

Renzi, Alessandra

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From Collectives to Connectives: Italian Media Activism and the Repurposing of the Social

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*From Collectives to Connectives: Italian Media Activism
and the Repurposing of the Social*

by

Alessandra Renzi

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology and Equity Studies

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Alessandra Renzi

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Abstract

The dissertation develops the concept of *repurposing* as a means for thinking *with* activists and the issues they confront. It moves alongside pirate television collective insu^tv as they draw on a variety of histories, traditions and technological resources for their practices. Repurposing functions on multiple levels and at multiple scales, from the recycling of materials and spaces to the harnessing and relaying of encounters and events within an ever-expanding field of social relations. When seen as a way of connecting activist groups and communities, the repurposing of media contributes to strengthening an often fragmented and conflicted activist field. Indeed, insu^tv's use of information and technology brings to the fore the value of media activism for the creation of social assemblages in which the "media" literally *mediates* between individuals and among individuals and their environment, instituting and developing an ontogenetic relation (Simondon, 1989).

Yet, rather than simply making sense of insu^tv's practices, the concept of repurposing also provokes a discussion regarding the *ethics of connection*. For insu^tv, this connective ethics can be understood as a set of rules and principles that facilitate the

evaluation of actions, communication, and thought according to an immanent mode of collective existence (Deleuze, 1988; Simondon, 1989). For the author, herself a member of insu^{tv} and an academic researcher, this immanent position helps challenge traditional models of knowing and envisioning social change and instead proposes alternatives that attend to the singularity and relation among new political movements, and to the political potential of research methods that focus on process and fold activism into academia.

The methodology is inspired by the militant research methods of the Italian *Autonomia* movement (*conricerca* or *inchiesta*), as developed and performed by activists themselves. While attending to the complexity of social struggles, the concept of repurposing enables an approach to research and experimentation as modes of sociability, where these modes are themselves repurposed through an ethics of connection. This line informs the relation between ethics and subjectivation, as well as between ethics and micropolitics, facilitating the emergence of new modes of political action through the repurposing of the social field itself.

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List of Acronyms

CD Cristian Democrats

CSOA *Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito* Autonomous social centre

MDo *Movimento Disoccupati Organizzati* Organised unemployed movement

ICP Italian Communist Party

Chapter 1

Introduction

A theorising intellectual, for us, is no longer a subject, a representing or representative consciousness. Those who act and struggle are no longer represented, either by a group or a union that appropriates the right to stand as their conscience. Who speaks and acts?

It is always a multiplicity, even within the person who speaks and acts. All of us are “groupuscules”. Representation no longer exists; there’s only action—theoretical action and practical action which serve as relays and form networks (Deleuze in Foucault and Lotringer, [1972] 1996: 75).

My research is an instance of social dynamics and political action in Italy. Although the “subject” of my thesis project is Telestreet—a network of activist pirate television stations based in Italy—my research performs a pragmatic intervention as a “situated practice” (Haraway, 1988) alongside that of Telestreet. This intervention begins by understanding Telestreet as a “process” and therefore enabling my research to challenge the academic tendency to fix a “subject” of inquiry *a priori*. By attending to the dynamic movements and constituent features that shape Telestreet, my research engages the necessarily incomplete and continuous expressions of self-determination that subtend the broader political struggle within the Telestreet project. This is done both as a way of offering other lenses from which to look at contemporary political movements and as a way of actively participating in their practices of self-determination.

My dissertation draws together two lines that form my inquiry by incorporating both academic research and political activism into a processual mapping of these mutually engendering registers of practice. Both primary lines are continually being shaped and redrawn as new connections are discovered and created. Indeed, the actual work of mapping begins by drawing contours and lines through practice—the practices of a researcher in sociology and an activist involved in the Telestreet project.

I see practices as the forces that continuously shape and reshape social formations and their agents (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Deleuze 1988; Foucault 1978). Starting my

inquiry *from* practice enables me to look at the Telestreet project outside of pre-fabricated analytical criteria that tend to characterise Telestreet as a static, delimited entity, focussing instead on the movement and relationships among the elements that engender the project and inform its actors. Telestreet is often portrayed as an isolated phenomenon, as a direct result of media consolidation, or as a neat play with the medium of television (Garcia 2006). This approach overlooks the emergence of forms of activism that are embedded in and thrive on a field of autonomous practices, which are tied to struggles against dominant powers and to moments of confrontation yet are not defined by them.

For researchers, a perception of the social that is based on ready-made categories of analysis diverts attention from emergent forms and sites of struggle that do not match pre-formed parameters of how structures come into being. Moreover, viewing social movements and their protests as the main medium of political action limits the possibilities of conceptualizing social change. For activists, a limited vision of how society changes restricts the space for envisioning action and reduces the possibilities to act in the world, whereas recognising the importance of continuously adapting their practices of resistance opens up the possibility of devising effective forms of resistance. At the same time, acknowledging the growing interconnectedness of fields and issues where specific forms of power are exercised enables human agents to draw on the potentials of communication and collaboration to create more effective networks of resistance.

My grounded study of Telestreet, and in particular of its node *insu^{tv}*, foregrounds some of these alternative modes of being in the social by making connections among different kinds of relations to broader political, cultural and economic contexts. In this analysis, I also consider elements such as technology as immanent forces that enable us to better grasp the complexity of processes of emergence in the mediascape and in the global field of media activism.

Any analysis of contemporary practices cannot ignore the ongoing and increasing integration of information and communication technologies into processes that shape the cultural, social and economic realms. Technology today is not only a constitutive element

in human life, in which specific power-knowledge formations play key roles, but, through biotechnologies, it has even come to shape life itself (Massumi et al., 2009). Our societies are increasingly composed of functional networks connecting different processes, resources and parts: networks of actors, communication means, technologies, institutions and so on. They need to be considered in their entirety and then disentangled, to be able to uncover the hidden relationships between such elements and how social change takes place. In this context, questions about technology become a necessary part of inquiries in the constitution of being, that is, they are tied to ontological questions. More precisely, since the questions pertain to investigations of the processes through which we change, or *become*, they are tied to *ontogenetic* questions. Examined from this perspective, *media* activist practices reveal themselves as fulfilling an ontogenetic function that surpasses that of the production of meanings and discourses to directly affect the emergence of social formations (Ch. 5).

My discussion of Telestreet/insu[^]tv will demonstrate that these ontogenetic processes cannot be disengaged from modes of knowledge and their associated practices, and therefore, the questions at issue are both epistemological and ontological (Massumi et al., 2009: 36–7). As a researcher, my attempt to understand and explain Telestreet’s political role through this dynamism adds more depth to the already available interpretations of its work in the fields of communication and cultural production. Yet it is also productive of an intervention that can embolden political action in general.

In other words, starting *with* practice enables me to actively engage Telestreet simultaneously as an activist and a researcher. My research is indebted to the many minor scholarly traditions that recognise and acknowledge a researcher’s agency in shaping official narratives on the relation between agency and change (Bourdieu, 1990). This line of scholarship has always found its legitimisation in the tangible transformations that are brought about during and after the research *in* and *by* the group taking part in the process, rather than in a more general recognition by other scholars (Frampton and al., 2006, Greenwood and Levin, 1998, Hale, 2002).

Politically-engaged academic research requires establishing a relationship where activist and researcher create knowledge as they support each other, such as in critical ethnography (Lather, 1984a, 1986b, Simon and Dippo, 1986) and Practice Action Research (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, Riel, 2007). It also requires moving beyond discourses on positionality and belonging that legitimise the fixed subjectivity of the researcher, emphasising instead the potentials for learning and collaboration.

I take these traditions as a starting point from which I attempt to shift the meaning attached to institutional social research from one of representation to one of *localised creation* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991). Through my approach, knowledge production becomes one of the residual effects of investigating practices, during which institutional critique, experimentation and self-inquiry strengthen and carry forward research to stimulate politics.

This operation is located in a field of tension between knowledge production and political activism, offering a productive critique of the institution and a self-questioning of the researcher's role as informed by the institution itself (Raunig, 2007). Here, an engagement with/in context-bound, cooperatively developed methodologies and data-gathering techniques can turn research into a creative learning process for everyone involved—not to mention engendering genuine interaction between research and activism.

Contemporary Manifestations of Political Movements and Telestreet

Over the years, contemporary studies of political movements have often concentrated their analysis on the modes of action that engage political or economic powers during specific events or protests (e.g.: McAdam et al., 2001, Melucci, 1989, Melucci, 1996, Touraine, 1981). While looking for the roots of social change within oppositional strategies, the study of political movements seems to have mostly overlooked the presence of alternative forms of social creativity and resistance that function outside of this logic. Yet, the last decades have seen the increasing diffusion of political movements

that do not function according to a logic of contradiction or opposition but to one of difference (Lazzarato, 2004). Importantly, difference here is not conceptualised as a 'difference from the same', or as 'difference of something across time,' which means that for social movements the stakes are not defined in terms of identity and claims to representation or inclusion in the dominant systems. Rather, following Deleuze, 'difference in itself,' is a positive conceptualization of the singularity of individuals, things, and phenomena that cannot be categorised because their elements are in constant movement and variation. Difference is that which enables change, while that which changes actualises difference. Finally, difference can be considered a condition for identity, yet not its basis (1994).

The actualization of this kind of positive difference into social and political practices is exemplified by collective political agents like the European Precarity movement. From the beginning of 2000 the Precarity movement has called attention to forms of social injustice derived from increasingly flexible, non-unionised work regimes that have serious repercussions on labour and living conditions. Today, the movement's colourful media actions and campaigns are harnessed within an infrastructural network of organisations tackling the issue of precarity on multiple levels through legal counselling, social research and analysis, education and support structures, theatrical actions, citizen journalism, cultural production and so on. The coordination among groups that find a common denominator under the umbrella term of 'precarity' has helped form a powerful critical mass, while transversally addressing issues that range from migration and temp work to sex work and home care (Renzi and Turpin, 2007). Precarity activist groups like the *Precarias a la deriva* in Spain, the *Chainworkers* in Italy, or the *intermittents et précaires d'Ile de France* in France prioritise difference, variation and a myriad influences to enable the coexistence and experimentation of a multiplicity of practices and subject positions (Lazzarato, 2004, Renzi and Turpin, 2007).

This does not mean that there are no moments of conflict, opposition or struggle, but that struggle primarily takes place through an exodus from institutions, party or union politics. At the same time, the singularities that make up the movement function through processes of subjectivation that unfold along the composition of common platforms and

collective rights, as well as through a multiplicity of practices for expression and for living (Lazzarato, 2004). For Maurizio Lazzarato, politically elusive practices and strategies of empowerment like the ones described above render the behaviour of many contemporary activists opaque and incomprehensible to political scientists, sociologists, political parties and even trade unions (2004). This is especially the case when activist practices are regarded in isolation from the web of power relations in which they function.

For many contemporary movements, the struggle with power no longer takes place simply against a kind of constituted, normalizing power (*potestas* or *pouvoir*) represented by the state with its institutions—or by the factory with its owner. Rather, the power of activism is increasingly defined in terms of a dynamic potential, a power to act (*potentia* or *puissance*) that is always in the process of constituting itself anew through experiments and practices of subjectivation that cannot be subsumed under relationships of subjugation characteristic of *potestas* (Negri, 1998). On the flipside of activist *potentia*—a fluid and diffuse kind of power— we also find other dominant, yet more dynamic forms of power actualised in contemporary socio-economic relations that function along the logics of flexible capital accumulation and neoliberal economic tenets (Ch. 2 and 4).

The activists' analysis of these new diagrams of power that inform contemporary society, often through the use of technology, is contributing to the development of new autonomous practices where the ones that sustain control are unmasked and critiqued, and new resistant subjectivities are engendered in their embodiment. Drawing on philosophers like Spinoza, Foucault and Deleuze, the theoretical and practical work of activists partaking in such forms of analysis and resistance builds on the belief that the subject or subjectivity are only residual elements of processes of subjectification that unfold through practice—the practices of labour inscribed within capitalist systems and the ones developed to subvert said systems (Lotringer and Marazzi, 2008).

The modes of resistance described by Lazzarato, and many of his colleagues, place an emphasis on the effects of labour and capitalist production on mechanisms of social control and attempt to devise practices that function outside of these forces. These modes

of resistance also consciously avoid a reification of the subjectivity of the actors in question by shifting the focus of attention from the economic aspect of labour to the activities involved in defining and fixing social norms and subject positions through daily work. To substantiate this approach, theorists like Antonio Negri have incorporated a Spinozist conceptualization of *potentia* as a power to affect other bodies, and be affected by them, into the theorization and development of experiments with the composition of collective bodies (Hardt and Negri, 2000, Negri, 1998). These collective bodies, far from being static entities, cannot be separated by the spontaneity and productivity that allow their emergence in first place and that forge them as *consituent*, rather than constituted assemblages (Deleuze in Negri, 1998: 6). They are consituent because they are immanent to processes of socialization (in opposition to any imperative to be constituted according to pre-established logics), and like processes of individual subjectivation of which they are composed, they are ongoing and never complete.

In this light, it is necessary to expand both concepts of political action and militant research, which now also involve the invention of alternative forms of struggle extending beyond national borders and direct forms of confrontation, but also a re-theorisation of subject formation and subject producing practices as foci of control and resistance (Foucault, 1978b). Like the activists they wish to support, researchers who wish to keep alive the field of activist scholarship need to constantly re-evaluate the conceptual and practical tools available to them and rethink the concept of resistance as a creative search for new strategies and forms of struggle that repurpose previously developed practices while combining them with new ones. This operation is necessary in the field of research, as much as it is fundamental in that of activism if the two are to enter into new productive compositions (Colectivo Situaciones, 2007).

The Telestreet phenomenon enables us to map and understand how activist practices migrate and mutate across social fields, as groups like the one in question draw on a variety of histories, traditions and resources—and combine them in a way that shifts the ground for politics from simple confrontation to autonomous cultural production and social organisation. In particular, insu^{tv}'s shifting character and connective capacity emerge and mutate simultaneously with the forms of control it faces and the communities

it supports. Insu^tv members constantly connect, disconnect, incorporate, synthesise and assemble together every element available that can sustain their work as media producers investigating the surrounding territory. Such practices range from ad hoc or temporary alliances with other Telestreet nodes, activist groups and civil society institutions to the recycling of material for broadcasting hardware. In particular, and most important of all, with insu^tv the repurposing of information and technology is shown to open up a field of potential for the material restructuring of social relations and their attendant structures, having effects that reach far beyond the circulation of messages.

Looking at Telestreet/insu^tv's practices of home-made television provides important evidence of the ongoing re-composition of the social, while forcing us to focus on the network's dynamism, contradictions and relations with other groups when considering the potential of present and future forms of organising. By focussing on the spaces of connections between the dots on the map being drawn we start discerning a general tendency in the processes of emergence of social practices and formations. This direction, far from being a teleology, is a mode of being in the social—a mode of being social—in which the elements that compose the social field are repurposed to engender new forms of interaction and sociability.

Similarly, studies about non-oppositional political movements like Telestreet prompt us to interrogate traditional models and modes of knowing, and to search for options for knowing and acting that attend not only to their singularity but also to their relation to broader social, historical and politico-economic contexts. They prompt us to produce alternative narratives and subjectivities derived from political action and social change, through the act of embodying more practices that open up our collective imaginary to the potential for change obscured by dominant perspectives.

Political Research, Collaboration and the Struggle against Representation

Traditionally, knowledge production has been viewed as a representational interpretive process that privileges the forces of recognition guiding our thoughts. This presupposition

is rooted in what Gilles Deleuze calls the “Image of Thought” (1994), an image underlying most western philosophical traditions and impacting their modes of thinking, as well as their practical, political and ethical implications. For Deleuze, thought has so far been subordinated to externally imposed directives, to commonsensical notions about the good nature of thought, to the priority of the model of recognition as the means of thought, to the sovereignty of representation over supposed elements in nature and thought, and to the subordination of culture to method, or learning to knowledge (1994: 131–133).

Common sense underlies the assumption that there is an original reality to discover, and that recognising and describing this reality objectively are the purposes of thought. Consequently, this taken-for-granted predisposition of the subject towards recognition and description becomes established as a natural mode of thinking and knowing via pre-established models and pre-formed categories. That is, models for recognition and representation come to constitute the unquestioned ontological basis for epistemological practices (Deleuze, 1994: 131–133).

