

and “since that’s the way we’re playing it,” Hamm determines, “let’s play it that way and speak no more about it.”⁹² With this inability to speak and think from nothingness, whether our illiteracy is linguistic or digital, *Endgame* becomes the path for a potential revelation through the surrender and submission to new and unconventional procedures of perception. Like Hamm’s experience, the effects of *Endgame* ask us to acknowledge the procedures that surrender without intention: the effects ask us to be nothing, to urgently *think of something*.

Ultimately, what these effects offer us is an instructional unfolding of the minimizing of the self, the recognition that radically different narratives are on the horizon, and that something unarticulated is always innate. If digital code has something of a narrative embedded in it, it will be alien indeed.

92 Beckett, *Endgame*, 84.

WARMING THE ALGORITHM

And Possibilities for the Future

FRANCO 'BIFO' BERARDI – INTERVIEWED BY

DILLON DOUGLAS & THOMAS SZWEDSKA

*Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s is a renowned Italian political theorist and leading figure of the Italian Autonomia Movement, an anti-authoritarian form of Marxism. Until recently, he was a professor at the Accademia di Brera, Milan where he taught the Social History of the Media. As an activist, he was involved with Radio Alice, a pirate radio station in Italy during the mid to late 1970’s that aligned itself with the autonomist movement before Berardi fled to Paris in the 1980’s. “Bifo” has been involved with many artistic collaborations and journals: he is a co-founder of the Italian e-zine rekombinat.org which focuses on culture jamming, radical philosophy and media activism; and is also involved in telestreet movement, founding the channel Orfeo Tv. His theoretical work brings together conflicting and conjunctive voices, operating within a creative theoretical matrix that emphasizes French Post-structuralism and Italian Autonomist Marxism. His oeuvre, which includes more than two dozen books and many more essays, has emphasized motifs such as exhaustion, depression, withdrawal, and cancelling the future. Recently, “Bifo” has incorporated a robust phenomenological dimension to his writings in order to address the relationship between technology and subjectivity in the current global horizon of capitalism. This entails a reinvigoration of the concepts of potency, possibility, and power as a means to reactivate a future for the social body. These issues are taken up in Berardi’s new book, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (Verso, 2017).*

This interview was conducted during Berardi's visit to London, Ontario in March 2017 where he delivered a keynote lecture at "New Italian Thought," a conference hosted by The Centre for Advanced Research in European Philosophy at King's University College and The Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at Western University. We wish to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to Dr. Antonio Calcagno, who made the interview a possibility, and of course to Professor Berardi for the generosity of his time, spirited engagement with us, and above all else assistance in organizing this interview.

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Dillon Douglas and Thomas Szwedzka: Let's begin by talking about the theoretical matrix that you develop between Deleuze, Guattari, Baudrillard and the Autonomist strain of Italian Marxism. What is so impressive and tantalizing about your synthesis is the persistent antagonism between Deleuze and Guattari's theory of desire and Baudrillard's theory of simulacra that you reconfigure as a means to diagnosis semiocapitalism. It seems that for you Baudrillard is more prescient for contemporary problems than Deleuze and Guattari. However, you also redeploy Tronti's strategy of refusal to undermine Baudrillard's cynicism about liberation tactics. Then, moreover, you also raise a polemic against Deleuze, Guattari and Baudrillard to supplement the "phenomenological deficit" in their work, which seems to jettison the corporeal referent of the body—a central part of your own amorous schizoanalysis. Can you tell us what you were thinking about when you put all this together?

Franco "Bifo" Berardi: First of all, I disagree when you speak of Baudrillard's cynicism about liberation tactics. I will start from this point because this question is complicated, but the central point is about, let's say, our assessment of the possibilities of liberation today. Why I refuse the definition of cynicism when you speak of Baudrillard is because I think the word cynicism implies

an ethical complicity, I can say, with the existing reality. This is not Baudrillard’s stance. You may accuse Baudrillard of pessimism or also of nihilism, in a sense, but not of cynicism. On the contrary, Baudrillard is ethically very sensible and absolutely opposed to the present reality. But at the same time he recognizes that a process of liberation is not impossible, but distant from the present constitution of society and of subjectivity. I would say that far from being cynical his position can rather be defined as ironical.

