A Question of Knowledge: Radical Social Movements and Self-Education

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To understand radical social movements (RSMs) and their relation to knowledge practices we must recognise their valence, which is *essentially* epistemological and not simply social.[1] This is to claim that, first, the discursive dimension of the radical community is a credible mode of analysis of their social and political conditions, and second, we can learn from their discourse and practice. The actions of this 'community', as Jacques Rancière spotlights, verifies their common capacity for the *invention* and *demonstration* of political concepts, arguments, objects, and the like, and in so doing they reclaim 'thought as something belonging to everyone' (Baronian, Rosello, & Rancière, 2008, p. 3). Therefore, in the first instance, support for my claim is available in Jacques Rancière's writing on emancipatory politics.

The intent of my engagement with Rancière's political thought is to reveal a way of understanding the formation of community that respects the epistemological work of the RSMs beyond the confines of expert knowledges and contests their facile recuperation within the mechanism of social aggregation. The radical political subject, according to Rancière (2003, pp. 205–206), destabilises the systemic and hierarchical elaboration of what belongs to a specific community as delimited through the

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proclamation of rules, practices, and dignifying subjects. He asserts that social movements are not identitarian; in fact, they are constituted by fighters trying to dismiss 'the identity *given* to them by a social order' (Rajchman, 1995), an identity that I suggest walls off the limits of community and diminishes particularity and difference. Significantly, as I will show, Rancière's work on politics logically brings us into contact with thinking on the pedagogical relation.

While pedagogy is not Rancière's focus, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* he highlights that the 'myth of pedagogy', which defines a relation of intellectual inequality between teacher and student, further divides the world into those who know (e.g., philosopher and adult) and those who do not know (e.g., common person and child) (Rancière, 1991, pp. 4–7). This presupposition of intellectual asymmetry underpins the hierarchy of social order and supports a division of manual and intellectual labour, partitioning society into the 'two humanities'—the active thinker (intelligent) and their passive medium (ignorant) (Rancière, 2009a, p. 30). Two important consequences 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 (Rancière, 1991). The authority of the intellectual is derivative of the assumed ignorance of the masses; consequently, it is explicitly those subjects excluded from intellectual labour that can undermine the systems of thought (social knowledge) that sustain what are essentially contingent hierarchical orders.

In the second instance, my view of RSMs draws strength from the example of co-research amongst the first generation of contemporary Italian social movements, and the subsequent third generation's establishment of concrete spaces free from formal organisation and coercive authority (Castellano et al., 1996, p. 234). The first generation workers' struggles focused on localised practices of dissent, and were independent to any readily discernible programme of political demands. The actions of this group sought autonomy from the work place and system of industrial relations, and their struggle reached out into their personal communities and daily lives beyond the factory (Negri, 1988, p. 210; *The Last Firebrands*, pp. 25–26). The third generation, the Movement of '77 or area of social autonomy, looked to alternatives to political militancy such as independently run social services and spaces of self-teaching, and sites of cultural production like artist collectives and independent radio stations. In both instances (worker's struggle and social autonomy) radicalisation, through self-activity, is the refusal of the exclusion from intellectual labour, the dismissal of social relations derivative of the myth of intellectual asymmetry.

Social Movements and Intellectual Emancipation

RSMs exist in a space that is marginal to the political community, and they act outside the established standards of behaviour, disturbing social order *and* the discourses that have that order as their object. By transgressing the conventional limits of representation they set up a polemical relation to social ordering. This conceptualisation of the nexus of politics and RSMs imagines a collective actor that generates both practical (real life/subjective) and theoretical (discourse/objective) *discontinuities*. Their self-aware practices of *immediacy* achieve real life outcomes by *directly* dealing with the impediments present in the environment. The correlate effect of the observation of these practices in the discourse on politics is an undermining of existing schemas of thought and driving theoretical renewal. Crucially, this challenges the hegemony of social knowledge—a system of thought that orders experience, structures perception and meaning, and prejudicially partitions and organises society.