This epistemological approach, in turn, legitimises regulatory practices within academia by constructing and classifying any object of inquiry as a static entity to evaluate according to general or universal categories. It is common for scholars to construct political movements as objects of study in a way that extracts and reifies them, leaving aside many of the connections and continuities proper to the field in which they operate. Above all, this operation requires a freeze-framing of the movement in a way that unavoidably obscures the dynamic processes that underlie its presence to provide a consistent description of its functions.

Reducing thought to the realm of representation also has the consequence of creating a split between theory and practice, in favour of a speculative, explanatory approach to social analysis. Sociological studies of activism are often conceived of as tools to “understand” social phenomena—they imply a “neutral” stance for the researcher, whose role is to explain the world around us. This positioning of the researcher outside of social dynamics brackets practical necessity, using instruments of thought against practice to

produce scientific knowledge (Bourdieu 1990). It poses knowledge production as detached from social change, denying any responsibility of the researcher in shaping official narratives about the relationship between resistance and change.

Research that questions the dominant representational paradigms and acknowledges a researcher's agency in the social field have come from sociologists (Frampton and al., 2006, Smith, 1987, 2002), as well as from geographers (Kitchin and Hubbardt, 1999, Ruddick, 2004, Staeheli and Mitchell, 2007, Wakefield, 2007) and anthropologists (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt, 2003, Messer, 1993, Speed, 2006). In these fields, many researchers recognise that knowledge production is never objective or neutral but always situated within the specific contexts and points of view of those involved. In particular, researchers whose ethnographic studies directly pertain to local issues and subjects feel particularly well placed to make strategic use of their symbolic and social capital to think through research questions that could trigger direct shifts in the fields of intervention.

Building upon Deleuze's idea of thought as "experimentation in contact with the real" (1987: 12), and from the research practices of the minor tradition of activist scholarship, I use research as an encounter that forces us to think creatively while engaging the dynamism of the social field within which we act: a *practice of/as thought*. This stance emphasises the importance of the process of thinking and knowing as indissoluble elements of social agency. As I will explain in the following sections, a *practice of/as thought* shifts the focus of thinking from the production of knowledge to the practice of learning through action. Here, learning refers to both the willingness to constantly challenge the assumptions and frameworks we use to make sense of reality and to the ability to experiment with newly acquired knowledge. Ultimately, the present work aims to show that it is by seeing research as a medium of social relations, which affects our perspective of reality (and that of others) that the political and ethical potential of creative academic work becomes full-fledged.

Research practice as/of thought can lead to a "superproduction" (Lotringer and Cohen, 2001: 5) of concepts and connections that constantly generate new ideas, thereby opposing the regimes of discourses that reinforce "common" sense and habitual thinking.

The gap between thinking and acting, between theory and practice can be filled insofar as theory is always put to the task to reflect on reality, to formulate and solve practical problems.

In *What is Philosophy* (1991), Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy as the act of creating concepts through the construction of a *problem field*—what they call the “plane of immanence” (1991). The *problem field* is rooted in an immanent relationship of philosophy with the world and provides a diagram of the features and elements of reality that can contribute to the formulation of a specific problem. It is a map of directions that are fractal in nature (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991: 40) and which sets the grounds for experimenting with concepts and possible solutions: “the concept is the beginning of philosophy, but the plane is its instituting. The plane [...] constitutes the absolute ground of philosophy [...] it is pre-philosophical [...] it implies a sort of groping experimentation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991: 41). Hence, concepts are not created to abstractly describe or understand phenomena, rather, they *derive* from reality and must enable us to think of new moves: “a solution has no meaning independently of a problem to be determined in its conditions and unknowns; but these conditions and unknowns have no meaning independently of solutions determinable” (1991: 81). Thinking and action are not two separate processes but two coexisting aspects of the same process.

The act of posing problems directly related to a specific context and devising solutions accordingly is creative rather than representational. When taking into consideration the processual aspect of social relations, it means to sustain truly creative processes that are not rooted in analytical thinking and recognition because there is no reality to recognise but only to create; it means to learn from movement how to constantly undo what has been thought so far and make room for new thoughts and practices (Deleuze, 1994).

The pedagogical value of this learning process is not limited to its by-product—knowledge— but lies in the very practice of thinking and acting upon a problem field. In this sense, learning by posing and solving problems consists of actualising the virtual connections between elements—i.e. thinking their relation—while at the same time performing a reflection on this very act, so that the operation remains evident and open-

ended. Returning to the idea of instituent practices, adopting this position within academia engenders learning *during* the process of assembling knowledge, where learning requires the act of moving away from pre-coded meanings. It is this pedagogical aspect that becomes key in research practices oriented towards a self-conscious use of theory for practice by all actors involved.

Philosopher of science Gilbert Simondon's work on ontogenesis enables me to investigate the complex dynamics characterising the field of activism and its broader contexts, from which individuals and groups can be said to emerge. Importantly, for Simondon, the study of ontogenesis does not simply refer to an investigation into the emergence of social paradigms or codings, with their attendant subject positions; nor is this process interpreted through the lens of human cognition (Massumi et al., 2009: 37). Instead, human subjectivity is seen as only one process of embodiment of reality, or of experience through practices (or processes). From an ontogenesis-centred perspective, other 'entities', ranging from crystals or bacteria, to DNA and animals, also partake in these processes and are co-constitutive of the world we experience. Furthermore, Simondon's philosophy does not consider the emergence of new realities by focussing on the conceptual relation between two pre-existing terms, but sees every relation as a mode of being itself; as simultaneous with the two terms it engenders (2006: 38).

Taking the reality of groups as a given misses the processes that engender the collective (and individuals, simultaneously); whereas moving away from a study of social morphology makes it possible to ask questions about how societies and their groups change along certain conditions of quasi-stability. Not unlike individuals, these formations are always examined from the perspective of their relationship with their environment, which continuously affects their structure. Importantly, the focus here is not on how social formations retain their stability but precisely on how they are not able to do so, passing thresholds after which they cease to be or take on different structures (Simondon, 2006: 73). This is a particularly useful angle to talk about activist practices because it sheds light on aspects that otherwise remain hidden behind the screen of representation.

More precisely, Simondon's non-anthropocentric approach identifies the signs that trigger the immanent and material processes underlying Telestreet/insu^{tv}, and considers their relations with and impact on different elements and levels of the system. The focus on process and relation, rather than on the products of the latter, functions outside of established binaries like subject/object; nature/society; science/politics or knowledge/actions. Most importantly, it stays away from representational paradigms in which knowing and acting are considered separate, and knowledge production must come first to enable action (Combes in: Simondon, 2006: 9–10).

The epistemology of processes of becoming is seen here as a function of ontogenesis itself because the processes of emergence that pertain to thought are similar to the processes of emergence that pertain to matter, and to individual and collective subjectivities. In more practical terms, because it is based on processes that involve affects and perception, thought is seen as what enables human actors to orient ourselves in our environment through action (Ch. 5–7). In this context, technological innovation becomes a site in which thought is folded into other processes of emergence, thus affecting the transformation of life (Massumi et al., 2009: 37).

Both Deleuze and Guattari's and Simondon's philosophy rely on a vision of the world, which unfolds as the expression¹ of a material, immanent process on multiple levels. As Brian Massumi explains:

each stratum has its own rules of content formation to feed its level-specific functioning, as well as unique forms of expression to transmit the generative impulse to other levels... upon impact on each level it catalyzes a self-organising of the stratum. [...] a transduction: a self-propagating movement seeding serial self-organizations, each differing in nature from the last but connected by a shared generative impulse (2002a: xxx).²

¹ Here, the concept of expression rests on the assumption that “there is not a substance that *then* expresses itself in different styles” (Parr, 2005: 94), rather it is a force immanent to every term and relation that make up reality and the subject. The concept of expression has nothing to do with that of the communication of information but with the emergence of something new (Massumi, 2002a: xxxii).

² It is worth noting how Simondon's concept of *transduction* reflects his attempt to account for the non linearity of processes of emergence, while still finding a common denominator for different processes of individuation. The term refers both to the actual emergence of structures and to the method uses to understand them. As opposed to *induction* and *deduction*, *transduction* brings on the same plane what is

While these ideas are instrumental in investigating the contemporary field of Italian activism, a clarification about the use of scientific analogies is necessary. Deleuze and Guattari, and Simondon draw on complexity theory, quantum physics and cybernetics, among other sciences, to articulate a vision that explains a series of processes of emergence —individuation—at multiple levels. My interest in philosophy that is heavily inspired by science lies in its attention to non-linear dynamics and in the kind of questions it enables me to ask and answer, rather than in using this system of thought as a scientific tool.

Following Muriel Combes, I recognise the value of these theories in breaking away from dichotomies that so strongly affect social research, and focus on what is between the terms that we usually consider without a middle (in Simondon, 2006: 11). Thus, I see here one possibility to think about the relationships, processes and intersections that are co-constitutive of what are usually considered unities, such as nature, society, or even the individual. It is at this point of intersection between epistemological practices and an ontology of processes that is possible for me to conceptualise new ways of thinking and acting, and to engage with both research and politics from multiple perspectives, ranging from subjectivity and desire below the subject, and from the individual to the social above.

Methodology and Data collection

The problems that I pose are always concerned with local and particular issues [...] because it seems to me that none of the major discourses that can be produced about society is so convincing that it may be trusted; and if one really wants to construct something new and different, or in any case if one wants the great systems to be open to certain real problems, it is necessary to look for the data and the questions in which they are hidden. And then I'm not convinced that intellectuals [...] can point to the essential problems of the society in which they live. On the contrary, one of the main opportunities for collaboration with "non-intellectuals" is in listening to their problems, and in working with them to formulate these problems (Foucault, 1991: 151).

being investigated and the actual change in the 'object' of investigation, cutting across distinctions between subject and object, or science and nature (Simondon, 2006) P. 10.

Methodologically, the act of constructing a problem field consists of mapping the potential relations among various terms constituting social entities and the processes of actualisation through which they come together (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). Deleuze draws from the language of differential calculus to conceptualise the relation between these elements. In *Difference and Repetition* he illustrates how the derivative of a function dy/dx can help us think through a relation without having to fix a value for its elements x and y : “In relation to x , dx is completely undetermined, as dy is to y , but they are perfectly determinable in relation to one another. [...] Each term exists absolutely only in its relation to the other” (Deleuze, 1994: 172).

A problem field maps how these undetermined elements are ideally connected and reciprocally determine each other (Deleuze, 1994: 173–174). At the same time it also maps the distribution of its singular points in a field of vectors (social forces) without having to determine their value or form —each differential equation remains a concrete manifestation of more potential differentiations (Bogue, 2004: 334).

The terms establishing differential relations can be isolated and analysed through ethnographic research and then re-connected in an open series, showing the ways in which they affect each other. It is only in the act of making such connections, without using pre-determined analytic categories, that it is possible to determine the coordinates of each specific element (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 15).

Rather than simply reporting on the political theories or economic context that characterise a given space-time, a map emerges while interlinking the behaviours, struggles, conflicts, decisions, and tactics of political actors. The body of political knowledge thus produced does not simply theorise about practice, or just apply theory but it is inscribed from the start in a field of different practices that harness its specificity, its functions, and its network of dependencies (Foucault, 1972: 194).

As mentioned above, I situate myself within a tradition of cooperative, practice-based research that has its points of departure and reference in the reality in which it is conceived. In the spirit of a ‘creative knowledge production,’ I recuperated and re-contextualised data collection and analysis methodologies already available, as well as

developed *ad hoc* ways of interacting with the people involved in the research. More specifically, in order to pragmatically attend to the specific ways in which the singularities of Telestreet—and of insu^{tv} in particular—emerge from various contexts, engender each other and interact with the outside, I draw my main lines of action from the cartographic, non human-centred approach described above and from Autonomist/Workerist social research.

The *Autonomia operaia* [Workers autonomy] is a political and cultural movement that cultivated a minor tradition of militant collaborative research methods in Italy, from the 60s onwards. *Conricerca* [co-research], or simply *inchiesta* [inquiry], is an independent case study method used by autonomist activists to understand the field in which their interventions unfold. These case studies were particularly influential in organizing factory workers until the late 70s, enabling the analysis of a new composition of the working class, and thereby facilitating the emergence of new practices of resistance against labour exploitation. To a lesser extent, they are still being used as organising tools by contemporary militant social researchers (e.g: Conti, 2001a, b, Lazzarato, 1993, 2001).

Briefly, co-research uses traditional research methods like interviews, questionnaires and self-narratives, but has different implications because it is also carried out by the actors themselves, doing away with the separation between interviewer and interviewee. For co-research, the groups taking part in the analysis actively participate in the construction of the tools for the study. The advantage of such an approach is that the group itself defines the relevant issues and constructs the questions. At the same time, because of their co-involvement, for both activists and researcher the production of knowledge is immediately a mode of subjectivation and development of political organization (Conti and al., 2007: 80).

Originally, co-researchers investigated the shifts in the subjective structure of the needs, behaviours and practices of resistance of a social formation, the working class, as well as the sedimentation of apparently spontaneous and unorganized antagonist cooperation. The latter was thought to leave a sort of ‘political residue’ in the subject positions of the groups and could become the basis for following struggles. Moreover, for researchers like

Romano Alquati, the relationship between technology and human agents did not simply point to the creation of mechanisms of control through specific forms of labour but also enabled the development of silent struggles against capitalist forms of oppression that appropriated or sabotaged these technologies (2003).

For autonomist researchers, an analysis of the composition of this emerging working class, with a mutated relationship to the modes of production, could help understand and strengthen a new political subject leading the struggle (Ch. 2). My reading of these theories relies on some strands of contemporary co-research that investigate the practices recomposing a field of antagonism, thereby avoiding focus on a central subject of struggle (Palano, 2003). At the same time, recomposition does not merely refer to a unification of these struggles but especially to the development of social practices of resistance that do not simply aim to block the forces of capitalism but that articulate alternative models of social organization (Palano, 2003).

It is worth mentioning that the difference between co-research and more traditional forms of sociological and academic research (but also the workers' inquiry) is political, rather than methodological. According to Conti et al., many of the inquiries performed in the past by political actors like the labour movement aimed at producing "neutral" knowledge to be used by external institutional subjects, ranging from parties to trade unions (2007: 78). Thus, studies were first produced as politically neutral and then subsequently used for political aims. In co-research, studies are already designed with political objectives in mind, as attention is immediately directed at the micro-conflictual, daily dimension within and outside of the work environment. The process of mapping these territories by investigating diverse forms of conflict helps identify the social needs, the traditions of struggle, as well as the practices of dissent that are already latent or present in hidden forms (Palano, 2007). It is by drawing connections between these conflicts and the various forces they confront that co-researchers provide concrete analytical maps that contribute to social transformation.

More in detail, the political charge of co-research can be seen on multiple levels. First, there is a refusal to accept the categories given by dominant sociology to make sense of

contemporary society. These categories are tested and questioned through different hypotheses that look at day-to-day struggles constantly recomposing and stratifying the social tissue, from the perspective of activists (Alquati cited in: Palano, 2007). Second, by following these “silent and subterranean” struggles, and teasing out and following their myriad bundled threads, it becomes possible to materially (rather than theoretically) set the basis for future movements to come (Palano, 2007). This is because these inquiries bring to light elements of struggles in which activists already partake. Third, from a political perspective, in co-research the production of knowledge *is* itself the production process of the research (i.e. it takes place simultaneously *with*, as opposed to *after*). Here the resulting knowledge involves both learning about and re-constituting the subjects involved,³ but also devising new organizational forms and practices that redesign the structure and allow for the constant reinvention of the project. For Conti et al. “collective research is itself organization” (Conti and al., 2007: 80) — that is, problem posing and problem solving. Finally, while attending to the complexity of social struggles, research functions as a way of stimulating movement within fields of struggle through participation and interaction among all actors involved (Borio et al., 2002: 15).