I use the word irony in a very precise sense. When I say irony I mean the ability to distinguish between the sphere of language and the sphere of reality; the understanding that in the sphere of language and also in the sphere of ethical language that we can develop forms of consciousness, of imagination, of reality construction which are incompatible with the reality existing in the world. So I found an idea of autonomy on a concept of irony: irony being the ability to distinguish a sphere which is autonomous from the existing reality, a sphere which is not purely symbolic but deals with reality. I mean, we can decide reality is the dimension of reality that happens around this table – this is reality for us. But actually reality is the dimension of mutual understanding among humans. There is no reality before the creation of a common, Deleuze may say, *plan de consistance*...

TS: A plane of consistency.

Bifo: Yes, a plane of consistency. Language is creating a plane of consistency and the only plane of consistency is that we work together. This is our sphere of reality. The problem is, says Baudrillard, is that our plane of consistency (he does not use this language) our level of linguistic and ethical understanding cannot become the prevailing form of social life. In a sense, Baudrillard is creating a form of autonomy that is based on the withdrawal of reality. That is absolutely far from the definition of cynicism. Although I know that the word cynicism has different meanings – you can refer to the cynical Greek philosophy, for example – but we know what we are talking about when we use this word, or that when we

refer to a cynical person we are not referring to these other ideas of cynicism.

So from this point of view we could say I am not against Deleuze and Guattari. I think that Deleuze and Guattari have created a methodology, a rhizomatic methodology that has opened a way to a possibility and then Baudrillard comes along who says this is not a possibility for a political project. It is possible only in the ironic dimension of a mutual understanding. Frankly speaking, I think that Deleuze and Guattari and Baudrillard were in a conflicting position for reasons that belong much more to their personal biography than to their philosophy. You know, in 1974 Baudrillard published a book called *Oublier Foucault* [*Forget Foucault*]. After this point Foucault asked his friends to ignore the existence of Baudrillard. And this is the beginning of a conflict which was understandable at the personal or political level but not philosophically speaking. I want to dedicate my actions to a reconciliation between their work—they are all dead so I can be free, but I can also beg their pardon! [laughs]

DD/TS: This is what is so fascinating about your work, not many people are trying to do this! Moving on now, readers of your work seem to have questions about the theoretical and political valence that your notion of the body takes. It is not just “*res extensa*” or the phenomenological and christological “substance” of finitude. Is it? Or is it an “existential territory” of corporeality, familiarity, community that Guattari takes up, that is, a body *qua* its pathic relationality? It often flickers between these two determinations in your work.

Bifo: Well, in Italian, jokingly we say “*la seconda è buona*,” “the second one is good!” [laughs] Actually, I understand the perplexity, I understand that there is a possible ambiguity in the use of the word “body”. For instance, in *The Soul at Work*, I try to be clear about this point. I am not speaking about the soul in the spiritual sense as something disembodied. On the contrary, when I say the “soul” I mean the body in a sense, I mean the animated body. So,

obviously we can speak of the body in the sense of *res extensa*, but that is not my point. What is interesting for me is the existential dimension in which the physical consistency, the narrow physiological consistency of the body, gets a soul and becomes capable of emotional interaction and also of rational thought. So you see, the body is in this sense indissociable from the soul. And in this sense, I cannot...if you wanted to speak of the body in the narrow physiological dimension I needed to explicitly signal this dimension. If I say body I mean the animated body which implies an existential dimension, which also implies the complex of consciousness and the unconscious.

DD/TS: So is this related, or what you mean by a rhizomatic phenomenology: what gives a body animus or allows it to act in a social situation or condition?

Bifo: Well, the term rhizomatic phenomenology comes from the methodology of *Mille Plateaux* [*A Thousand Plateaus*]. This is the way we can define social life and the social process without referring to a political fixation or ideological fixation. Rhizomatic phenomenology is the dimension of the Husserlian *Lebenswelt*...

TS: A “lifeworld”...

