From
Ethereal Shadows:
Communications and
Power in Contemporary
Italy

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Italian Media Activism in the 1970s

As in much of the world, in recent decades Italy witnessed the emergence of a self-organized movement of media activism among knowledge and communication workers. This media activism expressed itself through an ensemble of communicative practices aiming to remove social communication from the passivity of the spectacle in order to produce creative, public and socially engaged works. As the means of production and distribution for media discourse became more complex, costly and concentrated in the hands of few corporations, technologically mediated social communication was in the process of becoming a privatized and exclusive field. In recent years this trend has ebbed. Thanks to reduced media production costs, the capillary diffusion of technological knowledge and the increased availability of data-transfer networks, the mediascape is no longer the exclusive property of large private and public corporations, but is also populated with the experiments and exchanges of grassroots groups, individuals, artists, political and cultural agitators. Media activism came to represent the conscious practice of those who invaded the field of technologically mediated social communication to produce critical thinking and social awareness. In doing so, it fought a hard battle to redirect the social imaginary of media audiences away from the ephemeral fantasies of the media conglomerates.

Communication Technologies and Social Change

The means of techno-communicative production have played an essential societal role since the beginning of modernity. We recall how important the spread and

popularization of books and the printed word were for the birth of modern society: print allowed a new dominant form of discourse, based on the bourgeois democratic values of decision-making and political action, to become easily accessible to increasingly large sectors of the population. Only when it became possible to distribute one's own thoughts and memories in written form to a substantial part of society could the nation-state take hold over large swaths of the geographical and imaginary landscape.

Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new visual and audio reproduction technologies increased our ability to produce media messages and communicate with one another, resulting in a thickened infosphere with greater access to the social imaginary. For a long time, these means (photography, cinema, radio and television) remained inaccessible to the vast majority of the population because they were expensive and scarce. As a result, a narrow group of specialists was able to secure control over the totality of semiotic production. However, beginning in the 1970s, these instruments of techno-communicative production began to be mass produced and marketed affordably, thus becoming accessible to an ever-greater number of people. Such mass production and circulation produced a democratization of semiotic production, which counteracted the concentration of the means of communication in the hands of a few media conglomerates.

One of the first technologies to appear in the hands of the social movements was the mimeograph. The mimeograph was used primarily for the rapid mobilization of a considerable number of people through the reproduction of thousands of copies of messages at lightning speed and bargain prices. Leaflets with calls for a political action—including background information and slogans for a strike or demonstration—were written in the evening and then five thousand copies were pressed during the night, ready to be distributed in the morning at the gates of a factory, on the steps of a university hall, or in the center of town. The massive circulation of political messages in 1968 depended on the use of the mimeograph, which during those years made informal, wild, and independent consciousness-raising capillary actions possible—a phenomenon that would not have been possible with the traditional tools of the rotary press.

Three crucial tools for the widespread access of semiotic production followed shortly after the mimeograph: the offset press, the radio and the video recorder.

The offset machine facilitated the printing of a limited number of copies of color newspapers, with a livelier layout, richer colors, and more imaginative format than the mimeograph. The proliferation of 'transversal' newspapers and journals (such as *A/Traverso*, *ZUT* and hundreds of other news sheets and fanzines) that characterized the explosion of the autonomous creative movement between 1975 and 1977 was made possible by the low cost and easy-to-use nature of the offset press, which permitted layout assembly in the absence of printing expertise and allowed alteration right up to the last moment before printing.

The 1970s also saw the introduction and popular diffusion of video and audio recording technology. In Italy, the student movement was the first group to understand and develop independent video production. In 1972, the leftist revolutionary

group *Lotta Continua* [Continuous Struggle] together with Pier Paolo Pasolini (the poet, writer and filmmaker, known outside Italy as one of the most significant directors to emerge from the second wave of Italian postwar cinema in the early 1960s) produced one of the first full-length features, *October*, shot entirely using video equipment. Thanks to spontaneous groups of militant videomakers, video cameras began to appear at political street demonstrations. In 1970, Alberto Grifi, a Roman director who came from the 1960s' performance art movement, produced a full-length video entitled *Anna*, one of the first videos to connect performance art and political information in a TV-movie format. In these years, Grifi produced an enormous number of videos documenting the political and social struggles of the student and workers' movements, inaugurating a poetics of fragmentation that borrowed heavily from the aesthetics of the beatnik movement.

New media producers were recruited out of the students and blue-collar workers who made up an emerging social formation: the "proletarian youth." These men and women engaged in socially subversive actions such as squatting or the expropriation of the goods needed to survive (food staples, electricity, or heat). They took charge of the production and distribution of political tracts, documented street actions and demonstrations with video cameras, and became involved in the construction of independent (and illegal) radio stations. Thanks to this structural transformation in communicative production, Italy in the 1970s—which for various political and social reasons enjoyed a clear lead over other European countries in this field—experienced a merger between artistic experimentation and subversive political intentions, which was similar to the experiments of the American counterculture of the 1960s, albeit in a different social and political context.

Radio Alice

The battle for democracy in the global infosphere took different paths according to the particular situations and histories of different countries. For instance, while in the United States the main danger to the freedom of communication came from privatization and foreclosure of access, in Italy the principal danger came from the public monopoly of the airwaves. During the postwar decades, European governments did not grant access to the airwaves to any private citizen—not for any purposes, commercial or political or cultural. As we saw in chapter 1, in Italy, the monopoly of the airwaves was broken in December 1974, when the *Corte di Cassazione* [Constitutional Court] declared the state monopoly over communication to be unconstitutional.

Even before the Court's decision, a collective called Controradio was formed in Bologna to evaluate the consequences of violating the law on broadcasting and opening a radio station, which was to be called Radio Alice. This initiative was shaped by the editorial board of *A/Traverso*, a local magazine concerned with issues related to the techno-scientific and theoretical knowledge of communication from below. This magazine was directly inspired by the artistic avant-garde movements (dada, futurism, surrealism), by rock and pre-punk countercultures, by mass media

studies (from the Frankfurt School to McLuhan) and by the West Coast psychedelic vision of media as vehicles for human interaction.

Radio Alice connected these different strands and translated them into a media activism that spoke the sophisticated language of French poststructuralism. In the 1970s, philosophical thought, particularly in France, reopened the reflection on power and liberation in terms of microphysics, that is, in terms of power relations through which molecular social processes operate at the level of interaction between society and the social imaginary. Subjectivity was no longer identified in the monolithic form of ideology, politics and social affiliation, but was found in a whole microphysics of need, imagination and desire. The idea of social "microphysics" was introduced by Michel Foucault (1972 [1969]) and then developed in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1977 [1972]). In this book, the concept of the subject was substituted by that of "subjectivation," in order to suggest that the subject is not pre-made, socially determined and ideologically solid. Rather, in the formation of social subjectivities, we must see how the processes of attraction and fantasy model individual bodies and collective organisms and render them dynamic, variable and proliferating subjects. Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1965 [1961]) and *Discipline and Punishment* (1977 [1975]), *Anti-Oedipus* by Deleuze and Guattari, and *A Lover's Discourse* by Roland Barthes (1978 [1977]) were books that generated a keen interest in Italy during those years. Even though they did not propose a political program, these books ended up becoming reference points for the political discussions of the time. These books proposed a nomadic style that was nonidentitarian, flexible, creative and noncompetitive. The Bolognese movement in general, and Radio Alice in particular, took its language and behavior from these books, and as a result promoted the social movement as a symbolic agent and the media production collective as, to quote Felix Guattari, a "collective subject of signification."

Founded by a small group of young men (in the words of a local feminist, "by a group of all men who walked arm in arm and spoke nonstop"), Radio Alice was an island of male self-consciousness operating in a context in which women were reasserting their specificity and autonomy. It is not possible to understand this experience without realizing the impact of the feminist critiques on male protagonism, power relations and leadership ambitions. The choice of Lewis Carroll's fictional heroine was pointed; Alice was heavily linked to the world of feminine symbolism but also to the upside-down logic of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. Next to Carroll, as a second godfather, the group elected the Deleuze of *The Logic of Sense* (1990 [1969]), a book which deciphered the paradoxes encountered by Carroll's heroine as a metaphor for the mechanisms of loss of identity (for Deleuze, Alice wanted to always be outside all logic, and the mirror—as symbol of identity—had to be continually crossed over). The radio collective promoted an environment that discouraged the petty drives of identity, such as runaway ambition and shameless self-promotion, in favor of a truly collective voice.

The feminist movement was decisive in the redefinition of cultural and political programs for the Italian social movements. Radio Alice emerged from the awareness that the historical actor was not a unitary and homogeneous social class, but a storm

of singularities that expressed themselves on different levels, such as those of sexuality and language. For the first time in Italy, sexuality and drugs became subjects of discussion and experimentation. Radio Alice was the explicit and declared signal of the desire of the new social movement to break out of the linguistic schemes of the traditional workers movement and to propose new agit-prop techniques: mockery, irony, the spreading of fake news, the mixing of lyrical and hysterical tones, and the mixture of the historical reflection with ordinary events of everyday life.

The relationship between social processes and technological change was at the center of the theoretical preoccupations of the radio collective. Radio Alice tried to recast the connection between technology and social effects of communication in a new light. In the socialist theoretical tradition, communication was seen as a superstructure where systems of ideological content clashed and fought one another, true information against false. For this reason, the strategy of the historical socialist movement was to contrast the dominant sources of news with a counterinformation capable of recovering hidden or manipulated truths. It wanted to contest the consensus around the dominant information by means of propaganda and counterinformation, and to build an alternative consensus around progressive or revolutionary ideology. Marxist schools of thought conceived cultural and communicative production as part of the superstructure, an effect determined by the relations of production. So communication was considered (in accordance with the tenets of historical materialism) in purely instrumental terms, in terms of counterinformation for the establishment of proletarian truth against bourgeois lies.

In the 1970s, French poststructuralist theory put this material vision into crisis, particularly with the publication of Jean Baudrillard's essay "Requiem for the Media" in *Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1972]). The title is somewhat ironic, for Baudrillard was only beginning to develop a social theory in which the media will play crucial roles in constituting a new postmodernity. Baudrillard was really writing a requiem here for a 'Marxist theory of the media.' As an example of the failure of Marxian categories to provide an adequate theory of the media, Baudrillard criticizes the German activist and writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger's media theory and his attempts to develop a socialist strategy for the media. For Enzensberger, the political task of a socialist strategy in the field of communication consisted in reaffirming the use value of the process of signification and in organizing and setting it against the domination of capital. Baudrillard dug deeper, recognizing that the process of commodification involves the very structure of the message and the means of its production. Baudrillard took up McLuhan's essential lesson (even while raising some polemical objections): the organizational, technological and relational structure of the medium decisively influences the mode of communication and the conditions in which the communicative exchange unfolds. Therefore, the medium influences, even if in a non-determinist manner, the message itself. Baudrillard showed that the effect of communication on society depends to a substantial extent on the modalities of relation that the technology puts at the disposition of the players in the game, and not only on the ideological or political intentions of social actors.

In Italy, poststructuralist thought aroused great interest, especially in the milieus of the social movement that had been formed outside of the old militant structures of the Left. The deconstructive lessons of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, as well the semiology of Umberto Eco, were strongly identifiable within the theory and practice of the social communication movement. Culture and communication were no longer regarded as superstructure, but as symbolic production related to the shaping of the social imaginary, that is—to the ocean of images, feelings, expectations, desires and motivations through which social meanings were produced and reproduced. Shaped by French poststructuralism, both *A/Traverso* and Radio Alice conducted an intense battle against historical materialism, dialectical rationality and the bureaucratic language of the socialist movements. In particular, Radio Alice's experience represented a process of appropriation of communications technologies for the creation of a new public space autonomous from both state monopoly and private economic domination.

While the Italian Left (parliamentary or not) focused only on the content of information and the development of so-called counterinformation, the Radio Alice collective abandoned this tradition to shift to guerilla-warfare-inspired informational practices aimed at permeating the whole cycle of media production. A new wave of communications workers began to understand that the real battle was not over content and social consensus, but rather over the creation of new technologies, interfaces and social linkages. They realized that it was not a matter of recovering revolutionary truth against bourgeois lies, nor about producing counterinformation to unmask the hidden plots of some enemy. It was about acting on the social imaginary, circulating plays of fantasy and flows of desire capable of destabilizing the dominant message of work, order and discipline. As an editorial in *A/Traverso* put it, it was about moving away from "consumption toward the critical production of the given and said."

Radio Alice began broadcasting on February 9, 1976, with an extended schedule (in the morning from 6:30 until 8:30 and then from 2:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m.). The first morning, a soft female voice spoke against a background of Indian music, bidding the listeners good day and inviting them to stay in bed: "This is an invitation not to get up this morning, to stay in bed with someone, to make musical instruments and war machines for yourself." (This odd inclusion of the "war machine" was a clear homage to Deleuze and Guattari's "nomadic war machine," which will find its way into the pages of *Nomadology: The War Machine*, 1986 [1980]).

From the beginning, Radio Alice refused to be identified as an instrument of counterinformation. In the first place, Radio Alice was not a tool; it was a communicative agent. It was not in the service of the proletariat, but a subjectivity in a movement whose purpose was not the recovery of truths that had been denied, hidden, violated or suppressed. The purpose of independent communication was no longer a search for an objective truth, corresponding to the deep dynamics of history, but rather the construction of a process of autonomous expression, capable of confronting, entangling and contaminating other meaning-producing processes.

In Radio Alice's guerilla-warfare-style communication, it was necessary to

appropriate the means and disturb the circulation of information, to destroy the relationship between broadcast and circulation, to dissolve the rigid division between listeners and producers. From this perspective, news had to be produced in a collective manner. The fundamental element of this tactic was the refusal of news or information produced outside the processes of the social movements—a refusal, that is, to imitate the practices of the press agencies, which hoarded news so as to insert it into a capitalist profit cycle. Everything that went on air (music, news, interviews, debates) had to be considered common property. Above all, this was true for the music choices, which were left to the personal taste (and financial means) of each participant. Everyone brought her own records (apart from one member who worked in a music shop and borrowed stuff from the store) and played her own stuff while broadcasting, and then took them away again. It was an archaic file-sharing system, an analog precursor to Napster.

