In Search of Movement:

Italy’s “movimento dei movimenti,” Theoretical-Practice and Re-making the Political

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Abstract

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In Search of Movement:
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Under the direction of Dr. Arturo Escobar

My dissertation is an effort to rethink our understanding of social movements and politics, taking a movement’s own production of meanings, knowledge and theoretical-practices as key to such renewed understanding. By looking at Italy’s “movimento dei movimenti” (MoM), a movement that is considered part of the global wave of protest launched in Seattle, and made most visible on occasions like the violent protests against the G8 in 2001, I argue that social movements cannot be understood using traditional conceptions or theoretical frameworks for such an endeavor. Traditional approaches treat movements as objectively definable entities, delimitable in time, place and to a particular set of concrete demands and objectives. However, my sustained ethnographic research revealed that this movement, was comprised as much by the narratives, descriptions and stories about it, as it was by any material or political reality that constituted it. In fact, with its multiple levels of action and presence, it should be understood as a space and meaning-making tool for developing new political practices, for re-imagining the political, and for producing new visions and subjects of social change. Building on diffuse collective knowledge of both the past failures of traditional politics and new theoretical and practical insights, Italian activists have worked to create novel forms of cultural-political mobilization that have at their center political and ethical commitments to difference, partiality, reflexivity, and autonomy. Central to the emergence of these features are reflective and theoretical-practices that help to create the conditions of possibility for transformative social
change, through cultivating critical ethical subjects, non-dogmatic knowledges, as well as practices and lifestyles that reflect these. Building on insights from a wide variety of disciplines, including cultural studies, anthropology, geography, and political theory, I argue that social movements must be understood not simply as oppositional entities, but also as sophisticated knowledge producers, contributing to the creation or consolidation of a “new political imaginary.”
To my dear parents: Erna and Dan (Ima and Aba), this is for you, and because of you.

To Arturo, even in the hardest of times your spirit and mind leave me in awe.

To Sammy (you are one of the inspiring souls, see below!)

To all those souls who have and continue to inspire me with their energy, passion, creativity, and the belief that we can build new worlds.
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have yielded this final product.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATTAC</td>
<td>Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCI</td>
<td>Associazione Recreativa Culturale Italiana (Italian Recreational and Cultural Association)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGIL</td>
<td>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Italian Confederation of Labor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cobas</td>
<td>Confederazione del Comitati Del Base</td>
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<tr>
<td>CS/CSOA</td>
<td>Centro Sociale/Centro Social Ocupato e Autogestito (Self-managed social center/self-managed and occupied social center)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAN</td>
<td>Direct Action Network</td>
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<td>ESF</td>
<td>European Social Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>EZLN</td>
<td>Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacin Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Aid Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIOM</td>
<td>Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici, (Federation of Metal Mechanic Workers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTAA</td>
<td>Free Trade of the Americas Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>Group of Eight</td>
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<tr>
<td>GJSM</td>
<td>Global Justice and Solidarity Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMO(s)</td>
<td>Genetically Modified Organisms</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSF</td>
<td>Genoa Social Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Lotta Continua</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoM</td>
<td>Movimento dei Movimenti</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Organized Autonomia</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCSE in Italian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>PCI</td>
<td>Partito Comunista Italiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGA</td>
<td>People’s Global Action Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Social Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STS</td>
<td>Science and Technology Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TB</td>
<td>Tute Bianche</td>
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<tr>
<td>TINA</td>
<td>There is No Alternative</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPO</td>
<td>Teatro Polivalente Ocupato</td>
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<tr>
<td>WSF</td>
<td>World Social Forum</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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Introduction: Rethinking Social Movements and the Political

Movements in complex societies are disenchanted prophets... Movements are a sign; they are not merely outcomes of the crisis, the last throes of a passing society. They signal a deep transformation in the logic and the processes that guide complex societies.

Like the prophets, the movements ‘speak before’: they announce what is taking shape even before its direction and content has become clear. The inertia of the old categories may prevent us from hearing the message and from deciding, consciously and responsibly, what action to take in light of it.

Contemporary movements are prophets of the present. What they possess is not the force of the apparatus but the power of the word. They announce the commencement of change; not however a change in the distant future but one that is already a presence (Melucci 1996: 1).

It seems that the making of a new political imaginary is underway, or at the very least a remapping of the political terrain. Coming into being over the past few decades and into visibility and self awareness through the internet, independent media, and most recently the World Social Forums, this emergent imaginary confounds the timeworn oppositions between global and local, revolution and reform, opposition and experiment, institutional and individual transformation. It is not that these paired evaluative terms are no longer useful, but that they now refer to processes that inevitably overlap and intertwine. This conceptual interpenetration in radically altering the spatiotemporal frame of progressive of politics, reconfiguring the position and role of the subject, as well as shifting the grounds for assessing the efficacy of political movements and initiatives (Gibson Graham 2006: xix, emphasis added).

For more than seven years I have struggled to make sense of a complex entity known as “il Movimento dei Movimenti,” what I refer to throughout this dissertation as the MoM.

While the MoM is certainly something we can call a social movement, its complexity, dynamism and reality troubles easy categorization, narration or explanation. Its complexity is itself multi-fold; this means that speaking about the whole that was comprised of the
ensemble of actors, events, ideas and objects that were known as the MoM is at best a

*problematic* enterprise.

However, like Foucault, I do not think of problematics as being negative. Rather a problematic is something that poses problems to established ways of seeing or thinking, “asking […] a whole series of questions that [are] not traditionally a part of …[the field’s] statutory domain” (1994a:115). In other words they offer the possibility for thought. As Foucault puts it,

> It seemed to me there was one element that was capable of describing the history of thought—this was what one could call the problems or, more exactly, problematizations. What distinguishes thought is that it is something quite different from the set of representations that underlies a certain behavior; it is also quite different from the domain of attitudes that can determine this behavior. *Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals.* Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. To say that the study of thought is the analysis of a freedom does not mean one is dealing with a formal system that has reference only to itself. *Actually, for a domain of action, a behavior, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it.*” (Foucault 1994a: 117, emphasis added.)

MoM problematizes traditional understandings of what constitute movements, politics, and social change as well as our approaches for making sense of them. Through the challenging story of the MoM, this dissertation is an effort to complicate and expand our understanding of social movements, turning them into “cause[s] for thinking” (Stengers 2000:1002).

In the first section that follows I begin by introducing the reader to this “problematic” entity through a rather schematic (or simplified) rendering. Next I describe how and why this picture becomes complicated, presenting the main questions and arguments of the
dissertation. Following a brief discussion of certain limitations in the study of social movements that the dissertation addresses, the last section of the Introduction explains the arguments of the chapters and the structure of the thesis.

1. **Il “Movimento dei Movimenti”: an introductory sketch**

   July 18-22, 2001 over 300,000 people—the majority of whom were Italian—participated in protests at the annual summit of the Group of Eight (G8), in Genoa. The turnout made Genoa the largest mobilization yet in what was then becoming known as the “global justice” or “anti-globalization” movement(s), and what I will refer to in the course of this dissertation as the Global Justice and Solidarity Movement (GJSM). This transnational movement had come into visibility with the protest against the WTO in Seattle in November 1999, and became well known for the spectacular counter-summit protests at various meetings of transnational institutions such as the International Monetary fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), and the G8 in the years following. In addition to the high turnout for the event, the tremendous violence against Italian and international protestors alike throughout the protest, turned Genoa into an important event in this global movement. The death of a twenty-three year-old protestor, Carlo Giuliani, who was shot by police in the midst of skirmishes, became a particularly powerful fact, substantially raising

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1 Della Porta et.al 2002; Juris 2008.

2 There are many names for this “global movement” and even many arguments and discussions about what name is more appropriate. These include popular media usage of the “anti-Globalization movement” as well as the more positive alter-globalist movement, and even the “movement of movements.” I am not going to enter into these debates, but have chosen to refer to the GJSM because it seems the most inclusive, and for the purpose of this dissertation stresses that this is the Global movement—to be thought of in relation to but distinct from the Italian “Movement of Movements” (MoM), this ethnography is based on.

3 i.e. in Washington DC (April 2000), Prague (September 2000), Nice (December 2000), Quebec (April 2001), among others. But while counter-summits were important parts of this GJSM, they were actually only the most visible manifestations of what were far more complex movements and processes. For more on the GJSM see chapter 1.
the stakes for governments and activists alike. July 21st and 22nd newspapers from around
the world featured news of the protests and of the death on their front pages. That Sunday, *La
Repubblica*, a respected center–left Italian newspaper, had a front-page photo spread with the
murdered protestor juxtaposed to a photo of a rock-throwing Palestinian. The insinuation of
terrorism would hit home even more forcefully two months later on September 11, 2001
when the twin towers came down and shortly thereafter the “global war on terror” was
declared. At first glance the Genoa protest seems to be a relatively typical depiction of a
social movement.

In Italy, Genoa was considered very important, although perhaps not for the same
reasons depicted above. It was referred to as the first major protest after decades of relative
calm in terms of social movements. The diversity of activists, organizations and networks
ranging from student and autonomous activists based out of *social centers*, youth wings of
leftwing political parties, trade unionists, environmentalists and others affiliated with
voluntary associations and NGOs, to pacifists and Catholics that worked together to organize
and mobilize for the event was unprecedented in the history of the Italian left. At first glance,
the massive, violent, and spectacular protests against the G8 were proof of a sizeable
movement—both national and transnational—the likes of which had not been seen for
decades. That the Italian state responded with what seemed to follow old patterns of
repression seemed to both accentuate the movement’s import, while simultaneously raising
the prospect that like other large-scale protest movements before it, such repression, and the

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4 Since September 11th, new anti-terrorism laws have been used to monitor and interfere with movement
networks throughout the world. See Brabazon 2006.


6 Social Centers are self-organized spaces for production of culture and political organizing. For more see
chapter 2.
movement’s own reactions to it, would stunt the movement before it was able to achieve its goals and objectives.

However, this did not seem to be the case. Mobilization in Italy did not end following Genoa, nor after September 11th; on the contrary it seemed to grow. Between September 2001 through the summer of 2003, known as the *Primavera dei Movimenti* (springtime of movements), Italy seemed to be what Zibechi calls “a society in movement” (2006:33).

Immediately following Genoa local social forums sprang up in almost every city and even many towns throughout Italy. In October 2001, 100,000 people were in the streets to protest the Afghan war. In January 2002, several hundred Italians attended the Second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, making Italians third in numbers of attendees following Brazilians and Argentineans. In March 2002 three million people converged on the streets of Rome’s to protest *Articolo 18* and the increasing deregulation of labor laws (making it one of the largest protests in European history). There seemed to be a political shift to the left, even as one of Italy’s most right wing prime ministers had recently won election for the second time.

Together, all of these distinct moments came to be considered part of Italy’s “Movimento dei Movimenti,” (translated as ‘movement of movements,’) or MoM.\(^7\)

When the above narrative stops in 2003, Italy’s MoM appears to be a clear-cut case of a *winning social movement*; (even as in its diversity it evades classical categories and explanations used to define social movements). In Italy, analysts and activists alike looking at the movement declare it to signify the “return of politics,” “a leap in consciousness:”

\(^7\) Negri 2002; various interviews 2002, 2003,

\(^8\) In Italy there were several sister terms for the thing that in this dissertation I will call the MoM, namely il movimento No Global, Il Movimento New Global, Il Movimento di Genoa. While there are subtle distinctions between these, for purposes of clarity, I will only use the term MoM to refer to the contemporary Italian movement that participated in Genoa, and the GJSM. As will become clear, the terminology is quite complicated because it comes to bear on how people understand the meaning and effects of these various movements. In other words at times the terms used imply certain analyses or evaluations of the movement.
Everyone is ecstatic about the presence of this movement. Some even declare it to be “history beginning again.” However who is moving, what they are moving for, and what the political effects of this moving are or will be, are far from clear. What is clear—to almost everyone in Italy, both in the movement and the more institutional Left—is that the MoM is a force to be reckoned with.

The euphoria and sense of possibility around the movement did not last. By the time I completed my fieldwork at the end of 2007, the magical MoM that had lifted everyone’s hopes was considered long gone. Another protest in November 2007, again in Genoa, this time to contest the harsh sentencing of twenty five protestors arrested at the 2001 anti G8 Protests is seen by many as a march about the memory of a movement—a movement past. Within parliament the committee that was set to investigate the police atrocities in Genoa was suspended. Finally, in April 2008, Silvio Berlusconi was re-elected as head of a far right government after a short term for the center Left. This election marked an historic defeat of the parliamentary left; for the first time since World War II not a single member of the Communist party was elected to parliament. Many, including myself, were left puzzled about where the movement and moment that had marked a historic period of cooperation and collaboration between Italy’s radical movement left, and its institutional left, had gone. On the surface, by 2008, the MoM seems like a classical case of a failed movement.

This dissertation is an effort at complicating picture and subsequent evaluation of the MoM set out in the sketch above. I will argue that neither classical definitions of movement failure, nor movement success are sufficient for making sense of the political importance or outcomes of the MoM. Such definitions, are premised on limited conceptions of what social movements are, as well as what counts as politics and political outcomes; and these are in
turn predicated on latent positivism. Classically, social movements are taken to be objectively definable entities, delimitable in time and space and confined to a particular set of demands, objectives and effects, which are themselves numerable and measurable. The terrain of the political, moreover, is itself taken to be a given, constituted by what I will call Politics with a capital “P” and refer to the political institutions and structures of governance of a given political territory, i.e. a nation state, and in which political victories and losses are themselves easily registered at that macro-political level. Finally, research on social movements tends to limit itself to empirical writing about such supposedly delimited objects, failing to register the ways in which movements produce knowledge, theory, and cultural practices and meaning about themselves and society more broadly. These cultural productions actually defy the simple subject object divides that are still byproducts of Cartesian and representational thinking, complicating the research endeavor even further.

My ethnographic engagements with Italy’s MoM over the course of five years beginning May 2002 through December 2007, tell a very different story. They reveal that despite pessimistic appraisals of the movement’s ultimate failure, the MoM had substantially important political effects. Moreover, even at the movement’s supposed pinnacle, when it was winning, these effects were not legible within typical frameworks of “movement outcomes.” The MoM’s effects were largely at the level of theories, imaginaries, and visions of social change, as well as the cultures, epistemologies and subjectivities of those involved, in effect challenging our empirical, political, theoretical and even ontological expectations of what a movement both is and does.

Before explaining the broader literatures and problems with which my dissertation engages, a task I distribute throughout the five chapters of the larger text, I will describe the

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9 These dates blur somewhat, as I continued to follow many things throughout the summer of 2008.
process and trajectory this project took throughout several years of research and study in Italy and beyond.

2. Circumstances, Backgrounds and Initial Questions

I happened to be in Italy the summer of 2001, working on a project entitled, *Women and the Politics of Place*, at a small NGO in Rome. While I was unable to attend the protest at Genoa, it definitively captured my attention and my imagination not because of the violence, but because of the very fact of such a movement. When I returned to the US to begin my first year of graduate school, several aspects of the movement compelled me through the critical questions it raised. For example: Why did this “modern” “Western” industrialized country have such high participation in a movement that was ostensibly about the injustices of neoliberal globalization? As well as more more “classical” “social movement” questions such as: why, how and for what do people mobilize? — especially since the supposed “end of history” thesis had suggested people did not! Finally, I was intrigued by the movement’s own narratives of being a “new” kind of movement, one in which the diversity of subjects within the so-called Left were able to work and be together in new and different ways, transcending the paralysis of fragmentation and dispersal characteristic of the period since 1968.  

This was true of the movement in both its Italian and global iterations. I pursued the research, originally drawn by the enthusiasm and hope as well as the exciting questions it posed to traditional Leftist and movement politics.

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10 The emergence of “new social movements” in the period around 1968 has been evaluated positively in terms of breaking out of the orthodoxies of the traditional notion of working class revolution, however since the arrival of so many new social subjects, the question of what theoretical framework, analysis and practices can unite so many different social subjects has turned out to be a difficult challenge. In many ways whether the diversity is figured as a problem to be overcome, or a challenge to maintain while still finding adequate forms of action, is a key problematic faced by the MoM and the GJSM more broadly. See also Osterweil 2008.
My own decision to begin work in Italy with this “movement” was largely based on coincidence: the fact that I was in Italy in July of 2001 when the massive and violent events of Genoa rocked the country and even made headlines world-wide, combined with my growing interest in the GJSM, including the World Social Forum. The latter was due to my larger concern with discovering possibilities for radical and transformative movements in the “global North” where, after the fall of the Soviet Union, “the end of history” thesis seemed to have become so hegemonic, it was almost possible not to believe its truth.\footnote{Unlike much of my generation, I grew up fascinated by the histories of socialism, communism, even utopias in the US context. In fact, all of my life it seems I have been trying to understand how such projects, or the impetus behind them had ended. If all truth be told my encounter with the Italian MoM, as well as the myriad networks and individuals I encountered as I embarked upon this research have been an important part of my own political education, and have paralleled my own radicalization. While I have always been critical of capitalism, my activism had tended towards more access based issues.} Having done some research in India and Latin America as an undergraduate, I had been impressed by the richness of discourse and analytical lenses emerging from movements in these parts of the world—not about them, but \textit{from} them; and I was simultaneously interested in the seeming paucity of such analyses and discourses among movements in the North, at least in the Anglophone North, as far as I knew. (I would soon be impressed by the high level of theoretical and intellectual literacy and discussion among the activists I first met in Italy.) Moreover, I became convinced that anthropology had something both to gain and contribute by turning its analytical and ethnographic lenses to a social movement and to politics in a place like Italy. Having originally majored in Political Science as an undergraduate, I was well aware that Italy was often held up as a model case for the failure of modern (nation-state) democratic politics. In addition, many of the most famous political scientists, including social movement theorists, had cut their teeth doing research in Italy.\footnote{cf Tarrow 1979; This also includes Italians: Melucci, Pizzorno, Diani, Giugni, Della Porta—all considered to have done groundbreaking research in Italy.} Trying to understand...
politics, specifically social movement politics in an “advanced” “western” nation like Italy that was not the usual terrain of anthropologists,\textsuperscript{13} seemed an exciting prospect, even more so considering that politics is thought of as the strict purview of sociologists and political scientists. Having left political science largely out of frustration at the narrow definitions of politics, and their frameworks for assessing them, I was convinced that an anthropological and cultural studies approach to making sense of the political, as a contextual and processual set of practices, —not through a priori assumptions about where politics happened and what constituted a “successful” political structure—was key.\textsuperscript{14}

Compelled by the questions posed by this unexpected site, I decided to begin my dissertation research on Italy’s MoM the summer of 2002. I find it important to point out however that when I first began my pre-dissertation research in Bologna, Italy in May 2002, I had very little knowledge about the complex terrain I had set foot in. In particular I was not at all aware of the fact that following 1968, Italy experienced a decade of upheaval and social movements that were quite significant for the nature and development of politics and movements thereafter, and that were themselves closely related to the now well known political and theoretical tradition of Italian Autonomist Marxism.\textsuperscript{15} In other words, my

\textsuperscript{13} There are of course some Anthropologists of Italy, usually located within Anthropology of Europe. Moreover there is a small number of “political anthropologists” who have done research in Italy, usually focused on the institutional or party-politics, or the Mafia, rather than ‘social movements’ (See Shore 1990; Kertzer 1996; Schneider and Schneider 2003.) For the most part social movement research in Europe has been left to sociology and political science, whereas anthropologists tend to be more occupied with mass social movements in the “less developed world.” There is however a growing trend to move away from this: see Holland et.al 1998, 2001; Fox and Starn 1997; Starn 1999; Nash 2001, 2005; Alvarez and Escobar 1992; 1998; Burdick 1995, 1998; Juris 2008; Edelman 1999, 2001.

\textsuperscript{14} See my MA Osterweil 2004a; Gledhill 2000; Paley 2002; Vincent 1990, 2002; Alvarez et.al 1998; see also Grossberg et.al 1992a, 1992b.

\textsuperscript{15} See Cleaver 1993 for a description of the ways diverse Marxisms can be seen as belonging to a greater whole called Autonomist Marxism.
decision to study the MoM was not a result of the growing popularity of Italian Operaismo, a theoretical tradition that had emerged in the 1950s and developed alongside and with the movement known as Autonomia (or the Movement of ‘77) and that had gained international attention with the publication of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* as well as the visibility of groups like the Tute Bianche to the global networks of the GJSM. While in the 1970s, Operaismo had gained a minoritarian following outside of Italy,\textsuperscript{16} the immense popularity of this theoretical tradition and its variegated body of work, particularly after the publication of *Empire* in 2000, was still to come. Although in retrospect it seems absurd that I did not connect the text *Empire* to its locale of production, it is crucial to say outright that I did not, for this fact radically affected the nature of my ethnographic “discoveries” and both the narrative and argument I will provide in this thesis. Or said differently, if I had begun my research already locating the MoM as a continuation of these older movements and theoretical trajectories, many of my “findings” would have likely remained invisible, like part of an unobtrusive background.

The unexpected presence of historical and historicized relationships to a supposedly “new” movement was just one of the unexpected “problems” I discovered throughout the course of my research and engagement with the MoM. Below I spell out five main problems, framed as questions, posed by the MoM. These guided both the questions I asked throughout my research, and the contentions I make in this dissertation. While I try to delineate them each as separate questions, they are quite interconnected, traversed by complexities that do not increase or decrease as we move from one to another.

**Core Questions & Problems:**

1) What is a social movement? In this case what is the Italian “Movement of

\textsuperscript{16} see Lotringer 1980/2007; Red Notes Collective 1978.
Movements (MoM)’’ How do we know where it starts and ends: geographically, temporally, sociologically and politically?

2) How do we make sense of an entity, called a movement, that is comprised as much by statements about it, the meanings it connotes, and desires for it, as by the actual people, events, organizations, institutions that comprise it?

3) What understandings of the political are at play both in our engagement with MoM and its effects?17

4) How can we understand the production of concepts, theory and knowledge, as material movement practices that are central to both the political nature and impact of movements?

5) What does an ethnographic perspective bring? What does it make visible that other approaches do not? What does it obscure?18

I believe that the processes of ethnographic disclosure and/or discovery are key to these arguments. As such, instead of addressing these questions abstractly or conceptually, I will walk the reader through the course of my research, pointing out the outlines and parameters of each of these problems as they emerged, often highlighting key theoretical debates that such problems refer to, in particular with respect to social movement research. Finally I will reframe these questions, articulating them into the driving contentions of my dissertation. I will conclude this introductory chapter with a description of the structure and a detailed summary of the chapters that comprise the body of this dissertation.

3. Genealogy of an ethnographic endeavor

Problem 1: Empirical Delimitation (of a “global” movement)19

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17 Or as Agamben puts it in an episode I will describe later, “why is a politically decisive instance called a movement?” see Chapter 3.

18 A subsequent question which I have begun to write about elsewhere, is: How is ethnography changed given an “object of research” that is itself producing knowledge and theory, and in so doing affecting the parameters and nature of that “object”? And what does this say about the nature of knowledge today?
I arrived in Bologna in 2002 to begin ethnographic fieldwork on this immense movement that brought 300,000 people to the streets of Genoa. From the outset, making sense of it was a rather daunting task. In fact, at times it felt like one of those mind-teasing puzzles you can spend hours on without ever coming close to solving. It was something that everyone in Italy seemed to collectively know and agree was a social movement, and an important one at that; however it did not fit into any traditional definitions or notions—academic or more common-sense—of what a movement is. (That is, the MoM constantly evaded the categories, methods and conceptual frameworks I had for making sense of social movements, both social scientifically, but even at a more commonsense level.) Whereas traditional academic and commonsense understandings of movements tend to treat them as objective entities—clearly delimitable to a certain time, with a particular geography, and with a very clear set of political objectives, usually demands placed on a state or other power broker—Italy’s MoM did not fit these expectations.

In fact my earliest encounters, were characterized by a rather refreshing, if slightly discomforting, sense of disorientation: Despite my own awareness of the prevalence of the problem of letting one’s prior assumptions dictate what one finds and sees, I was quite startled to run up against a slue of my own prior, and non-neutral, assumptions. My initial interviews, then, were basically experiences in “culture-shock.” However, perhaps unlike other ethnographic shocks, the difference was that I had not expected to find the cultural differences where I did: in politics, theory, and history. As I will come to argue, my questions were shaped by an as of yet invisible “background of understanding,” that in turn elucidated

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19 As will soon become clear, this first problem is itself constituted by various elements of the subsequent ones, this is part of the reason for its disproportionate length.

the importance of understanding that in Italy, a different “background of understanding” with regards to politics and movements was at play.21

When I first began my ethnographic research, I imagined I would be studying the Italian GJSM, read: the Italian part of a global movement, as such many of my initial expectations were a product of my knowledge of the broader GJSM, or even more precisely perceptions of the GJSM circulating in the US and academia. Ironically, one of the things that had drawn me to want to study and engage with the GJSM in the first place was its reputed complexity and heterogeneity—the fact that there seemed to be no clear ideological commonality—among the various components of the global GJSM.22 However, the actual extent of this movement’s complexity and heterogeneity was surprising. Since at least November 1999, this “global” movement had become famous (or infamous) among critics and advocates alike for its extreme heterogeneity; the lack of an overarching ideology, and the multiplicity of its demands and desires. I found this diversity compelling because, based on much of my own background, education and prior activism, it was apparent to me that addressing the “problem of difference” or diversity—the different demands, ideologies, identities, priorities, of all those that comprised a vague space called “the Left”—was key to developing a more effective progressive politics, as well as defeating if not halting the domination of neoliberal and conservative forces globally.23 So, while I had in part studied

21 I explain the concept of “background of understanding” in Chapter 4. It is a Heidegerrian concept that refers to the tradition or culture of thought and practice that remains invisible until it is problematized. It is in many ways very similar to anthropological descriptions of culture as a way of life, but builds on phenomenological insights from Heidegger about ways of being in the world. This particular usage is borrowed from Winograd and Flores 1987.

22 For a description of the diversity of the GJSM see Notes from Nowhere 2003; Starr 2005; Juris 2008; Daro 2009.

23 Difference and diversity are usually treated as obstacles—problems to be worked through or overcome—
this movement for its reputed innovativeness in dealing with difference—the GJSM was critiqued and praised for its lack of apparent unity— when I actually began to speak to individuals, attend events and read various articles and essays about and from the Italian MoM, I discovered that its complex and heterogeneous nature, as well as its very Italian rootedness and specificity, overwhelmed even the very minimal frameworks and categories of expectation I had brought with me to the research.

Based on my previous observations of the GJSM, especially in the US and through the media, I had expected the Italian MoM to have a much more obvious orientation to the global politics of neo-liberalization. I knew that Italy had a very active, very large movement, but my frame of reference for it was as part of a global or transnational one, oriented towards a diverse, but delimitable set of issues having to do with corporate-driven neo-liberal globalization. So I arrived expecting to put together a picture of the different organizations that more or less mapped onto the slogans and issues of what I had known from my general attention to protests from Seattle through Genoa to compose the GJSM—i.e., “Drop the Debt,” Jubilee 2000, “Fair Trade not Free Trade,” The Turtles and Teamsters, etc. However, what I found instead was a very Italian specific entity that had developed with a certain degree of continuity over at least three decades. Moreover, its objectives and aims seemed to be largely defined by laws and circumstances particular to Italy, and for the most

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24 In fact my early ethnographic encounters were largely characterized by the co-presence of discourses discussing on the one hand the novelty, and the other hand the historical nature of this movement.
part, they had as much to do with re-thinking and reinventing the institutions and practices of politics, democracy and social change, as they did with opposing the G8 and other institutions and sites that enforced neoliberal globalization.

This meant that when I began conducting formal and informal interviews, and would ask activists what the movement was about, how it developed and why they had gone to Genoa, or were otherwise involved, their answers surprised me: Rather than speak about neoliberal corporate globalization in the contemporary moment, their answers tended to speak at a more systemic or meta level about the construction of new political modalities, theories and imaginaries, and more generally of the coming into being of “another kind of politics.” Activists described this modality of politics as new, and as a strong break with the political logics of Lefts and movements past. In fact they often heralded the movement as marking the definitive end of the “politica novecentesca” (twentieth century politics).

Moreover their discourses referred, to the contribution of what they called “Il Movimento Globale,” and I have called GJSM, however in ways that I did not expect. In particular they spoke of three important parts of this GJSM: the Zapatista Movement, the Counter Summits and the World Social Forum, each of which contributed to defining and creating the MoM. As one activist explained it:

Zapatismo in a sense resitutes all of a series of classical polarities of the 20th century challenging precisely their polarity: Reform/Revolution; Vanguard/Class; Seizing Power/Classical Reformism; Violence/Non-Violence. In some form the Zapatistas kill these polarities. And above all this performs a grand “squat” of the imagination, in which I am the vanguard, but I am not—rather I am just one part, not the only one, not the best…( interview, Bologna, November 2002, translation mine.)

25 The interviewee is speaking about a particular group, or ‘area’ called Tute Bianche which later developed into the Disobbedienti. They were some of the most visible participants in the Italian movimento dei movimenti. In fact, on many occasions the Tute Bianche/Disobbedienti strand of MoM treated its own history and ideas as definitive, or representative of those of the whole movement. While I had not planned it, my initial and therefore many of my subsequent engagements with MoM were centered around this particular “area” of the
Whereas typical definitions of global or transnational movements locate the globality in the issues, targets and forms of organization used—for example the debt, IMF, and transnational coalition— in the case of MoM, the global aspect was much more a matter of shared political and theoretical analyses of the problems facing the world, specifically with regard to the theories and frameworks used by the traditional Left for pursuing social change. Activists proudly and enthusiastically expressed their identification with the global movement, however, what the global movement meant and was had more to do with the new analyses and forms of politics developed at various sites of the GJSM than it does with the targets and geographic nature of the movements.

In addition, while the stated and most obvious definitions of the GJSM referred to neoliberalism, the description of the political aim and reasons for Genoa and the MoM, referred at a much broader level to the problem of contemporary politics. In fact as the quote above about the Zapatistas suggests, it is the redefinition of the main problematics of the Left—that makes the Zapatistas so important. Similarly, consider the ways in which an activist from Napoli, also part of the Disobbedienti network, describes the political vision and purpose of the MoM:

We don’t want to jump and put ourselves into power or to win elections. Much more is bound to the problem of self-government…the need to de-authoritize power, to disarticulate power, to progressively break the mechanisms of traditional political representation. While today in Italy and in the world there exists a real crisis of the Political… we are the only possible

movement—namely the social centers/Tute Bianche/Disobbedienti area. However, I interviewed and did research with several people and at several events that were not primarily involved with the TB/Disobbedienti, and over the course of 5.5 years of research the groups comprising this area themselves underwent significant changes, including divisions and other forms of falling outs. However it is difficult to deny that mediatically, discursively and theoretically the TB/Disobbedienti occupied a dominant space in the story I have followed. See Chapter 2. Unless otherwise specified, all interviews are translated by me from Italian.

26 see Guidry, et.al 2002; Della Porta and Tarrow 2004.
Finally, historically or temporally, while activists spoke about Genoa as a direct product and part of the GJSM, ostensibly defined as beginning circa 1994, their descriptions of the MoM often referred to a continuous history of experiments and experiences in extra-parliamentary politics that were particular to Italy. While most of these references referred to the decade from 1968-1979, at times there was also a reference to a longer history of anti-capitalist movements. (Chapters 1 & 2 describe the problem of the global and the place-based nature of MoM further.)

This then was the first problem, already deeply enmeshed with other questions about the nature of the political: How to delimit or define what counts as the MoM, geographically, temporally, or politically. This problem was made particularly difficult by the fact that the MoM would not fit expected categories of analysis. This can be summarized as follows:

- **Geographically**: References to the movement’s global nature went hand in hand with descriptions and enactments of its Italian particularities.

- **Temporally**: Claims to novelty and even rupture from movements past, were placed within a continuous trajectory of activism and movements in Italy.

- **Politically**: The content of their protest was defined largely in terms of critiques of current frameworks of politics—both in terms of the dominant Western politics of Liberal representative democracy, but also with respect to traditional Marxism.

This raised a series of critical questions for both the Italian movements and the global movement as a whole: What actually constitutes this movement that most refer to as the Anti-Globalization, or Global Justice movement? And what constitutes a *global movement*, more generally?\(^{27}\) I began to address the first part of the empirical layer of this puzzle in my

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\(^{27}\) At the time I began this project there was relatively little in the way of historically grounded ethnographic research Works in sociology and political science about transnational activist networks, ie. Keck and Sikkink
master’s thesis. In it, in addition to a lengthy literature review exploring the theoretical frameworks that underpinned dominant approaches to social movement research, I argued for the importance of a historically situated ethnographic approach for making sense of that which we have come to know as the GJSM. Moreover, I came to argue that rather than try to treat movements as unitary or coherent entities, they needed to be understood as assemblages, or temporary crystallizations of emergent and multiple networks, many of which were history and place-specific. Clearly, these also touched on the other areas of complexity I signaled above: namely the role of theoretical and conceptual production, the role and nature of historical continuity as a narrative or meaning making element in Italian social movements, and perhaps most profoundly, questions about the nature of “the political.”

Later Ethnographic Engagements: The problems multiply

The difficulties did not end with MoM’s refusal to fit into most traditional frameworks for making sense of social movements or transnational networks with which I was familiar. This had a lot to do with the fact that my research spanned several years, adding another layer of complexity to an already complicated field and site: Between 2002-2007 I went to Italy several times: In 2002 I spent two and a half months in Bologna, then returned for two weeks for the first European Social Forum held in Florence in November. In that period I conducted eleven open-ended political biography interviews, attended numerous meetings and events as a participant-observant—including three major protests—and had numerous informal conversations with activists. In January 2003 I attended the 3rd World


28 My MA (Osterweil 2004a) explores the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the dominant approaches to studying social movements, and their limitations with respect to Italy’s MoM, at length.
Social Forum in Porto Alegre Brazil, where I conducted four interviews, and participated in a week of activities. In March of that year I returned to Italy to attend a conference and was in Bologna when the Iraq War began, experiencing the energy that would result in three million people in the streets of Rome February 15, 2003—purportedly the largest of all the marches that took place that historic global day of protest, which the New York Times itself anointed as a second super-power. After attending the WTO protests in Cancun in September 2003, I returned to Bologna at the end of the month to begin ten months of fieldwork. During that period I conducted twenty five semi-structured interviews, re-engaged with people I had already interviewed, and continued as a participant observer attending small group meetings, various events, meetings of the Bologna Social Forum (BSF) and the Italian Social Forum (ISF), as well as the various national meetings and protests having to do with the emergent Mayday process around rethinking precarity. I also attended the second European Social Forum in Paris, and an activist research conference in Barcelona.

Problem 2: The movement’s nature and status as a material and real entity:

If the first problem spoke to the near impossibility of definitively delineating, identifying or defining MoM—sociologically, politically, temporally or geographically— the second had to with making sense of the very nature of MoM’s presence and reality. This problem required coming to terms with the fact that while MoM was to some extent empirically verifiable, comprised of people, organizations, events, texts, and practices, it was also, and perhaps even more so a meaning-making or discursive entity. An entity that was produced through myriad narratives and stories, that had as much to do with attributes and features seen to be posited by the movement, as an entity onto which people’s political desires and definitions were projected. These desires were in turn constituted as much by
negative reactions to past politics and the particular experiences of movements and politics in Italy, as they were inspired by creative engagements or readings of the positivities of the “new” movement.\textsuperscript{29} In particular, descriptions of the movement pointed to the emergence of a new political imaginary—premised on the valorization of difference, critical reflexivity, and autonomy. This political imaginary was itself premised on what I call a cultural political approach or modality, which is comprised both of destabilizing common-sense notions of what constitutes the political, and enacting alternatives at various sites of meaning-making.\textsuperscript{30} Moreover, MoM was not only present as an actual materiality—in meanings, discourses, events, —but as a potentiality, or virtuality—something less tangible, but equally real in terms of its effects.\textsuperscript{31}

I continued to pursue this research project over the course of several years. Sometimes I did so at a distance following debates and events gain traction on seven listservs (4 of which were national, one of which was local (Bolognese), and two of which were international, but primarily European) and websites; or in the newspaper, (usually \textit{il Manifesto}); sometimes I did so in person, coming for a few weeklong visit, or attending an international event like the 2005 WSF. Each time I engaged with the MoM who and what constituted it changed, at times substantially. Eventually, somewhere around 2005, but already beginning in 2003 and even moreso in 2004, declarations and verdicts of MoM’s crisis and then its death abounded. Just a few days after returning to the field in 2003, new

\textsuperscript{29} The co-constitution of desires and of movement by negative and positive forms of analysis—where negative being defined by what one wants in contrast to what one does not want; whereas positive means actually identifying and articulating emergent or existing things that one wants—is key to understanding the way this movement works both through problematization, and a politics of creativity and artisanship.

\textsuperscript{30} See Osterweil 2004b; Escobar 1992; Alvarez et.al 1998. I discuss the notion of cultural politics at length in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{31} Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Massumi 2002; Terranova 2001, 2004; Boundas 2005; See also Escobar and Osterweil 2009; and Chapter 4.
questions and paradoxes arose. Following a major protest in Rome organized to contest the neoliberal basis of the proposed European Constitution, *Il Manifesto*, a widely read independent Communist paper,\(^{32}\) reported on serious friction within the MoM. They argued that the protest and the assembly that took place the following day had “placed the [existence of the] so-called Movement of Movements in discussion.” While as I will discuss in Chapter 3, the putting into deliberation and debate of “MoM” is actually something that happened quite frequently, this declaration seemed to mark a turning point. Over the next two years, the state of MoM, and whether, if and how it would fall apart, became a key issue.

Despite these perceived crises and the eventual verdict that the movement was dead, what was remarkable was that its presence remained quite palpable. In fact, throughout 2003 and 2004, and also when I returned for further field work for 3 months in 2006, and then again in 2007 for 8 months,\(^{33}\) I still attended meetings, read articles and participated in events and listservs that still claimed belonging to, and referenced, the MoM (See chapter 3). Equally as interesting was the fact that people were able to distinguish between this period characterized by the supposed *absence* or *end* of MoM *and* the period when MoM was around and strong. This was particularly remarkable because during those years 1) Italy was full of social mobilization, unrest and protest regarding a number of issues, including the changing labor conditions and increasing precarity, education reform, development projects, military bases, and immigration (among others). 2) Many of the activists I had come to know were still very much committed to being activists, and to what they termed “the movement”—however it was difficult to know whether “the movement” was the same as

\(^{32}\) Other communist papers, for example Liberazione are funded by political parties.

\(^{33}\) In 2007 when I returned I moved between Germany where the G8 protests were held, Bologna, and Chiapas for the Second Encuentro of the Pueblos Zapatistas with the People of the world.
MoM.

What differentiated these periods of movement? Or perhaps, more precisely what did the declarations of the movement’s failures and deaths do? These questions were compounded by the fact that the cultural vocabularies, material infrastructures including physical spaces, individuals, organizations, websites, listserves, journals and books that had been produced or rejuvenated in the course of the MoM were all still very present, and very much being worked with and on. The articulation of a new political imaginary, as well as an articulation of “another kind of politics” continued in the name of movement, and specifically of MoM.

The second problem, then, had to with recognizing that many of the MoM’s most profound effects were at the level of meaning; and moreover, that MoM continued to produce meanings and have effects even when it was referred to as absent or failing. Indeed, one of the most compelling aspects of the entire problem was the fact that the movement’s presence was indisputable. That is to say, there was no dispute over the fact or reality of MoM, even though it was far from something objectively and empirically definable. If the movement’s existence was a socially accepted, if not objectively verifiable fact, the question then became, what was the status and nature of its reality? And, consequently what did it mean to recognize that a great deal of what the MoM was were the meanings and cultures it produced? What modes and methods could apprehend its distinct form of reality? While certainly anthropology, cultural studies and other disciplines have long recognized the depth and “reality” of meaning-making, how did this affect our understanding of the political prospects and effects of such a social movement?

This in turn raised questions about the problem of MoM’s political status: What did
one make of the fact that certain qualities—i.e. difference, criticality and autonomy—came to be signals or hallmarks of the movement? Moreover, that these could be identified through the positive identification and nomination of a series of qualities or elements on the one hand, and the problematization of past politics, and the articulation of the desire and expectation for another kind of politics, on the other?

Problem 3: The status of “the political”

The category of movement seemed to be associated with certain elements or cultural practices and values that were seen as “good,” often in contrast to problematic forms and practices of movements and lefts past. Almost as often as people pointed to the organizations, events and concrete programmatic demands that constituted MoM, their descriptions made reference to certain qualities, or elements that deemed them to be of MoM. By this I mean that these elements shared common values, forms, tactics—what can be thought of as a common, or transversal culture of politics, or political culture. These qualities became visible through positive definitions of emergent, often still inchoate, characteristics; in the faults of movements past, and in the expressions of hopes and political desires based on both. Briefly these “hallmarks” are: 1) the importance and value of difference and multiplicity, 2) the importance of reflexivity and criticality (non-dogmatism), and 3) autonomy: a rethinking of politics, in terms of power and forms of organization that stress non-identitarian, non-party like forms.

The ways in which the category or term movement (as related but distinct from MoM) worked through certain meanings and effects, even when those meanings were not explicitly defined, was closely related to the problem of making sense of the political status
of both MoM, and movements more broadly speaking. Whereas traditional approaches to social movements see the political in the relationship or impact the movement has with and on the state or other official political body—which can include the movement’s ability to overthrow the state—the MoM’s political impact seemed to have more to do with the ways that it both challenged and opened up notions of politics and the political, and worked at more subterranean and micro-political levels.

This opening up of the political took place in large part through the fact that for the most part MoM was designated the “other” of politics. This category of “other” referred to differentiating from the state-centered notion of politics; the traditional forms of politics of the Left, as well as part of numerous ongoing efforts to create a better kind of political system. Moreover, it achieved this status of other as much or more by its form and consistency, than by its political content or stated objectives and demands.34

As I will address at great length in Chapters 3 and 4, the political status of MoM was itself problematized by what I found to be implicit or unarticulated distinctions between different uses of the term movement. That is to say, often when people spoke of movements, they seemed to implicitly differentiate between what they deemed important movements, and what were just isolated social struggles, or marginal forms of activism. In fact, behind the term ‘movement of movements’—which can be seen to connote either unity and diversity, or the epitomized version of something called a movement—seemed to be a larger discursive formation, in which the term movement connotes a few different things. Such that we can implicitly differentiate between something I term movement (with a small m) and Movement, (with a big M). movements refer to the actual, everyday spaces of activism and social

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34 This resembles the way Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between State space (striated) and smooth space, or nomad science and royal science. In fact as we will see, the forms of knowledge produced and lauded are also part of the political nature of movement. Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 351-427.
struggles that are almost always present in Italy, even as submerged or marginalized spaces and networks. *Movements* in contrast are periods or moments, like Genoa and the period around 1968, in which activism seems to exceed the marginal spaces of militants and even seemed on the verge of involving much of society. (movements usually create and feed into Movements, but are not sufficient or equivalent to them.) And finally a third term present in the discourse is “il Movimento” (the Movement). This was often used to refer to MoM, but also to a more or less continuous and unitary history of movement/Movements throughout the 20th century. (This in turn points to yet another problem which I will elaborate in chapters 3, 4, and 5: the tension between the “new” political imaginary and modality which in many ways opposes or denies the teleological notion of the revolution, and the “old” or sedimented cultural and theoretical frameworks that persist, and are also at times productive.)

As such, if the second level of complexity had to do with the ways the MoM was produced and productive as much of and by narratives, ideas and meanings, which in turn had political effects (see Chapter 1), the third level, or problem, had to do with the ways in which these political effects were themselves understood and desired, without being properly articulated and defined, except in opposition and virtuality. In other words, despite its fluctuating nature, and even despite its supposed failings, the Movement, in particular the MoM, remained a politically desired entity—even if what that entity was, was not easily definable, and often became more legible in contrast to what it was not, than by any certain sense of what it was.

**Problem 4: The MoM as knowledge producer and theoretical-practitioner**

The vocal and articulate reflexivity and collective commitment to the category of
movement/Movement\textsuperscript{35} cut across the movement’s various transformations. This remained a powerful and inspiring presence, pointing to one of the key problematics posed by MoM: its status as a theorizer and knowledge producer. This commitment to the category was evidenced through numerous often analytically sophisticated, efforts by activists and others—in diverse settings ranging from public gatherings, to texts, to informal conversations and interviews—to define or interrogate the nature of (the) movement. While in the early years, people would express awe, confusion and wonder at the ways MoM exceeded their own frameworks of expectation; in these later periods, they would express confusion at why things were failing to achieve the status or quality of MoM. This sense of bafflement, coexisted with a commitment to work to define, make sense of, or otherwise theorize what the movement was, as well as what it could or should be and do. While on one level these efforts were quite straightforward material practices of bring part of movements, on another level they pointed to the importance of critical, reflexive analysis and theoretical reflection for the kinds of practices being cultivated by the movement. Whether these analyses referred directly to the nature of the movement itself, or to the current conjuncture; these efforts to understand, analyze and think, were not always instrumental. In addition to seeking “better knowledge” of and for social change, key to the new political imaginary and modality were forms of knowing (and being) that seemed to privilege thought, analysis, reflexivity and critique. These forms were less certain, rigid or dogmatic and promoted permanent critique, reflection, and creative experimentation (See chapters 5, as well as 3 and 4).

If the third problem referred to the ways in which the term movement seemed to inhere a challenge to prevailing concepts of the political, the fourth had to do with the

\textsuperscript{35} The category is singular, but since I am introducing this as a key argument, I need to keep both terms present when I refer to the concept of “movement.”
relationship of theory and knowledge production to that new form of politics on the one hand, and to our understanding of social movements as empirical entities, on the other.

While researchers of social movements have come a long way in recognizing the internal heterogeneity and network-like structures of those things called of social movements (see below), there is little to no work done on the fact that part of that internal heterogeneity has to do with the visions and theories of social changes, as well as the kinds of theories and knowledges movement activists are working with and from. For example, what are the differences in forms of knowing inherited from Marxist-influenced movements, vis a vis feminist ones? Or, why do certain Marxist actors pursue being movements rather than parties, and vice versa. Does the exaltation of more reflexive, anti-dogmatic and partial forms of knowing and theorizing necessarily correspond to different forms of practice? How does a social scientist relate to these questions, especially when the problem of theory and epistemology is a shared site of political engagement.

Problem 5: The paradoxes of reflexivity and ethnography

The final problem or layer of complexity relates to the epistemological issues raised above and is probably already quite apparent. It has to do with my own relationship to this messy entity known as MoM, as well as the set of problematics just described. This problem has both affective and epistemological dimensions, both of which are intertwined. Since beginning this project, I have had a hard time clarifying the relation between my own concept-making, theorizing, and analyzing, on the one hand, and those of the people I am working with, on the other. Where do each of these begin and end? I have had a hard time

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36 See especially Diani 2003; Escobar 2000; and Juris 2008. For a related notion of movements as “polycentric fields of action” see Alvarez forthcoming.
rationalizing whether the “movement” I am ostensibly studying is a movement I can call such by some external parameters and qualifications I, the researcher bring with me and look through, or whether it is something that the actors I am working with enact and bring into being through their various practices, including their own representational, analytical, theoretical or investigative practices in which they themselves so often use the term *movement*. In addition, at an affective level, I have grappled with just how much my own political desires and hopes for the potentials of the movement to be reached, were a part of this research process.\(^{37}\)

Like a growing number of anthropologists involved in studying “modern,” “emergent,” and “complex” objects,\(^{38}\) I am faced with numerous challenges. Not only do I face with the problem of studying an “entity” which is itself a “writing machine,” involved in analysis, textual production, and more, often informing the same discursive and political “fields” within which I move (Marcus 1999; Bourdieu et. al 1992); but I am also confronted with the reality that the very terms I use to name or describe that entity are themselves in flux, and recursively affected by the analytical and reflexive practices themselves. At the same time these very terms affect and impact understandings and knowledge of the political conjuncture and theoretical debates in my own world. In other words the fact that movements are theorizers and knowledge producers changes both our research relationship to them, as well as the articulations of our different knowledges and politics. In other words, understanding social movements as complex knowledge producers and writing machines, has

\(^{37}\) My own investment in the “success” of the movement is something worth reflecting on at a later date. In fact at the time I was also deeply disillusioned by the state of affairs in the US where I had long worked as an activist, and where the war against Terrorism, the war on Iraq and the impending re-election of Bush were imminent. For more on the role of affect as a method see Dowling Forthcoming.

implications not only for the nature of ethnography, but also for the ways that we conceive the impacts, and even the politics of our work. And different questions about the relationship of our knowledge to theirs, as well as our solidarity (or not) to them come up as well.\footnote{In fact these challenge certain notions of activist or engaged ethnography that are often premised on the assumptions that 1) movements are empirically obvious and transparent to us and themselves, and that 2) there is qualitative difference between the knowledge produced by academics, and the action done by social movements. See Osterweil 2007, Casas Cortes 2009, Casas Cortes et.al, forthcoming, Powell forthcoming.}

Quite frankly as I attempted to write several sections of this dissertation, I was almost paralyzed by my stark awareness of the limitations of my own perspective, and the absence of what we might call a complete grasp of “the whole story.” Honestly, I was even doubtful that there ever could ever be a whole story to grasp! I was not, and had not been, everywhere; nor did I strive to get a complete picture by interviewing a balanced sampling from the diverse strands or realities of the MoM. Not only would that have been impossible for one researcher,\footnote{I am not even sure a team of researchers could have apprehended this movement or experience of movement in its totality.} the bird’s eye view was not the story I was after—or at least not the story I felt compelled to follow and try to tell. At the same time, and perhaps paradoxically, I didn’t opt for a totally group- or place-specific project either. I deliberately chose not to do a case study of one activist group. This was because as I spent time in Italy I was completely impressed by the way both the idea of movement and the ideas produced by this movement transcended individual groups and organizations. I was further intrigued by how this contributed to the production of a commonly experienced notion of movement, which translated into a new or different notion of what constituted politics.\footnote{A central part of this included the creation or actualization of truly collective, even public, spaces of Movements where diverse groups and people would articulate and debate critiques, theories and analyses of alternatives to the present state of things, in ways that went far beyond the quite limited, sometimes even self-referential movement spaces, or specific activist groups.}
The production of this common idea of movement, and even more precisely, of a “movement of movements,” posed a particular challenge to social movement research and theory.

4. **Rethinking social movements: complexity, knowledge and politics.**

Social movement researchers have long struggled to adequately address the internal complexity, heterogeneity and dynamism of social movements as empirical entities. In fact, a great deal of the field has developed precisely as a response to critiques that much of their research was plagued with a latent positivism and political reductionism. It can be said that these are two fundamentally problematic assumptions underpinning a great deal of the research on movements that are worth flagging, and which are key to the work my dissertation does. Both mutually reinforce one another, and are critical to understanding the limitations of our current frameworks. We can call the first the problem of latent positivism or naïve empiricism: movements are treated as if they were objective, even natural, phenomenon, waiting to be explained by scientists, often in the language of scientific laws. Closely related to this is the assumption of unity and coherence of an empirical object called social movement. The second, related but distinct, can be referred to as a form of naturalization or neutralization with respect to the political: By this I mean that movements are conceived as political givens, neutral and expected parts of any modern political order, and as such do not question the nature of that political order itself. As Escobar puts it, “political science and political sociology are ill prepared to provide a general theory of the political, to the extent that they take for granted a particular form of society, that of the modern West, and a domain—‘politics’—that has to be delineated as an identifiable and
particular sector of social life by objective, positive knowledge.”42 In other words, social movement researchers take the political itself to be a given delimited part of social reality that simply is. In this, social movements exist in relation to that given field or subset, but do not—in fact cannot—call it, or the cultural logics underpinning it into question. As such movements place pressure and make demands on states and other sites of macro-political governance, but never challenge the logics, or the cultural, ontological or epistemological codes they are based on. In many ways it seems that these tendencies have only increased with the supposed “end of history” and the failure of actually existing socialism. Notably while socialism was seen as the only option to Western Capitalist Modernity it never called the state-form itself into question.43 This notion of the political is itself inextricably linked to positivist ways of knowing.

Today, many authors have gone a long way to critique and dispel the latent positivism largely influenced by a Mertonian notion of social scientific laws, and the related political reductionism (though to a lesser extent). They have pointed to the fact that the very classification of something as a movement is not an obvious or necessary choice—as if a movement existed in a reality out there waiting to be seen; it is always an analytical (or political) choice, determined by the political and epistemological frameworks of the researcher.44 As Elizabeth Jelin writes:

… it is the researcher who proposes the reading of a set of practices as a social movement…Social Movements are objects constructed by the researcher, which do not necessarily coincide with the empirical form of collective action. Seen from the outside, they may present a certain degree of unity, but internally they are always diverse (Elizabeth Jelin quoted in Escobar and Alvarez 1992:6).


43 see Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Agamben 2000.

Additionally Alain Touraine (1988) has pointed out that “it is impossible to define an object of study called social movements without first selecting a general mode of analysis of social life on the basis of which a category of facts called social movement can be constituted” (Touraine qtd ibid). However, these astute critiques of both the naïve empiricism and the related political reductionism and neutralization do not tell us what to do with a movement that is itself proposing a set of readings of something as a social movement, and similarly, calling a set of facts a social movement based on some form of social analysis.

From the narrative laid out above it becomes clear that to make sense of, or speak meaningfully about an entity as complex as the MoM requires a form of analysis that is attuned to the inherent multiplicity, or the “multiple processes that constitute” historical events or entities known as social movements (Foucault 1996: 277). As Melucci, writing precisely against reified and politically reductionist conceptions of social movements as clear-cut and simple entities reminds us, “Movements are not entities that move with a unity of goals attributed to them by ideologues. Movements are systems of action, complex networks among the different levels and meanings of social action” (1996:4). (Another problem that often goes hand in hand with this latent positivism is the corollary tendency of granting coherence, unity and agency to something that is far more fragmented, and that can be better understood in terms of assemblages, networks, fields\(^{45}\)—or even as temporary crystallizations, punctualizations, or events.\(^{46}\)

However, the MoM raises additional concerns: If on the one hand we are charged


with remaining true to the internal complexity and multiplicity of social movements, the case of the MoM requires that we also acknowledge the ways the concept or idea of movement can itself become a coherent entity. Such that to Jelin’s assessment, we might add not only a description of the diverse perspectives of the actors comprising the social movement, but also the ways in which those actors participate in producing a more coherent and unitary story or vision of the movement themselves. For, despite the punctualized and multiple nature of its empirical reality, there are efforts and effects that tend to produce a more singular and coherent vision of the movement. In other words there are attempts to put MoM into language, to make it coherent and meaningful, not least by those working for more movement.

While we can and should acknowledge the epistemological impossibility of providing coherent, linear explanations for historical phenomena as complex as social movements, this does not mean that people are not almost constantly involved in producing certain versions of history through our narratives and meaning making practices, nor that history does not appear to have an outward coherence—a coherence that is not “false,” but simply more tenuous or networky than it first appears. As such, we are faced with two challenges —how to adequately represent a movement in its complexity, multiplicity and dynamism, on the one hand, and how to incorporate the fact that movements themselves are avid researchers, interrogators and theorizers of movements, politics and the social more broadly. As Latour puts it, “If sociology of the social,” his term for our current frameworks of empirical study, “works fine with what has already been assembled, it does not work so well to collect anew

47 That is to say, the fact that certain entities only appear to be whole, coherent things, and are really the crystallizations or punctualizations of myriad networks and actors, does not discount the reality of their coherence.
the participants in what is not—not yet—a sort of social realm.”

As such while attempts at defining and explaining social movements are obviously nothing new and a great deal of the work done in the field of social movement research is dedicated precisely to explaining movements—what makes them emerge, mobilize, achieve success, decline, and of course what they are, the particular problems hinted to above suggest the need for a different approach and foci. That is reorienting our analytical lenses to the problem of social movements’ political, epistemological and ontological status.

In particular we must contend with the fact that what does or does not count as, or constitute, a social movement, and what is at stake in calling something a movement (or, in this case, a ‘movement of movements’) are not simply questions and problems posed by social scientific researchers. Rather, as the above narrative relates, movement participants are themselves deeply involved in theorizing, analyzing and otherwise employing the category of movement in myriad ways, often even ways that mirror and affect our own knowledge production and theorizing practices. Two questions follow: One is, why? What does the category of movement mean and do that the more commonsense, or commonplace political entities in Western modernity—i.e. states, political parties, and unions—don’t? In other words, why do certain actors want to be movements, rather than other forms of political subjects? This would be the political level. The second question is, what does this do to our


49 There are also numerous reviews of literature on social movements as well as critiques of the dominant approaches to studying them, that detail theoretical, political and methodological flaws. In many ways the entire sub-discipline of social movement studies has evolved in response to such critiques. I have reviewed several of these flaws in my Master’s thesis (Osterweil 2004a), as well as more recently in a co-authored piece on social movements as knowledge producers, see Casas Cortes, et.al. See also Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Mayer 1991; Goodwin et.al 1999, 2004, Kurzman ed. 2008.
understanding of what constitutes a social movement? And, how do we incorporate such reflexive meaning-making, theoretical and analytical practices that in many ways mirror our own knowledge-production practices into our research and “data”?

Re-invoking Melucci’s call to understand social movements as “prophets of the present” challenging our vocabularies and lenses, this dissertation seeks to understand the MoM as precisely as a story about the making of a new kind of politics, where asking these very questions holds key tools for understanding and intervening in the political present.

5. Contentions, Questions and Chapter Outline.

The central argument of this dissertation can be restated as follows: Movements cannot be understood as objectively identifiable entities, neatly delimitable in time and space, but rather that we must take their meaning-making practices and knowledge production, as well as their own cultural logics, including a notion of historical continuity and the need for rupture, as a key part of what they are and do. This means recognizing the Italian MoM—and potentially social movements more broadly—as meaning-makers, as well as concept and theory producers that, building on collective knowledge of past successes and failures, work to develop new stories, imaginaries, theories, and practices of and for social change. These theoretical-practices are material cultural practices overdetermined by cultural legacies, as well as authoritative knowledges with a great deal to offer for making sense of the contemporary conjuncture and the strategies or tactics for change within that.

The research that I conducted in Italy can be described to revolve around 3 main, or driving questions, which are basically condensations of the 5 mentioned earlier:

1) What is the Italian MoM? How does one go about defining it—theoretically, empirically, politically?
2) What does understanding MoM tell us about social movements, politics and processes of social change.

3) How does recognizing that social movements are knowledge producers, and in particular that activists are theoretical-practitioners, do for our understanding of social movements as entities, but also about the form of the political?

This in turn can be understood through a series of contentions.

1) The first is an empirical argument about what constitutes MoM. I argue that this movement is a discursive, meaning-making apparatus, that is constituted as much by material events, people, organizations, texts as it is by ideas, stories and desires. This means that what the movement did and was, was itself based as much on the meanings and discourses it produced, as it was on the concrete events, organizations and histories that comprised it.

2) The second is a methodological consequence of the former: I argue that making sense of the movement as a discursive entity, requires not only empirical research as to what people, events, etc. constituted ‘it’, but also taking stock of the variety of statements/enunciations about MoM; those that are direct and indirect, as well as their visibility and dispersion. This includes paying attention to what it was understood as not being, that is, what was excluded from the parameters of movement. Moreover, one has to pay attention to specific definitions/understandings of “MoM,” which coincide with, but were not identical to, the definition of social movement more generally.

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50 By meaning making I do not mean to suggest a focus solely on the terrain of “ideas”—this argument is itself based on a notion of meaning-making as material practice, hence its discursive rather than simply semiotic/symbolic nature (See Foucault 1978.) Charles Taylor 1983 is very helpful to this end, as is much work in social practice theory (Holland, et.al; Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992.)
3) The third is political, about the nature of the movement’s political effects. I argue that a key effect of the movement—both through the meanings, stories and ideas it produces; as well as through the knowledges and theories it generates,— is the production of “another kind of politics,” in close relation to the production of a “new political imaginary.” This new political imaginary in turn requires different theoretical frameworks about the nature of reality, social change and the relationship between knowledge and these, or more precisely the relationship between the production of concepts and the production of reality. I argue that the movement’s specific knowledges, narratives and theories are themselves part of a larger process and effort at re-articulating and changing the dominant political imaginary. This dominant political imaginary is itself premised on particular authoritative forms of knowing and being, which is in turn very much a part of the modern social imaginary (Taylor 2006). Complicating matters even more is the fact that a key part of the modern social imaginary is a rigid distinction between the political (and economic) and other domains, such that part of the work of challenging and transforming the dominant political imaginary has to do with contesting what counts as political vis a vis other domains of life. As such key to the production of new concepts, meanings, etc, has to do with re-inventing the political. This argument is both particular to Italy, and its specific political history as well as its experience of Movement, but applies elsewhere as well. Such movements become exceptional spaces where the “novel” can be introduced.

**Structure & Chapters Outlined**

The dissertation is organized into five chapters, each of which builds the above argument through reflections on my ethnographic and archival research. While each chapter has a distinct theoretical argument, the chapters are quite interdependent. As such, it is rather
difficult to read them out of order, in particular because each chapter refers back to those before it, in particular to the vignettes and quotes from various activists. In some sense, one can treat the first two chapters as dealing mostly with the background—providing the contexts for and giving the cast of characters for the MoM as situated within the GJSM, as well as in the specific place of Italy. Chapters 3, 4, 5 on the other hand deal more with making sense of my ethnographic material, trying to find meaning and answers in the problematic case of the MoM. In what follows I provide a brief description of each chapter.

Chapter One, Genoa: an event to the very core, begins with the Genoa 2001 protests described briefly above. The chapter argues that Genoa 2001 is a key moment in the development of the MoM, both historically, but also, and perhaps more importantly as an event that made the MoM legible as an important movement. In the course of the chapter I explain how Genoa, which functions rather like a synecdoche for the MoM, is comprised as much by the meanings, discourses and ideas it produces and are made about it, as it is by any of the events, people, organizations, etc. that constitute it. As such, Genoa can be understood as an event and as a discursive and meaning-making apparatus. Moreover through Genoa we begin to see how one of the most important elements of the MoM is its enactment of a new political imaginary, and a cultural political modality, in which there are three core features: difference, reflexivity and autonomy. These core features, and the new political imaginary continue to exist in tension with what we may call the “old” political modality or political culture that persists despite theories and desires for a “new kind of politics.”

Chapter 2, The Italian Anomaly: Historical Background & Italy’s Unique Left continues one thread of the argument of Chapter One. While Genoa was known as an important a global event within the GJSM, it must also be recognized as a very Italian event.
That is, in addition to being one in a series of transnational counter-summits, the event and its significance, are also products of specific histories, cultures, experiences and notions of politics and movement particular to Italy. At a more immediate level, it has to do with the deep disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the Italian government, both the recently elected right-wing Berlusconi government (elected in January 2001), and perhaps even more, the center left whose complicity with neoliberalism and general fragmentation was increasingly unattractive to both the left and the right. However, at least as important is Italy’s history and status as an anomaly with respect to other modern democracies, in particular because of its left—Institutional and extra-parliamentary alike. The majority of the chapter describes this Left: both Italy’s Communist Party (PCI) and the tremendous decade of mobilizations between 1968-1979. Not only does this chapter lay the foundations for understanding the particular ways movements developed, specifically with respect to their theoretical and political frameworks; it also describes how these movements actually created many of the conditions of possibilities for the emergence of the MoM.

Chapter 3 The “What is movement/Movement?” Problem(atic) begins to address more directly the central questions posited earlier: Namely, what are the consequences of recognizing that movements are themselves involved in various efforts at defining, analyzing, interrogating and otherwise producing discourse about what it means to be a movement, or even a “movement of movements”? Beginning with reflections on a provocative episode featuring Georgio Agamben in which what I come to call the “what is movement” mantra is articulated in a public seminar, I explore the ways in which we begin to understand that the term movement functions as much in presence as in absence. Moreover, I argue that we can learn as much about movements by what they are distinguished from, as
what they are, or described as. In fact, one of the main things we learn is that the term Movement refers to the “other” of politics. However, this in turn requires that we distinguish—analytically—between various iterations of the term itself. It is in this chapter that I argue for implicit distinctions between the terms movement, Movement and *Il Movimento*. The chapter ends by pointing to the ways these different meanings or notions of the term movement reveal key tensions and problems that in turn may be the most generative parts of the movement/Movement problematic.

Chapter 4, *History, Novelty and the Meaning of Movement* continues to explore the tensions and implicit meanings revealed in the narratives about MoM, and movements more generally. However, in this chapter I explore the odd or unexpected presence of historical and temporally framed discourses about the MoM. Seemingly paradoxically, activists define movement as a novelty and rupture from all that came before, while at the same time constantly referring to Autonomia, or the decade of struggles between 1968-1979. The chapter puzzles through this interesting yet counter-intuitive framing. While at one level the references to Autonomia are clearly meant as comparisons, recognizing both as moments of Movements (big m), when society seemed on the verge of being remade; the nature of the similarities begets further explanation. I go on to argue that despite claims to rupture—implying discontinuity—the decade of ’68 is connected to Genoa in various ways, materially, ideationally and virtually. These connections include people, organizations and infrastructures, as well as various networks of theoretical and intellectual production that contribute to rethinking politics, movement and the political conjunctures. Ultimately I argue that the historicized and temporally framed narratives from my interviews and numerous texts, reiterate the notion of Movements as the Other, or desired-for Other, of politics. This is
evidenced by the ways both movements and Movements are seen to function as actual and virtual spaces for “getting Movement right,”—which translates into the possibility of getting politics right. Here we re-encounter the tension implicit in these movements. This notion of getting Movement and politics right can be read in a more rational or progressive logic, that is of movement/Movement as sites of collective learning which are always moving towards a final, climactic endpoint—akin to the revolution. However it can also be read as a call for ongoing learning, critique and becoming, as the substance of movement. For now the two logics seem to coexist.

In part as a solution or response to this tension, the final chapter, Chapter Five, Theoretical-Practice: Enacting Politics Differently, proposes that key to the new political imaginary and cultural-political modality being developed and articulated by the MoM (and other iterations of Movement) is the increasing centrality of something I term theoretical-practice to the political engagements of activists. Theoretical-practice refers to several things and a substantive part of the chapter is spent defining the term and its political importance. Theoretical-practice refers on the one hand to material practices, something that actors in movement, and movements understood as discursive entities do. That is they produce texts, develop theories, pose hypotheses, and both pursue and produce knowledge about the political and social context. At the same time, I argue that when we understand movements as spaces for getting politics right, we can also recognize movements as theoretical in function or impact: they pose problems to politics as we know them, and then experiment with alternative possibilities, revising as the experiment works out “in practice.” Finally, theoretical-practice also refers to a quality or mode of engagement, one that privileges reflexivity, becoming, critique and uncertainty as bases for (political) action. Against forms
of knowing implicit (or explicit) in traditional forms of movement practice, especially those found among the traditional or Marxist left, but also in the increasingly polemical and anti-political modalities in Western representative democracies—i.e. forms of politics based on rigid, dogmatic, formulaic certainties and party-lines—theoretical-practice offers both a response and an anecdote. Moreover, practiced at multiple scales, theoretical-practice works at the level of the micro-political, emphasizing the continuum knowing-being-doing and the production of critical knowledges, subjects and forms of political practice that enable this new epistemology of unfixity, of permanent critique, similar to Foucault’s limit-attitude (1984). Theoretical-practice of course also signals or revisits the tensions I have previously mentioned-- between the new political logics (based on difference and multiplicity, autonomy, and criticality/reflexivity,) and the dominant logics (of Identity, state-power, and certainty, polemics, dogma, and Science). It reminds us that it is precisely the nexus or tension between “theory” (in which everything looks perfect, ala models) and “practice,” (that are always messy and constrained by the irrational) that has not only been a site of consternation for numerous political theorists and practitioners past; however thought of together, similar perhaps to notions of enactive knowledge, offer possible ways of thinking about how to move beyond the impasse between the old political imaginary and the new.

51 Maturana and Varela 1987; Varela 1992; Escobar 2008.
Chapter 1: Genoa: an event to the very core

Genoa has become synonymous with protest violence, *a metonym* evoking images of tear gas, burning cars, and black-clad protestors hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at heavily militarized riot police. Equally evocative are the haunting visions of twenty-two year old Carlo Giuliani’s hooded corpse lying in a pool of his own blood after being shot twice in the face and then backed over by an armored police jeep. The world was further shocked by pictures of dried blood on the stairs, floors and walls of the Diaz School, where a special unit of the Italian police carried out a brutal nighttime raid against sleeping protestors after more than three hundred thousand people had taken to the streets earlier that day. Images of street battle cascaded through the global mediascapes, helping to construct a mass-mediated image of the Battle of Genoa as iconic sign of wonton destruction (Juris 2007:161, emphasis mine).

Let’s turn back with our memory to the days of Genoa, let’s fall back into that air, that before having been made unbearable by the tear-gas, *had allowed so many of us to breathe together* again with full lungs. It was the first time that the global movement born in Seattle expressed herself in all of her richness and articulations in an Italian city. Certainly, there was the contestation of the OECD summit in Bologna in June 2000, and the days of March at Napoli, these were important anticipations to Genoa, and in many ways these were also filled with significance. But it was only Genoa, the beautiful and productive disorder of the tens of thousands of women and men that marched together in the Babel of tongues and languages of the 19th of July, that allowed us to see these meanings in their true light. For many even within the galaxy of “critical thinking”, it was an occasion to finally really take note of the radically innovative character of the global movement… (Mezzadra and Raimondi 2001, my translation from Italian, emphasis added).

Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the counter-summit protest of the G8 that took place in Genoa, Italy in July 2001— an event I will refer to from now on as Genoa—must be

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52 Slightly rephrased from an interview: “Genoa from its very core has the characteristics of an event. And like all events, is able to condense features that are extremely virtuous…” (Interview, Social Center Activist, Rome 2006).

53 The author uses the play on words *co-spirare*—to breathe together, or to conspire.
understood as discursive entity and signifier that is crucial to making sense of the MoM. Genoa is a key moment in the development of the MoM not only because it was a pivotal event in which the major relevant actors and histories converge, but even more so because Genoa is the one requisite point in any definition or narration of the MoM. Regardless of peoples’ opinions about it, it is Genoa the event that makes the MoM legible as a meaningful entity. Moreover, Genoa as an event comes to function as a sort of synecdoche for the MoM more broadly, such that descriptions of one connote the other. Finally, the reality and importance of Genoa, like the MoM for which it stands, is constituted as much (if not more) by how it is narrated, interpreted and known, as by the messy material elements—people, histories, events and things—that comprise it.54

Starting from the recognition that we will never be able to know the “whole story” of Genoa, or even more so of the MoM, this chapter focuses on the multiple roles, or kinds of work, done by Genoa-understood as event, symbol and story. Looking at Genoa allows us to get a glimpse of the basic cartography of the MoM and the multiple ways in which the MoM works, including perhaps most importantly the new political practices and a new political imaginary that it fosters and participates in bringing into being.

Chapter Outline

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part works to situate the claim I make about Genoa’s central and multiplicitous nature as a discursive event and meaning maker. I begin with an extensive first person reflection and then move on to a more schematic description of the concepts that frame this chapter. As I discuss in this section, Genoa has to be seen as an event, a point of articulation, and a discourse and meaning-making apparatus.

54 Since the completion of this thesis I have come across a few texts that make similar points: see Conant 2010; and Reinsborough and Canning, 2010.
In Part II, I go on to describe the multiple ways of reading or explaining Genoa the event, its national and transnational sociology, its chronology, and the different histories that lead up to it. Moreover, I argue that while all readings are accurate, none easily or simply explain the event in its totality. Beginning from a description of the three days of the Genoa 2001 protest, I map out the multiple threads and elements that comprise it: who was there, what events led up to it, and its multiple scales. However even this effort to tease out the multiple threads constituting this event start to reveal that what does and does not count as part of Genoa are in large part produced by the readings and meanings that are themselves generated by Genoa. These meanings are particularly interrelated with three processes: 1) the GJSM, in particular the transnational counter-summits; 2) the Zapatista Movement; and 3) the World Social Forum process. In turn I use three concepts: cultural politics, political modality and political imaginary to explain the interrelation between these “global” elements and the ways Genoa and the MoM are known.

In Part III, I examine more explicitly the meaning-making work done by Genoa in articulation with various elements of the GJSM. Beginning with its role in the creation of a common space of struggle in Italy, I argue that Genoa works as a discursive apparatus to produce the apparent unity of the MoM as well as numerous other effects, including political meanings, subjects, and knowledges. In so doing, Genoa comes to connote a series of what I term hallmark qualities that while certainly present at Genoa are also present and co-authored from other key elements of the GJSM mentioned above. Together these hallmark qualities—that include most importantly: 1) the centrality of difference, 2) reflexivity, and 3) autonomy—constitute the basis of a new political imaginary and lexicon, that tell as much about the failures or problems of past politics as they do about the project of the

55 The question of novelty, or how “new” this political imaginary is, is a topic I address in Chapter 4.
present. Finally, in Part IV, I outline what I term a cultural-political approach to the GJSM that allows us to bring out more forcefully not only the imbrications of culture and politics enacted by social movements but the constitution of new political imaginaries and how these played out in Italy.

1.1 Genoa: “La Storia Siamo Noi” (We are History)

That Genoa was to be understood as a key element in a discursive apparatus, as well as a metonymic device for the broader MoM, hit me in a rather poetic way as I rode the train home from what would be my last protest in Italy. It was November 17, 2007. We were returning from a march to protest the harsh sentencing of twenty five young protestors accused of “sacking and pillaging” a city during the original Genoa protests in July 2001. As we made our way back to Bologna, a place that had become my home in Italy, and where I had lived for about two and a half years cumulatively, I couldn’t help but be struck by the neatness of it all. Was it poignant, ironic, poetic—the kind of closure good stories are made of? Or did the fact that Genoa—as place, event, and symbol—framed my research in an almost picture-perfect way mean something more?
The day had begun early as we waited for the train that was reserved at a reduced rate for those attending the protest.\textsuperscript{56} In ritual form this “special train”—a train that was not part of the regular schedule, but made available through much negotiation by different political entities to provide an affordable alternative for those wanting to attend the protest, and which was, consequently, resented by many in the train company, partly for political reasons, partly for logistical scheduling reasons, and largely because it was a well known fact that a train used to go to a protest would effectively become a space with no rules, with people smoking marijuana, cigarettes and drinking, and basically doing whatever they liked—was late. In fact the departure time kept being postponed, and those of us who had been told to arrive by 7am to assure a seat waited on our feet for several hours. The train did not leave until sometime around 11am. The result was that on top of being late for the beginning of the march, by the end of the day, those of us who had been there early had been on our feet for over 16 hours.

By the time we made it back to the station for the return ride home, I was exhausted and couldn’t wait to take a seat, get warm, and get some sleep. As we walked from train car to train car looking for seats, we discovered that it was standing room only! I should have known the train ride back would be much more crowded because no one would be checking tickets. The only room left was standing practically pressed up against another standing, or precariously leaning, person. Luckily (or not, I suppose), out of sheer exhaustion and cold, I figured out an alternative: lying in the suitcase racks lining the top part of the corridors of the Intercity style train.\textsuperscript{57} I wasn’t the only one who got creative, the next day I found out that

\textsuperscript{56} As remarkable as it might sound to us Americans, in Italy it is a regular practice to offer transportation at lower costs for political events and protests—there is a right to protest. However someone does have to bear the cost. In fact in this case there was some controversy over who had made it possible for these trains to go at less than 1/6 the cost of a full price ticket. Word had it that it was the Communist Party (Rifondazione)—an irony that was denied by many in the movement who did not want to be seen as being supported or subsidized by a party that had come to be quite an opponent.
friends of mine spent the four and a half hour ride home in the bathroom!

