as such, providing an initial reference point from which to expound the issues at stake in this thesis.¹⁷

Touraine argued that minority collectives traditionally bore the label of victim, being marginalised from society and treated as pathological. Accordingly, he insisted on untangling the social movement actor from the snarl of sociological concepts and categories which he believed had collectively and effectively become an ideology of social order. Touraine contended that a consequence of this ideology was the presupposition that marginal communities, those alienated from society, are unable to understand and respond to their situation and transform themselves into social actors.¹⁸ This assertion implicates the existing order of society *and* discourses that have that order as their object, in maintaining the intellectual subordination of the radical community. In part, I will argue, this is a result of confusion regarding the epistemic value of the creativity and innovation of RSMs. Consequently, our thinking on the radical subject proceeds largely unaffected by the specificity of a radically different theory and practice of politics.¹⁹ The alternative I prefer, outlined by Toscano in his work on fanaticism, is to consider the valence of radical social movements, which are essentially epistemological and not simply 'political', when observing their dynamics.²⁰

The themes of intellectual subordination and political organisation provide an unlikely point of congress between sociology, revolutionary politics, and the work of Jacques Rancière.²¹ Common to the accounts of the Italian radical community I have surveyed, and the work of Rancière, is a criticism of the philosopher or scientist (the 'expert') who is elevated above the capacity of the masses for creative or innovative thought:²² for example, Sergio Bologna (IRT) decried the expropriation of knowledge by self-appointed elites such as the 'interventionist intellectuals' and the 'Parliamentary Left'.²³ Similarly, Alberto Melucci (NSMT) argues that the 'omnipotent intellectual' understands themselves as the singular figure of witness to the dynamics that connect material reality and consciousness. This self-aggrandisement, first associated with the Leninist intellectuals, Melucci also came to associate with

¹⁷ While considered problematic, the theorising of Touraine upon the place of social movements and the social actor in society has reached across the discipline of social movement studies, as has the NSMT paradigm more generally. Arguably, his most important contribution to the discipline was his 'rediscovery' of the social actor, and his claim that "social movements are not a marginal rejection of order, they are the central forces fighting one against the other to control the production of society by itself (...)." Touraine, *Voice and the Eye*, 29. Touraine's other important monographs on social movements consulted in this dissertation include Alain Touraine, *Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Postindustrial Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Alain Touraine, *Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995). I revisit his work in Chapter 3.

¹⁸ Touraine, "An Introduction," 216-217. Touraine's account of the relation of the intellectual and the movement is more complicated than presented here. Briefly, Touraine adopted the methodology of '*intervention sociologique*', a process that engages the sociologist in social action. The role of the social theorist, Touraine believed, was to construct a hypothesis of the meaning of the social movement based upon the practices and theories of grass-roots activism. See for an outline of Touraine's methodology Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, ed. John Keane and Pau Mier (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 199-201.

¹⁹ This claim refers to Alberto Toscano, "A Plea for Prometheus," *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory* 10, no. 2 (2009): 245-246.

²⁰ Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010), 58.

²¹ Rancière is renowned for his anti-sociological stance. I detail the reasons for his inclusion in the thesis during the introduction to Chapter 5. My aim is to foreground the work of Rancière that is applicable to the study of RSMs. His work is useful for the general project of renewing thinking on the nexus of politics and the radical community in contemporary western democracies.

²² In *Althusser's Lesson*, Rancière is critical of the "image of theoretical heroism," which he states is the belief that "the masses can make history because the heroes make its theory." Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, 31-32.

²³ Sergio Bologna, "An Overview," in *Italy 1977-8: 'Living with an Earthquake'*, ed. Red Notes (London: Red Notes, 1978), 117-122.

positivist accounts of social movements and the politics of representation.²⁴ The self-reflexive literature of post-positivist social theory has created its own niche within SMT by pursuing such self-congratulatory theorists.²⁵ Amongst this group, however, Rancière is unique as he responds most radically to the ontological division of society into the 'two humanities' of the active thinker and their passive medium, the masses.²⁶ He takes seriously the consequences of this partition, and attempts to recover the perspective of the exploited, as Deranty notes, by showing 'hermeneutic humility', by trusting in the action and discourse of the fighters.²⁷ Kristin Ross remarks in her "Translators Introduction" to Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, that Rancière accused the 'new sociology' (especially the work of Bourdieu), energised by the events of 1968 (in particular France's May 68), of "deriving its authority from the presumed (...) ignorance of its objects of study."²⁸ Rancière's methodological commitment to the recovery of radical thought endeavours to overcome the prejudicial separation of those who think from their object. The alternative, foremost in the sociological study of social movements despite assurances otherwise, discounts the discursive dimension of the radical community as a credible mode of analysis of the social and political conditions underlying exploitation and marginalisation.²⁹

An important feature of the work of Rancière, which proves crucial to the project of rethinking the mechanics of radical community, is his argument that political subjects are a result of and not a foundation for political action, in that they emerge from challenges to the *organisational* principle of society.³⁰ Here we find similarities between Rancière and NSMT, in particular the work of Melucci. Melucci contends that unity was erroneously taken as a given by SMT, with the 'reality' or existence of the social actor mistakenly designated as the starting point of research.³¹ Alternatively, Melucci claims that unity, if existing at all, must be approached theoretically as "a result rather than a point of

²⁴ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 382-383, 396. The common understanding of the 'politics of representation' in the sociology of social movements is as a centralised and bureaucratic or parliamentary form of democracy. Based on the principle of delegation, representative politics concentrates the decision-making process at 'the top', where a specialised body of elected representatives make choices on behalf of their citizenry. See della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 234; 239-241. Melucci and Avritzer suggest that the homogenisation of plurality and complexity in political systems of representation, the collapse of particularity into social aggregations delimited by the classification of interests, is necessary to the functioning of consensus politics. Alberto Melucci and Leonardo Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism and Democracy: Collective Action in the Public Space," *Social Science Information* 39, no. 4 (2000): 516-518.

²⁵ A good introduction to such literature is Bryan S Turner, ed. *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Directly relating to SMT, positivism and structuralism receive a critical and informative handling in Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, eds., *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

²⁶ Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 30; Jacques Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics," in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Beth Hinderliter, et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 37.

²⁷ Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Work in the Writings of Jacques Rancière," in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 192.

²⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), xi.

²⁹ I temper this claim with the observation that an important contribution to IRT is the historiography of Bologna and the group associated with the journal *Primo Maggio*. The intent of both was 'historical reflection on the mass worker' and the recovery of working class knowledge, the task of 'thousands of comrades'. Bologna, "An Overview," 122.

³⁰ See Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35-42. Also, Todd May provides an accessible discussion of this topic in Todd May, "Jacques Rancière: Literature and Equality," *Philosophy Compass* 3, no. 1 (2007): 85.

³¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 382-383, 396.

departure; otherwise one must assume that there is a sort of *deep 'mind' of the movement, instead of considering it as a system of social relationships.*³² Unlike the SMT assumption of unity in the form of a 'historical personage', Melucci approaches this aspect of collective action as another dimension of social action requiring explanation.³³ He states, "[t]here is a major difference between mobilisation [collective action] and a movement (...). *Movements live in another dimension*: in the everyday network of social relations."³⁴ Consequently, he argues, theories of social movement need to elaborate first the *processes* that establish a "shared sense of 'we'," and second, define the "*circumstances of common action.*"³⁵

Fundamentally, Rancière believes, "quite simply, parties do not exist prior to the declaration of a wrong. Before the wrong that its name exposes, the proletariat has *no existence as a real part of society.*"³⁶ Therefore, he contends, identity is not the basis of the radical community. Instead, Rancière argues that acts of *dis-identification* and *subjectification* are the foundation of emancipatory politics. This manifesting of subjectivities unidentifiable within the existing order of society produces 'problematic' or 'non-ontological identities.'³⁷ The first appearance of political contestation then, for Rancière, is not "objectifiable as the relationship between specific parties."³⁸ Rancière's assertion issues a specific challenge to the account of SMT that nominates protest as the 'modus operandi' of social movements, which, della Porta and Diani write, are characterised by "...an oppositional relationship between actors who seek control of the same stake – be it political, economic, or cultural..."³⁹

Rancière's strictly non-identitarian approach to explaining emancipatory politics places him outside of the limits of the prevailing sociological discourse. His theorising on the radical subject offers a useful perspective on social movements that highlights alternative ways to describe the development of radical communities that retain the nascent sense of formation that is lacking in sociological treatments of collective action.⁴⁰ As I investigate in chapters four and five, this proves important to our understanding of the dynamics of the politics of RSMs, especially among the outliers of the Italian social movements (the autonomous self-organised workers' struggles of the late 1950s and the 1970s counter-culture). SMT, NSMT, and IRT (especially Autonomist Marxism, AM), all essentially sociological frameworks, find the temptation to naturalise RSMs, for different reasons, irresistible. Moreover, in their own way they all endeavour to organise or 'politicise' the radical community by rationalising dissent as a political challenge. Consequently, as I will go on to show with particular reference to SMT, they attempt to understand the nexus of politics and the radical subject in a substantive sense, through the processes of identity, as *linking doing to being*.

It is a truism in contemporary social movement studies that analysis of the radical community must explore the theme of identity, and must do so across paradigmatic boundaries. Despite all the debates surrounding NSMT, its central concept of *collective identity* has become entrenched. Collective identity, from the SMT perspective, is an attachment to collectivity in "cognitive, emotional, and moral terms."

³² Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements," *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 793 (emphasis mine).

³³ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 26.

³⁴ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 61.

³⁵ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 20-26.

³⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 39 (emphasis mine).

³⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35-42. Subjectification, in translations of Rancière, is interchangeable with the terms subjectivisation and subjectivation.

³⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 39. This specification, as is explained in Chapter 5, differentiates his concept of politics from the common understanding of politics for which he reserves the label 'police order'.

³⁹ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 21.

⁴⁰ This is the task set aside for Chapter 5: The Volatile Universal Subject.

For NSMT, according to Goodwin and his colleagues, collective identity “replaced class consciousness as the factor that accounts for mobilisation and individual attachments to new social movements (...). [T]he collective search for identity is a central aspect of movement formulation.”⁴¹ Finally, certain quarters of IRT theorise that an awareness of a collective political identity is innate to the subjectivity of class composition; therefore, it is by materially organising and objectively expressing class composition that the political potential of the revolutionary subject transforms into a political organisation, a coherent and active movement.⁴²

Through the sharing of identity, the sociological study of social movements believes it has found the bridge between the ‘I’ and the ‘We’, a mechanism for the organisation of collective action based on the capacity to normalise behaviour. More importantly, as becomes apparent through the case study, the capacity to ‘objectively express’ the identitarian characteristics of a social group facilitates the *formal organisation* of the radical community, an instrumentalist project deemed necessary for political action.⁴³ Here again I foreground the work of Rancière to help rethink our approach to studying the politics of RSMs. He notes that while sociology has distanced itself from its original “project of a reorganisation of society,” it still attempts to establish “the rule of correspondence between social conditions and the attitudes and judgements of those who belong to it.”⁴⁴ Thus, the problem Rancière observes with identitarian movements, the type of movements that dominate the sociological models of RSMs, is that they do not take a reflective distance, through action or consciousness, on a condition. Instead, they give symbolic re-inforcement to the fiction of a condition.⁴⁵ This approach, I contend, cynically serves to restore the non-homogeneity of the radical community to a single organisation, school of thought, ideology, or collective subject, simplifying the repatriation of the radical subject to modern politics.

Rethinking radical social movements

The prevailing sociological models of the politics of RSMs (surveyed for this thesis) consign the outliers of the Italian situation to the margins of social action and social movement theory. Starting with the early risers of the workers’ movement in the late 1950s, the initiators of the ensuing political struggle of the 1960s, I contend that the antagonistic community of Italy emerges from the expression of difference, born of interruption. Subsequently, I argue that understanding the dynamics of these marginalised communities will prove crucial to our accounts of the politics of RSMs. This is to take seriously Bologna’s attribution of a ‘profound political nature’ to these radical subjects, a “capacity to set in motion organisational systems, [and] systems of struggle” from below.⁴⁶ Moreover, as I reveal, the practice and theory of this community poses a specific challenge to the SMT account of the nexus of

⁴¹ Jeff Goodwin, James M Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, “Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 416, 426.

⁴² Balestrini and Moroni discuss the idea that theorising composition transforms the radical community into a coherent movement in Nanni Balestrini and Primo Moroni, eds., *L’orda D’oro 1968-1977: La Grande Ondata Rivoluzionaria e Creativa, Politica ed Esistenziale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988), 428-434.

⁴³ Touraine provides an outline of the key aspects of social movements, including the dimensions mentioned here, in Touraine, “An Introduction,” 212-214.

⁴⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 7.

⁴⁵ See Jacques Rancière, “Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview,” *Angelaki* 8, no. 2 (2003): 193-196.

⁴⁶ Patrick Cuninghame and Sergio Bologna, “For an Analysis of Autonomia: An Interview with Sergio Bologna,” (1995), <http://libcom.org/library/analysis-of-autonomia-interview-sergio-bologna-patrick-cunninghame>.

politics and the radical subject, since it disputes that the influence of the radical community discharges within the dynamics of social aggregation.

The logic of modern politics, I argue, does not provide an adequate understanding of the discursive dimension of the radical subject or exhaust the conflictual charge of the radical community;⁴⁷ therefore, over the course of the thesis, I rethink the political import of the so-called 'inexplicable', 'unintelligible', 'incomprehensible' and 'irredeemable' subjects of the Italian RSMs 1968-78.⁴⁸ While seemingly irreducible to conventional politics, I contend that such radical communities prove inseparable from the processes and conditions that shape the modern political community. The activities of marginalised social movements, such as that of the Italian 'proletarian youth', are a fundamental aspect of the politics of RSMs. Such radical subjects are important, both as an historical figure and as the agent of a radically different politics. This is counter to their usual fate in the sociological modelling of RSMs that consigns them to the margins of social action and social movement theory as *anomalous* to, and the *epiphenomena* of, political struggle.

An outcome of the 'classical agenda' of SMT is that instrumental rationality, identity, and the politico-institutional sphere constitute the invariant core of accounts of the politics of RSMs. This dependence upon fixed concepts and analytic categories occludes that which is unexpected from consideration of radical politics in those accounts.⁴⁹ It is difficult for a discipline, built upon the ideal of the natural sciences, and focused on discovering similarity, conformity to laws, and regularity, to accommodate the flux and complexity present in the Italian social movement sector of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁰ I highlight this point through attentiveness to the theory and practice of the so-called 'unintelligible' subjects and 'nonsensical' social actors of the Movement of '77 and the movements of social autonomy generally. These subjects drew the attention of certain sections of IRT, and NSMT, through their unexpected ability to disrupt existing discourses on politics while occupying ostensibly apolitical or anti-political positions.⁵¹ The movements of social autonomy, as Bologna and others argue, *understood the relation of life and politics differently*, and exposed the crisis in Italian representative and party politics of this period, with

⁴⁷ The latter is a general concern expressed in the framework of NSMT, articulated here in a form most associable with Melucci. See for example Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 197; Melucci, "Frontier Land," 244.

⁴⁸ These are all names given to the marginal communities of Italian radical politics by the disciplinary accounts surveyed in the case study.

⁴⁹ This form of criticism has provenance in European philosophy, as Descombes discusses in his book, *Modern French Philosophy*. Descombe argues that the rationalism of philosophies of representation proves inadequate for the observance of difference, for the 'unknown' of this approach internally has the status of "a not-yet-recognised known." Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 154. A similar assertion is made within the self-reflexive literature of post-positivist social movement study, with the over-extension of explanatory concepts considered an attempt to recuperate conditions and processes that initially escape explanation. See for example Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*; James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); David A Snow, "Elaborating the Discursive Contexts of Framing: Discursive Fields and Spaces," in *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, ed. Norman K Denzin (Bingley: JAI Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ The self-understanding of the human sciences through analogy with the natural sciences, and its apparent consequences, is a common topic of critique in European philosophy and social theory. My window into this tradition is Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised ed. (London: Continuum, 2004).

⁵¹ Publications such as the Semiotext(e) series, in particular the edition titled *Post Political Politics*, partly addresses the misrecognition of the 'political' potential of this sector, the condition that saw it labelled 'unintelligible', 'unexpected', and 'nonsensical' by social theorists and radical left organisations alike. Franco Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext(E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980). Melucci, in a limited way, also looks at the politics of these subjects, which I discuss in chapter 3.

no existing or theorised form able to capture the complexity of this area.⁵² This reveals an idea fundamental to the contemporary European approach to the politics of RSMs (NSMT and IRT); namely, there is an essential asymmetry in the relation of the radical community and the political system. Specifically, in the Italian situation a fundamental antinomy exists between the theme of *autonomy* and *political organisation*.⁵³

An alternative to SMT's modernist vision of the nexus of politics and the radical community, favoured by NSMT (and differently IRT), is that RSMs continually remind us of the limits of conventional politics, exposing the intrusion of the system's instrumentalist logic upon daily life. Melucci states that "in advanced capitalist societies, social movements have challenged the optimistic models which foresaw a *gradual modernisation taking place without rupture* in the existing political and social systems."⁵⁴ Therefore, by utilising a fixed notion of politics, we risk, he writes, "becoming confined within the *logic of the political system* which does not exhaust the totality of the social movements' action."⁵⁵ I explore an alternative, which is not to assert that the NSMs are apolitical, but simply that politics in the traditional sense of addressing the 'institution' are not the priority. The decisive problem is that the SMT framework is "not prepared to capture the meaningfulness of behaviour which does not follow the stipulations of instrumental rationality, but which, nonetheless, is not irrational."⁵⁶

For a discipline enamoured of instrumental rationality and strategy, the inexplicable encounter of radical communities with 'something more' than a knowledge drawn from the theoretical and practical use of reason proves problematic.⁵⁷ The contemporary acknowledgement by SMT that the generality of reason and logical argument provide an *incomplete* understanding of the world of radical agents has undermined the confidence in its rationalist framework.⁵⁸ As an alternative to the impoverishment of the radical subject through its submission to structural constraint, organisational dynamics, and instrumental rationality, SMT experiments with the introduction of concepts such as meaning-making, emotion, affective gesture, and expressive action;⁵⁹ however, the efficacy of these and other

⁵² Steve Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," in *Resistance in Practice: The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, ed. Timothy Murphy, S and Abdul-Karim Mustapha (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 74. See also the collected work Red Notes, *Italy 1977-78: 'Living with an Earthquake'* (London: Red Notes, 1978). I take up this topic in chapter 4.

⁵³ Sergio Bologna, "Il Dibattito sull' "Altro" Movimento Operaio in Germania," in *Il Caso Karlheinz Roth: Discussione Sull' "Altro" Movimento Operaio*, ed. Maria Grazia Meriggi (Milan: Edizioni aut aut, 1978). Cited in Steve Wright, "Mapping Pathways within Italian Autonomist Marxism: A Preliminary Survey," *Historical Materialism* 16(2008).

⁵⁴ Alberto Melucci, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach," *Social Science Information* 19, no. 2 (1980): 201 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁵ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 197 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁶ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 395.

⁵⁷ The search for 'something more', beyond the sociological modelling of RSMs, is a theme explored amongst the Italian radical sector. This is most evident within the area of creative and social autonomy, with its roots within the counter-cultural area of '68. For example, Jansen and Nocentini note, Calvino, Celati, Neri, Ginzburg and Melandri had planned to publish a journal from 1968-72 in an effort to 'achieve something more'. "This something more was not clearly defined but was felt to be urgent." The search was for an alternative realisation of community through 'non-identification', a collective that could revive the imagination of social struggle, suffocated by politics and ideology. Monica Jansen and Claudia Nocentini, "Alì Babà and Beyond: Celati and Calvino in the Search for "Something More", " in *The Value of Literature in and after the Seventies: The Case of Italy and Portugal*, ed. Monica Jansen and Claudia Nocentini (Utrecht: Utrecht Publishing and Archiving Services, 2004).

⁵⁸ This is discussed in Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 172-173.

⁵⁹ Accompanying this is the conciliatory recourse to dimensions of the radical community such as the 'artistic element', 'feeling,' and 'empathy'. Insight into the reasoning behind such supplementation is available in the work of Gadamer, when he refers to these three notions as the subsidiary elements of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*,

supplementary concepts and categories is constrained by their inability to escape the heritage of sociological thought.⁶⁰

Engaging critically with the disciplinary traditions and philosophical foundations of the respective theories of RSMs is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, these traditions and foundations are an important backdrop to my approach to the case study of the Italian RSMs 1968-78. The study of social movements, in a substantive sense, is contiguous with the tradition of the social sciences, and as such shares the foundational presupposition of modernity: namely, the separation of the spheres of science (conceptual knowledge), morality (action), and art (play).⁶¹ The sociological deployment of the categorial separation of the spheres proves an important setting for my thesis. For the discrete divisions of knowledge (theoretical, practical) within modernity, their autonomous foundations and functions (science/knowledge, morality/justice, art/taste) and the suggested intrinsic structure amongst the relevant cultural dimensions (cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, aesthetic-expressive) have proven to be resilient settings, especially for the social sciences.⁶² More directly, it is specifically within the categorial separation of the spheres that the proximate cause of the rationalist understanding of community originates for the sociological study of social movements.

In his influential book, *The Fate of Art*, J. M. Bernstein states that “separating the discourses of truth, goodness and beauty from one another debar[s] us from comprehensively recording our situation, from making intelligible and significant its specific human weight and salience, its violences and griefs, disruptions and sensitivities.”⁶³ The diminished vision of humanity that results from the persistent commitment to the categorial separation of the spheres provides new perspective on the self-doubt plaguing SMT. An awareness of the heritage of the sociology of social movements, I show, helps diagnose and evaluate the explanations of radical politics. In particular, locating the modelling of SMT within the rationalist tradition reminds us it forms part of a larger endeavour of modern thought that Bernstein describes as attempting to reconnect the subject or self to an ‘order beyond it’.⁶⁴ On this point, Descombes notes that, since Kant, the successive philosophies of subjectivity have tried to:

salvage the unity of the world and the universality of values (...) by authorising themselves to pass from particular consciousness (...) to universal consciousness (...). If there were a universal subject, it would posit values that were similarly universal, though subjective (...).

The presupposition of unity in SMT is part of the search for an order beyond the actor, a way to bridge the gap between the objective and subjective, concrete condition and action, structure and culture. A

offered to ease the human sciences’ reliance upon truth as only located in conceptual knowledge. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 36-37.

⁶⁰ Jasper, a respected representative of the ‘post-structuralist’ shift in SMT, claims mobilising radical political participation proves irreducible to “an exercise in logical deduction.” Jasper, *Art of Moral Protest*, 13-15. Useful discussions of the effort to supplement the SMT framework include Jeff Goodwin, James M Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, “The Return of the Repressed: The Fall and Rise of Emotions in Social Movement Theory,” *Mobilization: An International Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000); Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*.

⁶¹ This heritage is not as discernible in the work of Melucci, whose complex system of thought, noted in chapter 3, strayed from the social science project of modernisation.

⁶² Jurgen Habermas, “Modernity Versus Postmodernity,” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), 272-273.

⁶³ J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 8.

⁶⁴ Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 8.

further consequence of Kant's critical project is that his conceptualisation of knowledge, based on the categorial separation of the spheres, is restricted to the "theoretical and practical use of reason."⁶⁵

Alternatively, Rancière mines Kant's philosophical system for new ways to think about the formation of radical communities. Kant's contemplation of the connection of the subjective and objective, particular and universal, offers new ways to think about the conflictual relations of groups in contemporary politics, beyond the mode of reason. Therefore, Rancière's analysis of Kant generates many of his unique insights into the politics of emancipation. In the Kantian system, Rancière argues, "aesthetic experience implies a certain disconnection from the *habitual conditions of sensible experience*" that also suspends "the normal conditions of social experience."⁶⁶ To Rancière, the aesthetic sphere is a realm of *disagreement*, a place of ongoing struggle between domination, emancipation, and reincorporation. These mechanics of emancipatory politics, unique to Rancière's work, are problematic for the sociological accounts of radicalisation in the Italian movements of '68 and '77. They present a different way of understanding the features and mechanisms of community formation, not as evidence of social aggregation but as an exception to the very way the diverse threads of communities have gathered. The nascence of the radical community, in the thinking of Rancière, is thus inseparable from the activities of *nonidentary* subjects that question the 'mechanisms of politics'.⁶⁷

Rancière's rejoinder to sociology's reincorporation of the radical community within the politics of representation outlines a more 'authentic' dimension of the radical subject, the practical verification of equality, which creates a clash between a *suspensive logic* of politics and the *substantialist* logic of society. Consequently, his contemporary 'aesthetic theory' of politics highlights how there are alternative ways to consider the features and mechanisms of community formation, one of these being the aesthetic *sensus communis*. I intend to demonstrate here how certain ideas from Rancière's aesthetics of politics bring clarity to the explanatory breaks in the contemporary frameworks of social movement theory, and *uniquely* highlight their origin. My purpose is not to advance a thesis of the aesthetics of action in the modelling of RSMs; rather, it is to identify and evaluate some of the hidden and unquestioned premises in the prevailing theories of social movements. The position of Rancière's thought on radical politics in this thesis is not one of uncritical appreciation; instead, I intend to mine his reconceptualising of the nexus of politics and radical community in order to forge new insights into the features and mechanics of social movement formation and radicalisation.

Rancière, through the example of the French worker's history, wants to reveal "the deceptive appearance of self-evidence of a 'social' movement as the expression of a 'social' group." He alternatively claims that a movement is composed of subjects attempting to discover, create, or understand an identity veridical to their experiences outside of the social order.⁶⁸ This process of subjectification, Rancière argues, opens spaces and catalyses transformations unpredictable or unexpected within the logic of the existing social and political sphere, revealing the contingency of the

⁶⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 36-37. Kant, in §40 "Of Taste as a kind of *sensus communis*" in his *Critique of Judgement*, elaborates two distinct concepts of common sense. The first as popularly understood, the 'vulgar', uncultivated, *understanding* of the multitudes that "indicates absolutely no merit or superiority." The second, as a 'reflection' that "takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought; in order as it were to compare its judgment with the collective Reason of humanity (...)." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1914).

⁶⁶ Jacques Rancière, "Thinking between Disciplines: An Aesthetics of Knowledge," *Parrhesia* 1(2006): 1-4 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 101-102.

⁶⁸ This is from Rancière's discussion in Rajchman, *The Identity in Question*, 87-88.

existing order and the absence of historical patterning or teleology.⁶⁹ Such disruptions question that which is 'given' to us through an existing convention of meaning and significance that knots "together possible perceptions, interpretations, orientations and movements."⁷⁰

Despite methodological pluralism, and the accumulation of supplementary concepts, the SMT study of RSMs – and to some extent all the surveyed sociological accounts, including that of Melucci and IRT – ultimately retreats to theories of structural constraint, instrumental rationality, identitarian movements, and the politics of social aggregation. This encourages SMT to persist with concepts such as political opportunity structures, the rational actor, and resource mobilisation. Alternatively, I turn to another perspective on the nexus of politics and radical community where the promise of politics resides not in the changing of the forms of the state but in the more meaningful change in 'sensible existence itself'.⁷¹ In this terrain, the politics of RSMs is inexplicable if subjected to the heteronomy of social aggregation. Bernstein identifies the way an antagonist community emerges from interruption and exemplars of difference. Such a community contradicts the continuity thesis and ideal of progressive culture that underpins the status quo. He argues that opposed to the 'passive *sensus communis*', a 'given community' of 'like-mindedness', is a community that questions what community has become.⁷² Such a vision of the radical subject, I argue, is crucial to explicating the politics of the Italian RSMs 1968-78.

2. Italian radical social movements 1968-78: A case study

I defend the claims of this thesis through a case study of Italian RSMs 1968-78. These RSMs, I will argue, present a unique challenge to sociology. The movements that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. worker, youth, student, women's, counter-culture) undermine the existing analytic frameworks, proving irreducible "to mere variations of the known forms of collective action."⁷³ I intend to show that the complexity of this sector is not a dismissible historical curiosity; rather, it is crucial to understanding the politics of RSMs.

The thesis begins by looking at the particular elements that consistently draw the attention of explanatory accounts of the politics of RSMs as they attempt to explicate their dynamics by schematising and periodising the Italian social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Without exception, theories of RSMs bring as their companion a specific contextualising of history, ostensibly to reveal the impartiality and real world relevance of their theory of social movement radicalisation. The generalised picture from the competing accounts of Italian RSMs 1968-78 is a teleology of fixed points, conspicuous events, identifiable agents, and mechanisms of action and reaction, that, unique to each approach, has a causal relation and set of preconditions that make the terroristic outcome of the late 1970s appear inevitable; however, I contend that the frameworks of the prevailing theories of RSMs, to varying degrees and in diverse ways, proceed largely unaffected by the specificity of a radically different theory and practice of politics.⁷⁴ In particular, SMT alleges that the complexity of the radical community in Italy

⁶⁹ Two accessible examples of Rancière's exposition on subjectification are: Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*; Jacques Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement," *Angelaki* 9, no. 3 (2004).

⁷⁰ Jacques Rancière, "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière," *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009): 120 (emphasis mine).

⁷¹ Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 32.

⁷² See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 102-103.

⁷³ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 239.

⁷⁴ This claim defers to Toscano, "A Plea," 245-246. There are obvious exceptions to this admittedly sweeping claim and the relation of theory and practice is rather more nuanced than I indicate here. Accordingly, greater attention is given to this assertion throughout the thesis.

is firstly a historical anomaly, and secondly a by-product of the general conditions and processes of the radicalisation of the left-wing social movements. I go on to discuss and contest this assertion through the case study.

A particular aspect of the sociology of social movements that hinders the explication of RSMs is the dismissal of the theory and practice of the radical community as a credible mode of analysis of their social and political condition. Beyond prejudicing the selection of materials and subjects, this obscures the conjunction of the subjective and objective modes of radicalism, creating blind spots in accounts of the Italian situation. This is patent, for example, in the summary dismissal of Marxist social theory (the most compelling referent of IRT) by SMT and NSMT. The wilful exclusion of potentially relevant theoretical practices in the SMT and NSMT modelling of the nexus of the radical community and politics sweeps aside the localised actions and discourses of various subgroups within the social movement environment. The coarse classificatory net utilised to disbar Marxist thought from the status of interlocutor in the Italian situation overreaches, dismissing the discursive dimension of autonomous and self-organised collectives that occupy a political terrain typical to Marxist interventionism.

Goodwin and Jasper note in their critique of the study of social movements that at the centre of our best theories, no matter how well disguised, is an invariant core that gives us a rigid set of concepts and explanatory categories. The consequence is that often we 'know' the answers to our questions before doing research, predetermining the scene of radical politics. Beyond affecting our ability to "imagine how things might be otherwise,"⁷⁵ the assumptions in play in disciplinary thought are used in a *strategic* fashion to disqualify certain agents and aggrandise others. After tumults such as France's May 68, and Italy's *Sessantotto*, when we attempt to answer questions like 'where are we?' and 'what makes us a we?' we are obliged to consider, Rancière argues, how to characterise the situation of our lives *and* to rethink the frameworks we use to 'see' and map our terrain.⁷⁶ By remaining attentive to the theory and practice of the radical communities in Italy 1968-78, and remembering the political and intellectual context within which our best theories of RSMs develop, I believe we can better understand the political situation arising from the materialising of radical subjects.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the context of the Italian RSMs of the 1960s and 1970s, gleaned from the surveyed accounts that make up the case study.⁷⁷ I argue that the general periodisation we receive from these accounts, coupled with a chronology that unfolds mechanistically, underpins a theory of radicalisation in Italy as a *product* of social, political, and historical conditions. In addition, the respective representations of each account have an explanatory intent and organising purpose, for their own reasons, attempting to systematise dissent as political. Consequently, the tendency is to replace specificity with vagueness, especially regarding the theory and practice of the localised and particularised collectives that circulated outside of the larger radical organisations.⁷⁸ This approach to explaining radicalism serves to restore of the non-homogeneity of the radical sector to a single organisation, school of thought, ideology, subject, or collective identity. This 'recuperation' is patent in the competing discourses of 'April 7', the first wave of arrests of key radical left intellectuals in Italy.

⁷⁵ Jeff Goodwin and James M Jasper, "Trouble in Paradigms," in *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James M Jasper (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 77.

⁷⁶ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 114-115.

⁷⁷ Beyond its stated purpose, this chapter also addresses the need to regurgitate accounts of this sector across the case study, providing a centralised reference point for the subsequent chapters.

⁷⁸ On the topic of theoretic vagueness see Toscano, "A Plea," 245-246. While the topic of Toscano's essay is specifically nihilism, his cautionary plea is, I think, applicable to the discipline of social movement studies and their work on the radicalisation of activism.

I utilise the hegemonic intent of the juridical *and* radical communities of April 7 as a lens through which to view other attempts, whether practical or theoretical, to unify the antagonist community. Ultimately, these efforts prove unrealisable and, more importantly, self-defeating. This conjecture arises from the belief that the essence of the radical subject is difference, with particularity and specificity crucial to our understanding of the radical community. Accordingly, the recuperation and organisation of the radical community as a sociological group within the sphere of modern politics serves to manufacture its disappearance.⁷⁹ During this investigation it becomes clear that the theoretical agenda of SMT (and NSMT) is comparable to the practical endeavour of IRT: namely, how to *politicise* the radical community. The outstanding question is how can substantialist and identitarian logic recuperate a phenomenon that interrupts all such classificatory systems?

Chapter 2 traces the development of Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT), that is, the definitive theoretical effort to rise above the tradition of treating collective action as irrational, as it evolves into the pluralist framework that I refer to as SMT. This framework, in spite of its complexity, forms around an unchanging nucleus of instrumental reason and modern politics, limiting its account of social movement radicalisation to an exposition on how collective actors do things with strategic resources. This has distilled into indifference toward the particularity of the radical subject in contemporary western democracies, with the outcome being a set of empirical generalisations regarding the connection of social movements and the political institution.

In spite of reassurances that SMT is attentive to the ‘vicissitudes’ of the entire social movement milieu, it becomes apparent through the case study that, in fact, it has collapsed the Italian movement sector into a cycle of political violence. The fêted theory of protest cycles effectively flattens the context of radicalisation, ‘evicting’ the movement participant and their lived experience from the account of radical politics.⁸⁰ In so doing, the parallel waves of the movement sector arising in the 1970s become the residue of the radicalisation of the left-libertarian (‘normal’) social movements. An overarching concern I have for SMT, expressed in this chapter, is that it perceives its account of the strategies and decisions of RSMs, based on a partial survey of subjects and materials, as exhausting the important questions of the politics of RSMs.

Chapter 3 focuses on the work of Alberto Melucci which developed as a theoretical reaction to Marxism, Collective Behaviour, and the strategy-oriented SMT. Melucci argued that the problem facing sociology, after the tumult of the 1960s, was finding new concepts to help understand “something that escapes us,” something beyond the scope of our traditional frameworks.⁸¹ In particular, this problem arises from the fact that “social movements and collective actions are the constant reminder of the limits of politics,” making the elusory ‘something’ a consequence of a reliance on political reductionism

⁷⁹ This claim arises from Rancière’s threefold division of the political realm, founded upon domination, dis-identification, and recuperation. See Jacques Rancière, “Work, Identity, Subject,” in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 214. I discuss this at length in chapter 5. It is also the basis of Melucci’s contemporary paradox of new social movements discussed in chapter 3.

⁸⁰ I have developed this position through consultation with recent self-reflexive works of social movement literature. Good examples include Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*; James M. Jasper, “A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social Movement Choices,” *Mobilization: An International Journal* 9, no. 1 (2004); Scott A Hunt, Robert D Benford, and David A Snow, “Identity Fields: Framing Processes and the Social Construction of Movement Identities,” in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, ed. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

⁸¹ Alberto Melucci, “Individual Experience and Global Issues in a Planetary Society,” *Social Science Information* 35, no. 3 (1996): 492-493.

and instrumental rationality.⁸² Significantly, for our understanding of the radical subject, this is not an assertion that contemporary social movements are apolitical, but rather that politics in the traditional sense of the word as a direct address to the 'system' or 'institution' are not the priority. In Melucci's major work, *Challenging Codes*, he argues instead that the cultural experiences of these 'new' social movements (NSMs) were an effort to counter the influence of instrumental rationality.⁸³ Accordingly, he asserts that the unity of the new movements can "never be completely translated into the logic of means-ends calculation, or political rationality, but carries with it margins of non-negotiability in the reasons for and ways of acting together."⁸⁴ This is borne out in political struggle where the institution reduces complexity through representation, and social movements respond through exhibitions of difference. The logic of the system, Melucci insists, only understands identification through incorporation or "difference as exclusion from all communication."⁸⁵

Through the encounter with the work of Melucci, I reflect on the theoretical consequences of holding instrumental rationality, identity, and the politico-institutional sphere as the invariant core of accounts of RSMs. I conclude that understanding the radicalisation of social movements in Italy requires more than its evaluation in terms of political rationality and organisation. Essentially, the mechanics of radicalisation involve questions of the hegemony of social knowledge and the logic of social aggregation. Accordingly, I contend, explicating the politics of RSMs requires us to engage seriously with radical thought, trusting in the actions and discourses of the radical community.⁸⁶ While Melucci's account of the Italian situation presents an alternative connection between the radical community and politics, I argue that his foreshortening of the youth and counter-cultural movements, along with his summary dismissal of *everything* Marx, compromises his modelling of the politics of RSMs. Subsequently, I consider the explanatory implications of the adversarial nature of Melucci's encounter with Marxism, which I reveal, causes him to ignore the composite reality of the movement, neglecting to ask 'who spoke?', 'who acted?', and 'who constituted the collective?'. Effectively, in specific instances, Melucci repeats the mistakes of SMT.

Chapter 4 opens with Michael Hardt's Introduction to the important collection of post-workerist thought, *Radical Thought in Italy: a Potential Politics*. Hardt claims that the theorising of the Italian radical intellectuals "has ridden the wave of the movements (...) and emerged as part of a collective practice, (...) *interpreting* one day's political struggles and *planning* for the next."⁸⁷ Subsequently, to untangle the knotty situation of Italian radicalism 1968-78, chapter 4 analyses the subjective and objective modes of radicalism, the conjunction of which the approaches of SMT and NSMT obscure. In other words, I distinguish between the acts of *immediacy* attempting to achieve real life outcomes *and* their verification in theory. This involves an exchange between the movement and the intellectual,

⁸² Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 287.

⁸³ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 354-360. While Melucci is renowned for his work on NSMT through his books *Challenging Codes*, *Nomads of the Present*, and *The Playing Self*, a cluster of articles written toward the closure of the movement sector in the early 1980s provide insight into the theoretical foundations of his work on radical politics, in particular Alberto Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism and the Political System: Reflections on the Italian Case," *Socialist Review* 56(1981). A concise presentation of his agenda is available in Melucci, "The New Social Movements."

⁸⁴ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 244.

⁸⁵ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 520. Ironically, however, Melucci appears to overlook the latter point when he dismisses certain sectors of the Italian social movement sector for being 'purely expressive.'

⁸⁶ This summation brings into play the thought of Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 32. As I will show in chapter 4, it is also attentive to the historiographical stream of IRT.

⁸⁷ Michael Hardt, "Introduction: Laboratory Italy," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1.

discrete, yet intimately entangled layers of the radical community, which affords insight into the rejuvenation of the politics of RSMs in the early 1960s and again in the mid 1970s.⁸⁸ On reflection, this is problematic for SMT and NSMT, for at certain junctures in their respective models of the radicalisation of social movements both approaches conflate the knowledge of the movement with that of the 'experts' (specialists), collapsing self-organisation (from below) into the mechanics of political organisation (from above). This occludes the discursive dimension of the grass-roots radical community, and grants the 'strategic reason' and the political rationalism of certain intellectual circles a monopoly over the comprehension of the movement.⁸⁹

IRT (AM), first generalised as workerism, is at root a sociological investigation of the dynamics of class composition that intends to describe the function or influence of certain processes and conditions in promoting shared consciousness, collective interests, and the organised capacity to act.⁹⁰ At times, however, this endeavour betrays the essence of the radical community, rendering the freedom of subjectivity from the dictates of reason ineffectual.⁹¹ By looking into the breaches that open up within the Italian RSMs of the 1960s and 1970s, I explore the theoretical and practical discontinuities generated by the actions of the antagonistic community, providing an insight into the nature of the radical subject. To this end, I construct a path through the movement sector signposted by, but not limited to, the works and political trajectories of prominent intellectual figures Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, Sergio Bologna, and Franco (Bifo) Berardi.

In Chapter 5 I deploy Rancière's unique response to the contemporary demands placed on political theory to help re-think the politics of the radical subjects of the Italian RSMs 1968-78. Rather than searching for the principle of unity that is the foundation of the political community, Rancière is interested in revealing that what qualifies as a community is always already underscored by an ordering of the sensible: conventions of meaning and significance responsible for ordering that which is given to us in sense experience. Against this background image of society as a 'distribution of the sensible', Rancière argues that political activity is the practical verification of radical equality in such a way that a rearrangement of the existing organisation of society is forged. This, in effect, is an aesthetic intervention in patterns of social hierarchy. It is aesthetic because it reconfigures the perceptual conditions of social experience, but it does so in a politically relevant way.⁹²

Through an encounter with Rancière's praxeology and political ontology, I explore a constructive way to recover the radical subject that contests sociology's facile recuperation of the radical community within the features and mechanisms of social aggregation. Rancière posits radical politics as an intervention in,

⁸⁸ The idea of being attentive to subjective and objective modes of radicalism is born of Rancière's elaboration of revolutionary practice in Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. It is also prompted by Deranty and Ross' introduction to Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross, eds., *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality* (London: Continuum, 2012).

⁸⁹ My thinking here stems from an important question posed by Wright who asks whether we can accept the political elite as a necessary consequence of the radical community without assuming that they must form a "single political unit designed to monopolize the broader movement's 'strategic reason'?" Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 102.

⁹⁰ Vincenzo Ruggiero makes this point in his study of Brigate Rosse. Vincenzo Ruggiero, "Brigate Rosse: Political Violence, Criminology and Social Movement Theory," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 43(2005): 298.

⁹¹ This idea of reason overwhelming subjectivity is from a recent collection of essays focused upon Rancière's work of aesthetics and politics. Beth Hinderliter et al., eds., *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 6.

⁹² Rancière defines politics as a "polemical redistribution of objects and subjects, places and identities, spaces and times, visibilities and meanings. In this respect, we call it an aesthetic activity (...)." Rancière, "Contemporary Art," 32. I discuss the specificity of Rancière's conceptualising of the aesthetic in chapter 5.

or an exception to, the ways community are gathered, disrupting the given of social experience and the discourses and theories that sustain divisions within the community.⁹³ Thereby, the politics of social movements fundamentally involve the staging of new communities rather than being a critical project that defends or promotes the interests of an existing collective subject. Genuine participation in radical politics requires the endless imagining of unpredictable subjects disconnected from their social condition and associated attitudes, aptitudes, and decisions. I argue that Rancière's composition of a nonidentary and non-institutional image of political activity provides an alternative vision of the positive contribution that RSMs make to modern politics, while negating the disciplinary impulse to identify and categorise everything within an existing order of knowledge.

⁹³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 105-106.

Chapter One

The politics of Italian radical social movements 1968-78

This radical acceptance of the empirical violates the empirical, for in it speaks the mutilated, 'abstract' individual who experiences only that which is given to him, who has only the facts and not the factors, whose behaviour is one-dimensional and manipulated.¹

Herbert Marcuse – *One Dimensional Man*

The Italian RSMs 1968-78 have particular significance to the renewal of sociological thought on the nexus of politics and the radical community, challenging the cogency of the existing analytic frameworks in the field of social movement study. The redundancies and breaks this social movement sector created in established thought engaged the intellectual in a process of theoretical rejuvenation. The Red Notes collective remarks, with regard to the Movement of '77, that "the revolutionary groups are having to rack their brains and rethink their theories to adjust to this new reality."² This undertaking proved necessary across the breadth of sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs.

Over the course of the thesis, I rethink the political import of the so-called 'incomprehensible' or 'inexplicable' radical subjects of the Italian situation, the social actors that eschew the norms of political engagement and exist in positions that are marginal to conventional systems of representation and disciplinary thought. While irreducible to conventional politics, these subjects, I argue, are indissoluble from the political cycle. That is, such radical subjects are important, both as an historical figure and as the agent of a radically different politics. This is counter to their usual fate in the modelling of RSMs, which consigns them to the margins of social action and social theory.

During the case study, which forms the body of this thesis, I reveal that the theoretical problem of SMT (and NSMT) is comparable to the practical problem of IRT: how to organise and politicise the radical community, repatriating it to western democracy, without effacing its particularity. This chapter is the first step in uncovering the radical subject of the Italian situation, and focuses on a problem noted by Renato Curcio. He asserts that the existing accounts of radical politics in Italy bury participants, regardless of their origin, underneath an image of armed struggle, which does not allow for the revelation of subjectivity or diversity of emotion, removed from the social, cultural, and political conditions.³ I begin with an overview of the context of the Italian RSMs, gleaned from the surveyed accounts of the case study.

¹ Marcuse is damning of the positivist social sciences, with their 'positivist mentality' reducing humanity to the 'one dimension' of instrumental rationality.

² Red Notes, *Living with an Earthquake*, preface.

³ Renato Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta* (Rome: Sensibili alle Foglie, 1994), x. This observation of Curcio will be familiar to students of radical social movements, since it repeats the claim of Touraine. Touraine, "An Introduction," esp. 216.

1. An overview

Across the theories investigated for this thesis on the politics of RSMs, it is common to periodise the Italian social movement sector according to established schemas of thought and political signifiers and discourses, founded on the reasons and explanations of a disciplinary tradition. That is, the representations provided define a specific scene for politics,⁴ and have an *explanatory intent* or *organising purpose*. To generalise, this amounts to the enumerating of social movements based on the presence or absence of signal features or defining characteristics and a set of variables, predetermined by the analytic concepts and categories of the relevant explanatory model.⁵ For example, Donatella della Porta, a leading exponent of SMT, divides the Italian social action of the 1960s and 1970s into a *libertarian* student movement phase (67-69), the *revolutionary* phase of the New Left (70-73), a *withdrawal* phase (74-76), and the ‘years of despair’ in which *terrorism* became the dominant form of social contestation (77-80).⁶ This particular periodisation crystallises around the ‘resource characteristics’ of the movement environment, defined by concepts such as political opportunity and protest repertoires, which are a crucial aspect of the modernisation of the politico-institutional sphere. For SMT, a key indicator of the status of the social movement cycle is the type and prevalence of collective violence, with both parameters considered a *product* of the conditions and processes within the movement context. Significantly, as I discuss in chapter 2, this methodology, which is founded on the concept of cycles of protest, tends to conflate the ‘radicalisation’ of ‘normal’ movements with the use of *organised* violence, and correlates it with the ‘decline’ of the *political efficacy* of collective action.⁷

An alternative representation of the social movement sector, popular amongst certain factions of the Italian Marxists of the period, was its segmentation through reference to the subject of class antagonism and its relation to the form of the state and capitalist system.⁸ For example, the central figure of the 1960s was the ‘mass worker’, the working class militant of the modernised factory who responded aggressively to accelerated industrialisation and economic growth. Controversially, the ‘socialised worker’, alternatively conceptualised as the disseminated figure of work, was theorised as the replacement for the mass worker, shifting contestation in the 1970s into the ‘social factory’. This new area of proletarian antagonism extended beyond the factory and into everyday life, and was

⁴ This phrasing comes from Rancière’s critical study of Althusserianism in Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*. I discuss the notion of disciplinary thought as a form of theoretico-political intervention in chapter 5.

⁵ The overview presented here surveys accounts of the Italian social movement sector that are representative of the prominent traditions in the contemporary study of RSMs and reflect the primary sources of my case study. Sources include for SMT: della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*; Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*. For NSMT: Melucci, ‘New Movements, Terrorism’; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, esp. 259-283. For IRT I refer to important anthologies such as Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. Maurizia Boscagli, vol. 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, eds., *Italy: Autonomia Post-Political Politics*, vol. 3, Semiotext(E) Intervention Series (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980). I compare the representative sources with each other and the historical account of Ginsborg. See Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*.

⁶ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 26-33.

⁷ For example, Tarrow states, with regard to the Italian situation, “organised violence (...) was a product of the end of mobilisation.” Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 307.

⁸ While recognising the Italian state of the period is not a singular entity, but fluid in its composition, it was constant in its effort to reincorporate dissent within a form of representative democracy. The individual components of the state competed and compromised to advance particular agendas, with notable outcomes of this exchange including the historic compromise between the PCI and DC, and the participation of the New Left in the electoral process. I discuss the role of the form of the State and the exchange between its components in the development of the radical social movement sector in Italy at various points throughout the case study.

theorised as a response to industrial restructuring and economic crises. AM saw the expansion of the radical community into areas such as the urban youth movements as an outcome of class recomposition, a dynamic process responding to the changing demands of class conflict. The final phase, marking the end of the 1970s, was characterised by the displacement of the class or mass subject from the centre of social action by the aggression and repression of the State, and by its other face, the terrorist organisations such as *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades/BR). This broad chronology of the radical left, however, further divides along fractures in the theory and practice of violence in the internal modelling of the sector.⁹ For example, the phase of 1974-76 was characterised by the immediacy of its 'defensive' violence, aimed at protecting the community by providing access to housing and affordable public services. This was a break from the preceding periods of reformist violence, utilised to support and promote political programmes intended to alter existing work conditions and modify the political institution, and from periods of revolutionary violence, implemented as a means of achieving long-term political change on behalf of the working class by replacing or transcending the existing political system.

Beyond the competing accounts of the dynamics of radicalisation that uniquely schematise the movements of '68 and '77, particular elements consistently draw the attention of explanatory accounts. Invariably, attempts to explain the importance of the radical social movement sector of Italy focus on the emergence and prominence of political violence from the late 1960s through to the early 1980s. These efforts then consistently begin by elaborating the effect modernisation had on Italy's industrial sector in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. A crucial detail of this period is the internal migration of Southern rural labourers to the urban industrial centres of the North, with their displacement and resituating altering the subjectivity/identity of the workers and the characteristics of the work place. Also considered important is the economic strength of this period, which influenced the reform agenda of the organisations of the official left and strengthened the bargaining position of the worker. However, in SMT and NSMT, the first 'phase' of social contestation (1967-70) is characterised by reference to the student uprisings, which connect with the undercurrent of workers' antagonism and provide the impetus for the movement of '68. Subsequently, the student movement and the workers' movement converged to provide the foundations of the extra-parliamentary New Left,¹⁰ which focused on the new subject of antagonism (the mass worker) and its primary environment (the factory). The importance of this social subject inextricably links with the two primary elements of 1969 that, across accounts, causally connect to the terminus of the social movement area in extreme violence. Specifically, 1969 is synonymous, firstly, with the intensity of the workers' mobilisation, supported by the students, in the 'Hot Autumn', and secondly, with the State's insidious response through the 'strategy of tension'.¹¹

⁹ This is not to accept this division. I have chosen this example to highlight the centrality of the category of violence to explanations of the movement sector, and to show how variegated the periodising of the movement milieu can be even when ostensibly utilising similar explanatory categories. For an example of the outline of the progress of the movement internal to the movement, see Lucio Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). An alternative account I have found useful is Sergio Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext(e) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980).

¹⁰ 'Extra-parliamentary' designates organisations with overt political intent that worked outside of, or more accurately to the left of, the official parliamentary organisations such as the Communist Party (PCI) and Trade Unions.

¹¹ 'Strategy of tension' is a euphemism for State sponsored terrorism.

The massive strikes of the Hot Autumn of 1969 saw an unprecedented level of radical mobilisation amongst the workers, primarily in the northern industrial centres, who were making demands for improved work conditions and greater autonomy from the typical instruments of negotiation. The reformist successes of the Hot Autumn provided impetus for a leftward political and social shift, which tragically drew the reaction of State-sponsored terrorism. The State's 'strategy' was to repress the left wing movement sector through aggressive policing of demonstrations, but most infamously through an "instrumental utilisation of fascist terrorism."¹² This strategy drew upon the residual tension between the fascists and the Left, finding a willing partner in the far right who carried out the programme of State-sponsored violence. The intention of the terrorist attacks was to quell the enthusiasm for the leftward shift by wrongly implicating the left-wing movement sector in the targeting of civilians. The State's political discourse represented the chaos and disorder of these acts as an insuperable consequence of the ascent of the radical left (new/far left), the heterogeneous left-wing movement sector that was primarily identified by its independence from organisations of the 'official' or parliamentary left.

Despite the cynical and aggressive response of the State, the start of the 1970s witnessed the continued 'rolling agitation' of the workers' movement, the consolidation of the New Left movements intent on promoting an anti-capitalist and revolutionary awareness amongst the working class,¹³ and the State's continued utilisation of clandestine violence. In the first half of the 1970s, this movement context collided with a deep economic crisis and the related restructuring of industry that reduced the size of the stable or 'guaranteed' workforce. Alongside these changes were the partial institutionalisation of the primary New Left organisations, the official left's (PCI and Trade Unions) continued drift toward parliamentary collaboration, and the disintegration of key revolutionary groups such as *Potere Operaio* (Workers Power/PO). These aspects contributed to the decline of mobilisation within the factory and witnessed the re-emergence of the social and cultural tendencies of the movement sector that had remained latent after the upsurge in support for the workers' movement in the late 1960s.¹⁴ In addition, the moderating and breakup of the New Left organisations has been associated with the emergence of *Autonomia*, an independent movement area constituted by the small, localised, workers' collectives who had abandoned the old and extra-parliamentary organisations.¹⁵

The mid 1970s saw a withdrawal or '*riflusso*' from the revolutionary movements, countered by a strengthening in the social and counter-cultural area, in particular the women's, youth, and student movements. This period also saw the PCI incorporation within the political institution, where it surrendered its role as the 'opposition', choosing instead to participate in the parliamentary majority.¹⁶ This 'Historic Compromise' and programme of national solidarity would see the collaboration of the PCI

¹² Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 110-112. Alternatively, other institutional responses to the unfolding struggles attempted to incorporate conflict within the formal mechanisms of representation. For example, the Workers Charter (*Statuto dei Lavoratori*) institutionalised conflict in the workplace through a formal process of appeal for unfair dismissal, the ratification of the presence of trade unions in the factory, and the 'awarding' of other individual rights. See Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 328; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 263.

¹³ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 313.

¹⁴ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 49. The significance of this period is a source of considerable divergence in the theories surveyed. Notably, the re-emergence of radical communities such as the women's movement, and the development of the urban youth collectives, was the catalysts for Melucci's shift in explanatory paradigm to NSMT.

¹⁵ I discuss the tendency to conflate the collapse of the New Left organisations with the appearance, and then rise, of *Autonomia* throughout the case study.

¹⁶ Alessandro Silj, *Never Again without a Rifle: The Origins of Italian Terrorism* (New York: Karz Publishers, 1979), xiv.

with the Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), an anathema to the radical left who interpreted this shift as a favouring of a relation with the constitution rather than with the worker or marginalised community.¹⁷ The foregoing of the opposition role by the PCI is an important catalyst in the radicalisation of non-institutional opposition, including the expansion of violent activism. The PCI programme of reformism, working toward gradual change within the system, put it at odds with the revolutionary left who were intent on de-structuring the system. Subsequent to the historic compromise, the period 1976-77 saw an increase in the number of *armed organisations* within the left-wing movement sector, and an escalation in clandestine violence that extended to approximately 1980.¹⁸ During this period there was a return of repressive State responses to left-wing movements, including the invoking of emergency and exceptional legislation (the suspension of constitutional order) to enact social control.¹⁹

Based on the surveyed accounts, 1977 was an extraordinary time in the manifestation of the violence at the end of the 1970s. The vigour of the student movement of 1977, which erupted in February, was an important phenomenon that neither the political institution nor the organisations of the far left were able to adequately represent or mediate. The ensuing aggressive response of the State aimed to repress the movement with physical force. The State also attempted to defuse resistance by punitive means such as incarceration, which reincorporated the radical or marginal communities within the social order through the criminalising of non-institutional challenges to the political process. This approach coincided with a wave of violent street clashes through February to May, and provoked the emergence of numerous small clandestine groups in the larger Italian cities.

For the theorists of SMT, the growth of violence and clandestinity linked directly to the decline in effectiveness of the movement sector in influencing political and social outcomes, in part a result of the 'blocking' of the political system. Certain factions of the radical left, such as the localised neighbourhood collectives and armed groups of the area of autonomy, thought the blocking of the political system to 'opposition' necessitated the break with formal political engagement.²⁰ The subsequent redirecting of antagonism saw the movement sector shift toward other avenues for opening political and social spaces to express their dissent. Within this movement context, the diverse field of armed groups solidified around the concept of counter-violence, a response to the systemic violence of the state form and the oppressive institution that reformist agendas had reinforced and rationalised.²¹

¹⁷ Red Notes, *'Living with an Earthquake'*, 45. *Living with an Earthquake* is an important source of information on this period for my thesis. While Katsiaficas is arguably too effusive when declaring this collected work as one of the most important single sources of information of this era, it does provide an important documenting of the movement sector often overlooked by sociological research.

¹⁸ The primary sources for the quantitative support of this and similar claims are della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*; Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*; Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta*; Phil Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay! Rebellion and Repression in Italy, 1972-7*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). Edwards also provides a summary of the data from primary sources such as David Moss, *The Politics of Left-Wing Violence in Italy, 1969-85* (London: Macmillan, 1989); V Vinciguerra and M Cipriani, "Opressione, Repressione, Rivolte: Storia d'Italia dal 25 Luglio 1943 ad Oggi," (1999), www.fondazionecipriani.it/Kronologia/introduzione.htm.

¹⁹ A basic outline of the legislation enacted is provided in della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 222 n215-216.

²⁰ Political engagement, a form of dialectical politics, designated for the Italian far left a compromising of the workers' struggle through the adoption of a system of party politics. In the "Tribe of Moles," Bologna explains how the system, "on the surface is a mediating and representing of conflicts" through the dialectic of Government and opposition parties. However, in response to 'crisis', concord between parties replaces conflict, with the relation between parties privileged ahead of the hostile movements in society. Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 36.

²¹ Silj, *Never Again*, xv-xvi.

At the end of the 1970s, with the perceived failure of the generalised movement area, the organised violence of clandestine groups flourished and its repertoire escalated. The primary example of the 'hardening' of the protest repertoire was the BR kidnapping and subsequent murder of the DC politician Aldo Moro in 1978. Soon after, through a confluence of circumstances, there was large-scale withdrawal from the radical movement sector that left behind only the most entrenched clandestine activists and the now marginalised social collectives. The actions of clandestine organisations, it appears, inadvertently assisted the State to criminalise the broader movement sector. A fascination with the spectacular violence of the BR and similar groups assisted in the homogenising and systemic framing of the radical left. The State's rhetoric designated the left-wing movement sector as the arbiters of dissent and the disintegration of the social order, as an illegitimate collective actor treated as the enemy of the State.

The criminalisation of dissent was realised most notably in the arrests of April 7th 1979. April 7 marked the first wave of State-sanctioned arrests of key radical left intellectuals and leaders involved with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. It also signalled the imminent collapse in totality of the movement of autonomy. The closing of autonomous spaces through the repression and criminalisation of dissent resulted in the breakdown of the organised, social, and cultural sectors of the movement. While the terminus of transgression was frequently found in a return to 'representative solidarities', such as the family and party politics, it also ended in the asceticism of clandestine struggle,²² in the continuation of marginalised lifestyles, or, tragically, in suicide, drug addiction, incarceration, and exile.²³ Eventually, the combination of State repression and the deprivation of asceticism ended the 'years of despair' in the early 80s.²⁴ In combining the evacuation of the political space by the social and cultural movements with the growth in clandestine violence, the criminalisation of dissent, and the struggle for possession of the political exception, we are expected to observe the logical conclusion to social contestation, which, after a period of despair, ultimately returns to an uneasy equilibrium.

Redux

The preceding overview, truncated but charitable to the surveyed accounts, outlines their simple descriptive path through the complex dynamics of the movement sector of the 1960s and 1970s. However, left at such a level of abstraction, with a focus on structural constraint, political organisation and grievance, these accounts are misleading. Even if developed with a basic level of conceptual sophistication, such coarse explanatory models proceed unimpeded by the specificity of a radically different theory and practice of politics that characterised the Italian situation. The result is the obscuring of the disparities in the Italian social movements gathered under the rubric of radicalism. SMT alleges the specificity of radical practice and theory in Italy is an historical anomaly. As such, it treats it as a by-product of the conditions and processes of the radicalisation of the left-wing social movements.²⁵ This has facilitated the marginalisation and facile recovery of certain social actors and agents involved in radical action within the frameworks of the relevant explicative or interpretive

²² The end of 1979 and 1980 saw a sudden spike in new recruits to the major organisations of clandestine violence, including BR and Prima Linea. Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta*, 63, 106.

²³ Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 97.

²⁴ The terminology of the 'years of despair' is particular to the SMT of della Porta.

²⁵ The primary example of this treatment is the work of Tarrow who, through his modelling of the cycle of contention, argues that the movement sector post early 1970s (71/2) is literally the aftermath of the Hot Autumn. Edwards provides an excellent critique of Tarrow's work on the Italian situation in Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*

community.²⁶ This has prevented the field of social movement studies from adequately grasping the dynamics of the politics of RSMs. An outcome of this approach, as I reveal through the case study, is the impoverishment, and at times banality, of the accounts of the Italian social movement sector.

Invariably, sociological accounts of the Italian RSMs 1968-78 'historicise' particular elements of the historical, political and social environment as a prelude to the substantialist logic of the field of social movement study. However, other crucial conditions and processes of radical community formation occupy blind spots in the descriptive re-telling of the Italian situation.²⁷ This has resulted in the typical oversight or discounting of factors important to the overall development of the social movement sector. A brief example I offer here, for I return to this topic in chapter 4, is how the nascence of a new radical left movement in the 1950s and early 1960s, which rejected the political model of the 'official left', is engaged at a level of generality by SMT and NSMT and positioned as an historical footnote. By this I mean there is scant analysis of elements such as the forming of the participatory collectives in the early 1960s that focused on localised practices of dissent, or the particular experiences of the newly migrated worker.²⁸ These groups were involved in the conducting of workers' inquiries, and their practices can be directly associated with the theoretical renewal of Marxism. In combination, these elements informed a new model of radical community that was independent and to the left of the PCI.²⁹ Importantly, the renewal stemmed, in part, from the altered constitution of the Italian Industrial sector and a new subjectivity of the worker inextricably linked to the migration of Italian Southern peasants to the industrial North. The peasants, who did not relate to the drudgery of factory work as 'real' or vocational, disrupted the classical Marxist discourse on the Italian working class. The 'co-inquiries' of this time, involving workers and grass-roots intellectuals,³⁰ were a bilateral attempt to shift the focus of workplace interventions away from reductive interpretations of the worker that historically tied them to questions of wage and the time of work and its organisation. Instead, the co-research tried to understand the "worker as a whole person," contemplating the real life effects of work, the workers' *experiences* of work, free time, and their daily struggles. This approach also respected the workers' *perceptions* of relations in the work place, and tried to exhibit the new subjectivity of the worker.³¹

²⁶ I use 'interpretive community' to designate a group, either purposively brought together (such as the April 7 judiciary) or formed around a shared theoretical commitment, which has the express intent to make sense of or explain a specific phenomenon.

²⁷ I use the term 'historicise' to identify studies of RSMs that attempt to populate history with central identities such as the mass worker, and collapse the social, political and historical conditions into a set of stable preconditions of radicalism. This is different to the task of historiography. I am specifically thinking here of Rancière's demands upon historical accounts of radical politics, and ostensibly Sergio Bologna's approach to workers' history. For an explanation of Rancière's approach to the writing of history, see Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). For an example of Rancière's practice of historiographical contextualisation, see Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labour: The Workers Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). I discuss the work of Bologna in chapter 4, and Rancière in Chapter 5.

²⁸ Beyond the materials cited in this section, the history of the early workers' movement receives detailed attention in the first three chapters of Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*. This excellent single volume on the Italian social movements of the 60s and 70s is underrepresented in the prevailing accounts of the politics of RSMs.

²⁹ Hardt, "Introduction: Laboratory Italy," 2.

³⁰ Grass-roots intellectual designates radical theorists who emerged from the social struggle and remained embedded within the radical movement rather than separating their role from the activities of the collective.

³¹ *Porto Marghera: The Last Firebrands*, 25. *The Last Firebrands* booklet documents the perspective of the self-organised worker militants of the Porto Marghera industrial zone, and contemplates the consequences of the process of modernisation that radically altered Italian society. I discuss the nature of the co-inquiries and the theoretical and practical outcomes in chapter 4. Sergio Bologna considers the practice of co-research as historiography, an approach that has been formative throughout his oeuvre. A brief introduction to his thinking on

The new constituents of the factory, the 'first generation' workers' movement, rallied against the conditions of work and came into direct and violent conflict with the State and its instruments of social control. The altered constitution of the factory worker had unearthed a social subject prepared to engage in aggressive forms of contestation. Subsequently, new forms of activism moved through the factories of the North and culminated in the Turin riots at the *Piazza Statuto* in 1962, where striking workers clashed with police.³² This first spectacular appearance of new working class struggles aimed to change the relation of the factory workers to the political and industrial systems by placing the worker at the centre of the revolutionary movement. The idea was that the new community of antagonism would form from below, rather than developing through the imposition of form via a top down theoretical process.³³ Initially, the innovative practices of the migrant workers and other participants from the industrial North directly seated them at the centre of radicalism. It was subsequent to this that a new practice of Marxist antagonism (*operaismo*/workerism) emerged from the conditions and processes of the workers' struggles and, as Hardt claims, focused on the needs of the worker independently from "the established capitalist relations of production."³⁴

With its focus in the factory, the movement became identifiable with the central figure of the 'mass worker', the unskilled assembly line employee who in no way resembled the skilled worker or artisan who could find pride in their work.³⁵ The theoreticians of the workerism, who would go on to play an important part in the formation of the extra-parliamentary New Left, evolved from the gatherings and journals of intellectuals who were critical of the PCI, trade unions, and "the revisionism of the institutional left."³⁶ Accompanying the self-activity of workers (the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement), was an emerging and novel theoretical expression of the relation of the worker to the state and capital. This new theoretical approach appeared in articles such as Tronti's *Operai e capital* (Workers and Capital) and the journal *Classe Operaia* (Working Class, 1964-66). It also occupied the seminal radical journal *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks, 1961-65) which published workers' inquiries alongside theoretical expositions³⁷ and focused on issues of class conflict and the need for an autonomous organisation for the working class.³⁸

Beyond the renewal of the workers' movement and the central struggle of the factory worker, a student movement that focused on reform of the Italian education and university establishment arose during the second half of the 1960s. A particularly salient example of the student unrest and its connection with the radicalisation of the movement sector was that associated with Trento University. The Trento rebellion was central to the violence of the movement of '68, and had links to the nascence of BR. However, as Silj observes, while the student movement of Trento would produce future BR members

this period is available in an insightful interview conducted by Patrick Cuninghame in 1995. Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". I discuss a selection of his other works in coming chapters.

³² Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 250-253; Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

³³ See Patrick Cuninghame, "Autonomia in the 1970s: The Refusal of Work, the Party and Power," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2005): 77; Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*.

³⁴ Hardt, "Introduction: Laboratory Italy," 2. For discussion of the non-productivist agenda see Alberto Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection: Tronti, Negri and the Subject of Antagonism," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2009): esp. 80.

³⁵ *The Last Firebrands*, 25-26.

³⁶ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 86.

³⁷ The group associated with *Quaderni Rossi* split over the aggressive nature of the 1962 workers strikes. I provide detail of this cleavage in Chapter 4.

³⁸ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 86.

(most notably its future leader Renato Curcio) it is irreducible to the “germ of a later position.”³⁹ Curcio and his fellow student agitators were explicitly opposed to armed struggle, and in their student review *Lavoro Politico* they criticised those theorists of the radical Left who promoted the notion of guerrilla warfare. The belief of the students was that armed struggle had to be subordinate to revolutionary theory.⁴⁰

As the student movement ‘matured’, its target developed beyond the university’s authoritarianism, broadening its focus, influenced by the literature of workerist intellectuals such as Panzieri and Tronti,⁴¹ to include industry.⁴² Again, this would further expand to include other ‘institutions’ such as the family⁴³ and the Church, and lead to a student movement with robust anti-capitalist intentions and political aspirations.⁴⁴ This resulted in a questioning of representative democracy and the gradualism of reform that it accommodated. Subsequently, the student movements began to elaborate a theoretical position that denounced reformism as implicated in the consolidation and rationalising of the status quo, a position that would become essential to the New Left’s political contestation.⁴⁵

The student occupations of universities at the end of 1967 and start of 1968 encountered a violent police reaction, demonstrating a level of brutality that “provoked a response in kind,” and became a decisive moment in the inclusion of physical violence as a part of the repertoire of social movements.⁴⁶ Throughout 1967 and 1968, student activism changed in character to include property damage, tactics disruptive to the operation of the universities, and public forms such as traffic blockades, protest marches, and forced entry to private spaces such as galleries and exhibitions.⁴⁷ The escalation of contestation saw a massive increase in participation amongst students and an invigorating of the concept of autonomy – an attempt to overcome the hierarchy of the status quo through the practice of

³⁹ Silj, *Never Again*, 53. While a student at Trento University Curcio was influenced by the work of Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni, and the work of Critical Theorists, notably Herbert Marcuse. See Silj, *Never Again*, 52-66. Also Mario Scialoja, *Renato Curcio a Viso Aperto: Intervista di Mario Scialoja* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1992).

⁴⁰ Silj, *Never Again*, 52-59. The position of Curcio, Silj notes, would not change until the contexts of his involvement in collective antagonism shifted from the milieu of student anti-authoritarianism in Trento to the social struggle of the extra-parliamentary left in Milan. Silj provides an excellent review of this transition. Silj, *Never Again*, 60-82.

⁴¹ While the Trento student movement aligned with ‘old school communism’, the influence of workerist theory was obvious at the national student conferences, with the Pisan Theses, founded in workerist thought, widely influential across the movement. See Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and the Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto, 2002), 94.

⁴² This interpretation of the change in the character of the student movement is highly contestable. For example, SMT describes the ‘maturation’ of the student movement alternatively as its decline. For theorists such as Tarrow and della Porta, a withering, rather than growth, altered the direction of the movement, forcing the students to look elsewhere for an effective form of radical participation in social action. See for example della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 27-28.

⁴³ One of the most famous slogans of the student movement was “I want to be an orphan.” See Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 305. The reference to ‘orphanhood’ became an important source of identity and a message of separation for the youth and student movements in Italy. See Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy 1968*, trans. Lisa Erdberg (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), esp. 29-30.

⁴⁴ These themes are developed in Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 455; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 260.

⁴⁵ Silj, *Never Again*, 48-49. The theoretical position on representative democracy and reformism was outlined in the Trento student review *Lavoro Politico* (Political Work)

⁴⁶ This period of fighting between students and police is theoretically significant across the collated case studies and historical accounts surveyed. See for example: Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 303-304; Silj, *Never Again*, 48-50; Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 148-149.

⁴⁷ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 153-154; Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Italy: The Postwar Years* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1981), 223; Mack Smith, *Modern Italy*, 455.

the 'free association' with institutional structures. The new repertoire of the student uprising supplied a renewed impetus to the radical praxis of the workers' struggles, but, equally, workerist analysis of the early 1960s had, prior to this, influenced the students' theoretical position.⁴⁸ The end of the 1960s saw the coming together of the student and workers' movements, a shift beyond 'connection' to 'convergence', which included the shared rejection of the PCI and its instruments of political negotiation.⁴⁹

The explosion in social action at the end of the 1960s started in the parallel struggles of the university and the factory, and spread throughout other social institutions. The eventual convergence of the student movement with the workers' struggles had, based on my reading of the surveyed literature, two primary dimensions. The first aspect was the waning, or possibly maturation, of the student struggle within the university context. The second was the development of anti-capitalist tendencies and political aspirations amongst the student leaders. This second dimension, rather than simply being an outcome of the cycle of the student agitation, signified internally to the movement the students' realisation that the authoritarianism of the university was emergent from a larger oppressive structure, capitalism.⁵⁰ In 1969, many of the students aligned with workerist groups. Consequently, the libertarian character of the student uprisings shifted toward the revolutionary ideals of workers' autonomy, resulting in a drastic increase in the activation of revolutionary groups.⁵¹

The combining of the student and workers' movements produced the primary organisations of the extra-parliamentary New Left that experienced its most significant aggregation in 1968-69. This included the formation of groups such as the orthodox Leninist organisation *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers Vanguard/AO), the libertarian (and longest-lived) *Lotta Continua* (The Struggle Continues/LC), the Leninist vanguard of *Potere Operaio* (Workers Power/PO), and the PCI breakaway group *Il Manifesto*.⁵² Of these organisations, the two invariably identified by social movement studies as most important to the future of the movement sector were LC⁵³ and PO.⁵⁴ PO emerged from the area of antagonistic Marxism intent on the direct, immediate, and autonomous meeting of workers' needs, and retained a primary focus on factory struggles. Forming a national organisation in 1969, PO brought together the localised workers' groups, such as PO Veneto-Emiliano, that had abandoned the official workers' movement of the PCI. This was typical of the larger organisations of the New Left, forming through the coalition of smaller radical and localised movements, and initially adopting inclusive and flexible structures. At first, the New Left organisations identified themselves, in part, against the backdrop of the Old Left. This unified the localised collectives who claimed the PCI presented a singular path of

⁴⁸ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 86-87, 107; Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 148-149.

⁴⁹ Silj, *Never Again*, 49-57.

⁵⁰ Silj, *Never Again*, 49.

⁵¹ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 312. The broader movement area, however, also maintained a 'classic' workerist position, and developed anarchist, Situationist, and intransigent Marxist-Leninist groups, all of which experienced marginalisation by both the political institution and the more 'classically' modelled organisations of the radical left. Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 45-46.

⁵² Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 312.

⁵³ LC was the largest neo Leninist group to come from the sector of 68-69, and assumed a more moderate position to that of PO. It also became involved in wider social struggles, including campaigns such as self-reduction, and uncharacteristically mobilised outside of the Northern industrial centres. With its dissolution in 1976, many of its militants joined the loose federation of organised Workers Autonomy (OWA), or filtered into the more diffuse Movement of '77. Alternatively, the LC marshals (the *servizio di ordine*, the armed protectors of public mobilisations), after a period in the autonomist movement helped form the major armed organisation *Prima Linea* (Front Line, PL). See Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

⁵⁴ Here I focus upon PO, primarily because of the State's designation of this organisation as the crucial actor in directing the Italian social movements toward violence.

'official politics' that removed the ability to construct alternative political positions.⁵⁵ However, ironically, the demise of the New Left organisations connects to their efforts to amalgamate the local practices into a centralised political programme, a shift that reflected the institutional path of the PCI and became indifferent to the specificity of the smaller workers' groups.