Bifo: Ya! Absolutely, a life as the world of life! The dimension in which social life is creating its own environment and world. Politics, or ideology, fixates in one sense or another social life. And obviously this is legitimate but I wanted to move beyond or come beside this ideological and political fixation, and I wanted to see what happens at the level of the social unconscious or the social imaginary, and so on.

DD/TS: In your critique of political economy’s cult of productivity, you aim to reconfigure desire as a *field* (a “psychosphere,” which flirts conceptually with Guattari’s and Bateson’s “mental ecology”) rather than desire as a *force*—specifically, rather than a

neo-Spinozist causal productive force. Here, you quite brilliantly, twist Guattari and Baudrillard into a double helix against the “relentless Spinozism” of Deleuze and Negri.

Bifo: Thank you very much for this definition!

DD/TS: You’re welcome! Now to quote you from *The Soul at Work*, the “schizo vision thinks that the proliferation of desire can endlessly erode all structures of control. The implosive vision sees proliferation as the diffusion of a de-realizing virus.”¹ Do you think that in some respect this neo-Spinozism has internalized the metaphysical principle of political economy—that is, its reality principle of infinite production, energy, force?

Bifo: Congratulations! [laughs] No, this is a very interesting question, and it is also the object of my next book which is coming out in May entitled *Futurability*.² Futurability is a way to reactivate an imaginal future. You know, I have been repeating many times “no future,” “after the future,” and so on...

TS: Now it is time for a future!

Bifo: Yes...you know, “keep calm, and...” [laughs] look for one! But I also say there is relation between possibility – which is the content inscribed in the present constitution of reality, and particularly of our collective brain – potency and power. So I try to distinguish between these three levels and their relationship to the future because they are a way to imagine a tendency to imagine an intention, in the Husserlian way, towards the future. Possibilities are a plural, multifaceted dimension. Possibility is not one, it is not infinite, because it is not possible that I will live forever, for instance. It is not possible that this table is a cucumber! But in this

1 Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Cambridge, Massachusetts: semiotext(e), 2009) 160

2 Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, (New York: Verso Books, 2017)

sphere of possibility we find much more than in the dimension of actualization. So the relation between possibility and actualization is a relation of vibration. And in this vibration something happens that makes possible the shift from possible to actual. But what happens exactly? I try to understand how this selection happens, a selection among, not infinite, but many possibilities. And my answer is, first of all, power.

Power is a negative selection, a reductive selection, which allows one actualization against all the other possible selections. It is like a *gestalt*, an entangling gestalt! So then I also ask myself, how can we extract [ourselves] from the present possibilities which are forbidden from the present constitution of power and my answer is potency.

Potency is the transformation of the multiplicity of possibilities into a possible multiplicity of actualization. So I try to better understand what potency means. And I am obliged to refer to Negri. Negri, in his works, particularly in his works on Spinoza, I do not remember their titles in English...not the “Anomaly”...

DD: He wrote *The Savage Anomaly, Subversive Spinoza...*

Bifo: Yes that one! Here, he expresses himself in very theological terms. So I tried to deal with this idea of an infinity of potency and criticize Negri’s definition of potency for the first time in an explicit way.

So, you see, I think that the problem of desire very much has to do with this relationship between possibility and actualization. In the Italian interpretation of the concept of desire, I mean, *Anti-Oedipe* [*Anti-Oedipus*] was published in 1975 or 1976 [in Italian], and in 1977 we all discovered Deleuze and Guattari. And for us this was a sort of discovery of the infinity of desire. That turn was dangerous and wrong. The idea that desire is a force of infinite potency, this was a mistake and the wrong interpretation – and frankly speaking Deleuze and Guattari opened the door for this interpretation. At a certain point, dealing with the problem of depression, which has become an important problem at the politi-

cal and psychological level in the 1980s, 90s, and today more and more, so in trying to come to terms with the problem of depression there is a separate problem in the definition of desire as an infinite force and infinite potency.