It wasn’t the most comfortable of rides, but it certainly made me highly aware and reflective of my point of view, or perhaps more aptly, of *the* point of view of and from Genoa.

Although I had never traveled by luggage rack before, I had been to Genoa, specifically to protest, several times before. It seemed notable, then, that this — probably the last big protest I would attend in Italy as part of my dissertation research—was both in and about *the event* that had in many ways began it all. While not everyone agreed that Genoa was the starting point for the entity that came to be known as the MoM,\(^5^8\) it is clear that without Genoa, the MoM would not have been legible as such. At a basic level, this final trip to Genoa seemed like an apt closure to a research project that had carried me from the height of the imaginings of political possibility and potentiality to seeing the messy, corporeal, emotional and very human failures of actualizing those possibilities. As I lay on the suitcase rack, trying to regain the feeling in my toes that had been unprepared for the damp coldness of Genoa’s streets, I looked through the narrow corridor filled with Italians of all ages. I was struck by the way Genoa seemed to at once embody, reflect, and frame many of the complex aspects of MoM that I had been trying to both make sense of and portray: the fact that *it* was at once a very corporeal and actual event, comprised of multiple messy histories, that had involved actual bodies, feelings, blood (“and shit,” as some activists pointed out) as well as a set of ideas and stories that were themselves part of an emergent process of pursuing another kind of politics.

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\(^5^7\) Italy has at least three different classes of trains, as I came to learn on the numerous train rides following the movement required. Each kind of train has a different level of cleanliness, ventilation and other key characteristics. Intercity tended to be *much* more affordable than Eurostar or Express trains, and well, special trains for protests seemed to be a particularly decrepit version of those.

\(^5^8\) In fact for many people I interviewed the protest at Genoa actually marked the beginning of the end of this exciting “new” movement. However this to was produced as a result of what Genoa was and did!
But it was more than that. I was also struck by the ways Genoa the material messy event, stood like bookends, or skin and flesh holding together the largely abstract, theoretical and even imaginary stories about the MoM I had gathered and engaged with for close to six years. During that time, whenever I asked people about Genoa or read the numerous texts circulating about it, the terms and phrases used to describe the event were compelling. Rather than point to the details of what actually transpired, people’s narratives tended towards another register, one that was spectacular, philosophical, even religious-sounding. Phrases like, “Genoa was a watershed,” “after Genoa nothing is the same,” “Genoa was an air that allowed everyone to breathe again,” and many others were just as common as descriptions or chronologies of what took place “on the streets.” Whereas almost all stories and interviews I had collected about the MoM related back to or referred to the historic July 2001 protests in Genoa, in some way; this particular protest was about Genoa—the march and the movement—in a much more total way, incorporating or referring to the specific, physical experiences of those days as well as to their symbolic import.

For several weeks leading up to the march, a span of time that turned out to be a large part of my last period in Italy, activists and others from the variegated “popolo della sinistra” (people of the Left) from all over Italy hosted seminars, presentations, and exhibits about the 2001 Genoa protests. Using myriad projections of photos as well as sound clips and video footage these presentations, aimed at mobilizing as many people as possible to attend the 2007 march against the recommended prosecutions,59 involved recounting and re-viewing every gruesome detail of what happened at Genoa those days of July 2001. In fact, many of these seminars were quite similar to meetings and presentations I had attended my first summer of 2002, when people were still reacting to the shock of it all.

59 This final march was convened in less than a month.
As I rode the train, unable to sleep in my snug yet extremely uncomfortable luggage rack, I continued to reflect on the role (and meaning) of Genoa. Throughout five years of ethnographic research, references to Genoa were a central, even requisite part of the descriptions and narratives, both textual and oral, that I collected about MoM. However, during many of those years the fact of the actual frightening protest, had faded from focus. In 2007 the streets had returned to focus. But did the return of the material streets change things? At first I thought the answer would be yes—that the physical return to Genoa, the return to focusing on the messy, physical, violent, elated events of those days, might mark an important shift in the nature of Genoa’s role. What was actually more interesting was that in large part it didn’t.

Here was Genoa again. This time we weren’t contesting the G8 or Berlusconi, nor the nature of globalization. We were protesting not only the very real threat that twenty five young people would be severely sentenced—risking spending up to a decade in prison—but also, and perhaps more importantly, we were fighting over how the events of Genoa in 2001, and by extension the movement affiliated with it, were to be remembered, recorded and therefore known. The slogan printed on the banner at the head of the large march stated it quite succinctly: “La storia siamo noi” (History is Us/We are History). It was difficult to deny that what seemed to be at stake had less to do with law, crime, or truth in any “real” sense, and everything to do with what story would prevail. The Italian government was trying to make Genoa, 2001—the tumultuous days where over 300,000 people mostly from Italy turned Genoa into the biggest protest yet in the nascent GJSM—go down in history as a day where anarchic, destructive protestors with no legitimate claims “sacked and pillaged” a city. The diverse thousands, by contrast, were marching not only to prevent the harsh sentencing,
but also to reclaim the movement that had driven 300,000 to the streets, re-vitalizing various sectors of the Left and marking the possibility of the beginnings of a Movement for real change. Perhaps even more basically, they were marching to reclaim the legitimacy of political protest then (2001), now and in the future. So much seemed rest on the meaning of Genoa—and not only for the activists or “people of the Left”—the State, the police, the media all seemed to have a great deal at stake in determining what the legacy, memory and meaning of this movement would be. This march was about what version of the movement’s history would be known, and therefore it was also about what futures would be possible.

Even the material, the messy, the physical—those things that reappeared in 2007 through videos, presentations, discussions, the protest and the impending trial—were themselves in large part significant, not in terms of any physical or direct effects one might expect from a protest, but in the meanings, practices and ideas they generated. What was at stake now, as it had been throughout my research, was the meaning of a movement—the movement Genoa stood for, both then and now. That was it: Genoa was what it stood for. But what does it mean to say Genoa is what it stands for? And what does Genoa stand for? And why begin here, with symbols, memories and metaphors rather than something more concrete? more material? This chapter is an attempt to answer these questions, or perhaps more precisely, to re-articulate them into an argument about how one can understand Genoa, while accepting that we will never fully know or understand Genoa, or the MoM. Genoa must be understood as an event, discourse and symbol whose reality is multiple and key to

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60 For many people the day was also poignant because after a few years of increased factionalism, and the diminishing of size and diversity of protests, this march on the 17th of November recalled the broad-based movement of six years prior. (However five months later when Berlusconi’s far right government won the elections, without a single representative of the communist or historic Left, the picture changed again.)

both the history and perceived unity of the MoM.

**Discerning Genoa**

One thing that makes beginning to tell the story of Italy’s MoM somewhat easier is the fact that despite its multiplicitous and hard to pin down nature, there is a convergence point around which much of what is considered important or of the MoM circles or approximates. No matter with whom you speak, or what texts you read, this event is a necessary part of the plot. It is a single point through which almost all narratives and even my own research trajectory need to pass to make sense of MoM or at least the stories about it. This point is Genoa: the 2001 counter-summit protest of the G8 that brought approximately 300,000 people to the streets of this ancient Ligurian city by the same name. This not only made Genoa the largest protest yet in the young GJSM, it was also seen to mark the beginning of at least two years of heightened even explosive political activity in Italy. Whether we look at the ways in which people described Genoa, or simply the fact that so many people, facts, and events point us there, it becomes clear that Genoa is not only pivotal to the course of the MoM, it is one of the main sites—perhaps the main site—where the story of the MoM gets crystallized and punctualized.\(^\text{62}\) That is, turned into an entity that can be discussed and identified as one. Moreover, the more we look at the ways Genoa is described and referred to, the more we realize that Genoa cannot be bounded in space or time by the typical parameters of a protest.

Genoa challenges our propensities to search for the ultimate truth, origin and causality of events, to separate meaning from effects, culture from politics, and to find simple synthesis in the complex, or unity in difference. The minute one begins to try to describe and define Genoa, the complexity and multiplicitous nature of the event itself begins to reveal

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\(^\text{62}\) See below for how I use “punctualization”.

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itself, and one is left with a perennial empirical or ethnographic problem: the problem of complexity, on the one hand, and meaning, or discourse, on the other.

As Marylin Strathern explains,

> Complexity is intrinsic to both the ethnographic and comparative enterprise. Anthropologists are concerned to demonstrate the social and cultural entailments of phenomena, though they must in the demonstration simplify the complexity enough to make it visible. What appears to be the object of description—demonstrating complex linkages between elements—also makes description less easy (Strathern 2004: xiii).

With regards to the case at hand, it is not simply that Genoa is a multi-faceted and complex object that gets more complex the closer one gets, but that Genoa is, means and does different things at multiple levels and scales, many of which are not legible in current understandings of social movements, protest, or politics.

Genoa means and does different things, depending on where and for what you are looking. For example, within Italy Genoa serves as an important marker for the beginning of at least two years of heightened political activity, what became known as the “Primavera dei movimenti” (the springtime of movements), and introduced a new political entity with which institutional political entities had to contend. From a global social movements perspective, Genoa is an important counter-summit in the tradition of Seattle. And, finally, to movement participants, and more micro-politically and culturally oriented analysts, Genoa is simultaneously a momentous event that took months to organize; a messy, affective and chaotic set of experiences, and a set of ideas, practices and principles that are in turn part of an emergent process of naming and theorizing a new political modality. In all of these cases Genoa cannot be delimited in space and time to the three days of protest.

Arguing that Genoa 2001 is different at different scales and analytical levels is not simply a claim about interpretation. I am not arguing that Genoa simply gets interpreted
differently at different scales and levels—although acts of interpretation do have everything to do with what Genoa is— but rather that it *is* and does different things at these different scales and levels. This means that rather than treat the different depictions of Genoa as different perspectives on one “real” thing called Genoa, we must recognize Genoa as itself multiple and look at the multiple effects and work done through it.63

**Multiple Meanings of the Global Movement**

Nowhere are the multiple meanings and effects of Genoa more apparent than when we consider Genoa’s relationship to the GJSM— the global movement that is most closely identified with the series of spectacular counter-summits that began in Seattle, November 1999—and the very nature of this “global” movement’s globality. Consider the two quotations at the outset of this chapter, offering two rather different descriptions or representations of the 2001 protest. In both descriptions the 2001 protest against the G8 in Genoa, Italy, is *known* as one of the pivotal counter-summit protests in the GJSM, typified by the anti-WTO protests at Seattle in 1999, as well as subsequent transnational counter-summit protests at the meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Prague in 2000, FTAA in Quebec in 2001 and numerous others. Both descriptions also treat and recognize Genoa as something that above and beyond all exists through what it means or symbolizes. Having said this it is also clear that what Genoa is and means in these two representations varies greatly. In the first text, Genoa *stands for* riots, violent clashes between black clad protestors and riot-gearred police—the typical image of the “anti-globalization movement”64 produced by and

63 See Mol 2002; Law 2004 for a discussion of this kind of multiplicity and the difference between a claim about different perspectives and different realities. See also the discussion of eventalization and punctualization below.

64 Another name for the GJSM.
for global media.\textsuperscript{65} In the second, Genoa is an \textit{air} that allows people to \textit{breathe}; it is a productive disorder, and it is radically innovative. Notably, both as violent clash and as the basis of a renewed political energy, Genoa is a pivotal event the representations and interpretations of which do various things and produce different effects.

This also points to something very interesting about the role of the global in our understandings of Genoa. Furthermore, in both these quotations it is clear that Genoa is understood as an important event in the GJSM. However, what makes Genoa part of this GJSM—i.e. the global movement—is not necessarily as obvious as it first seems. The first representation emphasizes Genoa’s place as one in a series of counter-summit protests where the main action is in terms of the protestors against the summit of the G8 leaders they are trying to disrupt. The second description treats the global movement as something politically innovative, as the carrier of a new political modality, hardly connoting the typical images or meanings of the counter-summit movement against neoliberalism. So we are faced with a tricky question: if we accept depicting Genoa primarily as part of this global movement, given the two very different images above, what exactly is this or any other global movement? Moreover, in this second quote both the global nature of Genoa and its importance—the two being inextricably linked—are described in ways that are themselves difficult to incorporate into our traditional depictions of protest, or even politics. We rarely think of the political as having to do with air, breath, disorder.

Typical understandings or treatments of global social movements, and the GJSM more specifically, locate the globality in the transnational composition of the protestors and the global or transnational scope of the target—i.e. the counter-summits against neoliberalism.

\textsuperscript{65} This is not to deny that activists themselves also at times produce and rely on similar imagery. See for example Razsa 2009.
globalization demanded upon the key institutions that enforce it; very little attention is paid to the form or understanding of the political generated.

As I will show, the GJSM is a critical part of Genoa as a discursive entity. However, the relationship between Genoa and the GJSM works at the level of the circulation and production of meaning. That is, it has to do as much (if not more) with the development and creation of a new political modality and imaginary as it does with opposition to the institutions enforcing and promoting neoliberalism globalization. This “new political modality” is constituted by a set of principles, values and practices and by a common critique of leftist politics past. Key principles and values are diversity and difference, reflexivity, and autonomy, that are embodied in organizational forms, norms and other practices. These in turn have everything to do with how the nature of globality, or the global nature of Genoa, are to be understood.

This question is even trickier because defining Genoa solely or even primarily in terms of its role as part of the global counter-summit movement not only presumes that transnational counter-summits are the defining factor of the GJSM; such definition also neglects the place-based and specific histories of Genoa that are themselves crucially important. As this chapter will show, in addition to being one in a series of global or transnational summits, Genoa is also a very specifically Italian event in terms of the networks, contexts and politics that produced it, as well as the ways it is experienced and read as an important moment in national politics.

Events, Articulations, Discourse and Meaning

Making sense of Genoa requires an approach that is attuned to the multiple levels of
its reality as an event; its different meanings and effects as discursive apparatus, and the different elements and qualities it connotes. While recognizing the non-necessary nature of events is, or should be, the nature of social scientific endeavors generally, I note that in reality the contingent and non-essential or non-necessary nature of events is seldom acknowledged. Social scientists, especially researchers of social movements, rarely acknowledge that often what we take to be a delimited “object of study” is itself a dynamic and barely unified entity comprised of multiple strands that only coalesce or punctualize briefly into that object, and then disperse back into multiple fields.66 This makes them challenging to ‘study’ as empirical objects, especially over time, since their apparent unities may shift, and disassemble over time.

In the case of the Italian MoM the fact that the “object of explanation” has been so dynamic, so prone to shifts and mutations, both in its form and content, as well as participants’ understandings of this form and content, made its study particularly challenging for me.67 There are several theoretical frameworks, concepts and debates upon which this argument about Genoa picks up and depends. These range from discussions about the incomplete, imperfect and partial nature of any attempt to explain or understand complex human phenomenon,68 to debates within anthropology, cultural studies and social theory about the nature of signification, representation, meaning and discourse.69 For the purposes

66 I am using the notion of fields here in the sense described by Bourdieu, (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), and picked up by Ray (1999) and Alvarez (forthcoming) to describe social movements. Latour’s description of social reality as a networked, temporary punctualization of what are otherwise messy multiple entities is also helpful. In other words the ways concepts/entities like “the social” are fragile and assembled helps us understand what appears to be the punctualized unity of movements, which is also quite temporary. (Latour 2005; 1999.)

67 John Law’s work on “mess” in method is helpful here. (Law 2004).

of this chapter I want to explain Genoa as a complex event and as a discursive entity.

We can begin to understand this through Foucault’s notion of the event as an empirical and analytical term that recognizes the multiple, heterogeneous and contingent elements or threads that constitute something as an event, and decries efforts to reduce complex events to a chain of simple linear causes and effects.

It has been some time since historians lost their love of events and made ‘de-eventalization’ their principle of historical intelligibility. The way they work is by ascribing the object they analyze to the most unitary, necessary and (ultimately) extra-historical mechanism of structure available (Foucault 1978/2000 qtd in Restrepo 2008: 10).

[Eventalisation] means making visible a singularity at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait or an obviousness that imposes itself uniformly on all. To show that things weren’t ‘necessary as all that’; it wasn’t as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it wasn’t self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock them up; it wasn’t self-evident that the causes of illness were to be sought through individual examination of bodies; and so on. A breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledges, acquiescences and practices rest: this is the first theoretico-political function of eventalization. It means uncovering the procedure of causal multiplication: analyzing an event according to the multiple processes that constitute it. As a way of lightening the weight of causality, ‘eventalization’ thus works by constructing around the singular event analyzed as process a ‘polygon’ or rather a ‘polyhedron’ of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite. One has to proceed by progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation (Foucault 1996: 277, emphasis mine).

As we will see in the second half of the chapter, Genoa’s event-status itself is inextricably linked to what it is seen to mean and do. For Genoa is experienced, described and interpreted as a turning point, a watershed, an event after which nothing can be the same. In this sense the term event becomes a different empirical entity—something with mythical, even religious import, on the one hand, and tendencies towards virtuosity and singularity on the other.

Deleuze discerns two ways of explaining events:

…there are two ways of considering events, one being to follow the course of the event, gathering how it comes about historically, how it’s prepared and then decomposes in history, while the other way is to go back into the event, to take one’s place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components or singularities (Deleuze 1990: http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpdeleuze3.htm).

The MoM and Genoa as event, are not simply understandable within history. We can understand them using Hayden White’s depiction of the historical event as something more closely related to myth and religion, than something precise or “real” that science might seek to describe,

…one of the reasons that modern philosophy and social science have so much trouble defining the specifically ‘historical’ event. It retains the odor of myth, of the extraordinary or praeter-natural, of sheer contingency because it does not instantiate the operation of ‘the laws of [physical] nature’, but manifests the kind of ‘individuality’ (and not merely particularity) that makes it peculiarly amenable to literary, poetic, or narratological treatment. In other words, the historical event has more in common with the occurrences met with in myth and religion, and specifically in the ‘miracle’, than with laws of material causality (Hayden White qtd in Domanska 2008:4). 70

Closely related to understanding Genoa as an event, we must also understand Genoa as a point of articulation and punctualization for multiple historical, sociological and discursive elements and trajectories. This picks up both on Hall’s description of articulation as the non-necessary and contingent coming together of at least two things, as well as Latour’s definition of articulation as a logic or process that inheres an understanding of both reality and truth-claims as the piecing together of disparate elements to produce the effects of coherent entities. Both of these can in turn be related to Foucault’s concepts of discourse, discursive formations and their production of knowledge objects.

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70 Closely related to this mythical world-historical notion of the event is a more ontological sense of the term that is also important for understanding Genoa’s event status. As Deleuze writes, “What is an ideal event? It is a singularity—or rather a set of singularities.…..Singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, ‘sensitive’ points.” Deleuze 1994: 52
“Articulation is the process by which different elements are connected,” however not all things can be articulated together and mean something (Grossberg et.al. 2006: 154). For Hall,

An articulation is thus a connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, or absolute for all time. You have to ask under what conditions can a connection be forged or made. So the so-called unity of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness’ (Hall 1996: 142-143).

Latour’s definition of articulation is slightly different in its emphasis on the relationship between human and non-human actors. He uses the term articulation in an ontological sense, to get at the ways “that no longer stress the distinction between the world and what is said about it, but rather the ways the world is loaded into discourse”(2004: 227). For Latour “The question is no longer whether or not statements refer to a state of affairs, but only or whether they are well or badly articulated” (1999: 303). In other words, Genoa, itself a punctualization of myriad entities, articulates and is articulated to a series of elements that come to be understood as part of a more or less coherent entity—the MoM. This articulated chain of elements and meanings includes the GJSM, which in turn is defined in relation to the Zapatista Movement, the World Social Forum, and Counter-summits. Taken together, all of these both refer to and help produce new ideas and practices of politics.

Understanding Genoa in terms of punctualization and articulation is itself closely related to understanding the ways it functions as a discursive formation or apparatus whose reality is as much about the ways it is known and put into discourse as it is about the 300,000 protestors, the death of Carlo Giuliani, etc. The fact that there is no outside to discourse and no final resting point, essence or truth to cultural interpretation is common wisdom among
anthropologists, cultural theorists and others interested in meaning-making and cultural processes. However, these understandings have not, as far as I know, been applied to understanding the ontological status of social movements and their constitutive events. The ways various representations, narrations, interpretations and practices work together to produce that which is then treated as an object, a social movement, or a social movement event, changes the way we understand both the nature and impact, of social movements. It both shifts us away from thinking of movements exclusively as positive or “real” things that work at the macro-political level, to recognizing movements as productive of political meanings, knowledges, subjects and other effects, that essentially establish the parameters of desired (if not acceptable) political actions.

In addition to making sense of their ontological status as discursive punctualized events, understanding Genoa and the MoM as discursive can also be understood in a much more traditional sense of meaning-making, contributing to the ways we understand our lives, and how to live. For as we shall see in the last section of the chapter the work Genoa and MoM do has a great deal to do with the political meanings and ideas they generate and their contribution to a new political imaginary and culture. In this sense Genoa, (and the MoM and GJSM) can be understood as part of a myth or story that can be used as a tool for social change. Notably this role of social movements as myth-makers is itself embraced and articulated as such by some activists within the MoM. I will discuss this in Chapter 4. As I shall continue to elaborate throughout, some of the most important work Genoa and the MoM do is to contribute to the making of a new political imaginary, a new political modality, one that re-introduces the possibility of politics in the wake of the failures of both Communism and Western Liberal Democracy. As such, Genoa’s role and its articulation with
the GJSM have a lot do with the ensemble of new political practices, ideas, stories and imaginaries that they produce, generate, circulate, and theorize.

Before elaborating more on this new political imaginary, which I do in the last section of this chapter, in the following section I describe the various levels and effects of this complex event.

1.2 Genoa 2001: Different Levels, Different Stories

In this section I will try to provide a general cartography or snapshot of Genoa, to give a sense of what Genoa was. I don’t pretend to explain Genoa in its totality; I simply provide some basic information to guide the reader while showing the multiple levels of Genoa’s significance. This is important because understanding the multiple realities of Genoa is critical for allowing us to see what the MoM was and why it should be considered important.

Anti G8 protests, July 19-21, 2001: a brief chronicle

In July 2001 between two-hundred thousand and three-hundred thousand protestors—the great majority of whom were Italian—participated in protests at the annual summit of the G8 held in Genoa that year. Since November 1999, meetings of various multilateral institutions and enforcers of neoliberalism ranging from the Bretton Woods Institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO), to others such as the World Economic Forum or G8, were met with transnational counter-summit protests challenging their policies and their legitimacy. These counter-summits were an important part of the GJSM, which I will discuss in greater detail below.

Not counting the months of preparation, official counter-summit events began in the

historic port city of Genoa on Thursday, July 19th. In many ways the concert the night before, headlined by Manu Chao who sang from his album *Clandestino*, had already kicked things off. For it is important to remember that the counter-summit convergences that caught the world by surprise beginning in 1999 were never simply protests, as they were always accompanied by numerous forms of art, cooking, media-making and much more as I will describe more below.\[^{72}\] That July 19th, an historic march *for* immigrants’ rights and against the repressive policies of the G8 and many European governments—which included indefinite detainment and exportation of immigrants seeking work—surpassed the expectations of organizers and police alike. Among the protestors this first march was considered a huge success. Participation during that first day neared 50,000—a remarkable number, I was told, especially considering the substantial presence of migrants who, beyond arrest, risked being detained and deported.\[^{73}\]

However, Friday July 20th stood in stark contrast to the peaceful, even triumphant, events of the first day. On that Friday, despite previously negotiated for and sanctioned protest routes, events turned violent, culminating in the death by an Italian Carabinieri of a 23 year-old Genovese, Carlo Giuliani.\[^{74}\] While this death was certainly the most potent evidence of police violence, it almost obscured the fact that this violence was very widespread, affecting almost everyone who attended, ranging from pacifists to more direct-
action oriented protestors.\textsuperscript{75}

The main focus of the police was supposedly to keep protestors out of the restricted “red zone” in the historic city center where the heads of state were to meet. However, throughout Friday (the 20\textsuperscript{th}) and Saturday the police employed harsh tactics against protestors in the streets as well as in the temporary detention centers, and in the activists’ own sleeping and working spaces. These tactics included chasing protestors, journalists and others in armored vehicles; shooting tear gas and others substances (some banned by international law); beating protestors with special batons; and finally, shooting with live ammunition which resulted in the death of Giuliani. Particularly notable was the indiscriminant nature of the attacks by police. Video coverage by numerous independent and even mainstream journalists documented the ways innocent people were beaten on the streets whether or not they had directly been involved in anything but the legal marches.\textsuperscript{76} In addition, the police were highly abusive in the makeshift detention centers where they held people. There are documented testimonies of dozens of protestors who describe police not allowing them to sit for several hours, taunting them with racist and fascist language and even with threats of rape and murder. Saturday, at the behest of the organizing committee to commemorate Carlo’s death and continue the opposition to the G8, hundreds of thousands of people arrived—many joining the protests despite televised requests by political leaders for people to stay away. That night police conducted violent raids of the media center and shelters, housing many international activists and media. They confiscated numerous

\textsuperscript{75} One of the defining features of this “new global justice movement” was the diversity of protestors and protest tactics. See below. (see also Juris 2008; Daro 2009).

\textsuperscript{76} Davies 2008; Genova per noi 2002; Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo 2002; Testimonianze Bolzaneto, Genoa 2001. G8: Blu Notte 2007; Ginori 2002; various interviews.
computers belonging to the organizing committee, and injured approximately 92 activists. Saturday, as protestors tried to get onto trains heading home, the train stations were also surrounded by police and essentially blockaded, not allowing protestors to either come or go. In all, over 600 people were injured, over 200 people were arrested, and an estimated sum ranging from $20- $40 million of damage was done.78

Since the protests there have been ongoing investigations into the events of Genoa. Who is responsible? Who began the violence? Did the police plant evidence? Why were police guns loaded with live bullets? While officially the State blamed the mayhem on the “Black Block” and the protestors in general, others suggested the violence was rooted in both confusion, bad communication and very intentional violence and intimidation on the part of the police.80 July 16, 2008—almost 7 years after the original event— police were finally found guilty for many breaches; however a loophole in the legal system means they will never serve any time. In contrast, several protestors were finally condemned to prison sentences ranging from five months to five years; legal procedures regarding the police attacks on the schools of Diaz, and their detention practices, were still the objects of legal processes in 2008.81 In general, following Genoa 2001, and even more after September 11,


79 The Black Block is usually described as one of the elements of the heterogeneous set of actors participating in counter summit protests. In reality, it refers more to a tactic of protest than to a particular group of people or organization. The Black Block usually identify themselves as anarchists and promote the use of property destruction and even violence against the police. See Juris 2008: 38.

80 When you listen to recordings of police communication, and testimonies of those held in police custody, the language is frightening, and quite obviously framed as being between a right wing (fascist) and Left wing (communist)—even if the majority of participants at the protest would not necessarily associate with communism. See Genoa 2001, G8. Blu Notte; Mantovani 2003.
there has been a marked increase in the use of repression, surveillance and other intimidation factors—both against known activists and would be protestors. As the description of the 2007 march I described at the outset of this chapter marks, there is still ongoing struggle not only over the facts of Genoa—i.e. who did what, who was at fault, and why?—but also about how the movement that Genoa marked the visible moment of would be remembered and therefore known. In many ways this thesis is part of that process.

The level and extreme use of violence by the Italian police can and was read as both a Global and Italian phenomenon. In other words, it was seen as both a particularly Italian-specific struggle between political forces on the extreme right, some with fascist affiliations, known to have power in the government and with the minister of interior, as well as both a turning point and trend within the global policing of these transnational summits, and perhaps global governance more broadly. In fact, taken in conjunction with the events of September 11 just two months later, Genoa has also come to be seen as a much more dramatic end to a certain period not only of movement, but of global governance. As a well-known activist put it,

…what happened in Genoa— that the comrades would have to fear for their

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In Italy the fear/anxiety associated with this clear escalation was not abstract in any way. The memory of the 1960s, and especially the 1970s, was a very real and present part of the Genoa movement. Those years, often referred to as Gli Anni di Piombo (The years of lead) were characterized on the one hand by tremendous social mobilization on the Left, as we shall see in the following chapter, these years are remembered fondly as having been on the cusp of “real revolution”—but they were also characterized by “domestic terrorism” both by right-wing and fascist groups, often with the complicity of some elements of the State, and as the decade proceeded, there was an increasing turn to armed clandestine struggle by some on the Left as well. According to noted intellectual Marco Revelli, those years Italy lived “its very own and very real civil war strisciante” (Revelli qtd. in Giachetti 1997). As such the murder of Giuliani, the use of many other violent tactics, as well as explicit comments by law-officers that echoed fascism, and the trauma suffered by those who attended Genoa were compounded by the collective history and memory of a period not too far past in which tens of thousands were arrested, exiled, or pushed into depressive and even destructive behavior. In fact as we shall see the history and memory of this period, as well as actual continuities to and from it are key to the meaning and experience of Genoa in many other ways.
lives – that the Carabinieri would shoot, that there would be attacks with thousands of gas grenades which are outlawed according to international military law. The state decided not to answer politically, but rather, exclusively militarily. It ended the first cycle of global conflict with a global declaration of war. With that, a new phase was anticipated in which war becomes the generator of the international scenario. Some people assume that Genoa is the rise of an injured and despairing global empire that desperately attempted to stop the movement after the crisis in Argentina, the crisis of the New Economy, and the summit’s crisis of legitimation, to which the global movement contributed. Others believe it was a preemptive arrival of what would happen after 11 September: a shut down at the political level and introduction of the level of war as the empire’s central ordering instrument (Bolognese activist, Martelloni quoted in Disobbedienti!).

Or as Starhawk, the well-known American activist and author has written,

Genoa was a watershed for the anti-globalization movement. It’s clear now that this is a life or death struggle in the first world as it has always been in the third world. How we respond will determine whether repression destroys us or strengthens us. To come back stronger we have to actually understand what happened there. The media are telling one story about Genoa: a small group of violent protestors got out of hand and the police overreacted. I’ve heard various versions of this from within the movement: the Black Block was allowed to get out of hand to justify police violence. But that’s not what happened at Genoa, and framing the problem that way will keep us focused on the wrong questions (Starhawk 2001: 125).

As such, understanding Genoa clearly requires an understanding of what the counter-summits were, as well as the more place-based and Italian specific networks of actors, causes, and organizations that produced it as an event. I will begin with the former and return to the latter.

**Transnational Counter-Summits Protests**

Beginning with the Seattle 1999 protests that shut down the ministerial meetings of the WTO, numerous transnational protests were organized against the Bretton Woods institutions as well as institutions like the G8, FTAA, OECD and numerous others seen as imposing neoliberal corporate driven globalization, or the Washington Consensus,
throughout the world. Between May 1998 and June 2007 there were at least 21 of these counter-protests throughout the world. These counter-summit convergences were never simply protests; accompanying them were almost always elaborate convergence spaces and activities, where food, art-making, and sociality—the elaboration of a new political culture—were as important, (for some, more), as the direct action protests filling the streets and making the news.

The reality of these transnational summits also has to do with the ways they are read and the elements that are highlighted in those readings. In general, transnational counter-summit protests brought together activists from all over the world—from North and South, from a diversity of political positions and interests. They tended to have as their explicit goal shutting down or making visible the myriad oppositions and critiques of the Washington Consensus, including of the institutions that enforced neoliberalism. One of the most notable things about the counter-summits and the GJSM more broadly was the heterogeneity of political subjects that moved under its banner. These included more radical anti-capitalist groups seeing the abolition or shutting down of the Bretton Woods, G8 and other institutions as the only feasible alternatives and groups that were more interested in reforming these institutions. The famed collaboration or alliance of the “teamsters and the turtles” in Seattle in 1999 itself became the symbol for the ongoing efforts of those participating in the counter-summits to deal with and manage their internal diversity, in particular with respect to the different political visions and tactics each component was willing to take. This led to the

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84 This has of course been a point of internal caution and critique, for often people from the Global South have less opportunities to come to such events due to financial and legal restrictions. Overall, while certainly imbalanced towards the North in terms of physical participation, one of the notable things of the GJSM has been the recognition of the uneven opportunities and responsibilities of the North vis a vis the South as well as new ideas of the ways in which North and South have in common this opposition to neoliberalism and in some cases capitalism.
emergence of a number of innovative practices, forms of organizations, and terms or metaphors for describing and enabling the modality.

In Prague (2000) when protestors mobilized against the IMF and World Bank meetings, these protestors introduced a new tactic that was then elaborated and continued in Genoa against the G8. The protestors organized themselves into different colored segments, and each color corresponded to a different strategy or tactic that diverse groups of protestors were willing to use, effectively dividing the “urban terrain of resistance” into three color-coded zones (ibid: 123). For example, blue meant people were willing to participate in high-risk militant direct action, yellow signified those who primarily wanted to march and take little risk, and the pink march was to serve as a sort of intermediary. This plan had been developed over several months and by people who had learned from the successes and failures of the “hubs and spokes” model of small affinity groups in Seattle.\(^{85}\) People recognized that there needed to be some level of higher coordination while still respecting and valorizing the differences in tactics and visions among the protestors. This meant finding a way of having some form of unity, without imposing one modality of protest. In practice, however, this elaborate plan was radically altered. As Juris describes,

In practice, the Italian White overalls transformed the Yellow March into a mass of bodies engaged in spectacular symbolic confrontation, the Blue March became a battlefield pitting Black Block swarms hurling stones and Molotov Cocktails against riot police armed with water cannons and tear gas and the Pink March provided a space for creative non-violent blockades. Additional zones were established for decentralized actions… and a mobile blend of festive and militant tactics dubbed Pink and Silver. In the aftermath of Prague and certainly in Genoa this tactic or respecting difference, while providing some order and structure was elaborated upon (2008:124).

Often, counter-summits would combine both active opposition—even in the form of direct actions aimed at shutting down or blockading meetings—with well-organized

\(^{85}\) Klein 2000.
meetings/workshops to discuss and elaborate alternatives, as well as spaces for artmaking, live music and general sociality. At times these two would be spatially and geographically divided to allow different political leanings to have their own spaces while still sharing some common infrastructure. For example, a direct action counter-summit oriented at shutting down the G8 meetings would also be the site of alternative forums, seminars, meetings, etc. aimed at developing alternatives to capitalism—thus employing prefigurative, utopian and experimental practices in conjunction with more traditional movement practices of opposition, campaigns and protest.

This opposition to neoliberalism and even the tactic of counter-summits was not totally new. People had participated in them in Europe, in particular against NATO throughout the 80s and 90s, and riots and protests against structural adjustment programs and the like were common in the Global South from the late 1970s as well. However this particular incarnation of protest, beginning with Seattle, can be seen as a somewhat “new” entity. In large part this is because of certain features that can be said to constitute a new political modality or culture of politics. These hallmark features included internal diversity, working in affinity groups and networks, and a concerted effort to focus on the institutions seen as primarily responsible for promoting neoliberalism. In particular attention was paid to practices that combined the strengths and diverse positions vis a vis neoliberalism and global economic policies of North and South.

The transnational counter-summits prior to Genoa were important to the individuals and organizations or “areas” that prepared for Genoa. The counter-summits were inspirations as well as material and physical experiences in which numerous Italians actually participated.
Many Italians participated in different counter-summit protests; several went to Seattle\textsuperscript{86} and increasingly more attended later counter-summits including those in Quebec, Prague, Nice, Davos, and Gothenburg. In fact, Italians became increasingly important parts of several transnational networks and events, not all of which were counter-summits. As I will discuss in greater detail below, while counter-summits were the the most well-known and visible parts of the GJSM, in reality the GJSM itself refers to a much broader movement and network, including a series of more place-based movements events and practices—perhaps most notably the Zapatista movement and its global networks, as well as the World and Regional Social Forums. Genoa and the MoM were as much a product of the nascent ideas, practices and visions of social change emerging from this broader notion of the GJSM as they were of the protests against the Bretton Woods and other transnational institutions.

\textbf{Sociology of the MoM: Organizations and Actors at Genoa}

As with other protests and events within the GJSM, the organizations and networks that participated in the days of protest at Genoa were quite diverse in terms of their issues of concern and political ideologies as well as with respect to their political trajectories.\textsuperscript{87} Many built on political histories or realities that, while intersecting with the GJSM and its themes, were quite specific to Italy. Others were quite clearly spawned within the issues, cultures and lifetime of the GJSM. As we will see this “unity in diversity”—the coming together of many disparate figures from Italy’s Left, along with some global actors—was a critical aspect of the MoM, both in terms of making the event happen and in terms of the larger meaning of

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\textsuperscript{86} I have been unable to get an estimate of this number.

\textsuperscript{87} There was no real notation of the extent of racial, ethnic, income or gender diversity and for the most part in the Italian context diversity refers to political ideologies and backgrounds.
Diversity of tactics

As I described above, one of the recognizable aspects of the GJSM and the counter-summit protests in particular had been the development of tools for managing and even building on different layers of diversity. One of the key ways this was done was through the organization of thematic “piazzas” that were divided by theme and protest styles or tactics. Each sub group had different protest plans and routes, not to mention different perspectives on what the goals of the protest were. Whereas some wanted to shut down the meetings, and even the institution, others wanted to convince the G8 to reform its policies. As such, throughout all counter-summit protests, different groups, committed to and coming from different ideologies and protest strategies, set out with the intention of participating in certain activities and not others. Some planned to use civil disobedience and breach the “red zone,” while others intended to remain solely within designated protest routes. Others, most notoriously the Black Block, were actively involved in property destruction and more aggressive attacks on police, and refused to participate in any kind of mediation with police. The management and acceptance of such diverse tactics was one of the most theorized and narrated elements of the GJSM. The same is true for Genoa.

If we consider the first figure in Appendix A (Figure 7), it gives one portrayal of the diverse elements present at Genoa, and the second (Fig. 8) offers a slightly different one. At a first level the elements present at the protest are divided between those who participated in and saw themselves as operating under the umbrella of the Genoa Social Forum (the official coordinating entity), and those that refused to participate in any form of mediated negotiation with the police or perhaps even other Italian organizations.
Genoa Social Forum (GSF)

The coordination of the diverse groups and thematic areas was facilitated and made possible by the Genoa Social Forum (GSF). Like the MoM more broadly, the GSF was an entity that grew out of diverse strands of the Italian Left and their interaction with the GJSM at both the level of ideas and by their direct participation in events of the GJSM. In 2000 a group of organizations began to have regular meetings to plan for the summit of the eight most powerful heads of state, known as the G8. Following the first World Social Forum (WSF) that took place in January 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil (see more on WSF below), the organizing committee began calling itself the Genoa Social Forum and tried to employ the new ideas and practices that were being experimented with in this other important site of the GJSM. While certain organizations, most notably the more antagonistic Southern Rete No Global and numerous Black Block and anarchist groups, refused to join the GSF, or to allow it to “represent” them, the GSF served as the coordinating body for over 800 groups, and was important for international and Italian protestors alike. In preparing for the summit, spokespeople and representatives from all over Italy would attend monthly and then more frequent meetings. The experience of working in this form of network was a crucial one for many involved. Notably the GSF—or more precisely its remnants—continued to be an important part of the MoM. By this I mean not only the fact that GSF was a pivotal experience in which individuals and organizations with diverse political commitments were able to collaborate functionally and intensively to organize an event, but also the relationships forged through the GSF became the starting point for discussions and experiments in a more permanent Italian Social Forum (ISF), a project that ultimately

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88 The GSF turned out to be the de-facto starting point for the tumultuous and fraught experience of trying to develop a permanent coordinating structure for Italy’s MoM (to be called the Italian Social Forum (ISF) in the
failed, but that for at least two and a half years the ISF was an important convergence point for the MoM. Beyond that it served as the basis for many relationships and networks that would become more operational in the anti-war and issue-oriented movements that arose in the years following Genoa.

“The archipelago of protest”

Italian social movement scholar Donatella Della Porta refers to the over 800 organizations that officially participated in the organizing of the Genoa protests as an “archipelago of protest” (2002:39), portrayed in Figure 8, Appendix A. According to Della Porta’s team’s interviews done the week of the Anti-G8 protest, 39.5% of those who attended identified with Italy’s more traditional Left, i.e. ATTAC, Rifondazione Comunista, ARCI, and FIOM; 29.9% identified with the larger area associated with the Rete Lilliput—a large pacifist network, catholic base committees, voluntary associations, and mainstream environmentalism; 24.5% identified with the Social Centers, the most “radical” of the organized elements present at Genoa, while about 3.8 % stated that they identified not with a particular organization, but with a local forum, and the global movement more broadly. (Notably Della Porta explained the absence of anarchist or Black Block participants in her survey, suggesting that it is more due to their lack of trust in authority, and people with recording equipment, etc, than a reflection of their actual numbers.) Finally, many participants did not belong to organizations, but came as groups of individuals and friends—

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89 By organized I mean that they had official or functional participation in the GSF, and had some form of interlocution with the authorities.

90 Her mapping of this archipelago coincides more or less with the maps and descriptions activists and others have shared with me through interviews and other texts written and produced about Genoa, although most of those descriptions speak in greater nuance—and with strong opinions—about the different elements or areas that comprised the larger movement. These maps have also changed over time.
known as “affinity groups,” or in Italy as “cane sciolti” (loose dogs). Ultimately only 44.6% of those interviewed by Della Porta claimed to belong to an organization or organized area, and many others came via informal networks, affinity groups, or as individuals. International protestors also comprised a smaller but still important sector of the attendees.91

We can discuss those present at Genoa, and to a certain extent those comprising the MoM, as five groups: 1) Activists based out of the social center networks—the area associated with the Tute Bianche (translated to White Overalls) who create and become the Disobbedienti at Genoa; 2) Rifondazione Communista and its youth wing; 3) Grassroots Unions, including Cobas, and FIOM; 4) Groups more explicitly addressing “the global” — including environmental organizations and other NGOs, the area of ATTAC, as well as Rete Lilliput, who were comprised of pacifists & voluntary associations; 5) Groups refusing to enter, or simply existing at the margins of the formal network or archipelago represented by the GSF. These included Black Block, the Southern Rete No Global, as well as numerous alternative and counter-media activists and other “unaffiliateds.” For the purposes of this dissertation the most important elements are the activists based in social centers, the Rifondazione Comunista, but also the broader more amorphous group, of “cane sciolti,” (as well as the large group of media activists, international and Italian alike).92

Immediate Histories

Although the turnout for the Anti-G8 protest was unexpectedly large, surprising

91 I was unable to get numbers of international protestors present.
92 See Figure 9, Appendix B, for a handmade example of this kind of mapping. Also see Della Porta 2002; Juris 2007; Mazzonis et.al 2002; LiMes 2001. In the next chapter I describe the histories of several of these networks at some length.
police and organizers alike (both police and organizers had predicted only between 40-
100,000), Genoa did not erupt spontaneously. Moreover, it was not solely a product of the
counter-summit movement. In fact, while it may have marked a numeric and symbolic
watershed within and beyond Italy for many Italian activists I spoke with, it actually marked
the beginning of the end of the most exciting and powerful years of the MoM, which activists
locate between 1994-2001. We can understand the GSF and Anti-G8 protest in terms of 1)
particular events and organizing efforts within Italy; 2) participation and inspiration in other
events globally; as well as 3) the longer political and theoretical histories and cultures of
diverse strands of the Italian Left. I will describe the first two below, and deal with the third
in the next chapter.

Italy

The stage for the mobilization at Genoa was set by at least four smaller protests, all
within Italy, and that served as practicing grounds for the cooperation and coordination
among diverse political groups evidenced at Genoa. These smaller events introduced police
to new tactics that came to characterize the kinds of activism typical and therefore indicative
of the MoM. These experiences, taken cumulatively, not only helped facilitate the creation of
a common mythos and understanding of the larger movement and historical moment within
which these movements fell, they also gave Italians hands-on experiences of new and
different ways of organizing and protesting. There were at least four events within Italy in
which a similarly diverse assortment of organizations and groups came together to protest.
These included: 1) a smaller, but also violent, protest at the Global Forum in Napoli in
March, 2001; 2) a protest in Florence against the meeting of NATO in May 2000; 3) a protest
against a MobileTebio sponsored exhibit on biotechnology held in Genoa in May 2000,\textsuperscript{93} and finally a protest entitled “No OCSE” against the meeting of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in Bologna in June 2000.\textsuperscript{94}

Moreover, as I will explain further in the next chapter, many people who attended Genoa explained their participation in terms of dissatisfaction with Italian politics writ large, in particular to the newly elected government of Silvio Berlusconi, that came into office in January of that same year. The particularly large numbers for Saturday’s march are also the result of anger at the police violence on Friday, which in turn picks up on many historical experiences with state and far-right extremism, particularly in the 1970s.

Ultimately what events were and were not part of the immediate and relevant history of the MoM depended in large part on whom you asked and even when you asked them. There were numerous events that prepared or politicized particular “areas” and individuals in the MoM, thus becoming important in their own narratives and explanations of MoM and its origins. In describing the trajectory of the Tute Bianche and the Social Centers affiliated with the Carta De Milano,\textsuperscript{95} Federico Martelloni explains that the first protest held at a temporary

\textsuperscript{93} According to Della Porta et.al (2002) this protest got the most mainstream media attention, and was dubbed ‘the Italian Seattle, making it the most important precursor. However no one mentioned it in any of my interviews. Della Porta et. al 2002: 36; various interviews 2002-2006.

\textsuperscript{94} The No OCSE proved particularly important to my research. This was on the one hand because it took place in Bologna where I was based, such that many activists really cut their teeth there, and experienced the unity in diversity model of organizing, but also because for many, the No OCSE event was seen as a real success in terms of mobilization numbers and media coverage. In the narratives and histories of different Bolognese activists, the preparation and carrying out of this protest marked a high point for the MoM, indicating the capacity of different people and organizations to work together—a hallmark feature, also lauded by participants for years to come—was an important reason for Bologna’s important role (or perceived importance) in the MoM.

\textsuperscript{95} See Chapter 2: Briefly “Carta De Milano” was a document created in 1998, essentially establishing a network of social centers that tried to work together as a coordinated body. The document emerged from a struggle over whether or not it was ok for social centers to accept spaces or buildings from the city—i.e. to turn social centers from illegally occupied spaces, to spaces with some level of legality and therefore not always under threat of eviction. For the most part those social centers that signed onto the Carta were the ones most active in the Tute Bianche and the Genoa Social Forum. They were also seen as more “reformist” by more “antagonist centers”
detention center in Via Matei of Milano was key for the Tute Bianche to both see themselves as part of the global movement and also be aware that this was part of what might be a “real Movement.”

The Tute Bianche were already very active in Italy when the WTO blockade was underway in Seattle. They recognized themselves as part of a global struggle. One of their fundamental aims was the struggle for the freedom of movement of immigrants. In January of 2000 in Via Corelli, a camp for undocumented immigrants, they carried out an action with inflated truck tire innertubes, based mainly on the concept of ‘protected civil resistance.’ The strong media presence led the media to speak for the first time of ‘internment camps’ and no longer of ‘reception centers.’ The struggle for freedom of movement and against barriers and borders in a world in which money and goods but not bodies of men and women, can freely circulate, quickly linked with a global struggle (FM quoted in “Disobbedienti! 2002).

GJSM: From History to Cultural Politics

In recognizing Genoa and various Italian networks and events as part of the global struggle, we must recall that the global movement—GJSM—is constituted by far more than the visible and spectacular counter-summit protests. While popularly this global movement is defined by, and limited to, these sensational counter-summit protests, the GJSM is also closely identified with the global networks of more place-based struggles against neoliberalism, as exemplified by the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, as well as spaces and events working for global alternatives, like the World Social Forum. Moreover, the chronology or delineation of the GJSM has itself always been a site of contestation and multiplicity, because there is no singular trajectory. Whereas some date the start of the GJSM to the who refused to negotiate with the state.
Zapatista uprising of 1994, and others to Seattle 1999, and still others to the J18 (June 18) 1999 shutting down of London’s Financial Center, what is clear is that the global nature is more about a recognition of the cumulatively common nature of these various events and organizations than a definitively “global” structure or organization. Alternatively, one can think of the GJSM as constituted by diverse trajectories and organizations that around 1999 and beyond started to see themselves as part of this global movement not only because of their common targets—i.e. Bretton Woods Institutions and neoliberalism—but also because of a shared political culture (or culture of politics) and a shared political imaginary.

An apt description of the ensemble of movements, struggles and events and the ways they relate to each other to constitute this “movement of movements” is articulated by an activist collective as follows:

Many describe Seattle as our movement’s ‘coming-out party’. For we didn’t emerge out of nowhere; a multitude of struggles had been slowly growing in the shadows... Against World Bank mega-projects, like the Narmada dam in India. Against the privatisation of public utilities, such as water struggles in South Africa. Against the enclosure of land with movements in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Mexico. Against employment reforms, like the ship-building and automobile strikes in South Korea. And against the meeting of the G7 heads of state, like the global day of action on June 18th 1999, the last time they met in Germany. The movement didn’t begin in Seattle, but its importance lay in its resonance both in the city’s streets and well beyond. It was a moment of intensity – none of us were alone anymore – even if we’d never been to Seattle or seen a WTO representative.

In the years which followed, lines of resistance and creation – the production of other worlds – could be traced around the world. These were lines which connected the counter-summit mobilisations in Washington DC, Chiang Mai, Prague, Quebec and Genoa. They linked European social centres with farmers’ struggles in India; the Argentinian piqueteros with free software movements; struggles for free access to education and knowledge with those against biotechnology. Spaces – both real and virtual – were created to build, strengthen and develop networks of resistance and creation: Peoples’ Global Action, the Indymedia news network, the World Social Forum and hundreds of local versions (Turbulence Editorial Collective 2007: 1).

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96 Notes from Nowhere Collective 2003
The various elements of the GJSM, including counter-summits, as well as other events and networks described below, served as material sites and events where Italians, as individuals, networks and organizations attended, gained experiences, made relationships, planned future actions, and participated in the elaboration of political practices and ideas (often in the form of analytical texts). As such when we describe Genoa as part of the GJSM, or more pointedly the GJSM events as part of Genoa’s “history,” this refers to the history of material events that build to Genoa, but also to an emergent culture and practice of politics—in particular a notion of anti-capitalist politics—that is itself read and authored by these other “events” and spaces of the GJSM. In what follows I describe the three primary components or sites of the GJSM that are relevant both for producing Genoa as an actual event and for co-creating the set of meanings, practices and ideas of politics and social change that Genoa then represents.

We can speak generally of three components that proved to be key to the development of Genoa, MoM, as well as the GJSM, both ideationally and materially: These are 1) the transnational counter-summits (already discussed above); 2) the Zapatista

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97 In many ways everything I am writing about should be referred to as anti-capitalist (except for some of the networks in the GSF, and as we will see in the WSF). I do not use the term often because as we move on to discuss the frameworks for thinking and doing movement present in the MoM, we will see that they are premised on Marxism and anti-capitalism, such that the qualifier is unnecessary. In some senses the GJSM’s attempt at including radical diversity has included many subjects that do not define themselves as anti-capitalist, even though one could, and I have made the argument that they should understand themselves as anti-capitalists. See “interview with the editors” in Turbulence 2010, and Osterweil 2004a. When I discuss cultural politics below it will be clear that I see the cultural politics I describe as decidedly anti-capitalist. However, as I shall also describe capitalism, and its opposition is insufficient to explain the political imaginaries I claim the GJSM and MoM are bringing into being.

98 I will discuss these elements and the cultural-political nature of the new political modality in greater detail in the next section.

99 In a certain sense the main concept to be thought with here is “networks”—however not simply in the more obvious sense of transnational networks that are consciously in network with one another (cf Keck & Sikkink 1998; Smith et.al 1997), but as a form of understanding relationally and relationality. See Escobar 2000; 2008; Latour 1993; Juris 2008; Terranova 2004.
movement and the related transnational activist and communication networks;\(^{100}\) and 3) the World Social Forum Process. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, events affiliated with these three served as sites where particular Italian activists gained material experiences and skills, and where they also learned and helped author new ideas, norms, imaginaries, and theories—as well as the hallmark attributes and meanings I will discuss in the next part. These were in turn circulated and elaborated in and beyond the transnational events, via the internet, and through informal channels.

**Zapatistas and Global (anti-capitalist) networks**

The Zapatista movement gained worldwide attention on January 1, 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect, when several thousand armed Zapatista insurgents in the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) successfully took over several major cities and towns in Chiapas, Mexico. While they did take up arms, their revolution was relatively bloodless—the few fatalities were caused by the Mexican army. Since 1994, the Zapatista movement has developed in quite important and interesting ways, from attempts to negotiate for recognition of indigenous law and autonomy with the government (San Andres Accords, 1996) to the elaboration and establishment of an alternative system of governance based on autonomous communities, committees and governance structures called Caracoles and the launching of “La Otra Campagna”—the other campaign for a new Mexican constitution in 2005.

The Zapatista uprising of 1994 and the ensuing ongoing movement of the Zapatista

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\(^{100}\) A separate category could/should be Indymedia and Free Software movements. I include them with the Zapatistas, recognizing that they don’t fit fully within that classification—they were invented in relation to the Seattle 1999 protests. Again every event (Seattle, Genoa, etc) has its specificities, and is then articulated with other things, and is then known as part of the GJSM.
communities in Chiapas was referred to as one of the most important events in the GJSM. This is true both in terms of people’s understandings of the trajectory and chronology of the GJSM and in their own politicization and participation in the Italian MoM. While the Zapatista movement is iconically important to activists around the world, the resonance of the movement, and in particular the new visions of social change and political practices the Zapatistas invented and then spoke and wrote about, became a particularly critical element of the way the MoM in Italy was described and defined. Several activists explained their participation in Genoa and the broader movement in terms of the novelties posited by the Zapatistas, stressing the way they basically re-thought a series of tensions that characterized the Leftist paradigms to which they were accustomed.

Zapatismo in a sense resituates all of a series of classical polarities of the 20th century, challenging precisely their polarity: Reform/Revolution; Vanguard/Class; Seizing Power/Classical Reformism; Violence/Non-Violence. In some form the Zapatistas kill these polarities. And above all this performs a grand “squat” of the imagination, in which I am the vanguard, but I am not the vanguard but rather just one part, not the only one and not the best... (FM Interview, Bologna, November 13, 2002).

There is clearly not enough room to do justice to this social movement that has gripped the imaginations of millions across the world. What is important to recognize is that beyond the movement in Mexico, the Zapatistas can be credited with helping to launch the idea and reality of the GJSM. They did so not only by innovatively using the internet and other technologies, but also by developing some of the key ideas and practices of the GJSM. These concepts and practices have been referred to as a cultural politics of Zapatismo, and have been key to inspiring individual and collective participation the MoM. While the list

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101 There is a vast and growing literature: See Leyva Solano 2003; Holloway 1998; Khasnabish 2008; Midnight Notes 2001; Harvey 1998; Conant 2010.
of terms, phrases and practices zapatismo has contributed is too long to list succinctly here they include: autonomy, to change the world without taking power, to walk while questioning, the critique of traditional notions of solidarity, and to lead while obeying. All of these are not only interesting in and of themselves; they are important for their critique of politics as usual, as well as the ways they modify and critique Leftist and Marxist theoretical and political frameworks that traditionally dominated the Anti-Capitalist Left.

Beyond its influence in terms of imaginaries and inspiration, the Zapatista movement served as the site for several events that proved critical for the development of the MoM. Two particularly important events, both for the development of the GJSM, and Italians’ participation in that development, were the First and Second Intercontinental Encounters for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, in 1996 and 1997 respectively. The first was held in La Realidad—an indigenous community in Chiapas, and the second took place in Barcelona, Spain in 1997. Around 3000 people attended each of these events, and I have been told that Italians were among the most numerous delegates at both, and were pivotal in creating the idea of the global or transnational network that would officially emerge in 1998 as the The People’s Global Action (PGA). In 2001 the Zapatistas organized the March of Indigenous Dignity, or the March of the Color of the Earth, a large caravan of Zapatistas and Zapatista supporters travelling from Chiapas to Mexico City, and that was comprised of many international activists. Italian activists, many through the networks of social centers and associations Ya Basta! And Tute Bianche attended and were a notable presence. Several of my initial interviews referred back to this experience as being formative.103


103 There was some controversy about the Italian presence at the 2001 Caravan. The Italian delegation was accused of acting like a military outfit, and assigning themselves the role of bodyguards to the Zapatistas,
The PGA was launched as a transnational network involving social movements from the North and South, ranging from the Karanatak Farmer’s Movement in India to Reclaim the Streets in the UK. While the idea for the PGA was hatched at the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Intercontinental Encuentro, it was officially convened at a meeting in Geneva in February 1998, meant to serve as a tool for global communication and coordination. The PGA launched the “Global days of action” which were in turn the basis for the counter-summits. November 30, 1999—the date of the Seattle protests that shut down the WTO was itself launched by the PGA as the third global day of action.\textsuperscript{104} The PGA was important part of the entire GJSM—both in terms of infrastructure—i.e. the material networks of people and organizations—as well as in terms of generating new notions and aims of politics, along with a particular political culture\textsuperscript{105}. The hallmarks of the PGA, while not quite as iconic as the Zapatista keywords, were also very important to the emergent political culture and cultural politics of the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian wings of the GJSM.\textsuperscript{106} They were an attempt to define, and, in a sense theorize a new framework for conceptualizing the politics of this “new movement” outside of the traditional Leftist approaches. These include:

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation;
2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings.

\hfill irritating many other attendees. Various interviews and conversations, Bologna and Mexico 2007.

\textsuperscript{104} Juris 2008: 48.

\textsuperscript{105} Thoroughly explaining the distinction between political culture and cultural politics, wouldr require a much longer discussion. For now, the best would be to think of them as a related set of terms, all of which point to the centrality of culture in politics. I will discuss this at greater length in the next section. See also Escobar 1992; 1998. Osterweil 2004b; Grossberg and Nelson 1988; Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler 1992. About the cultures of politics of the GJSM see Juris 2008; Chesters and Welsh 2006.

\textsuperscript{106} For more on PGA see Juris 2008; Routledge 2005; Routledge and Cumbers 2009.
3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker;
4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism;
5. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy.\textsuperscript{107}

Italians, particularly from the Ya Basta! and Tute Bianche networks situated mainly in Italy’s Social Centers, initially took a lead role in the PGA. However while numerous individuals and associations remained interested and invested, the more organized political components of the movement soon became disinterested.\textsuperscript{108} Beyond the PGA there were numerous other networks within the same anti-capitalist space and with similar political cultures. Many were informal, or networked in communication and culture, but not officially organized into “transnational networks” as traditionally understood, including for example Indymedia, Direct Action Network, as well as more NGO based networks, such as Jubilee 2000.\textsuperscript{109}

**Social Forums**

Faced with growing criticisms about the purely negative content of the counter-summit protests, and the articulated need to develop alternatives, the World Social Forum (WSF) was first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2001, and was initiated by Brazil’s Worker’s Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT), Le Monde Diplomatique and a few other

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\textsuperscript{108} The story of Italian activist networks losing interest in the PGA is something I wish I had found out more about. The relationship of the Italian networks to PGA was strained shortly after its inception for reasons that are not completely clear to me, but have something to do with the internal moves by many within social center networks to experiment with closer relationships to political parties and local institutions. (See chapter 2.)

\textsuperscript{109} See Indymedia website; Jubilee 2000, Graeber 2009; Juris 2008. Putting together a list of the literatures dealing with the histories, cartographies and ethnographies of these various networks and their intersections would be a very worthwhile dissertation project.
The WSF is an international open forum for creating, discussing, debating and coordinating alternatives to neo-liberalism. It was originally founded to counter-pose the World Economic Forum, an annual meeting of the world’s most powerful leaders, corporations, and non-profit agencies usually held in Davos, Switzerland. Whereas the World Economic Forum determines policy by stressing the economic, the WSF was developed to assert that “the social” should also be taken into consideration, equally or moreso than the economy. Today assessments of the WSF are mixed, due in part to the fact that beginning in 2004, and especially since 2006, the WSF has been held in different locations throughout the world and requires different local organizing and local considerations. Still for several years many have considered the WSF to be one of the most novel and potentially transformative progressive political ideas and experiments in recent times.  

The WSF is marked by certain key practices and values that resonate in many ways with other elements of the GJSM, including the counter-summits and Zapatista movement, but these features are also quite distinct. While not always lived out in practice, the WSF’s charter of principles expresses explicit commitment to being a non-party, non-directional space of encounter, debate and reflective thinking, and explicitly opposes becoming a movement for something.  

As its charter of principles states:

The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, and non-party context that, in a de-centralized fashion interrelates organizations and

110 See for example, Santos, 2004; Conway 2007; see also Sen et al 2004; Fisher and Ponniah 2003; Blau and Karides 2008.

111 Santos (2004) suggests this means the WSF is a different kind of movement, functioning according to different logics.
movements engaged in concrete actions at levels from the local to international – to build another world.\textsuperscript{112}

One of the most controversial and provocative aspects of the WSF is its refusal to produce campaigns or programs for anything in particular. In the terms of one of its founders, it is meant to be an open space rather than become a movement oriented in a particular direction.\textsuperscript{113} While there continue to be ongoing debates and disagreements about this, it is clear that the WSF is at least attempting to produce a different kind of political entity. As a deliberative, horizontal and non-party space for developing alternatives to neoliberalism, the WSF posits an organizational and political alternative to politics as usual, and this was clearly one of the reasons it was seen as inspirational and important to the MoM, at least early on. It is no small matter that directly following Genoa 2001, local social forums emerged throughout Italy, with most cities and numerous towns instituting or attempting to have some version of them. One of the most important and inspiring things about the social forums, and the GJSM more broadly are their commitments to diversity and the power of non-directive spaces for thinking and reflection.

In addition, and like the Zapatistas, the WSF rejects the participation of political parties, and considers itself contributing to new forms of politics. However whereas the Zapatistas come from a Latin American Marxist and Guerilla tradition, the WSF emerges more from the history and networks of NGO and UN Summits—Feminist, Environmental and others. Notably in the space of the WSF, and at times at counter-summits as well, the multiplicity of political cultures and experiences really do seem to co-exist, and even


\textsuperscript{113} See Whitaker 2004 and Teivanen 2004 for a discussion of the open space concept. See also Open Space Forum http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-index.php
influence each other. As some have described it, social forums have themselves been sites of struggle among very divergent elements of the broader GJSM. Notably from the first WSF in 2001, to more recent versions, the WSF has changed quite substantially, in large part as a reaction and response to critiques by more anti-authoritarian, libertarian and anti-capitalist networks.\textsuperscript{114}

Since the inception of social forums, Italians were some of the most numerous participants from beyond South America to attend the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre; in 2003 they were the third most represented country after Brazil and Argentina. This is largely why they were asked to host the first European Social Forum, held in 2002 in Florence, Italy at the Fortezza del Basso. Italian activists continued to attend subsequent Social Forums in Paris in 2003, London in 2004, Athens in 2006, and Malmo in 2008 in high numbers.

1.3 \textbf{Genoa—A story that is greater than the sum of its parts}

This section will focus on the way Genoa, and in particular people’s narratives and descriptions of Genoa, at times bleeding into, or becoming synonymous with descriptions of the MoM more broadly, point to the discursive and symbolic nature of MoM. It will then also look at the way Genoa itself must be understood as a symbol or shorthand for a new political modality, on the one hand, and a space of politicization on the other. While I have tried to give a sense of Genoa—the event—in the section above, in this section of the chapter I will explore the what Genoa came to mean. I will show how descriptions and narratives about Genoa point to several things. First to the event-like status of Genoa; turning it into not simply an occurrence that took place, but also a turning point and point of departure. This in

\textsuperscript{114} For an excellent description see Nunes 2005. See also Sen et.al, 2004.
turn relates to the ways other parts of the GJSM were read. Second, the ways in which Genoa is seen to denote and serve as a symbol for a broader political imaginary that is in turn legible in part through elements it promotes, and in large part as a critique of politics past. I will argue that three elements in particular come to characterize this new political imaginary, namely difference, autonomy and reflexivity. In the case of Genoa, difference seems to be the most prominent, but is intimately linked to the other two.

**Nothing will be the Same After Genoa**

As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, throughout my interviews and ethnographic research on the MoM, Genoa was almost always a key point or reference. Whether it marked the highest point, or the beginning of the end in people’s chronologies, it was a requisite and important point of the story. However for the most part rather than stress the violent, physical and messy occurrences of the actual event of July 19-22 2001, Genoa was spoken of as something much bigger and more difficult to pin down. On the one hand people tended to speak about Genoa in quite surprising ways; many of which seemed to have nothing to do with the political aims of the GJSM, or even of politics and protest traditionally defined. On the other, Genoa was related to a number of movements and happenings within Italy that didn’t seem to have anything to do with the 2001 protest of Genoa itself. Time and time again the term “Genoa” was used to connote something far bigger than the circumscribed event.

Perhaps the most striking thing was that in almost every narrative about Genoa ranging from my interviews to published texts, Genoa was described as a crucial turning point, a watershed, a momentous event after which nothing could be the same. Consider the
following examples:

Genoa is the watershed. The division. The frontier. After Genoa nothing is like it was before. Everything changes. (two Disobbedienti leaders, group interview, Porto Alegre, 2003).

After Genoa we continued, and there is a high point of explosion of militancy/activism. Everything was yours: you went wherever and occupied everything… (female student activist, interview Bologna October 2006).

From there nothing would be like it was before. Genova from its very core has the characteristics of an event. And like all events, it is able to condense together features that are extremely virtuous, to touch on the most profound limits and to make us think about the present, past and future of each one of us, no? And for me this is what happens… And therefore from Genoa on I decide to dedicate my life to this (student/social center activist, interview Rome 2006).

However what would never be the same, and why it was described in such terms is rather elusive. That is to say, what is so novel and exciting is not easily understood or named, especially with respect to conventional understandings and expectations of politics. Whereas in some cases what referring to Genoa as a turning point meant is more clear— i.e. the notion that Genoa marked a return to protest after many years without much,— in other cases, the naming of Genoa as a turning point seems to be synonymous with claims to sheer and momentous novelty—i.e. where the limits of present, past and future were touched upon—seemed to be more obscure and to do other kinds of work.

Consider for example the words of a man who was a local chapter president of ARCI, a national association of neighborhood/leisure circles affiliated with the Communist Party, as he described Genoa,

My political trajectory—also on an emotional plane—has changed a great deal since Genova. Before I considered Italy a democratic country… I respected the laws and… but at Genova I saw how my country had been reduced. There things without any sense or reason happened. There I experienced shame for Italy. It made me change the way I watch and see things… I look differently at institutions now, before I had a lot of confidence in the institutions, now I
hardly believe in them at all…(chapter president, ARCI—interview June, 2002).

Numerous people I spoke with, or who were interviewed by others, expressed a similar sentiment. In fact, many of the people who had expected to go to Genoa to have their voices heard about the issues at hand, like the injustices of neoliberal globalization or even the lack of democracy within those economic institutions, were shocked into disillusionment with the Italian state and with democracy at a much more profound level. For many of these people, Genoa was a radicalizing moment, revealing a far more violent and entrenched system that was not willing to respond to reasonable demands. For them Genoa as a turning point was a rather personal experience, causing a total shift in their political consciousness. However, Genoa marked shifts and ruptures in political consciousness in more ways than this. Beyond trauma and disillusionment, other people described the watershed nature of Genoa as something positive, magical even. For the young woman quoted above, barely 20 when she attended Genoa, the event meant a new period where the world was yours for the taking—“you went everywhere, occupied everything.” Others spoke of Genoa as “reintroducing the possibility of politics” after at least two decades without any.

At a basic level, and almost unanimously proclaimed, Genoa was seen to mark a return to politics, after over two decades of relative calm with respect to social movements. This return to protest was important because it seemed to blatantly disprove the widely held “end of history hypothesis,” Fukayama’s argument that with the fall of the Soviet Union, society had reached its final stage of development, that ideological differences were gone,

\[115\] This is eerily similar to quotes from activists in the Pantera movement circa 1991. They describe occupations as creating the world anew daily and speak to the ways moments of movement are extremely interesting in the similar affective experiences they entail. This resonates with numerous depictions of counter-summit protests and experiences of movements the world over and have been described as virtuosic (Juris 2008; Virno 2004), moments of excess (Free Association 2004), as well as movement plateaus (Chesters and Welsh 2005; 2006).
and the definitive winner of the race to progress was the Capitalist, Liberal Democratic model. Not to be underestimated, the movement of Genoa, seen both within an Italian and global perspective, was viewed as important. Even if it did not posit immediately feasible alternatives to neo-liberalism nor turn into a durable new structure or party, it did reintroduce on a relatively large or public scale the possibility of contesting the present state of things and the search for discovering and implementing alternatives.

Given that one of the most powerful and insidious characteristics of the thirty years since 1968 had been the apparent victory of the TINA ideology (There Is No Alternative), a victory supported by the apparent absence of contestation, this very basic return to visible protest was substantial. To a certain extent, what was important about Genoa and these movements was again not so much for and about what people were fighting, but the fact that they were there and moving. As we will see however, it is not true to suggest that there were no movements or politics in these decades. As we shall see through further readings of Genoa as a turning point and as an apex of a new modality, it is not simply that people are there and moving, but that there are numerous different people and organizations moving together, and in particular ways. These “ways” can be understood positively as part of a new political modality but also in their common critique and rejection of politics past.

Genoa was not the only “event” referred to in such momentous terms—as something after which nothing can be the same, as a rupture and novelty in the very ways of doing and thinking politics and movement (and, as we shall see, being and society more generally). — Zapatismo particularly and the GJSM more generally were also referred to as radically new

116 Fukayama 1989. Clearly the end of history thesis was never true, nor was there ever a time when people stopped living differently or contesting the dominant state of things. The point is with the MoM activism and contestation were visible again, and at a large scale. This is particularly true in Italy where the movements’ artifacts were on display in bookstores, in newspapers, journals and in many other places of daily life.
and as radical breaks with the past. Consider phrases such as, “One needn’t forget that zapatismo has closed definitively with the 20th century, constituting an epochal rupture with respect to the imaginaries of the historic left;” or as Marco Revelli, well known Leftist intellectual and former head of Lotta Continua, put it, referring to zapatismo, “it was history taking off again after the end of history.” In fact, at the high point of the movement there was a general jubilation about this return to protest; this jubilation however seemed to have as much to do with the problems associated with previous modes of doing politics—both mainstream and within the Left—as it did with the actual nature of the “new” and “epochal” politics causing all of the excitement. At a very basic level the assertion of Genoa as watershed and turning point speaks to this critique of politics past.

All of this points to the fact that Genoa functions in large part through the meanings it generates—in terms of the new stories, myths and theories it helps to circulate—and by what it produces and makes legible, as well as the problems in past politics it elucidates in the process. In many cases we learn more about what Genoa or the MoM was by how other events are read through Genoa, than by what events, actors and even meanings were actively or positively attributed to it. As such, by looking at more examples of the ways Genoa was described, we begin to learn how a large part of this meaning-making work produces a new political culture and imaginary—one which challenges the parameter of what counts as political, and what the aims of a movement should be.

Central to this political imaginary was the notion and valorization of engagement among diverse parts, or the valorization of difference.

**Difference**

The ability to work with and across differences, or to find some form of “unity” in the diversity and fragmentation of the Left, has been perceived as one of the main obstacles to the success of the Left, for many years, in particular since 1968. As such, it is perhaps no surprise that a movement that was seen to have found novel and functional ways to cope with and even work from the plurality of subjects that comprised it, would be the source of so much excitement.

Throughout my earlier interviews, one of the reasons Genoa was seen as a turning point had to do with the new qualities of politics it brought into being. For example, various activists praised Genoa, and the GSF, for being a unique and phenomenal experience precisely because of the surprisingly effective way this model worked, despite the seemingly insurmountable political and cultural differences including different perspectives vis-à-vis the use of violence, views of the role of the state, as well as myriad visions and alternatives posited, no to mention different epistemologies and cosmovisions.

One of my most memorable early conversations in which I found myself surprised by the centrality of this ability to work with difference was with two members of the Dissobedienti network, a network that was born at Genoa out of various social center networks and the Tute Bianche. The lively interview took place on a shaded patch of grass near the river at the center of Porto Alegre’s largest parks, home of the WSF’s Youth Camp during the 2003 World Social Forum.

118 Laclau and Mouffe’s 1985 *Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy* can be considered one of the pivotal texts in this line of thinking, but there are numerous others, ranging from feminist efforts at articulating politics of difference to engagements with Habermasian notions of the public sphere, to Deleuzian and Guattari’s multiplicities. (see Fraser 1990, Benhabib 1997, Anzaldua 1990; Grossberg 1992, Deleuze and Guattari 1987.) Most recently Hardt and Negri’s *Empire and Multitude* 2000, 2004, have done a lot to attempt to rethink how to rethink the relations of difference in the action of a political subject.

119 At the time I interviewed these two, they represented amusingly disparate positions within the spectrum of
N & Fr: Genoa is the watershed. The division. The frontier. After Genoa nothing is like it was before. Everything changes.

Me: Because of Carlo?

N& Fr: No! No.

Fr: For the fact that for the first time this plural communication is constructed—in a horizontal coordinating committee, something that has never existed on the Italian Left.

Fr: This was an absurd experience for me because I was at the table discussing matters with the Catholics, with Vittorio Agnolletto, with the FIOM, (The CGIL was not there), The Lilliput Network- people never seen, never!! And even so, they would say the same thing about me, they knew, in fact they were terrified, but we had never constructed something together, not even locally, but instead, after that thing [Genoa] in every region forms of relationships, forms for coordinating common initiatives were created.
(interview Porto Alegre, January 2003.)

At the time this conversation seemed notable because throughout my initial period of fieldwork (during 2 months in 2002, and then at the European Social Forum in November of the same year), the Disobbedienti had been the most skeptical about the MoM, and especially the Italian Social Forum,¹²⁰ which is essentially what the GSF became. What becomes clear here is that even for them, and even though they are critical of many other areas of the movement, the reason Genoa is seen as a watershed has something to do not only with the ability to communicate across and with difference, but with the political difference that difference makes.

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¹²⁰ The Italian Social Forum was an attempt to maintain a coordinating body/space for the various networks, organizations and individuals—including the local social forums—in the years following Genoa. It was always highly contentious, and its fractious end in 2004 following a heated meeting of several hundred in Bologna, coincided in large part with the end of the MoM, conceived of as an active political space/body. (As I have tried to show and will argue more thoroughly in the next chapter, the end of the MoM as a space, did not at all coincide with the MoM as a presence or politically productive entity—especially in terms of its being key to a political imaginary, that is a new idea or story of politics. (See chapter 3).
While Lefts the world over have had to face the problem of difference and fragmentation, the Italian situation can be considered particularly fractious. The fact that Genoa (and the years surrounding it) saw the presence of such a diverse set of actors was significant for a number of reasons. First, the sheer number and diversity of the organizations that did participate was itself rather unique in the history of the Italian Left. In January that year, Italian representatives at the first World Social Forum (WSF) acknowledged that it was only as a testimony to the novelty of the GJSM and spaces like the WSF that otherwise disparate and even contentious Italian Left could be brought together in this way:

It was necessary for an extraordinary event like this Forum, to be able to bring together such diverse things that in Italy are often jealous and litigious…. It was not a given that the CGIL, Fiom, Cobas, Arci, Ics, Prc, Ya Basta!, Punto rosso, Lilliput, Lila, the equi-solidarity businesses, NGOs, all the anti-Liberal press, etc are able to find a common language so rare in Italy, here. In sight of the Genovese counter-summit that intends to collect, not only symbolically the experiences of the Forum…this is a very relevant fact (Calabria January 30 2001).

