

## **Re-reading Bifo: a Non-Futurist Manifesto with some hope**

In his recent writings the much acclaimed Franco Berardi elucidates, together with the other bunch of Italian post-autonomists, the reason of the Western and more in particular the European crisis. In all cases, the finger is pointed to the financial class, the semio-capitalism, an enemy which, as in the book the “Grapes of Wrath” accounting on a family of Oakies hit by the Great American Depression, an enemy that has not really a face nor any territorial connection. Bifo (this is the pseudonym Berardi gave himself in his years as a young artist in Bologna), is rather clear in addressing the fact that nowadays, decisions are based solely for the sake of a finance which on its turn is driven by mathematics and has nothing to do with human labor and production. Other, less internationally acclaimed Italian philosophers like Umberto Galimberti, would simply point out that it is technology which is in fact structuring, not only our economy but our very lives; society overall cannot but second this trend, a trend that is progressively turning humans more enslaved and schizophrenic.

Bifo's popularity might arise from his visions of freeing humanity, and more particularly the young, no-future generation, from this technical enslavement. The Bifian formula to break loose and free is not all that clear and mainly consists on a long-lasting insurgence which would allow a re-sensibilization of the social body and reconstitution of a general intellect. Bifo stresses throughout his writings, that this can only occur as a long-lasting process, not then a revolution. Reading these enlightening sentences, the reader might asks himself what is Bifo really thinking while writing this as he is not providing any historical examples. It seems however that the Italian thinker draws from a blend of the Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution and Mahatma Ghandi non-violent disobedience. Can this be the actual formula he proposes in order for the social body to reactivate itself and get out of the technological hegemony?

The other non-violent formula that Bifo evokes is the pursuance of poetry in order to break loose the limiting and financiallydictated dogmas under which the social members have to comply. His idea is again that this kind of poetical insurgence should allow, at last, a paradigm shift to be able to transcend the present phase of cultural stagnation and impoverishment. This seems in fact a relevant step in order to resurrect sensibility among the many Western cognitarians, immaterial workers who cannot deal in fact with a poetry as it slows their ever increasing need for attentiveness, a survival need in their much precarious circumstances. Going back to the European situation so much at heart for Bifo, now that the iron curtain has in fact erected, as one century and a half ago in Italy, an economic divide between North and South, we might say that in fact, the

unemployed of the South, the equivalent of a Giovanni Verga or a Luigi Pirandello, might in fact rediscover such a possibility in their current state of unemployment.

One might question however whether such a poetry could rise in a Mantra fashion and in a choir of people singing in solidarity for the same cause. Can poetry be conceived collectively or it is rather a solitary manifestation particularly among the many Southern Europeans whose only duty now is that of a house-wife? Is this insurgent Bifo is mentioning, is it really going to be active and confrontational? In this respect one is tempted to think of Autonomia under other historical perspectives where it was not in fact the group of people but individuals giving rise to, if not independent collectives, autonomous cultures. We could easily think of Henry David Thoreau, the American Transcendentalist, thinker and poet, advancing quite early in his thoughts around a modernity (e.g. the railroad constructed across Walden pond where he was based) and the way it affected humanity and nature in general. We can even go further back and think about the Chinese artist, or the way traditional Chinese art and culture has been cultivated by individuals performing it on a day to day base as a mean to endure the political hegemony. Think about Chinese parks and the collective of more or less old but even young people performing various disciplines, a real rhizome completely uncoordinated and structured by governance and yet a true ground providing the much oppressed Chinese citizens a way to, in a beautiful non-violent fashion, a way to express themselves.

Thus, instead of the much uncoordinated actions of the young Westerners, what about learning from the older Easterns as anyway the world power roles seems to be swapping and Westerns society beginning to drastically age (while the life expectancy of the Easterners might be seriously affected, victim of the aggressive industrializations migrating there from the Western countries)? We may look in this case at disciplines, contemporary disciplines and not be naive or new age, importing yoga and tai-chi into our empty parks where only a bunch of drunkards hang out (or groups of aggressive company workers seeking to push out their testosterone with personal trainers). The point is here that, if it is technology oppressing us and the virtual is really the space we live and operate in, and our intellectual faculties have much increase, where then to display and perform and manifest and let out ourselves, our talent the joy and flower of our being, our mastership?