First, potency is not infinite, and this is proved by the social history of our time but it is also proven by the personal experience of Guattari and Deleuze! In their last work, *What is Philosophy?*, they never use the “d” word – depression, they never say it, but they are talking about it! In “Chaos and the Brain,” the beautiful conclusion of the book, when they speak of “too fast, too fast, my brain is unable to interpret, to learn, to contain,” they are speaking of depression, and they are speaking of aging. They explicitly say, “what is growing old, what does it mean?” I like this text very much, first, because I am discovering the problem myself but also because I see they are problematizing desire in a non-explicit way. They are criticizing or self-criticizing the idea that desire is an infinite force. Desire is not a force, desire is a field. Potency is a force that acts on the field of desire. This has been important in the political history of the [Italian Autonomist] movement, because since a certain moment, after Deleuze and Guattari, we understood that politics is not about ideas, ideology, projects, and agendas and so on. These are important but they are epiphenomena in a sense. The real field in which the political history of humankind happens is desire. You have to act at that level if you want to win. Trump wins because he is able to manipulate desire while Clinton is unable to do the same! That is the point.

So you see: first, potency is not infinite; second, desire is not a force but a field, and we have to act on and in the field of desire in such a way that our potency becomes able to extract and actualize the possibility that the present constitution of the world, the capitalist constitution of the world, is repressing, compressing and making *invisible*, not impossible but invisible!

DD/TS: We have a question, actually, about the invisibilization of the world and a certain impotence of worlds as you describe them in your recent book *And: Phenomenology of the End*. What do

you mean when you invoke concepts of “world”? In this book, you tend to emphasize *the* world of semiocapitalism as a process of invisibilization relying on immaterial signifiers. But you also make reference to numerous cultural worlds, and the manner in which we typically, and mistakenly, take up our surrounding environment as the world as such, the Real world. How do worlds, in their cultural, national dimension, and the world relate to each other? And how does the process of the invisibilization of the world under semiocapitalism figure into this relationship between the world and worlds?

Bifo: Well, I see possible plans for my answer to this question. First, the most immediate, banal and phenomenological is that the history of late capitalism of financial capitalism *is* a process of invisibilization.

DD: It is a good word, much better than impossible because it already starts to instill the idea of possibility within the lexiconal shift in the concept of invisibilization.

Bifo: Absolutely. Secondly, I want to define power exactly as a process of invisibilization of possibilities. I try to explain [in this book] that the possibility of the general intellect and of the present constitution of technology and knowledge, and so on, is inscribed in our contemporary life. But what does this mean concretely? It means we can work less, enjoy more, and so on. The potency of knowledge and technology is giving us this possibility but we do not see this as possible. Why is this so? Because the capitalist organization is not working as a form of repression. Sometimes it works this way, but essentially it acts as an invisibilization of the possibilities of the world. Think about what salary is, and salary work. The very form of salary is the creation of a social perception, a social vision, in which you don't see that salary is an inessential, historical, and determinate form of relations between survival, labour, and social life. We are lead to think that if we want to survive we must work. Obviously, I admit, in some periods of human history

it has been necessary and probably in a marginal way it is still necessary. But this is not a natural given! In political discourse you cannot even say that basic income can replace the form of salary. Some very rare politicians are able to admit that sometimes, when many people are unemployed, we can give them a small amount of money for a short period of time in which they do not work. But as soon as they find work, they have to accept it! Otherwise you will not have your income anymore.

This is a total misunderstanding of the essential concept of basic income. I prefer to say “*salario di esistenza*” or “revenue of existence”. You have to think of the revenue of existence as a possibility of making visible what is made invisible by the gestalt of salary. Salary is a gestalt in the proper sense. You know what a gestalt is? A gestalt, according to gestalt theory, is a form that is generating forms. I mean, here, what do you see? I see a chair. True, there is a chair! But I do not see many other things that are here...I do not see the physical constitution of the chair, I do not see that it is also a hammer if I need a hammer, I do not see that it is a weapon for killing you if I want to kill you. You see how many things I can discover in reality but that are covered by the prevailing form of invisibilization. And actually you know, there are some types of figures, the vase for example. You see, this is a vase... [draws “vase” and laughs]. Okay, well anyway this is supposed to be a vase. In psychology they used to say “you see this is a vase, but from another point of view this is a nose!”