Remarkably, the actual diversity at Genoa and its significance extended beyond the cooperation among “organized groups” and included the novel fact that there were so many unaffiliated individuals. According to people I interviewed, there had not been such a strong turnout of “unaffiliated individuals” (cani sciolti) in quite some time. This meant there were a number of individuals and small groups that were participating in the protest not because the organization they were a member of (i.e. political party, neighborhood association, social center, etc.) had endorsed it and encouraged attendance, but rather as individuals and small groups of people who wanted to express themselves politically and without mediation by another organization or mechanism. The fact that they did this not only outside of the more

121 As we will see in Chapter 2, the particular history of the Italian left and the Communist party, in particular in the aftermath of the historical compromise and 1970s, has a lot to do with this. Some of my interviewees also suggested that this has to do with the fragmented or heterogeneous nature of Italy as a state.
traditional political process (i.e. electoral or lobbying), but also outside the more traditional avenues of extra-parliamentary representation—i.e. political parties and trade unions—was considered notable. These unaffiliated protestors introduced an even more profound element of diversity as well as a critique of traditional forms of representative organizations.

The involvement of diverse actors, even many that were not professional or habitual activists or politicians, was itself seen as a crucial aspect of Genoa, one that references to Genoa came to connote even when the movement was seen to be in decline. Pierluigi Sullo, founder of CARTA, a weekly magazine created largely out of interest in the global MoM, often speaks of other movements vis a vis their relationship to Genoa, and the highpoint of the MoM—even after the movement is seen to be declining:

> Whoever had some doubts about the state of health of the alter-globalization movement, and above all else, about what this term means, could have made a trip to Scanzano Ionico last Sunday. In the epicenter of the most unexpected (and most successful) popular rebellion, that one against the creation of a nuclear waste deposit site, a Southern “assembly” of social movements was convened in the most informal way possible, literally through word of mouth. Scanzano functions by now, and not only in the South, how in their time, the days of Genoa against the G8 did, perhaps not as a model, but as a very strong influence, a suggestion (Sullo 2004: 4).

When I interviewed Sullo in 2006, he described the battles of Val Di Susa against the building of a high velocity train and the No Dal Molin struggle against a US military base in Vicenza, a town outside of Venice, as being part of the MoM legacy because of certain qualities. For example, the fact that they were not simply comprised of activists and politicians, but were sustained movements of diverse people in the places where they lived protesting unwanted and undemocratic development projects. As with the above description of Scanzano Ionico, the features of permanent assemblies, the critique and rejection of the politics of politicians on both the Right and Left, and the diversity of actors echo those
practices, qualities and ideals generated in the GJSM.

Overall, the valorization of difference was to prove one of the key and yet most difficult to maintain of the MoM ideals. The horizontal, plural form of coordination and organization (often invoking reference to the network form) and space for discussion among different parts was very clearly one of the legacies of the GJSM/MoM—both within Italy, and globally.\textsuperscript{122} This is evidenced by positive descriptions of the powerful and novel parts of Genoa and the MoM, as well as by the fact that it is precisely the loss of this ability to work together across and with differences that is seen as both evidence and cause of the end, and failure, of the MoM, at least within Italy. In fact what I would come to see more clearly after the movement had supposedly died, after 2004, that it was the very fact of a space of transversality, debate, discussion among diverse subjects; the very fact of engagement with and across difference, that was a large part of what made the movement significant.\textsuperscript{123}

Ultimately, we learn both about the fact of difference and how both difference and plurality were valorized, by the ways Genoa and the period surrounding it were spoken of after the MoM was considered to be faltering. Moreover, later descriptions reveal a more articulate and theorized understanding of the political effectivity of Genoa—as both a political space and as a symbol.

Consider an excerpt of an interview conducted five years after Genoa:

OK then, in my opinion, in one way, the politics of difference, and the research of the common, had its highest point at Genoa 2001. But like all the things you live, like all the parts that one has of one’s life—I am taking a point of view of the feminine gender—it is not that when things change you forget. A phrase that we use very often to explain this is that to change does

\textsuperscript{122} I have written at great length about the importance of difference to the new political modality and culture of politics. See Osterweil 2008, also chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{123} As I will discuss in Chapter 3, it was also what allowed it to be conceived of as a real mass Movement, in implied contrast to other smaller movements—with the potential to affect things on a systemic level.
not mean to go backwards (or go back). Therefore that kind of relationship among diverse parts, is something that still belongs to us, it has changed our DNA. That concept of getting beyond hegemony—beyond that politics that remains slow and masculine—in one way or another today for me it is a given, but not only for us, for everyone here that participated in those days and the months in preparation for Genoa, so that this is now part of our DNA (Bolognese Disobbedienti, interview, Nov 2006).

Or another example wherein in trying to explain the power and force of Genoa, the editorial collective of Derive Approdi asks,

How do we act in the wake of Genoa, in a scenario that has shifted greatly and is rife with problems? We return today to bet on the persistence of movement understood as a complex space of politicization, in which there are multiple collective and singular experiences of political agitation and social conflictuality, experimentations in practices and languages that aren’t reducible to the sum of their parts (Derive Approdi 2003-2004:3).124

The reference to this common space of struggle, defined as a “complex space of politicization,” speaks specifically to the Italian experience in the years immediately following Genoa. It also shows several aspects to which internal heterogeneity and diversity are linked. These aspects include the formation of critical subjectivities, new forms of militancy outside of traditional parties, and placing existing models of and for social change in discussion more generally.

**Primavera dei movimenti and a Common Space of Struggle**

124 The article continues: “…That which we leave behind is happily clear and (in large part) shared: the school of the third internationalist parties; indoctrination, the transmission of interpretive schema that are ideological, homogeneous and acritical, elaborated in restricted circles of the directors and dictated beneath the form of notes for the new generation of militants. And still we have the problem: organize, experiment and diffuse new processes of formation in network—capable of making their own the indispensable plurality that is presupposed, and the richness of the global movement. The stakes are high: we are not speaking anymore about reproducing political leaders, but to attempt formative experiences so that radically put in discussion the existing models. Construct here and now other universities, open spaces of formation of critical subjectivities, sediment and enrich the multiple expressions of subjectivization, without alienating them from inventive power.” (ibid.)
For approximately two to three years following Genoa, Italy was filled with ongoing and numerically impressive social mobilizations, strikes, and movement events concerned with a variety of issues. These issues included labor reform, immigrants’ rights, peace/anti-war, the reform of the universities, and precarity. This period between 2001-2003 came to be known as the “Primavera dei Movimenti” (springtime of Movements), and all of the events within it were known as part of the larger MoM. Some events and campaigns were viewed to be more explicitly part of the “global” movement. These included the march on occasion of the Food and Aid Organization (FAO) Summit in Rome June, 2002; the European Social Forum in Florence, November 2002 and Paris, October 2003, as well as the anti-War movement reaching a peak Feb 15, 2003 with a march of 3 million. Italians participated in a number of events considered part of the GJSM in significant numbers. These included the World Social Forums in Brazil (2002) and India (2004), a visit to Palestine, the Zapatista Caravan (2001), the general strike in Seville, and numerous meetings in Europe and elsewhere. While such events were recognized as part of the GJSM, or were at least partly transnational in character, other events and issues also considered part of the “springtime of movements” were oriented around very Italian specific struggles such as the protest against the Articolo 18, a labor law greatly reducing guarantees of job security, and the Legge Bossi Fini, a law restricting the rights of migrants. However, when seen within the rubric of the springtime of movements, all of these disparate events and issues also involve Genoa and the MoM.

125 A turn of phrase apparently coined by Liberazione, the communist party newspaper; it seems to be a clear reference to the famous “Autunno Caldo” (Hot Autumn) of 1968-1969, a period immediately following upon the movements of 1968. I will discuss this in great length in the next chapter, but briefly, whereas in most of Europe and the world 1968 and the social uprisings accompanying it, subsided shortly thereafter, Italy’s movements continued on and escalated for almost a decade, culminating in the Movement of ’77, also known as Autonomia.
Consider this description:

Nobody can deny that Italy is living a new, hot season of struggle and social turmoil. Conflict is multi-layered and manifold: there is a "molar" aspect related to huge mass mobilisation, involving the biggest general strikes in Europe and the biggest political demonstrations ever; perhaps more important, there is a "molecular" aspect, related to everyday activism, hacktivism, guerrilla communications and the building of direct democracy: social forums at municipal and regional levels, independent media projects springing up like mushrooms, the hard battle on copyright and intellectual property and so on. It is impossible to give a full account of what is going on, and I won't even try.

The government (and the forces behind it) tried a blind counter-insurgence strategy in Genoa during the G8 summit (July 2001), where the carabinieri [the military police] murdered Carlo Giuliani, a 23-year-old demonstrator, beat the shit out of marchers and tortured several of them in police stations. That was a boomerang, for it didn't stop the growth of the movement, and the 300,000 demonstrators of Genoa became the 400,000 of the Perugia-Assisi march against the war on Afghanistan, then the 3 million people taking part to the biggest demonstration in European history (Rome, 23 March 2002 I was there, and it was absolutely amazing!) and the 20 million people joining the general strike on April 16th,… (Wu Ming 1 2002).

While no one has claimed that the event of Genoa directly caused or concretely built the fomentation of extra-parliamentary activity that affected Italy in the two years following the Genoa 2001 protest, Genoa was seen as a key reference point. In numerous interviews and articles, all of these separate smaller “movements” were referred to as part of a greater whole. In fact, the term “movement of movements, taken from the language circulating in global circuits,” was used to refer to this unprecedented “unity in difference” or the common space of struggle that was in large part oriented to very Italian specific issues (as opposed to globalization and neoliberalism); what other times would have appeared to be separate movements. As Negri puts it in an influential article that appeared in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in October 2002, “Since the summer of 2001 we have seen a cycles of continuous struggles against everything from war to the growing impact of neoliberalism in Italian society. *Genoa*
provided the foundation for this movement and still serves as a reference point, …the talk in
Italy is of a ‘movement of movements’ (Negri 2002, emphasis mine).”

Or as a young collective wrote:

The three Italian years of movement—from the protest at Genoa to the struggles at Melfi—have definitively marked the story of the political culture of a generation and transformed in a profound way its way of seeing and living in the world.

…
A generation raised in adulation and exaltation of the individual and individualism that discovers in being social and plural the only form of happiness possible. Discovers in being plural and social, the only possible form of resistance to domination.
A generation that in its conditions of life and work, is living a leap in paradigm without precedents…(7 Blù 2005: back-cover).

At one level the recognition of these movements as being in common and even constituting a unitary space or subject seems somewhat straightforward and obvious. They involve anger at the way the forces of order, and a right-led government responded in Genoa, and the sense that a numerically substantial opposition to Berlusconi’s government was emerging.
However this is not sufficient to explain the particular ways both Genoa and the prolonged period of “movement(s)” are discussed, written about and remembered. In particular, it does not explain why Genoa or the MoM are seen as watersheds or paradigm shifts. (Nor as we shall see does it account for why other moments of protest in the years after Genoa are not included within the MoM rubric). In other words, neither sociological, historical, nor content-based explanations are sufficient for making sense of either what unified these movements, or of what the true nature of the excitement surrounding them was.

The question then becomes—besides anger at Berlusconi, and temporal coincidence—what held so many disparate issues and movements together? What allowed them to be understood as somehow occupying a unitary space, a common “movement of
movements” that just a few years earlier might have appeared as separate struggles? The answer seems to lie in the very fact of plurality and difference and its relationship to a new political modality. This centrality of difference and plurality in turn offer a strong suggestion about the very possibility of politics inherent in the concept of movement.

Beyond dissatisfaction with the current political status quo and the return to political protest in itself, Genoa was also read positively as evidencing something politically potent and important on its own terms. This politically potent something can be described as being a space for politics—after a period in which politics was considered over or dead—characterized by a new political modality, or political culture. This political culture was constituted by set of transversal elements that themselves posit a new conception of the political, even if that new conception or the importance of those elements is not yet fully transparent to those elaborating it. This set of elements includes practices, values and norms that were shared by many different organizations in various political moments and movements described above. This was particularly notable because many groups came from quite distinct political cultures, histories, ideologies and traditions, and it was rare to see them working together, let alone employing and valorizing similar practices, tactics and in some cases, objectives. These common elements included the use of new forms of organization stressing horizontality, flexibility, and diversity, and encounters across difference; new theories of politics and power, less interested in taking authority and power and more interested in autonomy; and an overall emphasis on thought, experimentation, reflexivity, and critical engagement.

What we come to see is that Genoa’s meaning is seen to profoundly alter the ways in which social movements, and politics, are both seen and defined. If we recall one of the
quotes I placed at the outset of this chapter by a decidedly movementist—i.e. opposed to party-ist—publication, it resonates quite impressively with the second quote below that comes from a member of the Communist Party. Both quotations point to the importance of difference, and share the excitement surrounding Genoa. In each of these there is a clearer discussion of a political modality, what we can also understand as a culture of politics, or a political culture. Effusive assessments spanned a wide spectrum of people, ranging from those from the more autonomist and movementist traditions, like Mezzadra, to others, like some involved in political parties.

….But it was only Genoa, the beautiful and productive disorder of the tens of thousands of women and men that marched together in the Babel of tongues and languages of the 19th of July, that allowed us to see these meanings in their true light. For many even within the galaxy of “critical thinking”, it was an occasion to finally really take note of the radically innovative character of the global movement….

From here the growth of this movement continues: from Washington to Prague to Quebec City passing through Porto Alegre. We are not ignoring that on each of these occasions (and in many others that we could remember) the movement has had a diverse composition, diverse “styles” of action, and even more fundamental differences in orientation. Even more important, it seems to us, is to highlight the fundamentally unitary character of the process of accumulating strength, a social-political consensus and richness that has at Genoa had its apogee. ….The ‘optimism of the intellect is imposed here: a first bet on the irreversible character of the turning point that first made its mark at Seattle and exploded vociferously in the streets of Genova. (Mezzadra and Raimundi 2001, emphasis added).

Consider the similarities with this next quote from Salvatore Cannavo, member of the Rifondazione Communista and Sinistra Critica in a book he wrote in 2002:

From Porto Alegre on in the variegated and multiple anti-global movement, the idea to have ideas has taken root, to be the carrier of a diverse order of the world, the conviction that even the smallest elaboration and specific experience has a universal value if it is put in relation with others. And from then on, another conviction was affirmed: the movement is composite and no-one can bring her back to a formal unity—a party, a State, a field—but the movement also has a unitary cause and chooses to weave together a very
intimate and ambitious fabric of relations and relationships. According to unanimous verdict Genoa represents the apex of this modality. After the terrible days of July, the name of the capital of Liguria now reawakens in the imaginary of the international movement the highest peak of alterity to neoliberalism possible, and, on the other hand, it reveals the degree of violence this latter is capable of when it claims that its own prerogatives are being threatened. A peak that even so never distances itself from the most comprehensive rhythm of the movement (Cannavo 2002: 50).

In the words of Cannavo, from the very traditional Left, Mezzadra and others, Genoa is perceived as part of a new political modality. But what is at stake in suggesting that Genoa is the apex of this new modality, and what do we mean by a political modality? What does this have to do with the novelty and watershed nature of Genoa? At one level, it means recognizing a fundamentally different understanding of both politics and social movements.

1.4 The Cultural-Political and New Political Imaginaries

A central point of this chapter involves recognizing that the GJSM contributed to bringing about a new culture of politics. This had to do at some level with the ways the active participation in and experience of the global events associated with the GJSM by numerous Italians, helped to produce Genoa as a physical and material event. Perhaps even more significant were the ways these global events, ideas and the practices they generated helped to produce that which Genoa came to be known for and mean within Italy and beyond. This included the beginning of a new period of social struggle or Movement, but perhaps more importantly was the fact that this common space of struggle was characterized by a common political culture and modality. So while we would generally think about the GJSM in terms of its contestation of the set of economic policies and practices known as neoliberalism. Instead one must recognize the globality of these movements in the level of communication,
theorization and meaning more broadly. In particular, one must recognize it in the circulation of ideas, tactics, theories and analyses that are in turn part of developing a new culture of politics and a new political imaginary. J. K Gibson Graham see this as a much broader process,

It seems that the making of a new political imaginary is underway, or at the very least a remapping of the political terrain. Coming into being over the past few decades and into visibility and self awareness through the internet, independent media, and most recently the World Social Forums, this emergent imaginary confounds the timeworn oppositions between global and local, revolution and reform, opposition and experiment, institutional and individual transformation. It is not that these paired evaluative terms are no longer useful, but that they now refer to processes that inevitably overlap and intertwine. This conceptual interpenetration in radically altering the spatiotemporal frame of progressive of politics, reconfiguring the position and role of the subject, as well as shifting the grounds for assessing the efficacy of political movements and initiatives (Gibson Graham 2006: xix).

This imaginary sees difference as invaluable and indispensable, it seeks forms of organizing that stress horizontality and avoid hierarchy, it works with a notion of means being as important or even more important than ends, and is a diffuse open-ended and reflexive notion of the political that opposes dogmatism and traditional notions of governance and power in favor of autonomy. A crucial part of Genoa’s reality, as well as its articulation and connection with the GJSM, is in contributing to this emergent political culture and the political imaginary, an imaginary that can itself be defined as cultural-political.

In all of these descriptions, many of the terms used to speak about what is important and notable about the movement suggest that the movement is effective or does its work at levels or in sites where we wouldn’t typically expect to find definitions of politics or movements. For “culture,” “ways of seeing and living,” “being social and plural,” “the idea to have ideas,” are not terms we are used to associating with politics, or more precisely with social
movements in modern political systems. Finding ways to make sense of these self-understandings requires making sense of what is valorized in the “New” movement, i.e. the elements that constitute the political imaginary and modality. I have summarized these new elements as being diversity, critical and reflexive epistemologies, and new forms of organization and power. I have also emphasized that as such this imaginary far exceeds the traditional terrain of the political.

Moreover, many of these elements are the same or similar to the “new” ideas and practices developed in the various parts of the GJSM discussed above. Notably, many of these elements have more to do with the form and nature of politics and social movements than the economic particulars of neoliberal globalization. What seems to be at stake in these common elements is not simply a shared political culture or modality, but a cultural-political notion of, and approach to, the political.

For this reason, defining and distinguishing between the various concepts “political culture,” “cultural politics” and “cultures of politics” helps us to begin to understand the true impacts and consequences of the MoM. In their seminal book *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Culture: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements*, authors Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar provide a compelling argument for the centrality of culture to any understanding of the work done by contemporary (Latin American) social movements, as well as of the centrality of culture to politics and power more broadly. They also provide a few useful definitions upon which I build. According to these authors, cultural politics refers to the fact that culture must be understood as political—concerning questions of power—in itself, and that we need to expand both the notion of the political and the cultural. This requires moving away from a definition that sees politics as the delimited sphere of
institutional and electoral politics:

We must view politics as more than just a specific set of activities (voting, campaigning, lobbying) that occur in clearly delimited institutional spaces such as parliaments and parties; it must also be seen to encompass power struggles enacted in a wide range of spaces culturally defined as private, social, economic, cultural and so on (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar: 7).

At the same time we must recognize that culture can no longer be seen to refer to easily delimited spheres or practices—i.e. music, art, religion, beliefs—but rather to an expanded notion that recognizes culture as “the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, experienced and explored” (Williams 1981:13). Since culture defines the norms and codes which structure everyday life, and necessarily imply power, all social movements—not simply those obviously working in the terrain of culture—engage or have a cultural politics. This means not only that we are not simply speaking about movements that work with film, music, etc., but also that this is not simply about identity based movements, as opposed to workers’ or poor people’s movements. In other words, even those movements that are engaged in material struggles are also engaged in struggles over the way the society is organized.

This takes us to the notion of political cultures, which has also been very prominent in this text. According to Alvarez, et al.,

Every society is marked by a dominant political culture … political culture is the particular social construction in every society of what counts as ‘political.’…political culture is the domain of practices and institutions, carved out of the totality of social reality, that historically comes to be considered as properly political (in the same way as other domains are seen as properly ‘economic,’ ‘cultural,’ and ‘social’). The dominant political culture of the West has been characterized as ‘rationalist,’ universalist and individualist (ibid: 8).

In other words what constitutes the political field is not a given but is particular to different places and times. While these authors refer to the rationalist, universalist, and individualist
political culture of the large sphere of “the West” (to which Italy does belong and which does affect the struggles of the MoM), political cultures can also establish themselves at different scales and sites. Different political traditions have different political cultures which not only define what counts as political, but in so doing also include a more everyday notion of the cultural, including how meetings are held, what events are organized, and how people behave in marches. These “internal” cultures are themselves imbued with power relations and struggles (I will discuss some aspects of Leftist political culture(s) in Italy in the next chapter). Political cultures also include the theoretical frameworks used for thinking and pursuing social change, as well as the frameworks for understanding the nature of the “problems” they are struggling against, or the objectives for which they are fighting or working.

In the case of the MoM, I have been consistently proposing that it is contributing to the emergence of a new political imaginary and modality, pointing out the ways in which those aspects highlighted by and in reference to Genoa, the MoM and GJSM, don’t fit into typical definitions of “the political.” I want to argue that in many senses what unified the MoM was in large part the production and sharing of a new “political culture.” Perhaps even more importantly, I want to assert that the premise of that “new political culture” or “modality” sees the reigning cultures of politics—both of Modern Liberal Democracy, but also Leftist, i.e. Marxist, movements and approaches past—as key sites of struggle. The cultural politics deployed by the MoM, and the meaning of Genoa, then, have to do with developing new frameworks and imaginaries for pursuing social change, but they also have to do with identifying the problems inherent in past approaches.

Ultimately, one of the novel things about the GJSM and the Italian MoM is that
cumulatively they are elaborating what I term a cultural-political approach. This means a few distinct but interrelated things. First, these movements recognize neoliberalism, and capitalism more broadly, as far more than an economic system. As such they require responses and oppositions that take this into account. Activists in the MoM see neoliberal, capitalist globalization as a complex and ubiquitous entity, with processes far exceed any identifiable institutions or policies and both pervade and help produce every aspect of human life—from our very conceptions of individuality, to our beliefs in progress and rationality. As such, no campaign or easily identifiable set of demands or objectives can constitute a sufficient or effective political approach. According to this analysis, an effective politics must not only work to change existing policies and economic agendas, it must also seek to oppose neo-liberal capitalist globalization in all of its iterations, from the individualistic, atomised and controlled human subjects it produces to its monopoly on value and elimination of difference in all spheres of life and its dependence on mono-cultural and hegemonic logics. According to the cultural-political approach, overall, successful opposition must confront the cultural logics, micro-practices and social institutions that underpin and sustain the system or amalgam of systems that tend to be grouped under the label Capitalism but that actually refer to the entire complex of authoritarianisms and oppressions that currently make up too large a part of our world.

However, a cultural-political approach involves much more than simply opposing a given system and its logics. It also requires undermining the monopoly that dominant narratives and logics have on our conceptions of truth, reality, and possibility. This requires on one level making these cultural logics visible and comprehensible as such, as particular cultural visions and systems of meaning that have no essential or inexplicable relation to
truth and reality. On another level, it means finding ways of producing and diffusing other systems of meanings and visions that can in turn make possible other ways of knowing, being, and relating to one another in the world.¹²⁶

A second aspect of the cultural political approach is the fact that it is premised on a recognition that many of today’s problems are a result of the political cultures (and lack of cultural politics) not only of the dominant political system, but also of Leftist political approaches past. This is in large part because traditional Leftist politics were themselves premised on many of the same imaginaries and cultural foundations as Western Liberal Democracy and Capitalism. The movements employing a cultural-political approach also work to counter and transform the political culture of previous Leftist modalities that have themselves helped to perpetuate the crisis or stasis of the political.

In this sense, one needs to understand both the recent political history of Italy, and the ways in which the “problem” of “the political” have been articulated there, in order to understand what the MoM was seen to offer, and why it seemed so novel. In this vein, we can see that those elements that are highlighted, picked up on and turned into the narrative of the MoM are perhaps just as indicative of political desires and imaginaries that are produced at the intersection of the actual and virtual, as they are about the actual material practices exhibited and practiced. Said differently, and as will become apparent as we look at the similarities and differences with experiences of movement in Italy since the 1970s, the elements that are picked up on must be understood as produced by the dynamic interaction of the movements’ potential(s)—or at least their reading of the potential—and the desires shaped by already emergent political imaginaries/narratives. A thorough analysis involved looking at the elements that were lauded—diversity/difference; autonomy/democracy;

¹²⁶ For more on the cultural political approach see Osterweil 2004b.
reflexivity/partiality—and the fact that they were described as representing a major rupture with previous modalities. So rather than try to make sense of these on their own terms, one must understand them as this intersection of the emergent (global movement) with the broader “background” or context (i.e. Italy’s unique political history, theoretical traditions, and socio-political make-up). Finally of course, one cannot separate these from the material networks of events, spaces, people and concepts that materially connected and developed the intersection of these multiple realms.

The claim to newness is itself based on a sense that actors working from traditional Leftist frameworks, for instance unions, parties, and movements, had failed to achieve social change or revolution, not only because of opposition and repression by States and Capital, nor due to their failure to mobilize enough support, but also because of shortcomings with the very visions with which they were working. Perhaps more importantly, it has to do with their own understanding, analyses and articulation of the nature or root of the problem. These shortcomings included: 1) The inability to deal with diversity and the refusal by “real-life” subjects to follow the historicist blueprint of the proletariat revolution that included the proliferation of sites and subjects of social struggles within Europe; the critique and secession of many women from the movements, and of course, the problem of organizing across cultural and geographic differences. 2) The problem of (constituted) power and hierarchical tendencies that tended to affect militant groups as much as parties, unions and the government. And finally, 3) an inability to deal with the inconsistencies between the analyses and theories movements employed to guide their practice, and what happened in actuality. These three elements are themselves a result of the fact that traditional Marxist

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127 Even the failure to recognize the existence of a complex problematic, rather than an easily delimitable enemy, was part of this larger background or culture. See Foucalt 1994a:115 for more on new political problematics.
approaches shared and were constituted by many aspects of the dominant political culture, social imaginary, and background of understanding that are part and parcel of the system, or problematic, those liberatory movements were meant to engage and even solve. In other words, one of the premises of the “new politics” of the GJSM, whether fully understood, or agreed upon by all, is a recognition of a more expansive definition of the problematic which these movements are working within and against. This problematic that cannot be limited to capitalism understood simply as an economic system, or representative Liberal democracy understood as a political system. Rather, that which these movements are working against must be recognized as a complex and multi-level entity that is itself supported by particular cultures of politics, political cultures and social imaginaries. In other words, the problem of the political includes many cultural, institutional, and micro-political aspects that are just as important as the economic.

**Conclusion**

Genoa was important in many ways. It not only marked a numerical and organizational high point within both the transnational counter-summit movement and Italian extra-parliamentary movement, it also definitively and materially marked a point of escalation in the physical and legal risk of participating in certain forms of activism (both in


129 While this work is informed by the concept of imaginary most recently engaged by Charles Taylor (2006), building on the work of Castoriadis (1997, 2007), it is also a very common-sense use of the term in conversation with the most recent work of J.K Gibson-Graham (2006) in which they describe the making of a new, or “emergent political imaginary”—as well as work by Jeff Juris (2008) in which he discusses an emergent cultural logic of networking, and a number of other scholar-activists contributing to a growing literature on the imaginaries of the GJSM. As such, while I do believe it important to understand the nuances of these various usages of particular term, I am not here so concerned with the terminological debates. (See also Appadurai 1996, 2000 on imaginaries.)

130 Heidegger 1953; Winograd and Flores 1987
Italy and globally). Taken together Genoa was perceived as the MoM’s peak, its high point. Whether understood as a trauma or turning point, what is clear is that Genoa radicalized and politicized people—turning an event that some participated in with rather limited, liberal definitions of their aims—i.e. to democratize or reform the G8—into an experience in which a more profound or systemic lack of democracy was revealed, thus raising more fundamental questions about the nature of the problem at hand. The importance of the event, and even the nature of its politicization, go beyond the fact of the tremendous violence or even the numerical magnitude of the event. The descriptions of Genoa and its importance also point to something more profound and far-reaching—what authors alternatively refer to as a “new” or different modality of politics—which is radically innovative, and of which Genoa represents “the apex.” But making sense of this “radically innovative character,” this new “modality” that in turn is what defines the relationship of Genoa to (the) global movement and its power, is no simple matter. It requires a substantially different understanding of politics.

Genoa challenges our propensities to search for the ultimate truth, origin and causality of events; to separate meaning from effects, culture from politics; and to find simple synthesis in the complex, unity in difference. This means that the reality of Genoa is constituted as much (if not more) by the ways it gets narrated, interpreted and put into discourse, as it is by any sociological or historical description of the people, organizations and events that led up to it. Moreover, Genoa is not bounded in space and time to the anti-G8 protests. As both a turning point and symbol, Genoa comes to serve as a synecdoche or shorthand for the broader MoM, while at the same time serving as one of the definitive moments of that movement’s crystallization. Genoa stands for a series of new practices and visions of social change, and even the very possibility of social change. These new practices
and visions in turn reflect a fundamental critique of the terrain of politics traditionally understood. Overall these practices work to bring into being a cultural political modality that poses a radical critique and alternative to traditional approaches to social change.
Chapter 2: The Italian Anomaly

Italy has been an anomaly at the international level for more than a century. [In the past] this was the case relative to the modalities of the unification of the country or the birth of fascism. In the seventies, the “great Italian anomaly” regarded the communist party as the strongest communist party in the West and also the force of the movements. Italy is also a country where the Church is rooted in all the important centers of power and society, and last but not least the country where Berlusconism was born (Raf Scelsi, in Negri 2006: 231).

Italy today is the best example in Europe of a situation in which a failure of the social democratic Left has been followed by an effective action of resistance. We have witnessed a sort of leap in consciousness, something that is difficult to define, but that guarantees that in order to struggle to change the world, the masses no longer need social democracy. The “movement of movements” is in search of new forms of expression, both at the level of theory and in concrete struggle; new hegemonic instruments are being prepared. Laboratory Italy has begun to work again (Antonio Negri 2002)

Introduction

Despite commonplace assumptions about the GJSM, and perhaps global movements as a typology more generally, Italy’s MoM was as much a product of histories, events, cultures and circumstances particular to Italy, as it was part of a “global” movement. As I discussed briefly in the last chapter, the political effects of MoM—both at the more macro-institutional level, but also at the level of movements, their cultures, etc.—were also quite particular to the Italian context. In this chapter I argue that several aspects of Italy’s particular political background and history, for which it is often referred to as an anomaly, are key to understanding the emergence, meaning and resonance of the MoM. I argue that the rich and particular experience of Italy’s Left—the fact that it had the largest and most
successful communist party in the West throughout the 20th century, as well as being home to numerous, unique and sophisticated social movements—was key to understanding not necessarily why the MoM emerged, but why it was received in the ways that it was. I argue that the long tumultuous decade dated from the late 1960s through the end of the 1970s can in many ways be viewed as the precursors to the MoM, both materially, but especially in the form of theories, practices and imaginaries. The particular theoretical sensibility attached to both the movements and the communist party are critically important to understanding the ways in which movements and the political are understood in the Italian context.

This chapter has four parts. In the first, *The Place of Italy in the Global Movement*, I provide a longer introduction to the arguments about the place-based nature of the MoM, situating it with respect to what is known as the Italian Anomaly. In Part II, *The MoM: A thoroughly Italian Movement*, I pick up on where the description of Genoa left off and describe the ways in which the MoM itself must be seen as a thoroughly Italian movement both because of its political aims and because of who comprises it. In the Part III, *The Italian Anomaly*, I describe in greater detail the political, social and economic uniquenesses of Italy, focusing in particular on the history of the Communist party and extra-parliamentary Left. The last section, Part IV, *Beyond ’77: Connecting Autonomia to the MoM*, describes the ways in which the history of the institutional and extra-institutional Left, and its numerous legacies, connect to the MoM, producing it both materially and ideationally.

### 2.1 The Place of Italy in the Global Movement

Most introductory political science classes in the United States focus quite a bit on Italy. This is not necessarily because Machiavelli was one of the founders of modern politics
as we know it today, or because from Rome to the Renaissance, Italy has been a site generative of some of the most valued elements of the “West.” It is not even because it was the home of Antonio Gramsci, whose writings are among the most influential discussions of the nature of class conflict, culture and governance still read today. While these facts are significant, and might be of interest to political scientists and others, the reason for Italy’s exemplary status as a political case-study has more to do with the fact that it is usually seen as a political failure, or at least as a conundrum to most notions of democracy, state-hood and even economic development—all basic tenets of Modern Liberal Democracy. Italy is described as a place of the mafia and failed states, where parliaments fall apart at a moment’s notice, where the (Catholic) Church, family and regionalism trump the “rational” forces of electoral democracy, and in general where political extremes (from fascism to anarchism) run rampant.

Having become a unified entity—the Kingdom of Italy—only in the mid-19th century (1861), and a parliamentary republic in 1946, directly following the fall of fascism, its anomalous status with respect to the West is at least somewhat fathomable. The normative frameworks underpinning these analyses tend to treat these characteristics as symptoms and evidence of Italy’s status as an exemplary “case study” in impediments to, or failures of, democracy. 131 While these frameworks leave a great deal to be desired, it is difficult to deny that Italy is, or has been, an anomaly. 132 In this chapter I will explore the ways in which Italy is in fact anomalous, and I will argue that rather than serve as impediments to democracy or

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131 Tarrow 1989; Galli and Prandi 2007.

132 Some have argued that recently Italy has ceased to be an anomaly or a unique case and is instead exemplary of the processes through which many countries are going. See Hardt 1996: 6-7. “Italian exceptionalism has in fact come to an end, so that now Italian revolutionary thought (as well as reactionary developments) can be recognized as relevant to an increasingly wide portion of the globe in a new and important way. The experiments of laboratory Italy are now experiments on the political conditions of an increasingly large part of the world.”
modernity tout court, Italy should be understood as a site where *other forms of politics and democracy*—which are far more democratic in many respects—are theorized and produced. In subsequent chapters I will show how this *other politics* has everything to do with the term, or discursive formation, *movement/Movement*.

This chapter’s purpose is (at least) twofold. First it will provide background information to the MoM. More specifically it will provide histories for some of the key networks, organizations and actors (human and non) present at Genoa, described in the last chapter. As the last chapter pointed out, the histories of these networks and the ways in which Genoa exceeded the parameters of the July days in which the protest actually took place, are critical aspects of MoM and its significance. This background discussion will also include some basic information about the contemporary social, political and economic context in which the MoM “moves,” as well as the ways in which Genoa and the MoM are actually very Italian events. Secondly, this chapter seeks to answer—at least partially—the question, “Why Italy?” What makes the Italian MoM worth studying? In the course of the chapter I argue that at one level it is precisely the Italian context and the ways in which *movements* and *the political* have been experienced that not only make the MoM possible, but allow for the particular relationship and articulation MoM has with the GJSM. The relationship refers both to MoM’s resonance and relevance for global networks, and the resonance of events like Zapatismo and World Social Forums for the Italian MoM. The particular strengths of the Italian MoM then should not be attributed only or primarily to the *global* movement, but

133 Ibid.

134 While I do not spend a lot of time on the Actor Network Theory literature (Latour 1998, 1999, 2005; Law 1992, 1999a) I do find it to be useful for making sense of the ways in which movement networks work, especially the ways in which texts and other material, yet non-human, objects function as important actors in these networks.
precisely to the ways the influence of its place, i.e. Italy, articulate with those global networks.

In addition to the ways in which the period directly before and after Genoa demonstrates the Italian orientation and nature of MoM, the narratives of activists and others I gathered in interviews strongly reinforce a vision of the MoM as both a very Italian and very historical entity. Throughout, but especially in my initial ethnographic encounters, I was consistently impressed by the ways descriptions of the MoM situated it not only or primarily within the GJSM, but also in a long history of radical leftist movements, and indirectly of the more institutional Left within Italy (see Chapter 4). In my early ethnographic encounters, activists spoke in particular about the decade following the cataclysmic 1968, a movement known as *Autonoma* and/or the *Movement of ’77*.\(^{135}\)

On numerous occasions, ranging from casual conversations to interviews and to my reading of numerous texts, Italians continuously described the MoM as a unique product of Italy, what they refer to as the “Italian Anomaly.” This is important because beyond reinforcing the objective vision of the Italian orientation of the MoM, the fact that young activists saw this Italian history and Italian uniqueness as so crucial and meaningful has important implications. For now, I will only mention this as a point of fact; I will discuss the meaning and work of these historical narratives more thoroughly in Chapter 4.\(^{136}\) As I will reiterate, the reason this chapter on history and background chapter is so important is because

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\(^{135}\) As I will discuss in greater detail below, these terms are distinct, but closely related. However in casual conversations and narratives they are often used interchangeably much like Genoa refers to the whole MoM.

\(^{136}\) In Chapter 4 I describe how the paradoxical juxtaposition of claims to novelty and history turn out to be critical to the nature of Italian movements. More specifically I describe how in some of my initial conversations and interviews with Italian activists, numerous people spoke of the absolute novelty of MoM. They also described it as a product, or continuation of a decade-plus period of social mobilization from 1968 to approximately 1980, as well as numerous other trajectories, many of which were largely underground, throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Quite importantly this includes the *Centri Sociali*—a series of often squatted and self-organized spaces used for autonomous artistic, economic and political production.

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activists themselves understand the movement as a product of these historical networks, and because central to these historical networks are theoretical practices, ideas, texts and concepts.

The chapter’s title, *The Italian Anomaly*, is itself a metaphorical phrase often used to refer to certain peculiar characteristics of Italy. These include, among other things, Italy’s consistently having the largest communist party in the West, as well as numerous radical social movements, its being the birthplace of fascism, its being home to the Vatican and the Catholic Church, and its regional heterogeneity. These political, economic, and social peculiarities help explain not only why the MoM emerged as strongly as it did in Italy around 2001, but also how and why the particularly critical and innovative approach and vision of politics MoM helped to consolidate and popularize was developed in Italy.

**Place-Based Movements and Provincializing Theory**

The central argument in this chapter then is two-fold. It is at once a claim about the place-based nature of the Italian MoM—and potentially other parts of the GJSM—as well as an assertion about the ways in which the political history of Italy and the Italian Left in particular yield a politics and set of imaginaries, visions, and theories that are so resonant with the GJSM and the new political imaginary it co-authored or co-created.

This means that the peculiarities or particularities of the Italian context point on the one hand to the place-based nature of supposedly “global” movements—what I have elsewhere discussed as “place-based globalism”—and on the other hand, to the ways in

137 This is a play on Chakrabarty’s 2000 *Provincializing Europe*.

138 The concept of place-based globalism emerges from the project *Women and the Politics of Place* (Harcourt and Escobar 2002; 2005; Escobar 1998), in which a collection of authors argued for the importance of
which certain political experiences yield stories, theories and narratives that then resonate at a global or transnational scale. Despite a tendency to study the MoM as a national version or part of the GJSM, i.e. a *global* movement whose globality or transnationality is defined both by the organization of groups that comprise it and the targets of their protest,\(^{139}\) I argue that it is critical to understand the MoM as a thoroughly Italian—i.e. *place-based*—movement. This does not dispute claims that the MoM is global. It is simply an argument that the nature of this globality is distinct from dominant ways of thinking about the global. The Italian MoM comes to articulate and resonate with the GJSM *in large part* because of its place-based specificities, including its “anomalous” political experiences and trajectories.\(^{140}\)

Although it is informed and inflected by the discourses, imaginaries and objectives of the GJSM, the particular events and networks of activists that comprise the MoM, *as well as* their political impact, are themselves clearly products of elements and events quite specific to the Italian context. These elements include the history of Italy’s institutional and extra-parliamentary Left, but also the strength and presence of an extreme, even fascist right both in and out of government. Throughout the 20\(^{th}\) century Italy had the largest communist party in the West, a communist party that, as we shall see, was itself quite distinct from its counterparts throughout Europe. And perhaps as important is the fact that not only was fascism founded in Italy, with Italy becoming a Republic under Mussolini, but fascism has recognizing the place-based nature of globalization. In another essay I argue that against political imaginaries of a global movement, or a global democracy, truly global movements can only be place-based. See Dirlik 2001; Osterweil 2005a&amp;b, Gibson-Graham 2006.

\(^{139}\) See Della Porta and Mosca 2003, Della Porta et.al 2006; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Ceri 2002; Guidry et. al. 2000. While the notion of spatial politics in some of the pieces in these volumes recognizes the complex interplay between various scales of action, they?the authors? Or the notion? do not recognize the way the scales themselves have been constructed by particular categories of the researcher, without questioning the historical and meaning-making processes that they entail.

\(^{140}\) Certainly some, probably many, individuals and organizations became involved through a critique of globalization and their involvement in transnational groups like Greenpeace, Oxfam etc. However the majority were involved for reasons particular to Italy’s contemporary and historical political context.
remained quite strong as both a social and political movement within the country through to today.

I agree with others who have written about the importance of recognizing all aspects of the GJSM, and even globalization more broadly, as necessarily “place-based.”\footnote{For definitions of place-based see Escobar 2001; Escobar and Harcourt 2005; Dirlik 2001; Osterweil 2005ab.} This means that it is impossible to imagine a globality that doesn’t touch down and become real or territorialized in concrete places. Within this framework, it is possible to argue that the case of Italy’s MoM can be considered exemplary, that is, a particularly strong example of this place-based nature. By this I mean that its components, including their histories, as well as their objectives and impacts, have a particularly notable national inflection, not only empirically, but also because they are explained and thought of in such terms. Their conditions of possibility are structured not by universal or global trends, but by the particular nature of movements and politics in Italy (as well as the rich theoretical traditions developed in close proximity and relation to these). The particular ways the concepts of the “political” and “movement”\footnote{This is what in Chapter 3 I will describe as movement/Movement.} are developed, imagined and resonate with many areas and visions associated with the global movement are themselves attributable to Italy’s singular status.\footnote{This claim about Italy’s singularity or uniqueness will likely be somewhat controversial, for many argue that while Italy was an anomaly, it has now become exemplary. Moreover, the stakes for claiming something is a particular versus a universal is itself an interesting debate. What I want to suggest here is that Italy’s particularities and singular status can speak to and of other situations, not as a case that proves a rule, but that is illustrative of how certain elements in different degrees work.}

It is fairly well recognized today, especially since the publication of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire (2000)*, that Italy is home to a rich tradition of what is alternately referred to as Critical or Autonomist Marxism (in Italy the term “heretical Marxism” is used with some affection). Yet we rarely discuss the fact that this theoretical tradition is itself a product of the
particular experience of the Left in Italy—a left inextricably related to the history and development of Italy’s communist party, on the one hand, and the lived experience with cultural and other differences on the other. The “new” political imaginary or story promoted by the MoM in its place-based and global iterations and articulations, itself must be understood as an outcome of the particular, place-based ways in which theories and practices of social change were experienced in Italy. (You may recall that the political imaginary, or cultural political modality that I described in the last chapter places a strong emphasis on the constitutive importance of difference, a political vision of autonomy, and critical and reflexive ethos. 144) Therefore, my argument is also tangentially a call to provincialize and situate theories and concepts in the places, by the people, and under the conditions where they were produced, rather than treat concepts as universal or ahistorical. 145 This stands in strong contrast not only to dominant academic practice, but also to the dominant modes of universalized, de-historicized and dogmatic forms of theory and knowledge that have accompanied past movements for social change, especially those self-identified as leftist and/or Marxist. 146 In other words, the lived history and specificities of the Italian Left (and other aspects of the Italian experience) are what have made them such an important site for

144 This reflexivity is in turn in large part and a strong critique of identitarian, dogmatic and teleologic/historicist approaches in which the path to revolution is already known, and in which there is little reflexivity or space for critique with respect especially to tensions or contradictions between theory and practice.


146 I have discussed this mode of theorizing in Osterweil 2007, and forthcoming. See also Young [1990] 2004. In the three elements of the “new political imaginary,” criticality and reflexivity do not simply refer to subjective practices, but to the modes of knowing and theorizing accompanying political action. The Zapatista caminar preguntando is as much a critique of dogmatic theoretical approaches of Marxist Leninism as it is a call for dynamic and situated knowledge production. I will argue in Chapter 5 that one of the most important elements of the Italian anomaly, and the new political imaginary furthered by the MoM, is itself a particularly reflexive and dynamic vision of the relationship between theory (or knowledge) and political action—even if this vision is sometimes forgotten in practice.
the production of movement practices, theories and imaginaries for the broader GJSM.

2.2 MoM: a thoroughly Italian Movement

Despite the fact that the phrase “Movement of Movements” was itself coined by Naomi Klein, a Canadian journalist widely read by activists from various countries and affiliated with the GJSM, the Italianness of the MoM is undeniable. In this section I will describe the ways the understanding and experience of Genoa/MoM as a “common space of struggle,” or movement, had a lot to do with the Italian-specific issues and networks that emerged in this period. I will then argue that this space was in large part constituted by dissatisfaction with the Italian Left and the political system and model more broadly. Finally, I will link this common space of struggle and dissatisfaction with information about the political and economic context of Italy in the years surrounding Genoa.

Common Space of Struggle: “Il Popolo Della Sinistra” (The people of the Left)

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Genoa is seen to be a catalytic moment and event. It is at once a “return to the piazza” and the inauguration of a new “common space of struggle.” While important within the GJSM, specifically as the biggest and most violent counter-summit protest to that date, Genoa is perhaps more notable for its political force within the Italian national terrain, both for those identified with the radical “movement” Left and in the sphere of institutional politics. The common space of struggle known as the MoM is constituted and in large part inspired by the counter-summit and broader GJSM movement. This is evidenced by the adoption of many key terms, values, organizational tools, techniques and concepts from the global movement, including social forums, the

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147 See Negri 2002; Agnoletto 2002; see also last chapter.
network form, the valorization of plural modalities of protest and a diversity of political ideologies. However when looked at closely, the actual space of commonality is itself distinctly Italian. It is constituted by a series of organizations, movements and actors with Italian-oriented agendas. Soon after Genoa (but also to a lesser extent prior), actors involved in the MoM become concerned and occupied with Italian-specific issues and political battles, in particular changing labor and migration legislations. Some, like Vittorio Agnoletto, national spokesperson for the Genoa Social Forum, saw the Italian emphasis as a flaw, criticizing the MoM for being too caught up in national politics, and as a result forgetting the global horizon which it was meant to be pursuing. He writes,

There is a specificity that is completely Italian. The Italian movement has coped on its own for seven months in a battle for the defense of the spaces of rights and democracy in Italy. From the week of Genoa to February of 2002 none of the organisms of the institutional and political opposition have joined in. The capacity to maintain this role, even after September 11, has facilitated the entrance of other political subjects, like those who are critical of the center Left in the marches in February and March 2002, reuniting thousands of people in the defense of democracy, political pluralism, of the autonomy of the magistrates…but this has risked making it such that the Italian movement occupies itself too much with questions of national politics, thus compelling the media to look to it for answers to Italy’s national problems …It is departing from the international dimension that we can identify issues and campaigns that can then connect to the national politics, but not vice versa (Agnoletto 2002: 72-73, translation mine).

For others the national orientation was part and parcel of the novel and important nature of Italy’s MoM. In August 2002 Le Monde Diplomatique published a piece by Antonio Negri that was widely read in movement circles. In the piece, entitled “An unusual social movement: Refounding the Italian Left,” he argues (convincingly, according to many activists I spoke with) that in the year immediately following Genoa, a combination of nascent struggles and conditions coalesced or rather intersected to form a new and complex “movement” of the Left. This movement included trade unions, university students,
immigrants, middle-class intellectuals, peace activists and many more, all of which according
to Negri represented about 20% of the Italian electorate. More specifically, Negri points to
three strong elements that, while somewhat separate, also form a unity. It is this unity that
creates the possibility of “refounding the Italian Left” after a period of crisis and virtual non-
existence. According to Negri these three movements are: 1) the anti-globalization (“No
Global”) movement\textsuperscript{148} — itself a variegated lot ranging from the autonomist Left to Catholic
pacifists and volunteer associations—or the Genoa movement; 2) the movement of the
\textit{Girotondi} (translated as “ring around the rosie”), comprised mostly of educated middle-class
citizens and some prominent intellectuals and public persona of the center-Left concerned
with preserving justice and democracy in the face of attacks on democracy by the Berlusconi
government;\textsuperscript{149} and finally, 3) the large trade unions and movements organized around
shifting labor conditions and policies. The large trade unions, and specifically the CGIL
(Italy’s largest trade union, closely affiliated with the Communist party), did not participate
in or endorse the protest of the G8 at Genoa. However in the period following Genoa they
were central in some of the key actions in the “\textit{Primavera Dei Movimenti},” in particular with
respect to mobilizations and actions against \textit{Articolo 18} (Article 18) and the \textit{Legge Bossi Fini}
(The Bossi Fini Law), that were labor and migration laws respectively.

\textit{Articolo 18} was a constitutional legislation that facilitated the liberalization of labor
practices and included the right of companies to fire employees “without due cause.”

Opposition to \textit{Articolo 18} was spearheaded by the General Italian Confederation of Labor

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{No global}, \textit{New global} as well as the \textit{Movement of Genoa} (See Della Porta et.al 2002) were used more or less
interchangeably with the Movement of Movements. I am not using the term MoM here precisely because in
some points of view in moments like the two years following Genoa, the MoM could connote this larger space
of struggle, or this larger common movement.

\textsuperscript{149} Throughout 2002, protests against Berlusconi’s efforts at changing, evading and even overriding certain laws
also brought hundreds of thousands to the streets. They were set apart by their use of the tactic of \textit{Girotondi} that
entailed encircling government buildings and other symbols of democracy with rings of people.
(CGIL), but also involved interesting collaborations with “No Global” activists, and it culminated in the then largest march in Italian/European history with three million people in the streets of Rome. It was quite clear that this march benefited from the enlarged space of struggle and activists from the Genoa Movement, as well as the participation of the Girotondi.150

The Bossi Fini act was legislation introduced by two parliamentarians from the extreme Right (Umberto Bossi of the Northern League and Gianfranco Fini of the National Alliance party) that severely curtailed the rights of immigrants. Passed in 2002,151 it created permanent detention centers where undocumented immigrants were held with no legal recourse, and effectively criminalized undocumented immigration. While immigration to Italy began relatively late, since 1984 immigrant numbers had been steadily rising. In July 2009, even harsher measures were adopted by the Italian parliament, making immigration without documents a felony.152 Opposition to the Legge Bossi Fini was not as dramatic in terms of a single event like the march in Rome, but it did result in continuous and numerous mobilizations and days of action for many years. The opposition included the building of alliances and collaborations between traditional trade unions, movement activists and

150 The activity around Articolo 18 is interesting precisely because although it was spearheaded by the CGIL, a traditional trade union, and was not “global” in any sense—it was clearly recognized as being part of the movement space generated by the movement of movements—a space that was always defined as global. This meant the labor movement built on the spaces, relationships, politicization and public attention generated by the movement of Genoa, but also in the form of many interesting collaborations, debates and spaces of discussion between widely different political cultures—including certain networks of social centers, the youth wing of the Communist Party, and the major trade unions. Many activists who previously would have never thought they would be on the same side as major trade unions remarked on the importance of these alliances, and moreover the importance of keeping the diversity present at Genoa going in these national battles about Italy’s labor laws. As mentioned previously they saw this as directly building on lessons and inspiration from the experience of Genoa and the GSF.

151 Four years after the original legislation was proposed in 1998. Ansa 2002. La Repubblica.it.

152 Spolar 2009; Zenit 2009.
The Tavolo dei Migranti—the committee focused on Immigrant Rights issues in the aftermath of the GSF—was one of the most active and durable committees within the ultimately failed attempt at creating the Italian Social Forum, and was meant to be a more or less permanent national coordinating body.

**Increasing dissatisfaction with the parliamentary Left**

There are numerous other examples or parts of this expanded space of movement within Italy, each with different focus and emphasis. Some were concerned with issues that are clearly global, and others that are quite clearly Italian, and sometimes it is difficult to sort so neatly between them. It is also clear that these movements and mobilizations did not go unnoticed politically. Some have speculated that the increase in support for the parliamentary Left in 2004 and 2006 had *something* to do with the activity and visibility of these movements. These movements were in point of fact at least partly motivated by anti-Berlusconism.

The supposition that approximately 20% of the Italian electorate was represented in the protests and other movement activities in the year after Genoa did seem to point to the very real potential to fundamentally re-found a new and strong Italian Left beyond the Communist party and outside of party politics in general, after decades in which a “real Left” had been practically absent. For Negri, the presence of this vast and diversely articulated movement is itself evidence of the ultimate rejection and defeat of the parliamentary modality of social democracy. According to Negri in this same article mentioned above,

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153 Notably, when the Left won power in the 2006 elections, their failure to substantially change or remove these repressive laws causes increasing tension with what is left of movements.

the reconsolidation of a viable Left constitutes “another, more advanced phase, of the communist revolution.” He writes,

Italy is absolutely the best example in Europe of a situation in which a failure of the social democratic Left has been followed by an effective action of resistance. We have experienced a kind of leap in consciousness. It is hard to define, but what it tells us is that the multitudes no longer need social democracy in order to struggle and change the world. The talk in Italy is of a ‘movement of movements’, a process of seeking out new forms of political expression both at the level of theory and in concrete struggles; we prepare to develop new hegemonic instruments. The Italian “Laboratory” has begun its work (Negri 2002, translation mine from Italian).

According to Negri’s analysis, then, the MoM should be read largely as a rejection of the politics of social democracy. While there may be dissatisfaction with the dominant political model in many places throughout the world, for Negri Italy can be considered exemplary. This exemplary status can be seen in the rather immediate dissatisfaction with the institutions of representation in Italy, including the failure of the center Left to adequately represent its constituents during the 1990s. This exemplary status, however, goes much farther back to the series of movements, organizations and intellectual projects that responded to the failures and contradictions of the Italian Communist Party beginning in the 1960s. Before going to this critical history, it is first important to give some political and economic context for the contemporary space of movement.

In many interviews and texts, people made clear that dissatisfaction with Italy’s parliamentary democracy and its political parties, specifically those on the Left, was a large part of why they attended the Genoa protest itself. For, while numerous Italians went to Genoa in 2001 to protest the G8 and its neoliberal policies, a large number who protested at Genoa and beyond went for reasons that were almost wholly specific to the Italian situation.

155 see Wright 2008.
More specifically, their involvement was due to their growing disillusion with a parliamentary system that was increasingly inclusive only of two large coalitions at the expense of smaller parties and real political diversity. Following a period of scandal and corruption in the early 1990s, a series of reforms made it more difficult for smaller groups to get elected. The beginning of the second Republic in 1992 saw Italy change from a proportional representational system to an “Additional Member System,” requiring parties to have 4% of the vote before having any representation in parliament. From 1995 on, the government switched between center Left and center Right coalitions, which left many on both extremes unhappy. Earlier in 2001, and prior to the G8 summit and the lengthy process of preparation for the protests, there was a growing dissatisfaction and disquiet among the popolo della sinistra with respect to the Italian government. Italian “leftists” were both angry with the newly elected Berlusconi government\textsuperscript{156} and frustrated with the politics of the center Left that had been in office for five years prior. Between 1996-2001 the center Left was in power, first in the Olive Tree coalition under Prodi,\textsuperscript{157} then with another center Left government headed by D’Alema, and then with Amato. These precarious coalitions fell apart making way for Berlusconi’s re-election in 2001.

Many people I interviewed described the importance of Genoa (and the MoM) as positing the possibility of finally being able to move beyond the impasse of the current model of Liberal representative parliamentary democracy in which there was little substantive difference in the policies supported by either side. People referred to this as the return of

\textsuperscript{156} Berlusconi, a far-right politician, one of the richest men in Italy, and owner of several media networks, came to office in June, 2001, after already serving as Prime Minister in 1994-1995.

\textsuperscript{157} The Olive Tree Coalition was a fragmented coalition of centre-left parties. Created in 1995, it was made up of the Progressives’ Alliance (including Democratic Socialists, Greens, and the Italian Socialist Party), the Popular Party, and Dini’s Italian Renewal party.
“real politics.” As one young woman explained to me at the WSF in January 2003, “Before there was simply no space for voicing opposition; take the war in Kosovo, most of us in the young Socialists were opposed, but our party was not” (conversation, Young Socialist, Porto Alegre, January 2003). A recent survey reported that 75.3 per cent have little or no (28.7 per cent) trust in parliament. Only 14.1 per cent of Italians have any trust in political parties. (Wainwright 2008). While certainly the frustration with Italian political parties was particular to Italy, the fact that it paralleled and therefore resonated with similar disillusion with democratic politics the world over is difficult to deny. Experiences of this disillusionment include of course the United States, but also critical parts of the GJSM including the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Popular Assemblies and Movements of Unemployed Workers in Argentina, and many others. The fact that the WSF was founded with the express rule that political parties could not participate is indicative of this distrust of government, even or especially those that were democratically elected. This points to how important the critique of party politics, and representative democracy more broadly, was to the GJSM, as well as to the ways place-based specificities articulate with more widespread experiences and trends.

Looking forward to the more present day, in 2006 Berlusconi lost the general election to Romano Prodi, who put together a new coalition including the Rifondazione Comunista. Fausto Bertinotti, who had been general secretary of the Rifondazione party since 1996, four years after the old PCI dissolved itself, and who was quite popular among the movement Left, was elected president of the House of Deputies (the lower house of Parliament). However in 2008, Prodi’s government fell apart for a number of reasons too complex to

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158 In part, as I will explain, it is itself a product of very specific circumstances including the close eye of the USA on its Leftist parties throughout the Cold War.
Berlusconi was re-elected, and for the first time since WWII there was not one single representative of the communist party elected to the Italian Parliament. Throughout the period between 2004 and 2008, relations between the “movements” and the Rifondazione were rather tenuous, especially once Rifondazione entered into parliament. While on the one hand, more and more movement activists joined and were even hired for official positions in the party, on the other hand, where there used to be collaboration, relations grew increasingly tense.

Over the last fifteen years and especially within the last five, Italy has experienced substantial economic decline including two officially labeled recessions. In 2005 the World Economic Forum ranked Italy 47th in overall competitiveness, just above Botswana (Peet 2005). Italy’s “economic miracle” after WWII transformed it from a predominantly agricultural economy to one of the seven largest Industrial economies of the world (Italy is a member of the G7 and G8). However, since at least the 1990s, the neoliberal model of liberalization and continued economic restructuring, while technically lowering Italy’s unemployment rates, has been rendering jobs less secure, less permanent and less well paid. There have been increasing numbers of young Italians graduating from university with very few prospects for steady or permanent work, and the university itself was restructured to better resemble the American model and allow for technical degrees. Many educated Italians are leaving the country seeking employment elsewhere. In a 2005 article, the Economist called Italy “the real sick man of Europe” (Peet: 3). Many activists

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160 Only 57% of those in the 15-64 age range are in employment, the smallest proportion in western Europe. Germany, by comparison, has an employment rate of 66%, and Britain one of 73%. Although overall unemployment in Italy is not too bad by western European standards, it is disturbingly high among the young and in the south. Peet 2005:3. See also Wright 2008; Fumagalli and Lazarrato 1999; Bologna 2007.
themselves recognized Italy’s declining economic opportunities and the transformation of its labor market to one based increasingly on temporary, precarious labor. This is often labeled immaterial and Post-Fordist—meaning labor involved in information, communication, service and other such forms of labor, as opposed to manufacturing or Fordist labor. In the years leading up to the Genoa protest, social centers and post-Operaisti theorists inside and outside Italy were developing analyses based around this new figure of precarious labor, including demands for a guaranteed basic income, known in Italy as a *reddito di cittadinanza* (income of citizenship), as a replacement for the old welfare model.\(^{162}\) In the years following Genoa, several protests and networks in Italy and throughout Europe were mobilizing and organizing around the problematic of the growing precaritization of labor and decline of welfare supports.\(^{163}\)

We can single out several characteristics of the political history and constitution of Italy that both contribute to its anomalous or singular nature and to the ways in which this singularity contributed to the formation of the MoM and its resonances with the GJSM. In this next section I describe in greater detail the notion of the Italian Anomaly, which includes Italy’s precarious nature as a unified nation, its internal diversity, the strength and size of its Left, as well as the rich tradition of critical theoretical production in direct relation to political and cultural activism.

### 2.3 The Italian Anomaly: the basis for another kind of politics.

This chapter’s title, the “Italian Anomaly,” is itself taken from a common metaphor

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\(^{162}\) Fumagalli 1996, 1997, 1998. Vercellone 2006; See also Carta de Milano in the last section of this chapter.

closely related to what others term “Laboratory Italy.” As activists repeatedly told me, and as the quote at the outset of the chapter depicts, Italy’s status as an “anomaly” derives from various elements. These include:

1) For much of the 20th century Italy had the largest communist party in the West; this is a fact that profoundly and materially affected the everyday experience of Italian society as well as the conditions for particular conception of social movements outside the party

2) Italy’s national unity and existence as a unified state, which are quite new and comprised of a great deal of regional heterogeneity

3) Italy as the birthplace and stronghold of fascism

4) The dominant and imposing presence of the Catholic Church, which to this day has a substantial influence in Italian society and politics

5) Italy’s uneven and rather late economic development

6) The nature, strength and continuous presence of radical social movements with rich traditions of intellectual and theoretical production

These “anomalous” elements are key to understanding how and why the MoM was so strong in Italy, and so resonant the world-over.

In this section I describe two of the four elements of the Italian Anomaly that help explain the size and nature of the movement in Italy. I begin with a description the Italian Communist Party, the mainstay of Italy’s institutional Left. Next I give a rather lengthy history of the wave of mobilization from 1969-1980, the period of movement or mobilization that so many of my interviewees described as being critical to understanding the MoM.

164 See Hardt and Virno 1996; Wu Ming 1, 2002.

165 This last is my own contribution to a list that others might point to without great difficulty.

166 There is another paper to be written and research to be conducted about the similarities between Italy and other movements, most from Latin America, that came to signify and produce resonant stories for the GJSM. I would argue that experiences with the limits of orthodox leftism, and the experience of cultural and epistemological difference are key to these similarities.
Italy’s (Institutional)\textsuperscript{167} Left

While Italy has been anomalous with respect to many things, the term is used perhaps most commonly with respect to Italy’s Left. Italy has a rich history of resistance and political mobilization, both among the working classes in the factories, and among the peasants in the rural countryside.\textsuperscript{168} Until 1968, and even more explicitly until 1973 and the Historic Compromise (see below), the term “Left” was used rather broadly to refer to the various parties of the Left (communist and socialist) as well as the large trade union the General Italian Confederation of Labor (CGIL) in particular. During that time the workers’ movement was treated as a complex whole, whereas today we differentiate between movements and institutions, where the term institution usually refers to political parties and unions. The party was seen as the site or mechanism of institutional mediation for what society expressed through movements. However beginning around 1968, and then even more starkly after 1973, “another kind of Left” appeared, one that differentiated itself strongly from the communist and other parties, and at times even found the leftist parties—in particular the Partita Communista Italiana (PCI)—to be its “worst enemies.”

While the critique of the traditional Left is similar to that offered by the emerging “New Left” throughout Europe and the Americas, there are several things that distinguish the Italian New Left. First, this “new” Left was deeply rooted in workers’ struggles, which are in turn influenced by particular theoretical and political traditions, especially the workerist or Operaista traditions, but also others like situationism, and even more traditional Marxisms.

\textsuperscript{167} I put institutional in parentheses because it is only at a particular point in time that it becomes important to distinguish between the movement and party/trade union left.

\textsuperscript{168} As described above, the shift from a primarily rural to urban economy has itself been a rather recent development, and many regions especially in the South are still largely rural. See Ginsborg 1990.
Second, the social mobilization spread throughout society to various sectors many have not
normally seen as protagonists of social change, ranging from more traditional factory
workers and students, to doctors, lawyers, journalists, and others.\footnote{See Bologna 1980, 2001; Lumley 1990.} Third, the success of
these movements was in turn related to the radical rejection of capitalism as an economic,
political and cultural system. Rather than seeking legal or labor rights \textit{within} the system—i.e.
through strikes demanding less hours, etc. and expressed in innovative slogans and tactics—
these movements rejected capitalism and its cultural manifestations that pervaded all of
society outright. Some of the most notable practices and theoretical elaborations included the
development and experimentation with notions such as “autonomy,” “the strategy of
refusal,” self-reduction campaigns, the critique of representation, the development of
counter-powers, and the valorization of difference. These concepts can themselves be read as
products of a rich tradition of critiquing orthodox Marxism and Leninism, inside and outside
political parties,\footnote{According to Shore the Italian PCI was so successful because of its critique and ultimate rejection of
Leninism (1990). Interestingly he admits that the explicit theory and ideology of the party itself might not have
acknowledged this, even if in practice and effect it had already done so. See pp 185-192.} and eventually from various extra-parliamentary movements, including
quite notably the Italian feminist movement.\footnote{Wright 2002; Hardt and Virno 1996; Lotringer 1980; Shore 1990.} In some ways, the strength, innovativeness
and originality of the movement Left cannot be understood without knowing about the
communist party, to which it was formed in large part as a reaction and critique.

\textbf{PCI: from Gramsci to the Rifondazione}

The Italian Communist Party, \textit{Partita Comunista Italiana} (PCI), originally the
Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I), was founded in 1921 by Antonio Gramsci and Amadeo

\footnote{See Bologna 1980, 2001; Lumley 1990.}

\footnote{According to Shore the Italian PCI was so successful because of its critique and ultimate rejection of
Leninism (1990). Interestingly he admits that the explicit theory and ideology of the party itself might not have
acknowledged this, even if in practice and effect it had already done so. See pp 185-192.}

\footnote{Wright 2002; Hardt and Virno 1996; Lotringer 1980; Shore 1990.}
Bordiga when they split from the Italian Socialist Party. Outlawed by Mussolini throughout the fascist regime, it emerged as the PCI under the leadership of Togliatti in 1944. Throughout the 20th century it had been the largest communist party in the West,\textsuperscript{172} garnering substantial percentages of the vote, even when US pressure would not officially allow communists to be in the ruling government. There were many reasons for its popularity, size and success. These included its legacy as one of the key structures sustaining the Partisan resistance against fascism, as well as the class composition of Italian society. In addition, its particular brand of communism had several notable characteristics. First, it combined a sort of pragmatism, autonomy and astute capacity for critique with an able politicking vis a vis the Soviet Union. Second, it always placed a significant emphasis on culture and popular culture as important sites for winning hegemony. From the very beginning, the influence of Gramsci’s particular version of Marxism, in which the concept of hegemony was central, recognized that class power and conflict necessarily took place in civil society and in popular culture. These took the form of neighborhood centers—\textit{case populare}—as well as involvement in popular and other forms of art and culture, including visual art, music, theater, etc.\textsuperscript{173} Chris Shore, who has written one of two ethnographies on the PCI based on ethnographic fieldwork he conducted in and around Perugia in the 1980s, attributes the party’s strength to its unique political culture, including its “focus on a communist identity, political socialization, the construction of a Party history and the theory and practice of Italian communism” (Shore 1990: vi). The theory and practice of communism were key. And despite critiques of Gramsci’s theories as being too idealist, journals like \textit{Ordine Nuovo}, in

\textsuperscript{172}In 1976 the PCI received 34.4\% of the vote. (Koff and Koff 2000).

\textsuperscript{173}See Kertzer 1996; Shore 1990; Ginsborg 1990; Wu Ming 1 2002.
which Gramsci first started his political work, were key to fostering a culture of lively debate and critique. A culture and space that were arguably part of the same tradition that led to the founding of key *Operaista* journals in the 1960s and 1970s, that would be critical to the development of the Autonomia movement, and many of the trajectories that arrive at Genoa (see Part IV below and Chapter 4). Shore describes the PCI’s intellectual robustness as one of its keys to success:

It has been the pioneer of a novel form of Marxism, and architect of many ground-breaking concepts in political theory and strategy, including hegemony, polycentrism, Eurocommunism and Historic Compromise. The PCI continues to rank among the world’s most creative and intellectually robust parties of the Left, and it is without a doubt, one of the few outstanding success stories of world communism (Shore 1990: vii).

The PCI gained real popularity as one of the main organizations supporting the 1943-1946 resistance against the fascism of Mussolini and the occupation by the Germans, and much ongoing loyalty to the party is a result of this legacy. In addition, Togliatti, who led the party from 1927-1964 when he died, had a particular approach that favored parliamentary and reformist measures rather than revolutionary action. As an astute politician he was able to build the party into an effective mass organization and while loyal to Stalin maintained a certain space for the particularity and difference of the Italian method. When Stalin’s atrocities were revealed by Kruschev, Togliatti fared better than most communist leaders by not shying away from or denying the claims, but arguing that Kruschev’s admissions did not go far enough. However, Italy did have a very tight relationship with the Soviet Union, relying on it for financial and infrastructural support until they broke with the USSR in 1980. In 1956 the party split over the Soviet invasion of Hungary with the party leadership siding
with Moscow.\footnote{In 1956 Soviet tanks harshly suppressed an anti-Stalinist revolution. While some, including Togliatti and others in the leadership, supported the aggressive stance of Moscow against the counter-insurgents in Hungary, others in the PCI sided with the students against the Soviet Bloc (see Kertzer 1996; Ginsborg 1990).} As we shall see below, in the mid-1970s economic crises, the popularity of the party, and attempts to get around the unofficial US policy preventing the inclusion of the PCI from government, led to the Historic Compromise, an alliance government with the Christian Democrats, in which the PCI accepted many capitalist premises.

Following the intense 1970s, which I discuss in great detail below, the PCI broke relations with the Soviet Union in 1980 in disagreement over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It persisted as the PCI until 1991 when the then general secretary, Achille Occhetto, dissolved the party based on the argument that Eurocommunism was over. He founded a progressive party called the Party for a Democratic Left, which was explicitly non-communist. After this break, the Rifondazione Comunista, (the Communist Refoundation Party), which was to be a key actor in the MoM, was formed by Armando Cossuto. Within the Rifondazione there were internal struggles between a more “movementist” camp, led by Fausto Bertinotti, and more “government oriented” camp, headed by Cossuto. In 1998 the party split further, pulling support from the Prodi government and essentially causing it to fail. Bertinotti’s faction retained the name Rifondazione, while Cossuto’s became the Party of Italian Communists, which entered the next Center Left coalition.\footnote{Looking ahead, in 2008, after being part of Romano Prodi’s center-Left government elected in 2006, the Rifondazione got voted out of power, with not a single member elected to Parliament. That year the Left won only 3.1 % of the national vote, whereas in 2006 taken together, i.e. with the Green and the other communist party included, the “Left” accounted for over 10 % of the vote. This was the first time since WWII that Italy had an Italian parliament without the presence of a single Communist (cf Mezzadra 2008; Wainwright 2008). In January 2009 the Left wing of the Rifondazione left the party to found a new “Movement for the Left,” seeking to include other Leftist parties (they had experimented with different forms of coalition and alliance in the years prior including perhaps most famously the Rainbow Coalition).} That Coalition eventually fell apart, leading the way to Berlusconi’s re-election in 2001.

The course of the Rifondazione in the 1990s became important to the emergence of
the MoM, at both a symbolic and institutional level. The Rifondazione’s interest in the Zapatistas, as well as the relationships between them and the emergent social center networks (Ya Basta and Tute Bianche), its youth wing in particular, were important aspects of the MoM, and speak to the anomalous nature of Italian politics. In January 1997 Fausto Bertinotti, head of the more “movementist” faction of the Rifondazione, went to the Lacondan jungle to meet with Subcomandante Marcos. It was an interesting event at many levels, not the least of which was its mediatic appeal. Bertinotti was quoted saying, “It is an honor, an honor to be here. The Zapatista struggle is an example not only for the indigenous, but for the whole world...there is an amazing convergence in analysis and evaluations with Marcos and the Zapatistas.” The party even invited Marcos to Italy: “We hope that he comes [to Italy] soon. ..the workers’ movement needs the Zapatista perspective, also the Zapatista point of view on how to refound politics” (Rosso 1997: 21, translation mine ). When I spoke to some Disobbedienti who were also members of the Giovani Communisti, the youth league of the Rifondazione, they actually described theirs as a party whose goal was deeply influenced by the Zapatistas and who sought to make change without taking power.176

How actionable and true this rhetoric turns out to be is an important question that I will not engage for the moment; what I want to point to instead are the ways in which both institutional and movement Lefts converge in the discourse of the Zapatistas and the MoM more broadly. In the late 1990s and early 2000s (as I will describe in greater detail below) important segments of the movement Left start to experiment with different relationships to political institutions. This is somewhat controversial within Italy, but is also viewed among global movements as one of its unique and exciting prospects.177 This constitutive and

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conflictual role between movements and institutions, what we can call the movement/institution articulation, or the ways in which the experience of both co-constitute each other, can also be seen as a part of the Italian anomaly. While many narratives posit a strict and bitter divide between the institutional or party Left and social movements, in reality this is not the case. There has always been a certain amount of overlap and fluidity between traditional institutions of the Left and the autonomous social movements.178

In many ways the great wave of struggles of the 1960s and 1970s turned out to be as much about staking out a form of anti-capitalist politics outside the traditional party structures, as it was about resisting capitalist exploitation. This was in large part because ultimately the choices, as well as the economic and political analyses with which the party was working, came to be viewed as fundamentally flawed and harmful to the real needs and conditions of workers. In particular these workers faced troubling and rapidly changing economic conditions, and these often conflicted with needs and desires that were not culturally compatible with a more growth-oriented culture. Anger and dissatisfaction with both the PCI and trade unions had been on the rise since the late 1960s, in particular among Southern Italian immigrants to Northern factories who faced racism and other forms of exploitation both inside and outside the factory, as well as fundamental cultural clashes with

177 Interestingly the autonomous social movements, though admired by anarchists and anti-authoritarian movements throughout the world, tend to distance themselves from anarchism in the Italian context.

178 For a more detailed discussion of the interesting/unexpected nature of this articulation see Trott Doctoral Dissertation, forthcoming. Theoretically, some interpretations of the development of the autonomous movements in Post-autonomia speak to this. According to Trott “Post-autonomy represents a partial break with precisely the ethico-political commitment to autonomy from parties, unions and other institutions – understood in its most radical sense as including a refusal of cooperation – which largely characterized the ‘autonomist’ movements. The term post-autonomous can be understood as describing those organizations, tendencies and areas of movements which on the one hand largely continue to maintain their autonomy in the strict sense, but which seek productive cooperation with others where possible – including on occasion political parties, trade unions and other organizations (Trott 2010).”
their ways of living. While the Italian workers’ movement had always been quite innovative and unique, it is likely that the experience of cultural clash and difference by these Southern immigrants — in the form of clashes with the dominant notion of labor-time, productivity, hierarchical models of organizing and more blatant forms of racism — played an important role in producing the chasm between the more hierarchical, centralized and mainstream PCI, and the workers’ movement that developed along side it. However, according to many the definitive break with the PCI, and with mechanisms of parliamentary democracy more broadly, happened in 1973 with the Historic Compromise.

**Historic Compromise, Strategy of Tension, and Financial Crisis: towards an-other Left**

In one of the few thorough histories of Italy available in English, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, historian Paul Ginsborg writes:

> From the autumn of 1973 onwards the advanced capitalist countries experience an economic crisis which was the most serious since 1929 and which dominated government agendas for the rest of the decade. For Italy it is vital to understand how much the crisis limited the room for maneuver and conditioned the actions of all the country’s social and political forces. The rapid transformations from 1958-1972 had given rise, as we have seen, to major tensions and widespread militancy. Had the economic climate been more serene in the 1970s, the militancy might have won greater concessions and achieved a higher level of political mediation. As it was, no sooner had Italy become one of the great industrial nations of the world than she found herself exposed to the icy winds of recession. The almost simultaneous occurrence of these two elements — transformation and crisis — had the most profound effect on the history of the Republic (Ginsborg, 1990: 35, emphasis mine).