The New Left shifted away from and radicalised the traditional leftist ideology. This shift was partially a result of the conflict with the PCI; however, it was also inspired by the revolutions such as were occurring in Cuba and China, and the Algerian and Vietnamese liberation movements.⁵⁶ The conflict between the moderate PCI and the New Left, coupled with the historical circumstances of the late 1960s and 1970s, encouraged the new organisations to favour more radical activism and to support, openly, the practice of violence. Della Porta notes that the theme of revolution became a shared source of inspiration across the movements, and the dramatic actions and urban guerrilla strategy of the third world and Latin American revolutions often inspired alternative, and violent, approaches to politics.⁵⁷ However, she also claims that while the revolutionary organisations in Italy, inspired by the historical circumstances, provided the initial rationale and support for *mass violence*, the larger organisations of the New Left (here referring to LC) normally evolved towards exclusive and centralised structures, tending towards formalised [political] bodies.⁵⁸

The movement area of 1967-70 moved beyond the existing representative organisations of the working class and students,⁵⁹ climaxing in the Hot Autumn of 1969. This period saw the explicit theoretical and practical connection of social transformation with a framework of illegality, a break from the traditional place of social movements within the political system.⁶⁰ The autumn of 1969 saw an unprecedented level of radical mobilisation amongst the workers' movements, primarily in the Northern Industrial centres, and included demonstrations, pickets, strikes, and violent street clashes with the authorities. The renegotiating of the conditions of factory work in 1969 was planned to occur between the unions and the companies; however, the revolutionary groups and their self-organised factory collectives attempted to seize control of the negotiations prior to the acceptance of a conservative system of reforms on their behalf. While the reformist success of the Trade Unions in the negotiations of 1969 strengthened their position in the factory, it also escalated the conflict between them and the revolutionary groups, who dismissed the union arbitration as a sell-out and restriction of workers' spontaneity.⁶¹ The trade unions introduced a new system of representation in the workplace through the creation of factory councils, constituted by elected delegates, who were responsible for coordinating the actions of the workers and elaborating the strategic response of the unions.⁶² Radical theorists, such as Bologna, claim this was a setback for the autonomy of the working class, a defeat for

⁵⁵ See for similar the radical left pamphlet: Red Notes, '*Living with an Earthquake*', 45.

⁵⁶ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 313; della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 105.

⁵⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 194. The events in Latin America maintained a prominent position in the rhetoric of the radical left, and events such as the failure of the political left in Chile intensified the fear of a fascist coup-d'état in Italy.

⁵⁸ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 105-106.

⁵⁹ Diana Pinto, "Introduction," in *Contemporary Italian Sociology: A Reader*, ed. Diana Pinto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 14.

⁶⁰ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 226. This interpretation of the new demands upon political theory by RSMs is at the core of the growth of the sociological discipline of social movement studies. See for an excellent introduction della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 1-14.

⁶¹ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 318-320. PO was the most vocal critic of the unions' method of arbitration. See *The Last Firebrands*, 23. The concept of spontaneity indicates to certain theorists of IRT a misunderstanding of the workers' movement. I discuss the concept of spontaneity in chapter 4.

⁶² Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 318-320.

the revolutionary theory of Marxist science, with the 'party system' creeping back into the factory. Further, the ongoing bargaining activity within the workers' environment fragmented the collective identity of the antagonistic subject and diminished its specificity, gradually enabling its reduction to the terrain of labour power. This transferred the non-homogeneity and subjectivity of the workers' movements to the hegemony and identity of the left-wing organisations.⁶³

The re-negotiated contracts of 1969 failed to calm the climate of antagonism, and the ensuing period saw the solidification and transformation of the movement sector from the logic of negotiation, favoured by the Union and PCI, to the logic of confrontation and workers' autonomy, a shift from the paradigm of reform to that of revolt.⁶⁴ The successes of the militant workers in the factory, whether acting independently or 'harnessed' by the official left, gave confidence to the movements of the New Left and provided impetus for a leftward political and social shift. Tragically, it also drew the infamous reaction of State-sponsored terrorism. The aim of the State's strategy was to counter the momentum of the Left by creating a sense of anxiety about the radical left collectives, and by discrediting the movements in the media, the political institution, and amongst sections of the public.⁶⁵

The political framework of representation showed an inability to deal constitutionally with the antagonistic social movements of '68 and beyond, a failing that manifested in the State's strategy of violence and repression of dissent.⁶⁶ The particular episode identified as a catalyst for high-risk activism during the following decade, and the start of a new phase of activism, was the bombing of the Piazza Fontana Bank in December 1969, which killed 16 people and injured 40.⁶⁷ A fascist collective conducted the bombing; however, blame fell upon the left-wing movements after the deliberate misdirection of the investigation and incrimination of individuals involved in anti-authoritarian activism. The State covertly supported and protected fascist violence, a fact exposed through trials in the 1970s, and more directly utilised it as a tool of propaganda and counter-mobilisation.⁶⁸

While contributing to the escalation of violence in the political realm, it is disingenuous to claim that the bombing in Piazza Fontana established violence as an element of political discourse. The student and worker movements had been involved, albeit inconsistently, with high-risk/cost activism during the 1960s, prior to 1969. The repertoire of these movements included violent confrontation with the police, destruction of property, the beating up of factory supervisors, and physical attacks on opponents, most frequently fascists. A violent rhetoric had also developed amongst the students and the workers, primarily through exemplars of 'just violence', like the third world revolutions and their lionised leaders such as Mao and Guevara.⁶⁹ More accurately, what the State's support of terrorism did was, firstly, to

⁶³ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 45-46. While Bologna provides significant insight into the failures of the radical left, and provides a level of understanding of the movement missing in some of the more widely read accounts by theorists of the period such as Negri, here he does not develop the idea of specificity and subjectivity to a fine enough theoretical grain. I discuss this further in chapter 4, but mention here that the sense of 'subjectivity' he is discussing is not that of the self-activity of the autonomous workers' movement. While attentive to the experiences and perceptions of the workers, the 'revolutionary Marxist science' he mentions itself aimed to politically organise the movement, reducing the workers' struggle to their hegemonic discourse on working class composition.

⁶⁴ See *The Last Firebrands*; Wright, *Storming Heaven*.

⁶⁵ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 150. In addition, see Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 110-112.

⁶⁶ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 150. See also Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 110-112.

⁶⁷ Gianfranco Pasquino and Donatella della Porta, "Interpretations of Italian Left-Wing Terrorism," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 169.

⁶⁸ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 110-112.

⁶⁹ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 306.

elevate the importance of violence in the pre-existing left-wing frame of illegality, and secondly to introduce political violence into the daily life of Italians through the targeting of civilians. As Viale claims, the indiscriminate killing of civilians was a specialty of right-wing extremists,⁷⁰ a form of violence not previously observed amongst the radical left's repertoire.⁷¹

A deep economic crisis and industrial restructuring in the 1970s intersected with the escalation of violence and the growth in revolutionary movements that emerged from the confluence of activism, institutional responses, and the historical context of the late 1960s. During this period, militancy, strikes, social struggles, violence, and youthful anomie besieged Italy.⁷² Similar to the effect of the Southern migrations during the industrial boom, the economic crisis and factory restructuring of the early 1970s saw changes in the constitution of the worker's movement, altered the structure of work, and influenced the conditions of employment. This, Castellano and his comrades argue, affected the significance and meaning of work in daily life.⁷³ An important effect of the restructuring of industry was a shifting in confrontation from the factory into society, and a new round of struggle. This removed the efficacy and relevance of the antagonistic subject of the previous period. During the 1970s, Balibar observes, 'refusal', which had started with the mass workers' refusal of a subjectivity derivative of work or capitalist planning, became the refusal of entry into the factory, the refusal of the status of the mass worker.⁷⁴ Instead, the youth and counter-cultural movements were forming communities and social actions around quality of life issues such as the right to leisure. This undermined the effectiveness of the factory as a 'political institution' and disrupted the unity experienced within the community of the mass worker.⁷⁵ The outcome for some New Left organisations was dissolution; for others it was a shift towards institutionalisation.

The changes in organisational structure and political model saw the 'more radical groups' abandoning what they considered to have become moderate organisations.⁷⁶ The response of the youth and cultural movements, emerging from a period of latency with renewed potency, was to interpret this as an opportunity to experiment with new identities and counter-cultural lifestyles.⁷⁷ Subsequently, the movement sector rapidly expanded beyond the demands of workers, and a decentred social movement sector emerged that rejected the worker-based identity of the movement of '68, and its organisation. This movement area, Italian grass-roots intellectuals of the period such as Bologna argue, understood the relation of life and politics differently.⁷⁸ This exposed a crisis in Italian representative and party

⁷⁰ Guido Viale, *Il Sessantotto : Tra Rivoluzione E Restaurazione* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1978), 219. Cited in Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 300.

⁷¹ This episode appears to have 'normalised' the use of violence in the eyes of the Left, making it an acceptable form of political conflict.

⁷² Pinto, "Introduction," 1.

⁷³ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 229-230. This essay was written by April 7 defendants Castellano, Cavallina, Cortiana, Dalmaviva, Ferrari Bravo, Funaro, Negri, Pozzi, Tommei, Vesce, and Virno while awaiting trial.

⁷⁴ Étienne Balibar, "Reflections on Gewalt," *Historical Materialism* 17(2009): 119-120.

⁷⁵ See Red Notes, 'Living with an Earthquake', 44.

⁷⁶ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 105-106. The assumption here, as is invariably the case in SMT, is that the use of violence made groups 'more radical', rather than simply more violent.

⁷⁷ Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 435-436.

⁷⁸ A good example is the Dadaism popular to the counter-cultural area, which, in keeping with the broader ideology of Dada, aimed to negate rationalism in favour of spontaneity. Amongst certain areas of the counter-culture movement the original sentiment of the Dadaists, the 'impatience to live', is observable. SMT describes the counter-cultural area containing this sentiment as apolitical or even anti-political, becoming 'merely' cultural or lifestyle initiatives. An investigation of the politics of the counter-cultural movements runs through the case study.

politics, with no existing or theorised form able to capture the complexity or impetus of this area.⁷⁹ During the same period (1972-76), a parallel wave of movements saw civil life experience modernisation through changes to the divorce and abortion legislation, while the women's movement and specific areas of *Autonomia* rejected the Leninist model of organisation that was exerting influence over the movement sector.⁸⁰ It was this "crisis of the Leninist model and the emergence of a dialectic between political and private life" that produced a new interest in sociological analysis of social movements in Italy, reflected particularly in the NSMT of Melucci.⁸¹

PO dissolved itself in 1973 in response to its waning political relevance, attributed to factors such as the PCI project of compromise, a shift away from the factory-centric initiatives,⁸² and a split over the use of violence.⁸³ The loose federation of the area of organised Workers Autonomy (OWA) slowly expanded to fill the void left by PO, and sustained the revolutionary thread of workerism through intellectuals such as Negri.⁸⁴ However, OWA was only one small part of a movement sector that decentralised, promoted difference, and radically separated from the politics of representation.⁸⁵ At a minimum, this area contained collectives of workplace militants, regional alliances, diffuse local collectives, the subversive counter-cultural or creative sector, feminist collectives, and innumerable clandestine groups.⁸⁶ During 1973-74, the mass movement of the workers began to disaggregate, and at the same time the PCI and official organisations of the left forged closer links with the political institution. The most active and innovative area of collective antagonism during this period existed in the social and cultural field, where autonomous spaces to experiment with new forms of community and life opened up. This 'area of autonomy' avoided engaging 'officially' (through the formal frameworks of representation) with the political institution, instead favouring confrontation or separation. Within this phase Berardi, a member of PO until 1971 and the most prominent organic intellectual of the counter-cultural movement, claims "(...) autonomy emerged as a true mass movement which united young workers, the unemployed,

⁷⁹ Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 74. I look at Melucci's interpretation of this phenomenon in chapter 3. Melucci similarly focuses on the change in relation between daily life and politics, and the theoretical impotence of existing explanatory frameworks of social action.

⁸⁰ Alberto Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness: What's "New" in New Social Movements," in *New Social Movements : From Ideology to Identity*, ed. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 119-120. This is an important period in the history of the social movement sector, variously explained across the surveyed accounts as the outcome of movement decline, social disintegration, and political rejuvenation. I assay these alternative representations in the ensuing chapters.

⁸¹ Mario Diani and Alberto Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy: The Sociology of Social Movements in Italy," *Social Science Information* 27, no. 3 (1988): esp. 341. This crucial period in the regeneration/degeneration of the movement sector exposes an important cleavage among the competing paradigms of the sociological study of RSMs. The 'post-workerist' generation, paradigmatic to NSMT and of enduring affect upon IRT, exemplifies the challenge to instrumentalist efforts to repatriate the radical subject to modern politics. This phase of social struggle is central to my critical study of the sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs.

⁸² Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 231.

⁸³ The disagreement over the use of violence and the role of militants in the non-clandestine organisations caused splits and conflicts within groups such as LC and PO. The problem for PO escalated when three of its members were charged with an arson attack that killed two children. della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 90.

⁸⁴ In a defense memorandum after his arrest, Negri outlined his understanding of the dynamics of the dissolution of PO from 1971-73, the 'lengthy gestation' of OWA during 1973-77, and the 'formal emergence' and immediate descent of OWA into crisis in 1977-78. Antonio Negri, *Il memoriale difensivo di Toni Negri*, cited in Timothy Murphy, "Editors Introduction: Books for Burning," in *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, ed. Timothy Murphy (London: Verso, 2005), xiii. Ultimately, the temptation to organise as a party would see OWA destined to failure in a manner similar to PO and LC. Steve Wright, "The Limits of Negri's Class Analysis: Italian Autonomist Theory in the Seventies," *Reconstruction* 8, no. Winter/Spring (1996).

⁸⁵ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 231.

⁸⁶ See Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy." Also Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 76. An excellent source of primary and secondary materials on the area of Autonomy is the website <http://www.autistici.org/operaismo/Autonomi3/>

students, and others living on the margins of society.”⁸⁷ This movement reached its zenith in the area of social autonomy and culminated in the ‘Movement of 77’. While some social movements in this sector had their nascence in the disaggregation of the larger New Left organisations, others, the ‘atypical’ movements that practiced ‘communalism’ and ‘separatism’, such as the feminist and avant-garde communities, emerged from independent areas of social action.⁸⁸

Virno, a member of PO who would go on to become an intellectual leader of the Italian New Left, observed the new subject of antagonism abandoning the “besieged fortress” of the factory, with the community of the new proletariat leading away, rather than toward, the traditional image and culture of the worker.⁸⁹ This behaviour, the interruption of established thought and traditional representations of the radical community, was prevalent throughout the Italian movements, most obviously amongst the ‘frivolity’ of the proletarian youth and the Movement of ‘77’.⁹⁰ The new subject refused work, forcefully reclaimed free time, and demanded access to cultural events such as the theatre, and opera. Combined with these actions were acts of mass illegality such as proletarian shopping, squatting, armed marches, and diffuse acts of violence against property.⁹¹ The Movement of ‘77’ extended conflict into previously unexplored areas of contestation, and made demands, such as the right to leisure, that were inexplicable as political to the organisations of the New and Old Left and the political institution. This temporally, physically, and socially dispersed figure directly affected the culture of opposition by disrupting the unity of the mass worker; by confronting the organisations of the official left; by challenging the standards of the political community; and through its interruption of customary discourses on the politics of RSMs.⁹²

While the movement sector of the 1970s was highly complex and variegated, the PCI’s historic compromise stands out, alongside the economic crisis, factory restructure, and failed electoral programme of the New Left, as a key contributing factor to radicalisation in the movement sector. The PCI compromise altered the relation between the institutional and far left, with the Party shifting toward the political centre, becoming more moderate, and forming an alliance with the Christian Democrats. Despite the PCI’s electoral success, the far left considered the Party a political failure on two fronts. First, it was unable to meet the collective demands of the movements of the worker or represent the heterogeneity of the radical left, and second it was unable to influence national policy substantially.⁹³ The PCI’s ‘failed’ efforts at institutional engagement occurred as the far left organisations were also struggling on the electoral front. The poor election results in 1976 of the New Left organisations that had emerged from the milieu of 1968/69 and subsequently shifted toward institutional participation left many of their members disillusioned with ‘parliamentary politics’, even in their militant or ‘extra-parliamentary’ form.⁹⁴ This contributed to the disintegration of organisations such as LC and AO,⁹⁵ which left a void within the movement area of the far left and produced a wave of

⁸⁷ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 152.

⁸⁸ In *Do You Remember Revolution?* Castellano and his comrades promote the feminist movement and its valorisation of difference as the inspiration for the general area of social autonomy. (p 230) Paolo Virno, "Do You Remember Counter Revolution," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 244-245.

⁹⁰ I present my reasons for believing this in chapters 4 and 5.

⁹¹ Virno, "Counter Revolution," 232.

⁹² See for similar Red Notes, *Living with an Earthquake*, preface, 41-48.

⁹³ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 110.

⁹⁴ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 379-381.

⁹⁵ LC dissolved itself as an organization at its congress in October 1976.

disaffected participants from the revolutionary movements, a cohort that would provide a source of recruits into the Movement of '77.

The parliamentary failures of the Left, whether of the PCI or the revolutionary organisations, affected the character of the social movements during the remainder of the 1970s. As Silj observes, the PCI's compromising of its opposition role effectively freed the radical left from its sense of solidary obligations and political obedience.⁹⁶ The disintegration of the electoral efforts of the New Left organisations had a similar affect. The PCI were seen to be yielding to demands of the Right, and attempting to stabilise the status quo through a 'solidarity pact' within the political institution.⁹⁷ The PCI also became openly antagonistic with the Movement of '77, OWA, and the armed groups. The behaviour of the Party, coupled with the political vacuum left by the disintegration of the primary organisations of the revolutionary movement, saw the far left social conflict expand and diversify. This opened up the social movement terrain to pluralism, with numerous collectives experimenting with new political and social formations that rejected the previous organisational forms of antagonism. The change in movement characteristics also saw the burgeoning of armed and clandestine groups that competed with the OWA for control of the newly vacated political space of the far left. The disaggregation of what were essentially identitarian movements re-opened the political terrain to innovative and creative difference, characteristics previously buried beneath the consolidation of a hegemonic discourse on radical politics.

As with the movement of '68, the students were central to the area of social autonomy and the Movement of '77. They were central to the promotion of illegality, understood as an effort to "prevent any institutional recuperation of the movements" by the official left or the political institution.⁹⁸ In the movement sector of the mid to late 1970s, however, the students usually participated in 'creative autonomy' (best identified with Berardi, the journal *A/traverso*, and Radio Alice) and did not subordinate their position to working class struggle.⁹⁹ The students of '77, unlike in '68, did not see themselves as the support group of the workers, and were uninterested in a reduction of their social antagonism to the same subjectivity of the working class.¹⁰⁰ The 'creative area' involved communities formed around elements such as 'free' radio stations, independent publishers, and art and theatre movements.

One of the factors central to the transition from the movement of '68 to '77 was the social sector. This sector tended toward self-determined marginal, but shared, experiences of community. This tendency repeated itself throughout the social movements, whether via membership in clandestine organisations, avant-garde art collectives, youth associations, social centres, or numerous other forms of 'voluntary marginality' (those who chose autonomy from the culture of class politics) and political self-determination. With this shift came alternative or new identities, culture, and social behaviour. The movement of social and cultural autonomy combined a variegated field of anti-capitalist and anti-liberalist collectives that considered the organisations of the traditional *and* New Left as oppressive.

⁹⁶ Silj, *Never Again*, 190.

⁹⁷ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

⁹⁸ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 227.

⁹⁹ A basic but useful source of primary material from *A/traverso* and the journals of the creative sector is Piero Danioni, ed. *La Rivoluzione della Creativita* (Milan: Pieroni Distribuzione, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 86. This interpretation of the relation of the student to the worker in '68 is also contestable. As I discuss in chapter 4 and chapter 5, certain sections of the student movement did not see themselves as subordinate to the workers' movement, rather, they believed themselves to be autonomously 'nourishing' radical politics.

These organisations were considered a form of 'police', attempting to interchangeably 'co-opt or ostracize' the predominantly youth movement.¹⁰¹ In particular, OWA attempted to draw the area of social autonomy into the neo-Leninist programme of class re-composition, placing them under the leadership of the revolutionary party.¹⁰² The aim was to re-focus the impetus of the social subject into OWA's model of proletarian antagonism.¹⁰³ This phase of contestation reached its socio-political apex in 1977 followed by a rapid decline, on one hand catalysed by the criminalisation of the movement sector and State repression, and on the other, by the intervention of the New Left organisations and voluntarism of the clandestine organisations.

Repressive and violent interventions on social action typified the way that the State handled the second climax of the Italian social movement sector in '77. However, Melucci claims that the violent confrontation of the State and radical left was, in part, promoted by the 'residue' of the movement of '68 and the 'fringe' groups of the more moderate New Left, in particular *Lotta Continua*.¹⁰⁴ The disenfranchised participants of '68 and the margins of the New Left became the constituents of 'splinter groups' that were dissatisfied with institutional confinement. They understood representative politics as a betrayal of the origin and 'purity' of the radical community. The new, more aggressive groups primarily consisted of collectives of ex-New Left militants, independent armed groups, clandestine organisations, and urban youth and unemployed intellectuals who had disengaged from the official and extra-parliamentary left. This area of antagonism, Melucci argues, gave violence 'theoretical legitimacy' as the only means possible of expressing themselves 'politically', and thereby systemised its use as a political means.¹⁰⁵

The confluence of State repression, the vanguard and militarised remnants of the revolutionary left, and clandestine violence within the space of autonomy, saw the counter-cultural and creative section of the movement ghettoised. Subsequently, this area and the disillusioned sector of social autonomy, Melucci claims, became open to the idea of high-risk activism.¹⁰⁶ This violence of the social subject, which absorbs the attention of SMT and NSMT, contributed heavily to the collective force of the movement sector in '77, and drew an aggressive and repressive response from the State. Through 1977 and 1978,

¹⁰¹ See for similar Vincenzo Ruggiero, "New Social Movements and the 'Centri Sociali' in Milan," *The Sociological Review* (2000): 171.

¹⁰² I deliberately use the term neo-Leninism instead of Marxism-Leninism, with the latter broadly applied by Anglo-American studies of the Italian situation to designate collectives that mixed either orthodox or neo-Leninism with Marxism. This coarse application, however, is insensitive to the different cultural connotations of the term Marxism-Leninism across English and Italian usages. In Italy, Marxism-Leninism designates a specific tendency within the social movement sector that relates to a more rigid and ahistorical Marxist-Leninist discourse associated with, for example, the BR and *Movimento Studentesco*. The Anglo-American use highlights, as I discuss in chapter 2, the tendency within SMT to collapse the social movement sector into the asceticism and political violence of groups such as BR. Regarding the juridical use of the term Marxism-Leninism, associated with the events of April 7, the label is applied accusatorily to strengthen the prosecutions' theorem linking BR, PO, and OWA. Therefore, throughout the thesis where I judge the use of the term Marxism-Leninism to be inaccurate I have replaced it with 'neo-Leninism'. When referencing source material I maintain the original usage of the term Marxism-Leninism, and where I deem the label accusatory or culturally insensitive I add inverted commas.

¹⁰³ In contestation with the 'police' characterisation of the OWA, certain intellectuals placed a positive spin upon the OWA as an organisation that attempted to express the richness and diversity of the new subjectivity of the working class, reaching beyond the factory to the social terrain. See Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 231.

¹⁰⁴ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 268-269.

¹⁰⁵ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 268-269. I detail Melucci's position in chapter 3, and clarify his assertion that political violence "paradoxically represents both the most radical outcome of emergent movements and their antithesis." (270)

¹⁰⁶ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 270.

this saw a growing crisis and rapid disintegration of the area of social autonomy. Within this political and social climate, the BR found a renewed source of interest in its clandestine violence. By repressing the generalised area of antagonism, the State inadvertently produced a new source of recruits for clandestine organisations, which saw acts of extreme violence maintained at their highest levels throughout 1978-81.¹⁰⁷ It is this other face of the sector, the armed organisations such as the BR and the remnants of the militant workers' movement focused on violent resistance, which dominates the attention of the Anglo-American study of social movement. It is from this area of antagonism that the SMT discourse on RSMs routinely extracts information on violence to illustrate and reanimate its theory of radicalisation.

As we have seen, periodisation of the movement sector is an explanatory tool, common to the surveyed accounts of the politics of the Italian RSMs 1968-78, which outlines the course of the radicalisation of the social movements from the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s. This periodisation, coupled with a chronology that unfolds mechanistically, also stabilises the sociological modelling of the politics of RSMs. In the section that follows, I look at a specific feature of radicalisation, the use of violence. In particular, I am interested in the tendency to typify political violence as a *product* of the social, political, cultural, and historical conditions, being symptomatic of certain grievances or crises at a structural, organisational, or agentic level. In addition, I look at an apparent conflation of radicalisation with increased violence, with terrorism considered the 'most radical' form of social movements.¹⁰⁸ While the study of RSMs has shifted away from the notion of radical action being a sign of social pathology, violence as symptomatic of social movement decline and the absence of 'serious programmes' or projects for its participants maintains an important place in the surveyed accounts of the Italian social movements.¹⁰⁹ In the following two sections, I start to reveal the image of the radical community this approach brings to our accounts of the politics of RSMs.

2. Italy, radical social movements and political violence

If there is a key to terrorism, we shall find it in the factories and the slums, and not in the university protest movement of the 1960s. If we have absolved *il sessantotto* of responsibility for terrorism, what of the extra parliamentary groups that came out of it in 1969? They are the key links in the chain that some have tried to draw from the university protest movement of the 1960s to the organised terrorism of the late 70s.

Sidney Tarrow – *Democracy and Disorder*, p302

¹⁰⁷ Statistical support is available for this claim across numerous and varied sources. See for example Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta*; Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*; della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*; Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*, 177-179.

¹⁰⁸ I offer a background to this idea here, and return to this topic in chapter 2.

¹⁰⁹ In SMT, we find very little critical thought on violence. Usually, descriptions of violence occur at the level of empirical generality, restricted to assertions such as an escalation in the use of violence is symptomatic of social movement decline. Arendt's classic text, *On Violence*, provides a cautionary discourse on the possible consequences of such thinking on 'symptomatic violence'. Any such 'organic thought', where violence becomes a symptom of sickness, may promote or excuse the use of violence as the last resort, destroying the ill political body to clear the way for rebirth. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Allen Lane the Penguin press, 1970), 75.

Approaching high-risk and high-cost activism as a 'product' or 'effect' fails to acknowledge the intrinsic rationale, or epistemological work, of the radical community.¹¹⁰ First, such an approach replaces the particularity and specificity of the radical communities with vagueness about their practice and theory. Second, it reinforces an attitude of indifference to the essential non-homogeneity of localised collectives and marginal communities, and serves the theoretical recovery of the radical subject in an indistinct and manageable form. Normally, these groups receive generic identities such as 'counter-culture', 'splinter groups', and the 'disenfranchised'. This type of labelling overlooks, for example, that the practices (self-activity) of the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement were foundational in the nascence of the larger New Left organisations, while, in the early seventies, the independent workers' collectives were formative in the new wave of antagonism extending beyond the revolutionary groups. The outcome of theoretical indifference and vagueness is the treating of marginal communities as either anomalous or as mere links in the causal chain: the linear logic of cause and effect that Melucci criticised the sociological approach for embracing.¹¹¹ However, this approach is not limited to the academic study of radicalism for the institutions of the political cycle and certain factions of IRT attempted to recover the heterogeneity of the radical sector within a single organisation, school of thought, ideology, or collective subject.

Without exception, theories of the politics of RSMs bring as their companion a specific contextualising of history, ostensibly to reveal the impartiality and real world relevance of their modelling of social movement radicalisation. Amongst the accounts surveyed, the historical narrative accompanying the development of RSMs habitually begins with Italy's social movement sector during 1968-70.¹¹² In this instance, radicalisation involved the student movement adopting practices such as university occupations. Subsequently, violence as an integral form of social and political action emerged at the end of 1968 and escalated during the spring and autumn of 1969.¹¹³ While the use of violence by the radical left and its opponents (the State and fascists) headlines this period, another factor contributes to the importance afforded this era in accounts of the Italian RSMs. That factor is the nascence of BR, the clandestine organisation that has become the beacon for theorists looking for a causal link (or at least a believable teleology) between 1968/69 and the terrorism of the late 1970s.

The emergence of the BR is traceable to the autonomous collectives of the far left that first coordinated as the group *Collettivo Politico Metropolitano* (Metropolitan Political Collective/CPM) in the late 1960s, which, as its name suggests, aimed to extend the working class struggle into the 'metropolis'.¹¹⁴ The formation of CPM brought together Curcio and his followers in the Milanese autonomist collectives with

¹¹⁰ My thinking here is influenced by Toscano, "A Plea," 245-246. In *Fanaticism*, Toscano asserts the valence of RSMs is both political and epistemological. That is, they are irreducible to their political strategies and decisions. Toscano, *Fanaticism*, 58.

¹¹¹ Kristin Ross' observation of the effect of the 'consensus memory' of France's May 68 is applicable here. Ross notes that consensus memory is where "what comes before is the cause, what comes after is the effect or the product (...)." This self-serving philosophy of history assumes the "past exists only to better justify and magnify the present," which enables the essence of '68 to be found amongst 'social effects of the present'. Kristin Ross, "Establishing Consensus: May '68 in France as Seen from the 1980s," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. Spring (2002): 653.

¹¹² This period is the focus of NSMT and SMT more so than IRT; however, the radical theorists are also guilty of acts of forgetting regarding the self-activity of the workers' movement of the late 50s and early 60s.

¹¹³ Tarrow, for example, quantifies this claim, informing us that death as a result of, or incidental to, political conflict increased after the Hot Autumn of '69, and although it peaked in the late 70s, was an element of violent conflict throughout this decade and into the early 80s. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 293.

¹¹⁴ Here I use the brief history of the Red Brigades provided in Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta*, 48-55. The primary project of *La Mappa Perduta* (The Lost Map) is presented by its editors, who were former participants in the armed struggle, as a quantitative representation of the trajectory and history of the armed organisations by the radical left, an attempt to reclaim the memory of radicalism free from any speculative political content.

Alberto Franceschini's group, the *Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana* (Italian Communist Youth Federation/FGCI) from the traditional 'red' region of Reggio Emilia.¹¹⁵ Subsequently a faction of CPM renamed itself *Sinistra Proletaria* (Proletarian Left/SP) and at the same time radicalised its actions to include violence as a practical choice rather than as abstract theorising of revolutionary politics. SP was an incubator of the BR, and its associated journal of the same name publicly interpreted the first actions with the Red Brigade signature in 1970 as central to the workers' movement,¹¹⁶ recording it as the birth of 'proletarian self-organisation'.¹¹⁷

While the appearance of BR is traceable to the same theoretical and practical matrix as the extra-parliamentary New Left, the BR would primarily remain independent of, or distant from, the movement of autonomy.¹¹⁸ Significantly, the initial BR manifesto of supporting the *organisations* of the revolutionary workers' movement, intervening through acts of violence toward factory controllers, shifted in 1974 to a frontal offensive toward the State and intensification ('hardening') of its violent activism. It viewed this change as a demonstration of its credentials as a revolutionary alternative to the New Left.¹¹⁹ Subsequently, both internally to the movement and amongst observers to the conflict, the theoretical debate on political violence split around whether violence of the kind practiced by BR was a continuation of mass violence or antithetical to the participatory drive of radical collectives.¹²⁰

The theory and practice of the New Left (far/radical Left) movements during 1968-70 may appear to represent the nursery for high-risk politics in Italy during the late 1970s; however, violence as a mass form of social and political action existed as early as 1962, present in the first mass appearance of the new workers' movement in the riots of that year. The workerists' discourse surrounding the practices of the workers' collectives from this and subsequent period claims that changes to factory work in Italy during the 1950s and 1960s were experienced as dehumanising and asocial. This was a condition challenged, initially in practice and subsequently in the theoretical observations of a contemporaneous stream of radical thought, through actions such as refusal of work, strikes, sabotage, violence, and the re-creation of spaces free from the demands of work.¹²¹ Within this environment IRT generically observed a new radical subject emerge, born of the aggressive workers' struggle and its accompanying theoretical expression in a unique and antagonistic form of Marxism.

Also prominent within the far left social movement sector at the start of the 1960s, and the aspect of it that absorbs the majority of the focus of SMT, was anti-fascist violence. The history of fascism in Italy

¹¹⁵ The dual origins of CPM, and by extension BR, are detailed in Silj, *Never Again*, 39-41. See also della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 88-90. The contrasting social and political environments of the Reggio Emilia group and the autonomous collectives of Milan are detailed in Silj, *Never Again*, 16-82.

¹¹⁶ *Sinistra Proletaria* was a left wing journal started by CPM, of which Curcio was an editor and contributor.

¹¹⁷ The violent interventions of BR in industrial struggles became, in the language of their supporters, "the apparition of autonomous worker organisations" and the nascence of "proletarian self-organisation," with the methodology of clandestine violence justified as a reaction to the "direct, selective, [and] covert" means of the bosses against the working class. *Sinistra Proletaria* leaflet "The Red Autumn Has Already Begun" cited and discussed in Silj, *Never Again*, 108-110. This interpretation, similar to other surveyed accounts, obscures the importance of the autonomous self-organisation of the early workers' movement.

¹¹⁸ BR would remain entrenched in the classical worker position and eventually adopted a strategy of clandestine violence directed at the rupture of the political institution, with the intention of seizing management of the State. The claim regarding the 'distancing' of BR requires tempering by acknowledging their symbiotic relationship with certain Milanese autonomist collectives in the early 70s.

¹¹⁹ R Borgogno, "Dai Gruppi all'autonomia," in *Per il Sessantotto* (1997), 43. Cited in Patrick Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement of Refusal. Social Movements and Social Conflict in Italy in the 1970s" (Middlesex University, 2002), 131.

¹²⁰ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 162.

¹²¹ Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 428-434.

provided a background tension between the left and the far right, representing a theme around which the Left could unify and draw on to build support within the audience to its conflict with the State. Before the emergence of BR, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli created the underground guerrilla organisation *Gruppi d'Azione Partigiana* (Partisan Actions Groups/GAP). The formation of GAP, modelled on the previous partisan struggles of the Resistance during 1943-45, was a direct result of the State led bombing of the *Piazza Fontana* and fear amongst sections of the far left of an imminent neo-fascist *coup d'état*.¹²² The rhetoric of the Resistance and the need to continue the struggle of their fathers was, according to della Porta, central to the self-understanding of the far left social subject.¹²³ In addition to the 'memory' of the Resistance, narratives of ongoing battles with right-wing and State opponents were interwoven with the workers' framing of political action that included positive recitals of Marx's traditional literature on the proletarian revolution.¹²⁴

The aligning of the radical left with the Resistance of the 'Italian Fathers', and the associating of the factory struggles with the larger historical project of working class revolution, della Porta believes, provided the movement of the 'new' social subject with a sense of continuity and legitimacy.¹²⁵ Purportedly, the radical ancestry of the radical community legitimised their practices. Italy's socio-political history, in particular the prominence of Marxist and Leninist academia in the New Left, as well as the notoriety of fascism, provided a compelling framing of the movement milieu and promoted the legitimacy of the antagonist community. An outcome of this conjunction of the Resistance memory with an aggressive brand of Marxism-Leninism was the longevity and co-existence of militant anti-fascism with political militancy amongst the far left practice of political dissent.

In the second half of the 1960s, accounts of the revolutions of the Third World and Latin America augmented the discourses of anti-fascism and Marxism. Positive comparisons were made between the Italian situation and the favourite referents of struggle, including China, Vietnam, and Chile. Various, these struggles were related to as exemplary or analogical, archetypal or rhetorical, but, overwhelmingly Tarrow claims, they were used to gain visibility, express the sentiment of the movement, and gather support for mass mobilisation.¹²⁶ The foreign revolutions were not 'models for action' for the majority of movement actors, but aided their cause by transferring meaning and sentiment across geopolitical borders; however, this was not to the total exclusion of exemplarity. The third world model of struggle influenced some armed and clandestine groups, most notably BR, who at times adopted their organisational approach to revolution.¹²⁷

While the rhetoric and imagery of revolutionary violence were prevalent amongst the movements of the radical left, the violence of the 1960s and early 1970s, categorised as *mass violence*, was

¹²² Silj, *Never Again*, xi-xii, 112-113. The GAP were predominantly a defensive anti-fascist force that set up weapon and food stores in mountainous zones to defend themselves in the advent of a fascist *coup*. The organiser of this group, Feltrinelli, was a leftist publisher who owned one of Italy's largest publishing houses. He produced an important investigation of the 'Strategy of Tension' and perceived threat of a neo-fascist *coup*. See Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, "Estate 1969," in *La Notte Dei Gladiatore: Omissioni E Silenzi Della Repubblica*, ed. M Coglitore and S Scarso (Padua: Calusca Edizione, 1992). This article was originally published in 1969.

¹²³ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 191-194.

¹²⁴ An oft-cited example of the 'narratives' is the 'battle of *Valle Giulia*', a violent conflict in March 1968 between student protesters and the police in Rome.

¹²⁵ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 174 (Life history no. 112:121).

¹²⁶ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 303.

¹²⁷ For example, after the 1972 police operation against them, BR attempted to include urban guerrilla offensives, modelled upon the organisation of the Uruguayan *Tupamaros*, within their political practice. Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta*, 48-49.

predominantly incidental to mobilisation in actions such as blockades and picket lines, strike action, street demonstrations, and occupations of public spaces, university buildings, and factories. Apart from the obvious counter examples of fascist violence and State controlled terrorism, violence against persons typically occurred through confrontations between the left and its opponents (the police and fascists) during mass events such as street protests. While 'street violence' became habitual during this period, which is claimed to have ended in 1973, this 'incidental' or *defensive* use of force against others is distinguishable from the violence of the second half of the 1970s. Violence post-1973, according to theorists such as Tarrow, della Porta, and Melucci, was systematic, programmed, and *offensive*.¹²⁸ It is during the second phase of violence that sociological thought observes a transformation in the relation of the social actor to high-risk and high-cost activism. This involves a shift from violence as a form of reaction to a form of action, from innovation to strategy, and from an incidental to an instrumental form. This change in the nature of violence, in the accounts of SMT and NSMT, is indicative of social movement decline or social disintegration.

1973 is a decisive year in the broad chronology of the gathered accounts. This year is identified as the tipping point in the transformation of the practice of violence. The enthusiasm for and increased participation in the systematic violence and vanguard action of small voluntarist armed groups, claiming to act on behalf of the mass movement, displaced mass violence as the dominant form of high risk activism.¹²⁹ 1973 is a key temporal marker for sociological accounts of the Italian RSMs 1968-78, not simply for the altered character of violence, but also for the decline of the organisations of the New Left movement sector. This circumstance reportedly created a vacuum in the political/institutional representation of dissent, a vacuum filled by organised violence. It was a turning point which saw a return to the State's policy of repressive policing of protest. It also coincided with the end of the economic strength in the factory sector, factory restructuring, and changes to the social welfare system. The conjuncture of these elements appears to have altered the sentiment of the revolution of the mass worker. In the writing of Negri, the change in outlook was associated with the manifestation of an altered subjectivity of the working class who were responding to the new demands of their environment. This change in the radical subject involved a different *kind* of relation to violence, disconnecting the revolutionary subject from the paradigm of transcendence and connecting it rather to the paradigm of self-valorisation.¹³⁰

Post 1973 the repertoire of violence expanded to include actions such as industrial sabotage, armed marches, targeted beatings of political opponents, kidnappings, 'political murders', and eventually, terrorism.¹³¹ During this phase, anti-fascist sentiment remained strong, providing a traditional framing of the adversary that extended to include the existing form of the State and its police. It was also a point of connection between diverse movements of the radical left, such as the student and worker, offering

¹²⁸ The two phases of violence do not split as neatly around 1973 as sometimes implied. The 'second phase' of violence is rooted in the pre-1973 movement context amongst the practices of 'semi-military' or 'semi-illegal' bodies such as the *servizi d'ordine* attached to the mass movement, and within the discourse on political violence that had a strong presence, especially as the rhetoric of revolution, within the student and workers' movement. More accurately, the change that occurred around 1973 relates to the increased visibility, influence, and popularity of offensive forms of violence.

¹²⁹ This cleavage in the chronology of political violence is common to works across all surveyed accounts. See for example Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*; Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism; Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?."

¹³⁰ I look more critically at Negri's work on class recomposition in Chapter 4. 'Transcendence' is associated with the capacity to replace or move beyond the existing conditions (for example the capitalist relation), while 'self-valorisation' in basic terms involves self-aware practices of community. I further explain these concepts below.

¹³¹ Tarrow offers his summary of the 'phases' of violence in Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 305-307.

an ideological and cultural link between the social action of the 1960s and 1970s. Anti-fascist violence was widespread, particularly amongst the organisations of workers' autonomy whose militants and armed stewards were central to anti-fascist marches. The armed stewards had always been strongly associated with defensive violence against fascists, protecting collective action from right-wing attacks; however, the protectionist task of the stewards shifted toward offense in the first half of the 1970s as the extra-parliamentary organisations began to wane or experience partial institutionalisation.¹³² Under these conditions, the semi-militant or semi-illegal servicing structures asserted their autonomy from the mass movement and directly fed the area of armed and clandestine activism.¹³³

While some movement actors adopted a particular approach to violence (defensive or offensive, rhetorical or practical),¹³⁴ others, such as LC, were attempting to combine them; however, while initially LC tentatively embraced vanguard violence, it definitively excluded such actions a few years later.¹³⁵ In the practical context of semi-military formations, the armed sector of the New Left organisations had combined with the political arm, forming a parallel structure. In this context, semi-clandestine violence was justified as a counter to the systemic violence of the existing order and the right-wing violence present in the social conflict. When the primary New Left organisations began to dissolve, their stewards, if wanting to continue activism, became independent from the political organisations, splitting roughly into two armed groups. One section founded Prima Linea after a period within the autonomist movement, while the already existing Red Brigade was the preferred destination of the Rome-based leadership of PO's stewards.¹³⁶

As LC and other New Left organisations moved toward the party system, groups such as BR were pursuing increasingly more violent and offensive agendas. This widened the gap in the approach to violence between those who 'preached violence' (e.g. LC) and those who practised it (e.g. BR). LC, throughout its history Tarrow claims, approached violence as a way to *communicate* with the mass movement, using it only rarely as a 'political weapon';¹³⁷ however, its experimentation with the practice of instrumental violence had created a problem for its participants and supporters. Tarrow notes that after experiencing political violence many within the movement found it difficult to move beyond this 'culture of force' such that their persistent attraction to militant anti-fascism, violent rhetoric, and revolutionary violence would continue to shape their role in the community of dissent.¹³⁸

¹³² I discuss the behaviour of the armed stewards further in subsequent chapters. However, missing from the surveyed accounts is an explanation of the violence toward political opponents practiced by the stewards' of moderate organisations such as the PCI.

¹³³ Some of the revolutionary organisations attempted to represent both parliamentary and armed impulses, resulting in a 'double militancy', where political ambitions were promoted alongside the vanguard violence of an armed wing or 'servicing structure'.

¹³⁴ Defensive violence is best associated with anti-fascism, typical of the student movements during both the 60s and 70s and in the pragmatic violence of the urban movements, defending public housing occupations. Defensive practices were also common amongst the reactionary violence of mass mobilisation, providing protection against attack and disruption by opponents. Offensive violence was visible in, for example, the language of insurrection within PO, the aggressive Marxist-Leninist and anti-statist speech of BR, and in the strategic/instrumental uses of physical force (vanguard violence) in the pursuit of political goals.

¹³⁵ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 284-285.

¹³⁶ *The Last Firebrands*, 31.

¹³⁷ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 288-289. Tarrow argues the practice of violence *as politics* was atypical in comparison to the rhetoric on violence, and this had its correlate in the path from the movements of '68 and '69 to terrorism or more commonly the party system (p 303).

¹³⁸ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 284-285. Chapter 2 looks at the mechanics of this attraction. Briefly, it involves the evolution of a master frame in an environment that exposed participants to increasing levels of violence, and hence required its justification in their shared definition of identity.

Observers of the Italian radical movements argue changes in the political, historical, and social conditions of the movement environment between 1974 and 1976 ushered in what would become the most violent period of the social movement struggles.¹³⁹ Between 1974 and 1976, programmed violence and mass illegality intensified as the armed sector expanded. During this period, BR moved beyond the factory and began its campaign against the State. Accompanying this change in direction was an expansion of its targets for violence, those targets now including judges and other public figures: proxies for the system, deemed to be supporting the repression of the radical left. Within this timeframe, the repertoire of the BR also hardened to include 'strategic' or 'political' murders. Within this sector it became normal to theorise that the only effective 'weapon' of politics was violence, with armed struggle against the State and physical force against the PCI a regular occurrence.¹⁴⁰ These were decisive moments in the radicalisation of the movement sector offering important insights into the intractable differences between the BR and the movement of autonomy. At this time in the history of clandestine violence, we can observe the redirection of antagonism toward the State. Accompanying this shift was the glorification of physical force and the consolidation of the *community of violence*, as distinct from the radical community.¹⁴¹ As Tarrow observes, the terrorism that would emerge from this period was the "fruit of a new generation of extremists"; it was not clearly the radicalising of the New Left movements;¹⁴² however, Tarrow persists with a modelling of the sector that maintains a causal link between the activism of the late 1960s and the violence of the late 1970s. Simply, his caveat is that while implicated in the evolution of political violence, the New Left are not directly accountable.

The rise of armed struggle within the territory of the industrial conflict appeared in part as a reaction against the loss of efficacy of traditional struggle repertoires affected by conditions such as factory restructures.¹⁴³ Similarly, Melucci claims, the initial recruits of BR had been militants "disillusioned by the 'moderation' of the unions and the PCI." These militants found performing 'demonstrative' acts of violence (e.g. beating up of managers), and after the 1972, kidnappings, an attractive alternative to conventional forms of protest.¹⁴⁴ A good example of the transition talked of in SMT and NSMT, is the practice of BR in the factories of Pirelli and Siemens, where the advanced state of restructuring, such as the outsourcing of labour to Spain, had reduced the effectiveness of strike action and similar generic forms of industrial activism. The BR responded, Ruggiero informs us (with the support of voices of

¹³⁹ Empirical support for this claim is available in the quantitative data of works such as Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*; Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism"; Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta*.

¹⁴⁰ During '78 and '79, the targets of violence expanded to take in PCI 'traitors' and others internal to the movement who, encouraged by the anti-terrorist policy of the PCI, denounced the violence of the BR and assisted management and the police to identify terror suspects. Such a 'qualitative leap' alienated the BR even from the extreme fringe of the 'movement'. Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 115-117.

¹⁴¹ This decisive shift receives scant attention in NSMT and SMT. Violence, treated as the only effective instrument of politics, amounts to the glorifying of physical force, against which, Arendt argues, the political community must be vigilant. Interestingly, as I discuss below, the State adopted a similar position on the effectiveness of violence and its exceptional quality as the final arbiter. If attentive, we can observe the area of social autonomy and certain factions of the radical left, challenging the discourses on radical politics that celebrated vanguard violence. Accordingly, greater attention is required to the theory and practice of radicalism beyond the vanguard violence of the late 70s when modelling the terminal path in Italy. Arendt writes, "... if only the practice of violence would make it possible to interrupt automatic processes in the realm of human affairs, the preachers of violence would have won an important point." This is, however, a point Arendt argues we never need to accept. Arendt, *On Violence*, 30.

¹⁴² Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 304. As I discuss below, this is an important insight when coupled with the far left idea that post 1973/74 the radical community could no longer be thought of as a 'family' of movements, with their 'points of resemblance' vanishing. See Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 231.

¹⁴³ Ruggiero, "Brigate Rosse," 293-294.

¹⁴⁴ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 117.

former BR members), with its 'name and shame' programme. Those thought responsible for the restructure within the factory, including supervisors, foremen, and consultants, were identified by the group who then targeted them through destruction of their property, most notably and spectacularly the burning of their cars.¹⁴⁵ The BR perceived the media attention afforded these actions as helping to gain *visibility* and show the strength of the movement that,¹⁴⁶ while still being part of the tradition of the resistance to fascism, now saw armed organisations as the nucleus and vanguard of the revolutionary workers' movement.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Castellano and his comrades claim, a parallel wave of antagonism in the area of social autonomy was disconnecting from the preparations for the workers' revolution, and instead became an effort to open independent spaces free from state and extra-parliamentary control. This period saw a shift from practices such as 'self-reduction' (the 'guaranteed income' of price reduction) toward illegality or appropriation. Self-reduction, intended as a symbolic gesture by the institutional left, was embraced as a material realisation of contestation by the broader movement.¹⁴⁸ The practice of guaranteed income was radicalised to include actions such as proletarian or 'political shopping' (looting), the forceful occupation and defence of public housing squats, and, particularly amongst the counter-culture area, the aggressive reclamation of the right to leisure typified by forced entry to concerts and theatres without payment.¹⁴⁹ This phase of illegality and violence of immediate needs also accommodated a 'militarisation' of the general movement population. This included a return to violent street conflict in response to the aggressive policing of protest and in reaction to the State's austerity measures.¹⁵⁰

By 1975, alongside changes in the area of social autonomy, Wright claims that OWA had elevated the significance of armed action and rebranded it 'armed Leninism'. This process alienated its traditional support base in the factory, while its foundation was reinforced by the new generation of radical left from the urban youth and students who, emerging from the environment of self-reduction and street conflict, were seemingly impressed with the willingness to use physical force.¹⁵¹ With the escalation of violence in the area of social autonomy (the violence of the 'social subject' beyond workers' militancy and clandestine violence), the political institution responded with the invocation of a state of exception, removing constitutional safeguards for political dissidents. The State introduced legislation such as the *Legge Reale* that allowed police to shoot anytime they felt public order was threatened and awarded them powers to jail those in possession of defensive weapons and items that could be used to mask their identity. The state of exception also allowed laws of the fascist period penal code, the *Codice Rocco*, to resurface within the Italian political constitution. This included a law that authorised the conviction of those adjudged to have 'dangerous opinions',¹⁵² and allowed the 'preventative detention' (incarceration without charge or trial) of activists suspected of illegal action through their association with an organisation or group under investigation for criminal activity.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁵ Ruggiero, "Brigate Rosse," 293-294.

¹⁴⁶ Ruggiero, "Brigate Rosse," 294.

¹⁴⁷ This strategy of promoting the BR appears to have succeeded, with their vanguard violence dominating the attention of the State, the popular media, and the audience to the conflict, including social movement theorists.

¹⁴⁸ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 232.

¹⁴⁹ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 231-232.

¹⁵⁰ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 232.

¹⁵¹ Wright, "Negri's Class Analysis."

¹⁵² Mario Tronti, "The Strategy of Refusal," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext (E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 173.

¹⁵³ Hardt, "Introduction: Laboratory Italy," 3.

In 1977 assassinations become more frequent, accompanied by a growth of “diffuse ‘small time’ terrorism” conducted by its marginalised youth recruits.¹⁵⁴ By 1978, the BR had begun to direct far left political action, taking it toward armed action and voluntarism. The indecision of the traditional movement area in the face of a rapidly changing social, political, and cultural environment, and the altered subjectivity of the radical actor, appears to have made the decisive shift toward violence more attractive to those participants alienated from their original movement memberships. This shift in the most prominent form of mobilisation, from organised and public movements of autonomy toward armed and clandestine groups, would be the final significant adjustment in the constitution of the radical community, heralding the collapse of the far left’s political and social dissidence.¹⁵⁵

In the field of social movement study, the ‘final adjustment’ of the radical community typifies the violence of the late 1970s, with the conflict between clandestine organisations such as BR and the State somehow ‘completing’ the radical left movement. Tarrow and others attribute this conclusion to the decline of the mass mobilisation of the students and workers of the late 1960s and the disaggregation of their organisations. Tarrow argues that the escalation in the severity of violent repertoires at the end of the 1970s was an outcome of the *failure* of the New left to realise, in any programmatic social or political form, the dissident sentiment of the radical left social movements.¹⁵⁶ Berardi similarly identified a problem with the Movement of ‘77 and its aftermath, which failed to capitalise on the reach of ‘77 by consolidating social forms into forms of self-determination and organisation of social relations, and instead reverted to the ‘classical form’ of Marxist organisation.¹⁵⁷

The practice of the marginal communities, reacting directly and subjectively to their environment, did not consolidate into a counter-culture capable of challenging either the political community or the ‘classical’ Marxist organisations that re-asserted their authority toward the end of the movement. The resultant mistake, Bologna asserts, was the reimposition of a discourse upon the radical community rather than a *comprehending* of their revolutionary form. This repeated the errors of their predecessors and strangled the broader movement in a fashion comparable to that of their enemy.¹⁵⁸ Mesmerised by the idea of the general clash, the conquering of power, and the proletarian dictatorship, the classic form of Marxist organisation expropriated the knowledge of the ‘thousands of comrades’ active in grass-roots struggle.¹⁵⁹ Firstly, this dismisses the veracity of the discursive aspect of certain sections of the radical community, a form of discrimination existing in the juridical assessment of this sector, and one repeated in the accounts of SMT and NSMT. Secondly, the expropriation of radical thought misrepresents the schemas and discourses circulating amongst grass roots participants. A consequence of this ‘failed dialectic’ between the movement and the intellectual, noted by Castellano, was that the actual

¹⁵⁴ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 117.

¹⁵⁵ An important source of primary materials on Brigade Rosse, armed action, and the direction of the movement at the end of the 1970s is the website *Archivio '900*. See for example, "Proletariato Metropolitano e Movimento di Resistenza Proletario Offensivo," <http://archivio900.it/it/documenti/finestre-900.aspx?c=1087&p=2>.

¹⁵⁶ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 306-309. This position finds support across a broad spectrum of social and political theory. Examples include the interviews conducted with Franco Berardi (2000) and Sergio Bologna (2001) for the CD accompanying Guido Borio, Francesca Pozzi, and Giggi Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore. dai "Quaderni Rossi" ai Movimenti Globali: Ricchezze e Limiti dell'operaismo Italiano* (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2001), 8. Melucci makes a comparable observation: Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 72.

¹⁵⁷ Intervista a Franco (Bifo) Berardi, (2000) Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore*, 8. Wright discusses and further contextualises the position of Berardi and Bologna, in Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?." I revisit the claim of Berardi in chapter 4.

¹⁵⁸ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 56-58; Bologna, "An Overview."

¹⁵⁹ Bologna, "An Overview," 122.

movement in the second half of the 1970s was *less* 'bellicose' or 'heroic' than its representation in the frames of leadership.¹⁶⁰

Toward the end of the 1970s, the inability of the theory and practice of the marginal communities to interrupt the prevailing traditional discourses on the politics of RSMs, whether institutional or Marxist, assumes a prominent position in accounts of the decline of the far left. Of particular consequence was the success of the State in representing the extreme violence of the 1970s as the culmination of the radical left planned insurrection which it asserted had been the intention of the New Left as early as the late 1960s. The State claimed the leaders and intellectuals of the movement, primarily those associated with PO and subsequently OWA, promoted the significance of indiscriminate and generative violence in politics. Nominated figures, in particular the core trio of Negri, Piperno and Scalzone, were purportedly responsible for sharing a glorified notion of Marxist violence across the movement context temporally, generationally, geographically, and ideologically.¹⁶¹ Calogero, in his 2010 book *Terrore Rosse*, asserts that the so-called 'benevolent intellectuals' were in fact the leaders of the 'soldiers', with their theorising reaching beyond 'harmless chatter', advancing the practice of politics and violence as one and the same. Calogero then states, persisting with the affirmative style of his April 7 warrants, that the appropriate expression of the subjectivity of the transgressive community in the theoretical practice of the radical left relied on the realisation of an adequate level of violence, and the resurrection of armed propaganda, that would culminate in the overthrow of the government.¹⁶²

The April 7 warrants represent the theoretical practice of the 'long '68', expressed in the 'hegemonic intentions' of organisations such as PO, BR and OWA as being intent on uniting terrorism with the mass movement, the final step in achieving insurrection and attaining the fabled proletarian dictatorship.¹⁶³ Ultimately, the April 7 discourse on the violence of the far left was more effective in disaggregating the antagonistic community by disrupting radical thought and exiling its theorists, than providing support in the prosecution of illegality. In fact, Melucci claims, such efforts to control the access to knowledge and the involvement in the discourse on politics and society, are the contemporary terrain of politics. For this reason, April 7 is more interesting than a mere legal footnote to the accounts of Italian RSMs 1968-78, with the hegemonic intent of its competing discourses providing a lens through which to focus the investigation of the sociological study of the nexus of politics and the radical community.

3. April 7: A contest of discourses

The surveyed accounts of Italian RSMs agree that the State, while fluid in its composition, was constant in its effort to 'integrate', 'redeem' or 'recuperate' the radical left within a 'more powerful consensus',¹⁶⁴ or programme of reform. This occurred through institutional strategies such as the

¹⁶⁰ Lucio Castellano, "Living with Geurrilla Warfare," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext(E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 230. The relation of the intellectual and the movement is a central theme of chapter 4.

¹⁶¹ Calogero, a Paduan prosecutor and central figure in the events of April 7, persists with this interpretation in his book *Terrore Rosse* (esp. pp. 5-6), in which he claims to present the 'bare facts' and 'truth' regarding the subversion and political violence of the radical left in the 70's. This he positions as a corrective to the narratives, memory and theoretical interventions of the radical left 'revolutionary fanaticism.' Pietro Calogero, Carlo Fumian, and Michele Sartori, *Terrore Rosso: Dall'autonomia al Partito Armato* (Bari: Guis Laterza & Figli Spa, 2010), v-vii.

¹⁶² Calogero, Fumian, and Sartori, *Terrore Rosso*, v-10.

¹⁶³ Calogero, Fumian, and Sartori, *Terrore Rosso*, 96-100.

¹⁶⁴ The concept of a 'more powerful consensus' is utilised by Melucci to explain the dynamics of political violence beyond the reaction to crisis. I clarify this position below. Alberto Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses for the Analysis of

Historic Compromise between the PCI and DC, the workplace introduction of the Workers' Charter, and the participation of extra-parliamentary organisations such as LC in the electoral process. For large sections of the radical left, however, the Italian political community was experienced as exclusive, with the possibility of sustained and *unmediated* antagonism unavailable within the representative system of party and consensus politics. The programmes of reform and the political solutions offered in place of the revolutionary impulse failed to comprehend and verify the autonomy of the radical left within a 'political relation', persisting instead with efforts to identify and substantiate the role of dissent within the existing social order and political system. These efforts reduced antagonism to an organised set of procedures that legitimised a compromised role of dissidence. The inability of the State to repatriate the radical and marginal community by centralising its rights and political legitimacy resulted in an intensification of the repression of antagonism and the aggressive policing of protest.

In the second half of the 1970s, the State adopted an alternative approach to 'rehabilitating' dissidence, with their programme of material inclusion/exclusion supported by a discourse of *political illegality*, propped up by liberal political thought. This limited the radical subject to the social categories of criminal, terrorist, marginal, or enemy, reducing the equality of antagonists to that available solely in the eyes of the law.¹⁶⁵ Subsequently, the invention of the extenuating identity of *pentiti* was added to the universal category of criminality. The *pentiti* identity facilitated the reintegration of radical activists, formerly involved in illegal activity, into the political solidary as informants to the judicial case against the radical left.¹⁶⁶ Along with the *dissociati*,¹⁶⁷ the *pentiti* became vital to the judicial interpretation of the meaning of high-risk activism amongst the left-wing movements, playing a central role in the procedures of April 7.¹⁶⁸

While April 7 ostensibly related to the activities of left-wing social movements from 1968 to 1979, it targeted anti-capitalist intellectuals with a workerist heritage, focusing on former members of PO.¹⁶⁹ Guiding this approach was the prosecution's insistence that PO was the 'primal scene', the progenitor, of all left wing paths to violence, and was responsible for the formation of the terrorist group BR.¹⁷⁰

New Movements," in *Contemporary Italian Sociology : A Reader*, ed. Diana Pinto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981), 186.

¹⁶⁵ Moss makes a similar observation in David Moss, "Politics, Violence, Writing: The Rituals of 'Armed Struggle' in Italy," in *The Legitimization of Violence*, ed. David E Apter (London: Macmillan, 1997).

¹⁶⁶ The *pentiti* were radical left activists who repented and turned State informant, typically in exchange for reduced sentences and occasionally immunity. As I discuss in Chapter 2, the State's definition of illegality and illegitimacy has its correlate in the explanatory devices of SMT, when, for example, della Porta denotes political violence as "behaviour that violates the prevailing definition of legitimate political action," and acts of physical force deemed illegitimate within the dominant culture of the time. della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 2-3. Importantly, as I discuss in chapter 2, the *pentiti* interviews became a key source of information for SMT accounts of Italian RSMs.

¹⁶⁷ The *dissociati* are those activists who disassociated themselves from armed struggle and acknowledged their own continued involvement in the radical left without turning State informant.

¹⁶⁸ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 194-195. Alessandro Portelli provides a useful review of the mechanics of the *pentiti* testimonies and the role they played in securing convictions during the April 7 trials in Alessandro Portelli, "Oral Testimony, the Law and the Making of History: The 'April 7' Murder Trial," *History Workshop* 20, no. Autumn (1985).

¹⁶⁹ The warrants also targeted OWA, which Calogero and Galluci suggested was the continuation of PO, but avoided members of the clandestine 'terror' organisations such as the BR and Prima Linea and the fragmented area of armed groups and the diffuse violence of the area of social autonomy.

¹⁷⁰ Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext (E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 9. In part, the linking of OWA and PO to BR appears an instrumental measure of the juridical approach, allowing the prosecution of defendants for participation in armed bands, a category not previously associated with OWA or PO.

Paduan prosecutor Calogero argued BR and PO shared the same 'hegemonic intentions' and were in fact concomitant, with the connection between extreme violence and politics a founding principle of PO, propagated by its leaders and intellectuals. The intent of this radical alliance included 'uniting terror and the mass movement' as part of a strategy of civil war, with the ultimate intent being an armed insurrection against the State.¹⁷¹ In addition to the association of BR and PO, OWA was considered a distinct but not distant organisation, an 'armed party' complicit with and contiguous to the radical left 'family of terrorism'.¹⁷²

The material evidence of the April 7 warrants consisted primarily of the pamphlets, journals and 'subversive communications' of the left-wing movements, in particular PO, with the discursive dimension of the 'April 7 cohort' held responsible for compelling violence. Their texts were given direct referential status, while select examples, such as Negri's inflammatory "Domination and Sabotage," regardless of their rhetorical function in aggregating the social antagonist, were afforded a central role by the prosecution in explaining the meaning of, and reasons for, left-wing violence.¹⁷³ The evidence for the Calogero warrant was almost exclusively written texts, with the four primary sources being the documents of Negri, PO, OWA, and the BR.¹⁷⁴ The warrant claimed Negri and other intellectuals were directly responsible for the violence of the movement sector.¹⁷⁵ It aimed to make them accountable for having

organised and led an association called the Red Brigades, constituted as an armed band (...) aimed at promoting armed insurrection against the Powers of the State, and violently changing the constitution and form of government by means of the propaganda of armed actions against persons and things and by means of the planning and execution of robberies and kidnappings, murders and woundings, arson and property damage and attempts against public and private institutions.¹⁷⁶

It continued with the claim that the intellectuals had led the area of the

(...) so-called 'Organised Workers Autonomy', which aims to *subvert by violence the constituted order of the State by means of propaganda* and incitement to practice so-called mass illegality and various forms of violence and armed struggle (proletarian expropriation and perquisition; (...) attempts on prisons, barracks, party and association headquarters (...)), by means of training in the use of arms, munitions, explosives, and incendiary devices and by means of recourse to acts of illegality, violence, and armed attack (...).¹⁷⁷

In Roman Judge Galluci's warrant, the strategy of the prosecution against the radical movements became more explicit, as did their account of the means of mobilisation and subversion; in particular,

Moss discusses this and similar judicial mechanisms in Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 165-209. In November 1980, the judiciary abandoned any formal connection between PO and BR.

¹⁷¹ Calogero, Fumian, and Sartori, *Terrore Rosso*, 95-97, 10-17. In this recent publication, Calogero, along with Carlo Fumian and Michele Sartori, claims that during the 70s the weapon of terrorism and the subversion and propaganda of political violence in Italy presented a threat to democracy and the daily lives of the public that was 'without equal in Europe'. Calogero, Fumian, and Sartori, *Terrore Rosso*, v.

¹⁷² Calogero, Fumian, and Sartori, *Terrore Rosso*, vi, 97.

¹⁷³ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 203-204.

¹⁷⁴ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 206.

¹⁷⁵ Subsequently, the majority of the 'serious' charges were dropped during the trial or upon appeal. Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*.

¹⁷⁶ Murphy, "Editors Introduction," xi.

¹⁷⁷ Murphy, "Editors Introduction," xi (emphasis mine).

the perceived substantive role of discursive elements such as pamphlets, publications, and public speech acts became clear.¹⁷⁸ The warrant in part read that, relating specifically to the accusations directed at Negri, he was guilty of the following:

(...) inciting civil war in the *State's territory*, subverting by violence the current *order of society*, and destroying the *democratic State* and its institutions with the aim of violently changing the State's constitution and form of government.¹⁷⁹

Galluci stated an essential means of motivating physical violence was:

the publication and distribution of pamphlets and communiqués that incite armed insurrection and faithfully follow the ideological lines that Negri presents at meetings and in his publications including *Domination and Sabotage*, *Proletarians and the State*, and *Crisis of the Planner-State*.¹⁸⁰

The initial case against the April 7 defendants rested heavily upon the pamphlets of Negri, and in particular focused on "Domination and Sabotage," assuming his theory of high-risk action was representative of the practice of the radical subject and ignoring the explicit disdain for Negri and OWA amongst certain areas of social autonomy and the workers' movements.¹⁸¹ It also echoed the self-aggrandisement of the political elite, which according to Giovannetti "poses itself as the relatively stable expression of social antagonism, as its memory, as the bearer of social values expressed by class behaviours."¹⁸² The most infamous examples of the writings of Negri were from "Domination and Sabotage," and two passages cited in the warrants read in part:

This violence [proletarian] is contrary to capitalist violence; it aims at the destruction of capital's system and regime; it is founded on class self-valorisation (...) we are speaking of opposing

¹⁷⁸ The reduction of the discursive acts associated with the radical community to the instruments of mobilising high-risk activism repeats in the works of SMT on this sector. Typically, this occurs through the notion of persuasive framing. Refer to chapter two.

¹⁷⁹ Murphy, "Editors Introduction," xiii.

¹⁸⁰ Murphy, "Editors Introduction," xiii. These pamphlets appear here in reverse chronological order. "Crisis of the Planner State" (1971) was a thesis on the "new-Leninism" of the Party for PO. "Proletarians and the State" was written between the dissolution of PO and during the solidification of the area of workers' autonomy. "Domination and Sabotage" was written in 1977 as Negri observed the organised area of Workers' Autonomy beginning to take a coherent shape amongst the fragmented sector of autonomous movements. The pamphlets address very different organisations, social subjects, social and political conditions, and appear during divergent episodes in the evolution of the Italian movement sector.

¹⁸¹ Many within the generalised movement area believed the theory and practice of Negri and OWA contributed to the collapse of the area of autonomy. In particular, the social sector believed the OWA were imposing a unified form upon the pluralist antagonism of the new *political class*, attempting to harness its momentum within a theory of a new proletariat class. This imposition denied the independence of the social subject, and, as Palandri claimed in an interview in 1999, treated them as their 'donkeys', attempting to impose their plan, "a utopia that they were putting over our shoulder." Interview with Enrico Palandri (1999), cited in Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 186.

¹⁸² G Giovannetti, "Il Movimento e le Leggi della Guerra," *Collegamenti* 8(1980). Cited in Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 101. I discuss the relationship between the political elite, intellectual leadership and the movement in chapter 3. The political elite form a "multi layered stratum of activists" *within* the movement, often associated with the task of leading class struggle and shaping the practices, analysis, and organisation of the wider movement. See Giovannetti, "Il Movimento; Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?." Bologna stresses the importance of remembering that the movement (for example the 'area of autonomy') and the political elite (groups such as LC) are distinct layers that maintain a dialectical relationship. Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". Further, the notions of the political elite and intellectual leadership are not to be confused.

terror with an operation of sabotage and the reappropriation of *knowledge and power* over the whole circuit of *social reproduction* (...).¹⁸³

And

Nothing reveals the immense historical positivity of workers' self-valorisation more completely than sabotage, this continual activity of the sniper, the saboteur, the absentee, the deviant, the criminal that I find myself living. I immediately feel the warmth of the workers' and proletarian community again every time I don the ski mask (...) every act of destruction and sabotage rebounds upon me as a sign of class fellowship. Nor does the probable risk disturb me: on the contrary, it fills me with feverish emotion, like waiting for a lover (...).¹⁸⁴

The interpretive community of April 7, which positioned itself as the interpreter of the practice of radical politics, asserted that a select conspiratorial intelligentsia (notably the defendants) organised the social movement sector from above.¹⁸⁵ In the end, however, with the conclusion of the trial in June 1984,¹⁸⁶ the prosecution had failed to impose unity on the heterogeneous movement sector or its variegated and fluid theory and practice of violence. As Moss succinctly states with regard to armed struggle, "the April 7 trial ultimately failed to re-translate local fragmentation into a national-level unity around a single project."¹⁸⁷ The State's discourse, supported by the reasons and explanations of consensus politics, accompanied with an instrumentalist conceptualising of violence and an image of radical consciousness as the fundamental element in human action, proved inadequate to the behaviour it attempted to explain: how and why the project of armed struggle unified the pluralism of localised political experiences across time and space. What it had achieved was the disaggregation of the radical community and the undermining of its discourse on political action.

The State's discourse was unable to explicate a consistent path to positions of political violence, seeming to fail in its efforts to link in theory the ideas and actions, discourses and decisions that it identified with the radical left. The attempt to explain the activities of the transgressive community appeared to be beyond a generalised theory of political action spelled out in terms of consensus, national solidarity, illegality/legislative 'equality', and delegated representation. That is, the reasons and explanations available to the prosecution within the existing system of political thought were unable to support the State's discourse on political violence in the face of the practice of the radical left community. Ultimately, this is a claim equally applicable to the discourses on the radicalisation of the Italian social movement sector surveyed in the case study, discourses whose disciplinary thought appears inadequate to the explanation of the processes and conditions of the politics of RSMs.

In an effort to defend the State's discourse on radical left political violence, the juridical community reduced the high-risk actions of the left to instrumental means, such as armed propaganda, or the 'propaganda of the deed', where violence in the service of a Leninist ideology aided in radicalising the consciousness of the social subject and promoted action through precedence.¹⁸⁸ Here, the instrumentality of violence is a 'radicalised instrumentality', considered capable of generating

¹⁸³ Antonio Negri, "Domination and Sabotage," in *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, ed. Timothy Murphy, S (London: Verso, 2005), 283 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸⁴ Negri, "Domination and Sabotage," 259.

¹⁸⁵ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 205.

¹⁸⁶ After its delayed start in February 1983.

¹⁸⁷ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 245. As I discuss in Chapter 4, this is a 'failure' ultimately shared by the organisations of the radical left.

¹⁸⁸ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 33.

revolutionary consciousness and animating struggle to mobilise the revolution of the working class.¹⁸⁹ The State identified the radical left as ‘illegitimate challengers’ of the constitution who attempted to undermine the power of the political community by threatening democracy and social order through violent means. Violence, according to the interpretive community of the State, was the instrument of political insurrection, where state management by the far left and the disaggregation of capitalism were the material goal of the radical thought supporting the ‘Marxist-Leninist’ discourse of the movement.

Calogero and Galluci’s theoretical elaboration of the dynamics of the violence of the radical left, expressed in their April 7 warrants and offered as an objective account of this group’s political practice, provided categorical statements of the State’s favoured explanation of the far left social movements. The theorem of the prosecutors centred on the role of former PO intellectuals and leaders in the ineluctable passage of the revolutionary movement toward political violence, holding this cohort responsible for organising and coordinating both mass struggle and terrorism. Fundamental to this presentation is a unilinear modelling of the path to positions of left wing political violence, a mechanistic unfolding of a specifiable historical progression toward extremism and a chaotic social form. Founded on the ‘Calogero theorem’, the approach of the prosecution employed a linear or ‘chronological’ understanding of causation as temporal succession to explain the violence and radicalisation of the left-wing movements.¹⁹⁰ They hypothesised a direct causal path from the workers’ movement to the realisation of radical politics in the clandestine and anti-statist violence of the BR. Ultimately, however, this approach resulted in large areas of the movement sector being unintelligible, discarded to the margins of explanation as the epiphenomena of programmed violence, and irrecoverable as part of the political institution’s account of political dissent.¹⁹¹

The prosecution’s model of chronological causation appears to discount the explication of ‘causal historical relations’ and, consequently, the characteristics of the present were thought to germinate, no matter how abstractly, in the past.¹⁹² This guided the April 7 deductive process, and according to Negri and his fellow prisoners/defendants, resulted in the “collapsing [of] the past into the present,” with all theory and practice drawn to their ‘logical’ conclusion in “armed insurrection.”¹⁹³ In their “Memorial from Prison,” Negri and his comrades suggested the prosecution attempted to flatten ten years of activism and its accompanying theory, discursive forms, and communicative action, removing it from its practical context.¹⁹⁴ Another essay, “Do You Remember Revolution?”, produced by April 7 defendants while awaiting trial, similarly accused the warrants of Calogero and Galucci of revisionism, removing the causal relations of history and ignoring the context of radicalisation.¹⁹⁵ This group argued the workerist

¹⁸⁹ In the service of its legal mechanism, the State seemingly glorified violence, bringing the State into partial accord with the ‘prophets’ or ‘preachers’ of revolution that Arendt thought it essential to discredit for the preservation of the productive potential of politics. See Arendt, *On Violence*, 70-83. The State’s position indirectly lends credibility to the notion that violence has a unique ability to interrupt automatic processes.

¹⁹⁰ My understanding of the April 7 interpretation draws upon Kristin Ross’ observation of a similar tendency in the ‘consensus memory’ of France’s May 68, where “what comes before is the cause, what comes after is the effect or the product (...).” Ross, “Establishing Consensus,” 653.

¹⁹¹ Another important assumption of the State’s account, which I revisit during the thesis but consider worthy of mention here, is the treatment of the masses that constitute the radical subject as ‘passive’ in their reception of the tutelage of the ‘conspiratorial intelligentsia.’

¹⁹² Again, I borrow conceptually from Kristin Ross. Ross, “Establishing Consensus,” 652-653.

¹⁹³ Antonio Negri et al., “Memorial from Prison,” in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext (E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 198.

¹⁹⁴ Negri et al., “Memorial from Prison,” 198. This does not exonerate Negri and other intellectuals from committing a similar mistake, as I discuss in Chapter 4. In Chapter 2, I consider a similar theme within SMT.

¹⁹⁵ Castellano et al., “Do You Remember Revolution?.”

thread of the revolutionary movement did not find its 'logical' conclusion, or solidify, in the voluntarism and 'terrorism' of the late 1970s.¹⁹⁶

The authors of "Do You Remember Revolution?" considered their essay a 'historical-political thesis' and a presentation of the 'disassociated' position. From their perspective, the thesis provided a corrective to the historical distortion of the State and the *pentiti*, written not as a defence but as a theoretical *intervention*.¹⁹⁷ The group suggested that at the core of the movement sector was a demand for qualitative change in everyday life and a challenge to the hierarchy of social knowledge. Certain sections of the radical left explained the shift of the revolutionary extra-parliamentary movement toward illegality, and the expansion and hardening of its repertoire, as an effort to avoid institutional reincorporation. This change in repertoire combined with the expansion of the revolutionary movement beyond the factory into society to avoid the "blackmail of economic crisis" and the resistance of the revolutionary workers' movement to factory restructure.¹⁹⁸ Subsequently, by the mid 1970s, left-wing violence followed at least three distinct paths, differentiated through the categories of *revolution and resistance* and *separation*, and did not conform to the unilinear progression observed by the prosecution.

Castellano and his comrades claim resistance and revolution were the forms of the militant workers' movements, fighting to sustain the material basis of their strength provided by control of the factory. This tendency, which bifurcated into armed struggle and clandestine violence, violently opposed the restructuring of the factory, and it is here the BR set up its foundation for the second half of the 1970s. While sharing a base in the factory struggles of the mass worker, by the late 1970s the use of violence by the revolutionary workers' movement (whether the last vestiges of the New Left, or OWA) and the clandestine armed struggles of groups such as BR were theoretically and practically irreconcilable.¹⁹⁹ The area of autonomy perceived groups such as the BR as anachronistic, with their offensive use of physical force deriving political cogency from an image of armed paths to political reformation, a course of action that drew them into a direct clash with the State.²⁰⁰ This, in particular, was the antithesis of the 'new movements' or 'new subject' arising from the area of social autonomy.²⁰¹ On a practical level, the actions of BR 'dispossessed' the movement of its most important form, mass mobilisation.²⁰² BR's 'specialist' acts of clandestine violence reduced participants to spectators and removed their opportunities for direct action, alienating activists from the radical community. While the broader movement was characteristically sympathetic toward the BR, understanding them as comrades who had erred, the consensus was that their State-directed violence was counterproductive.²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ A similar argument finds support among SMT theorists such as Tarrow, della Porta and Tilly, and within the NSMT of Melucci. I discuss this further in the ensuing chapters.