My choice to work with insu^{tv} is due to my familiarity both with the group—whose media productions I followed from the beginning in 2003—and with the context from which they emerged, especially the city of Naples—where I grew up. Two lines have guided my interventions with them: as a new member, I wanted to directly contribute to their work, offering my research skills for co-research and the activist experience I matured in Germany and Canada. As a researcher, I was interested in testing the benefits of using the social sciences as activist tools, to see what kind of questions and insights can be produced from this angle of analysis. I have spent two years actively involved with insu^{tv}, and striving to understand the context from which we came as a group and are currently functioning in. This time has also been instrumental in mapping the histories, connections, practices and conflicts within the Neapolitan activist environment.

In concrete terms, the ethnographic study of insu^{tv} and its connections to Telestreet, as

³ Foucault concept of *Savoir*, is very useful in this context to grasp how subjects are constantly constituted and reconstituted by the work undertaken to know and to construct an object of knowledge (1991).

well as to other groups, consisted of gathering material in the public domain (e.g.: books, magazines and journals, posters and flyers, communiqués and listserv messages); carrying out interviews with key actors; collaborating in the media production process; running a focus group and observing our practices; taking part in meetings and listserv discussions; organising and taking part in events, media centres and as many activities as possible. Further ethnographic research took place outside of Naples to gather data on the relationship between insu[^]tv and the groups it interfaces with.

In particular, I carried out interviews with some members of other Telestreet channels in the city of Bologna, in Northern Italy where the Telestreet movement was initiated, and in Gaeta, central Italy where one of the oldest members of the network is active. This was done as a way of setting the historical and socio-political contexts and situating—though not causally determining—our local practices in space and time (Heller, 2001: 118). In particular, Bologna is an important centre of political activities for the Italian *Autonomia* movement that played a key role in the development of the free radios in the 70s and of the social centres in which some of insu[^]tv actors were active.

Such forms of political organising are instrumental in understanding how Telestreet emerged from the history, culture and society of Italy —and how it mutates across economically different Italian regions— while also being in conversation with the global trajectories of political movements. To this end, the historical documentation on Italian and independent communication and my friends' personal accounts were both a valuable source of information.

During the inquiry, we developed different approaches and uses of the data, building on the experimental character of co-research. More specifically, the data was never analysed according to criteria of neutrality but always with the intention of influencing and affecting the 'object of study,' while always making sure to retain legitimacy and verifiability of the claims (Borio et al., 2002: 35).

Hence, while I make extensive use of the data gathered during the interviews and conversations with my colleagues at insu[^]tv, I have chosen to only selectively quote from my transcriptions. This choice has several reasons: first and foremost, I am wary of

singling out others' ideas in a context that also deals with criticism. This could cause misreadings and unneeded tensions among individuals. From an ethical research perspective, it is often hard to make choices about what piece of information to include when the time spent with our so-called informants is not only data collection time but also our time of work and friendship. This time spent together was based on trust and not on self-censorship, and although I did my best to anonymise information while still providing a multilayered tale, I fully claim responsibility for any contentious statement.

Second, as a member of the group who is trying to offer this study as a tool for activism, I also find always separating my own perspective on the activist practices in question from those of my colleagues of little use. This is because at many points of my analysis I am interested in offering a narrative of encounters and the assemblages they produce, including mine with theory, with Telestreet and with insu[^]tv. At the same time, I wish to investigate the potentials of certain modes of connection that relay political practice, rather than any specific practice in itself. In this context, in line with Colectivo Situaciones, more than as a transmission of data or of a set of research techniques, I see the writing of this text as a search for producing and receiving resonances. That is, I see this dissertation as a way of extending the experiment in research by calling for a direct involvement in the intensity of situated research and media activism (2005). This intensity, the *potentia* of an activist inquiry can never be properly communicated, but only lived, and it deeply informs the processes of individuation of the researcher, as well as the collective individuation of the group. This is why Colectivo Situaciones' militant research pragmatically foregrounds practices of composition, rather than methods for communication of research findings. Militant research is seen here as expanding, rather than representing *potentia* (2005).

Finally, while my experiment attempts to function outside of representational paradigms, this does not mean that the final outcome will not be a representation of my experience with and analysis of media activism and Telestreet. Rather, it means that my writing takes the form of a cartographic exercise that maps different assemblages and talks about the learning, collaboration and contamination that took place during their process of emergence.

To this end, the reader will be exposed to a series of narratives that come together as a map of connections—that intersect and re-emerge at different points. I favoured a non-linear structure that functions through intersecting series and disregards coherent timeframes to give material form to my belief that there are no coherent and causal dynamics of emergence in the social field and that change can only be thought of as continuous movement. Moreover, I wanted to retain some of the messiness of the process of militant research. The act of weaving narratives will make visible what conditions explain the emergence and mutation of movements like Telestreet/insu[^]tv, at specific times and places, involving specific people, while retaining a margin of unpredictability that always characterizes these processes.

I contended earlier that the act of weaving, the drawing of a map, the laying out of a problem field that foregrounds the relation between elements without assigning them a specific value, is called learning. This pedagogical practice brings the ontological underpinnings of how we think reality closer to everyday life to disrupt pre-established and habitual connections. I hope to show how it can lead both activists and researchers to make sense of the world through newly formulated problems and to engender new solutions. My intention is to help create these new narratives about social change that embolden our political imaginary by freeing it from the constraints of common sense and representation.

I also hope to show how this pedagogical approach to research and collaboration can teach us how to work in the gap between political activism and knowledge production as always instituting new practices that are immanent to a specific context, never separate from what preceded us but always different in relation to it (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 296, Raunig, 2007). Finally, I am interested in providing an example of how ‘learning’ forms us as ‘subjects’ always engaging the reality that contains us and the knowledge we create about it (Foucault, 1980, Simondon, 2006).

As Franco Bifo Berardi, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, reminded me at the beginning of our first encounter, “to talk about these things, we could start anywhere” (2008). I add, to talk about insu[^]tv, we could follow different trajectories than the ones I chose starting

from Bologna and jumping between decades in Naples. We could also end anywhere because *repurposing*, the main concept that I composed in this dissertation and that traverses it sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, is not a pre-defined political method adopted by insu^tv at a specific point in time. Rather, it is a name that gives some kind of consistency to the intensity and potential of composition that we at insu^tv wish to inject elsewhere. It is my hope that this dissertation itself will engender a productive encounter with its readers.

Chapter summaries

The following chapters proceed by trying to draw my academic and political lines of inquiry together on a map—or plane—that spans the macro-politics of knowledge production practices and narratives about social change, and the micro-politics of our fast-changing everyday life and work, which I engage both as a researcher and as an activist.

Chapter two discusses already available descriptions and analyses of Telestreet/insu^tv and lays out the basis for my own study of the projects as a creative, cartographic experiment. This is done while unpacking the concept of social change from a processual perspective (i.e. as the becoming of the social within a diagram of relations that is always specific to our space-time). The diagram in question—the society of control (Deleuze, 1995)—emerges at the intersection of technological development, political and economic forces, as well as socio-cultural practices. It engenders and constantly reproduces both dominant and resistant subjectivities in reciprocal presupposition. My meandering through the chapter's propositions attempts to set a pace, a rhythm, or a speed of connections that will guide the mapping exercise throughout the dissertation.

Chapter three provides a genealogy of Autonomist ideas about political agency and their actualization in their practices. Their impact still underlies many political and cultural practices of resistance in Italy and beyond. Autonomist thought and action are fundamental to understanding not only political struggle but also many past and current practices of cultural and knowledge production in Italy. While making visible the processes through which theory and practice recreate each other for *Autonomia*, the

analysis also shows how their ideas about creativity and the production of new modes of sociability inform my own approach to research and creation, trying to operate outside of dominant institutional power dynamics and discourses.

Chapter four performs a political economic study of the rise to power of Italian Prime minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi. Drawing on theories of differential accumulation of power through capital (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009), this analysis brings to the fore the connections between political power, the economy, and organized crime, that mark a historical shift in Italian politics and economy of which Berlusconi is an emblem, rather than a trigger. This excursus in the form of a rag-to-riches story sets the stage on which Italian contemporary activist struggles unfold. As it becomes clearer in chapters six and seven, the concept of differential accumulation is also key to make sense of social struggle in Naples, where these connections between crime, politics and business are clearly visible and yet incredibly hard to break.

Chapter five builds on the concept of societies of control and on cultural analyses that use information theory (Simondon, 2006, Terranova, 2004a, b) to discuss new activist formations that are actively affected by technology during their ontogenesis. In this discussion, the use of information theory opens up the space to discuss the effects of information dynamics that exceed the creation and circulation of messages and signs to materially affect the production of social relations. While focusing on Italian activism, this chapter also draws links with indigenous activism in Mexico and with the global social justice movement as an example of how practices of resistance resonate with each other and mutate through contact and experimentation. These two examples resurface in chapter six as fundamental lines informing Neapolitan activism—and insu^{tv}.

Chapter six further engages information theory to analyse the role of affect and perception in the emergence of subject positions mediated by television. More precisely, I use Simondon's theories about the emergence of individual subjectivities to unpack the relationship between mainstream television and the Italian social imaginary. This relationship is contrasted with an analysis of Telestreet's practices of autonomous production used to self-fashion meaning (and meaning-making), thereby subverting the

role of mainstream television as a template for social relations. The main conclusion of the comparison is that these practices partake in the process of emergence of new communities *and* of their members.

Chapter seven looks at the history of Neapolitan activism and the emergence of insu^tv in the field of tension among various activist groups and practices. While drawing on Frantz Fanon's analysis of the struggles between colonizer and colonized, this section attempts to make sense of the recomposition of the field of antagonistic practices that make up contemporary modes of dissent in the city and its outskirts. At the same time, through Simondon's theories about the ontogenesis of individual and collective subjects, my analysis reveals some of the tensions and forces that periodically fragment and restructure activism in Naples. It is at this point that a map starts taking form on which the challenges faced by groups like insu^tv can be articulated, not merely in terms of power struggles between dominant and dominated actors, but especially in terms of a synergy (or lack thereof) among the very groups that compose the Neapolitan activist assemblage.

Chapter eight develops with greater detail the concept of repurposing in relation to the 'connective' work carried out by insu^tv to address the problem outlined at the end of chapter six. In developing the concept of repurposing, special emphasis is laid on the role of technology to facilitate the transformation and strengthen the constitution of activist assemblages. However, as the concept unfolds, rather than simply making sense of the actual practices of the group—and of me as a researcher— provokes a discussion regarding the *ethics of connection* as a mode of repurposing social relations and collectivity/connectivity as forms of politics. For insu^tv, this connective ethics can be understood as a set of rules and principles that facilitate the evaluation of actions, communication, and thought according to an immanent mode of collective existence (Deleuze, 1988; Simondon, 1989). In this context, the lenses of repurposing can be extended to looking at thought and research as modes of sociability that can be themselves repurposed for politics through ethics.

The conclusions discuss the open-ended character of my experiment, calling for a re-engagement with my research to keep exploring both insu^tv's potential and that of

activist social research in different contexts. At the same time, I try to confront the messiness characterising the relationship between theory and practice, between making sense of the past and gauging the present. This is done by considering the new challenges that face insu^tv while we develop new projects and suffer of burnout; while we attempt to feed the joyful passion that has fostered our work so far and are caught between *cathexis* and the intensity of new individuations.

Chapter 2

Six propositions on Telestreet

The aim is not to make something understood to us, but to make us understand our power of knowing (Deleuze, 1988c: 83)

The philosopher Baruch Spinoza was also a lens-grinder, his life divided between philosophical treaties and hunching over glass, polishing his lenses time and again (Borges, 1981: 285). What was the effect of repeating this same gesture over and over? And what did he see, every time he looked through the lens, before grinding some more? If the process of optical lathing were to be taken as a method for thinking and analysing, what would my “eyes of the mind” (Spinoza, Ethics, 5P23) see at each step of crafting my own viewing tools? The following discussion is an attempt to make my own lenses to view the subject matter of my dissertation. As homage to the Dutch philosopher, my attempt is divided in propositions.

Each of the following six propositions corresponds to a new exercise that examines the media activist projects Telestreet and insu^{tv}—of which I am a member. Each proposition uses frameworks of analysis derived from dominant approaches to studies of activism, or it unpacks the categories that have been used in public discourse to look at these two projects. The studies of grassroots activism engaged in the following propositions are by no means the only ones available. As chapter one emphasises, I locate myself within a minor tradition of activist research that engages social issues and phenomena without objectifying the groups studied with the aim of contributing to social justice struggles. The present discussion aims to contribute to this line of scholarship by arguing for a need to focus on the processual aspect of change.

Indeed, while the approaches reviewed in this exercise turn out to be useful to make sense of some aspects of Telestreet/insu^{tv}, they also reveal the limits of the analysis they enable because they cannot address the processual aspect of the change triggered by the

activist practices in question. In some cases, these approaches also jettison a process-based element of research itself in favour of pre-determined categories of analysis, thereby limiting the possibility of understanding the phenomena under investigation. As a participant to the Telestreet/insu^{tv} project, my intention is to relay and strengthen our work. The operation of lens lathing is a gesture that speaks to the fact that for anyone interested in activist research the process of fashioning new lenses to look at the world is simultaneously a practical exercise and a theoretical one. This exercise needs to be repeated every time in order to engage the changing context in which we act. It is only in the actual practice of hands-on experimentation that the use value of ideas can be judged; and the value judgment itself lies in the usefulness of what the new tools enable us to see and do.

Proposition One: Telestreet is a social movement

From the “culture jamming” magazine *Adbusters* (Bronson, 2004), to the *International Herald Tribune* (Monico, 2002), the media project Telestreet has been celebrated as the forerunner of a new movement for communication democracy: “Street TVs have an extremely limited broadcasting range, covering just a block or two. But a blazing-fast growth rate combined with a very ambitious plan indicate they may soon start contending with bigger TV networks for local viewers” claims the (worried?) *Hollywood Reporter* (Davidkhanian, 2004). The one above is only one of the countless enthusiastic messages about Telestreet by the national and international press. In many articles, “micro-television” is posited as a neutraliser of mass media consolidation, not only in dystopian Italy where the government controls over 90% of the media, but everywhere such a television model could be needed in the future. With this model, television is also propelled out of the house to crash the heavily guarded gates of cultural production.

From 2002, public and private broadcasters and print media from the UK, France, Germany, even Australia, celebrated the Italian battle of media David against Goliath. The journalists marvelled at the do-it-yourself street weapon Italians use to sling shots at communication giants. A few months later, public attention towards the project faded,

together with the international disdain for a Prime Minister who runs a G8 country, despite 17 impending trials in the court of criminal justice, 7 additional police investigations and a blatant conflict of interests on media ownership (Ch. 3). More precisely, Silvio Berlusconi has been under investigation 22 times. Out of these investigations, 7 were archived before the trial (in two cases thanks to a law he had just passed). He has been on trial 17 times and some cases are still open. He has been convicted three times, although the sentences were invalidated by prescription. Three trials ended with an amnesty. In the remaining 7 cases, he was either acquitted, the cases were invalidated by prescription prior to any convictions, or because the accusations were no longer valid due to a change in the legislation (Travaglio, 2008).

“If things don’t change, they stay the same”: Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi with his media empire is still active, but so is Telestreet. Yet, while Berlusconi is photographed smiling, standing next to those who once felt good decrying the undemocratic turn of their European neighbour, Telestreet struggles and gasps for air in the grey underbellies of legal disputes and resource allocation (Ch. 5). Shutter speed and lens aperture have swiftly altered the ‘depth of field’ of Italian politics, leaving a slice of the photo in focus while the background is thrown into a beautiful blur.

As I grapple with methodological questions through my lens grinding, I find it hard to rely on already available framings for this media phenomenon. So, *what* exactly is Telestreet, and why has it fascinated such a broad audience? And more importantly, how do we make sense of it in the context of current activism and Italian politics?

Telestreet is the name of a network of low-cost, pirate micro-broadcasters that came to life in 2002 in the climate of Prime Minister Berlusconi’s control on the Italian media. Street television channels only transmit to households within the range of a neighbourhood or street-wide zone, using shadow-cones of frequencies granted to commercial networks that are unusable because of territorial obstacles like buildings or hills. Each TV channel constitutes a node in a net, offering technical assistance and sharing a web-archive of broadcasting material with other street TVs—thereby considerably reducing production and distribution costs. This tactic amplifies their

coverage at a national level, it provides a relatively sustainable infrastructure despite the scarce economic and technical resources available, and it allows each node to maintain a considerable degree of autonomy (Ch. 5).