Even within a general social and political history of the country, it is impossible to deny the volatility and significance of the early 70’s for the future of Italy. 1973 ended up being a

179 see Gramsci 1995.
pivotal year for a number of reasons. While the financial crisis had already made itself visible in years prior, the OPEC Oil Crisis of 1973 played a key role in the economic crash that affected all of Europe in 1974. Italy fared particularly poorly in this crisis. According to Ginsborg between 1973-1980 four major trends characterized the Italian economy: very high inflation, the growth of the black or illegal economy, a decline in production and a growing deficit in the public sector (Ginsborg 1990: 352).

Italy in those years was a highly polarized society, and experienced what has been described as a “real and proper creeping civil war” (Revelli quoted in Giacchetti 1997), characterized not only by conflicts around labor and university issues of mostly workers and students, but also by counter-offensives by fascist groups, ostensibly supported by parts of the Italian State and the CIA. This was what was called *la strategia della tensione* (the strategy of tension). This was a reaction to the rise of social movements and an attempt to scare the population out of shifting farther to the Left, or electing the communist party into office. *The strategy of tension* refers to the practice by the Right of intentionally creating an atmosphere of fear through terrorist violence in an attempt to convince the Italian populace that a violent communist takeover was in the works. Organized and carried out by Fascist groups, with some connections to the Italian state via its Interior Minister and its Intelligence units, the strategy of tension is dated from approximately 1969-1980, and was comprised of a series of bombings that killed and wounded several people. While during those years it was believed that the bombings were done by terrorist cells on both the far Left and the far Right, more recent evidence suggests that the majority were done by the Right, which staged so-called “red” terrorism to help justify the increasingly repressive strategies against social

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180 These dates are a bit arbitrary. 1980 marks the date of the explosion in the Bologna station when approximately 85 people were killed and 200 injured when an abandoned suitcase exploded in the station supposedly put there by Right- wing extremists.
movements and the Left. While there is debate over the extent of CIA involvement in the actual bombings, it is widely accepted that many of the fascist and extreme right-wing groups had at least some level of CIA support.\footnote{Bull 2007.}

The 1973 \textit{Historic Compromise} was one of the decisive steps that cemented the division between the institutional and extra-parliamentary Left. The strategy, devised by Enrico Berlinguer and promoted by Aldo Moro, leader of the Christian Democrats, can be dated between 1973-1979. It consisted of forging a historic alliance between the three main political parties: the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, and the Communist party. The policy was created in part as a reaction to the strategy of tension and perhaps more importantly as part of a strategy to end the effective political paralysis the PCI had experienced in recent years due to their exclusion from government. According to some, the rationale was obvious. With economic conditions around Italy worsening, and support for the party growing, Berlinguer thought that such a compromise was the best means of staving off a potential coup led by fascists or even U.S. backed forces. Pointing to its growing electoral support to ostensibly “play a bigger role in the parliamentary majority,” the PCI claimed to move from a party of opposition to a party of opposition \textit{and} government.

Moreover, Allende’s assassination in Chile had taken place that year. In practice however, the Historic Compromise served to further alienate workers and movements from the PCI, which now sided with the State against the movements in terms of law and order, and philosophically accepted the premises of capitalist development and economic growth no matter the form.\footnote{It is almost amazing how similar events were in the years after Genoa. Until 2004 there was a more or less
that marked the definitive break between the traditional institutional Left and the movementist Autonomist Left. It is to the latter that I now turn.

**The extra-parliamentary Left: The great revolutionary and political wave of 1968-1979**

Earlier periods, including 1919-1922 when the first factory councils emerged in a period of worker mobilization, and the years of the Resistenza — the resistance against German occupation and Mussolini’s Fascism at the end of WWII—are evidence of the deep-seated and widespread cultures and practices of resistance in Italy.\(^{183}\) However, the 1960s and 1970s were a period of unparalleled struggle, reaching beyond the working and peasant classes to incorporate many classes and social strata not typically involved in mass movements. Doctors, lawyers, journalists, and numerous other “mainstream professionals” were involved in radical and critical political actions in their social and economic terrains, as well as, at times, in protests.\(^{184}\)

1968 can be classified as a world historical event, characterized by the explosion of “new social movements” and “New Lefts” in many places throughout the globe. These “new social movements” referred to movements of students, women, environmentalists and others, as well as movements operating outside the classical working class structures of unions and parties. Unlike traditional workers’ movements, analysts have argued that these “new” movements were post-material; they were not only organizing around “bread and butter” or

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cooperative relationship between the party and movements, but towards 2004 and especially in 2006 when the Rifondazione Comunista became a key ally in the Center Left government of Prodi, tensions between movement and party grew. The issue of violence vs non-violence was often used as a pretext for the division, mirroring the politics of the 1970s almost eerily. The killing of Franco Larusso in Bologna in 1977 at the peak of the Movement of ‘77, is also eerily similar to the murder of Giuliani.

\(^{183}\) See Ginsborg 1990; Tarrow 1989.

\(^{184}\) See Bologna 1980; Bianchi and Caminiti 1997; Balestrini and Moroni 1988.
labor issues, but about quality of life issues, and the very terms and norms that governed modernity. This included expressions or reactions against forms of isolated individualism, consumerism, and lack of real democracy or autonomy in various spheres of life, etc.\textsuperscript{185} However, unlike other countries where the high points and massified moments of these movements were rather short-lived—i.e. May of ’68—Italy’s 1968 was only the tip of the iceberg. Kicked off by the irreverent, anti-authoritarian student movements of 1967-1968, and then even more by the highly conflictual “Hot Autumn” in the Northern factories from 1969-1970, the “long decade” or “great wave” continued growing until its peak in 1977, and ended by 1980—although some organizations did not formally disband until 1983.\textsuperscript{186}

While the years leading up to the Movement of ’77 have been described as one long arc, we can speak of at least two distinct periods: the first from 1968-1973, and the second from 1973-1979.\textsuperscript{187} The first period was crucial for the development of many of the hallmark practices and ideas including “refusal to work” and \textit{auto-riduzione} (self reduction of prices), and the emerging critiques of hierarchy and the traditional instruments and organizations of the Left, including especially traditional unions and political parties. However, it is the period beginning in 1973 that is most often referred to as Autonomia and is considered the most radical, largely because of its more definitive break and opposition to organizations of the traditional Left.


\textsuperscript{186} See Lotringer 1980/2007

\textsuperscript{187} See Berardi 1980; Lumley 1990. Interestingly Sidney Tarrow, one of the major figures within North American Social Movement studies gives the anomalous periodization of 1965-1975 in his now classic book \textit{Democracy and Disorder}. 


Early phase: 1968-1973

The earlier phase (1968-1973) can be said to begin with the 1967-68 student movements. The student movement in Italian universities was itself triggered by the expansion of higher education to broader sectors of the Italian population, inadequate support for completion, as well as a series of reforms seen by students to work against the democratic functioning of the universities. Student groups, initially all affiliated with the major Leftist parties, began occupying faculties and contesting the educational and structural conditions of the universities. The student movement saw the development of many of the cultural practices, including libertarian anti-authoritarianism, an emphasis on collective living, and sexual liberation that would continue to influence the movements of the decade. Unlike most student movements, the Italian students linked their struggle to those of workers, in many cases employing an Operaist analysis and methodology to substantiate an organic linkage between the two. Among other things, the Operaistas (see below) emphasized workers’ surveys and a methodology called conricerca (research with) in which researcher and the “worker subject” would co-produce knowledge about the conditions, desires and politics of the workers.188

This was itself facilitated by the explosion of labor struggles in the factories in the mid-1960s, reaching a highpoint in 1969-1970. Between 1969 and 1970 there were unprecedented labor strikes (cumulatively registering 440 million strike hours). Workers in factories in the North of Italy, particularly migrants from the South, struck not only for more pay and better hours, but also against the system that had forced them to migrate North to an “industrial” capitalist culture, where they faced discrimination and exploitation not only in the factories, but in housing, and in the very details of everyday life. As Lumley describes,

188 For more on conricerca see Borio et. al 2003; Malo de Molina 2004; Wright 2002.
“The movement was not new, in that industrial militancy had history going back over a hundred years in Italy, but it involved workers who were new to industrial organization and action” (Lumley 1990: 207). This demographic and experiential particularity of labor movements were key to explaining the innovative nature and course these struggles took, and many of the reasons these movements developed autonomously from the dominant representative structures of the Left, namely the major trade unions and the Communist party. In contrast to the period from 1973 on, and despite some animosity, during these years the relationship between the movements and these institutions was still in some sense dialectical; movements, parties and unions worked off of and overall with each other.

The Hot Autumn of 1969-1970 was kicked off by the occupation of the Fiat factory by its workers, and notably it was organized autonomously from both the major unions and parties and with only marginal presence of the small revolutionary groups such as Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio. It saw not only the proliferation of new tactics and goals including machine sabotage, refusal to work, and a political vision that rejected the whole capitalist model. It also produced new and interesting relationships between student activists, workers and political-intellectuals. According to Franco Berardi, aka Bifo, the Hot Autumn saw a movement essentially against capitalist exploitation of labor evolve into a vast network

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189 Following a period of rapid if uneven growth of the Italian economy, events in 1969-1970 were largely the result of significant numbers of immigrants coming from the south of Italy to work in the Northern factories. These were a “different” breed of workers who participated in strikes and other forms of protest to contest not only their labor conditions, but also the larger culture and model of development that had forced them to leave their homes in the South.


191 It is impossible to describe in depth the workers’ movements of these years, for not only are they dynamic and fascinating overall, the movement had its territorial particularities. The main sites for the Hot Autumn where Milan and Turin, but they were spread elsewhere. Balestrini’s novel, Vogliamo Tutto, is an excellent recreation of the development of the movement from this early phase. For more in depth description of these years see Wright 2002; Lumley 1990, and to a certain extent Ginsborg 1990. See also Balestrini and Moroni 1988; and Balestrini 1971. In Italy there are numerous essays and books on these and studies of the movements in particular cities.
of counter-powers that then began directly confronting the question of Power, or politics proper. Beyond factory struggles, the workers’ movement also became involved in a series of struggles about housing, cost of living, education and health care, struggles that eventually led to the theorization of the mass worker whose struggle necessarily took place outside the factory because the factory had extended throughout society. However, it was ultimately the theoretical and practical contradictions over how to deal with power, how to organize a movement that was actually liberatory and not oppressive, as well as the increasing financial crisis that led to the end of the first period of this movement.  

By 1973, largely due to the declining financial situation, the OPEC oil crisis and increasing unemployment (numbers of unemployed approached 2 million), the trade unions and Communist party had re-established their hegemony in the factories, reinstituting traditional structures and a political approach that tended to favor compromise with the institutions. This move, along with the increasing clashes of political cultures would eventually lead to the more thorough division between the “official” worker’s movement (i.e. the Unions and ICP), and the more diffuse and disperse movement of workers’ collectives, students and youth that would become the basis of the variegated whole known as Autonomia—originally meaning autonomy from the traditional organisms of representation. At the same time, following upon the tremendous mobilizations of the years around 1969-1970, revolutionary groups outside the party had experienced a series of internal crises with respect to the relationship between vanguard and masses, spontaneity and organization, hierarchy and decentralization, and feminist critique and exodus. All of these can also be interpreted as having to do with the conflict between militancy and life. In particular the

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193 Lumley 1990.
critique and exodus by many women was a significant sign of both the movement’s decline and many of its contradictions. Women were dissatisfied with the domination of the political culture by men, men’s unawareness of several issues that affected women, including the way personal issues and quotidian aspects were themselves sites of power and oppression, the threat of sexual and other violence, and the perpetuation of uneven divisions of labor within the movement. Overall, the feminist conflict happened at different points over time with serious effects including that Lotta Continua, one of the biggest movement organizations, dissolved itself as a result of vocal criticism by women at a large conference in 1976.) In 1973 Potere Operaio dissolved, “diffusing itself throughout the committees, collectives and base structures” that came to constitute the base structure of Autonomia. Potere Operaio had been one of the main revolutionary organizations in that first period. Based mostly in Padua and related to the Operaist theoretical traditions, its demise paralleled the demise of the first phase of movements in this tumultuous decade.

**Autonomia: 1973-1979**

Autonomia is the name given to the diverse array of autonomous and localized groups, collectives, organizations and practices that were active in the period from 1973 through approximately 1979, although some organizations remained officially active until 1983. The peak of this period was the Movement of ’77, although in informal conversation the two are often used interchangeably—much like Genoa is used interchangeably with the broader MoM. The term *Autonomia* came from Autonomia Operaia and the theoretical notion of worker’s autonomy—a key concept of Italian Operaismo—which refers to the autonomous status of the worker with respect to capital on the one hand, and instruments of

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194 Del Re 2002; Dalla Costa 2002; Red Notes 1978.
representation—i.e. trade unions and political parties, on the other. According to Harry Cleaver, Autonomist Marxism—a tendency broader than, but inclusive of, Italian workerism—is defined by an emphasis on the:

...autonomous power of workers—autonomous from capital, from their official organizations (e.g. the trade unions and political parties), 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 (Cleaver qtd in Wright 2008: 113).

However in practical and historical terms, Autonomia came to refer to something much broader. It referred to the whole array of diverse movements, collectives and projects that worked for a Left autonomous of the PCI. It also referred to a political, economic, social and cultural principle, as well as a diffuse practice and desire. Beyond a principle of causal and organizational autonomy from capital and political parties, autonomy also came to describe an ensemble of practices related to a critique of hierarchy, recognition of difference (mostly regional), and a critique of power and the political more generally. Although, as Berardi and others who have studied and attempted to record the history and fate of Autonomia and Operaismo, would argue, it was precisely the tension between organization and spontaneity, the role of power versus subjectivity, and numerous other issues that led to the first breaking up of groups around ‘73, but then again towards the end of the decade.

As I mentioned earlier in this section, some of the most widely celebrated and notable practices included self-reduction campaigns in which different groups of people in different

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195 As I will go on to show, this definition of autonomy is quite resonant with the new political imaginary supposedly augured by the Global Movement, and the Zapatistas in particular.

196 See Wright 2008; Berardi 1998.
sites—i.e on utility bills, on the bus, at the movies—students, workers, and others would self-proclaim a reduction in price (sometimes to zero) and refuse to pay. This was in many ways a manifestation of the strategy of refusal—meaning refusing to work, refusing capitalist growth rejection not only of exploitatative working conditions, but the very premise of a system that required more and more work, less time for leisure, more and more hierarchy and control, and less time for freedom.

In empirical terms, it is quite difficult to succinctly describe Autonomia because of its internal heterogeneity and dynamism. One of the most cited texts describes this period as “an authentic labyrinth” comprised of “thousands of ideological and organizational” currents (Balestrini and Moroni: 3). Moreover there is relatively little in-depth social scientific work on these movements.¹⁹⁷ One exception is the still unpublished dissertation of Patrick Cuninghame, entitled “Autonomia: a movement of refusal and social conflict in the 1970s.”¹⁹⁸ In it he describes Autonomia as “not a political organization or party, but a broad based ‘new social movement’ made up of differing and sometimes mutually antagonistic internal tendencies” (Cuninghame 2002: 11).

The first problem to be encountered in researching such a diverse and socially diffuse entity is one of descriptive discourse: which Autonomia are we dealing with? The Autonomia Operaia of the self-organised factory assemblies of Porto Marghera, Milan, Turin and Rome whose unifying slogan of ‘workers’ autonomy’ against work and capitalist command expressed through the

¹⁹⁷ For a thorough description of the gaps in the literature see Wright 2004. His book, Storming Heaven (2002), is an important contribution to the field but focuses more on the theories and ideas of Operaismo, than the “labyrinth of groups” active in Autonomia. Since his writing of the article and the 30th anniversary of the Movement of ’77, Derive Approdi has published three useful volumes in Italian called Gli Autonomi:Le storie, le lotte, le teorie. The first volume describes the different experiences of Autonomia throughout Italy. The second is a compilation of important documents, and the third, published in 2008, traces the intellectual and communicational developments.

¹⁹⁸ There are several key texts in Italian, but few are historically rigorous, most are more interested in the theoretical and political arguments than getting a thorough picture of the whole field. However in recent years more collections of primary texts, oral histories and interviews with main protagonists have emerged. (Bianchi and Caminiti 2007ab, Borio et.al 2003, Del Bello , Berardi 1997).
factory system and its wage differentials became the symbol of an expanding series of social conflicts? The Autonomia Operaia Organizzata of Negri, Scalzone and Piperno,199 the Padovani and the Volsci, those who sought to ‘ride the tiger’ of the ‘77 Movement, who wished to build a party-like structure of revolutionary contestation but were driven into prison or exile after 1979? The ‘armed Autonomia’ of often very young autonomi, disillusioned and frustrated by the political containment and defeat of the ‘77 Movement, who established the many tiny and often short-lived groups of the terrorist ‘second wave’, characterising the Anni di Piombo (Years of Lead) as much as the Red Brigades? The ‘creative Autonomia’ of the ‘metropolitan indians’ (MI) with their painted faces and ironic slogans against the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its ‘Historic Compromise’ with the Christian Democrats (DC); of Radio Alice and the network of free radio stations (radio libere), street theatre collectives and small publishers? Or the ‘diffused area’ of Autonomia, which encompassed all these social realities, including secondary school occupations, women’s groups and neighbourhood committees, but was also in deep contradiction with the more organised, ‘militarist’ part of the movement (ibid: 5)?200

Cuninghame goes on to distinguish between 1) “Organized Autonomia,” 2) “the area of diffused or Social Autonomia,” including what are called cane sciolti, or loose dogs, but refer to individuals who are not affiliated or leashed to an organization; 3) “Armed Autonomia” and the 4) “creative Autonomia of the Movement of ’77.” Each of these “areas” is itself inflected by local and regional differences, such that Autonomia in Rome looks quite different than Autonomia in Padova or Bologna. These internal differences, in particular the regional differences, are respected, and this difference is one of the things that people regarded as a particularly important and rather unique aspect of Autonomia.201 This inherent valorization, recognition and accommodation of the ways place-based and other differences

199 Toni Negri, Oreste Scalzone and Franco Piperno were founders of Potere Operaio (1968-73). They all continue to write about the 70s and remain politically active. Scalzone lives in Paris, Piperno in the South of Italy, and Negri now lives in Venice.

200 The description of the prosecutor that leads to the prison sentences of so many, is also ironically apt, describing Autonomia as “a veritable mosaic of different fragments, a gallery of overlapping images of circles and collectives without any social organization.” (qtd in Lotringer, 2007: v).

201 For descriptions of the different regional autonomies, see Bianchi and Caminiti: 2007a.
were in stark contrast to most versions of orthodox Marxism which attempts to do away with such differences. This in turn contributes to the reasons people throughout the GJSM pick up on (Post)Operaismo in the late 1990s/2000s.

More commonly, Autonomia is divided into two tendencies or “areas”: Organized Autonomia, and Social/Diffuse Autonomia. In this mapping, Armed Autonomia is considered part of Organized Autonomia, and Creative Autonomia is considered part of the latter. As Cuninghame and numerous interviews consistently remind us, these divisions should not be taken too seriously, for many people floated between and across the boundaries depending on the moment.

Organized Autonomy was itself a direct descendent or product of the Operaista (workerist) tradition, and even more specifically of the Marxist organization Potere Operaio that dissolved itself in 1973 but remained very active in diffuse forms, collectives and numerous projects of theoretical and intellectual production. As we shall see in the description of the Tute Bianche and Social Centers in the next section, Organized Autonomy was very influential both materially and theorectico-conceptually to the MoM.

The 1973 shift from a Marxist vanguard organization, Potere Operaio (which along with Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaio were the large revolutionary groups moving in the 1968-1973 period), to the decentralized archipelago of collectives characterizing Autonomia marked an important theoretical as well as practical shift that would have important consequences, not only for the growth and continuing momentum of Autonomia, and its eventual peak in 1977, but also for the theoretical tradition of Operaismo—and various other intellectual projects and tendencies.

Armed Autonomia was a substantial but never a majoritarian or dominant area of the
movements, although there were “more than 200 clandestine armed groups in Italy during the 1970s” (Ruggiero 1993: 33), any armed group tends to get disproportionate attention. The various cells comprising this area advocated for armed revolution, took up arms, and used violence. The most famous group was the Red Brigades, who in 1978 kidnapped the head of the Christian Democrat Party, held him for 54 days and then killed him. There were splits within organizations like Potere Operaio and other parts of Organized Autonomia over the use of certain forms of violence. Debates, arguments and violent fissures in various ambits of the Movement revolved around the issue of armed violence. There were a number of positions on the spectrum of employing violent means one could espouse—from sabotaging factory machines, robbing the bosses, destroying property, to kidnapping and murder. As the strategy of tension and police repression increased, more and more people decided to go underground and take up arms. While many within Organized Autonomia abhorred and publicly decried such tactics, mainly for strategic rather than moral reasons, until the assassination of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978, these groups had some level of support in various ambits of the Movement. As such many consider armed autonomia a branch or development of OA. Others however consider such a claim oxymoronic, arguing that the move to armed struggle was ideologically opposed to any real notion of Autonomy because it was premised on a relationship to the state, and actually worked within the logic of the state. These theoretical and strategic debates continued to play out, even in the MoM.

Social Autonomia I would argue includes Creative as well as diffused Autonomia in Cuninghame’s taxonomy. It refers not only to the broad sphere of groups embracing and

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202 These armed groups varied in ideology and scope. Some women’s groups had armed branches to avenge doctors who opposed abortion in public, but then performed them privately at a high price (ibid.).

203 Virno 1996.
developing ironic counter-cultural practices, but also to the numerous collectives and individuals that did not consider themselves in affiliation with any particular organizations. These latter were known as cane sciolti and refused the party logic of towing a single party or organizational line, and were even known to make fun of and critique the more politicized groups of Organized Autonomia. Social or diffuse Autonomia—which is not as easily delimitable from organized Autonomy as the categorical distinction implies—was in many ways more of a descendent of the irreverent student movements of 1968, as well as the radical feminist movements, and various counter cultures that had been developing in parallel to the political movements, whereas OA was more within a Marxist tradition of workers movements204.

Social Autonomia has been described by Cuninghame as a “mass of mainly counter-cultural youth, students, unemployed and semi-unemployed young people, radical feminists, gay men and lesbians, street artists and those disaffected former members of the New Left ‘groups’ who were increasingly critical of dogmatic Marxism”(ibid). The most iconic representatives of this wing were the Metropolitan Indians of the Movement of ’77 who basically employed various satirical practices to make interventions, while the autonomous women’s collectives were to have a profound effect on the development and crises of this movement. These “Indians” employed satire and cultural interventions to critique not only the traditional Left, but also the revolutionary Left, whom they found to be self-important and dominating. It is important to note that the counter-culture, including underground music, illicit drug use, and the development of new cultures of everyday life, was a key part of the overall atmosphere and day-to-day existence of the 1970s. Stark divisions imposed by analysts between cultural movements and political movements tend to efface the ways they

204 Cuninghame 1995.
co-existed.

Bologna, where I conducted the majority of my research, was seen as a key site for the creative and diffused “wing” of the movement in the 1970s. The legacy persisted; in fact it still affects the ways in which Bologna is perceived, and functions within the national panorama, such that within “laboratory Italy,” Bologna is itself seen as a political laboratory largely due to the effective co-existence and cross-pollination among many diverse political areas.\textsuperscript{205} Whereas other regions, like the Northeast, were dominated by a single political tendency, Bologna was both then and when I arrived in 2002 a place where different “areas” actually worked together. As I have mentioned elsewhere, one of the notable things about political movements in Italy is the difference in the experience of movement in different cities and regions. While this internal heterogeneity was at times experienced as an obstacle, overall there was (and is) also a general recognition and even certain pride in the recognition that differences were essential parts of the movement, and in many ways what made the Italian experience so unique and powerful.\textsuperscript{206}

This is in large part why the unity in difference posited by the GSF in 2001 was seen as so significant; it seemed to offer a possibility of moving beyond these divisions. However, some of the differences that were the most difficult to overcome with respect to the GSF hearkened or referred directly back to the different legacies or heritages left by the different Autonomias.\textsuperscript{207} Overall regional \textit{and} ideological diversity were both an asset and a problem

\textsuperscript{205} Various interviews, Bologna 2002.

\textsuperscript{206} Various interviews Bologna 2002; Virno and Hardt 1996; Balestrini and Moroni 1988; Bianchi and Laminiti. 2007\textsuperscript{a} which includes a representation of the different experiences of Autonomia from throughout Italy.

\textsuperscript{207} For example, years after Genoa 2001, I spoke with someone from Torino who had participated in the Black Block. He explained how his Social Center (Askatasuna) had refused to participate in the GSF in large part because during Autonomia, once the arrests began to happen, many people in his region felt betrayed by those areas of Autonomia that denounced armed struggle (conversation Bologna, October 24, 2007).
for the Italian movements and their legacy. Those areas advocating more direct uses of violence and a refusal to negotiate with the police were themselves remnants of certain parts of Autonomia that never renounced the use of violence, and they suffered particularly harshly during the period of arrests.

Operaismo roughly translates in English to workerism; however workerism is considered a problematic translation by some because the term lavoristi (which also can translate into workerism) in Italy has other meanings. I will stick to the Italian, Operaismo. Operaismo is a theoretical and political project that began with figures like Raniero Panzieri and Mario Tronti, and later was continued by Romano Alquati, Toni Negri, Franco Piperno, Sergio Bologna, Franco Berardi and others. Following within a tradition of critical Marxism of the 1950s, these men were Leftist intellectuals and were often members of either the Socialist or Communist parties. These intellectuals were unified in their critiques of the historical Left, orthodox Marxism, and the methods used to understand the struggles of the working class. While setting firm dates on intellectual and political movements is difficult because each theoretical move depends on the seeds of those before, experiences like Quaderni Rossi, begun in 1961 by former socialist party intellectual Raniero Panzieri, can in retrospect be seen as sort of incubator for what would then emerge as Operaismo proper with Mario Tronti’s journal Classe Operaia. Both journals became home for numerous activists and dissident Marxists critical of the dominant strands in their respective parties. Panzieri’s own commitment to permanent critique and to the importance of engaged forms of

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208 Wright 2002.

209 Relationships with the parties fluctuated. Ultimately several operaisti, those to be more active in Autonomia, rejected party politics wholesale, whereas others like Panzieri and Tronti became disillusioned with what they saw as the dogmatic nature of people’s anti-party stances, and returned to some relations to their party (see Wright 2002).

210 ibid.
sociological study that privileged the actual stories and opinions of the workers led to his exclusion from the core, or leadership, of his party. The seminal workerist text is Tronti’s *Operai e Capital*, written in 1966. In it Tronti articulates one of the most important tenets of this dissident, or “heretical” Marxist approach, namely the autonomy of the working class: it is not capital that is the dynamic force of history but the working class and its struggles.\(^{211}\) Capital must be understood to be *reacting to* the innovations, struggles and resistance of the working class, and not the other way around. In this text Tronti also articulates key theses including perhaps most famously “the strategy of refusal,” which was a key tactic of the workers’ movements in the 1960s and beyond. The strategy of refusal meant going beyond traditional working class demands for better working conditions, such as better pay, to the rejection or refusal of work itself. Against simplistic or monochromatic visions of Operaismo it is critical to note that the singular term connotes a rather variegated set of positions, within which remain numerous debates and points of divergence. The Operaista tradition in which we can also include post-Operaismo,\(^ {212}\) like the movement of Autonomia, is itself extremely variegated, constituted as much by stark disagreements as commonalities. In a recent book, Borio, Pozzi and Roggero describe Operaismo as “neither a homogenous doctrinaire corpus, nor a unitary political subject”, but rather “multiple pathways with their roots in a common

\(^{211}\) The text is itself a product of the “heretical Marxist” tradition associated with Della Volpe, and critical of Gramscian Marxism and the “Togliattian” strategy of reformism seen to be the practical outcome of Gramsci’s emphasis on culture and ideals.

\(^{212}\) With Operaista tradition I refer to both Operaismo and Post Operaismo, although many would see these as quite distinct. Nunes 2007 has articulated this argument, choosing to speak of (post)Operaismo to refer to the totality of both operaismo and post-, arguing that there are enough commonalities to have them treated as one. Strictly speaking Post Operaismo refers to the work that developed with Autonomia—from the early ’70s through to today. There are various arguments about the degree of continuity between the two—but in general the main difference is attributed to the shift from the factory or mass worker to the post-Fordist worker. Interview De Lorenzis 2002.
theoretical matrix” (qtd. in Wright 2008:111) Certain key themes and notions constitute Operaismo’s core theoretical matrix. These include the primacy of working class struggle, class composition, autonomy, and the subservience of theory, research and sociology to actual political developments and desires of the working class.  

The notion of “class composition” goes against Hegelian notions of the subject (i.e. class) as ontological givens, and instead focuses on the processes of their composition or becoming. Wright calls it the most distinctive aspect of Operaismo used to describe both the so-called ‘technical’ as well as the ‘political’ composition of the working class. The most peculiar aspect of Italian workerism in its evolution across the following two decades [from the beginning of the 1960s] was to be in the importance that it placed upon the relationship between the material structure of the working class, and its behavior as a subject autonomous from the dictates of both the labor movement and capital. This relationship workerism would call the nexus between the technical and political composition of the class (Wright 2002: 3). 

Bolognese Operaista, Franco Berardi (Bifo) prefers the term “compositionism” to Operaismo, because he doesn’t like the narrow social reference —i.e workers— Operaismo seems to imply (2003). With composition, “the concept of social class is redefined as an investment of social desire and that means culture, sexuality, refusal of work” (ibid). With the notion of composition, the working class desires are not given, and one must work to understand the composition of the working class at any given time. This in turn points to the

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213 The book is self-described as an object of conricerca—militant research--seeking to understand the connections between Operaismo and the MoM.

214 For a good description of Operaismo see Wright 2002; 2008; see also Hardt 1990.

215 Franco Berardi, aka Bifo, was an important intellectual activist from Potere Operaio, and then increasingly part of the Bolognese Creative Autonomy. He is still quite active today and I met with him several times.
notion of autonomy, on the one hand, and the centrality of certain forms of knowledge and research on the other. Research into class composition is then key. The relationship between the production of concepts and the actual struggles of the working class suggested a dialectical process in which practices arise, are theorized, and those theories and concepts are then used in the struggle.\textsuperscript{216} Research is always seen as a critical part of any movement or liberatory process. This centrality, implicit in the notions of conricerca (research-with), and the concomitant critique of traditional forms of research and knowledge production, is central to these movement’s uniqueness and to the emergence of the new political imaginary.\textsuperscript{217} Autonomy in Operaismo refers to the autonomy of working class desire and subjectivity, both from capital and from organisms of representation.

The Movement of ’77

According to authors like Steven Wright, Operaismo began to go into crisis shortly after the peak of the Movement of ’77. He writes, “1977 was a decisive year for the Italian Left. … 1977 was also a decisive year for Operaismo” (Wright 2002: 197). While the period from 1973 to 1979 (or to 1983) was a long arc of persistent mobilization and activity, including the prolific use of autoriduzione (self-reduction), squatting and free radios, the Movement of ’77 marked a peak, or moment of crystallization. In addition to the numbers and energy behind its mobilization, it came to symbolize the absolute distinction, and even animosity, between the “movement Left” and the PCI. Similar to Genoa in many ways, the Movement of ’77 came to symbolize the decade of movement. Sergio Bianchi, in ’77 a

\textsuperscript{216} Descriptions of this process were given to me in various interviews: DP, Bologna 2006; conversation Paris 2007; see also Hardt 1996; 1990.

\textsuperscript{217} For more see Wright 2002; Hardt 1990; Cuninghame 1995; and Malo 2004.
young activist from the small industrial town of Varese, and later founder of Derive Approdi, one the most important publishing projects in the 1990s, describes the Movement of ’77:

Although the weaving of social subjectivities has its roots well planted in the years prior to seventy-seven, it [’77] is in any case a distinguishable event, effectively an onset/insurgence. From the beginning of the year the events will have a rhythm that is always more pressing… the movement will live difficult moments of internal separation and exalting moments of extraordinary mobilization… But from January through December the movement still maintains itself, it manages a politics of its own, it invades the plazas. And therefore a political chronology that is not simply a list of facts is detectible. With the end of the year the components internal to the movement, its multiple subjectivities, lose the capacity to consider themselves as a whole: they will continue their trajectories or they will shatter. What is certain is that the complex whole of the movement loses its continuous invention of unity (Bianchi et.al. 1997: 51).

According to Bifo, “the struggles that exploded in 1977 were completely out of proportion to what occasioned them,” suggesting that it was not the immediate political aims and objectives that were at stake but something else (1980: 157). Ostensibly, the explosion of activism was a reaction to a proposed university reform, the Legge Malfatti, which included a quota system for limiting numbers of students. In February 1977 the wounding of a student in Rome by fascist groups led to the occupation of universities in major cities throughout the country—occupations not only by students, but also working and unemployed youth.

However, according to Bifo,

The occupation of the universities was a pretext: the academic institutions were occupied not only by students, but by young workers who worked in small factories, and had no other possibility for organization and concerted action. Then there were the unemployed who lived at the city’s outskirts, the juvenile delinquents, the disenfranchised… University communities became the general quarters for a wave of social struggle that had as a fundamental theme the refusal of the capitalist organization of work, the rejection of that system which generates exploitation and unemployment as the two poles of socialized work.

All work for less [time] became the watchword for this wave of struggle of young proletarians—a group heterogeneous from the point of view of productivity, but homogenous from the point of view of culture (ibid).
Later that month, as universities remained occupied, Luciano Lama, CGIL union leader and member of the communist party, came to the Sapienza University in Rome to talk some sense into the students. As part of a political action, Lama was expelled from the university. This action was repeated a few weeks later in Bologna. Building on the growing tension between the movement and the Communist party, events in Bologna in March led to an even bigger explosion of the movement. On March 11, following the expulsion of Lama and a general increase in tension, student and Lotta Continua activist Francesco Larusso was shot dead as he and hundreds of others ran from police who had been ordered to the university by the rector.\[218\] The death of Francesco at the hands of the police was particularly poignant in Bologna, a city that had until then been the Communist Party’s poster child. The Communist party sided with the forces of order against the students rather unsuccessfully, since for ten days Bologna was practically in the hands of the Movement. The event highlighted the division between the movement and party Left. Despite heavy-handed repression that followed, the Movement persisted.\[219\]

**The End of the Movement: Lessons and Infrastructure for the Future**

As with most social movements or periods of intense mobilization—“cycles of struggle” as the Operaistas call them— it is difficult to give final and clear-cut reasons for the end of this remarkable decade, or even provide a definitive date of its end. However, we can point to several widely acknowledged key factors: 1) the increase in repressive strategies by the State, 2) the turn to violent armed conflict by various groups in the movement, and 3)


\[219\] ibid; Cuninghame 2002; Ginsborg 1990.
disagreements and fragmentation internal to the movement on questions of theory and strategy.

The kidnapping and murder of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades was undoubtedly a pivotal moment. Not only did government repression and the pressure for arrests increase, but internal to the movement responses to Moro’s assassination were mixed. While some people defended violence and “terrorism” as a necessary movement tactic, others saw it as contradictory to the goals of a mass movement. Following the death of Moro, some turned farther to clandestine armed struggle while others left movement activities altogether. Numerous arrests followed Moro’s murder. These included the arrests of nine prominent intellectuals associated with Autonomia Operaia. On April 7, 1979, Toni Negri, Oreste Scalzone and Franco Piperno, the founders of Potere Operaio, were accused of being masterminds for “red terror” and specifically for the Red Brigades. Negri faced the most serious and severe accusations. Eventually some of these accusations against Negri, which originally included 17 counts of murder, including that of Aldo Moro, were dropped. However Negri was sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence based on the alleged crime that he and his texts were morally responsible for the movement’s violence. Many intellectuals and participants in journals and other forms of communication and knowledge production were also arrested. The use of laws from the period of fascism to hold prisoners without trial became a terrifying hallmark of the Italian state. The choice to target intellectuals was indicative of their importance to this decade of movement and beyond.

He served a few years in Italy and then went to France in exile. In 1997, he turned himself in and continued his sentence in Rebibia Prison, then under house arrest in Rome.

Balestrini and Moroni 1988/1997. Letters from numerous prominent intellectuals such as Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault and others are now well known. There were also letters and demands made from PCI members Cacciari, Eco, Tronti and others demanding that the false accusations be dropped).
In the course of 1979 thousands of people were arrested. “Between the late 1970s and mid 1980s, more than 20,000 ‘political offenders’ were processed in one way or another through the criminal justice system” (Ruggiero 1993: 34). In 1983, in the highpoint of imprisonment there were about 4,000 political prisoners. Some served lengthy prison sentences, and others were exiled, while others still went into hiding. Even in 2006, 200 people were still in jail and many others were living in exile (ibid; Della Porta 1995). The introduction of heroin in mass quantities in various spaces led to one of Europe’s largest heroin epidemics disproportionately affecting many that had been involved in movement activities. 222 This took its toll on the Movement as well. 223 As one activist from Verona, now living in Bologna described it to me, “from a period in which the piazzas were full of people and activity came a period where they seemed to be filled with zombies” (older social center activist, interview, Bologna, November 10, 2006.)

Beyond these clearly debilitating elements, disillusion, burnout and dissatisfaction with the internal dynamics of movement organizations, in addition to political, ideological and strategic disagreements, were also significant factors in bringing the movement to an end. Many people see the movement’s death as less than natural. Debates (sometimes quite polemical) about what went wrong still continue today. 224 While no one denies that the state certainly pulled out all the stops making it next to impossible for the movement to survive, others believe that if the movement had been more concerned with its articulation to society rather than simply its own internal dynamics, the movement’s death or disappearance would

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222 While the availability of heroin can’t explain this completely, the stress and depression associated with increasing air of repression, as well as self-marginalization from mainstream society facilitated this.

223 Many claim that heroin was brought in by the Mafia and CIA, to intentionally stifle resistance. The introduction of heroin does not however explain the choice to use it. (see Katsiaficas 1997: 39.)

224 There was a very intense online debate about ‘77 on various listserves, including [RK] and [Precog] in 2007.
not have been as stark, even with the harsh actions by the state. By articulation to society they mean the ways in which the ideas, practices, and cultures being generated in the movements related to and worked in “the everyday,” as opposed to the more exceptional and temporary spaces and events of the movements. Bifo has even written that he wishes he had shared in 1977 his view that the “end of the movement” was itself the product of unresolved tensions or divisions within the broad movement.

In the middle of the 1970s in the autonomous area, two diverse positions expressed themselves: one considered essential the individuation of the tendency, the research of points of bifurcation that constitute the tendency, and the construction of cultural conditions for a massive derailment of society. The deployment and construction of a process of self-valorization that would exceed, and spillover, domination. The other [tendency] instead considered the construction of an organized vanguard capable of breaking the chains of domination in its weakest point and to drag the movement towards forms of counterpower and communist organizations, decisive. These were two different prospects that in certain moments could function (and have functioned) in a complimentary way. Not in 1977.
(Bifo, email posted to rekombinant@liste.rekombinant.org 23 March, 2007).

He attributes the end of the movement and its great potential to be a result of the turn to Leninism by Autonomia Organizzata. While there is no room to get into this debate in great depth here, it is important to note that these two positions—one arguing for the need to become better and more strictly organized as a political entity, and one arguing for turning to the masses and generalizing practices that would overwhelm both capital and the State—correspond to classical tensions in Marxist theory and practice. These tensions between spontaneity and organization, party and mass, and numerous others also imply different visions of the form of knowledge necessary for movement.

Italian Feminism & The Women’s Movement

Perhaps no issue or event captured the internal contradictions and conflicts of these
movements, as well as the profoundly important effects of this period of movement, better than the issue of women and their role in the movements. Both in the period of decline leading to the dissolution of Potere Operaio in 1971-72, and surrounding the development of the Movement of ’77, the exodus and critiques by women, many of whom had “grown up” in various Operaisti collectives and organizations, were critical moments for the revolutionary, or movement Left. As sites of conflict and productive moments of debate, Italian feminism was a controversial but undeniably important actor in the panorama of movements, and many of their contemporary developments. The emergence of a strong women’s movement was itself partly a result of the period of fomentation and mobilization that led women to challenge conservative and oppressive aspects of society. Women in Italy didn’t win the right to divorce until 1974, and only in 1975 did a movement to legalize abortion take off. Besides these legal impediments, sexism was a rather diffuse fact of daily life and movement organizations were not very different; a woman “comrade” was more likely to be known as Federico’s or Luca’s girlfriend than as Luisa, a militant in her own right. The conflicts around women’s issues were brought quite dramatically to light on December 6, 1975 when male members of Lotta Continua, one of the largest movement organizations at the time, used force to enter a 50,000 strong “women’s only” march for the right to abortion. This provoked intense discussions about the relationship between men and women, as well as the role of “revolutionary” movement organizations. In 1976 at their national conference, Lotta Continua was dissolved in large part because of its inability to cope with the internal fissures that had developed between the leadership of the organization and its masses, epitomized by the exodus and critique by women, but also gay men. The

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226 Red Notes 1978; Big Flame 2009.
fissures occurred over three main issues, including the nature of political leadership, the meaning of the centrality of the working class, and perhaps most articulated and visible, the critique by feminists of the organization. According to Guido Viale who had a leadership role in LC at the time, the women “rebelled against a political practice and concept of communism and the revolution which totally ignored their needs—to the extent that it transformed revolutionary militancy into a new form of oppression” (Red Notes 1978: 82) 227 Not only did the strong critique of macho, hierarchical and authoritarian practices of men who dominated the extra-parliamentary movements themselves bring to the fore some of these internal contradictions at the time, the theoretical insights and analyses, as well as the practice of discussion and debate on divisive issues, of feminists have ended up being key contributions to the MoM. 228

Italian feminism has been important in terms of theoretical contributions to other feminists and social movements, and more recently within the MoM. It originated outside of the academy and largely within Marxist and Leftist groups, 229 and was developed through the experiences of various consciousness raising collectives and groups that established themselves in slightly different iterations throughout various Italian cities and regions. 230 The concept of autocoscienza, which according to Italian feminist Paola Bono contrasts from the English phrase “consciousness raising groups,” “stresses the self-determined and self-

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227 Several speeches and self-reports of this conference have been collected and translated by the British Red Notes Collective.

228 See Osterweil 2007; 2005a.


230 This legacy remains today so that rather than have a national organization for women’s rights etc, there are loose networks of autonomous collectives in various cities. See Bono 1990; see special issue of Feminist Review 2007. This tendency to organize differently from place to place, also seen in the broader Autonomia is a key characteristic of Italian movements.
directed quality of the process of achieving a new awareness…it is a process of the discovery
and (re-) construction of the self, both the self of the individual woman, and the collective
sense of self” (Bono1990: xx). Moreover, Italian feminism’s development within Marxist
collectives meant that feminism was often based on analyses of labor, especially the
centrality of exploited reproductive labor. While lesser known than many of their male
counter-parts, feminist Operaisti such as Maria Rosa Dalla Costa (Wages for Housework),
Sylvia Federici (Midnight Notes Collective), and Alicia Del Re, have been theoretically and
politically influential beyond the borders of Italy. In addition, Italian feminism of the 1970s
had a particular view of the constitutive importance of difference and structured their vision
not on a desire for equality, but on the importance of maintaining difference, without
imposing hierarchy.\textsuperscript{231} The Italian feminist critique of equality, with its valorization of
difference and analyses of the problems inherent in certain forms of militancy, has made
Italian feminism influential on the MoM.

\textbf{The Role of Intellectuals, Communication and Theoretical production}

Within the vast archipelago of Autonomia, and the movements from ‘68 on, journals
and other forms of intellectual and communication production were critical elements.
According to Balestrini and Moroni,

\begin{quote}
By the mid-1970s the archipelago of antagonistic communication is a vast
territory, contradictory, and branched out in every corner of the country.
Certainly, between 1975 and 1977 the production of communication—self-
organized, subversive (marginal, radical militant, direct, antagonistic,
alternative, democratic, transversal, clandestine, revolutionary, and many
other definitions that they were given) reaches its highest point of
development (Balestrini and Moroni: 582, translation mine).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{231} It is beyond the scope of this dissertation and chapter to get into more detailed discussions of Italian
feminism. For more See Bono 1990; Special Issue of Feminist Review 2007; Dalla Costa 2002.
The fact that the arrest of nine Operaisti was felt and interpreted as the “beginning of the end” of this vital period of movement and social mobilization is no small matter. It would be fair to say that in many ways the production of analyses, theories and other forms of communication was one of the most important and influential legacies of this period of movement. Balestrini and Moroni, who wrote one of the most thorough books about this decade-plus of mobilization, *L’Orda D’oro*, explain that the government’s reaction was itself not coincidental. They quote the trilateral commission (comprised of Japan, the USA and Europe)\(^{232}\) in a 1975 document:

> Today a relevant threat comes from the intellectuals and groups that assert their aversion to corruption, materialism and the inefficiency of democracy, as well as the subordination of the system of democratic governance to monopolistic capitalism. The development among these intellectuals of an antagonistic culture has influenced students, the studious, and various communication media… Industrialized societies have given birth to a stratum of intellectuals oriented by values and that often vote to discredit leadership and to challenge authority…this development presents as grave a threat for the democratic system, at least potentially, as that posed in the past by aristocratic groups, fascist movements and communist parties (ibid: 584).

They go on to note that as the different militant groups formed in this period begin to break up, “an enormous amount of intelligence formed in militancy is liberated,” and various groups start talking about not losing this important patrimony. In 1973 there is a document entitled “*Recuperate the subjective forces created by [political] groups.*” And by 1974-75, there is an explicit and articulated idea of developing “intermediary structures in service of the movement” (*struttura di servizio intermedie al movimento*). It is through this “that dozens and dozens of bookstores, centers of documentation, circuits of self-organized distribution, and small creative and original publishing houses are formed” (ibid: 586-587). These intermediary circuits, along with the different lessons learned within the experiences

\(^{232}\) A predecessor of sorts to the multilateral Bretton Woods Institutions.
of 1968-1977, both consciously and intentionally, but also inevitably, because the sheer presence of so much collective energy and knowledge cannot be contained, serve as the basis for what connects this movement to the MoM, specifically through the experience of social centers through to the emergence in the 1990s of the Tute Bianche.

The proliferation and intellectual depth of magazines were particularly notable, and stood in contrast to both the book form and flier format popularized in the student movements of ‘68.

The magazines that are born in this period are supported or born within this informal circuit of production... The thing is even more relevant if we consider the fact that this is one of the most vital sectors of culture, where the laboratories of ideas, often of people that live together, produce debates transmitted in times restricted to a vast territory, able to stimulate and promote new forms of behavior also in the most distant provinces. The multiplier effects of the magazine has been, with a few exceptions that one can count on the fingers of one hand, always superior to that of the book (ibid: 587).

In 1986, Primo Moroni produced a map of the various strands and threads of theoretical production that emerged from the disagreement over the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The map was printed in 1998 in a special issue dedicated to Moroni after his death (see Figure 10, Appendix C). The map is reproduced and evaluated in a recent article entitled “Mapping Autonomia” (Wright 2008). In the piece Wright points out one can see three major trunks or columns to the map, even though it is not a chart. On the far left, is the counter-cultural area.

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233 Ironically in December 2007 I attended a two-day seminar entitled “Crisis of the Magazine Form,” organized by Lanfranco Caminiti, and attended by many who had participated in the proliferation of magazines of the 1970s.

234 Moroni was an important figure before and especially after the end of Autonomia. Besides co-authoring (with Nanni Balestrini) one of the most exhaustive and important texts about the 1968-1979 long decade (see next chapter), he was an author, intellectual and individual whose contributions to the development of social centers (see below) and documenting the history of the 1968-1979 movement were crucial in many ways. He maintained historical memory, sustained continuities through structural and cultural infrastructure, and served as a sort of bridge for multiple political and cultural areas. While he was involved with Operaismo, he also had very libertarian and anarchist sensibilities, as well as an affinity/propensity for sub-cultures such as Punk. The publishing house ShaKe, and more recently Agenzie X, was an outcome of the punk counter-cultures. Another notable aspect of the Italian movement scene was the close relationship of cultures such as punk to explicitly political and even theoretical articulations.
influenced by Libertarianism, the Beats, the Situationists, who then grow into the experiences of Radio Alice, and journals _A/Traverso_, etc. In the middle coming from Panzieri’s Socialist tradition is one element of the Operaisti tradition proper, beginning with the Panzieri’s _Quaderni Rossi_, and developing quickly into _Classe Operaio_, and later into _Potere Operaio_, _Lotta Continua_, etc. On the right, emerging from the PCI, there are other direct connections to Operaismo through _Quaderni Rossi_, it is here that _Il Manifesto_, a key newspaper that continues to print today, is situated. Also in _L’orda D’oro_, Balestrini and Moroni discuss the ways in which the culture of theoretical production as well as the very notions of the purpose of knowledge and information themselves shift over-time. The tensions that emerged in the 1970s between Marxist-Leninist sensibilities and epistemologies and those of the more creative, diffuse and self-managed intellectual production continue to play out within the networks of the MoM.

The role of this vast network of collective intelligence and textual production cannot be dismissed. In many ways, it is this vast theoretical and cultural production, itself a direct product of the complex and multiplicitous space of movement as well as the unique relation of movements to parties in the Post-1968 period, that provides much of the basis for Italy’s contributions to Leftist movements elsewhere, and to the GJSM. In particular we can trace how many of the infrastructures created by these centers of documentation, magazines, publishing houses and the general circuit of movement, as well as the problematics and theoretical debates pursued therein, are what then get directly plugged into the development of the MoM, and in particular to the Tute Bianche.

2.4 **Beyond ’77: Connecting Autonomia to the MoM**

While most believe the Movement of ‘77/Autonomia came to an end, or was defeated
due to a combination of outside pressures and internal fissures, its legacies in terms of the meanings and memories as well as physical infrastructure it left in place were extremely important. In many cases, these legacies can still be felt today, and many were extremely influential in the formation and life of the MoM. For, this decade-plus of movements mobilized thousands of people and produced infrastructures in the form of free radios, alternative spaces, publishing endeavors, and most importantly networks of relationships among people and political cultures, all of which did not end with the end of the movements. So, the movements of the 70’s remained alive in the form of political practices, theoretical traditions, ideas and political cultures, all of which continued to produce spaces and practices, even if these became more underground and marginal. The key practices—what social movement theorists refer to as “repertoires of protest”\textsuperscript{235}—many of which are consistently referred to not only by the contemporary Italian activists that I spoke with, but also by admirers of Autonomia and Operaismo worldwide include: self-reduction campaigns, free radios, the practice of squatting or occupying, and the rejection of organisms or mechanisms of representation in their political organizations—i.e. notions of autonomy. All of these were quite influential in the MoM and contributed to the “new political imaginary” posited by it.\textsuperscript{236}

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and related both to social centers and the networks

\textsuperscript{235} I find ‘repertoires of protest’ to be evocative, but the problem is that it connotes a less than conscious or thoughtful practice i.e something unique to protest, rather than thoughtful human action. See Casas-Cortes et al 2008 for a critique of the ways typical SM studies treat (or rather don’t) what we call SM knowledges.

\textsuperscript{236} According to \textit{Semiotexte} founder Sylvere Lotringer, Autonomia posited the “the last politically creative movement in the West,” while Guattari similarly saw the Autonomist movement as a “flash” of the “collective subjectivity.” I will discuss the ways Autonomia and the Movement of ’77 were remembered and known in Chapter 4. What is important here is to recognize the kind of analysis that emerged from these movements that not only confronted the shortcomings of a transforming economy in which the role of the worker was undergoing profound transformations, but which also came to see these economic crises as profoundly linked to the problem of political organization, and the dominant forms of politics.
of activists in exile or prison, there were different efforts to maintain and continue the intellectual, theoretical and political discussions and production that had been so key to Autonomia. Throughout these years, though uneven, one could find various initiatives including publishing houses, journals, books, seminars, or even articles and conferences assessing the causes of the failure of Autonomia, and perhaps more importantly how to return to the potentialities made visible and articulated in those years. At times these conferences took place outside of Italy, among Italian refugee communities, in particular in Paris. Beyond the retention of certain knowledges and practices, remnants of the Movement remained alive in what were literally underground networks of autonomous social spaces, what Melucci has termed “submerged networks.” These “submerged networks” would eventually yield other activist moments and movements, many of which became the politicizing moments for groups and individuals who were later involved in Genoa and the MoM. These included the Anti-Nuclear and Peace movements of the 1980s, the Pantera student movement of 1991-1992.

Perhaps the most important aspect or elements of these submerged networks and moments of movement were the Centri Sociali (social centers). Social Centers had begun to be founded in mid-1970s, during the period of Autonomia. These self-organized, often illegally occupied or squatted buildings originally in the peripheries of cities were physical spaces where art, politics, and numerous forms of autonomous production thrived. They were based on the German communes diffuse throughout Berlin. Students, workers and other young people would occupy abandoned buildings, often in neighborhoods where there was

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237 It should be no surprise that Melucci, who coined this term that is now used as a generic concept throughout SM studies, was Italian and lived through this period of Italian politics.

238 Or more precisely Centri Sociali Autogestiti (CSA), translated as self-managed or self-organized social centers. Often the acronym CSA, would be CSOA the additional “O” for occupied.
little to no opportunity for socialization, especially for people without resources.\textsuperscript{239} When Autonomia began to wane, and the climate supportive of movements began to shift, in particular after the crisis of the Movement of ’77, many social centers were shut down. However a small number, including Leoncavallo in Milan—which was also the first social center ever established—remained. Leoncavallo became the model, as well as the physical rallying point for the spread of social centers throughout Italy in the late 80’s and to a greater extent throughout the 1990s. These social centers became an important political subject in the 1990s, and in the MoM.\textsuperscript{240}

**Social Centers: from submerged networks to the MoM**

While originally an experience quite particular to Italy, centri sociali, or have by now been picked up as a tool or practice by activists in several other countries including England, Spain, and others. The notion and practice of them was shared through diverse networks of the GJSM and MoM, and during actions. As described in the last chapter, the “area of social centers” where the Tute Bianche came from was critical to the growth and spread of the MoM and their connection to international networks like the People’s Global Action and the Zapatista movement. Below I will describe a bit more about what these entities were as well as key events that connect the 70’s to the period of the MoM.

Like most every thing in Italy, CSAs were quite heterogeneous. Some espoused

\textsuperscript{239} See Wright 2000; Ruggiero 2000; Montagna 2005.

\textsuperscript{240} In addition and somewhat related to the social center scene, but also to networks of activists in exile or prison, there were other networks and spaces of theoretical production and debate that had produced numerous publications and debates throughout the 1970s continued, though unevenly, throughout these years. These took the form of publishing houses, journals, books, and seminars, or even articles and conferences assessing the causes of the failure of Autonomia, and perhaps more importantly how to return to the potentialities made visible and articulated in those years. At times these conferences took place outside of Italy, among Italian refugee communities, in particular in Paris.
libertarian and anarchist political ideologies, while others saw themselves as heirs of
Autonomist movements, while still others were far more interested in cultural production and
the reclaiming of public space, than any political ideology. Whereas some speak of social
centers as a movement, and even argue that they are ideal examples of the “new social
movement” thesis posited by Melucci, Habermas and others241 I speak about them more as a
tool, concept and practice employed by activist and counter-cultural networks.242 In many
ways theirs was another iteration of the Operaista demand not for less work and more pay,
but for no work, the right to leisure and even luxury. Importantly, the practice of occupation
upon which they built was the very same used by the student and workers’ movement in the
1960s (not only in Italy). To this day, occupations are a common tactic used in any
movement, and a surefire sign of any movement is a banner hung outside a building
declaring its occupied status. While seemingly banal, the actual practice of occupations
provided many people with critical experience in self management and autonomy, as well as
the acquisition of many skills, including rigging electricity, water, providing food,
negotiating with neighbors, the media, etc. Numerous interviewees describe the importance
of occupations in their political development.

Leoncavallo, the first social center, was founded in Milan in 1975. Emerging as a
reaction to the increasing number of young people without places for leisure, it grew to serve
as physical place for supporting the counter-culture and theoretical developments of the
movements. And, with the beginning of the end of Autonomia, Leoncavallo and other social
centers soon became a space for support work, first against the heroin epidemic and political


242 The argument that they are “new social movements” builds on the notion that they are spaces for the
expression of post-material desires, opposing more traditional arguments of social movements as either resource
based, or primary needs.
repression, and then as sites for prison support to those arrested, exiled etc. Some have described the youth of social centers primarily as fighting against heroin use to keep together “the wise and crazy with the crushed and furious.” (qtd in Della Porta 1999: 89).

Following the disappearance of the Movement, additional social centers began to spring up. While some were directly political from the start, others were mostly interested in art and counterculture including music, performance, theater, etc. Social Centers were key spaces for the development of Italian punk and other forms of non-mainstream music, including Italian Rap (Wright 2000). Several of my interviews described rap, particularly the group 99 Posse, and other music to be an important tool of their own politicization in the 1990s. A dozen or so CSAs were established by the early 1980s, and by the mid-1990s there were estimated to be over 130 throughout Italy. While in 1994 police estimated that there were about 2000 young people heavily involved in CSAs, by 2001 the number had almost tripled (Marincola 2001: 61). CSAs existed in small towns as well as major cities. In some cases a tension between culture and politics emerged; in almost all cases balancing the desire for autonomy—meaning autonomy from the state and its legal power as well as from economic pressures and consumerist culture—with the need to sustain spaces created real tensions.

While throughout the 1980s most social centers were illegally occupied, and held illegality to be an important attribute of their status of autonomy, in the 1990s some social centers began to experiment with different forms of negotiating with the state, local, or municipal authorities. Most of my interviewees had some experience with a social center, and more than a few point to the solidarity event in Milan in 1997, the defense of the eviction

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and then demolition of Leoncavallo, as a key politicizing moment for them.\textsuperscript{244} Beyond political ideologies, social centers were key spaces for the development of skills and “know-how”, as many rigged their own water and electricity and essentially required constant and vigilant protection.

1989 was a critical year for CSAs. That year occupants of Leoncavallo decided to resist the first of many attempts to evict them. The effort turned into a national cause about the new generation and numerous other social centers were occupied “on the cusp of that wave,” and in the early 1990s there was beginning to be talk of creating a national network and coordinating committee for the CSAs (ibid: 62). This was key to developing the networks that then get sparked and inspired by events in the GJSM, in particular the Zapatista uprising and then later Seattle and the series of counter-summit protests.

Importantly there were serious differences and even conflicts among social centers, more specifically in their modalities or approaches and political ideologies. There was a broad range of anarchist-insurrectional, libertarian, punk, etc.\textsuperscript{245} This becomes a very crucial aspect of the differences among the different networks that participate in the GSF, and those that refuse, as well as the experiments among those social centers that create the Tute Bianche and Ya Basta networks to work in closer cooperation with parties, and municipal governments (see below).\textsuperscript{246}

Following Genoa there emerges a new rift between the social centers that were once

\textsuperscript{244} In effect the description of the event sounds a great deal like the convergence spaces and counter-summit experiences in the GJSM.

\textsuperscript{245} See Marincola 2001 for a brief attempt at describing these differences.

\textsuperscript{246} See ibid : 65, for a clear map of some of these different social centers. As with any map of movements in Italy, divisions are various and fluctuating, but also somewhat related to long-term rivalries or ideological divisions.
allied in the “Carta de Milano” and the Tute Bianche. This was certainly the case in Bologna where my research was based. In the summer of 2002, a tension that had been on the rise since Genoa exploded and resulted in a dramatic split within the movement, in particular within the Disobbedienti based mainly in one of Bologna’s most important social centers, the Teatro Polivalente Ocupato (TPO).

Bologna: a case

In Bologna the experience of social centers in the 1990s was particularly lively, incorporating vital, innovative, even avant-garde cultural production with a political critique. Social centers continue to this day and as I mentioned were key sites of my ethnographic work. (In Bologna there were two major social centers that played important roles in the MoM and that existed throughout my research, the TPO, and Ex Mercato 24, (XM 24). TPO was originally founded by an itinerant theater company comprised mostly of artists, eventually became the hub of the Tute Bianche and Autonomist political line in Bologna. It remains as such today. XM 24, was a more libertarian space with less articulated political ideology to national networks, but an important home to different initiatives, and an outgrowth of the space on Via Ranzani out of which the No OCSE protest was organized). Other social centers and occupations emerged and died throughout my period of research, while other initiatives explicitly sought to avoid the term “social center,” and instead attempted to create more publicly accessible and attractive spaces.  

The tension between social centers as spaces of experimentation, production, and alternative and social centers as spaces for the cohesion of new political orthodoxies/lines proved crucial to the course and history of these movements, and to the personal experiences

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Social centers are a fascinating phenomenon and deserve far more thorough treatment. Very little literature exists on them in English, and even relatively little systematic, and/or social scientific in Italian.
of many of the activists I interviewed. Women in particular, but not exclusively, became increasingly critical of the turn to what they saw as a new version of self-marginalizing and macho-activism in the aftermath of Genoa. In Bologna, a group of women who had been among the original founders of TPO articulated this critique, first by founding their own collective within the social center, and then finally by leaving the social center to found a space that they believed would be more visible and appealing to the public at large.

The decision to move Sexyshock from a squat to an urban-core shop was tied to a critique developed by the group against a model of ‘political space’ in which individuals and groups are localized and kept together in a unique political line and practice, often amounting to a very particular way of conceiving and experiencing politics. These conceptions and practices – shared by the entire experience of Italian ‘Centri Sociali’ – are often characterized by extremely exclusionary and self-centred practices that are unable to inter/act within themselves and with the world outside. They show a marked inability to deal with mobilities, continuous social transformations, political contaminations and interchange, which has included the refusal to deeply connect with gender and queer political theories and practices (Sexyshock 2007: 129).

The 1980s and early 1990s also saw the growth and development of anti-nuclear and anti-military base activism. Some activists were still involved in Autonomist networks, whereas others came from newer, environmental and more citizen-based and lobbying approaches. Like with other parts of Europe responding to Chernobyl and the accident at Three-Mile island, Italy in 1986 saw a marked increase in anti-nuclear organizing.248 In the 1990s, and then again with the MoM organizing against NATO and US military bases (Camp Darby, Vicenza and the No Dal Molin struggles), as well as some of the initial protests bringing together multiple diverse networks that later comprise the GSF) become important sites for the manifestation of the unitary subject for which the MoM is known.

The social center circuit shifts gears

248 Katisiaficas 1997; Diani 1995.
There were a series of dates that were of particular importance to the network of social centers that would eventually participate in the GSF mostly as part of the Tute Bianche and Ya Basta! TB and Ya Basta! were the most relevant networks not only for my research, but also in terms of articulation with and influence in global networks. The Zapatista Uprising of 1994, in particular the call by the EZLN for an “Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” in Chiapas in 1996, was critical for the development of a global movement and for the Italian movement networks.

Several Italians attended the first Encuentro, and founded the association Ya Basta! shortly thereafter. The purpose of Ya Basta! was to both be in solidarity with the Zapatistas—they regularly traveled to Mexico and donated supplies, such as the ambulance pictured above—but perhaps more importantly to work against neoliberalism in Italy. The association was headquartered in Leoncavallo. According to its own narrative,

Our association exists at a national level with some ten centers in different Italian towns and cities. We keep in constant contact with a network of Italian Social Centers: those dozens of political associations, which from the seventies up to the present, have been part of the radical, antagonistic left-

Figure 2. Ya Basta donated ambulance at Oventic, Chiapas. photo by Michal Osterweil 2007.
wing movement in Italy, linked to the struggle for the rights of those excluded from the economic resources distribution system, fighting for the right to housing, to better working conditions, to a better income, against heroin and hard drugs, against military powers and their wars, for people’s freedom of movement and for the rights of migrants, for greater freedom, equality, true justice.

Our network is organizing itself in a coordinated but decentralized form to take part in common battles. In the North West of the country a network of social centers and associations has been set up… The Carta de Milano is a national network. (“Who are Ya Basta?” doc: http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/global/about/yabasta.html).

Ya Basta! sent participants to the 1997 Second Encounter in Spain where the idea for the People’s Global Action (PGA) was founded.²⁴⁹ PGA was the organization that would start to call for Global Days of Action and that in turn became the basis for counter-summits, and as I argued in the last chapter, was one of the key authors of the new political culture and modality. The relationship of the Italian networks to PGA was strained shortly after its inception for reasons that are not completely clear to me, but which seem to have to do with the internal moves by many within social center networks to experiment with closer relationships to political parties and local institutions.

**Carta de Milano**

By 1998 an alliance of social centers, already working together in large part through Ya Basta, produced a common document, the *Carta di Milano* (Milan Charter) and essentially established themselves as a network. The central tenets of the Carta were, 1) amnesty for social centers and for the 1970s; 2) the right for freedom of circulation of men and women and the immediate closure of migrant detention centers; 3) depenalization/decriminalization of offences that are linked to the denial of social rights

including the use of drugs; and 4) liberation from jail of those that are seriously ill, or ill with AIDs. Perhaps most important for the MoM, the decision was made by the charter? to “leave the losing dynamic of conflict-repression-struggle against repression, and enter into a different panorama, in which social conflict carries projectuality.” Overall the Carta di Milano argued for the importance of a “constitutive” approach and sought to end the period of “self-marginalization” and ghettoization of the social centers. (That same year there were conflicts between the state and social centers in Torino that retained a more hardline opposition to any cooperation with the state or municipalities.)

The signatories included various social centers that were not opposed to receiving concessions or arranging some form of legal arrangements with local officials. These particular social centers were critical of the tendency among many anarchist social centers (especially in Torino) to maintain what they perceived to be a rigid commitment to marginality. The social centers that signed included Leoncavallo, the social centers of the Northeast (very closely associated with Padovan Autonomia Operaia), and others like the TPO in Bologna and Corto Circuito in Rome. In some cases, beyond simply accepting the legalization or normalization of relationships to town and city officials—i.e. having the officials donate the space (or a space) or arrange for a low cost rent—some social centers and associations began to experiment with participating in institutional politics, in particular local politics. The Venetian and Padovan social centers decided to run candidates for municipal office through the Green and Communist Parties, and in 1997 candidates were elected to the municipality of Venice on the Green party ticket. Many among social centers and movements saw the Carta de Milano and the related experiments as selling out. In contrast, others saw

such experiments and the willingness to try different relationships to institutions as one of the novel and exciting elements of the Italian movements. This openness was in turn attributed to the Zapatistas who shunted any apriori dichotomizations between revolution/reform and radical/reformist and had themselves tried to work with the State. That being said, the openness to collaborating with political parties and institutions did not remain. By 2004, and especially after the election of center Left with the Rifondazione in 2006, relations became very tenuous.

More than Ya Basta! which always remained a national association with its own meetings, organizational structures, etc., the experience and practice of the Tute Bianche was a concrete result of the network of social centers that came together through the Carta di Milano.

The Tute Bianche and the Movement of the Disobbedients

Figure 3. Tute Bianche/Disobbedienti at Genoa. Photo anonymous 2001, anti-copy right.

The Tute Bianche (TB) (translated literally as white overalls) were by far the most globally visible and influential area of the Italian (and Bolognese) No-Global Movement, in
particular among the networks of activists (international and Italian) with whom I mostly engaged. They themselves were in large part a product of, or at least were inspired by the Ya Basta association (as with most things, there is no one clear and definitive history or narrative to this organization). Technically the *Tute Bianche* was meant to refer to a practice the putting on of white overalls, as well as masks and eventually numerous forms of creative protective gear, including foam and rubber, to create internal shields and padding. The color white, inspired by the Zapatistas, was meant to symbolize invisibility, diversity (white is the combination of all colors), and the shifting constitution of labor—i.e. “white collar” work. However TB began to be used to refer to the heterogeneous ensemble of people, mostly from the social centers that had signed the Carta Di Milano, but also other strands or threads of activists, including in Bologna the Luther Blisset Project, which was more of a culture-jamming group.

The history I was able to piece together from the numerous interviews, web documents, and other archives, is very telling. It not only points to the conscious ways in which activists saw the 1970s and the Italian Anomaly as important to the MoM, but also the ways in which different regions and cities each had their own micro-story with respect to the rise of both the TB and the MoM. Moreover it reminds us of the ways in which stories reveal and produce self-understandings, and are therefore important and real aspects of the MoM.

When I began my research I was given a few “origin stories” of the TB, and more than one activist was actually quite aware of the differing, perhaps even competing versions. The most common story is that the idea of the TB emerged as a result of a speech of the right-wing mayor of Milan in 1994, declaring that invisible and phantom-like workers were inhabiting the peripheries of the city. The young unemployed chose to own this term and so
put on the white overalls. Another version argues that the TB originated in Rome as a campaign for access to transportation.

According to Roberto Bui, part of an influential writing collective and culture jamming project, the TB arose in both those instances and eventually came to involve 50,000 people who put on the white overalls. To him—and from piecing together numerous interviews and sources—there were three main elements that came together to produce the TB at their height: 1) the evolution of the CS who signed the Carta de Milano; 2) the impact of Zapatismo, and 3) in Bologna in particular, a project of culture jamming and creative use of media, known as Luther Blisset. The importance of Zapatismo, which was embraced by these social centers but also by other associations and political actors throughout Italy, cannot be discounted. The Zapatistas opposed keeping movements marginalized, isolated and invisible, and instead chose to speak and appeal to broader society. They also spoke of autonomy rather than taking state power, and they were committed to “walk while questioning” (*caminar domandando*), and to refuse the idea that any movement can have a-priori answers about whom to speak with and what actions to take.

Recall the fact that Rifondazione was itself inspired by the Zapatistas. This vision of the Zapatistas was seen to articulate with the Autonomist tradition of Italy. The first time the TB was actually worn was at a protest in 1998 against a Detention Center in Milan on Via Corelli. The Tute Bianche ended or were voluntary dissolved at Genoa in the Carlini Stadium where they, along with numerous Italian and international activists planning to breach the red zone were staying. The reasoning behind their dissolution refers in many ways to the tension that challenged the Movement of ‘77. In Genoa, it is widely acknowledged that what had started as a tactic—to wear the white overalls and cover oneself in protective padding in

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order to confront police—had started to become an identity, a way of separating the TB from others in the movement. Since the TB was itself meant as a critique of identitarian tendencies of past political movements, just before Genoa the TB collectively decided to disband, so that in theory they were not an exclusive “group.” As spokesperson Luca Casarini explains,

1998 was decisive. The Tute Bianche’s first experiences were very spontaneous. We liked the idea of provoking fear and irritation in those who arouse fear with their uniforms. We liked the idea that the white overall could serve to hide, to make us all the same. In 1998 we also liked the Zapatista idea of hiding oneself in order to be seen. Starting in 1998, for us the white overall was something like Subcomandante Marcos’s ski mask. We attempted to generate conflict and consensus. We came from the generations of Autonomia who had lived through the 1980s. Back then it was about showing that the conflict even still existed. The Tute Bianche are, so to speak, our interpretation of the conflict’s existence, but also that it must be formulated as a political message. Also, that every time someone organizes the conflict they conquer and win something. Mainly, they gain more fellow travelers. That was the idea of the Tute Bianche. The Disobbedienti changed this idea in that they expanded to a multitude. The Tute Bianche were a subjective experience, a little army. For us, the Disobbedienti is a multitude, a movement (Luca Casarini qtd in Disobbedienti!2002.)

The Disobbedienti—or more precisely il Movimento Delle/Dei Dissobbedienti (translated, the Movement of the Disobbedients)—emerged at Genoa. However the dissolution of the TB, in combination with the violence of the Genoa experience, also led to and coincided with many fissures within the social center networks. Beginning around 2002, the larger space of the TB and Disobbedienti began to get smaller as activists left, either leaving movement politics, or more commonly to try different things. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the space occupied by these networks remains visible even as the networks and organizations themselves shift and change. Out of these networks some of the most important elements visible after 2002 are the networks organized around issues of labor precarity. These include the MayDay networks, No Border activists, and numerous initiatives including local and equosolidary food, critical wine, and numerous journals and other
theoretical/intellectual endeavors.

**Conclusion: An Italian and Political Anomaly**

In this chapter I have described the ways in which Italy’s political history, in particular its experience around 1968-1979, was the necessary background, or conditions of possibility, for the experience of the MoM. This was not so much in terms of the MoM’s actual emergence or “causes” but with respect to the political cultures, theoretical traditions, and numbers of people who had a different view of politics and systemic social change.

The reason for going into this lengthy and detailed history, despite my own admonitions to recognize the multiplicity of histories and networks that actually came to constitute the MoM and the event of Genoa, is an attempt to show how the MoM as an entity was not only produced in and by its very Italian specific context. The very problems or problematics that the MoM is seen to address were themselves a product of the particular way the political, and perhaps more importantly, social movements and social change were thought and known in Italy. The MoM, though certainly part of a global movement, is itself produced and made possible by the ways in which what we can call the problem of post-communism\(^{251}\) had already been experienced and lived in Italy. Although there is not sufficient time to address this thoroughly here, I would argue that the astute critique of communism, which includes critiques of the broader theoretical, epistemological and political frameworks within which communism (and certain versions of Marxism) were committed, were in turn enabled by the fact that “the political” in Italy was itself never fully sutured, and was always rife with complex conflicts. In particular, the regional heterogeneity, the internal migration coupled with racism and cultural clashes, as well as the almost always

\(^{251}\) While theoretically people might speak of post-Marxism, in this case it would probably be more apt to say post-Marxist-Leninism.
present specters of authoritarianism—either in the form of the Church or fascism—were themselves very influential.
Chapter 3: The “What is movement/Movement?” Problem(atic)

We’re more interested here in the movement on the level of ‘problematics.’ Unlike demands which are implicitly vocal or static, problematics are about acting and moving. If demands are an attempt to capture who we are, then problematics are all about who we are becoming. Social Movements form around problems. We don’t mean this in a simple functionalist fashion, as if there is a pre-existent problem which then produces a social movement that, in turn, forces the state or capital to respond and solve the problem. Rather, social movements produce their own problematic at the same time as they are formed by them (Free Association 2007).

As for the events of May 1968, it seems to me they depend on another problematic. I wasn’t in France at that time; I only returned several months later. And it seemed to me one could recognize completely contradictory elements in it: on the one hand, an effort, which was very widely asserted, to ask politics a whole series of questions that were not traditionally a part of its statutory domain (questions about women, about relations between the sexes, about medicine, about mental illness, about environment, about minorities, about delinquency); and, on the other hand, a desire to rewrite all these problems in the vocabulary of a theory that was derived more or less directly from Marxism. But the process that was evident at that time led not to taking over the problems posed by the Marxist doctrine but, on the contrary, to a more and more manifest powerlessness on the part of Marxism to confront these problems. So that one found oneself faced with interrogations that were addressed to politics but had not themselves sprung from a political doctrine. From this point of view, such a liberation of the act of questioning seemed to me to have played a positive role: now there was a plurality of questions posed to politics rather than the reinscription of the act of questioning in the framework of a political doctrine (Foucault 1994a: 115, emphasis added.)