¹⁹⁷ Both defendants and prosecutors label their approaches as a theoretical intervention.

¹⁹⁸ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 226-227.

¹⁹⁹ With particular regard to the theory of BR, Melucci suggested the integralism of extreme violence could not be reconciled with the complexity, specificity, and heterogeneity of the broader movement of the radical left, especially the area of social autonomy. Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism." Similarly, Luisa Passerini, in her well regarded text *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy 1968*, writes, "Certainly one cannot sustain the hypothesis of a massive crossover of militants from the environment of the student movement of '68 to the armed struggle in a terrorist sense. The direct derivations in theoretical terms are also rather slim, especially because of terrorism's poverty on this score." Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 136.

²⁰⁰ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 228.

²⁰¹ This interpretation is common to Melucci and certain sectors of Italian Radical Thought (see chapter 3). See Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 270.

²⁰² Tronti, "The Strategy of Refusal," 162.

²⁰³ See Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 102.

'Separation' was the alternative way of the movements of social autonomy, of the new social subject (the 'new proletariat') fighting for self-determination and independent control of public spaces and daily life. This 'second path' to violence, in contrast to the militancy of the organisations of workers' autonomy and voluntarism of the clandestine organisations, removed itself from any programmatic political ambition or mediated interaction with the institutions of the political cycle. The social subject's 'violence of immediate needs' had no 'coherent plan against the State' and supported short-term goals such as the forceful occupation of housing and the self-reduction of transport and authority charges.²⁰⁴ This area of social action "was defined (...) by the complete identity between the form of struggle and the attainment of specific objectives"; thus, they did not require nor defend the idea of a 'servicing structure' of militant armed groups.²⁰⁵ By the mid 1970s, the violence of the 'new proletariat' had distinguished itself from the violence of the traditional and militant workers' movement. According to Castellano and his comrades, the new proletariat rejected the idea of "seizing power" and achieving the "dictatorship of the proletariat," refusing any notion of State management. Instead, in the area of the social subject, violence was a defence and celebration of an autonomous form of life, "the affirmation of the movement itself as an alternative society," an attempt to escape power, not take it.²⁰⁶

The violence of this movement sector escalated in 1977, becoming the focus of repression and aggressive policing. In this environment, the social subject disengaged from the political institution and organisations of the radical left which themselves began fragmenting through the pressures of the State's criminalisation of dissent and the growth in the area of clandestinity. Eventually, through a confluence of circumstances that I elaborate further throughout the thesis, the radical movement of the social subject became marginalised, driven underground and into the ghetto.²⁰⁷ BR, encouraged by what they perceived to be the failure of the participatory collectives and the institutional path to politics, imagined themselves as the new vanguards of the working class movement. The change in the BR vocabulary (from supporters to leaders of the revolution) and the shift from illegality to clandestinity was manifest in its escalation of physical force.²⁰⁸ With the BR change in approach, as Moss notes, the "activists and exegetes of violence ceased to be the same people."²⁰⁹

BR differentiated its political violence from the defensive violence of the proletariat (e.g. demonstrations and sabotage) and the collective self-defence of the marginalised communities (e.g. house occupations and fare evasion) where the participant and social subject coincided.²¹⁰ The strength of the BR and other 'terrorist' organisations seemed inversely proportional to the success of the generalised movement area, filling gaps that appeared in the antagonism of the Movement of '77.²¹¹ According to Berardi, it was the nexus of the relation of BR to the social movements where the decline of the area of autonomy inadvertently prepared the movement sector for a terrorist or vanguard reappropriation.²¹²

²⁰⁴ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 232.

²⁰⁵ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 232. I explain the importance of the idea of radical practice as an act of immediacy in chapter 4.

²⁰⁶ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 230. I revisit the controversial idea of the 'alternative' or 'second' society in chapter 4.

²⁰⁷ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 234.

²⁰⁸ Borgogno, "Dai Gruppi all'autonomia," 43. Cited in Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 131.

²⁰⁹ Moss, "Politics, Violence, Writing," 99.

²¹⁰ Silj, *Never Again*, 205.

²¹¹ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 161.

²¹² Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 161.

Toward the end of the 1970s, as more collectives (resembling the BR that had separated organisationally from the social area of autonomy and the New Left workers' movements) began striking out against the State, the association of political struggle with armed struggle dominated the popular discourse on political transgression.²¹³ Regardless, the vocabularies of violence popularly associated with the end of the 1970s and the image of absolute enmity they have promoted, become a seductive ruse. The picture of the period that is propagated muddies the possibility of observing alternative dynamics along the path to positions of radical politics and risks obscuring factors specific to the theory and practice of violence in Italy.²¹⁴ A notable example is the concealing of the radical thought and innovative actions of the counter-cultural movements from the prevailing accounts of the politics of RSMs, with the counter-cultural movements diffuse and defensive forms of violence at odds with the frontal attack of armed organisations. 'Creative autonomy', emergent from the sector of social autonomy, strongly criticised the party form, its bureaucracy and ideology, and its use of violence;²¹⁵ however, the lack of any immediately obvious or theoretically recoverable social programme or 'top-down' form of political organisation saw these movements reduced to epiphenomena, with their impact on the outcomes of the movement sector dismissed as the expressions of youthful anomie, cultural experimentation, lifestyle initiatives, or similar.

The competing discourses of April 7 aim to link ideas and actions, discourses and decisions, explicating a correspondence between political practice, social location, and a culture of dissent. The endeavour to present the radical actor as a stable empirical category of high risk and high cost politics appears motivated by the desire to dignify a theory of radicalisation through its subject, what Bologna refers to as the 'creation of alibis'.²¹⁶ This effort to realise the 'substantialist vision of a collective subject',²¹⁷ borrowing a turn of phrase from Rancière, has tracked the radical community throughout its Italian history, whether in the form of IRT, juridical recuperation, or sociological explanation. Bologna claims that the specific efforts of neo-Leninist intellectuals to create such alibis betrays the essence of politics, organising and aggregating antagonism, and dismisses the profound nature of the political subject manifest in the ability to set in motion systems of struggle and organisation from below.²¹⁸ Here, again foregrounding the ideas of Rancière, the radical community bears the weight of systemic oppression *and* the project of Marxist science.²¹⁹ This double bind is apparent in the brief presentation I have given of the competing discourses of April 7.

²¹³ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 235.

²¹⁴ This is evident, as I argue in chapter 2, in the SMT focus upon dialogues of 'us and them', frame constructions focused upon war analogies, and the narratives of heroes and villains. In contrast, Paolo Virno argues the social subject had left behind the 'absolute enmity' associated with the feud over who would be sovereign. The political struggle of the many is not comparable to the absolute notion of civil war; rather, it was understandable as unlimitedly reactive. Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 206.

²¹⁵ A/traverso, "Assemblea di Roma: Sconfiggere il Minoritarismo Preparare Subito la Rivoluzione", *Finalmente il Cielo È Caduto sulla Terra: La Rivoluzione*, A/traverso March(1977). Cited in Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 92-94. Wright provides further discussion upon the relationship of this area to *Autonomia*.

²¹⁶ Sergio Bologna, "Negri's Proletarians and the State: A Critique," in *Resistance in Practice: The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, ed. Timothy Murphy, S and Abdul-Karim Mustapha (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 40. I contextualise this assertion, directed toward Negri, in chapter 4.

²¹⁷ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 211.

²¹⁸ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

²¹⁹ Emmanuel Renault, "The Many Marx of Jacques Rancière," in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 180; Jacques Rancière, "Les Scènes Du Peuple," (Paris: Horlieu, 2003), 325.

4. Recovering the Italian radical subject

Framing the radical community as 'illegal' and 'illegitimate' facilitated the criminalisation of dissent, a process realised most notably in the warrants and subsequent arrests of April 7th 1979. The reduction of the radical subject in Italy to the status of citizen solely in the eyes of the law afforded the judiciary interpretive privilege in the political and social conflict, providing authority to their fixing of the 'public' meaning of radicalism.²²⁰ The interpretive community of April 7 identified the 'political dissident' by associating them with terrorism and a Leninist ideology, attributing to them the theory and practice of insurrection, revolutionary vanguardism, and armed action. The prosecution claimed an intellectual 'Marxist-Leninist' vanguard was leading the mass movement and had effectively quietened the voice of social movements outside the organisations of the worker; however, these 'censored' social movements themselves thought Leninism, while making lots of noise, had little to contribute in the face of the practices of the Movement of '77. Instead, it was the State and the armed organisations that afforded the Leninists an important voice by verifying their place at the centre of the radical community, a situation that has its correlate in sociological study of the Italian RSMs 1968-78, which aggrandises the 'experts' of political violence.

This juridical discourse on the actions of the radical left also formed part of the mechanism of the systemic repression of dissent. By representing the revolutionary movement as illegitimate, undemocratic and essentially violent, promoting its programme of armed propaganda ahead of other far left initiatives, the State removed any political voice from the RSMs. In addition, the presentation of a radical subject in an insuperable relationship with violence and a chaotic social order provided a foil against which a 'proper path to politics' was elaborated.²²¹ Writing on fanaticism, Toscano argues that the "constitutive ambivalence, which in many ways renders it an unreliable concept, turns into a strength when it comes to disqualifying or demonizing adversaries."²²² His point is relevant to the Italian situation, where the indifference of the political system toward the specificity of the radical actor aided the theoretical submission of the antagonistic community to the identity of the criminal, and the hegemony of Leninist vanguardism. The latter, we will observe, repeats in the sociological accounts of radicalism that subjugate the practices of the radical community to the discourse of organised Marxism. This is most conspicuous in the NSMT explanation of the workers' movement.

The State's vague characterising of the radical subject associated its dynamics of collective action with an aggressive ideology of insurrection within the frame of civil war, where the restorative project of the radical had as its precondition the destruction of existing society. The 'organisational perspective', which defines the radical community as an 'ideological sect' controlled by internal dynamics, emotion, and affect, was a popular explanation of the left-wing movement sector in Italy, shared by its opponents and contemporaneous sociological accounts.²²³ In the State's discourse, the organisational perspective explicitly delimited radical politics as the territory of the fundamentalist, extremist and terrorist that

²²⁰ Moss makes a similar point in Moss, "Politics, Violence, Writing."

²²¹ This mechanism repeats in SMT accounts, where RSMs ostensibly suffer from what I refer to as 'social movement envy'. I discuss this in chapter 2.

²²² Toscano, *Fanaticism*, xxv, 249.

²²³ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 195-196.

threatened the legitimate occupants of the political community. Consequently, the radical community is cast in the role of a violent and inscrutable adversary that dwelled outside the territory of politics.²²⁴

The escalation of violence in the second half of the 1970s is understandable as a response to the normalising intent of the State and its juridical process. Melucci argues political violence is, in part, a response to attempts by the system to integrate and manipulate collective demands, particularly those considered by the actor as irreducible, to create “a more powerful consensus.”²²⁵ This amounts to the effacing of difference, with the normalising intent restricting dissent. As Bobbio recalls, one of the central ideas behind the radical repertoire of the revolutionary movement sector was that social struggle was being ‘worn down’ by politics; therefore, political action was reinvented, taking on a new form.²²⁶ More directly, BR cited the efforts to co-opt revolution as a catalyst in the hardening of its repertoire of transgression. The approach of the BR, Curcio claims, was a reaction to the sophisticated processes of the State that absorbed the revolutionary impulse within the system of representation and calmed the antagonist community.²²⁷ Equally though, Curcio explains the practices of BR as a response to the left-wing intellectuals who discounted the centrality of the worker; however, as is evident in the case study, the recuperation of antagonism was a shared failing of the theoretical practice of the radical organisations, and most certainly of the BR.

The ‘asceticism of violence’ central to the BR image of revolution was contrary to the understanding of violence amongst the autonomist collectives who considered the clandestine groups separated from the social issues confronting the masses. The rigid Marxism-Leninism of the BR could not understand the momentum of the far left beyond the centrality of the worker. This inadequacy, shared with the New Left organisations, was catalytic in the expansion of the social and cultural area of autonomy;²²⁸ however, in the end, Bologna argues, the Marxist discourse of the ‘mesmeric communist syndrome’ overwhelmed the importance of the social sector, and the associated disconnect of theoretical practice from social action left the movement open to the more decisive discourse and active culture of armed struggle.²²⁹ Consequently, the terroristic acts of groups such as BR, and their rigid position on the centrality of the militant factory worker, dominated the representations of the radical subject and facilitated its association with the subject of armed struggle. This reinforced the position of the State by attaching the emancipatory subject to an essence and destiny that reincorporated them, albeit in a negative form, in the social order.

Conclusion

The idea that the Italian movement sector of the 1960s and 1970s, in all its diversity and complexity, was subsumable or recoverable in a single organisation, school of thought, ideology, or collective

²²⁴ The description as a ‘violent and inscrutable adversary’ borrows from Toscano’s elaboration of the fanatic. It also links to the notion of absolute enmity, the idea that politics is the feud over the claim to sovereignty, or pragmatically, the control of the political exception.

²²⁵ Melucci, “Ten Hypotheses,” 186.

²²⁶ Luigi Bobbio, *Lotta Continua: Storia di Una Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria* (Roma: Savelli, 1979), 115. Cited in Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 286.

²²⁷ Renato Curcio, “Who Is the Traitor?,” in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext (E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 282-283. BR, according to Curcio, theorised both the State and vanguard intellectuals of the New Left as opponents of the workers’ revolution.

²²⁸ Berardi, “Anatomy of Autonomy,” 152.

²²⁹ Bologna, “Intervista a Sergio Bologna,” 8.

subject, while appearing wildly ambitious, is surprisingly prevalent across accounts of the sector.²³⁰ The prosecutors of April 7 and their interpretive community do not stand alone in the expropriation of the memory of the movements of '68 and '77. As I will go on to argue in the ensuing chapters, the interventionist intellectuals matched the State's hegemonic intent, and this is suggestive of a similar intent in sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs. The goal of certain sectors of the movement was to unify the antagonist community around a single project or collective subject; ultimately, however, it proved unrealisable, with much of the radical left theory and practice irrecoverable within established thought or existing discourse on the radical subject. It would also prove, as I will argue, self-defeating. The essence of the radical subject is its marked difference from the status quo, and, accordingly, its recuperation in a sociological identity manufactures its disappearance.²³¹ The practical problem for IRT – how to organise politically the radical community – became the theoretical challenge for the sociological study of RSMs attempting to 'discover' the frame of meaning of the radical actor and populate Italian history with its central identities. In either instance, practical or theoretical, a requirement of such heteronomy appears to be a vocabulary of high-risk and high-cost action constructed at a level of generality that provides, in the first instance, broad appeal amongst its audience, and second, expansive applicability to the object of study.²³² This approach largely obscures the absence of specificity in explanations of radical action, and spuriously overcomes the question of the mechanics of community formation and social movement latency.²³³

Much of the discursive action of the radical community, the speech acts and written communication that developed and articulated ideas, have become categorised in the sociological study of RSMs as the 'resources' of collective action. In this fashion these studies ignore the lived-through experience and localised practices of an alternative community and radical subjectivity. At the same time we aggrandise certain agents while disqualifying others, granting the 'strategic reason' and the political rationalism of certain intellectual circles a monopoly over the comprehension of the movement. Moss argues that discursive acts explicate the meaning of violence, disambiguating what is experienced as a meaningless or senseless act in the political realm if left without *framing*.²³⁴ Therefore, he asserts, the intelligentsia are the crucial element in the creation of a vocabulary of violence capable of manipulating its public meaning, while they help "to form the *political imaginations* of activists and potential recruits (...)." ²³⁵ Here Moss makes a significant error, prevalent across accounts of the Italian situation, treating the radical agent as a victim, a passive agent incapable of mobilising themselves as a social actor, ignorant of their political potential.²³⁶

With the exception of the juridical community, ostensibly the observers of the Italian RSMs 1968-78 gathered in this thesis share a criticism of the 'heroic theorist'; however, in their theoretical practice,

²³⁰ This situation reflects the 'consensus memory' of France's 68 as discussed by Kristen Ross in "Establishing Consensus." The representative figures of the Italian radical movement, chosen by the respective interpretive communities, and the thinkers selected by historians to represent the French 68ers, were those whose memory helped establish a view of the upheavals as harnessed to a contemporary outcome, allowing the narrator to impose a vocabulary upon the events that explains the unilinear unfolding of history. Ross, "Establishing Consensus."

²³¹ This claim is based in Rancière's threefold division of the political realm, founded upon domination, dis-identification, and recuperation. See Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 214. I take up this point in Chapter 5.

²³² Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 8.

²³³ My criticism here builds upon the claims of Melucci and Toscano. Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 382-383, 396; Toscano, "A Plea," 245-246.

²³⁴ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 8. This is a position also defended by the frame theorists of SMT.

²³⁵ Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 48.

²³⁶ This treating of the activist as the medium of the theorist is a theme I develop in chapters 4 and 5.

they advance the discursive acts of the intellectual, the *leadership frames*, ahead of the capacity of the ‘thousands of comrades’, as Sergio Bologna refers to them, for creative or innovative thought. This *entitles* the intellectual to speak as the representative of the radical community and simultaneously occludes the discursive dimension of grass-roots activism. In *Althusser’s Lesson*, Rancière is critical of the heroic theorist who, he claims, believes that “the masses can make history because the heroes make its theory.”²³⁷ This ideology is one that arises consistently throughout the case study, but which receives little critical attention, with the notable exception being the historiographical quarter of IRT.²³⁸

In the following chapters I contend that many of the antagonistic subjects of Italy refused identification through repatriation to the political and social order. Further, I argue that the most appropriate image of the radical community is as a collective actor that regenerates or rejuvenates ‘politics’, or, as Melucci writes, “relaunch the dynamic of society” through localised practices, voluntary marginality, and exemplary difference.²³⁹ These areas of innovation and creativity eschewed the gradualism and reformism associated with the organisations of the official and New left. Accordingly, contemplating the radical community and its relation to violence that fascinates contemporary sociological study requires more than its evaluation in terms of political rationalism, strategy, and identity. It should question the hierarchy of social knowledge and the logic of social aggregation. This requires the recovery of radical thought, trusting in the practice and theory of the radical community, and believing in the epistemological work of RSMs beyond the confines of expert knowledges and instrumental reason. That is, to paraphrase Rancière, the radical subject is not the material of the theorist; in fact, the practice of the exploited “operates a shift in the very mode of theorising.”²⁴⁰ The judgements associated with RSMs do not map neatly to a formal capacity such as instrumental rationality; nor are they the product of structural grievances, the manifesting of an identitarian vision, or a stable category of the revolt.

The State’s interpretive community, certain intellectuals of IRT, and the sociological discipline of social movement study find the temptation to rationalise, identify, and substantiate RSMs irresistible. The agenda, for various reasons, is to naturalise radicalism, making it a stable category of the social, political, and cultural condition in western democracy. This gives it an essence, assigns it a task, and fixes its location within politics; however, such an exercise discounts the way that these communities disconnect from their social condition and its associated attitudes, aptitudes, and decisions.²⁴¹ The consequences of naturalising and thereby confining the radical community to a determined position in the politics of exchange and the logic of instrumental rationality are the focus of the remaining chapters of this thesis. In particular, I investigate how the matrix of the competing discourses on the politics of RSMs affects the meaning and importance afforded the so-called ‘incomprehensible’ radical communities of Italy.

²³⁷ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 31-32.

²³⁸ I revisit this topic in chapters 4 and 5.

²³⁹ See Melucci, “New Movements, Terrorism,” 134.

²⁴⁰ Rancière, “Work, Identity, Subject,” 205.

²⁴¹ As Rancière claims, genuine participation in radical politics requires the endless imagining of unpredictable subjects, untying the particularity of the individual from the constraints of social knowledge. Rancière, “A Few Remarks,” 120.

Chapter Two

Social Movement Theory: Theorising the radicalisation of social movements

What brought about a new explosion of political violence after the conservative tranquillity of the fifties and the reformist hopes of the early sixties? How can we explain why a generation socialised to democratic values resorted to political violence? Why, in the 'First World,' were the police ordered to open fire upon political demonstrators?¹

Della Porta – *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*

At one level it is organizations with *distinct names and histories* that go underground and carry out clandestine activity within a specific national context. At another level the decision to go underground is made and enacted by individuals, who then must live with the consequences.²

Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta – "Disappearing Social Movements"

As defined by SMT, protest actions, which are the crucial element of RSMs, are unorthodox and 'illegitimate' means of *coercion* usually intent on influencing the political institution;³ however, while 'illegitimate' or 'culturally unsanctioned', protest in its most basic form is part of the political 'arena of debate.'⁴ As such, the wave of RSMs in the 1960s and 1970s and the *disorder* they created, Tarrow writes, "contributed to the broadening of democracy where it was strong, and to its consolidation where it was weak."⁵ In the introduction to his *Democracy and Disorder*, Tarrow sets the scene for the remainder of his study, which is interested in the contribution of RSMs to the broadening of contemporary western democracy, that is, the modernisation of the political system. He writes:

From the mid-1960s on, a new wave of protest began to sweep over Western Europe. Using direct, confrontational, and sometimes violent collective action, people erupted into the streets, the campuses, and the factories (...). With a combination of threat and ridicule, they disrupted institutions, opposed elites, and attacked authorities. (...) when the dust of disorder had settled, it became clear that the boundaries of mass politics had been extended.⁶

It is in the wake of the disorder caused by the new wave of the politics of RSMs that SMT began rethinking the task, time, and place of the radical subject in western democracies and contemplated the 'names' and 'histories' of the groups involved. Tarrow has urged this undertaking must consider the deeper challenges this class of movement presents to politics and society, not to simply focus on and

¹ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 1.

² Gilda Zwerman, Patricia G Steinhoff, and Donatella della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements: Clandestinity in the Cycle of New Left Protest in the U.S., Japan, Germany, and Italy," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000): 86 (emphasis mine).

³ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 165 (emphasis mine).

⁴ The notion of the protest arena, a subset of the political arena, is explained in della Porta, "Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts," 5.

⁵ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 1.

⁶ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 1.

analyse its most dramatic features;⁷ however, as this chapter highlights, he and other key figures in the reconstruction of SMT fail to heed this advice, with their ensuing work fascinated with the spectacle of collective violence. Consequently, SMT diminishes aspects of the politics of RSMs not immediately recognised as related to political violence or deviance.

The literature surveyed for this chapter concentrates on relevant works of the leading exponents of SMT: della Porta, Tarrow and their collaborators.⁸ This cohort offers an approach that applies a progressively more complex synthesis (pluralist) framework of analysis to the politics of RSMs. Further, their modelling of the dynamics of political violence in the Italian situation provides the best received accounts of high-risk collective action.⁹ Their particular approach is to periodise the sector supported by a theory of the mechanics of *radicalisation*, the process of 'conversion' from a social ('normal') movement to a radical ('deviant') social movement.¹⁰ In addition, to support their theories of *how* the Italian radical left was inextricably drawn into the 'terrorism' of the late 1970s, della Porta and Tarrow contextualise the radicalisation of the movement sector by locating it within an image of the political, social, cultural, and historic situation of Italy post World War II.¹¹

The methodology of SMT involves firstly, identifying and isolating the principal social movement within the political arena. In the Italian case, this was the left-libertarian movement of the late 1960s. Secondly, this movement is populated with certain sociological groups, for example workers, students, and tenants. Thirdly, the movement is associated with visible forms of protest. Fourth, the theorist nominates the movement's grievance and classifies the source, object, and target of collective action. The result of this examination, with regard to political violence, Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta write:

Brings to the fore the *dynamics of clandestinity within the larger cycle of mass protest*. It shows that the *move underground* is a complex and continuous process that *cannot be separated from the vicissitudes of the entire protest cycle*. (...) Previous approaches to clandestine groups which treat them as phenomena different from social movements — as criminal enterprises or as terrorism — have hidden this reality.¹²

The promise of their approach, to be attentive to the 'vicissitudes' of the entire social movement milieu, I argue, is not realised in their account of the Italian RSMs 1968-78. This is evident in the collapsing of

⁷ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 3.

⁸ While important figures in SMT, della Porta and Tarrow both occupy an unusual position with respect to conventional theoretical models in so far as they draw on insights from both European and Anglo-American social movement theory.

⁹ The conceptualising of high-risk activism I use in this chapter is as a form of action that requires long-term commitment and/or has lasting effects upon the lives of those involved, making a return to prior existence impossible, severing significant links to mainstream institutions. See Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements."

¹⁰ For a definition of social movements, della Porta refers to Neidhardt and Rucht, who claim social movements are "an organised and sustained effort of a collectivity of interrelated individuals, groups, and organisations to promote or resist social change with the use of public protest activities." F Neidhardt and Dieter Rucht, "The Analysis of Social Movements: The State of the Art and Some Perspectives for Further Research," in *Research on Social Movements: The State of the Art in Western Europe and USA*, ed. Dieter Rucht (Boulder: Campus and Westview Press, 1991), 421-464.

¹¹ These claims are outlined in Tarrow's Foreword to della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*. It is worth noting that the term terrorism is purportedly used 'cautiously' in the field of social movement study. Zwerman and her colleagues state, "In fact, there is uneasiness in using a term which is not only politically highly contested, but also of doubtful heuristic value." Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements," 222.

¹² Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements," 102 (emphasis mine).

the movement sector into a *cycle* of political violence, which flattens the context of radicalisation and deforms the participants by presenting them as the ‘abstract individual’.¹³ For example, the SMT narrative of radicalisation asserts that the RSMs of the late 1960s arise from the failed reformist projects of the student and worker, a narrative that neglects the diversity of the ‘first phase’ of the social struggle.¹⁴ Lumley notes, the complexity of this movement sector has regularly been:

dismembered into one of its constituent parts (...). Without analysing the ambiguities and the polysemic elements of the subculture created by the social movements of 1968-9, it is impossible to make sense of both the coexistence and the conflict that characterized the relationship between the social movements and the first of the major armed organizations, the Red Brigades, during the course of the 1970s.¹⁵

This observation has particular relevance for my investigation, for as I remarked in chapter one, the BR are a beacon for theorists trying to link the social movements of 1968-69 and the terrorism of the late 1970s. Yet, despite their persistent efforts, this connection has proven elusive. While it is rarely claimed that the students and extra-parliamentary militants of the late 1960s were the perpetrators of the political violence that indelibly marked the second half of the 1970s, accounts of the movement sector identify continuities within the theory and practice of the Italian radical community in an effort to explain the terminus of the movement sector in terrorism. The discovery of continuity, regularity, organisation, and generality within the movement sector of the 1960s and 1970s is the intent of sociological research.

I will argue that the rationalist framework that dominates the SMT effort to repatriate the radical subject to modern politics, part of the attempt to normalise the study of RSMs, comes at an unacceptable cost to our understanding of the nexus of politics and the radical community. This approach occurs at the expense of ‘something else’, that is, it relinquishes the difference and particularity of the radical community. By analysing how RSMs contribute to the modernisation of the politico-institutional sphere and contrasting radicalism against a background of conventional political engagement, we forgo the marked difference and non-homogeneity of the radical community, replacing it with custom. Crucially, in reducing radicalism to a set of indistinct or abstract processes as part of the search for a teleology of radicalisation, we chance conflating RSMs with other marginal communities such as the extremist, fundamentalist, terrorist, and so on. This approach is prone to false witness, similar to that observed in the warrants of April 7, where an ideological hegemony is observed amongst the diversity, innovation, and creativity of the radical left. Such hegemony denies the radical community an innate rationale or epistemic value and consequently reduces the vicissitudes of the movement sector to the epiphenomena of political struggle.

When offering accounts of the politics of RSMs we must be mindful of what is at stake. The intent of such mindfulness is to avoid what Toscano refers to, in *Fanaticism*, as the ‘entanglement of politics and epistemology’, which complicates the separation of prescription and political commitment from explanation.¹⁶ My interest in this entanglement is provoked by the parallels I observe in the accounts of April 7 and SMT, Tarrow’s ‘teleological temporality’ of disorderly politics, and the statements of a

¹³ These are accusations levelled toward the April 7 juridical community in chapter 1.

¹⁴ In chapter 4, I build upon this criticism, and contemplate whether the ‘first phase’ of radicalism is better understood as the ‘second generation’ of the contemporary Italian radical community.

¹⁵ Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 279.

¹⁶ Toscano, *Fanaticism*, 17. As such, we risk ignoring an explanatory antinomy born of a fundamental disagreement between conceptions of the political subject and the criterion of permissible political action.

political programme such as that hidden away on the final page of della Porta's significant contribution to the study of RSMs in Italy. Della Porta writes:

As was true in Italy and Germany in the seventies and eighties, to find a way to invert the escalation of social and political conflicts, *without endangering democracy*, is not an easy task. Understanding the dynamics of this escalation may be a first step in this direction. *I hope that the concepts developed in this volume can help to reach this end.*¹⁷

Further stimulating my attention is the self-proclaimed 'virtue' of contemporary SMT: the rooting of their object of study within political institutions and the 'normalising' of RSMs as part of the political process.¹⁸

The background assumptions and disciplinary heritage of SMT prove invaluable for understanding its account of the Italian RSMs 1968-78 and the subsequent conclusions it makes regarding the politics of RSMs. Hence, this is where I begin the following section, looking at the evolution of contemporary SMT and how it frames the object of study. The purpose of this chapter is to raise concerns regarding the consequences of this framing for our understanding of the nexus of politics and the radical community.

1. Contemporary SMT: Rational actors, cycles of protest and framing

Post 1968 a state of flux characterises the Anglo-American tradition in social movement studies.¹⁹ This complicates the 'classical agenda' (which developed subsequent to the upheavals of the 1960s) to repopulate the territory of consensus politics with an identifiable, strategic, and reasonable radical subject, specifically, one sustainable within a framework of political rationalism. In part, this flux has been a result of the 'cultural turn' in SMT, which is critical of the overly structural, positivist, and rationalist approaches such as RMT and PPT.²⁰ While, for example, the work of Melucci on identity, and Benford, Snow and their collaborators on Frame theory has influenced the discipline, the bias toward the determining role of sociological structures and the explanatory priority of instrumental rationality persists.²¹ SMT's account of activism builds on the presupposition that social agents are guided by instrumental reasoning, which, deploying the classical notion of rationality, is focused on the best means of achieving a contingent end. Accordingly, SMT's strategy-oriented modelling of the processes and conditions of radicalisation concentrates on how collectives, constrained by extrinsic conditions, do things with the available movement resources. This approach, I contend, is to the detriment of understanding the mechanisms of community formation in radical politics.

¹⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 216 (emphasis mine). In the research of della Porta the definition of social movements is limited to the domain of '*political movements*', those movements that, according to Jenkins, "make changes in power arrangements, especially those structured through the state, a central part of their program." Jenkins (1981) p 83, cited in della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 3.

¹⁸ Tarrow discusses these virtues in his foreword to della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*.

¹⁹ Turner, in his introduction to an anthology on social theory, argues the "problem with modern social theory is that there is more disruption than continuity (...). Bryan S Turner, "Introduction," in *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, ed. Bryan S Turner (Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom ; Malden, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

²⁰ A good example of a collected work providing an introduction to the challenges facing sociological theories of social movements is Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*.

²¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*; Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*. Robert D Benford and David A Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26(2000); David A Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilisation, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (1986).

During the first half of the twentieth century, interactionism and an image of an irrational activist motivated through deviance or psychopathology guided much of the study of social movements. The resultant marginalising of movement participants was based on the image of the activist as defective and collective behaviour as outside of reason. Historically, this stream of collective behaviour theory had its beginnings in the protectionist task of the social sciences, born of the reactionary work of Gustave Le Bon who feared the effect disorderly politics, such as those of the Paris Commune, would have on social order, hierarchy, and privilege. Accordingly, McPhail and Tucker note, Le Bon's theoretical contribution was more a tool of governance than a model of collective action. While later interactionist theorists such as the key figures of Park and Blumer refined Le Bon's concepts, they still maintained a divide between acceptable 'rational communities' and uncritical 'irrational masses' such as protest gatherings.²² The early collective behaviour framework, based on 'collective psychology', described revolt as an 'automatic' response to situations such as deprivation and crises, and an outcome of the psychological (pathological) mechanisms of crowd behaviour.²³ Subsequently, like many contemporary studies on terrorism, the agenda was to 'search for effective responses,' which, as Goodwin states, narrows and distorts theoretical focus.²⁴

A second factor that shaped the re-birth of the study of social movements was a similarly negative characterisation of Marxist social theory, manifesting in the post-Marxist approaches of the European and Anglo-American traditions of social movement study. Criticisms of Marxist theory focus on the determinant character of its structuralism, thereby suggesting that the transformation of structural antagonisms into conscious behaviour or purposive collective action is 'almost automatic.'²⁵ Additionally, other sources of social stratification such as gender and ethnicity appeared more relevant than class based cleavages in post-industrial society, undermining the relevance of Marxist interpretations to contemporary social conflict.

The early collective behaviour frames and Marxist social theory were respectively said to typify the individual as unthinking, impulsive, and aggressive, or 'outlandishly homogenised' and as *strategically derivative* of the forces of production and class relations.²⁶ The apparent spontaneity of collective action in these models troubled the rationalist framework of the regenerating Anglo-American approach, which duly responded with the search for an organisational aspect in the appearance of RSMs. Further, and this proves significant, SMT and NSMT summarily dismiss Marxism as a credible mode of analysis of the politics of RSMs. This is manifest in the attempt to purge the analysis of contemporary social movements of the knowledge and praxis of Marxist radical subjects. This marginalising of select communities is comparable to the political marginalisation experienced by sectors of the Italian RSMs 1968-78. The labelling as Marxist serves to preclude the discursive dimension of those radical

²² McPhail and Tucker, "Collective Behaviour," 722-723. My knowledge of interactionist sociology, beyond primary sources, draws upon a collected work, *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, which presents works of highly regarded sociologists such as Norman Denzin and Vyran Gecas. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney, eds., *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* (Lanham, Md. ; Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2003).

²³ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*. p 12

²⁴ Jeff Goodwin, "Review Essays: What Must We Explain to Explain Terrorism?," *Social Movement Studies* 3(2004): 259.

²⁵ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 8.

²⁶ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 6-10. The criticism of Marxist sociology is shared across the contemporary European and Anglo-American approaches. I discuss this convergence in more detail in Chapter 4. Primary examples of this criticism in NSMT are Alain Touraine, *The Self Production of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1977); Touraine, *Voice and the Eye*.

communities thought subordinate to the Marxist political elite.²⁷ Both the post-Marxist Europeans and Anglo-Americans describe Marxism as an ideology of insurrection and perverse commandeering of social action within the contest of the Italian radical sector. This, at times, reduces the political violence of the late 1970s to a cultural expression of revolutionary Marxism, repeating the assertions of the April 7 judiciary.²⁸

It was against this background that SMT began to reconstruct its explanatory framework: firstly, as theorists disenchanted with aspects of their disciplines contemporary inheritance, and secondly as intellectually and politically engaged with the libertarian movements they studied at the close of the sixties.²⁹ After a period of foment where the dividing line between theorist and activist was often blurred, the discipline, however, has returned to a more traditional subject/object split, with the sociologists taking a more 'disengaged' and 'neutral' position.³⁰ This theoretical approach has practical implications as evidenced differently across the competing accounts of the Italian situation. A particularly important outcome, and one I track throughout the case study, is the consideration of RSMs as objects of study. This objectifying discounts them as political subjects in the sense of being knowledge producers,³¹ and, to borrow from Rancière, establishes a 'position of mastery' by placing the scientist and their *account* ahead of the participant and their *expressions*.³² This position then extends to cover judgments of the worthiness of certain subjects and materials for representation, aggrandising certain agents while disqualifying others.

The rational actor and framing

Theoretical deficiencies coupled with a change in the relation of theorist to activist (from intolerant to empathic) in the 1960s and 1970s saw the field of social movement studies shift away from the 'irrational' and 'emotional' crowds of a specific stripe of collective behaviour theories. As the polarisation of the political climate faded, the irrational social psychology models of activism were replaced by rational actor (rational choice) frameworks where the decisions of RSMs are based on utilitarian cost benefit analyses of the available social movement resources (e.g. money, trust, authority). This paradigm shift was filtered by other factors such as the positivism of American sociology which understands people and society as normally stable and patterned in their behaviour, part of a 'natural system', which in keeping with the framework of scientism encourages the search for general laws and mechanisms of action. Early structural responses to the new theoretical demands of the Italian situation on the political and social sciences, reflected within Anglo-American SMT, focused on 'causal variables' such as economic inequalities or political cleavages. Alternatively, conjunctural accounts centred around historical peculiarities such as rapid changes in value systems and the phases of

²⁷ I look at this point in chapter 4, building upon an insight of Bologna who states "the causes [of marginality] lie precisely with the parties, the 'party system', who have decided to exclude certain modes of struggle, certain material and subjective needs, from the things which can be accepted as having social legitimacy in our country." Bologna, "What Is 'the Movement'," 97-98.

²⁸ See below for further discussion. Invariably, SMT and NSMT understand Marxist theory and literature, typified by reference to the neo-Leninist groups, as little more than a rhetorical excess and cynically coercive ideology.

²⁹ Ron Eyerman, "Social Movements between History and Sociology," *Theory and Society* 18(1989): 4.

³⁰ Mario Diani and R Eyerman, eds., *Studying Collective Action* (London: Sage, 1992), 3.

³¹ This is a primary theme of the Chapel Hill school of thought. María Isabel Casas-Cortés, Michal Osterweil, and Dana E Powell, "Blurring Boundaries: Recognizing Knowledge-Practices in the Study of Social Movements," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2008).

³² Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 49.

modernisation.³³ These competing approaches were respectively criticised as unable to account for the transformation of common structural configurations into different forms of mobilisation, or as too idiosyncratic and dependent on irregularity.³⁴

Subsequently, the rational choice framework developed into the dominant Anglo-American approaches of Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) and its companion Political Process Theory (PPT).³⁵ The early rational actor frameworks, based on monadic utilitarian agents, had difficulty explaining the dynamics of community. In response, the descendants (RMT and PPT) retained the instrumentalist character of participants while asserting collectives are a *given* of contemporary society. Significantly, RMT retained a theory of the subject as a rational agent, "postulating a connection between individual properties and protest insurgency."³⁶ RMT and PPT replaced an individualist ontology with an 'ambiguous mix of collectivist and individualist ontological assumptions,' modelling the rational subject, through the category of identity, as a product of a dialectically indeterminate relation between individuals and their community.³⁷

RMT and PPT respectively emphasised the instrumental and rational character of social movement participation and sociological structures (in particular macro-political aspects),³⁸ while similarly diminishing the importance of activist constructions of meaning and their perception of the environment. This adopting of the 'static rational man' as the basis of human action de-emphasised the effect of social psychological experiences of apparently common social structures,³⁹ and, consequently, had difficulty elaborating the dynamics of differential participation. In response to these and similar shortcomings, and criticisms of its overly structural, rational, and utilitarian models of social movement, SMT referred back to constructionism and social psychology as derivative of interactionist sociologies.⁴⁰ While contemporary SMT eschews the image of the irrational activist that traditionally accompanied early interactionist sociology, it selectively reintroduces symbolic interactionism to the modelling of collective action to redress the importance of constructions of meaning and significance within the interpersonal processes of social movements.

Arguably most important amongst the pluralist heritage of interactionism is American pragmatist philosophy, widely considered the impetus and foundation of the perspective.⁴¹ Interactionism reflects the pragmatist rejection of fundamental truths, alternatively theorising that the practical consequences

³³ Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, "Unwanted Children: Political Violence and the Cycle of Protest in Italy, 1966-1973," *European Journal of Political Research* 14(1986): 608.

³⁴ della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 608.

³⁵ PPT is best represented by the concept of political opportunity structure (POS)

³⁶ Diani and Eyerman, *Studying Collective Action*, 6.

³⁷ Crossley provides an accessible overview of this development. Crossley, *Making Sense*, 100-101.

³⁸ Crossley, *Making Sense*, 60.

³⁹ Sheldon Stryker, Robert W. White, and Timothy J. Owens, eds., *Self, Identity, and Social Movements*, Social Movements, Protest, and Contention (Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3-4.

⁴⁰ Particularly the qualitative Chicagoans that rejected scientism, determinism, and behaviourism, and the Dramaturgists

⁴¹ Important to understanding the influence of interactionism within complex models of SMT are particular intellectual antecedents. Through Evolutionism, SMT understands behaviour as environmentally adaptive, organisms and their environments as co-determinant, and life as essentially processual and emergent. The German idealists provide the presupposition that people create the world in which they live, responding to a 'working definition' of the environments they inhabit. Larry T. Reynolds, *Interactionism: Exposition and Critique* (Dix Hills: General Hall, 1993), 40-44. Functional Psychology suggests social learning mediates instincts and that selective attendance to stimuli aids realisation of ongoing activities. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney, "General Introduction: Taking Stock: A Handbook for Symbolic Interactionists," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 16.

of experience ground and assess truth (meaning). Meaning, constructed within social interactions, is dynamic and emergent and is not based on immutable, ahistorical, or external foundations.⁴² The culmination of interactionism's heritage is the notion that people engage with their world purposively in a manner that achieves meaning based on the "symbolic or linguistic communities in which...[they] are embedded," and the 'humanly experienced world' has a limiting influence on knowledge and action.⁴³ Meaning is historical, with interpretation of stimuli dependent on temporal context. That is, in the social environment, contemporaneous constellations of meaning influence perception which people then reflect on to make decisions.

This vision of collectives as meaning-makers most notably manifests in Frame Theory, which Westby observes, "lays claim to theoretical significance by inserting itself into the *core problematic* of movement analysis, *why* people participate, and by proposing that rational signifying processes have a central role in this."⁴⁴ Subsequently, framing, as Benford and Snow acknowledge, has become part of the triumvirate of the sociological study of social movements alongside resource mobilisation and political opportunity processes.⁴⁵ SMT, however, only accommodates Frame Theory to the extent that it complements the strategy-oriented explanatory priority of PPT and RMT. Within this constraint, frames are theorised to intervene or mediate between structure and action, translating (strategically/tactically) social, political, and historical conditions into *orienting meanings*: meanings that delineate problems and prescribe specific responses.⁴⁶ This takes seriously the *strategic and tactical* 'signifying work' of movements, in particular, through the "major strategic mechanism" of frame alignment, which aims to link movement frames and interests with those of the audience.⁴⁷ It is for this reason, as I discuss below, the concept of persuasive framing has become predominant in SMT, raising, as Crossley notes, the 'murky issue of persuasion.'⁴⁸ The synthesis approach of SMT reduces alternative conventions of meaning and schemas of thought to elements of 'frame strategy', with the discursive dimension of social movements categorised as a 'framing activity', part of a 'strategic challenge.'⁴⁹

The vision of collective actors as meaning-makers, capable of strategic action, is important to contemporary accounts of the politics of RSMs. The dynamic and unstable conditions of modernity, involving the dissolution of traditional sources of meaning, link to the cultural upheavals of the 1960s.⁵⁰ This makes the individual progressively more responsible for assembling systems of value and belief and

⁴² Ken Plummer, "Symbolic Interactionism in the Twentieth Century," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, ed. Bryan S Turner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 194-197.

⁴³ Robert Prus, "Ancient Forerunners," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 19-32.

⁴⁴ David L Westby, "Strategic Imperative, Ideology, and Frame," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 7, no. 3 (2002): 287 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁵ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes," 611-639.

⁴⁶ Joel Best, "Social Problems," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 984-985 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁷ David A Snow, "Social Movements," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 822.

⁴⁸ Crossley, *Making Sense*, 140-141.

⁴⁹ A similar discussion of the treatment of frame theory is available in Doug McAdam, "Revisiting the U.S. Civil Rights Movement: Toward a More Synthetic Understanding of the Origins of Contention," in *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James M Jasper (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), esp. 225. A strategy-oriented approach promotes framing as an activity of an already existing collective and makes it part of the process of political organisation.

⁵⁰ Giddens provides an authoritative and well received account of the instability of modern societies and the affect upon the individual and community: Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

the formation of new communities.⁵¹ With particular regard to Italy, della Porta, in a statement bearing the mark of Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni,⁵² claims:

During the phase of *statu nascenti* of the late sixties and early seventies, political countercultures developed (...), and it was in these countercultures that the future militants of the underground organizations first became involved – usually at a very young age – in political activities. In the extraordinary atmosphere of those phases of *high collective mobilization*, dense social networks of comrade-friends proliferated and alternative value systems emerged.⁵³

According to della Porta, the *statu nascenti* – the nascent state, the period of disaggregation and re-organisation of social order in Italy during the 1960s when the sense of freedom and possibilities were heightened – was a decisive moment in the formation of political countercultures. Under these circumstances old ‘norms’ were overturned and alternative value systems were established alongside intensified processes of ideological socialisation and the creation of new collective identities.⁵⁴ The de-structuring of existing communities and the disruption of custom associated with the nascent state increased the dependence of practical action on new constructions of meaning which also became more urgent and determinant of behaviour.⁵⁵

The methodological response of contemporary SMT to the challenge of explaining RSMs under these conditions is to analyse radical practice as the outcome of a complex set of structural and organisational dynamics mediated by individual perception and instrumental reason.⁵⁶ This is to accept the basic claim of interactionism that a person’s perception of a situation affects their subsequent decisions and actions. Therefore, it is necessary to understand reality from within the actors’ perception, providing a ‘contextualised explanation of action’ through the subjective relation of an individual to their environment.⁵⁷ Crucially however, as will become evident, SMT ultimately questions the veracity of the perception of radical actors. Consequently, despite assurances otherwise, the individual’s behaviour is reduced to the sum of their desires and grievances and considered passive, with their knowledge of the environment little more than a coercive construct of movement leaders and political experts. This interpretation relegates individual perception to an explanatory device of sociologists, which conceals

⁵¹ Tarrow, in a moment of restraint, cautions that this does not prove the era of RSMs is a manifestation of anomie or alienation: in fact, the burgeoning of RSMs signals deeper changes in the participatory forms of western democracy. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 3.

⁵² Francesco Alberoni, *Statu Nascenti: Studi sui Processi Collettivi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1968); Francesco Alberoni, *Movement and Institution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). A discussion of the broader influence of his work upon social movement theory is available in Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy." Francesco Alberoni was an important figure for the Trento student movement during the second half of the 1960’s, influencing the thinking of the movements’ leaders (notably Renato Curcio) through his sociological work on social movement dynamics and as Dean of the University (1968-70). For an outline of Alberoni’s relationship with Trento University and the student movement see Silj, *Never Again*, 45, 51-52, 60-66. Also Mario Scialoja, *Renato Curcio a Viso Aperto: Intervista Di Mario Scialoja* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1992)

⁵³ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 161 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 161. Also, McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism"

⁵⁵ This theme is common to works such as della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*; della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 78-79; Snow, "Social Movements."

⁵⁶ Pasquino and della Porta, "Interpretations." Della Porta states her intention to discover "what motivates individuals to join a radical organisation," without characterising the activist with psychopathology, or personality distortions, as they are popularly portrayed within the media and terrorist studies. della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 10, 17.

⁵⁷ Gil Richard Musolf, "The Chicago School," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 97. However, again this raises the problem of how the individual is organised as part of a collective, connecting their subjectivity to a communal sense of value.

the discursive dimension of radical practice and grants the strategic reason and the political rationalism of the intellectual a monopoly over the meaning of the movement.

Frame Theory

Presently, a synthesis approach that combines RMT and PPT frameworks with concepts native to frame theory typifies SMT. Frames, or more accurately collective action frames, are essentially enabling. That is, they facilitate the 'problematic accomplishment' of meaning and significance through the "... weaving, (this) blending, (this) knitting or stitching together of strands of history (...), beliefs or ideology (...), and selected events (...)." ⁵⁸ The consolidating of a frame of reference makes it possible for individuals to orient themselves within ambiguous situations, and most importantly, condenses concrete conditions into action-oriented meanings. ⁵⁹ Holistically, frames are schemas of thought, and as such, provide a "general, standardised, predefined structure (in the sense that it already belongs to the receiver's knowledge of the world), which allows *recognition* of the world, and *guides perception* (...) allowing him/her to build defined expectations about what is to happen." ⁶⁰ These interactionist themes most consistently coalesce around a constructionist modelling of social movements consistent with theories of framing and collective identity. ⁶¹

The basis for contemporary frame theory is Goffman's dramaturgical concept of 'frame', a schemata or 'background understanding' that makes the *meaningless* meaningful, and allows individuals to "(...) perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their situation. ⁶² Dramaturgy considers the construction of meaning and significance as necessitated by the disruption of traditional systems of meaning (e.g. religion) in modern societies, as in the Italian *statu nascenti*, and theorises how new meanings can be communicated and concretised. ⁶³ In moments of crisis (occurrences that suspend "the customary practices of daily life"), ⁶⁴ framing processes provide a way to re-imagine the social, political, and historical context in a manner that is familiar and thorough enough to address the sense of anomie associated with an otherwise disaffecting environment. ⁶⁵ The original aim of the interactionist was to provide a "contextualised explanation of human behaviour," ⁶⁶ in particular *reflective* ('minded') human behaviour, which is a response to situations that are problematic or ambiguous and that interrupt

⁵⁸ David A Snow and Scott C Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly Review* 12, no. 1 (2007): 131.

⁵⁹ Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes; Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes."

⁶⁰ Paolo R Donati, "Political Discourse Analysis," in *Studying Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and R Eyerman (London Sage: 1992), 141-142.

⁶¹ Snow, "Social Movements," 827-828.

⁶² Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 21-22. Broadly, the early dramaturgical tradition in interactionism was influenced by literary critic Kenneth Burke's concept of dramatism, utilised to understand literature's use of 'dramatic strategies' to explain the persuasive effect of motives upon the behaviour of an actor, an approach paralleled by Goffman's focus on the "dramatic strategies in everyday social interaction" that effect the 'presentation' and reception of self, and consequent behaviour. Cheryl A Albas and Daniel C Albas, "Motives," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 351, 356-357.

⁶³ Robert D Benford and Scott A Hunt, "Dramaturgy and Social Movements: The Social Construction and Communication of Power " *Sociological Inquiry* 62, no. 1 (1992). Dramaturgy utilises the vocabulary of the theatre to understand how processes such as 'staging', and 'performing' can achieve this task.

⁶⁴ Fantasia (1988), p14, cited in della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 162.

⁶⁵ A similar claim is made in Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes."

⁶⁶ Musolf, "The Chicago School," 96-97.

routine or habitual responses.⁶⁷ The task of meaning making in collective action has been adapted to the rational actor framework in contemporary frame theory. Accordingly, meaning construction refers to circumstances where frames *organise* and *unify* complex situations, enabling 'rational' self-determination.⁶⁸

Originally conceived as a link between structuralism and social psychology, responding to the inadequacy of macro-macro inferences, frame theory considers the micro processes of framing as a possible answer to differential/subjective yet organised participation in radical politics.⁶⁹ The active and discursive mechanisms of framing, according to Snow and Byrd, provide an explanatory counterpoint to the historical *organisational perspective* that reified ideology and consequently "portray(ed) individuals as passive, mimetic recipients."⁷⁰ Alternatively, frames are not the carriers of 'extant' ideas used to indoctrinate audiences, but involve individuals in the interactive process of meaning construction and the formation of identity. Frames tie together select elements from the environment, such as typifying imagery, exemplary actions, and decisions, providing a link between ideas, events, beliefs and action.⁷¹ Importantly, this 'link' is underwritten in SMT by instrumental reason, theorised as the common capacity of the rational actor.

The affective methodology of framing is considered more cogent in the explanation of high-risk activism than psychological or ideological based explanations. This is because framing, Snow and Byrd write, provides "two highly agentic, interactive, discursive processes: frame articulation and elaboration." Frame articulation is the active gathering and connecting of events, experience, and moral codes, while frame elaboration elevates the significance of specific events, issues, and beliefs.⁷² In contrast, descriptive accounts of movements based on homogenised ideologies remain ambiguous and at a level of abstractness that does not penetrate the conditions and processes that must link perceptions, orientations, and action to affect an audience.⁷³

Inherent to the discursive processes of framing is the conceptualising of self and identity, most importantly a shared identity. Minimally, the self is an open project emergent from continuous biographical processes. On the other hand, identities are like 'nouns', '*defined objects*' that situate the self in the social context.⁷⁴ Across paradigmatic boundaries, despite all the debates surrounding NSMT, its central concept of *collective identity* has become entrenched.⁷⁵ From the perspective of SMT, "the collective search for identity is a central aspect of movement formulation" where collective identity is an attachment to collectivity in "cognitive, emotional, and moral terms (...)."⁷⁶ While at any point in

⁶⁷ Bernard N Meltzer, "Mind," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ John H Goldthorpe, "Rational Action Theory for Sociology," *The British Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (1998): 170-174.

⁶⁹ David A Snow, Louis A Jr Zurcher, and S Eklund-Olson, "Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment," *American Sociological Review* 45, no. 5 (1980).

⁷⁰ Snow and Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes," 123.

⁷¹ Snow and Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes; Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes."

⁷² Snow and Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes," 130.

⁷³ Similar ideas are discussed in Snow and Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes."

⁷⁴ Two excellent and detailed texts on self and identity in Interactionism are Andrew J Weigert and Viktor Gecas, "Self," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003); Kevin D Vryan, Patricia A Adler, and Peter Adler, "Identity," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ The importance of collective identity to explanations of radical communities is developed in chapter 3. Here I restrict my focus to strategic framing processes.

⁷⁶ Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions," 426, 416.

time collective identity will contain “a fixed content of meanings, frames of interpretation, and normative and valuational proscriptions,” its apparent advantage in the explanation of radicalisation is that it is dynamic and an “emergent quality of group interaction.”⁷⁷ Methodologically, this treatment of the activist as having an open self and a ‘name’ facilitates an understanding of persons as “both subjects and objects to themselves.” Boldly then, the shared nature of identity is posited as the tertium between subjective/particular experiences and objective/universal decisions. Consequently, the contemporary sociological accounts of social movements are invariably identitarian.

Using the work of Pizzorno,⁷⁸ Diani and Melucci point out that the sharing of an identity within a movement connects private and public experience. This “enables the individual to assess the effects of his action and evaluate the *costs and benefits* of his decision to mobilise,”⁷⁹ giving *subjective* interpretations a *measure of objectivity*.⁸⁰ Interactionism and subsequently Frame Theory inform us that it is the ability of a community to construct shared, intersubjective meanings, which ‘organise experience and guide action,’ that *facilitates* collective action.⁸¹ In particular, the shared capacity to objectify, typify, and reflect on self through the category of identity is fundamental to our experiences and practical orientation.⁸² As such, for SMT, framing processes have become the theoretical link between structure and agency, subject and object, individual and community, providing an intermediary that connects persons to a specifiable and quantifiable range of values, beliefs, and decisions. It is through the emergence of collectives and the dynamic relation of personal and collective identity that “people shift from one meaningful definition of reality to a new one.”⁸³ As Johnson, Larana, and Gusfield explain, collective identity enables purposive action by providing normative proscriptions, by transferring meaning and significance across environments, and by inextricably linking ‘doing’ to ‘being’.⁸⁴

Through the strong links of Pizzorno to Anglo-American political science and its innate instrumentalism, collective identity has a decidedly instrumentalist connotation, facilitating cost–benefit calculations that orient action. Tempering this image of the utilitarian rational actor is the claim that identity is both an element of social order and an aspect of social struggle. The relation of ‘assembled self’ and ‘society’ is dynamic, one of dialectical indeterminism.⁸⁵ This conceptualising of self makes it both a *product* of social factors and a social force.⁸⁶ Gamson notes, collective identity constructions can be ‘adversarial’, part of the process of challenging dominant cultural codes, with their *hostile content* intended to expose

⁷⁷ Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, eds., *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 28.

⁷⁸ Alessandro Pizzorno, "Political Exchange and Collective Identity in Industrial Conflict," in *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe*, ed. C Crouch and A Pizzorno (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1978); Alessandro Pizzorno, "Identity and Interest," in *Interest Groups in Western Europe*, ed. S Bergen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Pizzorno is the progenitor of the contemporary concept of collective identity.

⁷⁹ Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 336-337.

⁸⁰ Ambitiously, the central proponents of Frame Theory and their collaborators claim that framing processes can address the long standing concern in the social sciences with experience and its objective expression. Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes," 466. Since James, other notable figures such as Mead and Goffman have concerned themselves with understanding how agreement is achievable amongst the diversity of the subjective interpretations of objective situations. George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present* (Chicago: Open Court, 1932); William James, "The Perception of Reality," *Principles of psychology* 2(1950); Goffman, *Frame Analysis*.

⁸¹ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes."

⁸² Weigert and Gecas, "Self," 280.

⁸³ McAdam (1988) as cited in Donati, "Political Discourse Analysis," 155.

⁸⁴ Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield, *New Social Movements*, 16-17.

⁸⁵ Musolf, "The Chicago School," 106-107.

⁸⁶ Vryan, Adler, and Adler, "Identity," 382. Here they further refer to the work of Rosenberg, (1989), p37

the arbitrariness of the existing order.⁸⁷ In keeping with the politico-institutional theme of SMT, this 'hostility' is usually a claim for recognition, a representation of the radical community as a legitimate political actor.

Collective identity, as a form of claims making, involves coercive and persuasive communicative acts. This is best represented in the notion of '*vocabularies of motive*,' which has become central to contemporary SMT accounts of the dynamics of RSMs.⁸⁸ For frame theorists, mobilising high-risk activism crucially depends on vocabularies of motive to coerce or instigate practical action. It is here, in theories of 'frame persuasion', that the contemporary perversion of frame theory and the dismissing of any innate rationale of the radical community are most obvious.⁸⁹ The paradigm of 'frame persuasion', born of the work on consensus mobilisation by theorists such as Klandermans, who has also collaborated with Tarrow, is predominant in contemporary SMT.⁹⁰ The vocabulary within the frame of an RSM "*provides a 'call to arms' or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action.*"⁹¹ The presupposition is that the native discourse of the antagonist community is devoid of an innate rationale of political practice. Frames associated with radicalism in the synthesis model of SMT provide firstly, a *distancing* from the reality of high-risk social action (this inverts the original intent of interpretive frames) and secondly, cynically mediate between perception and judgement. That is, frames strategically translate the social, political, and historical conditions into orienting meanings, providing an effective means of organising and identifying the radical community. However, as Donati notes, this approach to framing 'tracks the spread of ideas' but hinders our appreciation of the radical community's *reasons* and *explanations* of political and social reality.⁹²

Strategy oriented approaches to explicating the role of radical schemas of thought in the politics of RSMs appear to limit the opportunity for radical theory and practice to inform our sociological account of the nexus of politics and radical community. The practice and theory of marginal communities is relegated to the status of the '*resources of the powerless*', who attempt to gain voice and achieve *visibility* by persuading or coercing firstly, participation, and secondly *recognition* as political actors. This chapter is concerned with such theoretical consequences, born of SMT's specific framing of the object of study, its preferred analytic tools, and its choice of subjects and materials. These elements are readily

⁸⁷ William A Gamson, "The Social Psychology of Collective Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon Morris and C McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 60.

⁸⁸ Robert D Benford, "You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey: Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement.," *Sociological Quarterly* 34(1993); Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes." The concept of vocabulary of motive is founded on the work of C.W. Mills and Ervine Goffman. In particular C Wright Mills, "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive," *American Sociological Review* 5, no. 6 (1940); Goffman, *Frame Analysis*. Albas and Albas provide a detailed elaboration of the progression of the concepts of motive in interactionist sociology. Albas and Albas, "Motives." Originally, Mills and Goffman conceptualised motives as *emergent* from within performative and expressive interactions, rationalising specific actions rather than providing a mechanistic cause or determinative 'drive' or 'instinct'. Charles Edgley, "The Dramaturgical Genre," in *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, ed. Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003).

⁸⁹ Traditionally, typifying vocabularies consisting of stable institutional and religious motives were considered as "cues and justifications for normative actions," however, in modern societies they have been replaced with variable and contested constellations of meaning. Mills, "Situated Actions," 906, 910-911.

⁹⁰ This approach is best exemplified in their early works, including Bert Klandermans, "The Formation and Mobilization of Consensus," in *From Structure to Action*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich: Jai Press, 1988); Bert Klandermans and Sidney Tarrow, "Mobilization into Social Movements," in *From Structure to Action*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich: Jai Press, 1988).

⁹¹ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes," 617 (emphasis mine).

⁹² Donati, "Political Discourse Analysis," 155.

discernible in two renowned works of SMT on the Italian RSMs 1968-78. One is Della Porta's *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*, and the other is Tarrow's *Democracy and Disorder*.⁹³ The section that follows concerns itself with these two authors and the effect RMT, PPT, and Frame Theory have on their accounts of the politics of RSMs.

Della Porta, Tarrow, and a theory of protest cycles

The intent of della Porta and Tarrow, specific to the Italian RSMs, is to explain how the violent conclusion to the 1970s relates to the social movements of the previous decade. Tarrow, in his foreword to della Porta's book *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*, provides a statement of the importance of her work, which offers a broader insight into the contemporary approach of SMT. Notably, Tarrow informs us that a virtue of della Porta's work is its place within a schema that attempts to 'normalise' the study of social movements, even those utilising violence, by "relating the movements she studies to the political processes." That is, della Porta connects social movements to politics through the system of representation and dynamics of mediation. While utilising a pluralist (synthesis) methodology, SMT still embraces its modern traditions, significantly PPT, which requires the 'rooting' of RSMs within political institutions.⁹⁴ Tarrow himself argues that the capacity of collective action to be disruptive, its source of power, depends on the "strategic position of protesters within institutions (...)."⁹⁵

While SMT is ostensibly a pluralist framework, the disciplines dependence on select foundational concepts is patent in the persistent characterisation of the rational actor (taking della Porta as representative) as underwritten by instrumental reason. This is conspicuous in the typification of violence as a resource for social movement organisations (SMOs). For example, della Porta writes:

To the extent that radical groups took advantage of the available resources in their environment to strengthen or reinforce their militancy, their decision to emphasise violence can be considered a rational choice – at least if we understand *rationality in a limited sense referring to reasoning or calculation*.⁹⁶

Here, della Porta relies on a classical notion of instrumental rationality as a form of means-ends reasoning that does not reflect upon the value of that end. Accordingly, SMT concentrates on how collectives do things with 'strategic resources', rather than *why* radical communities form. Such typifications also highlight the continued dominance of RMT in della Porta's framework. She makes the assumption that RSMs "act as *violent entrepreneurs*, consuming and producing *resources* for violence in their environment (...)." These radical groups 'propagandised the most radical tactics', with their three

⁹³ Another important work on the Italian social movement sector that brings together the modelling of Tarrow and della Porta is della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children." Della Porta's *Social Movements, Political Violence* is the culmination of her previous research, consolidating her findings from works such as: Donatella della Porta, *Il Terrorismo di Sinistra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990); Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements and Violence: Participation in Underground Organisations* (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1992).

⁹⁴ See Tarrow's foreword in della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*. While embracing the disciplinary traditions of SMT, della Porta has also made a significant contribution to the development of the SMT framework. Her main input to the tradition of PPT is her theory of the policing of protest, where the strategic response of the State influences collective action, primarily when in the form of physical repression.

⁹⁵ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 345.

⁹⁶ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 198.

main tasks being “the *mobilisation of resources*; the *integration of resources*; and the *allocation of resources for external aims*.”⁹⁷

Added to the foundations of della Porta’s framework, mined from the Rational Actor Theory (RAT) derivatives of RMT and PPT, is a meso level theory of social movement organisation. With reverence for the preceding work of McCarthy and Zald,⁹⁸ della Porta accepts that the actions of SMOs are the consequence of *strategic choices*, firstly made in relation to the movements future goals, and second as a function of its interactions with competing organisations.⁹⁹ She writes, “organisational analysis provides an ideal basis to study the escalation of political protest, as political violence is, indeed a strategy used by radical – sometimes underground – organisations.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, della Porta and Tarrow note:

The widespread political violence that developed in Italy in the early 1970s is explained as an *internally differentiated strategic adaptation* within the social movement sector, during a cycle of protests that was disorderly but far from violent.¹⁰¹

Beyond meso-level mechanics, della Porta takes a further ‘corrective step’ to energise the static rational man of RAT, adding micro dynamics to her account of the radicalisation of social movements. The intended outcome of the synthesis framework is an ‘integrated modelling’ of the three levels (macro/meso/micro) of analysis utilised to explain the dynamics of social movements. Della Porta aims to create a theory of RSMs where structural and organisational dynamics are mediated by individual perception. Inherent to this process is the formation of identity, most importantly a shared identity, a *name*, or *defined object* that situates the individual in the social context, and is the intermediary between subjective experience and objective decisions.

To bring together the elements of the synthesis framework of contemporary SMT, della Porta deploys the ‘cycle of protest’ modelling of collective action to order the complex set of interacting factors involved in the life cycle of social movement radicalisation. Della Porta and other SMT theorists (notably Tarrow) define RSMs as an outcome of ‘radicalisation’, a product of the political, social, cultural, and historical context, which combine to *radicalise* social (normal) movements. This interpretation borrows heavily from the influential work of Charles Tilly, especially his concept of protest repertoires.¹⁰² Della Porta writes; “a repertoire of action describes a limited set of forms of protest that are commonly used in a *particular time and place*. Typically, the repertoire was learned from previous waves of protest.” When these protest events cluster, we have a protest cycle. Della Porta continues; “the analysis of protest cycles is particularly useful for an understanding of the development of political violence, as violence is frequently one of the *outcomes* of a cycle of protest, though not the only nor the most important one.”¹⁰³

⁹⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 12.

⁹⁸ John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, N, "Resource Mobilisation and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82(1977): 1219.

⁹⁹ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 11-12.

¹⁰⁰ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 83 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰¹ della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 607 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰² Tilly has been an important figure in the study of collective violence. Two important works for the sociological study of radical social movements are Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰³ Donatella della Porta, "Research on Social Movements and Political Violence," *Qualitative Sociology* 31(2008): 222 (emphasis mine). Della Porta does clarify in her major work on Italian RSMs that she does not believe violence was the main outcome. della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 216.

It is through the analysis of protest cycles that della Porta and Tarrow claim to discover a 'general tendency' associated with political violence and social movement radicalisation. This, della Porta asserts, is evident in the Italian case.

In Italy, (...) protest cycles started with symbolically innovative tactics, and then shifted to mass action, which sometimes escalated into violence. When *mass mobilization declined*, the *movements* went back to more institutional forms of collective action, whereas small groups resorted to *more organized forms of violence*.¹⁰⁴

Based on their study of Italy, della Porta and Tarrow believe there are reasons to anticipate correlation between different phases of mobilisation and the level and form of violence present.¹⁰⁵ This reported correlation further suggests a relationship exists between the stage of development of the cycle and the kind of movement organisations remaining within the sector. The assertion is that:

Violence cannot be understood except in the context of a country's *cycle of mass protest*; that it is a *function* of the competition between components of the social movement sector; and that it occurs – not as the essence of a period of mass protest – *but as a sign of its decline*.¹⁰⁶

It is instructive to notice that in the work of della Porta and Tarrow, through the concept of a cycle of protest, the notion of radicalisation becomes intimately entwined with violence, with terrorism understood as the 'most radical' form of activism. Further, continuities are posited to exist between political behaviour (that of social movements) and radical action. Both points are evident in the claim of della Porta that the violent outcome in Italy was a result of the "gradual *radicalisation* of political actors," in part a consequence of "the relationship between systemic characteristics and collective actors." Political violence therefore is a product of the radicalisation of normal social movements.¹⁰⁷ This process of 'conversion' forms the basis of a thesis of continuity rather than discontinuity with regard to the formation of RSMs. Della Porta and Tarrow declare in their "Unwanted Children":

The *logic of a protest cycle* is that institutionalization and increasing violence accompany and feed upon one another as the cycle winds down. *That both these trends augur the completion of the cycle should by now be obvious*. The culture of protest, which so recently appeared to be both general and transformative, *retreats into art forms, fashion and religion*. Political elites reweave the fabric of political society, *perhaps adding a client group here and deserting another there*. Mass demobilization, institutionalization and the isolation of extremists into a clandestine ghetto make it possible for economic elites to regain their hegemony.¹⁰⁸

In addition, Tarrow, inspired by the Italian sociologist Alessandra Pizzorno, reflects upon the important dimension of temporal extension in protest movements. Citing Pizzorno, he claims:

¹⁰⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, (emphasis mine). I have highlighted the term 'movement' here, for as I discuss below, della Porta classifies a movement as an organisation with access to resources that remove the need to radicalise.

¹⁰⁵ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 52-54.

¹⁰⁶ della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 607 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 613 (emphasis mine).

If we do not pay attention to the cyclicity of protest, then 'at every new upstart of a wave of conflict we shall be induced to think that we are at the verge of a revolution; and when the downswing appears, we shall predict the end of class conflict.'¹⁰⁹

The approach of cyclicity and continuity, however, contains a causal and 'teleological trap', or what Sewell refers to as a "teleological temporality," where the tendency of historical processes to proceed from 'less to more' is utilised to explain events, in this case, radicalisation.¹¹⁰ As I explain in section 3, the risk firstly, is reducing radicalism to a determinant variable: a product of political processes and resource characteristics that correlates to the phase of protest and tends toward violence. Second, marginal communities and their practice and theory are reduced to the epiphenomena of the cycle of protest specific to *the* chosen RSM. Communities peripheral to the SMT vision of the politics of RSMs are categorised and classified (objectified) by reference to extrinsic facts linked to the temporality of the struggle, such as the openness of the polity and the existence of SMOs.

Tarrow's reduction of the social movement sector in Italy to a single cycle of protest is exemplary of this type of modelling, where RSMs post 1970-71 are characterised against the backdrop of social movement decline. This characterisation disregards the politics of the radical communities that emerged during the 1970s, such as the autonomous women's movement and the Movement of '77. SMT is indifferent toward the broader movement sector of Italy, firstly pre 1967, and secondly post 1973. I make this point in more detail in later chapters of the Italian case study, in particular through consideration of the early workers' movement and the movements of social autonomy, which are more expansive than the violent *autonomi* (see below) and more important in its creativity than a mere retreat to 'fashion'.¹¹¹

Della Porta attempts to expand her explanatory framework by analysing the 'life history' of social movements and their participants, yet the analytic concepts of PPT similarly govern her account of the politics of RSMs. Consequently, collective violence is considered a *strategic adaption* or outcome of protest cycles, political opportunities, and competition for movement resources.¹¹² Political protest theorists believe social movements develop and succeed when the political context changes, providing opportunities for an existing grievance to be expressed. Della Porta states:

A major breakthrough in social movement research came when researchers found that *social movements develop and succeed* not because they emerge to address new grievances, but rather because *something in the larger political context allows existing grievances to be heard*. These contextual dimensions, called political opportunities, include regime shifts, periods of political instability, or changes in the composition of elites that may provide an opening for social movements.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Pizzorno, "Political Exchange," 291. Cited in Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 3. The position of Tarrow and SMT more generally, is influenced by the work of Alessandro Pizzorno, an important figure in Italian sociology who's most important contribution to the field is the concept of collective identity.

¹¹⁰ William Sewell, H, "Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terence McDonald, J (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). Della Porta expands upon the work of Sewell in della Porta, "Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts," esp. 3.

¹¹¹ This is a derisory characterising of this area of social conflict SMT shares with the NSMT of Melucci.

¹¹² Political opportunities are macro variables, such as the presence of an institutional support group, the openness of the institution to reform, and the attitude of 'elites' toward protest, that promote or discourage social movement development. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 25; Diani and Eyerman, *Studying Collective Action*, 6.

¹¹³ della Porta, "Research on Social Movements," 223 (emphasis mine). It is important to note, della Porta is talking specifically of social movements, 'normal' collective actors, which have yet to 'radicalise'.

Conversely, radicalisation occurs when the political structure prevents the voicing of a grievance, thereby forcing the antagonist to utilise innovative forms of protest to make visible a yet unknown conflict. Therefore, in part, the degree of radicalism in the accounts of della Porta and Tarrow is a function of the level of movement integration with the political institution and the political opportunities present in the movement environment. SMOs, being more integrated, have greater bargaining resources, and in turn, they utilise less experimental means of coercion. Alternatively, RSMs must take greater risks and be more tactically innovative to achieve a similar level of influence. Moments of experimentation expand repertoires of action and sometimes introduce violence into the movement sector. Beyond being politically reductive, this image of radicalisation is ignorant of movement dynamics outside of their tactical and strategic orientation.

For PPT the repertoires of collective action modify to meet the resource characteristics of the political environment and the political needs of the social movement,¹¹⁴ with the historical variability of social movement activity and the dynamics of protest 'clusters' accounted for by the concept of protest cycles. Tarrow asserts, relying on the work of Tilly, that over history we have been able to associate *certain groups* with specific forms of action, limited by the existing social order and *cultural conventions*.¹¹⁵ This supports the assertion of della Porta and her co-authors that at one level it is "organizations with distinct names and histories" that are associable with the most radical forms of action.¹¹⁶ This reveals the tendency of SMT to see political violence as an expression of certain social groups. In the hands of the April 7 judiciary such prejudice aided in criminalising the broad sweep of far left movements, while for SMT, it promotes indifference toward the particularity of this movement sector, collapsing it into the cycle of violence.

Tarrow, again calling on Tilly's work on the repertoires of contention, asserts:

Forms of collective action are not chosen randomly, but because they are the *most efficacious means to achieve a particular goal*, communicate a message, or attract members and allies, and outflank or defeat opponents.

On the other hand:

Within protest cycles, new forms of collective action succeed one another (...). People adopt new forms of action ... and new actors come on the scene (...). Cycles of protest are the crucibles within which the repertoire of collective action expands.¹¹⁷

During a cycle of protest there is characteristically an initial spike in social movement activity followed by decline, with the actions of individual social movements effecting other movements, influencing protest processes, events, and repertoires.¹¹⁸ Within this apparently disordered social climate, SMT finds generality and patterned behaviour. Social movement activity emerges and transforms based on a cost-benefit analysis of the resource characteristics of the movement context, and is either constrained or promoted by factors (opportunities) within the political realm. Together, the concepts of protest cycles and repertoires, della Porta asserts, explain *extreme* forms of activism, notably political violence. While variegated and complex, the defining feature of protest cycles is that radicalism – the attempt to strengthen the influence of a movement from weakened or weakening foundations through the

¹¹⁴ della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children."

¹¹⁵ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 20.

¹¹⁶ Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements," 86.

¹¹⁷ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 20 (emphasis mine).

¹¹⁸ della Porta, "Research on Social Movements," 222-223.

experimentation with new repertoires of action – increases during the decline of a protest phase.¹¹⁹ That is, radicalism is a mark of desperation and crisis, a reaction of the excluded to political impotence. The modernisation of politics, while stimulated by RSMs, is to SMT a consequence of the virtues of western democracy, not the radical community.¹²⁰

2. The frame and cycle of radicalisation in Italy 1968-78

Della Porta and Tarrow have access to a limited store of concepts and categories for their work on social movement radicalisation, a limitation that guides their selection of subjects and materials and restricts their field of view regarding the range of RSMs. I partially represented the image of the Italian radical sector this produces in Chapter 1. What follows here is supplementary to the account previously provided and has a specific purpose: to analyse the way that the theoretical pursuits of della Porta and Tarrow (and by extension SMT) structure their handling of radical theory and practice.