The virtual space of the Internet has certainly been the place. We can say “been” as most unfortunately, it is now no more. Can we imagine a bunch of companies in China taking over the parks and structuring its activities from above, killing the system of self

organization that much characterizes it? No, and yet this is what has happened from the very start in the once free platform of the Internet where people were able to frame and constitute and perform and manifest themselves, inventing and mastering a discipline in full autonomy. Now they are just puppets complying to activities directed from them.

If we then agree with Bifo that, in order to transcend this state of cultural paralysis, we ought to bring new meanings with new poetry and go beyond the mathematical dogmatism, can we look more deeply at what possibility we have at hand? Lightly reading Bifo's essays with would be keen to think that somehow, new poetry can arise from this mass insurgences, from the solidarity among these groups of youngsters protesting in the streets, subverting. Bifo seems to allude that this collective body is somewhat of a mantra, a body as a whole breathing together, manifesting its discontent, no longer enduring the reality. In other words, he seems to provide a contradictory vision where on one side we have somewhat of a meditative audience tuning to one another, and on the other we have a chaotic multitude skirmishing with the police. We may now sympathize once again more with the policemen, as the Italian film maker and intellectual and poet Pierpaolo Pasolini did in 1968 and take Bifo's idea that any sort of poetry might not in fact arise from a total Luddite break of the endurance... Why really not look at where a potential for new poetry arise.

As Bifo is talking about banks where people store their hopes (materialistic hopes), we can in fact now look at banks where artists (which Bifo calls really the hope for the future other than philosophers), where artists or just other sort of youngsters not so much in to skirmishes, begin to store their meanings utilizing the very technology and dogma and automatism and limitations that Bifo so much criticizes. We refer here about generative art forms, databases as the new poetic of the future. We refer about young individuals who do not refrain (as Bifo again suggests) from technology, from dogmas, from automatisms, but fully embrace it in their everyday life, and somewhat develops means to come out of the enslavement imposed by above frameworks creating and devising their own. It is here a problem of willing and endurance of a mathematical algorithms which scattered youths apply on themselves to generate new poetry, linking a bit back to the cultural experiments of the Oulipo in the 1960s and 1970s (why not to traditional and fully constrained classic poetry), but having at last the medium (or a dialectic of media) to explore new languages breaking the time and space constraints already set by cultural institutions, universities and overall by society. It is here, we can stress, that a real autonomy can be devised, in the creation of self-crafted frameworks, frameworks that can be shared and fascinate one another as it used to be before the

Internet was taken over by the new media corporations.

It is a question of courage (and here the other transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson had a point), not the courage of throwing a stone at the police or torching a car and then go back to bourgeois family, not such a juvenile courage, it is a far more compromising and less perceptible courage, the courage of becoming autonomous, meaning, in the Michel De Certeau way of thinking, not independent and adopting strategy to survive as in a natural Jean-Jacques Rousseau scenario, but autonomous apply tactics to survive within some sort of already established framework yet with the primary goal of fulfilling once own framework, cultivating the secret garden as urban guerillia gardeners do, within the big garden. The courage then, lays not to go off as some Christopher McCandless "into the wild" but to sort of device an autonomous framework of existence becoming the real one determining our lives. Once this is established, and a certain set of new meaning is gathered, solidarity will come along. One could see it as some sort of Confucian endurance, yet again, while the Western powers provide bread and circus (TV, alcohol and so forth) to their folk, impoverishing them, the East has often allowed these grounds of self development where solidarity matures organically without much of artificial boasting. It is an anarchic place where no politics can infiltrate. This is what we should be afraid of, any sort of politics intruding in our area where we can manifest ourselves. Thus whatever Bifo says about all the crap that neoliberal right wing politics have created (misery, impoverishment and deculturalization), can be true of any regulated country as for example socialist countries. In the latter geniuses like Bifo would certainly not be able to emerge, talent is uprooted from the start as can be discerned from Doctor Zhivago, where, in the shift from aristocracy to communism, he signifies the death of genius in such regulated regime.