Introduction

In this chapter I delve further into the “problem” of defining the MoM and the category of movement more generally. I show that beyond the difficulties in delineating the geographic, temporal and political parameters of MoM, there are epistemological, ontological and political challenges as well. I point to a particularly resonant ethnographic vignette in which world-renown philosopher Giorgio Agamben declares that he cannot figure
out what a movement is. One of his perplexities is that while no one can give a definition of
the term, everyone still understands what is and is not a movement, or when it is or is not
present. This vignette seems to sum up many aspects of my research; and so I use this
moment to frame the rest of the chapter in which I evaluate different instantiations of what I
call the “what is movement?” mantra. I argue that not only do enunciations of the question,
“what is a movement?”, and various efforts to define it, abound, but also that in occupying a
substantial amount of the space of what a movement is and does, this question—“what is
movement?”—must be understood as a material movement practice. At the same time I note
that what a movement is, is itself often defined more by what it is not, or what it is trying not
to be.

To deal with these puzzling elements, I argue for the utility of understanding MoM as
a discursive apparatus that is productive as much as a question and problem as it is as a given
entity or answer. It is, in other words, as much an absence as a presence. Working through
examples from my fieldwork, I build on the argument of MoM as a discursive entity that I
began to make with the description of Genoa. Here I go further, showing how behind the
discourse of MoM, that as we already saw, denotes a new political imaginary, one based on
difference, reflexivity and autonomy, lies a more general discourse, in which different
versions or uses of the term movement are deployed. These uses are movement, Movement,
and “the Movement” (il Movimento).

I argue that distinguishing between Movement, with a capital M, and movement with a
lower case m allows us to come to a better understanding of the use and function of the term
“movement” in Italy. Briefly, the former, Movement, refers to an ideal-type, or state, of
movement as a space where transformative social change on a large scale seems actually
possible. Movements are relatively rare, or at least not common, and only take place when there is a confluence of smaller movements or struggles. By contrast, movements refer to the almost always present space of activism and social struggle extant in Italian society. These are the actual everyday spaces of activism within which people are constantly working for social change but which are not always effective at involving substantial sectors of society (notably this distinction is merely analytical, there are obviously various gradations and in-betweens). In many ways both movement and Movement are related with the slightly different notion of “Il Movimento” (The Movement), which in turn refers to something akin to more traditional (and Marxist) notions of “the revolution.” The Movement of ’77/Autonomia, and Genoa, or the MoM, are seen as cases of the former (Movement), however they are always overlapping with the notion of “the Movement” and constituted by several movements. MoM notably traverses all three.

While MoM must be understood as a specific entity, in order to understand it, we must also understand that it is constituted by the desires and hopes for the ideal type, or ideal state, of Movement, which is in turn situated in a long historical arc of movements/Movements, what Italians tend to refer to as “Il Movimento.” As such, the discourse of MoM (and therefore the reality of MoM) is as much a desire, potential and idea of how social changes happens and futures are made, as it is about the reality of the particular experience of MoM. It is no coincidence that in interviews and texts, the terms MoM and “il movimento” are often used interchangeably.

Chapter Outline

Part I of the chapter “Che Cos’e un movimento?” Discerning the problem (what is
a movement) begins with a multi-media, multi-sited episode featuring Agamben positing the question, “What is a movement?” It goes on to investigate the ways this episode introduces this question as a productive and oft repeated element of my ethnography. Here, I examine the critical questions raised about the political and epistemological status of movement, as well as my own relation to the MoM. Beyond pointing to the fact that the pronouncement of Agamben’s question is itself a statement/enunciation and object of research, Agamben’s query into the term movement directly and indirectly brings to light the multi-faceted nature of the term and the work done by analytic and reflexive statements about MoM, and movement more generally. In Part II, The “What is movement” Mantra, I describe how diverse enunciations of this question demonstrate the ways in which the term movement works to delimit and produce what does and does not count as MoM, and perhaps what does and does not count as Movement, revealing a notion of Movement as the “other” of politics.

In Part III, Movement as the Other of politics and Part IV, Present in Absence: the productivity of crisis and failure, I continue to explore the meaning and effect of the movement/Movement discourse through describing the persistent presence and effectivity of the failure of the MoM, something that becomes more apparent in my later field-visits. Finally, in the Conclusion, I return to Agamben’s query, and offer some additional readings of the political and theoretical implications of the MoM and m/M discourse, in particular the ways they suggest that the political effects of MoM (and movements more generally) maybe understood as much in the realm of the virtual and the practice of delineating problematics, as it is about standard political outcomes.

3.1 “Che Cos’e un movimento?” Discerning the problem
On January 29-30, 2005, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben participated on a panel as part of the first seminar of the Uninomade, which was held in a gym in the city of Venice.252

![Uninomade seminar. From left: Toni Negri, Marco Bascetta and Georgio Agamben. Photo by permission of Global Project, Creative Commons.](http://archive.globalproject.info/IMG/jpg/DSC00927.jpg)

Uninomade was (and is) an explicit effort launched by activist-intellectuals who had been very active in the MoM to create an autonomous space of “real debate” and knowledge production—both outside traditional universities and the ideologically limited spaces of movements.253 As two of its founders and protagonists wrote in a piece appearing in *Il Manifesto* a few months later:

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252 In the introduction to the two-day event the fact that the event is taking place in this kind of space—not a university, nor a social center, is highlighted, indicating the transversal aspiration and nature of this nomadic project.

253 Uninomade (Nomad University) is a project that was launched by activist-intellectuals specifically as a response to the disappearance of real or substantive debate and theoretical production in movement spaces on the one hand, as well as the crisis of Italian Universities, on the other. See Bascetta and Mezzadra 2005. For details on the contents of this particular seminar see [http://www.globalproject.info/art-3436.html](http://www.globalproject.info/art-3436.html). (Image: [http://archive.globalproject.info/IMG/jpg/DSC00927.jpg](http://archive.globalproject.info/IMG/jpg/DSC00927.jpg), image Creative Commons. As far as I know the Uninomade site has never been up and running.
The Uninomade project, itinerant laboratory of critical thought; Researchers, teachers, students and activists give life to a “free university.” A practice that is theoretical and political in contrast to the misery of the behavior/action of the university, and the smug cultural self-sufficiency that often characterizes the “movement of movements” (Bascetta and Mezzadra 2005).

Speaking from the podium on the second day of the very first seminar of this nomad university, Agamben reflected on a sort of “malaise” or confusion he felt when engaging with Toni Negri and others about the term movement. His “intervento” has since been linked to various websites and circulated via movement-affiliated listserves throughout Europe. The following is a translated transcription that was posted on “generation-online”:

My malaise came from the fact that for the first time I realised that this word was never defined by those who used it. I could not have defined it myself. In the past I used as an implicit rule of my thinking practice the formula 'when the movement is there pretend it is not there and when it's not there pretend it is'. Now I realize that I did not know what the word ‘movement’ meant: despite its lack of specificity, it is a word everyone seems to understand but no one defines. For instance where does this word come from? Why was a politically decisive instance called movement? My questions come from this realization that it is not possible to leave this concept undefined, we must think about movement because this concept is our ‘unthought,’ and so long as it remains such it risks compromising our choices and strategies. This is not just a philological scruple due to the fact that terminology is the poetic, hence productive moment of thought, nor do I want to do this because it is my job to define concepts, as a habit. I really do think that the a-critical use of concepts can be responsible for many defeats. I propose to start a research that tries to define this word, so I will try to begin this with some basic consideration, to orient future research (Agamben 2005: emphasis mine).

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254 These “others” clearly referred to intellectuals who identified quite explicitly with movements, and in general came from the Autonomia Operaia tradition and movements. Throughout my time in Italy I came to learn that there was a distinction between those intellectuals who were seen to be part of the movement. As one person explained roughly, there are those who were “friends,” but not “part of the family.” (interview, Bologna, October 2006.)

255 “Intervento” literally translates as “intervention”, but in the context of a meeting it also means speech or statement. When someone wants to make an “intervento” they have something to say, to contribute. In Italian meetings these are often prepared ahead of time and are longer than a quick comment.

256 Generation_online acts as a sort of hub where many theories, analyses and ideas are shared and circulated among people interested in movements and alternative politics. See http://www.generation-online.org/
As I listened to this speech via a webstream from my Carrboro, North Carolina apartment, partly as part of my research on Italy’s MoM and partly out of my own political and intellectual interest in both movements and Agamben’s views on politics, his questions resonated strongly and unexpectedly. On the one hand, they seemed to capture and begin to put into words several aspects of my experiences of encountering and trying to make sense of “MoM” since I began my research in June 2002. And at the same time the moment as moment, in its complicated totality—the fact of this public interrogation of the term movement, its political and philosophical tenor, and its relationship to Italy, MoM, and myself—resonated and evoked interesting insights. The speech confirmed not only the empirical difficulty of delimiting MoM and turning it into an “object” that can be described and explained. His words, themselves a complicated iteration or performance within my ethnographic research, traversing and seeping over the lines between ethnography, politics and theory, pointed out that the question “what is movement” was itself a key “object” of my research. For beyond being a question, awaiting an empirical or objective answer, it was an enunciation and performance, performed in a complicated site that was itself virtual, actual, theoretical and philosophical at once.²⁵⁷

At a very basic level, Agamben’s query reiterated the difficulty I had in delineating MoM—sociologically, historically, geographically and politically. But the question was much more. It became clear that part and parcel of this difficult to delineate nature of MoM was the fact that, like Agamben’s own pronouncement, the question “what is movement” blurred and seeped over the lines between (my own) questions, pronounced as “a social scientist,” or “analyst,” and as a statement and problem central to those actors who

²⁵⁷ Hearing the speech in 2005 proved to be decisive point in my research. This itself raises fundamental questions about the nature of empirical research, the gleaning of data, and the derivation of findings, since it is not clear how missing the speech would have affected the overall dissertation.
considered themselves part of the movement. In other words, throughout my research I found that activists asked the same or similar questions regarding “what is a movement.” At times, these statements and questions were analytical or investigative in the sense that activists, much like scientists, wanted to “know”; that is, they wanted to understand what was going on, what worked, and what didn’t, in order to have better explanations—i.e. knowledge—for social change. But this wasn’t always the case. At other times, activists’ interrogative statements were pronounced with no intention of finding a solution or answer. Instead of thinking of “what is movement” as a question to be answered, I began to recognize it as a multi-faceted problem, a problem that generated effects, including more movement.

Agamben’s own assertion of this question constituted just one of the myriad occasions when I listened to movement actors pronounce some version of what I came to define as the “what is movement?” problem; this was the first level that this episode took on meaning for me. That is to say, it was the simple fact of the pronouncement, rather than any hypothesis or answer that he posited, that made this episode so resonant and salient. Throughout my research on and with MoM, I had been struck by the prevalence and centrality of reflexive, analytical and theoretical questions about the nature and effects of MoM, and movements more broadly. Over the course of more than five years of research on and with the Italian MoM, the question(s) “what is this movement?” “what does it bring?” “why did it fail?” as well as various attempts to define the term and answer these questions, have been articulated countless times and in myriad forms. However I didn’t know what to make of this “data.” What did the fact of the material presence of so many reflexive and analytical questions about the meaning of movement mean and do in the context of MoM? Were these rational efforts to gain “better” knowledge about why MoM seemed so powerful
and what this meant for politics? What did it do to our understanding of MoM that a central part of its daily practice was constituted by various efforts to interrogate, define, and otherwise theorize the nature and effectivity of movement? Were all such statements aimed at trying to produce more and better knowledge about and for MoM, regardless of their context? Or did the diverse performances mean and do something else?258

This concern about the centrality of statements seeking to interrogate, understand and otherwise define movement, was itself complicated by a second level of concern raised quite directly by Agamben’s speech—namely, the political function and meaning of movement. At times statements and questions about MoM actually produced forms of exclusion, disqualifying certain things from the category and concept of movement, however without clearly articulated criteria. Why were certain things, what Agamben terms “politically decisive instances,” called movements, even though there are no clear criteria of definition? Implicit in this was a question of why other things were not considered movement.

This had particular salience for me because by the time I heard Agamben’s speech in 2005, I had witnessed various instantiations and phases of the so-called MoM,259 raising key questions about why certain things counted as MoM, and others didn’t. Over the years I had witnessed what was thought to be the pinnacle of the movement as well as several proclamations of its demise.260 From late 2003- 2004, I watched, almost in exasperation, as

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258 This realization raised different, but related, concerns: Whose questions were they? Where did the questions and categories I the “researcher” asked end, and those of the actors of the movement begin? Did this matter to the quality or nature of “the data”? This was both an epistemological question about where “knowledge” comes from, and a methodological question about my (or social science’s) relation to these statements. Were they “ethnographic data” or “theory?” Did this change the nature and purpose of my analysis of them?

259 Uninomade was created specifically as a response to the MoM, and so is at least implicitly part of what Agamben was speaking to.

260 The discourse of the movement’s death or failure, imminent or already passed was articulated often and at different times by multiple people. In fact, I think the first time I heard of the movement’s death was in the very
the movement shifted from an effervescent period of activity—one when the movement literally seemed to be everywhere: in the major piazzas, in independent and even mainstream bookstores, newspapers and on the tips of everyone’s tongue—to a period with much lower levels of visible and public activity, accompanied by an increasing climate of factionalism and depression within movement spaces and among activists. One of the more interesting and perplexing things was the paradoxical way the absence of movement seemed to be known and used.

The paradox was somewhat as follows: even during times when there was growing consensus that MoM was failing or had already died, there was still a great deal of movement-like activity. This included protests, strikes, and meetings—many with extremely large turnouts comparable to the numbers present at the movement’s height—and numbers of people still committed to (making) movement. In fact, the collective commitment to the category or concept of movement, both as something that had been and passed, often with a deep commitment and belief that it would return, was rather remarkable. The absence of MoM was itself a presence of a certain kind. What did this persistent commitment to, and statements about, movement, even movement as absence and failure, mean and do? If its presence was not definable by certain criteria and definitions, what was its political function?

Overall, the resonances of Agamben’s speech highlighted that “what is movement?” constituted a complex problem and object of inquiry that traversed empirical, epistemological, philosophical and political boundaries. It could not be understood simply as

261 As we will go on to see, when I use movement spaces, I refer to physical places like social centers that are occupied or ceded spaces and buildings, explicitly used to house activist and cultural events as well as more transitory events, meetings, etc. However, at high points certain bars in the city became “movement spaces.”
a question awaiting an empirical or scientific answer; it was a multi-faceted statement and problem. It seeped over and blurred lines of distinction between my own questions and categories and those of the Italian activists. In so doing the episode not only presented epistemological and methodological challenges and insights about the nature of knowledge production as a networked discursive and material practice, it also touched on larger political-philosophical problems and trajectories having to do with the nature of “the political” in Italy and beyond.

3.2 The “What is movement”? mantra

It was quite early in the course of my research that I discovered that my perplexity with respect to the movement was not simply my own problem as an “analyst” or “social scientist.” Almost everyone I spoke with seemed to share some degree of puzzlement and wonder with respect to this movement. In my initial interviews in 2002 and 2003, people would eagerly describe the movement (MoM), who was a part of it, what it had done, and what it was about. However, often in the same sentence—almost in the same breath—they would express a sense of bafflement, wonder and lack of understanding similar to my own.

The owner of a popular bar where many informal movement gatherings and conversations took place, explained to me in one of my first informal interviews, “It’s strange, I don’t know how to explain it… What moves is like nothing I have seen before, it’s a sensibility, an affinity.” One of the leaders and spokespersons for the Tute Bianche, expressed his own awe and puzzlement in a meeting of the Bologna Social Forum, declaring,

262 Like Rayna Rapp in her discussion of amniocentesis and genetic counseling in the United States, I needed to acknowledge that “our ethnographic work is continuously relocated in practice, as we incorporate an appreciation of lack of holism, nonclosure, and self-positioning into the representations of the phenomena we study” Rapp 1999: 12.

263 Conversation, Bologna June, 2002
“I believe that this movement is a woman” (pointing to the movement’s erratic, unexpected, yet positive characteristics). Meanwhile, another seasoned militant explained to me at the 3rd World Social Forum, “…what is remarkable is that when just one or a few of us call for a march or other action, it fails, turnout is bad, but if we all are involved turnout far exceeds our memberships and expectations; nothing like that has ever happened before” (informal interview, Cobas militant, Porto Alegre, Jan 2003). Perhaps most poignantly, and as I discuss in greater detail below, was the declaration, “Non ci capiamo questo movimento!” (We don’t understand this movement!) expressed by a perplexed, yet exuberant leader from the South of Italy to an auditorium of hundreds in Genoa the day following a hugely successful march in which 150,000 people far exceeded the expected turnout of 10-30,000.

Such enunciations and efforts to make sense, define or otherwise think through this movement continued to be prevalent throughout my research and raised numerous critical questions that challenged both my understanding of what a social movement is and was, as well as the role and nature of questioning as a form of practice. That movements themselves ask a number of questions about their own status of being in the world and that these questions produce effects are not very studied aspects of social movements. This has a number of implications for both our research methods and our understanding of what social movements do and are. In this section I will show that while at times these acts of questioning seemed to be aimed at making sense of and gaining knowledge about something called movement, much like conducting research in order to know and understand a

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Militants are generally full-time activists. Often they are employed by an organization (i.e. a trade union, an NGO, a party), but at times they are simply fully committed to their organization and social change voluntarily. The distinction between more militant and casual activists becomes important for a few reasons: 1) MoM was notable for the large presence of unaffiliated participants, or the cane sciolti (you’ve mentioned this term already), whom we can think of as not officially belonging to an organization, i.e. non-militants; and 2) because the flux between particular periods of “high movement”--what I describe as Movement--is largely determined by the presence of non-militants, or rather the ability of movement to spread throughout society or the public sphere more broadly.
phenomenon, at other times these questions and enunciations were not interested in actually finding answers, but raising them as problems, or simply producing the category of MoM through naming what was excluded or failed to be MoM.

**Public interrogations of the MoM**

As I learned from various people and my own observations, one primary site where the commitment to the category of movement, and even more specifically to the “what is movement” question, was performed was in public assemblies. These often followed big events like protests, but at times were planned specifically in order to discuss the state and prospects of MoM.

Two particularly contrasting and therefore poignant instantiations of posing the question took place during two different moments of my earlier research. The first was in 2002 the day after a the successful march commemorating the one year anniversary of the death of Giuliani took place on the one year anniversary of Genoa 2001. Occurring still well within the positive and ecstatic phase of MoM in the midst of the “Springtime of Movements,” this event illustrates the way in which such a question was a call to know and research an emergent yet poorly understood entity. The second instantiation takes place in February 2004 at a national meeting to discuss the possibility of investing further in the Italian Social Forum, an outgrowth of the Genoa Social Forum that many would like to see serve as a synthesizing and organizing structure for the archipelago of movements. This meeting took place during the beginning of the end of MoM, a phase in which differences over political visions, tactics, and what does and does not count as movement eventually lead to division and fragmentation. In this latter instance we can see that articulating a definition
of movement has less to do with making sense of positive qualities and more to do with disqualifying certain practices as part of MoM, and of Movement.

Genoa 2002

During my first research trip to Italy, in the summer of 2002, when I was just beginning to get to know how things worked, a loud and very public articulation of the “what is movement” question struck me quite strongly. The words “Non Ci Capiamo Questo Movimento!” (We don’t understand this movement!), declared from a stage in front of thousands, intrigued me greatly. It was July 2002, about two months after I had arrived in Italy for language study and pre-dissertation fieldwork. I was in Genoa, for the first time, to attend a “manifestazione” (march/protest) following a week of workshops and events sponsored by ‘MoM,” or what was then more commonly referred to as “il movimento No Global.” The event was organized to mark the one-year anniversary of the violent and historic events that surrounded the massive protests at Genoa the year before. Most specifically they were there to commemorate the death of 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani, whose death by police bullet amidst the protests had become a key symbol of both the violence and importance of those massive protests.

In the weeks leading up to this anniversary march, organizers and various people I spoke with predicted a very low turnout for the event. They expected less than 30,000 participants, which was quite low for Italy in this period. However, immediately following the collective moment of silence that took place at precisely the minute Carlo Giuliani had been killed, it became clear that these educated predictions—made by organizers, media and others who had quite a bit of experience in such estimations—had been wrong. The march
was huge. In addition to suddenly having over 150,000 bodies, the march swelled and moved as if propelled by an internal, even magical energy (this was something I felt, but was also confirmed to me by the behavior and statements of many activists I was walking with).\textsuperscript{265} I remember standing with Federico to the side of the body of the march watching as the thick, seemingly endless march passed by. Federico, an organizer from Bologna, kept shaking his head and smiling, his eyes appeared almost glazed over. “I have never seen a march like this before,” he said. A little after we rejoined the procession, it became clear that the march’s head—under no supervision or external control—had gained so much speed that the march had divided into two and then dissolved into increasingly smaller parts. Half laughing, half frustrated, Federico repeated, “I have really never seen a march like this!” As we lost track of the front completely, he groaned and muttered something about how this shouldn’t happen and that a march should stay together. By the time we reached the end and passed the apartments where many immigrants were watching from their windows, the march had dissolved into a joyous but disperse crowd. No rally, no call to action, simply presence. That night people partied until early morning while others slept in sleeping bags wherever they found an empty space on the sidewalk.

The day following this unexpected turnout, “movement” participants from all over Italy representing different political and organizational affiliations, as well as many unaffiliated individuals and smaller collectives, met in the Teatro dello Corteo near Genova’s train station. They were taking advantage of what was then still a novel, but not uncommon, opportunity for all of these organizations with extremely diverse ideologies, political cultures and organizing

\textsuperscript{265} This was a very stark contrast to the last protest I had been at--my first Italian protest ever--just one month earlier, in which a protest against the neoliberalization of global food policy and for food sovereignty had a much lower turnout than expected (about 30,000). It was so tightly organized and run I had even remarked on that fact in my field notes.
styles to be in the same place with no immediate or urgent political objective. They recognized the chance to have an open and seemingly spontaneous discussion about their thoughts on this somewhat enigmatic entity they had been calling the movimento “no global,” the “new global” or, most recently, the “MoM.”

While I sat in the crowded auditorium of the Teatro dello Corteo listening to over 90 people speak, I remember being particularly struck by the words of Francesco Caruso, a rather well known Napoletani spokesperson for the Disobbedienti. When he began to talk, I was almost startled by his seriousness. He shook his head and said, “Non ci capiamo questo movimento” (We don’t understand this movement). He went on. How, he asked, had over 150,000 people arrived for the march when both the organizers and the press expected and predicted (and so theoretically worked to mobilize) only 10-30,000?! This was especially strange, he noted, since just a little over one month before, many activists—most notably several Disobbedienti—had made headlines by warning of “the death of the movement.”

Francesco concluded by challenging the audience, made up not only of the movement militants, but also of people who only come out for big events like this march, to acknowledge that this “movement” did not work according to logics they were accustomed to and that it was important to take on the task of working to understand it.

The words “Non ci capiamo questo movimento” resonated so much, they became the title of my Master’s thesis. At that time, however, they struck me for their seemingly more

266 The proclamation of death had been a reaction to, among other things, the remarkably low turnout for the protest of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome just one month earlier (mentioned above). Ironically that event had been very well organized, and expectation for turnout was high.

267 In fact, while part of me feels a bit tacky reusing this episode here, I did so rather intentionally in order to point to a) the multiple levels and ways each of these practices work, and to b) the difference and complexity added by a research project carried out over a relatively long period of time. In particular on an “emergent” (Fischer 2003; 2005), complex (Law 2004, Marcus 1995, 1999, Mol 2002), recursive and reflexive object (Riles 2000, Fortun 2001), that is itself a practice, what Knorr Cetina (2001) might term an objectual or epistemic
literal meaning, a call to research a movement that was not explicable through typical political or analytical lenses. It was, it seemed to me at the time, a very straightforward invocation and call for research as a path to knowing. That is, as a call to comprehending this movement in an empirical, perhaps even scientific, way. Moreover, his words also suggested that he and I shared an interest in researching this movement while also pointing to the central role of critical, analytical and theoretical practices within these Italian movement networks. I will return to the fact of research and the centrality of knowledge production in Chapter 5. For now, it is more important to note that this was one of the earliest of many public performances of this question I would witness. Notably, until 2004 every major “appuntamento” (movement event) was followed by a day of assembly and discussion, \(^{268}\) and many considered these a vital part of MoM.\(^{269}\)

It would take several years witnessing numerous and different forms of similar statements that either questioned or asserted hypotheses about the nature of MoM, including perhaps that of Agamben’s described above, for me to begin to be able to understand that there was something more than a straightforward call to research and analysis both at play and at stake. At some level such statements were made quite sincerely and literally, as an interrogative meant to move towards (better) knowledge about and for MoM—to better understand its internal dynamics, what made it move, and what compelled its popularity and force. Clearly wrapped up in this, at least to a certain

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\(^{268}\) Appuntamento translates literally as “appointment.” It is used to refer to the next big event, to be inclusive of diverse events ranging from protests, strikes, marches, Social Forums, etc.

\(^{269}\) In an interview in 2004, an activist would point out that the lack of the discussion following the protest against George Bush on June 4 was significant and a strong signal that the movement was fundamentally changed, if not gone. “If nothing else, the 4th of June has another face. That is, it was the first day of mobilization after Genoa that wasn’t followed by a day of discussion—there was no assembly, no social forum, there wasn’t anything. How can we say this speaks of a situation in which the internal relationships are very measured? And contemporaneously all of the ‘organized’ components of this movement, but all of them, seem to have renounced assuming as a priority the unitary dimension of the movement” interview, Bologna June 2004.
extent, was the assumption that if MoM was an effective movement, that is if it could be figured out and gotten right, it had important potentials for progressive social change. However, this belief in movement/Movement is itself an interesting, and not obvious or universally prevalent assumption; for, the world over, the dominant sites of political investment are States, parties and an entire system of representative democracy. These are the presumed givens of politics. As such the persistent belief in something called Movement—in this case a movement of movements—as a politically desirable and effective entity, is then an interesting fact. This fact becomes even more interesting when we realize that the form movement is itself not a clear or obvious thing. Is movement defined simply by the presence of marches, protests, and other “activist” activities? Is it defined when a certain numeric threshold is reached?

Was something else being done in the pronouncement of the term movement, especially in the form of questioning the nature, form and status of its existence? These questions became even more pertinent when one reflected on another public assembly I attended almost two years later.

The Italian Social Forum (2004)

In February of 2004, about one year and a half after the surprising Genoa march I described above, and about two and a half years since the original anti-G8 protest at Genoa, a very different instantiation of the question, in a quite similar setting, was pivotal. This was yet another meeting of the various “areas” of MoM, this time held in Bologna. More specifically, this was one of a series of meetings to discuss the prospect of a permanent Italian Social Forum, or other coordinating body, for the movement of movements. One of the most visible and interesting outcomes of MoM and the Genoa protest had been the emergence of local social forums in almost every single city and town throughout Italy. While certainly inspired by the World (WSF) and European Social Forums
(ESF)—the first European Forum was actually held in Florence by decision of the WSF’s International Council—the direct precursor was actually the experience of the Genoa Social Forum (GSF), which had successfully served as a coordinating body for over 800 organizations in the build-up and management of the protests against the G8 in 2001. However since the successful experience of the GSF, subsequent attempts at developing a structure that could retain difference and specificity, along with some unity, had proved challenging. Towards the end of 2003, and at the beginning of the 2004, there were a series of meetings to determine how, and whether, to establish such a body. This February meeting was one last effort to bring this idea to fruition.

In many ways, this was a referendum on whether to try to give a more permanent structure to the diverse components of MoM. Yet besides the topic at hand—although as far as I was aware there was no overt agenda-- I could tell it was an important meeting because “everyone” was there, and numerous communiqués had been issued for the occasion.\(^{270}\) By “everyone” I mean that people from diverse parts of the movement—including the Communist Party, trade unions, social centers and other associations—were present and had sent key members or leaders. Once again, speaker after speaker took the stage to give his or her perspective on what can most succinctly be described as the “state of the movement.” As in Genoa, these interventions included a number of speeches attempting to explain both what the movement was and what it could, or should, be. While in these ways the meeting was very similar to the meeting held after the Genoa 2002 anniversary, what was striking were the important differences.

Held at the beginning of February, in the midst of Bologna’s nastily cold winter, the meeting stood in stark contrast to the warm and effervescent meeting in the summer of 2002. The February meeting itself was in a far less comfortable auditorium—an enormous unheated room of the

\(^{270}\) “Everyone” refers on the one hand to the myriad parts of MoM, many of whom first began to work together in the Genoa Social Forum, in the lead up to Genoa against the G8 in 2001, but “everyone” also means that leaders and major players were there.
warehouse-like complex that served at the time as the site for a Bolognese social center Teatro Polivalente Ocupato (TPO). In fact the coldness of Bologna’s winter air in that unheated auditorium seemed to be matched (or augmented) by a chilly tension in the air. The people here were deeply concerned about the “movement.” According to what seemed to be a collective consensus at least since the start of the Iraq war the year before (March, 2003), the movement(s) had suffered a great deal, both in terms of more tangible things like visibility and popularity, and also in terms of morale, energy, and other qualities that registered at the affective or experiential level. In my interviews and research between 2001 and 2002, there was a sort of consensus among disparate elements about the importance and exciting potential of the MoM; however this new period was marked by increasing divisiveness and sadness about the movement.

This cold meeting then was in large part centered on a shared concern about the “state of the movement.” But those present were deeply divided about what was wrong and how to proceed. Throughout the weekend, a number of people spoke of two major areas of difficulty. The first was that after a few years of being able to work well in this somewhat diverse network, which meant groups with tactical and even more fundamental differences of political vision working together, now the ideological, strategic and personal differences seemed to be trumping the functional unity in diversity. Rather than lead to the productive engagements many described around the Genoa Social Forum, now the emergence of differences resulted in irresolvable clashes about how to organize and pursue lasting change. The second difficulty was the sense that what was being called “movement”—the people who self-identified as movement members or activists, which basically applied to all 250-300 people there—was missing the “real” or “effective” sites and practices of social struggle.271 Beginning in late 2003 Italy experienced high

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271 In further research one finds conflicting narratives about this. Some claim the social struggle as the site of ‘real’ movement against the movement comprised only of professional militants.
levels of unrest and mobilization, such that from a superficial or external perspective one might see lots of movement, and yet somehow there was a clear understanding that these sites of mobilization did not coincide with the “movement.” Throughout the meeting people continuously pointed to the fact that “real struggles” were actually occurring elsewhere in Italian society, including among the transportation workers, in the universities and schools, and at nuclear waste deposit sites—all of which had experienced substantial and visible periods of mobilization.272

An implicit question emerged: if there were lots of social struggle in Italy, but it wasn’t seen as part of MoM, or even of movement, what exactly was, or did count as, “movement?” Although no-one said so explicitly, I think it was clear that one reason people were so distressed was because whereas almost everyone agreed that the new phase of struggle associated with Genoa had introduced some key innovations and improvements in the practices of pursuing social change, they had never figured out how those tendencies could be translated into something more—something more lasting, tangible, and effective. Even what that “something more” was seemed to be open for question. Was it more durable political formations? If so, what kind? Could a movement become more permanent? Or did a movement require other forms of social or political organization in Italian society? Were they after a new kind of government? Economy? At one level, the Italian Social Forum itself was an attempt to answer these questions and fill the “need” for a structure to house and facilitate the diverse “souls” (anime) of the movement. However the conflicting and even bitter tone of the meeting revealed fundamental differences in visions, analyses and theories with regard to such organizations, and the very

272 If you read the newspapers from the period of late 2003 until early 2004, the amount of social unrest in Italian society—from the wildcat strikes of the transportation workers that paralyzed Milan to the blockades of entire railway lines to prevent nuclear waste deposits—is quite remarkable.
desirability, let alone possibility of having a single structure for this role (it is relevant to mention that the rancor was also clearly of a more personal and affective nature.\textsuperscript{273})

After two days of debate, mostly in open and plenary form, but also with some break out groups, the event ended. Most activists and attendees appeared to leave feeling quite discouraged. Although I was aware of and affected by the distress in the air, I was also completely impressed by several things: 1) the richness and intensity of the debates and the analyses that went along with the proclamations of failure, lack and dismay at the state of the movement; 2) the fact that, faced with such a mobilized society, people were so sure about the shortcomings of MoM; and finally, 3) the persistent commitment to the possibilities and desires invested in the term Movement, without a clear definition of what it was.

Perhaps most provocative was the fact that while most people left the 2004 assembly apparently convinced that the movement that they had put so much energy and excitement into was on the brink of dissolution, I could not help but marvel at the undeniable, unanimously articulated, presence of the movement: the way the absence or failure of the movement was such an acknowledged fact—a presence that did work and compelled both action and reflection. The perceived lack of movement was in itself a presence. What did this presence in absence mean about the nature and function of movement? What was the difference between a movement in crisis and a movement as an emergent presence?

**Evaluating the Differences: Movement v. movement**

When considered in tandem with the meeting two years earlier, several things stood out as noticeable about MoM. First was the similar presence of the questions (implicit and

\textsuperscript{273} It is difficult to account for or measure the role of affective, emotional and personal motivations in many divisions that are explained in terms of more rational and ideological differences. The same seems true of many of the affinities as well (For more an affect see Dowling 2010, Clough 2007.)
more explicit) of “what is movement?” and “what is this movement” discussed publicly among a broad-based audience that all saw themselves as belonging to the “movement of movements.” Second, however, and more significant is how different these two ostensibly similar episodes were. Of course being two years apart made a difference in broader political context. In 2002, the beginning of what then got called Primavera Dei Movimenti, the institutional Left is outside of government; in 2004 the institutional Left, that is Rifondazione Comunista is approaching it. In 2002 it was the height of the Primavera dei movimenti, and opposition to Berlusconi and the center Left seemed—along with the new return to public protest—to mark the potential of tremendous social change. In 2004, the increasing possibility that the Left (including the Communist Party) would make significant headway in the June elections had led to a number of changed relationships within the movement. Additionally, this “macro”-political context co-existed with an internal movement context that is much more polarized (and in some cases like Bologna, has been fragmenting since Genoa 2001).

As such, in 2002 the question is posed, seriously but positively, to address the surprising, enchanting, and inexplicable nature of a movement that is perceived as exciting, good, and something that is working. The reason for questioning is in large part because people didn’t have the political concepts or categories to explain or make sense of how and why it is working. Hence, Caruso’s call for a research to understand why this movement compelled so much participation and seemed so potent, is a positive call to action, to work to understand something in its presence and positivity—something that is emergent, but as of yet inchoate.274 In 2004, however, what emerges is the fact of a crisis, even failure or absence

274 These efforts to make sense of practices and values that are not legible within the current political lexicon constitute a great deal of the theoretical-practice I describe in Chapter 5.
of the positive potentials of this movement. While the fact had been in discussion since at least October of 2003 when I returned to begin a year of research, this meeting seems to constitute an important step towards making public concerns and complaints that had been uttered peripherally for several months, with a verdict tending towards the negative. As such, the question in 2004 seems exasperated on the one hand, and judgmental on the other. It is less about naming and understanding an as of yet unarticulated positivity—as in 2002—and more about excluding and devaluing things, declaring them not movement, or at least not part of “MoM.” As one intervention at the meeting just prior to this put it, “It isn’t possible that everything that moves is called a movement!” In other words, whereas in 2002 empirically researching and joyfully struggling to find language to make sense of the movement and what made it so powerful seems both plausible and meaningful to politics and future-making,\(^\text{275}\) in 2004 making sense of the situation seems to be about figuring out what went wrong, and perhaps even more about excluding practices from the category or status attained by the MoM.

For me what is perhaps more interesting is the fact that these exclusions are based on certain unarticulated, yet apparently collectively understood parameters. As I mentioned briefly above, while this meeting was happening and as diagnoses of the movement were increasingly dismal, there were actually numerous mobilizations. In December and January of that year, there was near constant social upheaval. In December transportation workers throughout Italy had pulled off wild-cat strikes that paralyzed Milan and other Italian cities for at least three days. In the South, citizens of the small town of Scanzano Ionico had blocked the entire North/South rail line, erecting a permanent village in order to protest the

\(^{275}\) The former is part of the meaning-making, theoretical and imaginative work I will go on to argue is central to all movements. On future-making and futures, see Holland and Lave 2001; Scott 2004; Koselleck 2004.
In Bologna, parents, teachers and students had occupied classrooms and taken to the streets in protest of the school reforms being proposed by the Legge Moratti. Despite these high levels of mobilization, and very effective blockades, at the distressed meeting described above, there was an almost unanimous consensus that these mobilizations were not part of, or the same as, the MoM. And moreover, this was not a neutral judgment—while some people thought they should be, and others didn’t, it was clear that the exclusion of these activities from the purview of MoM was cause for concern. On the one hand it was seen as not boding well for MoM—because MoM was missing the “real” sites of social struggle. On the flipside, the failure of these smaller movements to be a part of a larger “public space” such as MoM—with its hallmark of an enlarged vivacious public sphere where different social subjects met, debated, and engaged—seemed to suggest that these struggles were doomed to remain isolated social struggles, rather than part of MoM or any Movement.

Overall these episodes point to the ways in which the interest in understanding and asking questions about the MoM have multiple purposes and effects. Some try to name an emergent inchoate positivity. Others continue to produce the category of MoM by naming things that fall short. As we shall see, this in turn reveals that behind MoM is a larger discourse of movement, which itself refers as much to a political dynamic, and desire for different politics as it does to set of concrete practices that are called movement.

3.3 Movement as the Other of politics

The episodes above, as well as others below, reveal and reiterate the fact that there is a great deal of reflective, analytical and even theoretical work taking place within the space
and with the concept of movement;\footnote{I discuss this knowledge and theory producing work of movements in Chapter 5. See also Casas Cortes 2009.} at another level the diverse statements begin to point to the ways in which discussions and definitions of the term movement are critical to what a movement is and does. This refers both to the function of movement as a delimiter of problematics and relatedly to the fact that the concept of movement serves as a space or terrain where what constitutes a better politics, and perhaps more importantly what forms and practices will lead to that alternative politics, are fought over and negotiated. Definitions of the term movement have to do with a political critique of traditional or mainstream politics, as well as of movements past. At the same time this critique itself participates in articulating the relevant problematics with which any new politics must deal. These problematics turn out to have a lot in common with those elements singled out by the “new political imaginary” of the MoM. These in turn reveal how the MoM is itself only one iteration in a larger discursive apparatus, that of movement, or of what I will call movement/Movement. In what follows I delve into the ways in which these statements elucidate a desire for another kind of politics, in the space of movement, and further describe the implicit distinction between movement and Movement.

A political anti-body

Consider some of the following examples in conjunction with the episodes and quotes mentioned above:

This is why I have argued that the movement is a space of politicization. (Activist-Intellectual, interview Bologna June 2004).

We are speaking, first of all, of coming to an understanding of the category of movement…During the decade of the nineties, at least in Italy, the term
“movement” indicated mostly the organized components (or self-organized, if you prefer). That is, that ensemble of social centers, collectives, grassroots trade unions that made their own the symbolic heritage of past movements and in diverse ways the made themselves prosecutors of it… (Derive Approdi editorial, 2003-2004: 2).

.. there is this enormous possibility that the form movement is the form that within the current crisis of representation affirms itself as the only possibility of constructing another power (potenza). That is the possibility of constructing, rather than simply opposing something.(Massimo Cervelli, Movimento Antagonistica Toscana, Global Project Audio 2007, translation and emphasis mine)

On the other hand great spaces and great questions are opened: how to construct a new democracy, how to resist the injustices imposed by neoliberalism, how to auto-value the wealth of the social made of relationships, cooperation, creativity and desire? We believe that the social movements that we have come to know in these years, and in which we participated, can be the laboratories in which we look for this answer (neurogreen@liste.rekombinant.org, “The space of movements: Appeal for a Laboratory of the social networks,” March 9, 2006, translation mine).

When Federico declares in the middle of a Bologna Social Forum meeting that he believes “this movement is a woman,” he is not just flagging that he is puzzled by the movement (MoM). He is also suggesting, and those in the audience ostensibly understand this, that the movement works with different logics than the “normal” movement we might presume. These logics include difference, dispersion, horizontality, anti-dogmatism, and an awareness of the diffuse nature of unequal but potentially “other” power relations.277 Similarly when Mezzadra a long time militant active since the 70s, and currently Professor of Political Science in Bologna, speaks about a “space of politicization,” he uses the term “space” for its non-directional, open, and potentially multiplicitous nature and “politicization” for its activation of political subjectivities, and because it is precisely the open and processual potential of these terms that are significant. This stands in contrast to the

277 He is also clearly referencing Italian feminism and the “politics of difference.” The influence of feminism on notions of movement and MoM are significant.
ways in which traditional and dominant political models functioned by blocking such processes and treating politics as uni-directional, given and static. Relatedly, Cervelli’s suggestion that the movement posits the only possibility of another kind of political form able to offer something during this crisis of representation reveals more about the fact of the problem of the dominant political form than about the nature and meaning of movement. This in turn resonates with other definitions given to me about what the MoM was. For example recall the description of the MoM as antibody that I included in the Introduction:

> We don’t want to jump and put ourselves into power or to win elections. Much more is bound to the problem of self-government…the need to de-authoritize power, to disarticulate power, to progressively break, the mechanisms of traditional political representation. While today in Italy and in the world there exists a real crisis of the Political… we are the only possible anti-body, the only possibility for a rethinking of the political in terms of, precisely, real political participation (Disobbedienti, Interview, Porto Alegre, January 2003).

What we begin to see is that what is at stake in descriptions of the MoM and the use of the term movement does not always refer to what a movement is—i.e. the protests, meetings, organizations, and events that comprise them—but rather what a movement does, or perhaps even more precisely, what it aspires, or what actors aspire for it, to do and be. Moreover, this aspiration and desire is in turn defined as much by contrast and opposition, as for what it positively is. That is it is defined by what it is opposed or contrasted to, in addition to what it itself is.

This reiterates part of Agamben’s speech in which he describes how etymologically movement originated more to describe a function and quality in opposition to the state and parties than as something definable in and of itself. Agamben actually traces the etymology

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278 Overall the use of spatial imaginaries and architectures in the GJSM tends to emphasize the importance of multiplicity, unity-in difference, and possibilities for encounter and localization, over more campaign and directed political agendas.
of the term *movement*, describing how in politics, in contrast to physics and philosophy, the term only comes into use in the 19th century, with the French Revolution of 1830. Agamben notes that more often than not rather than define movements in certain terms, movements are spoken of as “dynamics” or “functions” that are counter-posed to other political entities. Agamben notes that the term *movement* was first used “when those fighting for change, called themselves *partie du mouvement*, and their adversaries the *partie du l’ordre*.” Soon after this date, Agamben’s genealogy continues with philosoper Von Stein, who begins to use the term to refer to contrapositions to the state: “The state is the static and legal element whilst the movement is the expression of the dynamic forces of society. So the movement is always social and in antagonism with the state.” Agamben continues, “Von Stein does not define movement: he ascribes to it a *dynamic* and designates *its function*” (Agamben 2005: emphasis mine). Similarly, Agamben continues, Arendt shows how around WWI entities in strong contraposition to parties start to develop on both the Right and the Left—including Fascism, which was a movement long before it was a party.

These diverse enunciations—as well as others I will discuss below—reveal a collective commitment to the category and concept of *movement*. But, rather than provide a clear positive definition explaining what a movement does, this commitment reveals implicit understandings of and desires for what this and other movements may do and be, as well as what they are not. *Movement*—the term—can be understood as something to be differentiated from other traditional political forms, on the one hand, and movements past, on the other. As we will see, and have in relation to Genoa, at times this means *Movement is* spoken of in terms of difference, dispersion, or debate, and at others as an epochal, an exceptional space of life, much like a utopia or “event,” where new things become possible.
At other times, movements are described as mundane, or as failures. In most of these
definitions, one thing remains constant: movement is the “other” of politics. It is seen as an
antibody or corrective to the failures both of Marxist or communist movements, but even
more of the dominant political system—Liberal Representative Democracy— which is itself
inextricably linked to Capitalism. Descriptions of movement, and of the MoM, then, tend to
have as much to do with a belief in this “other” of politics as they do in the positive elements
and things they experience with the MoM. What also remains clear is that those elements of
the new political imaginary represented by MoM have something in common with more
basic definitions of the meaning of a Movement.

**movement v Movement: an implicit distinction**

Throughout my years of research I gathered descriptions that seemed to recognize
something almost magical in the realm of movement. Yet this “magic” itself depended on
recognizing a difference between the everyday or almost always present forms of movements
and activism that were always present, and those that happened only rarely at moments like
the MoM and the Movement of ’77.

Consider this description from one of my earliest interviews with a key older figure in
the Bolognese movement scene. Here, still in the heyday of MoM, he describes the build up
to the NO-OCSE protest—predating Genoa— as follows:

That which effectively struck you in that moment, that which leapt to
visibility immediately, was this heterogeneity of trajectories that encountered
each-other. While in the previous years you fundamentally met with people
that had biographical trajectories similar to your own, with fundamentally
common reference points. There instead you found… you crossed experiences
that were totally new, totally uncircumscribed, completely anomalous with
respect to your own trajectory. And here you begin to think about this, and
here, also if you will, is the litmus test, that you can begin to say that you are
in front of a Movement. Because, precisely, you weren’t any longer in a predefined ambit, more or less antagonistic that develops its own trajectory, but rather, you encounter a heterogeneity of situations that start talking to one another again. Evidently, on the one hand, with all of the difficulty that this brings. Because the differences obviously existed and they aren’t erased, but at the same time with the capacity to be together, to give a projectuality of networks that permitted these men and women to do things together. (long time Bolognese activist (MB), interview, Bologna, October 2003).

Notably, similar understandings of Movement emerge in later descriptions when the MoM is already in crisis, or has even failed. For example, in an interview in 2006, RB tries to explain the difference between moments with “real” political fervor, real movement, and the sizeable protests happening then:

There are moments of mobilization still, but the problem is that they are episodic, while one time, a manifestation was inserted into a context, into an imaginary, etc. Now they are isolated moments. And this recent protest in Rome. It was read completely through the lens of politicized politics, as a performance of the feuds between Rifondazione and Prodi—it wasn’t seen at all as a moment of autonomy of the social body. It was seen as a moment of interest group pressure on the government… that old mode. Genoa was never seen this way, not even a year later (RB interview, Bologna, November 2006).

Quite differently, but with the same ends, Benedetto Vecchi, a well known journalist and longtime militant, writes on the listserv Neurogreen in 2006 in a thread entitled, “Crisis of il Manifesto, Crisis of the Left, and Crisis of Politics”:

I continue to uphold that the only feasible road is that one that is certainly torturous, but is still necessary, that we distance ourselves of the political culture of the workers’ movement, searching in the meantime to not throw into a ditch that which was positive and which was able to pull up the 19th century class struggle. From this point of view we need theoretical, political and organizational flexibility. …For the present I think this means we need to put our gaze and interest towards other places, groups, attitudes that express an often radical critique of the present, but not always able to translate that radicality into a political force/power. It is rare, but at times it has happened: look at the No Global [movement]—it conquered an unimaginable consensus (Vecchi, email posted to neurogreen@liste.rekombinant.org, August 8, 2006).

Similarly, in one of my last interviews, a PhD student, whom I will call Margarita very
involved in immigrants’ rights issues and a Bolognese social center, explains the difference between the high period of the MoM, with Genoa, and after or at the movement’s end. Here Margarita reflects on what drew her to Genoa:

Ma: More than for its themes—I was in the university and clearly had a much more general perspective—but it wasn’t the themes in and of themselves so much, but all of the organization that were being created behind it. *The idea that you were in some way at the center of a constant debate, a very, very big one…ehhh the idea of a response, in some way commensurable with the G8 summit—a resonance that was very, very big, so that it was very difficult to remain outside. And it was an enthusiasm given specifically from the idea that, that…there was a discussion that was truly gaining the dimension of a mass—in Bologna, but also elsewhere, in the spaces of movement, but also in the spaces of the media*

Me: Was there high participation in the debates?

Ma: Yes, in 2002, yes. The idea was to grasp the “order words” of the movement—to make them play one against the other, creating and in some way discussing the meaning of that word—and from that point there to put together the problematic points inside which? was the discussion internal to the movement. And the LUC (Libero Universita Contropianı) ended precisely because it is difficult to reproduce today, with a completely different situation of movement, something of the same nature—in short, that makes you taken by a movement that discusses these things…

Me: But when did it stop being like this?

Ma: According to me, it surely functioned like this for all of 2002 and 2003 and then it began to go in crisis.

Me: The movement and also LUC, or just the movement?

Ma: Both. Yes, because in some sense it just could not anymore… The problem of who is, and who you are talking with about certain things…or the very things that you want to put to discussion… ehhh how to say it, are the words still at the center of a movement that is complex and plural? Or not? Meanwhile, with the end of 2003 we more or less returned to a very fragmentary situation. So that it is difficult to see a “movement of movements” like you could imagine in 2001, right after Genoa, and in

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279 This Free University was created in the build up to the No OCSE meetings (2000). It was revered by many in Bologna and brought together a number of the people who remained most active and respected throughout the duration of the MoM. The LUC continued for a few years, but started to wane around 2003/4.
Bologna even before Genoa. In Bologna this thing is born with Contropiani\(^\text{280}\) (in 2000). So that in a certain way Genoa arrives very strongly in Bologna because of this experience of the No OCSE (Anti OECD) protest (MA interview, Bologna December 2007).

Implicit in statements from Margarita, MB, and many of the others—and hearkening back to the puzzle enunciated by both Agamben and Caruso—is the distinction between a “real” Movement of the scope and importance of MoM, and movement understood more or less as activism in the everyday. The former are moments when those variegated things called Movements exceed the marginal spaces of activism and (are perceived to have the potential to) engross society at large. Movement is perceived to have the potential to, or even be on the cusp of, involving masses—even the majority—of people and producing transformative and radical social change. The latter, in contrast, are simply present.

If we look at the quotations throughout this chapter, as well as descriptions of Genoa in Chapter 1, we see that there are certain qualities that seem to connote what a “true” or “real” movement, one that truly has the potential for social change, is. They involve public space filled with a diversity of political subjects, in which diverse trajectories and identities can truly encounter one another across and with their differences. This in turn is linked to a space of debate and openness. Rather than each faction remaining in polemical or ideological ‘ghettos,’ the unity in difference posited by real movement is beyond dogmatics. This non-polemical, non-ideological form of politics is outside BOTH the tradition of the “politicized politics” of the State and the dogmatic traditions of the workers’ movement. If we were to analyze all of the statements above more closely, we would find that in addition to differentiating between movement and other politics, these statements echo the elements of

\(^{280}\) Contropiani was the plural organization that formed to organize against the OECD meetings. It was said that Contropiani essentially preceded the model of the social forum that was to become very popular throughout Italy. The BSF was considered by many to be one of the more effective versions of a social forum in Italy.
the new political imaginary— the key attributes being difference, autonomy and reflexivity, that are themselves reactions to past politics—that I began to describe in the chapter on Genoa. All of these elements themselves work against the dominant political logics, logics of the state, parties, etc. Again we see powerfully what MoM was thought to be, both by its relationships to an idea of something called Movement, as well as by what it was articulated against. In this way the new political imaginary posited by MoM is intricately and inextricably linked to the function of movement in opposition to state politics and representative politics more broadly. At the same time, MoM does not simply express to what it is opposed; it is also a particular instantiation, or moment in what is perceived as a more or less continuous trajectory of movement/Movement, what Italians tend to refer to as “the movement,” or Il Movimento.

3.4 Present in Absence: The productivity of crisis and failure

In the years since 2004, there seemed to be an emergent consensus among diverse parts of the movement that the entity known as MoM was in crisis and soon to be dead and gone. However, this did not coincide either with the complete absence of movement-like activities and practices, or with the absence of statements about both movement and the MoM. Certainly, the visibility of the mass movement had certainly diminished from public view. For example, larger (and even more movement oriented) bookstores no longer featured books about it and its various themes in its main display. There was less regular media attention to the movement, and even the more informal movement spaces and gatherings were less public. Yet there were still numerous protests; activists were busy doing

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281 A minor but interesting evidence of this was the shift of the “main” defacto gathering spot for the MoM. In 2002, at the height of the MoM La Linea, a large bar located in the most visible and popular plaza in Bologna
programming and running campaigns. Perhaps just as important for our purposes here, discussions about and references to the MoM were still common/prevalent. Thus the discourse of MoM and movement was still very present, it was just that rather than being enthusiastic, these discourses spoke of failure and absence. So, in spite of the fact that vibrant social mobilizations outside of both Genoa and Bologna were taking place, discourses spoke of the absence of movement and the MoM. As such, I would argue along with Foucault, in so doing produced this absence: and the absence was itself a presence of a certain kind.

Overall I learned as much, if not more about what MoM was by how people read either failure or other events through it, than when “it” was actually present and observable. In particular, I learned from the ways in which activists lamented its loss and excluded or devalued other movement-like things from the category or status of “il movimento”—a status that was both specific to MoM, but which also had a lot to do with the very category or term Movement and the political hopes, desires and assumptions that category inhered. In this section I explore both the ways in which the crises and failures of MoM work as a critical part of the movement/Movement discourse. Through considering a few events as well as descriptions of these as failures and crises, we learn not only about what MoM is, but also that the pronouncement or reading of failure is constitutive of the way movement works as a limit-concept and problematizer.

Readings of Crises

Despite my own desires to research a successful, radical and inspiring movement that could

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served as a defacto informal gathering spot for the MoM folks. I could go by most evenings between 7-9, apperitivo hour and find activists, get updated, etc. In 2006, the defacto bar had moved to a small one way street in the University sector of Bologna, a very alternative space featuring fair trade and organic beers, as well as fully vegetarian fare.
overcome the travails of most other movements in which I had observed or participated, the majority of my fieldwork was actually characterized by the crisis, and even failure of the MoM. This crisis, like its uncanny success, was evidenced not so much by my own empirical observations, of say the absence or obvious failure of movement-like things, but rather as a collectively understood and expressed fact. It took me a while to figure out what this meant in terms of my concrete research practices. While the crisis and failure became an oddly irrefutable fact almost immediately upon my return to Italy,\textsuperscript{282} rather than mean that I no longer had a “movement” to study, it meant that the presence of the movement was largely defined and manifested by its crisis. The crisis, turned decided failure by my trip in 2006, revealed more about what MoM was, or perceived to be, as those elated moments of its success. I was struck by the fact that failure and crisis seem to be constitutive of the very existence and category of movement/Movement, instilling a condition of perpetual not-yetness that could be read as both demoralizing and productive.

In what follows I take the reader through some examples of these encounters.

\textbf{Oct 4, 2004}

I arrived in Bologna Friday evening, Oct. 3rd, 2004 only to drop off my suitcases at a friend’s apartment and then to rush back to Rome to attend what was supposed to be the next big protest and event of MoM. I became aware of this protest from the many emails I received about the event, urging all interested “networks, movements, and associations” to participate “in a protest that will open the ‘Social Autumn’\textsuperscript{283} of movements. Having gleaned some of my most meaningful observations and interviews in relation to protests the year

\textsuperscript{282} I returned in October 2003 after being gone for most of a year, but I had been in Italy in March when the war against Iraq started, as well as in November 2002 for the first European Social Forum.

\textsuperscript{283} Very clearly a reference to the Hot Autumn of ‘69.
before, I decided it was worth going even if I had not been able to adequately follow the process leading up to it, and therefore didn’t have a good sense of who would be there, what was at stake, etc. The occasion—as I also learned from listserv emails, as well as from posters throughout Rome where I had been the week before—was the intergovernmental conference of 25 European heads of state to discuss the content of the new European Constitution. The protest had been called in order to contest the continuing commitment to neo-liberalism in the new Constitution for the European Union.284

The slogan,

You 25, we 400,000,000. We are Europe.
AGAINST LIBERALISM, WAR, AND RACISM,
4TH OF OCTOBER IN PIAZZA,
FOR ANOTHER EUROPE.
(Bsf-info, Listserv email, September 30, 2003)

clearly situated this event within the space and culture of the movement of movements.

Obvious (MoM cultural??) elements included the broad appeal and general aims, the reference to the people’s outnumbering of the politicians, the clear echoes of the slogan for the Genoa protest two and half years earlier (“We 6 million, You 8”) as well as the slogans of the World and European social Forums — “Another World/Europe is possible.” Since I hadn’t been in town very long at all, I did not have a very good sense of who from Bologna was going, and by what means they would make their way there.285 I only knew that there was a bus leaving the central bus station at about 7am the morning of the 4th and that I had reserved a spot. As I approached the buses I realized that I was actually very nervous. This

284 In Italian the term neoliberalism is rarely used, the word Liberismo, or liberale, are used much more commonly, often in reference to economic theories about the liberation of the economy from government. While at times “liberal” can be understood to mean the same way we might use them in English, at others it is understood as a clear reference to neoliberalism, and the overall economic and political ideology dedicated to freeing the economy from social and governmental constraints.

285 As described with respect to the last trip to Genoa, travel to protests was an interesting matter of negotiation and allegiances.
was to be the first major event I would participate in since the European Social Forum in November the year before, but through a quick round of phone calls and emails I knew that many of the people I had worked with then were not going. As I arrived at the station I hoped I would find some people I knew. Luckily after hanging out outside for a few minutes seeing only faces of unfamiliar, mostly older people, I caught a glimpse of Sara, a writer for Zero in Condotta, one of the movement newspapers in Bologna. She was one of perhaps three women I had interviewed the previous summer. She was there with a handful of other folks, all mostly students from the department of Political Science, whom I only vaguely knew, but whom I would get to know over the next few years. After a longer than expected ride to Rome—the bus was very old and slow—we finally arrived into a familiar sea of people carrying flags, dressed in bright colors and in a generally festive mood. That festive atmosphere would not last.

Because we had arrived late, we were in a relatively far back part of the corteo (procession), and we never made it very far. A few hours after being in a standstill amidst a march of several thousand people, we simultaneously received news that the Disobbedienti, led by the female members, had begun to try and breach the “red zone,” the thick security zone surrounding the building where the conference of 25 leaders was to take place, by throwing eggs and balloons and other objects at the line of police. Shortly thereafter the

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286 I had actually been in Bologna the day the Iraq war began in March 2003, so I was present for some more spontaneous protests then, but nothing to compare with the approximately 700,000 people I had joined in the protest against the war in November 2002.

287 Il Manifesto reported 100,000. Campetti 2003.

288 Having been at the anti WTO meetings in Cancun one month earlier I recognized this tactic as having been directly appropriated from the red zone surrounding the WTO delegates on the Hotel Strip of Cancun. The Disobbedienti would often do this: import tactics from events of il movimento globale, often with negative results, I would argue, because they were transplanted with no attention to the place-based specificities of the context into which they were being brought, nor to the processes that allowed those tactics to work elsewhere.
police responded with tear gas and started to beat back protestors. The march quickly dispersed, and we started to make our way back to where the buses were. As we did so, we received news (mostly via text messages on various cell phone) that people trying to leave via the Metropolitana (subway) were blocked by teargas as well. It was clear that memories of Genoa 2001 still haunted many protestors as a mild sense of panic began to set in the air. However, almost as soon as fear of police brutality hit, the vivid natures of those memories also assured them that this was nothing with which to compare Genoa. So while clearly it was not the peaceful march many had expected, the general assessment I heard as we waited to leave was that the *cariche* (charge by police) had been rather light.

The chatter and sentiment on the bus home was overwhelmingly negative. People were angry, somewhat at the police, but mostly with the Disobbedienti whom they saw as having acted inappropriately by making such a unilateral decision to use aggressive methods that were likely to provoke police reaction. However, I also learned that tensions had been on the rise for several months (especially since the referendum on Article 18 that took place in June), especially between the Disobbedienti, the large trade unions and the Rifondazione Comunista. I was reminded of the fact that when I left Bologna in July 2002 the local movement of the Disobbedienti had largely split in half, due to disagreements over political modalities, in particular the tactics in the piazza, but also with respect to communicating with the other parts of the march.

The following day, October 5th, there was an explosive assembly of various movement areas. Reporting on that meeting, *Il Manifesto* — the widely read daily, independent Communist paper,289 declared:

> The No Globals divide over Saturday’s march… The Disobbedienti claim

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289 Other Communist papers are run by the political parties.
victory in having broken through the Red Zone, and attack the bureaucratic trade unions on the stage in front of the Piazza Del Popolo. But between them there is no agreement over the modalities in the protest. The Young Communists: like this we pay too high a price. And on Indymedia they are speaking of the “victory of the police (Mastrandrea 2003: 2).

The article continues by asking,

A defeat or a victory? The beginning of the end or a new point of departure?” Whether successful or not, it goes on, “Saturday’s protest in Rome had surely produced, probably the first time in such profundity, the effect of placing the so called movement of movements in discussion. (ibid).

The irony, from my perspective, was that MoM had been in almost constant discussion since my getting to know it; the difference here seemed to be not so much that the MoM’s survival was seemingly in question or at stake, but that now there was a discussion about this discussion. So was this discussion different? Was this assessment of crisis different from other critiques and declarations of crisis or failure I had already witnessed, and would continue to see?

**Beyond Crisis: awaiting ‘Il Movimento’ (2006)**

The failure and fragility of MoM became even more clear when I returned to Italy in 2006 and then again in 2007 for several months. By then things had changed considerably. In 2003 and 2004 I definitely experienced and observed the deterioration of various social relationships and an increasing air of frustration and factionalism among diverse groups who had been working together. Although there were several criticisms and declarations of the failure of the movement, throughout the years 2003 and 2004 it was still quite easy to see the space that had been occupied by the movement. It was not only possible to trace or map where various activists and groups that had been part of the MoM were. The infrastructures, in the form of listservs, websites, and various cultures and practices—such as the May Day
Parade—were still in existence. Moreover, in 2004 discussion of the failure and crisis of the MoM was still had in spaces that were decidedly of the MoM—i.e. spaces characterized not only by the particular “culture of politics” or modality developed through the MoM, but also inhabited by the diverse political entities.

By 2006 the degrees of the movement’s absence, or the finality of its end, were much starker. While I could return and still find meetings to attend, as well as several key activists still working as dedicatedly as ever, the sense that this was part of the MoM—a larger effervescent Movement—was largely gone. While many of the physical places and even the people were the same, the context and sense or effect surrounding the movement had completely changed. And yet again the space occupied by the MoM was still very clearly present. While different than in 2004, the presence of this absence was both eerie and fascinating. Some people literally laughed when they saw me, saying, “Look at the poor American researcher, she’s come here again, but the movement she’s come to study is dead and gone.” However others continued to speak to me about –il movimento (the movement).

At first I just assumed il movimento referred to MoM, because throughout my research, the term il movimento was used interchangeably with MoM. What I began to notice was that it was not clear if they were speaking about MoM, i.e the movement of Genoa, or something

290 Macro-politically there were also significant differences. Not only was Romano Prodi, from the Center-Left Olive Tree Coalition, Prime Minister, but Fausto Bertinotti, head of the Rifondazione Comunista, was head of the smaller house of parliament, essentially making him the third most powerful man in Italian government. While the role of the Rifondazione had been variable for a few years, the fact that the “party that wanted to change the world without taking power” was now in power changed things quite a bit, not the least because it was now enforcing many of the policies that the movement had articulated critiques of, most particularly the war in Afghanistan, and the reform of labor laws. The relationship to the party had a profound effect on positions within and by the movement. Several young activists I know became deeply involved in the party structure while others who had worked closely with party members in the period surrounding Genoa took hardline positions against Rifondazione. The relationship and role of the party was not the only influence on the negative “state of the movement,” though as is typical, having a governo amico (friend government) always posed particularly challenging problems for movements. This relationship/articulation—how to construct a truly autonomous politics, on the one hand, without fetishizing spontaneity and activism on the other, was one of the most important and unresolved problematica articulated and raised, but not resolved, by MoM. For more on this see Trott forthcoming.
else. It turns out that *il movimento* referred to both the MoM and more generally to the figure of *Movement*. This was not another movement, but the idea of *Movement* as something with a more or less unitary historical trajectory, beginning with the workers’ struggles in the 1920s and extending through to now and into the future. *Il movimento* was far bigger than the MoM as a particular historical entity, but MoM counted as part of its history, as did the Movement of ’77. While I had noticed the use of *Il movimento* with discussions of Autonomia, I hadn’t paid it much mind.

In 2006 and 2007 when spoke to many activists they described MoM with a sort of longing and waiting. Or rather they described their current practices as waiting *il movimento* to return. In fact, we could say that they described their current activist practices alternatively as waiting for, and trying to cultivate, another moment or period of *Movement*. For example, Alberto, a twenty-something university student who was 19 when he went to Genoa, calmly explained, “This is a period of experimentation, to see what will put the *Movement* on its feet” (conversation Bologna, Oct 2006).

Similarly, a key Disobbedienti leader, passionately explained that movements always have cycles,\(^{291}\) that the moment of stagnation is normal, but that nonetheless he is part of and working for *the Movement*:

H: Movements have never been linear movements of social progress, movements are of waves and fractals, they erupt…

M: So for you this period is normal?

H: Yes it’s normal, movements go in cycles. Whoever says this is a phase to return to our houses lies, knowing that he’s lying, because in reality, from the biopolitical perspective, the collectivity of experiences that we have done, that my generation has done, is a cycle of experience that we carry with us, a piece

\(^{291}\) “Cycles of Protest” is a term used in SM research, coined by Tarrow, not coincidentally from his research on Italian movements. However to my knowledge he does not acknowledge the fact that the concept itself was produced by the movements. Tarrow 1997.
of knowledge available to movements that will be put into play…

M: So do you right now feel like you are part of a movement, or of something else?

H: Of movement, absolutely!

M: Even if you are a very few (10 instead of a 100)?

H: Yes of course. We work for the Movement.

M: But when it will emerge you don’t know?

H: No, ok, then.. Movement is a thing that can have tremendous leaps in advance, as it can have moments of stagnation. What kind of discourse is this? I am part of these cycles because this is the juice of bio-politics; this doesn’t necessarily say much, I don’t know when the Movement will take off. I only know that I am working for the movements, that this of all the things I am doing, of all the things…. A mode of constructing instruments that then the movements will use (GM interview, Bologna November 2006.)

51-year-old Valerio, who has been active in Bologna since he was 14 in the Autonomia era, and who has been working as an independent City Councilor for at least eight years, describes it as follows:

V: But the movement, you know, it is not that… that is, you want someone that continues to work to maintain some form of organization on its feet, that gives some continuity. But then the Movement explodes on its own. The contradictions are tied to the social. It’s not that there is a political input that is part of the movement. The movement takes off, then if you have continued to work, if you have structures in the terrain of communication, this can be useful to movement, but it’s not that you can push the Movement. The Movement takes off from real needs, or from the social conditions that are created at specific moments.

M: So what happened that there’s no movement now?

V: But movements don’t last forever…that’s it: the node that has never been resolved about the form of organization. Now, until relatively recently there was on the one hand the movement that carried forward social instances, and the party that did the synthesis. According to me it is this mechanism that goes.. the party form is in crisis… But that is the terrain that we are trying to experiment with, but no one, or very few have been able to address this in an effective manner (interview, Bologna, November 2006).
In contrast others like Fernanda, a Bolognese activist around the age of 30 whom I had met in 2002, who had been part of the Tute Bianche and the Disobbedienti, and who was now involved with Rifondazione, described herself as being worried about the Movement:

I am very worried about the Movement. That is the history I come from. That is why so many people are experimenting with new relationships to institutions. The major problem is that there is no longer a common political space—that’s why we are trying to create this new subject, as well as new national journal/magazine.

When she gave this interview in 2006, Fernanda had recently become a leader of the Young Communist Party at the national level. The choice of many former movement members to work with and in political parties, mostly the Rifondazione Communista, was a very controversial issue beginning in 2004 but increasing in 2006. Notably several movement leaders—including Francesco Caruso (who declared “Non Ci Capiamo Questo Movimento” from the stage)—had joined the party. (Francesco became a member of parliament.)

The interesting thing, as it had been in 2004, was the fact that as they described waiting, or working to cultivate another period of Movement; it was not that there was an absence of movement-like behavior, events and discourse throughout Italy, or even transnationally. While I was there in 2006 and again in 2007 there were numerous protests, some with over 100,000 participants. Moreover the topics of many of the protests were the increasing precariatization of labor, the fact that labor conditions were increasingly resembling the U.S. model, the rights of immigrants, and many of the same issues that had been at the origins of the Tute Bianche, the MayDay Movement, etc. Moreover, many of the people I had come to know as part of MoM were still active in various social spaces and political organizations, and they still considered themselves activists, although there were certainly also those who had retrenched from most forms of political/movement life.
And yet, for the most part, there was a unanimous understanding that this was not the same. According to personal conversations, narratives, and collectively produced and distributed “readings”\(^{292}\) of the events, few of the events in 2006 or 2007 lived up to the standards of MoM or Movement more generally. Again what was so fascinating was the existence of the expectation that something would live up to this recently experienced Movement (i.e. the MoM), one which as we saw was itself characterized more by a particular culture of politics and a new political imaginary based on different political logics, than by any clear sense of what change or movement is. In addition, there was also an expectation and commitment to something called Movement, a more transhistorical, even virtual entity constituted on the one hand by its function as delimiting the relevant problematics of politics, and on the other, by faith in the possibility of social change more generally.

If we think about this question with respect to the phrase that makes up MoM, the movement of movements, it is also very interesting. While genealogically the term emerges as an effort to name the fact of unity in diversity—that is, the ability for so many diverse subjects to function within a somewhat unitary space—at some level the turn of phrase also invokes or suggests a logic of comparison, even historicism. The implication in the terminology MoM is to some extent that this is “THE MOVEMENT of all movements.” Beyond emphasizing multiplicity and diversity, the phrase seems to claim that this is the best of a certain kind of thing (movement), and that the process of developing this “best” movement is itself an historical and ongoing process. In effect this framing also implies a certain teleology, or even eschatology (Derrida 1994); the sense of finally getting movement

\(^{292}\) This collective practice of reading and interpreting events is one of the main mechanisms through which this discursive apparatus works. It is remarkable how quickly and seamlessly a given event’s interpretation/evaluation will be apparently agreed upon, shared and asserted by “everyone” within a certain ambit.
right, and an implication of past movements as having fallen short.

**The function of failure**

Quite notably, declarations of the movement’s failure, or its imminent failure, seemed to abound at all stages of the existence of MoM—almost as if it were a requisite part of movement. Even in 2002—at the height of the “springtime of movements”—there were proclamations of the faltering health of the movement. In June 2002, following the “disappointing” march on occasion of the FAO’s meeting on agriculture and aid policy, the movement of the Disobbedienti published a communiqué in which they pronounce the movement’s crisis:

The open letter from the Movement of the Disobbedients, about the state of health, the supposed crisis, and the prospects of the No Global movement…

Maybe instead, since the days of Genoa, we should have asked ourselves if we were really in the presence of a movement, even if “of movements,” or if rather there were manifested and coagulated, only with a coincidence of spaces and times, oppositions that are not only different but also counterposed to one another, with no possibility for synthesis, let alone a form of unitary representation.

In Italy the movement of movements has never existed, or rather it has always been a symbolic invention: that is the truth (“Lacrime di coccodrillo,” June 23, 2002.

I point to this short excerpt from a longer letter not only because it is yet another example of a public (this time written) pronouncement interrogating the nature and meaning of movement, and “movement of movements,” but also because while it is a negative declaration, practically declaring the failure of the MoM to be what it claims, it was quickly rescinded with statements of awe about the MoM’s
inexplicability. In Caruso’s speech a little over one month later, MoM emerges in all its messy glory despite the fear and accusations (in this letter) that politicians, and political leaders from various factions, had tried to appropriate and instrumentalize it. Despite pessimistic diagnoses, the movement emerged more alive than ever—leading Caruso to declare, “Non Ci Capiamo Questo Movimento!” The “lack of understanding” was itself a way of admitting that that the presumed failure of the movement just one month earlier, based on analyses and assessment, had been wrong. But how then did we know what kind of failure was a real failure, and what was just another facet of making movement? What then was the difference between the declarations of failure that became known as “truth”—i.e. “real” failures—and the ones that were premature and actually often had the effect of producing a series of responses that some might translate as productive? This in turn begged the question, what did declaring the failure of the movement do or mean?

The more texts I read from and about Italian movements, present and past, the more I noticed that statements declaring or assessing the failure of movements—often juxtaposed quite dramatically with beliefs in their near success—were quite prevalent. In particular, the near success but ultimate failure of Italy’s iconic and little known “Movement of ’77” which I will return to in the next chapter, seems to persist like a specter of what might have been, and what could be. The fact that the Movement of ’77 is often spoken about in phrases such as “the revolution to come” (Bianchi and Caminiti 1997) or “the future at our backs” (Virno 1996: 243), and that MoM is placed in relation to it, reinforces the ways in which the category of Movement works not only as the actual historical trajectory of various movements/Movements, but also as a virtual space where the very idea and desire for a better
politics is expressed. The supposed failure of movement was often one the most productive elements of it, pointing out the terrain or limit of “good” politics. This takes us back to the Agamben speech with which we started.

**Movement as the limit of every politics**

One of the most provocative, if obscure parts of Agamben’s intervention is when he states:

> In the past I used as an implicit rule of my thinking practice the formula 'when the movement is there pretend it is not there and when it's not there pretend it is'. Now I realize that I did not know what the word meant: despite its lack of specificity, everyone seems to understand it but no one defines it.

> The movement is that which if it is, is as if it wasn’t, it lacks itself (manca a se stesso), and if it isn’t, is as if it was, it exceeds itself. It is the threshold of indeterminacy between an excess and a deficiency which marks the limit of every politics.

The way in which Agamben’s “thinking practice,” in which he defines movement as the “limit of every politics,” seemed to mirror many of the ways activists treat, create and think movement, collectively and materially, was quite uncanny. The image it conjures resonates with the paradoxical ways in which movements in Italy seem to move between phases of “real” Movement and everyday forms of activism with no clearly delimitable criteria, as well as the ways these two notions or faces of movement are constitutive and necessary for each other. It also suggests that the performances of these declarationa of failure are also in many ways productive and necessary. Ultimately the distinction between movement and Movement points to the fundamentally paradoxical nature of the term and concept. For while movements are often described in a negative or disappointed tone, due to their failure to achieve something greater, more like Movement, movements are essential. They are both the conditions of possibility for Movement and the necessary counterpart to them. For it is
through the day-to-day practices of actively working to create Movement that many of the insights about the nature of “better politics,” as well as the problems of past politics, are discovered. Moreover, and as becomes increasingly clear, movements are also the main sites for the articulation of Movement with everyday life and practice. Not coincidentally, it turns out that one of the problems of Movements that is highlighted in the interrogative work, is their unsustainability. That is, their exceptional status as singular events, where everything can be made and remade. This problem of unsustainability not only offers little in terms of how to articulate the insights gleaned at the height of Movement to, or with, daily life; it often results in painful contradictions and disillusionments.

As numerous people trying to make sense of what went wrong described, it was often the failure of territorializing, or rooting, the ideals, effervescence and “new” notion of the political in everyday life that ultimately led to the “failure” of MoM.

MA: I think that after Genoa we lost an occasion that was represented by the strong growth of social forums at the local level. It is probable that dimension there, it would have been necessary to invest more there. Instead the proposals that were made, with respect to the conformity of social forums themselves, but EVERYONE did this, even that which I did, have fallen back into a very traditional conception of political, and did not continue [to generate] the great capacity of involvement.

M: A project that did that would be…?

MA: Certainly, there is a problem of constructing spaces—where this movement lives this aspect of—how do I say it—space of politicization. A space of politicization needs to be organized in some form, otherwise it ends up exhausting itself (Interview Bologna, June 2004).

In many ways failure then was constitutive of the effectivity of movement, not only in

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293 For more on this problem see Free Association 2007; DeCerteau 1984; Jordan 2005, Grossberg 2008. This is an important site for future research.