Radio Alice rejected any form of professionalism as well as the division between "journalists" and "users." It was against prepared speeches, carefully produced programming and perfect mixes: "We will not professionalize. We refuse to educate ourselves. We will not learn. We don't even know what 'professionalism' means," they wrote in *A/Traverso*. Their refusal of professionalism allowed direct links with the listeners; anyone could collaborate in the making of the broadcasts.

The telephone played a fundamental role in the communicative routines Radio Alice developed in order to give listeners access to the radio. During Radio Alice's live broadcasts, the radio and telephone found themselves interacting in an increasingly intricate way. In this coupling of radio and telephone, Radio Alice produced a revolution in journalistic language that would then be imitated by many Italian communications producers. There were two innovative features: first, live broadcast of news provided reportage at the same time as the event described (most of the time through people calling in from the streets); and second, the lack of centralized coordination of this instantaneous journalism, where the radio acted as an open channel for anyone who wanted to take the podium (a strategy that we will see again with indymedia.org). In this way, the distinction between the production of news by an editorial group and its passive reception by the listener was erased. News was provided live by whoever called the radio, without any filter or editing. Freedom of access, the informal style of communication, refusal of professionalism and the live broadcast allowed the wall between broadcasters and receivers to be torn down and for the concept of private property in intellectual labor to be overcome. Every social subject became a producer of radio culture.

Opening up the radio broadcast brought with it a radical transformation of the communications context: "Radio Alice broadcasts everything: all that you want and what you don't want," its producers announced, "what you think and that which you think you think, especially if you come here in the heart of Bologna and say it on air or call us at 27 41 28." Given that all calls were broadcast live, one could sometimes hear voices that insulted the producers. One caller decried, "Filthy communists, we'll make you pay dearly for this radio station, we know who you are." Most of the time, the calls had a surrealist quality:

Alice: Hello?.... Hi, this is Alice.
Caller: Yes, what's new?
Alice: What do you mean what's new? You tell me, you called.
Caller: Exactly, what's new?

For the students and workers who were its audience, Radio Alice was "the appropriate instrument to explore the country behind the looking glass, and to intervene creatively in everyday life" (*A/Traverso*). Wonderland, indeed.

The radio collective sought to get rid of the distinction between technicians and producers and to avoid internal hierarchies. And even if this desire for an open and nonhierarchical project ran the danger of swamping editorial creativity with the banality of thousands of callers (a problem not dissimilar to the one experienced by Indymedia much later), at the same time, it permitted the radio to tap directly into the most creative productions of the social movements of those years. The total absence of control over access to the transmission channels allowed the spreading of every conceivable topic or theme:

> Radio Alice transmits: music, news, blossoming gardens, rants, inventions, discoveries, recipes, horoscopes, magic potions, love, war bulletins, photographs, messages, massages, lies (*A/Traverso*).

There was bit of everything in the radio program: bulletins on social protests in the schools, discussions about sex, advice on food, different types of music, interviews with Bolognese workers on strike, travel tales, philosophy and fiction readings, cinema schedules, personal messages. One person announced: "Someone stole my bicycle, can I say on the radio that they're a son of a bitch?" The street price of drugs was broadcast, as were the results of research done on the Bolognese dialect. The established order usually given to political news and disasters by the television disappeared, while first-person accounts, freewheeling stories, local news and snatches of everyday life were given top priority.

The Revolution will not be Televised, but we will use the Radio

Radio Alice was far more than an avant-garde artistic-communicative experiment. Through its interaction with the city, it produced networks of friendships and social aggregation. For instance, one evening in 1977, someone from the radio collective came up with the idea to organize a party in the town square at midnight of the same day. With just a couple hours notice, two thousand people met in the square, "armed with milk, guitars, flutes, kites and flags for a night of improvised jam sessions and dance" (*A/Traverso*). At the end of the party, a cheerful and noisy march snaked through the city's streets in the deep of night, waking people and trying to convince them not to go to work the next day. Finally, it reached the door of the radio station. Only then did it dissolve into hugs and kisses.

The youth began to carry little portable radios so they could listen to Radio Alice

as they moved around Bologna. If they needed to communicate something to the radio they just jumped into the first available telephone booth. Most of the time they just wanted to relate an amusing incident, get in touch with a friend, or request a specific song. However, with the intensification of the student struggles in 1977, the radio assumed a role of great political significance. It came to be used to warn students of the presence of an undercover police unit or a group of fascist thugs in front of a school, to remind people to take part in an assembly called for that evening, and to discuss strategies for fighting the city and the university administrations. Radio Alice swam in the movement like a fish in a river, a movement that until then had the levity of a peaceful cultural revolution.

Then, the March riots broke out. On March 13, during the student occupation of the University of Bologna to protest against reform proposals stemming from the "historic compromise"—the Catho-Communist alliance between the Christian Democrats and the PCI—Francesco Lorusso, a student at the University's medical school, was shot dead by the *Carabinieri* [Italian military police]. This precipitated furious clashes between youth and the police, not only in Bologna but in other major cities. Hundreds of thousands of people all over Italy went into the streets to protest police brutality and the repressive tendencies of both the PCI and the Interior Minister, Christian Democrat Francesco Cossiga (who would later become President of the Republic).

The situation became so serious in Bologna that armored tanks were sent into the streets to restore order. The students reacted by using Radio Alice to gather valuable intelligence on the police's positions and movements. During these days in March, Radio Alice became a tool for real-time communication of the complex dynamics that were occurring in the streets. It enabled those fighting the police to keep in touch in situations that were not always ideal (because of poor visibility created by tear gas, the noise of police sirens and the need to disperse quickly in the myriad small streets of the city center). Radio Alice became a collective mobile phone. The radio-telephone hybrid also provided the possibility of live accounts during the riots. The calls, broadcast live, alternated with long musical interludes and the commentary of the radio anchor, creating an audio tapestry where multiple radio genres blended in a continuous mix of voices, screams, music and excited statements.

During three days of riots between students and the police, Radio Alice fulfilled three important functions: it allowed listeners to keep abreast of events by functioning as a relay switchboard for the clashes going on in the streets; it provided a space for discussing how to respond to the police's intervention; and it injected its own perspective as a militant radio station.

Radio Alice as a Relay Station

News of Lorusso's death was conveyed live on the radio by an eyewitness just minutes after the incident:

Alice: Now let's hear from someone who is calling us from the area of the ri-

ots... just a minute, there's some confusion... yes, go ahead.
Caller: I saw a Carabiniere who jumped down and fired, I don't know if it was him, I can't say. When it happened I was there with two others, we called for help to carry him away... when I saw him he was still breathing. We lifted up his jacket and he was bleeding, they told us to hold up his head otherwise the blood would go the other way but he started bleeding from the mouth, so we laid him down on the ground and called, called, called for an ambulance. One person was so overwhelmed that he began to weep.... I immediately called for an ambulance because it seemed too serious to call a car and bring him to a sympathetic doctor. But the ambulance took ages because the police kept charging nearby and the streets were filled with teargas... at that point two ambulances arrived... he lay on the ground for four minutes, while we tried to put our hands on his brow and so on, every once in a while he seemed to be still alive, but at a certain moment I'm afraid that... that he died... I touched his forehead, it was warm... but his hands were very cold....

As soon as the news of the shooting spread, thousands of students met in the University area to express their rage:

Caller: Here I am again, sorry I'm a touch disorganized, I'm rather shaken.... The comrades in Piazza Verdi have torn up the cobblestone pavement in front of the theater next to University Hall. Lots of them have their backpacks full of stones, there are piles of them at street corners and everyone who passes by puts a couple in their pockets and then heads off quickly. Everywhere the feeling is that of rage, of determination. Tables have been taken out of the faculty buildings, as well as chairs and who knows what else to make barricades, so the area is blocked off in every direction with barricades.

Then the students decided to take the riots outside of the University quarters, and to wreak havoc on the city. At different points, participants took a break to call the radio station:

Caller: It started with a huge assembly that totally filled the square and overflowed in the streets nearby. Then we moved on, a line of locked ranks; we came from the University area and passed through Piazza Maggiore. Afterwards the demonstration continued and came upon the police, who started throwing shock-grenades and tear gas. I also heard gunshots. The riot is now full-on, and you can't see anything because of the thickness of the smoke that now rises and hides everything on the street from view.

Some calls provided a lyrical intensity until then unknown on state radio, always too concerned to separate news and commentary, a division that struck Radio Alice as absurd:

Caller: I'm coming now from the area around the train station. We made a trip by car to the crossroads of Via Marconi and Via Ugo Bassi. There are still remnants of smoke, the eyes may water a little. There are traces of the clashes everywhere, firemen are putting out the last flames, and there are lots of people talking and discussing. On every face there is a look of amazement and rage about what has happened. One still can't understand the meaning of what has taken place. However it's a fact that Via Ugo Bassi is really beautiful. It's filled with debris, the plants that decorated the arcades under which there were the finest and most expensive shops, well those plants have been torn up and wrecked. The vases have been smashed and thrown into the middle of the street. There are lots of broken windows and burnt-out shops. The comrades' rage is quite visible. Via Ugo Bassi is fantastic.

Conscious of the gravity of the situation, Radio Alice maintained a tone that was serious and informative but also capable of grasping the inevitable ironies of the moment:

Caller: Down there the fires go on, but things are not very clear.
Alice: Fire? What's on fire?
Caller: The entire barricade in front of Piazza Verdi is burning. However, the police have now stopped firing tear gas. The comrades have learned how to throw them back perfectly, and send them behind the cops. There is also a breeze that blows the tear gas back towards the police, in fact we have the breeze at our backs, there is beautiful sunshine and the air is sweet and very fresh....
Alice: Ah, wonderful, it's springtime!

This tone, oscillating between informative seriousness and the typical irony of the avant-garde's language of those years, was picked up by various callers:

Caller: About a half hour ago, around 4 p.m., we met a group of firemen wearing uniforms, helmets, oxygen tanks, etc., who were running away along Via Zamboni in the middle of the smoke from the tear gas. They said that the police cut their water supply and now they can't put out the fires anymore. That's what I heard with my little blue ears.

Faced with increasingly heavy guerilla warfare, Radio Alice continuously reported the events, relaying everything the callers said, even if potentially damaging to the students' side, such as when a caller reported hearing shots coming from both sides:

Caller: So this is the situation in Piazza Verde, the police have managed to occupy it, the comrades are dug in behind the barricade in front of the Humanities building, as well as behind the University cafeteria. There... aaah... they are

firing gunshots from both sides... throwing tear-gas grenades... at head height. That's the situation as far as we know....
Alice: Sorry, I didn't hear you there... you speak of firearms from both sides in what sense?
Caller: That is, they're firing from both sides.
Alice: Hmmm.
Caller: Or at least one can hear pistol shots from both sides, explosions of Molotov cocktails coming from our side, or something like that.
Alice: Yes.

Bologna was engulfed in a day of chaotic guerilla warfare, and Radio broadcast the rage of the student movement:

Caller: I've just slipped through the police lines. Now that the tear gas and smoke are gone people have started coming back. You can already hear their angry shouts. One more thing, all the comrades should hit the street, this is guerilla warfare, for God's sake, get into the streets.

Radio Alice and Community Relations

The radio's direct involvement in chronicling the events also produced some protests and comments from listeners, proving that the radio broadcasts were followed not only by members of the student movement, but also by ordinary citizens. Thus multiple, and sometimes antagonistic voices, were broadcast:

Caller: I want to congratulate the guy who characterized the policemen as pigs.
Alice: Right, yeah, that's me.
Caller: Well done. Now, let me tell you that you're extremely uncouth because on the radio, or TV, you don't insult people, understand? Among other things, you also cursed.
Alice: Yeah, yeah, right now who gives a fuck. I mean, these people continue to call us bad-mannered because we insult and curse on the radio, while outside on the street they're shooting us. I'll just go change the music.

Other voices from this progressive city were more sympathetic but still critical:

Caller: But listen, don't you realize that you're just stirring up trouble nonstop? You're providing no service to the community, you're continually reporting that there are clashes occurring and thus making them worse.
Alice: We do nothing but give out what we get. We're not doing the reporting, the people who are calling in are, the people who are living it.
Caller: What do you want to achieve? What use do you believe this has? What service are you providing? Please answer me.

Alice: This is just the news, and it makes itself.
Caller: This isn't news for me, it's a chain reaction. These words immediately become events. This seesaw of music, shouts, silences and dramatic facts strikes me as very kitsch.

Radio Alice let everybody speak, but also kept its own position quite clear:

Caller: It would be important for the students to go the assembly taking place right now at the psychiatric hospital and discuss all their problems, because I think they should distance themselves both from the cops who are shooting and the small bands of extremists who are fucking shit up. If they don't do so, their position is contradictory. That's what I wanted to say.
Alice: Basically, you want to invite the students to keep discussing among themselves....
Caller: It strikes me that the problems are dragging on, and the students have to bring their answers to the discussion.
Alice: Okay, look, there's a situation here, maybe you haven't really grasped what's happening. There are people injured, others have been brought to the hospital and we don't know how it'll work out, so I don't know what to say to you, just that we have to keep the telephone line free.
Caller: But the students are the main players who right now have to go everywhere to explain themselves to the people.
Alice: Listen, you talk about players, I don't know, but I'm extremely agitated and confused right now.
Caller: In my opinion you should never lose your clear-headedness....
Alice: Yes, in fact I totally agree, let's not lose clarity, but I—they are taking action, right now, do you understand? We are with those comrades who are taking action, revolting, rioting, we're not interested in getting lost in discourses like yours, getting lost in bullshit.

Radio Alice as a Militant Participant

From the last comment, we can see that Alice did not shy away from taking a position and from seeking an active role in determining the events played out in the streets. It is fairly clear that Radio Alice was used by the students during the clashes, and the radio station itself was inclined to increase its own visibility by advising people to keep listening to find out police movements and where to go.

Alice: All those listening are invited to go to Piazza Verdi, to answer in person as to what has happened. Wherever possible, organize groups of listeners, always have somebody listening and call us with any news.

For their own part, the students in the streets were very conscious of the role that the radio was performing:

Caller: We need information for the comrades, so that they know... they are calling the radio station and there is always someone here listening to the radio. There is a need to know because we need to organize ourselves with barricades and so on.
Alice: Yes.
Caller: We need to know if there are cops at Porta Zamboni, if they're on Via Irinerio, if they're at the circle behind the Hall of Anatomy... I mean, what's it called? Well, whatever, in the ring around Porta Zamboni.

