

Interview with Franco 'Bifo' Berardi @ NEURO, Munich 2004

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi was engaged in the 70ies autonomous-movement in Italy, founding-member of free Radio Alice in Bologna and nowadays working for 'telestreet' an independent media network in Italy [<http://telestreet.it>], which initially started in Bologna and include more than 150 TV-stations at the moment. It occurred to be possible to run such local independent TV-station in Bologna due to the fact that Bolognas 'shadow' of the service-area of national italian tv-programm has made it possible to broadcast on very micro-local level without interfering with the national TV-stations.

Question: Could You shortly introduce Yourself?

Answer: My name is Franco Berardi, people call me 'Bifo'. I live in Bologna, Italy, and I am teaching and involved in the network 'telestreet', which is working against the media-dictorship, which is destroying Italy nowadays.

Q: Do You think democracy is or has become the entertainment for society?

A: I don't really know, what democracy means. I know very differnt kinds of democracy like social democracy of workers organising themselves or democracy of the intellectuals, who can talk and so on. I know the parliamentary democracy of modern bourgeoisie, but at the moment I just don't see them. Democracy has become a completely empty word and I ask myself, if we can continue using such a word, which is completely devoided of meaning.

Q: Once in an interview with Matthew Fuller you have drawn a line between the 'conventional' anti-globalism protester, who is demonstrating on the streets, and the linked -what you call- 'kognitariat'. What do You exactly describe with that term? Is it the unemployed web-designer in times of dotgone-economy, does it include the highly flexibilized worker at ford-factory in the post-fordism?

A: The word 'kognitariat' is probably only a metaphor. In my opinion the central force of society nowadays is the cognitive labour force, the 'general intellect', the cognition as productive force, but during the last 10-20 years the cognitive workers got more and more exploited and seperated from their social and erotic existence. Cognitive work has become a more and more empty time, intellectual time. Your body, your social life got completely seperated from the worker. One can see it in the life of dotcom-workers, of virtual workers. They are completely taken in this attention-competition. They don't have time, they can't spend attention to their own social and sexual life, to their social relationship, to their family and children. This kind of seperation is the main problem nowadays. I think, when the cognitive worker becomes aware of this seperation and when they start to build social relationship with their comrades and with their own bodies, they become 'kognitarian'. What is a 'kognitarian'? A 'kognitarian' is a proletarian of cognition. When

one becomes conscious of ones belonging to the proletarians, of your being a proletarian of intellectual force and work, when one becomes aware and able to create this kind of connection between cognitive work and social existence, this my idea about it.

Q: Would You agree on that opinion that capital nowadays is rather a process than easily to personify with something like the figure of capitalist? Which concepts or terms are in Your view describing the situation, we are living in, in more appropriate way?

A: You know, capital is not a thing or an amount of things. Karl Marx said, capital is a social relationship. Felix Guattari told, that capitalism is a form of semiotization of life, what means that it is a special of perceiving Yourself and Your relationship to things and with others. So we can say that capital is at the same time a social relationship and an imagination of Your relationship with the world. What nowadays is absolutely central is the shaping of imagination. It is central for the power, for us, for society and the movement. Shaping of imagination is not only an intellectual, a mental thing. It is also the possibility of creating another relationship to the world than the capitalistic one. When the intellectual work gets more and more exploited and more and more connected to the capitalistic organisation the intellectual imagination is drying out and it is loosing their ability of imagination. This is our main problem nowadays to reactivate such ability to imagine other possibilities. This central in the self-organisation of intellectual work.

Q: Does for You 'the public' in a common dimension still exist?

A: This has something to do with imagination. On one side we are loosing public sphere. Public sphere 'Oeffentlichkeit' has only become the production of spectacular, of capitalist production, of images and imaginery and so on. So we have lost any public dimension. On the other side everything brcomes public in that sense that everything gets devoided of a singular existence, singular imagination and so on. Everything becomes homogenized by this kind of capitalist production and imagination. The privatization of the social existence is a way of devoiding, of emptying the public sphere. On the other side everything becomes public sphere, but we can not treat it as such. It is public but not common. It is public in that sense of 'Oeffentlichkeit', which produces 'Oeffentlichkeit'. Advertisement is a creating a common world, but this common world is not common at all. It is completely privatized and it does not belong to us. Only if we reanounce ourselves to our time, to our life, to our intelligence and to our imagination. This is the paradox of 'Oeffentlichkeit'.

Q: When did You get in touch with the Internet and what was Your driving motivation?

A: I come from the background of the free radios from the seventies. The novelty of the free radios has not been so much its technique. It has been special in the social connecetion, it has created. Telephone and free radio, you know, people calling from

the streets talking to other people, who can react, calling and reacting and so on. This is the paradigm of the network, of the Internet. When I became aware of the ability of the Internet to create possibility to create a social and horizontal connection, I told myself, that this has been the same I was doing in the 70ies with Radio Alice.

Q: But isn't Internet much more elitist than FM-Radio?

A: First at all, it isn't elitist. Nowadays 500 Million people in the world are connected to the Internet. We can say that the Internet has changed in the last 3-4 years. It has become something much more broadcasting then 10 years ago. But in any case what for me is interesting about the Internet, is not its technique but the paradigm the network produces. People connecting to the internet become some kind of new possibility of social relationship based on a horizontal, egalitarian relationship rather than broadcast vertically and so on. This is why I don't care so much about the difficulties and its exclusiveness of the Internet. The importance is diffusion of a new kind of paradigm, a sensitization of a possibility.