The Telestreet group of activists and citizens is described as defending freedom of expression and information with a bottom-up communication model that promises to take the broadcasting frequencies and media power distribution by storm. Many social scientists would say that Telestreet is a perfect example of how civil society works: if it is not the social capital of Telestreet that will lead the State to adjust its policies (Purdue, 2007: 11), certainly the network's presence will at least be a symbolic gesture by Italian citizens claiming their right to free communication (Tarrow, 2004).

Parallel to the birth of Telestreet, a series of other actions and interventions took place, in which a plurality of organisations from civil society coalesced around various forms of protests. For Alberto Melucci, this kind of “new social movements” experiment with cultural values often through the deployment of alternative practices that speak to broader audiences (Melucci, 1996). Indeed, the last decade in Italy has seen a resurfacing of creative and theatrical strategies with traditional forms of direct action in the attempt to involve new actors in social change (Ch. 2; 4).

Many of the Italian interventions during the first and second terms of Berlusconi's government were successful in transversally connecting different groups beyond traditional left-right political divisions. They did so partly because of the implementation of creative strategies, and partly because their discourses focussed on safeguarding basic civic rights, rather than pushing a specific political agenda. The strategies adopted to protest Berlusconi's conflict of interests range from the so-called *Girotondi* to events denouncing the ‘purging’ of journalists and comedians from the mainstream media because they were critical of his government.

The *Girotondi* are a practice adopted by various citizen movements in Italy, starting from 2002 to protest Berlusconi's government and defend the principle of democracy. In Italian *girotondo* is the game of ring-a-ring-o'-roses, and it was played around the symbols of those rights that were considered endangered by Berlusconi's rule. For

example, people gathered around the main studios of the Italian public service broadcaster RAI in 19 Italian cities to protest Berlusconi's interventions in its functioning (Societacivile.it, 2003). More recently, starting in 2009, events like the No Berlusconi Day have seen thousands of people dressed in purple turn out in the streets (Il Popolo Viola, 2009).

According to social movement theorists like McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, social change takes place during moments of contestation like the ones described above (2001). In other words, society changes and evolves through contentious, oppositional politics sustained by members of civil society that engage the state to negotiate power arrangements and social rules. While still taking into consideration the social and economic conditions of emergence and persistence of these groups, these scholars mainly see society and its institutions as the result of fully social processes in which actors shape the identity of the groups involved (McAdam et al., 2001). For this reason, many studies of social movements focus on particular moments of contestation when political claims are articulated through collective practices, often innovatively, like the *Girotondi* I referred to above.

In a similar vein, Touraine (1981) and Melucci (1996) view social movements' actions as the *medium* through which social change takes place. Thus, although everyday practices are the means by which movements can define themselves and reach their goals during specific events (Melucci, 1989: 71–3), the latter are considered the triggers of social change. In particular, much research on social movements and activism focusses on the negotiation of collective representations that account for unity and cohesion during specific events, as well as on the strategic articulation of political goals. Ultimately, for all these scholars, it is the very *ability* of civil society to plan and engender moments of dialogue or confrontation, like town hall meetings or rallies, that makes social change possible. Again, with political economic conditions in the background, the focus of the analysis is on the presumed rational agency of individuals and groups.

In the context of Italy's climate of unrest against Berlusconi, Telestreet can easily be seen as functioning as a megaphone for the rights to free speech that groups articulate in “an

idiom that local audiences will recognise” (Tilly, 2004: 4)— i.e. homemade television. Following research in social movement studies, we could say that Telestreet *poses as a social movement*—it assumes a particular attitude or stance. That is, it functions as a medium to articulate claims for a more democratic management of the Italian mass media and to formulate possible solutions to Berlusconi’s conflicts of interests (Purdue, 2007: 7).

Finally, Telestreet’s identity functions as a ‘badge’ that institutional politicians and interest groups can wear as supporters of the freedom of communication and as critics of Prime Minister Berlusconi’s government. This is because social movements often possess ‘social capital’ that enables them to interact with other groups within civil society while they engage with the state (Purdue, 2007: 10–11). Due to the peculiarity of the Italian case (Berlusconi’s media monopoly), within a few months of existence, Telestreet quickly became a symbol of resistance and a medium to voice civil society’s concern about social justice.

Yet, as is the case with many contemporary instances of social struggle, the actions organised by Italians to protest Berlusconi’s abuses of power—as well as the timid protests of neighbouring states at the European Union Parliament— were ignored by the Italian institutions. This comes as no surprise when scholars like Touraine, Melucci and McAdam, for whom social movements are the carriers of social change, find it harder to conceive of a successful relationship between collective action and change in the present context of neoliberal governance (prop. 5).

Broadly speaking, neoliberalism can be said to have two sides, a theoretical one and a geo-political one, which does not entirely mirror the ideas that gave origin to neoliberal practices in first place (Harvey, 2005). As an economic school of thought that already developed in the 40s and took hold in the 70s, neoliberalism proclaims that the best way to support efficient democratic rule and protect the economic health of nation states is by eliminating any control on the market and thus letting individual freedom unfold. In practice, the neoliberal doctrine is actualized as a general political-economic force that reorganizes societies by transferring control from public to the private sector. It functions

through privatization of government and infrastructural services, government deregulation and deep cuts to social spending that are enabled by strong alliances between a few very large corporations and a class of mostly wealthy politicians. This commitment to privatization, deregulation and cuts—what Naomi Klein dubs the free-market trinity (Klein, 2008)—is also accompanied by policies that erode the public sphere, that free corporations of legal constraints and obligations of accountability to the public, and that justify governments' distancing from a social welfare structure and tax system. Other features of neoliberalism include high unemployment rates and a tendency to rely on temp and flexible work. This is combined with a slow but steady dismantling of union and labour politics, by reliance on banks and the finance sector for the stabilization of government (and individual) deficits, by the substitution of public spending with programmes that are supposed to increase economic growth and productivity, by trade liberalization and by the elimination of tariffs to stimulate competition. Finally, the spread of neoliberalism cannot be separated from the financialization and free flow of capital across borders, without any oversight of financial institutions. As a consequence of these changes there has been growing social polarisation, where new small elites thrive as those in lower strata of society become more and more impoverished (Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberal policies have been reconfiguring the geopolitical and economic face of the planet over the last thirty years through the patient and subtle work of think tanks, business schools and organizations that lobby or work together with political parties to influence public policy. With the help of international organizations for humanitarian relief and reconstruction like the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as through foreign investment, neoliberal ideas and structures have taken root also in developing countries. In this context, the media also plays a fundamental role by contributing to a climate of fear in which specific forms of the economy thrive, by influencing public opinion, and overall by reinforcing a neoliberal world view (Harvey, 2005, Klein, 2008).

Importantly, neoliberalism can be said to blur social and market values, celebrating the entrepreneurial potential of every person and re-routing any blame for the failure of the

system onto the individual (Foucault, 2008). The blurring of the distinction between the economic health of a country with its political and democratic condition has allowed the emergence of nationalist sentiments that justify bottomless spending on security, within and outside the borders of many powerful states (Klein, 2008). Moreover, since activists inside the national borders also pose a threat to the neoliberal *status quo*, the last decade has seen a boom in the development and implementation of surveillance tactics, private security, police repression and mass incarceration. While these practices are developed in collaboration with and are contracted to the ever-present corporations, the shrinking of civil liberties is justified in the name of security and is sustained by mediated representations of dissenting groups as *potential* enemies of order. In this climate, it is not hard to imagine how the agency of social movements who function through oppositional politics is strongly reduced. Many scholars are now calling for more analysis of how, with neoliberalism, social movements seem to have lost their power to act (Elmer and Opel, 2008, Jordan, 2005).

The Berlusconi government is strictly tied to neoliberal ideology while capitalizing on media control of public opinion. Politicians in the Berlusconi government are often able to design policies that undermine civil liberties and widen the gap between the rich and the poor. With a stronghold on the media, they are able to hollow out collective action of its social meaning and political charge by attacking any opposition as the result of personal persecution of the Prime Minister, jealousy or “communist connivance” threatening the wealth of the country (e.g. Schrank, 2009). Thus, calling Italian judges ‘communists’ and dismantling the judiciary system to successfully evade trials, Berlusconi is still smiling in his photographs (Ch. 3). He is smiling and promising happiness to all Italians through his nation-wide channels of which *Rete Quattro* transmits on frequencies legally assigned to another channel owned by a less powerful person (Kohl, 2003).

“If things don’t change, they stay the same” Berlusconi is still smiling, but so is Telestreet, only not in photographs. According to most literature on social movements and much of the press covering the spectacular spread of the network, social change equals a visible shift in the system, or at least a consistent engagement between

representatives of civil society and the institutions contested—a crisis in the government, a discussion about media monopoly, the legalisation of Telestreet. Social movement study methodologies focus on stories of contestations and confrontation, on successes or failures. This approach cannot make sense of Telestreet and its relationship to dominant power now that their momentum has considerably slowed down, the climate of political and social conflict has fallen into stupefied torpor, and groups are not protesting. But is there really no change triggered by Telestreet, or should we be looking for different lenses? Telestreet's Cheshire cat smiles are not visible in pictures, but things do change, even when they seem to stay the same.

Take two: Telestreet *poses as a social movement*, yet *to pose* no longer means *to pretend*, rather it is akin to *pausing*: “to assume or hold a physical attitude”, *to stand in a position* for researchers to observe them. Posing, pausing, positioning: Telestreet is frozen in an attempt to take a picture, which still turns out to be out of focus. Positionality is opposed to movement, yet is not the latter that constitutes change—especially imperceptible, bracketed, qualitative change that precedes systemic shifts, ruptures and visible changes?

Of course, this kind of imperceptible movement-change—what happens in the eventless everyday—might come to engender ‘Real Change’ (Melucci 1989). Then we should be looking at a social field in which groups unspectacularly position themselves to create subversive yet intelligible meanings and signifiers that could take over those in power (e.g. Tilly, 2004). But, for Brian Massumi, the movement of subtle change is hard to see because the analysis of resistant collective actors takes place through the coding within a social system, that is, a group's *positioning* on a social grid of signification, and all one can look at is their starting and endpoints, never movement itself (2002b: 2–3).

The social grid enables the negotiation of oppositional and cultural identities and their attendant practices, such as those of antagonistic social movements, the environmentalists, gender, race or other forms of identity-based or oppositional politics. Unluckily, as with systemic shifts, identity is only perceptible when the dots move from one place of the grid to another. Thus, in order to understand the presence of these groups, we need to watch the ‘actors’ *pose* because we cannot see them move. What we

can do is momentarily stop them, while we do our best to retrace how they got there, to reconstruct what has happened in-between point A and point B. More importantly, we can study the terms and conditions of their shift. Where there is any change to detect, A and B can become the objects of a research that will yield representations of social dynamics.

In dominant strains of social research, to talk about social movements means to discover what characterises them, what strategies they employ, what conditions facilitated their emergence. It means to analyse their contexts and functions and to possibly offer some projections of their future. Unfortunately, this objectification of activist groups through social studies can have the side effect of turning social research into an instrument of surveillance or repression by dominant powers (e.g.: Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001, Frampton and al., 2006). There are, however, some very successful attempts at developing research methods that avoid the pitfalls of objectification, for example the excellent book *Sociology For Changing The World: Social Movements/Social Research* (Frampton and al., 2006) that engages research from the perspective of feminists, queer and poor and migrant workers.

In some cases, the analytical tendency to classify movements or groups can force them into pre-defined categories and restrict the scope of the research and its utility. For example, the classification of social movements as old or new places exclusive emphasis on a separation between the political and the cultural fields (Frampton and al., 2006: 13). This classification disregards the relation between the two fields as a generally productive force that is key to understanding some expressions of contemporary political practices that engender projects like Telestreet. By working on a topography of practices of resistance and a taxonomy of collective actors, social movement studies produce a functional orientation tool to understand the field of the social. They can yield a reconstruction of how movement happens within it, especially if bringing into the analysis external politico-economic forces that intersect with the agency of the actors involved.

Still, does change only mean to move around the social grid to recombine its elements? Or are there ways to get out of these gridlocked structures that seem to pre-determine every move and the ways we can make sense of non-confrontational struggles (Massumi 2002: 3)? And to what extent can that which is engendered on and/or determined by this grid affect its own field of emergence before we can perceive a shift? Massumi points to the fact that positionality comes before movement, which is subordinated to the pre-defined positions it connects, thus missing a notion of movement as qualitative transformation (2002: 3). To fill this lacuna, Massumi attempts to look at the dynamism that drives change in the social. He argues for assigning primacy to movement, and considers position (or the finite product or object) as its derivate:

The idea is that there is an ontogenesis or becoming of culture and the social [...] of which determinate forms of culture and sociability are the result. The challenge is to think that process of formation, and for that you need the notion of a taking-form, an inform on the way to being determinately this or that. The field of emergence is not pre-social. It is *open-endedly social*. [...] That interaction is precisely what takes form. That is what is socially determined—and renegotiated by each and every cultural act. Assume it and you beg the whole question. Not assuming it however, entails finding a concept for interaction-in-the-making. The term adopted here is *relation* (Massumi, 2002b: 9).

Relation is what happens before the coordinates that are often the object of study in the social sciences; it is between these chosen points that change happens. It is through this change that the points that come together in a relation affect each other. For Gilles Deleuze (1988a), the act of studying an object in space as being quantifiable, divisible or clearly positionable requires a freeze-framing of reality and the elimination of its processual interaction with its surroundings through representational forms of thinking.

For Massumi, building on Deleuze, such operations cannot grasp the object's movements because we are looking at the quantitative dimension of reality, whereas the distinctions suggested here address the continuities under qualitative transformation (Massumi, 2002b: 7–8). By separating the ontological status of the relation from that of its terms, the notion of change shifts from merely negating, subverting or deviating from the pre-constituted terms and codes of a relation within a structuring grid, to the simultaneous

and (differential) emergence of both individuals *and* society from “a shared realm of relationality that is one with becoming –and belonging” (Massumi, 2002: 71). From this perspective, it can be argued that change *is* an immanent relationship in itself.

If we take into consideration the networked aspect of much activism (e.g.: Castells, 2004), then it becomes useful to also think through how we can conceptualise the constituent relations among groups rather than simply focus on their constituted parts. Said differently, if contemporary societies are increasingly built upon functional networks connecting different processes, resources and parts (networks of actors, communication means, technologies, economies, institutions and so on), then we need to find ways to traverse these immanent and always-shifting relations. That is, we need to understand how to talk about the elements that ontogenetically constitute change, rather than just focus on the terms of the relation, as would be the case with defining Telestreet according to social movement studies.

Telestreet is not a social movement; for a while it *posed* as one, reaping some social benefits and being described and categorized by social scientists. Ultimately, for me, what Telestreet really does is to pose the question of movement in the social. This question pertains both to ways of producing an analysis that is located in movement and to the ontogenetic potential of social research working from this movement.

Proposition Two: Telestreet is a tactical media practice

In the week leading to September 21st, 2003, the walls of Rome’s historically working class district of San Lorenzo were covered in posters declaring “*Totti libero!*” “*Montella libero!*” [Free Totti! Free Montella!]. Puzzled by the enigmatic incitation directed at their star football players, the inhabitants of this Rome Football Club-mad area tore some of the ads down, until another campaign of flyers clarified their meaning (Anonimo, 2003). These new posters and flyers announced a free broadcast of the Juventus-Roma match on UHF channel 26 the following Sunday. In fact, a decryption card had been connected to a television transmitter enabling viewers to watch the game without paying a subscription.

This was done in protest against the increased media monopoly and to allow thousands of underprivileged football fans to once again afford to be an audience. The groups behind the action included some street television channels (SpegnilaTV, Teleaut, AntTV, OrfeoTV) and the subversive communication agency Guerrilla Marketing.

On the day of the match, polls conducted through the houses' intercoms made sure that the enthusiastic inhabitants of San Lorenzo were receiving a clear signal while they enjoyed a free performance of their favourite team. At the bottom of the TV screen, the logo of Disco Volante TV expressed solidarity with the disabled-run Telestreet channel closed by the authorities a few days earlier (Ch. 5).