Some correspondents seemed conscious of the possibly negative consequences (both legal and intelligence-wise) of providing live information:

Caller: Listen, um, maybe, I don't know how to say it.... I need to ask if it's possible to get more comrades.
Alice: Yes.
Caller: That is to support us, because it's not as if there are hordes of us.
Alice: Yeah, we heard you.
Caller: Okay?
Alice: Thanks, bye.
Caller: Fine, bye. Maybe if there is news later I'll call back with it.
Alice: Okay.
Caller: Okay, or maybe someone else will, bye.
Alice: Bye, thanks.

In the heat of the riots, the radio station's efforts were concentrated on providing detailed information to the students in the street about the police's movements and possible exit routes:

Alice: Listen, do you know if... if there's a way out there on Via San Donato? If there's—
Caller: A way out through San Donato? Not really.
Alice: Basically—
Caller: Via Zamboni is blocked.
Alice: All blocked.
Caller: Also you can't go through the ring.
Alice: Is the demonstration there?
Caller: Nope, no demonstration.
Alice: Where are the comrades?
Caller: The comrades are in the little streets behind Piazza Verdi, but lots of them are here in the University, in assemblies, because the meeting with the journalists has just finished.
Alice: Okay.
Caller: Listen, there's an open corridor through Piazza Roosevelt and the little square beside it.

Alice: Okay, very well.

Radio Alice didn't limit itself to passing on the word; in some cases it was clearly involved by callers in the elaboration of strategy for the course of the riots:

Caller: So we're here in Via Zamboni, the police still haven't managed to get past the barricade... the majority of the comrades at Porta Zamboni are... it doesn't matter, they are undecided whether to disperse and reconvene in Piazza Maggiore or to go to Via San Donato. But I think that they'll probably break up and go to Piazza Maggiore. If you have any ideas, say them before we finish up so that I can go tell them.
Alice: Let me talk with the people here—listen to the radio.

Later in the day, once the riots subsided and the students returned to the University quarter, Alice became the promoter of the multiple assemblies organized to discuss how to proceed in the next days:

Alice: We'll continue to broadcast, don't despair. We'll go on transmitting whatever fragmentary news we have. Now there's massive confusion. Outside it's beginning to rain, if I'm not mistaken. The general assembly for tonight at nine in Humanities Hall is confirmed. There are already lots of comrades in Piazza Verdi with their dark jackets waiting for it to begin. The assembly will start at 9 p.m. Lots of people are already there, others are arriving. I think it's really important to participate... not just for the exchange of information, but also to decide how to continue. These have been incredible hours, after the murder of this afternoon. His name was Francesco, a medical student.

Radio Alice's role as media protagonist thus became a fundamental element in the synergy between radio and movement, so much so that it became impossible to distinguish between the voices of the radio station and the callers, which merged into a choral "we":

Alice: Let's remember that for every incident that has occurred, incidents which the state television drew attention to tonight, such as the fires, the destruction of the newspaper office, the burning of two police stations, the attack on the Fiat office, all these things, like the clashes that happened at the train station, all the comrades assume full responsibility for them. Everyone took part in this enormous collective effort; we prepared our Molotov cocktails together in the square, everyone ripped up the pavement to get stones, everyone had incendiary devices in their hands and bangers in their pockets, because what happened today was a violent demonstration decided on by everyone, because this was the only way to stay alive.

Radio Alice acting as a protagonist did not please the police, and in the middle

of the night on March 12, the police stormed the station, stopped its transmission, and blocked its frequency.

Alice 2: So the police come and then what? Leave the mic on, as high as it can go.
Alice 3: Don't run away, calm down.
Alice 1: If there's a lawyer out there... if there's a Legal Defense Collective lawyer out there, please come here immediately, please, immediately. The police are here right now, aiming their pistols and submachine guns at us. Everyone, everyone listening, the police are here wearing bullet-proof vests.
Alice 3: Calm down, guys, calm down. They're coming in now, take this away.
Alice 2: Do they have a warrant?
[Police heard at the door.]
Police: YES!
Alice 2: Should I come out?
[Police heard shouting. Phone rings.]
Alice 1: Alice? Please hang up, the police are here.
Alice 4: What? Are we going to get on the roof? From there?
Alice 3: Calm down guys.
Alice 2: Don't open the door, don't open it until someone comes.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 2: Hello, Alice. Yes? Listen, the police are here. If you can find someone from the Legal Defense Collective... send them here immediately.
[Sounds of objects being moved around.]
Alice 2: Take this thing here. Don't escape out the window.
Alice 1: No, I don't give a crap, listen, it's more important... yes, listen, put it down, please, come on. Attention, attention all lawyers, all comrades who are listening to us, please contact the lawyers immediately. Attention all comrades, all comrades who are listening right now, please try to reach Attorney Insolera or anyone from the Legal Defense Collective.
Police: ALICE?
Alice 4: I'll shoot at them, I'll shoot.
Alice 1: Daniela, if you're by the phone, I mean, if you're by the radio, be calm.
Alice 3: No, where are you going?
Alice 2: Give me the phone number. Does this one work? This one here, Gamberini 51?
Alice 4: The house?
Alice 3: Yes. 51 80 66.
Alice 1: Again, a plea from Radio Alice. Radio Alice has the police at the door. Please, our comrades from the Legal Defense Collective, please hurry here, we're in Via Pratello.
Alice 2: Is anyone answering?

Alice 3: No one's answering.
Alice 1: Attention, attention. All comrades from the Legal Defense Collective, please call the radio station, please come here immediately.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 2: Hello? Yes? It's Mauro. Listen, the police are here. We're waiting for the lawyers.
Alice 1: Attention, Radio Alice is still here. We're still waiting for the lawyers to arrive to let the police in. The police are trying to break down the door right now. Put that thing down.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 2: Hello? Who's there? Yes, the police are outside, trying to knock down the door. They have their guns drawn and I'm refusing to open the door. I've told them I won't do it until they put down their guns and show me their warrant, and since they aren't putting their guns down, I told them we won't open up until our lawyer arrives. Can you please come here? Right away, right away please. These assholes have guns and bullet-proof vests. Via Pratello 41, okay? We're waiting for you, bye.
Alice 3: Tell him—Mauro, be quiet.
Alice 2: The lawyers are coming. Just a minute, the lawyers are coming.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 4: The phone, the phone.
[Police heard shouting.]
Alice 2: After the lawyers get here.
Alice 4: The phone.
Alice 3: Alice.
Alice 4: God, this sucks.
Alice 3: Listen, we have the police here, hang up please.
Alice 2: Attention, Alice is still here. We have the police outside the door. We have the police outside the door. And—we have the police outside the door with bullet-proof vests, guns drawn and the like, and we're waiting for our lawyers. We're refusing to let the police in before the lawyers get here, and because they have their guns drawn and such, and these are things we absolutely cannot accept, and [laughs] okay. Please, Radio Città comrades, if you are retransmitting this as I believe you are, please give us a sign through the radio, I'm listening to you.
[Radio noises.]
Alice 3: Before midnight, absolutely. Radio Città, please call Radio Alice.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 3: Hello?
Alice 2: Radio Città, please call Radio Alice. Radio Città, please call Radio Alice. Or let us know you are listening and retransmitting this thing over the radio. Please, we're listening for you, but we can't tell whether it's our return or if it's their retransmission. Please, Radio Città, please let us know.
Alice 3: Thanks.

Alice 2: Radio Città try—friends of Radio Città, call your comrades. In any case, comrades, the situation is under control.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 3: Hello? Ma'am, we're just waiting for the lawyers.
Alice 2: The police are... situation under control. The police are still outside, waiting to come in, still in their bullet-proof vests with guns drawn. They've said they are going to break down the door, and we ask all comrades who know lawyers to call them, and tell them that we are under siege by the police right now, just like, I don't know if you've seen the movie, what the hell was it called? [Laughs.] The one by Boelkorff in Germany, about the Katherina Bloom case. The same exact elements, the same—bullet-proof vests, guns drawn, stuff like that. It's truly absurd, truly incredible, truly [laughs] like a movie. I swear that if they weren't breaking down the door, I'd think I was at the cinema.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 3: I don't have it here. Listen, does anyone know the number for Radio Città?
Alice 1: 3 4 6 4 5 8
Alice 3: 3 4 6 4 5 8
Alice 2: We're still waiting for our comrades to arrive.
Alice 3: Bye, thanks.
Alice 2: There's four of us here at the station, and... nothing... there are four of us doing the work of counterinformation, and we're waiting to see what the hell the police do. For the moment, they seem calm, there aren't making so much noise. They've calmed down, they've stopped banging on the door. You can tell they think it's really strong [laughs].
Alice 2: Give me a record, I'll put on some music for Christ's sake.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 3: Alice?
Alice 2: The phone here is always ringing, really always ringing. Here's some Beethoven, if that's okay, if not, tough shit....
Alice 3: Hello? No, Calimero left. Yes.
Alice 4: My God, I knew it, I knew it would happen.
Alice 3: No, listen, listen. We have the police outside who are....
[Music in the background.]
Alice 2: A bit of background music.
Alice 3: I don't know, listen. I don't know if I'm going to sleep at home tonight.
Alice 4: Go tell them we are waiting for the lawyers.
Police: OPEN UP!
Alice 2: Now the police have started banging on the door again. They're shouting for us to open up. Look alive, get down.
[Shouts from the police.]
Alice 4: Our lawyers are on the way, wait five minutes. Eh, they're here on the street.

[More shouts from the police.]
Alice 2: Their only comments are for Christ's sake open up, things like that.
[Phone rings.]
Alice 2: Alice? I don't know who Alberto is. Anyway—eh? No, this isn't Matteo, listen, the police are at the door.
Alice 3: They're in.
Alice 2: They're here. They've come in, they've come in.
Alice 3: They're here, they're here.
Alice 2: They've come in, they've come in, we have our hands up. They've come in, we have our hands up.
Alice 3: Look, they're taking off my mic.
Alice 2: They're taking off my mic. We have our hands up, they say that this is a place of....

The Radio Alice collective was later indicted for seditious activities and many of its collaborators were imprisoned.

Two days later, Radio Alice started broadcasting again using borrowed equipment and on a different frequency, but by then Bologna was under curfew and the police were searching many houses, seeking any media activists involved with the radio station. Many of them elected to leave Italy, temporarily or for good, rather than face a biased prosecution. The political spring of 1977 had come to an end.

Coda: On Forgetting and Technological Obsolescence

Rather than an appendix to the proletarian struggles of the twentieth century, or the tail end of the student movements of 1968, the revolt of 1977 anticipated the political and communicative dynamic developed in the following two decades. The proliferation of communication tools was central to the youth revolt of 1977. In the following years, however, technology developed rapidly: formats and standards changed in the space of just a few years, rendering the equipment used by the first wave of media activists obsolete. The field of video production is a good example. Between 1976 and 1979, hundreds of videomakers with ties to the social movement used Beta video cameras to document everything being produced at that time: ordinary life, political events, ludic plays and the many public performances of the movement. When more advanced technologies became available (Super-8, Hi-8), they adopted them. It was only many years later that they realized that the rapid obsolescence of standards and deterioration of the electronic storage media had rendered most of the products of the work of those years unusable. With many media activists outside of the country, Beta videocassettes and audiotapes of radio recordings were left to rot in cellars for years and years, decaying past the point of recovery, and thus sinking those years of electronic experimentation into the distant past, as if buried under centuries of dust and forgetfulness. Between 1976 and 1979, Radio Alice produced hundreds of audiocassettes and scores of videotapes, but few documents have persevered. The material quoted above was saved, ironically, by the

Italian police, who had requisitioned it after the break-in on March 12, 1977 and archived it as evidence for the trial against its producers.

The following account from a member of Radio Alice's staff, however, allows us to see in this unpredictability and obsolescence much more than an inevitable material condition of those years, but rather an echo of things to come:

> One night I was doing a program about Mayakovsky, in a totally casual way. It was three o'clock in the morning and I received a phone call. Calls at such an hour were rare and the noise made me jump. We talked live, she told me that she was a stewardess and this made me think that she must be pretty. I had the impression of a certain excitement in her voice, knowing that she was being broadcast all over Bologna, in the middle of the night. At the end she asked to meet me and added, "Let's meet, but let's not see each others' faces." I agreed. "Come to my house," she said, "I'll keep it dark." I went to her house on my bicycle. The door was left ajar. I entered in darkness. Suddenly I felt her presence, she reached for my arm and took me to her room, her voice no longer warped by the technological medium. We talked for ages, lying stretched out in the dark, her face still a mystery. She was a good talker but a little strange, because she would intentionally mispronounce some adjectives. She said many times that she was tired (mispronouncing that word) but then continued to talk in her funny way. She was a young woman, I could tell from her voice. The mood was very ambiguous. Then she said to me, "If you want, you can sleep here, but I don't want you to come close." I said, "Okay, no problem." We slept there together. When I woke up in the morning she wasn't there. She had already left. I never saw her face. This is my favorite metaphor for that period. It was a time full of enthusiasms, excitements, passions, impossible expectations. And then it all just vanished. Just like her that night.

four

Internet Activism and Post-Mass-Media Culture

After the spring of 1977, Italian media activism skipped summer and went straight into a long winter, which lasted well into the 1990s, when the rise of Berlusconi's media power and the parallel emergence of new communication technologies (above all the Internet) produced new conditions for mobilization and dissent. The story of Italian media activism in the 1990s must be framed within the general context of the conflict between a videocratic system—in which power structures of finance, advertising and television converge—and the horizontal network of media democracy. In the mediascape of this decade, two contrasting tendencies were intertwined: a) the formation of an interconnected "global mind," wired according to the lines of semiocapitalist power; and b) the formation of a resistant "collective intelligence," capable not only of autonomy and self-determination, but also of forwarding different priorities than those of the capitalist economy.

The battle between these two forces shaping the mediascape started in the 1990s and still rages on, using digital communication as their weapon of choice. The choice of the Internet as the site for battle can be traced to its rhizomatic agency and to its acentric, diffuse and nonhierarchical nature. This meets the needs for the self-organization of cognitive work according to an egalitarian and diffusive process. In the course of the 1990s, several large companies, above all Microsoft, attempted to colonize the Internet through the imposition of standards subject to proprietary control. Thanks to the simplification of research and connection procedures, this colonization project was able to infiltrate the working modalities and cognitive models of

the Internet. But despite these attempts at colonization, cyberspace did not cease to proliferate in unforeseen and uncontrolled directions: ever-more innovative content was produced, ever-more sophisticated interfaces were experimented with, and programs that evaded proprietary control and the free market model were created.