294 The problem of this articulation can also be seen in descriptions of the Movement of ’77, as well as other movements in other places. See Brophy 2002, Zibechi 2006, and a series of emails on RK list regarding the 30th anniversary of 2007.
compelling future action, future efforts for more movement, but also for pointing out the most relevant problematics for politics. Agamben’s provocative invocation of movement as a limit concept—“an unfinished act, without telos, which means that movement keeps an essential relation with privation” such that “Movement is the indefiniteness and imperfection of every politics”—is less cryptic. His is a call for recognizing movement in another kind of logic. For as Agamben also reminds us, the movement “always leaves a residue.” Another way to read these residues is that the role of movement is to flag problematics, or rather that we can understand a great deal about movement if we ask why people are invested in the term, and what work the term movement in turn does.

Conclusion: From Limit to Problematization

What happens if we invert the question to ask another, prior question: Why do these people, in this particular time, and this particular place, appeal to, or desire to (be a) movement, or even more specifically, a movement of movements? What are the stakes (ideologically, conceptually, politically) of using and more specifically, defining, the term? What understanding of the present—the neo-liberal, post 9-11, Berlusconi in power, unified European Union present—condition or shape this desire or quest for movement/the status of movement? Or relatedly, what understanding of politics, and the potential or role of movements, condition and form the basis for this desire? What do the constant claims of failure have to do with this? Framed in this way, the question to answer is not so much, or only, what is/was the transformative (or failed) project of the movement, and why did it fail, or get repeatedly narrated as a failure? but rather, to what problem or problems was the (new) conceptual-ideological framing of the movement (movement of
movements)responding? What problem did this reincarnation/appropriation of the term movement seem to address?

This question picks up on David Scott’s critical insights about how to re-conceive of the ways we read and evaluate the anti-colonial and other “radical” or “transformative” political projects. Building on the work of a series of historians and critical theorists, Scott argues that it is absolutely imperative to look not only at the propositions and projects of movements, but also at the sources of their discontent. He writes:

Many studies of revolutionary discontent have failed to adequately understand the role of new concepts in generating social discontent…because they have mistakenly focused on the way these concepts define alternatives to the present social limitations, rather than on the way they shape our understanding of these limitations themselves (Scott 2004: 5).

As such, in the case of MoM the simultaneous claim and search for movement, as well as the qualities and characteristics lauded and then missed (in failure), may tell us more about what political desires and problems movement is hoped to solve than about the merits of the projects themselves. However—as Foucault reminds us—revealing problematics, the act of problematization, is itself a potent political act.295 The English activist collective Free Association quoted at the outset of this chapter put it quite nicely: “We’re more interested here in the movement on the level of ‘problematics.’”

Throughout this chapter we have observed how the term or concept of movement poses problems to politics and illuminates possible ways forward for developing another politics. Throughout this chapter we have seen then the ways that pronouncements and questions regarding movements have the dual function of illuminating and bringing more clarity on those dynamics that work, while also delimiting those practices that don’t. The

295 Foucault 1994a. Recall the quote above and in the Introduction.
concepts of *movement* and *Movement*, in turn, help reveal that this work is done through the paradoxical yet inextricable relationship between movements in the everyday, and the notion and experience of *Movement* as that exceptional space where social reality may be remade. In this sense the concept of *Movement*, which is often described as Il Movimento, is seen to be comprised of a long more or less continuous arc of *movement/Movements* throughout at least the 20th century (all those spaces where you would be called *comrade* or *compagno*).

Notably, this notion of THE Movement can also be read in more than one way. On the one hand it can be seen within an eschatological or messianic progressivist logic, typical of both Marxist and dialectical approaches, suffering in many ways from the dream of a revolution that is never reached. In contrast, this discourse can also be read more within a logic of emergence, immanence, and becoming, in which *Movement* is constituted by a lack, or a privation as Agamben puts it. This lack is not necessarily negative. Rather, its perpetual not-yetness can be the grounds for another status of being and politics, a *becoming-politics*.²⁹⁶ Rather than experience this as a failure or otherwise negative thing, this not-yetness and becoming are seen as positive, constituting a different logic and ontology upon which to base both politics and being. The problem of movement is then at some level the lived tension between these two counter-posed logics.

In the next chapter we will see how the framing of MoM as a historical being further elucidates this dimension of movement, as well as this tension.

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²⁹⁶ See Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Braidotti 1996; Patton 2000.
**Chapter 4: History, Novelty and the Meaning of Movement**

In the nineties of last century, when the post-Communists in power carried Europe into the ‘humanitarian war’ and the labor market into the worst kind of liberalism, we imagined, precognitivizing/understanding a new social and political composition on the way to precaritization and exploitation, the White Overalls. With them we arrived at Genova, where we “reworked” the idea of civil disobedience, constructing a movement with whomever was disposed and willing to sabotage the mechanisms of the permanent global war. *Today we can say that we are new, but we are those of always: we are always for the armies that aren’t afraid to disband.* We are willing to walk with many, but not to cancel or put at risk the autonomy of our path. Today we are the Invisibles for a basic guaranteed income, for the right to housing, against the war, for humanity (Laboratorio Diana 2004, emphasis and translation mine from Italian).

We will walk then the same path of history, but we will not repeat it; we are from before, yes, but we are new (Subcomandante Marcos 2001).

The movement of ’77 constitutes (to use Hanna Arendt’s beautiful expression) a ‘future at our backs,’ the remembrance of a potential class struggle that may take place in the next phase, a future history (Virno 1996: 243).

To speak of what the 1970s represented in Italy’s political history is to speak of the present….

…The 1970s are still with us in the sense that the posed for Italy the problem of how to arrive at models of democratic representation in a context in which the social modes of production are being transformed. (Negri 1998)

**Introduction**

This chapter is about the unexpected role of history and historicized narratives in the descriptions and stories about MoM. In particular, it is about the odd presence of narratives about a past period of movement in descriptions of a supposedly contemporary and radically

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“new” movement, and what this presence does. While there is nothing odd about recognizing that all movements have histories, and that any discussion of a movement should be based on some understanding of its historical specificity and dynamism, this chapter argues that the nature of history’s presence in the case of the Italian MoM is particularly striking because of the ways it is narrativized and the work this historical narrativization does. These history-inflected narratives have several effects. They help create or produce the larger discourse of Movement as a virtual presence, as well as revealing the work movement/Movements do as material, intellectual and virtual spaces for the elaboration of “better politics.” These better politics can in turn be understood as another kind of politics, politics opposed to modern representative democracy, as well as the logics underpinning it. As such, this chapter examines the central role played by a particular construction of history in the constitution of Movement, the M/m relation and MoM in particular. It also argues that the narrative of historical continuity linking the periods 1968-77 and 2001-today is, itself, part of producing a new political imaginary.

The central “character” in the story is the well-known Autonomia that had its heyday from 1968-77 and which is seen as shaping movements in important ways ever since. The material and discursive continuities and connections between the two periods are shown to operate at three different levels: a) the existence of particular movements (small m) and submerged networks of activists, projects, centers, organizations, and so forth; b) the production of theoretical knowledge and theoretical practices; and c) the enactment of a politics of the virtual, including the ways in which M is read in terms of radical potentiality for social change and alternative visions of society.

After further establishing this argument, Part II of the chapter introduces the
importance of the Autonomia period in activists’ memories and discourses. It uses an anecdote from my fieldwork concerning a classic text on the period, *L’Orda D’Oro 1968-1977*, to start the discussion of this period in the cartography and history of the Italian Left. Two key questions emerge from this ethnographic reflection. First, why was this book so important to contemporary Italian activists (that is, activists of the Genoa age)? Second, what did this history mean *and do* for them? I contrast the Italian positioning of political history with my own socialization in the US, in which memories of the Sixties play a very different and much more limited role. The fact that I did not know about *Autonomia* until beginning my research points at the importance of ethnography, in that my previous ignorance of it enabled me to “discover it” as profoundly meaningful to what *M* and *m* are. Finally, I end this section by highlighting the central place occupied by the retelling of history in the production of alternative narratives and imaginaries of the political, which in turn offer insights into the mode of existence of the category of *Movement* itself as a space for developing *another kind of politics*.

Part III retakes the three levels at which material and discursive continuities between ‘77 and Genoa are constructed. The entry point for this discussion is the activist sense of the peculiarities of Italy’s political history and practice, what they refer to as the “Italian anomaly” or “Laboratory Italy.” As described in chapter 2, there is a broad, and in many ways unique, anti-capitalist sensibility that is also related to a very real continuity of backgrounds and material practices of struggle. These continuities are made up of a multitude of objects and practices ranging from artistic projects and cultural spaces—including quite prominently, the very active social centers—to individuals and organizations. The presence of all of these show that even in the dearth of *Movement* —
retold in terms of narratives of “the void” by activists, particularly for the height of the neoliberal moment in the 1990s—important continuities remained. A second level of continuity is found in the rich networks of theoretical production. As retold by activists, Operaismo, the theoreti-co-political approach described at some length in chapter 2, can itself be seen as a common space or referent to which theoretical debate and analysis about the character of work and industrial society undergoing transition at the time, occurred. This production was largely articulated around journals like Quaderni Rossi in the 1960s and Derive Approdi in the 1990s. These journals played a salient role not only in terms of analyses about the conjuncture, but also in the socialization and politicization of young activists. Overall these contributed to the cultivation of a shared background of understanding among many young activists. Theoretical and political analyses are not the only sites of continuity at this conceptual and narrative level. More important perhaps are the stories, myths and metaphors movements construct for themselves and about themselves. In Italy these stories have been theorized as the “mythopoesis” of the movement; the production of these metaphors is itself another important feature of Italy as laboratory of the political.

Seeing movements as story makers and as theory/knowledge producers brings into consideration the third and last level of historical continuity: the development of new and better theories of social change and social life in general, these ultimately include, fundamental questions about how life is seen and lived. This aspect of the reading of history takes the form of thinking about “getting Movement right.” However getting Movement right is not only about learning from the past. It is first about the ability to develop appropriate readings of the conjuncture. Second, and concomitantly, it is about getting the practices for

298 See Wu Ming I 2001.
bringing about social change right, such practices include forms and techniques of knowing.

Third, it is about the kinds of rethinking of the political implied by both of the previous goals. It is at this third level of continuity that $M$ and $m$ can be understood to be sites where people work and struggle to develop practices adequate to transforming Western liberal democracy, capitalism and modernity in particular ways. This is also the level that brings the Italian MoM close to Zapatismo and the GJSM, a kinship that needs to be found at the very high level of abstraction of the politics of the virtual. That is to say, particularly in their respective critiques of dominant politics, and the shared sense that another world is possible, but also their work within a temporality of the “not yet,” the MoM, Zapatismo and the GJSM find themselves inextricably linked. The Italian take on this politics of the virtual, involves certain tensions and contradictions embedded in the visions of the new society and the paths to get there. This chapter concludes with a discussion of one of these key tensions: namely that between eschatology or teleology on the one hand, and that of the logic of multiplicity, emergence, becoming and open-endedness, on the other. Whereas the former carries with it the Marxist legacy of the messianic vision of a revolution to come, the latter comes out strongly from activist discourses about the continuity between ‘77 and Genoa and contemporary theorizations of the political, ala Guattari’s molecular revolution.

4.1 The Odd Presence of History and Memory

Ever since beginning my research on the movement of Genoa—a movement I presumed would be contemporary and concerned primarily with the contestation of corporate driven neoliberalism—I was simultaneously puzzled and intrigued by the co-presence of historical narratives, specifically about the Movement of ’77, with the narratives about MoM,
a supposedly contemporary and radically “new” movement. In many of my earliest conversations and interviews about what the Genoa movement was and meant, the discourses about the novelties and ruptures posited by MoM were accompanied by narratives about and by references the Movement of ’77, known alternatively as Autonomia. In the same conversations when activists described the MoM as a novelty and a radical break from past politics—pointing to the watershed-like nature of Genoa, or the ways that the Zapatista movement had finally broken definitively with the politics of the 20th century—the same activists would also say something like, “Don’t you know about our 1977?” Similarly, and ironically, while numerous interviewees would emphasize how Genoa was the first movement after more than two decades of “nothing,” one activist after another would also describe the existence of a series of other movements and counter-cultural spaces that had developed and existed in the 1980s and 1990s. These included the anti-nuclear movements of the 1980s, the student movements known as La Pantera in the early 1990s, and the establishment and spread of self organized social centers throughout Italy.

Over a short period of time I learned a great deal about the Movement of ’77 and its actual relationship to MoM. I learned that the Movement of ’77 referred to the pinnacle moment of over a decade of high levels of social strife and political mobilizations that have been described as “shaking Italy’s foundations” (Lumley 1990: 2). I also learned that it was also closely associated with Operaismo, and that between the 1980s and the years leading

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299 These references continued —though perhaps to a lesser extent as the movement entered less vibrant periods — but as you might expect, as I became more familiar with them, I was no longer as struck by the references. There is a lot to be said about the ethnographic moment of discovery—when one learns something one was not looking for, it is perhaps one of the most important aspects of an historically situated ethnographic approach, especially with regard to social movement research which is often dominated by a modality in which the researcher always already knows what s/he is looking for (for more see Osterweil 2004a; Casas-Cortes et. al 2008)

300 Recall that this was the political-theoretical tradition that developed alongside and with these movements,
up to Genoa, many of individuals, as well as networks of activists, theories, cultures and practices, were involved in a number of other movements and forms. However, learning about the Movement of ’77 did not solve the puzzle of why this movement over thirty years passed was so central to the narratives of the MoM. In other words, knowing of the “fact” of this history left many questions unanswered. What did this history, this movement of ’77 that I had never heard of prior to beginning this research, have to do with this “new” “movement” I had come to study? In particular, why did it seem to be articulated to the very fact of its being considered new? Why did these activists, many of whom would have been too young to be involved in the 70’s, see this history as so pertinent to their understanding of the present movement? And, why did so many activists speak of Genoa as the first politics in two decades, when throughout the 1980s and 1990s there were myriad smaller movements, activism and forms of counter-cultural work? Did this have any connection to other temporally framed statements suggesting that MoM represented the first politics of the 21st century, or the end of the 20th century?

Although history is usually presented as part of a background chapter—i.e. what you need to know to understand the causes and lead up events to another particular event or phenomenon you are trying to explain—this chapter is not about historical background. Rather it is about the centrality and importance of history, as a site of material connections where new (and better) practices and theories of social change can be developed, as well as a meaning-making trope in which what needs explaining are not continuities per se, but how such continuities are themselves perceived, narrated and then come to produce certain effects. This in part builds on Foucault’s genealogical approach and his critique of historical

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301 However it is about a “background of understanding,” the often unconscious cultural and cognitive background within which humans move.
approaches that de-eventalize history, fetishing continuities and causation, rather than the ways new discourses and new statements are formed. Locating history as one of the main topics of this dissertation is a deliberate effort to challenge any neat notion of objective historical causation and to move us towards conjunctural analyses in which we recognize that history is also always interpreted. Historical events are not simply there with a bundle of objectively discernable effects; they are made to mean, and that is how they are productive of certain effects—often making certain things visible, and others not. Moreover, the ways in which things, in this case movements, are or are not placed in historical context reveal a great deal about the culturally specific ways in which both politics and movement are understood and lived. As Winograd and Flores put it,

Every questioning grows out of a tradition—a pre-understanding that opens the space of possible answers. We use the word tradition here in a broad sense, without the connotation that it belongs to a cohesive social or cultural group, or that it consists of particular customs or practices. It is a more pervasive, fundamental phenomenon that might be called a way of being. ...It is not a set of rules or sayings or something we might find catalogued in an encyclopedia. It is a way of understanding, a background within which we interpret and act. We use the word tradition because it emphasizes the historicity of our ways of thinking—the fact that we always exist within a pre-understanding determined by the history of our interactions with others who share the tradition (1987: 7).

Re-thinking the place of history in the study of social movements

Let us first consider the ways history is usually incorporated into studies and analyses of social movements. History is usually referred to either in causal terms to describe the actual connections and causes between one period and another or as a tool of comparison, ________________________________

303 See Grossberg 2006 for more on conjunctures and conjunctural analysis.
304 By culturally specific here I am once again referring to the notion of political culture and cultural politics I began to articulate in Chapter 1.
either scientific or metaphoric. Both causality and comparison are used respectively in order to deduce/induce what worked and what didn’t in different periods, or to point to similarities between different “revolutionary moments.” For example, intellectuals and activists often invoke 1968, 1989, and even 1848 as moments of “almost” but ultimately “failed” revolution in all discussions of moments at which social change seems or seemed imminent. Whereas both comparison and analysis of causality are present and important in the case of MoM, the forms of historical relationality used and implied in the historical and historicized references and narratives I collected go far beyond either causation or comparison. These historical discourses show how the particular forms of historical continuity present in the Italian case co-produce movement/Movement as a discourse about particular forms of social change and politics. In addition they point to the problematic articulation between the everyday and the momentous, as well as the complex relationship between a logic of teleology, progress and messianism and a logic of multiplicity, becoming and emergence. Like my discussion of the ways Genoa came to mean, and the effects of the “the what is movement” mantra, the historical and temporal logics within which MoM and the period from 1968-1977 are placed reveal more about the meaning of the term Movement, its culturally specific nature, and the conflicting cultural logics that underpin it, rather than about the actual chronology or history of the MoM.

At a very fundamental level, this chapter shows that the MoM and the Movement of ’77 are placed in historical relation to each other because they are both considered big Movement moments. However, beyond these similarities, the very real continuities between these two periods—continuities that are both actual and virtual—also suggest that the relationship between these two Movements can actually be understood as part of one longer
process. This means that it is quite possible that the reading of the MoM as another Movement had as much to do with memories of the Movement of ’77, and the political desires and understandings associated with it, as it did with the actual power and potentiality of MoM itself. These desires and memories were being expressed and experienced by people either involved in ‘77, or who were politically “socialized” through the narrations of that movement. This does not negate that these desires and memories are themselves real, but suggests how the narration of MoM in relation to the long decade of 1968 is itself part of a long process of desiring and producing a new political imaginary, that is a hopes-for new political articulation, constituted by the logics of difference, criticality and autonomy. For, as we shall see towards the end of this chapter, many of the same terms used to describe the novelty of the MoM had also been used to describe the novelty and significance of Autonomia. Rather than see this as evidence of political naiveté or ignorance on the part of young activists, this chapter argues that claims to novelty are themselves inherent in the politics of the virtual and the logics of becoming and of the event that Movements can be understood to promote.

At one level, this is an argument against the a-historical treatment of social movements that dominate the sub-discipline of social movement studies, as well as many commonplace definitions of movements. Most research within the sub-discipline is interested above and beyond all in causation and causal mechanisms rather than historical

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305 As discussed in Chapter 1, I am referring here to a Deleuzian notion of the “event,” which is in turn linked to the politics of becoming and the virtual. See Stagoll 2005; Boundas 2005: “Events carry no determinate outcome, but only new possibilities, representing a moment when new forces may be brought bear.” (Stagoll: 88; cf Deleuze 1994. I will discuss the role of novelty more later on in this chapter).

306 There are of course important exceptions to this—cf Andrews 2004; Wright and Wolford 2003; and many others. In other words there are individual texts that have provided good historical accounts. However for the most part the theories and approaches that dominate privilege causation at a cost of historical and contextual understanding.
Concomitantly, they are committed to a mode of social scientific explanation and inquiry in which the aim is to find generalizable and robust mechanisms of causation “that explain the crucial—not all—features of contention.” Within this sociological approach, movements tend to be treated as easily delimitable entities that arise around a particular set of issues, resources, or political opportunities, without looking at the larger context and history within which they arise, or rather, that larger context and history are important in so far as they reveal the mechanisms of causation. As a result, a movement’s life is seen to be limited to its activities around these particular issues, neglecting the fact that movements are themselves dynamic complex entities comprised of people and ideas that do not end their effort for social change once a political issue or opportunity has disappeared, either through achieving their objectives or through failing. Instead, they often continue to work to figure out “new” and better ways of pursuing these goals.

As Cox, building on the work of EP Thompson, argues, the framing of social movements as isolatable and discreet instances of social protest about particular issues, usually by sociologically delimitable groups, fails to recognize that often the same people

307 The field is dominated by sociologists and political scientists who tend to favor structuralist and causal explanations: See Goodwin and Jaspers 1999, 2004; Kurzman 2004 for a critique of causal explanations.

308 As three major social movement scholars put it in their book, Dynamics of Contention, in which they critique the over-emphasis on sociological laws, “In this study a search for explanatory mechanisms and processes takes the place occupied by the checklist of variables—opportunity, threat, mobilizing structures, framing—we saw in the classic social movements agenda. Although we helped promote it, we mean this book to go well beyond it…we seek more adequate ways of dealing with such phenomena…Because of the urge to get causal connections right, we reject the effort to build general models of all contention or even of its varieties. Instead, within each major aspect of contentions we search for robust, widely applicable causal mechanisms that explain the crucial—not all—features of contention” (McAdam, et.al, 2001: 32. emphasis mine). For more on this analysis see Osterweil 2004a.


310 For more on the critique of the a-historical approach to studying movements, see Cox 2003, Osterweil 2004a. For alternative approaches see especially Holland and Lave 2001; Thompson 1966.
will shift from one cause to another, not out of fickleness, but because they are themselves reflexive agents that learn from the past. Cox challenges the way contemporary social movement research treats historical connection and movements more generally. Referring in particular to *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson 1966), Cox argues that movements are developed over time, and that they are the expressions and outcomes of *dynamic processes of learning*, which are themselves dependent on different periods and experiences, which in turn are constituted by practices, ideas and people who are the bearers and generators of ideas:

> What I want to suggest here is that rather than see these [movements], with orthodox "social movement studies", as so many different movements, it makes more sense to start from their interconnections, in terms of participants, political traditions, organising skills and shared culture. In this perspective, we have so many different aspects of the same social movement, whose linkages, mergers and separations can be understood in a historical perspective: not that this movement died, and this movement was born, but that the one movement changed its shape (Cox 2003:)

Similarly, Holland and Lave write about what they term "enduring struggles" as sites where collective and individual selves and subjectivities are produced and produce meaning (Holland and Lave 2001: 5). In both cases, these arguments challenge the tendency within social movement studies to differentiate starkly between individual social movements, or between social movements and other kinds of entities—i.e. revolutions, etc. Besides pointing to the a-historical nature of such research, these critiques also point to the fact that traditional approaches neglect the messy, internal, meaning-making processes and practices in which identities and political visions are authored by movement participants themselves (ibid). These include the theories and systemic visions of change with which people involved in movements work, as well as the emotional, affective, identity-making and other elements that
comprise movements. The fact that social movements are comprised of reflective and reflexive meaning-making subjects, as well as their own elaboration of theoretical and other kinds of knowledge, is a crucial point for this argument.

Recognizing that the nature of the historical relationality, or the role of history, is itself multifold is also key to my argument. While there certainly are the material and historiographically traceable connections and continuities between different periods, in this case between the 1970s and the late 1990s that I have described in Chapter 2, these actual connections are themselves constituted by submerged networks of people, spaces, cultures, events and discourses, i.e. activist practices and infrastructures that serve as collective spaces of learning and subjectivation. In addition, these actual connections both of submerged and more visible practices are in large part comprised of the ongoing developments, discussions and material production of theoretical, analytical and other forms of knowledge for social change, a crucial form of material movement practice, which I discuss in the final chapter as theoretical–practice.311

Both of the material traceable connections, and the more conceptual continuities in turn depend on and contribute to the more virtual, discursive and interpretational connections and continuities. These include not only movement as an ensemble of spaces and sites where new theories and practices of social change are actually developed and derived, but also the ways in which Movement functions as both a virtual presence and a category in which Movement is the horizon and some kind of unarticulated end-goal, the possibility and potentiality of another kind of politics. (And where figuring out the articulation of movement/Movement—that is the articulation of the submerged movements in the everyday with this more epochal or event-like Movement—is itself

311 This is the topic of Chapter 5. For more on knowledge-practice and this argument see also Casas Cortes, et.al. 2008.
a virtual process.) The actual and virtual roles of historical connection are not neatly separable and have a lot of overlap, especially within the sphere of theoretical-practice. Going beyond traditional historical or historiographical approaches interested in background and causation, I argue that the recognition of historical continuity, coupled with both actual and perceived moments of rupture, are critical to the very ways social change and the political are imagined and lived in Italy, specifically on the Italian Left.

As such, it is not only the fact of historical continuity, although that fact is important, but the conscious recognition, interpretation, and production of narratives about these continuities, that matters. Understanding the role of history, in particular the history of the Movement of ’77, in the MoM requires much more than a historiographical knowledge about the actual material, theoretical and causal connections between past and present. It requires understanding history as a narrative device, a cultural logic, and as a horizon used for developing and proliferating stories, ideals and theories of social change in which “new” movements are premised on both past shortcomings and ongoing political and theoretical efforts, to think and do politics differently. Complicating matters even more, however, are the ways in which the kinds of knowledge implicit in these new stories, theories and practices of social change challenge the teleological or messianic logic seemingly implicated in the notion of Movement.

**Revolution vs. Revolutionary Becoming**

In an interview with Antonio Negri in 1993, Gilles Deleuze offers a very useful distinction between the different kinds of cultural logics that I am trying to describe as being in tension within the category of Movement, in particular when it is located within historical
trajectories. He distinguishes between the revolution and the notion of a revolutionary becoming, a distinction that in turn relates to differentiating processes of becoming from history. Beginning with a discussion of Nietzsche’s statement, “Nothing important is ever free from a non-historical cloud,” Deleuze continues,

Becoming isn’t part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent that one leaves behind in order to ‘become’ that is, to create something new…They say revolutions turn out badly. But they’re constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people’s revolutionary becoming (Deleuze 1990).

This distinction is crucial at a number of levels. First, it implies a critique of the latent historicism still present in much Marxist-inflected political approaches, including at some level parts of the MoM. This historicism, the notion that the revolution is an inevitable, even natural process of the development of history, is not only premised on a slue of problematic epistemological assumptions, it has also been at least partly responsible for many movements’ inability to cope with internal inconsistencies between theory and practice as well as oppressions or micro-fascisms that develop “on the way to revolution.” Conversely, Deleuze’s distinction reminds us how crucial the level of subjectivation is in terms of the political effects and potency of the MoM, and the process or event of movement/Movements.

The production of critical, reflexive subjects—theoretical-practitioners as I depict in Chapter 5—is a key part of Movement. We could also add to this, the difference between the notion that revolutions will turn out, and end, implicit in the first, and the notion of continuous renewal, critique and becoming implied in the second. As I discuss in part V, these different logics are very much in tension within the MoM, whose theoretical propensities for the latter are constantly running up against sedimented ways of being, doing and knowing—as Guattari puts it the “libidinal trafficking that goes on among all these organizations”—of the

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312 See Guattari 1996: 7-14 for a description of this problem.
former (ibid:9). As we will see, the appeal to the Movement of ’77 as “the revolution to come,” or a “future at our backs” wherein the novelties of that revolution are themselves a critique of dominant forms of politics and militancy, is a problematic and rich tension filled with questions about how we might re-negotiate the different notions of futurity, desire and politics implicit in the two.313

4.2 Re-membering Autonomia: L’Ordo D’oro and early ethnographic encounters

Figure 5: Book Covers of L’Orda D’Oro, 1987 and 1997 left to right.

The historical nature of MoM was a key component of my initial ethnographic “findings.” It formed an important part of my early arguments about the significance of historically situated methods and frameworks for research, against tendencies of de-historicization dominant in social

313 The notion and temporality of the ‘virtual’ as a space of multiplicities that challenge our understanding of what the present reality consists of is helpful here. Whereas a thorough discussion of this complex and confused term is beyond the scope of this chapter, briefly we can speak of “the politics of the virtual” as involving questioning the relationship between the probable, the possible and the real and “somehow resisting the confinement of social change to a closed set of mutually excluding and predetermined alternatives; and deploys an active engagement with the transformative potential of the virtual (that which is beyond measure).” (Terranova 2004: 26, 20). Or as Delanda explains of Deleuze: “One of the tasks of a philosopher attempting to create a theory of virtuality is to locate those areas of the world where the virtual is still expressed, and use the unactualized tendencies and capacities one discovers there as sources of insight into the nature of virtual multiplicities. .Deleuze recommends following a very specific philosophical method in which, as he says, it is “necessary to return to the interior of scientific states of affairs of bodies in the process of being constituted, in order to penetrate into consistency, that is to say into the sphere of the virtual, a sphere that is only actualized in them” (Delanda 2004: 76).
movement studies approaches. However, I always remained convinced that there was *something more* to the centrality of historical narratives. It was not until years into my research that the more interesting understanding of these historical narratives began to emerge. In what follows I share an episode and an object—a text—from my fieldwork that turned out to be pivotal to making sense of the place of the Movement of ’77 and historical narratives more broadly. After describing the event and text, as well as the impact and effects of an ethnographic vantage point, I will begin to describe and explain the role of history through analyses of the text.

**December, 2007 at the Modo Infoshop**

I hadn’t thought much about the strange fact and presence of the Movement of ’77 in several years. By 2007, I had pretty much accepted or naturalized the relevance of *Autonomia* and the Movement of ’77, even if they had remained fascinating and still partially mysterious elements of my project. It was not until one of my last nights in Italy and the ensuing re-engagement with my earlier ethnographic encounters, and most importantly, a key text, that this *something else* began to clarify itself. It was at a small good-bye gathering that an activist I had only recently met presented me with a particular gift that shed some new light on the matter. The gift was the nearly 700-page book, *L’Orda D’Oro 1968-1977: La grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale* (*The Golden Horde 1968-1977: The great revolutionary and creative, political and existential groundswell*). As its title suggests, *L’Orda D’Oro* is a book about the “great wave” of social and political mobilization that swept Italy in the decade following 1968 and that I discussed in much detail in Chapter 2. Originally published on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of 1968, then reissued with a new forward in 1997, it is one of the only books that attempts to review the tumultuous
events that were alternatively described as the years that “shook Italy’s foundations” and “the revolution to come” from the point of view of its protagonists.

As Antimo presented the book to me he said:

I have been thinking since we spoke on the bus [to the No Dal Molin protest against the building of a US military base in Vicenza] that this book is perfect for you, for your research. Anyone who wants to understand Italy’s movements must know this book – especially if you want to understand what’s going on today (interview Bologna, December 2007).

At first I didn’t know what to say. In fact, I was quite surprised by my own reaction. I was simultaneously touched by the gift, a little embarrassed, and slightly annoyed. Even before I had a chance to express my gratitude for his generosity, a number of defensive thoughts ran through my head. The reality was that I already owned and had read the book. It was now almost six years after I had begun my research—if I hadn’t already read that book, what kind of researcher could I claim to be?! After looking briefly at the cover—it was a newer version than the borrowed one I originally read[^314]—I teased him, saying with a big smile, “Antimo, after more than five years working on this project, do you think I wouldn’t have already read it?!” Antimo smiled. He didn’t seem to take offence at my crude attempt at sarcastic banter, a technique I was using to cover my actual discomfort (it had taken me a while to acquire this mode of communicating that most of my Italian friends engaged in almost constantly). So, I hugged him, thanked him, and gratefully offered to return the book that at a cost of more than 15 Euros was not cheap at all. He insisted that I keep it to read on my flight home, murmuring something about how re-reading it was never a bad thing.

Despite my initial reaction, the affection with which Antimo seemed to hold both the book and his ability to give it to me were noteworthy. They not only reminded me of my

[^314]: I later found out this was because the original version had sold out.
initial ethnographic encounters when I was first puzzled by unexpected references to ’77 and the Italian Anomaly, the fact that Antimo—who was both older and involved with different areas of the Bolognese movement than many people I had interviewed and spent most of my time with—gave it to me, phrasing his reasons for doing so quite similarly to how I had heard of the book over five years prior, struck me. It wasn’t exactly a déjà vu moment, but it was something similar. It was as if I was looking through a different set of glasses at a fact that had both puzzled and intrigued me since I began by ethnographic fieldwork on MoM five years earlier. I was once again moved to consider the odd presence of the Movement of ’77 in contemporary narratives about the movement that had brought over 300,000 to the streets of Genoa in 2001—a presence that was based on a remarkable level of historical continuity, but which could not be understood simply in terms of those actual connections.

**Hindsight and the ethnographic vantage point**

On my flight home I reflected on my oddly defensive reaction to the gift. I also recalled the memories of the earlier period of my research in which I had first been told that I “simply had to read this book if I was to understand contemporary Italian movements.” Why had my immediate reaction been so defensive? The answer had something to do with the implications of what I presumed to be Antimo’s assumption that I may not have read it, or had not known about the Movement of ’77, and perhaps more importantly the ways the Movement of ’77 related to the contemporary movement. It was as if “knowing” this book was a matter of pride (for me), a proof of my own authenticity as an “insider” anthropologist, or fully acculturated activist privy to the full context and deep meaning behind actions (ala Geertz’s “thick description”).
I had learned about the Movement of ’77 that first summer when I spent most evenings mesmerized by the vivacious Bolognese movement in various iterations, ranging from casual conversations at La Linea\textsuperscript{315} to the lengthy meetings and other \textit{appuntamenti} of the MoM at TPO, XM 24 (two key social centers), and other public or semi-public meeting halls owned by the city. Most evenings I would drink in stories and listen to multiple sessions of debate, chit-chat and analyses of the latest current events. Quite unexpectedly, those evenings turned into a crash course on the cartography and history of Italy’s Left.

I can’t recall exactly when, but during one those evenings when I hadn’t been there too long I do remember that either Georgio or Antonio asked if I knew anything about Italy’s 1977. It was clear that they almost expected me to not.\textsuperscript{316} Mesmerized by the passion and enthusiasm with which they recounted their stories, I shook my head, eagerly encouraging them to tell me what it was. They carried on, almost as if following a script,

\begin{quote}
You see you have to understand \textit{our} 1977. Whereas in most countries like France and the United States, 1968 lasted only a few months, ours—Italy’s—lasted more than 10 years!\textsuperscript{317}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{315} I have to admit that the fact that La Linea, located smack in the middle of Bologna’s most central square, Piazza Maggiore, a piazza outfitted mostly by up-scale establishments geared at tourists and the well to do, was, at the time, one of the main—if not THE main—movement hangouts, was perhaps rather surprising. On any given day, especially during the \textit{aperitivo} hours (between 6-9pm) you would likely find activists and others affiliated with the movement scene or culture having coffee, tea, and later drinks, readings the newspaper or simply chatting. How this posh place had become such a hub was never completely clear. The Modo Infoshop where I held my goodbye gathering and where I increasingly found myself was in many ways a much more obvious candidate for a movement hub. It was vegetarian, sold organic beers and was run by the owners of the alternative independent bookstore next door that sold mostly artistic, political and counter-culture books. Moreover it was located on a one way street in the more grungy University Zone in downtown Bologna. When I think back on it now the location of the movement bar itself mirrors/reflects something interesting about the spatiality/geography of the movement, at least with respect to its relation to the public. In 2002 the movement was central and visible; you really couldn’t miss it. In 2007 if you didn’t know where to go, you might think it didn’t exist. “Everyone stays in their own home;” “there is no more public space of engagement (\textit{confronto}),” several people explained it to me. This lack of public space and interaction was in fact named as one of the key “indicators” that there was no, or very little “Movement.”

\textsuperscript{316} This presumption was not, I don’t think, based on their opinion of me, but more realistically because they were used, until recently, to have the theoretical tradition that has now inspired conference, special journal issues, and has even become a sort of necessary literature to cite in many disciplines, to be very unknown to most people.
It was in that same conversation that Georgio and others first told me about *L’Orda D’oro*, explaining in almost identical terms as Antimo had, that “this book is very important to us;” “to understand the movement of Genoa you have to read this book.” It was that night that I scribbled the title in my notebook, circling it several times, as a book I needed to find.

At that time, I was not at all fazed by their assumption of my ignorance. It was after all a correct assumption. And, while I was impressed with their enthusiasm, it only fit with the overall tone and energy about *all things* having to do with the “new” movement that I was hearing about daily. However, as I thought about it in connection with my reaction to Antimo’s gift five and half years later, new questions and thoughts began to emerge. If Antimo’s presumption of my ignorance and his enthusiasm were so similar to that of Giorgio, Antonio and others from that first summer, reflecting the same sort of pride in Italy’s anomalous Left, why was my reaction so different? Why was I so defensive? In fact at least at a superficial level his assumption about such ignorance was quite understandable, as there was really nothing all that obvious about the connection of movements three decades past and those of which I was trying to make sense. While for years I had forgotten the sense of puzzlement I had first experienced when hearing about the Movement of ’77, especially in such close proximity to proclamations about the novelty of MoM, at the moment I received Antimo’s gift, the sense returned. Moreover, it rekindled the questions that I had carried with me since beginning my research. What exactly did this particular history mean and do for contemporary activists? Why was this book so important to them?

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317 The way that ’77 was brought up was almost always this way, full of pride and always contrasting to other experiences of 1968—usually the US and France—and this made it almost seemed scripted. When I say scripted I don’t mean fake, nor am I passing judgment about the truth or validity of the claim. I am simply pointing it out, because the ways certain stories and analyses come to take hold is a very notable part of the Italian MoM. See similar statements in Virno and Hardt 1996; Negri 1987.
Perhaps as important was the question of why I did find it so odd and therefore compelling. I would like to suggest two important observations with respect to this, before returning to the larger argument. First, the so-called oddness of the presence of these historical narratives has to do not only or even primarily with any “objective” reality of Italy’s movements, but with the political and theoretical frameworks I brought with me, and therefore saw and experienced the MoM through. Second, and closely related, is the peculiar nature of ethnographic research. For not only was I not Italian, I was an American, raised and socialized in a more or less stable and very Liberal political regime where readings of movements looked nothing like they did in Italy. For example, coming from where I did academically and politically, I couldn’t imagine anyone in the US involved with the GJSM there referring to a movement long since past, nor could I conceive of them referring to a series of debates and theoretical developments as central parts of how they would narrate or describe either the reasons of the movement, or their involvement in them. Certainly people in the US constantly refer to 1968, but not as a direct or historical precursor to contemporary movements. If anything 1968 may be seen as a comparative point, the last great movement of the 20th Century, or the first Post-Materialistic/Post-Modern revolution. Certainly people would agree that 1968 was crucial and changed many things, but this claim would be intellectualized and abstracted; this was not the case with the references to “77 by these Italians.

While we don’t typically think that our political culture and background (personal, political, epistemological) contribute to what we mean by a term like social movement, they very clearly do. The central role of this background contributes to a larger argument about the ways in which categories such as movements and “the political” —often presumed to be
universal, or culture and place neutral—are themselves culturally specific, inflected by the more and less conscious theoretical, cultural and epistemological frameworks—the “backgrounds of understanding” —through which they are seen (Winograd and Flores 1987).

The question of why I found these historical narratives so compelling, raised additional key issues about ethnography as method, perhaps especially when that method is conducted over a period of many years. That is, questions about the “rigor” and “scientificity” of ethnography were raised. While I stand behind the ‘truth’ of the analyses and arguments I am putting forth in this and other chapters, it is important to recognize the ways in which my own positionality and relative ignorance vis a vis the historical importance of Autonomia, influenced these ‘findings.’ As I mentioned in the Introduction, despite the publication of Empire and the increased popularity of Italian Autonomist Marxism in certain circles, this was not the framework or knowledge with which I began this project. I think this point is an important comment on the nature of ethnographic research, as well as the partial and situated nature of all knowledge (Haraway 1991). It was my relative ignorance that allowed these historical discourses to be unexpected or odd, and it was in large part the unexpected presence of these historical narratives that allowed me to garner the insights about movement/Movement that this dissertation is ultimately about. If I had begun researching the MoM as a “fan” or “follower” of Operaismo and heretical Marxism knowing or assuming its connection and relationality to contemporary movements, my entire entrée to the questions posed by my dissertation would be radically different. Having said this, there is another comment to be made about ethnographic objects as such as the MoM. For, Operaismo’s growing popularity and use in both activist and academic settings with which I was involved challenged and enriched my project in many ways, challenging the notion of an
obvious boundary around a site or object of research on the one hand, and subjects and objects on the other. The fact that the Operaismo tradition offers insights not only about the relationship of workers to Capital but also its methodological and epistemological commitments to the centrality of research for social change—through the concept of conricerca, or research-with, in which research is seen as a mode of political engagement and involvement—further exceeded my “field-site” in a way that continues to inform and perturb this project.

Re-reading L’orda D’oro: Rediscovering Movement

Beyond these reflections on methodology, re-engaging L’Orda Ora turned out to be very productive at a theoretical level. In re-reading and re-considering this text, a number of answers to the questions about why these two periods were connected and why a text about a period of movement three decades past was so important began to emerge more clearly. In large part it had to do with the text itself and the parallels with the way Genoa itself had been described. Consider the way the original book begins:

Years of lead, Separated Bodies, State massacres, Subversion, Repression, Terrorism, Emergency…or the opposite: The most beautiful years of our lives, Radical transformation of daily life, Utopia, The need for communism, Sexual Revolution, Armed Struggle etc.
And then still: The Beats, Hippies, Situationists, Student Movement, Potere Operaio, Lotta Continua, Maoists, Consiliari, Anarchists, Autonomists…
Behind all of these definitions, the lives of thousands, of hundreds of thousands of individuals during two decades in which they dug/excavated through to the apparently immutable foundations and pillars of Italian society. After this enormous and profound collective experience, nothing can be considered the same as before (Balestrini and Moroni: 13).

These passages are striking not only for their resonances with other periods of movement, but

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For more on this see Malo de Molina 2004.
also for the nature of those resonances. Consider Phrases like “the most beautiful years of our lives,” and “the lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals excavating to the seemingly immutable foundations of Italian society,” and perhaps most notably, “nothing can be considered the same as before.” Each of these is reminiscent of many of the statements used to describe Genoa but also numerous quotes from other experiences of movement. Recall from Chapter 1 statements like, “Genoa is the frontier. After Genoa nothing is the same;” “After Genoa we continued, and there is a high point of explosion of militancy/activism. Everything was yours: you went wherever and occupied everything….” Or consider this from the Pantera movement of the early 1990s: “you felt like you were creating the world anew everyday;” or about the peasant movements around WW II:

He who has the experience of the peasant movement in the South [of Italy] knows very well that in this struggle for emancipation something is fermenting which goes beyond the predominant demand for land. It is *something which involves a new way of being*, the first experiment with a higher morality and with a more active participation in politics, the rejection of ancient ideological servitudes, and in their place the illumination of sudden flashes of a new and civilized vision of life and of the world (Ernesto De Martino, 1955. qtd in Ginsborg 1990: 481).

The two paragraphs from *L’Orda D’Oro* and the quotes above suggest that movements, at least at their highpoints, function outside typical registers of the political, becoming moments or spaces where it is not particular political demands that are at stake, but the entire remaking of the society, very ways of being, and what constitutes “the political”—ala Deleuze’s becoming-revolutionary. When read in its entirety, the title of the book seems to be premised on this, for it pairs the revolutionary and political—terms that seem quite obvious for a tumultuous period of movement—with the terms *creative* and *existential*, as if the connection between politics and creativity, as well as existential and revolutionary, clearly work
together. The fact that this decade was experienced, or more importantly remembered and narrated, as a rather exceptional space and time, a rupture in the everyday is similar to the ways Genoa and the highpoints of the MoM were experienced and narrated. This in turn reiterates the notion or discourse of *Movement* I described in the last chapter. The reference to this text and to the period of movement to which it refers were a result of the fact of these similarities and the not too distant memory of a time when politics was similarly remade, or seemed about to be. While interesting in itself, but this similarity in elated tone doesn’t explain other elements that were similar between the two periods.

In the ’97 reissue, the authors of *L’Orda D’Oro* explain the motivation for writing the book. Describing their disbelief and irritation at the simplistic narratives to date as being either overly celebratory or overly condemning versions of this history, they set out to write

...[a] text about the “movements” of the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies that was as faithful as possible to complexity expressed from that revolutionary wave ....This did not mean that we would try to be, as they used to say, “objective,” which was frankly impossible, but that our being “a part of” would mean being generously and critically next to and inside the history of “movements,” against constituted Power. ...our difficult and desired impartiality, then, would be relative to the project-intention and desire to “tell” the story of those conflicts, without privileging one or another of the infinite ideological and organizational scaffolding produced by extra-parliamentary movements of that historical period.

All this meant to be confronted with an authentic labyrinth, with a political laboratory within which, for “historical” necessity, the principal streams and currents of the orthodox and heretical revolutionary movements of the last century, had converged (ibid: 2).

What do we make of the fact that we find the authors using and valuing elements that are so similar to those that were lauded in the MoM? For both the description of this past decade, as well as their need to tell its story are strikingly similar to what I had experienced vis a vis Genoa. These similarities include 1) references to complexity, heterogeneity and difference; 2) the situated and
therefore partial nature of knowledge; 3) the emphasis placed on critique and a weariness of ideological dogmatisms; 4) the importance of internal diversity and of a space for the convergence of ideologically diverse currents and streams. It is compelling that the authors in turn connect the need to capture and describe this complexity with the emotional and intellectual commitment and desire for *this story, this narrative* to be told. It is clear that it is not simply for the purpose of checking facts or getting history right that telling this story is important; rather understanding this story, in all its messiness and complexity, *does* something—it holds something crucial for ongoing projects of social change and against “constituted Power” (Negri 1999). 319

By considering the importance of *L’Orda D’Oro* to both young activists of the Genoa generation, as well as people like Antimo who lived the period of ’77 in conjunction with the content of the text, the argument about the importance of this history to contemporary Italian movements becomes more clear.. It certainly has to do with the actual continuities between the earlier period of movement and the period around Genoa—actual continuities that are lived in the memories or lived experiences like those of Antimo. But at the same time it had to do with the production of alternative stories, that is, alternative narratives and imaginaries of the political. Moreover, the production of those alternative stories in turn have to do with the ways in which movements are figured, narrated and experienced as exceptional moments in which life as we know it seems on the verge of being remade, as antibodies or correctives to modern representative democratic politics, capitalism, and

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319 According to Negri 1999: Constituted versus Constituent Power is a binary that characterizes modern politics. However constituted power, the power of the State or sovereign power, is itself premised on a prior relation to Constituent power. There would be a long discussion to have about the relationship of *movement/Movement* to these notions of power. “Constituent Power ‘is grounded on nothing more than its own beginning and takes place through nothing more than its own expression.’ Constituted power, on the other hand, marks the end of constituent power's expression, its capture and institutionalization into various political and social forms, most obviously the form of the modern state itself” (Frank 2000). One thing in particular that stands out is that Constituent power seems closer to *Movement*, but includes within it the everyday and mundane, that which is not organized, and not with the kind of projectuality of *movement*. Exploring the relationship between these would make for an interesting follow-up. For now, since the authors define the movement as against constituted power, but do not mention constituent power, it is not necessary for my argument to go there. See Negri 1999; Frank 2000.
State-based visions of society and power.\textsuperscript{320} Furthermore, the importance of telling these stories in this way speaks to the importance of putting into language an analysis and description that is critical and situated, rather than ideological and scripted.

In order to understand the ways these two levels interrelate, we need first to understand the nature of the actual continuities, as well as the ways they were narrated. In this next section I describe the nature of those continuities and their implications.

4.3 Multiple Levels of Continuity between '77 and Genoa

In this section I begin with one of the narratives about historical continuity from my early interviews. I then review the actual continuities between the period of ‘68-’79, that I already described in Chapter 2. The bulk of the section is devoted to how the ways these continuities are narrated reveal different, at times ambiguous relationships to the historical figuring of Movement, as well as how these continuities of movements and Movements work as both actual and virtual spaces for “getting Movement (il Movimento) right,” which in turn means getting politics right.

The Italian Anomaly Revisited

As I mentioned above, it was in my earliest conversations and interviews that I first came to notice the peculiar presence of historical discourses. In one of my earliest interviews I asked a lead Bolognese activist why he thought Italy was such an active and important participant in the Alter-Globalization Movement. While at the time his answer surprised me, now it serves to illustrate the nature of the continuities and the elements of the story that I

\textsuperscript{320} This could be put in terms of constituent versus constituted power ala Negri 1999, or state-logic versus nomadic and war machine logic in Deleuze and Guattari 1987.
will argue is at stake in the relationship between the Autonomist movements of the 60’s and 70’s, and MoM.

M: Why do you think Italy has such a strong presence [in Chiapas and other events]?

F: Why Italy? Italy is an anomaly, I am convinced of the fact that Italy is an anomaly. It has always been an anomaly: it is that which inaugurates the movements for the rights of workers in July of 1960, and that which turns 1968 into a 1968 from which also follows 1969, that is other than all this, it is a battle for cultural modernization, the emancipation of the roles of women and the refusal of hierarchies, and it is also that movement which intersects with the re-vindication of salary increases for EVERYONE in the factories; that which mixes the movements of the factory councils that are about grassroots/base representation, and that substitute the official Unions in the first phase.

And this why? In my opinion it is because this is the country of Gramsci, that is the same Gramsci that changes the history of Latin America, that is translated in Latin America and changes its history. It has the strongest communist party in the Western World, with all the good and the bad that this thing means…in the sense that it is a country with a Large Communist Party and at the same time a country with a communist party with all of the limitations of communist parties, and to whose Left another kind of workers movement is born. That which gets called Laboratory Italy, that is the one of Quaderni Rossi of Panzieri and of Tronti, that of Rosso of Toni Negri, that of the autonomous assemblies of Porto Marghera, that poses the problem beyond the demands based on work—the refusal of work. So, it is a great laboratory, where a series of different cultures are mixed together, that really only return to speak to one another with the great global movement. (Social Center activist and leader, interview, Bologna, November 2002)

There are numerous interesting elements of this quotation, but I want to focus on and discuss a few. First, and somewhat obvious is the simple fact that Federico employs the term Italian Anomaly, and that he does so with a certain amount of pride and certainty about the exceptional and unique status of Italy. Federico’s certainty that Italy’s historical, political and intellectual history (the background) are key to understanding the present, specifically Italy’s tremendous involvement in the GJSM, is itself quite interesting. Second, while Federico’s pride in the Italian anomaly refers to the whole of the 20th Century, including Gramsci, he spends most of his time around the movements of the 1960s
and 1970s. Moreover, while he is most interested in extra-parliamentary movements, what he calls “another kind of workers’ movement,” he sees the fact of Italy’s Communist Party, itself quite an anomaly insofar as communist parties go, as highly influential. It is clear that for Federico, theoretical and intellectual work—i.e. the role of Gramsci, and Operaista journals *Quaderni Rossi* and *Rosso*—are key to Italy’s movements. Finally, the very elements that he finds remarkable, i.e. the refusal of work, and the refusal of hierarchies, the mixing of different political cultures, and the experimental/laboratory type nature of this Italian anomaly, all have a remarkable resonance with the three elements of MoM that I highlighted in Chapter 1. These are autonomy, diversity and reflexivity, respectively. Moreover, in many ways each of the elements we see in this quote correspond to a different form or level of continuity that connects the Movements of ’77 to the Movement of Genoa. 1) Historical and Cultural Background, that is not the *events* that lead up to MoM, but the particular cultural and historical contexts and broader backgrounds of understanding or political cultures within which movements and the political are thought and imagined. 2) Actual material continuities in ‘submerged networks’ comprised both of people, places, things and ideas/concepts, mostly in spaces of movement. These two contribute to and require an understanding of 3) *movements/Movement* as an *actual* tool and space for producing better theories and practices of social change—by which I mean a central part of what is done in *movements* and *Movements* is to figure out what works, as well as analyze and theorize about these. This however, is in turn related to (and somewhat dependent on) 4) the imagined or virtual space of *Movement* as a site where another kind of politics—one opposed to the dominant modernist, representative and state based politics is created.

**Material Movement Continuities: Ongoing *movements* and spaces of activism.**

In Chapter 2 I described the ways the Italian Anomaly, with respect to both the
institutional and extra-parliamentary Left, was crucial for understanding the emergence and receptivity of the GJSM and the MoM in Italy. This can be explained in terms of the ways the anomalous elements of the Italian Left fitted into a common cultural background. For example, the fact that the political cultures and infrastructures of a critical Left were present; the presence of material and infrastructural continuities between ongoing smaller movements such as the anti-Nuclear movements, some environmental movements, and the student movement of the early 1990s; and finally the people, organizations and spaces that exist in submerged networks, as well as their own ideas, etc. Before moving on, I do want to reiterate how some of these continuities worked with respect to the memory, influence and their narrativization.

One of the things that I feel is crucial is my contention that forms of anti-capitalist sensibility and practice, as well as various organizations and spaces of militancy, are almost a given in Italy. This contention is perhaps harder to make sense of because its effects are at the cultural and everyday level. So despite the fact that the Autonomous movements define themselves in large part in opposition to the traditional or Communist Left, they move in a terrain already affected and defined by the more majoritarian actor. This relates to my argument about the sense and reality of continuity within the extra-parliamentary Left. The more institutionalized form of the party is much more likely to be sustained over time, even if problematically. Additionally, the machinations and support structures for the party, including recreation and leisure centers established throughout Italian cities and towns, community/cultural centers and the annual neighborhood parties that are thrown have become traditional and make it more possible for new occupied or otherwise obtained spaces to be used for such cultural activities. This can be compared once again to the US where very
little of such infrastructure exists, and where neighborhood block parties, if they happen, are very temporary, rather than built structures. While these structures and spaces have certainly diminished in importance and use over the years in Italy, they are far from invisible or non-existent.

The background of the institutional or dominant Leftist culture was only one layer of background that explains the continuity of movements. Despite claims to the contrary, the continuities between what are usually seen as different periods of movement (which I would argue is itself affected by the institutional Left) are rather remarkable. As Federico states in the prior quotation, Italy is the place not only where 1968 turned into 1969, which in turn crescendoed until 1977, but Italy is also where in even the bleakest of times for politics, i.e. the 1980s period of an increasing consensus around Neoliberalism, consumerism, individualism and other economic growth indicators within Italy and around the world, there was a level at which movement, or at least some forms of activism and counter-culture were sustained.

As I have already stated, it is important to remember that while Autonomia, or the great wave of movements of the 1960s-70s may have ended, the lives of individuals did not. Some people did leave movement politics due to disillusionment or complacency, while others were imprisoned, went into exile or underground. Yet many of these same people, and others continued to exist as political beings with hopes, desires, critiques and analyses of the problems and possibilities of the world as they knew it. Moreover, many of these political beings’ subjectivities and ways of knowing and being in the world had been fundamentally affected by these experiences. Many of the protagonists of social centers, media centers and publishing projects that developed in Italy throughout the late 1980s and 1990s were born of

321 Portelli 1997; Ginsborg 1990.
the movements of the 1970s. Similarly, several people I spoke with had parents and other
family members who had been involved. Moreover they were collectivities of individuals
who had rich experiences of extremely successful periods and practices, and also many
experiences of failures. Together these biographical, infrastructural, technological and other
forms of practice effectively became the conditions of possibility for MoM.

Besides these continuities there was another interesting fact: the discourse of the void
or hole of the 1980s. One of the things that had continuously puzzled me throughout my
research was the claim that the MoM was the first movement in decades. Some activists even
spoke of it as the first of the 21st Century. Several activists spoke about how “before the
explosion of Genoa” (and a few key protests like the No OCSE in Bologna) “there had been
‘nothing’” in the way of movement in Italy. This nothing was referred to as the “hole of the
1980s” and [to a lesser extent] 1990s. These claims were puzzling precisely because the more
I talked to people and learned about how they arrived at the MoM, and where the MoM itself
came from, the more it became clear that there was a lot that happened between the end of
the 1970s and mid 1990s. And more importantly, perhaps, that those things that happened
during the “void” of the 1980s and early 90s, had everything to do with how and why MoM
was able to be as big as it was.

Some activists recognized this continuity, while still stressing a hole or void in that
continuous space of movement. A longtime activist (in his mid-forties), and now “hacktivist”
put it:

V: Well, anyways there is the hole of the 80’s in which survival was still
guaranteed by the autonomous collectives. The survival of the movement, that
is—because in other countries we saw the complete disappearance of the
Movement, like in France for example, you can’t speak of movement. …In
France and England there is no perception. But in Italy an expansive
movement remained.
M: Remained in the 1980s?

V: No, today. Today in Italy the movement is much stronger than in other European and non-European countries. But why? Because there was a strong core/clump (zoccolo) that resisted the repression of the 1980s, and that was in part supported by the instruments and means of communication, like the radio, as well as the centers of documentation, and also through some important campaigns including the anti-nuclear, anti-liberalization campaigns...and this is what allowed us to pass from 1982-83, until 1990, when then there was the Pantera, where then the circuit of social centers emerged around the ashes of the first Leoncavallo at the beginning of the 1990s... an active resistance in combat against a Milan of speculation, of a socialist Milan (of which of socialism it had very little, and Neoliberal it had a lot) ...there were even Molotov cocktails thrown from the roof... and from there emerged tens of social centers, and with the Pantera the circuit was nourished. (interview, Bologna, November 2006).

The consistency of the narratives about the void of the 1980s, visible here in V’s description, but of which there are other examples, is notable. Such narratives draw a picture of a history in which what was left of the exhilarating movements of the 1970s was a void, but that void was visible, much like the failure of MoM was visible in 2004 and in 2006/7. The question then becomes, why? Why refer to the 80’s as a void, as if there should be something filling it? Notice too Vittorio’s repeated reference to “the Movement.” In his language, the Movement (il movimento) is always being worked on and towards, even when it only exists as a virtuality, absence or latency. Here in fact we return to where the last chapter ended, the description of the absence of movement, seems to refer more specifically to the absence of Movement, where the term movement itself refers not to the almost always present spaces of activism that in Italy were basically taken for granted, but to the more exceptional moments when activism exceeds the delimited or marginal spaces and groups of activists to become something that articulates to society more broadly, existing as a “real public space.” Such that whereas Genoa and the years directly pre- and pro-ceeding it were high points for
activism, it is not true as many would say “that there was nothing happening” in the 80’s and 90’s. Rather, there were almost always spaces and people doing activism, in one way or another.

So what was the difference, and why claim a void? In the period of the 1980s and 1990s when social centers were the main sites for activist and artistic experimentation, oppositional and critical stances to the present were limited to a relatively small, isolated part of Italy’s population. Most often this was a population who already identified themselves as belonging to the radical Left or to the musical, artistic and/or even drug sub-cultures. In these periods, arguably as critical for the development of more visible and massified moments, these movements were unable to reach broader publics. This inability was itself at least in part, a product of repression, drugs and the demonization of movements by mainstream actors, including the PCI. Even among individual social centers—many of which came from different ideological positions and histories—there was quantitatively (and qualitatively) less communication and interchange. However what is clear is that it is in large part because of these minoritarian experiences and infrastructures that experiences like the Tute Bianche and myriad other autonomous collectives that would then get involved in the MoM were as large and diffuse as they were. At the same time we might also ask whether the claim of a void has something to do with the fact that in the 1980s and for part of the 1990s there were no theoretical leaps, new “aha” moments about what being a “good movement/Movement” would be.

The recognition of the unique historical—material and infrastructural —continuities between not only the 1970s and 1990-2000s, but also between the 1980’s-1990’s, and the larger cultural background in which leftist movements moved, are key to understanding both
the nature of historical narratives and their force. We can contrast this to both the ways social movement theorists treat social movements, as described earlier, and the more commonplace conceptions of them. Viewing and defining movements in terms of their particular demands at a particular time and place, negates the fact that movements emerge from collective histories and processes in which lessons are learned and strategies are tested, elaborated and tossed.\footnote{One could argue that this tendency to ignore these longer aspects of movements has increased since the explosion of “new social movements” in the 1960s, who already were seen as different from the “old” working class movement, neglecting the fact that many “new social movements” and perhaps more importantly theorizations of them as such, emerged within Marxist informed movements, spaces and intellectual communities.} In addition, there are the things that endured: technologies, infrastructures, and the politicization of individuals and collectives. The fact that many of these continuities were themselves occupied largely with culture, information, new technologies and knowledge production—in the form of publications and other forms of theoretical texts—itself points to and is inextricably linked to other forms of continuity. We can speak about two: first, the ongoing development of theories and analysis of social change and an analysis of the relevant problem-space or conjuncture—in this case of the transition to Post-Fordism—but also a growing recognition of the failure of representative politics, and second, the virtual and mythical space of developing new and better political stories and imaginaries. Of course both continuities are closely intertwined.

**Other kinds of actual continuity: (Post-)Operaismo, theoretical-practice, and mythopoiesis**

Interestingly, my earliest encounters with narratives about Autonomia and Movement of ’77 did not stress these actual material or infrastructural continuities. These were either taken for granted or downplayed in the narratives. For the most part the descriptions and references to ’77 and Autonomia were far more intellectualized and abstract.
They referred in part to the ongoing networks of theoretical production, specifically the production of texts, debates and discussions within the tradition of Operaismo and Post-Operaismo—what I, following Nunes, will refer to as a variegated whole (post)-Operaismo, emphasizing the fact that it retained a certain sense of continuity even if there were substantive breaks and disagreements\(^{323}\) —and the ways these politicized individuals. Secondly, they included reference to the ongoing space of movement as a tool or modality of social change, in which the continuities were much more abstract and virtual.

The relationship between the production of concepts and the actual struggles of the working class was one of the noteworthy things about Operaismo, and it persists in particular areas of the Italian movement today. It is a dialectical process in which practices arise, are theorized, and those theories and concepts are then used in the movements.\(^{324}\) While many of the key theorists of Autonomia Operaia, and therefore of Operaismo and Post-Operaismo were imprisoned and exiled—including Antonio Negri, Franco Piperno, Oreste Scalzone and many others—they continued producing journals and books in exile.\(^{325}\) Moreover their work continued to be read and discussed, and the reading definitely picked up in times of more movement like Pantera. To this day there is a thriving community of Italian political intellectuals living and writing in Paris.\(^{326}\) Notably, many young people attribute their own politicization and eventual involvement in MoM not first to material contradictions, but to

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\(^{323}\) Nunes 2007.

\(^{324}\) Descriptions of this process were given to me in various interviews. See also Hardt 1990 and Osterweil 2004a for a description of this relationship.

\(^{325}\) Notably, Operaismo itself was not limited to Italy; the bibliography or genealogy of the field itself refers to key texts produced in US labor movements of the 1920s. Harry Cleaver and others are considered some of the most critical figures in translating and consolidating autonomous Marxism as a theoretical framework linked to movements. See Cleaver 1993; cf Cleaver 1979/2000.

\(^{326}\) The journal *Multitudes* [http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Multitude-s-english-presentation](http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Multitude-s-english-presentation), as well as the former journal *Futur Anterior* as well as several ongoing seminars have been the fruit and evidence of this.
their enlightenment through the (Post-)Operaista tradition. Moreover in Italy, beginning in the early 90’s, informal research and study groups started forming around people like Paolo Virno, Augusto Illuminati, and others. In 1991 Sergio Bianchi founded the journal Derive Approdi which began reintroducing Operaista thought to an eclectic audience of political and counter-cultures, many in the growing networks of social centers. A few years later Derive Approdi became a publishing house and began publishing and translating key political texts. Several of my interviewees cited reading Derive Approdi and texts by the Operaistas as being key not only to their political development, but also to their eventual involvement in the MoM. The importance of this tradition was made clear to me throughout my research. At one level (Post)-Operaismo was the means by which certain people were politicized.

Consider the following four examples.

TL describes his own transformation upon discovering the Operaistas soon after moving from Lecce to Bologna:

Then in ’95 I move to Bologna. At Bologna I start to read Situationism, Guy Debord, The Situationist International. So for two years I was one that gave that type of analysis. Anyway, then in ’97 there is the more important passage. ..At that point I encounter the thought of the actors of Autonomia Operaia. I begin to study that which gets called Operaismo, and then Post-Operaismo—which refers to the more recent thought, of the second phase of thought and analysis of the theorists of Autonomia Operaio.

Similarly, the same Bolognese leader interviewed earlier explains:

I arrived in Bologna in ’94; I was active in politics in middle school and then during the new cycle of occupations that began in ’93—I was very active in politics at the Classical Highschool I attended. After this, rather, I arrived at doing politics in Bologna rather strangely. That is more than a material contradiction. It was through a trajectory that was more than anything else, intellectual. It was my confrontation with, lets say the transformation, the new forms of production, from Fordism to Post-Fordism, and therefore the knowledge that this was an area of research for new instruments to struggle with. And so I started to study, and there were
two large transformations. The first was January 1994: Zapatismo. The second: the transformation in forms of production, and the transition that was also intellectual from the Operaistas to the Post Operaistas (interview November 2002, Bologna.)

And a Roman activist, giving his political autobiography four years later:

Truthfully and in parallel to the occupations of school, I was with my uncle who was part of the “Coordinamento Autonomia” of the 1980s, since the end of the 1970s/80 until the Pantera—so he was from the Roma Autonomia, the Volsci. There it happens, beginning from one of his initiatives, we pull together a sort of study group. It was 1994-95. We are speaking about years that the popular authors are Marco Revelli, in il Manifesto, and in the publications of Boligneri...Marco Revelli, Aldo Bonomi are two authors that we read a lot. And we begin to talk about the crisis in the factories, of crisis of traditional work, of the redefinition of new contract models, and the redefinition of the productive model in its totality. We discuss the transition in phase of the political crisis of representation. That’s a bit of the debate we have, very beautiful, very stimulating. We do this with a group of students, one of whom is still working with me now—we were very young.

The readings of Virno and Negri arrive a little later. They arrive via the journal of Derive Approdi that I discover in the anarchist bookstore that is located here in San Lorenzo, called Anomalia. Yes. I devour these books. I read a lot. These are years that I am dedicated for the most part to reading and doing politics in school. But the direct knowledge with my “bad teachers” — clearly the readings of Negri and Virno— are for me the discovery of that which I want. The discovery of the truth! In a sense—call it what you like—the discovery of the good things to say. Truth is an ugly word, but once in a while it should get used. By truth I mean those things of which Machiavelli speaks that have to do with conflict and antagonistic experiences (interview Rome, November 2006).

Moreover, one can see this not only in descriptions of individual trajectories, but also in the description of the key groups/movements that arrive at Genoa. More than the individual narratives, the ways in which histories of organizational experiments and events were located within this broader span of movement were quite remarkable.

Tute Bianche are not part of a particular tradition. They are a novelty both in Italy and the world and maybe that is why it works. But there are historical experiences that they refer to in one way or another. On the one hand are the

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327 Cattivo Maestro was a term used to describe Negri.
Zapatistas: the rebellion in 1994 of an army that was armed, but only fought for twelve days. The decision to put on a ski mask was not to hide, but rather, to be seen. Using the internet rather than bullets. On the other hand are the Italian Autonomia Operaia and post operaism, the tradition of Quaderni Rossi, and all later journals of the Italian heretic Marxists. The Tute Bianche can be located mainly in the debates about the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism. The choice of the color white is an attempt to overcome the color of the blue overalls as the only point of reference. Operaism has a particular social actor as a point of reference – the unskilled worker in a large factory – called a “mass worker.” At that time there was a central subject in relation to production and conflict. This is how it was during the struggles from 1968 to 1973 and also after that until 1977. As this role of the mass worker lost significance in production and conflict, a debate was sparked that first completely evolved in the 1990s. It was about the shattering of productive subjects and the emergence of new subjects. And that is exactly what the color white is meant to represent. In the additive mixing of colors, the color white is produced when all the colors are mixed. We chose white to refer to the diversity of production subjects and the conflict in Post-Fordism and post-industrial society (Federico Martelloni 2002 in Disobbedienti!).

I will discuss the role of theoretical production as a key form of movement practice in greater detail in the following chapter. For now what is important is to recognize both the fact of the ongoing development of this theoretical tradition, disseminated via journals, bookstores and in various social centers and other spaces, and its influence and significance for the politicization of individuals and even of key organizations. In addition one can see how the delineating of certain concepts, problems and ideas around which campaigns and activities are organized, are also crucial. In particular concepts like the multitude, Empire, various elaborations about the new Post-Fordist subject, the precariat, the metropolis, new tools for and of research—themselves picking up on the classical notion of “conricerca” (trans. as research with), —can be seen to gain attention and discussion, especially in the 1990s, and

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328 While one can argue that these quotes are taken from a group of “intellectuals,” and are not representative of the majority of the Italian movement—this is only partly true because to begin with I wasn’t pointed to them as intellectuals, but rather as some of the most active and articulate activists in the movement—I still find the fact of the role of theory and intellectual production, specifically of Post-Operaismo, even though each of them reads other things—worth pointing to.

329 Not just as theorized by Hardt and Negri 2004, but also Virno 2004 [published in Italian in 2002] and others.
then with even greater force in the years of MoM. A glance over the table of contents of the various issues of *Luogo Comune, Derive Approdi*, as well as key texts like the *Lessico Post Fordista* and many of Negri’s works, are very useful to this end. As some activists described it to me, the existence of debate on the “order words of a movement” was a sure sign of a Real Movement (recall the quote by Margarita in the last chapter). Many initiatives during the MoM were oriented around these and are perfect examples of the centrality of theoretical-practice I discuss in Chapter 5.

**Mythopoesis, Stories and the Work of Movements**

The relevance of theoretical production is itself not always so strictly related to the development of a particular theoretical tradition such as Post-Operiasmo. It can also refer to what the outcomes and effects of movements are. I will discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 5. For now if we return to the very night when Antonio or Giorgio first asked me whether I knew about Italy’s ’77, the ways in which some of the key elements of both the actual and more virtual forms of historical connection become visible. Having just been told about the uniqueness and importance of the Movement of ’77, one of the authors of Wu Ming, an internationally renowned and popular writers’ collective, also present, chimed in in agreement.\(^{330}\) He added, “Italy has always been a laboratory,” for “this was, after all, the country of Gramsci.”\(^ {331}\) The discussion continued, and while I didn’t record this particular session, it was that evening that I began to notice and become fascinated by the presence of historical narratives, as well as references to Italy as a political “laboratory” and as an

\(^{330}\) These phrases are paraphrased, taken from notes in my journal. (I later was referred to an article /speech by Wu Ming 1 2002, that eloquently and succinctly described the historical continuities between ‘68 and now.

\(^{331}\) Notably, and despite these early mentions of Gramsci with pride, I would later find out that Gramsci was not popular among theorists of the Autonomia or Operaismo tradition, for his Idealism and affiliation with the PCI.
anomaly—La Anomalia Italiana. It was also that evening that I first scribbled the title 

*L’Orda D’Oro* in my notes.332

Taken together with Federico’s comments at the beginning of this section about Italy as a laboratory and as the country of Gramsci, one begins to get the picture not only of the centrality of theoretical-practice (i.e. the production of highly theoretical debates in the forms of journals, articles and the general work of movements), but also how certain interpretations and narratives get scripted and codified. In fact according to Wu Ming 1, the codification or production of certain interpretations and narratives—what he calls mythopoesis—is part of the primary work of social movements. He explains this quite clearly and succinctly in an article he wrote that very year entitled, “Why not show off about the Best Things? A Few Quick Notes on Social Conflict in Italy and the Metaphors used to describe It.” (The title is itself quite indicative).

Revolutions and radical movements have always found and told their own myths. …

Myths are necessary. We couldn't live together without stories to tell and listen to, without "heroes" whose example we can follow or reject. Our language, our memories, our imagination and our need of forming communities are the things that make us human beings, and the stories keep them all together. There is no way we can get rid of myths, and why the fuck should we? Instead of wasting our time listening to some bullshitter who poses as the most radical of all, we ought to understand the way actual social movements want to fullfill their need for myths and mythologies, and help them keep mythologies lively, flexible and in motion.

As far as this kind of experimentation (radical "mythopoesis") is concerned, Italy's always been an exciting laboratory. For many historical and social reasons, the Italian social movements were able to emerge as multitudes of people describing themselves by an endless, lively flow of tales, using those tales as weapons in order to impose a new imagery from the grassroots. When

332 By the end of the summer I had acquired quite a reading list. Ballestrini’s *Invisibili* and *Vogliamo Tutto* were also on that list, and Negri’s *Potere Costituente (Insurgencies)* followed shortly thereafter. I will discuss the importance of books and other texts in the next chapter.
we talk about "myths", we mean stories that are tangible, made of flesh, blood
and shit. As we tried to explain several times to people who live in other
countries, mythopoesis is what enriches the Italian movements (2002).

Wu Ming associates this quite specifically with the continuity between past and present.

Towards the end of the same article he writes:

Among the many metaphors used in the left's public discourse (the Hot
Autumn, the Springtime of movements, the Tearing, the Shoulder Push, the
Ten Thousand Zeligs...), two are used to describe the "continuity of past and
present" I hinted at in the premise: Italy as "the great laboratory" and the
decades-long experience of the movements as "the sedimentation." The
former does not need an explanation, since a laboratory is where experiments
take place; the latter refers to the process of depositing sediment, that is,
according to the Oxford Dictionary, "sand, stones, mud, etc. carried by water
or wind and left somewhere, e.g. at the bottom of a lake, a river, the sea, etc."
The waters and winds of social conflict have carried and left us a plenty of
experiences and examples. Among the sand and the stones are so many
nuggets that it would be absurd not to keep digging. Stories are shovels. That's
the way we use them (ibid).

We can see the role of mythopoesis is theoretical, but while it is seen as a tool for social
change and theoretical production, it is also an example of a key form of meaning-making
necessary for all forms of community. The making of stories is achieved in part by what
we might read as highly rational theoretical forms of knowledge production used as tools to
make social change. While for Wu Ming 1 this more formalized theoretical-practice in the
form of texts and highly sophisticated debates among the Operaistas, this is only one small
part of the story-telling work done by movements.

This more literal understanding of movements as story-makers on the one hand, and

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[334] In an interview I conducted with him in 2006, but already implicit in the article I am citing from above, he is
adamant about his dislike for some of the overly-academic brands of theory that at times become the main form
of meaning and story making of movements in Italy. The centrality of theoretical and intellectual elements to
both the fact and interpretation of continuity, as well as to the political trajectories of many of the activists I
spoke with, is actually quite remarkable. Moreover, it is a very gendered finding. While I interviewed several
women, only one of them described the theoretical production of Operaismo, but also of feminism as being that
which brought them to activism and the MoM.
concrete spaces, processes and sites with and where theory gets produced, circulated and engaged, on the other itself points to another form of continuity that has to do with both the material and theoretical, or narrative continuities. This refers to the way movements/Movements overall can also be defined as ongoing processes and spaces for developing new and better tools, theories and practices of social change, and in deliberate and reflexive relation to what has passed.

4.4 Getting Movement Right: Novelty, Rupture and the Specter of Movement

References to ‘77 and the past stressed not only the myth-making and story-making powers of movements or their relationship to theoretical elaboration, but that movements were themselves, in actuality, but also by definition, sites of collective and progressive learning. This learning was comprised on the one hand of what we can refer to as positive discoveries of “new solutions”: for example Zapatismo, the cultural politics of the GJSM, the features of the new political imaginary, are all observed or desired aspects of a new political modality. On the other hand, and, perhaps to an even greater extent, the learning occurred through increasingly astute analyses about the failures and flaws of past political modalities. These past approaches included both the traditional, i.e. institutional Left, as well as and in this case more prominently, “radical” movements past.

