

Franco '**Bifo**' Berardi, was involved in the free radio 'Radio Alice' in the seventies in Bologna, Italy, and worked for the magazine 'A/traverso'. He was accused to be one of spokesman of the insurrection in 1977 in Bologna. A flight to France prevented him from jail. In France he stayed at Felix Guattari's place in Paris. Nowadays back in Bologna he is engaged in the network of "telestreet.it".

Questions asked by Jan Brueggemeier.

**Jan Brueggemeier:** Could you shortly introduce yourself?

**Franco 'Bifo' Berardi:** My name is Franco Berardi. People call me 'Bifo'. I don't know why. I have been writing some books about communication, movement and power. The last book I've published is 'the sage, the merchant, the warrior, which is about the emergence of the kognitariat.

**JB:** You have been involved in Radio Alice in the seventies in Italy. What has been the impulse for you to start such activities?

**FB:** In the seventies, sixties and fifties in Italy, Germany and everywhere else in Europe the media- scape was dominated by state- monopoly. Only state could broadcast TV and radio and was able to produce the collective knowledge and information. At the beginning of the seventies something began to change. Especially the social movement produced by the 68- wave were creating a new social participation. At the same time the technology was changing and becoming cheaper. So more and more people were able to produce radio- or videotape communication. In the seventies (75/76) in Italy the law changed. The constitutional court decided that the state owned monopoly was unconstitutional. So we could start many radio- stations all over Italy. In Bologna we created Radio Alice against the state own monopoly but also against the dominant politics of the moment, which has been the historical compromise in an alliance of Communist Party and the Christian Democratic Party. In a sense Radio Alice represented a political minority, just little part of the political world, but a social majority, because the movement of the unemployed and the students was becoming large. So I would say Radio Alice was against the state own monopoly, the cultural conformism and the political dictatorship of the Communist and Catholic Party.

**JB:** Was does the phrase mean coined by Felix Guattari that there shall be millions and millions of Radio Alices?

**FB:** Felix Guattari in my knowledge, who understood during the seventies that the history of human communication was changing in a radical way. I mean that Felix saw that the growth of big corporation of communication was only one side of a process. The other side was the proliferation of little, microscopic tools of communication, groups of communication, subjects of collective enunciation. He understood that Radio Alice was a fragment of this process. He told millions and millions Radio Alices are important. He was absolutely right with that, we have witnessed in the last thirty years and in the years of indymedia the proliferation of little, microscopic subject of enunciation.

**JB:** Let's talk about the recent project, you are involved in: telestreet.it. What is it about and what is again the impulse for you to work for it?

**FB:** Telestreet has been born in a condition, which recalls the situation of the

seventies and sixties. In those years in the seventies there was a monopoly of communication dominated by the state. During the last five years since the election of Mister Berlusconi in Italy a new kind of monopoly appeared which has been a private monopoly. In the media (newspaper), it was said that these Italian corporations were created with the help and the money of the mafia and in complete illegality. This economic group has become the owner of the entire Italian media- scape. Two years ago a group of people, many of them coming from the old experience of Radio Alice began thinking about, what we can do against such a monopoly. We decided to start a micro- TV in Bologna. Micro- TV 'telestreet' means the television can be received only by the people, who live in your neighbourhood, in your street. We started with that idea and many other groups in every city in Italy started micro- TV in their neighbourhood. We created a network of micro- TV, which are connected via the internet and are producing broadcasts for their neighbour but also can be downloaded and used by the other 'telestreets'. We can say 'telestreet' is a new step in the proliferation and is a new combat against monopoly, this time a corporate monopoly.

**JB:** Can you state over the last thirty years some transformations or changes regarding peoples relationship to media and medias relationship to the reality of the people and their notion of so called public in terms of space, mentality or customs?

**FB:** That's a very difficult question, because first at all we must think about what has changed in technology. Communication- technology, the machines for broadcasting, for producing video, photography, print- media and radio have completely changed on an economic level. Everyday millions of people own an own video- camera, a professional digital video- camera, that's a first change. Every group can become a media- producer, but at the same time the access to the media- scape has become narrower, private dominated and selective. It is kind of feudalism of the media- scape. The emperor Murdoch and the king Berlusconi owning big regions of the global media- scape and millions of people who have the technical possibility of producing communication, but they have become dumb, deaf, mute. They can not do anything. They can not speak with the people they are living with. We are more and more powerful, but at the same time impotent, silent. The main contradictory to me is that 'Oeffentlichkeit' – how you call it in German – is less and less 'offen' and is more and more closed. You see it in the advertising, which is the production of the collective mind, but the collective mind is imagined, produced by a very narrow group of people. The openness, the public- ness of our age is a deeply contradictory one and we are acting in this contradictory.

**JB:** What happened to Radio Alice and how do the reaction on telestreet nowadays look like from the perspective of the receiving people and from the official side of the city and parties? How does reaction look like on such communication projects?