So the point is that you are accustomed to see things according to the prevailing gestalt. And if you want to disentangle the other forms of possibility you need to forget about the gestalt, you have to *cancel* the gestalt in your brain. Well, salary is a gestalt, an entangling gestalt which forbids the possibility of seeing the possibility inscribed in the general intellect which is producing the possibility of, call it a basic income but I call it the revenue of existence. That does not mean that people can live without doing anything, because people do not want to do nothing. People want to act, want to be active, and want to be helpful; they want to be creative and so on! So you have to disentangle the potency of hu-

man activity from the limitation of salaried work. Socially speaking, what we need more now is not the creation of fake forms of employment. We need to give people the possibility of healing, of dealing with the psycho-pathological problem of our time, which is to be healed not in a salaried way. The healing happens when you give people the possibility of living outside the blackmail, the entangled salaried form of activity.

DD/TS: Can we tie this back to when you speak of the reduction of the erotic domain and our ability to conjunct with people? I think there is an interesting congruity here with Peter Sloterdijk in his “archeology of intimacy” or *Spheres* project, when he claims that modernity is a historical machinery that specializes in the production of lonely individuals or monads who take as their metaphysical starting point the notion of “the one,” a historical machinery that “begins the history of the human who wants, and is meant to have, the ability to *be alone*.”³ You give a much more needed political inflection to what you see as the reduction of the erotic domain than Sloterdijk does, especially as “workers” are being swapped out for “floating atoms of time” due to capitalism’s recombinant ability. I suppose the question is how to overcome this historical production of loneliness. It is not simply “I feel lonely”, but it is a social production that capitalism has developed and that you can see in the architecture of apartment buildings as lonely cells, in the cubicalization of the work place or the dissipation of the work place altogether.

Bifo: Did you see Roman Polansky’s film *Carnage*? It is a film about two couples that meet in a small apartment, it is a very claustrophobic film. They continue talking about their children...but at a certain point, at the end, one of the husbands from the couple of visitors, one of which is Kate Winslet...the husband I do not remember, he does not deserve to be remembered [laughs]. But he is on his phone all of the time, he is a lawyer so he has to deal with

3 Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres I*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, Massachusetts: semiotext(e), 2011) 203.

something. But at a certain point Kate Winslet takes his phone and launches it into the bowl of water. She kills his smartphone, and then she says a beautiful sentence: “what is far is always more interesting than what is close.” This is a beautiful sentence, because this is the real point.

The real point is that the investment of desire, or the desiring-investment, is displaced from the dimension of the lived experience of the body of the other, of their presence, to the promise of a possible coming experience. I mean, I know, you know what we are talking about because it also happens to me. Think of Facebook. Tinder is in between, because it is a promise but it is a promise that is going to be fulfilled soon, maybe, maybe because it is not for sure. Facebook is perfect, because it is a permanent promise that experience will happen. And we start a “jump” with Facebook that never happens. But this is not the repression of desire.

Desire was repressed in the industrial age, in the age of Sigmund

Freud. In a sense, it is the contrary to repression, it is a sort of obligation to expression. An expression which continuously creates the promise of something that never happens. But desire is really invested in it. You see the capture of desire, contrary to what I thought when I was a young reader of *Anti-Oedipe* [*Anti-Oedipus*]: desire is not a good guy. Desire sometimes is cheating, sometimes it is taking you into a dimension of continuous frustration, a dimension of continuous postponement. My problem is not the invitation to people to throw your smartphone into a bowl of water. And I understand that in the game of postponing there is something happy, if you want. But if you transform erotic life into this permanent process of postponement, the effect is quite simply the valorization of capital and the dissolution of the possibility of happiness.

DD/TS: Since you mentioned that your answer to the problem of socially produced loneliness is not simply to throw away your smartphone, perhaps we should turn to one critique of your work by accelerationist theorists who accuse you of technophobia, humanism, and to ventriloquize Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, a

“folk politics” (a politics that fetishizes the immediate, tangible, hypokinetic and tries to reduce the hypercomplex, abstract and uncannily asubjective features of contemporary capitalism into a concrete package).⁴ How would you respond to this?