A few things come to mind here, at first a thought regarding the uprise of such a poetical sensibility Bifo so much seek to propose as the remedy of a finite and thus hopeless stagnation dictated by technology (or finances as he puts it). The first thing that comes to mind is the fact that such a sensibility might be only able to grow in a rather intimate environment, in a state that is neither too precarious nor secure, possibly at a cross road between right and left, neoliberalism and socialism. What has in fact the over protected and benefit spoiled youth to say if they do not expose themselves to the reality outside their garden of heaven, the social bubble where they grow into. A young man or woman coming from a more socially tragic situation (e.g. from a country victim of neoliberal politics with divorced parents and always told not to get into any art making) might benefit from the many resources laying unused in the

many institutions of those social countries. A ground for sensibility upbringing cannot, in other words be planned, it is a ground which only the individual youth can create by being exposed and wounded, and seeking to be healed but then being wounded again. The figure of Thomas Mann's Senator Buddenbrook can in a way represent the European cycle coming to an end. A Senator who has invested his life in commercial enterprises and later realizes the meaningless of his existence once the house has been built (... than it is time to die, as the Turkish saying goes in the novel). Europe as the Senator, has also built its house and this is why there is a crisis, and this why Europe choose the homogeneous shore of the North as a therapy and sight to rethink and seek a meaning, unfortunately into history and philosophy, possibly death.

The figure of the young Buddenbrook, the weak artist is also emblematic. Is it in him that we are to lay the hope for Europe? The issue is that probably this house is such an artificial construct that any thought of renewal is just unbearable (wood would have been better than cement)and this is why the house will keep empty and new an more precarious form of autonomous governance will arise, possibly avoiding any establishment and recognition but live in an underground culture which still lacks connection and solidarity at this level. Here we might be more pessimistic as, in fact, the separation of the cognitarians does not allow such a new underground culture to rise, all being caught in their fragmented lives where human to human communication is no longer natural. It is thus, in the end, a problem of cultural communication and networking outside of the boring and conventional and lifeless institutions doing for the sake of doing and ending up in an establishing a main main stream while the low stream gets even lower, so underground that it can no longer germinate (this thinking of Emile Zolá' s "Germinal" quite in context with this uprising discussion).

Another important issue that comes to mind in respect of the framework and the tactics of survival within another bigger framework is that, alas, without realizing it, in the last years, aside from being dictated by a framework of physical infrastructures, we have given up the possibility to mature a framework (this given the technology potential that has been offered to us in the last decades) to have an independent framework to structure our cognitions, our intellect. The violent taken over, and the mass adherence to a commercial framework to regulate our intellect has been sudden. On one side the mass has been lazy to apprehend the new technological language and on the other the capitalist corporations have been prompt to see this and provide "free services" for the "ignorants" who were unable to craft there own technological interface to structure their intellect. Thus now, on top the physical infrastructures we must adapt to, we have virtual ones. Those who have been there from the beginning to craft and experiments

their own interfaces have been overshadowed, or at least might still operate but in the shadow, away from the profit thirsty corporations to which a public presence on-line expose them to (although many of them are now the bought out as “guru” of such corporations).

A further reflection arising from Bifo's essay regards again the role of the young poet, a person that classically should be disregarded from any attention. According to Plato dictum in fact, young people should not be taken in considerations by the older ruling class and poets should not be allowed to teach. In this respect, at least as far as for the later, we see a counter tendency, an actual and desperate need for new blood and regeneration, this probably again due to the impossibility to organically renew any established institutions and this also probably caused by the media potency which has elevated the levels of bureaucracy and so forth, making any changes extreme, in that they are either too difficult to make or too easy (in a binary sense either 0 or 1). In this respect the youth is faced with a harsh conservatism of the old ruling class, secured in the insured positions they have created along with the media driven bureaucracy or wild competition. We can point at for instance the case of Universities and particularly Europeans ones, probably at the origin of the crisis. On one hand we have the family of workers who all wished their offspring to bypass their proletarians life and go to university to then earn more money. In this respect many countries in Europe have been left without really anyone wishing to do the humble work but immigrants, this is rather obvious. The less obvious effect is that the level of intellectualization the recent generations have undergone in their academic studies, has caused personal psychological discontent. This discontent, has been caused by not providing these youngsters any actual skill, let them use their hands as Thoreau would simply point out, which his for him the source of happiness (for Plato here is the balance maintenance of the head, the chest and the abdomen corresponding to the intellect, braveness and pleasure). The practice of skills are thus very important to at least overcome crisis that can be merely psychological, as all Europeans now seem to be just even mentally in a state of crisis.