The show opened with a communiqué denouncing the planned eviction of more than a hundred Italian and migrant families from an illegally occupied building in the area. The advertising intermission showcased Telestreet's own video-spots and an interview with Roma fans denouncing the commercialisation and enclosure of football through pay-only match broadcast and unaffordable stadium tickets (Anonimo, 2003). The independent broadcasting of the game, facilitated by Telestreet, was also interspersed with information on the background of Richard Murdoch—who owns the Italian sport pay-tv channel Sky—and with home-made commentary on the game (Blisset, 2004). Match score: Juventus 2-Roma 2.

Already in the press release that preceded the action, the coalition drew attention to the underlying connections between intellectual property and the consolidation of monopolies on information, as is the case with football. It is precisely at this intersection, that the groups involved see a perfected separation (Debord, 1983) between the business and spectacle of marketed football, and the sport as a moment of sociability and popular culture, constantly produced by (low-income) fans around the world. For the Telestreet groups involved, as well as for Guerrilla Marketing, “no monopoly should be allowed to encrypt the richness of the streets and of the stadium terraces. [...] The public is not for sale” (AntTV et al., 2003).

The separation between football as business and spectacle, and football as a catalyst for aggregation becomes immediately visible once the group interferes “with the

massmediocritised communication flux” (AntTV et al., 2003) by hijacking the encrypted signal of the match. The use of a television transmitter and a rigged decoding card enables an inversion of the power relations organising the functions and qualities of the sport, thus returning football into a form of expression of which sociability and popular culture are the actual forms of content. This operation decrypts and breaks down the links among football, business and spectacle in which the form of content (capital) and the form of expression (sport) are seen as necessarily coupled.

On Monday, February 2, 2004, I received an email from the Telestreet listserv passing on the news about a similar decryption action a day earlier in Scampia, one of the most degraded areas of the Neapolitan province. MA.GI.CA.TV, named after the three historical stars of the Napoli FC football team —Maradona, Giordano, Careca—had delighted its audience with another free match, as well as with footage of local kids’ games. Although Napoli FC lost, “Sky must’ve had its grief too” the email joked. Match Score: Telestreet 2 – Sky 0.

At another level of social formations, the one that harnesses broadcasting dynamics and cultural production, Telestreet effectuates a similar inversion, this time through the simple switching of two connectors in an antenna’s box. By switching cables, the device is changed from a receiver of signals to a sender—from passive to active medium. This practice of reverse engineering of tools, and of their attendant functions in the social field, for Candida TV, points at: “the intention to radically remould the perception of media, which means eliminating the prejudices about its non-interchangeability. Instead of one-way communication, from one to many, [...] communication going from many to many” (Janković, 2004).

Temporary reversals of power are what characterises the practices by rebellious users’ who use tactical media “as a set of tactics by which the weak make use of the strong” (Garcia and Lovink, 1997). The *ABC of Tactical Media*, a manifesto for Do-It-Yourself (DIY) media tacticians is one of the many texts that call for creative resistance by groups and individuals who are excluded from the wider culture (Garcia and Lovink, 1997). Inspired by the work of the Situationist International, these media practitioners tap into

the practice of *détournement* and other tactics discussed in the French group's writings.

They aim to use the existing means of cultural expression to link a theoretical critique of modern society with an enacted critique, while maintaining a critical stance towards their own practices (McDonough, 2004: 164; 181). For tactical media practitioners, as well as for the Situationists, there is no separation between critique and action. Both are made manifest in the appropriation of elements of the spectacle on which contemporary social interaction is based. Tactical media engender hit-and-run, ad hoc stunts, pranks and other practices rooted in a fleeting moment that can cause a shift in the perception about dominant forces.

This is a form of activism based on aesthetics and experimentation: a temporary grouping of actors, who come together around an action, only to disperse again, and maybe regroup under different formations for future undertakings. Temporary groupings, and temporary reversals of power: “just a few individuals who get together on the occasion, can improvise on and improve the formulas tested elsewhere by others. This type of uncoordinated action [...] may usefully punctuate the dawning consciousness of the time” (Viénet in: McDonough, 2004: 183).

What the Situationists wrote in the 60s reached its climax in the 90s, when activism manifested a new consciousness in tactical media, recombining old school political work, art and new technologies (Lovink and Schneider, 2003). The development and accessibility of consumer electronics and DIY technology enabled artists, hackers and activists to come together and rethink the role of media as tools whose parameters are “permanently under construction” (Lovink and Schneider, 2003) and that address emerging configurations of dominant powers in novel ways.

The dawning consciousness of the time, summoned by René Viénet and his colleagues of the *Internationale situationniste* in 1967, was later articulated and incorporated into political analyses and micro-political practices after 1968. This consciousness is grounded in the realisation of living in a so-called society of control, first described by the American writer William Burroughs, and taken up by French philosophers like Gilles Deleuze. Control societies refer to the diagram describing the fluid power relations of

contemporary western capitalism that followed a (partial) shift from disciplinary societies. Disciplinary societies developed in the 18th and 19th century and were characterised by the organisation of major sites of confinement, for instance the family, school, hospitals and so on. After WWII we witness a breakdown of such sites of confinement and a decline of institutions in favour of “ultrarapid forms of apparently free-floating control that are taking over from the old disciplines at work within the time scales of closed systems” (Deleuze, 1995: 178). These new forms of control became increasingly predominant starting from the 1970s.

Unlike disciplinary societies, control societies offer a new degree of freedom while contributing to indirect yet equally powerful forms of control. They are characterised by the use of computers and other information technologies and by a shift from production (of goods) to meta-production, selling services and buying activities (Deleuze, 1995: 181). It is this shift of waged labour from factories to immaterial labour that blurs the boundaries between work and leisure (Deleuze, 1995: 179), and sets the ground for the new arrangements of power and control, pervading society like a gas.

In particular, marketing strategies function as a template for social activities —ranging from life styles and politics to health care—and increasingly isolate individuals. For Maurizio Lazzarato, production here is directly the production of social relations for capitalist accumulation, and the “raw material” of immaterial labour is subjectivity itself, as well as the environment in which subjectivities are reproduced. Importantly, the production of subjectivities is no longer predominantly an instrument of governmental social control that functions through self-discipline and the creation of docile bodies, as in disciplinary societies. In control societies, dominant processes of subjectivation also become productive of active consumers/communicators whose agency seems limitless when functioning within consumption-based social dynamics, which they sustain and relay: “Immaterial workers (those who work in advertising, fashion, marketing, television, cybernetics, and so forth) satisfy a demand by the consumer and at the same time establish that demand” (1996: 132). This is why so many current practices of resistance focus on the construction of networks of solidarity and on alternative forms of socialization and cooperation. They redefine the body and the subject as crucial sites of

resistance against modulated control and aim to develop alternative collective values and practices that engender subjectivities that thrive outside of logics of consumption. These practices range from looking back to past histories of social struggle and community structures to developing new ways of making strategic use of available resources like DIY technology (Ch. 2–8). They are hardly noticeable if observed through more traditional lenses of oppositional strategies and ‘civil society vs. state’ power dynamics.

In a society of control, the commodification of information and life styles is inextricably connected with the development of cybernetics—“a theory of messages and their control” (Crary, 1984: 292). It is at this intersection between information technology and information as commodity that we also find a shift in the social functions of television, increasingly overlapping and networked with other forms of consumer electronics, especially computers. Television’s content does no longer merely constitute a simulacrum of life but reduces all signs to free flowing elements that can be made compatible and sold with the rest of the available information flows (Crary, 1984: 287–289).

More precisely, the increased connectedness among different information distribution media, and the content transmitted have effects that range from the boom of the entertainment industry thriving on these flows to the creation of mass mediated social imaginaries based on consumer identities (Ch. 3; 5). The circulation of information itself has an impact that goes beyond signification to affect new social arrangements (Ch. 4). It is in this context we understand that tactical media’s attempt to tackle control societies’ expanding grid of control by constantly intervening in these semiotic flows and the power relations they sustain. Here, capture and co-option of symbols and practices for market purposes become the main reasons to opt for ephemeral and nomadic structures.

So, then, tactical media’s *purpose*, if there is one, is nomadic, mobility, always opening up new spaces, platforms and channels for rebellion and questioning: “once the enemy has been named and vanquished it is the tactical practitioner whose turn it is to fall into crisis” (Garcia and Lovink, 1997). Movement seems to be the purpose for tactical media, not simply because it allows on-going renewal of the tactics and of self-critique but

especially because it is fundamental in finding cracks and empty spaces in the media; to intervene in the system; to find new targets; to unsettle; to keep up with technological innovations and newly developed forms of control—to effect reversals. In their words, tactical media practitioners study “the techniques by which the weak become stronger than the oppressors by scattering, by becoming centreless, by moving fast across the physical or media and virtual landscapes. The hunted must discover the ways to become the hunter” (Garcia and Lovink, 1997).

Telestreet’s second national meeting, *Eterea II*, was held in Senigallia in March 2004, in support of Discovolante TV, closed by the authorities a few months earlier. Aside for discussing the future orientation of the network, the meeting was also marked by the participation of some of the founding members of the tactical media movement, interested in the innovation brought about by this tactical project. In an interview I conducted at *Eterea II* on behalf of the network, tactical media pioneer David Garcia foresaw the end of Telestreet, once the Italian political crisis was over (Telestreet, 2004).

It was not to take on the infamous prophetic role of Cassandra, but in the spirit of tactical media that Garcia celebrated the reversals of power brought about by Telestreet, while emphasising that they would only suffice in uncovering the problematic arrangement of media in the country. Unless new effective strategies were developed, Telestreet’s endurance and potential institutionalisation would inevitably constitute its capture and demise by dominant powers.

Three years later, the media tactician openly declared the death of tactical media as an efficient form of political activism because of its definitive co-option by capital, turning culture and creativity into commodities and economic resources (Garcia, 2006). The essay raised the problem of a new split between artist and activists, precisely on the basis of the commercial cannibalisation of creativity. For Garcia, neoliberal rhetoric of ‘freedom’ and ‘creativity’ has re-opened an old fault-line dividing artists from political activists. This resulted in producing mere epiphenomena of communicative capitalism not only tolerated but consumed and appropriated by it (Garcia, 2006).

This, apparently, has the effect of ‘de-politicising’ and subtracting credibility from

tactical media. Garcia calls for new connections between short lived tactics and more sustainable strategies of dissent: “It is not that cultural or information politics are not important, it is just that outside of a broader context and strategy of meaningful confrontations they are simply not enough” (Garcia 2006). The Situationists’ strategies to undermine the spectacle in society have turned themselves into a spectacle—R.I.P. tactical media.

If mere inversions of power and constant movement are not enough anymore to engender effective forms of resistance within neoliberal governmentality, what is Telestreet’s purpose? And why or how is it still functioning? Garcia’s call for sustainable strategies has not gone unheeded. Or better, long before Garcia lamented the need to harness tactical forms of activism in a more sustainable context, activists had already incorporated DIY creative and aesthetic tactics into their modes of protest (Ch. 4). Still, there seems to be something more to Telestreet than simply being an attempt to harness temporary inversions of power and make them endure. It seems rather that Telestreet doubles the bet, moving beyond temporary inversions of roles and power by embodying not only social critique but also one possible solution to the social problem it addresses.

Tactical media appropriate sign and symbols to deterritorialise the codes that fix the social imaginary along the logic of the market. Telestreet *détourns* tactical media; it pushes this practice to its limit by not simply using a medium, but *being the medium* that others can use: “We are television and we circulate messages that disturb and change the spectators’ usual perspective. In this way we stimulate criticism, we create visions of multiplied reality” (Janković 2004). Media activism is often associated with attempts to portray events as close as possible to reality. Yet, since the language of television is never neutral and always manipulative, many street television channels openly, humorously and *purposelessly* embrace this manipulation, offering narratives and visions of possible worlds that push manipulation into creation.

Criticism and creation go hand in hand, but criticism is only implicit in the process of creation (Ch. 5). This means that to tell the story of Telestreet as an anti-Berlusconi movement is to tell only part of the story. Defying much of the media attention that

created the hype about the project, the *Telestrittari* (people involved in Telestreet nodes) do not strictly see themselves as the paladins of the anti-media consolidation crusades. Granted that they were engendered within the context of Berlusconi's rise to power and are critical of it, Telestreet does not conceive of itself primarily as a movement causing power inversions (Ch. 5).

"Reverse engineering" is a practice that requires the unpacking of the functions and modes of devices. With the traditional television model morphing into a networked grid for the flow of heterogeneous data, symbols and codes of semio-capitalism (Berardi, 2007), it becomes harder to talk about a simple reversal between spectators and creators of images, consumers and producers of desires and lifestyles. Can we still argue that a remoulding of the perception of the media takes place through a simple reversal?

Through the anti-television model of communication "from many to many" currently taking over the traditional broadcast system, Telestreet's reverse engineering process investigates the interoperability of television with other forms of accessible technology and alternative modes of socialisation that surpass communicating and distributing information: "if television killed the streets, we return it to the site of the crime [...]. Television is a weapon. The screen reality must be squatted. Weapons are in our hands, beware! If there is a big brother, Candida [tv] is his little sister..." (Janković, 2004).

The concept of interoperability, more than the idea of reverse engineering (of the social and of semio-capitalist structures) opens up the possibility for a qualitative transformation of tactical resistance (Prop. 5-6) into autonomous practices that facilitate the continuous self-fashioning of meaning rather than yet again forcing subjects through streams of disjunct objects and affects (Crary, 1984: 289). Street television literally and figuratively becomes a (strategic) relay of multiple realities and ways of (re)directing its codes and flows of meaning, on more than one level. This is where the ongoing self-critical attitude, inherited from the Situationists and from tactical media, enables processes of reverse engineering to reach deeper levels, in order to connect, interface and more efficiently relay different realities.

Telestreet detourns tactical media's *inversions* into *perversions* of power, it moves from symbolic temporary inversions of forces between mainstream and independent media to a perversion of the television model as an interoperable concept always under construction because rooted in its collectivism. This tactical concept of television enables the strategic embodiment of plural experiences and a search for non-representative political forms through "active participation in socialized knowledge" (Virno, 2004: 13). This knowledge is partly created in the act of working together, and partly by harnessing this work in already available resistant practices and discourses (Ch. 5)

Thus, the *telestreettari* find their own fulfillment in their practice of being together, and not in any end product (Virno, 2004: 13). To paraphrase the Situationists once more, Telestreets refuses traditional forms of communication but also turns this refusal into a constructive project (McDonough, 2004: 134) of collective creation. Telestreet is not a tactical media practice but it draws on it and turns tactical media into a strategic, autonomous medium with no fixed purpose other than an ongoing perversion of power relations, i.e. the creation of "multiplied reality".

Proposition three: Telestreet is a counter-public

Bangalore, India: a media workshop organised by artist Shaina Anand for the students of Srishti School of Art Design and Technology turns the multi-ethnic Russel market into a "microcosm, a temporary utopia" (Anand et al., 2005). In it, students interact with vendors and visitors, producing the television content that the latter wish. For a few days, all sorts of programmes are showcased by a network of cabled TV sets placed in the aisles between the market stalls: songs, poetry, dancing, re-enactment of movie scenes, talent shows, but also serialised features and portraits, "time-lapsed shorts about the 24-hour cycle of the market and its environs, photo essays, promos, signature tunes and animations in more than four languages" (Anand et al., 2008: 335–6). The programming is enriched with live broadcasting, open fora, and "tele-jamming"—inserting different content between sections—during cricket matches or screenings of pirated movies. Through the use of video, the market becomes a site for the exchange and sharing of

memories, experiences and personal narratives.

We could argue that this is an example of the self-creation and self-organisation of a public as a site for the reflexive circulation of discourses (Warner, 2002: 62). More precisely, Warner sees publics and counter-publics, as the result, rather than the starting point of communication between humans: a public is understood as an ongoing space of encounter for discourse (2002: 90). This space is clearly present in Anand's account of the 'Rustle TV' project: "the site of the market was the public realm, its people were the audience and performers who determined the content and in turn received what the students gave them by way of their performance" (Anand et al., 2008: 332).

In addition to this, the workshop underscores the temporary aspect of publics, as well as their interpellative element (Warner, 2002: 86). Publics are not static entities, they come into being through their self-creating capacities and through the reflexive circulation of discourses— but they disappear once these activities cease. Finally, Rustle TV is a reminder of the fact that a public needs to be self-organized through discourse rather than external frameworks to produce a sense of belonging and activity (Warner, 2002: 52).