Bifo: I have already responded to them in an article on *e-flux* and in a small book on accelerationism, and my answer is in many ways still the same.⁵ I mean, accelerationism is very interesting when this philosophy or theory opens the way to understanding that in the machine a possibility of freedom is implied, but more, that only in the acceleration is there implied a possibility for liberation. However, this consideration becomes a form of simplistic progressivism.

DD: They have a sort of Hegelian optimism: in the end, everything will be good, the machine will take care of us, luxury-automated communism. They have these sorts of fantasies.

Bifo: Ya, absolutely! You know, I have always considered the “Fragment on Machine” the most important text about the possibility of liberation. But I know it is a possibility and I strongly emphasize the word possibility. Because, Marx’s Fragment is the starting point of Nick Land and accelerationist theory, explicitly or implicitly. So I agree when they say that the possibility is *in* the acceleration but only the possibility! At the same time, you have to acknowledge that if the body is captured in the dimension of acceleration without the possibility of autonomization or detachment, of de-multiplication, the possibility will never become actual. We will stay as an anguished possibility and it will never become true.

I do not reject that theory, but it is only part of the story. The other part of the story is not about acceleration or about de-

4 See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work*, (New York: Verso, 2015).

5 See, for example, Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Accelerationism Questioned from the Point of View of the Body” in *e-flux*, Journal #46 (June 2013): <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60080/accelerationism-questioned-from-the-point-of-view-of-the-body/>

celeration. I am not proposing a sort of nostalgic going back to a pre-technological dimension...

TS: It is not a retreat for you.

Bifo: Not at all, not a retreat from the technological dimension. I refuse any definition of technophobia as strongly as I refuse the definition of technophilia. The relation with technology cannot be a relation of passive acceptance or nostalgic refusal. It has to be a relation based on the creation of “chaoids”, the multipliers of chaos. I mean, good political action consists in the ability of creating the multipliers that gives you all the potency that is inside the acceleration, but also gives you the possibility – slow or fast I do not care – of being inside your body. A body is slow sometimes, why not? I like the slow body as I like the amphetamines, I have nothing against it. My relationship to acceleration is exactly this: half of the story is there, but what is lacking is important.

DD/TS: So can we talk more about this idea of refusal you mentioned before. There are a number of motifs of refusal that are emerging within contemporary Marxist discourse—“exodus” (Virno), “desertion” (Raunig), “separation” (Negri), even “subtraction” (Badiou). There is the attempt to subtract from the spatio-temporal dimensions of real subsumption or the “social factory” that seems to simultaneously require the creation of a new form of communistic life. You deploy the concept of withdrawal. Can you explain more precisely what this concept means for you? Is it akin to what Deleuze and Guattari call escape or “courage” in *Anti-Oedipus*?—that is, when they ask quoting Maurice Blanchot “What is this escape? The word is poorly chosen to please. Courage consists, however, in agreeing to flee rather than live tranquilly and hypocritically in false refuges.”⁶

6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (New York: Penguin Books, 2009) 341.

Bifo: You see, you have listed many good references. The line of escape [*ligne de fuite*] is much more about the possibility of avoiding bad conflict at unavoidable costs. You cannot cancel reality but you can escape. Then you have the concept of exodus, Paolo Virno for instance, which implies that you have social force, like for instance the general intellect or the community, and this social force cannot act in a form of negation but can “exodate”, transfer to another dimension. All of this has to do with the concept of withdrawal. After 1977 I began to speak of the process of withdrawal as a process of social action. But the most interesting way interesting way to approach the subject in my opinion is Gregory Bateson. Bateson, in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* speaks of a *schismogenesis*. Schismogenesis is perfect because everything is in that concept. One, schism, is an escape, exodus and so on. But it also speaks of genesis. Somewhere Deleuze says when you are escaping you are not only escaping, you are looking for a weapon. Bateson says more. He says when you escape you are creating another form of social life. Inside the escaping community you have a concept of sanctuary. Sanctuary is simultaneously a way to escape and of protecting the legacy of a past social civilization, and of creating the conditions of a new form. So it is a genesis, not only a schism. All of this, is I think, the beginning of a reflection that goes beyond Leninist dialectics that goes beyond thinking in dialectical terms. We are looking for a methodology for the revolution of tomorrow.