While Microsoft attempted to enclose the Internet, at its margins, patrols of experimenters sought escape from this control by using open source technologies, providing free access to data and programs, and producing collaboratively. This has enabled the subtraction of a large part of the cognitive workers of the Internet from the economic and imaginative domination of semiocapital. In the 1990s, the multiform practices of net culture spread like wildfire, creating conditions for a mass critique of media. For the global revolt begun in Seattle in November 1999, the Internet served not only as an organizational and informational tool, but also—and above all—as the formative space for a reclaimed public sphere, an energized social imagination and innovative production models. Notwithstanding the colonizing actions launched by the large software companies, the Internet continues to function as an organizational tool for the international cognitariat who continues to perform their role in gathering and spreading content, and even succeeding in several cases, as in the days of revolt in Seattle, in exerting a genuine net-culture hegemony over the global media system.

The crisis that struck the entire information economy at the turn of the millennium has initiated a new phase that may have unpredictable results. In the years of dotcom mania, financial capital and advertising had a determining influence on the creative work of the majority of netizens. But during the economic crisis, financial investments in, and advertising on, the Internet declined drastically. This certainly had an impoverishing effect, which, in the long run anyway, might subtract productive energies from the domination of capitalist culture.

Aside from the incursions (as invasive as they might be) of advertising, up until the end of the 1990s, the flow of communication on the Internet was for the most part self-regulated and self-produced, working toward the social, cognitive and imaginative interests of the men and women who used, frequented and nourished it. During the boom, the economic interest in the Internet had created a dangerous commercial regimentation and generalized homogenization of content. The economic crisis reduced the involvement of the large financial and advertising groups, and for a brief moment, restored the possibility of independent production.

The boom and crisis of information economy produced new social scenarios and new possibilities for media activism, and in this chapter we would like to first address the transformations of the world's social imaginary as a result of new information technologies, and then look at various Italian cases of digital media activism.

The First Video-Electronic Generation

In 1984, in a book entitled *Mind and Media: The Effects of Television, Video Games, and Computers*, psychologist Patricia Marks Greenfield reported an experiment performed in a Canadian city in the 1970s in which researchers were able to follow the behavior of a certain number of children before, during and after the spread of television sets in their community. The findings indicated that the creative imagination of these children tended to decline when television came to occupy the principal spot in the mediascape. However, together with this atrophy of the imaginative ability, members of the first video-electronic generation acquired new competencies: they were able to read and orient themselves in a highly complex semiotic universe, they acquired executive skills of ever more complex semiotic manipulation, and they were increasingly at ease with multitasking.

So far however, nobody has looked at the sociopolitical effects of the intense mobilization of semiconscious attention by the extremely complex and interconnected media system that has developed in the last three decades. How does the collective mind react to the increase in infospheric pressure, to the acceleration of stimuli, to the intensification of production rhythms? Cognitive ability, intelligence, attention and imagination are put to work, subsumed within the process of the development of capital, and thus subject to the intensification of productivity, to constant acceleration, competition, the rules of victory and defeat, failure and aggressiveness. Social attention is constantly mobilized, both from the point of view of production and from the point of view of consumption. Many of the production processes of high technology, in fact, require time and attention. Attention must also be constantly mobilized to consume: the semioproducts that constitute a large part of contemporary consumption require mental time and attention, uninterrupted mobilization of the cognitive faculties.

In 1977, anthropologist and mass mediologist Rose Goldsen wrote in the foreword of her book *The Show and Tell Machine*:

> A generation ago, people in this country began to watch images of wrestlers, trained poodles, and pitchmen on television sets placed mainly in public places such as bars and store windows. Today the television set, standard equipment in the American home, so blurs the distinction between the public environment and the privacy of the family that it is ever present even as the tiniest babies are ushered into the social system. Human beings whose primal impressions come from a machine—it's the first time in human history that this has occurred. What such an innovation might mean for the way the human consciousness develops, quite apart from the content of the materials the machine transmits, nobody yet knows (1977: iv).

When Goldsen was writing that book, a new generation was beginning to form itself in front of the television. Now the first video-electronic generation is reaching adulthood. Again, more than a social change, we find ourselves in front of a cognitive change, a change in the psychic, cognitive and linguistic makeup of humanity.

Western people who grew up in the 1970s and later have gained a breadth of abilities that do not have precedents in the history of the human mind: they have

acquired the ability to move themselves rapidly through a universe chock-full of electronic visual signs. Their ability to read images has developed at a skyrocketing pace, and this ability holds an important function among the skills of semiconscious formation of a contemporary individual. The problem posed is not that of judging the cognitive skills of the new generation, but of interpreting them. Whoever intends to communicate with the new video-electronic generation must remember how the collective postliterate brain works, keeping in mind McLuhan's warning, according to which mythic thought tends to take precedence in cultural formation over logical-critical thought.

It is difficult not to believe that the speed at which the mind is exposed to video-electronic messages is a cause of increasing volatility of attention. Under the extreme speed of video-electronic inputs, the mind is briefly engaged, then tends to quickly move away, to seek another object. Rapid transfer proceeds by association—by substituting critical understanding with correlations. Never in the history of human evolution has the human mind been subject to such an intense and invasive bombardment of sensory information. Whoever is around children in a teaching capacity knows that in the last generation, the concentration time of children on a mental object has continually decreased. Now, it is difficult to hold the attention of a boy or a girl on an object for more than a few seconds. As a result, in the United States alone around five million children take a psychopharmaceutical drug called Ritalin that is used to treat so-called Attention Deficit Disorder.

Nicholas Mirzoeff writes in his book on visual culture: "Western culture has consistently privileged the spoken word as the highest form of intellectual practice and has seen visual representations as a second-rate illustration of ideas" (1999: 6). Instead, the language in which the global imaginary expresses itself is that of visual culture. Cultural globalization has been able to develop much more through visual media than through the written or spoken word. Images function as activators of cognitive, behavioral and mythopoetic chains that can be generated beyond the limits of verbal language and the interpretative grids of culture, nation and religion. Visual language is therefore the *lingua franca* of the first video-electronic generation, a generation that has learned more from the television set than from mom and dad, in the sense that a significant part of its emotional and cognitive imprinting depends more on the exposure to the mechanized semiosis of the television or the Internet than it does on its relationship with parents or with other human beings.

Should we consider the first video-electronic generation to be emotional mutants? While social communication is ever-more mediated by technological systems, and the presence of bodies in social space becomes ever more superfluous to the ends of the exchange of messages and interaction, it seems as if the forms of unmediated communication lose coherence and efficacy: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, aphasia and dyslexia spread into the behavior of individuals, and psychopharmaceuticals become an increasingly indispensable support for a socialization that has become weak, asphyxiated and anorexic.

Media Culture and The Crisis of Universal Humanist Values

Since the early part of the twentieth century, the birth and development of electronic media has constituted a critical element for political democracy and for critical and progressive thought. Since the first developments in radiophony and cinematography, critical thought has taken an ambivalent position regarding electronic media, a stance which is entirely understandable. Already in the interwar period, Benjamin and Adorno had outlined two different critical intellectual sensibilities regarding the diffusion of mass media. Benjamin intuited that the technical reproduction of messages creates completely new conditions of aesthetic perception and communication, while Adorno presented a humanist and elitist vision that saw in mass communication a state of decline in the artistic and cultural arena.

But it was Marshall McLuhan who made the change in the rules of the game clear. When the simultaneous succeeds the sequential, when electronic technology succeeds literacy technology, at that point, discursive communication forms cede the way to forms of configurational communication, and mythic thought tends to prevail over forms of logical-critical thought. This is the reason why, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the political culture of the Left was revealed to be inadequate to seize the new possibilities of media, and has remained at the margins of the grand transformation that brought electronic media to the center of social communication. The political Left was formed on the values of critical thought, and it has kept at the center of its own intellectual panorama the dialogic value of democracy. The Left has not been able to gracefully free itself of the idea that social communication is composed primarily of dialogic and discursive acts, directed toward the acquisition of a rational and critical consensus. This has prevented it from accepting the brutal transformation of the scene that has made the 'mythic imaginary' the privileged field of social communication and of public opinion formation. The Right, indifferent to the values of criticism and democratic dialectic, has known how to seize the mythologization of the social field, the passage from the discursive field to the imaginary one that has been verified by public opinion, and thus has known how to reap the greatest advantage from the mediatization of social communications.

The choice presented to progressively inspired critical thought derived from humanism is a painful one: suffer a definitive marginalization in mass culture due to emerging forms of the neomythic imaginary, or react in the name of humanist values that electronic media tend to cancel out in the perception of the great majority of society. It is a complicated situation, because critical thought is forced to choose between an implicitly conservative position and one of subordination to the cultural models that are affirmed in the hyperspectacular infosphere. As the experience of the last twenty years teaches us, in this situation, politically progressive critical thought finds itself in a defensive position facing the aggressive exuberance of the neomythic culture of the Right and the breakout of identity-based cultural forms that recall the aggressive values of belonging rather than those of universalism.

In this difficult situation, humanist thought foreshadows the appeal of the eruption of media cultures, and simultaneously reports the dangers to

democracy that are implicit in this change that involves both the mediascape and the collective mind.

TV Meets Web

In 1990, George Gilder published the book *Life After Television*, in which he outlined the prospective transformation of the television system. The agent of this transformation, according to Gilder, would be digital technology, the computer and above all, the Internet, which in the early 1990s was heading toward a mass explosion. There was great activity surrounding this project, a visionary spirit that pushed many scholars to imagine the future of the Internet in terms of the expansion of its borders and of the convergence of diverse media within one reticulated system. The endpoint of the transformation would be, according to the hypothesis of Gilder, the 'telecomputer,' namely a television set designed to function as a computer connected to the Internet.

> Tired of watching TV? With artful programming of telecomputers, you could spend a day interacting on the screen with Henry Kissinger, Kim Basinger, or Billy Graham. Celebrities could produce and sell their own software or make themselves available for two-way personal video communication. You could take a fully interactive course in physics or computer science with the world's most exciting professors, who respond to your questions and let you move at your own learning speed. You could have a fully interactive workday without commuting to the office or run a global corporation without ever getting on a plane.
>
> You could watch your child play baseball at a high school across the country, view the Super Bowl from any point in the stadium that you choose, or soar above the basket with Michael Jordan. You could fly an airplane over the Alps or climb Mount Everest—all on a powerful high-resolution display (1990: 40–41).

Notwithstanding the optimism for the future that fourteen years later seems rather annoying, this passage outlines the concept of convergence between television and the Web.

The techno-communicative model of television as we have known it from past decades is oriented toward broadcast, to the diffusion of a single flow of visual information coming from a single source and directed toward a receiving public that is unified and passive.

The techno-communicative model of the Internet is oriented toward networking, namely toward a plurality of visual information flows coming from multiple sources and directed at restricted sections of a public which is differentiated and capable of interaction.

When we speak of convergence, we do not speak merely of the broadening (no matter how boundless) of the spectrum of available television stations thanks to

digital reception technologies such as the parabolic antenna, cable or satellite. We speak of a new concept of production and consumption of the televised image. As Paul Levinson noted, the new information technology doesn't necessarily displace the old so much as it expands it:

> TV, with the important exception of home video recorders, is completely programmed by people other than the viewer. Computers, with the important exception of the structure imposed by underlying programs such as word processing and Web hypertext, is programmed only by the proximate user. But note that the content of word processing is supplied solely by the user, and the content of hypertext is for the most part supplied by other people similar to the user—in contrast to TV programming, almost all of which is supplied by professional TV producers, filmmakers, TV network programmers, and so forth.... Each TV station broadcasts exactly the same programming to everyone.... Television is, to a significant degree, an "incidental" medium in its condition of attendance—meaning that people can do other things when the television is on.... TV screens for the most part traffic in images and sounds, with occasional written words. Computer screens, as we have explored in detail, traffic in text, with occasional (but increasing) presences of icons, images and sounds (1997: 163).

Levinson goes on to observe that the VCR has created the conditions for a transition that the Internet has begun to bring to fruition. The purchasers of video recording devices began to record images and to acquire competence in recording and editing techniques. By the mid-1990s, some even began to find themselves in a position to transform themselves into disseminated producers of television transmitted via the Web.

At the end of the 1990s, several large groups involved in the field of television and the computer industry began to use the Internet as their main production vehicle. In July 1996, MSNBC, a joint venture of Microsoft and NBC that put news and television reports at the disposal of Web users, began operations. In the same period, CNN also put some of its television reports online.

The creation of an online television system also required several technological preconditions, such as the digitization of television products. A large part of the investments made in the early 1990s in high-definition TV (HDTV) ended up going in this direction. Investments in HDTV projects allowed television to proceed along the road of digitization and contributed to the convergence of television and the Internet, which by the end of the 1990s became an actuality.

If we want to reconstruct the process of convergence, we must not only the course taken by the large telecommunication companies or the products destined for mass consumption. We must also keep in mind the 'disseminated panopticon,' namely the proliferation of webcams and the experimentation of various forms of techno-art. In the process of convergence, indeed, we must not only look at the technical problem of unified support, but on a cultural level, the mobilization of as producers.

Let us glance at the world of webcams. This expression refers to a flow of images recorded by video cameras placed anywhere in the world, controlled by a person or left on without control, and received by a server in order to be passed onto the World Wide Web. Any Internet user can connect to the address corresponding to the webcam and receive the images (in continuous movement, immobile or in sequence).

There are people who show the deserted landscape of their surroundings, or girls who show their legs, or youth who are stunned in front of the lens, or simple automated broadcasts of city intersections (as Andy Warhol did more than thirty years ago, when he installed his movie camera in front of the Empire State Building for twenty-four consecutive hours).

Omnipresent, interconnected electronic eyes, open to record a frame of the universe and to make its viewing available almost anywhere in the universe.

The Aleph of Borges in Progressive Realization

Webcams represent the nucleus of a process that finds its horizon in the tendency that we will call 'hypermedial convergence.' A particular argument should also be made regarding artistic experimentations and performances that have been multiplying all over the world. Artists have entered the field of linked technologies by experimenting with languages appropriate for diverse and innovative platforms, such as online video.