The narrowed point of ingress into the Italian social movement sector provided by della Porta and Tarrow, opens out onto an expansive and diverse field of left-libertarian social action activated by the student movement. Della Porta writes:

The student movement that arose (...) triggered the development of a protest cycle, which involved diverse social strata. Hundreds of new political groups were created, but, although they criticised the Old Left, they remained very much within a traditional leftist master frame. For these groups, adopting violent tactics was a way of differentiating themselves from the Old Left, as well as a means of attracting recruits in the growing internal competition between movement organisations.¹²¹

Throughout 1967 and 1968 the new student collectives were radicalised in comparison to the traditional student movements. That is, they experimented with new forms of protest such as campus occupations and property damage.¹²² On the one hand, such experimentation was a response to competition internal to the movement sector, and on the other to the declining of student mobilisation within the university context. The latter was caused by the institutions blocking of student demands for radical reform, which generated frustration amongst participants. Based on biographical reports gathered by della Porta, some of the displaced activists found it difficult to return to 'normal' lives – the generalised mark of having been involved in high-risk activism – and instead looked for other objects of contestation.¹²³ During this transition, della Porta notes, the initial support of the student movement by its institutional ally the PCI was replaced with alliances with 'workerist' groups that provided support for further mobilisation and mass protest within the New Left sector.¹²⁴ Viewed through the framework of SMT, the change in tenor of the student movement was an outcome of the blocking of their reformist agenda and the loss of their representative voice within the political institution. In combination, political

¹¹⁹ della Porta, "Research on Social Movements," 223; della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 612.

¹²⁰ The alternative explored by NSMT (discussed in chapter 3) is that radicalism contrasts instrumental poverty [a lack of resources] with 'richness of expression', and 'movement disintegration' [decline] with 'hidden initiatives' such as counter-culture. G Lodi and M Grazioli, "Giovani sul Territorio Urbano: L'intergrazione Minimale," in *Altri Codici*, ed. Alberto Melucci (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984).

¹²¹ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 207.

¹²² Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 153-154. This change is also noted in historical accounts such as Kogan, *A Political History*, 233; Mack Smith, *Modern Italy*, 455.

¹²³ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 27-28.

¹²⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 86.

disengagement and demobilisation left the movement 'resource poor', a condition that initiated the radicalisation of their repertoire and transformation of their interpretive frame.

Beyond the pragmatic support of the students by the workers' movement, workerism, Tarrow tells us, was a popular theme amongst the frames of the student movements that drew on the inheritance of the 'traditional left.' This resulted, firstly in the replacing of the meaning of the university with the metaphor of the factory, and secondly the re-imagining of the student as a worker.¹²⁵ This facilitated the students' self-representation as an "autonomous social actor" and helped overcome populist understanding of them within the left as "petit bourgeois dilettantes." The 'proletarianisation' of the student movement, Tarrow argues, was not the assimilating of the student; rather, it was the formation of a new social movement. The language of workerism had a 'strategic function' geared toward *dignifying* the student's grievances, and aided the diffusion of protest by appealing to common understandings and an acceptable rationale of insurgency, making the student comprehensible to the New Left.¹²⁶ While Tarrow stops short of reducing Marxism to mere ideology, ultimately he equates the workerist thesis and its transformation within the student movement with persuasive framing.

From the student and worker milieu, the extra-parliamentary organisations of the New Left emerged. These organisations attempted to differentiate themselves from the Old Left, della Porta notes, through the promotion of a 'radical and aggressive ideology'. However, while SMOs such as LC provided the initial rationale and support for mass violence, the larger groups routinely evolved towards formalised (political) bodies. During this transformation, many members returned to the official left, while others formed small local collectives, and others still re-aggregated into alternative larger organisations.¹²⁷ Some of the 'splinter groups' gathered around leaders who were critical of the mistakes of the Old and New left, forming autonomous collectives (*collettivi autonomi*) constituted by new militants prepared to utilise more high-risk actions. The *autonomi* became part of the radical movement field that also contained independent groups that, while originating from the same milieu of the late 1960s, never converged with the larger organisations that they considered too moderate. These groups were committed to "vanguard violence, thought to be a vital step in the revolutionary process," and it was from the 'vanguard' collectives that the BR emerged and evolved.¹²⁸ The most direct path into the BR was via the Trento Student movement, passing through *Lavoro Politico*, onto CPM, and finally appearing as BR in 1970.¹²⁹

The parallel sources of violent activism amongst the *autonomi* and vanguard practices engross della Porta. While other clandestine organisations such as PL would evolve alongside BR, the former militants of organisations such as PO and LC congregated in the area of *Autonomia Organizzata* (organised

¹²⁵ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 148-149. This is the Proletarianisation thesis, an account familiar to the theorising of PO. I look more closely at this interpretation in Chapters 4 and 5. Briefly, Tarrow's (and independently della Porta's) superficial engagement with the theory and practice of Marxism, especially workerism, effects his account. For example, the Trento student movement, which is the focus of Tarrow's assertion here, aligns more accurately with 'old school communism' than workerism. This would explain Tarrow's observation of the importance of the language of commodity and exchange value. However, he does correctly identify the influence of workerist theory within the widely influential Pisan Theses.

¹²⁶ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 149, 124.

¹²⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 105-106.

¹²⁸ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 88-92. Tarrow, reporting upon the statistics of della Porta, notes less than a quarter of the participants in terrorism had come from the organisations of the extra-parliamentary left. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 304.

¹²⁹ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 93. While della Porta provides a more complex picture, this path is offered as a direct lineage to BR.

workers' autonomy), a loose band of radical collectives that eventually coalesced around the radical journals of *Rosso* and *Senza Tregua*. These journals, central to della Porta's research of radicalism, attempted to "'rephrase' the 'workerist' ideology of the sixties so as to make it more appealing to the new 'autonomous' mood of the mid-seventies."¹³⁰ These, and similar newspapers and periodicals, are central to the dynamics of the Italian 'spiral of violence'. Once involved in radical activism, Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta tell us that practical considerations such as prosecution were restrictive on subsequent choices; however, rather than accept the image of criminalisation promoted by their opponents, elite and revered identities were constructed, reinforced, and circulated through the movement literature which romanticised and legitimated radicalism as heroic and revolutionary.¹³¹

As the 1970s progressed, the State's repression of protest and blocking of reform agendas narrowed the range of active 'political communities'. Amongst the social actors choosing to remain within the political field, the elimination of their prior community necessitated a search for new sources of orientating meaning. Confronted with this dilemma, choices were made between the available alternatives, or less frequently, new innovative communities formed. The latter, if we are to believe the account of SMT, was rare beyond the start of the cycle of protest in the late 1960s. Seemingly, the invalidation of an existing community increased the appeal of programmatic political violence, a form available to participants in the practice and theory of radical communities such as the armed and clandestine groups. Caught between the militarisation of social movements and the State's repressive response, the social conflict was progressively evacuated of alternative political choices, with radical collectives who resisted both extremism and institutionalising reportedly eliminated from the sector.¹³² This, however, ignores the ongoing presence of cultural collectives and their alternative focus on social autonomy, realised in activities such as the forming of independently run social centres.¹³³

In the accounts of SMT, the political polarisation of struggle in Italy – a result of the hard-line repression of the State – created a sense of absolute enmity, an 'us and them' mentality that encouraged the emergence of more radical collective action frames.¹³⁴ In these frames, the State was representative of the perversion of democracy and imagined as the enemy of the revolutionary groups who now allied themselves with third world radical communities. The theme of revolution was a common source of inspiration across movement sectors in the 1960s. In Italy, reference to revolutionary episodes and events such as the Latin American uprisings encouraged the broadening of the radical movement sector.¹³⁵ Complementing these 'other-worldly' referents was Italy's socio-political history of anti-fascism and the prominence of Marxist and Leninist academia in the New Left. These local influences provided a source of 'heroic legends' that were supported by an identity and image of revolutionary insurgency.¹³⁶ In particular, della Porta and her co-authors assert classic Leninist texts on vanguardism inspired the New Left students to imagine themselves as the leaders of the revolution. Similarly, the

¹³⁰ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 93.

¹³¹ Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements," 94-95.

¹³² della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 95.

¹³³ Edwards provides an informative discussion of the inattention to the cultural and social area of conflict resulting from the SMT cycle of protest approach. Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*, 191-204. The account of SMT ignores the idea of social movement latency, which I discuss in chapter 3.

¹³⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 189-194, 204. In chapter 4 I discuss RSMs that, as Virno notes, had left behind the image of absolute enmity.

¹³⁵ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 194.

¹³⁶ Leonard Weinberg, "The Violent Life: Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 147-149.

work of Guevara on the ability of groups such as rural peasants to create the conditions of revolution was reportedly an equally effective ideology.¹³⁷

For della Porta and Tarrow, the pre-existing discourses of revolution and resistance were pivotal in *conversion* to the 'most radical political positions', for conversion is mediated by development of a radical identity or self-image (e.g. freedom fighter), which *provide the rationale* for militancy and include orienting meanings.¹³⁸ In addition, the more widespread the radical identity and the accompanying frame of meaning became the more 'normal' or 'natural' radicalism seemed to participants. Accordingly, in the accounts of SMT, much of the social movement activity in Italy focused on 'cognitive restructuring' which usually occurred through *frame amplification* and *elaboration*, presenting activism as honourable by connecting violent actions, for example, to traditional narratives and valorised identities. Once 'within' these frames, elaboration and amplification were continuous, with deaths, arrests, and assassinations of fellow activists linked to the symbolism of 'war' and 'massacre', providing the "rhetoric of a historical moment" that, della Porta claims, justified any form of action.¹³⁹ Here, in the explanation of della Porta, the exemplars and traditional theory of radical practice are viewed as the political resources and instruments of the movement entrepreneurs and political elite.

To support such an account of the mechanics of radicalisation SMT often relies on the self-report of 'activists.' In Italy, those surveyed by della Porta suggest involvement in high-risk activism depended upon exposure to dramatic encounters, adoption of a heroic self-image, and the sense of fulfilling of an "extraordinary role."¹⁴⁰ Within the most radical sectors of the left-wing movement, the imagery of revolution and civil war was at its strongest, with the identification with comrades and militant struggle 'absolute'. Amongst such groups, the relation to a radical community and its identity appeared particularly important during times of crisis, helping activists to understand situations that may otherwise be insufferable or confusing. A favourite example of della Porta is the radical community's interpretation of an activist's incarceration for involvement with high-risk activism as politically motivated, with the detainee portrayed by their community as 'political prisoners' or 'hostages'.¹⁴¹ This apparently made hostile environments bearable, with personal suffering endured for the good of comrades, a sign of strength, loyalty, and ongoing resistance.¹⁴²

To confirm the legitimacy of activism, della Porta notes that initially many of the left-wing radical movements had referred to Marxist literature, drawing on the traditions of the workers' movement to support their political arguments and radical practice. Later they filled their publications with such rhetoric as working class victory, support of the masses, and "the coming revolution." Della Porta, citing an 'official militant interview' – her designation for *pentiti* transcripts – remarks radicalisation was supported "by famous quotes from Marxist literature, in which violence appeared as absolutely legitimate."¹⁴³ As the sector developed toward ever more violent forms, however, the language of the clandestine movements (the most extreme amongst the field) and their documents became laden with

¹³⁷ Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements," 86-87. In chapter 4 I look at an alternative reading of the mobilisation of 'peasant politics' by Sergio Bologna.

¹³⁸ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 201-205. In addition, Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements."

¹³⁹ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 191-194, 158-159.

¹⁴⁰ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 170-172.

¹⁴¹ It is curious that we receive no discussion from della Porta or Tarrow of instances when such portrayals of political prisoners appear accurate.

¹⁴² della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 181-183.

¹⁴³ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 174 (Life history no. 112:121).

'military jargon' supported with a 'military frame'. This overrode "normal values and behaviour" and eventually the "military metaphor became a self-sustaining reality."¹⁴⁴ Here della Porta offers a description of the mechanics and elements of radicalisation where the imagery, vocabulary, and rhetoric of the interpretive frame provide an alternative expression of the socio-political condition to help overcome the appeal of competing 'factual arguments.'¹⁴⁵

While displaying characteristics of a social movement, the most radical organisations apparently lose sight of their social and political agenda and consequently, according to SMT, their framings of 'reality' become more perverse. For example, to legitimise violent activism an Italian activist (in fact a *pentito*) recounts:

(...) her involvement in the killing of a warden was "lived (...) inside this logic of the 'role', because he was a warden, and he was well known as a 'torturer', as we used to say, so I had all the justifications of the ideology....For me it was a routine job. And this is the very aberration of the ideology: on the one side, there are your friends, and on the other, there are your enemies. (Life history no. 26:62-3)¹⁴⁶

Typifications of self and other changed as violence escalated. Representations became highly symbolic, ritualistic, and focused on consolidating the identity of the community while elaborating the threat external to the movement as evil and immanent.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, della Porta records, the rationale of the radical community for its actions shifted from instrumentalism to expressivism, moving away from pursuing future goals toward using violence as a communicative form, "an expression of conflict."¹⁴⁸ Further, as the broader movement sector disaggregated, Zwerman and her colleagues claim that "in the absence of a larger revolutionary movement, violence becomes an end in itself, expressing and sustaining the collective identity of the group (...)," separating from the mass movement.¹⁴⁹ As the costs of high-risk activism increase, the personal benefits also need to amplify. Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta suggest that at the level of the individual, subjective experience is decisive; therefore, frames that clearly elaborate themes of hope and commitment and protect the revolutionary identity are the most important.

An account of one such subjective experience of radicalisation, favoured by della Porta, is the 'life-history' of 'Marco', who she refers to as an Italian militant left-wing activist, glossing over, as is typical, his status as *pentito*. Marco's (and other similar 'militants') self-report is relied heavily upon to advance a theoretical position on the place of violence in the family of Italian RSMs. Marco's initial exposure to activism, and that which lead to his involvement, was a student protest march that was, he reports, 'very spectacular'. Marco "saw Milan in a way I would never have imagined, with the smoke of the tear gas, and a really ghostly scene (...)." Subsequently, the 'atmosphere' of protest meetings and the creation of networks of friends and 'comrades', strengthened his commitment to activism.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 174-177.

¹⁴⁵ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 172-173, 201.

¹⁴⁶ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 174.

¹⁴⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 133.

¹⁴⁸ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 174. Della Porta offers little further discussion of the significance of this observation.

¹⁴⁹ Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements," 101 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵⁰ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 143. The broader life history of Marco is presented on pages 142-147

Marco was socialised into violence through the daily fights with neo-fascists at his school and eventually became part of the defensive marshals, a position respected even amongst his professors. Subsequently, as recalled in his 'official interview', Marco's decision to join PO after being involved in *Movimento Studentesco* formed around PO's 'moral coherence' and the 'very radical action' associated with workerism. When PO dissolved, Marco militarised alongside other friends. Militarisation occurred amongst the 'fantastic atmosphere' of radical activism and 'revolutionary consciousness', with parallels drawn between Italy and Third world and Latin American revolutions (especially Chile) as they fought against the 'evil fascists'. Marco became active in the violent sector of the radical autonomous collectives, which, from 1974-77 attempted to 'solder' armed struggle to mass violence. It was not until Marco abandoned activism and the associated movement frames, mediated through the processes of juridical collaborator as a *pentito*, that he reassessed negatively the violent actions once considered necessary to the revolution and armed struggle. Marco recounts how, when "pushed to abandon his ideological image of the world" through his court interview, he realised his "political evolution had been mediated through political and ideological categories." He continues:

I think that the phenomenon of collaboration and repentance derived also from this sense of freedom, which comes from the possibility to recollect your life using the *normal logic* for which a murder is a murder, a wounding is a wounding, a ferocious comrade is a ferocious man, and not a vanguard with a higher level of class consciousness. (Life history no. 12:44)¹⁵¹

Such recollections, taken as microcosms of radicalisation, highlight for della Porta two important differences between what she classifies as social movements and radicalised movements. Firstly, social movement participants, while "deeply committed to their political goals (...) are not *prisoners* of their groups (...) [and] they generally remain open to the environment." Second, normally, social movements "do not emphasise extremely heroic definitions of the self, nor do they resort to warlike images."¹⁵²

The rhetorical excesses of radicalised frames are encouraged, della Porta believes, by the experience of a *crisis* or *turning point* in lived experience, which requires new behaviours, associations, values, and identities to enable orienting meanings to be found in the otherwise alienating conditions.¹⁵³ This process, like religious *conversion*, prompts individuals to look for significance and meaning in an alternative lifestyle.¹⁵⁴ Such conversions crucially involve cognitive processes that focus selectively on "events congruent with one's belief system, rejecting the incongruent information, and reinterpreting ambivalent data as confirm[ing]."¹⁵⁵ The implication is that marginal communities treat framing as a movement resource that provides instruments of persuasion to orient the behaviour of activists and influence the character of mobilisation.¹⁵⁶ This interpretation seemingly conflates interpretive framing with ideology, failing to hold separate the active and discursive mechanisms of meaning making

¹⁵¹ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 147 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵² della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 206.

¹⁵³ Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Cited in della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 162.

¹⁵⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 182. Here della Porta cites the study of Lofland and Stark on religious conversion: John Lofland and Ronald Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30(1965).

¹⁵⁵ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 180.

¹⁵⁶ See della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 200-201.

acknowledged by Frame theory from the organising task of ideology associated with an *organisational perspective* that reifies ideology.¹⁵⁷

The radicalisation of Italy's social movement sector escalated during the spring and autumn of 1969, in particular, through the emergence of State sponsored terrorism. Under these circumstances, della Porta notes, left-wing violence was initially 'defensive'. Only later did physical force become an organised and strategic repertoire utilised against an opponent framed through the concept of absolute enmity.¹⁵⁸ Unlike defensive violence, organised or strategic violence required a more sophisticated frame of reference to facilitate support, which, as outlined above, necessitated the tying together of ideas and exemplars from extrinsic sources (e.g. the Resistance and Marxism). Tarrow, working closely with della Porta on the Italian situation, similarly observes a 'progression' in the radical repertoire of the far left. This progression he attributes to tactical innovation and demobilisation, two central aspects in the realisation of terrorism during the 'years of despair'.

Tactical innovation, according to Tarrow, is first a response to the strategies of opponents (such as the forms of protest policing)¹⁵⁹ and second, an attempt to 'outflank' competing movements.¹⁶⁰ Recalling Tarrow's position from chapter one, the violence of the movement phase 1967-69 was characteristically *incidental* to protest action while at the end of the decade the violence in the industrial sector was a *tactical* response by the workers' movement to the moderation of the PCI and unions. Primarily, radical repertoires were an attempt to draw support away from the official left and toward the extra-parliamentary groups. In a similar vein, from the mid 1970s on, the increasing severity of violence was an effort on behalf of the 'extremist groups', Tarrow believes, to break away from the progressively more institutionalised politics of the New Left. Violence was a product of the demobilisation associated with the change in character of the New Left, and through necessity, involved small, localised collectives. Small group activities became the most accessible form for new movements trying to break into the left-wing sector, and, Tarrow states, violence was the *one* form of action that could impress its audience without requiring a mass base.¹⁶¹ Therefore:

By the end of the protest cycle, when most people were no longer engaging in mass collective action, of those left in the social movement sector, a large proportion were meeting in small groups and using *violent means* to advance their claims. Organised violence was not a property of *il sessantotto*; it was a product of the end of mobilisation.¹⁶²

Hence, Tarrow informs us that "terrorism was not the child of 1968; it was not even its grandchild; it was the fruit of a new generation of *extremists* who found the extra-parliamentary groups too

¹⁵⁷ Melucci discusses a similar point, as well as the deformation of ideology by integralist intent, in Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 354-355. He attempts to distinguish the 'deeper' activity of constructing shared meanings from the organising task of ideology that overlays this accomplishment. See chapter 3 for discussion

¹⁵⁸ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 22-30.

¹⁵⁹ For della Porta, the various approaches to protest policing in Italy correlate with the sentiment of the State and the radical left. State policing, she reports, started with the *repression* of the 1950s, replaced by the *tolerance* of the 1960s, which gave way to vulgar clandestine violence in late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. A return to repression during the late 1970s state of emergency eventually ended in preventative tolerance in the 1980s. It was during the phases of repression and State sponsored violence that the movements typically radicalised, a reaction to the blocking of independent forms of transgression. della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 55-62.

¹⁶⁰ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 305.

¹⁶¹ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 305-309.

¹⁶² Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 307.

moderate for their tastes.”¹⁶³ While not directly responsible, the cycle of protest initiated by the 68ers terminated in extremist collectives and acts of terrorism. Whether blameless or not, this interpretation links *il sessantotto* to clandestine violence and allows the formation of a narrative of association.

An analysis of social movement radicalisation

SMT tells us that the strains within a society, however pervasive they may be, do not automatically generate political conflict. For this to occur, firstly, social movements or informal subcultures must be present within the political sphere and then, through a confluence of macro, meso, and micro conditions, radicalise. Radicalising involves constructing radical collective identities, adopting deviant systems of beliefs and values, and the forming of organisations capable of tactical innovation. Then as strategic, reasonable, instrumentally rational actors, they need to accumulate the resources required to mobilise and sustain a radical community. This process involves numerous variables, across all levels of explanation and, accordingly, its outcome is variegated and gradated. Radicalism as an analytic category of SMT ranges over disparate phenomena, and as a subset of political action is constituted by more and less radical repertoires and ideologies. Its manifestation is measurable along a scale that begins with peaceful innovation, such as street theatre, and terminates at terrorism. While radical action is ‘deviant’ it is not pathological, but more modestly, is distinguishable from the existing ‘standards’ of social movement activity within the political system. That is, SMT tells us, the classification of the radical status of an action is fundamentally relative, a judgement of its legality and legitimacy contrasted against the dominant political culture of the time. Radicalism, unlike political action, is an unexpected and culturally unsanctioned repertoire of conflict.¹⁶⁴

Radicalism as culturally unsanctioned actions is foundational to della Porta’s construction of the general life-history of a RSM. RSMs usually start peacefully and are disruptive through novelty and lack of conventional form. Radical activism in Italy started with innovative and creative forms of protest that included experimentation with actions such as demonstrations and street marches.¹⁶⁵ The episodes of violence associated with these forms of social action were typically ‘incidental’ or ‘unplanned’, arising through confrontation with opponents. The catalytic adversaries for the radical left in Italy were the fascists and the State. Initially, then, social movements radicalise at their margins through conflict with adversaries. A consequence of this confrontation is that in order to mobilise support or repress opposition, participants on both sides tend to experiment with ‘hard’ techniques. In particular, the State’s practice of ‘policing’ proved significant in the escalation of violence.¹⁶⁶

By the time the workers’ organisations demobilised in the first part of the 1970s, participants were socialised to the legitimacy of violence and political subcultures sympathetic to the use of violence beyond anti-fascism existed. Consequently, programmatic and offensive acts of physical force, usually performed by small voluntarist armed groups emerging from the militant wing of workerism, replaced

¹⁶³ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 304 (emphasis mine). Tarrow argues blaming the 68ers for the realisation of terrorism would be like blaming the PCI for the emergence of the extra-parliamentary organisations. While part of the pre-conditions, they did not play a determining role. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 297-310.

¹⁶⁴ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 20.

¹⁶⁵ Prior to the predominance of organised violence in both the late 1960s and 1970s, street demonstrations were an important repertoire of protest that, on both occasions, drew a violent response from the State.

¹⁶⁶ della Porta, "Research on Social Movements," 222-223. This is a point of agreement across surveyed accounts. Whether elaborated within the SMT framework of Political Process Theory (PPT), through NSMT’s notion of ‘mediated dissent’, or the IRT concept of counter-revolution, the State lead reaction to RSMs is recognised as a primary factor in either promoting or calming political violence.

mass mobilisation as the most visible form of social contestation. Then, trapped between militarisation and State repression, the support base for the far left receded, leaving behind the most radical organisations. With the progressively more moderate official left withdrawing all support for these increasingly marginalised organisations, their members came to consider (frame) themselves as the political vanguard, the most elite freedom fighters. Subsequently, the prominent form of violence became the terrorism of the clandestine cells that typified the final years of the movement and indelibly marked the terminus of the organised areas of social and political dissent.¹⁶⁷

Despite the conjunctural and complex nature of the conditions and processes underlying the emergence of radical SMOs, their regional and historical particularity, and the influence of the vicissitudes of the wider movement sector on their character, della Porta, Tarrow, and their co-authors find it plausible to generalise the dynamics of radicalisation in contemporary society. While not pronouncing the discovery of invariant characteristics or universal laws, these authors state that certain aspects of radicalisation transfer across regional and historical boundaries.¹⁶⁸ By way of an example, Della Porta presents a mechanised image of radicalisation in Italy and makes substantive claims such as, “in Italy (...) radical ideologies engendered radical violent repertoires *only* when political opportunities triggered escalation.”¹⁶⁹ In more detail:

Political opportunities allowed for the diffusion of violent actions and radical frames of meaning; movements’ entrepreneurs sustained the escalation of violence – or in analytic terms (...), *conditions for violence were determined first at the macro-level*, and, later on, processes taking place at the *meso-level favoured their reproduction*. (...) [However] one cannot completely understand political violence without examining the way in which the political opportunities and the radical organizations affected the activists’ life – that is, how they *influenced the building of radical collective identities*.¹⁷⁰

This makes clear that while working across three levels of explanation there remains a hierarchy of cause and effect in SMT modelling of the politics of RSMs. This is well illustrated by reference to della Porta’s ‘box-and-arrow’ account of Italian RSMs. The key aspects of the radicalisation of social movements in Italy were firstly, political opportunities. While the political and social conditions (of which we never receive a considered account in SMT) affect the meso and micro levels, creating the ‘pervasive strains’ of contemporary society, it is the effect of political opportunity structures on existing social actors that firstly shapes the movement sector. The experimentation with radical repertoires is a *strategic response* to the frustration of action, usually caused by the reluctance of democracies to yield to radical demands for reform. Experimentation is also a response to the strategy of the State and the presence of counter-movements, such as the neo-fascists in Italy. Protest as a political repertoire normally emerges during periods when the State’s policing of movements remains tolerant, and accordingly involves relatively little risk to participants. Secondly, organised violence sparks off when radical demands for change, and the frustration of these demands, intersect with the presence of subcultures willing to use violence. These elements are more prevalent when the State’s policing policy shifts toward repressive and aggressive campaigns. Subsequently, through militarisation of the movement population, exposure to violent interactions, and the occurrence of a precipitating event such as the bombing of Piazza Fontana, underground organisations develop and over time transform

¹⁶⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 207.

¹⁶⁸ See for example della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 210.

¹⁶⁹ della Porta, "Research on Social Movements," 227 (emphasis mine).

¹⁷⁰ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 201.

into extremist 'sects'. During this second stage of radicalisation, the meso level becomes determinant of the behaviour of the sector.

Finally, collective identity is the third essential aspect in social movement radicalisation. Radical identities develop contemporaneously with the macro and micro stages, and are essential to the formation, sustenance, and ultimately disaggregation of RSMs. The temporally extended dynamics of the development of a shared identity start inconspicuously through sometimes chance involvement in certain movement milieus, activist networks, and the initial choice of friends or 'comrades'. With this choice comes exposure to new values and beliefs, which in some circumstances include sub cultures with existing justifications of violence. In such instances, as part of the larger collective action frame, a radical collective identity starts to emerge, created by the community to support and promote these radical values. Subsequently, exposure of such a community to violent interaction escalates the tendency to dramatise the importance of these events, which strengthens the existing radical discourse and further radicalises the movement and the identity of activists.¹⁷¹ This, Tarrow notes, is the 'spiral of violence' that sees extremists using 'increasingly violent tactics,'¹⁷² drawing hard line institutional responses, which creates an environment where micro dynamics become determinant of behaviour.

RSMs, as described in the framework of SMT, emerge in one of two ways. Either they are the product of the deformation of an existing social movement, or they result from the political impotence of a social network that is unable to gather the resources necessary to form a social movement. That is, RSMs suffer from 'social movement envy'. Radicalisation occurs in response to the inability of a group to attain political resources and influence the political institution through the standard behaviours of a movement. As previously mentioned, political protest theorists believe social movements develop and succeed when the political context changes, providing opportunities for an existing grievance to be expressed. Consequently, radicalism is more likely within "exclusive political systems and unstable democracies."¹⁷³ Della Porta contends that in Italy the radicalising of movement activity related to a decline in movement effectiveness and in response to oppressive and violent state control. While many movements chose the institutional path in an effort to sustain their political resource levels and influence, some organisations decentralised and formed a loose confederate of smaller collectives; others still, decided to go 'underground' and adopt the most extreme/violent forms of collective action.¹⁷⁴

For some organisations, the shift underground was through necessity after experimenting with 'hard' techniques or militancy, adopting 'extremist' methods of conflict in response to the characteristics of the movement sector and political environment.¹⁷⁵ The extremist outcome, in the view of Tarrow, was a product of the decline of the larger movements and the competition this created within the far left 'political sector'. Violence became a way to 'outflank' opponents, to distinguish their product within the radical left, and was the only form that could impress its audience without requiring a mass base. In addition, Tarrow notes that the attraction of violence was elevated after the demobilisation of the worker produced an "absence of any *serious project*" within the left wing movement sector.¹⁷⁶ After the decline of the New Left, Tarrow states:

¹⁷¹ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 189-206.

¹⁷² Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 320.

¹⁷³ della Porta, "Research on Social Movements," 223.

¹⁷⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 85.

¹⁷⁵ della Porta, "Research on Social Movements," 225-226.

¹⁷⁶ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 304-310.

In the absence of a serious revolutionary project that transcended workerism, and could capture the imagination of their young recruits, the extraparliamentary groups left them with a rejection of reformism, with the tools of violence, but with little else. It was not the teachings of the new Left that produced a terrorist generation; it was the absence of a serious project with which to inspire the next generation once the militance of the workers had subsided.¹⁷⁷

Ultimately, according to SMT, the decisions and actions of RSMs are firstly a product of the structural and political conditions, which interact with organisational dynamics and finally filter through agency. Viewed across the entire cycle of protest, recognised and delimited by its empirical features, the stages and levels of radicalisation follow a specifiable pattern of behaviour (protest dynamics) that sociology believes provides a general mapping of the path to terrorism (the 'most radical' form of collective action) in western democracies.

3. Radicalism as a culturally unsanctioned political strategy

Of particular interest to this chapter is the failure of contemporary SMT to rise to its own challenge regarding the explication of the dynamics of social movement radicalisation. SMT sets itself a series of tasks and poses a range of questions for investigation. One such question della Porta poses for research on 'deviant political careers,' is "how and why do 'normal' political activists end up being 'terrorists'?"¹⁷⁸ Goodwin suggests the difficulty in answering this question has seen the field shift away from *why* individuals convert to radical political paths toward the instrumental question of *how* they are *converted*.¹⁷⁹ It is this persistent focus on strategy and instrumental rationality that appears to enfeeble the account of SMT. Such academic single-mindedness stems from the heritage of the sociological study of collective action and the contemporary default of SMT to a fixed politico-institutional sphere, influenced by its apparent esteem for the rationalist and reasonable political culture of representative democracy. The correlate reduction of radical practice and theory to means-ends rationality, coupled to the continued enthusiasm for the rational actor, makes it unsurprising that SMT concentrates on how social movements and radical communities do things with 'strategic resources'. While a legitimate area of enquiry, the concern is that the strategic perspective is considered to have exhausted the important questions around the politics of RSMs.

The rejuvenation of the study of social movements in the late 1960s and 1970s weighs heavily on contemporary SMT, evident in the central notions of a social movement and protest. "Social movement actors," della Porta and Diani write:

Are engaged in political and/or cultural conflicts meant to promote or oppose social change. By conflict we mean an oppositional relationship between actors who seek control of the same stake – be it political, economic, or cultural power – and in the process make negative claims on each other – i.e., demands which, if realized, would damage the interests of the other actors.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 309. In chapters 3 and 4, I look at the post-workerist generation that Tarrow believes never appeared.

¹⁷⁸ Donatella della Porta, "Life-History in the Analysis of Social Movement Activists," in *Studying Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and R Eyerman, *Life-History* (London: Sage, 1992), 174.

¹⁷⁹ Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, "Return of the Repressed," 70. The self-reflexive literature of social movement theory dedicates considerable space to this problem. I do not revisit it here, but refer those interested to a good introductory work on such issues: Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*.

¹⁸⁰ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 21.

This conceptualising of a social movement and its central dynamic as direct conflict comes from the work of Tilly, especially his *From Mobilisation to Revolution*.¹⁸¹ Such an exclusive definition restricts the applicability of the works of SMT to 'the political', represented as a struggle over resources that occurs in an 'arena of debate' delimited by the rules of institutional politics and the prevailing culture. While such political reductionism is a topic I look at in subsequent chapters, I also find it troubling that in her recent paper on protest, which is nominated as the 'modus operandi' of social movements, della Porta recalls the work of Lipsky to explain this aspect of social conflict.¹⁸² Lipsky wrote, protest is a "resource of the *powerless* (...), they depend for success not upon direct utilization of power, but upon activating other groups to enter the political arena."¹⁸³ This makes patent the sustained treatment within SMT of marginal communities as victims, as passive agents unable to transform *themselves* into social actors, requiring others to speak on their behalf, import a rationale for action, orient their behaviour, and translate their expressions of grievance into a political voice. Della Porta continues, this time with reference to Wilson, claiming that the voice of a social movement is obtained by "employ[ing] methods of *persuasion* and *coercion* which are, more often than not, novel, unorthodox, dramatic and of questionable legitimacy."¹⁸⁴ Della Porta represents social movement activity as an attempt to be heard by being disruptive or innovative, or for Tarrow, disorderly, attracting public attention, garnering institutional support, and subsequently being *afforded* visibility.¹⁸⁵ I take up whether such a form of visibility is adequate to the concept of the appearance of the radical community in chapters 4 and 5.¹⁸⁶

For Tarrow and other political process theorists, the key aspect of disorderly practices is their strategic or tactical innovation, explained in terms of their influence on the political institution. The expressive forms associated with creativity and innovation, whose importance resides in the ability to capture the imagination of audiences, makes claims and publicises demands that create uncertainty about the identity and aptitude of the radical community.¹⁸⁷ As previously mentioned, however, SMT judges the success of the politics of RSMs in relation to its influence within the mechanisms of representative democracy. This overlooks that for Zolberg, a favourite referent of Tarrow, revolution is understandable as a challenge to the political process, an effort to replace the instrumentalism of representative democracy with the expressivism of participatory democracy.¹⁸⁸

SMT declares it a virtue to work within a schema that normalises the study of social movements by rooting RSMs to the existing political processes of western democracy. Tarrow, avowedly a consensus theorist, judges social protest successful when it strengthens democracy and broadens the political community. SMT's esteem for political rationalism, as Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell observe, reduces social action to a strategic challenge for incorporation within the political system. This instrumentalist reading serves to promote the possibility of quantitative research and neutral

¹⁸¹ Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*.

¹⁸² The article I refer to is della Porta, "Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts," esp. 1-2.

¹⁸³ Michael Lipsky, *Protest in City Politics. Rent Strikes, Housing and the Power of the Poor*. (Chicago: Rand MacNally, 1970), 1.

¹⁸⁴ John Wilson, *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 227.

¹⁸⁵ della Porta, "Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts."

¹⁸⁶ Visibility, in the form of a politics of recognition, according to Rancière, is not enough to emancipate the oppressed. I take up this topic in chapter 5. I discuss a similar claim made by Bologna, in chapter 4. He claims visibility "is the back door through which the traditional logic of politics is returned to play." Bologna, 'Intervista a Sergio Bologna,' 14.

¹⁸⁷ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 76, 59.

¹⁸⁸ Aristide Zolberg, "Moments of Madness," *Politics and Society* 2, no. Winter (1972): 202-203.

observation, which facilitates explanation in terms of “generalisable mechanisms and laws.”¹⁸⁹ SMT deploys a model of RSMs that conforms to the researchers’ analytic and objective concepts that remain sceptical of the veracity of the knowledge claims associated with collective action. A consequence of this approach is the discounting of the important effects that RSMs have beyond the traditional terrain of politics, and, as Casas-Cortés and collaborators note, overlooks that RSMs rarely concentrate solely upon “*enacting politics* through protest and cultural contestation (...).”¹⁹⁰ Significantly, the approach of SMT discounts the discursive dimension of the radical community by limiting its character to that of a strategic organisation.

Benford and Snow implore those who have borrowed from Frame Theory to consider the discursive work, “the talk and conversations – the speech acts – and written communications, of movement members that occur primarily in the context of, or in relation to, movement activities.”¹⁹¹ That is, the theory and practice of self-activity. Benford and Snow however contribute to the occluding of the knowledge of the grass-roots radical community when they remark that the novelty of new frames is more often the way they *reassemble* existing ideas to present a refreshed perception of a situation.¹⁹² Frame theory diminishes the importance of original thought in the process of radicalisation. This is palpable in the accounts of SMT, which persistently advance the importance of exemplars to radical communities, invariably listing otherworldly revolutions, Marxism, and anti-fascism as the most important sources of ideas and identities.

Conversion to radical political positions in Italy, according to della Porta, relied on an alternative set of values and beliefs contained in master frames and collective identities, which replaced ‘normal’ understanding of right and wrong. Amongst extremist collectives, the war context was dominant, as were typifications of self as a ‘freedom-fighter’ and opponents as ‘evil’.¹⁹³ These ideations were categorised as part of the ‘cultural toolkit’ that provided a store of concepts and identities that could be accessed to help strategise the collective response.¹⁹⁴ While itself a significant element in the dynamics of social conflict, the tendency is then to ignore radical thought and practice without the attributes of exemplarity, which by their nature are difficult to identify as ‘political’. A case in point is the urban youth movement of the mid 1970s, conspicuous by their absence in the work of della Porta, which dislocated from the neo-Leninists and shifted away from the otherworldly models of revolt. By 1975, gone were the favourite referents of SMT (civil war, Guevara, and so on) from the massified radical community. As I argue throughout the rest of my treatment of the Italian case study, while these movements were not political in any traditional sense, neither are they able to be cleanly extricated from the political cycle.

¹⁸⁹ Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, “Blurring Boundaries,” esp. 22-26. This position is representative of the ‘Chapel Hill’ critique of positivist and structuralist sociology. The approach of SMT marginalises collective action that lacks an overt political agenda, treating it as residual or a ‘consequence’ of the cycle of political movements. Of specific relevance to the Italian situation, this has seen the cultural or creative sector and their radical practice and theory overlooked. Political process theory and its conceptualising of cycles of protest risk treating a complex and heterogeneous movement sector as homogenised, unified, and linear. Edwards elaborates similar themes in Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*

¹⁹⁰ Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, “Blurring Boundaries,” 17.

¹⁹¹ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes,” 623.

¹⁹² Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes,” 623.

¹⁹³ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 171, 183.

¹⁹⁴ della Porta, “Research on Social Movements,” 224, 228.

Persuasive framing or frame perversion?

The politically reductive and instrumentalist framework of SMT has transformed the concept of framing within accounts of the politics of RSMs. A purported benefit of frame theory is its ability to avoid reification, as is typical of references to ideology. This is important, for as della Porta notes regarding the Italian situation, a sociological focus on ideological characterisations of SMOs had advanced, at the time of her study, ideology as the instigator of violence. Specifically, and this should be familiar from the outline of the juridical interpretation in chapter one, the 'ideology of *operaismo*' was deemed the catalyst for violence, particularly through a connection to the terrorism of BR.¹⁹⁵ This representation of the movement sector, attributed by della Porta to social theorists and historians such as Galante (1981) and Ventura (1980), mimics the State's discourse.¹⁹⁶ To avoid similar mistakes, frame theorists argue it is vital to understand the dynamic processes involved in framing. Benford and Snow explain frames are emergent from discursive, strategic, and contested processes of interactive meaning construction and are constrained and facilitated by the cultural and social context.¹⁹⁷ However, as has become the want of synthesis theories, SMT is selective in the elements of framing it incorporates in the modelling of RSMs.

The overarching macro framework of SMT has progressively assimilated to structuralist models concepts native to frame theory, while the progressive disassociation of framing from its dramaturgical heritage has seen it reduced to a movement resource and strategic mechanism, losing or evicting the movement participant, their perceptions, and their lived experience from the analysis of RSMs.¹⁹⁸ Importantly, however, the concepts of frame and resource are essentially different. As Crossley states, "frames are not objects or utensils in the objective world which agents can pick up and use like tools. They are constitutive aspects of the subjectivity of social agents which those agents cannot get behind or detach themselves from."¹⁹⁹ The self-awareness and identity of the activist, their perception of the concrete conditions and the corresponding ideas, beliefs and values, are experienced as an obdurate reality and not a detachable or cynically constructed instrument or facade.

Dramaturgy (the disciplinary origin of framing) is an interpretive framework concerned with explaining the accomplishment of meaningful lives through social interactions;²⁰⁰ however, the contemporary accounts of frame theory, shoe horned into structuralist frameworks, are removed from the dramaturgical context and progressively instrumentalised, with social action reduced to the search for political solutions and programmes.²⁰¹ Within contemporary SMT the importance of the correlate knowledge formation of movement activities to "being in the world" is diminished.²⁰² Contemporary frame theory focuses on 'doing' and its persuasive connection to 'being', which orders social relations

¹⁹⁵ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 193-194.

¹⁹⁶ Representations such as those of Ventura, at times, informed the prosecutions reconstruction of the past. This included the categorising of activities as diverse as murder and 'rough picketing' as terrorism. It also promoted a 'hierarchy of sources' amongst the prosecutions' documents, advancing the theory and practice of the political elite and the complementary testimony of the *pentiti* ahead of the accounts of the defence. See Portelli, "Oral Testimony," 9-12.

¹⁹⁷ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes," 623-629.

¹⁹⁸ For development of this topic see Goodwin and Jasper, "Trouble in Paradigms," 90. Also useful is McAdam, "Revisiting the U.S.," esp. 225.

¹⁹⁹ Crossley, *Making Sense*, 141.

²⁰⁰ Edgley, "The Dramaturgical Genre," 143-146.

²⁰¹ It should be acknowledged that Mills' concept of motive, and the 'frame analysis' of Goffman, conflict with the rational calculus models of action favoured by contemporary SMT. See on this topic Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson, "Social Networks," 795.

²⁰² Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 28.

and facilitates a politics of reason. This is to forget that Interactionism, firstly, is interested in the *everyday* creation of meaning and its exchange,²⁰³ and second that knowledge formation is an 'active' mechanism that enables individuals to cope with and adjust to the socio-historic challenges of life.²⁰⁴ To ignore these aspects of dramaturgy and social interaction is to drift toward descriptive accounts based on homogenising ideologies that, to recall Snow and Byrd, "portray individuals as passive, mimetic recipients."²⁰⁵

The extent of the 'perversion' of the original concept of framing through its representation as a coercive repertoire and tactical innovation is evident in Tarrow's work. He tells us:

Because it is so reliable a source of emotion, religion is a recurring source of social movement framing. Religion provides ready-made symbols, rituals, and solidarities that can be accessed and *appropriated by movement leaders*.²⁰⁶

We are told that movement leaders (and entrepreneurs) make choices regarding the 'cultural symbols' utilised in their frames based on a tactical assessment of the movement environment and the needs of the target audience.²⁰⁷ While here Tarrow refers specifically to religion, the same logic apparently applies to the utilisation of symbols drawn from the third world revolutions and the Resistance, and importantly, the Marxist thought of the radical community. To SMT, the radical community of contemporary politics is goal oriented and seeks political resources, two factors that shape behaviour through means-ends calculations. Somewhat more surprisingly, despite the protestations of the discipline, the perversion of frame theory also guides SMT toward some of the archaic premises of collective behaviour theory, where the masses are led by the charismatic radical elite and their rhetorical excesses. As we have seen in the April 7 warrants, and will observe again in chapter 4, this error is not limited to SMT.

To the detriment of SMT's explanation of the nexus of politics and the radical community, the capacity of the radical subject to create new schemas of thought is reduced to the cynical instruments of manipulation and indoctrination, and in spite of the assurances otherwise, is treated similarly to proselytising ideologies. A consequence is the failure to engage critically with the theory and practice of the RSMs in Italy. As I will show, such a failure of engagement is a significant oversight in the mainstream sociological theories, discounting the veracity of the knowledge of radical actors, especially that of the grass-roots participants. This has allowed SMT to monopolise the concepts and explanatory categories of the politics of RSMs. The endeavour to express objectively the experiences and perceptions of the radical community resorts to a top-down analysis of political organisation. This approach promotes the abstract thought of movement leaders and their efforts to organise and politicise the radical community, making the political elite the decisive force in the politics of RSMs. Not only does this repeat the methodological error of the April 7 account, it expropriates the movement of its knowledge of antagonism and diminishes our understanding of the dynamics of radical community.

²⁰³ Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, "General Introduction," 8.

²⁰⁴ Patrick Baert and Fernando Dominguez Rubio, "Philosophy of the Social Sciences," in *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, ed. Bryan S Turner (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

²⁰⁵ Snow and Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes," 123.

²⁰⁶ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 112.

²⁰⁷ Crossley provides a concise discussion on the use of Frame theory in sociological thought on social movements in Crossley, *Making Sense*, 133-143.

Conclusion

A contemporary challenge to the sociological study of social movements is the “blurring [of] well-established boundaries in social science between the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ of knowledge production.”²⁰⁸ This critique attempts to recognise the ‘epistemological work’ that occurs within social movements, especially amongst localised, and particularised practices, which produce new knowledges rather than bricolage.²⁰⁹ The relevance of this challenge to SMT is clear in the work of della Porta, who asserts the sociologist’s expertise is required to negate the ‘vagaries’ and ‘aesthetics’ of memory associated with radical thought.²¹⁰ Consequently, her sources focus heavily on ‘official’ documents such as police reports, court documents, and *pentiti* interviews, avoiding grass-roots theorising. While engaged critically, there is little regard for the influence of the juridical mechanics on the *pentiti* interviews. Similarly, this approach dismisses the claim by the radical community that the *pentiti* accounts were historically distorting.²¹¹ While not exclusive of left-wing media, della Porta’s choices of materials mimic those of the State, typified by the journals of *Senza Tregua* and *Rosso*, which represent the more ‘aggressive’ thread of *Autonomia Organizzata*. The prejudiced selection of materials and subjects is equally conspicuous in the work of Tarrow, who, for example, bases much of his quantitative research on media sources such as the conservative Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.²¹² Subsequently, having shared numerous resources with the State’s judiciary, Tarrow and della Porta cannot avoid, at times, repeating their statements, and have become similarly enthralled with certain radical organisations and leadership frames.

A consequence of the choice of materials and subjects in SMT is that they sample from the dependant variable and tend to over generalise.²¹³ The fascination with Italian radical organisations such as BR, the armed sector of *Autonomia*, and the Leninist vanguard, is comparable to the focus of the April 7 warrants. To recall my point from chapter 1, this affords the community of violence, particularly the Leninists, a voice that resounds beyond their actual position in the radical community. This discounts other far left initiatives and silences a large part of the radical movement sector. SMT makes a similar mistake as the ‘terroristologists’ it rightly chides for conflating the specificity of its object with other forms of struggle. Della Porta writes that by “concentrating on the most radical forms of political violence, terrorism studies tend to isolate their object of interest from the larger political system.”²¹⁴ Yet, despite this and similar pronouncements, the SMT endeavour to remain attentive to the vicissitudes of radicalism fails. I pursue this claim further in the next two chapters. The diversity of the

²⁰⁸ Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries." This is an idea with heritage in the wider self criticism of SMT. Useful resources for exploring this topic include collected works such as Diani and Eyerman, *Studying Collective Action*; Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*.

²⁰⁹ This idea of particularised knowledge practices, and their equivalency with ‘expert knowledges’, is a theme explored in Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries."

²¹⁰ Della Porta’s handling of documents and the ‘appropriate’ relation of the theorist and activist is outlined in della Porta, "Life-History." Her materials and interpretive approach is also documented in della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 18-21.

²¹¹ As mentioned in chapter 1, the category of the *pentiti* is a creation of the State’s judicial process associated with April 7 and similar events. Moss, discusses the category of the *pentiti* and its juridical role in Moss, *Politics of Left-Wing Violence*, 165-209, esp. 194-199. Alessandro Portelli provides a useful insight into the workings of April 7 testimony and interview in: Portelli, "Oral Testimony."

²¹² Edwards provides an excellent assessment how this has skewed Tarrow’s account of the Italian RSMs. To make his point, Edwards compares the representations of radicalism in the *Corriere della Sera* with the PCI’s daily paper *l’Unità*. Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*

²¹³ Goodwin makes this point with regard to terrorist studies. Jeff Goodwin, "Review Essay: What Must We Explain to Explain Terrorism?," *Social Movement Studies* 3, no. 2 (2004): 260.

²¹⁴ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 5.

movement sector receives little more than a passing acknowledgement, with, for example, the women's and urban youth movements treated as historical footnotes of the violent SMOs and political movements.

A primary example of della Porta's dismissive summation of the movements of social autonomy is her account of the women's movement post 1973.²¹⁵ We are informed that the women's movement of 1973-76 achieved mass mobilisation through its campaign to legalise abortion, a single-issue movement that forged 'important links' with the PCI and Unions. Subsequently, the women's movement commonly analysed its role in society through the traditional vocabulary of working class struggle; however, with the waning influence of the Left in institutional politics, della Porta flippantly remarks, the women's movement abandoned 'political forms' and tended to form 'consciousness raising groups' concentrating on the 'search for self', with no interest in 'advertising their existence'. I take up the highly contestable nature of this outline in the remaining chapters of the case study, and question the scant regard for the Movement of '77 and the counter-culture area occupied by collectives such as the Metropolitan Indians (MI) and the groups gathered around journals such as *A/traverso*.²¹⁶

From the outset, Della Porta, who is exemplary of the general orientation of SMT, sets about delimiting her area of study from the broader political, social, and cultural context of the Italian situation. Firstly, she stipulates that her 'mid-range theory' is "applicable to violent interactions between social movements and the state in Western democracies." Secondly, in reference to Italy, she narrows her focus to the left libertarian movements, the movements that emerged at the end of the 1960s, and then, *only* considers the "political violence of the state or of other movements and counter-movements insofar as it *interacts* with the main object of research."²¹⁷ Subsequently, political violence beguiles the theory of radicalisation, captivated by the drama of the promise to eradicate programmatically the 'first world.' Such a narrow focus prevents SMT from critically engaging the 'social subject' of the mid 1970s, who was also prone to violence but with a focus on 'escaping power, not taking it'.²¹⁸

The theoretical consequences of the political reductionism innate to PPT occupy Edwards in his examination of the work of Tarrow. Edwards claims that the cycle of protest interpretation of activism is founded in the conceptualising of social movements as failing or succeeding dependent upon their influence *within the political institution*, with other 'outcomes' or actions considered residual, deviant, or symptomatic of decline.²¹⁹ Accordingly, the 'second phase' (1972-77) of the Italian situation is 'systematically neglected' by Tarrow, and to an extent by those such as della Porta who share the assumptions of PPT. Post early seventies (1970-71), changes in the RSM sector outside the primary radical organisations are viewed as debris thrown off by the spiral of violence. Therefore, in the account of SMT (particularly della Porta and Tarrow) we find an assessment of the movements of social autonomy that shares the rejection of these radical communities with the PCI and the State as marginal, criminal, parasitic, and illegitimate.²²⁰ As Edwards writes, "a history of the period written on that basis

²¹⁵ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 30-32.

²¹⁶ Curiously, we rarely find mention of *A/traverso*, which first appeared as a supplement to *Rosso* but became an independent publication, representative of the general division between the creative and organised forms of autonomy. Cuninghame provides an informative introduction to the approach of *A/traverso* (and the '*creativi*' more generally) in Patrick Cuninghame, "'A Laughter That Will Bury You All': Irony as Protest and Language as Struggle in the Italian 1977 Movement," *IRSH* 52(2007).

²¹⁷ della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*, 3-4 (emphasis mine).

²¹⁸ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 230. The idea of escaping power involved differentiating the community of the social subject from the political solidary *and* the organisations of the radical left.

²¹⁹ Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*, 192-193.

²²⁰ The PCI assessment is taken up in chapter 4

would systematically neglect, ignore and forget the experiences of the second cycle of contention (...).” Yet, as he subsequently notes, the movements of this period left unexamined by prevailing sociological thought, were ‘creative and innovative’, fostered political change, and in contravention of della Porta’s observation of a dominant sombre fundamentalist mood, involved sectors that were ‘rebellious’ and ‘playful’.²²¹ The SMT assessment repeats the mistake of the ‘political interpretation’ of the State. That is, they judge the marginal communities, to quote Edwards, as “unacceptable as part of the process of being rejected, rather than being rejected because they are unacceptable in themselves.”²²²

While similarities exist between the account of the Italian State and SMT, this is not to suggest they have shared intent, but they do have comparable explanatory projects. This is patent where SMT falls back on the ‘classical agenda’ of social movement research, attempting to repatriate the radical subject to western democracy. Here we readily observe the political rhetoric of the April 7 warrants, with references to civil war, illegality, illegitimacy, militancy, and the anti-statist position of the BR. While SMT does not claim terrorism was a logical conclusion or the material realisation of the revolutionary movement, it does persist with efforts to link this sector to extremist groups. By focusing on the strategic framing activities associated with political violence, SMT aggrandises organisations such as PO, BR, and OWA, at times echoing the claims of the April 7 prosecution that a select conspiratorial intelligentsia organised the social movements from above. This over-represents the voice of ‘movement entrepreneurs’ and advances the place of the ‘political elite’ in the field of social movements. It also fails to consider that the radical community, as noted by Castellano, was *less* ‘bellicose’ or ‘heroic’ than its representation in the frames and rhetoric of its leadership.²²³ The seductive ruse of violence and frames of absolute enmity and civil war, carried forward by SMT’s superficial encounter with historicist Marxism and the aggressive brand of Marxism-Leninism associated with the Italian area of organised violence, overwhelm the importance of the social actor. I concentrate on this claim through the remaining chapters of the case study.

I share the concerns of Lumley with regard to the ‘dismembering’ of the Italian social action “into one of its constituent parts,”²²⁴ and with theorists such as Snow who worry about the structuralists drawing too general a conclusion from ‘segmented’ social movement environments.²²⁵ I believe the choice to track the revolutionary organisations and their link to organised political violence are pragmatic decisions of an explanatory project. This decision comes at a cost, creating blind spots in the SMT account of the politics of RSMs and its descriptive re-telling of the Italian situation. This includes overlooking the political potency of groups such as the women’s and counter-cultural movements that reappear in the 1970s after a period of latency during the revolutionary surge. It also misses the shift in the radical left confrontation from being ‘factory centric’ to socially based, an opportunity for marginalised communities to expand beyond working class initiatives, a move that instigated the formation of decentred radical sector. Instead, the SMT representation of this epoch focuses on the aggressive *autonomi* and armed groups, which were but one part of this complex scenario. The ‘political vacuum’ caused by the collapsing or re-direction of the New Left, according to SMT, was ‘filled’ by

²²¹ Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*, 192-193. In his introduction to *Radical Thought in Italy*, Hardt notes the joyful character of the revolution associated with the theorists and their respective movements, suggesting “revolution is a desiring-machine,” and is unnecessarily linked with asceticism. Hardt, “Introduction: Laboratory Italy,” 6-7.

²²² Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!*, 193.

²²³ Castellano, “Living with Geurrilla Warfare,” 230.

²²⁴ Lumley, *States of Emergency*.

²²⁵ Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes,” 467.

organised violence; however, as Curcio notes, the advancing of this sector in theoretical accounts buries participants beneath armed struggle, regardless of their origin.²²⁶

SMT's persistent effort to recover the practice and theory of the radical community within a rationalist framework of strategies and decisions, attempts to provide general rules of the politics of RSMs that identify the radical community as objects adequate to modern politics. Consequently, the term 'radical' operates as a label for an empirically defined phenomenon, and forms part of a stipulative and restrictive definition of modern politics. This occurs instead of providing a concept capable of casting new light upon the nexus of politics and the antagonistic community. This firstly is a consequence of the specific framing of the object of study, which is effectively part of a political programme that drives theoretical development. Second, as I investigate in the next chapter, it is a result of a 'naive historicism', which focuses on the decisions of an always already existing collective actor. Melucci remarks, with relevance to my latter point, that while we are made aware of the precipitating factors involved in the appearance of collective action, we are left with the claim that these conditions 'activate' social movements without ever knowing why.²²⁷

Goodwin and Jasper comment that at the centre of our best theories of social movements, no matter how well disguised, is an invariant core of concepts and explanatory categories. The consequence is that often we 'know' the answers to our questions before doing research. This affects our ability to "imagine how things might be otherwise,"²²⁸ and prejudices our choice of subjects and materials. The case study at the core of this thesis, involving an exposition on the so-called incomprehensible subjects, destabilises the approach of western sociological thought on the radicalisation of social movements, undermining the three central pillars of its framework; namely, the rational actor, identitarian movements, and the mechanism of social aggregation. With regard to the politics of RSMs, the dynamics of resource mobilisation, political opportunity, and the 'logic' of a protest cycle do not exhaust the mechanics of community formation. Understanding RSMs in the Italian situation, I argue, requires awareness of the interplay of the subjective and objective modes of radicalism, an exchange involving the movement and the intellectual that affords insight into the nascent sense of formation that is lacking in sociological treatments of collective action.

²²⁶ Curcio et al., *La Mappa Perduta*.

²²⁷ Melucci, "The New Social Movements," 212. In chapter 4 I expand upon Melucci's criticism of the SMT idea of 'Historic Personage', the metaphysical existence of the social actor.

²²⁸ Goodwin and Jasper, "Trouble in Paradigms," 77.

Chapter three

New social movement theory: The politics of Italian social movements post 1968

Social movements and collective action are the constant reminder of the *limits of politics*; they remind society of the fact that social processes create demands for politics while occupying areas at the same time *prior and beyond politics*. Collective action is fed by needs that originate in the social fabric of everyday life and are not *comprehended* by the political system or are excluded by its filters; but its emergence is no less encouraged by expectations and demands that are bypassed by the decision-making process – that is, by the negative or insufficient outcome of the political game.¹

Alberto Melucci – *Challenging Codes*

Melucci's global criticism of the sociological study of social movements asserts that the dynamics of contemporary movements are beyond the scope of traditional frameworks, which leave us an "anachronistic stockpile of terminology (...) and a set of allusive concepts."² The new social movements he observed in Europe, and in particular Italy, involved the "search for a communal identity, the turn to primary affiliations (in terms of sex, age, place or group)," and extended essentially beyond instrumental objectives.³ Characteristic of these movements in Italy was a "search for participation and direct action, (...) the *refusal of mediation or of delegation* expressed in a non-negotiable form, i.e. 'wild', the opposition to control or to the decisions imposed by various authorities."⁴ All forms of representation are "rejected as likely to reproduce the mechanisms of control and manipulation against which the struggle is directed in the first place."⁵ He writes:

In advanced capitalist societies, social movements have challenged the optimistic models which foresaw a *gradual modernisation taking place without rupture* in the existing political and social systems. In explaining social movements, however, we can no longer be satisfied with analyses which are confined either to the logic of capitalist development or to dysfunctions in the system's integrative mechanism.⁶

¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 287 (emphasis mine). While other works of Melucci deal more directly with issues such as terrorism, the processes of self and identity, and sociological method, *Challenging Codes* is his most comprehensive effort to bring together his work into a system of thought on social movements in contemporary society. *Challenging Codes* also provides an extended treatment of the Italian situation. I introduce his other works throughout this chapter.

² Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 89.

³ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 180. Originally published in the 'counter-sociology' or 'non-professional' journal *Quaderni Piacentini*, this article, along with other early works of Melucci, provide a concise outline of his theoretical and analytical ambitions in the study of social movements. See also Melucci, "The New Social Movements; Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism; Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge."

⁴ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 181 (emphasis mine). I argue in subsequent chapters that this includes the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement, student assemblies, and urban youth communes, which all sought participatory forms of collective struggle, and autonomy.

⁵ Melucci, "The New Social Movements," 220.

⁶ Melucci, "The New Social Movements," 201 (emphasis mine).

The popular categories of modern thought, such as capitalist society, cannot, Melucci argues, adequately account for contemporary forms of social action and conflict, and the constituency of movements cannot efficiently be analysed along an axis such as class. The latter point becomes more pressing if we accept, and Melucci insists we must, that collective identities are *socially constructed* and not structurally guaranteed.⁷

From his observation of the Italian situation, Melucci concludes contemporary social movements seek autonomy from the 'system'.⁸ This involves the attempt to re-appropriate the meaning of daily life, including that of identity, through the disruption of systemic interference. That is, Melucci writes, an:

Important characteristic of the new social movements is that they are not focused on the political system. Essentially, they are *not* oriented toward the conquest of *political power* or the *state apparatus*, but rather toward the control of a field of autonomy or of independence vis-a-vis the system. The new movements have often been reproached for insisting upon the *immediate satisfaction* of their demands and for their lack of an overall strategy.⁹

The notion of immediacy appealed to here aims to destabilise accounts of the politics of RSMs that explicate social movements in terms of political organisation and instrumentalist reason. The focus on autonomy challenges politically reductive theories that make modern politics the invariant core of its explanatory framework. Primarily, this statement of Melucci is a broadside against Marxism (particularly Leninism) and the SMT framework of strategies and decisions as models of collective action.

By utilising a fixed notion of politics we risk, Melucci writes, "becoming confined within the *logic of the political system* which does not exhaust the totality of the social movements' action."¹⁰ Linking RSMs to the modernisation of the political system, as occurs in SMT, is a critical error of the social sciences.¹¹ The alternative is not to assert that the NSMs are apolitical, but simply that politics in the traditional sense of addressing the 'institution' are not the priority. The most important function of the radical community, according to Melucci, is the legitimising of alternative knowledge practices, which through lived experience and alternate modalities of communication deconstruct the production of 'reality'. Collective actions, he contends, provide "different ways of addressing things and of imagining them (...), prompting the redefinition of *Nature itself* (...), beyond those inscribed in the hegemonic codes of *scientific and technological discourse*."¹²

While Melucci recognises social movements affect the political system, crucially, they are also "pre-political because they are rooted in everyday life experiences; and *meta-political* because political

⁷ Similar themes are discussed in Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," 456.

⁸ Melucci's 'systems approach' to explicating social reality "refuses to characterise this reality as any kind of essence or metaphysical entity, and instead considers it to be a coincidence of interdependent relationships (...), the complex of relationships among its elements." Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 26-27. Melucci's definition of a 'systems society' minimally involves the interaction of four systems of relations. They include a system characterised by the relations of production, a political system, organisational system, and life-world or reproductive system. Importantly, this approach "declines the invitation both to reduce the social to the natural and to turn it into the expression of essence."

⁹ Melucci, "The New Social Movements," 220 (emphasis mine). Autonomy, here, seeks an interdependent form of equality, a participatory role defined by the collective actor and recognised without interference.

¹⁰ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 197 (emphasis mine).

¹¹ Pinto asserts the 'model of modernisation' is a social-science construct, a "dream that failed to materialise." Pinto, "Introduction," 4.

¹² Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 356-360 (emphasis mine).

forces can never represent them completely.”¹³ He argues that politically reductive theories overlook, firstly, the importance of social movement practices that satisfy ‘social and psychological needs’ rather than seeking external goods or resources.¹⁴ Secondly, political theories conflate mobilisation (protest) with movements, neglecting the submerged networks of social relations and the dynamics of latency that found and sustain radical communities.¹⁵ While SMT observes RSMs ‘extend’ the boundaries of democracy, this it explains in terms of ‘political exchange’, modelled as a form of consensus building and social aggregation. This explanation truncates the practice and theory of the radical community to a clash with authority,¹⁶ which fails to recognise that social movements are “always a complex and heterogeneous historical reality.”¹⁷

Early in his academic career, Melucci noticed the movements emerging in Italy did not conform to the prevailing models of social movement mobilisation – Collective Behaviour and Marxism – and subsequently, strategy oriented SMT and models of political exchange.¹⁸ The movements he witnessed that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. those respectively of youth, student, women’s and peace) were irreducible “to mere variations of the known forms of collective action,” an objective cause, or their subjective dimension.¹⁹ Melucci’s ‘systems analysis’ of society asserts that “social action is not the effect of mechanical laws or natural determinism, but nor is it the incarnation of the spirit or a progeny of values; it is the result of relationships which tie together a plurality of social actors producing meaning for what they do.”²⁰ Collective action, therefore, does not arise from structural contradictions, systemic crises, or psychological motivations. To paraphrase Melucci, there is ‘something that escapes us’ in the Italian situation.²¹ This ‘something’ continues to intrigue and elude sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs.

This chapter is not an exposition of NSMT; rather, through the work of Melucci it explores an alternative modelling of the nexus of the radical community and politics. This provides a useful perspective on the Italian RSMs 1968-78 that reaches beyond the SMT fascination with violent SMOs, as it examines a contemporaneous wave of collective action that includes the women’s and urban youth movements. As such, it offers a next step in revealing the political import of the radical subject of the Italian situation. To this end, I pay attention to the antinomy NSMT observes between the radical community and the political system, between the logic of collective action (identity) and the logic of representation (rationality). I take seriously Melucci’s claim that “social movements and collective action are the constant reminder of the *limits of politics*.” In addition, I explore his foreshortening of the Movement of

¹³ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 72.

¹⁴ These are ‘expressive practices’, in contrast to instrumental practices. Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 326-327.

¹⁵ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 61.

¹⁶ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 202-203. This reinforces the notion “that politics comes before society and everyday culture.”

¹⁷ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 178.

¹⁸ While typically dismissive of Marxism, there is a neo-Marxist stream of NSMT, best represented by the Spanish theorist Manuel Castells. Buechler, in his concise and widely cited review of NSMT discusses the various bifurcations in theoretical modelling, most prominently Marxist/post-Marxist and political/cultural, and the implications of adopting each position. Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories."

¹⁹ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 239. The Introduction to *Nomads of the Present* and the interview with Melucci in the same book provide an excellent overview of Melucci’s project. Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*.

²⁰ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 26.

²¹ Melucci, "Individual Experience," 492-493.

'77 and his distaste for *everything* Marx, discussing how this compromises his modelling of the politics of RSMs.²²

Section 1 explores the unique perspective of NSMT on the features and mechanisms of community formation, generated by the paradigms theoretical exchange with SMT and Marxism, as it attempts to redress their absence of any 'substantial analytic significance.' Section 2 looks at the implications of the NSMT analytic framework for our understanding of the politics of Italian RSMs 1968-78, specifically investigating the perceived impact upon theories of political rationalism and Marxist political organisation. Section 3 supplements our existing account of the radicalisation of the Italian social movements 1968-78, with its primary intent to highlight the NSMT connection of the RSMs and the terroristic terminus of the Italian situation. Section 4 serves as a conclusion, reflecting on the NSMT explication of the politics of RSMs and considers the implications of Melucci's approach for our understanding of the so-called incomprehensible subject.

1. Sociology and the new social movements

The cultural dimension has demonstrated its great significance. Simply reducing these emergent phenomena to the *political level proper*, such dimensions and meanings that are not immediately identifiable as political become ignored and eliminated from analysis. It is here that the point of view centred on identity formation (...) can help preserve an analytic space for a different understanding of what a collective actor does and what the meanings are that this actor produces.²³

Alberto Melucci – *Challenging Codes*

Melucci, who from the 1970s became one of the most consistent theorists on social movements in Italy, utilises a framework of analysis coalescing around the idea that contemporary collective action is an outcome of the processes and conditions of identity in 'complex' or modern society.²⁴ 'New' social movements form around the preservation of an autonomous lifestyle and identity, rather than the collective pursuit of political or economic 'goods' that can strategically reposition the social actor within the existing order of social relations.²⁵ While Melucci's approach to social movement theory is distinct, it is indebted to Alain Touraine (his doctoral supervisor) and Jürgen Habermas.²⁶ This trio helped shape

²² Formative in Melucci's relationship to Marxism is his early negative experiences with the Italian PCI and his general disdain for the neo-Leninist vanguard of the Italian New Left. These experiences skew his engagement with the Marxist social movement sector generally. Some accuse Melucci's critique of Marxism of being 'too faithful to classical Marxism', in effect building a straw man to aid his theoretical development. For a basic outline of Melucci's relationship with Marxist theory and practice see Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 180-183; 190-195.

²³ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 199 (emphasis mine).

²⁴ A well regarded introduction to the study of social movements in Italian sociology and the contribution of central theorists such as Melucci, is the review paper Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy." Another useful and more expansive work on contemporary Italian sociology, which attempts to contextualise the developments in the study of social movements, is Diana Pinto, ed. *Contemporary Italian Sociology: A Reader*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²⁵ See Diani and Eyerman, *Studying Collective Action*, 7. Melucci is not particularly fond of the label 'new'.

²⁶ Melucci recalls that his intellectual discomfort with the theoretical inheritance of sociology persisted until encountering the works of Habermas and undertaking his doctorate with Touraine. However, his relationship to these theorists was not one of uncritical acceptance. Melucci expresses concerns with both of their approaches. Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, esp. 182-183; 195-203. Touraine (France) worked with an image of post-industrial society, Habermas (Germany) comes from the tradition of critical theory, and Melucci (Italy) works within an

NSMT, advancing the idea that the contemporary movements emerging from the upheavals of the 1960s are 'new'. Not new in a way that can be measured empirically,²⁷ but new in the sense that there is something fundamental to them that escapes the scope of traditional frameworks of social movement study, in particular, Collective Behaviour and Marxism, and contemporary approaches, notably the SMT model of political exchange and instrumental reason.²⁸

While the Italian research on social movements was historically from a political perspective, in the shadow of the dramatic social changes experienced during the 1960s and 1970s the study of social movements became an autonomous field. Melucci believed the challenge of this new epoch in social action was to discover "how it is possible to develop democratic public spaces of representation that enable collective action to manifest itself and to be heard without losing its specific character of autonomy?"²⁹ Significantly, in Italy, Diani and Melucci note, NSMT was a direct theoretical reaction to the *post-workerist* movements of the 'area of autonomy'. This radical community is largely absent in the SMT account of Italian RSMs 1968-78, however, the apparent "crisis of the Leninist model and the emergence of a dialectic between political and private life" around the Movement of '77 is paradigmatic in the rejuvenation of Italian sociological analysis of social movements.³⁰

Two key factors influence the development of Melucci's account of the politics of RSMs. Firstly, in Europe NSMT was an outgrowth of the debate with Marxism regarding the absence of the proletariat revolution and its unlikely appearance in a society that has moved beyond the social capitalist model.³¹ Melucci, through his exposure to the Italian movement sector and the affect of his academic environment, concluded Marxism is a theory of organisation, or, in the hands of the Communist Party, a 'doctrine of order'.³² Therefore, he proclaims that we must replace the previous image of the uprising of the working class – the myth of a homogenous group leading society to a 'revolutionary destiny'.³³ Secondly, mediated by his sympathetic stance toward the NSMs of Italy, Melucci sought an empathetic model of social movements that did not reduce collective action to the pathology of crowd psychology. Recognising RMT as the definitive effort to rise above the tradition of treating collective action as irrational, Melucci gravitated toward the new theoretical developments in America. Subsequently, he

eclectic framework that contains elements of semiotics, postmodernism, phenomenology, existentialism, constructionism (processual), and humanistic psychology.

²⁷ As Crossley notes, NSMT is not "an empiricist thesis about the observable properties of a specific movement cluster." Crossley, *Making Sense*, 150.

²⁸ I do not investigate in detail the response to the collective behaviour paradigm, but note two functionalist categories that dominated the framework. Firstly "instrumental conservative functionalism" utilised by those who protect the political monopoly by reducing opposition to deviance or pathology (for example the State and its April 7 judiciary, even the PCI) and secondly "extremist functionalism" that suggests the reach of capitalist domination is so complete that the space for opposition no longer accommodates conflict, so can only be opened through 'marginal revolt' (certain Marxist-Leninists). Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 101.

²⁹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 73 (emphasis mine).

³⁰ This is evident in the particular focus, as reflected in the works of Melucci, upon youth movements in Milan and Bologna. Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," esp. 341. While Melucci is renowned for his work on NSMT through his books *Challenging Codes*, *Nomads of the Present*, and, *The Playing Self*, a cluster of articles written toward the closure of the movement sector in the early 1980s provides insight into the theoretical foundations of his work on radical politics. See for example Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism."

³¹ Crossley, *Making Sense*, 11. Melucci suggests that while NSMs can be conceptualised as including 'class' conflict in the sense that they involve a challenge against the 'mode of production of advanced capitalism', this utilisation of class is more an acknowledgment of a theoretical tradition than an analytic category, as NSMs are challenges to the totality of social relations. Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism." p97.

³² Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 102.

³³ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 181.

conceptualised collective action through a theoretical prism consisting of a “European ‘structuralist’ approach and an American approach in terms of resource mobilisation.”³⁴

The primary source of tension in Melucci’s pluralist framework is the discord between NSMT and SMT, with the latter reductively conceptualising social movements as operating *within* the political system. That is, the conflictual aspect of the practice and theory of the radical community discharges *within* the dynamics of social aggregation, building a stronger consensus. The modernist vision of this paradigm is of a political system progressively improved by the presence of social conflict.³⁵ Accordingly, SMT investigates the empirical conditions of social movement radicalisation and looks to discover what influences the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a movement, which is judged by the level of institutional inclusion/exclusion. Alternatively, Melucci claims that collective action has shifted from a predominant ‘political’ form to a cultural base,³⁶ a shift manifest in the social and cultural aspects of NSMs proving irreducible to ‘politics as such.’³⁷ Social movements seek autonomy from the system, returning control of the ‘conditions of existence’ to the actor, and reject the ‘manipulation of identity’ and political mediation.³⁸ For NSMT, it is the search for identity, not an effective political strategy, which provides the inertia for the formation of new radical communities.

The analysis of social movements

Melucci asserts that social theory is:

trapped in an analytic and linguistic impasse which has left us wavering between, on the one hand, an outdated, if not completely anachronistic, stockpile of terminology that we still employ in the absence of new cognitive tools, and, on the other hand, a set of allusive concepts bereft of any substantial analytic significance.³⁹

The architecture of this trap is, in part, a remnant of sociologies endeavour to theorise a final goal for the progress of history. Therefore, Melucci implores, “let us free ourselves from the heritage of the philosophy of history and think of social systems as the *product* of collective actions.”⁴⁰ This position forms on the back of the influential works of Touraine and Habermas.⁴¹ Like Touraine, Melucci contends that social movements attempt to create spaces of autonomous action and refuse exclusion from social knowledge. Like Habermas, he believes that domination in modern societies penetrates the private

³⁴ Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 339.

³⁵ The definitive work for reference is Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*.

³⁶ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge."

³⁷ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 276. More accurately, social movements, according to Melucci, make us aware of the limits of institutional politics.

³⁸ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 98.

³⁹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 89.

⁴⁰ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 192 (emphasis mine).

⁴¹ While influenced by the notion of colonisation of the lifeworld, Melucci has ‘theoretical and empirical reservations’ about the work of Habermas. Primarily, he believes Habermas’ theory of social movements is too homogenising, and reduces collective action to a defensive and reactive mechanism. Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 195-196. Regarding Touraine, Melucci is sceptical of his ‘*intervention sociologique*’, which assumes there is a “highest possible meaning of social movements” and that amongst the movement milieu there is one pivotal movement. Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 200. Ironically, as becomes evident in chapter 4, this approach is comparable to the Italian interventionist intellectuals of AM. As Pinto notes, often the academics and the intellectuals were involved in theorising how best to translate social action into political action. Pinto, "Introduction," 25-29.

concerns of daily life, realised in the colonisation of the lifeworld.⁴² Central to the theorising of this trio is the belief that the logic of politics is essentially different to the logic of collective action.⁴³

Touraine's work on NSMs attempts to distinguish a new cleavage in society, beyond capital and labour, and to identify the social actor that emerges from this rupture.⁴⁴ Regularly identified with the effort to discover the social movement in contemporary society that will occupy the space held by the worker in industrial society, Touraine remarks:

The concept of social movement is useful when it helps one to rediscover social actors where they have been buried beneath either structural Marxist or rationalist theories of strategies and decisions. (...) These actors are often more able than the 'silent majority' to analyse their situation, define projects and organize conflicts.⁴⁵

His conceptualising of social movements occurs at a level 'above' political and institutional analysis. Here the stake in social conflict is the:

*control of the main cultural patterns, that is, of the patterns through which our relationships with the environment are normatively organised. These cultural patterns are of three main kinds: a model of knowledge, a type of investment, and ethical principles. These representations of truth, production, and morality depend on the capacity of achievement, of self-production.*⁴⁶

In modern societies, social movements control, or fight to exert their will, on the direction of social change and upon the *system of knowledge* that designates the *rules, norms and values*, and the function, production, direction and action specific to the current form of society.⁴⁷ With the modern field of social action no longer constrained by the 'meta-social guarantees of social order', the control of *historicity* – "the capacity to produce an historical experience through (...) a new definition of nature and man" – feels limitless. However, the ability to control historicity, the capacity for self-management, has coalesced in the form of the state, making the state the new locus of contestation. On this terrain, collective action emerges at the seam of the subject's defence of autonomy and a system that attempts to extend power into all areas of life.⁴⁸

Habermas provides another highly regarded definition of NSMs that influenced the theorising of Melucci. NSMs, Habermas argues, primarily engage in conflicts concerning equality, quality of life, self-

⁴² Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 99. The influence of Habermas is broadly evident amongst the collective action scholarship in Italy, with the first adoption of the concept of the 'lifeworld' by Ardigo, where new forms of social action are expected to increase the freedom of the 'lifeworld' from the "influence of systemic apparatuses of social control." Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 338.