It is only through the collective work of the students and the market dwellers that the public can be (temporarily) projected from the concrete experience of a world that is shared (Warner, 2002: 63). A public is a useful concept and a discursive practice that aims at empowering those who come together around issues they share. Warner is not alone in recognizing the importance of participating in a public to discursively involve oneself in civic life (2002: 52). Other scholars who have discussed the political role of publics and the public sphere(s) foreground the value of feelings of commonality, communication and participation in the empowerment of political subjects (e.g. Arendt, 1998, Fraser, 2008, Habermas et al., 1989).

In this context independent communication is often seen as contributing to the emergence of such public spheres. Traditional media, like television, are being celebrated as spaces where this form of communication can be enabled. In a similar vein, Telestreet has been described as exemplifying "the desire to redesign the contours of the Habermasian public sphere in a mediatic context that stifles innovation, creativity, and diversity" (Ardizzoni,

2008). Telestreet's ability to 'squat' the streets—as well as the air waves—is, according to Michela Ardizzoni, the concretization of a spatial activism reclaiming the boundaries of public space and of the public sphere (2008).

In addition to this, projects like Telestreet can be seen as developing a new consciousness of communication rights and a claim to such rights within a new Public Domain of media (Pasquinelli, 2003). Another example of this emerging consciousness is the “People's Communication Charter”: a project that mobilises groups to express concern with the quality of the current communication environment and to play an active role in shaping the cultural environment, as well as the production and distribution of information and culture (www.pccharter.net). For media scholar and activist Matteo Pasquinelli, Public Domain refers to “a sphere which does not belong neither to the State nor to the Market, but to the whole society, and it is managed and controlled by the society itself” (Pasquinelli, 2003).

By “giving voice to the voiceless” (Ardizzoni, 2008), the presence of antagonistic publics in the public sphere of media—what Warner calls counter-publics—not only enables dialogue among dominant and minority groups but it also fosters the development of and exposure to alternative practices of “embodied sociability, affect, and play” that may be transformative, rather than merely replicative of dominant models (Warner, 2002: 88). Although Warner specifies that publics do not have agency, if not at a discursive level, what they do have is the capacity to constitute a presence in the public sphere that opposes dominant public discourse and may create the conditions for social change.

Linz, Austria, September 2005: Rustle TV meets Telestreet channel Orfeotv at the festival *Ars Electronica*. While the split screen in the background blasts the images and sounds from Russel market, conversation quickly moves to what it means “to take media to a space”, whether the market or a neighbourhood. The group touches upon how television shapes the social imaginary of both countries, how to pick the right technology and calibrate interventions to on-the-ground knowledge of the sites, how to open up spaces that would otherwise be closed.

Yet, more than by any other issues, the exchange is informed by a critique of representation and participatory logics. Shaina does not believe in the “happy veneer of sharing and democracy” connected to the concepts (Anand et al., 2008: 332); there are too many layers of power relations sedimented not only in social interaction but also in the modes and kinds of cultural production for that to be effective. Like many of Telestreet’s projects, hers are about involvement and cooperation, while they are still mediated by the performance of a crew or a group of organizers (Anand et al., 2008, Pelizza, 2006).

Indeed, it is not ‘mere’ participation Rustle TV and Orfeo TV focus on —often connected to discourses about publics and the public sphere. Nor do they want to empower a group by creating a more “authentic” representation of its plight. As a matter of fact, many of the projects Shaina, Ciro and Annalisa have been involved in, think through these notions critically and forego conceptual ideas of participation to experiment with the ways collaboration plays out onsite. This often leads to devising video practices that can bridge pre-existing divides, for instance by flipping a camera viewfinder, so that gazes are shifted and redirected. Tactical and street television are not about “being do-gooders” of identity politics and representative democracies (Anand et al., 2005) but about producing a shift in the awareness of the potentialities, the languages and modes of interaction that can be explored through video and television (Ch. 5).

But what exactly does television do *in the street*? It is there to be watched together, as much as to be produced together. It is there to “intercept the vital flows of the city, interfere with them”, to manufacture the tools “to create and/or share practices of spontaneous sense-making” (Pelizza, 2006: 14). This is the concept of ‘proxy-vision’ (vision from close) on which street television is based and which opposes the more traditional ‘tele-vision’ model (vision from far). The character of this approach makes each street television channel the point of intersection between what is familiar and what belongs to the spectacular construction of TV reality, between what is normalized or codified, and what is emerging as re-claimed or as new (or not-yet-captured) (Ch. 5). Thus, “Street proxy-vision” brings the public into the private and the private into the public, yet, it does not bring the two realms closer to each other (as in “public is private”

or viceversa), it straddles them transversally, making the binary untenable.

It also has the “confusing effect” of making another dualism redundant, that between the public sphere with its public(s) and the State. The *Telestrittari* consciously abandon the presencing logic that underlies any forms of representational or participatory democracy. So that, at a closer look, a dialogue between publics, or counter-publics, and those in power, between majoritarian and minoritarian groups, is not a priority for Telestreet’s channels.

As shown in Proposition one and two, Telestreet does not position itself within political dynamics of contentious politics, nor does it aim at inverting power relations, but at perverting them. Nevertheless, this kind of relationship still informs the way in which projects like Telestreet are understood as always in opposition to a dominant formation from which to seek recognition. Foregrounding the presencing and oppositional aspects of some of Telestreet’s work pushes into the background a whole wealth of practices and ideas that emerged in Italy in the last thirty years and that are critical to understanding how Telestreet emerged (Ch. 2, 4).

Undeniably, the street facilitates various forms of communication and dialogue, it may even be, in a few cases, that it fosters democratic deliberation, if there is such thing. Still, the ‘street’ in Telestreet is not Hannah Arendt’s *agora*, nor Jürgen Habermas’ *Öffentlichkeit*. It is the street of the home-born slave, the *verna*, who has no presence in the *vita activa* of the polis (Arendt, 1998, Habermas et al., 1989). It is the street of power struggles, resistance, but also of creation, affect and play. On this street, there are no monumental buildings designed for public assemblies like in ancient Greece. The structures created around Telestreet are in fact vernacular, and so is the language that brings the *telestrittari* together.

Is it possible then, to look at Telestreet by focussing on its common language⁴ while avoiding the pitfalls of concepts such as ‘speech community’ (Gumperz, 1968, Gumperz

⁴ Language use here is taken in a broad sense to refer to a set of linguistic and non-linguistic practices that contribute to the construction of social reality and are not conceivable if not as embedded into social diagrams of power. Telestreet’s performative acts and their subject positions cannot be understood if not in relation to what they engage, create or resist.

and Hymes, 1972)? If the notion of publics is associated with a logic of presence in civic life and does not address Telestreet's social functions, the very notion of community, which is constituted through shared and essentialised identities, contradicts the premises of most forms of contemporary Italian activism.

Most notions of community function through the selective exclusion or assimilation of difference and have their roots in the German notion of *Gemeinschaft*—etymologically: “that which is in common”. These notions unavoidably lead to oppositional and identitarian forms of politics and social interaction.⁵ As already observed above, these intrinsic limitations of the concept of community are not lost on Telestreet, nor on many of the groups they interact with, who consciously seek to enable the coexistence of difference within and among groups.

Moreover, difference and heterogeneity are not only of concern to activist groups but also to scholars who are grappling with the shifting terrain of social organization. The concept of speech community itself, an important building block in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology ever since the 1960s, is now considered problematic by the same theorists who once developed it. This is because, despite enabling subdivision into smaller units, it does not challenge “the thinking on which this division rests; speech communities continue[d] to be seen as bounded, internally integrated units” (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2008: 541).

As proposition one already discussed, the analysis of Telestreet as an object of study from a perspective of space only captures its extension and position, while eliminating both the time dimension and any processes of interaction with its surroundings. Again, it is qualitative alteration, a difference “in kind from all others *and from itself*” (Deleuze, 1988a: 31) that goes missing. It is not a coincidence that in the meantime, sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists alike recognize the limitations of analyzing phenomena through concepts like speech communities because they rest on operations of diminution or augmentation, i.e. quantitative change.

⁵ For a discussion of the relationship between this notion of community and their attendant Kantian and Hegelian universalists roots, see: Casarino and Negri, 2008: 253-4-n25.

Today, language research is often marked by an attempt “to reformulate questions in ways which allow us to escape reifying language and to thereby shift our focus from object to process” (Heller, 2008: 506). So, then, in what kind of processes is Telestreet’s vernacular use implicated? And what kind of practices and modes of resistance does it harness if we look beyond concepts like publics and communities?

Reading Dante Alighieri’s *De vulgari eloquentia* [On the Eloquence of the Vernacular], Cesare Casarino unveils a conceptualisation of the vernacular that accompanies the more traditional one of language variety. Dante’s vernacular, or *locutio prima*—learned by watching and hearing rather than studying a standard—is a natural characteristic of all individuals. Thus, aside from being a specific language variety, the vernacular denotes the potential to learn a language and a linguistic practice common to all beings: “that which brings human beings in common is at once a shared potentiality for thought and for language, as well as the collective process of actualisation of such a potentiality in the first place” (2008: 9–12).

Here we are dealing simultaneously with two concepts of the vernacular: a strictly linguistic one, and a more generic one referring to present and future modes of socialization. The process of standardization of language, which was originally connected to the emergence of nation states, requires restricting and fixing the degree of variation within a system to support uniformity, and hence unity. However, variation always remains as the flip side of any standard. There is no language that does not automatically engender variation, as soon as its rules become fixed and heterogeneity is suppressed (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 101). Language use cannot be extricated from processes that render visible many power struggles over the positioning of individuals and groups in the social field (Bourdieu, 1991). In this context, the standardization of languages can be said to be instrumental in perpetrating social exclusion (originally across national borders and identities but eventually across social boundaries) by discriminating between ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ or ‘high’ and ‘low’ varieties and thereby producing a dominant majority and various minorities of speakers.

Standard languages are created by extracting constants, while vernaculars place language in continuous variation. If, following Deleuze and Guattari, there are not two kinds of languages but two possible treatments of the same language, then major and minor do not refer to two different languages but to two usages or functions of language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 103–4). This makes the distinction between majority and minority a qualitative one, rather than quantitative, insofar as it refers to a use or denial of constants for evaluation. From a quantitative perspective we can only distinguish between a majoritarian—i.e. a constant and homogeneous system—and minorities as subsystems (1987: 105). From a qualitative perspective, however, minoritarian language use refers to “a potential, creative and created” (1987: 105) process marked by a refusal of standardization and by a potential for continuous variation.

As a mode of socialization, the minoritarian position is not a mode of relating to the majority to eventually reach its power position. Rather, Telestreet’s vernacular practices are the seeds that trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorialisations of the majority (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 106) since the latter is seen as a construct that normalizes dominant discourses. In this context, Telestreet’s peculiarity lies in taking the position of a minority not as an objectively definable state but as a mode of existing in the social field. This is why the *telestrittari* make no claims to win power by eventually becoming the majority.

All in all, the process of being on the street and speaking its idiom is directed against the general tendency to control through regimenting and codifying subjects and social life (Prop. 2), and through the immanent and contextual subversion of specific uses of language that are embedded in the power structures they want to sidestep rather than confront head on. Instead of seeking to have a presence in institutional public life to create a new majority through different constants, as is the case with identity politics or representational and participatory models of democracy, the *telestrittari* exist through their practices of subtraction and variation of social norms. In fact, for Deleuze and Guattari, “Becoming minoritarian as the universal figure of consciousness is called autonomy” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 106). Chapter two directly links Telestreet with the political movement of the *Autonomia*, which developed in Italy at the end of the

1960s also in connection with French philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari, and Foucault. The remaining chapters make clearer links among Autonomist theory, the Italian activist scenario and broader socio-political issues.

Ultimately, the minor speaks vernacular while keeping its variation alive, the minor fosters a process of autonomy by which potentialities are actualised and actualities engender new potential (Casarino and Negri, 2008: 15), keeping movement alive. Telestreet is not a counter-public, it is the expression of a minoritarian use of (vernacular) language as a mode of on-going perversion of social codes and regimented practices.

Proposition Four: Telestreet is a discursive formation

There are far more ideas in the world that any intellectual can often imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant and passionate than “politicians” think. We need to observe the birth of ideas and the explosion of their force, though not in the books that formulate them, but during the events in which they manifest all their force, in the struggles fought in the name of ideas, for or against them.
(Foucault, 1978a; My translation)

How does one struggle for and against ideas? This quote is part of an introduction to a series of reportages on political struggles that the Italian newspaper *Il corriere della sera* commissioned to Michel Foucault and other French intellectuals. The collaboration took place in the late seventies: This was a period of tension, terrorism and violent police repression in Italy, and also a time of shifts in political discourses about social justice and class struggle. At that time, intellectuals in France were keenly observing the Italian political ferment, often visiting the country, or contributing to debates in newspapers and magazines. At the same time, many Italian intellectuals, who were allegedly involved in terrorist attacks or in “masterminding” the theories that inspired Italian left-wing extremism, were able to move to France and collaborate with them (Ch. 2).

So, while many intellectuals’ politico-philosophical ideas on new forms of class struggle were being singled out as having instigated violence against the Italian State, students,

artists, feminists, “proletarians” picked up, developed and incorporated some of the theories circulating at the time in their experiments with socio-political practices outside of a logic of capital. These included, but were not limited to, autonomous education or work groups, zines and journals, music, and the free, independent radios. It is in these kinds of practice that, following Foucault, it is possible to see the extent to which ideas make an impact and are able to emanate the force necessary to produce (sometimes otherwise imperceptible) shifts and transformations (Ch. 2).

In order to investigate how individuals and groups come together around ideas such as the ones above, researchers have followed Foucault’s method for an archaeological analysis of discourses, or discursive practices (e.g. Fairclough, 2003). This operation takes place through a search for “systems of statements” with particular modalities of existence that constitute a discursive formation. More precisely, archaeological analysis requires an analysis of the groups of verbal performances that come together within what Foucault calls statements, searching for regularity in the dispersion of such statements to map how they come to constitute a discursive formation (1972: 107).

Fast-forwarding to the time of political ferment in which Telestreet was born (Ch. 4), what does it mean to look at their discursive practices—the place “in which a tangled plurality –at once superimposed and incomplete—of objects is formed and deformed, appears and disappears” (Foucault, 1972: 48)? What are the discursive relations, the groups of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of Telestreet, in order to “deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc.” (Foucault, 1972: 46)?

I listen to one of the most exciting interviews about ‘the making of a media activist’ and try to think through media activism as a discursive formation. My interviewee tells me about disillusionments with crystallised and stagnant statements informing and animating local discourses on activism. He tells me of a 2003 summer camp to protest the presence of detention centres in southern Italy as a way to cure his ‘activist burn-out’ without completely disengaging from politics. We discuss the increasingly (and forever

increasing) harsh treatment immigrants receive once they are washed up on the shores of ‘the garden of Europe’, as some Italians still like to call their country.

From the late nineties on, activists have been using cameras for documentation purposes, but also as proof of police brutality during rallies. Simultaneously, the independent, grassroots documentaries available online and through activist networks have multiplied. Nicola tells me about how, during the camp, more or less by chance, he ends up with a video camera in his hands while gate-crashing a detention centre in Bari to document the infrastructure of the camp and the stories and complaints of its inmates. Still more or less by chance, he manages to hide the tape with the footage before the police destroy all visual evidence of the event. Some inmates escape. Rumours have it that one of them is now a football player, and others found work. “Alessandra, since then I could not put the camera down” (Nicola, 2008) is all he needs to say.

Already, I can isolate some statements coming from other discursive formations (e.g., about transnational flows of people, human rights, rights to citizenship, but also statements on geopolitics). These are relayed, come together, combine with other statements (e.g., freedom of communication, counter-information, critique of cultural production, the symbolic power of broadcast images, media consolidation) and start delineating a possible regularity (and shift of the statements) in what we could call media activism as a discursive formation. Telestreet’s discourses develop at the intersections between some of them and others that can be identified through further analysis.