While the common is a contested site, volatile and processual, where constructions of the possible (common sense) compete one against another, social knowledge aims to stabilise the situation by establishing a material order. In response, the struggles of the radical subject decouple aptitude from social location; they untie the particularity of the individual from the constraints of a determinate knowledge. Subsequently, Rancière (2003, p. 203) aims to reveal how 'a so-called (…) social movement [is] also an *intellectual* (…) one, a way of reconfiguring the frameworks of the *visible* and the *thinkable*'. To achieve his aim, he places his concept of politics against the background image of society as a 'distribution of the sensible'. He is interested to show that what qualifies as a community is always already underscored by conventions of meaning and significance that order that which is *given* to us in sense experience (Rancière, 2006a, pp. 1–2). This 'regime of sensibility' is a construction of, and at the same time a limit to, what is possible (Rancière, 2009b, p. 120). As Caroline Pelletier (2012, p. 109) identifies, membership in the community thereby requires 'adopting its ways of knowing … [and] new members are initiated over time, using pedagogic techniques'.

A consequence of this vision of social aggregation in the writing of Rancière is that he remains sceptical of the claims of anti-authoritarian and progressive pedagogues who proclaim to undermine the existing systems of social inequality. Alternatively, Rancière resolutely believes that politics begins when those who 'cannot' show that indeed they 'can', causing

disputation. The outcome is a polemical common sense, a restaging of the common and what belongs to it, where the collective arises from 'sharing what is not given as being in-common' (Rancière, 1999, p. 138). Opposed to the 'given community' of 'like-mindedness' is an antagonistic community which, to borrow from J.M. Bernstein (1993, pp. 102–103), emerges from interruption and exemplars of difference. The nascence of the radical political subject is an intervention in, or exception to, the ways community are gathered. The processual and disputatious nature of the antagonist community disconnects from the existing material ordering of bodies, and eschews the gradualism of progressive culture that attempts to pacify the excluded with the promise of reconciled futures. By transgressing social boundaries and breaching epistemological hierarchies, the antagonist disrupts the sensible co-ordinates of community, and teaches us. We learn, as Deranty (2010, p. 23) notes, of the error of the assumption 'that relegated them [those from below] to this position within the hierarchy'.

Access to knowledge is a central concern for RSMs addressing situations of inequality and exploitation. One pathway is delineated by theoretico-political intervention, which is comparable to pedagogy as means. This route retains the aspirations and progressive ideals of the enlightenment, which assumes a 'lack' in the subject, alienating the excluded of their knowledge and postponing self-determination. A similar relation persists in contemporary theories of critical pedagogy, which has as its object the epistemological hierarchies of the formal institutions of education. Along with the related concept of popular education, which is community based, critical pedagogy entrusts emancipation to the pedagogic relation. While informal, popular education, like critical pedagogy draws upon an external agent as educator, who, while decentred makes the pedagogic situation explicit. That is, emancipatory pedagogy, in whichever guise, typically requires an 'intellectual intervention', and in particular one free of the polluting influence of ideology and power (G. Biesta, 2010, p. 44).[2] The outcome is that critical pedagogies usually maintain minimally stratified models of education (Brophy & Touza, 2007, p. 132). In part, this is attributable to the figure of Paulo Freire that looms large over the field of emancipatory education, as does the legacy of his belief in false consciousness and his struggle to address the figure of the universal intellectual in traditions of pedagogy.[3]

Rancière's counter to the pedagogic relation of theoretico-political intervention is that there is, in fact, an intellectual symmetry to the relations of politics: the oppressed can teach, and as Deranty (2012, p. 192)

emphasises, we learn 'not from their pathos, but from their discourse and action (…)'. At the core of Rancière's (1991, p. 4) telling of the story of Joseph Jacotot—a theorist of the equality of intelligence—in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, is Jacotot's revelation that the myth of pedagogy is foundational in the 'fiction of the explicative order of the world'. This pedagogical relation underwrites the valorisation of the intellectual, and in effect 'declares the inability of the ignorant to be cured of their illusions (…)' (Rancière, 2011, p. xvi). Rancière takes seriously the consequences of the ontological division of society into the 'two humanities', and responds radically to this partition by attempting to recover the perspective of the exploited, acknowledging their capacity to articulate and organise their experience. As Deranty (2012, p. 192) notes, he shows 'hermeneutic humility', or, he is epistemologically humble.