⁴³ For a basic understanding of the critical position SMT takes toward the work of Melucci, and a lesser extent Touraine and Habermas, see della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, esp. 8-11.

⁴⁴ The key works of Touraine upon social movements and the conditions of modernity relevant to their emergence include Touraine, *Self Production of Society*; Touraine, *Critique of Modernity*; Touraine, *Voice and the Eye*; Touraine, *Return of the Actor*; Touraine, "An Introduction"; Alain Touraine, Michel Wieviorka, and Francois Dubet, *The Worker's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴⁵ Touraine, "An Introduction," 216. Touraine, however, is culpable of a similar recuperation of antagonism in a rationalist vision of political contestation. As he states in the aforementioned article, social movements, as a special class of social conflict, must be *organised* and have *instrumental* ends (p 212).

⁴⁶ Touraine, "An Introduction," 214.

⁴⁷ See Jasper, "A Strategic Approach," 3.

⁴⁸ Alain Touraine, "Beyond Social Movements," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 9(1992). For a concise introduction to the work of Touraine, see Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories."

realisation, human rights, justification of norms, and direct action or participation, rather than material reproduction.⁴⁹ Such conflicts involve resistance to interference in, or the colonisation of, everyday life.⁵⁰ Buechler provides a concise summation of the process of colonisation as where the 'system imperatives' and logic of the state's economic and political interactions expand, through modernisation, to intrude into all areas of daily life. The *instrumental* and *strategic rationality* of the politico-economic system interferes with identity formation, symbolic interaction, social reproduction, and communicative rationality, removing them from the context of the lifeworld. This effectively affords 'experts' and 'administrative structures' or apparatuses greater power in decision making in modern societies.⁵¹ Accordingly, NSMs that form in response to colonisation are different to the labour movement, since they are interested in identity and culture rather than distributive justice or state control.

While sharing central premises, NSMT is not a unified or monolithic approach to the study of social movements. Instead, it provides a broad theoretical and analytic framework that supports varied accounts of contemporary collective action. Buechler, in his well-regarded review of NSMT, elaborates an approximation of the key themes that hold across the paradigm,⁵² three of which I mention here. Firstly, collective action involves symbolic action within *the cultural sphere as well as instrumental action in the political sphere*, with this conjuncture delineating social movements from other forms of social action.⁵³ Secondly, processes of self-determination and autonomy are central to collective action, not the rationality of strategies and decisions. Thirdly, submerged, *latent*, and temporary networks that consist of small groups experimenting with the meaning of daily life, creating new experiences and identities, support collective action. A centralised organisational form is not a prerequisite of a movement,⁵⁴ with the personal experience of the innovative practices of a social network more important to community formation.⁵⁵ It is within the constraints of this framework that Melucci delimits the "empirical forms of collective action," which he adds, "are objects of analysis, and are not meaningful in themselves."⁵⁶

Melucci's restrictive definition of social movements aims to make them an 'analytic category' for sociology and then an 'empirical phenomenon'.⁵⁷ Social movements, he contends, consist of at least four analytical categories involving different behaviours and types of situations. In reality, however, a movement mixes elements of all the forms of collective action and is 'identifiable' simply because one aspect is predominant, not because each category is discrete.⁵⁸ Firstly, collective action is not a

⁴⁹ Jurgen Habermas, "New Social Movements," *Telos* 49, no. Fall (1981): 33-34. Notably, Habermas does not focus on the mechanics of social movements or engage his object in empirical study as do Touraine and Melucci. For an example of the application of the work of Habermas to the Italian situation, see Ruggiero, "New Social Movements," esp. 167.

⁵⁰ Habermas, "New Social Movements." See also Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

⁵¹ Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," 445; Habermas, *Communicative Action*; Gemma Edwards, "Habermas and Social Movement Theory," *Sociology Compass* 3, no. 3 (2009).

⁵² Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," 442.

⁵³ Important works on this area include Jean Cohen, "Strategy or Identity? New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements.," *Social Research* 52(1985); Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*.

⁵⁴ See Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*.

⁵⁵ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 800. In addition, Crossley notes, NSMT attaches "movements to the dialectics of history or a specific type of society." Crossley, *Making Sense*, 11.

⁵⁶ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 793.

⁵⁷ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 173.

⁵⁸ This outline of the analytic categories of social movements is taken from Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 177-178; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 34-36. Originally, Melucci identified three categories – movements of demand, political movements, and class movements – which he extended to four in *Challenging Codes*.

symptom of a *crisis* of the system, which “set in motion processes of disintegration” and accelerate the activation of a movement. Instead, social movements are the result of a *conflict*, an “opposition to the control and use of certain resources.” Crisis theories, Melucci states, are the domain of bourgeois sociology, political science, the ‘ideology of the regime’, and, specific to Italy, the New and Old Left. This is patent, he believes, in the prevailing interpretations of the urban youth movements of the 1970s that conceal their conflictual content, reducing them to the product of the ‘Italian crisis’, the end of the economic miracle and similar.⁵⁹ Crisis theories treat radical communities as pathological to the system within which they arise, allowing their reduction to systemic grievances, overcome by re-establishing social order. The other key markers of a social movement are solidarity and the breaking up of the system within which collective action occurs. Melucci explains solidarity as the ability to share a collective identity, the capacity for *mutual* recognition, as opposed to mere social aggregation. Breaching the system involves going beyond the limits of compatibility. This involves breaking the ‘rules of the game’, presenting non-negotiable objectives, questioning power, and the like.⁶⁰

The conjuncture of collective behaviour, and the situation in which it occurs, bear four analytical categories of social movements. Firstly, *conflictual networking* consists of a conflict at the level of the lifeworld, with social actions breaking the rules that attempt to govern “social reproduction in everyday life.”⁶¹ Secondly, there are *claimant movements* (movements of demand), which break the rules of an existing *organisational system* “characterised by roles and functions.” Unions making demands beyond the limits of negotiation, outside of an existing system of industrial relations, are an example of this category. Thirdly, a *political movement* “fights for the widening of political participation and struggles against the prevalence of ruling interests within the representative systems. Many of the urban struggles for decentralisation of political decisions belong to this category.” Importantly, these struggles breach the political system through the initiation of non-institutionalised action. Finally, *antagonistic movements* (class movements) are the most abstract category, for in reality all movements must confront “organizational systems and the mechanisms for political representation and decision-making.”⁶² However, as an instrument of analysis, antagonistic movements are important. This type of movement “effect through conflict the mode of production and the appropriation of a society’s resources,” a phenomenon the ruling class always tries to reduce to the level of grievances and political claims. On the other hand, by distinguishing antagonist movements we can avoid conflating all collective action to, for example, class interests and revolution.⁶³

Importantly, Melucci utilises these social movement norms to distinguish them from other types of collective action, most notably, those he labelled ‘deviant’ and ‘aggregate’. The former is the basic interruption of social order without delineating a field of struggle or adversary. These ‘pure movements’ are not equipped with an instrumental base and have no relation to decision making mechanisms. Aggregate behaviour, “through the creation of a generalized belief (...), which is not a system of solidarity, but an object of affective identification, unites a plurality of atomised behaviours. Panic, a new fashion or the diffusion of certain collective rituals contain predominantly, if not exclusively, these

⁵⁹ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 174-175. As previously mentioned, Melucci’s focus upon youth movements in Milan and Bologna is paradigmatic in his rejuvenated analytic framework.

⁶⁰ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 794-795. I further detail the concepts of Solidarity (collective identity) and the breaching of the limits of compatibility below.

⁶¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 34.

⁶² Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 35.

⁶³ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 177-178; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 35-36.

characteristics.”⁶⁴ As I will discuss, the categories of deviance and aggregation are important to Melucci’s foreclosure of the Italian RSMs at the end of the 1970s.

The problematic of unity

Melucci believes many of the difficulties confronting the study of social movements are linked to the sociological inheritance of the study of collective action, most notably, the tendency to elevate the ‘phenomenology of collective behaviour’ to the level of ontological and conceptual reality. The effect of this is the acceptance of a ‘qualitative homogeneity’ in collective action and the taking for granted of unity.⁶⁵ Melucci’s counter is to assert:

The empirical forms of collective action are objects of analysis, and they are not meaningful in themselves. Currently one speaks of a ‘movement’ as a unity, to which one attributes goals, choices, interests, decisions. But this unity, if any, is a result rather than a point of departure; otherwise one must assume that there is a sort of *deep ‘mind’ of the movement, instead of considering it as a system of social relationships.*⁶⁶

The presupposition of unity is part of the search for an order beyond the actor, a way to bridge the gap between the objective and subjective, concrete condition and action, structure and culture. This search is borne out in the sociological modelling of the dynamics of collective action, an undertaking simultaneously driven and plagued by dualistic thought. In Marxism, Melucci writes, “the immense chasm was inevitably filled by a kind of *deus ex machina* (the party, the intellectuals) that serves as the external supplier of that consciousness which the actor is lacking.”⁶⁷ Alternatively, Anglo-American studies post ’68 recover unity through reliance on ‘pure actor rationality’. A significant outcome of both approaches is that they “consign the intuitive and emotional dimensions of behaviour to the sidelines.”⁶⁸ Subsequently, and here Melucci speaks directly of the Anglo-Americans, their explanations depend on “methods not prepared to capture the meaningfulness of behaviour which does not follow the stipulations of instrumental rationality, but which, nonetheless, is not irrational.”⁶⁹

Melucci believes that historically, sociology:

Ascribes collective action either to the structural location of actors or to the values, ideologies, and suggestions which guide them (...). Structural destiny or the mobility of actors, ‘objective’ determinism or revolutionary voluntarism, formed the poles of a theoretical oscillation inherited from the nineteenth century. This oscillation has indelibly marked the conceptual models and research methods of the area of collective action.⁷⁰

The alternative Melucci favours is to elaborate the *processes* and *conditions* that define the possibilities of common action.⁷¹ That is, to provide an explanation of the collective actor whose unity or solidarity is

⁶⁴ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 35-36; Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 176-177.

⁶⁵ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 15.

⁶⁶ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 793 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁷ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 240.

⁶⁸ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 395.

⁶⁹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 395.

⁷⁰ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 239.

⁷¹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 20.

an *achievement*, reached through the creation of a coherent and shared image of a 'we'.⁷² 'No doubt', he writes,

we can observe a group of individuals, who, acting together, define themselves as 'we', and to whom we, the observers, attribute the same sense of unity. But this everyday common sense succumbs to naive realism, when it assumes the metaphysical existence of such a unified actor.⁷³

Consequently, an essential task of social movement research is investigating how individuals and groups make sense of their action, agreeing on the proper course, and how we can make sense of this process. This, however, Melucci notes, requires a fundamental shift in the understanding of collectives, avoiding approaches that treat them as pre-existing entities. Instead, we should focus on movement formation and periods of latency, which offer insight into the epistemological work of radical communities and its role in orienting action.⁷⁴

The problematic of unity in social movements has traditionally resulted in the theoretical retreat to the realist treatment of the collective as an 'historical personage', ignoring the fact that it is a composite reality, a product. This usually manifests in the historical analysis of a pre-defined object, for instance, the proletariat. This leads us to ignore, as Melucci observes and as I argue throughout the case study, who spoke, who acted, who constituted the collective, and conflates, for example, the frames of the leaders with the meaning of the movement.⁷⁵ Collective action involves a reconstruction of collectivity in response to the deconstruction of an imposed system of aggregation. Unity is exceptional, for social movements contain a plurality of meanings, orientations, and behaviours, an aspect devalued by empirical generalisations that base analysis on an apparent homogeneity. Consequently, Melucci defines social movements as dynamic *action systems*, not 'things',⁷⁶ actively and dynamically involved in constructing an identity and new conventions of meaning that orient action.

Crucial to the realisation of unity is latency. During phases of latency, social movements experiment with alternative forms of practice and living that have an effect on the daily lives of participants. This creates new perceptions of their environment that shapes the meaning they attribute to their action.⁷⁷ Individuals and small groups experience directly the consequence of a new interpretation of their world during periods of latency. Building on this point, Melucci writes:

There is a major difference between mobilisation and a movement. In most discussions, references to the movements' political effects and organizational tactics are commonly mistaken for the collective forms of mobilization which develop around specific issues. *But movements live in another dimension*: in the everyday network of social relations, in the

⁷² Melucci, "Frontier Land," 243.

⁷³ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 243.

⁷⁴ Such a task for the discipline is contemplated in Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity," in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Hank Johnston (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 43.

⁷⁵ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 382-383, 396.

⁷⁶ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 795.

⁷⁷ For further discussion of this point see Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy; Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*; Alberto Melucci, *The Playing Self: Person and Meaning in a Planetary System*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Common to early Italian theory was the idea movements existed beyond their visible form, the protest and campaign. Therefore, it was necessary to investigate latent forms, the broader relations and networks that involve participants at the level of everyday life. Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 341.

capacity and the will to reappropriate space and time, and in the attempt to practice alternative lifestyles.⁷⁸

Social movements, Melucci theorises, have two poles, latency and visibility. Therefore, protest – the conspicuous or visible form of collectives that are the favourite mark of social action to SMT – is a poor indicator of the existence, and a superficial representation, of a social movement. By way of example, Melucci notes the women’s movement existed as an antagonistic community long before its public identification with single-issue mobilisations associated with divorce and abortion. The movement coalesced around ‘day-to-day experiences’ and the ‘small gestures’ of being a woman in a patriarchal society, before organising politically. The women’s movement, he asserts, was born of small groups, self-reflective collectives that made space “not only for the instrumental logic of efficiency but also for the feelings, uncertainties, and affective conflicts that always nourish human action.”⁷⁹ Social networking always precedes the public mobilisation of a social movement. Therefore, it is amongst the processes and conditions of submerged networks and the relational aspects of collective action that answers capable of addressing the problematic of unity exist. This assertion is realised in the concept of collective identity that, Goodwin and his collaborators declare, “replaced class consciousness as the factor that accounts for mobilization and individual attachments to new social movements (...). [T]he collective search for identity is a central aspect of movement formulation.”⁸⁰

Collective identity

For NSMT, the explanation of collective action rests on the concept of collective identity. This is apparent in Melucci’s response to the problematic inheritance of sociology, a response that traverses the dynamics of identity and a specific image of society.⁸¹ Melucci states that in modern, complex societies, the self no longer attaches to “a stable identity; it wavers, staggers, and may crumble (...) in the face of the surging flux of events and relations.”⁸² The weakening of traditional systems of meaning, and a correlate waning of traditional sources of identity, transfer responsibility for identity from metaphysical and meta-social guarantees that endow the subject with a mysterious ‘essence’, to the individual and the area of “associative human action.” Here, Melucci asserts that social and personal networks replace the function of institutions like the church, family, and the Party.⁸³

Consequently, the provision of an environment for self-realisation, transformation, and affirmation – intrinsic to the NSMT conceptualising of the submerged networks associated with social movements – becomes a project of greater significance in modern societies, where incursions on everyday experience by the dominant institutions are ubiquitous.⁸⁴ Under these conditions, the affirmation of identity and the meaning of action that accompanies it confirm our status as active subjects, countering the

⁷⁸ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 61.

⁷⁹ Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 119-120.

⁸⁰ Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions," 416, 426.

⁸¹ Melucci’s conceptualising of NSMs occurs within a highly complex and synthetic framework that is detailed well beyond our current requirements. However, to grasp his unique contribution to the study of social movements it is important to have a basic understanding of his explication of collective identity in modern societies. Beyond the eclectic framework mentioned above, Melucci’s approach draws on a theory of modernisation that he deployed to explain and research the impact of collective action and social movement participation upon individual experiences. For an outline of his influences, see Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 182-183.

⁸² Melucci, *The Playing Self*, 2-3.

⁸³ Melucci, *The Playing Self*, 46-47; Melucci, "Process of Collective Identity," 50-51.

⁸⁴ Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories."

prevailing sense of passivity and domination. Therefore, participation in social movements, innovative cultural forms, and similar are all based, Melucci argues, on the desire for self-affirmation, the “need for securing our identity and [to] facilitate its satisfaction.”⁸⁵

Collective identity is one of the most important contributions to contemporary social movement theory from the early works of Italian sociology. Pizzorno developed identity as the elementary explanation of social action, in contrast to the pursuit of interests elaborated by rational choice theories.⁸⁶ To recall, Pizzorno,⁸⁷ here cited by Diani and Melucci,

“(…) stresses that the logic of group action cannot be reduced to the sum of individual actions (…), in practice it is the actual belonging to a network of relations that enables the individual to assess the effects of his action and evaluate the costs and benefits of his decision to mobilise.”⁸⁸

The decision to become involved in collective action is closely related, if not inseparable from, the ability to evaluate the outcome or effect of the action, and depends on the individual relocating and ‘belonging’ within a complex and broader system of group norms associated with a collective identity.⁸⁹ This “shared definition [is] produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place.”⁹⁰ While at ‘any point in time’ collective identity will contain fixed meanings, “normative and valuational proscriptions” and interpretative frames that influence the action of collectives and individuals, it is emergent, dynamic, and founded on ‘boundary maintenance’ and intersubjective recognition, which includes the public and other social actors.⁹¹ Most simply, a shared relation to a collective identity enables individuals to decode the meaning present in their environment and facilitates the discovery of common purpose in their actions. This ‘common sense’ connects private and public occurrences by weaving them into an ‘encompassing narrative’.⁹² Hence, identity is not a property of actors, is not stable, or owned, but is a reflexive process that attributes meaning to traits, occurrences, and social relations.⁹³

Melucci further contends that collective identities are part of an ‘action system’,

⁸⁵ Melucci, *The Playing Self*, 32. In addition see Peter Jowers et al., "Affective and Aesthetic Dimensions of Contemporary Social Movements in South West England," *Innovation* 12, no. 1 (1999): 110-111. Critically engaging with Melucci's anthropology of the social actor is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it is worth noting that he provides an alternative image of human nature to that of the rational actor of SMT. Melucci refers to a specific condition of complex humanity that motivates action. He believes human beings have an innate desire to “transcend their given forms of existence.” Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 232. In the *Playing Self*, Melucci writes, “the perception that we are lacking something seems to be one of the main-springs of our behaviour (...). We are plagued by the fragility of a presentness which calls for a firm foundation where none exists; we search for permanent anchors, and we question our own life histories.” Melucci, *The Playing Self*, 24-25, 43.

⁸⁶ For further detail see Monica Sassatelli, "Everything Changes and Nothing Changes," in *The Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory*, ed. Gerard Delanty, *Everything Changes* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 103.

⁸⁷ Pizzorno, "Political Exchange; Alessandro Pizzorno, "Identita Ed Interesse," in *Identita*, ed. Sciolla (Turin: Rosenberg and Sellier, 1983).

⁸⁸ Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 336-337.

⁸⁹ See for similar Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 337.

⁹⁰ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 34.

⁹¹ Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield, *New Social Movements*, 28.

⁹² della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 22; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*.

⁹³ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 92. This notion is attributed to Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*.

in that their structures are built by aims, beliefs, decisions and exchanges operating in a systemic field. A collective identity is nothing else than a shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action: 'shared' means constructed and negotiated through a repeated process of 'activation' of social relationships connecting the actors.⁹⁴

Action systems "render accessible a specific potential for action."⁹⁵ For Melucci, the constraints and opportunities present in the field of collective action are never 'objective', with the particular knowledge of the actor decisive in the decisions of the radical community. He believes social movements, by their *existence* and through their *form*, move beyond specific initiatives and break-up the systemic structuring of meaning, offering an alternative.⁹⁶

As collective identity is an outcome of *social interaction*, it necessarily involves cognitive frames, emotions, and affective exchanges, an idea that is currently taking hold across all forms of social movement theory. The decision to participate,

which develops at the level of the individual, cannot be considered as an exclusively individual phenomenon (...). The incentives to act exert a dominant influence on individuals' motivation. But the criteria used by individuals to recognise and evaluate these incentives are always interactive.⁹⁷

Social movements are irreducible to means-ends calculations or political rationality, which deform the idea of the social actor and the formative relations underpinning solidarity. Social movement unity (or collectivity) includes "margins of non-negotiability in the reasons for and ways of acting together."⁹⁸ The outcome of the alienating nature of modernity, the failing of traditional sources of meaning to match our daily experiences, is a renewed search for identity, understood as an action system 'irreducible to instrumental rationality.' Thus, the fundamental conflict in contemporary society is over who has access to knowledge,⁹⁹ and who controls the ways of perceiving and explaining social order, outside of the hegemony of 'scientific and technological discourse'.¹⁰⁰

Knowledge, ideology, and integralism

Melucci points out that past social struggles involved competing ideologies, expressions of alternative ways of life and culture antagonistic toward ruling class values. However, in contemporary society, ideology has become the privileged site of dominant interests, requiring collective action to produce new knowledges.¹⁰¹ Vital to contemporary movements is access to the informational resources necessary to order social and political relationships and to produce meaning and identity, which in modern societies is inequitably distributed.¹⁰² New social conflict involves contesting established thought and interrupting conventional systems of meaning, reworking the formal elements of the

⁹⁴ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 793.

⁹⁵ See Melucci, "Frontier Land," 249.

⁹⁶ della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 21; Touraine, *Voice and the Eye*.

⁹⁷ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 31-32.

⁹⁸ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 244.

⁹⁹ Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 112-113.

¹⁰⁰ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 356-360.

¹⁰¹ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 192-193.

¹⁰² Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 178-179; Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 112-113.

environment to provide a refreshed perception of society, action, identity, time, and space. Where the political system reduces complexity through representation and homogenisation, social movements respond through self-determination and exhibitions of difference. This is antagonistic to the logic of the system, which only understands identification through incorporation or “difference as exclusion from all communication.”¹⁰³ Consequently, Melucci and Avritzer assert, the sociology of social movements working within the politico-institutional sphere:

Overlooks the formal innovations of social movements and thus fails to thematize their public dimension. Instead of taking advantage of the innovations produced by movements in *ways of doing politics* and proposing an extension of the participatory forms of democracy, RMT ends up reducing such innovations to the instrumental level of action.¹⁰⁴

Alternatively, Melucci conceptualises movements in contemporary societies ‘riven by change’, as ‘prophets’, signs of a shift in the logic of complex societies from the instrumentalist logic of the system to the symbolic logic of the everyday – communications and interactions that make sense of the world rather than strategise the pursuit of impersonal goals. The radical disruption this field causes amongst the existing discourses on politics, offering a markedly different conceptualisation rather than representing a mere permutation of the state of the system, announce a change in society that is occurring here and now.¹⁰⁵ As such, the alternative modalities of communication, diversity of experience and realisation of community, counter the influence of the systems instrumental rationality, its abstract means-ends calculations that recuperate complexity within the political order.

However, the place of ideology in social movements is not under threat, for it plays an important role in *mobilisation*. The challenge for sociology is to recognise that ideology is not a ‘simple reflection of a more profound dimension’. Ideology is a *representation* of the collective actor that is not “false conscience, simply mystifying real social relationships, nor (...) the transparent representation of shared social values.”¹⁰⁶ Melucci, who in this respect is influenced by the work of Touraine,¹⁰⁷ and Snow and Benford and their collaborators, claims, with regard to social movement mobilisation:

The *ideology* of a movement always includes a (...) definition of the actor, the identification of an adversary and an indication of ends goals, objectives for which to fight. The connection between the *particularism* of the actor and some *general values* (...) is a key mechanism of the framing activity of a collective actor. A link of necessity is established between the role of the actor and some kind of totality to be reached through his action.¹⁰⁸

This framing activity, associated with mobilisation, always defines the position of the actor in society and names a group that the action represents. In effect, Melucci argues that overlaying the ‘deep constructive activity’ of framing (knowledge) is the *strategic* function of ideology. He writes:

¹⁰³ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 520.

¹⁰⁴ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 520.

¹⁰⁵ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 348-349.

¹⁰⁷ Touraine, *Self Production of Society*.

¹⁰⁸ Alberto Melucci, "Challenging Codes: Framing and Ambivalence in the Ideology of Social Movements," *Thesis Eleven* 31(1992): 132 (emphasis mine). Melucci works here with a definition of ideology as “a set of symbolic frames which collective actors use to represent their own actions to themselves and to others (...).”

Ideological patterns and leadership functions are always at work in an attempt to give a durable and predictable order to the continuously negotiated process. One of the main tasks falling on the part of the leaders is precisely that of producing frames that reinforce unity (...).¹⁰⁹

While this 'ideological function' of framing is typically ambivalent, when it takes on an integralist quality it requires careful theoretical reflection.¹¹⁰

Movements consist of submerged, latent, and temporary networks emerging from a structural conflict that is connected to a specific system of relations. Subsequently, collective actors attempt to situate themselves in their environment through the processes of framing (including an ambivalent ideological function) and the construction of a collective identity. In the formative stages of mobilisation, a degree of integralism is necessary for the coalescence of the collective actor. This requires the reference to exemplars and historical images, such as Marxism and otherworldly revolutions, which act as placeholders for the developing action frames that emerge as the movement matures and becomes more complex in its thinking.

Present in the early phase of many collective actors, to facilitate mobilisation, is the composition of an ideal self-image. This involves the selective reference to past events and preceding traditions of social struggle, the appropriation of 'sacred texts', and under certain circumstances the appeal to myths, such as the 'myth of transcendence' (the promise of social and individual rebirth).¹¹¹ An outcome of integralism is an inability to perceive complexity and diversity in the environment, which limits the range of actions available to the group and fosters intolerance, but simplifies activation. In Italy, the primary example of integralism for Melucci was Marxism-Leninism, in particular that of the BR with its fixation with the 'primitive images' of revolution and the vanguard party.¹¹² However, while usually sectarian in nature during early stages of coalescence, simplistic in their imagery and the manner in which they conceptualise their context, social movements, except amongst their primitive fringes, discard integralism as they mature.

Integralism and ideology perform a strategic function in collective action, organising the plurality of interests within the movement, rationalising and representing the actions of the social actor. The important point to take from this is that the discursive dimension of social movements contains elements of knowledge, ideology, and integralism, which must be deconstructed if used to theorise the meaning of collective action. It also highlights how important the conjuncture of the intellectual and the movement, and the maintenance of unity, is to our explication of the politics of RSMs. If we limit our representation of social movements to leadership frames, exemplars, myths and similar, we restrict collective action to its instrumental level, which is usually associated with activation and does not reflect the features and mechanisms involved in community formation.

Melucci's concentration on the processes and conditions of social movement formation and mobilisation is the distinctive mark of his interpretation of the Italian RSMs 1968-78. This perspective is patent in the following summation:

¹⁰⁹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 354-355.

¹¹⁰ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 120.

¹¹¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 58, 104, 111. Myth, unlike the appeal to past events and preceding struggles, does not have a determinable basis. It provides a symbolic resource that helps participants withdraw from constraints present within the movement environment.

¹¹² Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 120-121; Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 180-181.

The profound crisis of so many of the political groups stemming from 1968 does not, contrary to how many would rather have it, indicate the end of the movement or its disintegration, but rather the end of a utopian, fragmentary phase of collective action. In the late 1970s, the movements left behind the myths and symbols which had helped to bring it about in the first place.

It is subsequent to this shift (post-workerist) that Melucci believes the real contents of the movement manifest. This coincides with his assertion that it was not until the women's movement came together in the mid 1970s that there was any significant move away from the language and categories of Marxism.¹¹³ This was the first appearance of the NSMs, which, as Lodi and Grazioli theorise, contrast instrumental poverty with 'richness of expression', and 'movement disintegration' with 'hidden initiatives' such as counter-culture.¹¹⁴

2. The logic of collective action

In addition to Melucci's broadside against the 'analytically barren' frameworks of the sociological study of social movements, he questions the reduction of collective action to the logic of the political system. More specifically, he challenges the collapsing of social movement activity into the deployment of political organisation and instrumental reason. While acknowledging contemporary social action includes instrumental demands, this it mixes with a challenge to the system of relationships of which the actor is a part. However, the latter aspect of contemporary struggle is inexplicable within a politico-institutional model that finds unintelligible "the public forms of action introduced by contemporary social movements." Melucci argues that in the public domain the meaning of a movement resides in 'what they are' – [a new definition of the political] – not 'what they do' – [protest and pursue goals].¹¹⁵ As such, the public sphere is an alternative political space for the expression of unique identities and knowledge claims, where the form of collective action is not merely a repertoire that best responds to resource characteristics, but is a message and challenge to the current ordering of social and political relations. By their very existence, these movements offer an alternative and ask questions that are not 'allowed', such as, who are we, and why are we? The best-established sociological theory of social movements (RMT) is, however, unable to deconstruct the general framework of politics, observing the demands of social movements as rational, seeking integration through political inclusion.¹¹⁶

Alternatively, with regard to contemporary social action, Melucci simply believed that:

Conflicts do not express themselves through action taken in accordance with the purposive norms of efficacy. (...) Action does still have effects on institutions, (...) at the same time, however, *it raises issues that are not addressed by the framework of instrumental rationality.* This kind of rationality is devoted to the effective implementation of whatever has been decided by *anonymous and impersonal powers* operating through the apparent neutrality of *technical expertise.*¹¹⁷

Accordingly, radical movements (those that Melucci simply refers to as social movements) seek something more than political integration. That is, they:

¹¹³ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 121.

¹¹⁴ Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 341. Here, Diani and Melucci are specifically referring to Lodi and Grazioli, "Giovani sul Territorio."

¹¹⁵ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 809.

¹¹⁶ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism."

¹¹⁷ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 9 (emphasis mine).

recast the questions of societal ends (...). The action of movements deliberately differentiates itself from the model of *political organisation* and assumes increasing autonomy from political systems; it becomes intimately interweaved with everyday life and individual experience.¹¹⁸

Melucci's vision of the antagonistic community is a collective that disrupts the progressive culture of modern politics. Further, under the conditions of modernity, the knowledge that orients the action of the radical community alters through mental, sensory, and emotional modalities, and is irreducible to the mode of reason, to instrumental and strategic rationality.¹¹⁹ Melucci remarks that instrumentalism "structures; it establishes relations, links, and hierarchies," manipulating and ordering experience, whereas wisdom (knowledge other than that of technical expertise) "integrates meaning into personal experience." The latter "addresses the fundamental regions of human action: the body, the emotions, the dimensions of experience irreducible to instrumental rationality."¹²⁰ This creates a specific problem for RMT's 'instrumentalist' reaction to its collective behaviour past, which reduces mobilisation to a set of variables that facilitate rational choice, defined in relation to the modernising of the political system. It also challenges the organisational or party perspective of classical Marxism and, specific to the Italian situation, Leninism. Hence, the primary refrain of Melucci's critique of SMT and Marxism is that their theories of political rationalism and organisation deform the collective actor and are ill prepared to "capture the meaningfulness of behaviour which does not follow the stipulations of instrumental rationality, but which, nonetheless, is not irrational."¹²¹

The limit of politics

Melucci claims the Italian movement sector, with its roots in the upheavals of the late 1960s, is irreducible to the level of politics, containing important social and cultural aspects that have irrevocably changed the Italian way of life. This indicated to him that the foundation of politics was shifting toward a different domain, where innovation and creativity escaped the reduction of social movements to an institutional challenge for incorporation, necessitating respect for the notion of autonomy by avoiding its collapse into the political dimension.¹²² Melucci notes, however, that SMT is unable to break with a framework of democratic elitism, with the actions of social movements reconciled with rationality when they seek inclusion within the political community. That is, SMT considers social movements "to be a rational way to pursue social integration."¹²³

The intent of SMT – to repatriate the radical subject to western democracy – requires the revelation of the rationality of the antagonistic community. This undertaking involves defending the position that social movements mobilise based on calculations of cost and benefit, rather than as a *reaction* to grievances or deprivation, or driven by psychological states.¹²⁴ Explicated through the logic of political representation, social movement mobilisation (protest) is a normal and stable aspect of contemporary society. To escape the rationality/irrationality debate, SMT classifies collective actors according to their 'relation to the political system', that is, "as resourceful or resourceless, included or excluded." Under certain conditions, the visible forms of social conflict play an important role in the 'modernisation' or

¹¹⁸ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 9 (emphasis mine).

¹¹⁹ See Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 354-360.

¹²⁰ Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 112-113.

¹²¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 395.

¹²² Melucci, "Challenging Codes: Framing and Ambivalence," 276-282.

¹²³ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 510.

¹²⁴ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 515-516.

betterment of the political system, helping build a stronger consensus. Tarrow, representative of PPT, states that the politics of disorder 'extend the boundaries of mass politics', "contributing to the broadening of democracy where it was strong, and to its consolidation where it was weak."¹²⁵ This approach, however, as Melucci and Avritzer observe, has fallen back on "modern politics as a sort of invariant point of reference." They argue, drawing on Pizzorno's "Identity and Interest," that "the postulation of rationality attributed solely to actions seeking *representation* falls short of addressing the need of a sphere for the *presentation* of difference."¹²⁶

The homogenisation of plurality and complexity in political systems of representation, the collapse of particularity into social aggregations delimited by the classification of interests, is necessary to the functioning of consensus politics. The cost to social movements is the closing of spaces for self-activity and self-organisation, the removal of opportunities for direct participation. The crucial struggles in complex societies, then, are no longer between those with resources and power and those without. If we are to believe Melucci, the important struggles occur at the seam between the logic of identity (the collective) and the logic of rationality (the system). That is,

conflicts tend to affirm individual or group 'identity' against the 'rationality' of domination: to be woman, youth, or old person, to have at one's own disposal one's own body, one's space, one's time (...), in a different way from that imposed by the management of the apparatuses of development.¹²⁷

The epistemological work of social movements, such as those, respectively, of women and youth that participate in forms of knowledge different to that of instrumental reason, is vital to Melucci's account of the politics of RSMs. The conflict associated with these groups, provoked by particularity and local conditions, concern the overall logic of the system. That is, "they address the entire system from a specific location within the social structure or in the name of a category or group."¹²⁸ While particularistic, expressing a condition such as being a woman or young, these movements have a universal effect. They challenge the dominant logic by symbolically offering alternative meanings and realities through their very existence.¹²⁹ Their actions verify an alternative, and, according to Melucci, they reveal the standardisation and homogenisation of experience is a managerial procedure of social systems, which contain hidden aspects of violence, irrationality, and silence.¹³⁰

Conflicts associated with the women's and youth movements in Italy involved resistance to the colonisation of everyday life, fighting against the intrusion of 'system imperatives' and the logic of the state's economic and political interactions into all areas of daily life. To recall Buechler, the *instrumental* and *strategic rationality* of the politico-economic system interferes with identity formation, symbolic interaction, social reproduction, and communicative rationality, removing them from the context of the lifeworld.¹³¹ Consequently, even movements that do not address the political institution can be 'political'. Thereby, political movements do not require an explicit political content, as their form expresses their nature. The Italian autonomous women's movement fights for the recognition of their difference, the acceptance of a legitimate body of experience and 'outlook on reality' other than that of

¹²⁵ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 1.

¹²⁶ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 516-518 (emphasis mine); Pizzorno, "Identity and Interest." Representation and presentation respectively designate indirect and direct forms of politics.

¹²⁷ See Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 134.

¹²⁸ Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 118-120.

¹²⁹ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 810-811.

¹³⁰ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 812; Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 120.

¹³¹ Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," 445; Habermas, *Communicative Action*; Edwards, "Habermas."

the dominant culture.¹³² Their struggle, irreducible to the conformities of class struggle and political representation, opposes the logic of the political system by interrupting social knowledge, disconnecting their community from established relations, links, and hierarchies, without recourse to the explanations and reasons of instrumentalism and strategic rationality. Similarly, the urban youth movements fight for the right to 'belong by choice', exemplifying indeterminism and discontinuity. They oppose the logic of allocation that attempts to manage change, making it predictable and measurable. Through their *presentism* and self-determination, these movements challenge the imposition of continuity, the future based logic of instrumental rationality.¹³³ The political nature of these communities, in the framework of NSMT, is explicable without reliance on the logic of rationality.

For Melucci, overtly political movements (such as the extra-parliamentary Left) that express a political intention and content through institutional channels, while conflictual, are not profoundly political.¹³⁴ Their disruption of order seeks 'particular compensations' without escaping the logic of the political system. As Buechler concisely puts it:

Melucci, whose stance is not that the new social movements are political (in any conventional sense of the term) but rather that it is just as well that they are not. If the new movements were more political in the conventional sense of that term, they would be playing by sets of *rules* that benefit existing power-holders and they would in all likelihood be much easier to co-opt through the normal channels of political representation and negotiation.¹³⁵

The rules of the political game and the roles and functions of organisational systems reduce collective action to a quest for political resources and inclusion. This minimises plurality and liquidates autonomy through representation amongst the "aggregation of political majorities." Antagonistic toward such aggregative systems, contemporary movements express their difference, exploding the logic of consensus and conformity. Radical communities "withdraw from one's constituted identity to form a new one," and seek self-*presentation* without exclusion.¹³⁶

SMT identifies social movements that exist in a space that is marginal to the political community, acting outside of the established standards of behaviour and transgressing the conventional limits of representation, as deformed social movements and resource poor collectives. Operating from a weakened foundation, these communities 'radicalise' to address their lack of power. Alternatively, on the same terrain, NSMT perceives the appearance of political movements, which interrupt the traditions of representative or consensus democracy. These movements claim the right to participate autonomously, a display of interdependence and equality. Autonomy is not an act of self-exclusion, it is a reclaiming of 'knowledge', or more accurately, it is the refusal of "the exclusion from knowledge."¹³⁷ The practices of the radical community verify their ability to control the symbols and language of society, to define new conventions of meaning, and to offer alternative reasons and explanations for action and identity. Therefore, Melucci and Diani write, any adequate method of investigating collective action requires "analysis of structural variables, motivation and events (...), but the action itself, its formation and evolution, must also become an object of investigation."¹³⁸

¹³² Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 119.

¹³³ Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 118-120.

¹³⁴ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*; Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 176.

¹³⁵ Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," 452.

¹³⁶ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 507.

¹³⁷ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 193.

¹³⁸ See Diani and Melucci, "Searching for Autonomy," 348.

Marxist organisation

NSMT raises doubts about Marxism's capacity to explicate the politics of RSMs, especially those movements that emerged around the developed world during the 1960s and 1970s. This is manifest in Melucci's adversarial critique of classical Marxism and his distaste for Leninism, acquired through his exposure to the Italian social movement sector. Melucci is critical of the reduction of social action to the logic of 'capitalist production' and to 'class relationships', and the favouring of the 'proletarian revolution'. These traditional Marxist categories of analysis, he argues, do not satisfactorily imagine the constitution of complex society with its "multiplicity of groups which are stratified and intersect in complex ways."¹³⁹ NSMT, as Buechler remarks, refers to sources of collective identity "such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality," dismissing the figure of the proletariat associated with the industrial revolution.¹⁴⁰

Melucci's primary concern for Marxist social science is "the tendency to unify the heterogeneity of collective action by means of either a key concept – such as class struggle or the objective historical role of the proletariat – or through empirical generalisations."¹⁴¹ The concern he holds for Marxist practice, with particular reference to the Italian situation, is that the 'omnipresence of state power' tempts the social movement to rely on the Party, top down forms of political organisation, and professional vanguards for guidance.¹⁴² Melucci argues that combining the science and practice of Marxism marginalises and devalues all forms of collective action irreducible to models of a centralised organisation (political composition).¹⁴³ In part, the problem of unity generates this situation, which for Marxism, Melucci remarks, has always involved the "passage from a class in itself to a class for itself (...)."

Inevitably, the Marxist solution to the activation of class struggle as a collective actor is the invocation of the Party or intellectual. The inescapable consequence, according to Melucci, is Leninism, a theoretical construct that unfolds 'before political practice', effectively imposing a top down organisational form (an ideology) on the self-determination of the movement.¹⁴⁴ The Leninist model of collective action and "theories of crowd behaviour and mass society," Melucci states, "paradoxically share a common assumption." That is, involvement in collective action "is the work of a minority that inspires an undifferentiated mass of individuals and leads them to recognise their real interests (Lenin) or to accept, through suggestion and manipulation, the aims of the agitators (crowd psychology theory)."¹⁴⁵

The 'fantasy' of the Marxist intellectual or vanguard, Melucci claims, is of being the popular hero and the system or institution the villain. Founded on the myth of a homogenous group (the working class) leading society to a 'revolutionary destiny', the intent of the Marxist intellectual is to conquer the state and assume their rightful place in power.¹⁴⁶ Melucci's counter is that "whoever exerts or aims at

¹³⁹ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 100. Examples of his critique are available in: Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*; Melucci, *Challenging Codes*.

¹⁴⁰ The inadequacy of Marxism is argued to arise through economic and class 'reductionism' that respectively presumes, firstly, that "politically significant social action derives from the fundamental economic logic of capitalist production," and secondly, that the "significant social actors will be defined by class relationships rooted in the process of production." Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," 441-442.

¹⁴¹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 190.

¹⁴² Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 194 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴³ Melucci, "The New Social Movements," 199.

¹⁴⁴ See Melucci, "Frontier Land," 240.

¹⁴⁵ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 32.

¹⁴⁶ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 181.

exerting power cannot at the same time claim to represent conflicts against power.”¹⁴⁷ Beyond their fantastic ideas, Melucci contends the particular naivety of the *whole* Marxist tradition is that ‘interests’ motivate collective action and that suffering and inequality will necessarily result in mobilisation.¹⁴⁸ He continues:

The primary concern of classical Marxist analysis has been to define the preconditions of revolution by examining the structural contradictions of the capitalist system. Centring its investigation on the logic of the system, it has underestimated the processes by which collective action emerges, as well as the internal articulation of social movements.¹⁴⁹

The analytic framework of Marxism, Melucci maintains, focuses on defining the “conditions under which the system enters a state of crisis, (...) it lacks the analytic instruments required for defining the actors.”¹⁵⁰ This theoretical shortcoming had concrete consequences in the Italian situation. Unable to comprehend and reincorporate the NSMs, the Marxist organisations viewed them fearfully, considering the new movements a threat to the “march towards state power.” The emergence of the NSMs at the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s created a crisis for the traditional categories of Marxism, which organisations such as the PCI interpreted as an official ‘doctrine of order’. Ultimately, a functionalist ‘Marxist homage’ obscured “the antagonistic importance of the new struggles” in Italy,¹⁵¹ apparently diminishing the veracity of contemporaneous Marxist analysis of the politics of RSMs in the Italian situation.

3. The Italian situation

From his critique of the sociological study of social movements, Melucci is emboldened in *Nomads of the Present* to argue that the emergence of social movements in the Italian context present an example of collective action that is consistent with the conceptual framework of his specific form of NSMT.¹⁵² Melucci’s analysis of RSMs in Italy attempts, first, to explain beyond conjunctural variations what aspects, processes and conditions, are *permanent and common*, and second, looks to avoid the “commonplace juxtaposition of extremism and rationality.”¹⁵³ Below, I outline in basic form Melucci’s account of the radicalisation of the Italian social movements 1968-78, intending to supplement the previous descriptions of this sector. The primary purpose is to highlight the divergent assessment of the nexus of the RSMs and the terroristic terminus of the Italian situation, provided by NSMT. Secondly, it contemplates the comparable dismissal of the counter-cultural wing of the Movement of ’77 by NSMT and SMT.

Melucci suggests the coming together of the ‘chaotic’ processes of modernisation and a nascent new movement was the catalyst for the ‘explosion’ of ’68 in Italy. The struggles associated with the social movement sector were the “expression of new demands,” products of the blocked political system that prevented substantial reform and the “crisis of institutional mediation.”¹⁵⁴ The persistence of these conditions in Italy meant the movement of 1968 was not momentary, forming the basis of an ongoing

¹⁴⁷ See Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 135.

¹⁴⁸ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 192.

¹⁴⁹ Melucci, "The New Social Movements," 199.

¹⁵⁰ Melucci, "The New Social Movements," 199.

¹⁵¹ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 102.

¹⁵² Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 58.

¹⁵³ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 183, 173.

¹⁵⁴ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 183-185.

struggle.¹⁵⁵ The first phase of collective action in Italy, from 1968 to approximately 1973, contained elements of contemporary movements in an embryonic form. These elements, however, were “hidden beneath the need to give organized and political form to demands for modernization, i.e., for changes in the working of various social and political institutions, cultural patterns and norms of civil society.” Melucci continues:

It was not until the mid-1970s, with the crisis of the New Left, that there was the first significant development of a new model of collective action. The crisis of the New Left emerged on two fronts: the growth of women’s demands from within the Left itself and the ‘crisis of militantism’, which in turn reflected the steady withdrawal of individuals from Leninist-style politics (...).¹⁵⁶

The new demands of the social movements of Italy related to the ‘quality of life’ and involved a framework of ‘refusals’, most notably the refusal of the authority of distant and impersonal institutions and organisations. These movements, Melucci observes, faced a rigid and ‘blocked’ political system that attempted to repress or recapture the collectives, rather than seek to reform the system.¹⁵⁷

Melucci saw radicalisation resulting from three interacting processes: firstly, modernisation, secondly the form of social movements, and thirdly the political systems ‘malfunctioning’.¹⁵⁸ From the mid 1950s Italy experienced significant economic growth and changes such as new industrial organisation and consumption patterns, but the “cultural and institutional life of civil society” did not reflect these changes.¹⁵⁹ These contradictions manifested in social action at the end of the 1960s that sort reform in key institutions such as the university and industry. While there were marginal changes to the structure of the university, the state ignored or dismissed other demands of the student movements, such as to alter the Italian response to the Vietnam War. The outcome, Melucci remarks, was frustration and disillusionment that saw the student movement radicalise to the left,¹⁶⁰ where it found a vocabulary of anti-authoritarianism. A similar response occurred in the industrial sector, sparked off by the efforts of the ‘official left’ to recuperate the radicalism of the mass worker, negotiating new workers’ charters on their behalf. This accelerated the degeneration of the relationship between the movement and the political institution, which had failed to comprehend the centrality of autonomy for these groups.

In Italy during the 1960s, 1970s and beyond, the State was pervasive through most areas of daily life, with opportunities for autonomy limited.¹⁶¹ In addition, social action was being ‘*hyper-politicised*’ by certain Leninist groups who attempted to organise the breadth of the demands of the far left movements within an existing model of revolutionary politics. However, neither the State nor its political opponents could adequately represent the identity of the actors within models of representative politics and delegated authority. During the first phase of social action, the PCI had aspirations towards involvement in the political institution. This, Melucci notes, affected its ability to comprehend the radical social actor, such as the women’s movement, failing to give legitimacy to their actions and demands. Under these conditions, the New Left temporarily flourished, adopting the classical tradition of the Marxist revolutionary, which fed into LC, *Il Manifesto* and other similar

¹⁵⁵ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 183-185.

¹⁵⁶ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 58.

¹⁵⁷ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 110-112.

¹⁵⁸ See Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 225.

¹⁵⁹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 225.

¹⁶⁰ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 225-226.

¹⁶¹ See Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 223.

organisations and parties; however, while more aware than the PCI of the character and demands of the new movements, the New left image of the activist context was heavily influenced by Leninism, and this prevented them from understanding the novelty, innovation, and *difference* of this social phenomena.¹⁶²

While sympathetic towards the student movement of '68 in Italy, Melucci recognised an intolerance and desire for integralism amongst the students that he had previously rejected in Catholic youth activism. Such integralism, Melucci suggests, took "the place of a not-yet-acquired capacity for self-definition"¹⁶³ and was a consequence of the student movements' reliance on Marxism for orientation. This was a result of the students' connection with the early risers of the workers' movement in Italy, who, according to Melucci, had revived the tradition of the Marxist revolution. Relying on the work of Tilly, Melucci explains that the formation of the new movement employed the language, symbols, and forms of action utilised by prior movements during preceding struggles. In Italy, Melucci claims, this resulted in the rediscovery of the "'pure' themes of Marxist scholasticism."¹⁶⁴

Melucci notes a 'formal homage to Marxism' existed amongst the New Left thinkers, typified by an absence of critical scrutiny of its theoretical origins. This homage, he believes, was a dangerous tendency that blinded the New Left to the importance of the new movements, treating them as marginal. This contributed to disintegration of the movement and increased the appeal of violence, a situation most notably exacerbated, on Melucci's account, by the theorists of the 'political area' of *Autonomia* (OWA).¹⁶⁵ Subsequently, Melucci claims the *entire* Left failed to comprehend the importance of the embryonic new movements and were unable to generate an adequate analysis. The PCI had closed off any conflict to its left that threatened its 'political' ambitions, while the New Left could not move beyond Leninist orthodoxy.¹⁶⁶ Most directly, the ideologically and politically Leninist New Left were unsuccessful in recuperating the fundamentalist fringes and the 'cultural' movements, which for some participants in these marginalised groups made political violence appear the only solution. The "terrorism of the 1970s," Melucci declares, "synthesised the disillusionment produced by the half successful institutionalisation of social demands and the repression and neglect of the claims of new groups of urban youth."¹⁶⁷

According to Melucci, autonomy, a phenomenon of the first half of the 1970s, loosely brought together new youth and cultural movements responding to social marginality and the workers' collectives breaking free of the institutionalised New Left and trade union groups. This broad sector of autonomy – *Autonomia* and the 'autonomous desire' – combined "the core of a rising social movement, the thrust of marginality produced by the system but no longer controlled by it, [and] the grafting of fundamentalist

¹⁶² For similar Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 224.

¹⁶³ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 121.

¹⁶⁴ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 121. While maintaining a criticism of Tilly's political reductionism, Melucci specifically refers to two of his works for an understanding of the development of movement repertoires: Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*; Charles Tilly, Louise A Tilly, and Richard H Tilly, *The Rebellious Century: 1830-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). See Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 190.

¹⁶⁵ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 103.

¹⁶⁶ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 103.

¹⁶⁷ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 226. While fundamentalism and extremism share a characteristic foundation in a symbolic and integralist universe that structures the personalities of their members, fundamentalism is not a sufficient condition for violence. Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 270. Fundamentalism does not imply violence, with this actuality dependent upon the context or specificities of the situation. As Melucci writes, fundamentalist groups usually "become circles of theologians and they grow old and die peacefully." Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 118.

sects of militants deceived by an increasingly institutionalised Left.”¹⁶⁸ The ultimate outcome is the emergence of an ‘autonomous extremist arm’, where the introduction of fundamentalists into the ‘shambles’ of the Movement of ‘77 that had descended into crisis because of the systems repressive response, saw the rise of extremist groups. In this milieu an alternative social base amongst youth, unemployed intellectuals, and the movement sectors ex-militants, was discovered by the ‘Marxist-Leninist’ residual, in particular from PO and the ‘extremist fringe’ that had abandoned what they considered the compromised and overly moderate organisations (particularly LC) of the New left.¹⁶⁹

Radical politics: Terrorism and the Movement of ‘77

In 1977, Pinto writes:

Autonomous forces marched in the streets protesting against the PCI’s betrayal of its revolutionary mission and its entrance into the social and political ‘establishment’. (...) At a more extreme level, terrorism had sought to wipe out all tendencies to compromise within the PCI and to return it to its class positions in a revolutionary war (...).¹⁷⁰

The tendency of the political parties, including the official organisations of the Left, was to treat the mass mobilisation of 1977 as deviant, marginal, or parasitic. However, Melucci argues, certain actions of the Movement of ‘77 were in fact a damning critique of society, a comment on the instrumental rationality of the system and consensus impulse of politics. After 1972, with regard to the workers’ movement, the more autonomous and combative unions (e.g. the chemical workers’ union) were again brought under control by the union confederation, which attempted to return conflict back to more traditional terrain of job defence and political representation. This, however, excluded the participatory and experiential dimension of collective action, replacing it with a delegated voice within the political process.¹⁷¹ During the same period (1972-76), a wave of NSMs saw civil life experience modernisation through changes to the divorce and abortion legislation, and the women’s movement and specific areas of autonomy rejected the Leninist model of organisation that was exerting influence over the movement sector.

The separation of the women’s movement from the New Left is particularly significant for Melucci’s account of Italian RSMs 1968-78. The ‘right to be different’, both from the patriarchy of the dominant culture and the working class struggles, structured the practice and theory of the ‘new’ women’s movement. Their expression of difference, as autonomous rather than excluded, ‘exploded’ the dominant logic of representation, denying the identity afforded them by the social order and New Left.¹⁷² As Melucci acknowledges, autonomous feminism aimed to preserve the particularity of women’s experiences of daily life, experiences that were radically subversive in respect to the systemic logic of social aggregation. Crucially, their subversiveness arises from the challenge they present to the standardising, homogenising, and generalising of the name woman within social knowledge.¹⁷³ Notably,

¹⁶⁸ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 190.

¹⁶⁹ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 114.

¹⁷⁰ Pinto, "Introduction," 19.

¹⁷¹ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 108.

¹⁷² Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 119-120.

¹⁷³ See Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 119-120.

the importance of the autonomous women's movement for Melucci (while he expends little energy on its explication) distinguishes his approach from that of SMT.¹⁷⁴

While 1977 saw the realisation of the new movements in mass mobilisations, it is also the point at which Melucci identifies the process of degradation taking hold in the field of social action. This occurs, he claims, through the conjuncture of increased repression of the movement, political closure to reform, and a crisis in the politics and theory of the New Left, all of which limit the space available to the innovative and creative margins of the movement sector. A consequence was the spread of terrorism, which itself became a "part of daily life."¹⁷⁵ For Melucci, however, the other face of radicalism in Italy veiled by politically reductive theories was the NSMs, in particular, those of the urban youth. The submerged networks of these movements, focused on quality of life issues, separated from the political process and altered their forms of collective action.

Toward the end of the 1970s, cultural events such as concerts replaced political protest and demonstration. With political militancy losing its appeal to the mass movement, the cultural events became increasingly attractive, especially amongst the 77ers.¹⁷⁶ Melucci, in his research on Milan youth movements, recognised a unity associated with the Movement of '77 that existed through a 'system of exchange' formed around free radio stations, journals, magazines, and bookshops. These 'hidden' collectives shifted away from traditional models of political organisation and fixed membership.¹⁷⁷ The new radical communities of the second half of the 1970s refused mediation, representation, and participation within the political institution. They also attempted to preserve the emergent novelty of the community "tied to identity, expression, personal and collective creativity."¹⁷⁸ Ultimately, the State and the Left of politics segregated and directed this sector towards a "privatisation of demands which (has) allowed their reduction to marginal, *purely expressive*, countercultural experiences."¹⁷⁹

The twinned forces of repression and institutionalisation of the political movements created a residual fringe of activists who joined collective searches for political effectiveness in integralist and fundamentalist groups. In some instances, the 'fundamentalist groups' found purchase and legitimacy amongst the disillusioned and marginalised Movement of '77 that became frustrated by the closure of autonomous political spaces. Under these conditions, alongside the 'historical' terrorist groups such as BR, new organisations based around the use of political violence recruited small bands of disaffected youth.¹⁸⁰

The bifurcation of the Movement of '77, according to Melucci, reveals that:

Terrorism paradoxically represents both the most radical outcome of emergent movements and their antithesis. On the one hand, terrorism is the product of a distorting process which forces movements to deny their own nature and to shift conflict into the arena imposed by repression

¹⁷⁴ To recall, SMT promotes the importance of the single-issue mobilisations of the women's movement. Refer to chapter 2 p 92.

¹⁷⁵ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 116.

¹⁷⁶ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 59.

¹⁷⁷ Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge," 799-800.

¹⁷⁸ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 118.

¹⁷⁹ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 118.

¹⁸⁰ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 270.

and the political system's lack of response. On the other, the ideology and practice of the terrorist groups are the antithesis of the emerging contents of the new conflicts.¹⁸¹

The repression and misunderstanding of the Movement of '77 caused it to fragment, with its remaining 'politically' active members cast off into the violent fringes of armed groups.¹⁸² Importantly, driving fragmentation was an incomprehension and 'culture of representation' that, according to Melucci, prevented the movements from "expressing themselves on their own terrain."¹⁸³ This saw them marginalised, or more tragically, drawn toward their antithesis in:

the doctrinaire celebration of (...) sectarian tradition, to inflexible Leninist principles, to the dogmatic use of Marxism. There is nothing in common between the movement of 1977's [student movement] slogan 'Take back our life!' ['riprendiamoci la vita!'] and the lucid determination to murder one's opponents, as a means to fight against capitalism and accelerate the revolution."¹⁸⁴

In Melucci's descriptions of collective action, much of the 'work' undertaken by the movement is the creative and innovative production of knowledge, which alters the interpretation and relation of the individual and their community to the political system and order of social relations. It is the deformation of this process amongst fundamentalist and extremist collectives, with their perverse limit being large-scale organised violence, which characterises terrorist groups. Melucci argues, in contrast with the particularity of the NSMs such as the women's and youth collectives, fundamentalist and extremist communities have a "symbolic framework which structures even the personality of the members. A totalising, radically 'integralist' vision of reality (...) to which all are more or less subservient in different ways, except for a minority of the elect."¹⁸⁵ Amongst such groups that reach the final stages of political violence, there are only a few standard 'narratives' or 'scripts' available for orienting action. The most prevalent are the 'victory of the hero' and the 'vanquishing of the villain'.¹⁸⁶

In moments of crisis, extremist sects resort to simplistic justifications of violence that usually involve the affirmation and protection of an existing group.¹⁸⁷ Terrorism, according to Melucci, inexorably links to the expressive character of violence, constituting an instrument of *identitarian* expression. Therefore, he believes that "in complex societies, which tend to normalise every diversity, violence and minority action become recurrent (...)."¹⁸⁸ Violence is symptomatic of the 'consensus impulse' and the logic of representation, the urge to organise, rationalise and capture even deviance and criminality by representing them within a set of social relations. The desperate choice of violence signals to Melucci "the limit of the decomposition of a movement and the prevalence of its crisis element."¹⁸⁹ This occurs when a movement becomes incapable of articulating objectives or maintaining a complex process of collective identity.

¹⁸¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 270. Castellano and his comrades make a similar point when they write: "there is no good version of 'armed struggle' (...), itself incompatible with and antithetical to the new movements." Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 238.

¹⁸² Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 112-115.

¹⁸³ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 116.

¹⁸⁴ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 270.

¹⁸⁵ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 119.

¹⁸⁶ This is a point of agreement between Melucci, della Porta and others within the SMT framework.

¹⁸⁷ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 271.

¹⁸⁸ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 272.

¹⁸⁹ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 186.

In the Italian case, Melucci asserts, the typical outcome of moments of crisis within the movement sector was the adoption of a simplified scholastic Marxism. This reliance of the Left on the 'official culture' and the 'simplified truths' of Marxist organisation had two primary outcomes. Firstly, it provided a sense of certainty or understanding in ambiguous situations, which helped to activate participation during the nascence of movements and to re-assure participants in more advanced collectives during crisis.¹⁹⁰ Secondly, however, while in the Italian social movement context Marxism was the prevailing source of collective identity, Melucci notes that its vocabulary and imagery were 'exhausted', failing to keep pace with social transformation and advance the radical community's knowledge of their changing political and social condition. Buried beneath the ritual referents of the Left, which absorb the focus of sociological and political accounts, there was a deeper frame of meaning associated with the radical community. This is why the NSMs proved incomprehensible to the Marxist organisations and the workers' movement, resulting in their marginalisation.

Melucci observed the political elite and intellectual leadership of the movement sharing the mistakes of social science. That is, the illusion of a socio-political sphere that no longer existed, seduced them. Consequently, instead of radical thought producing knowledge, Melucci believes it nourished the fantasy of a 'cheap palingenesis', either through the 'power of the masses,' or more sinisterly, the 'bloodbath'.¹⁹¹ While the ritualised references to the 'working-class' and other Marxist constructs such as the proletariat worked initially to mobilise enthusiasm, in the end, these simplistic representations obscured other variables such as youth and sexuality,¹⁹² identitarian markers that expressed the maturation of the movements. Accordingly, a theoretical focus on the vocabularies of political violence and Marxist integralism conceals the complexity and development of the contemporary movements and marginal communities.

The movement of 1977, Melucci stresses, was the result of the grafting of "new youth demands (...) onto the problems produced by the economic crisis." The outcome was a social movement sector that combined uneasily "those searching for personal creativity and those fighting against the social marginality of the student condition."¹⁹³ Pressures such as unemployment and political repression amongst the youth cohort influenced their path of activism, diminishing resources and restricting opportunities for mobilisation, especially for the metropolitan youth. On the one hand, the blocked political system and conditions of a deformed modernisation, in conjuncture with the denial of self-realisation and intersubjective recognition, made conversion to the path of political violence and its community an attractive alternative to social movement participants who could not coherently imagine withdrawal or institutionalisation. More expansively, the wave of youth mobilisation in the late 1970s, Melucci writes:

divided between the political radicalism and the violence of the *Autonomia* groups, the marginalised expressiveness of the counter-culture, the power-seeking of political organisations, and a conflictual approach taking the form of a cultural challenge (...). This final component was not combined successfully with the others.

Therefore, on the other hand, the movements disappear "in a pure display of signs (the metropolitan tribes defined by their different dress styles), in the professional marketing of innovative cultural

¹⁹⁰ See for similar Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 122.

¹⁹¹ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 124.

¹⁹² Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 124.

¹⁹³ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 113-114.

resources and, more tragically, in the marginality of drug abuse and mental illness.”¹⁹⁴ This is to claim, as Tarrow and della Porta do, that during this period “[t]he culture of protest, which so recently appeared to be both general and transformative, *retreats into art forms, fashion and religion.*”¹⁹⁵ This assertion, however, disregards the ongoing influence of this area and its relevance as a radical community beyond obvious moments of spectacle. Both the SMT and the NSMT frameworks consider, for different reasons, the ‘countercultural’ or ‘creative’ sector as “the path of the ‘personal’, as a purely individual search for meaning or solace,” compared unfavourably by Melucci to drug addiction, and religious sects.¹⁹⁶ Either way, the new wave of RSMs that emerged in the 1970s apparently ‘vanish’, even from the sphere of difference, in Melucci’s explication of Italian radical politics.

Melucci writes:

What holds individuals together as a ‘we’ can never be completely translated into the logic of means-ends calculation, or political rationality, but carries with it margins of non-negotiability in the reasons for and ways of acting together.”¹⁹⁷

Consequently, if the outcome of political engagement is repressive tolerance or manipulated consensus as the only alternative to the ‘criminalisation of dissent’, the result is social movement disintegration. At this point, “terrorism, or the glorification of an illusory, totally privatised ‘creativity’, as in countercultural expression, are the choices that follow (...).”¹⁹⁸ Significantly, both terrorism and ‘countercultural expression’ fall outside of what Melucci judges to be a social movement.

4. The politics of new (radical) social movements

Melucci conceptualises contemporary movements as ‘prophets’, signs of a shift in the logic of complex societies from the instrumentalist logic of the system to the symbolic logic of the everyday – communications and interactions that make sense of the world rather than strategise the pursuit of impersonal goals.¹⁹⁹ New social conflict involves contesting established thought and interrupting conventional systems of meaning, reworking the formal elements of the environment to provide a refreshed perception of society, action, identity, time, and space. By their very existence movements offer an alternative, and ask questions that are not ‘allowed’, such as, who are we, and why are we? However, Melucci argues, the best-established sociological theory of social movements (RMT) is unable to deconstruct the general framework of politics, observing the demands of social movements as rational when they seek integration through political inclusion.²⁰⁰ Alternatively, Melucci claims that collective action has shifted from a predominant ‘political’ form to a cultural base, proving irreducible to ‘politics as such.’²⁰¹

Social movements, Melucci maintains, are:

¹⁹⁴ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 67.

¹⁹⁵ della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 613 (emphasis mine).

¹⁹⁶ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 118.

¹⁹⁷ Melucci, "Frontier Land." p 244

¹⁹⁸ See Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 133.

¹⁹⁹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 1-2.

²⁰⁰ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism."

²⁰¹ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 276. More accurately, social movements in the thinking of Melucci make us aware of the limits of institutional politics.

Pre-political because they are rooted in everyday life experiences; and *meta-political* because political forces can never represent them completely. Paradoxically, unless collective action is represented it becomes fragmented and dispersed; at the same time, because it is never fully capable of representation it reappears later on new ground, with *changed objectives and altered strategies*.²⁰²

Therefore, Melucci stresses, in a liberal system of politics inadequate to the representation of contemporary forms of conflict the challenge is to discover “how it is possible to develop democratic public spaces of representation that enable collective action to manifest itself and to be heard without losing its specific character of autonomy?”²⁰³ Autonomous collectives, through their actions, aspire to open a space within public dialogue for the presentation of difference. The conundrum is that, as Pinto notes, the essence of collective movements “is often lost in political translation, while at the same time their key goals cannot be fulfilled at a local or grass roots level.” The risk this presents to contemporary society is that “without a coherent political vision collective movements which deny or criticize society run the risk of anomie, marginality, violence or even terrorism.”²⁰⁴ All of these elements were manifest in the Italian situation where the political system and state apparatuses proved incapable of responding to the new social movements, and the intellectuals and leaders of the Left labelled them incomprehensible.

The inability of the state apparatus to deal “with the new demands [or] opening [of] new channels for the expression of new conflicts” contributed to the materialising of the movement of autonomy, which contained a collective actor fighting to seize control of the ‘conditions of existence’, defending identity, daily life and social relations against institutional manipulation.²⁰⁵ Consequently, the problems of the individual and the private have become collective problems, and conversely, collective and social problems have descended to the level of the individual, becoming private through socialisation. Borrowing an observation from a life history referenced by della Porta, collective action in the movement of autonomy involves the:

(...) intertwining of ‘personal’ problems and external conditions which, determines the way in which these problems are expressed. For example Grazia felt that ‘collective rebellion against authority’ gave expression to her individual problems, to her conflict with family...church, hierarchy, authority. (...) Raised in a period of rapid social and cultural change, such as the 1960s, [this generation] come to understand personal problems as a ‘collective situation’ (...).²⁰⁶

In contemporary societies where the public and political have become entangled with the ‘private’, where the status of the ‘problems of daily life’ elevate to the level of ‘politics’ and the system intrudes upon the personal, private areas have become “the place where resistance begins and conflicts emerge.”²⁰⁷ An outcome of this situation is that even collectives that do not focus on the political system or state experience the frustrations and repression of a dualistic process of modernisation, which protects traditional interests preserved within the political system of representation. Under these

²⁰² Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 72 (emphasis mine).

²⁰³ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 73 (emphasis mine). Pinto notes that the problem of how to best *translate* social action into political action, without compromising the particularity of the agent, held the attention of Melucci and other Italian sociologists of the period. Pinto, "Introduction," 25-29.

²⁰⁴ Pinto, "Introduction," 25.

²⁰⁵ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 185-186.

²⁰⁶ della Porta, "Life-History," 175.

²⁰⁷ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 180-181.

conditions, all movements will eventually experience “confrontation with the state,” unable to attain self-determination or autonomy.²⁰⁸ It is this aspect of contemporary politics that provides a unique insight into the RSMs of Italy and restores a level of complexity to social movements removed by the rationalist and socio-political frameworks of SMT. One outcome is that NSMT reinstates the women’s and youth movements as constituents of the radical community, crucial subjects of the politics of RSMs that are not a party to social aggregation.

The women’s movement in Italy presented an alternative image of society that understood the relations between men and women differently and revealed how the demands of radical communities extend beyond the legislature of political mediation. This is vital to understanding how NSMs, while needing to be interpreted and mediated by the political system to avoid decomposition, remain irreducible to mediation.

Divorce and abortion struggles become *efficient* only when transformed into institutional movements on behalf of divorce and abortion legislation. The mobilization linked to these themes went well beyond the legal results and touched upon man-woman relations, issues linked to the body, the role of medicine, life and death and the right to choose one’s identity. The movement carrying these collective demands *reconstructs itself well beyond mobilization* on behalf of divorce or abortion.²⁰⁹

Such expressions of an alternative social discourse, “rooted in the fabric of daily life and in individual existence,” have a profound effect. Ultimately, they “relaunch the dynamic of society (...) and are collectively effective only if they manage to act on the political system,” opening up alternative spaces instead of providing new forms of incorporation.²¹⁰ While these collectives can create institutional change, this never exhausts their ‘conflictual charge’. Therefore, the struggle to keep society open requires ‘new forms of political representation’ that recognises the duality of politics and social action, rather than collapsing the latter into the former.²¹¹

The NSMT approach of Melucci broadens thinking on the radical subject, including collectives considered marginal and parasitic to politics in competing paradigms. However, his foreshortening of the Movement of ‘77 and his distaste for *everything* Marx compromises his modelling of the politics of RSMs.²¹² Melucci, firstly, summarily dismisses Marxist movements through a simplistic association with the perceived failures of Marxist sociology, the Leninist penchant for organisation and professional vanguard, and the integralism of certain collective actors of the New Left. Despite Marxism facing the crisis of a paradigm shift during the 1960s and 1970s, manifest in the rejuvenation of Italian Marxist theory and practice, Melucci asserts a doctrinaire model of ‘vulgar Marxism’ regenerated amongst the student movement of ‘68. This situation purportedly eventuated through the students’ contact and reference to marginal and small intellectual groups, that is, the workerist circles surviving the struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Consequently, Melucci alleges that a scholastic Marxist vocabulary was predominant and that the New Left sector emerging from this environment exclusively utilised a Leninist party model of organisation.²¹³ Secondly, Melucci disregards the ‘purely expressive’ counterculture collectives through a spurious observation of crisis behaviour. The claim Melucci makes

²⁰⁸ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 115.

²⁰⁹ Melucci, "Ten Hypotheses," 190-191 (emphasis mine).

²¹⁰ See Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 134.

²¹¹ See Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 135.

²¹² I question the veracity of this account in chapter 4.

²¹³ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 116-119.

is that the countercultural sector was the product of a panic or fashion and aggregated around generalised beliefs and affective identification. Accordingly, he contends they lack solidarity, collective awareness, and knowledge of the system of relations within which they exist.

Melucci's exclusive account of the Italian RSMs 1968-78 is borne of the failure to heed his own cautionary advice. Firstly, he ignores the composite reality of the movement. He neglects to ask 'who spoke', 'who acted', and 'who constituted the collective'. Crucially, he does not investigate the relationship of these aspects, overlooking how they combine to form the collective actor. Second, he neglects to deconstruct the discursive dimension of the New Left movements, which consists of knowledge, ideology, and integralism. Integralism and ideology perform a strategic function in collective action, organising the plurality of interests within the movement, rationalising and representing the actions of the social actor. If we limit our representation of social movements to leadership frames, exemplars, myths and similar, we restrict collective action to its strategic level, which does not reflect the features and mechanisms involved in community formation. This repeats the mistakes of SMT, and the political accounts of the state.

Melucci contends that during formation a collective actor "*always* speaks the language of the struggles that have preceded it." That is, the discourse of emergent radical communities recycle and 're-assemble meaning' from an existing cultural store. This makes them reliant on exemplarity rather than imagination.²¹⁴ This encourages him, at certain times, to mimic the voices of *persuasive framing*, exhibited in his handling of the student movement in the second half of the 1960s, which he classifies as Marxist hacks. It is also patent in his neglect of the particularity of the autonomous workers' movement emerging in the early 1960s.²¹⁵ Finally, it encourages his dismissal of the 'politics' of the counter-culture as an illusory creativity.²¹⁶ Most bewilderingly, Melucci's disdain for all things Lenin prompts him to neglect, firstly, the theory and practice of autonomy by the early workers' movement, secondly, the general assembly and the collective as 'organisational forms' in the movement sector, and thirdly, the non-homogeneity of the student movement and its variegated interaction with workerism. Autonomy is a central theme of NSMT, yet Melucci's expansive oeuvre rarely, if ever, engages with it at a grass roots level. I attempt to redress this situation by looking at the conjuncture of the subjective and objective modes of radicalism in chapter 4.

Melucci believes that in the history of social action the marginalising of certain collectives occurred "not so much because they resist the established order but because they escape it."²¹⁷ This is conceivably the plight of the so-called incomprehensible subjects of the Italian situation. Ironically, he repeats this delegitimising of sectors of the Movement of '77 when he diminishes the political nature of their creativity. Melucci's foreshortening of the youth and counter-cultural movements, along with his aversion to Marx, impairs his modelling of the politics of RSMs. The political system *and* the sociology of social movements ghettoize the radical subjects that are marginal to their respective efforts to translate

²¹⁴ Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism," 121.

²¹⁵ This is a point explored in the following chapter, where I consider the political character of the early workers' movement and its non-identitarian form.

²¹⁶ A prominent theme among the Italian counter culture collectives that I believe should interest NSMT is their challenge to the 'dictatorship of meaning' and the 'Political'. Marco Grispigni, *Il Settantasette: Un Manuale Per Capire, Un Saggio Per Riflettere* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 1997), 73; Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 182. The Dadaism of the 'A/traverso collectives' explicitly a connected knowledge and politics and was self-aware of its separation from traditional forms of Marxist organisation. In its journal it stated: "Dada was not inside the proletarian movement, and the proletarian movement was not inside Dada." Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 604. This quotation comes from the February 1977 volume of *A/traverso*.

²¹⁷ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 239.

social action into political action, attempting to reincorporate the radical community within modern politics.

The self-production of contemporary social movements interrupts the previous history of social action, breaking with established thought on the nexus of politics and the radical community. Therefore, contemplating the radicalisation of social movements in Italy requires more than its evaluation in terms of political rationality and organisation. Essentially, it involves questions of the hegemony of social knowledge and the logic of social aggregation. Accordingly, I contend, explicating the politics of RSMs requires the recovery of radical thought, trusting in the actions and discourses of the radical community.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ This summation brings into play the thought of Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 32. As I will show in chapter 4, it is also attentive to the historiographical stream of IRT.

Chapter four

Italian Radical Thought: The theory and practice of radical politics in the 1960s and 1970s

No, it's not the masses, and this is an important point. We don't claim that it is possible to talk about the movement as an *indistinct phenomenon*. (...) When we put ourselves in contact with a mass movement, in reality we are opening a relationship with organisms which are already politically mature. *So this completely changes the vision which makes the political elite an active subject and the mass movement a passive subject: the political elite, a kind of stratum endowed with knowledge and, instead, the mass movement, a stratum endowed only with wishes, with desires, with tensions and so on.* In reality, the relationship is a dialectical one: the mass movement which is already endowed with knowledge, (...) capable of producing systems of struggle (...) and which can offer us...the beginning of this exchange between intelligentsia and militants.¹

Sergio Bologna – “For an Analysis of Autonomia”

In his Introduction to the important collection of post-workerist thought, *Radical Thought in Italy: a Potential Politics*, Michael Hardt claims that the theorising of the Italian radical intellectuals “has ridden the wave of the movements (...) and emerged as part of a collective practice, (...) *interpreting* one day’s political struggles and *planning* for the next.”² Here I explore two important aspects of this observation. Firstly, Hardt is asserting that radical theory entwines with radical practice, supporting and contributing to the material organisation of the radical subject by answering questions raised by the actions of the antagonistic community. That is, theorists form a layer of the movement and provide reasons and explanations that shore up the foundations and *politicise* RSMs. They lend coherence to the movement by exploring new ideas, strategies and decisions, and forms of organisation. Therefore, in conjunction with the discursive dimension of radical practice, the works of IRT are a factor in the fruition of the radical community and offer an alternative perspective on the nexus of the radical subject and politics.