The prison of past movements

Still in my initial stages of research, I came upon another reference to the history of movement in Italy; however this one was quite different. Late one night after a long meeting of the Disobbedienti at the Teatro Polivalente Ocupato (TPO), one of the most active social centers in Bologna, I interviewed one of the more nationally well-known spokespersons of
the Disobbedienti. While not from there, he was staying in Bologna in an effort to cultivate connections between the Bolognese and Padovan social centers and Disobbedienti. He explained the importance of MoM in a very distinct way. According to him its significance lay largely in the fact that “it helped to break Italian movements free” from “the prison of the memories of past movements.” For him the very term and concept of a “movement of movements” provided an important lesson for many movement ambits, in particular those with strong Marxist-Leninist roots and tendencies, to recognize that “today it was clear that no one could do (the movement) alone.” For him the term MoM a single movement that accepted and was even premised on plurality. This was particularly challenging in the Northeast of Italy, he explained, “because even the current movement is still very much made up of those [militants] from the 1970s.” For him, then, the global movement, the novelties introduced by the Zapatistas and Seattle, were key not only in and of themselves, but also because “there was already a large amount of doubt [among Italian activists] about how to conceive of movement in the aftermath of Communism.” For him, and from my understanding for many others, the emergence of the GJSM was embraced largely because it offered new tools and modes for thinking and doing movement, after many years in which “the Movement” had remained submerged and, as many would put it, “stuck in its own ghetto.” Recall the language in the “Carta de Milano” described in Chapter 2, wherein the social centers explained their reasons for becoming more visible and official networks of cultural and political production, which employed a constitutive approach —in contrast to an antagonistic or resistive one.

Here again we see the material and biographical connections between past—

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335 Where he and not coincidentally Antonio Negri, are both from.
specifically from Autonomia—and present. However, what is so interesting about this conversation is not only the reference and material connection to the past, but also its comment about how the past and present relate; specifically how the present movements are seen as addressing the shortcomings or failures of movements past. This points to the fact that in addition to the material ways in which movement continuities build and innovate on past practices, Movement in Italy is thought of, even if often unconsciously or implicitly, as an ongoing project and problem—something to figure out and get right. Moreover, the problem at hand is itself often illuminated by the experiences of movements past. Those movements’ failures reveal that like the political system more broadly, they themselves were troubled by what we might call the “specter of communism,” or what Derrida calls the Specters of Marx(1994), where communism is understood not as an alternative to Capitalism, but as an outdated political culture and modality itself constituted by many of the same logics, social imaginaries, epistemological premises and tendencies as that to which it is supposedly opposed. This old political modality or form is constituted by universalist, dogmatic and hierarchical logics and is based on a mistaken reading of the problem of power and the political.336 In this sense movements are not only physical and material spaces for developing and improving on past habits, mistakes and innovations in efforts at social change;337 they are conceived conceptually as where the answers to the most important political problems, or rather the problem of the political, are to be found.338 Getting Movement right means getting practices of social change right, which in turn is premised on


337 In addition to seeing the MoM as a corrective, Luca explained that many of the things—like combining conflict and consensus—were latent or emergent in Italy, and were brought out or made to crystallize when seen vis a vis the global movement.

338 David Scott’s notion of problem spaces is quite useful here, Scott 2004.
rethinking the political and getting better readings of the problem or conjuncture. This itself requires rejecting the ideological or dogmatic, and embracing the more complex and dynamic —what Grossberg describes as conjuncturalism (2006).\(^{339}\)

Many of the ways in which MoM and its important events and influences were spoken of are themselves temporally or historically inflected. This temporal logic manifests itself either through positive claims to novelty – i.e. MoM did things, or had qualities that no politics had ever done—or, and perhaps even more commonly, by claiming differentiations from the past.

A longer version of a quote I discussed briefly in Chapter 1 demonstrates this perfectly. I will re-quote it here more fully and with different emphases:

>The three Italian years of movement—from the protest at Genoa to the struggles at Melfi—have definitively marked the story of the political culture of a generation and transformed in a profound way its way of seeing and living in the world.

A generation that, in comparison with the reasons and categories of the historic left, marks a strong discontinuity and, departing from the eruption of the movement of movements, refuses the natural links/ties with their parents and grandparents of the Left.

A generation raised in adulation and exaltation of the individual and individualism that discovers in being social and plural the only form of happiness possible. Discovers in being plural and social, the only possible form of resistance to domination.

A generation that in its conditions of life and work, is living a leap in paradigm without precedents, and in this book we will try to recount this without breaking into tears (7 Blù 2005: back cover).

The very words and categories this particular quote chooses are temporal and progressivist in nature: For example, that the MoM “definitively marked the story of the political culture of a generation”… “[a] generation that, in comparison with the reasons and categories of the historic left, marks a strong discontinuity and, departing from the eruption of the movement

\(^{339}\) See also Wendy Brown 2000, an essay which speaks of the Left’s tendency to cling to past ideological readings as a source of its continuing problems.
of movements, *refuses the natural links/ties with their parents and grandparents of the Left,*” clearly sees time and development as key. While clearly a positive assessment of the leap in paradigm introduced by MoM, it is articulated by asserting a strong discontinuity and outright refusal of the movement’s heritage. This heritage includes the historic or traditional Left defined by the Communist and Socialist Parties, Trade Unions, the official workers’ movement, and many of the groups of Autonomia, particularly Autonomia Organizata.

Ironically, but perhaps less so than it might first seem, this disavowal of heritage does not deny the relationship. On the contrary it acknowledges and situates the relationship between past and present quite centrally. Again this is not a given. The figuring of practices as against those of the past depends on recognizing the relationship, and implicitly the heritage. One would be hard-pressed to find such discourses among people of the Seattle generation in the US, for example.

This implicit acknowledgement of temporal connection is quite similar to the original depictions of the high point of the movement, when there was a general jubilation about a return to protest. This effervescence itself seemed to have as much to do with the problems associated with previous or traditional modes of doing politics, as it did with the actual nature of the “new” or “epochal” politics causing all of the excitement. Remember phrases such as, “One needn’t forget that zapatismo *has closed definitively with the 20th century,* constituting an epochal rupture with respect to the imaginaries of the historic left.” As Marco Revelli, well-known Leftist intellectual and former head of Lotta Continua referred to Zapatismo, “It was history taking off again after the end of history.”۳۴۰ Or as I have described earlier, “Zapatismo in a sense resituates all of a series of classical polarities of the 20th century.” This reading of the Zapatista movement was not unique to Italy, but it was particularly resonant.

۳۴۰ Revelli ۲۰۰۴.
For a large part of what defined the MoM were the ways these “new” politics were read as addressing the pitfalls of both the institutional and movement Left.

As John Holloway, an Irish-born author very popular among parts of the GJSM, writes,

The zapatistas pose a theoretical and practical challenge: a challenge to all the established practices and ideas of the revolutionary left or indeed of the Left in the broadest sense. As Marcos puts it in a comment on the first year of the uprising, "Something broke in this year, not just the false image of modernity sold to us by neoliberalism, not just the falsity of government projects, of institutional alms, not just the unjust neglect by the country of its original inhabitants, but also the rigid schemes of a Left living in and from the past. In the midst of this navigating from pain to hope, political struggle finds itself naked, bereft of the rusty garb inherited from pain: it is hope which obliges it to look for new forms of struggle, that is, new ways of being political, of doing politics: a new politics, a new political morality, a new political ethic is not just a wish, it is the only way to go forward, to jump to the other side". (Subcdte Marcos - citado por Rosario Ibarra, La Jornada, 2/5/95). He might also have added, "a new political theory, a new understanding of politics and of power." (Holloway 1996).

However, this itself suggests interesting things about the nature of supposedly “new” movements. It also raises questions about how these supposedly “new” movements related to the failed politics of the past, and about the notable similarities between the claims to novelty in the MoM, and the claims to novelty around Autonomia: For not only are the claims to novelty somewhat paradoxical given the acknowledgement of historical heritage, the very features that are lauded as new are actually remarkably similar to those elements lauded in Autonomia. How do we make sense of this? I argue that the answer lies in the fact that both Autonomia and MoM are part of the same long process of developing new political imaginaries and modalities.

**The Resonance of Zapatismo: ‘We Are from Before, Yes, But we are New’**

In many ways Zapatismo, which became one of the most salient and effective symbols or stories of the MoM, has far more to do with the ways in which it is read as
contributing new and better ways of doing politics, than as a social movement with which the
Italian MoM is in solidarity in any traditional sense. This is not to say that there wasn’t
traditional solidarity in the form of aid, political protest, etc; however more important than
such solidarity was another kind of relationship. Rather than a site where Italians needed to
send help, Zapatismo emerges and is engaged as a theoretically innovative political approach.
It offers an improvement upon past forms of Leftist politics both by articulating a clear
critique of the negative elements of such past politics, and by offering up “new” qualities and
elements that are defined positively, not just in contradistinction to the past. Many of the
elements lauded in Zapatismo, namely the valorization of difference, the call for open-
endedness, reflexivity and partiality, as well as the articulation of a political project of
autonomy, themselves are key contributors to the new political imaginary and the new
cultural political modality of the GJSM.

And yet these are also all very resonant with the qualities that are appreciated about
Autonomia—despite the fact that Luca refers to these “old” movements as prisons. Many of
the qualities that are hailed as novel can also be seen in descriptions of the importance of
Autonomia. For example when Antonio—the same activist who first explained 1977 to me—
described his activist trajectory, he pointed to the important history of Autonomia that the
Tute Bianche and the social centers he came to be involved in beginning in 1985 intercepted.
He spoke of this Autonomia not only as a past-legacy, but almost as proof of the unique and
prescient nature of politics in Italy.

Autonomia Operaia meant an autonomy from the Parties, of the local spaces.
It was nodal, finding points of opposition to traditional political parties. Being
rooted in one’s territorial particularity was incredibly important. It was against
all forms of centralization—even though there is always tension about this,
because one can be theoretically against centralization, but actually be

341 Perhaps best articulated by the Zapatista phrase: caminar preguntando (to walk while questioning).
sufficiently hierarchical in practice. (AA, Interview, June 2002 translation mine from Italian.)

This is in turn resonated with other depictions of the Movement of ’77 I would find while doing fieldwork in Italy, but also and increasingly outside, even when I returned to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Once there, I encountered references to Autonomia and the Operaist/Post-Operaist traditions, on the one hand, and Zapatismo on the other, almost everywhere. In a volume entitled, *Autonomia: A Post-Political Politics*, published in 1980, the year after many key intellectuals were arrested, Semiotext(e) founder Sylvere Lotringer, then living in New York, wrote:

> Autonomy is the body without organs of politics, anti-hierachic, anti-dialectic, anti-representative. It is not only a political project, it is a project for existence….Autonomy has no frontiers. It is a way of eluding the imperatives of production, of the verticality of institutions, the traps of political representation, the virus of power. …Political autonomy is the desire to allow difference to deepen at the base without trying to synthesize from above, to stress similar attitudes without imposing a ‘general line,’ to allow parts to coexist side by side in their singularity…(Lotringer & Marazzi, 1980:8).

Similarly, Felix Guattari, avid critic of the traditional Left, describes the Italian Autonomous movements on several occasions as being one of the critical examples where a different kind of politics was being developed and experienced. One need only return to Chapter 1 the descriptions of the meaning of Genoa where I discussed those elements that are perceived as defining the MoM and the “new” politics it seemed to hearken—difference, critical reflexivity and autonomy— to see the similarities.

Perhaps even more striking are the ways Autonomia, or the Movement of ’77, is hailed as a moment of rupture and total novelty as well. That is to say, like Genoa these are

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342 The book was reprinted in 2007 as a result of the increased popularity of these Italian traditions.

also described as “events” after which nothing will ever be the same. Does this suggest a falsity or hypocrisy? How can both the MoM and Autonomia be seen as radical ruptures with what came before, when many of the same features or characteristics are what are lauded as new? In other words if the MoM comes after Autonomia, and they are both claiming the same elements to be new, mustn’t someone be wrong? Even more interesting perhaps is that this is obviously not a matter of historical ignorance or naiveté, for often the same people speaking of the absolute novelty of the MoM are the ones who proudly refer back to the legacy of Autonomia. How do we make sense of this seeming paradox? Are people in the MoM simply claiming novelty for the sake of it? Or is something else going on?

This might seem rather banal, but at one level, the answer is quite simple. With respect to the over 500 years of Western Capitalist Modernity, both the Movement of ’77 and Genoa/MoM are relatively new. The novelties claimed or aspired to themselves seem to point to the fact that the experience of MoM is in some sense part of the same process—or movement/Movement—that began or at least crystallized around the Movement of ‘68 and then ’77. Against numerous criticisms about the historical ignorance and consequent falsity of claims to newness by many movement actors (both inside and outside Italy), one can explain the repeated claims to newness as a result of both “movements”—i.e. Autonomia and MoM—belonging within one larger/longer process, one that can be termed “Post-Political.”

An important response to this would be that millions of people have been living despite or against capitalism for centuries. As a friend of mine who works with an indigenous community in Paraguay said when I first started describing this “new” political imaginary, “What is it with European activists, did they finally take their blinders off!? Indigenous communities have been describing similar things for decades.” (Blaser, personal conversation 2005.) The answer here has to be an acknowledged yes, but recognizing that this critique has reached people in Italy, the US, and all over “modern” spaces, is still novel, if not in terms of content, then in terms of reach.
Post-Marxist, Post-Liberal, or Post Modern. Here again the concepts of the problem-space, or problematic are very useful. The movements in both periods are addressing the problem of the failure of not only Capitalism, but of previous approaches and frameworks within which a critique of Capitalism was both thought and practiced. This also explains why the qualities that are lauded are so similar; the problems they are a response to are largely the same—even if in different stages of visibility or presence. I listed several of these problems in the last part of Chapter 1.

This in turn points to something very crucial that I also discussed in the first chapter. These similar features and the emergence of a new political imaginary are themselves premised on an analysis that understands the problem as far larger and deeper than politics, understood as government, or even the economy. It is an analysis based on recognizing that beyond macro-institutional and economic systems, culture and micro-politics form the terrain in which hegemonies of the current economic and political regimes maintain themselves. This means that the dominance of these systems is both manifested in and dependent upon various cultural elements, including subjectivity, social institutions and social relations, the unspoken rules that govern the micro-practices of daily life, as well as cultural logics such as progress, individualism, and identity. Successful strategies of resistance must confront not only the political-institutional and economic manifestations of neo-liberal capitalist

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345 It is notable, and I hope to return to this later, that the entire sub-discipline known as Social Movement Studies, as well as many others, were basically founded on the debate over the truth or falsity of the novelty of the “new social movements”—a term/concept coined by Alberto Melucci to refer to those movements that appeared around 1968, breaking the hegemony of the workers’ movement as THE central and privileged movement. While the arguments about how new the new social movements were in some sense particular to the emergence of the term, coined by Melucci in 1994, in many ways the debates about novelty are relevant again today as people like the Italian activist-intellectuals I speak with, but also many more, once again put on the mantle of New. While I am intrigued by what this mantle does, and that is in a sense what I will continue to discuss in this chapter, I think that how aggressively people seek to disprove the truth of the novelty claim, as if its truth, rather than the work it does, is what is at stake, is equally interesting. (See Lilley interview of Turbulence Collective, 2010).
globalization, but simultaneously the foundational cultural logics and the everyday practices and social relations that both constitute, produce, and make the dominance of these systems possible. This is especially important because these logics and practices all too often manifest themselves among organizations that call themselves progressive – including many movement organizations, and certainly the traditional Left. The conception of history as linear and progressive, as well as the notion that there is one certain path to revolution, are both examples of how these logics persist.

To engage in effective struggle requires radically challenging not only a current economic or political system, but enacting, sustaining and cultivating other ways of being. However, rethinking and remaking the ways people are and do in the world is a tremendous task, one that requires a great deal of time and space for elaborating, experimenting and even failing at times. Rather than dismiss the apparent repetitions as products of historical ignorance, it might be more helpful to see them as attempts to take these practices farther, aware of the limitations of past attempts, but optimistic about the possibilities that trying again, differently, might bring.

This speaks to another issue with respect to novelty. As Luca and others pointed out, Autonomia itself often faltered, or was critiqued precisely for its inability to deal with the problems of hierarchy, hegemony and difference (especially in terms of women) in Autonomia. This problem repeats itself with MoM.\textsuperscript{346} It is very important to appreciate that the recognition and promotion of a new political imaginary does not mean its automatic assimilation and actual social transformation. This then also explains why Italy was so receptive to Zapatismo and the cultural politics of the GJSM. It was not simply due to the

\textsuperscript{346} I have written about the “gender problem” in the Italian movement in Osterweil 2005, 2007, and a forthcoming essay called “Becoming-Woman.”
brilliance and aptness of their content. Rather, the discourses and practices posited by Zapatismo etc. were so effective at mobilizing in Italy precisely because they resonated with sensibilities, knowleges and experiences that were already there. In other words the ground had already been set in terms of many of the questions, crises and experiments already emergent in material Italian networks and the political imaginaries and theoretical-practices they were involved in producing. Moreover, that which was already there was also the critique of dominant politics and the political imaginary developed in and beyond Autonomia, not only in theoretical traditions like Operaismo, but in myriad cultural experiments, including social centers, publishing houses, and counter-cultures. In addition there were the innovations and changes brought about by technological advances and global connectedness, on the one hand, but also by the lessons, cultural practices and ideals and more intensive engagements with the problems and legacies of Autonomia, often in analytical texts, spaces etc, on the other. These included in particular more intensive understandings of the meaning and value of the partiality of any view or subject position, and the importance of radical ontological difference.

Perhaps rather obviously, this implies that claims to novelty pre-suppose, or at least should have, some relation to the past, even a conscious use and engagement with that past. This might also suggest that the presence of historical knowledge, as well as narratives and stories about the importance of that past in Italy helps to explain the force and popularity of the MoM. Notably, the Zapatistas, or more specifically the way they are interpreted and put into discourse, speak volumes to the interesting way in which past and present periods of movement connect, and the ways in which claims to novelty are themselves dependent upon a certain kind of historical relationality. The Zapatistas seem to be quite aware of this when
they state, “We will walk then the same path of history, but we will not repeat it; we are from before, yes, but we are new.” Inherent in the Zapatista valorization and use of history, then, is a double-movement: on the one hand a recognition of their connection to diverse past and diverse revolutionary efforts and that they are part of a long, enduring path, with tumultuous curves and twists, and the continuous and inevitable production of new realities along this path that gives one the possibility and necessity of being new. In this way of seeing things, repetition is not a real risk or possibility, because the subjects walking the path are necessarily constituted by all the sediment, cultural, technological and otherwise left behind, and by the difference of the present: the possibility of this time, this place, maybe, getting it right – or at least doing it better. (For as some philosophers and the Zapatistas remind us, what we call repetition can only exist with the constitutive and generative presence of difference.)

This also leads us to another way of responding to question about why both Autonomia and MoM claim novelty. This other way takes us to a more ontological plane, to questions about the nature of being, change and transformation—those things to which movements are so committed. If we go to this more ontological level, recalling as well descriptions about the MoM as an event, and about movements/Movements being about remaking our ways of living and being in the world, we could claim that both Movements (Autonomia and MoM) come with claims to newness because novelty is a constituent or necessary characteristic of movements, or more precisely, Movements. In this sense, novelty is more of a dynamic, or function that by definition directly opposes and challenges inertia and teleology, in particular at the level of subjects, knowledges, practices, and desires. Here we return to Deleuze’s distinction between the “becoming revolutionary,” and “the
revolution,” or molecular revolution as opposed to traditional militancy.

Within Italy, however, the category Movement is currently constituted by multiple and somewhat contradictory political logics and cultures. For on the one hand the efforts at “getting the m/Movement right” can be, and is at times, within a teleological logic; however, such efforts can also be interpreted and produce the effect of encouraging constant critique, problematization and renewal.

Concluding thoughts: A ‘future at our backs’? ‘A flash’? revolution?

The tension here between a logic and political culture based on teleology and an eschatological or messianic vision of the revolution to come, and a logic of multiplicity, emergence and becoming in which there is no such thing as a final endpoint like a revolution, is played out in the subjectivities and lives of those who theorize and struggle for this new political logic and modality, but are products and subject of the former culture. For changing ways of being and knowing are tremendously difficult tasks not achieved by simple volition. However this tension is also played out in a more complicated terrain of the “not yet.” As I described in the last chapter, the very discourse of Movement, and the phrasing “movement of movements” hints at this tension. At times, Italian activists narrate and imagine this history as singular and continuous, as Il Movimento (The Movement) Il Movimento has a long tumultuous yet continuous past, characterized by moments of lesser and greater visibility, changes and revolutions, such that each period of heightened mobilization is an iteration of THE Movement, rather than a “new” or “different” movement. This singular Movement is in many senses abstract and is not necessarily limited to Italy. It is the same road the Zapatistas walk. However it is more useful to think of that road as the articulation between movements and Movements, rather than being The Movement. The discourse of The Movement seems to contain the eschatological specter—i.e. the promise of revolution—that
characterizes many Marxist informed movements, and to which cultural difference, micro-fascisms, etc. are sacrificed. References to ’77 (and ’68 even) seem to share and participate in this messianic logic—in which history is the unfolding of a progressive story in which, in the end, there is transcendence: the revolution will be reached, while opposing it at the same time.

It is no coincidence that a phrase like “la rivoluzione che viene” (the revolution to come) is the sub-title of a book on Autonomia, published on occasion of the 30th anniversary of 1977. Similarly, when Paolo Virno cites Arendt’s “lovely phrase,” “a future at our backs,” to describe the Movement of ’77, this play with a different futurity emerges,

The movement of ’77 constitutes (to use Hanna Arendt’s beautiful expression) a “future at our backs,” the remembrance of a potential class struggle that may take place in the next phase, a future history (Virno, 1996: 243).

There is even an entire book entitled Future Anteriore. Published in 2003, the book is written by three young scholar-activists who studied with Romano Alquati, the father of conricerca. The book consists of nearly 300 pages of analyses of over 58 interviews of 1970s militants that the authors conducted over two years. As the book’s subtitle, Dai “Quaderni rossi” ai movimenti globali: ricchezze e limiti dell’operaismo italiano (From “Quaderni rossi” to the global movements: the wealth and limits of Italian operaismo) suggests, the analyses are done with the express belief that making sense of Autonomia has everything to do with making sense of the present movements, and their political prospects. The question then becomes, how does both the good and the bad of the past relate to the present?

Returning us to the ontological plane of the ruptural quality of Movement, how does this quality that is, as Nietzsche would say, non-historical relate our understanding of how futures

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349 The book also comes with a DVD with the transcripts of a majority of the interviews.
Sylvere Lotringer (2007) asserts:

.... I was trying to draw the attention of the American Left, which still believed in Eurocommunism, to the fate of Autonomia. The survival of the last politically creative movement in the West was at stake, but no one in the United States seemed to realize that, or be willing to listen. Put together as events in Italy were unfolding, the Autonomia issue—which has no equivalent in Italy, or anywhere for that matter--arrived too late, but it remains an energizing account of a movement that disappeared without bearing a trace, but with a big future still ahead of it. (Lotringer 2007emphasis mine).

The sense of the Movement of ’77 as that almost revolution also has other possible readings that are somewhat more compatible with the new political logic and imaginary accompanying descriptions of both Autonomia and MoM. For world-renowned theorist, psychiatrist and philosopher Felix Guattari, who spent time in Bologna during the 1970s, the movements of the 1970s hold elements that speak far beyond their particular times and places:

Since no revolutionary war machine is at present available and there is no way to get a good grip on reality, the collective subjectivity is so to speak, tripping: from time to time it has the “flashes.” It sees things, and then it stops. There was the autonomist movement in Italy… and then we pass on to other things. But it’s all going to come back. All these flashes don’t mean that there is a total incoherence in the subjectivity but simply that an effort to is being made to perceive something which is not yet registered, inscribed, identified. I believe that the forces which today rally around the peace movement are the same which, in other phases will rally around the ecologist movement, around regionalist movements, around ex numbers of components of what I call the molecular revolution. What I mean by that is not a cult of spontaneity or whatever, only the effort not to miss anything that would help rebuild a new kind of struggle, a new kind of society (Guattari 1996:90).

Or similarly as a group of Italian activists wrote within a longer letter circulated after the 3rd European Social Forum:

There are no shortcuts and if there are they are only ‘table tricks.’ There is
only experimentation as method and substance of the "becoming-movement”
(“Is it cause I am cool?” 2004).

The ways in which The Movement, the connections between 1977, the MoM and the discourse of Movement are used lead us to different readings of the effects of these historicized narratives. On the one hand, there is the more rational notion of Movement as a space where stories, theories and practices are developed both to offer better readings of the present and to serve as innovative sites for generating new “better” practices. However this role of movement/Movements as the place where we come to a better knowledge of, or learn how to come closer to, a better politics can itself be related to the ongoing presence and background of the political culture and theoretical culture of Marxism (even if heretical). In that culture figuring out the natural progression of history, how history should go, inevitably means going to the revolution. A large part of the problem with this is that coming up with better knowledge towards that final endpoint often neglects or purposefully avoids the problems that arise in the here and now, also avoiding the complexities and messiness of the everyday in favor of neat new slogans and order words that sound good, but efface internal hypocrisies and oppressions. However, if figuring out how to get movement/Movement right presumes that we will always find more questions, problems, complexities and see this as the very stuff that makes true movement/Movement; this in turn resonates with the concept of becoming. It also sheds new light on Agamben’s suggestion to consider the movement as that which one must presume is if it isn’t, and isn’t when it is. In effect, the not yet of movement needn’t be the not yet of the revolution, and again it is that fine line that the discourse of movement/Movement works.

In this chapter I have addressed the surprising presence of narratives about Autonomia and the Movement of ’77 in descriptions of the MoM. I have argued that the presence of these discourses speaks to the very important connections between the two periods—connections that we can find in the cultural and infrastructural background of Italy, the submerged networks of practices, spaces,
people and ideas. Here, movements are seen as key tools in order to achieve a “better” politics. This better politics is in turn a response to the failure of past movements on their own terms and a critique of the categories and theories of politics as we know them. The movement/Movements discourse walks a fine line between being the promise of a revolution, as promised by the false science of a certain historicist Marxism, and the replacement of that political logic with one characterized more consistently by the logics of becoming, emergence and the “not yet”.
Chapter 5. Theoretical-Practice: Enacting Politics Differently

Knowledge is simply knowledge. But the control of knowledge, that is politics.’ This phrase by Bruce Sterling from Chaos USA can be efficiently used to synthesize the practice of co-research (*conricerca*). In as much as it is an activity of transformation of the present, a place of socialization and counter-cooperation of activists, co-research is the ensemble—constitutively an ensemble—of the production of other knowledges and the experimentation of practices and organizational models. To be brief: as much as research without the “co” is a sociological story with precarious means, “co” without research leads us to a sterile ideological production (Borio, Pozzi and Roggero 2002: 1).

Thinking is a paradox, not because it is simple disobedience or negation of orthodoxy, but because if thinking has any force or distinction it has to work against inertia. If a body were only to connect with what allowed it to remain relatively stable and self contained—in image of the autopoetic system that takes only what it can master and assimilate—then the power of life for change and creation would be stalled or exhausted by self-involved life forms that lived in order to remain the same. Colebrook 2005: 5.

Introduction

Throughout the previous chapters I have been pointing out the ways in which the MoM (and *movements/Movements* more broadly) function as spaces for getting movement right, or for figuring out how and what a “better” political modality would be. Key to this understanding of *movement/Movement* and the MoM have been the actual practices involved in producing theory and knowledge to this end, as well as the more ongoing and virtual understanding of the concept of movement as the site where different kinds of politics are elaborated. Recall the zines, journals, books, debates, public seminars and discussions characterizing the MoM; the numerous networks and practices characterizing movements in
the 1960s and 1970s, as well as those connecting both periods. Moreover I argued that these various efforts at arriving at a better politics are themselves related to several tensions between “old” and “new” political modalities, which in turn relate both to underlying cultural logics and the sedimented practices in organizations and individuals involved in enacting these. In this chapter I address these by introducing the term theoretical-practice as a way of making sense of both the function and quality of many of these aspects of the MoM I have already described.

In the course of the chapter, I will argue that theoretical-practices, an ensemble of knowledge and communicational practices, as well as their forms, are central material practices of the MoM. Not only are these practices key to characterizing what the movement is and does, they are also indicative of how to understand the MoM’s political aims and effects, and they are an important part of why the MoM is deemed novel. Theoretical-practice should be understood as an overarching characteristic of the new political modality and imaginary overall.

I will define the term theoretical-practice extensively in Part I of this chapter. At the outset it is important to understand that to argue that the MoM is largely constituted by theoretical-practices refers to—at least two things: first it is an argument about particular practices that are theoretical in nature, and second, it is a claim that the nature of MoM’s practices overall can increasingly be described as theoretical. In addition we should recognize a few basic premises about the term, theoretical-practice, as I use it. First theoretical-practices are material practices. By this I mean theoretical-practices are something done by particular actors in movements, as well as by movements understood as discursive entities. Activists and movements produce texts, develop theories, pose
hypotheses, and pursue and produce knowledge about the political and social context.

Second, when we understand movements as spaces for getting politics right, we can also recognize movements as *theoretical in function or impact*. They pose problems to that which is considered politics, and then experiment with alternative possibilities, revising as the experiment works out in practice. Finally, theoretical-practice also refers to a quality or mode of engagement, one that privileges reflectivity, critique and uncertainty as bases for (political) action. Against forms of knowing implicit in traditional forms of movement practice, especially those found among the traditional or Marxist left, theoretical-practice offers both a response and perhaps an anecdote to the current crisis of politics. This crisis in politics does not simply apply to Marxism, but also to the increasingly polemical and anti-political modalities in Western representative democracies,\(^\text{350}\) forms of politics based on rigid, dogmatic, formulaic certainties, moralisms and party-lines, on the one hand, and an inability to reconcile theoretical descriptions or desires with lived practice, on the other. The three levels or kinds of theoretical-practice I described above relate to, produce and depend on a different conception and modality of politics, one that is micro-political.

At a theoretical level this chapter works from three claims. First, it is important to recognize that social movements are knowledge-producers, a move which is itself a significant departure from traditional social scientific approaches that have difficulty seeing empirical “objects of study” as complex knowledge objects with recursive and reflexive capabilities.\(^\text{351}\) Second, the centrality of knowledge production must be understood as

\(^{350}\) See Mouffe 2002 for more of a description of how what passes as politics today is increasingly moral and juridical and therefore inimical to democratic politics.

\(^{351}\) See Casas Cortes et al 2008; Casas Cortes 2009; Osterweil 2007. There is work to be done in Anthropology in particular in terms of the epistemological, ontological and methodological challenges posited by increasingly complex objects of study that are themselves involved in producing theories and knowledges about themselves and the world which in turn alters them and the world under study. For more on this see Knor Cetina 2001.
fundamentally affecting the political impacts and stakes of movements. And third, we must see that key to political modalities past and present have been their epistemological frameworks, and in particular, those frameworks’ ability to cope with empirical reality and the messiness of practice.

**Chapter Outline**

Part I of the chapter offers a somewhat schematic explanation of the term *theoretical-practice* as I intend to develop it, situating the argument in relation to some of the examples and arguments encountered in previous chapters. Part II is organized around one event that points to multiple forms of theoretical-practice that constitute the daily practices and artifacts of MoM. This event points to 1) the fact that we can read the event as a moment of reflexive, analytical and investigative practice much like the seminars I described in previous chapters; 2) the event reiterates the importance of texts and other explicit forms of knowledge production to the MoM; and 3) finally, the event demonstrates how activists themselves recognize the ways different epistemologies are related to different forms of political actions and political imaginaries. In particular the final part of this section points to the key critique of ideological dogmatisms and “the party line” that goes hand in hand with critiques of politics past, and the need for the forms of theoretical-practice I see as nascent in the MoM.

Critical to all of these instantiations of theoretical-practice is recognizing that different forms of knowing correspond to different modes of political action, as well as different understandings of the sites and subjects of politics. In the final part of the chapter, I further delineate the ways in which different conceptions or uses of knowledge relate to distinct political modalities and describe how the new epistemology, what can be called an
“epistemology of unfixity,” depends on and cultivates autonomy and multiplicity and is therefore at the heart of the new political imaginary I introduced in Chapter 1.

5.1 Why Speak of Theoretical Practice? Epistemologies, Politics, and Subjectivities

It is nothing new to suggest that intellectual work is a central and key part of social movements and emancipatory politics more broadly. From Gramsci to Foucault, from party vanguards to feminist consciousness raising groups, the role of the intellectual and of diverse forms of knowledge have been critical to making sense of politics and power—both from the perspective of maintaining order, and from that of overturning it and gaining freedom. The contribution of philosophy to social change has been a very important and provocative issue within myriad theoretical schools; Marxism is no exception. Similarly, there is nothing unique about the claim that movements have always been involved with the use and production of theories. Clearly, there can be no social or political projects without ideas, analysis, communication, culture and various forms of theoretical elaboration and understanding with which to strategize, set objectives, etc. Many of the most important social and political theories, especially those affiliated with the now vast body of work developed within and against Marxism, feminism, and other theoretico-political schools, have developed precisely in the course of debate and elaboration among political actors, either in social movements or political parties. (For example Luxembourg, Trotsky, Lenin, are referred to for their political and theoretical contributions. In addition, consider the ongoing development of feminist movements, anti-colonial movements, civil rights movements, etc.: each have been characterized by ongoing debates, many related to theory, as well as different

352 Gramsci 1971; Foucault 1977, Haraway 1991; Varela 1999; see Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Conway 2004. I don’t mean to reinforce a simplistic dichotomy between order and freedom/spontaneity or organization, but use it here rather schematically because the dualism is instructive at least for thinking with.
and often conflicting theories of social change and the “good society”).

The philosophy/action; theory/practice nexus has continuously been one of the most elusive, yet productive problematics facing diverse philosophers and political theorists, as well as social scientists of various ilk. However, there is relatively little empirical research focused on this nexus of knowledge production and social change as material sites and practices or as the material practices of social movements. Recently a few authors have begun writing about social movements as knowledge producers. In their seminal text, *Social Movements a Cognitive Approach*, Eyerman and Jamison speak about movements as cognitive practitioners, producing diverse forms of knowledge that can be separated into different categories or functions: the cosmological, technological, and organizational dimensions. Janet Conway puts it even more directly when she says,

"Social movements produce knowledge. Through their everyday practices of survival, resistance, and solidarity, progressive social movements are producing new and distinct knowledges about the world as it is and as it might be, and how to produce conditions of possibility for other possible futures. Movement based knowledge is largely tacit, practical and unsystematized. It is partial and situated, grounded in activist practice, arising from concrete engagement in social struggle, and embedded in specific times and places (Conway 2007:1)."

Without engaging with the particulars of these descriptions, I will state that this chapter builds on the trend of recognizing movements as knowledge producers. However, besides recognizing that movements produce knowledge, here I make a distinct argument with respect to the political implications of the kinds of knowledge produced, pursued and embodied by participants in the MoM. Moreover, I argue that a key reason that recognizing

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353 Although there is a call to change this, and a few works that are already bucking the trend. See Conway 2004; 2006; Escobar 2008; Chesters and Welsh 2005, 2006; Casas Cortes 2009, Powell forthcoming. For a more thorough literature review see Casas Cortes et al 2008.

movements as knowledge producers is important is itself based on a recognition that forms of knowing and theorizing are themselves intricately linked to forms of doing politics (political modalities), the imaginaries that underpin them and ways of being in the world. The failure to recognize the numerous ways in which the intellectual and theoretical function of movements, classically conceived, are interconnected with forms of being and action, has contributed to the perpetuation and even entrenchment of “old political modalities.”

This chapter is organized around the argument that a key innovation in the MoM is the centrality of work done at the nexus of theory and practice—where by nexus, I do not mean a simple coming together of distinct things, but a recognition of the ways they are and must be understood as inextricably linked. As one feminist activist I spoke with put it, “As feminism has taught me, the particular matters, and theory and practice if they don’t go together, don’t go anywhere!” This nexus is and has always been important to projects for social change. However I argue that the increasing centrality of theoretical and knowledge-practices—specifically practices that are themselves committed to critical, open-ended and partial understandings of theory and knowledge, and as such contribute to a politics carried out at the level of critical subjects, knowledges and forms of practice—is key to the emergence of the “new” political modality. It is also key to making sense of, and potentially resolving or addressing the tensions and contradictions between the new and old political modalities (and imaginaries) I have been pointing to throughout this dissertation.

Consider once again the Zapatista movement. In many ways its contributions to theory, as well as its theorization of a new epistemology, were a large part of what made, and makes, it so resonant. In various interviews and essays since 2001, many Italian activists point to a fundamental shift in the political culture and approach that characterized extra-

355 Interview with feminist activist, Bologna November 2007.
parliamentary action in Italy. They describe a move away from a culture and tradition of universal and formulaic political paradigms with strict notions about the necessary role of the vanguard, the revolutionary class, the seizure of power, etc, to a more humble approach, --a humble approach in which they recognize themselves, “not as the vanguard, but one part.” They state that this shift is in part epistemological, and they attribute it, in large part, to the influence of the Zapatistas, they refer especially to one of their most cited slogans, in Spanish, “caminar preguntando” (to walk while questioning), which I will discuss now. Notably, they also refer to feminism.

The Zapatista concept “caminar preguntando” which Italians used repeatedly to explain their own political practice—it was the title of at least one book and one dissertation about the MoM—is itself a critical example of theoretical practice. The concept’s emergence is quite instructive. Caminar preguntando was itself a product of cultural “clashes” between urban guerillas and indigenous communities in Mexico’s Southeast as the urban guerillas tried to bring their Marxist visions of social change to one of the poorest regions in the country. Rather than convince the indigenous that the guerillas (who were more educated, whiter, etc.) held the recipe for revolution and an end to poverty, the dissidents learned through listening and engaging that the indigenous communities had their own systems of knowledge and worldviews that were intelligent and “good” in their own right. As Mignolo and Schiwy describe it in an insightful article on the Zapatista practice of translation:

Marcos explains that the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary organization encountered a reality that could not be explained by Western concepts. The organization therefore realized that it needed to ‘listen’: ‘The [new] EZLN was born from the very moment that it realized that there is a new reality for which it has no answer and to which it subordinates itself to be able to survive. (Marcos 1997: 149)’

See Revelli 2004; but also various interviews, 2002.
Marcos calls the moment when these two cultures come together a choque, a clash. But rather than a moment in time, this clash produces a space of contact and conflict wherein translation takes place. The EZLN notices that it needs to learn rather than teach. A space opens up where knowledge flows from the Mayan indigenous communities into the thinking of Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 22).

Both parties, but perhaps most notably the Guerrillas who had not originally even been aware of the “need” for translation and an exchange of knowledges, learned that working with, rather than in spite of or against difference could actually be quite productive. However it required letting go of some the certainty or authority which each thought they had in terms of “knowing” the “Truth” or right way forward.

This resonated greatly in Italy where, as I discussed in the last chapter, ideological clashes and factionalism were common. Whereas in the past organizations might have proceeded thinking they already “knew” what should happen—so that if others didn’t follow it was a matter of false consciousness or apathy—during the MoM there was a move and claim to having less pretensions to such certainty. On numerous occasions people cited the Zapatista insight about the partiality of any one subject position as a key part of what made Zapatismo so influential.  

Recall the poignant quotation I referred to in the introduction:

Zapatismo in a sense resituates all of a series of classical polarities of the 20th century challenging precisely their polarity: Reform/Revolution; Vanguard/Class; Seizing Power/Classical Reformism; Violence/Non-Violence. In some form the Zapatistas kill these polarities. And above all this performs a grand “squat” of the imagination, in which I am the vanguard, but I am not—rather I am just one part, not the only one, not the best…(Leading Bolognese social center activist interview November 2002, Bologna, emphasis mine.)

The entire process of organizing the massive protests against the G8 through the Genoa
Social Forum, involving more “radical” groups from social centers to more mainstream NGOs and Catholic associations, was one of the first examples and experiences of such an insight in action, pointing not only to a new epistemology, but to the almost requisite presence of difference to the enactment of that new political modality.

We will return to concrete examples and the centrality of difference to theoretical-practice in the subsequent sections in this chapter. For now I want to point to the various levels at which we can see theoretical-practice in the example above: 1) the evasion or critique of hegemonic or dogmatic ways of thinking was seen as critical to developing a “better politics”; 2) this critique itself had to do with the theoretical function of movements—i.e. in reading the Zapatista movement, Italians re-read, rethink and re-envision the nature and purpose of their own practices, something they had been unable to do in the “void” between Autonomia and the 1990s; and finally, 3) the nature of the Zapatista epistemology and subsequent practice has to do with a partial, situated and dynamic notion of knowledge and theory—as opposed to universal, formulaic and static. At the same time, this evasion did not result in less desire to speak, research or produce knowledge, culture and information, but instead corresponded to search for different ways of knowing, which in turn both depended on and implied different kinds of subjects that are, move and know differently in the world.

A first element of this chapter is simply to point to the fact that intellectual work, or knowledge production, and even more specifically theoretical-practice, is key to what the MoM, and potentially social movements more broadly, are and do.\footnote{I have begun to describe this centrality in other chapters in which I have pointed to the pivotal nature of intellectual and communicational work for the continuity, infrastructure and very existence of...} I refer to this as one form of knowledge-practice, which I do not deny here, but am referring to theoretical-practice as a more specific subset of knowledge-practice.
the discourse of movement/Movement. I have also pointed to the importance of reflexive questions and analyses about the very nature and purpose of movement. A second element in this chapter is to argue that certain ways of knowing are themselves linked to certain ways of acting, organizing and pursuing social change. This leads to the second argument. Within the MoM the nature of the relationship between knowledge and practice, or rather theory and practice, tends towards a particular kind, leading to what I describe as a particularly theoretical nature of practices, which are in turn central to the raison d’être of the MoM. Again, this is an argument both about the increasing presence and centrality of a set of concrete practices we can call theoretical, and a larger argument that the overall nature or quality of MoM’s practices are theoretical, or have a theoretical function.

In what follows I define this term rather schematically and at a rather abstract level. In subsequent sections I will work to show how this notion of theoretical-practice is lived in the daily life of the MoM.

Theoretical-Practice and the New Political Modality

I began to use term “theoretical-practice” after encountering it in texts and conversations with activist-intellectuals involved in the Italian MoM. The first place I saw it phrased as such—pratica teorica—was in the editorial to one of the three widely read Derive Approdi journals dedicated to the cycle of global movements known as the MoM.359 In this 2004 article the journal’s editors point to a current lack in theoretical capacity adequate to the radical message coming from Seattle. They write:

359 According to most people I spoke with, Derive Approdi was the most widely read and discussed journal in the movement Left in the 1990s. However in 2004 there was actually a great deal of disagreement within the editorial board about the new cycle of journals that had emerged about the MoM and GJSM (Issues: 22-24). Moreover several interviewees described the recent issues as having been overly academic and inaccessible. Interestingly, DA became somewhat well known outside of Italy as a result of these three issues.
The urgency of today… is the expansion of theoretical practice, a continuous research that does not look either to linearly prefigure remote futures, nor to resurrect un-reproposable pasts, but to interrogate the present in order to transform it (Derive Approdi Editors, 2003-2004: 3).360

Clearly referencing Marx’s now infamous 11th thesis in the Theses on Feurbach—“philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”---the assertion seemed a very apt way to make sense of many of the practices I had been observing within the MoM. Not only does the MoM locate itself both within and against Marxism, it also seemed to suggest avenues for understanding the tensions between what I have described as the “old” and “new” political modalities, somewhat differently.

In this chapter I use the term theoretical-practice in multiple senses that play on the ambiguity of the pairing of the terms “theoretical” and “practice.” The term is hyphenated in order to emphasize this relationship. On the one hand the term stresses that the work of making and using theory is a practice; that is, it is something movements do. On the other, “theoretical” is an adjective or quality describing the nature of the practice and politics done and/or aspired to. These two modes themselves function at multiple levels and are often, though not always, co-constitutive. Key to this argument is understanding that it is not simply that Italian activist networks do intellectual and analytical work in order to further their more central political aims (although at times this is the case). Rather a form of reflexive, critical, creative and thought-based practice is part of the ends, or among the sought-after outcomes of the movement. Notably, this is itself a vision of ends as inseparable or equivalent to means. In the first sense intellectual work is seen as instrumental, the means for achieving other, more important, ends. In the second, a core set of actions and practices that value and are constituted by critical, investigative, reflexive and thoughtful forms are seen as part and

360 First circulated as a pamphlet at the European Social Forum in Paris, October 2003.
parcel of the “new” politics they are working to create. This in turn is dependent on recognizing that older forms of politics were themselves dependent on different forms of knowing, and different understandings of the relationship of knowledge to social change, modes that tended to be dogmatic, ideologically closed, and un-reflexive.

All movements have theoretical and epistemological frameworks according to which they move, choose actions, strategies, tactics etc., and all movements at some level fulfill and require an intellectual function. However this chapter highlights the differences between the intellectual function classically conceived, and what I argue is the differently central role of thought and theory understood as much as a method and ethos as a practice—exhibited by the MoM. Of concern here is the recognition that a key aspect of what movements do is not only intellectual, but theoretical.

Traditional or classical notions of intellectual work, in relation to movements, usually taken from Gramsci, inhere a particular vision or imaginary of the political. Typically associated with the vanguard, the party, and a directive role, Gramscian understandings of the intellectual see the role of knowledge as finding synthesis—i.e. to synthesize the desires of the masses and hence find a point of unification in order to construct a hegemonic bloc. This role of knowledge and intellectual work, while present in the MoM, is in tension with the new political imaginary and its valorization of multiplicity and difference, and its weariness of the impositions of unity/synthesis, which it sees as part and parcel of the problem of the “old” political modality. One of the important points of departure of this chapter is precisely the fact that we must recognize that a key part of the “old” political modality or imaginary that the MoM is trying to work against is maintained (or perpetuated) in large part because of

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361 This is very clearly a simplified overly schematic treatment of Gramsci’s category of the intellectual. I actually find a lot of nuance in Gramsci’s own categories, but these have often been missed by the political movements that have used them.
its sedimentation and rootedness in the political organizations and systems and in the very ways of knowing, thinking and being underpinning these. The State-logic, the party form, what activists call *politica politicizata* or the official politics—by which they refer to the politics of right and left alike—are both implicitly and explicitly comprised of ways of knowing and of using knowledge for politics that impede other ways of being and acting from emerging.

I argue that the MoM has other conceptions of what the role of theory, analysis and knowledge should be, and that this in turn has consequences for its very way of defining “the political.” While the MoM is inconsistent in its use of the forms of theoretical-practice I describe, I would argue that theoretical-practice functions as an important horizon and part of the imaginary to which the MoM both aspires and already works to bring into being. To sum up: theoretical-practice can be understood both as a practice, or a set of practices—some resembling traditional conceptions of theory and knowledge production, while others looking very different; but it can also be defined as a quality or adjective that characterizes the purpose and nature of MoM’s practices overall. Moreover it does so at multiple levels—i.e the nature of practices, the kinds of subjectivities and the kinds of knowledge produced. Finally, theoretical also implies an aspiration not just to any knowledge, but to “good,” or even “better” knowledge, while simultaneously critiquing and refuting traditional standards of “truth” and verification in favor of partial, situated, embodied and local knowledges.

In what follows I elaborate on each of these definitions of theoretical practice.

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*I recognize that I am asking theoretical-practice to do a great deal of work, and that most of the practices I will describe as characterizing theoretical-practice can be understood and analyzed differently as well. My point here is not to offer a definitive new solution to the problem of the political and the new political imaginary, but to show how inextricably linked modes of thinking and knowing are to forms of being and doing, with respect to political action as well. Given that a key line of argument has been that the MoM is working with an expanded visions of what counts as politics, in which subjects are key, this centrality is very consequential.*
Theoretical Practice: As Practice

In the first case of theoretical-practice as a thing or practice movements do, my argument is that movements work to produce and create new and better theories and analyses of social change, as well as understandings of their own actions and the worlds and systems against which they are either building or struggling. This corresponds to a rather standard definition of theory as an adequate description of reality that enables more effective practice.

In an essay entitled, “Social Theory as Practice,” Charles Taylor defines theory and then distinguishes between pre-theoretical and theoretical understandings.

Social theory arises when we try to formulate explicitly what we are doing, describe the activity which is central to a practice, and articulate the norms which are essential to it.

Theories do not just [make] explicit our constitutive self-understandings but extend, or criticize or even challenge them. It is in this sense that theory makes a claim to tell us what is really going on, to show us the real, hitherto unidentified course of events.

Pre-theoretical formulations are like those in myth and ritual. ..Without which we would be incapable of acting together….But with certain advances in culture… we feel the need to submit our discourse of self-understanding to the special disciplines of objectivity, rigour, respect for truth which are constitutive of the activity we know as theorizing (Taylor 1983:4).

Taylor’s definitions offer clear and useful starting points. However, insights from feminist, post-structural, phenomenological and STS approaches on the nature of knowledge, truth and objectivity—i.e. that knowledges are partial, situated, embodied and dynamic—challenge his vision of the Truth and scientificity. These insights are equally crucial to making sense of the theoretical-practices of the MoM. When I say better or more effective with respect to MoM’s practices, this is itself a complicated matter having as much to do
with affect or resonance as accuracy.\textsuperscript{363} As we shall see while not empiricist in the traditional sense, theoretical-practice does inhere a certain notion of empiricism, in that it is based on a commitment to interaction with the world as a basis for knowledge, and that not all knowledges are equally “good”. We can begin with Charles Taylor’s definition of good or correct theory, because it does not depend on a correspondence or essentialist notion of verification but is committed to a form of empirical rigor nonetheless. He describes a good theory as one that “brings our practices into the clear, that its adoption makes possible what in some senses is a more effective practice…good theory enables practice to become less stumbling and more clairvoyant” (Taylor 1983 15-16). But again, redefining what constitutes good knowledge is itself key to what theoretical-practice is.

This theoretical-practice, as practice, is done in various forms including through the writing and reading of texts, but also orally, publicly, and even in more intimate forms of conversation and reflection. In this sense the theoretical-practice of the MoM resembles at least in overall purpose and form the work of “traditional” theorists or intellectuals, including academics. There are heated debates on the role of knowledge, intellectuals and academia, even among these more “traditional” intellectuals. Broadly speaking, dominant positivist conceptions see the aim of knowledge as revealing or explaining the single truth and reality of one world “out there.” In this approach, there is a clear and univocal notion of correspondence between the knowledge that is produced by the academic and the “real world.” However, there are increasing critiques of such representational and positivist forms of realism and empiricism in favor of conceptions of knowledge as always situated, partial, and embodied. Such critiques therefore refute the notion of there being one universally valid

or appropriate knowledge or truth that can accurately represent a world out there;\textsuperscript{364} this however does not mean there are not “better” knowledges, or better descriptions of the world. There is a great deal of debate with respect to the political role of knowledge. For analytical purposes we can distinguish between those who see the intellectual function as serving a synthesizing or unifying role to help construct a hegemonic bloc (cf Gramsci) from someone whose role is far more specific, local and related to a notion of permanent critique and problematization (cf Foucault) and the creation of concepts and thought, for their generative and productive rather than directive capacities (cf Deleuze; Strathern and Stengers). These different notions of the political role of intellectuals and of knowledge and the intellectual are very much alive and in tension within the MoM, and in fact, while these tensions are not explicitly articulated, they are key to understanding the new political modality—as well as the perpetuation of the old.

Beyond these very crucial similarities between academic and activist knowledges and theories, there are also differences, or tendencies towards certain differences, between the work of traditional theorists and philosophers and the production of theories by activists and movements. I would however argue that these differences are less stark than they might first appear. In a comprehensive article on this matter, Cox and Barker discuss the differences between academic and activists forms of theorizing. They note that, “Activist theorizing ... produces a strange reflection –‘as in a camera obscura’—of itself in academia. On the face of it, the language is often almost identical. But things that are \textit{said} in that language, and the kinds of conversations that take place, are very alien to its usage at home” (Barker and Cox 2001). This strange reflection and of itself does not make one better and another worse, simply different. Moreover, the multiple mediums in and through which the theoretical-

\textsuperscript{364} Haraway 1991.
practice is done—from diverse forms of texts ranging from books, to zines, to listserves, to meetings, seminars, and late-night conversation, are generally more varied than standard academic formats of books, journal articles and conference papers. The situated and practice inflected nature of their theories also makes them qualitatively different from more abstract or external theories, often the kinds typified by professional intellectuals or academics. This difference is due in part to the temporality of the theoretical-practice of movements: movements are not thinking, analyzing and theorizing about something that might be applicable at some future date, often with the assumption that such a pure intellectual endeavor lends a status of purity and objectivism to their practice. Rather, they are always theorizing with a purpose and the more immediate aim of impacting practice themselves.365 Barker and Cox argue that rather than think of movement knowledge as categorically distinct from academic theory, its dialogical and active nature is what distinguishes it. By active and dialogic they mean movement knowledges are actively involved in conversations, and these conversations have a political purpose. In this sense activist theories can be said to be somewhat messier, and their validity is judged by more their usefulness, and how and if they “take” than how accurate they are. However, as STS and other critiques of Science point out, scientific knowledge is itself rather messy, always dealing with a certain amount of noise, and its truth also depends on processes of enrolment, articulation, etc.366 Academic theories are also involved in conversations, certainly different conversations with different temporalities, and different standards of worth, but many are also political in intention and

365 This purpose might be to create space for silence, thinking, rumination, much like Stenger’s argument about the need for thinking in a cosmopolitics. Knowledge-for need not imply a simplistic leap to action without time for thought, in fact assumptions about the kinds of actions movements take as being clearer, and less ambiguous than academic critical action is itself not necessarily true. See Stengers 2005.

366 According to Latour 1988, this is actually true for all knowledge, even scientific knowledge. As such the difference may be one more of visibility and temporality than a real difference in kind.
nature. While I recognize the sentiment and analytical point of distinguishing between these kinds of knowledge and theoretical practices, in many ways this argument about theoretical practice requires that we complicate our ideas about the forms of knowledge movements use and need and simultaneously recognize that academic knowledges are themselves involved or potentially involved in political conversations and projects. Arguments about the constitutive differences between activist and academic knowledges have more to do with the domination of certain kinds of academic (and activist) practices than anything inherent to these sites.

Theory as a creative and disruptive moment of practice


Figure 6. San Precario. figure invented by Milan MayDay anti-precarity activists. Example of ironic theoretical-practice. Image from temporaryculture.wordpress.com, no copyright.

The projectual, or for-something nature of theory produced by movements and activists, doesn’t always look or sound like theory as we might expect. I would argue that one of the main roles of movements is to introduce an element or function of the theoretical into society by

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367 Many of the traditions I have cited, especially cultural studies, were constituted as political projects.

368 I have written about this in the form of a critique of the stark distinction between academic knowledge and activist knowledge.
disrupting practice-as-usual, habitus, or even larger worldviews. By this I mean that movements work to destabilize common-sense and hegemonic assumptions, and reveal new problematics. Often they do this through actions and practices that seem to have little to do with what we could traditionally classify as “theoretical” or intellectual production, working more at the level of imaginaries. These non theoretical, theoretical-practices range from new modalities of protest — such as when the Tute Bianche wore padding and confronted the police, withstanding their physical blows, without engaging in violence themselves to illustrate the challenges to democracy — to experimental interventions in daily life and the city, such as the self-reduction of supermarket prices performed as a rite to San Precario, or the occupation of an abandoned space simply to create a laboratory for re-imagining the city, as with a temporary squat in the center of Bologna in 2004.

While not the only way to read these practices— theoretical-practice does not exhaust the meaning or impact of these practices— when they are seen as having a theoretical function, direct actions and practical interventions take on a new standard of effectiveness. It becomes clear that they are not meant to achieve “actual” or immediate changes such as a permanent reduction in prices or the creation of public spaces in the city as a direct result of the action. Rather, they become part of an extended theoretical or experimental moment in which the object is to test out or make visible the possibilities of new arrangements or imaginaries of the social. Success, then, is achieved by impacting people’s imaginations and desires: making the possibility of imagining “other worlds” possible, rather than creating immediate or actual transformations in the present.

369 For a good example of the “theoretical” and productive interpretation of the Tute Bianche, see http://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/outtakes/monaco.html

370 San Precario was a figure invented by the Chainworkers to both make fun of and intercept the public to draw attention to the conditions of both laborers and consumers in chain-stores, including supermarkets. [see images above and more at: http://temporaryculture.wordpress.com/san-precario2/]
This works at multiple levels ranging from engagements with “the public” as in the examples above to work for activists themselves. For movements become spaces/sites where activists individually, and more often collectively, experiment with different practices and lifestyles, sometimes temporarily as in counter-summit villages, and other times longer-term, as in living in intentional communities, cooperatives, non-monogamous families, etc. More often than not this function of movements as opening up or revealing new problematics involves a feedback loop between more performative or theatrical practices such as direct actions as well as more logocentric or traditional reflection, analysis and theorizing. The concept “theoretical-practice” is meant not only to recognize an important function of social movements, but also to underscore that theoretical-practices need not be limited to written or rationally articulated practices.

That being said, the theoretical nature of these practices does imply or go hand in hand with a form of empiricism that is in turn committed to a certain commitment to “good or better” knowledge. However this is not a classical form of naïve realism or positivist empiricism. Rather it is premised on the partial, temporary, and local nature of “good knowledge,” in some cases even objectivity, when objectivity is seen to be defined not by total certainty or domination of an object of knowledge, but “in the politics and epistemology of partial [situated] perspectives”—i.e one in which science fiction and myths can also be described as good forms of

371 See Daro 2009.

372 See Chapter 3 for description of movement as opening problematics, see also Free Association 2007.

373 Chesters and Welsh 2005 have described this recursive relationship as “retrodictive sense-making” (183), arguing that it is particular to the alter-globalization movement, and a direct result of its particular relationship to new communications technologies, such as the internet. The practice of reading, circulating readings and then having a consensual interpretation that gives new or richer meaning to a practice was a fascinating process to watch.
This is in turn similar to Foucault’s arguments about the superiority of local knowledges and an aspiration to a historico-critical-attitude, or “critical ontologies of ourselves” (Foucault 1984: 46). While Foucault is less interested in deriving a new objectivity, he is very committed to local criticism, the subsequent theoretical production, and what some have termed a new empiricism or realism, in which what is at stake are not multiple views of one world or reality, but multiple, radically contingent realities. In this vein, theoretical-practice is committed to empirical rigor and reflexivity, which means that it does not remain at the level of postulates and hypotheses, but rather is informed and ideally revised by experience and practice. When activists experiment with creating autonomous, or self-managed spaces, they continuously evaluate how these are working according to their readings and theorizations of both the problem and their expected outcome, asking whether they need to be modified, and if so, how. The failure to note, or address, the inconsistencies between desired and theorized outcome and the actual outcome has been one of the key problems of politics past, and remains a key criticism of parts of the Italian MoM. As one female activist put it with respect to the Disobbedienti with whom she was involved for several years, “I liked what they said, but I didn’t like the way they did [what they said].” She also describes how when she began to critique these inconsistencies rather than invoke interest and efforts at renewal, she was marginalized.

When I say that theoretical must also be understood as an adjective, something that qualifies practice, I am referring to a set of qualities that I denote as being of or pertaining to theoretical understood as a modality and method. There are several ways, related but not

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374 As Haraway also puts it, “our problem is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own semiotic technologies’ for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world... a successor science project and a postmodern insistence on irreducible difference and radical multiplicity of local knowledges.” (ibid 187)

synonymous, that something can be theoretical in quality. As I use the term it is closely related to critical, thoughtful, reflexive, investigative, experimental and creative. It is also meant to suggest some commitment to “better” knowledge. However, as I mentioned above, this better knowledge privileges experience, situatedness, partiality, connectedness and articulations, rather than accuracy or Truth. If we recall the example of Uninomade described in Chapter 3 (the initiative within which Agamben’s speech takes place), the founders’ description of this nomad university very clearly articulates such a notion of better knowledge, a knowledge they assert is better by defining it as “theoretical and political” and differentiating it from both the classical University and the MoM. While these authors distinguish this from the smugness of the kind of knowledge that “tends to characterize the MoM,” the Uninomade is itself part of the MoM, such that the critique is about a trend or tendency they are working to counter, and is itself an enactment of a critical and reflexive practice.

While theoretical as a term is invested in notions of better knowledge, theoretical-practice is wary of science’s pretensions to universality and total authority. As knowledge claims, in fact, theories inhere a certain recognition of uncertainty and fallibility—otherwise they would be posited as axioms and rules rather than theories. Theoretical as adjective also connotes uncertainty and partiality. Although traditional conceptions of theory are linked to a level of abstraction and generality, insights from feminism, post-structuralism (especially Foucauldian), and Science and Technology Studies challenge the assumptions that knowledge and theory necessarily require certainty, generality and abstractness. There is a growing recognition that there is no such thing as a globally or universally valid theory, so whereas partiality, specificity and locatedness used to be seen as enemies of theory’s
aspirations to generalizability, today they are the requirements for many knowledge claims, especially those interested in remedying problems of theories past.\footnote{I do recognize that this is within a small corner of the academy. However the confluence of science studies, feminist, and other forms of post-structural theory around this is a significant matter.} Relatedly, the notion of politics and knowledge implied with this understanding of theoretical itself stresses the ongoing processual and becoming nature of movement knowledge and actions. I am speaking of theoretical as an adjective to connote critical, reflexive, thoughtful—i.e. the ability to put one’s practice not only into question, but under continuous reflexive scrutiny or analysis—and at another level, as experimental, investigative, and concerned with the ways in which the description engages or affects things. These adjectives apply to many movement practices taken overall, the particular ways of knowing and doing that both groups and individuals use, as well as the way in which individuals learn to know and think. Critical to the notion of theoretical-practice as an adjective is recognizing that the ways in which cultivating subjects who know, think and act differently, critically, with uncertainty and with ambiguity are an important realm of theoretical practice.

**Fulfilling a theoretical lack**

Finally, as an adjective, *theoretical* is also meant to emphasize a need for “new” or more adequate theories and theoretical frameworks to address the paucity and inadequacy of the current categories and frameworks as well as of those past. Critical to the meaning of the term, then, both in terms of how I deploy it and how I understand others’ use of it, is the key fact that older theoretical frameworks used by the Left, in particular Marxism,\footnote{Here it is important to recognize that Marxism, while distinct from Liberalism, is itself a very Modernist, helogo-, Euro- and Phallo-centric theory. While many of the movements I am describing see themselves as working to revise Marxism, these movements resonate with those working in a post-Liberal problematic as well} are no
longer sufficient. There is not time here to review all the shortcomings of Marxism, or the problem of politics tout court. As I described in Chapter 1, we can summarize at least three central problems of Marxism as being: 1) an inability to deal with diversity and the refusal by "real-life" subjects to follow the historicist blueprint of the proletariat revolution. This inability was manifest in the proliferation of sites of social struggles within Europe, and the critique and secession of many feminists, and of course, the problem of organizing across cultural and geographic differences. 2) The problem of (constituted) power and hierarchy that tended to affect militant or activist groups as much as institional groups such as political parties, unions and the government. And finally 3) an inability to deal with the inconsistencies between the analyses and theories movements moved according to, and what happens in actuality. These are related but distinct from the crisis of the political writ large that includes an increasing tendency towards moralism, religiosity and polemicism, and the acute absence of substantive differences between positions. This stands in strong contrast to politics understood as taking decisions in undecidable or agonistic terrains.378

I start from the premise that the current problems or crises of politics stem at least in part from the lack of adequate theoretical and conceptual frameworks.379 As Agamben writes,

If politics today seem to be going through a protracted eclipse … that is so because it has lost sight of its own ontological status, it has failed to confront the transformations that gradually have emptied out its categories and concepts (Agamben 2000: ix).

Or similarly according to Guattari,

How do we regain control of such an auto-deconstructive and potentially

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catastrophic situation?... Although Marx’s own writings still have great value, Marxist discourse has lost its value. It is up to the protagonists of social liberation to remodel the theoretical references so as to illuminate a possible escape route out of contemporary history, which is more nightmarish than ever (Guattari 2000: 43-44).

Both of these statements not only name the problem of the inadequacy of theory today, they also point to the importance of creating new concepts or theoretical references. The call of a new theoretical-practice by the Derive Approdi editors echoes this as well. Here, Guattari even goes so far as to argue that it must be “protagonists of social liberation” who develop better frameworks. Both Guattari and Agamben recognize the ontological nature of politics as a key to this inadequacy. Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that the MoM is defined in large part as a response to the outdated political modalities of the 20th century, and as certain activists put it, serve as “the only possible antibody” or antidote to the “crisis of the Political.” The notion of theoretical-practice also refers to this aspect of what the MoM does.

One could add to this an argument that a constitutive aspect of these emptied or inadequate categories is the fact that the problem of politics has itself not been thoroughly understood. Both Guattari—although not in this excerpt—and Agamben recognize that people have failed to understand that politics is in large part a question of ontology or ways of being in the world, which I argue is intimately linked to ways of knowing and doing. In fact, at least some of the reasons for Marxism’s failures are that it shares certain key attributes and premises with Capitalism and Liberalism, in particular its participation in and with mechanisms of representation. Euro- and logo-centrism, a fundamentally progressivist and teleological view of history, and the modern individual subject, are all aspects of Marxism, and all are supported by and involved in supporting what Heidegger calls
representational thinking.\textsuperscript{380}

The failures or inadequacies of extant theoretical approaches, this “lack of theory” or lack of theoretical-practice, can be thought of on an even more basic level. That is, that there is a lack of theorizing or thinking within the political common-sense, people are too busy following the inertia or habitus of their activist practice, as well as dealing with daily exigencies, to stop to think.\textsuperscript{381} In other words there is a paucity of moments of rupture, what we may define as \textit{Movement}, or in this case as thought which can interrupt the usual.\textsuperscript{382} In this sense the “new” centrality of theoretical-practice corresponds to the fact that for a time those working for movement had (and have) been paralyzed, often proceeding as if from inertia, or habitus.\textsuperscript{383} This movement by inertia or habitus stands in contrast to thoughtful action where thought is understood as a moment of disruption and creation, or as sensitive and reflexive/reflective wherein the ways specific contexts and events change and unfold over time, are taken into account. This explains the excitement about Genoa and the MoM among Italian activists, not only for their particular content, their precise objectives or outcomes, but as a re-introduction of the \textit{possibility of politics}. Theoretical-practice suggests a theoretical mode of political practice in which thought, or an ‘ethics of thinking,’ are central, in which thinking can be understood to take place both collectively and individually.\textsuperscript{384} This then is

\textsuperscript{380} Tormey 2006; Mignolo 2007; Escobar 2007.

\textsuperscript{381} See Deleuze on the opposite of thought as inertia, see initial quote this chapter.

\textsuperscript{382} I am not trying to accuse individual activists of being “stupid” or not thinking individually, but rather I am speaking at a more general level of the effects, or supposed effects of the end of history thesis. In many ways social centers and other things were actually working to create new ideas and practices for social change, but these were not visible or articulated at a more mass scale until the MoM.

\textsuperscript{383} Bourdieu 1977, See also Crossley 2002 on movement habitus.

\textsuperscript{384} See Gibson-Graham 2006; Connolly 2002; Deleuze 1988: 100. Gustavo Esteva also contrasts autonomy to heteronomy, and ontonomy in similar ways as doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy (lecture, March 2009, UNC Chapel Hill.)
linked to a notion of politics, or more specifically to an autonomous politics, as requiring and inhering thought—i.e. thinking-doing, rather than just doing. This thinking-doing in turn requires and implies work on the level of subjectivity. This role of thought also relates back to the role or aspiration to novelty seen in the last chapter, as well as the function of *Movements*. For as ‘events,’ or moments of rupture, movements introduce the novel through provoking thought—an important micro-political form of intervention, on the one hand, and the possibility of autonomy on the other.\(^{385}\)

The inextricable link between forms of knowing and being, and their relation to political action is a crucial part of theoretical-practice and the new political modality and imaginary of which it is a crucial part. As I will imply throughout this chapter, this in turn requires that we understand both politics and knowledge to relate to different kinds of subjectivities, and to recognize subjectivities as the most probable sites of ethical transformative action. It is also at the level of subjectivities that we can begin to imagine the resolution, or potential engagement with the inevitable gaps and tensions between theory and practice, that can also be understood as the gap between the old and new political modality.

As Gibson-Graham, picking up on Connolly, Foucault and Varela, put it:

> To cultivate new attitudes and practices of thinking, is to cultivate a new relation to the world and its always hidden possibilities (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxix).

> The co-implicated process of changing the self/thinking/world is what we identify as an ethical practice. If politics is a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions in an undecidable terrain, ethics is the continual exercising, in the face of the need to decide, of a choice to be/act/think a certain way (ibid: xxviii).

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\(^{385}\) “While thought runs the risk of assimilating everything new into old habits, or old readings (Connolly 2002:65), thought as a moment of creative agency, creates difference.” Gibson-Graham 2006: xxxii.
This, building on Foucault, requires tools of “ethical self-cultivation,” and a recognition that such an ethical practice is inextricably linked to thought, or thoughtful action, and for Foucault, to the “undefined work of freedom.” Foucault’s depiction of the historico-critical attitude, or limit-attitude, is itself very affine with the notion of theoretical-practice at the level of political subjects I am referring to with respect to the MoM.

But if we are not to settle for the empty dream of freedom, it seems to me that the historico-critical attitude must also be an experimental one. I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up realms of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take. This means that the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. In fact we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions.

... I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings (Foucault 1984: 46-47).

**Theory/Practice: that impossible nexus**

In researching the phrasing “theoretical practice” further, I found that it was often considered an Althusserian concept. For Althusser, theoretical practice refers to the knowledge necessary for political action, but also inheres a strong critique of empiricism.

He criticizes French workers’ movements for lacking theory, and for too often acting

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386 See Foucault 1984: 46.

387 Foucault 1984: 45. This in turn resonates strongly with Guattari’s recognition of the multiple levels at which the ecosophic or molecular revolution must work. See Guattari 2000; 1996; Deleuze and Guattari 1987.

388 Such as those embodied by notions of the revolution.

389 “Althusser”: [http://www.filosofico.net/althusser.htm](http://www.filosofico.net/althusser.htm).
politically without being anchored in a theory. However, he also speaks of philosophy as the “theory of theoretical practice,” opening up a possibility for recognizing philosophy and thinking as material practices, on the one hand, and those material practices as the kernel that philosophy must grapple with and is constrained by, on the other.\textsuperscript{390} As Jason Read explains it:

[Althusser] writes that “practice is what philosophy, throughout its history, has never been able to incorporate. Practice is that other thing, on the basis of which it is possible not only to knock philosophy off balance, but also to begin to see clearly into the interior of philosophy” ... At its most ambitious, the idea of theoretical practice suggests not only a materialist redefinition of philosophy in terms of its conditions and its effects, but the idea that one can only understand the transformative effects of philosophy if one first sees it as conditioned (Read, 2007: 503).

Arguing against the reigning treatment of Marxism as an empiricist science, Althusser maintains that Marxist philosophy did away with a correspondence notion of empiricist knowledge (cf above). Philosophy or the theory of theoretical practice was productive and creative. Rather than revealing a truth about empirical reality, its ultimate effect was to produce concepts and descriptions. In other words the production of concepts and descriptions was not representational but creative.

Precise genealogies or etymologies aside, for I did not actually settle on the terms theoretical-practice out of any genealogical reasoning,\textsuperscript{391} the idealist vs materialist dualism has characterized some of the most heated and important debates within Marxism, as well as Post-Marxism, Post-Structuralism and other schools of thought. Thought, philosophy,

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{390} See Read 2007.
\textsuperscript{391} While I did not pick the term based on its genealogy and admittedly only found Althusser’s usage ex-post-facto, at the very least Althusser’s use of the term, which some have read as being indebted as much to Spinoza as it is to Marx is noteworthy because Negri and others affiliated with Operaismo also “turn to Spinoza” following reaching the limits of certain Marxisms (cf Read 2007). It also speaks to the ways theoretical traditions can be re-read and re-interpreted.
\end{footnotes}
knowledge and theory have been some of the most difficult, at times even paradoxical issues for theorists committed to materialist understandings of reality as well as to understanding mechanisms of social and political change. Returning to Marx’s famous eleventh thesis in the *Theses of Feuerbach*, while seemingly straightforward, the statement is actually a brilliant enactment of the paradox at hand. Marx seems to posit a stark distinction between philosophy and practice—i.e. action for social change. The ironic part is that it is well known that his own work as a philosopher was very much done in order to both act in and change the world.\footnote{In Deleuze’s book on Foucault he also notes how the relationship between thought and action were always haunting Foucault (Deleuze 1986: 116).} This tension and seeming contradiction—between language and action, ideas and practice—points to the complex, yet rich node or nexus in which the term theoretical-practice resides.

In many ways the tensions I have been pointing to throughout the dissertation, while certainly defined by several key differences in terms of political modalities, in particular with respect to the three features I have repeatedly highlighted, can also be thought of as pointing to inconsistencies between theory and practice.\footnote{This separation is itself merely analytical, as in reality it is impossible to separate neatly between something called theory and something called practice, because theory is itself a form of practice, and most practices are guided by some theories, even if often these theories are tacit and relatively invisible.} That is to say we can think of this as the gap between theory understood as the idea or notion of a better politics—with its desired qualities, in turn based on critiques of past politics—and the perpetuation of the old modality that continues to be lived out in practice, and that cannot be willed away despite the supposed efficacy or superiority of the “new” theory.\footnote{While this is clearly a simplification, it does speak to one of the key questions that seemed to linger at the end of my project: why the articulated desire for and belief in this new political modality and imaginary was not successful at being lived out in practice. On numerous occasions, as I have described in previous chapters, the failure of the MoM was more about the failure of articulating this new understanding of politics to everyday life.} However, it is the fact that within the MoM and
the GJSM more broadly we can see the beginnings of a recognition not only of the importance of epistemologies for political practice, but of different possible ways of knowing, which are in turn linked to ways of being and doing.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to enter into debates or trace the full genealogy of the role of philosophy in social change, nor of philosophers’ own understandings of that role. However, my purpose in choosing this hyphenated binomial has to do with the ways it allows us to understand this nexus as key to politics and to movements. In addition it was to stress the fact that movements work and struggle with and at this intersection, precisely because theorizing practice and practicing theory is key to working for social change, and for creating new worlds. Finally, this binomial emphasizes the ways the new political imaginary and modality depend on a fundamental shift not only in what we traditionally see as political, but in our modes of thinking/knowing/being/doing. Theoretical-practice is a key practice and quality of the “political anti-body” and new imaginary posited, by the MoM—at least according to its own self-descriptions.

Leaving the land of assertions, I will return us now to the MoM in the aim of demonstrating how thoroughly imbued with examples and aspects of theoretical-practice it is. We could also return to many of the examples I have pointed to throughout the dissertation and describe them now as forms of, or characterized by, theoretical-practice.

5.2 New Political Subjects, the Genoa Generation, and Competing forms of knowledge

In this section I describe a panel and discussion that took place in October 2007 which demonstrates many of the aspects of theoretical-practice I described above: 1)
theoretical-practice as a material practice done in public spaces such as a seminar, as well as in texts to arrive at a better reading of the present; 2) theoretical-practice as a question about forms of understanding or theorizing the nature of the political and modes of intervention and action appropriate to the moment; and 3) as a site where tensions between different political modalities and the desire to create a different kind of politics play themselves out and reveal their close relationship to different epistemologies.

I begin by describing the panel including its nature and context. As a public seminar reviewing and reflecting upon the MoM in 2007, the seminar itself is an example of theoretical-practice. Next I describe the intervention of one of seven speakers that highlights the centrality of texts to the MoM, and begins to point to the tension between the textual as a moment of opening thought, and as a form of imposing new blueprints and formulas. I briefly leave the site of the discussion to evaluate the role of texts more broadly and show the ways they are key to multiple levels of theoretical practice. Next, I return to the workshop, this time to the final discussion that in tone and content points to a notion of a new epistemology linked to an autonomous political modality. I conclude the section by discussing the ways ideological dogmatism and an imposition of a party-line remain key obstacles to the coherent enactment of the new political modality, within numerous movement organizations and spaces.