Rancière's investigation of social and political domination occurs, as Kristin Ross shows, 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' (Ross, 1991, p. xxiii): his 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 (Rancière, 1989, p. 11).

The axiom of equality sets out the praxis of Rancière's archival project, which he approaches by documenting the voices and experiences of the exploited (thought from below), creating 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 (Rancière, 2009b, p. 117). He assumes their 'common capacity to invent objects, stories and arguments' (Rancière, 2006b, p. 12). Consequently, acts of intellectual or self-emancipation are a 'self-affirmation' of the excluded 'as a joint-sharer in a common world' (Rancière, 1995, p. 49). This breaks with the convention of the universal intellectual, and by association the educator of enlightenment pedagogy, who, through their unique capacity for rational thought and cognitive existence beyond the polluting ideologies of society, found, and guarantees knowledge.[4]

Rancière's 'excursion' 'into the flesh of working-class experience, into the thinking and practice of emancipation', (Baronian et al., 2008, p. 2) caused him to reject the belief that the role of the intellectual was to enlighten the antagonist community. 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 incapable of controlling their own destiny. This 'clears the way' for the 'intervention of philosophy' (Rancière, 2011, pp. 10–11). The implication of a division of manual and intellectual labour is that intellectuals are responsible for 'instructing and organising' those blinded by the dominant bourgeois ideology, those inflicted by false consciousness. Consequently, 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' (Rancière, 2011, p. xiv). However, the practice of workers, peasants, immigrant workers, youth, women, and national minorities during the tumult of the 1960s 'renders absurd the efforts of classical leftism to unify these struggles and bring them under its hegemony' (Rancière, 2011, pp. 118–120).

The radical subject's demonstration of their capacity for discourse and reason undermines their exclusion from intellectual labour, reclaiming a role in knowledge practices and the common. Primarily, Rancière's (1991, p. 137) political thought derives its coherence from his most enduring idea that equality is common to everyone—there is only one intelligence—and vitally such 'radical equality' is 'not given, (…) it is practiced, it is verified'. Further, it 'is not a goal to be reached but a supposition to be posited from the outset and endlessly reposited' (Rancière, 1995, p. 84). 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 (May, 2008, p. 40). Consequently, the promise of politics for Rancière resides in the 'global change in the ways of living, thinking and feeling', a revolution in the forms of life not in the forms of government (Blechman, Chari, Hasan, & Rancière, 2005, p. 295).

THE ITALIAN SITUATION: SOCIAL STRUGGLE AND SELF-ACTIVITY

While political philosophy and social science have great success in proving the existence of inequality, Rancière is interested to see those who 'demonstrate the existence of equality' (Rancière, 1995). Such demonstrations

are present in the self-activity and self-determination of the first and third generation of the contemporary Italian movement sector. These antagonistic communities typically emerged in the second half of the twentieth century from the actions of as yet *unidentified* subjects, subjects unconstrained by the enclosures of social knowledge. They were, in part, a result of the influx of 'atypical individuals' into the space, first, of industry (the southern agriculturalist immigrants), and subsequently the city (urban youth). The effect this had on the politics of the Left is that it cleared away 'points of resemblance', confounding conventional political thought (Castellano et al., 1996, p. 231). The redundancies and gaps created in the determinate knowledge of the Party by the innovative practices of the RSMs engaged the intellectual in a process of theoretical renewal. As revealed below, by breaking from the restrictive culture and ethos of *the* working class, the radical political subject produces new forms of being and in doing so they literally teach us about the relation and dynamics of the common, community, and social knowledge.

The First Generation

The intent of the 'first generation' workers' movement was to change the relation of the factory workers to the political and industrial systems. This was an attempt to take back the control of daily life from the demands of the work ethic. Rather than seeking representation in the existing system of political relations through negotiation with the company, certain groups took charge of the situation by directly altering the work/leisure balance by taking extended breaks, stopping work, and absenteeism (Lotringer & Marazzi, 1980, p. 9). Typically, practices were localised and peculiar to the distinct experiences of the work place. Freed of the constraints of the Party and the political project of the 'historic worker', the workers' movement focused on needs and desires, as Toscano comments, independent to economic rationale 'and nationalist and productivist agenda'(Toscano, 2009, p. 80).