At the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1998, Julia Scher (USA) distributed television monitors throughout the rooms and corridors of the building and these terminals transmitted images simultaneously recorded in other corridors and rooms of the same building. The spectator thus got used to seeing normal museum scenes, such as people who walk around slowly and stop to look at this or that. However, from time to time, unpredictable images casually appeared on the screens, such as the image of two completely nude young men running through one of the rooms. Real time constituted a communicative dimension in which it was possible to introduce unpredictable and bewildering breaks.

Other artists have tried to hint at a new perception of geographic space in their performances. Felix Stefan Huber (Switzerland) and Philip Pocock (Canada) have installed a parabolic antenna on a van that, traveling from Alaska, Klondike and Dempster Highways to the edge of the Arctic Sea, sent daily messages and video clips to their website, thus connecting Arctic space with virtual space. In the spring of 1999, Andrea Renzini (Italy) held a performance that took place physically in Marrakech, but that could be attended in real time via the Internet by an audience at a gallery in Bologna. Experiments of this type are multiplying, often with scarce attention to the image quality, because the problem is entirely conceptual.

The essential part of the prediction that Gilder advanced in his book went on to come true in the following years, even if many details did not follow directly along the lines he imagined. Since Gilder wrote his book, it is common knowledge that the passage from analog to digital television involves not only technology, but also economics and culture. The multiplication of channels is in fact destined to

bring enormous masses of the public away from the generalized flow and toward an ever-greater fragmentation of offerings, and consequently, the offering will need to adapt itself to this change. But it is not enough to speak of a channel revolution if we are not able to speak of the revolution related to content. There cannot be any revolution in content if it does not pass through a reformulation of the relationship between the flow of images and the communications system; between the transmitter and the territory.

The broadcast audience is being progressively eroded in favor of a narrowcast audience, something already foreseen by Gilder in 1990. But we should go beyond this simple distributional fact, we should deepen the relationship between the technomedia system and the social connections that it makes possible.

The number of spectators will be the same, but they will be able to choose between a myriad of different possibilities. If, however, these thousands of possibilities are all culturally and socially homogenized, if they are simple clones of a subaltern advertising image, then the multiplication of channels will not serve any purpose at all except to increase disorientation.

The point of departure for Gilder's reasoning was a prediction about technology: the diffusion of broadband owing to the use of fiber optics. Today, thanks to the increase in capacity and management of this infrastructure, it is possible to begin to conceptualize an integration between the Internet and the production and diffusion of video, beyond the horizon of what we know as a 'television system.'

Television has always been a centralized communicative system. The relationship model between transmitter and receiver has always been unidirectional with the passivizing effect on the receiver-telespectator. Furthermore, the costs of production for television have always prevented access by those who do not have large amounts of capital at their disposal to invest and are not able to gather advertising revenue. It has always been this way, but today this is no longer true. The means of visual production have become accessible: a collective, a social center, an artist or a group of independent artists can easily afford a digital video camera.

The digitization of visual production machines has allowed for the immediate integration of the visual product with the Internet. At this point, streaming video has only taken its first steps. Thanks to the growing availability of broadband, it is now possible to circulate large quantities of streaming video over the Internet. It is also possible to create banks of visual data, genuine jukeboxes, accessible by internauts (who remain for the moment a tiny minority of the world population) and by tiny television stations that can transmit content via the Internet to the household TV set. What is emerging now is the possibility of a new integration between the Internet and recombinations of fragments of visual production.

Media Convergence and the Danger of the Colonization of the Internet

The convergence that emerged at the turn of the millennium is an important aspect of the autonomous operation that cognitive workers have been developing at the technological level and in their ventures into new media systems. It indicates the

tendency for flows of audio, video and text to meld inside the multimedia Internet. In the process of convergence we have seen many opportunities but also many dangers. At the beginning of 2000, at the culmination of the economic boom—and exactly on the eve of a steep decline in stocks on Wall Street that marked the definitive reversal of the stock market trend—the merger between America Online and Time Warner appeared as the signal of an imminent infiltration of the Internet by entertainment and advertising giants. The netizens went into a state of alarm. A month after the WTO protests in Seattle, Time Warner was moving toward the conquest of the Internet, using the largest existing provider, America Online, as its Trojan horse. The convergence of Internet service provider and television content provider represented a drastic change in the Internet's communication model.

The goal seemed clear. HyperTV intended to swallow the Internet, to subtract the production of content from individuals and groups that willingly and knowingly joined together in the infosphere, and to transform the Internet into a replica of the television model: homogenized signals for a homogenized public, programs produced according to the interests of a very small minority, for the taste of the majority, pushing the users to consume the Internet as they consumed television. If this design had been fully realized, it would have meant the colonization of the Internet by television; the invasion of the Internet by the semiotic flow of homogenized entertainment. But things did not go this way. The crash of Nasdaq a few months before the merger of the two giants resulted in confusion and disinvestment. Media convergence under the power of Microsoft and AOL-Time Warner did not occur.

The corporate colonization of cyberspace has continued, but it has never fully succeeded in absorbing all the energies and attention of Internet users. So far, the convergence model has produced unforeseeable results. On the one hand, control of the Internet by large economic and media groups has increased. At the dawn of the Broadband Age, the flow of traffic on the World Wide Web began to resemble that of commercial television. In its first five years of existence, when the Internet was growing exponentially, diversity prevailed. But by 1999, according to Jupiter Media Matrix, 110 global companies controlled 60 percent of the connection time of users. Only two years later, this number was reduced to only 14 companies. By 2004, with the growing dominance of AOL-Time Warner and Microsoft, the model of democracy that the Internet appeared to be was becoming an oligarchy. The broadening of use did not correspond to a greater variety of information offered because new users tended to follow ever-more uniform navigational paths.

At the same time, the innovations launched by base groups or by net artists set in motion avant-garde social experiments that changed the workings of entire zones of the Internet. A tidal wave of international media activism could redefine the entire mediascape. Media activism has its origins in the mass diffusion of tools for video recording, editing and image transmission. A vast number of sites made streaming video possible, resulting in the invasion and disturbance of television space. The most significant phenomenon in this field was certainly indymedia.org, the largest, best-constructed and most democratic environment for world social movements. The very existence of Indymedia and the principle of radical self-organization on

which it was developed, constitutes the emergence of a form of information, coordination and production that is both global and local.

Indymediea.org, also known as the Independent Media Center, was born during the Seattle revolt, when a loose federation of independent media (radio stations, local television stations, photographers and journalists of various mastheads) came together to cover the events.

From that point on, Indymedia proliferated, thanks to the formation of local branches in each country—and occasionally in every city—that put online information about the global movement against corporations. It is a question of a diffusive communications experience: democratic, acentric and at the same time working toward a common operation; toward the formation of a global community that is not limited to protest nor to the exchange of information, but constructs zones of autonomous existence from the rules of capital.

Indymedia represents an easily exportable model from the terrain of textual information to that of visual information. It has put streaming video at the disposal of user-participants to document the history of the movement. Now, the Indymedia model can converge with the model of webcast stations, and make navigational interfaces available between all producers of images who want to renounce the exclusive rights to their products.

The latest generation of activists, many of whom emerged from the WTO protest in Seattle, has given life to the global network of the anti-corporate movement, developing a practice suited to new media and elaborating a media theory that takes into account the potentialities and dangers implicit in new communication technologies. It is not our intention to reconstruct the history of media activism, but we must point out some of the experimental forms of media production that grew from the 1980s to the 1990s in America as in Europe: Paper Tiger Television (PTTV) in New York, Van Gogh TV in Hamburg and Candida TV in Rome all underscore the fact that the critique of television had a long incubation.

Social and Ideological Effects of the Dotcom Economy

In the 1990s, telecommunication of the Internet became the main support for mass capitalism during the long expansive phase of the dotcom boom. Tens of millions of people invested their money without leaving their homes, buying and selling stocks from their online positions. Today that long phase of expansion has entered into crisis, and the Internet, fantastical multiplier of popular participation in the market, risks becoming the multiplier of its crises, and the vanishing point for the system of media-financial control.

Thanks to mass participation in financial investing in the 1990s, cognitive workers self-organized and invested their competence, knowledge and creativity in the dotcom arena, and financed their businesses using the stock market. For several years, this undertaking forged a meeting point between financial capital and cognitive work, giving rise to a form of production that exalted the autonomy of work and at the same time, dependence on the market. The neoliberal model adapted

itself perfectly to this process, and American cyberculture provided the ideological background (even founding its evangelist in the magazine *Wired*). But this digital-liberalist *Weltanschauung*, disdainful and triumphalist, collapsed in the first two years of the new millennium, along with the new economy and most of the army of self-employed thinkers who had animated the dotcom world.

It failed because the model of a perfectly free market is a practical and theoretical falsehood. What neoliberal ideology has favored in the long term is not the free market, but the monopoly. And while the market was idealized as the free place in which various expertises, competences and creativities interacted, reality demonstrated that large controlling companies did not act at all in a libertarian manner, and imposed themselves with force (of media or of money), and shamelessly pillaged the common shareholders and the cognitive workforce. The falsehood of the free market came to light with the first Bush presidency. The politics of this administration explicitly favored monopolies (beginning with the scandalous acquittal of Bill Gates, in exchange for a political-economic alliance). With Bush's victory in 2000, the neolibertarian and laissez-faire ideology was defeated, and it became a hypocritical repetition of commonplaces without content or truth. The same thing occurred in Italy. Berlusconi presented himself as the champion of neoliberalism against state control and governmental intervention as represented by the Left. But behind the market ideology he was busy establishing a monopoly for himself, a monopoly that used the power of government and the law to sanction corruption. Italian neoliberalism was nothing more than an ideological smokescreen behind which took place classical power grabbing of public resources and unchecked business arrogance.

In the years of dotcom boom, a provisional and fragile alliance came about between cognitive labor and capital financing. But when that economic tide ebbed with the dotcom bust, cognitive work found itself cut off from capital. Digital artisans, who in the 1990s felt themselves to be owners of their own work, began to feel they had been cheated. They bitterly realized that even though they possessed all of the production power, they had been robbed of the fruits of their labor by a minority of ignorant speculators who had nonetheless managed the legal and financial aspects of the production process. The unproductive part of the virtual class, the lawyers and accountants, had appropriated the cognitive surplus generated by the physicists, computer scientists, chemists, writers and media operators.

This situation could produce a new consciousness for these cyber-operators, so that they can separate themselves from the judicial and financial fortress of semio-capitalism and construct a direct relationship with users. Only then will the process of autonomous self-organization of cognitive work begin. This process may already be underway, as the experiences of media activism demonstrate.

The struggle between media activism and videocracy in Italy can be read in this context. The Berlusconi regime prospered during the period in which neoliberal ideology had a solid base of consensus. But after the dotcom crash and the resulting economic recession, a growing divide emerged between the interests of the dominant group and those of the cognitive workers upon which the functioning of the communications system was based. The sectors of innovative work that participated in the

illusion of the new economy and mass capitalism in the 1990s were precisely those that, in the new decade, were most exposed to the crisis. Fortunately, a number of cognitive workers and the most dynamic strata of the high-technology workforce managed to turn their situation of weakness and isolation into self-governance. Media activism emerged as the expression of the disconnection of the techno-media system from social consciousness and cognitive work. It gave voice to the autonomous transformation of the social communication system. In fact, the change of technologies made independent production and communicative connections possible, and since the dotcom crash cognitive workers have begun to assume political, cultural and scientific responsibilities, actively intervening in these technological transformations instead of passively suffering their effects.

Media activism is a conscious function of the technological and communicative change that developed in the last few years, at the intersection between diverse media languages and the global paradigm of the Internet. One must keep in mind the problematic field tied to the prospects of open source technology, free software and computer hacking, because these have been the first manifestations of autonomous appropriation of the technology system by cognitive workers. Media activism is an aspect of this autonomous reappropriation of competencies and technologies.

Subvertising

The linguistic masterpiece of capital is advertising: a flow of pronouncements unchained from any pretext of truth, and precisely for this reason capable of making suggestions, constructing fictional worlds, capturing social desire, then mobilizing and exploiting it. Advertising gives voice to feelings, provokes emotions, prompts unconscious identifications and bends them in pursuit of an objective that at one level is commercial and on a deeper level is ideological or anthropological. The user of advertising language (the consumer) is not so ingenuous as to believe the literal truth of the content of the message. He knows full well that the advertiser is playing and creating simulations of the world in order to induce the consumer to identify with a made-up character, in order to convince him to buy a certain aftershave rather than a competing product. Beyond its banal commercial solicitations, advertising seeks to sell a product bigger than all products, namely the context in which all products become goods: capitalism. A large computer company launched a laptop with the image of a young man who was happily waterskiing with the computer on his knees. The slogan enthusiastically exclaimed: "At work everywhere." In essence, the ad proposed a lifestyle in which workers are flexible and available twenty-four hours a day, always giving their work and their time, always participating in the uninterrupted cycle of producing surplus value.

In the battle of social communication, a soldier advances who does not use the weapons of the reasonable opposition or the instruments of counterculture, but fights madness with madness, suggestion with suggestion, falsity with creative falsification. This soldier is a media activist who uses the weapons of subverted advertising, and for this reason he has been dubbed a "subvertiser": a semiotic guerilla fighter who

has developed over the course of the entire twentieth century, and who comes into complete form in the time of generalized advertising communication.

Subvertising has been consciously theorized by the Canadian journal *Adbusters* since 1989, and is a reference point for all who want to use linguistic techniques of advertising to reverse the function of advertising communication. In effect, linguistic saboteurs have been firing their ordinance at the fortified castles of the powerful in the communications sphere for decades, indeed for an entire century. Dada, Surrealism, the Beat Generation, the Situationists and Mao Dada transversalism were all experiments in linguistic sabotage. Subvertising begins when it is intuited that it is possible to slyly usurp the pronouncer's power, showing his distinctive signs and speaking in his tone of voice, to make him say things that destroy his authority. Subvertising consists of pushing the falsification of power to the limit, to reveal its weakness, its unbelievability, its madness.

"False information produces real events," claimed the Italian magazine *A/traverso*, which launched campaigns of info-subversion in the 1970s. Communication sabotage groups were born all over Italy at this time. In Bologna, fake copies of the local conservative newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* exclaimed: "This year, as always, there have been thousands of work-related deaths. Thousands of Bolognese wipe their asses with *Il Resto del Carlino*." In Naples, a manifesto was posted that carried the stamp and the letterhead of the Prefecture, inviting the population to come to the supermarkets and take goods without paying. In 1978, this same group created the tabloid *Il Male*, a satirical newspaper that occasionally simulated the mastheads of major Italian newspapers to announce impossible news such as the landing of Martians in the Piazza del Duomo, FIFA's decision to cancel the results of the soccer World Cup (which Italy lost in the finals), or the arrest of actor/director Ugo Tognazzi as the head of the left-wing terrorist group, the Red Brigades.