Secondly, while the movement and the intellectual reach common political shores, Hardt’s analogy places the intellectual atop the surging tide of radical practice. While the actions of the antagonistic community engage the theorists, who seemingly await the wave of disorder created by RSMs, activities such as interpreting (translating) and planning (strategising) risk expropriating the movement of its knowledge of struggle. Ostensibly, in the interest of advancing a common political programme, radical thought organises and channels the subjectivity of the movement, selecting amongst the tide of social movements the most energetic. Such political intervention, however, created divisions within the Italian Left, firstly amongst competing intellectual circles, and second between the radical community and the political elite (‘experts’). Contra to the imploring of theorists such as Bologna,³ periodically, the theoreticians of IRT re-asserted their authority in the organisation of dissent. Most conspicuously, this

¹ Cuninghame and Bologna, “For an Analysis”. (emphasis mine).

² Hardt, “Introduction: Laboratory Italy,” 1.

³ Bologna himself shared in the mistakes of the interventionists. I discuss this below.

saw workerist intellectuals such as Tronti go on to theorise the autonomy of the political, asserting that at times the movement needed to concede autonomy to the PCI.⁴

Consequently, if we accept radical theory is a factor in the realisation of the radical community, then equally, we must be mindful of what is at stake in radical thought. Theoretical representations, political organisation, and leadership frames interweave elements of explanation and prescription, analysing the subjectivity and self-determination of the movement while advancing abstract political goals.⁵ On reflection, this is problematic for SMT and NSMT, for at certain junctures in their respective models of the radicalisation of social movements, both approaches conflate the knowledge of the movement with that of the experts and confuse self-organisation (from below) with political organisation (from above). This fuses the self-awareness or subjectivity of the movement with the representations of generic leadership frames. One of the features specific to the Italian situation is that this tendency has welded the self-awareness of the movement to caricatures of historical Marxism and a neo-Leninist vanguard.⁶ My concern is that this occludes the discursive dimension of the grass-roots radical community. It also grants the 'strategic reason' and the political rationalism of certain intellectual circles a monopoly over the comprehension of the movement.⁷

To untangle the knotty situation of Italian radicalism 1968-78, this chapter analyses the subjective and objective modes of radicalism. I distinguish between the acts of *immediacy* of the radical subject and their verification in theory. The former encompass practices that achieve real life outcomes by *directly* dealing with the impediments present in the environment, which has an effect on the quality of life. These practices, not to be confused with spontaneity,⁸ are organised, strategic, and political; however, they do not postpone choices regarding collective action to the 'time of theory' or promote the authority of strategic reason.⁹ The correlate effect of the observation of these practices in the discourse on politics, the objective mode of radicalism, is an undermining of existing schemas of thought and rejuvenation of radical theory. Firstly, this approach takes seriously the claim of IRT to provide a mode of analysis of the dynamics of social movement radicalisation. Second, it looks to excavate the so-called 'incomprehensible' radical subjects, buried beneath the conditions and processes of modern politics. To this end, I construct a path through the movement sector signposted by, but not limited to, the works and political trajectories of prominent intellectual figures Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, Sergio Bologna, and Franco Berardi.¹⁰ Of this quartet, I pay special attention to Bologna, a dissenting voice amongst the

⁴ Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection," 87.

⁵ This is to recall my previous mention of Toscano's cautionary remark in Toscano, *Fanaticism*, 17.

⁶ Not to mention the *pentiti* parroting of these elements and the vocabulary of the State and judiciary.

⁷ As mentioned in the introduction, my thinking here is stimulated by Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 102.

⁸ I clarify this distinction below.

⁹ I discuss the idea of postponing the political moment to the time of theory in Chapter 5. See Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, xvi.

¹⁰ Tronti was a seminal theorist of *operaismo* (workerism), providing many of its classic texts such as "Lenin in England," "Marx Yesterday and Today," and "The Strategy of Refusal," with his early works providing an insight into the radical nature of the renewal of Marxism in Italian workerism. Ultimately, Tronti would leave behind the intellectual circles of workerism to concentrate on his role within the PCI. Negri, whose radical thought is discernible in chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis, primarily in the warrants of April 7 and the recourse to his 'stylistic excess' as indicative of the sentiment of the radical left, was a leader of PO and a central figure in OWA. He is representative of the so called 'interventionist intellectuals', and is the figure popularly associated with autonomist theory in the English-speaking world. Berardi, the youngest of this group, was not active in the early years of the movement. He was, however, a member of PO until 1971 before becoming arguably the most important intellectual figure of the counter culture movements of the second half of the seventies. He was directly involved in the creation of Radio Alice and the journal *A/Traverso*.

Italian workerists, whose historiographical method marks him out from the prevailing theoretical style of Marxist scientism.¹¹

The arc of this quartet through the movement affords us a refreshed perception of the dynamics of the radical community. Bologna's particular schematising of the Italian social movements 1968-78 forms around the three 'generations' that constituted the radical social movement sector of this era, a subdivision seldom encountered in SMT or NSMT accounts. The first generation involved the autonomous self-organisation of workers' struggles from the 1950s to the mid 1960s. During this period, the unpredictable practices of the industrial worker stimulated a rethinking of Marxist theory. It also prompted a change in methodology among intellectual circles such as those centred on *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks), involving Tronti, Negri, and Bologna. The second generation (1968-73), sharing the subject of the industrial worker with its predecessor, became the movement of '68, coalescing around the organisations of the New Left and the identity of the mass worker.¹² Here, the theorists of the first generation took on the role of an intellectual vanguard while introducing new figures such as Berardi into their midst via the 'proletarianisation' of the student movement. Finally, the third generation reached beyond the factory and had a new social basis, which from 1975-77 was primarily constituted of an urban youth movement that breached the political culture of '68. This new generation robustly rejected the intellectual leadership and programmes of the New Left, separating from groups such as LC. The Movement of 1977 shunned the 68ers as 'zombies', and rejected the political elite of this previous generation of militants.¹³

The Italian situation witnessed multiple generations of RSMs, which Hardt claims, in their own right were "experiments in democratic political organisation and radical political theory."¹⁴ The point to take from this is that the Italian RSMs 1968-78 consists of a succession of radical communities and they cannot be understood as if they were a progressive radicalisation of a single 'family' of social movements. In the following discussion, I present an outline of the movement sector that puts into question the approach of western sociological thought to the radicalisation of social movements. Principally, this involves reconsidering the various efforts to repatriate RSMs to the traditional terrain of politics, and re-assessing their treatment as a partial political phenomenon. This discussion aims to make it clear that the theoretical problem of SMT (and NSMT) is comparable to the practical problem of IRT, namely, how to *politicise* the radical community without effacing its particularity and difference. Complicating this task is an apparent contradiction. How can substantialist and identitarian logic

¹¹ Bologna questioned the theoretical shift away from the challenge of the mass worker in the 1970s and criticised the political judgements of OWA's most important theorist, Antonio Negri. Bologna's work crosses disciplinary boundaries (Marxism, historiography, and sociology) and political memberships. He participated along with other workerists in the Italian 'counter-sociology' that flourished in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s, contributing to 'non-professional journals' such as *Quaderni Piacentini*. His writing in the area of workers' historiography is definitive, setting the standard for subsequent studies in Italy. This is evident in the journal *Primo Maggio*, of which he was the editor from 1973-80. For a useful reflection on the history of *Primo Maggio* see the concluding sections of: Sergio Bologna, "Primo Maggio: Oltre il Movimento," *Primo Maggio* 13, no. Autumn (1979). The historiographical endeavour of *Primo Maggio* centres on the presentation of the worker and class struggle as the crucial aspects of contemporary political antagonism. This narrowing of focus influences the account of the politics of the Italian RSMs offered by Bologna. I discuss the theoretical consequences below.

¹² The focus of this chapter is the first and third generation, which I argue share characteristics fundamental to the regeneration of the radical community. I discuss certain aspects of the second generation in chapter 5.

¹³ This overview comes from an interview with Sergio Bologna conducted by Cuninghame in 1995. Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". Another concise and accessible introduction to the Italian radical movement sector is Bologna, "Tribe of Moles."

¹⁴ Hardt, "Introduction: Laboratory Italy," 2. The modelling of the Italian situation as progressive phases of radical politics is common to IRT.

recuperate a phenomenon that interrupts all such classificatory systems? According to Bologna, we risk misrepresenting and rendering movements passive when we reduce them to the objects of analysis and organisation. On his account, this seems to be the outcome when we conflate the movement with the political elite and reduce their knowledge to the material of abstract thought, obscuring the dialectical relationship between the movement and the political elite and intellectual leadership.¹⁵

Specific to the Italian case is a fundamental antinomy that, according to Bologna, exists between *political organisation* and the theme of *autonomy*.¹⁶ This is borne out in political struggles where the attempt to rationalise and organise the radical subject from above, distilling their essence in a theoretical culture of antagonism, is countered by 'redefinition from below', the exhibition of difference. This is to recall the conundrum of contemporary politics, outlined by Melucci, where the dominant logic of the system only understands identification through incorporation or "difference as exclusion from all communication."¹⁷ An interest in the effect of the political search for the radical subject on radical practice and accounts of the nexus of politics and the radical community runs through what follows.

Starting with the early risers of the workers' movement in the late 1950s (the initiators of the ensuing political struggle of the 1960s), this chapter contends the antagonistic community of Italy emerges from the expression of difference. This community, born of interruption, contradicts what community has become through its particularised and self-aware practices.¹⁸ After looking at the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement, I turn my attention to the third generation ('post-workerist'), which SMT and NMST afford a theoretical terminus in violence or 'purely expressive' counter-culture. This radical community, which formed in the mid 1970s and crystallised in the Movement of 1977, as Virno remarks, proved "incomprehensible for the traditional elements of the workers' movement."¹⁹ The 77ers, Bologna argues, understood the relation of life and politics differently, and exposed the crisis in Italian representative and party politics of this period, with no existing or theorised form able to capture its complexity. He emphasises that the difference and originality of this generation, during its ascent and subsequent to its decline, left a 'void' in the project of radical politics.²⁰ A correlate lacuna exists in the SMT effort to repatriate the radical subject to modern politics.

By looking into breaches that open up within the Italian RSMs of the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter explores the conjunction of the subjective and objective modes of radicalism. In addition, the theoretical and practical discontinuities generated by the actions of the antagonistic community, responding directly to their social, political, and cultural conditions, provide an insight into the nature of the incomprehensible subject. Moreover, this insight poses a specific challenge to the SMT account of the politics of RSMs, since it disputes that the influence of the radical community discharges within the

¹⁵ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". For further discussion of Bologna's position on the negative impact the political elite had on the movement, see Sergio Bologna, "Amo il Rosso e il Nero, Odio il Rosa e il Viola," in *La Tribu delle Talpe*, ed. Sergio Bologna (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978); Sergio Bologna, "Editoriale," *Primo Maggio* 12, no. Winter (1978).

¹⁶ Bologna, "Il Dibattito." Cited in Wright, "Mapping Pathways."

¹⁷ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism," 520. Ironically, however, Melucci appears to overlook the latter point when he dismisses certain sectors of the Italian social movement sector for being 'purely expressive.'

¹⁸ My idea of the radical community here draws on the notion of the aesthetic *sensus communis*, as contrasted with the passive *sensus communis*, the 'given community'. See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, esp. 102-103; 107-108.

¹⁹ Virno, "Counter Revolution," 244.

²⁰ Sergio Bologna, "Composizione di Classe e Sistema Politico," in *Crisi delle Politiche e Politiche nella Crisi*, ed. Lauricella (Naples: Libreria L'Ateneodi G. Pronti, 1980), 28-29. Wright builds upon this discussion in Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?." See also Red Notes, 'Living with an Earthquake'.

dynamics of social aggregation. The ensuing discussion of the Italian social movements 1968-78 starts from the idea that the 'outliers' of the Italian RSMs, the autonomous struggles of the workers' movement of the late 1950s and the youth movements of the 1970s, make an essential contribution to the materialising of new radical subjects.

1. The first generation: The practice and theory of self-organisation

The summary dismissal of Marxist social theory as a credible mode of analysis of the politics of RSMs creates blind spots in SMT and NSMT accounts of the Italian situation. Their caricature of Marxism, which firstly invokes a monolithic image of historical Marxism and then promotes neo-Leninism as representative of Marxist renewal in Italy, prejudices their selection of materials and subjects.²¹ In addition, it obscures the complex conjunction of the subjective and objective modes of radicalism, an exchange involving the movement and the intellectual that affords insight into the rejuvenation of the radical community in the early 1960s and again in the mid 1970s. Consequently, the prevailing models of the politics of RSMs surveyed for this thesis consign the outliers of the Italian situation to the margins of social action and social movement theory. Alternatively, by deploying the hypothesis that the antagonistic community of Italy is born of an interruption, which contests in and through its practices what a given community has become, I contend that these marginalised movements are fundamental to radical politics. This is to take seriously Bologna's attribution of a 'profound nature' to these movements. He asserts, for instance, that the early workers' movement had a "capacity to set in motion organisational systems, [and] systems of struggle." Furthermore, their actions initiate an exchange between radical practice and radical theory.²² That is, the redundancies and gaps created in established thought by the innovative practices of the worker engage the intellectual in a process of theoretical renewal, and draw them in to the social conflict. Such an exchange, between the movement and the intellectual, repeats across the three generations of the Italian RSMs.²³

The regeneration of the radical community after the mid 1950s interrupted the history of the Italian Left, most notably recorded in the Marxist orthodoxy of the PCI, and initiated a rethinking of the politics of RSMs. This rethinking, exemplified by the early work of Tronti and the journal *Quaderni Rossi*, was a theoretical expression of the aggressive workers' movement, which located the subjectivity of the

²¹ I previously discussed the SMT criticism of Marxist social theory; refer to chapter 2, especially pp 62-63. For NSMT's criticism refer to chapter 3, p 99, and pp 115-116. The SMT criticism centres on the structural determinism of Marxism and the 'outlandish homogeneity' of its concept of the working class, which are deemed inadequate to model the social stratification associated with contemporary social struggles. Melucci shares the latter criticism with SMT, while adding that the key failing of Marxism is the invocation of the Party or intellectual to activate class struggle, imposing an organisational form and ideology on the movement. The renewal of Italian Marxism in forms such as AM shared similar criticisms of historical or classical Marxism. A useful outline of the characteristics of Marxist social theory post 1968, including discussion of its constructivist features, is available in J Söderberg and Netzén, "When All That Is Theory Melts into (Hot) Air," *Ephemera* 10, no. 2 (2010).

²² Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". Notably, the effort to theorise the 'profound' capacity of the workers' struggles lead to the creation of the journal *Quaderni Rossi*.

²³ I do not look at the detail of this exchange with regard the second generation here. I return to this topic in chapter 5. Here I simply note Bologna, who stated, "I remember our embarrassment in interpreting the underlying social mechanism, (...) when we were incapable of assessing the nature of the student movement." Sergio Bologna, "Per Una 'Società degli Storici Militanti'," in *Dieci Interventi sulla Storia Sociale*, ed. Sergio Bologna (Turin: Rosenberg and Sellier, 1981), 14. Cited in Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 90. Wright adds that ultimately, the students' fascination with the industrial working class overcame this 'isolation'. The result, according to Berardi, would be the interpretation of the student movement by PO as an outcome of the proletarianisation of the student organisations. Franco Berardi, *La Nefasta Utopia di Potere Operaio* (Rome: Castelvechi, 1998), 97.

worker at the centre of politics.²⁴ A crucial insight in Tronti's theorising is that contemporary working class struggle attempts to "cease to be a worker," and in this sense it was initially non-identitarian, a revolt against the status of *being worker*.²⁵ In the following section, I examine the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement, the associated renewal of Italian Marxism, and a subsequent intellectual intervention (voluntarism) connected to the political composition of the mass worker from the mid 1960s onward. It is the latter, the transition to an organisational perspective, that stimulates the analytic projects of SMT and NSMT and ultimately becomes the focus of accounts of the radicalisation of social movements.

The worker and workerism

The radical subject of the modernised factory, born of the aggressive workers' struggles in the Northern industrial cities, was opposed to the progressive culture of the official left. This subject, designated by Sergio Bologna as the first generation of contemporary Italian social movements, was involved in "the destruction (not the affirmation) of the worker *qua* worker."²⁶ Wright, discussing Alquati's analysis of the autonomous workers' strikes at Fiat in 1963, writes: "the most important property of these wildcats lay in their refusal to play by the *established rules (...), they were unpredictable, they excluded the union from the direction of struggle,*" and in a final statement whose significance will become clear as the chapter progresses, "*they demanded nothing.*"²⁷ Nothing, that is, in terms recognisable to the capitalist system of exchange (for example, wage demands), but something that goes beyond the logic of the system. They were rejecting negotiation with the company and refusing official forms of representation, and, instead, utilised direct means (such as stopping work) to overcome obstacles in their environment that diminished their quality of life.²⁸ This radical subject was transitioning from the valorisation of labour (the mark of the artisan or professional worker) to the refusal of work, and self-valorisation. This was a withdrawal from the values and needs imposed by capitalism, consumer seduction, and work ideologies, replaced with the values and desires generated by the direct experiences of the working class.²⁹ Subsequently, it was from the conjuncture of radical practice and a theory of antagonistic

²⁴ An excellent and detailed account of this period is available in Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, esp. 15-143. For an account of the history and importance of *Quaderni Rossi* see pages 32-43.

²⁵ Mario Tronti, "The Struggle against Labour," *Radical America* 6, no. 1 (1972): 22-25. Cited in Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, 56; 58. For a definitive image of the worker at the centre of Tronti's work see Tronti, "The Strategy of Refusal." The underlying theme of the refusal of work, and associated practices, run through the Italian RSMs 1968-78 and is realised most radically in the movement of the second half of the '70s. In the revolts of 1973, Katsiaficas notes, the self-organisation of some radical groups became, in the words of those involved, "a rage against work." George N Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonisation of Everyday Life*, Revolutionary Studies (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1997), 43.

²⁶ Virno and Hardt, *Radical Thought*, 7, 263.

²⁷ Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 76. Wright here refers to R Alquati, *Sulla Fiat e Altri Scritti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), (emphasis mine).

²⁸ The idea that some social movements pursue goals while 'demanding nothing' has proven useful to accounts of contemporary movements, for example, those movements responding to the recent global financial crisis. See for example Marina Sitrin, "Goals without Demands: The New Movements for Real Democracy," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 2 (2014).

²⁹ The glossary entry for self-valorisation in *Books for Burning* states: "Self-valorisation is the autonomous generation of needs, demands and values from within working-class experience and composition to supplant the alien and coercive needs and values imposed upon workers by capitalist command (...)." Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, ed. Timothy Murphy, S (London: Verso, 2005), xxxiv.

Marxism – first generalised as *operaismo* (workerism) and then AM – that a new radical social movement mobilised, culminating in the movement of '68 and the New Left extra-parliamentary organisations.³⁰

The Marxist theoretical renewal associated with workerism rediscovered Marx's *Workers Inquiry* to, as Cuninghame notes, "generate theories from the raw material of everyday grassroots struggle."³¹ This, Bologna states, was an attempt to open a relationship with a 'politically mature movement' already 'endowed with knowledge' and the capacity for self-organisation.³² The rejuvenation of radical thought, associated with the effort to theorise the *class composition* "present in the upsurge in autonomous working class militancy (...) from the mid 1950s onwards," primarily occurred through a re-reading of Marx by "dissident PCI and PSI intellectuals." This included Tronti, Bologna, and Negri. Bologna recounts that while maintaining the centrality of the worker, this group "was otherwise critical of orthodox Marxism's *victimist* vision of the working class and the ineffectual *reformism* of the Historical Left."³³

The preferred methodology of this intellectual circle was conducting co-research, a form of sociological enquiry that necessitated their shift into the movement. By participating in Italy's 'counter-sociology' and radical social science, the hope was to generate social knowledge attentive to the experiences of the worker. This theoretical and methodological response to the workers' altered subjectivity under the changed conditions of the modernised factory, the economic miracle, and migration of Southerners to the North, crystallised around the intellectual circle associated with the journal *Quaderni Rossi* (and later *Classe Operaia*). Workerism, according to Wright, was an attempt to "rethink political practice" and confront new problems arising from the 'historical specificity' of the Italian situation.³⁴ This undertaking, judged beyond the traditional left and its official organisations, contained the germ of the New Left of the late 1960s.

While contiguous with the Marxist tradition, AM is a historically definitive field of radical thought evolving from a change in the mode of theorising. Initially, the workerist project was an effort to represent the self-activity and the experiences and perceptions of the workers, to write in their language and not that of the intellectual or party militants.³⁵ That is, the focus was on recovering the knowledge of the worker, 'daily expropriated by capital'.³⁶ With apparent regard for the practice and discursive dimension of workers' self-organisation, the workerist intellectuals 'relocated into the factory' rather than, as Hardt remarks, drawing 'class struggle into philosophy'.³⁷ Social theory was to be a pragmatic

³⁰ Gathering up IRT under the label Autonomist Marxism is imprecise, as is any simple translation of *operaismo* as workerism. However, if we remain attentive to the plurality of positions within this intellectual 'tradition', and remember AM is not equivalent to workerism, the application of this terminology is adequate. AM, according to Wright, can be traced, not always directly or without controversy, to a foundation in *operaismo* (workerism), but developed independent theses while maintaining central premises. Wright provides an excellent introduction to the development of AM in Wright, "Mapping Pathways." Cleaver also provides a useful outline of the relation of Italian Autonomist thought to its Marxist heritage. Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, 51-65.

³¹ Cuninghame, "Autonomia in the 1970s," 3.

³² Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". (emphasis mine).

³³ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". The renewal of Marxist thought associated with the project of *operaismo* undermines the assertion of Melucci (and generally SMT and NSMT) that the radical theory of the 'entire Left' failed to scrutinise its theoretical origins. I previously discussed the assertion of Melucci in chapter 3, p 118.

³⁴ Steve Wright, "Back to the Future: Italian Workerists Reflect Upon the Operaista Project," *Ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007): 271.

³⁵ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". See also Bologna, "Intervista a Sergio Bologna"

³⁶ Bologna, "An Overview," esp. 122. I discuss this differentiation below.

³⁷ Michael Hardt, "Into the Factory: Negri's Lenin and the Subjective Caesura (1968-73)," in *Resistance in Practice: The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, ed. Timothy Murphy, S and Abdul-Karim Mustapha (London: Pluto Press, 2005),

activity of the workers, an antagonistic science, and as Cuninghame explains, was to move beyond a theoretical conflict between Marxists, neoliberals, and post-modernists occurring in universities, or as part of the State's production of social policy.³⁸

The practices of the first generation, freed of the constraints of the Party and the project of the 'historic worker', focused on needs and desires, as Toscano comments, independent to economic rationale "and nationalist and productivist agenda."³⁹ Liberated from the system of industrial relations promoted by the union and PCI, the actions of the new workers' movement involved wildcat strikes, go slows, line sabotage, and absenteeism. Typically, practices were localised and peculiar to the distinct experiences of the work place. The self-activity of factory collectives was 'unpredictable' if viewed through the lens of existing schemas of political thought, and was independent to any readily discernible programme of political demands;⁴⁰ however, the immediacy, urgency, and exuberance of the movement are irreducible to 'workers spontaneity' in any pejorative sense. As Cleaver argues, being 'unplanned' is not the same as being disorganised, and fundamental to the workers' autonomous practices was the ability to co-operate and self-organise. Any sense of these activities being chaotic comes from organisational or ideological perspectives that understand organisation solely as a strategic and 'top down' enterprise.⁴¹ These 'spontaneous movements', Bologna asserts, are in fact 'micro-systems of struggle', organised from below. While their actions are difficult to translate through a conventional political vocabulary, this generation, according to Bologna, is already politically mature and self-aware.⁴²

The radical community of this era was marginal to the labour movement and fought against the status of being worker;⁴³ however, the deconstruction of the social identity of the worker did not involve an alternative identitarian expression or claim for political recognition. By the mid 1960s, Tronti writes, "the workers have already gone beyond the old Organisations, but have not yet reached a new organisation (...). We have reached a period of *in-between* in working class history: (...) its political consequences will be decisive."⁴⁴ This observation, recorded in the first issue of *Classe Operaia*, marks a distinct shift in the approach of IRT, moving 'beyond' the original intent of workerism. Tronti declares that the vacuum of political organisation created by the new era of workers' struggles "demands a greater theoretical effort (and one more capable of making *abstractions*)." The absence of the traditional institutional channels through which class-consciousness usually expresses itself, poses the challenge, he believes, of how to grasp the materialising of the new revolutionary consciousness.⁴⁵ How is workers' subjectivity to be

27. Hardt claims that the neo-Leninism of the Italian intellectuals did not wish to drag class struggle into the halls of the university, as was the will of Althusser.

³⁸ Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 57. Select recent works of Cuninghame, including his unpublished dissertation, provides a useful source of oral history of the veterans of the Italian movements 1968-78 generally missing from other sociological accounts. Cleaver remarks that workerist social research was opposed to the fantasy of the academic positivism of the 'third position', the purported objective or disinterested view from above. Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, esp. 65.

³⁹ Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection," 80.

⁴⁰ Lotringer and Marazzi refer to the autonomy of the early workers' movement, especially that of the emigrant workers from the South, as "Autonomy at the base," indicating independence from official organisations. Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," 9.

⁴¹ Massimo De Angelis, "An Interview with Harry Cleaver," (1993), <http://www.libcom.org/library/interview-cleaver>

⁴² Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

⁴³ Tronti, "The Struggle against Labour," 22-25. Cited in Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, 56; 58.

⁴⁴ Mario Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra," in *Operai e Capitale* (Roma: Derive Approdi, 2006), 88-89. This article was originally published in Issue 1 of *Classe Operaia* in 1964. Wright provides a brief discussion of Tronti's project of organising the 'in-between' working class in Wright, *Storming Heaven*.

⁴⁵ Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra," 89.

objectively expressed? How is it to be organised politically? The answer comes courtesy of a foundational concept of AM – class composition – that analyses the processes and conditions of the self-organised capacity to act that unify the radical community.

Class composition, the formation of social consciousness and subjectivisation, is a complex notion ‘opaque’ even for many workerist theorists.⁴⁶ Originating in workers’ subjectivity and materialising as struggle, needs, and behaviour, class composition contains an awareness of its technical structure and its *collective political identity*.⁴⁷ This is a process of *self-transformation*, nascent within the sensible (perceptual) aspect of radical practice, and emergent from shared behaviours and awareness of material conditions; or as Virno states, developing through the sharing of ‘emotional tonalities’, inclinations, mentalities, and expectations.⁴⁸ For Negri, class composition is:

the *phenomenological, behavioural and disciplinary organisation internal to the working class* at a specific historical juncture, (...) determined by the interplay of the technical structure of work, the psychological pattern of class needs and desires, the institutional environment, (...) and other variables.⁴⁹

The identity and unity of the working class are apparently particularised by the common experiences of work and its effect on life, with the rationale of antagonism innate to the subjectivity of the radical subject; however, for Tronti and other like-minded intellectuals, this unity requires a general political approach – a ‘political composition’ – and an organisation to transform the immediacy of radical practice into revolution.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the theorising of working class struggle transitions from an analysis of subjectivity to the voluntarism of the instrumentalist project of political organisation.

Intellectual intervention and organisation

Tronti’s original vision of the radical community was as a class autonomous from the control of capitalism and free of the history of the labour movement; however, opposing this ‘creative force’ is the riposte of capitalism. Therefore, class struggle is an ongoing interaction consisting of two decisive moments. First, there is the crisis in capital caused by the actions and recomposition of the worker, and second, there is the ability of capital to subsume the new subject by turning the crisis upon the worker in order to restore command.⁵¹ This second moment of class struggle, what Virno designates as counter-revolution, involves the establishment of a new social order or ‘common sense’ with its own mentalities, culture, customs, and tastes.⁵²

Faced with the prospect of counter-revolution, the early faith in the autonomous self-organisation of the workers’ struggles abated in the mid 1960s, with their practices considered tactically innovative while strategically naive. Although the actions of the worker interrupted capital and historic forms of organisation, politically they were incomplete. While workers’ struggles contain the germ of a collective political identity, evident in the nascence of a new working class subject, its ‘force’ or ‘power’ to contest

⁴⁶ See Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 77.

⁴⁷ *The Last Firebrands*, 25-26; Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 428-430.

⁴⁸ Virno discusses these ideas in Virno, "Counter Revolution; Virno, "The Ambivalence."

⁴⁹ Negri, *Books for Burning*, xxxii (emphasis mine).

⁵⁰ Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra." This was the new project of a new working class paper – *Classe Operaia*.

⁵¹ Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, 62-63.

⁵² See Virno, "The Ambivalence; Virno, "Counter Revolution." Virno characterises the ‘two decisive moments’ as revolution and counter-revolution.

the social organisation of capital is only realised politically, according to the interventionists, through an appropriate form of *scientific organisation*. Such organisation, a task reserved for the theorist, anticipates capitalist development and helps guide the *spontaneity* of class struggle.⁵³ For Tronti, the most important task awaiting the intellectual, and the most pressing need of the revolutionary worker, was the transformation of the unity of the movement from class composition to class organisation. A primer for this approach of political recomposition, as Wright notes, is the judging of the workers' struggle as transitional, 'filling in until a new form of organisation was uncovered.'⁵⁴

Without discovering the *rules* and *laws* of the revolution in the new era, Tronti believed the structural constraints inherent to the existing system of relations would stabilise and force the workers upon different political paths.⁵⁵ In "Il Piano del Capitale," he argues that the only thing capitalist society cannot "mediate within itself is the irreducible partiality of the workers' interest." Therefore, the strategy of the bourgeois is to entice the worker to submit their 'sectoral demands' to the claims of 'social reason'. In particular, this involves submitting to the rationality of the capital relation, becoming an active participant in the 'dialectical development of social capital'.⁵⁶ The strategic response of the working class, Tronti asserts, is to organise as an 'irrational element', that is, outside of the *specific rationality* of capital. The intent is not to create chaos but the organisation of "the systematic disorganisation of production."⁵⁷ Consequently, the theorising of class composition becomes the instrumentalist 'science of anticipation'. This is palpable in Tronti's "Classe e Partito," where he advances the role of the Party and its leadership in controlling the progress of working class politics, intervening in class struggle to put in place a framework of *strategies and decisions*.⁵⁸

While the contestation of the worker may inspire the social actor, Tronti believed it did not provide a model for revolution or an account of its relation to the present conditions: this was a task reserved for a scientific interpretation of a new kind.⁵⁹ In "Marx Yesterday and Today," Tronti contended that the role of the theorist was to aid in the practical realisation of the subversive force of the worker "(...) and contribute towards giving a *materially organized* form to the revolutionary instance which in that existence is *objectively expressed*."⁶⁰ Here, the theorist becomes the vital link between working class struggle and working class consciousness, between the subjectivity of immediacy and the objectivity of organisation. This revives what Melucci refers to as the 'old Marxist problem of the *deus ex machina*', where the intellectual or party "serves as the external supplier of that (...) which the actor is lacking."⁶¹ Tronti's vision was the intellectual 'monitoring' of struggle, the verification of '*strategic validity*' of

⁵³ Mario Tronti, "Social Capital," *Telos* 17, no. Fall (1973). Originally published as "Il Piano del Capitale" in *Quaderni Rossi*, No. 3, 1963, pp. 44-73. Also available in Tronti, "Il Piano del Capitale," in *Operai e Capitale* (Roma: Derive Approdi, 2006).

⁵⁴ Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 76. This statement is not necessarily representative of Alquati's theoretical stance, but does capture the mood of the intellectuals of the period. Tronti makes a similar claim regarding the transitory forms of working class struggle in Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra."

⁵⁵ Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra," 88-89.

⁵⁶ Tronti, "Il Piano del Capitale," 80.

⁵⁷ Tronti, "Il Piano del Capitale," 80.

⁵⁸ Tronti, "Classe e Partito," in *Operai e Capitale* (Roma: Derive Approdi, 2006). Originally published in December 1964 in *Classe Operaia*.

⁵⁹ Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra," 87-88, 92.

⁶⁰ Tronti, "Marx Ieri e Oggi," in *Operai e Capitale* (Roma: Derive Approdi, 2006), 33. Here I have referred to a translation by Guio Jacinto; however, the emphasis is mine. This article was originally published in 1962.

⁶¹ Melucci, "Frontier Land."

specific repertoires where “the political approach (...) must verify the correctness of the particular struggles, and not vice-versa.”⁶²

The notion of ‘specialists’, an elite group of intellectuals reascending from the factory to assume the leadership of the revolution, appealed to Negri. While he maintained that the interaction of the movement and the intellectual is of mutual benefit, the privileging of an intellectual vanguard is evident in assertions such as: “(...) where theory ends up empty-handed, practice must remain blind.”⁶³ Importantly, there is an outstanding paradox in the work of Negri, identified as such by Hardt. This exists at the core of Negri’s concept of the mass vanguard, an effort to synthesise intellectual leadership and the masses into a revolutionary subject capable of ‘meeting the needs of class struggle.’ While he argues the unity of this subject must ‘come from below’, from ‘mass subjectivity’, it still organises around a privileged vanguard that has hegemony over the rest of society. Here, as Hardt suggests, Negri overlooks the fine detail of this synthetic unity in the interests of discovering an ‘adequate’ revolutionary subject.⁶⁴

Hardt, giving a positive spin to the vanguard role of the theorist, asserts that the abrupt change in forms of social action and the central demand for autonomy in Italy created a new social reality that the intellectuals attempted to ‘clarify’. The intent, he believes, was to “lend a theoretical coherence to the direction of the mass struggles in order to further their objectives and construct the newly emerging *norms of collective behaviour; they sought an order in the exuberance of the struggles.*”⁶⁵ Here, theorising class composition *organises* and *transforms* individuals and groups disjointed by the processes of modernisation into a coherent and active movement.⁶⁶ Subsequently, this subject becomes identifiable with certain behaviours, beliefs, political commitments, and social awareness. That is, class struggle transitions into a social movement organisation, gathering around the collective political identity apparent in class recomposition. In the theory of the specialists, the subjectivity of the antagonistic community coalesces into a culture of radicalism, developing a collective ethos and a political programme.

In the mid 1960s, efforts to organise the subjectivity of the radical community reintroduces familiar theoretical panaceas – such as the vanguard intellectual, the Party, and a contemporary representation of paradigmatic subjectivity – to the AM analysis of the politics of RSMs. These theoretical bridges from the phenomenology of community to a political ontology address the desire amongst the leadership and intellectual circles of the far left to identify an adequate radical subject.⁶⁷ Chiesa and Toscano characterise this desire in terms of a search for a “muscular political ontology of revolutionary subjectivity,”⁶⁸ a search most conspicuously driven by Marxist-Leninist theory.⁶⁹ Such doctrinal

⁶² Tronti, “Lenin in Inghilterra,” 92.

⁶³ Antonio Negri, “Crisis of the Planner State: Communism and Revolutionary Organisation,” in *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1967-83)*, ed. Red Notes (London: Red Notes, 1988), 103. Originally published in 1971.

⁶⁴ Hardt, “Into the Factory,” 23-24.

⁶⁵ Hardt, “Into the Factory,” 7-8 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁶ See Balestrini and Moroni, *L’orda D’oro*, 428-434.

⁶⁷ Such theoretical bridges, to recall Melucci, elevate the ‘phenomenology of collective behaviour’ to the level of ontological and conceptual reality, enabling theoretical passage from phenomenological consciousness to logical concept. Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 15.

⁶⁸ Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, “Introduction,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2009): 2.

⁶⁹ Tronti outlines the ‘need’ for Marx and Lenin in Tronti, “Marx ieri e Oggi,” 34.

attachment, however, constrains the autonomy of the worker, subjugating it to the hegemony of a privileged vanguard and the demands of an abstract theorisation of the working class.

Bologna argues that initially the creativity of the grass roots movement displayed consciousness, knowledge, behaviours, and a culture that the political elite and intellectual leaders tried to 'ideologise ex-post'.⁷⁰ In the mid 1960s, an instrumentalist project of political organisation replaced the original ambition of workerism (to recover the knowledge of the worker and to write in their language and not that of the intellectual or party militants). The endeavour to express objectively the subjectivity of the worker, promoted the role of the theorist, and resorted to 'top-down' analysis and abstract thought that expropriated the movement of its knowledge of antagonism.⁷¹ It is therefore important for accounts of this period, as Bologna continues, "to distinguish clearly the behaviours and expressions of the history of the political elites (whether ideological or organisational) from those of the spontaneous movements, from that which was a real class composition (...)." While entwined, the history of the political elite is different to that of the movements, "but the real history is a little bit the history of their meetings and partings."⁷² Interventionism breached the initial workerist project of co-research that attempted to integrate the worker and the intellectual. The practices of the radical community became the material of the theorists, who occupied themselves with projects of organising dissent, searching for an order and political form transcending the autonomous self-organisation (self-activity) of the workers' movement. This ambition of certain factions of IRT, to rationalise and ultimately institutionalise the struggle of the worker in a proletarian form of the state, is central to the foreclosure of the first generation of contemporary Italian social movements (discussed following), and contributes to the materialising of the third generation during the 1970s (see section 2).

The first generation and its theorists

The workers' struggles of the late 1950s broke from the official organisations, political programme, and ideas of the Left, which had as their object the established professional worker of the Northern factory.⁷³ Alternatively, the new worker, the unskilled assembly line employee reduced to monotonous repetition, sought autonomy from the work place, and their struggle reached out into their personal communities and daily lives.⁷⁴ The actions of this 'community', which directly and locally dealt with the problems they confronted in the workplace and daily life beyond the factory, confounded conventional political thought. While they made specific and articulable demands, the Old Left and their official organisations did not take seriously the capacity of the antagonistic community to speak about and organise their experience; however, nor could the Old Left relay the demands of this community through a traditional vocabulary of political antagonism.

The self-activity of the new worker prompted a re-reading of Marx amongst certain intellectual circles, who also initiated co-research projects involving the worker. *The Last Firebrands* suggests that central to Marxist renewal was a relation to the worker as a whole, an interest in their life beyond the factory and their perception of conditions in the workplace.⁷⁵ The deskilling of the work force (the replacing of

⁷⁰ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

⁷¹ Wright deals with this situation at length in Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?".

⁷² Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

⁷³ Negri, "Archeology and Project," 202-203.

⁷⁴ *The Last Firebrands*, 25-26. Negri, "Archeology and Project," 210. Negri interprets this as the spreading of the workers' subjectivity into "the fabric of proletarian society."

⁷⁵ *The Last Firebrands*, 24-27.

technicians with 'unskilled' labour), and the migration of Italian Southern peasants who did not relate to the drudgery of factory work as 'real' or vocational to the industrial North, preceded the mobilisation of the workers' movement in the 1960s.⁷⁶ The 'mass worker', the foundation of the movement of '68, was a theoretical figure of class composition constructed around the subjectivity associated with the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement.

In Italy, Cleaver writes, "workers insurgency took the form of confrontation and rejection of the powerful Communist party by large numbers of industrial workers, students, and intellectuals (...) escaping both the control and the *understanding* of Marxist orthodoxy."⁷⁷ This worker was fundamentally different to that elaborated within the traditional or classical theories of class antagonism, with the 'workerist project', according to Cuninghame, facilitating an escape from the Classical Marxist confines of the idealist notions of the determinant and stable historical and/or material relation of capital and working class organisation.⁷⁸

Bologna, discussing the period of the workers inquiries in the early 1960s, recalls:

Montaldi wrote this beautiful book, (...) where he wrote the history and the theory of this stratum, of this generation of revolutionary militants, almost all workers, or else linked to peasant struggles. (They) had such a profound political culture, such a profound capacity to *set in motion organisational systems, systems of struggle*, which, according to Montaldi – this is the part where he is so right – are the real leaven, are the *real drive* to those struggles which appeared before and during *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks). So, *Quaderni Rossi* was an attempt to understand these things and to theorise them.⁷⁹

On this reading, the radical subject emerging in the early 1960s is not politically naive; rather, they have their own histories of struggle, whether of peasant or militant origins, which endow them with social and political knowledge. This introduced new subjectivities into the factory struggles, with their altered perception of the work place contributing to innovative and localised practices of contestation (often devised by the southerners) unintelligible to established thought on the politics of RSMs. Balestrini and Moroni note that the worker of the modernised factory generally experienced the changes to the work place as 'dehumanising', and 'asocial', a condition they directly challenged through practices such as the refusal of work, absenteeism, and importantly, the re-creation of spaces and 'social imagination' free from the demands of the factory and subservience to the Party.⁸⁰ Subsequently, it would be in the factory, within the experience of class recomposition, that:

life began to reflower, exactly where it had been most radically cancelled and extinguished (...). The factory, which had been conceived as a dehumanised concentration camp, began to

⁷⁶ *The Last Firebrands*, 25-26.

⁷⁷ Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, 51 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁸ See Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 113.

⁷⁹ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". However, Bologna continues, "within *Quaderni Rossi*, according to Montaldi and also many others, only a few people, in particular Romano Alquati, had the capacity to understand these things, while the others were completely out of touch, in my opinion. They didn't even pose this problem." Cleaver also comments on the importance of the workers inquiries, the interviews with Italian factory workers. Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, 52-54. The unique place of Montaldi is discussed in Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 33.

⁸⁰ Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 428-434.

become a place of study, discussion, freedom and love (...). This was the recomposition of class.⁸¹

The first massified appearance of the new workers' movement occurred in the riots of 1962. The altered constitution of the factory worker had unearthed a social subject prepared to engage in aggressive forms of contestation.⁸² Within the intellectual layer of the movement, an outcome of the aggressive nature of the workers' actions was the split amongst the theorists of *Quaderni Rossi*, who disagreed over the use of physical force by the movement. Subsequently, Bologna, Negri, and Tronti (and others) became local editors of *Classe Operaia*, a more strategic and activist oriented journal involved in theorising a new relation of the worker to political organisation.⁸³ This project afforded the theorist a vanguard role in politicising the workers' movement. In "Lenin in Inghilterra," Tronti expounded that while the seizing of power by the proletariat was assured, the leaders of the prior struggles could, by intervening politically, hasten and secure its realisation.⁸⁴ Ultimately, Tronti and Negri retreated from the participatory project of 'grass-roots workerism' and, respectively, returned to the PCI, and neo-Leninist organisational projects (PO, OWA).⁸⁵

Bologna, while sharing many of the mistakes of his colleagues, would come to see the situation differently. He believed a crucial aspect of the decline of the far left movement was the 'mistakes of organisation', based in the "old political cycle (struggle/party/transition/civil war/State power)," a historical patterning redundant in contemporary radical politics. Worse, he continues, "this mistake turns into a parody when the groups all troop down into the electoral arena. The rotten institutional forms of politics, eaten away from the inside and *abandoned by the more aware elements, become a form of oppression.*"⁸⁶ Unlike Tronti and Negri, Bologna believed the self-reflexive identity of the political composition of the working class was confirmation that class struggle had moved beyond the need for 'Leninist organisation.' The mobilisation and self-organisation of workers' collectives during the Hot Autumn of '69 verified, he thought, this fact.⁸⁷

Bologna believed there was an innate contradiction between *political organisation* and the theme of *autonomy*.⁸⁸ This contradiction was manifest in the approach of Tronti who argued that at times the movement needed to concede autonomy to the PCI.⁸⁹ In "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party," Bologna contends that organisation must be flexible, changing along with class recomposition.⁹⁰

⁸¹ Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 430. This translation by Cuninghame

⁸² For a detailed account of this period see Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*. In particular, see chapter 3: 'La Nascita dell'operaio Massa e la Frattura del Movimento Comunista', 128-149.

⁸³ In the late 60s, Bologna and Negri went on to form, along with Piperno, the intellectual core and secretariat of the national level extra-parliamentary organisation PO. PO, which Bologna left in 1970, was instrumental in bringing together the student and workers movement that formed the basis of the Hot Autumn of 69. Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". Bologna provides a brief but useful chronology of workerist publications and biographies in Bologna, "Workerist Publications and Bios."

⁸⁴ Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra," 91.

⁸⁵ For an incisive discussion of Tronti and Negri see Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection," 87. Toscano notes, while Tronti began asserting the need for a mass Party of the worker and theorising the 'autonomy of the political', Negri focused upon a non-dialectical antagonism founded in insurrection and an organisation that could realise the menacing potential of the worker by extending struggle throughout society.

⁸⁶ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 55-56 (emphasis mine). After leaving PO, Bologna became the editor of the magazine *Primo Maggio* from 1973-80, a publication focused on workers' historiography, which he recounts, had as a "principal aim (...) to re-start the process of historical reflection on the mass worker."

⁸⁷ *The Last Firebrands*, 27.

⁸⁸ Bologna, "Il Dibattito." Cited in Wright, "Mapping Pathways."

⁸⁹ Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection," 87.

⁹⁰ Sergio Bologna, "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party," *Telos* 13, no. Fall (1972).

Rather than formulating or institutionalising a working class organisation appropriate across a range of struggles, organisation should focus, as Cleaver clarifies, on facilitating “co-operation among people in struggle,” foregoing the idea that the essential non-homogeneity of the antagonistic community can be unified from above.⁹¹ Tracking the new social subject, however, was a renewed fervour amongst the intellectuals for a ‘philosophy of history’, a distillation of theory that realised the mass worker as the ‘most advanced’ point of class struggle. The mechanism of such ‘philosophies’, Bologna asserts, is the ‘exaltation’ of the working class.⁹² A consequence of this exaltation is the suspension of the autonomy of the worker, and, as Cleaver notes, it freezes “working class self-activity in manageable forms.”⁹³ Such self-serving philosophies assume, as Kristin Ross argues regarding the political packaging of France’s May 68 experience, that the “past exists only to better justify and magnify the present.” This reduces the essence of preceding actions to current social effects.⁹⁴ Petrified within a political ontology, the constraining of radical practice affects, in terms familiar to the self-reflexive work forming around SMT, the ability to “imagine how things might be otherwise.”⁹⁵

Carlo Formenti, a former member of the *Gruppo Gramsci* and *Autonomia*, recounted in an interview for Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero:

To my mind this is the old flaw of the Workerist tradition: that is, the constant attempt to chase what can be thought to be *the most advanced ‘point’ of conflict* and of contradiction, defining it as vanguard and thinking that the entire dynamic of conflicts can, in the last instance, be brought back to the *paradigm, the model, the objectives, the culture, the practices and the behaviours* of this most advanced point.⁹⁶

The proclivity to translate the practice and discursive dimension of the radical community into a political programme, a set of reasons and explanations, strategies and decision, was strongest amongst the neo-Leninist intellectuals. By assuming control of the ‘political imagination’, subduing the perceptual and creative potential of the radical community, and returning to the ‘hoary old questions’ of organisation from above, as Bologna bluntly states, the party “march[es] over the corpse of the movement.”⁹⁷ By alienating the movement of its political capacity, the organisational perspective realises an ideological struggle or contest between leadership frames, which reduces the practice of political antagonism to a symptom of philosophy.⁹⁸

While not as perverse as the situation Ross observes in France, certain factions of IRT insisted on projecting social struggle into the future, where the progression of the politics of the radical subject would tend toward solutions to marginalisation,⁹⁹ most notably in the realisation of the proletarian

⁹¹ De Angelis, "An Interview with Harry Cleaver".

⁹² Sergio Bologna, "Memoria Operaia e Rifiuto della Memoria Operaia," in *Memoria Operaia e Nuova Composizione di Classe*, ed. C. Bermani and F. Coggiolo (Milan: Magioli, 1986), 461. Berardi asserts in *La Nefasta Utopia di Potere Operaio*, the theory of Tronti and politics of PO swap between the exaltation of workers’ spontaneity and the subjectivist voluntarism of the vanguard. Berardi, *La Nefasta Utopia di Potere Operaio*, 80.

⁹³ De Angelis, "An Interview with Harry Cleaver".

⁹⁴ Ross, "Establishing Consensus," 653.

⁹⁵ Goodwin and Jasper, "Trouble in Paradigms," 77. I take up this theme in the final two sections of the chapter.

⁹⁶ Formenti, C. (1999) 'Intervista a Carlo Formenti', 13 December, from the CD-ROM accompanying Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore*. Translation taken from Wright, "Back to the Future."

⁹⁷ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 58.

⁹⁸ Toscano discusses the ‘analytically barren’ results of approaching radical politics as a symptom of philosophy in Toscano, "A Plea," esp. 245-246. Such a warning is applicable across the approaches surveyed for this thesis, including certain quarters of IRT.

⁹⁹ Hardt discusses a similar endeavour in the work of Negri in Hardt, "Into the Factory," 9-10.

State. The enthusiasm for future outcomes and the implementing and defending of political programs and solutions, drew radical theory back to questions of political organisation. On this terrain, the abstract theorising of neo-Leninism dictated and regulated political action through recourse to a theoretical model of antagonism, and involved the implementing and defending of a set of strategies and decisions. Such theoretical intervention stifled the localised practices of the grass-roots radical community, agents who were organised, strategic, and political, but who adapted to their dynamic environment, and through their concrete acts, set in motion systems of struggle and forms of self-organisation. The ostensibly ephemeral and indeterminate 'new science' of the interventionists, the science of anticipation, limits the autonomy of the social movements when it coalesces around a political philosophy that aggregates or homogenises the radical community.

Initially, the meeting or collaboration of the workers and intellectuals of workerism was of mutual benefit, with "political practice oriented around the actual struggles of the working class (...)." According to *The Last Firebrands*, however, the history of workerism also includes a parting between these two groups: in the end, "the first group were still workers and the second still academics."¹⁰⁰ A consequence of the success of the mass worker was the politicising, or ideologising, and reifying of this figure, contradicting the sense of emergence and indeterminism of the thesis of a self-reflexive composition of the workers' movement. The methodology of inquiry, meant to relay the experiences of the worker and verify their capacity to articulate their situation rather than provide, impose, or import class-consciousness, became redundant once a new revolutionary subject was 'discovered'. Subsequently, some factions of the New Left were emboldened to stipulate the rules, standards, and practices appropriate to the mass worker, and by extension, class struggle. This new science of political action materialised from the understanding of the mass worker as a stable empirical category of the revolt, the new vanguard of class struggle. According to *The Last Firebrands*, the result is a rigid and stipulative definition of radical politics, where "the movement of the working class (...) necessarily corresponds to a typical system of social practice. It has to correspond to a *particular political expression*..."¹⁰¹

The autonomous practices of the self-organised workers' movement were unpredictable, markedly different from the established rules of workplace negotiation associated with the previous subject of working class struggle, making demands unrecognisable in terms of the capitalist system of exchange. During the nascence of the first generation, political practices were self-aware and concerned with the immediate liberation of the individual from particular experiences of exploitation and opposition in their workplace and daily life. The community that formed around these practices avoided programs of political reform, negotiation, and official representation. The early workers' collectives were an attempt to take back the control of subjectivity and perceptual potential from the demands of the work ethic. This agitation for autonomy defied the way that the figure of the worker was inscribed in the conventional Marxist thought of the PCI and PSI.

The tendency of SMT and NSMT to reduce the political import of early 'workerist collectives' to the development of the social movement organisations of the New Left is at best simplistic, and worse, disingenuous. It conceals the renewal of Marxist thought and practice in the early 1960s, which attempted to address the theoretical disadvantages of structural determinism, and acknowledged the complexity and stratification of the new working class composition. Further, SMT and NSMT are inclined to portray the initial break from the PCI and trade unions as a choice of political allies, with a direct lineage to the extra-parliamentary organisations. A major achievement of IRT in the early 1960s was the

¹⁰⁰ *The Last Firebrands*, 27.

¹⁰¹ *The Last Firebrands*, 27 (emphasis mine).

separation of the subjectivity of the radical community from the Party and trade unions, a response to the self-activity and practice of immediacy present within the movement. Collapsing the practical and theoretical separation of struggle from the official Left into the manifesting of new SMOs, obscures the importance of the novelty and imagination of the radical community to politics.

The PCI endorsed the workers' function within society and valorised the work ethic and economic development. The intent was to promote the worker within the 'political solidarity', conceptualising the proletariat as the "worker-as-citizen," with their condition objectified, integrated, and protected within the existing social order.¹⁰² This dismissed the subjectivity and non-homogeneity of the antagonist community, and according to the journal *Primo Maggio*, favoured a relation with the constitution and the 'labour aristocracy'. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the PCI was complicit in the effort to stabilise and reproduce the existing social order, and through its political rationalism alienated new political behaviours. The behaviour of the PCI, on the theoretical plane at least, was an attempt, unsuccessful, to contain the radical subject, limiting their ability to question the roles and competencies assigned by the social order and associated with a social location.¹⁰³

Ultimately, the organisations of the New Left would make an error similar to those of the PCI and PSI; however, more important to this eventuality than the simplistic reduction of the theory of Left political antagonism to a caricature of historical Marxism and neo-Leninism, is the exchange between the movement and the intellectual and political elite. The original cohort of workerism, in particular leaders such as Tronti and Negri, relinquished the characteristics of the nascent workers' movement in exchange for an 'adequate' theory of the revolutionary subject and 'muscular' political ontology. One outcome of the change in theoretical focus (from observing radical activism to the creation a new science of revolution), accompanied by the promotion of the autonomy of theory and the installation of an intellectual vanguard, was the collapse of the New left organisations in the early to mid 1970s, an event that would remind them of the force of the antagonistic community and its hostility toward all forms of social aggregation. Next, I turn my attention to this situation through the dynamics of the 'movement of social autonomy'.

2. The third generation of radical social movements

We can identify, within the larger Marxist tradition, *a variety of movements, politics and thinkers* who have emphasized the autonomous power of workers – autonomous from capital, from their official organizations (...) and, indeed, *the power of particular groups of workers to act autonomously from other groups* (e.g. women from men). By 'autonomy' I mean the ability of workers to *define their own interests* and to struggle for them – to go beyond mere reaction to exploitation, or to *self defined 'leadership'* and to take the offensive in ways that shape the class struggle and define the future.¹⁰⁴

Harry Cleaver – "An interview with Harry Cleaver"

The crisis of the New Left in the early 1970s was indissoluble from the emergence of a new radical community whose practices in the social realm were a crucial way that the political culture associated with the figure of the mass worker had been shunned by radical activist communities. The asymmetry of the relation of the new movements to party politics and organisational perspectives is a defining

¹⁰² Red Notes, 'Living with an Earthquake', 4.

¹⁰³ Giuliano Buselli, "Il Moderno Principe a Bologna," *Primo Maggio* 8, no. Spring (1977): 39. This article is also available in English in Red Notes, 'Living with an Earthquake'.

¹⁰⁴ De Angelis, "An Interview with Harry Cleaver".

characteristic of the 'area of social autonomy'. In fact, asymmetry was the 'great achievement' of social autonomy. With the benefit of hindsight, Castellano and his collaborators suggest that the 'second society' at the foundation of this struggle was not confronting the State, but instead evaded it, "or rather, more concretely ... [was] a search for spaces of freedom (...) in which the movement could consolidate and grow." However, the response, whether of the State or the organisations of the Left, was to reimpose a social identity and political form upon this movement sector. This, we read, drove communities focused on quality of life issues into the political ghetto.¹⁰⁵ I will discuss Castellano's misleading label of the 'second society' below.

Within the Italian political environment of the mid 1970s, Bologna writes:

The real marginalisation is political marginalisation. And for this reason, the causes of 'marginalisation' are not to be attributed (...) to the 'objective' mechanisms of the economic crisis. No – the causes lie precisely with the parties, the "party system", *who have decided to exclude certain modes of struggle, certain material and subjective needs, from the things which can be accepted as having social legitimacy in our country.*¹⁰⁶

Movements such as those of the autonomous women and urban youth were being excluded by definition, that is, to recall Edwards, they were judged "unacceptable as part of the process of being rejected."¹⁰⁷ The separatism and communalism of these movements, in the discourses of the PCI, the contemporaneous form of the state, and the newly established radical thought of sectors of the New Left, excluded them from politics or made them partial political phenomena. Practices such as street theatre, free radio, and the production of zines did not, the PCI believed, add up to politics. Consequently, the persistent urge to recuperate or politicise the marginal community, repatriating them to the social relations of contemporary democracy, is realised for the PCI and the State through criminalisation, and for the far left in the organisation of dissent. Thus, attributing marginality, criminality or deviance to 'objective' mechanisms (independent variables) associated with economic crises, an absence of political resources, or similar, conceals this relation of RSMs to the political cycle.

Amongst the surveyed accounts documented in this thesis, the desire to reconnect the radical community to modern politics is prevalent; however, by submitting to this desire we risk obscuring fundamental aspects of antagonism. Bologna describes one such aspect as the 'conscious practice of irrationality'.¹⁰⁸ Such 'irrationality' is not 'pure behaviour' (spontaneity, mere reaction, or crowd psychology) contesting logical schemas, but involves subterranean networks and practices, forms of 'cooperation' that are unpredictable and unintelligible from a strictly instrumentalist or organisational perspective.¹⁰⁹ For instance, the self-activity of the autonomous workers' movements in the late 1950s to the early 1960s, labelled 'invisible' and 'irrational' by some within the Left, were crucial in the realisation of the new radical community forming outside of the structures of the official Left. In his

¹⁰⁵ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 234 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁶ Bologna, "What Is 'the Movement'," 97-98 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!* p 193

¹⁰⁸ The choice of the label 'irrationality' is unfortunate, as I believe it does not indicate that the term designates a tactical opposition to specific forms or rationality, such as economic rationality, associated with an ideology of command and control. See Negri, "Archeology and Project," 202-203. Melucci observed this phenomenon of 'irrationality' as the practice of 'non-rationality', behaviour that does not follow the stipulations of instrumental rationality, but which, none the less, is not irrational. Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 395. While speaking of similar practices, Bologna's theory is distinguishable from that of Melucci through the formers inclusion of the counter-cultural area.

¹⁰⁹ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 56.

article "Archaeology and Project," Negri outlines how the immediacy of the struggles of the new radical community, coupled with the disorderly, mobile, and multiform nature of their radical practice, made little sense when analysed with the existing concepts and categories of radical thought. Pejoratively designated as 'spontaneity' (chaotic, disorganised) by some, the new struggles were in fact organised, intelligent, tactically imaginative, and driven by an independent knowledge of their situation. The new subject of radical politics problematised existing relationships within the working class, introduced actions beyond the instrumentalist repertoire of the established system of industrial relations, and questioned the rationality of a working-class politics associated with capitalist reason.¹¹⁰

While Negri would become a crucial figure in the push to politicise the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement, suffocating the innovation and creativity of this community, he did, retrospectively at least, observe the originality and importance of their acts of immediacy. He acknowledges that:

while the union leaderships stuck to a repetition of the old forms, the working class reacted in ways that were autonomous. The union would call a strike action and the entire workforce would go in to work – but then (...) [at a later date] that same working class would explode in spontaneous demonstrations.¹¹¹

The new forms of struggle, such as wildcat strikes, absenteeism, and sabotage, were a part of a coherent project, organised from below, that extended beyond the factory and was peculiar to each situation. The new antagonistic community was 'invisible', as Negri recalls, only to those who did not want to see them, they were irrational to those who disagreed with them, and chaotic to those who hoped to organise them.¹¹²

Aspects of radical practice similar to those of the early workers' movement emerged in the 1970s, with the actions of the new social subjects providing a critique of traditional politics. Commenting on the organisations of the left, particularly the PCI and their relation to the Movement of '77, Bologna writes:

any separation between the 'post-political' (the area of instinct, of the irrational, the personal and the private) and the *political cycle* is unacceptable. It is not possible to confine the *new subjectivity* within the terms of the youth counterculture, or to consider it an exclusive prerogative of the women.¹¹³

The particularity of the actions of the movements of social autonomy, Bologna asserts, comments on the logic of the state-form, and denies resolution and measure in existing systems of social aggregation or political composition. He continues:

The specific, autonomous interests of women, organised *by* women, not only directly challenge family relations of production; they also (...) involved a radical separation from the mediations of the 'party system', and from Trade Union representation, but also above all from the revolutionary Left groups themselves.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ See Negri, "Archeology and Project," 202-203.

¹¹¹ Negri, "Archeology and Project," 202.

¹¹² Perhaps the label 'unseen' is more appropriate than 'invisible'.

¹¹³ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 56.

¹¹⁴ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 49.

Bologna believes aspects of autonomous feminism, beyond the challenge to family relations, are common to the three generations of the Italian social movements. Thereby he asserts:

(...) controlling one's own body and the structures of perceptions, emotions and desires. This is not just a problem of 'youth culture'. It has working class antecedents in the cycle of struggles of 1968-69. The defense of one's own physical integrity (...) is a way of reappropriating one's own body, for free enjoyment of bodily needs. Here too there is a *homogeneity*, not a separation, between the behaviour of the young people, the women and the workers.¹¹⁵

In attempting to redress the political marginalising of the movements of social autonomy, Bologna in effect homogenises the essential non-homogeneity of the radical community, with the 'worker' claiming primacy as a descriptive category in his account of the politics of RSMs, gathering up the 'general political potential' of new movements in the notion of the 'phenomenon of the disseminated worker'.¹¹⁶ Bologna appears to re-appropriate what is peculiar to the struggles of women and youth, reclaiming it for the territory of the worker.¹¹⁷

Melucci asserts that contemporary conflicts pit the identity of the individual or group against the "rationality" of domination: to be [a] woman, youth, or old person, to have at one's own disposal one's own body, one's space, one's time (...), in a different way from that imposed by the management of the apparatuses of development."¹¹⁸ In the following section, I focus on what appears common to the outliers of the Italian social movements: the effort to take back the control of subjectivity and perceptual potential from the demands of the work ethic, from the interference of political organisation and the leadership of the political elite, and from the identitarian and substantialist impulse of theoretical intervention. To this end, attentiveness to the particularity of the youth culture and women's movement proves invaluable.

The 'movement of social autonomy'

The 'post-workerist' generation (third generation), paradigmatic to NSMT and of enduring affect on IRT, exemplifies the challenge to instrumentalist efforts to repatriate the radical subject to modern politics. *Living with an Earthquake* claims that the movement of social autonomy denied identification with a material condition or sociological category (labour, students, worker etc.). Instead, it was part of a regeneration of the radical community, overcoming social, historical, and cultural dispersion to create subjectively a new and shared experience of community through opposition to formal political and social incorporation.¹¹⁹ Materialising around 1973, this sector, primarily through the urban youth and autonomous women's movements, revealed an essential asymmetry in the relation of the radical community to the institutions and organisations of political representation, refusing, as Virno identifies, to transfer their rights or alliances to a central power, or external authority.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 55.

¹¹⁶ See Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 51-52. Bologna does temper his position by noting that the disseminated worker has "neither an institution to symbolise it, nor is it represented by a majority social figure."

¹¹⁷ In response to criticism of his "Tribe of Moles," Bologna outlines his approach to explaining the area of social autonomy and its shift into the field of the revolutionary left in Bologna, "Amo il Rosso e Il Nero, Odio il Rosa e il Viola."

¹¹⁸ See Melucci, "New Movements, Terrorism." p134

¹¹⁹ Red Notes, 'Living with an Earthquake', 41-42.

¹²⁰ Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution."

While the subjectivity, indeterminism, and dynamism of the workers' autonomous self-organisation were the strength and catalyst of the mass workers' movement of '68, these characteristics would become the greatest challenge to the theoreticians of AM. Bologna argues that the larger organisations of the New Left that emerged from 1968-69 had rejected the creativity of the counter-cultural sector and marginalised classic workerism, anarchism, and more intransigent forms of radical community. Deprived of a political voice, this sector would re-emerge with renewed potency in the first half of the 1970s.¹²¹ Preceding them was the nascence of a new phase in the autonomous feminist movement, and the diffusion of intelligence throughout the professional sector. This was a 'mental revolution' where 'intelligence' spread throughout the social strata, breaking from the notion of intelligentsia coalescing around Leninist and political projects of the working class.¹²²

While the workers' movement founded in an autonomous Marxist refusal of work was the historical centre of the area of autonomy post 1973, more accurately, as Wright notes, this area is one of 'autonomies',¹²³ stratified by politics, geography, generation, and gender. In this environment, many of the radical communities formed around practices responsive to their particular circumstances, and claimed their right to self-representation. The activities of this area personified particular subjectivities, and eschewed the organisational analysis of the political elite.¹²⁴ Freed from any sense of political obligation, the new movements regenerated in the social sphere and began experimenting with new identities and counter-cultural lifestyles.¹²⁵ While changes to the structure of work in the early 1970s had material effects, it also had subjective consequences, with the nascent social movements irreducible to the paradigmatic subjectivity of the working class. Consequently, the extra-parliamentary groups began to lose their relevance for large areas of the far left, with some, such as PO, shelving plans for working class hegemony founded on the figure of the mass worker.

For the movements of social autonomy, the refusal of work, so important to the workerist movement, grew into a refusal of the party form and the politics of aggregation.¹²⁶ For the urban youth, refusal became the refusal of entry into the factory, and a break from the 'ethic of work'. The 'destruction of the worker *qua* worker', central to the workers' movement of the early 1960s, would materialise more radically in the youth and women's movements of the mid-late 1970s. While the factory remained an important site of contestation, the private and personal lives of the 'new proletariat' were also the place of radical practice. The social relations of capital were theorised to extend through all aspects of life, reducing 'free time' and 'leisure' to the mere re-creation of life as labour power, geared toward the preparation for work. Accordingly, Cleaver notes, it would also be in the emancipation of daily life from the demands of work where struggle would re-emerge.¹²⁷ For the urban youth, this involved the forceful reappropriation of 'bourgeoisie privileges', including practices such as attendance at concerts and

¹²¹ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 45-49.

¹²² Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". The professional sector distinguished itself from the vanguard intellectuals, setting up collectives and antagonisms particular to their field of struggle.

¹²³ Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 76. Bologna also provides a description of the 'autonomies' in his interview with Cuninghame. Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

¹²⁴ Statera understands this as the discovery of "its own unifying impulse." Gianni Statera, *Violenza Sociale E Violenza Politica Nell'Italia Degli Anni 70. Analisi E Interpretazioni Sociopolitiche, Giuridiche, Della Stampa Quotidiana* (Rome: Franco Angeli, 1983). Cited in Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 115.

¹²⁵ See Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 435-436.

¹²⁶ Cuninghame provides a detailed account of the persistence of the theme of refusal in Cuninghame, "Autonomia in the 1970s." The seminal work on the centrality of refusal to antagonistic politics in Italy is Tronti, "The Strategy of Refusal."

¹²⁷ Cleaver discusses the importance of the reclamation of free time to the practice of autonomism in De Angelis, "An Interview with Harry Cleaver".

theatre without paying. This made them unrecognisable to the organisations of the left, and irreducible to the subjectivity of the working class. The effect was liberation from existing communities and solidarities, and, Castellano and his co-authors contend, was a search for a new experience of the common.¹²⁸

The youth were basing collectivity and radical practice around quality of life issues and nomadism,¹²⁹ while the autonomous women's movement, which separated explosively from the revolutionary left, pursued practices of 'self-discovery' and 'self-control'. As Bologna notes, the attentiveness of women to their own needs and desires broke from previous forms of mediated representation, political choices, and theories of organisation.¹³⁰ These movements interrupted the political discourse of the New Left and dismissed them as 'political allies', reverting to practices of self-organisation. Collectively, the women and youth undermined the effectiveness of the factory as a 'political institution', with their diffused subjectivity disaggregating the unity experienced within the environment of the mass worker. This forced the 'working class' to re-imagine itself,¹³¹ repeating the interruption caused by the self-activity of the first generation movements.¹³²

What SMT labels the period of withdrawal is, in part, the relocation of political antagonism to a new terrain, leaving behind the traditional territory of politics. For Berardi, this was a positive shift away from the 'new authoritarianism' of the New Left organisations toward an autonomous and self-aware community. The political organisations of the New Left had subsumed the autonomous workers' movement that split from the PCI and unions, and this organisational approach now constrained the practice of the radical social movements, assuming hegemony over the radical community. The Movement of '77 would actively differentiate itself from the new historical figure of antagonism, the mass worker. This saw the urban youth experimenting with new forms of expressing and transforming collective identity, life, and culture, favouring youth associations and communes.¹³³

The counter-cultural elements of '68 re-emerged in the 1970s, and this time challenged, Cuninghame notes, "the neo-Leninist and workerist premises of organised *Autonomia*," primarily through the *form* of radical practice.¹³⁴ The movement of social autonomy broke from the austere and institutionalised forms of politics, looking to alternatives such as independently run social services and spaces of self-teaching, artist collectives, and independent publishing and radio stations. The break with the SMO's, and the strategies and decisions of the New Left, recalled the autonomous workers' separation from 'official politics'. Accordingly, the movements of social autonomy were similarly unpredictable, with their demands deemed to lack political content, circulating outside the boundary of political resistance. Rather than being epiphenomena of the dissolution of the extra-parliamentary organisations, or the 'retreat into the personal', taking its lead from the autonomist women this area was reclaiming responsibility for self-constitution.

¹²⁸ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 232.

¹²⁹ Virno, "Counter Revolution," 247-249. This break from the ethic of work, the factory, and the historical left, Virno notes, made this subject the voice of the radical community *for a moment*, before the new ethic of daily life 'was put to work' in a recuperated notion of the professional worker.

¹³⁰ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 47.

¹³¹ See for similar *Red Notes*, 'Living with an Earthquake', 44.

¹³² The need to reflect on 'who we are' or 'who we are not', adjusting to the influx of atypical 'political adventurers' into the territory of radical left politics, is discussed in Bologna, "Amo il Rosso e il Nero, Odio il Rosa e il Viola," 155-156.

¹³³ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 156.

¹³⁴ Cuninghame, "A Laughter," 155-156.

Berardi interprets the Movement of '77 as the new proletarian collective. This proletariat, who was not a worker, evacuated the movement of its old imagery, paradigmatic subjectivity, and exemplars. '77 concluded the effects of '68 that had initially disrupted "forms of social behaviour, values, human relationships, sexual relationships, the relationship to country and to home."¹³⁵ It announced, Balestrini and Moroni assert, "a new (...) beginning (...), a phase without progressive ideologies nor faith in socialism, without any affection for the democratic system (...) [or] the myths of the proletarian revolution." The radical communities of social autonomy began to practice new forms of life. This 'living' of struggle ('living a left life') was the birth of the new subjects of the Movement of '77,¹³⁶ a decentred social movement sector rejecting the identity, organisation, and intellectuals of the movement of '68. Unlike previous attempts to find order beyond the 'exuberance' of struggle, the self-report of the movement area post '68 (particularly after 1973) indicates the radical or marginal communities formed around shared experiences and self-aware practices. Gone were the icons, myths, and exemplars of '68 – Mao, Guevara, and the third world revolutions – failed or reappropriated.¹³⁷ This area also rejected the 'culture of communism', resistance, and revolution. The new subjects of the area of social autonomy wanted to manage their own spaces, and this would form the centre of the Movement of '77 – a search for concrete spaces free from formal organisation.¹³⁸

The alternative to the coalescing of a new 'mass social subject' in the area of social autonomy was the notion of the radical community being 'massified' through the strata of society that constituted it. Non-identification was a strong impulse amongst the radical subjects. The students, urban youth, women, the unemployed, generally those excluded politically, culturally, and socially organised directly and independently of the existing institutions and parties.¹³⁹ An article from the Fall 1977 edition of *Primo Maggio* identified the movement of 1977-78 as a new collective force that was irrecoverable as part of society through any simple 'numerical gathering'. The article conjectures that this 'new social group':

seems not to have any objective, material reality. It seems to come together and recognise itself *only subjectively* – outside of the formal political structures, outside the channels of 'democratic participation', outside the political groups, and also outside the workplace.¹⁴⁰

The Movement of '77 existed externally to party and consensus politics, and distinct from any sociological group it shunned attempts to 'materially organise' or 'objectively express' its subjectivity. Instead, this was a diffuse self-seeking radical community unperturbed by its particularity and lack of stable collective or political identity. The dispersed subjectivity, communalism, and separatism of the feminists and avant-garde collectives exemplified the starting anew of the antagonistic community. As such, interpretation of this sector moved/or proved to be beyond existing schemas of political thought. This saw the PCI give up attempts to recuperate the new movement in any positive sense. Instead, in an effort to fulfil its obligation under the Historic Compromise to restrain the Left of politics, the PCI labelled the new radical community as marginal, criminal, and parasitic. By accepting the existing limits

¹³⁵ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 155. The *A/traverso* collective believe that from '68 onwards, the control that "capital exercises over the family, the school, the factory" hampered class struggle. *A/traverso*, "Strutture Liberanti," *A/traverso* May(1976).

¹³⁶ Balestrini and Moroni provide an insightful account of this newly emerging figure. See in particular Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 435-437.

¹³⁷ Grispigni, *Il Settantasette*, 23.

¹³⁸ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 234.

¹³⁹ Red Notes, *Living with an Earthquake*, Preface.

¹⁴⁰ Buselli, "Il Moderne Principe a Bologna," 37.

of culturally sanctioned political contestation, the PCI interpreted the cultural and social movements as illegitimate and apolitical.¹⁴¹

While the new subjects were abandoning the fortresses of the mass worker fortified by a theory of political organisation and class recomposition, and buttressed by an instrumentalist class based politics, AM pursued the most advanced point of antagonism. Progressively, AM was more aware of parallel struggles waged in areas such as gender, education, and sexuality. While acknowledging the historical workers' movement no longer founded social and political conflict, AM disagreed that the new movements of the 1970s brought to an end class-based struggle.¹⁴² Building radically upon Tronti's initial insight that class struggle, based in the subjectivity of the worker, reaches out to the whole of society (the 'nonfactory'), certain theorists represented the new subject of these movements as the socialised worker. This was theorised as the latest materialising of class recomposition, a stratified working class that incorporated groups such as woman, youth, and migrants, and contained a plurality of interests.¹⁴³ However, AM was culpable of conflating voluntary marginality – those who chose autonomy from the culture of class politics – within a vision of working class organisation.¹⁴⁴

The concept of the socialised worker, best associated with Negri, attempts to represent “the potentiality of a new working class,” the theoretical development of an expanded vision of antagonism reaching throughout the social sphere.¹⁴⁵ However, as Nick Witheford remarks, the socialised worker, a dispersed figure of the proletariat theorised to supersede the concentrated subject of the mass worker after capitals de-structuring of the factory, was a cause of disagreement amongst theorists of the far left. Even those who shared “a broadly similar political orientation” with Negri passionately challenged his theorising on the new radical subject “within a single grand theoretical construct.”¹⁴⁶ On one side were those who believed the socialised worker would restore the proletariat consciousness of their efficacy in political struggle. Others, such as Bologna, argued the theoretical invention simply dismissed the unresolved problem of the mass worker, discarding the project of analysing the conditions and processes of working class autonomy in favour of *abstract conceptualisations* focused on re-founding class struggle.¹⁴⁷ In this moment, we hear the echo of Tronti's call to arms in the first issue of *Classe*

¹⁴¹ Buselli, "Il Moderne Principe a Bolgna," 39.

¹⁴² A number of works discuss the broader relation of AM theory to the practice of marginality. Examples I have referenced include Cuninghame, "Autonomia in the 1970s; Bologna, "Tribe of Moles; Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". More generally, I have referred to edited works such as *Red Notes*, *Living with an Earthquake*; *Lotringer and Marazzi, Autonomia Post-Political Politics*.

¹⁴³ Cleaver, *Reading 'Capital' Politically*, 57-59. An alternative to the category of the socialised worker preferred by some AM or post-workerist theorists was the 'disseminated worker'.

¹⁴⁴ Historically, Cuninghame notes, Marxist theory diminished the role of these 'marginals'. Alternatively, for AM, this was the recomposition of the working class associated with a shift of the movement into society, away from the point of production. Cuninghame, "Autonomia in the 1970s," esp. 79. Consequently, AM is guilty, as Cuninghame remarks, of collapsing elements of the movement sector, such as feminism, into the mechanism of class recomposition. Patrick Cuninghame, "Italian Feminism, Workerism and Autonomy in the 1970s: The Struggle against Unpaid Reproductive Labour and Violence," *Amnis* 8, no. 3 (2008): 3.