Wright (2002, p. 76), discussing 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 (…), [and] "they demanded nothing"'.[5] Nothing, that is, in terms recognisable to the capitalist system of exchange, but something that goes beyond the logic of the system. The innovative and creative practices of the new collectives, organised from below, achieved real life outcomes by directly dealing with

the impediments to equality present in their environment. It also interrupted the history of the Italian Left and defied the way that the conventional Marxist thought of the PCI (Italian Communist Party) inscribed the figure of the worker. Consequently, the new situations of the radical political subject engaged the intellectual in a process of theoretical and methodological renewal, a process exemplified by co-research, which hoped to generate a shared knowledge attentive to the experiences of the worker (Wright, 2007, p. 271).[6]

Co-Research

Co-research was a significant break from the nineteenth century notion of the 'worker-intellectual', a worker drawn into a circle of intellectuals educated in the enlightenment tradition of rational thought (Wright, forthcoming). The focus of co-research, involving workers and grass-roots intellectuals, was on recovering the knowledge of the worker, 'daily expropriated by capital' (Bologna, 1978, esp. p. 122). As in critical pedagogy's dialogical methodology, co-research purportedly overcomes the object-subject divide, creating a 'co-subject' relation. This, Bologna states, is an attempt to open a relationship with a social movement endowed with knowledge and the capacity for self-organisation (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995). He continues,

> 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. (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995)

Co-research was 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 research tried to understand the 'worker as a whole person', contemplating the real life effects of work. Social theory was to be a pragmatic activity of the workers, an antagonistic science, and as Cuninghame (2002, p. 57) 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. The rejuvenation of radical thought, inspired by 'the upsurge in autonomous

working class militancy (…)', maintained the centrality of the worker, but 'was otherwise critical of orthodox Marxism's *victimist* vision of the working class …' (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995).

Initially, the workerist project was an effort to relay 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 (Bologna, 2002; Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995). However, in the second half of the 1960s, efforts to politicise and organise the radical community reintroduced familiar theoretical panaceas—such as the vanguard intellectual and paradigmatic subjectivity—to the analysis of political struggle. These theoretical bridges between objective and subjective, concrete condition and action, structure and agency, express, in part, the desire amongst the leadership and intellectual circles of the Italian far left to identify an adequate political subject.[7] As Wright noted with regard the workerist experience, sometimes self-activity frustrates the intellectual who wishes to see the antagonist community move in a certain political direction (Cowden & Wright, 2013, p. 216). The outcome of this exchange was the capturing of the creativity of workers autonomy by a theoretical explanation of the identity of a new revolutionary subject.

The Intellectual

There was a collaboration between the left intellectuals searching for the revolutionary subject and the workers in revolt (…). After this collaboration came to an end, the [second] group were still workers and the [first] still academics. (*The Last Firebrands*)

Michael Hardt (1996, p. 1) 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'. Firstly, Hardt is asserting that radical theory is a layer of radical practice, lending *coherence* to the movement by exploring new ideas, strategies and decisions, and forms of organisation. Secondly, while the movement and the intellectual reach common political shores, Hardt's analogy places the intellectual atop the surging tide of radical practice. 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 cleavages within

the Italian Left, firstly amongst competing intellectual circles, and second between the antagonist community and the political elite. Periodically, the theoreticians re-asserted their authority in the organisation of dissent, imagining themselves as the vital link between working class struggle and working class consciousness. Here, as with condescending forms of pedagogy, the intellectual serves, as Melucci (1992) spotlights, 'as the external supplier of that (…) which the actor is lacking'.

The original cohort of workerism, in particular leaders such as Tronti and Negri, relinquished the initial vision of workerism in exchange for an 'adequate' theory of the revolutionary subject and a 'muscular' political ontology (Chiesa & Toscano, 2009, p. 2). However, the collapse of the New Left organisations in the 1970s would remind them of the polemical force of the antagonistic community and its hostility towards all forms of social aggregation. The original intent of co-research was to relay the creativity and innovation of the worker, and to learn from their practice and discourse; however, in the end the intellectuals would alienate the movement of their knowledge, which they would 'ideologise ex-post' (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995).