Protest movements all over the world have used falsification to creatively detourn messages of power, and in recent years, communications-based sabotage operations have multiplied, thanks to groups that work over the Internet such as rtMark, and groups linked to the circuit of Indymedia or *Adbusters*. Subvertising has only taken its first steps, and has yet to construct an exact science of creative falsification.

Convergence and Postmedia Culture

The process of convergence for postmedia culture has followed contradictory tendencies. In the spring of 2000, it was thought that the convergence might be dominated by economic investments of television infotainment and advertising culture giants, and there would be no space left for cultural experimentation and social self-organization. Despite the process of economic concentration of information that has continued to grow as the use of the Internet expands, the convergence still contains unpredictable possibilities. The framework of the Internet is very complex. Economic concentration constitutes the dominant quantitative trend, but this does not limit the proliferation of agents of individual and collective transmission who make use of the Internet's global diffusion and intermedia intersections.

On the theoretical level, this prospect was foreseen by Felix Guattari in the 1980s with his concept of a postmedia society. In those years, as the power of new media began to emerge, and in Italy, Big Brother assumed the televisual features of Silvio Berlusconi, the theoretical imagination was paralyzed by the danger of an absolute dominance of the media by economic power. In this atmosphere of medialogic pessimism, Guattari, with his schizoprophetic gifts, spoke of the possibility of a postmedia society. Exactly while the mass media system was becoming the central agent of cognitive colonization and political authoritarianism, Guattari was saying that one need not fear the dominance of television over the flow of social communication: the progress of computer technology would soon make a vast diffusion of rhizomatic devices possible. "There will be bidirectional and multidimensional relationships between collectives of postmedia transmission," he said. These devices and their relational models would infect the centralized television system, disturbing and destructuring all state-controlled and hierarchical economic forms.

Clearly Guattari was predicting the utopia of the Internet, the ever-proliferating rhizome of brains and machines. This utopia is incarnated within technology, in culture, even in enterprise. But like all utopias it is not pacific, and within the emerging postmedia society it has presaged an inevitable war—the recurrent and interminable war between domination and liberty. The 1990s saw the rise of the rhizomatic communicative system, but this system quickly became infected by centralizing and hierarchal media viruses. The penetration of the Internet by advertising, business and television represented an aspect of this infiltration. The imposition of proprietary software was another aspect. But the complexity of the rhizomatic system was no longer reducible in any significant manner to a totalizing and centralized project. Following this logic, Guattari's post-mass-media prophecy seems to be incessantly belied and reaffirmed by the dynamic of domination and freedom.

But there is a more radical aspect of this post-mass-media prophecy. The fundamental question that we must pose is: to what extent does mediatization involve, disturb, repress and cancel our bodily singularity? While technologies make a growing mediatization of social interactions possible, and thus tend to promote long-distance communication and the abolition of personal contact and corporeal presence, new energies capable of recontextualizing corporeality, presence and erotic physicality are also activated. These energies occasionally manifest themselves in cultural behaviors of a Luddite nature, such as the refusal of technological prostheses and the search for an unmediated relationship with nature. Occasionally, they manifest themselves through the refinement of a visionary-futurist style that proposes to bring the energy that comes from psychedelic creativity into the media infosphere.

On one hand we must ask ourselves what direction mediatization is taking us, which tendencies will predominate in the mass media universe or which force will predominate in the process of convergence; on the other, we cannot fail to ask ourselves about our corporeality in relation to the diffusion of cyberspace. We are caught in this conundrum because our virtual communicative lives make an expansion of our experience possible, but at the same time continually threatens to paralyze us, and to destroy our singular sensibility.

One of the fundamental struggles of the present epoch is the continual reactualization of the singular sensibility of our existence in both real and virtual dimensions. This is what Guattari defines as the 'post-mass-media battle.'

five

Telestreet: The Archipelago of Ethereal Shadows

Throughout this book, we have discussed the futility of opposing Berlusconi's media takeover. Within this situation of powerlessness, however, a new type of phenomenon spread at the margins of the official media system: Telestreet, a network of micro-television stations using a low-power signal to broadcast over a very limited geographical area, sometimes a single street (thus the name "Telestreet" or street televisions). These micro-television stations transmitted via the ether, utilizing so-called "shadow cones"—areas where the signals of commercial terrestrial broadcasters could not reach because of natural or trade barriers. This movement of "antennas toward people" aimed to enable citizens to freely use the communication channel of television to not only to receive information but especially to produce it. By doing so, it allowed individuals to closely interact from a distance in sharing and co-producing information. "Don't watch TV, just do it!" was the slogan of the street televisions.

The very low cost of the equipment gave everyone the opportunity to transmit information not typically covered by mainstream networks. Moreover, antenna broadcasting was combined with the Internet, allowing video works to be shared and aiding in the management of the street televisions scattered all over Italy. A new Italian media activism had emerged within protests organized around the Social Forums, and found itself not only capturing the events, but also propagating an atmosphere, an impatience, a desire for autonomy.

OrfeoTV

The first Italian micro-television was created in the first months of 2002 by a group of people who had lived the experience of free radio twenty-five years before, namely Radio Alice. The group included several media professionals, transmission technology experts, an antennist and a computer programmer. This heterogeneous little group circulated the following message on some Italian media activist sites like ECN, Indymedia and Rekombinant:

> Let's go down into the street, let's get together our friends, life-long companions, those 'still-alive,' who still have their voice and thoughts, let's buy an antenna, a frequency modulator and a TV transmitter, find a room, a garage or workshop, hook up our Sunday afternoon video camera, videocassette recorders, a television set and a couple of lamps for light. We can now begin.

People responded to the call, and during the spring of 2002, in a central district of Bologna—a city, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, with a long history of avant-garde experimentation in communications—a motley group of media activists were performing strange experiments. One person would go around on the roofs of the houses with odd devices, scanning the radio spectrum. Others would disassemble television receivers and turn them into transmitters. Still others would interview passersby. After several attempts, the group discovered a "shadow cone"—a blind spot where no transmissions are receivable for mainly topographical reasons—along the spectrum of the television frequency at channel 51 (MTV-Italy). Thus, the conditions were set for broadcasting within a radius of a few hundred meters. The group then tested the broadcast signal and success was confirmed by checking the reception of channel 51 from different houses in the vicinity: within a range of 300 meters, the signal was received very clearly.

The headquarters of the first Italian street television station were established in Mick and Max's bar on Via Orfeo, a place seemingly untouched for fifty years, through which several generations of artists and freaks had passed. The initiation of the broadcast was announced at a local street party and groups of activists with video cameras went around the neighborhood interviewing people. The group's manifesto was posted on the walls of the district:

> Citizens,
> The television ocean in which we are immersed is starting to seriously stink of monoculture.
> Only one type of fish dominates the great waters of the infosphere.
> Communications biodiversity is at risk of extinction.
> The banana fish is eating all the others.
> LISTEN UP, strong and free fish who still love to swim,
> chase the anxiety and depression from your hearts.

> Now is the time to come out of the aquarium.
> Let imagination and creativity rediscover their strength,
> let friendship and challenge guide us into the open,
> for where there is danger there is also salvation.

A press conference was called at Mick and Max's on June 21. The summer had scarcely begun and the bar was hellishly hot. To an assemblage of overheated journalists, the group announced the launch of an Italian micro-television station called 'OrfeoTV' (taking the name from its district). The OrfeoTV antenna could only cover a radius of 300 meters, just a few buildings, a small neighborhood. The first broadcasts were dedicated to the neighborhood, including a documentary about the protest against the proposal to destroy a local park in order to build a parking lot, and profiles of local craftsmen. The broadcast ended with coverage of a massive street demonstration organized the previous week for the defense of union rights and against the policies of Berlusconi's government.

Everybody was initially swept along by the wave of media enthusiasm, but after a while, the group realized that while broadcasting an hour and a half each day was easy, preparing the material to be transmitted was not. The fact that the broadcast range was just a few hundred meters or that the audience was little more than a couple of dozen people did not make any difference. It still required the same amount of work as any television station: recording, selecting, editing and all the rest. The station used any available video camera. Someone from the collective was able to tap into the resources of a few local private television stations, and later, students from the Communications Department at the University of Bologna provided some help. Pidgin, a small video production company located in the vicinity and sympathetic to the project, provided an editing facility. But this worked for only a few weeks. The editing machines could not be permanently made available, as the editing studios had to be used for commercial jobs. Thus, whoever went out to shoot had to try to edit using the camera. In some cases, OrfeoTV even experimented with a breathtaking new editing technique, daring but efficient: the operator charged with broadcasting the recorded material decided when the piece was getting a bit boring and "cut it" by pushing the fast-forward switch during transmission.

Several viewers phoned in to complain, "I can't tune in this evening," said the woman who lived just two buildings down the road from the broadcast. Others called in to give messages of encouragement to the group.

But what mattered in terms of the objectives of the original group was not the quality of the programs or the images. At its heart, OrfeoTV was a conceptual work more than an effective television station. It was a simulation of postmediatic democracy; a symbolic protest against the media monopoly in Italy; an experiment in what one could call 'postmediatic society.'

For several weeks, OrfeoTV transmitted an hour and a half each day. Not quite enough time to say that an independent voice had come to life in the television system, but enough to demonstrate that a clandestine anti-government television station could be operative. The collective did not want this initiative to remain isolated

or circumscribed by the local conditions of one district in Bologna, it believed it had to proliferate. It wanted other groups of media activists to climb on top of their roofs, find shadow cones in their neighborhoods, alter a television reception unit and begin broadcasting. But what should they transmit? Whatever made up everyday life, social struggles and cultural projects that opposed and subtracted themselves from the teledictator's show.

The OrfeoTV collective wanted to show that it was not only possible to set up a pirate television station, but also that this experience was easily replicable in any urban context. Telestreet proposed itself as a national platform for the coordination between micro-TV stations.

In a second manifesto distributed via the Internet, the OrfeoTV collective spelled out their call to all Italian media activists:

> Everyone knows that in Italy we live in a televisual dictatorship.
> Thanks in part to his domination of the mediascape, a scoundrel has seized political power. And thanks to this political power he can feed his media power.
> There's no way out. Many fear that he is destined to rule forever.
> But it's not like that. Because television is dead.
> The energy of social communication is shifting in another direction. The direction is that of the Internet. But the majority of the Italian population receives most of the signals that influence its social brain from the television screen.
> Thus, we must we must bring the message to that screen and connect it to the Internet.
> In the immediate future, our task is to connect the circuit of audiovisual production within a territorial grid (neighborhood by neighborhood) of short-range micro-broadcasters.
> And so the first thing to do is to build this grid.
> We will call it Telestreet.

To answer the questions of those who wanted to know more, a website (www.telestreet.it) was launched and a mailing list was activated. Hundreds of people contacted the OrfeoTV studio to propose broadcasts of every type; everyone wanted to interview someone. The unexpected success of the initiative also had some drawbacks, including burn-out on the part of some members of the original group. "One guy came up to me the other day in the suburbs," recalled one member of the collective, "and asked me, 'This idea of Telestreet is great. I live on the tenth floor, what can I do?' I would have liked to have answered him, 'Throw yourself off your balcony,' but instead I told him, 'go and have a look at the list of technical criteria for a micro-TV station on Telestreet's website and put up your own station.'"

What is Needed to Transmit

The collective distributed a document explaining how to set up a micro-television station, what the problems were, and how they could be resolved. The document

contained the following: Gather the materials technically necessary for transmission, find an unoccupied frequency in your area and get the transmitter working; we would advise you to get the help of somebody who knows TV antennas. The costs for getting a micro-TV station going are difficult to estimate. The basic technical materials don't cost much, less than a thousand Euros in all. But naturally, you need the help of technically qualified people.

In the case of OrfeoTV, such competencies existed within the collective and were volunteered to the project, but it is not a given that it will be like that for everyone. In some cases, it will be necessary to pay for assistance, and this will add to the initial costs.

The Production of the Flow of Images

The production of the broadcasts depends on your communicative and poetic intentions. There is no minimum standard in this field; everyone can broadcast as they please. The transmissions can be edited using sophisticated machines or one can forego all post-production work and live-broadcast someone reading poetry by Paul Eluard, or transmit the statements of a street's inhabitants who casually address a stationary video camera.

A list of the materials necessary for production and post-production includes: a video camera, possibly digital, a video mixer and an editing kit. Many collectives, social centers as well as amateur videomakers, possess everything necessary to make professional broadcasts. You should find people in your area, among your acquaintances, who will to allow you to achieve a decent level of production.

With regards to content, the task the founding group of OrfeoTV set for itself was to create a network of micro-TV stations throughout Italy capable of exchanging materials and knowledge over the Internet. These media activists saw the future of street TV as an integration of micro-TV stations with a global circuit of video production. Every micro-TV station would be able to access an archive of images, films, documentaries and video of every type produced by media activist collectives throughout the country. The Internet would handle the exchange between the different micro-TV stations.

In July 2002, the collective organized a meeting of media activists in Bologna to explore different possibilities for the creation of a 'jukebox' of streaming videos that would function as an open-source archive for every micro-TV station. The most brilliant hackers set to work on devising a compression system that would make an archive of image streams freely accessible to the street television network.

Someone asked: "But how is it possible to find a frequency in the overcrowded ether?" And someone else answered: "The spectrum of television frequencies is entirely occupied by the big TV operators who obtained government permits. But anyone with knowledge of TV reception knows that in urban areas there exist frequencies that, although having been assigned, do not in fact carry the signals for unpredictable geographical reasons: a hill or a building may be so high that it impedes sight to the repeater. With a small transmitter you can send a signal in a shadow

cone capable of reaching the antennas that are to be found in that little area." Others asked: "Is it legal or illegal to transmit without a government permit?" "Oh, it's illegal, yes, illegal."

Of course it was illegal. The law regulating the field of television broadcasting (the so-called Mammì Law, approved in 1984 under direct pressure from Bettino Craxi) was specifically designed for Berlusconi and thus it is illegal for anyone to transmit without a government permit. The collective expected to be shut down any day.