¹⁴⁵ Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1967-83)*, ed. Red Notes (London: Red Notes, 1988), 209. This social subject was also theorised as more antagonistic toward the capitalist restructuring of industry in the first half of the 70s than its predecessor the mass worker. See Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection," esp. 86-87.

¹⁴⁶ Nick Witheford, "Autonomist Marxism and the Information Society," *Capital and Class* 18, no. 1 (1994).

Witheford outlines Bologna "had himself provided an important autonomist analysis of the diffusion of social conflicts out of the factory into the body of society and the multiplication of Marx's revolutionary subject into a 'Tribe of Moles' (1980)."

¹⁴⁷ Bologna, "Negri's Proletarians." Originally published as Sergio Bologna, "Proletari e Stato di Antonio Negri: Una Recesione," *Primo Maggio* 7(1976).

Operaia. In the image of the non-identitarian subjects of social autonomy, we can see the trace of the in-between subject of the first generation. In the subsequent theoretical composition of the socialised worker, we have reproduced the transition from struggle to political organisation.¹⁴⁸

Bologna, critical of Negri's pursuit of the "worn-out trade of the theoretician or ideologue," contended, "this form of political discourse is obsolete; (...) this autonomy of the theoretician should be combated (...)." The 'mystified general theory' or ideology of Negri needs to be replaced with precise concrete representations of the subject of autonomy in terms of what, where and who.¹⁴⁹ Bologna relates to Negri's philosophical pursuit as a 'creation of alibis' for his new theory of class composition, a homogenising of the sectoral nature of conflict that amounts to a theoretical "hunt for a different social subject – constructing and on occasion inventing another social figure to whom can be imputed the process of liberation from exploitation." The self-aggrandising of Negri overlooks that radical theory, according to Bologna, is one's intervention in a debate involving thousands of participants. A consequence of Negri's philosophical endeavour, Bologna continues, is the 'burying of the past' and "at the level of theoretical reflection, this translates into silence on what the working class left has done during recent years (...)."¹⁵⁰ This is to ignore the rationale of groups such as those that valorised voluntary marginality and the 'living of the left life' over questions of working class composition and political organisation. Such neglect is the distinctive feature of contemporary sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs in the Italian situation.

Post-politics and the radical subjects

In the contemporary movement sector of Italy (from the mid 1950s onwards), the antagonistic community interrupted authoritarian forms of organisation, denied conventional social identities, and returned to self-aware and self-determined practices of community. This rejuvenated radical subject removed itself from political servility, social obedience, instrumentalism, and integralism. In the revival of co-research and self-activity, the post-workerism of the social factory, and the 'post-political politics' of counter-culture, the emancipatory practice of autonomy wavers, strays, or breaks from the epistemic community that tied politics to organisation from above, theoretical intervention, and identity. Bologna, discussing the class struggle of the 1970s occurring in an environment where 'party politics' has become a force for social aggregation, asserts that radical politics has become "a question of social and cultural identity, of acceptance or refusal to accept the norms of social behaviour required and laid down by the form of the State." Under these conditions, he continues:

Classes have tended to lose their '*objective*' characteristics and become defined in terms of *political subjectivity*. But in this process, the major force of *redefinition has come from below*: in the continuous reproduction and invention of systems of counter-culture and struggle in the sphere of everyday living (...).¹⁵¹

For example, as recorded in *Living with an Earthquake*, autonomous feminism:

¹⁴⁸ Also reoccurring, according to Bologna, is the formation of political elite that suffocates the "workers' direction of organisation and the movement." Bologna, "Amo Il Rosso e il Nero, Odio il Rosa e il Viola," 155.

¹⁴⁹ Bologna, "Negri's Proletarians," 45-47.

¹⁵⁰ Bologna, "Negri's Proletarians," 40. Again, this has similarities to Kristin Ross' observation of the 'self-serving philosophies of history' in the memory of France's May.

¹⁵¹ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 44 (emphasis mine).

Was firmly based on the material and other needs of the participants themselves, and no longer on some abstract 'commitment to the needs of the working class' in abstraction. In this new movement, the feminist component has been more strongly present than ever before, particularly in the struggle to integrate the 'personal' and the 'political' aspects of politics, and in the *struggle against hierarchy-structures and leader-figures*. (...) We have insisted that our movement is specific and distinct (...). We have fought to establish the fact that our daily life is political – we are autonomous political agents.¹⁵²

Autonomist Feminism broke from the workers' movement, which had 'postponed' the issue of gender,¹⁵³ and pursued agendas disarticulated from the demands of the wider community. Such a pursuit was characteristic of the diffusion of agendas that stemmed from the 'autonomy of the social'.

Subjectivities previously subordinate to that of the worker ascended in the mid 1970s. The RSMs of this period extended conflict into new areas of contestation (geographically, socially, culturally, and politically) making anything, anyone, anywhere, and anytime the material of politics. The creativity and innovation of this sector went beyond the recognised limits of political struggle, and rejected the austerity and moral seriousness of the New and Old Left.¹⁵⁴ This included practices of the urban youth collectives, which were no longer symbolic gestures and forms of material struggle. Instead, they appropriated 'luxuries' such as concert tickets and cinema entry; positive expressions of 'living marginal' and an immediate rejoinder to the experience of social exclusion.¹⁵⁵ This newly formed antagonistic community fashioned itself around lived experience ('real behaviours'), and as Cuninghame notes, its actions were not instrumental means or the material realisation of abstract reflections.¹⁵⁶

However, the movements of social autonomy were not politically naive or apolitical, as is commonly portrayed. Further, they did not constitute a 'second society' isolated from questions of social hegemony and the cycle of politics. Importantly, the practices of creative autonomy were not merely the 'path of the personal' as NSMT (Melucci) and SMT (Tarrow) would have us believe. This is conspicuous in the persistent desire of the counter-cultural movements to rail against being a worker, showing they are capable of more than work, 'participation' in society, and the reduction to general interests.

In an article titled "Radio Alice – Free Radio," the *A/traverso* Collective state that their struggle is against:

The blackmail of poverty, the discipline of labour, hierarchical order, sacrifice, fatherland, family, general interests, socialist blackmail, participation: *all that stifled the voice of the body. All our time, forever and always, devoted to labour.* Eight hours of work, two hours of travel,

¹⁵² This statement forms part of the preface to a section of *Living with an Earthquake* dedicated to elaborating the relation of the women's movement to the Left. Red Notes, '*Living with an Earthquake*', 114.

¹⁵³ Cuninghame, "Italian Feminism."

¹⁵⁴ Umberto Eco understood the movement of '77 as a shift away from the moral seriousness of Marxism, choosing instead an avant-garde approach to daily life. Umberto Eco, "C'e Un Altra Lingua, l'italo-Indiano," in *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977: La Grande Ondata Rivoluzionaria E Creativa, Politica Ed Esistenziale*, ed. Nannni Balestrini and Primo Moroni (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997).

¹⁵⁵ See Viola 1976 cited in Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 174-175. The appropriating of bourgeoisie privileges as a political practice has precedence in the student movement of the late 60s. By taking up actions usually associated with the bourgeoisie, the working class youth intruded upon social spaces typically devoid of the antagonistic class.

¹⁵⁶ See Cuninghame, "A Laughter," 165-166.

and, afterward, rest, television, and dinner with the family. Everything which is not confined within the limits of that order is obscene.¹⁵⁷

In the Marxist theoretical form favoured by Berardi, the Movement of '77 understood the intrusion of capitalism as an anthropological disturbance, "an expropriation of time for life."¹⁵⁸ The classical Marxist notion of the alienation of work became not simply labour exploitation, but the expropriation of the time, space, and opportunity to live a quality of life demanded by those marginalised by bourgeois culture.¹⁵⁹ The *A/traverso* collective assert their actions speak of the Paris Commune, France's May, and Italy's Autumn; however, the established order has a discourse and a set of reasons and explanations that silence this voice, for it already and always "connects, explains, *allows no interruptions*, organises, participates, reprimands ..."¹⁶⁰ The 'culturally advanced proletariat' was conscious that within this order, traditional Marxism was now effectively an organised form of exploitation, dominating working life. The response of the subjects of social autonomy was re-invention from below, an attempt to shed the ideological and organisational baggage of the revolutionary groups of the late 1960s.¹⁶¹

From within the generalised area of autonomy, the strongest criticism of the party form, its bureaucracy and ideology, was the creative sector. Best identified with Berardi, the journal *A/traverso* and the independent radio station Radio Alice, 'creative autonomy' challenged the State and Capitalism through imagination and innovation.¹⁶² These movements were different; they turned away from the enticements of representation. While groups such as the artistic collectives and the Metropolitan Indians (MI) shunned projects of political organisation, what they considered a form of instrumental unity inflicted upon them by impersonal authorities, they were politically aware and active. An article in the first independent issue of *A/traverso* (May 1975) remarks that the new collectives forming in the area of social autonomy were "a new way of understanding political organisation. No longer of the party, no longer of the grand politicised structures, but an organisation that comes from below, from everyday life."¹⁶³ While the new movements sidelined the political agenda of seizing control of the state, they did not give up the terrain of politics, but, instead, they reconceptualised its territory as the resistance to conventional styles of life.

Negri observed while 'adjusting' his position on the movement of social autonomy, that this field of antagonism presented a describable challenge to the system, embodying a break with the capitalist relation and becoming a primary antagonist of the state form.¹⁶⁴ The collectives of the area of creativity had a rationale for their actions and articulable aims relating to the kind of life they wanted to live. Accordingly, they condemned the organisational tendencies of the area of autonomy, especially OWA,

¹⁵⁷ Collective A/traverso, "Radio Alice-Free Radio," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext (E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 130-131 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵⁸ Franco Berardi, *Dell'innocenza. 1977: L'anno della Premonizione* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 1997). Cited in Cuninghame, "Autonomia in the 1970s," 9. The work of Foucault influenced Berardi's intellectual development, as did Deleuze and Guattari, whom Berardi fled to Paris to work with. The influence of these figures is apparent in the 77ers relation to work and capital outside the terms of conventional Marxist analysis. Bologna remarks that generally the 77ers were more likely to read Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari than Marx. Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

¹⁵⁹ Berardi, *Dell'innocenza*, 73-74.

¹⁶⁰ A/traverso, "Radio Alice," 131.

¹⁶¹ Berardi, "Anatomy of Autonomy," 152.

¹⁶² A/traverso, "Assemblea di Roma." Cited in Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 92-94. Wright provides further discussion of the relation of this area to *Autonomia*.

¹⁶³ A/traverso, "Piccolo Gruppo in Moltiplicazione," *A/traverso*, no. 1 (1975).

¹⁶⁴ Negri, "Domination and Sabotage."

for its ignorance of the diversity of the movement and alternative forms of political resistance.¹⁶⁵ The young proletarians communicated, circulated, and intervened on the progressive culture of the political community, developing a new vocabulary of political antagonism, in some quarters inspired by Dada and the Situationists, that challenged the 'common sense' of the New and Old Left organisations, and the institutions of the political cycle.¹⁶⁶

The 'painted politics' of the MI provide a pertinent example of counter-cultural politics. NSMT and SMT invariably single out the youth movement to represent the 'pure behaviour' of the collectives that 'vanished' in a 'display of signs' and 'a retreat into art'. While described by the prevailing accounts of the Italian RSMs as a 'nonsensical' element in the Movement of '77, the MI displays a keen self-awareness and knowledge of the political philosophy it contested, rejecting the notion that politics requires the material organisation of subversion and the coalescing around the abstract principles of theoreticians.¹⁶⁷ The contribution of Maurizio Torealta to the *Semiotext (e)* series on Italian post-political politics exhibits a comprehension of this radical community that escapes our sociological accounts. A popular portrayal of the MI is that it was "unable to participate in public assemblies with *sensible speeches*"; however, Torealta challenges this notion of 'incapacity' in the re-telling of the mass gathering in Bologna in September 1977.¹⁶⁸

The Bologna convention split between two groups that converged on the city. One group, who would end up 'breaking chairs upon each other's heads', congregated at the sports arena, setting up as an assembly where formal speeches were delivered. The other group, Torealta recounts, slept in the streets and conducted discussions in thousands of small gatherings. The first group "sought the establishment – in the order of signs and discourse – of a city fortress, (...) in reality the mark of an old passion for collecting imported practices," while the second "chose not to establish a city; they decided to continue being *nomads*, but perhaps it is more correct to call them sophists."¹⁶⁹ The notion of the sophist registers the absence of a rigid set of beliefs or formalised doctrines, the avoidance of representative organisations and institutions. Their actions were an assault on the politics of the Old Left and the vanguard New Left, marking its break from the seriousness and dogmatism of the political institution. Their practices record contempt for the leadership of the political elite, the voluntarism of the intellectual vanguard, and the traditions of resistance and revolution that confine the subjectivity of the radical community to the 'fortresses' of working class struggle.

The subjects of the area of social autonomy understood the relation of life and politics differently. As Wright has noted, this exposed a crisis in representative and party politics, with no existing or theorised

¹⁶⁵ A/traverso (1977): 1 cited in Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 92. OWA was criticised for its "logic of organisational patriotism."

¹⁶⁶ Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 602-612. An example of the experimental political forms of this area is Mao-Dada, the effort to bring together Dadaism's challenge to the separation of life and art with a Maoist advancing of the needs and self-organisation of the masses. See also Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 92-94.

¹⁶⁷ Mino Monicelli provides a useful introduction to the subversive practice of the creative movements and outlines the place of the theory and practice of the MI in the movement of '77. See Mino Monicelli, "Creativita Sovversive del Movimento '77," *Derive Approdi* 15(1997). Volume 15 of *Derive Approdi (Lingue & Linguaggi. Gli Indiani Metropolitan)* focuses on the creative movement sector and the MI in particular.

¹⁶⁸ Maurizio Torealta, "Painted Politics," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext(E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 102 (emphasis mine). For another useful review of the Bologna convention see "Il Covegno di Bolgna: Il Movimento Senza Sbocchi" in Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 574-581. While the streets were filled with dancing, singing, music and games, the convention was more than just a festival. The youth came to meet and talk, to share their experiences of exploitation and liberation, and to discuss politics and the movement (577-578).

¹⁶⁹ Torealta, "Painted Politics," 104-105.

form able to capture the complexity or impetus of this area.¹⁷⁰ The actions of creative autonomy created breaches in the thinking of the organisations of the Left, which could no longer substantiate the actions of these collectives within political frameworks braced by instrumentalist and identitarian explanations of class struggle. Virno recounts:

In large part it was these tendencies (...) that made the young people of '77 incomprehensible to the traditional elements of the workers' movement (...). Rather than closing themselves in a besieged fortress, doomed to a passionate defeat, they tested the possibilities of tempting the adversary to attack empty fortresses, abandoned long ago.¹⁷¹

An error common to accounts of the new movements of social autonomy is treating them as 'partial phenomena', as Cuninghame notes, devaluing their political significance in comparison to institutional politics,¹⁷² taking away their 'legitimacy' as a form of political resistance. In part, this is a result of confusion regarding the epistemic value of the creativity and innovation of this sector. The new social subject, according to Lotringer and Marazzi, produced a 'surplus of knowledge', an excess of invention and intelligence outside the needs of the workers' movement, political organisation, and society.¹⁷³ Extraneous to the traditions of working class politics, the counter-cultural movements and groups such as the autonomous women were conceptualised as 'something else', in need of the direction of the worker's strategy of social transformation. This saw intellectuals – notably Asor Rosa as part of the PCI 'two societies' thesis¹⁷⁴ – marginalise these communities, repeating the errors of the institutional rejection of the novelty of the social autonomy. The second society thesis considered the 'marginals' as of secondary importance to the struggles of the worker, epiphenomenal and irrational, effectively the debris from the radical community's disaggregation caused by the industrial restructuring in the early 1970s.¹⁷⁵ However, Lotringer and Marazzi note, otherness and idiosyncrasy were inextricable from struggles undertaken on the social terrain where marginality was central to antagonism.¹⁷⁶

Melucci noted that the social and political exclusion of certain collectives occurred "not so much because they resist the established order but because they escape it."¹⁷⁷ Ironically, he repeats this delegitimising of sectors of the Movement of '77 when he diminishes the political nature of the creativity of the counter-cultural collectives. This is common across sociological approaches to the politics of RSMs where an organisational intent and explanatory purpose overwhelm accounts of the difference and particularity of communities that eschew the norms of political engagement and exist in positions that are marginal to conventional systems of representation. This is the plight of the 'incomprehensible' subjects of the Italian situation, irreducible to a political composition while indissoluble from the political cycle. They disassociate from social identities and sociological groups elaborated in abstraction, but they fulfil the needs of a wider community.

¹⁷⁰ Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 74.

¹⁷¹ Virno, "Counter Revolution," 244-245 (emphasis mine).

¹⁷² Cuninghame, "Autonomia in the 1970s."

¹⁷³ Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," 15.

¹⁷⁴ Alberto Asor Rosa, *Le Due Società: Ipotesi sulla Crisi Italiana* (G. Einaudi, 1977).

¹⁷⁵ Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," 15.

¹⁷⁶ Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," 15.

¹⁷⁷ Melucci, "Frontier Land," 239.

3. The incomprehensible radical subjects

In the Red notes pamphlet *Italy 1977-78: Living with an Earthquake*, we read that the culmination of the new radicalism of the 1970s was the growth of the territory of 'revolution' to encompass general society and daily life.¹⁷⁸ On this new political ground, opposition went beyond single issues that had previously tied struggle to concerns such as factory wages. Nor was there a unique subject, such as the 'worker' or 'student', with which to classify the radical community. Instead, a 'revolutionary process' was opening up an unmapped political terrain populated with unfamiliar radical subjects. Problems common to social relations under the current form of representative democracy forged this political landscape. This saw the movement *massify* through the direct, particular, and subjective actions of a decentred radical sector. This area, loosely referred to as the movement of social autonomy, consisted of diffuse subjects who shared their particular experiences of political and social exclusion as being in common, and were attempting to liberate daily existence from the hegemony of party politics and political organisation.¹⁷⁹ This movement dislocated from the neo-Leninists, from the New left as well as the Old, and shifted away from the models of revolt drawn from countries such as Cuba and Vietnam.

By 1975, the favourite referents of SMT were gone from the massified radical community, in particular, from the autonomous women's movement and urban youth collectives. While definitive, the regenerated radical community escaped conceptual capture by the theories of radical politics in vogue in Italy at the time. The leaderships of youth and autonomous women's movement, and their underlying forms of organisation and co-operation, were estranged from the political elite. The Red Notes collective claims that during this period "the revolutionary groups are having to rack their brains and rethink their theories to adjust to this new reality,"¹⁸⁰ a rethinking necessary across the breadth of sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs.

The radical community that emerged from the area of social autonomy in the mid 1970s, in particular the urban youth groups that provided the impetus for the Movement of '77, are the other face of this epoch that is invariably masked in the clamour to explain the 'terrorism' of groups such as the BR.¹⁸¹ While the crescendo of protest and street violence is the epicentre of fascination in most accounts of '77, this was also a year of intense cultural and social opposition, not 'mere' cultural experimentation, personal indulgence, art, and fashion, but politics in the form of cultural and social transformation. As Virno intimates, it was something other than the use of violence or a 'siege mentality' that made these radical communities incomprehensible. For this reason, we must not be seduced too readily by the sociological theories of decline (SMT) and disintegration (NSMT), demobilisation and fragmentation. As is noted in *Living with an Earthquake*, this was a mass movement, involving "large numbers of people – tens of thousands in the big cities take part in street demonstrations...a couple of thousand turn up as a matter of course at assemblies held at the Rome University." In addition, "it is also 'mass' because it's not just 'left-wing intellectuals.'"¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Red Notes, '*Living with an Earthquake*'.

¹⁷⁹ This is my particular interpretation of the summary provided in the preface to Red Notes, '*Living with an Earthquake*'.

¹⁸⁰ Red Notes, '*Living with an Earthquake*', preface.

¹⁸¹ The urban youth groups, in particular those on the outskirts of Milan, were co-ordinated under the name of the *Circoli Proletari Giovanili* (Proletarian Youth Circles). These groups, precursors to the Movement of 1977 and "creative autonomy," were not generic social phenomena but, as previously discussed in this thesis (see for example pages 114, 120, 148-150), contained a plurality of interests that were irreducible to a sociological group and were searching for new experiences of the common.

¹⁸² Red Notes, '*Living with an Earthquake*', Preface.

While the theory of AM presented a new way of thinking revolutionary politics, spawning numerous collectives, understanding RSMs in the Italian situation requires awareness of the interplay of the subjective and objective modes of radicalism, understanding the exchange between the acts of *immediacy* of the radical community and the correlate effect of the observation of these practices in the discourse on politics. An early signpost to the centrality of this dynamic in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s was the co-inquiries of autonomist thought. The workerist booklet *The Last Firebrands* asserts that these investigations contemplated the real life effects of work, the workers' *experiences* of work, free time, and daily struggles, and elevated the importance of the workers' *perceptions* of relations in the work place.¹⁸³ This was the living of revolution, accompanied by an effort to relate this theory and practice of the grass-roots activist through a historiographical methodology. As Bologna notes, it was an effort to understand the relation between the movement and the political elite, to be aware of their distinctiveness and entanglement.¹⁸⁴ At times, however, the opportunity to represent and recuperate the subject of antagonism in political frameworks and schemas of thought proved as irresistible to the radical theorists as it did to the institutions of the political cycle and sociological thought. The ability to recuperate or politicise the in-between subjects seems to mark out the veracity of competing schemas of thought.

However, the indeterminism associated with the shift from '68 to '77, a period of political, cultural, and social transformation and transition in Italian society that has the 1950s and late 1970s as its outliers, was for the radical community as much a practical problem as it was a theoretical one. The recomposition of class, the emergence of new radical subjectivities, and the 'excess' of innovation and creativity became, Toscano remarks, the challenge of generating "new organisations of class struggle on a new terrain," in response to "the fundamental non-homogeneity of class composition."¹⁸⁵ The realisation of political organisation is uncertain in this environment, and, Toscano asserts, politicisation "must be conquered explicitly" within projects of class unity.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, it is apparent that for the social movements that materialised in the mid 1970s (heralding and then founding the Movement of '77), and similarly those of the late 1950s, the problematic was something other than a question of *generating organisation*, materially realising or objectively expressing unity.

At key moments throughout the 1960s and 1970s, political contestation was manifest in the relaunching or restitution of the radical community. This is evident in the Movement of '77, which denies social, historical, and cultural dispersal to create new, shared experiences of collectivity coalescing around self-awareness. This movement sector practiced new forms of life and did not seek their endowment from an external authority. This was the forming of a radical class-for-itself, without the intervention of the Party or vanguard intellectuals, and without recourse to a theoretical model of political programmes and solutions. These RSMs realised community through a 'doing' particular to the local and specific conditions of the collective. Virno suggests that in the area of 'great disorder' of the Movement, action is incomprehensible through the principle of identity. The discrete components, for example the women and young proletarians, are parts irreducible to a whole, for community here founds upon the "qualitative consistency, profoundly varied, of their 'doing'."¹⁸⁷ This is a direct, processual, and subjective response to exclusion, a practical verification of the capacity to recognise and respond to the

¹⁸³ *The Last Firebrands*, 25.

¹⁸⁴ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

¹⁸⁵ Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection," 88.

¹⁸⁶ Toscano, "Chronicles of Insurrection," 88.

¹⁸⁷ Paolo Virno, "Dreamers of a Successful Life," in *Italy: Autonomia Post Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Semiotext (E) Intervention Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980), 112-113.

experience of exploitation. It is through their actions, such as the refusal of entry into the factory and the reclamation of the time of leisure, that these groups verify that they are capable of more than the capacities afforded them through identification with a specific location in the existing social order.

The self-aware practices of this third generation are not isolated phenomena in the Italian situation. The first regeneration of the radical community began with the industrial workers of the modernised factory, in particular the southern migrants, refusing identification through their relation to work. This subject was born of the self-activity and autonomous self-organisation of workers. The first generation took responsibility, Hardt believes, for self-constitution and the re-ordering of society based on their experience and perception of the material conditions, not an idealised organisation or paradigmatic subjectivity.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, the urban youth extended political conflict into new areas, promoting a communal form dismissed as parasitic and criminal by the official Left, conflated with class recomposition by the New Left, and misinterpreted by social movement theorists as symptomatic of social crisis or social movement decline. In their own way, these accounts obscure the subjectivity of the new movement and expropriate it of its knowledge of social struggle, drawing it back to questions of political composition, strategies and decisions, institutional engagement, and conflict over political resources.

The importance of these self-determined radical subjects in emancipatory politics is evident in the subjective force of the new community, which fractured thought, disrupted perception, and shifted – if only temporarily – the focus of theorising from an objective theory of social action [a political philosophy] to the support of the ‘concrete subjectivity’ of the social antagonist [a strategy].¹⁸⁹ Workerism was a recasting of the radical community and reconfiguring of the nexus of the radical subject and politics. However, the espousal of a new ‘philosophy of history’ by the theoreticians constrained the autonomy of the grass-roots movement. An outcome of the ‘success’ of the mass worker was the politicising (organising) of the movement around a common identity and sense of purpose. This establishing of a collective identity secured its social location, and, as *The Last Firebrands* notes, guaranteed its place in the social order.¹⁹⁰ It also tied its political practice to a social condition, naturalising its behaviour.

Workerism’s recuperation of the radical subject in the figure of the mass worker would itself stimulate the appearance of alternative subjectivities during the 1970s. Hardt tells us that Negri, and others like him, were trying to give the movement “*real* substance and a solid theoretical foundation.” Their theory was an “effort to *read the intelligence* of the masses and *translate* it into an effective political form,”¹⁹¹ developing, Negri writes, “a scientific (and thus practical) understanding of its composition and its desires.”¹⁹² A contradiction exists at the core of this pursuit however, for as Tronti asserts, “no sooner is organisation institutionalised into a form, than it is immediately used by capitalism (or by the labour movement on behalf of capitalism).”¹⁹³ It is where class antagonism aggregates that it becomes most vulnerable to attack. Beyond the capitalist threat of subsumption, theoretical intervention that

¹⁸⁸ See Hardt, "Into the Factory," 17-18.

¹⁸⁹ Hardt, "Into the Factory," 27.

¹⁹⁰ See *The Last Firebrands*, 27.

¹⁹¹ Hardt, "Into the Factory," 8.

¹⁹² Negri, "Crisis of the Planner State," 142. Negri, in his pamphlet *Domination and Sabotage*, suggested innovation and creativity emerged from the dynamics of struggle, a revolutionary imagination where hypotheses are developed, and propositions unfold; then they can be theorised. Negri, "Domination and Sabotage," 284.

¹⁹³ Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra," 93.

stabilises the identity of the radical subject also jeopardises the autonomy of the antagonistic community.¹⁹⁴

The dissolution of New Left groups in the first half of the 1970s, Bologna believes, highlighted their misunderstanding of antagonism, which the concrete conditions and actual behaviours of the antagonist informed, not the analytic categories or abstract statutes of the political elite. The mistake was imposing rather than comprehending the revolutionary form, repeating the errors of their predecessors, 'whipping out their Lenin masks' and strangling the movement in a fashion comparable to that of their enemy.¹⁹⁵ The interventionist intellectuals overlooked their own role in subsuming the RSMs within a vision of proletarian politics, subjugating the diversity of the radical community to working class hegemony.

According to Bologna, the irretrievable error of PO [and the other primary organisations of the New Left] was traceable back to the formative decision of its instigators (including himself) to form an extra-parliamentary group. Instead, he states, "we should have continued working in the social sphere, constructing alternatives (...): alternative spaces, liberated spaces. We were mistaken, we were mesmerized by the old idea, the old ambition of conquering power."¹⁹⁶ Berardi identified a similar problem with the movement of autonomy and its aftermath, which failed to capitalise on the reach of '77 by consolidating social forms. Instead of "social self-organisation, radio, television, information agencies," it reverted to the 'classical form' of organisation. He continues: "there was a movement that in social terms was quite vast, and that contained a quantity of (...) competencies (...). When this movement reached its pinnacle, in '77, (...) there was absolutely no capacity (...) or idea of giving a *directly social form* to those potentialities."¹⁹⁷ Whether reverting to 'classic forms of organisation' or being seduced by 'old ambitions', there was a failure of faith in the actions of the radical community on behalf of the organisations of the Left. This contributed to their inability to escape the horizon of the politics of representation, an affliction of theory shared by Melucci's concept of collective efficacy, and SMT's foreclosure on the politics of social autonomy.

The creativity and innovation of the movements of social autonomy tried to break from the austere and organised forms of political involvement. As this area was attempting to 'organise socially', Wright remarks the organised area of autonomy appeared to lose its initiative, looking back to traditional forms of political combat such as 'militant anti-fascism'.¹⁹⁸ It is the latter that draws the attention of SMT, was the focus of April 7 and the State, and prejudices Melucci to the positive social force of workers' subjectivity. Such beacons of political violence illuminate the sociological search for the politics of the radical subject in western democracy. However, as we have seen, Bologna and Berardi bemoan the failure of the far left to focus on the social sphere, missing the chance to consolidate political struggle within daily life. Instead, the political elite drew the movement back to questions of political composition and working class hegemony.

¹⁹⁴ The contradiction mentioned by Tronti, however, does not render the organisation of working class struggle and theoretical research futile. In fact, it makes it more urgent. He outlines in "Lenin in Inghilterra" how what is missing in the Italian situation is a form of revolutionary organisation, an approach to organising class struggle that can address the contradiction that presses the workers organisation back into the service of capitalism.

¹⁹⁵ Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 56-57.

¹⁹⁶ Bologna, "Intervista a Sergio Bologna," 8.

¹⁹⁷ Intervista A Franco (Bifo) Berardi, (2000) in Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore*, 8. This translation taken from Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 102-103.

¹⁹⁸ Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 86.

What could the prevailing sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs learn if, instead of focusing on the interventionist intellectuals, Marxism-Leninism, political violence, and the organisational perspective, they were attentive to the historiographical stream of IRT, the outliers of the movement, and alternative figures such as Virno?¹⁹⁹ While the former are important aspects of the movement, they need contextualising within the dynamics of the radicalisation of social movements, and the ongoing interplay to be found there between practice and theory.²⁰⁰ For instance, while the political elite may pose itself, as Giovannetti reflects, “as the relatively stable expression of social antagonism, as its memory, as the bearer of social values,”²⁰¹ and we cannot understand the movement without contemplating their role, equally, we must realise this group is but one layer. Bologna notes that the history of the radical community of Italy is, in part, a history of the meeting and parting of the movement and the political elite.²⁰² While intimately entangled with the movement, at times the instrumentalist projects of organising dissent beguiles the theorist and leadership, and in these moments, the politics of the movement and the intellectual come apart.

In whatever guise, the practice of autonomy in Italy is a direct, participatory, and self-organised form of struggle. Castellano and his comrades’ add that at its core, social autonomy was a demand for qualitative change in everyday life and a challenge to the organisation of social knowledge.²⁰³ On this terrain, the regeneration of the radical subject, the deconstruction and reconstruction of community, is a direct means through which the hegemony of the form of the state is destabilised. Toscano notes that autonomy was thought to counter the defusing of resistance enacted by the capitalist state in punitive and programmatic form.²⁰⁴ At the same time, the deconstruction of the radical community undermines organisational analyses that reduce radical practice to strategic abstractions. Contemporary social movements, in response to their reincorporation within the social order, Sassoon remarks, involve endless invention, “no longer endless struggle.” Accordingly, it is the innovative and creative aspects of social action, the ‘non-binding’ and diffuse forms, which provide insight into the dynamics of collective action.²⁰⁵

Conclusion

IRT provides a unique perspective on the development of the movement, and an alternative account of the dynamics of radicalisation. However, we must be mindful of those sectors that appropriate the knowledge of the radical community for political ends. Palandri, a student activist and writer associated with Radio Alice, relates in an interview with Cuninghame the sense of disdain for the organised area of workers’ autonomy felt amongst the social and creative sector. He (and others) disliked the organised workers autonomy because this group were attempting to impose their plan, “a utopia that they were

¹⁹⁹ While beyond the scope of this thesis, I am curious about the consequences for SMT, so enamoured of the framing of an ‘us and them’, of taking seriously Virno’s assertion that the social subject of the 70s left behind the ‘absolute enmity’ associated with the feud over who would be sovereign. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 206.

²⁰⁰ On this point, Bologna argues that we need to “understand to what extent (...) intellectuals and militants, represented a political elite; that is, a political stratum whose history is substantially entwined with, but is not the same as the history of the movements.” Cuninghame and Bologna, “For an Analysis”.

²⁰¹ Giovannetti, “Il Movimento.” Cited in Wright, “A Party of Autonomy?,” (emphasis mine).

²⁰² Cuninghame and Bologna, “For an Analysis”.

²⁰³ Castellano et al., “Do You Remember Revolution?,” 226-227.

²⁰⁴ See for similar Toscano, “Chronicles of Insurrection,” 87.

²⁰⁵ J Sassoon, “Ideology, Symbolic Action and Rituality in Social Movements,” *Social Science Information* 23, no. 4/5 (1984), p406, cited in Diani and Melucci, “Searching for Autonomy,” 340.

putting over our shoulder, that we were their donkeys (...)."²⁰⁶ The vanguard were imagined as the 'police', attempting, as Ruggiero states, to interchangeably 'co-opt or ostracize' the predominantly youth movement.²⁰⁷ The institutions of party politics and the radical organisations of the neo-Leninist intellectuals burdened these communities and twice excluded them from the knowledge practices of antagonism.

Bologna, commenting on the rhetorical excesses and millenarian language of Negri, states:

This conception [conflict as the moment of constitution] still attributes great value to visibility. The 'other', in order to be such, must be visible, manifest, and the more clamorous the conflict, the greater the identity it confers ... *This is the back door through which the traditional logic of politics is returned to play.* I prefer (...) a non-visible, non-spectacular path, the idea of the silent growth of a body that is *foreign to the sort of visibility that leaves you hostage to the universe of mediation.*²⁰⁸

When SMT and NSMT choose to ignore such analysis of the politics of RSMs, they repeat the error of the April 7 warrants, and the intellectuals such as those of OWA, who Wright asserts, "privileged a discourse around the party." They made the mistake of occluding 'the dialectic between political elite and movement.'²⁰⁹ If knowledge is to aid radical politics, Bologna remarks, we must "start from trying to recover that knowledge which capital (...) is daily expropriating from the working class. (...) This job is not one for a small group of intellectuals, but for thousands of comrades."²¹⁰

The theoretical rejuvenations of SMT and NSMT ignore voices such as Bologna, summarily dismissing Marxist social theory as a credible mode of analysis of the politics of RSMs. This creates blind spots in accounts of the Italian situation. Having invoked a caricature of Marxism as a monolithic and historicist political framework, against which they compare their explanatory frameworks, they then advance a neo-Leninist voice as representative of the radicalisation of social movements in Italy.²¹¹ Beyond prejudicing their selection of materials and subjects, this obscures the conjunction of the subjective and objective modes of radicalism in these movements. With regard to social movement mobilisation, Melucci states that Leninism assumes "that involvement is the work of a minority that inspires an undifferentiated mass of individuals and leads them to recognise their real interests."²¹² While in its most vulgar form he may be correct, he fails to acknowledge the effort of certain quarters of IRT to theorise the subjectivity of struggle as the motor of social change, inspired by the unpredictable practices of the early workers' movement. This emboldened Melucci to try to purge his analysis of contemporary social movements of the knowledge and praxis of Marxist radical communities. SMT is similarly dismissive. Carried forward by a superficial encounter with historicist Marxism and the aggressive brand of Marxism-Leninism associated with the Italian area of organised violence, SMT

²⁰⁶ Cuninghame, "Autonomia: A Movement," 186.

²⁰⁷ For further discussion see Ruggiero, "New Social Movements," 171.

²⁰⁸ Bologna, "Intervista a Sergio Bologna", 14 (emphasis mine). This interview with Bologna comes from an important contemporary project that provides sources of oral history on the Italian movement sector, beyond the official sources, such as the *pentiti*, preferred by Anglo-American research.

²⁰⁹ Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," 101. Wright formulates this position in reference to the theory of Bologna, amongst others. See Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis".

²¹⁰ Bologna, "An Overview," 122.

²¹¹ As a social movement theory, Marxism is characterised as a top-down macro or deductive theory, universalist, dismissive of agency and anthropology, and reductive of social relations to the structural pre-conditions of activism. Alan Scott, *Ideology and the New Social Movements* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

²¹² Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, 32.

affords IRT a diminished presence. In both instances, the 'post-Marxist' framework avoids critically engaging with the Marxist renewal that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, the coarse classificatory net utilised to disbar Marxist thought from the status of interlocutor in the Italian situation overreaches, capturing the self-activity and discursive dimension of the radical community that organised from below while circulating within the political territory dominated by Marxist interventionism.

In an interview with Massimo De Angelis discussing the importance of AM to the development of radical thought, Harry Cleaver maintains that:

The Marxist-Leninists (...) have privileged the political party of professional revolutionary intellectuals capable of grasping the *general class interest and teaching it to workers* (...). The critical theorists, who largely accepted the orthodox Marxist analysis (...) have also privileged the role of *professional intellectuals* who alone are capable of grasping the nuances of instrumentalist domination (...). What both approaches have failed to do is to study the *power of workers to (...) throw the system into crisis and to recompose social structures*.²¹³

This emphasises the fact, generally elided from the accounts of SMT and NSMT, that AM questions the veracity of existing Marxist explanatory frameworks after the renewal of class struggle at the end of the 1950s. Autonomist thought, initially informed by the practice of workers' inquiries, was a predominantly Marxist theoretical thread that ran throughout the Italian movement sector of the 1960s and 1970s, critical of orthodox and historicist Marxism and neo-liberalism/capitalism. In addition, AM responds to the *indifference* of western sociological thought toward the identity of the radical subject. As such, it attempts to explicate the dynamics of class composition that unify the radical community. Rather than being an outcome of an indistinct or abstract process, as elaborated by the SMT synthesis frameworks, AM understands collective action as a direct, processual, and subjective response to specifiable, yet not static, political and social conditions.

AM, first generalised as workerism, is at its foundation a sociological investigation of the dynamics of class composition, where workers' subjectivity is the 'force' driving social development. As such, its claim to be a credible mode of analysis of the politics of RSMs deserves careful consideration; however, SMT and NSMT protect their respective modelling of the nexus of politics and the radical community by isolating Marxist thought and quarantining the practice and theory of far left social movements in Italy.

²¹³ De Angelis, "An Interview with Harry Cleaver".

Chapter five

Radical equality: Rancière's account of the politics of social movements

One must choose to attribute reason to real individuals or to their fictive unity. One must choose between making an unequal society out of equal men and making an equal society out of unequal men. Whoever has some taste for equality shouldn't hesitate: individuals are real beings, and society a fiction. It's for real beings that equality has value, not for a fiction.¹

Jacques Rancière – *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

Theoretical renewal in the field of social movement study post 1968 supports Rancière's view that the new situations of politics raise questions on two interdependent levels: the practical (real life/subjective) and theoretical (discourse/objective). After tumults such as France's May 68 (and Italy's *Sessantotto*), when we attempt to answer questions like 'where are we?' and 'what makes us a we?' we are obliged to consider, Rancière argues, how to characterise the situation of our lives *and* to rethink the frameworks we use to see and map our terrain.² Resolutely, his perspective requires us to consider how theoretical accounts of politics populate their studies with certain kinds of political subjects.³ Rancière is concerned to understand how, in a given situation, we determine what is and what is not political and how we know "whether the subjects who count in the interlocution 'are' or 'are not,' whether they are speaking or just making noise."⁴

Rancière's unique response to the contemporary demands placed on political theory offers a different historical conceptual elaboration of the nexus of politics and the radical community, and reaches beyond the reasons and explanations of sociology. First, his composition of a nonidentary and non-institutional image of political activity provides an alternative vision of the positive contribution that RSMs make to modern politics. Genuine participation in politics, Rancière states, requires the endless imagining of unpredictable subjects, subjects emancipated from their social condition and associated attitudes, aptitudes, and decisions. Thus, social movements fundamentally involve the staging of new communities, rather than being a critical project that defends or promotes the interests of an existing collective subject within the institutions of the political system.⁵ Ultimately, Rancière wants to reveal

¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 133.

² Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 114-115.

³ In her discussion of the intent of the history collective *Les Révoltes Logiques*, of which Rancière was a founding member, Kristin Ross recounts that their approach was to interrogate the grounding of historical discourse, rather than 'write an alternative history'. A critical question for this collective was "where do the representations (...) generated by social historians come from, and what do they obscure?" Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 124. The task set by *Les Révoltes Logiques* marks the historiographical methodology of Rancière out from that of Sergio Bologna and *Primo Maggio*, discussed in chapter 4. To recall, the undertaking of *Primo Maggio* was to "re-start the process of historical reflection on the mass worker." Bologna, "Tribe of Moles," 55-56.

⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 50.

⁵ Rancière represents politics as the "global change in the ways of living, thinking and feeling," a revolution in the forms of life not in the forms of government. Max Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus and the Aesthetics of Class Struggle: An Exchange with Jacques Rancière," *Historical Materialism* 13, no. 4 (2005): 295.

how “a so-called political and social movement [is] also an *intellectual* and *aesthetic* one, a way of reconfiguring the frameworks of the *visible* and the *thinkable*.”⁶

Primarily, Rancière’s political thought derives its coherence from his axiom of politics, his most enduring idea that equality is common to everyone. Vitaly, such ‘radical equality’ is first, “not *given*, nor is it *claimed*, it is *practiced*, it is *verified*,”⁷ and second it “is not a goal to be reached but a supposition to be posited from the outset and endlessly repositied.”⁸ Practiced by individuals, equality forges a rearrangement of the existing organisation of society, with the effect being an aesthetic intervention in patterns of social hierarchy.⁹ It is aesthetic because it reconfigures the perceptual conditions of social experience, but as I will explain, it does so in a politically relevant way.¹⁰ A result of Rancière’s rethinking of emancipatory politics as the verification of equality is that he does not conceive the politics of RSMs as a ‘*strategic anticipation*’, the representational idea “that there is a known end that enables a choice of better means.”¹¹ Decisively, while Rancière asserts that the radical community does not *organise* around a common purpose, a collective identity, political solution or a programme of reform (institutional demands), their actions are rational. The egalitarian logic of emancipatory politics centres on the capacity of the excluded to articulate and organise their experience, it is not derivative of irrationalism, spontaneity, or wilful obscurantism.

Second, Rancière places his concept of politics against the background image of society as a ‘distribution of the sensible’, his ontological statement defending the claim that the ordering of speaking bodies is contingent. Accordingly, rather than search for the principle of unity that is the foundation of the political community, a task that preoccupies sociology, Rancière is interested to reveal that what qualifies as a community is always already underscored by an ordering of the sensible, conventions of meaning and significance that order that which is given to us in sense experience. Sense and meaning are organised forms of experience, but the modes of their organisation are contingent while typically hierarchical.¹² Consequently, it is the prejudices of social organisation, not the condition of the radical subject, which are naturalised in disciplinary thought. Accordingly, Rancière’s work attempts to negate the disciplinary impulse to identify and categorise everything within an existing order of knowledge.¹³

A discipline or discourse is, before everything else, Rancière claims, the erection of a territory and the objects that belong to it. Its methods are the ‘weapons’ that institute and maintain the boundary,¹⁴

⁶ Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics," 203, (emphasis mine).

⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 137 (emphasis mine).

⁸ Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London ; New York: Verso, 1995), 84. Todd May provides a useful summation of Rancière’s notion of ‘political equality’ as that enacted by individuals. “Politics (...) is collective action emerging from the presupposition of equality.” This is distinguishable from the created, protected, and given or ‘granted’ equality of contemporary liberal politics. Todd May, "Wrong, Disagreement, Subjectification," in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010), 70.

⁹ The notion of politics as an ‘aesthetic intervention’ marks out Rancière’s modelling of social movements from the cognitivist models of SMT and NSMT that rely on the dynamics of collective identity and framing to explicate the politics of RSMs.

¹⁰ Rancière defines politics as a “polemical redistribution of objects and subjects, places and identities, spaces and times, visibilities and meanings. In this respect, we call it an aesthetic activity (...).” Rancière, "Contemporary Art," 32. Below, I discuss the specificity of Rancière’s conceptualising of the aesthetic. Briefly, aesthetics to Rancière is not the science or theory of art, but is both a ‘regime of identification of art’ and a ‘dimension of human experience’.

¹¹ Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 295.

¹² Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge " *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. Autumn (2006): 1-2.

¹³ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 118-120.

¹⁴ Rancière, "Thinking between Disciplines," 11.

while the assumptions in play in disciplinary thought are used in a strategic fashion to disqualify certain agents and aggrandise others. Key to what follows, such distinctions, Rancière argues, accord with the fundamental prejudice that partitions society into ‘two humanities’: those who know and those who do not.¹⁵ This legitimises the dominance of certain classes – the active over the passive, intelligent over sensuous, and the educated senses over the raw/unrefined senses.¹⁶ What is important for Rancière is that such a partition of labour is overlooked as one of the main ways that the *scene* of politics is set up. For example, as previously discussed, the sociological accounts of radical politics normalise the division of intellectual and manual labour. The effect, in its various guises, is the clearing of the way for political or scientific intervention in the organising or politicising of RSMs. Fundamental to this situation is that the relation of the intellectual and the movement is that relation of knowledge and ignorance.¹⁷ Exploiting this relation creates a sense of *entitlement* that privileges the intellectual to speak as the representative of the radical community while occluding the logic and discursive dimension of grass-roots activism.

Rancière’s work on emancipatory politics

The writing of Rancière on emancipatory politics ranges across two distinct phases in the development of his political thought, and draws on sources as diverse as classical aesthetics, Marxist sociology, and ‘proletarian’ literature. The works he produced during the first phase, centred on the mechanisms and features of political and social domination, are an attempt to understand the history and ‘originary complexity’ of workers emancipation *and* its relation to theoretical accounts of social transformation.¹⁸ Rancière is concerned, he tells us, to study the “ways thought [and speech] assumes form and produces effects on the social body.” His study includes the “set of material forms of dominant thought – decisions, regulations ...” and so on, and “the materiality of the discourses and practices of those who were then engaged in opposing dominant thought (...).”¹⁹ Rancière’s early works of political thought yielded such important monographs as *Althusser’s lesson*,²⁰ *The Nights of Labour*,²¹ and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.²² As Kristin Ross shows, Rancière’s investigation of social and political domination occurs on two fronts: one through the resources of his archival project and the other through his critique of theoretico-political intervention. The former presents the ‘unexplicated’ thoughts and words of the exploited and excluded, while the latter lays the foundation for his criticism of those intellectuals claiming to “know and thus speak for, or explicate, the privileged other of political modernity.” While distinct, the praxeology and polemic of Rancière’s work ‘entertain a crucial dialogue’, which bears on his thinking on politics.²³ Rancière’s archival work is testament to his belief that the reasoning of those subjects dominated within the existing social order is the equal of the rationality and logic of the so-called experts and specialists who dominate the dialogue on the natural order of society. Thereby, the

¹⁵ Questioning the ontology of the two humanities is central to the development of Rancière’s political thought.

¹⁶ Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 31; Rancière, “Contemporary Art,” 37.

¹⁷ The relation of the intellectual to the movement is a prominent theme in Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*.

¹⁸ Rancière, “Work, Identity, Subject.”

¹⁹ Rancière elaborates this concern in his foreword to Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, xv-xvi.

²⁰ First published in 1974 as *La Leçon d’Althusser*.

²¹ This is the culmination of Rancière’s archival work, initially published in 1981 as *La Nuit des prolétaires*.

²² Originally published as *Le Maître ignorant* in 1987. The listed monographs, along with *Disagreement*, are of particular importance for understanding Rancière’s radical recovery of the concepts of politics and proletarian thought.

²³ See Kristin Ross, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), xxiii.

axiom of equality sets out the praxis of Rancière's archival project,²⁴ showing the verification of equality in diverse instances, rather than holding out for 'proletarian authenticity' or utopian ideal.²⁵

Rancière's design in *Althusser's Lesson* is to displace the 'specialist' and their form of theoretical intervention from the centre of political struggle.²⁶ Importantly, as Deranty acknowledges, the archival work of Rancière studied the multiplicity of voices and forms of speech "below the overbearing discourse of organised Marxism."²⁷ This is in contrast to the sociological accounts I have surveyed for this thesis, which amplify for various reasons the voice of the intellectuals (primarily those associated with the neo-Leninist organisations) who introduced Marxist science as a form of partisan philosophy to the workers' movement. Conversely, Rancière, as Deranty remarks, "refused to express the conclusions reached in studying the writings of the proletarian thinkers in the abstract languages, or using the canonical references, of academic philosophy and social theory."²⁸

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière developed his thinking on emancipation as dis-identification; this deconstructive political action, he avows, is free from substantialism and identitarian visions of the collective subject.²⁹ Subsequently, in *Disagreement*,³⁰ Rancière develops a theoretical framework to reflect upon politics as the reconfiguring of the field of experience. Political struggle, in the sense Rancière understands it, is the practice of subverting social order through the claiming of an identity *unavailable* as an ontological (sociological) subject.³¹ During this period of theoretical consolidation, Rancière developed the concepts of *police order* and *political subjectification*. He also elaborated a constructive dimension of political action, where the subject enacts a form of equality that expresses a shared intellectual capacity, common to *everyone*. Conceptualised as "the public intervention of a non-identitarian people subject,"³² the notion of enacting radical equality provides Rancière's political thought with a reconstructive vision of the radical community that stands apart from sociological accounts.

The second phase of Rancière's work on political emancipation is styled around aesthetics, an 'aesthetic turn' that searches for new conceptual tools to provide answers where existing conceptual models of emancipatory politics had proven inadequate.³³ He retrospectively justified his aesthetic turn in a recent

²⁴ Andrew Schaap labels Rancière a 'praxis theorist', disillusioned with political philosophy's persistent collapsing of "political issues into questions of government." Andrew Schaap, "Hannah Arendt and the Philosophical Repression of Politics," in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 146.

²⁵ For an outline of the early development of his archival project see Rancière, *The Nights of Labour*, 11.

²⁶ Opposed to interventionism is the *relaying* of the theory and practice of the excluded without introducing interpretive tools. The latter undertaking is starkly realised in Rancière's book *The Nights of Labour*, where he gathered the journals, thoughts, poems, dreams, and theory of the early nineteenth century workers, documenting and recounting their experiences and voices. Kristin Ross provides important insights into the research programme of Rancière in Ross, *May '68*. See also her "Translator's Introduction" to Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

²⁷ Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Logical Revolts," in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010), 20.

²⁸ Deranty, "Logical Revolts," 18.

²⁹ Rancière claims that in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* there appeared a positive figure of emancipation devoid of identity and substantialism, a figure emergent from the opposing of the egalitarian assumption to the logic of social aggregation. Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 211.

³⁰ *Disagreement* was first published in 1995 as *La Mésentente*.

³¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35-42.

³² Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject."

³³ The term 'aesthetic turn' and its applicability to the work of Rancière come from Deranty and Ross, *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, 13.

article where he claims that it is also within his early work that we must look for the formative image of his aesthetics.³⁴ His 'aesthetic period', which ranges over works such as *The Politics of Aesthetics*,³⁵ *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2009), and the important essay "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes" (2002), provides an account of the historical development of the political potential invested in modern philosophical aesthetics, and differentiates his aesthetico-political configuration from those who seek consolation either in art's autonomy or in its submission to politics. In addition, his aesthetics of politics breaks radically from the notion of the autonomy of the political, further marking his position out from the Marxist-Leninist intellectuals of the Party in France (and neo-Leninists in Italy) that dominated the discourse of left wing politics after the upheaval of 1968.

Against the deflation of aesthetic significance by the social sciences, Rancière attempts to restore the pertinence of the aesthetic dimension for the conceptualisation of social formations. His contemporary 'aesthetic theory' of politics highlights how there are alternative ways to consider the features and mechanisms of community formation, and one of these is the aesthetic *sensus communis*. His position offers a useful perspective on social movements that retains the nascent sense of formation that is lacking in sociological treatments of collective action. The intent of my engagement with Rancière's work is to reveal an alternative way of understanding the formation of community that retains essential characteristics of the radical subject (particularity and difference), and respects the epistemological work of this community. Here, I demonstrate how certain ideas from Rancière's work bring clarity to the explanatory breaks in the contemporary frameworks of social movement theory, and *uniquely* highlight their origin. My purpose is not to advance a thesis of the aesthetics of action in the modelling of RSMs; rather, it is to identify and evaluate some of the hidden and unquestioned premises in the prevailing theories of social movements.

A series of distinctive concepts and ideas constitutes Rancière's work on political emancipation. These stand alongside yet other concepts displaced from their usual uses and ends in disciplinary thought on political struggle.³⁶ What is to follow is an investigation of the contribution that the theorising of Rancière, specifically on the politics of emancipation, makes to the critical study of sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs in the Italian situation. Through an encounter with his praxeology and political ontology, I explore how Rancière puts forth a way to recover the radical subject both as an historical figure and as the agent of a radically different politics. This is less a critical study of Rancière's political thought than it is a utilisation of his theoretical development as a lens to focus attention on the sociological modelling of RSMs. Crucially, Rancière's conceptualising of the nexus of politics and the radical community contests the facile recuperation of the radical subject within the mechanism of social aggregation and dynamics of political contestation. He posits that radical politics are an intervention in, or an exception to, the ways community are gathered. Politics, as Rancière understands it, disrupt the 'given' of social experience and the discourses and theories that sustain divisions within the community.³⁷ I consider how his modelling of the political moment as an aesthetic intervention into the hierarchical ordering of experience offers new insight into the mechanisms and features of community formation and their representation in disciplinary modelling of social movements.

³⁴ In his early works on politics, in particular *The Nights of Labour*, Rancière developed a conception of politics he believed was 'naturally associated' with "some of the formative images and concepts of the very idea of aesthetics," in particular, those developed in Kant and Schiller. Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 214.

³⁵ Published initially in 2000 as *Le Partage du sensible*.

³⁶ In an interview in 2005, Rancière states that his work on politics involves "creating concepts and changing the meaning of words," an attempt to break from the "referential system of 'common sense'" exploited by disciplinary thought to stabilise its dialogue on the natural order of society. Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 299-300.

³⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 105-106.

1. Philosophy, society and politics

The work of Rancière on political emancipation occupies a distinctive position in social and political theory.³⁸ He admonishes sociology for its complicity in sustaining systems of social and political domination, and he refuses to connect his thought to sociological research. Counter to the prevailing treatment of the marginal community as ignorant of their condition, Rancière asserts that politics consists in “reclaiming thought as something belonging to everyone,” an overcoming of the division between those ‘qualified to think’ and their passive ‘objects’.³⁹ That is, he takes seriously the perspective of the exploited *and* their capacity to articulate and organise their experience, a theoretical commitment reflected in his effort to relay ‘thought from below’ (‘proletarian thought’).⁴⁰

Rancière’s archival project creates a space where, for example, the workers’ words are removed from their usual situation – ‘social stuff’ – and enter into a dialogue as the equal of philosophical narrative.⁴¹ An outcome of his commitment to such ‘indisciplinarity’ is the belief that “what is at stake in a social movement is *unintelligible* if you view it through the separate lens of political science, sociology, philosophy and so on.” This offers an insight into the label of ‘incomprehensible subject’ encountered in the sociological accounts of the Italian situation: the intelligibility (‘visibility’) of political activity is a function of the disciplinary framing of politics. Rancière remarks, “you cannot understand anything (...) if you enclose yourself in the field of one discipline. A discipline is always the *anticipated implementation* of a decision about the relation of thought and life, about the way thought is shared.”⁴²

A mainstay of Rancière’s re-thinking of politics – the belief that the radical theorist must *add* their dissident voice to politics, not as its author or interpreter, but as a participant – distinguishes his methodology from that of ‘old critical theory’.⁴³ He approaches the task of documenting the voices and experiences of the exploited from the perspective of the equality of intelligences, which assumes the common capacity for the invention and demonstration of political concepts, arguments, objects, and the like. Rancière’s ‘intuition’ is that “there is not, on the one hand, ‘theory’ which explains things and,

³⁸ Deranty provides an excellent introduction to the ‘paradoxical position’ Rancière occupies in contemporary political philosophy in Jean-Philippe Deranty, “Jacques Rancière’s Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition,” *Political Theory* 31, no. 1 (2003). He also offers a concise account of Rancière’s work on the theory of social and political domination in Deranty, “Introduction: A Journey in Equality.” Nick Hewlett provides another useful perspective on Rancière’s place in modern French thought in Nick Hewlett, *Badiou, Balibar, Rancière: Rethinking Emancipation* (London: Continuum, 2007).

³⁹ Marie-Aude Baronian, Mireille Rosello, and Jacques Rancière, “Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity,” *Art and Research* 2, no. 1 (2008): 3. The idea of intellectual emancipation receives its most detailed treatment in Rancière’s telling of the story of Joseph Jacotot in Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Rancière argues that the lesson of disciplinary thought, whether in philosophy or sociology, is one of inequality.

⁴⁰ Here the label ‘proletarian’ stands in for the exploited, not as the ‘privileged other’, but as an example of the equality of intelligences. Deranty concisely details the changing place of work and the worker in the thought of Rancière, in Deranty, “Work.”

⁴¹ The idea of the equality of proletarian thought with political philosophy is an example of Rancière’s commitment to ‘indisciplinarity’. This idea is the focus of Rancière, “Thinking between Disciplines.” It is reiterated in Rancière, “The Aesthetic Dimension.” Here I also refer to Rancière, “A Few Remarks,” 117.

⁴² Blechman et al., “Democracy, Dissensus,” 300 (emphasis mine).

⁴³ See Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 31-32. Paul Patton identifies in the work of Rancière the mark of French thinkers affected by May 1968. While Rancière’s approach is distinct to that of Deleuze and Foucault, he shares the presupposition that the role of the intellectual is “not to bring knowledge to or from the people,” but to struggle “against the order of discourse within which particular forms of knowledge appear or fail to appear.” Paul Patton, “Rancière’s Utopian Politics,” in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 133.

on the other hand, practice educated by the lessons of theory.”⁴⁴ Below, I look to the conceptual yield of Rancière’s praxeology for insight into the dynamics of the politics of RSMs.

Rancière’s historical lesson on equality

In France during the 1960s and 1970s, as in Italy, Marxism was modernising in an attempt to remain relevant amongst the students and workers who were experimenting with new forms of social struggle. By 1973, Rancière recounts, the enthusiasm of ’68 began to wane; however, the decline of leftism does not signal the disappearance of the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian aspirations it once represented, with “these ideas and aspirations finding new forms of expression.”⁴⁵ Coinciding with the disenchantment of the movement was the critique of militantism, patriarchy and ascetic rigour. The prevailing responses in France (and Italy), were a turn toward Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘desiring machines’ (the liberation of desire), and the flourishing of Marxist organisations (a return to order) that were developing new ways to offer ‘shelter’ to the ‘orphaned energies’ of ’68.⁴⁶

Rancière asserts that “the return of the old parties to *recapture* a revolt breaking away in every direction (...) picks up anew the discourse about the universal proletariat (...).” This trajectory reassures the Marxist of the certitude of “*the* proletariat, of Marxism-Leninism, and of the labour movement.” It also restores confidence in Marxist science as the guardian of knowledge;⁴⁷ however, the practice of workers, peasants, immigrant workers, youth, women, and national minorities “renders absurd the efforts of classical leftism to unify these struggles and bring them under its hegemony.” On one hand, the breakaway of the new political subjects revealed the impotence of Leftist movements to organise the radical community. On the other, it revitalised the ‘old apparatuses’ of the left. The communist and socialist parties now fought to regain control of the radical forces that leftism set in motion but failed to unify.⁴⁸

The return of philosophy, Rancière declares, attests to the inability of ’68 to breach the “theoretical and political machine of *representation*” that carries on the “discourse of the universal held in the name of the masses.” It also testifies to the inability of radical thought to “think *positively* the specificity of their revolt, that is, the place of their revolt in the space of the revolution.”⁴⁹ The multiplication of the discourses of struggle associated with the new movements, made their retrieval within a unified figure of revolt intractable without the utilisation of ‘blatant generalities’.⁵⁰ France’s May ’68, according to

⁴⁴ Rancière, “A Few Remarks,” 120. The judgement of what people are doing when they use their mouth, differentiating between those who have speech – the ability to enunciate the difference between good and evil, the just – and those who have voice – the noise of pleasure and pain – is critical to the political thought of Rancière. This judgement, he believes, depends on an underlying regime of identification. See Rancière, *Disagreement*. I discuss this topic further below.

⁴⁵ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 118. The defence and language of revolutionary Marxism is conspicuous in Rancière’s early work, including *Althusser’s Lesson*. While his remarkable knowledge of Marx influences his political thought, he ultimately rejects Marxist sociology. Emmanuel Renault has recently documented Rancière’s transition from Althusserianism (in the mid 1960s) to a final rejection of Marxist sociology (1980s onward), passing through phases including the ‘defence of revolutionary Marxism’ followed by analysis of “the aporias of Marx’s discourse.” Renault, “The Many Marx,” 168.

⁴⁶ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, xiv-xv.

⁴⁷ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 120 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁸ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 118-120. This conjuncture of ‘leftism’ and the ‘old left’ has its correlate in the Italian situation, borne out in the conflict between the New Left and parliamentary organisations, such as the PCI.

⁴⁹ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 121 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁰ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 118-119.

Rancière, rendered unacceptable the philosophers pretension to “systematise the practice of others.” In *Althusser’s Lesson*, he claims the activities of ‘68 imperilled the exalted place of the armchair Marxist (philosopher) who wished to claim their discourse was “the discourse of Marxist philosophy.”⁵¹

Rancière’s work on emancipatory politics started as part of a neo-Marxist group formed around Louis Althusser; however, his concern regarding the legitimising effect of Althusser’s ‘scientific’ Marxism on the lineaments of social order, resulted in his public split from his former teacher after the events of May ‘68. Rancière has stated that the way the Philosophy department at Paris VIII promoted the mastery of Althusser as the figure of the educator, caused him to reflect upon the dogmatism of theory in the ‘aftershock’ of the student and social movements of the 1960s.⁵² Subsequently, he became a staunch critic of Althusserian Marxism, expressing his dissatisfaction with the Althusserian ‘philosophy of order’.⁵³ Rancière believed the ‘worker’ was made to bear the weight of systemic oppression *and* the project of Marxist science, with the worker’s particularity devalued in contemporary Marxism and made of secondary importance to their collective relation to structure and production.⁵⁴

Subsequently, Rancière’s theoretical concern was:

the issue of why people found themselves in a particular place and what they could or couldn’t think in that place. Following the events of 1968 and the vicissitudes of the far left, I thought that it was to be resolved not by continuing to immerse myself in Marx’s texts, but by *entering into the flesh of working-class experience, into the thinking and practice of emancipation*. At the outset, this was a kind of excursion to collect historical material. But the excursion led to a switch of perspectives.⁵⁵

Rancière’s ‘excursion’ distinctly influenced his thinking on politics; notably, it caused him to reject the belief that the role of the intellectual was to enlighten the antagonist community, instead he trusted in the self-activity of the radical community. Althusserian Marxism promoted the theorist as the vanguard of the revolutionary class,⁵⁶ an approach that established a ‘position of mastery’ by placing the scientist and their *account* ahead of the participant and their *expressions*.⁵⁷ Rancière is critical of the philosopher or scientist who elevates himself above the capacity of the masses and promotes the ‘autonomy of theory’. The fêted theorist effectively censures the discursive dimension of grass-roots activism, becoming a form of oppression that Rancière claims is as old as political philosophy itself.

In *Althusser’s Lesson*, Rancière argues that at the core of the prevailing critiques of social domination was a theory of the inequality of the intelligences, an assertion that the ‘masses’ were ignorant and

⁵¹ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 118.

⁵² Rancière recounts his position in numerous interviews that call upon him to discuss his transition from Marxist science to a position that contests the privileges of the position of ‘knowledge’ presupposed in the Marxist conception of ‘science’. For example see Rancière, “Politics and Aesthetics; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

⁵³ See Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, preface. The source of my historical references to Rancière’s relationship to Althusser and Marxism, beyond *Althusser’s Lesson*, includes an excellent recent article by Emmanuel Renault. See Renault, “The Many Marx.” From the same collection Rancière, “Work, Identity, Subject.” See also Deranty, “Jacques Rancière’s Contribution.”

⁵⁴ Marxism, according to Rancière, oscillated between class as an idea of dissolution and as an idea of identity, with the second becoming the mainstream thinking of Marxism. Blechman et al., “Democracy, Dissensus,” 287. See also Renault, “The Many Marx.”

⁵⁵ Baronian, Rosello, and Rancière, “Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity,” 2 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁶ Rancière, “Work, Identity, Subject,” 206-208. The Marxism-Leninism that characterises Althusserianism has parallels with the neo-Leninism that promoted the notion of vanguardism in the Italian situation.

⁵⁷ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 49.

incapable of controlling their own destiny. This 'clears the way' for the 'intervention of philosophy'. While the masses may be capable of transforming nature, they must "rely on the wisdom of the Party and their specialists" if they wish to change history.⁵⁸ The implication of this division of manual and intellectual labour meant the masses could only access the truth of politics through the scientific theses of the Party intellectuals, whose responsibility it was to 'instruct and organise' those blinded by the dominant bourgeois ideology.⁵⁹ A consequence, in the context of France (and Italy), is that those rebelling outside of the Party's apparatus, for example the students and counterculture, were dismissed as a misguided petit-bourgeois movement that threatened class antagonism.⁶⁰

Rancière intent in *Althusser's Lesson*, rather than to offer a treatise on Althusser's thought, was to "study the politics of a system of thought and the way in which this system seized upon the signifiers and the political stakes of a moment, and in so doing defined the specific scene and time for thought to be politically effective." Althusserianism, as a "form of theoretico-political intervention," distinguishes itself both "theoretically, by calling for a return to Marx (...) and politically, by displaying (...) a faithfulness to the party."⁶¹ The Althusserian restoration of Marxist science and the restitution of the idea of partisan philosophy is an attempt to *invent* solutions to the problems where political practice ostensibly falls short. The equivalent situation, as discussed in chapter 4, existed in Italy. To recall the sentiment of Tronti, while the radical practice of the masses is tactically innovative it remains strategically naive, thereby requiring organisation by the Party.⁶²

The autonomy of theoretical practice associated with theoretico-political intervention represses the creativity of the masses, and as Rancière states, provides an "image of theoretical heroism: the masses can make history because the heroes make its theory."⁶³ Consequently, as Renault concisely relates, philosophy as class struggle becomes a form of discursive police, as "the scientific police of intellectuals of the Communist party (...) and of the leading intellectuals within (...) authoritarian leftism."⁶⁴ The result is the censure of revolt, with its 'slogans' subjugated to the authority of an intellectual vanguard. Marxist science denounced 'spontaneous ideologies', for instance, those of the students which "delivered them into the trap of bourgeois domination."⁶⁵ Therefore, the theorist claims the only hope for those immersed in the 'thickness' of ideology was "re-education by the authority of Science and the Party."⁶⁶ In Althusserianism, and the new sociology (in particular Bourdieu) energised by the tumult of 1968, the fundamental aspect of the relation of the intellectual to the masses is that relation of knowledge and ignorance.⁶⁷ This relation, essentially of inequality and domination, rests, among other things, on the 'pedagogical myth'.

At the core of Rancière's telling of the story of Joseph Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, is Jacotot's revelation that the myth of pedagogy divides the world into those who know and those who do not, a

⁵⁸ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, 10-11.

⁵⁹ The equivalent of this situation in Italy was the interventionist 'science of organisation' and the 'intellectual monitoring' of struggle.

⁶⁰ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, 20-23.

⁶¹ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, xiii-xiv.

⁶² Or, as Hardt believes, the theory of Negri and others were an effort to translate the practices of the radical community into an 'effective political form'. Hardt, "Into the Factory," 8.

⁶³ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, 30-32.

⁶⁴ Renault, "The Many Marx," 175.

⁶⁵ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, 53.

⁶⁶ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, xiv. This is comparable to the invocation of the *deus ex machina* discussed in the previous two chapters.

⁶⁷ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, 40. Kristin Ross highlights this point in Ross, "Translator's Introduction," xi.

relationship of inequality that is foundational in the “fiction of the explicative order of the world.”⁶⁸ The presupposition of inequality that defines the relation of the student to teacher, Rancière believes also underpins the hierarchy of social order, dividing the world into those of superior intelligence (for example teacher, philosopher, and man) and inferior intelligence (child, common person, and woman).⁶⁹ This ‘pedagogical relation’ underwrites the valorisation of the theoretician, and in effect “declares the inability of the ignorant to be cured of their illusions (...).” Two important consequences of this relation are that first, it postpones the ‘proper moment’ of politics to the ‘time of theory’, and second it ‘infantilises society’, making all those of inferior intellect dependent on explication for comprehension to occur.⁷⁰ It is seemingly a reverence for this myth that provokes sociology to explain the mobilisation of high-risk collective action via the cognitive framing of movement leaders.

Contrary to the explicative fiction, Jacotot observes that all of us learn in the situations of our daily life without the need for further explanation. This, he suggests, verifies the equal capacity of all to understand, an equality that makes possible the ‘society of the emancipated.’⁷¹ Rancière states:

[s]uch a society would repudiate the division between those who know and those who don’t (...). It would only know *minds in action*: people who do, who speak about what they are doing, and who thus transform all their works into ways of demonstrating the humanity that is in them is in everyone.⁷²

Verifying the absence of ‘natural difference’ through action is a foundation of emancipatory politics. Subsequently, Rancière formulates politics as the “open set of practices driven by the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being and by the concern to test this equality.”⁷³ On this basis, political *reason* is instantiated not by the rational exchange of ‘partners’ edging towards consensus, but,

where equality is recognised: *not an equality decreed by law or force, not a passively received equality, but an equality in act, verified, at each step by those marchers who, in their constant attention to themselves and in their endless revolving around the truth, find the right sentences to make themselves understood by others.*⁷⁴

The radical community’s intention to communicate, which does not recognise “any hierarchy among orators or discourses,” singularly verifies both their equality and that of the ‘other’.⁷⁵

The close of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* reminds us that “intelligence is at work in all trades; it is seen at all levels of the social ladder.”⁷⁶ It is this insight that triggers Rancière’s commitment to indisciplinary, where the theorist must show ‘hermeneutic humility’, trusting in the action and discourse of the fighters whose intelligence, as Deranty outlines, is the “understanding and capacity to discursively articulate the experiences of oppression and the possibilities of emancipation.”⁷⁷ The concrete acts, the actual situations of radical politics, are, Kristin Ross claims, what disrupt the “fiction of inegalitarian

⁶⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 4.

⁶⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 7.

⁷⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, xvi.

⁷¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 16.

⁷² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 71 (emphasis mine).

⁷³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29-30.

⁷⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 72 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 136.

⁷⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 137.

⁷⁷ Deranty, “Work,” 192. This undercuts the need to ideologise ex-post the innovative practices of the radical community, as was the tendency of the interventionist intellectuals in Italy.

society.”⁷⁸ Radical practice (the arguments and demonstrations of the exploited) is not merely the ‘illustration of theory’; according to Rancière, radical practice “operates a shift in the very mode of theorising.”⁷⁹

Political philosophy and disorderly politics

When political philosophy starts from a theory of domination and inequality (as evident in the rejuvenation of Marxism-Leninism and sociology after France’s May and Italy’s *Sessantotto*) it eventually mutates into a form of resentment, a patronising theory of the incurable ignorance of the masses.⁸⁰ The return of ‘reasonable politics’, the ‘restoration’ of a political philosophy whose teleologies end in the pacification and management of society, brings with it the fading of politics proper.⁸¹ This has implications for the social sciences, which Rancière states, “has been the final form taken by the strained relationship between philosophy and politics and by the philosophical project of *achieving politics by doing away with it*.”⁸² He claims that while sociology has distanced itself from its original “project of a reorganisation of society,” it still attempts to establish “the rule of correspondence between social conditions and the attitudes and judgements of those who belong to it.”⁸³ This makes it complicit in sustaining the domination intrinsic to the hierarchical structuring of the community, an accusation than can be levelled at the SMT effort to press the radical subject into the service of representative democracy. The contemporary efforts of sociology to repatriate the radical subject to western democracy via the substantialist and identitarian modelling of the involvement of the radical community in political contestation and social aggregation, correlates with the overcoming of disorder through the repartitioning of the political community. As Tarrow acknowledges, at the end of a political cycle, the political elite stabilise society by “adding a client group here and deserting another there.”⁸⁴

Political philosophy and sociology, Rancière argues, attempt to explain the circumstances of inequality and describe how it forms part of the dynamics of the “slow road to reconciled futures.”⁸⁵ Along this road, sociology variably deploys the archetypes of political philosophy where disorderly politics are subsumed (the *archipolitics* of Plato), appropriated (the *parapolitics* of Aristotle), or organised (the *metapolitics* of Marx).⁸⁶ He asserts that political philosophy has always attempted to make respectable

⁷⁸ Ross, "Translator's Introduction," xxiii.

⁷⁹ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 205.

⁸⁰ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, xvi.

⁸¹ Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement," 8. In his essay “Ten Theses on Politics,” Rancière sees that during the 90s, in the context of state-consensus, there has been a “blossoming of affirmations proclaiming the end of the illusion of the social and a return to a ‘pure’ form of politics.” Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics " *Theory and Event* 5, no. 3 (2001). Renault succinctly states, Rancière targets the “rebirth of normative philosophical investigations about justice, rights and democracy, and especially its consensus versions associated with the names of Rawls and Habermas.” Renault, "The Many Marx," 184.

⁸² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 92 (emphasis mine).

⁸³ Rancière, "Thinking between Disciplines," 7. Deranty provides an insightful account of Rancière’s relationship with sociology in Deranty, "Jacques Ranciere's Contribution," esp. 142-143.

⁸⁴ della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 613 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁵ Rancière, *On the Shores*, 84.

⁸⁶ For Rancière the failings of political philosophy are exemplified in these three archetypes. Rancière’s monograph *Disagreement* is attentive throughout to the classical texts of Plato and Aristotle, and the third ‘great archetype’ in Rancière’s genealogy, the thought of Marx. Rancière stages *Disagreement* as an inquiry into the possible existence of political philosophy, an investigation in part prompted by the contemporary proclamations of the return of this field. Rancière writes that after the collapse of Marxism, “political philosophy is supposed to be finding its contemplative purity in the principles and forms of politics itself returned to its original purity thanks to the retreat of the social and its ambiguities.” Rancière, *Disagreement*, vii.

and regulate the 'scandalous' and *disorderly politics* of absolute equality, endeavouring to associate political activity with the police order of society.⁸⁷ Bruno Bosteels argues that the priority Rancière gives to struggles for political emancipation shapes the terms of his confrontation with classical political philosophy. Rancière thus draws attention to the ways in which theses of Plato, Aristotle, and Marx still structure the suppression of equality in the contemporary field of political thought.⁸⁸

Against political philosophy, Rancière argues that politics is not the realisation of a philosophical principle that orders community, in fact, politics proposes "a specific rupture in the logic of the *arkhe*." In "Ten Theses," he avows that politics "does not simply presuppose the rupture of the 'normal' distribution of positions between the one who exercises power and the one subject to it. It also requires a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions 'proper' to such classifications."⁸⁹ This idea is crucial to Rancière's definition of politics where "police identification [domination], political subjectivation [emancipation], and its metapolitical reincorporation [recuperation] *endlessly* clash."⁹⁰ The case study of the Italian situation, as witness to this threefold structure of political struggle, encourages agreement with Rancière, who claims that in the age of social movements collective actors have fulfilled all the roles associated with politics. First as the designation of groups with a political function in the social order, the favoured designation of SMT; second as the mechanism of subjectification that disrupts the place of these groups in the 'natural order'; finally as the name of a metapolitical form, popular to conflict theories such as AM and NSMT.⁹¹ Importantly, the explicative orders of political philosophy, at the same time as recuperating the radical community conceal the threefold structure of politics. In particular, sociological accounts of radicalisation diminish the aspect of political subjectification, the key dimension of politics in the work of Rancière.⁹²

In reference to Plato, Rancière argues that traditionally political exclusion existed through the narratives of a "material incapacity to occupy the space-time of political things – as Plato put it, artisans have time for nothing but their work. Of course this 'nothing', which they have no time to do, is to be at the people's assembly."⁹³ This basic idea provides a model of the first great political philosophy (archipolitics) that attempts to subsume politics within a homogeneously structured social space that leaves no gaps for its disorderly reappearance. It is an appeal to a communitarian order, a manifestation of the community's *logos* (a communal truth or *arkhe* such as justice) that regulates the behaviours of the individual within a rigidly ordered society.⁹⁴ By breaking the community into its 'natural memberships', this philosophy of community was thought to overcome the need for a 'polemical apparatus of politics', finding its basis instead in the 'ethical rule of power' legitimised by the presence or absence of natural differences.⁹⁵ It is the contingency of all such communitarian orders that emancipatory politics continually reiterate, verifying, as stated previously, the absence of 'natural difference'.