At its best, Wright claims, co-research is a form of self-education, with workers analysing in detail their lived situation and identifying and sharing ways to overcome the obstacles in their environment that prevent them from living the kind of life they desire (Cowden & Wright, 2013). Ultimately, however, Italian co-research proved only a poor approximation of self-education (self-research) that researchers such as Alquati believed was required for true self-management.[8] In reality, co-research is more accurately a form of 'subversive pedagogy', a radical critique of social knowledge (Borio, Pozzi, & Roggero, 2007, p. 177) that offers its own account of the distribution of the common, mapping out how best to enclose its variegated fields of struggle to reduce inequality. This downgrades the struggles of the radical subject to the material of the theorist, reinstating hierarchical orders founded on the presupposition of an intellectual asymmetry.

The Third Generation

The second generation of Italian movements (the movement of '68) coalesced around the organisations of the New Left. Here, the theorists of the first generation took on the role of organising and politicising the movement. However, during 1973–1974, 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. In response, the third generation reached beyond the factory and had a new social basis, which from 1975 to 1977 was primarily constituted of an urban youth movement that breached the political culture of '68. 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 creative autonomy', constituted primarily by collectives forming at the margins of society, avoided engaging with the political institution and produced what Lotringer and Marazzi label a 'surplus of knowledge', an excess of invention and intelligence outside the current demands of society (Lotringer & Marazzi, 1980, p. 15).

The third generation, a variegated field of anti-capitalist and anti-liberalist collectives, reached its zenith in the area of social autonomy and culminated in the 'Movement of '77' that rejected the militant intellectuals of the previous generation. 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 collectives exemplified the starting anew of the antagonistic community. They imagined the vanguard intellectuals as the 'police', attempting, as Ruggiero (2000, p. 171) states, to interchangeably 'co-opt or ostracize' the predominantly youth movement. Or as Palandri recounts, 'we were their donkeys', carrying forward the intellectual's plans (Cuninghame, 2002, p. 186). 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. The response of the Movement of '77 was self-activity, self-education, and the opening of common spaces for cultural production.

The *centri sociali* (social centres), one of the most persistent and compelling legacies of the Italian movement sector of the seventies, emerged as part of the self-activity of the antagonistic youth movements of the 1970s (Moroni, 1994). Consisting predominantly of urban youth, the movement of social autonomy relocated into the city. It set up self-managed occupied social centres (CSOAs) that recognised neither public nor private ownership, taking over and squatting public spaces, and abandoned buildings (Ruggiero, 2000, pp. 170–171). The public spaces were host to various events such as concerts, became sites of political activity, and provided welfare from below. They were sites of self-management

and self-production—for example, creating fanzines, providing food co-operatives, and informal opportunities for self-education (Mudu, 2004). These positive expressions of 'living marginal' were an *immediate* rejoinder to the experience of social exclusion.[9] Ruggiero, in his study of Milan social centres, states, 'The movement of the *centri* does not rely on a precisely identifiable set of ideologies which, in some traditional movements, help endure the present while postponing happiness to a future Jerusalem'.[10] Social centres are more accurately a place of resistance, eschewing gradualism, and avoiding the trap of seeking answers to social exclusion in the progressive logic of social aggregation.

Subsequent to the self-organised workers' movement, certain subjects of the area of social autonomy extended political struggle into new areas, beyond the walled in political community. Their achievements were opaque to the political thought of the organisations of the Left and the representational logic of the political institution. The students, urban youth, women, the unemployed, generally those excluded politically, culturally, and socially, organised directly and independently of the existing institutions and parties (Red Notes, 1978, preface). However, they did not give up the terrain of politics, but, instead, they reconceptualised its territory as the resistance to conventional styles of life. According to Bologna (2002, p. 8), the irretrievable error of the primary organisations of the New Left was traceable back to the formative decision of its instigators to form an extra-parliamentary group. Instead, he states, 'we should have continued working in the social sphere, constructing alternatives (…): alternative spaces, liberated spaces'.