OrfeoTV broadcast every day throughout July 2002 and nothing happened. If the authorities had decided to intervene, a fine group of Bolognese media activists would have ended up in jail. The theory that circulated was that it would have been pretty scandalous if a regime that based its power on control over the whole communications system intervened to shut down a tiny street television station broadcasting to a mere few blocks.

The Legal Question

In order to answer these legal queries, the Telestreet website opened a discussion on the legal question. First of all, let us keep in mind the fact that Article 21 of the constitution guarantees equal right of information to all citizens: "Everyone has the right to freely express their own thoughts by speech, the written word and every other means of distribution. The press cannot be subject either to censorship or the need for authorization." Secondly, let us recall that the Constitutional Court's Judgment 202 from July 1976 establishes the illegitimacy of the broadcast monopoly and at the time there was a state monopoly, in which RAI was the only body recognized by the state as having the right to send electromagnetic radio and television signals.

Following this court decision, a proliferation of free radio stations became possible. Today, that decision acquires new meaning because the monopoly has been reconstituted, even if it no longer has the features of a state monopoly. Rather, it is the monopoly of a public-private financial and political group.

During the years following 1976, private television stations began to form and as they spread, various legal problems emerged. One problem in particular concerned nationwide unified broadcasts. Legislation was passed on this issue in 1984; the Craxi government requested the drafting of an ad-hoc law explicitly devised to favor those groups intending to broadcast television nationwide (i.e., Mediaset). This law—quickly approved so as to regulate a difficult legal situation for the then-rising star of private television, the young Silvio Berlusconi—took the title "Mammì Law" from then-Minister of Communications Oscar Mammì.

This law states that private parties can transmit television only after obtaining permission from a government commission that meets every four years. Those without permission (which none of us could ever obtain, for technical, financial and political reasons quite aside from the question of overcrowding) are not allowed to transmit and do not even have the right to own equipment capable of transmitting.

The Mammì Law also states the sentence for someone who transmits or who possesses transmission equipment: nine-to-eighteen months incarceration for anyone who transmits nationally, and half of that for someone transmitting locally. Beyond this, obviously, the equipment would be confiscated.

When the collective prepared to launch OrfeoTV, its members asked themselves a thousand times: "Will they, or will they not, shut us down?" Some believed the station would be closed swiftly by administrative decision rather than for political reasons. Others believed that no one would close the station down because it would be rather embarrassing for a magistrate to order the closure of a microbroadcaster when everyone knew that Italy was governed by a bully who had taken control of 90 percent of the available ether.

Indeed, nobody came to seize OrfeoTV's equipment and no one was charged with breaking the law. If this had happened, the group was prepared: they had their lawyers ready to invoke Constitutional Court's 1976 decision, which proclaimed the illegitimacy of the monopoly; that is, the illegitimacy of the situation created in Italy after the victory of Fininvest in the elections of May 13, 2001.

Whatever may have happened, OrfeoTV would have won. If Berlusconi's regime did not close the station, it would have created a legal precedent allowing anyone who wanted to do so to create their own microantenna. If it closed the station down, the ensuing legal battle would have opened up a long-overdue debate on the state of the Italian media, and could have produced the conditions to shutdown Mediaset for clear breach of the court's ruling.

The Archipelago of the Ethereal Shadows

In the summer of 2002, the OrfeoTV collective produced a third manifesto that outlined the national project of Telestreet in broad strokes:

Orfeo is a microbroadcaster, a street television station.
Orfeo covers an area of a few hundred square meters.
Orfeo uses a broadcast power of 0.07 watts.
Orfeo does not produce electromagnetic pollution.
Orfeo was started for less than a thousand Euros.

Orfeo is the self-financed and voluntary fruit of a common sensibility in its becoming.
Orfeo knows it can be pursued legally.
Orfeo knows that it can count on Article 21 of the Constitution.
Orfeo knows how to act in a viral manner.

Orfeo transmits in Bologna on channel 51 in a shadow cone of MTV.
Orfeo does not interfere with MTV or any other broadcaster in any way.
Orfeo knows that there are thousands, tens of thousands of shadow cones.
Orfeo imagines a broadcaster in every shadow cone.

Orfeo imagines Telestreet, a national network of street television stations.

Today, Telestreet is a website whose address is: www.telestreet.it.
Telestreet gathers supporters, offers information and creates contacts.
Telestreet opens itself to the global circuit of independent video productions.

Telestreet will be the technical, political and informational platform of the street TVs.
Telestreet will be the place for the coordination and exchange between all street TVs.
Telestreet will function as a global, interdependent and interactive editorial staff.

Telstreet will accomplish the integration between micro-broadcasters and broadband Internet.
Telestreet will integrate broadband Internet with satellite TV.

The urban legend of the little pirate broadcaster opposing the huge dictatorship of the national mediascape began to circulate. Groups wanting to recreate the experience of OrfeoTV were founded in different Italian cities. The first objective of the group of media activists all over Italy who organized themselves as Telestreet was the denunciation of Berlusconi's media domination. Flyers and leaflets were distributed everywhere to promote the micro-TV philosophy against the power of the banana fish.

The Banana Fish is Poisoning Us

The banana fish has infected the aquarium and now the stench is intolerable. An economic group that built its power on illegality, the corruption of judges, and the systematic marginalization of intelligence, is poisoning thousands of hearts and minds. It is the vilest form of fascism: the dictatorship of media-produced ignorance.

The master of Mediaset has entrusted RAI to his personnel. The waiters of the man from Mediaset are cleansing the public service of every ounce of intelligence and information. From the airwaves we will only be able to get that which loyally serves the dictatorship of ignorance.

But in many districts of Italian cities a new fashion has begun to spread. In Trieste, Bologna, Rome, Florence, Termini Imerese and other places we don't even know about, groups of media activists have started creating street-TV stations. They are capturing the images and words of the people. They put up an antenna and connect it with a short-range transmitter. They broadcast daily life in the range of daily life.

OrfeoTV has been transmitting several hours each evening, two or three

days a week, since June 21. Its message is: "Turn off the television of the regime, turn on the video camera, create a group of media activists who go around and do interviews, collect, mix and edit. Put up your antenna, create your own television station." It doesn't take much. You need an antennist capable of locating the blind spot for the television frequency and technical equipment costing little more than a thousand Euros. And most of all, you need the time to discuss and work together, and freedom of imagination.

A wave of neighborhood televisions can bring some oxygen to this dying country.

Telestreet is not advocating a better television, nor one that is more just or more pretty. This is the end of television, the end of this tyrannical medium you have been forced to endure. It's the beginning of a process that can spread everywhere: of seizing the word and image by a peaceful army of networked communicators.

Telestreet initiated a discussion of theoretical elaboration and practical experimentation. Other nuclei of media activists began to follow the example of OrfeoTV, to root out the blind spots in the frequency spectrum of their neighborhoods, and to build a transmitter capable of sending short-range television signals, and to record, edit and broadcast streams of information, video art and creation. It was not easy for any of these activists to build the technical instruments needed to start broadcasting, and still less so to find the time and energy necessary to activate an editorial process.

The process slowly began to spread, with the aim of bringing a network of neighborhood micro-TVs to life that would produce video information in a diffuse manner and were capable of covering—through the proliferation their short-range antennas—a growing part of the national territory.

From OrfeoTV to Telestreet

The following is an excerpt from a document that summarizes this first phase of the Telestreet experiment:

On June 21, in a neighborhood in Bologna, the first free video antenna arose: OrfeoTV.

The studios are in a tiny shop, three square meters, and the potential audience extends a few hundred meters between the Via Dei Coltelli, Via Castiglione and Via Degli Angeli.

How many viewers are there? Personally, I know three.
Maybe there are others, but we don't have Auditel.
OrfeoTV would only be a joke of questionable taste if it weren't for Telestreet.

And what is Telestreet?
1. Telestreet is a symbolic campaign against the teledictatorship. David always wins against Goliath. It takes some time but it's always going to finish that way.
2. Telestreet is a project for convergence from below: neighborhood microantennas connected via broadband networks. Only a few people are able to understand the concept today. We appeal to those few. Thanks to this concept, we will destroy television. Samson will die with the Philistines.

It is not important how many people watch and listen (television is always crap). What matters is how many people speak and record (making TV is the very opposite of being subjected to television).

Everyone should do it; this way no one will watch it anymore.

This is the principle.
This is the alpha and the omega.
This is convergence from below.

The Closing of Telefabbrica

In October, new street televisions started up in other Italian cities. One in Trieste, others in Pisa and Florence. In the autumn of 2002, Fiat, the country's main car manufacturer, went into one of its recurring catastrophic crisis. Thousands of workers were laid off at Fiat's main plant in Turin but also in Termini Imerese. Termini Imerese is a small Sicilian town that is home to a Fiat plant that is the sole source of work and income for thousands of people. Fiat's decision to close the factory meant poverty for thousands of families. Some local media activists decided to document the fight against the closure by setting up their own telestreet called Telefabbrica. A group of youngsters began to interview the laid-off workers, trade-unionists and women who were protesting. The interviews went out over the airwaves each evening. The micro-TV's office was located on the premises of the trade union and for three days television was used as a tool to discuss the problems of the workers' resistance. The military police of the Carabinieri arrived on the fourth day, seized the transmission equipment and prevented these young people from continuing their broadcasts.

Telestreet, the national coordination of street television stations, responded with the following communiqué:

> Today, December 4, 2002, a group of Carabinieri, on the orders of the Minister of Communications, shut down Telefabbrica, a street TV born in Termini Imerese to support the struggle of the Fiat workers threatened with layoffs. Telefabbrica had been broadcasting since Saturday evening within a radius of five hundred meters. The Minister of Communications gave the order to close it.

> Five hundred meters. This is more or less like preventing two deaf mutes from gesturing to one another from opposite sides of the road. The message sent by the government seems clear. No one has the right to communicate anymore, only He (and His orderlies) can. Telefabbrica did not have a government permit giving authorization to broadcast and therefore was in violation of Article 195 of the Mammì Law. Retequattro (one of Berlusconi's national networks that was supposed to broadcast only via cable but never complied with the order) has no permit either, and its operative radius is not five hundred meters. But Retequattro can transmit because it's the property of the dictator and thus the Minister of Communications doesn't shut it down.
>
> Telestreet was born to raise consciousness that it is possible to break the communications monopoly simply by assuming the responsibility to communicate. By all means, including television. It's possible to do it, it costs little, and it sets creative and political energy in motion. Telestreet was born to bring democracy into communications, precisely what in this country there is an attempt to destroy.
>
> This is why Telestreet calls on all sentient people to experience the same disgust that we feel at this comic repression that prevents people from transmitting words and images in a range of five hundred meters.

After these events, the Italian media activist milieu began to ponder the significance that this televisual experience was assuming, notwithstanding how poor and down and out it was.

For all those involved, it was clear that two different elements in the Telestreet operation needed to be distinguished from one another: the tactical and political struggle against the excessive media power of Mediaset and the Berlusconi government; and the strategic aspect involving the production of content. For the first time in Italy, media activists tried to develop an intermedia communicative model by which the Internet could absorb video production.

Eterea

On December 14, 2002, the first national meeting of street television stations was held to unite the groups inspired by OrfeoTV that were proliferating all over the country, and to deepen the political and mediatic aspects of the Telestreet project. Five hundred media activists from many different cities attended. The conference was called *Eterea* (a wordplay on *etere*, the airwaves, and *etereo*, ethereal light). What follows is the manifesto released to organize the event:

> There is a heavy air about. The environment is increasingly polluted.
> Not just the physical environment, cities poisoned by millions of cars, coasts devastated by seas of oil. Not just the social environment, impoverished by avarice, attacked by private interests, frightened by the inkling of an imminent economic storm.

The mental environment also, the space of communications, where the imagination, sensibility and desire are formed, is heavily polluted with fear, arrogance, economic aggressiveness, racism and hypocrisy.

In Italy, a strange fact has come to being. A private economic power has progressively taken control of the communications system and particularly television. Let's leave aside by what methods this private group took control of everything. The fact remains that thanks to its domination over the means of production of the collective mind, this economic group has conquered political power and is using it to dismantle every democratic space in the sphere of mass communications. The purging of RAI—always central to the distribution of political power—allows this private group to attain two objectives: to eliminate dissenting voices and to bring down the quality of RAI's programming, in order to eliminate it as a competitor and take a significant slice of its advertising market.

All this was foreseen, but it still does not cease to astonish observers. However, maybe it's just better to get used to the idea and think about how to dismantle this political and mental trap.

Heaviness is not fought but dissolved. Therefore, we should not become obsessed with just the idea of providing opposition. We need to find ways that circumvent, deconstruct, break up and ultimately dissolve the heaviness that weighs upon the air. What should we do in such a predicament? Protest against the arrogance of the heavies, who took control of the public entity and are now dismantling it in their own interest? Of course we must protest, but we already know that they will not listen to us. They have no time to lose, these heavies, with the time-wasting minutiae of democracy. Thanks to a media bombardment, they have stunned the people, and out of this befuddlement come opaque hopes and the necessary votes. They use these votes to get themselves what they want day after day.

So then what should we do? Demonstrate against the racist laws or the senseless rush towards war? We did, but it didn't come to much, because a diffuse climate of war, fear and persecution is useful to these heavy spirits, where everyone lays low.

So we keep on going. We will not stop protesting and demonstrating against the heaviness, but that will not be enough to dispel it.

There is something we can do, and many of us are already doing it: experimenting with democracy, assuming the responsibility to disobey and to act in an autonomous manner in the fields of communication, knowledge, technical innovation and social action.

The behavior we are proposing is utterly ethereal, a conduct composed of withdrawal, desertion and at the same time micro-interference, a continual hijacking of the flows of language and images. The heavies have built a massive machine of domination the human mind, someone must make little vessels for escape available in a thousand directions.

The Eterea conference was a huge success. For an entire day, hundreds of media activists explored the various tactics and strategies of proliferating street television, media activism and the convergence-from-below aspects of the television grid and the illegal transmission of images in the ether.

Telestreet was born out of a critique of television, with the intention of multiplying the amount of televised transmission points in order to make the television system "delirious," (thus making it explode through proliferation) and to produce a systematic, organized activity of advertising subversion. It needed to differentiate its languages, techniques and objectives in order to become a movement of creative falsification and communicative sabotage; to be able to distribute false news capable of inspiring real events.