**Context: Festa della Sinistra and the “problem” of the party form**

In September of 2007, I was asked by a long-time acquaintance to serve as moderator of a panel about the Genoa generation. The panel was titled, “*Genova per noi* (Genoa for us): New forms of civil commitment and political militancy in the individual trajectories from the
Genoa generation.” According to its convener, its purpose was:

To call upon people to describe their own experiences of politicization (avvicinamento alla politica—getting close to politics), all those subjects that have undertaken paths of political militancy in ways that are heterodoxic with respect to the classical trajectories of militancy of the 20th century. I am referring to all those individuals, that, even without belonging in a stable or organic way to any party or group, in these years have invaded the streets and plazas of the country through the most disparate initiatives: from the battle against GMOs to the secularity of the state, from the refusal of the war to the contestation of the supranational organizations that lacked any form of democratic mandate (WTO, IMF, OECD, etc), from the struggle against (alla) precarity to the defense of the environment.

It will be very interesting to listen and understand the reasons of those who in these years had mobilized for such initiatives, and how after Genoa, they lived their individual paths. Where did all those people who were at Genoa end up? All those people who perhaps undertook life courses that were very different from those who instead continued upon paths of more classical militancy? And at the same time, after Genoa, how many of these young people entered into political parties of the institutional Left? How many in the union? And of those who worked in the dozens of organizations that were part of the movement, have they remained in some way [politically] committed or have they taken refuge in the private sphere? These are some of the questions that can orient the discussion, that in any case should be centered around the personal stories, individual histories of those who did movement in these years. (Proposal for seminar, personal email Sept 28 2007).

As Simone the convener, explained it, he had asked me to coordinate the panel because of my extensive research on Italy’s MoM, and especially because I had conducted so many interviews with individuals involved in diverse ways with this movement. Like other seminars I have described, this one was not meant as a sociological or academic assessment of the generation of Genoa. Rather, it was a space to reflect and evaluate where the movement and “its” generation were vis a vis the development of a “new left” six years after the massive protest. As I will also describe, the initiative it was part of, a three day Festa della Sinistra (see below) was not easily defined as a movement space because of its interest

395 At the time of this panel the 2007 march (La Storia Siamo Noi) that I described in Chapter 1 had not yet happened, nor had the 25 protestors been sentenced.
in forging a “new political subject” at the national level, one with more interest in parliamentary politics. In fact it was probably not classified by the press or majority of Italians as being within the rubric of the MoM; however, part of the reason I have chosen to write about what might be seen as a rather mundane event was that while “subject” here refers to the more macro-scale of the political party, the panel also exhibited how central the production of new subjectivities or political subjects at the level of individuals is to the politics elaborated by the MoM.

To begin with I received the invitation with a bit of surprise, but I was also admittedly excited by the opportunity. In all the years I had been working in Italy I had never been asked to actively chair or lead any discussion, and despite my known role as researcher I had never been looked upon as any form of “expert.” I was also intrigued because in this last year of my research I had actually begun asking, as one of my research questions, how different actors changed or didn’t change their practice and conception of political involvement, and of movement, since Genoa. Ironically, Simone had already invited all of the speakers and sent out the proposal, so there really wasn’t much for me to do.

The panel was part of a three-day event called the “Festa Della Sinistra”—translated literally as “Party (or celebration) of the Left.” While not sponsored by a political party, it definitely fit within a long tradition of working class or neighborhood feste (parties),

396 This is notable if only for the fact that, while many anthropologists write about their participant observation, or observant participation, as if it were a matter of choice, one which THEY choose, my position for many years was rather limited to observer, at least in public spaces. In many ways I think this had something to do with my gender. This is not the case for my research and work with the GJSM outside of Italy where I tended to have a more active role. It was only in this final year that through a number of unexpected events, I was able, and even forced, to take on a more active role—that is one in which I can consider myself, and was perceived to be a protagonist. Besides this benign case, as well as another instance when I served as a translator for a rather high profile speaker, in the last few weeks of my stay I ended up being part of a rather nasty fight between feminist critics of one of the main social centers in Bologna, and the center itself and my role as anthropologist was questioned. While some ethnographers of social movements in particular tend to presume a simple role for the anthropologist willing to help, my experience with the MoM raises serious questions about this, questions and episodes upon which I would like to reflect on in future writing.
historically organized by the PCI or trade unions. This festa (party) was itself part of a local initiative, La prima casa a sinistra, (Literally: the first house to the left) attempting to create “a new political subject of the Left.” The initiative was self described as a “laboratory” for “those who feel orphaned by the left,” and was founded as a space for “disillusioned leftists” by some of the people associated with the MoM in Bologna, to construct a new political subject to the Left of all current parties and coalitions. This local effort was itself related to myriad national endeavors to construct such a political entity for the tens of thousands completely disaffected by the available political options. More specifically these initiatives were trying to compete with and contest the Partita Democratica, a new Center Left party/coalition founded by Walter Veltroni, longtime mayor of Rome.

Six years after Genoa, initiatives like the Sinistra Arcobalena, and their odd relationship to a larger space previously occupied by the MoM, spoke to the diversity the MoM had once held, to how fragmented it had become, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, to how the problem of creating another kind of politics was subject of diverse traditions and entities. Many who still saw themselves as part of movements, and even still identified with the MoM, were very critical of local and national initiatives like the Prima Casa or Sinistra Arcobaleno, respectively. They saw them as too concerned with

397 Kertzer 1990. Neighborhood parties are a time honored and ongoing tradition of political parties, in particular the Communist party as this was part of their patrimony of involving the working class culturally as well as politically. Typically such a party goes on for several days, with several speakers, music and food. The kitchen is run by party members, and often this means being waited on by old compagnos, and the food always running out!


399 The Prima Casa can in many ways be seen as a local counterpart of the national Sinistra Arcobaleno (Rainbow Left) a national coalition that sought to unite the traditional left with the peace and green movements/political forces in Italy.
traditional institutional politics in both form and content. On the other hand, the group of individuals who had founded the *Prima Casa* had all been very active in the MoM, and in the Bologna Social Forum in particular. This initiative, then, shared with the MoM a critique of current and past politics, but the Prima Casa was based on the rationale that there needed to be some form of “real” “political” unification and engagement in institutional politics to keep the Left from becoming politically obsolete. A key question or problem raised then is precisely one of how to be politically effective outside the party-form.

The speakers on the panel were of mixed minds about Prima Casa, but all were relatively sympathetic if not actively involved (it is probably fair to say that no one fully opposed or not slightly interested would have attended). Situating this initiative politically then is no simple matter, and points to the complex, multi-leveled, and factional nature of political reality in Italy. As already mentioned, the Italian political scene, movement and institutional alike, are quite labyrinthine. In particular explaining the relationships between particular movement areas with other movement areas, and then with political parties or politicians.

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400 They also viewed them as too sympathetic to the Rifondazione that had betrayed the movements by supporting many government policies that it and the movement had been against in the years prior (the national budget [Finanziario] and the war in Iraq and Afghanistan were particularly sore issues).

401 [http://www.societacivilebologna.it/gruppo_cons/iniziative/07/altra_casa_sx_200207.htm](http://www.societacivilebologna.it/gruppo_cons/iniziative/07/altra_casa_sx_200207.htm); ZIC 2007, accessed May 2009. The BSF was one of the largest and reputed to be one of the most effective Social Forums in Italy. At its height it saw the participation of up to 500 people, and it stayed somewhat functional after many other local forums had fragmented.

402 It is beyond the scope of this chapter and this dissertation to adequately explain this process but in 2006-2007 there was a national effort to create a subject that was unitary, plural, of the rainbow (a term for combining red and green and the peace movement), and outside the traditional political class of the current political parties. On October 20, 2007, over 150,000 people went to a protest in Rome as part of this other political subject demanding change and for a new politics that respected multiple modalities of acting politically, but nonetheless presented a unified front on a number of issues, including the increasing precaritization of Labor. The march was clearly critical of the then Center Left Government, but many communists and others considered part of the *popolo della sinistra* –the people of the left---and therefore of the culture of the political Left participated, including independent Communist Newspaper and Journal *Il Manifesto* and *Carta*. The nature of this event and this entire process especially as it was interpreted by the MoM, is itself interesting and perhaps another chapter/research could be dedicated to it. However in this chapter it is more a piece of background to help give some depth of context to the seminar I am about to describe in greater detail. For more see: [http://20ottobre.gcpalermo.it/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=37](http://20ottobre.gcpalermo.it/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=37)
coalitions is quite complex. This is in part because they are quite dynamic—that is they shift a great deal, internally and externally. But also, unlike many other autonomist movements, the Italians have never completely abandoned the sphere of institutional politics, theoretically, strategically or ideologically.\textsuperscript{403} The Disobbedienti in Venice and Padova had actually won a few seats and substantial voting power by harnessing the movement’s power to the Green Party in 2001 and 2002. Moreover several people from the MoM have run for office in Milan, Bologna, Rome, and as I already mentioned, around 2006 several prominent movement spokespeople ran and were elected to Parliament in the Rifondazione party.\textsuperscript{404}

However, in general, since the heyday of the MoM, there was less intermingling or participation among movement areas—in particular there were tensions about relationships that broached, or brought up in some way the relationship to the Rifondazione and trade unions. There are many reasons for this; these varied by locality, and some had more to do with personal and personality disputes than political or ideological disagreements. Yet there were some key points of conflict. One had to do with the difference in analysis of precarity. While the Rifondazione and trade unions treated it as a problem and condition to be fixed by a return to the 40-hour work week with contracts for indeterminate lengths, another approach more associated with social centers and autonomist politics saw a need for a more radical re-conceptualization of labor in an increasingly immaterial and dynamic scenario of production.\textsuperscript{405} In addition, was the tendency by Center-Left parties in power to follow a politics of “securitization” in which they explicitly or tacitly support increased

\textsuperscript{403} For a thorough discussion of this see Trott forthcoming.

\textsuperscript{404} Some see this as a strength while others as a contradiction. There is very clearly a difference between those who joined the party when it was gaining power and those who used parties as an extension of movement tactics, however this line is hard to draw.

\textsuperscript{405} See Casas Cortes 2009; Greenpepper 2004; Chaincrew 2001, chainworkers.org.
criminalization and control of activist and counter-cultural practices, along with immigrants, hooligans and other “counter” or “sub”-cultural figures. This was done moreover without serious protest, and at times with cooperation from, Rifondazione. In Bologna these securitization practices by a center Left government impacted heavily on movement spaces and the city overall. From 2004, with the election of former CGIL general secretary Sergio Cofferatti, who ran against Conservative Guazzaloca with substantial support from the movement left, the city had been transformed from a socially liberal city to a more policed and sanitized space. Every year there were new laws seeking to “clean up” the city including of unkempt youth, students drinking in public, immigrants, and numerous others. Arrests were more common, and social spaces were under heightened vigilance. There was also an increase in public and visible organizations by Fascists, usually against immigrants, and in particular against Muslims.

In 2007 there were many events on the national scene that competed with the MoM for a critique of politics as usual, in particular populist initiatives like “V-day” led by comedian Beppe Grillo. On Sept. 10th, 2007, just a few weeks before this panel, comedian-turned-populist politician Beppe Grillo used his blog to launch an initiative called V-Day, or vafancullo (go fuck yourself) day, in reference to the corrupt and unaccountable politicians. This included a tour with a petition and overall expression of extreme discontent with the political status quo. His internet-launched and led effort to quell political corruption and demand accountability ultimately involved millions throughout Italy—including 50,000 people in Bologna who filled Piazza Maggiore on Sept. 10th when he came to speak. Quite notably most of these people were not considered part of the movement Left and were from

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406 Bologna is known for its accessible public services and active youth nightlife, hence many runaways and drug users populate its streets and plazas.
all parts of the political spectrum. This simultaneously shocked and compelled the interest of some of those on the Left. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to thoroughly explain the complicated (and shifting) political landscape, with local and national variations here. However describing the Grillo phenomenon is meant to point to the fact that the critique of politics as usual was very widespread, suggesting either competitors or potential adherents to the MoM’s own ideas and practices.

Moreover, I have spent some time situating the Festa della Sinistra itself to illustrate how difficult it is to classify this event politically. For in many ways the Festa was more of a party-politics type space and event, especially in its orientation towards developing a new political subject that can contend at the level of parliamentary politics. However, many of the participants in the panel I was chairing would have defined themselves as more committed or interested in Movement. In the course of the panel, different definitions of politics and political cultures became visible, reiterating this subtle and difficult to explain, but often more easy to sense (in the visceral or affective sense), difference—a difference between a politics of movement and of more traditional politics, what Roberto Bui called “ politicized politics.” For intimately tied to the central role that knowledge and theory play is precisely this question, or problem, of the relationship to institutions, and in particular to the tension between organization and spontaneity, or social and political articulation. At the same time, this problematic does not present itself simply or as one might expect, for at the level of culture, form and tone, the division between movement and institution was not as easy to assert. Despite the fact that this event might have had more people with a political sensibility

407 See beppegrillo.it for his blog.

408 In Bologna in particular, the legacy and ubiquity of the cultural practices and infrastructures of the Communist Party affect many of the non-party movement spaces.
affine with parties and unions, the open, sincere and non-ideological nature of the discussion, where differences and weaknesses were admitted to and allowed to bounce off of each-other, drew out precisely those qualities that were noteworthy of the MoM, and even of the GJSM more broadly.

The panel’s location contributed to the ways in which the event seemed to be more of party-politics type event. It was not in a social center, but an old Dopolavoro (translated literally as “after-work”), referring to a physical place of leisure where people would go after work to get a coffee, play cards, and socialize more generally. The room itself was medium-sized, but in the course of the event most seats were filled, with about 50 people attending. Interestingly, while I knew all but two of the speakers, I didn’t recognize many people in the audience. With seven people speaking, the panel lasted over three hours, not taking into account the informal discussions that continued over dinner at the make-shift cafeteria staffed by mostly elderly Prima Casa volunteers. Despite its length, the event was fascinating; the tone, energy and content are all worth reflecting on. The invited speakers included seven people who had been intentionally invited for their distinct political backgrounds, and perhaps more importantly, distinct trajectories since Genoa. Whereas Federico had been a leader within the social center, Tute Bianche circuit and was now more or less not politically active with any group. Francesca, who had also been part of the TB, was now a leader of the Young Communists. There was also former spokesperson of the Rete Lilliput, an organization committed to non-violence, and which had been very visible and active in the MoM (they had the white painted hands in many of the most iconic photos), and who was now one of the sponsors of the larger event this panel was a part of. The guests also included a former youth leader of the PC, who had been groomed to be a party leader since his
childhood, and who shortly after Genoa, gave up his membership to the party. Notably no one currently active in social centers was there.

In what follows, I will begin by discussing the ways Federico’s autobiographic description demonstrates the centrality of the more straightforward definition of theoretical-practice. I will then leave the scene of this event to briefly discuss the role of texts. Next I will return to the final discussion of the event where a tension and struggle between two modes of knowing-doing and their political affiliations become very clear.

**Theoretical-Practice and Texts: from the Postfordist Lexicon to the insertion of Thought**

During this panel, Federico, whom I had interviewed at different intervals since beginning my research, gave a very compelling political autobiography. The excerpt that follows is a bit long, but it is worthwhile because it highlights the ways in which texts, theories and concepts, all part of the practice or work of doing movement, are so constitutive of MoM, at the levels of individuals, collectives and collectives of collectives. For me, something that was particularly interesting was the fact that after five years in which I had interviewed him on at least three occasions, and conversed with him more casually on several others, this was the first time he brought up this particular thesis about the centrality of research. Without having discussed it directly with him, I had started to write and make a similar argument exploring the centrality of research, knowledge production and theoretical-practice.⁴⁰⁹

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⁴⁰⁹ There are two relevant points to make here that point the rich, yet complicated nature of acknowledging movements as theory producers. 1) I had first written about theoretical practice with respect to the Italian movement in 2006, in a paper I presented at the Feltrinelli sponsored conference at Cortona. While it was a decidedly “academic” affair, a handful of people I knew through my research were present, although not Federico. It was in part their enthusiasm about the paper that encouraged me to continue using the term. 2) This points to the interesting ways in which academia and movements overlap, on the one hand, and the ways my “ethnographic” based analyses could have potentially fed back into the very movements I was writing about. I
Something very interesting happens in January 2001. There is a meeting at Rivolta. This meeting is where, that is in my understanding of things, where Genoa is invented (others might have their own reading of things, of course). So we have this meeting in January at Rivolta where, after there had been Seattle and a few other things, we decide that Genoa has to be an epochal appointment. Something bigger than No OCSE in Bologna—but at that time bigger meant 100,000, not 300,000, because that was unthinkable in January 2001—among which 10,000 were to do civil disobedience. This is one of three things that get delineated at that meeting.

The other two are that we must participate in the Zapatista march for indigenous dignity that will take place in March and April 2001, because we had encountered that discourse about the crisis of politics of the 20th century, thought of in terms of “taking power” on the one hand, and on the other, we discovered the paired concepts of conflict and consensus. For us social centers, this meant leaving the corners of marginality and looking to speak to many if not to everyone… The third thing that was said at that meeting, that is in many ways the most interesting of them all, because it was unthinkable… that this would be one of the three most fundamental actions of a meeting of the Movement; the publication of a book was signaled. Lessico Postfordista (The Postfordist Lexicon) was published by Feltrinelli in February 2001. That is to say, it is still a Movement meeting that signals three fundamental things for the coming year: the Zapatista march, the protest at Genoa, and the publication of a book. What did the publication of this book mean? It meant that the Postfordist Lexicon marked the state of the art of a decade of analysis about the transformations of labor, that was so sedimented in our approach, that they could come out as a lexicon, as a new grammar of the present. …I say this because then in the coming years, I will occupy myself much more with the postfordist lexicon than with movement… so for me this is very interesting in general.

He then briefly describes Genoa, explaining that he was one of the “leaders on the truck,” and then continues:

Ok and here what happens at Genoa—that I notice and then rediscover in force at the Fortalezza del Basso [ESF in Florence, November 2002]? I discover that the people next to me are a piece of the technical composition of class, in large majority, Postfordist….I know that there were all kinds of people, but the great majority… that is to say this is a movement, tendentially am not claiming they did, but it is a possibility!

410 Rivolta is the main social center in Padova, and hub of that area of social centers, those affiliated with the Carta de Milano.
of the university, very highly educated, that does work that is tendentially immaterial; and that when they do material work they do so to pay for the possibility of doing immaterial labor. In cooperation, in research, in a thousand contexts... this is what I return with from Genoa, and then again at the Fortalezza del Basso.

He goes on to note that in December of 2001 after having been to Genoa as one of the “leaders”—something he is quite sheepish about—he returns to finish his thesis on the crisis of the subordination of labor in the transition to Postfordism, with the most important chapter focused on a guaranteed basic income, which was one of the demands of the Social Centers affiliated with the Carta de Milano (see Chapter 2) that eventually formed the Tute Bianche.

He explains:

The thesis is dedicated to the Tute Bianche and it wins the award for best thesis in Labor law that year. I don’t say this to brag, because its quite obvious that this is a collective thesis in the sense that I had done my research in the context of the things that we had said in the months and three years before.. but the incredible thing is that this award that is of the most traditional academic kind that exists in Labor law, that I think before Genoa it would have been unthinkable. That is if it weren’t for the fact that a grammar had massively entered into a part of the common sense, and even in the academy recognized it… (translation mine from Italian).

At the end of his speech, he explains why eventually he breaks with the movement, or rather turns to do primarily research even though this research is on the very things the Tute Bianche had brought out:

And I will finish on this point because it has to do with the dimension of research. When it is chosen to change this thing of the Tute Bianche, that we choose to take off at Genoa, in order to dissolve, because we were insufficient with respect to something that had become even bigger... the Movement of the Disobbedienti to me seems and seemed pathetic. But pathetic from a theoretical point of view because all of the analysis about Postfordism was an analysis of the crisis of a disciplinary paradigm, the paradigm of the large 20th century disciplinary factory, that about which Foucault wrote in Discipline and Punish ...and after having studied the microphysics of power, after having studied the transition from disciplinary society to the society of control, we come out with this thing of disobedience as an identity rather than a tool!?
this point its not just a stupid tactical thing … but, it is a theoretical error, that is, how to say it, extraordinary, that betrays, and renders demented an entire theoretical analysis that was, to my mind, very interesting…. That is to say it was not the attempts at conflict and consensus, but the attempt at theoretical discourse that was beneath it, and it was that where we were trying to work, Derive Approdi from 1992, we in a small way in '97,411 Bologna massively from 2000, that is from No OCSE and on, albeit with different declinations.

There are a number of things to highlight here. First, Federico’s indication of the Postfordist Lexicon: Dictionary of ideas of the mutations as one of three things highlighted in the same meeting where the decision to invest a lot of energy in the counter-summit protest of Genoa; second, his own thesis as contributing to and benefiting from a collective research and analysis done within the context of the TB; and third, his very strong conviction that the failure of the movement is based on a theoretical error, all point to the centrality of theory and knowledge for movements. Let us also note that the end of this passage Federico himself describes the predominant function of movement as theoretical and research-based. In the course of this speech Federico highlights numerous aspects of the first level of theoretical practice I delineated above: theory and knowledge in a rather straightforward, or traditional sense, as one might imagine theory would and should be used. This includes the production, use and circulation of texts, concepts and “better knowledge” at multiple levels, as an individual, and as a collective. In this speech one sees how movements are both recipients or engagers of knowledge produced elsewhere, like the academy, as well as producers of it, both in academic spaces— Federico’s dissertation, for instance— but also in the context of developing political projects, like the Tute Bianche. Movements not only require and desire knowledge and descriptions of the present, and often work based on the belief that more

411 He explained earlier in his talk that he and a group of friends start a journal called Ban Lieu that is supported by the editors of Derive Approdi and well received.
accurate descriptions of the present will lead to better intervention and action, they also contribute to making sense of the present by researching the context and producing concepts.

For example, the *Postfordist Lexicon* was meant to put into language and text, categories and terms to describe an economy, society and politics that were undergoing substantial mutations. It is well known that analysis and deliberation are especially essential in periods of change, when our ways of knowing are insufficient. The concepts defined in this dictionary include a wide range—i.e. “transnational monetary agencies, cyborg, Lilliputian Strategy, work and language, gender, transgender”—pointing not only to how all-encompassing the transformation to Postfordism is perceived, or how far-reaching in scope relevant theoretical production is, (Federico’s linking of this economic regime with Foucault and Deleuze’s notions of disciplinary and control societies, also points to this), but to how the work of movement seeks to create and publicize new concepts for making sense of the present. The fact that the *Lexicon* was published by Feltrinelli, rather than a smaller movement publisher, also suggests an effort for wide circulation and impact, on the one hand, and the belief that there was an audience for it on the other. In many of my interviews a central part of the descriptions of the period of Genoa (and Movement more generally), includes a description of public space for the discussion of new terms, concepts and order words, which are signs of “real Movement.”

**The theoretical function of texts: analysis, problematization, and thought**

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414 This is not to suggest that Feltrinelli rarely published ‘movement texts,’ but there certainly is a difference between the publication numbers of something produced via Feltrinelli, and something produced by Derive Approdi.
While this book, the *Postfordist Lexicon*, was not mentioned in many of my other interviews, several interviewees did describe books and texts as being key moments of their politicization and their understanding of the movement of Genoa. I was pointed to *Empire* by Hardt and Negri, *Insurgencies* by Negri, *Grammar of the Multitude* by Virno, *Capitale e linguaggio* by Marazzi, *Diritto di Fuga* by Mezzadra as well as older books within the Operaista tradition. People also recommended books by non-Italians such as Naomi Klein, Jeremy Rifkin and others.\(^{415}\) In addition to these, of which in particular the Italian texts, despite their important theoretical contributions, were not as accessible to a wide audience due to their technical language, other examples from Italy’s history illustrate the importance of texts at a larger scale. Don Milani’s *Lettera a una professoressa*, written in 1966, was widely acknowledged to be a pivotal book for the movement generation of ’68–’79. This book, written by a priest in 1966, posits a strong critique of education and its hierarchal modalities that teach abstracts and false “knowledges of the bosses;” moreover it does so in an accessible, popular language. By 1972 the book had sold over one million copies, such that one writer in an Operaista journal called it a “Chinese book”!\(^{416}\) The broad-based circulation of this book and the verification that many people who actively participated in various forms of activism read it, speaks to the effectiveness and importance of texts in movements, in this case even as catalysts. In the book *Social Movements: A Cognitive approach*, Eyerman and Jamison show how some of the most important movements have been launched and become effective through key texts—i.e. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*

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\(^{415}\) See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the ways particular Operaista texts were key to politicizing individuals.

\(^{416}\) Balestrini and Moroni 179-180. Throughout the course of their book they illuminate the key role of texts. This book would be a worthwhile translation project.
and the modern environmental movement. A slightly different role was played by another key text highlighted by Balestrini et.al. Franco Basaglia’s *L’istituzione negata. Rapporto da un ospedale psichiatrico, (The negated institution: Behavior from a Psychiatric Hospital)* published in 1968, denounced the problematic practices of psychiatry, connecting it to an essential function of capitalism. While the book sold less copies overall, and it can’t be said to have sparked Movement, within the areas of already active movement it became a must-read, selling thousands of copies and placing more aspects and institutions of society in contestation (ibid: 599).

Texts work in different ways and perform different forms of theoretical-practice, what elsewhere I have called knowledge-practice. While on the one hand texts participate in the processes of giving information, or providing particular readings of certain situations, texts can also play the role of problematization, or creating space for thought. Clearly classifying *Lettera a una professoressa* in terms of one of the theoretical-practice functions I set out is difficult. For while it definitely helped spread particular knowledge, at the same time the text worked by causing people to question forms of hierarchy and authority throughout the social sphere. So collectively, but also vis a vis the individuals who are parts of them, movements produce texts that in turn produce, disseminate and generate concepts, information, ideas and communication which allow for better, or at least different engagements with the present. Whereas at times texts are meant to disseminate information, or produce “better information,” at other times they are meant to open up moments of thought and creativity,

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417 Interestingly, in *What A Book Can Do*, about Carson’s Silent Spring – the author Patricia Coit Murphy, make the point that very few people ever read SS, but its effects in transforming public knowledge were extensive, due to the way the text was taken up by the environmental movement (Murphy 2005.) In several of my interviews I discovered that many people never read key texts, but used and referred to them vis a vis presentations and others’ descriptions and interpretations of them.
and to enact moments of autonomy. Rather than conveying a given reading or providing information, the theoretical simply provokes thought.

As I showed at the end of Chapter 2 and in Chapter 4, the role of books, magazines, pamphlets and other intellectual and communicational practices not totally contained within the category of the text are not only crucial to the politics of Italian movements, but also to their enduring nature. Not just the texts, but the people politicized, as well as the networks of actors and spaces involved in both creating and using them, are largely what connect different periods of movement, and prepare for “new” ones. What one begins to notice beyond the importance of these texts to movements is the fact that in many ways movements are comprised in large part of this textual function, that is, the function of circulating information, ideas, theories, analyses, and perhaps even stories via different mediums, on the one hand, and instigating thought, on the other. Recall Wu Ming 1’s description of mythopoiesis and Italian movements as a lively flow of tales in Chapter 4. There certainly are differences between efforts at circulating information to counter false claims, or produce better knowledge, more truthful truths, and those that see themselves as working at the level of tales in which their truth is not what is most important (ibid). (For instance, can myths be considered theoretical?) One thing that is common to both is recognizing how at a general level the work of movements has this function of generating and translating narratives, as central to the work and status of being movement. For Balestrini and Moroni the enormity of the long decade of ’68—that is its far reaching nature—can be attributed in large part to the ways ideas and practices were diffused by new communication technologies and the very fact of sharing of ideas, tactics, etc. via different textual and communicational forms, including magazines but also free radio stations. Balestrini and Moroni describe how struck they were
by the rapid pace at which practices, tied to ideas and analyses, could travel from one city to another, and even to less cosmopolitan areas, often over great distances. This also parallels Anna Tsing’s description of activism as working in “charismatic packages, allegorical modules that speak to the possibilities of making a cause heard. These packages feature images, songs, morals, organizational plans and stories. ….” (2005: 227).

More pertinent to the case at hand in many ways are parallels to the GJSM, and the Zapatista movement in particular. It is important to remember how key the identification with the global movement was for the MoM, and as I described in Chapter 1, it is precisely in the role of providing new stories and theories that much of what was global about the MoM came to be. Arguments about the communicational character of the GJSM overall, and even more specifically the centrality of what Harry Cleaver describes in the “Electronic Fabric of Struggle” to both the survival and ingenuity of the Zapatista struggle (1998), are well known. Key to this have been the stories and analyses Marcos and the Zapatistas have circulated in their various communiqués. But almost as important as the content has been their emphasis on resonance and local specificity, rather than directives and universality. In many ways that which ties the GJSM together are the stories, analyses, information and theories and especially the fact of their circulation. Moreover, the particular ethic of “glocalization” and the imperative to see these stories as tools for thinking, rather than blueprints, is also key. The adoption of terms like “glocal”, and a rethinking of the categories and purposes of narratives is demonstrated by Italian activists’ own narratives. For example, one disobedienti leader who described the movement as the only possible anti-body also stated:

…It is not anymore the 20th century, with “the political” on one side, and “the social” on the other; the labor unions on yet another. Our objective, even if it is unconscious, is to reactivate the processes of participation, to re-appropriate
in our own hands our own resources of our own communities, contexts, territories: From the little, without the big. Related to “the big,” related to general themes, to grand values, grand issues, universal struggles, but, within the dynamic of the small, of the quotidian—to construct forms of political participation that also make society. And so we move away from the politics of brains, the politics of simply telling—i.e. ideology—And from ideology we move to the politics of doing. 

...Because ours is in fact the problem of building a glocal movement, not a global movement, that is, a movement that is well rooted in the concrete (Disobbedienti Interview, Porte Alegre. January, 2003).

This different understanding of “global” relationships, what I have termed elsewhere a place-based rather than universalizing notion of globality, is a key part of what made the GJSM, and the MoM so exciting. In addition to the notion of walking while questioning, it contributes to the construction of a new standards and modalities of knowing.

There is no question that books, as well as other innovations in communication and culture were important sites and forms of the MoM’s theoretical-practice. As was pointed out to me several times, technological innovations in this realm were key throughout the experiences of social movements in Italy. In the 1970s small publishing houses were able to print smaller numbers of books at an extremely fast pace, cutting the time between event and reflection by a great deal. In the student and anti-nuclear movements of the 1980s, faxes created yet further innovations, allowing a nascent form of network communication. And with the GJSM, different technologies—including the internet—with its blogs, listervs, chat rooms, P2P—as well as increasing proximity through cheaper travel and communication of the once distant, also affected the ways theories traveled, or the geographies of theory.

In Federico’s exposition, we move from theoretical-practice as a rather straightforward practice movements do, resembling theoretical and knowledge production elsewhere—i.e. the production of texts and analyses—to a description of the nature and quality of the MoM’s practices overall, as well as to a critique of what they ultimately failed
to maintain. That is to say, it is also in the realm of theoretical-practice that we find evidence of the MoM’s failures according to its own terms. For despite “good” theoretical analysis within the MoM which was premised on critiques of identitarian, static and ideological ways of thinking, according to Federico the MoM failed precisely because it turned these into dogmas, identities, blueprints. This appears to be one of the key problems within the MoM, and is closely related to the tensions between new and old political modalities. This has to do with the difficulty of living and being a theoretically critical, reflexive, and dynamic subject. That is, many groups ended up turning circulating texts into a directive or manual, rather than a tool or translation. For Federico and others it is this that has a lot to do with the loss of effectiveness of the groups involved with the MoM. Federico’s own analysis of the grave theoretical error of turning disobedience into an “identity” rather than a “tool”—which has to do in part with the sedimentation of older more dominant ways of thinking-being-doing, as well as the discrepancy between intellectualized understandings and their enaction.

To better understand the tension between different forms of knowing/thinking-doing, which are inextricably linked to forms of being, as well, in the “old,” or dominant, and “new” political imaginaries, I will return to the panel at the Festa Della Sinistra, where the final discussion proves very illustrative to this end.

A Non-Polemical Discussion: Encounters Between Old and New Political Modalities

The panel that I moderated turned out to have one of the more interesting discussions about the event of Genoa I encountered throughout my years of research. This had a lot to do not only with the content of the discussion, but also the tone and energy present. While it took several hours to get to this point, the concluding discussion—after seven speakers from
distinct organizational backgrounds each gave a rather detailed description of their personal journey to and beyond Genoa—was absolutely poignant, capturing not only the centrality of knowledge and theoretical practice, but also the political tensions and stakes involved. Let us take a look at bits of this discussion.

Shortly after I opened the floor for questions, Simone, my friend and organizer, stood up and spoke. I wondered if he had had this question when he decided to put together the panel.

From all of the stories that have been told this evening, there is one thing that strikes me. Our generation, however it moved, was a bit unable to ... to count, to matter in some way. To be able to be politically incisive. ... And after Genoa, a great epic moment of our generation, who wrote about it? Who told about Genoa? ... all people who were 50, 60.. How in the world? How? This would be a problem... or not?

A heated and animated discussion ensued. While there was an overall consensus about the truth of Simone’s claim—i.e. that the generation of Genoa had failed to count, or profoundly alter politics—there seem to be very different evaluations of the causes, and even whether this was a good or bad thing.

F: ... but what you say is VERY true, we were never able to give legs to...

L: It’s also interesting that during Genoa, during the movement, there was very little writing... even the Social Forums didn’t have a final document... we had a series of points, but...

S: And it’s strange because as Federico said we are a movement with a high level of scholarization/education.

L: But there are two subsequent points: One is that we were a movement in a continuous research-action (ricerca-azione), those that were leaders, were those that moved the most, but not necessarily the ones who thought the most ... and still another point, we are continuing the (re)search⁴¹⁹, maybe that is what is constitutive of our generation, we haven’t found an arrival point, we wouldn’t know, many of us wouldn’t know what to write, we didn’t know

⁴¹⁹ Ricerca can be research or search.
what the thing was…

F: Luca that’s an alibi—and maybe you’re right—but the fact still remains….its like a rock that remains, we weren’t able to…

S: But its not our fault, its [also] because they didn’t give us space…

A: But, you have to take the space, you can’t expect that it will be served to you…I think its what he said, we never became a classe dirigente(a directive class). We weren’t able to get beyond simply protesting, or even positing analyses—analyses about globalization that were good and correct— but this is not enough, you also need to organize yourself and understand how to structure yourself, and it has to be based on what you have in front of you…. in Italy a movement can’t have the same characteristics as it does in the US or in France, because national specificities must be taken into account …. But then we must also learn from our history. We understand that in ’68 they made a substitution: they threw out the bosses and became bosses themselves. They were physically substituted, but they took power.

F: I don’t agree that no one [from our generation] succeeded, those who chose to be inside—inside the parties, inside the unions, they functioned well inside. The problem from the point of the view of the movement is that the large majority of comrades, that like Luca said were on the level of research, they never had a landing.

M: ..but there were various levels. Let’s remember that with the generation of ’68 what worked was also the fact that despite or beyond where people were, they supported each other amongst themselves. This is an element that was missing [for us], ok?… even though it does still function like this in certain places. Think about it. Those of Lotta Continua regardless of where they were or what the issue was they were committed to sustaining each other amongst themselves no matter what happened!

But I don’t want to be Lotta Continua, I don’t give a damn about LC! When I did the movement of Genoa I thought I was breaking as much with ’68 as I was breaking with ’77!... Who the fuck cares about… its not like we wanted to become a lobby, like Lotta Continua. When I spoke about Zapatismo I believed in the fact of not taking power. Plus it wasn’t our failure, it was the change in approach by the minister of the interior who with Napoli showed….

Like many of the examples I have pointed to in previous chapters, the reflexivity and

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420 Dirigente is a very Gramscian and PCI term—used to distinguish between a class or intellectuals that can become hegemonic, and those that remain too specialized. (Gramsci 1971 : 10)
analyses involved in this movement are notable. The level of theoretical and political know-how and literacy are also quite evident. Beyond these, the content, the form and both the presence and nature of the disagreements are very noteworthy: First at the level of tone the discussion is quite chaotic and passionate, but it is not polemical. Second, the question of what it means to *count* politically, what it means to be effective, or make political interventions, is clearly raised. Even more interestingly, the question seems closely affected by, or related to, the perceived relationship of knowledge to action, as well as the intellectual function. These in turn are tied to particular imaginaries or notions of the political.

With respect to the tone, I think that part of the reason this particular discussion was so interesting was that it was messy, sincere and full of passion, without being vitriolic. Everyone seemed to try to speak at once as if their insights were urgent, but rather than weaken or detract from the ‘authority’ of the conversation, it seemed to strengthen it. This points not only to the potentially productive role of affect and emotion, but also to a subtle yet important difference between between a polemical modality and one based on thinking and problematizing.\(^{421}\) Perhaps the fact that people were asked to speak autobiographically encouraged them to avoid the polemical platitudes — often astute and interesting in their own right, but markedly less candid and dialogic — that so often prevailed in these public assemblies.\(^{422}\) Unlike other events when disagreement seemed polemical, in a clear for or against style, this discussion seemed to reveal a real engagement — including thinking and grappling with complex, messy and not easily categorized issues. For Foucault, moving from

\(^{421}\) See Foucault 1994 for an excellent description of the depoliticizing effects of polemics and the need for a politics of problematization. I see this closely connected to Mouffe’s notion of agonism 2002, further discussed in Osterweil 2008. See also Foucault 1994b.

\(^{422}\) It was interesting that a few of the speakers were unable to do this. Notably I had had similar difficulties in my interview with one of those.
a politics based on the culture or modality of polemics to one based on thought, local criticism and problematization, is a key criteria for a “better” political modality, and has everything to do with the role of the intellectual, on the one hand, and subjectification on the other.

Moving from tone to content, first, Simone’s provocative statement immediately elicits reflections from the rest of the panel, but one of the first things pointed out was how little was written. Second, Luca’s statement, “We are a movement in continuous research-action,” asserts his belief, or desired belief, in another modality of doing, one that favored and was premised on a continuous or ongoing research-action, with no final end point. From his earlier discussion it is clear that he finds this fact, i.e. the movement’s positing of an ongoing research-action, as a good thing. While he realizes this presents some difficulty in determining political action, Luca? is also somewhat confident that this modality is important. In contrast are the words first of Federico who calls it an excuse, and then of Alessandro, calling upon the tried and true assumption of the requisite “directive class,” a class or intellectual position necessary for gaining hegemony. However, Alessandro also then immediately recognizes the problem of “taking power,” and the way the generation of ’68 betrayed the ethos of movement. He also astutely recognizes the importance of place and specificity—showing that these different political imaginaries modalities are not fully formed in any one person or group.

What emerges then is this almost classical political tension between organization and process, between hegemony and something else. This something else is related to, and even involves continuous research-action, but it is not clear how it works. In the current framework for both seeing and understanding things, it doesn’t seem to be able to leave a real
political mark. At the same time, these young activists are not rejecting the role of synthesis or intellectual work, but recognizing that it can’t be the same as it has been. Marco’s statement about his desire to break both with the generation of ’68 and that of ’77, and his belief in the words of the Zapatistas also seem to get at the heart of this tension: how to take political action given the critiques of old forms of political organizing, while still not having the answers or understanding of how to actually act within the new model. There is an understanding of what is wrong with an old politics that function with logics of hegemony and solidarity—i.e. an understanding of the problem—but there is not a clear sense of the solution, and there is even an open question as to whether and what form a solution that was itself partial, open and fine with uncertainty, would look like.

There is a sense of exasperation at not having more visible or recognizable political effects, nor a sufficient theory or language for explaining what those different political effects would look like and do. This exasperation reflects the ways a desired for continuous “research-action,” and a more thoughtful practice, are in tension with the typical understandings of how action happens, i.e. by having someone do the unifying or directive work, as in the parties.

Differences and similarities between old and new modalities of doing and thinking politics—which are in turn intimately related to ways of being—can be understood to be one of the most salient components of the event, and of the importance of the central concept of theoretical-practice. Crucially, this is not a case of one political ideology against another; the “new” political imaginary is in fact premised on the fact that it cannot become a new blueprint or solution. Almost as important as seeing the old and new in tension with one another is to understand that the way and fact that they are able to play off of each-other—to conflict,
even—is itself productive. It is productive particularly in forcing actors to ask questions and work to gain better understandings of the problematic and conjuncture at hand. What is at stake cannot be understood as one theory versus another, but an entire ethos or modality of thinking-doing politics.

What is almost as interesting about this tension, especially in the case of this panel, but also at other sites of the MoM, was that the tension or conflict itself was a source of thought, and in this sense another level of theoretical-practice. Far from a simplistic or polemical discussion with one position vying against the other, in this case people seem to be struggling with how to get out of one political, epistemological and political framework, and into another. While the problems of the past modality seem somewhat clear, and the ethics of the “new” also somewhat discernable, this is not enough to immediately produce new forms of practice. This conundrum or gap between a theoretical or intellectual conception of a “good politics,” and practice, at the heart of the term, remains key. Whether it is a gap to be filled, or maintained as a space and provocateur of more thought, remains an open question.

This tension also points quite directly to different conceptions of the role of intellectual, knowledge and theoretical work, and to the fundamentally different notions or imaginaries of the political on which these are based. For while in Gramscian terms, within a modernist Marxist framework the notion of the intellectual is quite clearly connected to a synthesizing or unifying role, ideally performed by organic intellectuals within the class, but usually played by the party or union, this notion of intellectual work already implies a particular vision or imaginary of the political (and social reality), one in which finding synthesis, and a point of unification are critical. In many ways it is precisely the notion of unification and synthesis, as well as the role of knowledge as imposing or finding this, that
many critiques of representative and liberal modes of politics and democracy take issue. Deleuze and Guattari see these assumptions about the very need for unification and the role of knowledge as part of the problem. As Guattari explains in an interview, this traditional understanding of the need for analysis is directly linked to a state-centered approach to politics, with all of its problems:

The revolution clearly needs a war machine, but that’s not a State apparatus. It also needs an analytic force, an analyzer of the desires of the masses, absolutely—but not an external mechanism of synthesis. …The most important thing is not authoritarian unification, but a kind of infinite swarming: desires in the neighborhoods, schools, factories, prisons, ..Its not about a make-over or totalization, but hooking up at the same plane at its tipping point. As long as we stick to the alternative between the impotent spontaneity of anarchy and the hierarchical and bureaucratic encoding of a party organization, there can be no liberation of desire (Guattari qtd in Deleuze 2004: 267).

The opposition between analytic as unifier and analyzer as a kind of infinite swarming points to two very different imaginaries—event spatialities—of the political and political intervention. Foucault’s writing on power/knowledge, the need for specific intellectuals, and the importance of critique to be local are in this same vein. Throughout his essays Foucault argues for the primacy and necessity of local research and critique against any projects interested in explaining, or speaking from universal or global projects. In *Truth and Power*, Foucault argues that despite fears that commitment to local, conjunctural struggles may render political work victim to larger structures, local criticism and knowledge production are the only appropriate tools because truths, or regimes of truth, are themselves specific, and specifically maintained, despite their pretense to universality. Specific intellectuals, those speaking from particular terrains of expertise, rather than universal intellectuals who can use reason to rationally determine the correct action in any situation, are key. According to Foucault the importance of the specific intellectual itself has to do with the key job of
knowledge being not at the level of content, but rather revealing that truth is itself produced and maintained through certain practices: “The intellectual is not the ‘bearer of universal values.’ Rather, it’s the person occupying a specific position—but whose specificity is linked in a society like ours, to the general functioning of an apparatus of truth” (1977/1980: 132). Notably this work is itself linked to a particular ethos or subjectivity, that of a limit-attitude, or a permanent critique, I described above (1984:46).

What becomes clear is that the role of knowledge, how we conceive of that role, and what counts as political intervention, all imply different models, or ontologies, of the political. The tension between these different modalities of knowing-being-doing is key to both the meaning of the MoM, and the struggle to move it from the realm of potentiality to actuality. This also speaks to the ways in which part of the problem for recognizing political effects in the new imaginary is because in it politics is recognized to be far more than the macro-political or institutional realm usually defined as politics, and that the political is affected and dependent on micro-political elements, including culture, affects, the everyday. At stake are fundamentally different understandings of both what constitutes the political and what a movement for change would be. This includes recognizing how a key site for politics is in fact the production of new forms of subjectivities, and new political, intellectual subjects that do the form of acting I am describing.

5.3 **Beyond the Party-line: Autonomy, Difference & Theoretical-Practice**

Key to a desire for a more theoretical-practice based politics is the critique of ideological dogmatism, on the one hand, and the maintenance of the party-line and unity on the other. As Marco points out, Lotta Continua may have had a legible political impact, but this also required that it exclude the possibility of critique or differences of opinion.
Becoming effective had meant establishing a unified “take” on whatever issue was at hand. In this last section I will show how theoretical practice works both counter to the party-line and ideologically dogmatic or polemical approaches of politics past. Theoretical-practice also implies an intimate relationship to both autonomy and difference, the two additional features of the new political imaginary I have been arguing is at stake.

Frustration and agitation with the ineffectiveness and even the violence of this tendency towards the rigid maintenance of unity, and a party-line, no matter what, was a recurrent theme in numerous interviews throughout my research. Similarly, expressions of excitement around political moments and initiatives that were able to accept critique, diversion from a party-line, and difference were also oft repeated themes in numerous interviews. Many women in particular describe the disciplining nature of the party form and its inability to recognize the different needs and desires of people. This was eerily similar to the critiques by feminists in the 1970s. The turn to Marxist-Leninism and away from a politics of multiplicity and becoming was also key to how the failures of ’77 are described and evaluated, often with an explicit recognition of the direct relationship to forms of intellectual and theoretical production.\(^{423}\) In *L’orda D’oro* Balestrini and Moroni note that

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\(^{423}\) In their book on the long decade of ’68, Balestrini and Moroni spend quite a bit of time on intellectual, theoretical and communicational practices. They not only describe the plethora of magazines, publishing houses and other sites of cultural production that were vital to the political productivity of the movement, they also distinguish between types of intellectual production and their corresponding politics. They describe how throughout the 68-79 decade different movements at different moments employ visions or theories of knowledge that are not always explicit to movement actors, but which are critical to understanding both their strengths and their weaknesses. In a long section titled: “Communication, Culture and the Intellectuals,” they differentiate between different forms of knowledge production: 1) “other editorial, other culture”; 2) “counter-information, and 3) Marxist-Leninism. ibid 588-595. While at a certain point the role of “counter-information,” i.e. to counter the false information disseminated by the state, is key to movements, such that they are interested in supporting “truth,” with certain events, this obvious and good relationship to the “truth” changes. “There is a historical moment in Italy in which zones of movement make radical choices with respect to which the mechanism of truth is a mechanism that doesn’t function anymore.” While the moment they are speaking of has everything to do with the turn to armed violence, the question is? of whether the role of knowledge production should be to reveal the truth of a situation—as in a form of classical empiricism—or whether it is to recognize that truth is produced through power.
while for an important period the use of knowledge is an enactment of autonomy and self-representation, the turn to Marxist-Leninism brings with it marked shifts in the modalities and purpose of knowledge and communication. Marxist-Leninist movement groups, much like the political parties they were ostensibly against, become conveyors of rigid dogmas and micro-party politics, for whom the revolution always lies around the next corner, and for whom truth is scientifically transparent. It is clear the Balestrini and Moroni’s sympathy lies with the counter-cultural movement that was opposed to the rigid dogmatisms of Marxist-Leninism. The failure of this decade is often attributed to the conflict between more Leninist approaches and those that favored a “becoming multiple” of society. However for Moroni and Balestrini it is the reduction of the movement’s complexity, the forms of information that reduce the multiplicity, that is the tragic error and cause of its downfall.

Earlier in the evening of the same panel I described above, when each participant shared a brief political autobiography, the striking things that emerged were the similarities in the experience of Alessandro who had “grown up” militating—in the orthodox sense, i.e. within the Communist Party, and was even groomed as a party leader—and Federico who had been a local leader and spokesperson for the Tute Bianche in the period before and after Genoa. While in theory these were supposed to be opposite forms of political organization, in practice there were many interesting similarities. Of particular note were the ways both Federico and Alessandro described how they each had decided to leave their respective organization, disturbed by its disciplining nature that tended to deal badly with any form of critique and dissent, unable to tolerate any evasions from the “party line.” This was particularly noteworthy because the area of the movement from which Federico came was

424 While in theory, coming from the area of Autonomia, the TB claimed to be opposed to the politics of a political party, in practice, descriptions by Federico and many others, especially feminists, showed how party-like that organization became.
very fluent in the theories opposed to the state-form, and quite aware of the pitfalls of ideological dogmatism. (Recall one activist’s characterization of the MoM as breaking movements free from a prison, one that was partly an ideological prison.) While the extra-parliamentary Left may have developed in opposition to the institutional, it is difficult to deny that in many ways they are both products of cultural and epistemological patrimonies associated with Communism and the theoretical and epistemological approaches that accompany it.

The avoidance of dogmatic or party-lines is also clearly articulated to more contemporary intellectual projects. The emergence of explicitly intellectual projects like the journal *Derive Approdi* and the itinerant university, Uninomade, are excellent examples, not only of the expressed need for theoretical production, but also of the aspiration to a different kind of knowledge-action relationship, one that avoids thinking with the party, but is situated and has a political impact—what we can call autonomous knowledge. What seems to be at stake is a desire for a knowledge and theory that is “good,” where goodness is defined as authoritative, but also autonomous. For autonomous knowledge we can return again to Foucault:

> I believe that what this essentially local character of criticism indicates in reality is an autonomous non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought (Foucault 1977/1980: 81).

An editorial meeting of the journal *Derive Approdi*, cited by many as being one of the most important initiatives to prepare the ground for the MoM, at least in terms of theory and thinking, reveals a similar aspiration to autonomous knowledge. Within one month of the National Assembly of Italian Social Forums described in Chapter 3, during an annual meeting of

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425 See Chapter 3.
a well-read journal, this “new” form of activism was explicitly articulated. In discussing both the
direction this particular journal should take, reviewing its recent issues, and (once again)
reflecting upon the “state of the movement,” one of the journal’s editors quite confidently
asserted,

    In the last year and a half, our journal has become something more than a
    journal or magazine, it has become a new form of political
    activism/militance”—one that has a certain authority because it is both
    situated within the movement, but is not committed to one position or course
    of action. This autonomy not only means we are unlikely to fall into the
    factional or ideological divisions between groups, it also gives a certain
    amount of authority. (Meeting March 2004. The first part, in quotations, has
    been translated directly from Italian by me; the rest is paraphrased directly in
    my notes

This statement ended up setting off a rather intense debate on whether it was possible for
a journal to take a position while still remaining authoritative, and whether or not it was true that
the journal was actually seen as autonomous. Regardless of the debate, or whether in reality this
journal was actually capable of being both situated and autonomous, the importance of this
discussion and the quote by the editor, lies in the claim it makes about a certain kind of political
practice—what the editor refers to as “a new form of political activism” —one that is premised
on situated, partial, and yet rigorous and authoritative knowledge and theoretical production.
Again, the similarity to many post-Cartesian theoretical moves within the academy is notable
What interests me then is the fact that the journal editor—a long time activist himself—seems to
be aspiring to a certain form of critical theoretical-practice, and that this “new form of activism”
is seen as something “good,” an improvement, at least with respect to both other forms of
activism, and other forms of intellectual-political work. This has implications not only for what
we understand activist-practices to be comprised of—namely the production of theoretical
knowledge—but also for the kinds of “knowledge” or theory that are both sought after and

426 See especially Latour 1999 for his discussion of this post-Cartesian space.
produced.\textsuperscript{427}

As with the panel described above, this desire for a non-dogmatic yet authoritative and politically effective form of knowledge production is in tension with other modalities, sometimes among the same people. In numerous personal interviews the difficulty people who believed they “knew the right answer” had with letting go and yielding to this more open-ended, and seemingly less certain modality, was quite evident (people would even make jokes about this).

It is with explicitly intellectual and communicational projects that one can see once again the way the centrality of theoretical and intellectual work actually affects the nature and meaning of the political project. For, while producing knowledge, comprehension and theory are clearly important to contemporary Italian movements, as with all movements past, in the case of the activists I was engaged with, these acts of questioning and reflection seemed to be something more. At times the very acts of asking questions and being reflexive seemed to be important in and of themselves. Recently activists have built on the Italian tradition of conricerca (research-with) and worker inchiestas (surveys) to try to make sense of the diffused struggle in contemporary cities.\textsuperscript{428} They have worked to update these research tools that were historically used to come to mutual understandings about workers’ conditions on the factory floor, to the more disperse, less delimited space of the metropolis, also part of the “social factory.”\textsuperscript{429} While certainly these researches are intended to gain more knowledge

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{427} This is also related to the level of complexity of the claims made by movements, and a response to the supposed requirement for absolute certainty in order to act, especially politically. While it is presumed that political action requires eliminating or clearing up all doubt and complexity, movements themselves are increasingly pointing to the possibility, even necessity, of taking action even when answers are not clear-cut or black and white. In another recent paper (Osterweil 2007, unpublished), I describe how the assumptions that movements produce “simple knowledge”—i.e. where wrong and right are thought to be clear-cut—is itself a simplification of the theoretical-practical nature of movements.
\item \textsuperscript{428} See Borio, et al 2002, as well as Conti et. al 2007 for definitions of conricerca and inchiesta.
\end{itemize}
about the people and their contemporary context, activists also see the very fact of raising questions as both a politicizing moment and as a central part of their activism.

As was posted to a listserv of political science students at the University of Bologna in 2003,

So many questions, no given certainty: we need new lenses with which to read reality, new forms of collective action to transform it. Ambitiously we speak of conricerca to point to a process of production of knowledges [conoscenza-know-how] and other knowledges [saperi], of experimentation in new forms of social and political cooperation, of the construction of languages and communication … of opening spaces of self-formation and counter-formation...In so far as they are non-conclusive [would be non-concludible], open and transformative, conricerca is really an open-source, non-patentable and constitutively contrary to any form of copyright!((coscienzapolitica) posted 12-11-2003, translation mine from Italian accessed June 10, 2004).

So, the point is not simply to do research in order to find answers or produce blue-prints that everyone should follow. Rather, the ability and fact of researching, the recognition that there are no clear or universal answers, has to some extent become the basis for political and ethical action—even if as we saw in the Festa della Sinistra, what the political impact of such action is, is still unclear. At other moments however, the open-ended nature of action is accepted for what it is. For example, in the third European Social Forum, a network of Italian activists published an open letter on several international websites, as well as on their own listserves in an attempt to evaluate the contemporary situation and prospects of the movement. The letter quoted in Chapter 4 speaks of the “becoming-movement” and the fact that politics can only be experimental and playful. In both of these cases the novelty and importance of the movement is not simply about finding new “solutions” or “formulas” for organizing social change; it has become about questioning all of the assumptions or taken for granted categories of thought that accompanied

\[\text{Recognizing the way labor relations extended far beyond the factory walls was one of the key insights of post-Operaismo, and specifically of Negri. See Negri 1979, also 1977.}\]
older modalities of pursuing social change. In particular in the case of the letter about becoming-movement, movement activists recognize the movement as a sort of puzzle with no clear-cut solutions. Rather than see this as a problem to be fixed or solved, they identify in this inexplicability the call for a positive and ongoing practice of investigation, experimentation, and imagination—what they, with no coincidental reference to Deleuze and Guattari, term “becoming.” The open-ended, experimental nature of these understandings of the politics of the movement stand in stark contrast to the rigid ideological dogmatisms of past Leftist paradigms, with their rigid categories and expectations of the vanguard, revolution, etc. At the same time, they emphasize and focus on the theoretical and investigative moment of political practice.

**Difference and Myths**

As with other things about the MoM, one learns as much or more about the “new” imaginary through critiques of the old, as well as the less than coherently articulated aspects that are valued. Marco’s critique of the “stand by your group no matter what” attitude of Lotta Continua and the movements of ’68 and ’77 has to do not only with dogma, but with its corollary, the need to maintain a unity, no matter what. Rigid dogmatism it turns out, is closely related to synthetic unity, and to the shortcomings of past approaches. Federico also points to this when he laments the ways in which the Disobbedienti became an identity, i.e. something unitary, to be defended against the outside, rather than as a tool to be used by anyone.

This tension between unity and something else—a something they don’t have words for—and the importance of theoretical-practice in the form of narratives is well articulated

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by different members of Wu Ming, a Bolognese writers’ collective, who also broke with the Disobbedienti in 2002. Wu Ming 4, speaking in an interview in 2003 once again about the central role of myths and social movements as mytho-poetical, points to the dangers of myths when they move from their role of lending meaning and giving guidance in moments of uncertainty to producing very “identitarian processes.”

Stories are the ecological fuel of communities in motion. But they can also become oppressive and paralyzing instruments. The patrimony of shared stories and of prospectives, the imaginary furnish a communitarian base of cohesion. But it takes little from which cohesion, from a sense of the path that you are on, becomes the construction of a fixed identity, that one must maintain and preserve from external contamination….

In the same way propelling myths, promethean, of struggle, that have an indispensable role to push a community to change the world, can become the alter upon which to sacrifice diversity, “deviancy,” contamination, taking on a teleological form. This is the case of the myth of the proletarian revolution…

…This is why the activity of telling stories becomes so very important. Because to continue to tell myths, to change them, to discover new meanings, and to adapt them to the contingencies of the present, is the antidote to their sterilization and alienation. And therefore also to the sterilization and alienation of the community (Wu Ming 4, in Fernandez Savater, 2003)

Not only does this quote show the connection between forms of unity and lack of reflexivity or dogmatism, it also highlights the difference between the content of the narrative and its form and function. It is not enough for a story to be good; its goodness, efficacy, etc. depends on the contingency of the present, as well as the recognition of the dangers of eliminating diversity. Such that closely linked to the possibility for reflexivity is the central importance of difference; difference is the condition of possibility for struggle, community and thought.

In an interview conducted over email in 2006, Wu Ming 1 explained the importance of figuring out how to maintain diversity, while still working in unity. This statement points

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431 Interestingly Charles Taylor describes myths as pre-theoretical. However I would argue given the reflexivity and dynamism suggested in the notions of myth posited here, this doesn’t necessarily need to be the case.
once again to the interrelationship between the need for a theoretical-practice as a means for finding new concepts and theories, as well as a goal for a kind of practice in and of itself.

We’ve got to figure out what a multitude is. Not necessarily according to Spinoza, Negri or Virno: I’m using the world multitude — the quality of being many — in a wild, intuitive way, in order to describe a state we all experienced at least once: being many without becoming one. If someone has a better word for this lets use it.

The multitude I am talking about is not a ‘mass’ (a mob), it is an interaction of singularities. The multitude is ‘the many,’ not ‘the bloc’. The multitude is plurality, polyphony, syncopation (as in African and African-American collective improvisation), not the choir and monody (as in Gregorian chants…)

People can stay together, work together, create together… and even be counted together without dissolving singularities, nay, they can be together thanks to their irreducible differences (personal email communication, Oct 25, 2006).

Part of what was difficult to explain throughout the years of the MoM’s crisis was the ways in which as people became more and more set in their “movement area” — no matter what that area was, and what its political ideology or approach was — the less interesting and productive politics became. The inability to communicate across differences, to have transversal spaces of debate and action, were indicative of the failure to be a real Movement. Recall how the descriptions in Chapter 3 pointed to the importance of difference and debate to the meaning of the MoM, and the notion of real Movement. The moment there was no more exchange among diverse subjects, the moment public space disappeared, is very close to the moment Movement, or the MoM, is seen to end, or turn bad.

At a theoretical register, one can see how difference is in many ways the condition of possibility for creativity, thought, and critique. In effect, difference is that which introduces the possibility for rupture, for thought, and for needing to rethink ways of doing and being, which are at the core of what being a Movement should mean. According to translators of
Guattari:

Heterogeneity is an expression of desire, of a becoming that is always in the process of adapting, transforming and modifying itself in relation to its environment. Whereas the State works by homogenizing (macropolitical consensus), it is always defeated by heterogenous formations whose singularity cannot be represented (micropolitical dissensus). However much organizations seek to homogenize desire, something always leaks out (Guattari 2000: 90, n 49).

At a political register, the importance of difference is once again better explained in a micro-political understanding of politics, and is closely related to the critiques of micro-fascism and the violence done in the name of the party, the revolution, etc. Interviews with women overwhelmingly revealed experiences with the movement as a place of a sort of disciplining violence in which intellectual or rhetorical commitments to difference and a new non-hegemonic modality of politics were constantly betrayed by the practice.

V. Conclusion: A theoretico-practical modality

In this chapter I have argued for the central role of what I have termed theoretical-practice for the MoM. By this I have argued that theoretical-practice must be understood not only as the production of theory—which in turn can happen in various forms-- but as general description of the nature of MoM’s new political modality, a nature that in turn can be described as an ethical and critical practice and way of engaging with the world. Understood both as key to what the movement is and does, it must also be seen as a constitutive part of the “new political imaginary” the MoM is working to bring into being. This ethic of theoretical-practice, understood not only as the production of theory, but as an ethic and practice of thinking-being-doing, is inextricably linked to the two other “hallmarks” of the MoM I have mentioned repeatedly, namely difference and multiplicity, as well as autonomy.
In many ways, given the description of theoretical practice I have offered in this chapter, one can characterize this new political modality and imaginary as theoretical-political. Notably, Guattari himself has defined micropolitics as “a politics of desire that questions all situations” (Guattari 2000: 83, n 34).

At this level, theoretical-practice refers quite specifically to a thoughtful, reflexive, critical practice, and the rejection of the idea that there can be one theory. Far beyond having the right theory or story, then, to be able to act and speak outside of prescribed party lines, to act reflexively and thoughtfully rather than according to a pre-determined script or dogma is one of the most crucial and defining aspects of the MoM—even if very difficult to achieve in practice. I could list numerous examples from my interviews, as well as descriptions of the MoM from various texts, assemblies, etc. that point to this desire, the belief that the MoM had achieved this, and critiques of failures to do so. I have argued that inherent to this theoretical nature is the notion or aspiration to “better” knowledge, and implicitly better, more ethical forms of action. The measure of whether or not a practice is good is its own capacity to withstand critique and interrogation, produce moments of thought or problematization, and to create resonance, affect or connection. All of these in turn only happen locally.432

It is no coincidence then, that many of the concepts and practices, including the architectures and imaginaries that have proliferated in the Alter-Globalization networks within Italy and beyond imply the need for thought, reflection and experimentation; and that they strive for partial, situated and processual knowledge and authority, as opposed to certain, universal and fixed knowledge and practice. Terms and concepts like *caminar*

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432 See local action as described by Foucault, 1984.
preguntando (walk while questioning); “network(ing),” “open space”, “Social fora” and “encounters,” as well as the increasing use and centrality of websites, listservs and other decentralized, reflexive and dialogical communication devices, all point to this other political modality. And, each one of these concepts and devices carries with it an understanding of politics as something not closed, not formulaic, not linear and not necessarily concerned with ends. But rather, these are a politics that value communication and the exchange of ideas, not in order to come to an agreement on one plan or solution, but for the unpredictable, often subtle, even affective effects the very process of critical engagement and encounters have.433

This is again how we can see the mutually productive ways in which the GJSM and MoM interact. It is no coincidence that the World Social Forum, the International Encuentros for Humanity and against neoliberalism, as well as a growing number of conferences and web meetings have come to be recognized as increasingly important and directly political (even when they do not produce clear-cut campaigns, or programs!434). Each of these events or sites—all places (virtual or physical) where ideas and practices are discussed, invented, elaborated, etc.—contributes to this “new” understanding of what the goal and effects of a truly radical and effective politics might be; an understanding that is itself based on the recognition or belief in politics as a non-directed, critical and experimental space and capacity, rather than as something ideological, or something necessarily oriented at the political-institutional level like policy-making or elections. This does not mean ignoring or neglecting these more traditional political levels or spaces, nor more traditional notions of


434 There is a lot of debate, especially within the Social Forums, about whether the WSF should aspire to be more like a movement and clearly articulate goals and objectives around which everyone should unite, or whether to remain an open space. For more see also Whitaker and Teivainen’s pieces.
outcomes. One need only look at the myriad ways activists continue to engage with the state, even running for elections, to see this. However it does mean thinking through how these forms of critical and pragmatic experimentation might actually be articulated to those spaces and institutions.\textsuperscript{435} There is a shift in what is understood as the active site of politics. From a more traditional state-centered, institutional or macro-analyses of power and politics, there is a shift to a more cultural and micro-political definition of the political and social change.

\textsuperscript{435} Varoius interviews Bologna, Venice, June-July 2002.
Conclusion

This text, the product of almost ten years of graduate work, has been an attempt to participate in many conversations and “communities of practice” in academia and beyond (Holland et.al 1998:56-57). These communities range from social movement researchers’ debates on movements and political outcomes to activist communities working to develop new tools and visions for social change; from social scientists struggling to enact new practices of knowledge production given the highly sophisticated knowledge producers and meaning makers with which they work to understandings of the political within a broad range of fields in and beyond the academy. Overall, I have wanted to engage more general publics in developing new vocabularies and understandings of the meanings and possibilities of politics today, in a context where none of our old political frameworks seem to make sense anymore. Above all, I hope this dissertation opens up the ways we think about and conceive of what social movements both do and are, while always recognizing that their reality is itself highly contingent on our, and their own, parameters of analysis.

This desire itself came from the dual beliefs that social movements—or those sites and spaces that are called and call themselves by that name—are crucial contemporary actors, and that we currently lack the theoretical, methodological and conceptual tools with which to make sense of them. This lack is due, in particular, to the ways movements’ own knowledge production practices increasingly mirror and affect our own. I hope that this dissertation has gone some way in apprehending both.
I began the Introduction with Melucci and conclude here with him as well, as his words continue to evoke the ways in which social movements are crucial, both as “objects of study,” and as sites or spaces of political hope.

The social space of movements has become a distinct area of the system and no longer coincides either with traditional forms of organization or solidarity or with the conventional channels of political representation. The area of movements is now a ‘sector’ or a ‘subsystem’ of the social.” (Melucci 1996: 3).

Movements in a complex society are disenchanted prophets….Movements are a sign; they are not merely the outcome of the crisis, the last throes of a passing society. They signal a deep transformation in the logic and the processes that guide complex societies. Like the prophets, the movements ‘speak before’: they announce what is taking shape even before its direction and content has become clear. The inertia of the old categories may prevent us from hearing the message and from decoding, consciously and responsibly, what action to take in light of it. Without the capacity of listening to those voices, new forms of power may this coalesce, though multiple and diffuse and no longer reducible to any linear and recognizable geometry. Contemporary movements are prophets of the present. What they possess is not the force of the apparatus but the power of the word. They announce the commencement of change; not, however, a change in the distant future but one that is already a presence. They force the power out into the open and give it a shape and a face. The speak a language that seems to entirely their own, but the say something that transcends their particularity and speaks to us all.” (Melucci, ibid:1).

Whereas in the first quote Melucci points to the ways in which social movements, by definition, evade the current categories and conceptions of where politics and even the social are made, the second suggests that it is they that offer the clues our society urgently needs.

Having taken the reader through this dense exploration of Italy’s MoM, I hope the reasons why I find social movements to be so important has already become clear, but I would like to spell out those reasons explicitly here, inspired by Melucci’s astute observations. At a basic level my interest comes from the belief that social movements—or those sites and spaces that are called and call themselves by that name—are crucial contemporary actors whose very existence is key to making sense of and potentially beginning to address many of today’s most complex and urgent problems. These are problems that themselves run the gamut from practical problems of how to live in more
sustainable collaborative ways, to developing more effective political forms; to more existential or philosophical questions about the nature of how to live, why we live as we do, and for what. In fact, I believe social movements are crucial on at least three levels. First, their own actions—including both form and content—highlight in specific ways the most pressing current problem(atics), and in so doing begin to point to outlines of solutions or alternatives. Second, their concepts, values and imaginaries underpin the contemporary common sense—both on a broader societal level, but also within what we might call “the Left” (i.e. those people with a strong critique of capitalism and the current system). Third, I believe social movements are pivotal in terms of what they reveal about the limits, lacks and necessary directions of our own theoretical, methodological and political frameworks, as well as our “application” of new post-representational/post-Cartesian understandings of the social, in which the social is not something sutured out there, but constantly being made, and often trying to be made differently.

These three crucial components of social movements in turn can be seen on at least two levels: first, in our understandings of how and what kind of knowledges are involved in and appropriate to current and needed processes of social change. This insight, in turn, is premised on the belief that our ways of thinking and knowing are inextricably linked to such projects, and to politics more broadly, precisely because subjectivities are a crucial site where the political is played out. Second, in the ways in which this poses challenges to what we conceive to be the role of “social scientific” or empirical work, in particular with increasingly complex, dynamic terrains or objects that are themselves creating and producing knowledge and concepts that recursively shift the very site or field within which they move. Put succinctly: I believe that social movements are vital contemporary actors because they tend
to form around, as well as develop and experiment with astute responses to, our most pressing contemporary problems. As such they both elucidate these problems offer models of engagement or “solutions” that are themselves less constrained by current common sense or status quo—in terms of concrete practices, but also by emphasizing different values and principles according to which, and for which they are living. In addition, they are also pivotal in the ways they disclose the limits and aspirations of contemporary “social scientific” efforts interested in apprehending emergent, complex and recursive (knowledge) objects, whose natures and ontological statuses reject simple or traditional forms of representation, realism, or empiricism. However, the Italian movement I have explored here, and others I have worked with, do this without eschewing the importance of rigorous and efficacious intellectual work where there are such things as “better” stories, knowledge, theory and concepts, at least in terms of producing more coherent and satisfying practice.

In fact, a key problematic that emerged in the course of the research and writing, and that I have begun to explore further, are two questions about the relationship between theory and practice. On the one hand, this is a problem of what I have called the “gap” between theory and practice, which in this dissertation is described as the tension between new and old imaginaries and modalities. Specifically, I have asked how particular social actors deal with this gap or tension in their work. I have begun to articulate this problem and a research project around it in a forthcoming essay entitled “Becoming Woman: Between Theory, Practice and Potentiality.” The site of gender politics is a particularly visible site where both this tension and gap played out, not only in the contemporary MoM, but also in the New Left and Autonomista experiences of the 1960s and 1970s. Closely related to this problematic is the question of how we re-articulate the relationship between “our” academic intellectual
practice and those of “movements,” when we acknowledge that we are often involved in different kinds of social movements ourselves (and not always, or only, as “academics”).

The concept of “theoretical-practice” as a central movement practice, described in the last chapter and introduced in earlier essays, bears important implications for those studying social movements, but also for others engaged in efforts to make sense of complex social actors and processes of social change. It works epistemologically and methodologically, but also addresses the political nature of theoretical-practice, and our own engagements with it. Recognizing social movements as theoretical-practitioners, but also meaning-makers and story-tellers requires that we shift the mode of engagement in our research, blurring well-established boundaries in social science between the “subjects” and “objects” of knowledge production. Engaging with movements not simply as objects to be explained by the distanced analyst, but as lively actors producing their own explanations, forms of expertise, theories and knowledges, I would argue, also shifts the utility—or the “what for?” — of social movement research. For where there has been a great deal of progress within the rubric of social movement research, including the renewed focus on human agency and culture, as well as the shift to understanding movements as heterogeneous networks, for the most part the strict distance between the world and expertise of the researcher, and that of movements, is maintained. Rather than consider movements’ ideas and concepts as innovative and authoritative in their own right; ideas, narratives, and ideologies generated by social movements are, in the end, usually located in a separate sphere from acts of knowing, or the “cognitive praxis” that define the rest of social life (Varela 1999, Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

As such the overall argument is two-fold: if we recognize that movements theorize and otherwise produce knowledge — including the very categories of collective-identification and
political analysis according to which they act — we would be both better able to make sense of their objectives and effects, and (perhaps even more importantly) we would acquire important knowledge about the world, and how to change it, not readily available from other perspectives.\(^{436}\) Toward this end, in a recent co-authored paper, Casas Cortes, Powell and myself attempt to offer suggestions for a post-representational knowledge-production practice in which building on the concepts of knowledge and theoretical-practice, we engage in a reframing of the debate on activist or engaged research (forthcoming).\(^{437}\)

These efforts to reframe how we think about politically engaged research, in turn relates to a need for a broader research and articulation of the ways the political is being rethought and re-made. This is in a sense the key argument and purpose of this entire project. Throughout this dissertation I have shown how the MoM exceeds our current epistemological, methodological and theoretico-political frameworks in numerous ways: empirically, MoM refuses to be bounded by, or fit into, the spatial, temporal, sociological or historical categories or delimitations of what would typically denote a movement— not only as an empirical entity locatable in time and space, but also with respect to its aims and objectives, aims that tend to correspond to a certain political and social order in which scales of governance are seen as obvious givens. As such and directly related to its evasion of empirical delimitation is MoM’s challenge to traditional understandings of “the political.” In fact, MoM is actively working to reinvent what counts as politics, what social imaginaries underpin these conceptions, as well as the forms and institutions through which we engage them. This is what I described as the new political modality, one that is cultural political and centered around the privileging of three core concepts: difference, reflexivity and autonomy.

\(^{436}\) This latter argument is developed in Casas Cortes et.al 2008, as well as Osterweil 2006, 2007.

\(^{437}\) See Casas Cortes, et.al. forthcoming, as well as Osterweil 2007.
These are in turn premised on critiques of the dominant older political imaginary and modality.\footnote{438}{In many ways this notion of politics resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of micro-politics,\footnote{438}{on the one hand and Michael Fischer’s description of the directly political nature of “emergent forms of life” (2005, 2009).}}

If we recognize the political as itself ontological—the coming into being of new forms of life—we recognize that this is part and parcel of what makes the MoM so difficult to apprehend, as well as what makes it so important to engage. In other words, MoM’s ontological status is particularly challenging to grasp for it is always working to apprehend and produce a (better) future not-yet had, however with an increasing awareness of the problems and limitations of teleological and representational forms of knowing and doing, as well as with a recognition of the importance of conjunctural, ethical decisions, and events that cause shifts and changes in the here and now. This ontological status then is intricately related to the political and empirical complexities it poses.

A different way to understand the argument I have made throughout this dissertation is that MoM is itself indicative of, and correspondent with, the multiple and messy terrains occupied by the dominant political imaginary and modality. That is to say, the complex and multifold nature of the MoM and the process of making sense of it—traversing material, cultural, discursive, historical and virtual terrains—corresponds and parallels the complexity and difficulties involved at any potentially successful effort at social transformation today. As such, any actors working for true social change must work at all of these levels, which span the political, cultural, epistemological and even the affective and embodied, often without fully understanding the ways they interrelate. At the same time, the very real, dynamic and fluctuating experience of the MoM points to the ways contingent events, and the ways they are narrated by participants, pose challenges and possibilities for anyone trying
to either make sense of the movement’s success, or its status as a part of social reality. The MoM in its specificities is itself unique, but it is deeply connected to many movements, processes and practices that can be found globally. Moreover the forms of practices experienced and experimented with in Italy, are not unlike many taking place around the world. As such, the lessons and arguments we can glean from it can be crucial far beyond the limited case of this particular movement—one that as I have repeatedly stated, cannot itself be easily bound by place or time.
Appendix A: Different movement "areas" during the G8 protest

Figure 7

From Juris 2008: 171

Figure 8

"The archipelago of protest at Genoa" Della Porta, et. al. 2002: 39
Appendix B: Figure 9. Handmade map of “il movimento dei movimenti”

From MP interview, Rome, November 2006
Appendix C: Figure 10. Primo Moroni “Mapping Autonomia”

From Derive Approdi 16: 56. Sergio Bianche, ed.
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