Conclusion

At key moments throughout the 1960s and 1970s, political contestation was manifest in Italy in the nascence of a radical political subject. This is evident in the Movement of '77, which practiced new forms of life, was novel and creative, and did not seek their endowment from an external authority. These social movements realised community through a 'doing' particular to the local and specific conditions of the collective, and did not aggregate about a given sense of the common. This is not an isolated phenomenon in the Italian situation. The first regeneration of the antagonistic community began by refusing identification through their relation to work. This subject was born of the self-activity and self-organisation of workers. The first generation took responsibility, Hardt (2005, pp. 17–18)

believes, for self-constitution and the re-ordering of society based on *their* knowledge of the material conditions. 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. The new struggles were intelligent, driven by an independent knowledge of their situation, and as I clarify, did not rely on an external agent for explication of their social and political condition. While Negri would become a crucial figure in suffocating the innovation and creativity of this community, he did retrospectively, at least, observe the originality and importance of their practices (Negri, 1988, p. 202). In the contemporary movement sector of Italy, the radical political subject interrupted authoritarian forms of organisation, and returned to self-aware and self-determined practices of community.

The Italian RSMs claimed the right to participate autonomously: this is not an act of self-exclusion, it is a reclaiming of equality and it is the refusal of 'the exclusion from knowledge' (Melucci, 1981, p. 193). 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. This rejuvenated radical subject removes itself from political servility, social obedience, the hegemony of social knowledge, and deconstructs the two humanities ontology. Through the revival of self-determination, emancipatory practice breaks from the epistemic community that ties politics to organisation from above, theoretical or pedagogical intervention and the logic of social aggregation—progress. This is the promise of the radical political subject, 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) (Rancière, 2006a, pp. 2–3).

Access to knowledge has become a central concern for RSMs. One pathway, delimited by pedagogy, leads to the informational resources necessary to order social and political relationships, which, Melucci (1981, pp. 178–179; 1994, pp. 112–113) identifies, in modern societies is inequitably distributed. An alternative is to undermine the systems of thought that prejudicially partition society. Here, those excluded from intellectual labour demonstrate, and we must witness, that there is only one intelligence. This act of radical equality reworks the formal elements of the environment to provide a refreshed perception of society, action, identity,

time, and space. I claim, supported by Rancière's political thought and the example of the contemporary Italian RSMs, that it is the alternative path that reveals the political potential of creativity and innovation. This conceptualisation of the nexus of politics and RSMs imagines a collective actor that generates both practical and theoretical discontinuities.

Contemporary social movements, in response to their reincorporation within the social order, Sassoon (1984, p. 406) 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. This is where we can witness the nascence of RSMs, learning from their response to the hegemony of social knowledge and efforts to enclose the productive force of the common. Therefore, to understand RSMs requires more than an evaluation in terms of political rationality and organisation. Essentially, it involves questions of knowledge practices and the logic of social aggregation. We must avoid treating knowledge from below, self-activity and self-education, as a partial epistemological phenomenon that requires an intellectual intervention or further explication. Theoretico-political intervention and emancipatory pedagogies threaten to become remedies to ignorance. Accordingly, whenever we observe the dynamics of RSMs—those fighting against the status quo—we must consider their valence as essentially epistemological and not simply 'social-stuff'.

NOTES

1. Alberto Toscano discusses the importance of considering the valence of radical communities in his work on fanaticism. See Toscano (2010, p. 58).
2. Gert Biesta perhaps best summarises the intent and current status of critical pedagogy, with relevance to the writings of Rancière, in works such as G. Biesta (2010), G. J. Biesta (1998) and Bingham and Biesta (2010).
3. See for example Freire (2000).
4. See Berardi (2007, pp. 134–135).
5. Here Wright refers to Alquati (1975).
6. The efforts of these researchers crystallised around the intellectual circle associated with the journal *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks, 1961–1965, and later *Classe Operaia*).
7. See for discussion Melucci (1996, p. 15).
8. For further discussion see Wright (2002, pp. 24–25).
9. See Viola 1976 cited in Cuninghame (2002, pp. 174–175).
10. See also Foa (1982).

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