For Foucault, statements are not phenomena of expression, they cannot be ascribed to specific unified and unifying subjects; they cannot be attributed to ‘knowing’ or ‘knowledgeable’ individuals. Rather, the latter are various dispersed enunciative modalities, they are functions *derived* from statements (1972: 54–5). Nor are statements simple linguistic units, “Far from being the principle of individualization of groups of ‘signifiers’ [...] the statement is that which situates these meaningful units in a space in which they breed and multiply” (Foucault, 1972: 100).

Statements are constantly differentiating themselves. In addition to this, statements always border other statements that constitute their external limit and condition their

enunciative function. This means that Telestreet's statements cannot be simply found in their language; that they cannot really be ascribed to the *telestrittari*, but rather situate the latter within a field of statements that are linked to practices and modes of subjectivation; and that they refer to a series of statements by adapting, commenting, countering them (and their associated field); they refer to all formulations enabled by, and whose status can be shared by that statement (Ch. 5).

Looking to isolate these elements and understand how they come to constitute a discursive formation, perhaps media activism, I watch an online video of the detention centre action (Noborder, 2003). I watch a fence, and pliers cutting it. I watch people sneaking in with their cameras and a banner. Of course, I hear them chant "No borders, no nations, stop deportation", and the detainees' answer "Freedom! Freedom!" Yet, the bruises they have from the police beatings and the metal mesh they speak through are not discursive, they are real—material. They are certainly more real and material than an abstract call to stop detention and deportations, which does not necessarily have the performative function it would like to have. And real are the soldiers escorting "aliens" out of the country or arresting (and lately releasing) the protesters.

There is a materiality to these practices that reminds us about Foucault's emphasis on another aspect of his archaeological analysis of discourse, namely the non-discursive as constitutive of the statement itself (1972: 101). This materiality does not merely refer to the actual tools, resources and communication means used in contemporary struggles for social justice. Much more than this, it plays out in the localised existence of 'institutionalised' settings in which statements create their objects and their attendant subject positions (Foucault, 1972: 163–4; 46). Here, I think of the institutions and the statements that 'create' national borders and 'aliens'. I also think of the 'material' social networks of migration and media activism with an enunciative force that enables the transformation of an anti-deportation supporter into a media activist and eventually into a *telestrittaro*.

There are other non-discursive elements, which fulfil a fundamental role in the complementary space of non-discursive formations such as the rallies and actions mentioned, with their attendant practices and the processes they trigger. For Foucault:

the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. Thus the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry (1972: 105).

Hence, there is a need to look at institutions, processes and social relations that enable the articulation of a discursive formation. Ultimately, however, this discourse can articulate and mutate in the social field only because of non-discursive practices that are external to it (Foucault, 1972: 164). Both media activism and no-border activism at the beginning of this millennium can be analysed as discursive formations, yet they are connected to actual groups and individuals, and their non-discursive practices.

How does one struggle for and against ideas? The ideas and forces Foucault refers to in “*Reportage des idées*” are microphysical power relations mutually implicated in the constitution of fields of knowledge and diffused within a social field (Foucault, 1979: 27). To be able to understand these relations at given times and in given contexts, Deleuze takes up Foucault’s concept of a diagram—the display/plane of the relations among the forces that localise power and compose both discursive and non-discursive formations: “The diagram acts as a non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field [...] and these relations between forces take place ‘not above’ but within the very tissue of the assemblage they produce” (Foucault, 1972: 36–37). Forces can only be identified through the points they traverse, so that there is no diagram that does not include certain points of creativity, inversion and resistance and which are forever changing. In this sense, diagrams function as processual maps of the (micro)relations that engender change in the social.

By analysing the “formation and transformation of a body of knowledge”, it becomes possible to avoid assigning a central position to individual or collective consciousness, to rational ‘revolutionary’ subjects. Thus, looking at how one struggles for and against ideas would explain how discursive practices emerge and how bodies of knowledge play out in behaviour and strategies which offer up a theory of society and affect that behaviour and those strategies (Foucault, 1972: 195). This is the kind of operation Foucault seems to be referring to in the introductory quote.

But what does it mean to *ask* “How does one struggle for and against ideas?” Laying an emphasis on mapping movement between objects is an ontological and ethical issue (Deleuze, 1988b: 297–98) that underlies a different way of perceiving agency in the social, as well as political knowledge. Looking at the relation between points/forces can do more than just help us understand these functions: thinking through concepts like processual mapping strives towards a practice of thought and action that uses these same objects as reference points, as “signs pointing beyond themselves” (Bogue, 2004: 334).

It understands change as an ongoing flow from which to draw and forge a series of new connections, new assemblages or mechanisms. This is why “to write is to struggle and resist; to write is to become; to write is to draw a map” (Deleuze, 1988b: 297–98). From this perspective, Telestreet may even be looked at as a discursive formation, however, what really needs to be proposed is not another definition of the project, especially if cut off from its non-discursive elements. What we want to do is to draw this map as a way to tap into, relay, interrupt, or follow and divert the lines that come to engender Telestreet for what it is, and what it can become (Ch. 5-8).

Proposition Five: Telestreet is a terrorist organisation

In the era of intangible weaponry, some of the biggest guns of all are deployed by the media.
(Toffler and Toffler 1997)

From: media@peacelink.org

*Date: January 18, 2005 8:12:20 PM EST
Subject: [Media] Terrorism and Telestreet*

*The eyes of the Viminale (Ministry of Interior) on the Telestreet phenomenon.
“Often close to antagonistic movements” (ANSA) - ROME, 18 JAN –Policing eyes on the so-called Telestreet, “street televisions” or “neighbourhood televisions.” This is revealed in the Ministry of Interior’s Report to Parliament. The chapter “Terrorism and Subversion” says that “these pirate broadcasters are often close to social centres and transmit alternative programs with the aim of creating a Global network with independent communication channels for antagonistic movements.*

*From: media@peacelink.org
Date: January 21, 2005 3:40:27 PM EST
Subject: [Media] Terrorism and Telestreet – Bulgarelli’s Response*

Security: Bulgarelli (Green Party), Viminale baffled about street tv; questioning after the analysis of the phenomenon (ANSA) - ROME, 19 JAN - "It is really baffling that the Ministry of the Interior decided to include Telestreet in the chapter “Terrorism and Subversion” in the Report to Parliament on Order and Public Security. This is the statement of Green party MP Mauro Bulgarelli who requested from the Minister of the Interior a hearing on the matter. Bulgarelli explains: “we are confronted with another move in a campaign launched by Minister of the Interior Pisanu to criminalise social movements.” The MP continues: “Street televisions are reported to be close to the social centres and part of a general project defined as “global network”. For Bulgarelli: “these autonomous, non-profit experiments should be supported and funded by the State, not depicted as dangerous breeding grounds for terrorism.” ANSA (the Italian associated press).

In their foreword to *In Athena’s Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, social scientists Alvin and Heidi Toffler describe an emerging mode of interaction and power distribution between media, governments and various stakeholders (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997b). Within these “complex coalitions”, media technological innovation—the so-called Third Wave —is not a tool but an active element formatting and shaping “networks of alliance”, or “deep coalitions”:

three nation-states, fourteen civil society organizations, a narcotrafficante here or there, a couple of private corporations with their own self-interests at stake, an individual speculator, and who knows what other components. The deep coalition involves players at many levels of the system. It is multidimensional, with all of these groups operating all the time, in continuous flow – multiplying, fissioning, then fusing into others, and so on. It is

part of a nonequilibrium order in which there may be instability at one level and temporary stability at another (1997: xix)

Although such assemblages with their peculiar combination of parts may remind us more of a screenplay for a Hollywood blockbuster than of a sociological case study, the formation above is considered symptomatic of contemporary strategies adopted by state and non-state actors to wield power.

This increased merging of diverse actors and media on the basis of political discourses, private self-interest, speculation and outright criminality becomes clearer when thinking of capital accumulation as a crystallization of power (Nitzan, 1998). That is, if we think of capitalism not as an economic process but as a social order in which the action or inaction of certain actors has a significant effect on others' ideas and practices. It is this relationship, not productivity itself that makes accumulation possible while drawing on population and technical knowledge as resources: "accumulation is an interaction between productivity and power" (Nitzan, 1998: 174; 180).

Information, and information technologies play a major role in this process and are therefore also the main focus of studies for the economic restructuring of countries and their military systems. Indeed, elaborating on some of the overall effects the recombination of human actors, resources and social forces have on larger configurations of global power systems, Toffler and Toffler (as well as Nitzan and Foucault) lay an emphasis on the development of different relationships to this knowledge for the creation or the destruction of new system of wealth:

the new system is based less on "balance of power" relations among major nations than on the ability to configure the right combination of players at every level. More important than the balance of power is the "power of balance"—the ability of a major state to keep its senses in the midst of this turbulence, and to match its economic and military capabilities with high-level knowledge resources. (1997: xix-xx)

The continuous dismantling and reforming of assemblages across social and economic domains does not merely entail the coming together of various actors to guide the stream of capital. It also, equally, implies a relation among terms—including any material and

intangible resources—to impact the development of social practices, and consequently the unfolding of new modes of collective subjectification of the population.

Accompanying these shifts in economic discourses and structures is a mutation in governmental techniques in the name of social interests. For Foucault, liberalism and neoliberalism turn politics into a mode of dealing with individual and collective interests: “the new governmental reason [...] deals with [...] interests, which precisely constitute politics and its stakes; it deals with interests, or that respect in which a given individual, thing, wealth, and so on interests other individuals or the collective body of individuals” (2008: 45).

In the name of safeguarding these interests and wealth, states also take on the task of protecting citizens from any internal or external threat. Knowledge about technology and information dynamics play more and more into the balancing acrobatics sustaining or hampering both civilian economies and global geopolitical arrangements of power. In particular, with increased access to technology, the agency of civilian in critiquing, opposing or sabotaging the dominant order has increased considerably, thereby blurring the line between military and civilian threats, between fields of struggle and control (Toffler and Toffler 1997:xviii-xix). That is, with the boundaries between war and civilian guerrilla opposition blurring, governments find themselves looking for threats outside of the traditional military and paramilitary formations.

The US-based RAND corporation offers an illustrative example of the kind of inquiries about “networked warriors,” or “civil society netwarriors,” that states are commissioning for the purpose of public safety. This American think-tank studies social justice movements on behalf of the US government with the help of sociologists hired to develop “non partisan” case studies and provide suggestions for counter-strategies to neutralize them: “Netwar is the lower-intensity, societal level counterpart to our earlier, mostly military concept of cyberwar. Netwar has a dual nature [...] in that it is composed of conflicts waged, on the one hand, by terrorists, criminals, and ethnonationalist extremists; and by civil-society activists on the other” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001: xi) The activist groups included in the list of examples for netwarriors includes campaigners for the

removal of landmines and pacifists (Zanini and Edwards, 2001). RAND's in-depth analyses underline the challenges posed by the novel character of contemporary social struggles based on information and knowledge circulation and set the criteria to discover an appropriate response. In this context, politically motivated social researchers do well to remember how their "non-partisan" inquiries could easily become tools of repression of basic civil rights.

Among the suggested strategies to deal with dissenting voices is the dismissal of all efforts to debate the political and social issues raised by civil society's organizations. Then, if the level of attention of citizens and members of civil society becomes so high that it is difficult to avoid any discussions, "counter-netwar" should be waged:

Since network designs are inherently information intensive, counterterrorism efforts should target the information flows of netwar groups. [...] Equally important, policymakers should consider going beyond the passive monitoring of information flows and toward the active disruption of such communications. [...] Increased emphasis on targeting information flows should not exclude non-electronic efforts to gather intelligence and undermine the network (Zanini and Edwards, 2001: 53).

Repression of networks constituted within civil society becomes a necessary step in the interest of the wellbeing and safety of populations, especially after the 9-11 attacks. To this end, the Italian Ministry of Interior's *Reports to Parliament on Police Activity, Public Security and Organized Crime*, issues a special section on *Terrorism and Subversion* that sets the ground to take action against (potentially) dangerous collective actors. In 2005, this section described street televisions as: "close to the squatters movement and broadcasting alternative programmes that aim at creating a global network of independent channels for antagonistic movements" (ANSA, 2005a).

In order to map the emergence of social formations we need to look for the points of intersection and clash among various forces. The emails reported at the beginning of this proposition signal a particularly complex encounter and layering of statements. They do more than simply construct media activism as a political force. In the first email, the encounter of the statements by activists with other fields of statements about the global

economy, individual and collective freedoms, law, dissent and the security of populations, takes place within a configuration of discursive relations sustained by the existence of institutions of the Italian State, together with other stakeholders and international bodies. This is how the Ministry of Interior can speak of Telestreet through statements that name and classify them as “terrorist” and be prepared to deal with them according to strategies of defense that draw on the abovementioned bordering statements about domestic or alien threats by “netwarriors” (Ch. 2; 4).

The second email reported adds further data to the analysis. Telestreet’s support by some left-leaning parties and personalities locates the project in the crossfire of institutional political battles between Berlusconi’s ruling majority and those in the opposition who not only disagree with his political agenda but also denounce the Prime Minister’s conflict of interests (Prop. 1). Green Party MP Mauro Bulgarelli is one of the politicians attempting to legalise the network’s status, recognizing its value for local communities (Ch. 5).

In his call for an investigation about the report, Bulgarelli emphasizes Telestreet’s heterogeneous composition and names it as a valuable organ of Italian civil society: “these autonomous, non-profit experiments should be supported and funded by the State, not depicted as dangerous breeding grounds for terrorism” (ANSA, 2005b). Bulgarelli also denounces the government’s attempt to criminalise social movements—a trend that is on the rise in many countries with high stakes in the implementation of neoliberal economic policies that undercut states’ social responsibilities towards their citizens.

Two sets of discourses can be seen to collide as the stakes and interests of the majority’s legitimizing their presence in the government and its opposition define Telestreet. Since the Berlusconi government started systematically dismantling the Italian welfare state to allow more competitiveness on the market and more wealth for the nation, the Italian Federation of Greens, or Green Party, has been involved in direct actions against the economic restructuring and media censorship. The collision between these two discursive formations on the same institutional ground locates Telestreet in a zone of tension between the illocutionary act of naming them a terrorist organization and valuing them as a social and cultural resource. Although never completely, the tension can only be

resolved if Berlusconi's economic policies and their attendant social values become so pervasive that certain assemblages opposing or functioning outside of this logic will no longer be able to form. This is where the media plays a key role (Ch. 3-4).

As of March 2009, the Berlusconi government approved a bill, "ddl 50-bis", which, according to its author, senator D'Alia, will "clean up the Net, especially social networks like Facebook" from any supporters of the Mafia, the Italian terrorist group Red Brigades, rapists and "any other bad examples whom we have so far irresponsibly given space" (((A))), 2009). The security package enables the Ministry of Interior and its police force to order the immediate shutting down, filtering or fining of any website allegedly guilty of apology of crimes. Internet providers refusing to collaborate will be accused of complicity and punished accordingly.

This law is indicative of an increasing tendency to transfer responsibilities among governmental bodies to speed up the implementation of protective measures for the population (and its wealth). The process is accompanied by media campaigns bringing attention to the emergence of new, dangerous actors. In Italy, as well as in many other democratic countries, any form of surveillance and control over the Internet had formerly been the responsibility of the judiciary body, rather than that of the police. Ddl 50-bis is only the latest expression of an Italian trend in the devolution of power to military bodies (Ch. 6) and local administrations. This is done in the name of security processes that undercut conventional criminal proceedings and are embedded in media panics about danger nesting among left wing extremists, religious fundamentalists and illegal immigrants. Security comes at a high risk for the freedom of expression of protected citizens.

For RAND social scientists the difficulty of dismantling (dissenting) networked social formations lies in a lack of hierarchical structures and in the suppleness of the groups' organization and practices (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001). In light of what has been explained, it seems safe to say that sometimes criminalization can be a very effective strategy to justify all repression and sabotage of opponents not deemed acceptable under "civil" circumstances. By creating Telestreet (or other activist projects for the matter) as a

dangerous object, it becomes possible to re-actualise all statements about their work and that by those participating in a network of affinity whose discourses engage economic and global social justice. These discourses materially affect activist assemblages, disrupting their functioning, while security measures are normalised. Still, the tendency to recombine and incorporate new resources can be said to thrive on the tension between being formed top-down as dangerous subjects or as commodities and the actual process of reinventing activist practices.