Actually, probably the term revolution has to be dismissed. Revolution actually refers to the idea that this is the territory, and we have to subvert it, revolve it. It is not a good methodology, probably. The idea now is that this is the territory, but the territory is making something invisible. We have to escape, withdraw, to find a good perspective in order to see what is invisible.

TS: So it is not simply a dialectical shift, or rotation –

Bifo: It is a displacement.

DD: In this sense, it is almost a cubist tactic where you have one

object and you are trying to look at it from a hundred different perspectives at once.

Bifo: Yes, exactly!

DD/TS: We would like to ask a naïve question about your hypothesis regarding cognitariat recomposition: namely, how does this differ from the connective sensibility you outlined as belonging to semicapitalism? I am curious because in an article published in *Multitudes*, “Décomposition et recombinaison à l’âge de la précarité,” you claim that the cognitariat cannot form a social class because their material social proximity is no longer perceived as “being part of a living community.”⁷ Would it be fair to say, then, that what you call cognitariat recomposition, or auto-identification in the conclusion of this essay, is an “immaterial” collective subjectivity, or an immaterial living community?

Bifo: Well, immaterial living community is a strange expression. The immaterial community already exists in a certain sense, the problem is that it needs to be embodied. Actually, the process of recomposition for me is absolutely fundamental, especially in the Workerist (Operaismo) Thought but also in finding a strategy. The strategy has to be a strategy of recomposition. Strategy in the industrial age used to be based on the physical proximity of workers. But physical proximity does not necessarily imply a social alliance.

TS: We need to distinguish between mass and class, in this regard.

Bifo: Absolutely, of course, the mass is not immediately a social class. You need strategies of recomposition also for people who are being together, who hate each other sometimes. So with the history of the unions, of historical communism and the history of social recomposition of that form of social labour, we first have to elabo-

7 Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Décomposition et recombinaison à l’âge de la précarité,” *Multitudes* 62, no. 1 (2016): 78, doi: 10.3917/mult.062.0077. Translation is ours.

rate a strategy of recomposition for a social body, or a social class, or a social combinatory system which is not yet a class, which is deprived of all physical proximity. Second, that takes into account the condition of permanent competition. Precarious labor first, is physically deterritorialized, and secondly is put in a condition of permanent competition, which is essential to understand what precarity means.

TS: The system is always presents itself as being-full in a sense, and contradictorily this scarcity of work makes labor even more desirable.

Bifo: Yes, and every day you have to fight against others to have your job and your salary. So we have two obstacles in the process of recomposition. And I attempt to better understand this problem by saying that “the general intellect is looking for its body.” What is the body of the general intellect?

Actually I do not have the answer to this problem as it is a problem of the upcoming years. But, first, we need to clearly define the problem. Second, we need to phenomenologically define the suffering of these workers. The body exists in a sense, but it exists only in the form of suffering. In the experience of industrial workers the body was always joking together, going to have a beer, sabotage, it was a sense of complicity. Complicity was essential for industrial workers. How can we find a ground for complicity among cognitive workers? Again, I do not have the answer but I see that the problem is there.

For instance, Tinder is an interesting example. You know what Tinder is of course? These kinds of apps are interesting because it is an attempt towards the possibility of a provisional recomposition of the cognitive body. Actually, this is true up to a certain point. First, because as far as I know, I do not know much because I only read about it or speak to friends, but as far as I know it is a very provisional experience. It is not transforming into a persistent and permanent form of socialization. But it is going in the right direction. I think, the accelerationist in me thinks, that we

need to work towards a platform that works for the erotic socialization of the cognitive body. I don't know exactly what it means, what is the right form, the right form of ecstasy, the ecstatic form for cognitive labor. It is a political problem but it is also a technological problem.