**FB:** The reaction on the communication of Radio Alice was repression. In '77 the Christian- Democratic and Communist government sent the police to break down the communication of Radio Alice. In March '77 the city of Bologna was involved in a kind of insurrection, which lasted four days. One student was killed by the police and the students reacted on that in a very

strong way. Radio Alice was coordinating the riots in the streets until the moment police entered the station and destroyed everything and arrested everybody inside the radio-station. This was the story of Radio Alice. What is happening now? The situation is very complex. People are perceiving the danger of Berlusconi's dictatorship especially people are perceiving the danger of colonization of the public space of communication. More and more people are joining the idea and the process started by 'telestreet'. At the same time it is difficult to break the economic and media domination of power. Nowadays 'telestreet' in Italy counts about 200 stations. There are a lot of media-groups of activists, who act in their territories and are coordinated via internet. This is very good, but we are not able to stop the colonization of the media-scape. We are not able to stop the criminal action of Italian government. We are not able to subvert this kind of situation, which is a fascist situation. The strength of the autonomous media is not able at the moment to really break the actual forms of power. This is the problem, we are facing nowadays.

**JB:** What has been the official reason for closing down Radio Alice in the seventies?

**FB:** Radio Alice has been closed in March '77, because we have been accused to be the organiser and coordinator of the riots in the street. But in the reality what has been the fear of the power especially the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats have been the ability of society to create network of autonomous communication and a network of counter-power in the neighbourhoods, in the schools, in the factories and universities. In that period the media-fight was part of a very violent social struggle, social opposition. To cut it short: reason has been the specific problem of the riots in the city but in the same time the deeper problem has been the contradiction of corporate concentration and proliferation of the media-scape.

**JB:** What is for you a link between radio and something like a collective production of desire?

**FB:** Desire is a process of communication. Desire means creations of a constellation of bodies and language. This is desire. The etymology of the word desire comes from the Greek word for stars. Of course radio is a privileged tool for creating constellation of people. Problem is that at this time we are facing a very aggressive attack from the power. I wonder if we can separate the problem of temporary autonomous zones, zones of a collective desire, zones of autonomous communication and the fear of domination, repressive production from the power. I am not sure anymore. During the eighties and nineties I was convinced that our task is the creation of an autonomous sphere of desire, language and social production. Nowadays I am doubtful, if we can protect our temporary autonomous zones, our desire, if we are not able to stop fascism, to stop this new form of fascism which is the connection of economic corporations and the machine of war.

**JB:** Would you understand radio as a space, as a public space?

**FB:** Radio is a fragment of the public space. it is a tool for production of the public space. It is a subject of the collective enunciation. The public space is

the product, is the effect of enunciation.

**JB:** Radio Alice was claiming to rather talk 'dirty' language. What is meant by that?

**FB:** I would rather translate it with contaminated, contamination between different styles and cultures but mostly contamination between language and practice. The idea that language and communication is separated from the social practice is an old one. In seventies the very idea of a contamination between social practise and language was a scandal. Today we are maybe much more accustomed to the idea of making radio, making TV, writing poems and making tags on the walls is a form of social practice. But in that time we needed that contamination as extension of the potential of language and of art.

**JB:** When I was reading Paolo Virno, I very much liked his remark on Hannah Arendts statement that politic has much in common with labour, because it produces the state, the nation. Virno adds that nowadays labour has much in common with politics, because it is not producing so much concrete products anymore, but is dealing with more and more communication- like situations ex. g. the service hotlines of companies. Do you see a special role for radio in such post- industrialized conditions?

**FB:** Paolo Virno and Christian Marazzi working on that idea, which I share absolutely, that productive work becoming more and more linguistic. Language is involved in the production of value, in the production capital. This is creating a strange kind of contradiction for media- activism, for radio- production and so on. We are working at the same time as media and political activists and as producer of the media- scape. In many senses we are producing the new fashions of communication and we are producing the new ideas that the corporations are recuperating and using. So what should we do in that kind of contradiction? First: We should not get paranoid. We are not acting in order to be absolutely pure and uncontaminated. That's not our problem, but we have to be conscious of the continuous integration of language of expression of desire and the capitalist recuperation in these new forms of politized and communicative productions.

**JB:** What means public- ness nowadays? Is it the manifestation in the streets or is it what is being covered of it in mainstream- media? What would be the consequences for the expression of protest and resistance?

**FB:** I was on the mayday- demonstration in Barcelona. Thousands of people have been walking in the streets against the 'precarisation' of life, against the power of the corporations. At the same time there was a big demonstration in Milano. Hundred thousand young workers are walking for the same reasons. You ask me, what is the sense of demonstration in the streets, when our way of production, our way of protest is mostly a mediatic, linguistic form. I answer You that, that demonstrations are a form of communication. The people, who walked in the streets of Milano and Barcelona are people, who go everyday in a physical center, in a Mc-Donald shop. People, who work as precarious worker, people, who have to choose every day, every second between the capitalist domination and solidarity, which is a solidarity of desire. Demonstrations are good and necessity, are communication between us and the rest of the world. I do not see a radical difference talking on

phone and on the streets or to act on TV or in concrete everyday life.