⁸⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 92. I explain the significance of the label 'police order' below.

⁸⁸ Bruno Bosteels, "Archipolitics, Parapolitics, Metapolitics," in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010).

⁸⁹ Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" theses 3 and 7.

⁹⁰ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 214 (emphasis mine).

⁹¹ Rancière outlines the three 'positions' of the radical social movement in Rancière, *Disagreement*, 91.

⁹² I explain the important concepts of 'the police' and 'subjectification' in the next section.

⁹³ Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 24.

⁹⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 61-93; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 83. Archipolitics, Rancière states, subordinates politics to the logic of the police order. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 66.

⁹⁵ Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" thesis 3; Rancière, *Disagreement*, 75. These include aspects such as the 'difference in birth', where, for example, the old command the young, and masters have power over slaves.

Parapolitics, unlike archipolitics, is unprepared to give up conflict in its modelling of politics. Accordingly, it endeavours to incorporate political antagonism within the police order in such a way as to protect the stability of society. Schaap neatly sums up this idea, remarking that parapolitics presses class conflict into the “service of political unity”;⁹⁶ just as we saw in SMT, in parapolitics conflict labours toward the construction of a stronger consensus. The cost to parapolitics is the reduction of politics to negotiation and contestation. This, Rancière explains, provides ‘those with no part’ a liturgical role (‘litigious freedom’) as a political partner within the constitutional order.⁹⁷ Parapolitics attempts to appropriate antagonism, transforming the radical community into a ‘political party’, hoping to contain the people without ‘suffering their conflict’.⁹⁸ This would appear normal or acceptable to modern parapolitical forms such as the social contract and sovereignty.⁹⁹ Rancière, however, highlights that the judgements of the status of interlocutors and political activity within parapolitical forms are themselves political. This is because “politics is not primarily a matter of laws and constitutions. Rather, it is a matter of *configuring the sensible texture of the community* for which those laws and constitutions make sense.”¹⁰⁰ An ordering of the sensible supports the division of competencies, and, as Todd May notes, inequality “is not simply a matter of how we are treated. It reaches down into our perceptual engagement with the world.”¹⁰¹

Metapolitics condemns both the ‘ideological illusions’ of parapolitics and the “appeal to a communal incarnation of social truth” of archipolitics.¹⁰² Metapolitics sees a truth in politics, but not of the kind discussed in archipolitics that would enable the realisation of the ‘real community’ to replace the ‘political lie’. Instead, it asserts the existence of an absolute wrong or injustice, which makes it impossible to ‘deploy any political argument of equality’. The truth of modern politics is not an essence or ideal, but what lies behind it, what it exists to conceal; politics is a displaced manifesting of the reality of the inequality in social organisation.¹⁰³ Accordingly, metapolitics functions as a ‘symptomology’, detecting within every ‘political distinction’ the untruth, marking the ‘gap between names and things’, and *gives form* to this ‘truth of the lie of politics’ by embodying it in concepts such as the proletariat or working class.¹⁰⁴ However, this organising of the dispute into a metapolitical form is opposed to political subjectification. Rancière contends that:

In politics, subjects do not have consistent bodies; they (...) have their moments, places, occurrences, and the peculiar role of inventing *arguments* and *demonstrations* (...). This invention is performed in forms that are not metapolitical ‘forms’, but forms of materialisation of the people, which oppose metapolitical ‘appearances’.¹⁰⁵

Rancière asserts that politics must be immodest when and where philosophy and the social order try to force modesty (respectability) upon it, for the risk of modesty in politics is that it occurs at the expense

⁹⁶ Schaap, "Philosophical Repression of Politics," 154.

⁹⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 61-93; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 83.

⁹⁸ The primary example of this in Italy is the relationship of the PCI and the official organisations of the left to the political institution.

⁹⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 72-75. See also Schaap, "Philosophical Repression of Politics."

¹⁰⁰ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 8 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰¹ May, "Jacques Rancière," 86.

¹⁰² Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 87-88.

¹⁰³ "The truth of politics is the manifestation of its falseness. It is the gap between any political process of naming or inscribing in relation to the realities subtending them." Rancière, *Disagreement*, 81-82.

¹⁰⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 81-85.

¹⁰⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 89.

of something else, and that something else is equality.¹⁰⁶ For instance, In Italy, the metapolitical form of the mass worker and socialised worker appropriated the radical potential peculiar to the new movements and reclaimed its novelty for class recomposition, smothering the creativity of the women's and youth movements and infantilising the 'ignorant multitude'. On the other hand, the parapolitical image of national solidarity and the dialectical politics of reform reincorporated the antagonistic community within the institutions of social aggregation.¹⁰⁷ In both situations, political philosophy recuperates the radical community while concealing the prejudices inherent to theoretico-political interventions that effectively calm political struggle.

The contemporary sociological study of the politics of RSMs proclaims to address the inequity of previous governance based theories of social movements that defended the existing social order and normalised the domination of the ruling classes (the men of reason/progress) over the lower classes (the crowd, the irrational and desirous masses). However, implicit to the persistence of theoretical positivism is the relation of knowledge and ignorance that underpins the explicative fictions of unequal societies. The ontology of the two humanities that supported the prejudice of collective behaviour theory, and reassured Marxist science of its guardianship of knowledge, also shores up the authority of disciplinary thought. Rules of governance endure in the contemporary sociological modelling of social movement radicalisation. In SMT, this is evident in the effort to 'civilise' the radical subject by characterising them as instrumentally rational. Rather than radically challenge the division of society into the superior and the inferior, the rational and irrational, the sociology of social movements repartitions society, adding certain radical actors and their materials to the political community and its discourse.

2. Politics, the police order and subjectification

I read Rancière's early work as a challenge to political (disciplinary) thought, posing the question of how to characterise the situation of our lives without recourse to the two humanities ontology, explicative fictions, or theoretico-political intervention.¹⁰⁸ He believes, undoing the 'knots' of a particular system of thought that ties together social identity and aptitude, and undermining the legitimacy of the prevailing ordering of society, is approachable in several potentially contradictory ways. One is to propose "another kind of substantialist identification" of the subject of radical politics, such as we find in sociology and political philosophy. An alternative is a 'performative conception' where the forms of action exhibited by the radical community are no longer a substantialist activity that constitutes the antagonistic community or 'nourishes its thinking'.¹⁰⁹ Instead, the activity of RSMs set up a polemical relation, the mechanics of which become clearer when we recognise the key distinction Rancière makes between what he refers to as the police order and politics.

Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectives is achieved, the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the

¹⁰⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 136.

¹⁰⁷ For Rancière, the notion of political solidarity is oppressive. Rancière, *On the Shores*, 84.

¹⁰⁸ The last category includes empathetic responses such as the '*intervention sociologique*' of NSMT.

¹⁰⁹ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 208. Work is the example Rancière provides of a substantialist activity.

systems for legitimising this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimisation another name. I propose to call it *the police*.¹¹⁰

Politics, viewed as a domain constituted by anything that intervenes upon the *perceptual coordinates* of the community *without* re-establishing an alternative division, is antagonistic toward all police ordering.¹¹¹ While politics and the police are both symbolic orders, politics sets up a 'contentious commonality', scandalising rather than legitimising the existing order, or an alternative.¹¹² Consequently, politics fades or transforms into its opposite whenever, and wherever, it is reduced to a fight for social identity, or is instituted in a system of governance or legitimisation.¹¹³ Therefore, there is an irresolvable tension between the politics of the excluded and their representation. This tension plagues the efforts to renew or modernise Marxism, as evidenced by the French and Italian contexts post 1968.¹¹⁴ Melucci acknowledges this tension in his own work as the paradox that frustrates efforts to translate collective action into a form of political representation that respects the autonomy of contemporary social movements. At the point of reincorporation, a radical political movement has already crossed over into the police order, where the organising of community around principles such as tolerance and consensus depoliticises society by pacifying a *disorderly empirical politics*.¹¹⁵ Thus, politics is never realised through negotiation (reform) between social institutions and the radical community; nor is it achieved through the imposition of a political composition or top down form of organisation. Efforts to institutionalise or politicise emancipatory acts recuperates them, as Rancière writes, as "instruction of the people, in other words, a way of organising the eternal minority."¹¹⁶

For Rancière, "nothing is political in itself. But anything may become political (...)"¹¹⁷ Politics "can be a popular uprising staging the manifestation of a still unheard of subject," or he claims it can be 'modest' activities such as changes to a workers evening timetable or a small gathering of an open access Corresponding Society.¹¹⁸ Rancière's caveat upon political action, opposed to the covenants of sociological frameworks, is that it opposes *all* forms of police order realised in both the material ordering of bodies and the reasons and explanations that support the legitimising discourses on social order.¹¹⁹ This conceptualisation of collective action as an open-ended practice occurring outside of

¹¹⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 28. Rancière understands this as a consequence of thinking the specificity of politics, which he claims "forces us to distinguish it from what normally goes by the name of politics and for which I propose to reserve the term policing." Rancière, *Disagreement*, xiii.

¹¹¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 28-42.

¹¹² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

¹¹³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 139-140. In "Ten Theses on Politics," Rancière writes, "consensus is the vulgar name given to this cancellation." Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" thesis 10. Rancière's distaste for consensus democracy is well documented; see for example Rancière, *Disagreement*, 86-87; 95-121; Rancière, *On the Shores*, esp. 4, 22-26; Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2009).

¹¹⁴ Certain sectors of IRT typify such a contradiction as the dynamics of revolution and counter-revolution. Tronti, for example, notes the institutionalising of the form of political composition makes the radical community vulnerable to attack. I discuss this previously in chapter 4. See Tronti, "Lenin in Inghilterra," 93.

¹¹⁵ Rancière, *On the Shores*, 18-19.

¹¹⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 34. This inexhaustible tension between politics and policing makes emancipation an endless process. Rancière provides detailed explanation of this relationship in chapter 2 of Rancière, *Disagreement*, 21-42.

¹¹⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29-32.

¹¹⁸ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 117.

¹¹⁹ As Bernstein recounts in a recent article on the work of Rancière, both the police and the organisations of radical politics are distributions of the sensible, the former already established, and the latter involving redistribution. J. M. Bernstein, "Movies as the Great Democratic Art Form of the Modern World (Notes on Rancière)," in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 23.

organisational systems of social aggregation is markedly different to that of SMT, which insists institutional engagement and identitarian claims are the signal features of politics. That is to say, these features are the 'signifiers' and the 'political stakes' utilised by SMT to define a specific scene of political effectivity.

The subject of politics, according to Rancière, destabilises the systemic and hierarchical elaboration of what belongs to a specific community as delimited through the proclamation of rules, practices, and dignifying subjects.¹²⁰ The struggles of the radical subject untie the particularity of the individual from the constraints of social knowledge, which knots "together possible perceptions, interpretations, orientations and movements."¹²¹ Hence, the concept of collective identity cannot explain the dynamics of political struggle. Definite collectives, groups, or class based struggle do not manifest the radical form of equality necessary to the political subject. By framing politics as the practical verification of radical equality, emancipation has a concrete history of *singular solutions* to the experience of exploitation. This history, Deranty notes, is available in the *specificity* of each particular movement,¹²² which initiate a disagreement regarding the "perceptible givens of a common life,"¹²³ notably the division of manual and intellectual labour. Such a 'political disagreement', Rancière remarks, is not "a struggle between camps; (...) it is a struggle about what politics is (...)."¹²⁴

Rancière outlines in "Ten Theses" that the principles of ordering society, posited as the basis of politics, are in fact its object.¹²⁵ Every partitioning of society is firstly a distribution of the sensible, a 'general law' that defines "the modes of perception in which [the forms of part-taking] are inscribed."¹²⁶ With this in mind, the fundamental dispute of politics is whether the subjects to a dispute, the interlocutors, "'are' or 'are not,' whether they are speaking or just making noise."¹²⁷ By redistributing the sensible in a politically relevant way, the political subject reorders the conventions of sense and meaning, a restaging of who makes sense and what it is that, previously unintelligible, becomes intelligible.¹²⁸ Rather than making 'irrational noises', the political subject demonstrates their capacity for speech. It is explicitly

¹²⁰ Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics," 205-206. This idea of politics, as I discuss below, shares with Rancière's conceptualising of aesthetics the idea that a regime of identification populates their respective communities through the application of rule bound concepts.

¹²¹ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 120 (emphasis mine). This is comparable to instrumental knowledge, which Melucci remarks, "structures; it establishes relations, links, and hierarchies," manipulating and ordering experience. Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness," 112-113.

¹²² Deranty, "Introduction: A Journey in Equality," 5.

¹²³ Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement," 6-7.

¹²⁴ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 116.

¹²⁵ Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics " thesis 7.

¹²⁶ Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics " thesis 7.

¹²⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 50. In this passage, and more broadly within chapter 2: "The Rationality of Disagreement," Rancière distinguishes his notion of disagreement (*mésentente*) from Lyotard's *différend*, where 'language games' form the basis of politics. He similarly dismisses Habermas' ideal of communicative action, and suggests literary heterology explains the 'penchant for dialogue' in politics more appropriately than the search for an ideal communicative situation. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 59. Generally, Rancière is opposed to political thinkers, such as Habermas, who attempt to pacify struggle and replace it with an aggregative system based upon processes of mediation, which assume inequality or conflict is based in a misunderstanding or miscommunication that could be corrected. This is because were it to be amenable to correction the dissensus and the untold possibilities it contains would cease. In *Disagreement*, Rancière suggests the political quarrel has nothing to do with linguistic content or language games, "it has to do with consideration of speaking beings as such." Rancière, *Disagreement*, 50.

¹²⁸ A 'politically relevant' reconfiguring of the sensible is concerned with the effects of equality and the capacity to partake in the common. This is opposed to 'mere redistribution', which is concerned with social repartition and the representation of competing interests. See Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 297.

those subjects excluded from intellectual labour by the existing social order that undermine the systems of thought that prejudicially partition society into the 'two humanities', and thereby reveal the contingency of hierarchical orders.

The opposing of the *egalitarian assumption* (concerned with the effects of equality) to the logics of *social aggregation* (social repartition),¹²⁹ realised in actions where those who 'cannot' show that indeed they 'can', creates a 'polemical commonsense'. The transgression of traditional boundaries by 'those from below' demonstrates, Deranty notes, the error of the assumption "that relegated them to this position within the hierarchy."¹³⁰ Beyond having practical effects on life, the practice of the verification of equality has correlate effects in the discourses on politics. That is, radicalism has both subjective and objective modes; the former is the practices of the dominated that achieve real life outcomes by directly dealing with the impediments to equality present in their environment, the latter is a form of discourse that verifies the equality of the radical community and breaks down the identitarian logic and explicative order of existing schemas of thought. The acts of those dominated within the existing order undercut the *naturalness* or *spontaneity* of the social order, and instead, exhibit the coercive form of society. This proves problematic for sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs that attempt to stabilise the dynamics of the radicalisation of social movements, in particular, those frameworks that rationalise the radical community through the conditions and processes of identification, rooted within political and legal institutions.

Subjectification and identification

Subjectification presents a way of understanding the formation of a radical subject, which is not an aggregation of an 'ideal future community', but an interruption or exception to the way communities have gathered.¹³¹ Rancière, as Deranty remarks, resists the temptation of sociology (and history) to generalise and substantiate the movements of emancipatory politics. Instead of distilling their features into a collective identity or class composition, giving the radical movements a destiny and essence as is the want of the previous surveyed accounts, Rancière looks to those communities who transgress or subvert the status quo by acting outside the boundary of the proletariat.¹³² Against the modelling of SMT, Rancière argues that:

a 'social' movement is not the movement of a sociological group. It is the movement of subjects, of people who try to find or apprehend an identity as fighters through the very *dismissal* of their sociological identity, the identity *given* to them by a social order.¹³³

Opposing the 'empty freedom' of the collective subject asserting a *social identity* is the *process of subjectification*, the materialising of a non-ontological or *political identity*.¹³⁴ Through singular acts of self-transformation, the radical subject reveals the contingency of the link between their attributes and their condition. That is, Rancière states, "the constitution of a network of individuals whose capacity to

¹²⁹ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject; Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 120. The presupposition is that the logic of the community of equals (absolute equality) is heterogeneous with the logic of social order (inequality).

¹³⁰ Deranty, "Logical Revolts," 23. For a concise account of the place of equality in the thought of Rancière see Deranty, "Jacques Ranciere's Contribution."

¹³¹ Two accessible examples of Rancière's exposition on subjectification are: Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*; Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement."

¹³² Deranty, "Jacques Ranciere's Contribution," 142, 152.

¹³³ Rajchman, *The Identity in Question*, (emphasis mine).

¹³⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35-42.

produce the statements of the working collective rests on a radical separation with the forms of being-worker."¹³⁵ This provides us with a new way to conceptualise the activities of the outliers of the Italian situation, redeeming the political effectivity of actions such as the southern immigrants' direct altering of their work/leisure balance.¹³⁶

In his research for *The Nights of Labour*,¹³⁷ Rancière saw the nineteenth century French worker "transform the name 'proletarian' into a subject of experience that cannot be identified to any productive process," a mode of subjectification exemplary to emancipatory politics.¹³⁸ Rancière explains:

A mode of subjectification does not create subjects ex-nihilo; it creates them by transforming identities defined in the natural order of the allocation of functions and places into instances of experience of dispute. 'Workers' or 'women' are identities that apparently hold no mystery (...). But political subjectification forces them out of such obviousness by questioning the relationship between a *who* and a *what* in the apparent redundancy of the positing of existence.¹³⁹

For Rancière, the nineteenth century French worker embodies the 'in between' subject of emancipation, making more of their night by reclaiming it for activities beyond rest, demonstrating they are capable of something beyond the strictures of a working life. Accordingly, the most effective voice of the worker, Rancière alleges, was the 'strange spokesman' who "had made themselves 'different': doubly and irremediably excluded for living as workers did and speaking as bourgeois people did."¹⁴⁰ This 'strange spokesperson' disrupts, through an act of dis-identification, the reasons and explanations that establish fixed co-ordinates of a community. It destabilises the institutionalised conventions of meaning and significance that sustain an existing hierarchical ordering of society, and in so doing reveals the 'gap' between the logic of the community of equality and that of the community of inequality (the police order of society).¹⁴¹

Crucially, the in-between subject does more than perform; it does not merely dramatise the situation by 'acting out', it *demonstrates* its equality by appropriating that which is not afforded it in the existing distribution of parts.¹⁴² Social emancipation in the Nineteenth Century, according to Rancière, was initially individual breaks from the identity of the worker, an overturning of their assigned task, time, and place. A similar situation is discernible amongst the activities of the so-called 'invisible' (unseen)

¹³⁵ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 210.

¹³⁶ I explain this claim in section 4 below.

¹³⁷ While *The Nights of Labour* did not contain a theory of subjectification, it did provide a foundation for the positive place non-identitarian struggles occupy in the work of Rancière.

¹³⁸ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 206-207. Jason Read acknowledges that in the work of Rancière the 'figure of the worker' is not an object for sociological study, it is a 'political process'. Jason Read, "Politics as Subjectification: Rethinking the Figure of the Worker in the Thought of Badiou and Rancière," *Philosophy Today* 51(2007): 125.

¹³⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ Rancière, *The Nights of Labour*, ix.

¹⁴¹ Exemplary to this revelation is the emancipatory act of the *appropriation* of leisure by the worker, the capacity to attain the sensible world meant for the non-worker. The classic example, and the one that inspired Rancière's approach, was a letter between Saint-Simonian workers, discussing how they spent their Sunday afternoon in the countryside 'talking metaphysics and doing propaganda.' Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 210.

¹⁴² Politics, Rancière argues, is not the 'theatre of victimisation', for it is not concerned with becoming visible in the sense of having a grievance witnessed or the claim to an existing identity or resource recognised; politics is about being seen and heard as an equal on the political stage. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 39.

and 'irrational' (unintelligible) subjects of the Italian RSMs, for instance those 'workers' that turned the factory into a place of study, or the urban youth that occupied the leisure spaces of the city. Rather than being mere 'primers' for political recomposition, transitional struggles filling in for social movement organisations, the activities of these subjects, if we believe Rancière, are potentially political.

Rancière remarks that *The Nights of Labour* is the:

history of those nights snatched from the normal round of work and repose (...) in which our characters prepare and dream and already live the impossible: the suspension of the ancestral hierarchy subordinating those dedicated to manual labour to those who have been *given* the privilege of thinking.¹⁴³

The characters central to Rancière's archival project broke the sensuous partition of day and night, and in so doing, re-ordered their existence. The leisure of the night, the discussions, thinking, and reading, separated the 'proletarian' from the culture and identity of the worker.¹⁴⁴ The nascence of the radical community is thus, in the thinking of Rancière, indissoluble from the activities of *nonidentary* subjects.¹⁴⁵ Proletarian subjectification, Rancière explains:

is in no way a form of 'culture', of some collective ethos capable of *finding voice*. It presupposes, on the contrary, a multiplicity of fractures separating worker bodies from their ethos and from *the voice* that is supposed to express the soul of this ethos (...). 'Speaking' out is not awareness and expression of a self asserting what belongs to it.¹⁴⁶

Subjectification, rather than designating a group, "disrupts the *system of designations* that frame the community in terms of definite standards of inclusion."¹⁴⁷ Therefore, Rancière argues, at first glance we can express "the difference that political disorder inscribes in the police order (...) as the difference between subjectification and identification."¹⁴⁸ While order is about 'right names', politics is about misnomers, 'wrong' names that articulate a gap, a staging of a 'polemical commonplace' that is neither searching for consensus nor 'visibility'. Instead, it asserts equality, never simply through the "assertion of an identity," for Rancière declares, "it is always, at the same time, the denial of an identity given by an other," it entails an 'impossible identification'.¹⁴⁹ In this form, politics refuses the dilemma of choosing between "submission to the universal as formulated by those who dominate," for example the idea of citizenry, or being confined "within an identitarian perspective" where political achievement 'belongs' to a sociological group or an identity, such as *the worker*.¹⁵⁰

Identity is the primary impediment to politics according to Rancière. The radical community, he states, "is the sharing of what is *not given* as being in-common: between the visible and the invisible, the near

¹⁴³ Rancière, *The Nights of Labour*, viii (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁴ Rancière, *The Nights of Labour*.

¹⁴⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 100-101.

¹⁴⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 36 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁷ Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 290 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 37.

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," *The Identity in Question* 61, no. Summer (1992): 62. Classic examples offered by Rancière are 'identity claims' such as 'we are all German Jews', or, 'we are all children of immigrants', acts of dis-identification that in effect declare the absence of natural difference. For further discussion see Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 290-291. The use of misnomers in the Italian situation (for example 'Metropolitan Indians') achieved, although fleetingly, a similar sense of dis-identification.

¹⁵⁰ Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics," 199.

and the far, the present and the absent.”¹⁵¹ This contradicts sociological explanations of the radical actor that conceptualise social movements as forming around the development of a collective identity and a common purpose that link values, ideas, action and strategy.¹⁵² Rancière believes the problem with such identitarian movements is that they do not take a reflective distance, through action or consciousness, on a condition. Instead, they give symbolic re-inforcement to the fiction of a condition.¹⁵³

A potential politics

Equality, as axiomatic to politics, exists in a negative sense as the challenge to an existing form of inequality or hierarchy, while in a positive sense it presents as self-activity, the practical demonstration of being capable of more than exploitation. Todd May notes, equality arises from a collective action by those experiencing discrimination, an action that specifically undermines the *mechanisms* of what is conventionally thought of as politics.¹⁵⁴ Rancière’s egalitarianism therefore, as Paul Patton acknowledges, is distinguishable from the philosophies of contemporary liberal politics that are “committed to equality of condition, resources, [and] opportunities.”¹⁵⁵ Alternatively, Rancière’s stipulative and restrictive definition of politics confines it to a ‘very particular activity’, which Patton writes, marks it out from the usual struggles over power and resources that are staged within the conventions of political and legal institutions and are rooted in public opinion and public reason.¹⁵⁶

An implication of Rancière’s rethinking of politics is that ‘politics proper’ is rare, it is a local, occasional, and precarious activity unique to demonstrations of equality by the excluded of an existing distribution of the parts of community.¹⁵⁷ As such, politics is “always on the point of disappearing,” but more optimistically, “perhaps also on the point of reappearing.”¹⁵⁸ While some critics associate Rancière with a pessimistic view of politics, or with producing a theory of ‘politics without politics’, he is upbeat regarding the potential for egalitarian revolt.¹⁵⁹ Crucially, for the future of radicalism, politics as understood by Rancière has a lasting effect in the form of ‘political inscriptions’ and the provision of a “fresh sphere of visibility for further demonstrations” of the clash between the logic of equality and inequality.¹⁶⁰ Not all politics inevitably ends in ‘mere social sedimentation’ (reincorporation), with “new inscriptions of equality” providing a “living memory of politics.”¹⁶¹ The history of politics provides

¹⁵¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 138 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵² Jodi Dean notes that the contemporary field of social movement study has embraced an empirical account of identity in the models deployed to explain radical politics. That is, in such models, identity works sociologically by naturalising, rather than politicising, the markers of identity. Jodi Dean, "Politics without Politics," *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009): 24.

¹⁵³ Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics," 193-196.

¹⁵⁴ Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 40.

¹⁵⁵ Patton, "Ranciere's Utopian Politics," 139. Accordingly, it is also distinguishable from SMT conceptualisations of resource mobilisation, political opportunity structures, and the cycle of protest as part of the liberal model of politics.

¹⁵⁶ Patton, "Ranciere's Utopian Politics," 129.

¹⁵⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 139.

¹⁵⁸ Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement," 6-8.

¹⁵⁹ Rancière notes this criticism and provides a brief response in Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 118. Examples of such criticism include Dean, "Politics without Politics; Paulina Tambakaki, "When Does Politics Happen?," *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁶⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 42.

¹⁶¹ Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 297-298.

examples of the *form* taken by the 'confirmation of equality', verifying the axiom equality.¹⁶² Further, political struggle accomplishes the slow accretion of advances in democracy. That is to say, not all police orders are the same, with some better than others. That said, however, even those orders including new inscriptions of equality remain the opposite of politics.¹⁶³

A methodological consequence of Rancière's political thought is that his investigation occurs at the limits of conventional politics, and he avoids the epicentre of contestation and the clash of interests common to sociological accounts. His focus is on the margins of social order, where he believes we can see the situations of the birth and fading of emancipation.¹⁶⁴ This approach draws disapproval from critics frustrated with his denigration of contemporary consensus democracies while failing to provide any concrete criteria for identifying 'politics proper' in the current situation.¹⁶⁵ Compounding this shortcoming, Patton believes, is the absence of any consideration as to the rational and reasonable goals of politics and an accompanying lack of any conciliatory intent within his work.¹⁶⁶ Patton's focus on conventional politics, however, is the same that encourages the sociological reduction of RSMs to an aspect of the modernisation of western democracy. This reduction treats the radical community as a partial political phenomenon, and collapses social movements into the dimension of institutional engagement. The alternatives explored by the identitarian approaches of NSMT and IRT lead to paradox and contradiction, leaving us in no better position than Rancière's egalitarian presupposition.

A corollary of Rancière's notion of radical equality is that "the community of equals can never achieve a substantial form as a social institution," as this reinscribes inequality and loses its emancipatory value.¹⁶⁷ This notion of an irresolvable tension at the centre of radical politics is not alien to the study of social movements, in fact, it is common to conflict models of the politics of RSMs. Decisively, the subject of politics is only such whilst manifesting a political identity, distinct from a social identity; a difference in need of constant reiteration. Unlike the SMT assumption of a 'historical personage', NSMT's search for *the* contemporary movement, and IRT's reifying of a specific class composition, Rancière believes there is no privileged other of modern politics that 'exists as a *real* part of society'.¹⁶⁸ The subject of politics is processual, volatile and emergent, rather than identitarian, static, and foundational.

While the political subject may be transient and resistant to institutionalised form, it is not abstruse.¹⁶⁹ Importantly, Rancière wants to reveal that the antagonistic community is not necessarily opaque (hidden, incomprehensible, or so on) to political thought, but more accurately, is unintelligible when viewed through the lens of one discipline or within the confines of the prevailing convention of meaning and significance. Emancipatory politics involves disconnecting what is thinkable and visible from the ordering of the sensible, and in doing so, it negates existing schemas of thought that attempt to stabilise

¹⁶² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 32.

¹⁶³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30-31.

¹⁶⁴ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 117.

¹⁶⁵ See for example, Patton, "Ranciere's Utopian Politics; Tambakaki, "When Does Politics Happen?." Patton, in a recent article chastises Rancière for his lack of empirical data on contemporary politics and the failure to identify what politics might look like under conditions where the divisions of community have become unclear. Accordingly, Patton suggests Rancière's work has come to resemble the 'just-so stories' of post modernism, and is unidentifiable as political sociology. Patton, "Ranciere's Utopian Politics," 143.

¹⁶⁶ Patton, "Ranciere's Utopian Politics," 143.

¹⁶⁷ Rancière, *On the Shores* p84

¹⁶⁸ See Rancière, *Disagreement*, 39.

¹⁶⁹ Deranty goes as far as to identify formal traits associated with the radical subject's capacity to interrupt their social destiny. The traits include rebelliousness, courage, intelligence, and imagination. Deranty, "Logical Revolts," 23.

the radical subject within an existing social hierarchy. That is, the key to emancipatory practice, according to Rancière, is the disruption of the organising of sensible experience. Therefore, Rancière's challenge to disciplinary thought requires an explanatory mechanism that accounts for the potential of the radical community to disrupt the normative relation of complementary opposites (knowledge/ignorance, active/passive, nature/culture, and so on) central to consensus theories of political struggle. He searches for an answer in a perceived interdependence of aesthetics and politics, a conjunction he believes central to the nascence of the radical community. Subsequently, a political judgement in the sense Rancière wants them to be understood requires the skills involved in the aesthetic perception of novelty. The importance of this proclamation for the modelling of the politics of RSMs is the topic of the following section.

3. The aesthetics of politics

So political conflict is an aesthetic matter from the very beginning, to the extent it deals with the very interpretation of what people do with their mouth. In passing, this does not mean that the aesthetic is a 'principle' of politics that comes to supplement – and possibly to contradict – equality. Equality is the principle of political action, but this action is an aesthetic intervention, an intervention on the distribution of the sensible.¹⁷⁰

Jacques Rancière – A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière

Against the deflation of aesthetic significance by the social sciences, Rancière attempts to restore the pertinence of the aesthetic dimension for the conceptualisation of social formations. Such formations are aesthetico-political configurations, in which politics and aesthetics are interdependent.¹⁷¹ Rancière argues that emancipatory politics is fundamentally aesthetic, as every form of police order is indissoluble from a distribution of the sensible, an aesthetic order.¹⁷² This distribution is the *systemic* elaboration of rules of correspondence that institutes a relation between seeing, hearing, doing, making, saying, and thinking that establishes a "system of self-evident facts of sense perception." This equates to the organising of community at the level of sensible co-ordinates, and "determines those who have a part" and stipulates their roles and competencies. While "equality is the principle of political action, (...) this action is an aesthetic intervention" that reorganises what is apprehended by the senses.¹⁷³ Therefore, within the aesthetico-political configuration, politics is definable as entailing a certain kind of aesthetic experience.

¹⁷⁰ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 121.

¹⁷¹ Rancière is concerned to show art and politics are both contingent forms dependent upon regimes of identification. For elaboration of this project see Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes," *New Left Review* 14, no. Mar-Apr (2002): 133-151; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, esp. 22-26. Rancière writes that "art and politics do the same, intervening upon sensibility; that is to say, they both dispute the received perception of reality with their alternative expressions reconfiguring our sensible relation to our environment." Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution," 150-151. This, Rancière says, "is why those who want to isolate art from politics are somewhat beside the point. It is also why those who want it to fulfil its political promise are condemned to a certain melancholy."

¹⁷² Rancière goes to lengths to explain that the revolutionary promise of aesthetics does not lie in its support of emancipation through the creation of art, as art can only lend to politics what they have in common. The level at which the intervention by art on politics is possible, Rancière tells us, counters the 'imaginary stories' of arts autonomy or its submission to politics. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 19.

¹⁷³ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 121.

Rancière develops the concept of aesthetics at the core of his political thought from a rethinking of the first part of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and its political translation in Friedrich Schiller's, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*.¹⁷⁴ While recognising that Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* has framed the modern conception of the aesthetic, Rancière, as we have seen, has a political conception of the aesthetic. Accordingly, he mines Kant's work on aesthetic judgement for ways to think about the formation of radical communities.¹⁷⁵ With regard to Schiller, Rancière interprets his writing on "aesthetic suspension of the conditions of domination [as] close to the kind of aesthetic neutralisation that shaped the proletarian subjectification as a break with proletarian identity."¹⁷⁶ While both Kant and Schiller afford the aesthetic sphere a consolatory function, a place for the working out of consensus and toleration, Rancière stresses the political promise of aesthetics. Rancière tells us that "'aesthetic judgement' in Kant, 'aesthetic education' in Schiller, mean a specific form of relation that dismisses traditional hierarchies and, for these reasons, is proposed by them as a possible mediation to overcome the drawbacks of political revolution."¹⁷⁷ Rancière interprets the aesthetic sphere as a realm of disagreement, where radical equality is immediately demonstrable, neutralising (rejecting) the impulse to classify and categorise society into those of superior and inferior intellect.

Kant's contemplation of the connection of the subjective and objective, particular and universal, offers new ways to think the conflictual relations of groups in contemporary politics, beyond the mode of reason. J.M. Bernstein succinctly captures the affirmative role Rancière gives to Kantian aesthetic judgements of taste, which require approaching an object without a concept, interest, or concern for its typical causal affect on the senses. Bernstein tells us this approach, the effective configuration of the aesthetic regime,¹⁷⁸ is the:

tearing objects out of their ordinary circumstances, their usual uses and ends, *the standard ways they are categorised and conceptualised*, their moral significance or insignificance, and considering them in their mere appearing, as *things in themselves*, all but worldless apart from their imposing claim on the judging subject.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Rancière's starting point with Kant is the "analysis of the beautiful as the expression of a neither/nor," neither a judgement of *knowledge* nor of *desire*, which Schiller translated politically as the dismissal of the "ethical opposition between the class of those who know and the class of those who desire." Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 5. For an outline of this development see Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension; Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*..

¹⁷⁴ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 121. Schiller, in the shadow of the terror of the French Revolution, revised Kantian aesthetics in an attempt to explicate how the transition from despotism could occur. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004), 55. This important monograph was originally published 1795.

¹⁷⁵ Rancière sees in the work of both Kant and Schiller an overcoming of the oppressive division of the aesthesis: each thinker provides the resources for questioning the *order of knowledge* naturalised in disciplinary thought. I explain this below.

¹⁷⁶ Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 293.

¹⁷⁷ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 121. Schiller, in the shadow of the terror of the French Revolution, revised Kantian aesthetics in an attempt to explicate how the transition from despotism could occur. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 55. Importantly, Rancière believes that the freedom experienced in aesthetic judgement is attainable by the 'multitude' without the need for the refining of taste through Kantian civilising, or Schiller's aesthetic education.

¹⁷⁸ The aesthetic regime is the specific regime of sense within which Rancière locates some aspects of his own unique political discourse. It is where politics, according to Rancière, is consubstantial with the very definition of the specificity of art.

¹⁷⁹ Bernstein, "Movies," 24 (emphasis mine).

In the aesthetic regime, art, free of *representational logic*, is defined “by belonging to a specific sensorium that stands out as an *exception* from the normal regime of the sensible, which presents us with an immediate adequation of thought and sensible materiality.”¹⁸⁰ Translated into politics, the break with the normativity of the existing order of society opens up the possibility of creative and innovative action.¹⁸¹ The social condition of an agent no longer determines their aptitudes, or manner of being. By disassociating the meaning and significance of an action from its location within the social order, we acknowledge the activity of the worker may possess political intelligence, and, for instance, that the purported sense of anomie associated with the ‘condition of youth’ does not disbar young people from the terrain of politics.¹⁸² Or, in the favoured terms of Rancière, the judgement of what people are doing when they use their mouth, differentiating between those who have speech and those who have voice, is no longer based on a ‘principle of discrimination’, where the capability of an individual is tied to their social occupation and location.¹⁸³

Key to Rancière’s conceptualising of the aesthetics of politics is the original Greek notion of ‘aesthesia’ (the faculty of sense) that singularly captured “the capacity to both perceive a given and make sense of it.”¹⁸⁴ Drawing upon Kant, Rancière elaborates how the ‘doubling of sense’ constitutes the distribution of the sensible at the centre of his political thought.

First, there is something given, a form that is provided by sense – for instance, the form of a palace (...). Second, the apprehension of this form is not only a matter of sense (...). The apprehension puts into play a certain relation between what Kant calls faculties: between a faculty that offers the given and a faculty that makes something out of it.”¹⁸⁵

Crucially, according to Rancière’s take on Kant, the relation of ‘sense and sense’ (sensation and signification), the manner in which we make sense of a ‘sense given’, takes three forms; two involve a hierarchical relation between faculties where one of the senses is made subordinate, while the third

¹⁸⁰ Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution,” esp. ff 135. Rancière provides a description of the three regimes of art, which are effectively methods of identification, in Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, esp. 20-22. Subsequently in Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution,” esp. ff 135. Also in Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 28-30. These regimes are the ‘ethical’, the ‘representational’, and the ‘aesthetic’. In the ethical regime, characteristic of Platonism, “works of art have no autonomy.” Rancière states, “there is properly speaking no art as such but instead images that are judged in terms of their intrinsic truth and of their impact on the ways of being of individuals and of the collectivity.” In the representational regime, art is “no longer subject to the laws of truth or the common rules of utility. They are (...) ways of imposing a form on matter. As such, they are subject to a set of intrinsic norms: a hierarchy of genres, adequation of expression to subject matter, correspondence between the arts, etc.” Finally, “the aesthetic regime overthrows this normativity and the relationship between form and matter on which it is based.”

¹⁸¹ Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” 131. Deranty provides a brief discussion of the crossover present in Rancière’s work regarding the creative potential he sees available to politics and aesthetics with the “demise of the constraining representative logic.”

¹⁸² Here I recall the sociological classification of novel forms of social action amongst the youth counter-culture in Italy at the end of the 1970s as the mere expression of youthful anomie, cultural experimentation, lifestyle initiatives, or similar.

¹⁸³ Rancière, “The Aesthetic Dimension,” 3-4.

¹⁸⁴ Rancière, “The Aesthetic Dimension,” 1-2. Political philosophy, the aesthetics of politics, and the politics of aesthetics, in the work of Rancière, all revolve around the division and subsequent conjunction/disjunction of ‘aesthesia’.

¹⁸⁵ Rancière, “The Aesthetic Dimension,” 1-2. In *Disagreement*, Rancière discusses the aesthetic appreciation of a palace, drawn from the *Critique of Judgement*, for example in § 2, §14, §16, where “a palace may be the object of an evaluation that has no bearing on the convenience of a residence, the privileges of a role, or the emblems of a majesty (...).” Rancière, *Disagreement*, 57-58.

escapes (neutralises) the hierarchy.¹⁸⁶ In the *order of knowledge*, naturalised in disciplinary thought, the faculty of knowledge (signification) subordinates the faculty of sensations (the sense given). This order imposes a form of organisation on the 'raw materials' of sensation, either in respect to knowledge claims (theoretical reason) or assessment of utility (practical reason). Conversely, under the *law of desire*, the faculty of sensation commands the faculty of knowledge.¹⁸⁷ Importantly, the two hierarchical orders that organise the relation of sense and sense translate into the partitioning of society into those who know (the class of intelligence) and those who do not know (the class of sensation). The 'natural order' is the command of knowledge over ignorance, and in consensus thought, the only perturbation of this relation is "the struggle of the worse against the better."¹⁸⁸ Politics, on this account, is reducible to the 'game' of domination and rebellion (political contestation) that sits at the centre of sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs.

Importantly, in the third situation *neither* knowledge *nor* desire, rule the other. The 'neither/nor' of this third form (the aesthetic function of the faculty of judgement) perturbs the 'either/or' of the oppositional relation typical to the partitioning of society. Therefore, either there is domination capable of origination in either of the complementary and opposite faculties, or there is rejection of the order of the faculties that is effectively a rejection or neutralising of social hierarchy. It is through the latter that new sensible worlds emerge. This is the promise of the aesthetic *sensus communis*, the potential to disrupt the relation of command, the 'normal relation' of better over worse, higher over lower, or its simple inversion in the rebellions of the men of desire (the ignorant) against the men of reason (the intelligent).¹⁸⁹ The promise of politics for Rancière therefore resides not in the changing of the principles of discrimination or their manifesting in alternative forms of the state, but in the more meaningful change in 'sensible existence itself'.¹⁹⁰

As we have seen, Rancière's work on aesthetics was, in his own words, a "consequence of the previous work, as the systemisation of a thinking of politics in terms of 'distribution of the sensible', of polemics about the visible and sayable (...), who speaks and who makes noise (...)." ¹⁹¹ He clarifies his position through discussion of the exclusion of the poet in Plato's *Republic*, and its equivalence with the exclusion of the artisan:

One and the same distribution of the sensible both excludes artisans from the political scene where they might do something *other* than their work and prohibits poets from getting on the artistic stage where they might assume a character *other* than their own. Theatre and assembly: these are two interdependent forms of the same distribution, two spaces of heterogeneity that Plato was obliged to repudiate at the same time in order to constitute his Republic as the organic life of the community.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 2. Rancière takes the vocabulary of the faculties, of the understanding and desire, and of a third way that neutralises the determination of either, directly from Kant. Rancière suggests that Schiller reiterated this relation of the faculties soon after in his interpretation of aesthetic experience as suspending the opposition of the 'sensible drive' and 'form drive'.

¹⁸⁷ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 1-2.

¹⁸⁸ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 3, 9. This goes some way toward explaining the sociological dismissal of the political credentials of social movements that do not make overt claims against an opponent, or demand the redistribution of political and social resources.

¹⁸⁹ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 2-3.

¹⁹⁰ See Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 32.

¹⁹¹ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 115.

¹⁹² Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 26.

It is the 'haemorrhage' in the ordering of society that disciplinary thought "must stop in order," Rancière explains, "to establish stable relations between bodily states and the modes of perception and signification that correspond to them."¹⁹³ Order relies on bodies having the appropriate sensations, perceptions, and thoughts, and it is specifically the suspensive logic of the aesthetic that disrupts the neat division of society by established thought into the two humanities – those who are 'ignorant and subjugated' and those who have 'knowledge and are free.'¹⁹⁴ Effectively, such a disruption demonstrates the lie of the sensible inadequacy of the oppressed, while demonstrating the possibility of the society of the emancipated. This demonstration empowers the radical subject that has been pacified in the sociological theories of the *victim*, and political theories of *recognition*.¹⁹⁵

Rancière asserts that the 'disinterested' nature of aesthetic judgement attains its full signification in the demonstrations of the political subject that suspends knowledge whose adequacy depends on observing a necessary relation between being and thinking, places, parts, and competencies. Disinterestedness, Rancière writes, is "the dismantling of a certain body of experience that was deemed appropriate to a specific ethos," and as such, the "dismantling of the worker's body of experience is the condition for a worker's political voice."¹⁹⁶ A crucial moment in Rancière's thinking on the aesthetic of politics occurs in *The Nights of Labour*, where an article by the joiner Louis Gabriel Gauny in a revolutionary workers' newspaper appears to be a paraphrasing of the 'disinterested' appreciation of the palace in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*.¹⁹⁷

Gauny's text discusses the ability of the worker to disconnect his appreciation and imagination from his time and place of work.¹⁹⁸ This is the moment when the worker 'transforms into an aesthete' and brings the supposed relation of aptitudes, or ineptitudes, and occupation into dispute.¹⁹⁹ Rancière asserts:

The constitution of a specific 'aesthetic' sphere thus appears as an essential moment in the modern idea of equality. It is the place where the *categories, classifications, oppositions and hierarchies, which inscribe the forms of domination within the very structures of perception and sensory experience*, are first questioned: form and matter, nature and culture, appearance and truth, activity and passivity, the vulgar and the refined, work and leisure, play and serious activity.²⁰⁰

Rancière, in his modelling of emancipatory practices, "takes into account the phenomenon of *aesthetic suspension* and understands it in terms of the *dis-identification* of social positions and the reconfiguration of the spheres of experience."²⁰¹ Consequently, politics in the writing of Rancière is creative, a manifesting of innovative communities. This new community is his radical inversion of the

¹⁹³ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 17.

¹⁹⁴ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 8.

¹⁹⁵ Theories of the *victim* and *recognition* treat social movements as requests for visibility and representation, seen as such in their expressions of grievance, and identitarian claims making. For Rancière, making politics about recognition reduces it to individual suffering and a desire for its rectification, which patronises the political subject. His distaste for the politics of recognition is made clear in his response to an article by Jean-Philippe Deranty (*Jacques Rancière's Contribution*), in Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 295.

¹⁹⁶ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 8.

¹⁹⁷ Rancière, *The Nights of Labour*, 81.

¹⁹⁸ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 7. Rancière elaborates, "Aesthetics means that the eyes of the worker can be disconnected from his hands, that his belief can be disconnected from his condition. This is what must be ruled out if sociology is to exist."

¹⁹⁹ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 214.

²⁰⁰ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 214-215.

²⁰¹ Rancière, "Work, Identity, Subject," 215 (emphasis mine).

principles that order the Platonic Republic.²⁰² Plato's Republic, Bernstein states, makes the domain of theory distinct and authoritative, thus creating a politics (practice) that is entirely engendered by the "application of theory to the world."²⁰³ Rancière's rejoinder is to conceptualise politics in relation to the exemplary emancipatory acts that make "understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise."²⁰⁴ Counter to authoritative reason, exhibited in political deductions such as Plato's list of qualifications for the 'ethical rule' of power, aesthetic experience suspends all such social hierarchies that advance the claims of the 'better over the worse', ignoring the 'entitlements' that legitimise the 'intelligent classes' to exercise command over the 'sensuous classes'.²⁰⁵ Such 'politics' is more 'authentic': it is the exercise of power by those who have no title to do so that reveals the contingency of the foundations of social order.²⁰⁶

The political encounter, where sensible experience is not pre-determined, eludes 'conceptual determination'.²⁰⁷ This form of political experience, then, is what differentiates political judgements in the sense Rancière wants them to be understood as requiring the skills involved in the aesthetic perception of novelty, from the judgements made within the confines of the prevailing convention of meaning and significance.²⁰⁸

4. The 'unintelligible' subject of Italian RSMs 1968-78

In the Italian factory during the early 1960s, certain sectors of the workers' movement, rather than seeking representation in the existing system of political relations through negotiation with the company, took charge of the situation by directly altering the work/leisure balance by taking extended breaks, stopping work, and absenteeism. Certain quarters of IRT assessed these practices as 'demanding nothing', and SMT and NSMT generally denied their political status. Rancière's approach to the politics of social movements, however, offers a more positive appraisal of such self-activity. Relevant to the Italian situation, Rancière claims a "strike is not political when it calls for reforms (...). It is political when it reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community." He asserts that workers resisting as workers actually reinforces social division by reinforcing their position in the social order. Instead, Rancière identifies the subject of politics as those workers 'travelling the road in the opposite direction', deserting 'their' culture and 'their' truth', and reframing their existence.²⁰⁹ This is not the exchange of one fixed identity for another. It is the opposing of a social identity with a political identity, which reveals the contingency of the link between their attributes and their condition.

The late 1950s in Italy saw the nascence of a new radical community that rejected the political model of the official Left. The autonomously self-organised workers' movement achieved real life outcomes, causing changes in the conditions of work and life beyond the factory. In addition, this in-between or

²⁰² Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 31-32.

²⁰³ Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 12.

²⁰⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30. See also Chapter 3: The Rationality of Disagreement, in Rancière, *Disagreement*, esp. 49-55. Traditionally, from the philosophical heritage of Aristotle, hearing the voice of the masses as noise – an animalistic expression – was enough to deny them the status of political being.

²⁰⁵ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 9.

²⁰⁶ Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement," 5.

²⁰⁷ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 43.

²⁰⁸ Novelty, in the work of Rancière, is fundamentally different to the SMT utilisation of the term, by which it designates activities that fulfil a coercive and persuasive tactical function in the protest repertoires of RSMs.

²⁰⁹ Rancière, *The Nights of Labour*, 15.

non-identitarian subject of early workerism interrupted the classical Marxist discourse on the worker. The inexplicable nature of this political subject, eluding conceptual capture through the lens of existing schemas of political thought, prompted efforts to modernise Marxism. Eventually, the project of Marxist renewal recuperated the radical community, and a subsequent permutation, through the theory of class recomposition that successively named the radical subject the mass worker and the socialised worker. The Marxist science of political composition facilitated the material organisation of the radical community. On the one hand, this aided institutional engagement. On the other, it caused the fragmentation of the movement, with the identitarian vision of the New Left unable to unify the heterogeneity of the radical community.

The preferred methodology of workerism was initially the conducting of co-research, an approach that necessitated the shift of the intellectual into the movement. Bologna and the intellectual circle associated with this early working group acknowledged that to aid radical politics required them to start “trying to recover that knowledge which capital (...) is daily expropriating from the working class (...). This job is not one for a small group of intellectuals, but for thousands of comrades.”²¹⁰ This ‘excursion’ has interesting parallels with Rancière’s practical and theoretical trajectory; however, a decisive difference is that while Rancière began his archival project with a Marxist agenda, his praxeological commitments would overwhelm such doctrinal attachments. The workerist project was at first an effort to represent the ‘self-activity’ and the experiences and perceptions of the workers, to write in their language and not that of the intellectual or party militants;²¹¹ however, ultimately, the Italians remained faithful to their Marxist (and sociological) heritage. The interest in the worker became a theoretical practice geared toward the intellectual monitoring of struggle, where Marxist science *organises* and *transforms* individuals and groups disjointed by the processes of modernisation into a coherent and active movement.²¹²

At first glance, some theorists of the Italian situation appear to confirm certain aspects of Rancière’s analysis of emancipatory politics. For instance, Virno acknowledged the new subject of antagonism in Italy during the 1970s was abandoning the ‘besieged fortress of the factory’. The community of the new proletariat lead away from not toward, the traditional image and culture of the worker.²¹³ This idea of the antagonistic community, however, Virno positioned against the background of political conflict (contestation), which he (and others) designated as an ongoing struggle between revolution and counter-revolution. This political dynamic of rebellion and command displays the characteristics of what Rancière refers to as the Platonic relation of the better and the worse, a struggle between “two complementary and opposite powers.”²¹⁴ In various forms, the background image of politics as a matter of conflict (institutional/SMT, cultural/NSMT, and political/IRT) is the mark of sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs. This assertion finds indirect support in the work of Virno when he remarks that it is the discovery of new *rules* and *standards* that are the real *achievement* of the interruption of the existing order by the radical subject.²¹⁵ Virno’s assessment is common to the sociological approach to the politics of RSMs, where political struggle is conceptualised as the effort to overturn the political relation, an attempt to replace one social order (order of discrimination) with another.

²¹⁰ Bologna, "An Overview," 122.

²¹¹ Cuninghame and Bologna, "For an Analysis". See also Bologna, "Intervista a Sergio Bologna"

²¹² See Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 428-434.

²¹³ Virno, "Counter Revolution," 244-245.

²¹⁴ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 3.

²¹⁵ Sonja Lavaert, Pascal Gielen, and Paolo Virno, "The Dismeasure of Art: An Interview with Paola Virno," *Open* 17(2009).

Subsequent to the self-organised workers' movement, certain subjects of the area of social autonomy extended political struggle into new areas. Similarly, their achievements were opaque to the political thought of the organisations of the Left, the sociology of social movements, and the representational logic of the political institution. Retrospectively, the 'eccentric worker', the 'barefoot intellectual', and the 'urban proletarian youth' were all figures Virno saw appear where and when political programmes were failing.²¹⁶ The students, urban youth, women, the unemployed, generally those excluded politically, culturally, and socially, organised directly and independently of the existing institutions and parties.²¹⁷ Potentially, the novelty of this sector provides examples of what Rancière refers to as 'paradoxical subjectivisation', in which, as Deranty explains, the 'twice excluded', "renegades of their own class," act as political representatives by leaving.²¹⁸

In *Autobiography of a Generation*,²¹⁹ Guido Viale and Luigi Bobbio recall that the student movement in Turin during the second half of the 1960s thought it possible to disrupt the existing hierarchical relations of society through attentiveness to the particularity of the 'student as student'. This practice, designated as anti-authoritarianism in the social movement theory literature, involved the reclaiming of the name 'student' by particularising its meaning and significance to reflect the heterogeneity of its constituents.²²⁰ The open access to the university had introduced youth of working class backgrounds into a social space typically thought of as the sole terrain of the bourgeoisie. Here the 'strange students' firstly, disrupted the perception of the student movement as a movement of 'petite bourgeoisie dilettantes', and secondly challenged the conception of the bourgeoisie as the place marker of the educated class.²²¹ While some in the New Left saw this student movement as dangerous to their cause, introducing a culture to the working class movement that would undermine the *ethos* of the radical struggle, the in-between student viewed themselves as revolutionary through constant attention to their own condition, a source of 'nourishment' for the politics of RSMs.²²²

Sections of the student movement, in the image of the counterculture to come, saw themselves as small discursive communities, the location of the reclamation of speech. The ideal within this common space was the practice of direct democracy, a horizontal collectivity without a specific organisational or party form, or formalised structure,²²³ however, after the 'conquering of discursive spaces', Passerini recounts, the students were confronted with a sense of unease, feeling the pressure to make choices about how to proceed. Therefore, at times, the communities gravitated toward self-identification as 'avant-garde', the 'proletarian student movement', and so on. Such choices, according to certain

²¹⁶ Virno, "Counter Revolution."

²¹⁷ Red Notes, *Living with an Earthquake*, Preface.

²¹⁸ Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution," 141-142. The history of political subjectification in Italy is evident in the disruptive capacity of radical subjects such as the self-organised workers' movement that attempts to "cease to be a worker." Tronti, "The Struggle against Labour," 22-25. As discussed in chapter 4, the autonomous self-organisation of the workers' movement initially was a non-identitarian revolt against the status of being worker. This subject was involved in "the destruction (not the affirmation) of the worker *qua* worker." Virno and Hardt, *Radical Thought*, 7, 263.

²¹⁹ Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 94-95.

²²⁰ The student movement and its interaction with the workers is a highly complex area. In certain instances, the relation of the student and worker does appear based on the student's identification with class politics. However, my point is that the homogeneity of the proletarian thesis is insufficient to the dynamics of this movement environment.

²²¹ I borrow the label of the 'strange student' from Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda D'oro*, 533-536. The way I utilise this label here is different to that of Balestrini and Moroni, who use it to reference the student movement of the second half of the 1970s.

²²² For an example of this exchange, see Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 85-86.

²²³ Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 71-72.

memorial texts, would impose a form and order on the previously open assembly of the movement, demanding commitment to the political programme at the cost of personal choice.²²⁴ The consolidation of the student movement often excluded, for example, certain styles and habits of clothing and behaviours. Activities such as “going to the mountains and reading novels” were restricted within certain quarters of the movement, believing that the worker and the radical subject experienced a ‘lack of time’ for such things and should be hostile toward ‘bourgeois self-indulgence.’²²⁵

Rancière’s utilisation of ‘women’ and the ‘proletarian’ as exemplary to subjectification, while interchangeable with other social identities, resonates within the Italian situation. The transformation of these identities generated much of the impetus in the RSM environment 1968-78. Previously I have mentioned the disruptive aspect of the immigrant workers transformation of the identity of the industrial worker. Similar observations are available regarding the women’s movement, in particular, as Passerini notes, through the rejection of ‘feminism’, when it is practiced as an agitation for equality, understood as achieving ‘parity’ with men rather than the pursuit of agendas aligned to the specificities of women. In *Autobiography of a Generation*, Passerini recalls how the vitality of certain sections of the women’s community was generated by the challenge they posed to the ‘established order’ and the ‘limits of knowledge’ concerning the female subject. The gatherings and practices of these groups:

profoundly shook up the stereotypical ideas about women and the relationship among them: that we were orderly, motherly, undifferentiated and helpful sisters. They taught the *opposite of their collective and levelling appearance*: that there are women, multiple and different subjects in search of themselves, not *the woman*, with obligatory stages and models.²²⁶

The voices of the women that Passerini is attentive to do more than make claims for parity; they create new communities. The attentiveness of this ‘autonomous feminism’ to the singularity of different female experiences separated their practice from the feminism of the New Left or workerism that either conflated or subordinated women’s struggles to that of the class struggle. The autonomous women’s movement appeared alert to the importance of the concrete particularity of their situation, the distinguishing of their egalitarian community by revealing the difference of the name woman from ‘itself’. To recall Rancière, “‘workers’ or ‘women’ are identities that apparently hold no mystery (...). But political subjectification forces them out of such obviousness.”²²⁷ Disconcertingly, this act of dis-identification results in the under-representation of woman’s voices in sociological accounts of the Italian situation.²²⁸ Usually, only their ‘political achievements’ (for example, changes to abortion legislation) are acknowledged, and these are classified as such by their conformity to the disciplinary rules that define a specific scene of political effectivity. Retrospectively, Castellano and his comrades shed light on the inadequacy of the prevailing schemas of IRT during the 1970s (and subsequently sociological accounts) to understand autonomous feminism. They claim that the effect this subject had

²²⁴ Passerini discusses the general conflict and duality of the movement throughout her work. Here I refer to Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 86-91.

²²⁵ Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 109.

²²⁶ Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*, 120 (emphasis mine).

²²⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 36.

²²⁸ Cuninghame notes that there is a general absence of the women’s radical community in the literature on Italian RSMs. This, he continues, “reflects the historical tendency (...) for that voice to be silenced or ignored (...).” Cuninghame, “Italian Feminism,” 3. See also Giovanna Dalla Costa, *Un Lavoro d’amore, La Violenza Fisica Componente Essenziale del ‘Trattamento’ Maschile nei Confronti delle Donne* (Rome: Edizioni delle donne, 1978).

on the politics of the Left is that it cleared away 'points of resemblance',²²⁹ making them unrecognisable or unintelligible to established modes of discourse.

Generally, the decentralised RSMs of Italy emerged from the actions of as yet unidentified political subjects, in part a result of the influx of 'atypical individuals' into the space of industry (the southern immigrants), the university (working class youth) and the city (urban youth). Politics, according to Rancière, is the domain of 'volatile subjects' whose 'political identity' cannot be mistaken for a 'real social group' or 'anyone's actual particulars'. Dis-identification shifts from a fixed identity to an open name available to all.²³⁰ In addition, at key moments, the antagonistic communities of Italy rejected the normal relations of the workplace, the university, family, gender, and generation. Such activities disrupt the social hierarchies of 'natural memberships', ignoring the entitlement to rule, which Rancière asserts, exist at the "level of the social in families, tribes, schools, workshops, and so on; parents over children, the older over the younger, the rich over the poor, teachers over pupils, and so on."²³¹ A political interpretation of these 'achievements',²³² based on Rancière's unique scenography of politics, is contra to the apolitical classificatory work of sociological labels such as youthful anomie, marginality, and pathology. Rancière tempers such assessments by cautioning against the confusion of the reconfiguring of the sensible with the banality of social repartition, such as when an avant-garde movement imposes their own schema on the redistribution of social order.²³³

The configuring of politics as the practical verification of equality is endlessly demanding of its subjects, requiring the continual iteration of contingency, for emancipation never produces the 'vacuum of freedom' as the radical subject is constantly being recuperated within the police order through the inscription of a new collective subject.²³⁴ Politics ceases when an identity, once open to all, comes to designate an exclusive community, when self-referentiality becomes insular, and a political identity becomes a social identity, a system of designations that "frame the community in terms of definite standards of inclusion."²³⁵ While Rancière's political thought does not recover the range of unintelligible subjects in the Italian situation, his assessment of political activity adds a layer of complexity that at least neutralises interpretations that dismiss the political credentials of such subjects based on a normative judgement of their naivety compared with the rational agency of those who participate in the institutions of the modern state and call such participation, 'politics'.

Conclusion

My critical study of the sociological accounts of the Italian RSMs 1968-78 has examined the nexus of politics and the radical subject, and revealed how the intellectual and political context of theory development directly impact on representations of the political efficacy of the radical community. Across the case study, the intelligibility of the radical subject as a political subject proves dependent on

²²⁹ Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," 231.

²³⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 126.

²³¹ Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 10.

²³² Examples include the self-activity of the workers independent of the systems of representation and delegation; the 77ers rejection of the leadership of '68; and the disconnection of the feminist movement from the patriarchal organisations of the Left.

²³³ Other examples of this confusion in the Italian situation include: the forceful appropriation of leisure, more akin with social repartition by the representation of a groups interest in the existing order; the creation of a second society with its own standards of inclusion.

²³⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp 28-36.

²³⁵ Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 290.

the prevailing schema of thought, which can hide the practices and discourse of radicalism. Perpetuating acts of concealment is what Deranty labels a ‘condescending sociology’;²³⁶ a sociology that fails to recognise that the radical subject is more than the generic labels we use to describe them would indicate.²³⁷

SMT diligently enumerates the instances of radical politics and establishes general principles of radicalisation from sociological research.²³⁸ This process enables the demarcation and then analysis of political communities (social movements) and their perversion (radical social movements). In the surveyed sociological accounts of the Italian situation, after contextualising the political effectivity of the radical subject, naturalising the object of study becomes the critical aspect of investigation. This approach, however, conceals unexpected subjects and consigns them to the margins of social action and social theory. The leadership frames, integralist themes, and ideologies utilised by sociology to generalise the politics of RSMs, obscure the marginal communities and hide their particular achievements. While the early archival project of Rancière searched for ‘proletarian authenticity’, *the* voice of the working class, in the introduction to *The Nights of Labour* he writes: “there comes a moment when one asks oneself: is it possible that the quest for the true word compels us to shush so many people? What exactly is the meaning of this evasion (...)?”²³⁹ Irrespective of the approach, all surveyed accounts of the Italian situation silence the majority of voices within the radical social movement sector, muting the words of unexpected subjects, those subjects speaking from outside the boundary of the oppositional relation of political contestation.

The radical subject of politics for Rancière exists in the gaps and intervals of an existing order, created by tearing objects and subjects from their usual uses and ends. The breaches occupied by the antagonist community coincide with certain lacunae or discontinuities in our sociological explanations of social movement radicalisation. The politics of RSMs correspond with the faltering of substantialist and identitarian logics, when our best sociological models of radicalism must pause and reflect on their frameworks, philosophical foundations, and presuppositions regarding their materials and subjects. This coincidence makes sense if we accept, firstly, that the practice and theory of the radical community exist in a space that is marginal to the traditional community of politics. They act outside of the established standards of behaviour and transgress the conventional limits of representation. Secondly, in so doing, these communities question the prevailing discourses on the connection of the radical subject and politics. That is, RSMs disturb social order *and* the discourses that have that order as their object.

In the case study, I have observed the radical community (emerging from interruption and exemplars of difference) occupying three different locations in the surveyed accounts. It is that consigned to the margins of SMT and alienated by the AM concept of class composition. In NSMT, it is a partial political phenomenon in a paradoxical relationship with the political system. Only when we engage with the work of Rancière does the antagonistic community (the aesthetic *sensus communis*) manifest as a political subject. This assertion relies on the most enduring concept of Rancière’s political theory,

²³⁶ Deranty, "Introduction: A Journey in Equality," 6.

²³⁷ Examples of such labels include ‘the oppressed’, ‘the dominated’, ‘the worker’, ‘youth’, and ‘women’.

²³⁸ Kristin Ross, in her *May '68 and its Afterlives*, highlights how in the thinking of Rancière the sociologist and police ‘speak with the same voice’, both dealing statistically with the social order and constructing the whole with no leftover by dealing with groups designated by their natural differences and associated competencies. Accordingly, things could not have been different within the accounting of the police and the sociologist. Ross, *May '68*, 23.

²³⁹ Rancière, *The Nights of Labour*, 11.

namely, the axiom of equality. It is this axiom that generates many of his unique insights into the politics of emancipation, and in its specificity as an aesthetic intervention the axiom provides a way of understanding the development of a radical community that retains the nascent sense of formation that is lacking in sociological treatments of collective action. That is, the radical community is born of interruption, contradicting via its particularised and concrete practices what community has become, and presenting as an exception to the way the diverse threads of communities have gathered.

The mechanics of emancipatory politics, as described in Rancière's writing, are incompatible with the sociological accounts of radicalisation in the Italian social movements 1968-78. They suggest a way of understanding community formation, which is not akin to social aggregation. In fact, the radical community, Rancière asserts, can never co-exist with society, which homogenises the heterogeneity that defines radicalism.²⁴⁰ His honest appraisal of emancipatory politics is that it is difficult to identify. He is adamant, however, that politics raise the issue of equality, of 'who takes part in the common', and is not reducible to the conflicting interests of sociological groups.²⁴¹ The aesthetic *sensus communis* is not a participant in the struggle between complementary opposites, the normal relation of which is the domination of the better over the worse. The sociological study of social movements describes political conflict that arises from *either* the domination of one group over another, *or*, the inversion of this relation in the form of rebellion. Rancière acknowledges a third situation, which is not a part of the conflict, but is an aesthetic intervention that neutralises social hierarchy through the demonstration of radical equality. At the same time, the aesthetic experience of politics reveals the contingency of the order of knowledge that sustains the either/or situation of political contestation.

²⁴⁰ See Rancière, *Disagreement*, 101-102; Rancière, *On the Shores*, 84.

²⁴¹ Blechman et al., "Democracy, Dissensus," 297.

Concluding Remarks

Every speaking subject is the poet of himself and of things. Perversion is produced when the poem is given as something other than a poem, when it wants to be imposed as truth, when it wants to force action.¹

Jacques Rancière – *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

In various ways, SMT, NMST, and IRT clear the way for theoretico-political intervention into the explication of the politics of RSMs, and become a form of discursive police. Fundamental to this intervention is that the relation of the intellectual to the radical community (the masses/movement) is that relation of knowledge and ignorance. Resting on the ‘fiction of the explicative order of the world’, this relation makes those of inferior intellect – judged as such through association with a social location and occupation – dependent on further explication for comprehension to occur.² Whether exploited by sociologists, movement leaders, and philosophers or similar, the explicative order creates a sense of entitlement that privileges the experts and specialists to speak as the representative of the radical community. In addition, such accounts revive what Cleaver observes as the false dichotomy between ‘organisation and spontaneity’.³ Any sense of the activities of the radical community being chaotic (spontaneous/disorganised) comes from organisational and ideological perspectives that understand organisation of a social movement as solely a top down and abstract enterprise that requires external leadership, further explication, and the implementation of a theoretical programme of political antagonism.

To highlight the relation of the specialist and the movement, I examined the criminalisation of dissent in Italy associated with the arrests of April 7th 1979. I revealed how the April 7 interpretive community exploited the explicative fiction and the organisational perspective to assert that a select conspiratorial intelligentsia were responsible for organising the radical community. Reducing the Italian radical subject to the status of citizen solely in the eyes of the law afforded the judiciary interpretive privilege, providing authority to their fixing of the public meaning of radicalism. I then utilised the hegemonic intent of the April 7 prosecutors as a lens through which to view other attempts to unify the antagonist community. Subsequently, it became clear that the in the rush to naturalise the radical subject, the prevailing sociological models (and IRT) of the ‘movement society’ attempt to organise or politicise the radical community as a political subject, collapsing social action into the political process. In particular, SMT’s strategy-oriented modelling of the politics of RSMs roots the radical community within the political system. The modernist vision of this paradigm is of a political system progressively improved by the presence of social conflict, where the political dimension of the practice and theory of the radical community discharges within the dynamics of social aggregation.

The best-established sociological theory of social movements (RMT) is unable – or unwilling – to deconstruct the general framework of politics, observing the demands of social movements as instrumentally rational, seeking integration through political inclusion.⁴ Consequently, as Melucci notes,

¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 84.

² See Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, xvi, 4.

³ De Angelis, "An Interview with Harry Cleaver".

⁴ Melucci and Avritzer, "Complexity, Cultural Pluralism."

those subjects and their actions not immediately or self-evidently “identifiable as political become ignored and eliminated from analysis.”⁵ This occludes the perspective of the exploited, the manifesting of innovative communities, and the capacity of those dominated in the existing social order to articulate and organise their experience. In addition, it grants the strategic reason and political rationalism of certain intellectual circles a monopoly over the comprehension of the movement; however, if we accept radical theory is a factor in the realisation of the radical community, then, equally, we must be mindful of what is at stake in radical thought. Theoretical representations, political organisation, and leadership frames interweave elements of explanation and prescription, analysing the self-activity of the movement while advancing abstract political goals.

The inclination of the sociology of RSMS is to fuse the self-activity of the movement with the representations of generic leadership frames. In the Italian situation, the outcome is the welding of the self-awareness of the movement to caricatures of historical Marxism and a neo-Leninist vanguard. This is evident in the seductive ruse of violence, carried forward by SMT’s superficial encounter with historicist Marxism and neo-Leninism, which overwhelms the social actor, and, at times, reduces the political violence of the late 1970s to a cultural expression of revolutionary Marxism, repeating the assertions of the April 7 judiciary. The explanatory intent and organising purpose of the sociology of social movements, utilising established schemas of thought and political signifiers, expropriate the radical subject of its knowledge of social struggle. Against such expropriations, Rancière’s design in *Althusser’s Lesson* is to displace the ‘specialist’ and their form of theoretical intervention from the centre of political struggle, studying, as Deranty acknowledges, the voices and forms of speech “below the overbearing discourse of organised Marxism.”⁶

The Italian situation shows that the concrete acts, actual behaviours, and the historical specificity of individual social movements present the rationale of the radical community. Therefore, it is necessary to resist the temptation to elaborate the radical community in abstraction, relying on the analytic categories or abstract statutes of the political elite. Taken in isolation, the representations of the movement leaders define a specific scene for politics that obscures the disparities in the Italian social movements gathered under the rubric of radicalism. This, I have demonstrated, overwhelms the importance of communities that eschew the norms of political engagement, and exist in positions that are marginal to conventional systems of representation. This is the plight of the unseen subjects of the Italian RSMs, which disassociate from social identities and sociological groups elaborated in abstraction, while fulfilling the needs of a wider community.

This thesis examined the theoretical and practical discontinuities of the Italian situation, arguing that the marginalised movements – those I labelled the ‘outliers’ – are fundamental to radical politics, crucial to understanding the dynamics of community formation and latency. In order to reveal that certain sectors of the antagonistic community of Italy are generative, born of interruption, contradicting via specific concrete practices what community has become, I started over with the early risers of the workers’ movement in the late 1950s and reconsidered the political effectivity of post-workerist generation. The latter, paradigmatic to NSMT and of enduring affect on IRT, exemplifies the challenge to the modernist vision of SMT. The case study revealed that the Italian situation fostered unprecedented challenges to existing social hierarchies and the entitlements associated with ‘natural difference’. This included self-activity that confronted the exclusivity of the university system, the patriarchy of Italian society, and the political elitism of the New and Old left. While the crescendo of protest and street

⁵ Melucci, *Challenging Codes*, 199.

⁶ Deranty, "Logical Revolts," 20.

violence in the second half of the 1970s is the epicentre of fascination in most accounts of the politics of the Italian RSMs, the Italian situation involved significant cultural and social opposition. Bologna argues that the novelty and originality of the third generation, during its ascent and subsequent to its decline, left a 'void' in the project of radical politics.⁷ A correlate lacuna exists in the SMT effort to repatriate the radical subject to western democracies.

The contemporary demands placed on political theory are most noticeable in the moments that substantialist or identitarian logics falter, when our best theories of social movements must pause and reflect upon their frameworks and philosophical foundations. Therefore, I turned to Rancière's unique response to these demands, his aesthetic theory of politics that reaches beyond the reasons and explanations of sociology. Rancière's perspective puts forth an alternative way of understanding emancipatory politics that retains the nascent sense of community formation that is lacking in sociological treatments of collective action. The aesthetic *sensus communis*, which is not a party to social aggregation, presents as an interruption or exception to the very way communities have gathered. The politics of RSMs involve, according to Rancière, struggles that untie the particularity of the individual from the constraints of social knowledge and stage new communities, rather than being a critical project that defends or promotes the interests of an existing collective subject.⁸ Such a community contradicts the continuity thesis and ideal of progressive culture that underpins the status quo. Bernstein argues that opposed to the 'passive *sensus communis*', a 'given community' of 'like-mindedness', is a community that questions what community has become.⁹ Such a vision of the radical subject, I argued, is crucial to accounts of the politics of the Italian RSMs 1968-78.

Accounts of the politics of RSMs that homogenise the sectoral nature of conflict, Bologna argues, amount to a theoretical construction or invention of a "social figure to whom can be imputed the process [of emancipation]."¹⁰ This endeavour is ignorant of the rationale and epistemological work of groups such as those that valorise marginality over political organisation. Such neglect I have shown is the distinctive feature of contemporary sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs in Italy. Accordingly, I suggest sociological modelling of the nexus of politics and the radical community must neutralise interpretations that dismiss the political credentials of radical subjects based on a normative judgement of their naivety compared with the rational agency of those who participate in the institutions of the modern state and call such participation, 'politics'.

The sociology of social movements describes much of the theory and practice of the Italian radical community 1968-78 as 'invisible', 'unintelligible', and 'irrational', dismissing it as 'fashion', 'cultural experimentation', and so on. The social world may be unintelligible and agents' acts incomprehensible if they are inexplicable in some sense as strategic; however, the new struggles in Italy, whether of the late 1950s or mid 1970s, were organised, intelligent, imaginative, and driven by an independent knowledge of their situation. The invisibility of the radical subject is not literal; rather, they are invisible only to those who do not want to see them, they are irrational to those who disagree with them, and chaotic to those who hope to organise them. The social movements in question are describable, have articulable aims, and a rationale for their practice; however, when they sideline traditional political agenda's such as the 'control of the state' and workplace reform, they apparently forfeit their title as a political

⁷ Bologna, "Composizione di Classe e Sistema Politico," 28-29.

⁸ Rancière, "A Few Remarks," 120 (emphasis mine).

⁹ See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 102-103.

¹⁰ See Bologna, "Negri's Proletarians," 40.

movement. Still, while not political in any traditional sense, we cannot cleanly extricate these movements from the political cycle.

I was fortunate enough to visit three key archives in Italy during my research for this thesis. One day, after reading endless copies of *Senza Tregua* and *Rosso*, trying to understand the dynamics of social movement radicalisation, I took a break to look through the bookshop at the Milan social centre, Cox 18. Thumbing through counter-cultural magazines and a collected works of *A/traverso*, the musings of Rancière in *The Nights of Labour* came to mind: “is it possible that the quest for the true word compels us to shush so many people?” Through a case study of the Italian situation, this thesis has critically examined the sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs, focusing on the modelling of the nexus of politics and the radical subject deployed by SMT, NSMT, and IRT (AM) to repatriate the radical community to western democracies after the tumult of the 1960s. I have revealed that an effort to organise or politicise the vision of the collective subject has tracked the antagonistic community of the Italian social movements. The outcome is that something escapes us in the Italian situation: something that continues to intrigue and elude sociological accounts of the politics of RSMs, something inexplicable as an aspect of political contestation.

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