DD/TS: As a final inquiry, we have a couple of curious passages here that we just found by Deleuze. In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Deleuze writes that we “hardly believe any longer that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it – no more than we believe that action can force a situation to disclose itself, even partially. The most “healthy” illusions fall.”⁸ Then in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* he says, at his most uncharacteristically Kierkegaardian, “Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, *we need reason to believe in this world. It is a whole transformation of belief*” where “belief” translates into the fact that we must again “believe in the body, but as the germ of life, the seed which splits open the paving-stones.”⁹ These passages give life to your ideas about cognitariat recomposition, and to your mantra “the general intellect is looking for a body”. Many readers of your work consider you purely as a thinker of doom, of catastrophe – exhaustion, depression, and suicide. But if we read your work we see a process of autonomy unfolding, a miracle disentangles where action becomes possible again. Perhaps this is a kind of rejuvenated belief. Perhaps it is more than this, perhaps you provide us with “chaosmotic” texts (a book that brings us beyond the book, as Nietzsche says) where we can, to use your words, begin to form a cosmos elaborating chaos.

8 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 206

9 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 172-173

Bifo: This is more an answer than a question, but it is useful for me because I read the books on cinema over 25 years ago and in hearing these passages I remind myself I have to reread these books. Here, when Deleuze says “whether we are Christian or atheists we need reasons to believe in this world.” *We need reasons to believe in this world...* Actually, it is not a problem of belief but a problem of evocation. We need reasons for the evocation of the world. The problem of evocation is a long story. I mean, since Mallarmé, the Symbolists were reasoning about the problem of evocation. Words are not denotative things, they may be more-than-denotative things and they may have the ability to evoke the world. And actually a hundred years after this, virtual reality tools are in a sense giving technical reality to the possibility of evoking worlds starting from signs, from semiotic combinations and so on. So politics, in the good sense, is about finding reasons and constructing reasons that make it possible to believe in the world. But also to trust the world, also believing in a world that may be trusted, that might be expected as a source of pleasure and not only of danger.

How can we go in this direction? This is the political problem of our time, and actually you answer the question when you say that this is directly linked with the problem of transforming the chaos into a cosmos. Guattari speaks in *Chaosmosis* of chaotic spasm. This is the only place he uses the expression chaotic spasm. So what is a spasm? A spasm is a painful acceleration of the muscle, of the physical matter of the body. It is an acceleration but it is painful, it is a spasm. So what should you do when you live in the condition of spasm? You cannot go back to the pre-spasmic dimension – I am not a technophobe. But you cannot accept the existing situation of mere acceleration.

You have to find a new harmony, if I can use this expression, or a new chaosmos. A cosmos that transforms chaos into something that is not painful, but – but what? But able to unfold the possibility inscribed in the chaos. Deleuze and Guattari say in “Chaos and The Brain”, that chaos is a foe and a friend. It is an enemy because it is painful. But it is a friend, also. Why is it a friend? Because only starting from chaos you cannot go back. When you

are entering a situation of chaos you cannot go back, you need to be able to find another rhythm. It is all a problem of rhythm. The concept of rhythm should also be elaborated. The process of acceleration is the creation of a rhythm which is painful. But what should we do? We have to interact with the accelerating rhythm with an autonomous rhythm which is able to de-multiply the acceleration.

Let's find a final metaphor to describe what you are speaking of. Let's say that in the biorhythm an algorithm has entered. And you know that the etymology of algorithm seems to be from an Arab mathematician named Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Mūsa...

DD: Ya, I think I have heard of this...

Bifo: Well I reject this etymology. [Laughs] You know, etymology is not a science, it is an art. Algorithm comes from the Greek *algos*. *Algos* means pain, as in nostalgia, neuralgia, or melalgic. But also from the word *algid*, which means cold. The English language has this word as well; it is an old word. So, the algorithm in my parlance is a rhythm producing pain and producing cold. And the algorithm has intersected the biorhythm: we cannot come out of the algorithm. We have to warm the algid-rhythm, we have to find ways to bio-litize the algorithm. Poetry is all about this problem. Poetry is a form of warming, of giving warmth to the coldness of daily words. The solution lies in the relation between algorithm and biorhythm. And this solution is not given as the accelerationists think. It is not enough to wait until the acceleration makes its course. The course of acceleration is bad. We have to accept acceleration but also we have to poetically deal with it. This is the political problem of our time.

⚡ REVIEWS