Television in the Time of War

At the end of July 2002, the OrfeoTV collective decided to suspend broadcasting, resolving to resume it in the beginning of fall.

Fall 2002 was marked by large mobilizations against the Iraq War: the demonstration on November 9 in Florence during the European Social Forum; No War Day on December 10, with demonstrations in every city; and a gigantic demonstration on February 15, 2003 in Rome, in which close to two million people took to the streets to protest the impending war. OrfeoTV followed these activities with three or four video cameras, assembling many hours of raw footage, but the broadcasts became increasingly erratic and then stopped all together.

Is this what the collective had in mind when they came up with the idea to launch OrfeoTV? In meetings held after the closing, they easily acknowledged that they never had an actual plan. "Destroy the power of television by simulating television, by proliferating television," was the motto that emerged from their post-mortem analysis of their operation. Reviewing the content produced by OrfeoTV, the collective cannot recall anything particularly innovative that broke with existing televised schemas, or that broadened comprehension or awareness of the broadcasting machine. There was nothing that signaled a new language or a new expressive form. The novelty of Telestreet did not lie in any innovative way of producing images or creating information, or in the capacity to enter into unknown places or discover hidden truths. Telestreet was not about discovering technical innovations or new media languages.

Above all, Telestreet was a political campaign against the power that has been illegally concentrated in the hands of a media-financial company. It was also a practical critique of the communicative system that is condensed within television. The important result that Telestreet achieved was the activation of a large number of people who organized themselves into media activist groups, mobilized with their agitating recording tools and experimented with whatever was at hand in order to acquire technical and political skills in microbroadcasting, thus setting in motion processes of social self-organization of one sector of cognitive work.

We cannot say if, in the body of the experiments performed by the various street

TVs, there were new stylistic inventions, that new forms or new languages were created. It is possible, but until this moment we have not focused on this. Is this a limit to the experiment? Perhaps, but the point is this: since the beginning of this experiment, the intent of Bolognese media activists has been focused entirely on how the technocommunicative system and the politics of its operation could represent the social imaginary of contemporary Italy. The question was how to capture and share the spirit behind the street-TV network, which was the spirit of an epoch that no longer had any faith in power or in politics, and perhaps no hope for the future. This was (and still is) an epoch characterized by people who realize that they are alone, yet who are unable to square themselves with the irreparable catastrophe carving out a ground zero in their lives, and above all in the collective life of global humanity. The media activists behind the OrfeoTV experiment realized how worthwhile it was to collect the tools available to them, to connect friends who came out of corners, to go on the attack barehanded, without the hope of winning, but with the certainty of doing the only thing that one can do. Resist the homogenized horror, avoid the imaginary of submission, refuse the glossy hypocrisy and put into motion bizarre systems and unpredictable connections. This was what OrfeoTV was meant to be: a non-homogenized imaginative machine. Then the wars started.

The Vision of the Horror

The beginning of this century was marked by the explosion of a mad aggression. Since September 11, 2001, war has become routine; indeed it has become the horizon beyond which no one is able to see. A war that has been presented by both sides as interminable, preventative and merciless—two sides, by the way, which closely resemble one another. The war has naturally become the focus of street-TV stations because media activist groups have participated in the mobilization of the peace movement: they went to interview schoolchildren and the elderly in retirement homes about the war on terrorism, and they filmed the candle-lit vigils at nighttime and the daytime marches with multicolored banners.

At a certain point, many street-TV stations decided to form, if only temporarily, a satellite television channel against the war. It was not an easy decision or one taken lightly. In fact, the implicit model of the Telestreet experiment was not easily reducible to the model of satellite television. Telestreet meant the proliferation of micro-TV stations through the transformation of regular receiving antennas into transmitters, and sought to reticulate the diffusion of electronic video images. Satellite broadcasting, on the other hand, required the creation of a central production agency able to select, edit and screen the available material; its goal was to reach a large and geographically diffuse audience.

The creation of a satellite television channel dedicated to protesting the politics of war necessarily implied the belief that there was a lack of information or a truth deficit that the regime's television was responsible for creating and maintaining. It implied the intention to fill this void, to respond to the demand for truth that the regime's television, by its nature, could not and would not respond to. The Telestreet

model did not at all conform with this "counterinformation" idea. Telestreet was not counterinformation, but a way out of the world of referential meaning. This problem was examined and discussed many times in the meetings that preceded the linking of the Telestreet network to the No War satellite channel. In the end, not everyone agreed with the decision to join that initiative.

On December 10, 2002, Emergency, an Italian NGO founded by Italian physicians working in war zones, organized a No War Day, with the mobilization of protests in all cities, candlelight vigils, and sit-ins. For the day, it rented eight hours of time on a satellite television channel. This made it possible to broadcast the day's events (interviews, meetings, marches) all over the country. Global TV was born out of this experience, and began to broadcast on a satellite channel shortly thereafter.

In the first months of 2003, when the drums of war were rumbling and the heroic Western military divisions were preparing the slaughter, Italian media activism thought it necessary to prepare informational tools in order to shed light on a war that they feared would be carried out in the dark, without witnesses, without images. They believed the war televisions would hide the reality of the massacre. That assumption turned out to be mistaken.

From the moment the bombardments of Iraqi territory began, the entire world was drowned in horrifying images. Decapitated bodies, houses with their windows blown out and all the things inside blackened by smoke, wretched people who screamed with terror in their eyes, blood and dust—everything was documented. In 1991, the images of the first American war against the Iraqi regime had been shot from the point of view of smart bombs in search of their targets, and had all the cool cleanness of an electronic interface and the dissociated passion of the video game. This time, the horror was shown in all its terrifying truth, clashing with the words of the Western warriors who in Doha, Washington or London spoke in euphoric tones of the advance of the liberators.

However strong the political-military control of information, the effect was very different from what we had expected. Journalists, for the most part, behaved as workers who want to do their work decently, and they narrated the horror they encountered day by day, hour by hour. But these journalists wound up victims of the strong polarization between those who were following the occupation forces and the rest of the press.

The American government had in fact given a considerable number of trusted American journalists access to the battlefield, and this was unprecedented in the recent history of war journalism. These embedded journalists, in exchange for being allowed to follow the combatants up close, voluntarily submitted to a series of restrictions on their reporting freedoms. The U.S. Defense Department (Rumsfeld and his men) had thought up this particular solution to prevent accusations of a media blackout similar to the one during the first Gulf War, and at the same time to be able to maintain tight control over information. With the embedded journalists (for the most part shortened to "embeds," which sounds curiously similar to "in bed") the Pentagon compelled American journalists to submit to a strict self-censorship, to limit themselves to describing situations in a very generic manner, to refrain from

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mentioning the weapons used by their own troops, and to obey the orders of the commanding officer of the unit to which they were assigned. This officer could declare at any moment a media freeze or confiscate their cell phone (with the excuse that a transmission could reveal the unit's position to the enemy). With the embeds, American reporters were for the first time intimate participants in the military's actions and encounters. This generated excited and propagandist information, with journalists clothed in protective vests and night-vision goggles ecstatically admiring the power, speed and precision of the American deployments. A clear linguistic symptom of this embrace on the nuptial bed of war was the substitution of the third-person pronoun "they" with the more inclusive "we," thus seriously compromising the self-image of the reporter as someone able to express critical-analytic judgments on the situation.

This situation had two principal effects: the construction of particularly factious information by the embeds; and a structural (and dangerous) division between embeds (essentially American journalists) and all the others (Reporters sans Frontières estimated that of the 2,000–2,500 journalists present in and around Iraq, only 600 were embedded).

On the one hand, this divide reduced the danger that all the information provided would be reduced to propaganda; more diverse and global news was possible (primarily due to the presence of Arab journalists). On the other hand, it left this second group of journalists less protected, and thus more vulnerable to attacks from both sides.

The American military distinguished itself in a series of attacks on nonembedded journalists, for example, the attack on the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad (official headquarters of the nonaligned press) that caused the death of Taras Protsyuk, a Ukrainian cameraman who worked for Reuters, and of José Couso, a Spanish cameraman. American troops also bombed the offices of Al Jazeera and Abu Dhabi Television, killing Tareq Ayyoub, a Jordanian-Palestinian journalist who worked for Al Jazeera (let us not forget that the offices of Al Jazeera were already bombed by American planes during the war on Afghanistan in 2001).

Both the American military and the Iraqi regime tried to marginalize and repress the independence of journalists, but the principle of competition between the various new agencies made it impossible to cancel out diverging voices, and at least outside of the United States, this facilitated the dissemination of information broad enough to permit a clear understanding of what was really happening: a succession of heinous crimes and the beginning of a long-term war.

This did not mean that the information system told "the truth," it meant only that the sanitization of information about the war in many countries (above all in Arab countries and in Europe) did not succeed, thanks to a sort of spontaneous revolt by news agents who had the courage to report what they saw. Even information channels subject to the control of the information regime, such as RAI, ended up providing contradictory and clashing views of the situation. The packaging of the programs was sugar-coated, falsified, triumphalist and sanitized, but every once in a while the correspondents (above all the female correspondents) would speak

in their own voice, with their own gestures and their own words, and the horrors they witnessed came through. The ridiculous talking heads of the national news programs (both on RAI and Berlusconi's networks) chirped reassuring words about the advance of the troops who brought liberation to a people oppressed by supreme evil, but when the faces of Giovanna Botteri in Baghdad and other female journalists in other war zones appeared, we were able to understand what was really going on, and the crust of hypocrisy was repeatedly broken.

The information blackout forecasted by Italian media activists did not happen, why? Why had the powers that be allowed the European television-viewing public to bear witness to the intolerable? We could propose various hypotheses, such as an error in the American estimation of the Iraqi resistance, or the willingness and desire of the majority of journalists to generate independent information. One might even suppose that the feeling of repugnance the broadcasted violence prompted in the majority of viewers was no longer very important to the powers that be. Indeed, these powers were no longer preoccupied with obtaining the consensus of the Western populace: instead they were intent on provoking terror, which generated a supine acceptance of any violence: "Let them do anything, commit any violence as long as it is not directed against me, as long as I can be spared."

In the end, what lesson did we learn from months and months of viewing the horror on a daily basis? Perhaps it is too soon to say, because the systematic power displayed in those months may still be working deeply on the global unconscious, carving a trench of hatred in the heart of an entire generation and pushing millions of youth, and not just Arabs, to plot revenge with merciless methods. There was one thing that appeared fairly clear early on: the vision of the horror, the exhibition of illegitimate force that can destroy everything and (apparently) obtain everything, paralyzed the will and oppressed the soul with such a load of disgust that the desire to protest, to demonstrate peacefully, to declare in the light of day the rights of civil and political life, seemed to be exhausted.

More than once the White House declared all that which did not follow its will to power to be irrelevant. They threatened the United Nations and the European Union, declaring those institutions that did not follow their will to war to be irrelevant. "He who does not accept the dictate of force no longer counts," proclaimed the lords of war. The spectacle produced by the mastiffs in London and Washington (and their puppies in Rome and Warsaw) was one of absolute arrogance. Military brutality was shown to be the only source of right, of law and even of reality. The vision of horror, the systematic exhibition of the suffering of the weak, the humiliation of those who did not possess hypertechnological weapons: this spectacle of power that knew no reason functioned as a very powerful dissuader. Negotiations were good for nothing, reason was good for nothing, culture was good for nothing, beauty was good for nothing, so too with love, prayer and the word. The only thing that was good for something was power.

This message flowed from the uninterrupted viewing of horror. This was the dissuasive and paralyzing message that could result in a prolonged depression of civil society and the underground formation of an army of hate and revenge.

Media activists should reflect on this experience. It was no longer the job of media activism to inform, to unmask and to show. Everything there was to see, we saw. Everything there was to know, we knew. The result was that we were no longer able to imagine, nor to desire, nor to hope for anything.

We must recognize that one of the premises on which Italian media activism based the satellite television initiative of No War/Global TV was belied: the idea that there would only be very restricted information on the war provided to the global public proved untrue. Did we think that more images, more blood, more dust, more terror than what we were able to view would have been useful?

Conclusion

As Deleuze and Guattari said, and is true more than ever today: "We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present" (1994: 108). What is missing is political, linguistic and communicative creation. The ability to respond to horror with an efficient mobilization is missing. Tens of millions of people protested all over the world, but it was not enough. Street-TV stations followed the protests with their cameras, filmed the marches, interviewed thousands of people, got people to talk and broadcast the faces and voices of pacifists. But it did not serve any purpose, or at least it was not enough.

The acceleration, the overload and the angst of the conflict come to nothing, though they were probably inevitable. Perhaps, one thinks, in such situations it would be better pull the plug and not participate in the flow, to take a step away from the surrounding media frenzy.

We must reflect on this: what innovation can we make on the narrative level? How can we create zones of social existence that do not suffer the essential impoverishment and the psychological and physical violence of war? Only if we are able to produce something political on this level (that of content, style and narrative invention) will we have produced something complete and useful.

We are midway though our work. Street TVs are not interested in competing at the crammed level of information, in taking up space in the already super-saturated ether. Rather, these stations should work toward the creation of a recognizable sign that does not preach peace, but constructs friendship, because peace is not the effective opposite of war. Peace dissolves as soon as a bully fires his cannon. Friendship endures, underground and invincible, and does not collapse under the blackmail of war. Telestreet must become communication for friendship.

three

Italian Media Activism in the 1970s

As in much of the world, in recent decades Italy witnessed the emergenc
self-organized movement of media activism among knowledge and communi
workers. This media activism expressed itself through an ensemble of commun
practices aiming to remove social communication from the passivity of the sp
in order to produce creative, public and socially engaged works. As the me
production and distribution for media discourse became more complex, cost
concentrated in the hands of few corporations, technologically mediated socia
munication was in the process of becoming a privatized and exclusive field. In
years this trend has ebbed. Thanks to reduced media production costs, the ca
diffusion of technological knowledge and the increased availability of data-tr
networks, the mediascape is no longer the exclusive property of large priva
public corporations, but is also populated with the experiments and exchan
grassroots groups, individuals, artists, political and cultural agitators. Media
ism came to represent the conscious practice of those who invaded the field o
nologically mediated social communication to produce critical thinking and
awareness. In doing so, it fought a hard battle to redirect the social imagin
media audiences away from the ephemeral fantasies of the media conglomera

Communication Technologies and Social Change

The means of techno-communicative production have played an essentia
etal role since the beginning of modernity. We recall how important the sprea