A believe for future and possibility should thus arise from a youth being allowed to develop a practice involving skills and not be hindered by it as all street art seems to be, nor being too facilitated and told what a practice is. Obviously, for a time, the virtual realm has been the place where such rising of new poetics have been accomplished (alas, not to full maturation) but the issue here is that again, as physical reality has been regulated, also virtual reality is now, or at least fewer and more powerful becomes the institutions that are eligible to determine this. Let's think only in terms on how media is

delivered in schools, with teachers going for very traditional softwares, the softwares of the convention and thus of the establishment, coming down here also to very crystallized dogma, and all because of conformations and conventionalism. Teaching is thus delivered without leading the students in and out (ex ducis) the processes of things, breaking through the ever more sophisticated and complicated tool boxes delivered by the establishment, understanding, in other words a process that the former try to hide for copyright reasons. It seems an unavoidable process, that of transforming the open minded and full of potential talents of our youth into close-minded, dogmatic beings, bringing them in the Platonic cave rather than taking them further out, those at least that are still in an ambiguous position. In an interview to a Spanish TV channel, Bifo, in fluent but not totally correct Spanish, which at least shows his open-mindedness and readiness to master and speak several a languages, he has identified the real enemy in the conformists, this mostly focusing on finances but now one could also turn to education and see the same issue. Autoditactism can in this respect be seen as dangerous, the developing of one's skills, of a poetry to go over this crisis symptom which inevitably arises from a disproportioned application of our brains in our daily living. Self governance, this for sure a teacher should facilitate, second, like an old and close to natural death Chinese martial art teacher at a park, only there to transmit his passion to a pupil, not seeking anything more (the least money).

As Autonomy seems to then be a good alternative to Anarchism in that it seeks independence from governance but by trying to survive within its framework, it has also, in recent years, become the voice of the Non-futurists. Exactly a century later, when the Italian Futurists where in fact singing the masculine age of technical acceleration and progress, another group of internationally acclaimed Italians, are singing a sudden pessimism. Not Neo-Futurists, nor Pastist, nor Presentists, just and simply Non-Futurists also, as the former, provocateurs of an uprising to come (hopefully nothing like a First World War or an October Revolution), or we could call them counter-provocateurs, in that, at least in Bifo's mind, this process of uprising should be a slow, almost decelerating process.

To conclude, what has been informally suggested in this almost endless and live reprocessing of Bifo's writings, is where this poetry for change should come from and how it should unfold, and what qualities it should have. There are certain points here that has emerged, as the fact that it should be long-lasting, somewhat slow and decelerating (this really putting it on an opposite line than the Futurist poetics of acceleration and destruction), it should not be conventional in a sense that it should not be inherited from any already established form of poetry. Here again, the lines of

thoughts might divide but in a way it would be easy to conceive this poetry to be completely destructive and filled of political messages shouting against the establishment, rising hater through affect, or, this is the least beaten path, that such poetry should in a way embrace all the media that has resolved in creating these dogmatic and stagnating finances on the macro level, and establish them in the micro, in that of the very “young poet”, making a bank not of surplus values, but of meanings. In other words, creating a system of “sousveillance” mimicking the establish one of surveillance of the establishment, undertaking aesthetics which inherit the very level of automatism and only through this being able to recuperate a ground of “autonomy” from which poetry can legitimately reborn, a ground which cannot be established otherwise, in the precarious conditions of financial enslavement pointed out by the “Non-futurists”. In this respect, rather than be the Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov killing the money lender, youth might want to usurer by this time an usurer resignifying the dried up content processed by the later, store it, ferment its fragments, and put it back in circulation. An operation the only the very mimicking of the technology of power can allow.