It is through this dynamic interaction that Telestreet directly or indirectly partakes in various forms of social actions and is (re)individuated through them (Ch. 5-7). Telestreet does not come after some discourses took hold but emerges and exists simultaneously with them. This means that it would be counterproductive for my analysis to assign antagonistic movements ontogenetic primacy over security measures, as much as claiming the opposite: they engender each other. At the same time, within the field of activism, while the reconfiguration of external forces and the development of practices of resistance reciprocally affect each other, the internal presence of political discourses and ideological positioning traverses these processes of emergence, constantly fragmenting and recomposing the formations involved (Ch. 6).

The origin of insu[^]tv, a street television channel in the Southern Italian city of Naples, needs to be understood within this framework. A splinter group from the fragmentation of the crushed post-Genoa *alterglobalization* movement in the city, insu[^]tv members, or like some call them, the *insulini*, found themselves in a “grey zone” populated by activists who could not completely identify with any discourses and debates about the movement’s future orientation (Ch. 6). Steering away from any form of strict organizing and pre-defining identitarian principles, the *insulini*—video camera in hand—coexist, conjugate and connect (Foucault, 2008: 42) with the most disparate assemblages, ranging from parishes and fair trade associations to No-border organizations (Ch. 6-8).

In his analysis of neoliberalism, Foucault (2008) talks about a move from a dialectical frame of reference to what he calls a strategic frame that enables the coexistence of apparently contradictory elements and discourses. This logic informs not only

contemporary activism but especially pervasive modes of governmentality: “A logic of strategy does not stress contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity. The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms, which remain disparate. The logic of strategies is the logic of connections between the heterogeneous and not the logic of homogenisation of the contradictory” (2008: 42). Toffler and Toffler’s description of assemblages echoes this analysis.

Similarly, *insu^tv* coexist, conjugate and connect on a plane, or map on which there are no dots that indicate their position—their closeness to or distance from others. To coexist, conjugate and connect are the modes of an anti-dialectic, strategic logic that establishes the possibility of connections between disparate components and among different assemblages without promising a resolution in their unity (Foucault, 2008: 42). This is not only a theoretical shift from *position* to *relation* but, especially, a practical move from position as organization in movements to *composition* as a mode of socio-political relation (and consolidation) among heterogeneous elements (Ch. 6). As mentioned in proposition one, relations have ontological primacy and engender the points at their ends.

I heard it in the squat’s TV studios, in the hospital room where one of the *insulini* works. I was reminded of it in the graphic design coop where we sometimes met: “we are not a collective, we are a connective”. There are a thousand different ways to connect and assemble and there will always be something that goes wrong, that will force re-composition of different elements or materials available, taking their specificity away (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 258–9). How does *insu^tv* compose, pose together, ‘*composition*’? How do they connect, disconnect and reconnect (Ch. 6-7)? What are the ways to engender the new, once filiation and hierarchies are no longer useful modes of organization and evolution?

For Deleuze and Guattari, social change works through connection and contagion. This means that the emergence of social assemblages is not to be seen only in linear terms of evolution from one less differentiated thing to a more differentiated one. Rather, according to a process that they call involution, it *involves* the creative formation of a

block “that runs its line “between” the terms in play and beneath assignable relations” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 239). This form of emergence takes place through the connection of biological, social and technical components, rather than simply from the interaction of the different levels that lie between actors on one end and society on the other. The bio-social-technical assemblage gestures towards insu^tv’s political potential for experimenting with social relations and individuating through them: an antenna, a roof, a camera or screen as interactive interfaces, neighbours and neighbourhoods, piles of garbage, a difficult socio-economic context in a disadvantaged area of Italy, and so on, and so on (Ch. 6-8).

Contagion and epidemic are often strategies adopted by terrorist organisations. Yet, while those are the last nihilistic gesture against something that can no longer be resisted (Baudrillard, 2007), insu^tv’s experiments are a joyful practice that engenders new social life in ways that compose and spread through contact—contamination. Telestreet is not a terrorist organization, not yet anyway, since the struggle to name the different is ongoing and is fought on all sides as a struggle to compose or decompose social assemblages.

Proposition Six: Telestreet is a form of political subjectivity

A television screen: antennas, people and TV sets overlap to the sound of fast-paced electronic music while echoing voices proclaim:

Our aim is to create the conditions so that anyone can cease to be a spectator [...] becoming an active subject of communication [...] a warm and sensual wave to resist the rhythm of hyper-production [...] democracy is not the showcase of what is possible, it is the experimentation of what is possible [...] to spread knowledges, to resist we don’t need so much abundance, all we need is communitarian tools [...] a way out of the present catastrophe [...] to connect the circuit of independent auto-productions in a territorialized web with short-range micro-transmitters [...] we need tools [...] frequencies, community spaces [...] we need to build this web, we shall call it Telestreet [...] (Telestreet, 2003).

In the summer 2005, the Telestreet corner, shared with the internet-based video archive NewGlobalVision was showing this short film in the Lounge of the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria. Telestreet and Ngvision had just won the Ars Electronica “Award of Distinction” for the category “digital communities.” Not unlike the numerous passers-by who stopped to watch curiously, their footage had caught my attention two years earlier at the Transmediale Festival in Berlin. Now, with my video camera in hand, LCD flap open, I am helping document their festival encounters. Watching their interaction and the images on the TV through my little camera screen does not add one more layer of separation between “me, the researcher” and them—the spectator and the spectacle.

The screen sucks me into the event: it does not set a boundary confining me to my (institutionalised) subject position. Neither does it constitute a border to cross, marking my movement from one position as researcher to another as media activist. The material, the liquid crystals and plastic of my LCD constitute a virtual limit, they do not signal a passage, they beckon me to always pass. Through this limit, I do not focus on my starting point but on the gesture of “being about to overcome” (Revel, 1997: 38). The screen sets up a relation to what is on the other side of it.

My holding and pointing of a camera requires a transgression, an (ongoing) attempt to displace the space-time where I am transfixed as a subject attached to the dominant field of signification. No longer a researcher, not for the first time an activist, I do not simply add up to activist-researcher. This experiment with social relations and meaning-making is a form of politics because to talk about politics is also to talk about processes of subjectivation, or individuation. More precisely, any experimentation with assemblages directly addresses the issue of subjectivity. ‘Subjects’ are engendered within the bio-social-technical assemblage of ‘modernity’ and its capitalist axiomatics, while agents link up with other agents through specific practices to re-pattern their subjectivity, individually and collectively (Proposition two).

For psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, a subject, or subjectivity, are the residual elements of processes of subjectification that unfold through an ongoing relation to alterity. He

proposes a broad yet inclusive definition of subjectivity: "the set of conditions that make it possible for individual and/or collective factors to emerge as a sui-referential *existential territory*, adjacent or in a determining position to an alterity that is itself subjective" (Guattari, 1996: 196). This production of subjectivity implicates intersubjective human factors that become apparent in language, as well as suggestive or identificatory factors originating from the use of technical objects, developed in institutional contexts, triggered by "universes of non-corporeal reference" such as music or the arts (Guattari, 1996: 196).

This means that although my relations to the outside are governed by factors such as my family background, the customs of the countries I lived in, the laws I am *subject* to, the academic norms I endorse, etc., subjectivation functions as a collective process. Here, "collective" refers to a multiplicity developed beyond myself, both on the side of the *socius* and on my pre-verbal side. In the last case, my relation functions more through affects than through any specific logic (Guattari, 1996: 196).

Every individual and group find their orientation along reference points that are cognitive, but also mythic and ritualistic, and condition our relation to our affects, our anxieties, and our attempts to manage our various inhibitions and drives (Guattari, 1996:197). Among all elements, the "political" struggle for subjectivity can be seen as claiming the right to "difference, variation and metamorphosis", where the subject is a focal point of resistance, created on each occasion, on the basis of subjectivated knowledge and bending on power (Deleuze, 1988b: 105–6).

As in proposition one, we are giving ontological primacy to the process of emergence, while the 'subject *position*' is regarded as a 'by-product'. Still, the ontogenesis of the social *and* of its subjects, and what becomes socially and culturally determined are co-terminous and constantly affect each other. This focus on processes of subjectivation as a relation to alterity avoids a classification of individuals according to social categories, which do not reflect their genesis but only allow access to the final product (Simondon, 2006: 198).

The social itself is thus conceptualised as a system of relations: “a system that implies a relation and sustains it” (Simondon, 2006: 175). Again, the relation between the individual and the collective is not pre-given, but is exactly what emerges and shapes both terms through interaction. In other words, individuation, both personal and collective, takes place through practice. What I become when I look through my camera can only unfold through *what I do* with Telestreet and in the act of writing this text.

Guattari and Simondon are certainly not the only ones to point at information and communication technology as important factors in processes of subjectivation, resonating with memory and social intelligence but especially with our sensibilities and affects. Yet, they are among the few who do clarify that this is not mechanistic causal thought *à la* McLuhan. The limit set by the camera or TV screen is certainly not the only one that helps Telestreet’s experimentation, yet it is one of those thresholds past which *different* relations and conceptions of subjectivity and alterity are engendered, not determined, with the aid of technical objects.

This is because the screen is both connected with the time-space in which we are present, and it also has to go through a virtual limit where the outside can once again be folded in (Foucault, 1998). By folding along the line between the two planes of “reality” separated by the interface, the subject engaging with Telestreet can re-actualise the influence of the medium of television onto herself. This is an important objective of the project, as the shouting mainstream TV host declares in the “Telestreet” video: “[Inserted commercial film footage of a TV presenter in front of a screaming crowd] This is mass folly, you are all crazy, for God’s sake you are real, it is us who are only an illusion” (Telestreet, 2003).

Thinking beyond the cliché idea of a blurring between producer and consumer, we abandon the much heralded birth of the “prosumer” characteristic of nineties techno-determinism. Many of the Telestreet nodes are not “prosuming” information. They are not creating to consume but are creating the conditions for modes of relation that draw on technology to creatively set the ground for new encounters.

As Sandro Verna from insu^{tv} explains, much of their work aims at stopping “the spiral of silence”, the feeling of isolation that people have when they are not aware of the

existence of others that share the same views, and to whom they can relate (Verna and Renzi, 2005). Against this isolation, insu[^]tv constantly connect, disconnect, incorporate, synthesise and assemble together every element available that can sustain their work (Ch. 5). As Guattari emphasizes, what is important is not the final result but the fact that this experimentation coexists with processes of subjectivation, by reterritorializing the means of production of subjectivity (1996: 198).

Telestreet's combination of television, technology and the Internet with their video-makers and media activists exceeds the creation of a network and any other imposed scales between communities, borders and other imposed boundaries, new and old subject positions. Telestreet is not a form of political subjectivity, it is a (changing) set of practices, experimenting with social relations indissolubly connected to processes of subjectivation and collective individuation. To talk about subjectivation through action is to talk about politics.

Conclusions

Looking

What has my lens grinding allowed me to see? What was the effect of repeating this same gesture over and over? I squinted and ground: Telestreet is not a social movement but it brings up the question of movement within the social—it tells us about social change as relation, and about the possibility of talking about and intervening in these relations. As a member, the case study of Telestreet/insu[^]tv is a useful and familiar entry point into an analysis of the Italian non-institutional political field because it enables me to talk about social struggles, while still participating in them.

Telestreet is not simply a tactical media practice that engenders power inversions. It enables the strategic perversion of the dominant role of communication, as well as the creation of a multiplied reality through the reverse engineering of informational components and social habits that produce new forms of interoperability. That is, Telestreet can be looked at as a set of practices that move us away from a simple critique

of the spectacle of television and of the celebration of techno-power to facilitate the creation of forms of sociability. The focus on the production of relations, rather than on the (albeit temporary) tactics and discourses against dominant powers contributes to a genealogy of the project while bringing to the fore its pedagogical elements.

Telestreet is not a counter-public. It bypasses oppositional politics as a mode of publicity in a society of control and opts for a vernacular, minor status that keeps the process of power perversion and reality creation open and in ongoing interaction with political economic forces. Telestreet may be described as a discursive formation. However, Foucault's analyses of discursive and non-discursive formations animating political struggles calls for a *practice* of processual mapping of social relations, rather than for theoretical prowess in representing groups. Processual mapping exceeds traditional modes of representational descriptions to facilitate new creative connections between theory and praxis; knowledge production and agency; social research and political struggles.

Telestreet is not a terrorist organization. Rather, the battle for the legitimization of projects like Telestreet unfolds through discursive and non-discursive practices that play out in a field of power relations that decompose already individuated bio-social-technical assemblages and (re)compose new ones. Looking at *insu^tv* as one outcome of Telestreet offers an example of how these recompositions are also affected by a kind of contagious experimentation that draws on past political practices and discourses while adapting to changing external forces. Finally, beyond crystallizing the static subject position of 'media activist,' Telestreet opens up a space for political experiments with assemblages that cannot be isolated from a discussion of and from the actual process of subjectivation. Subjectivation cannot be separated from the practices that enable it; this is not limited to political actors but also draws attention to the agency of the activist researcher developing alternative modes of being in the field.

Reflections

Lenses help us see well but they also reflect. My choice of starting with lenses and with Spinoza originated from and sparked a series of reflections and refractions. First of all, whereas all objects of research can be defined through *propositions*, the mapping of relations is linked to the concept of *composition*. More precisely, the use of propositions in philosophy has mostly been connected with a statement, which defines a predicate of a subject or object as either true or false. After having moved away from looking at Telestreet as an object of research, each proposition was invalidated as neither true nor false but it engaged a series of compositions and connections made among various elements and terms of the analysis. Setting the stage with the first proposition, we went from position to movement to look at social change from the perspective of a cartographic mapping of relations.

Second, for Spinoza, bodies, and I include collective ones, are composed by their affects. That is, they are defined by the way they affect other bodies or are affected by them; by how they enter in composition, engendering creation or destruction (Spinoza, 1992). His focus on processes of change from the perspective of relation unavoidably leads to an analysis of the practices developed by single individuals as well as groups to affect and be affected. This operation not only addresses the relationship among Telestreet's members, and between Telestreet and the outside, but it also and especially extends to my relation to my work with them and to the milieux in which all of the above unfolds. Disregarding this last aspect would not only be disingenuous but also methodologically unsound, given my theoretical framework.

Third, the relation among composing forces and their folding into individuated assemblages does not only address the results of my work but my own subjectivity as soon as I enter into composition with the Telestreet groups. In particular, my experience of working with insu[^]tv during my work in Naples and the long distance collaborations have affected (and are affecting) me in ways that can only be rendered in the process of composing this text, with the intention of creating a relay between my existential territories, our collective frames of signification, my professional and political commitments, etcetera, etcetera. The latter include consciously considering my own subjectivity from the perspective of its production.

Finally, in the winter 2008, I witnessed the death of Telestreet. The network exhaled its last sigh in a couple of tired emails that exhorted all the listserv members to pull the plug from a comatose body full of sad affects. Euthanasia can be the best treatment to avoid watching the slow decomposition of Telestreet at the hands of internal friction, inertia, lack of resources and the disappearance of many of its nodes (Ch. 5). The agony had been already going on for a while, yet this made me want to continue the work I started even more.

This is because although some *telestrittari* are now caught in a finger-pointing stalemate of sad passions, and some have simply moved on, a few channels survive, thrive, and make this story a worthy story to tell. Worthy, not only because Telestreet has been an experiment that opened up a space in the imaginary of many, and not only because the story of insu^tv is a story that needs to be told in the spirit of contagion and epidemic. Telestreet's story, like many others that came before and are yet to come, is emblematic of the life cycles of activist projects from which we can learn the limits and potentials of being together in productive ways. Moreover, the story of Telestreet has to be told because it is in the act of telling it that something new can emerge. In this context, I apologise to those who may find themselves confined to marginal roles in a (unavoidably partial and subjective) narration of events, since this will not be the story of how they created Telestreet but of how Telestreet created them, and others like me.

Refractions

Naples can be a nightmare of a city. With its density of population, faulty infrastructure, high unemployment and criminality rates, and lack of resources (Ch. 6), life its not easy. However, (permanent) crisis makes people creative. Insu^tv is just this, the miraculous effect of passion and desire in the face of difficulty. There is one word, I find, that sums up the creative momentum of this group: *repurposing* (Ch. 7).

In his discussion of processes of individuation and the emergence of bio-social-technical assemblages, Simondon talks about technical objects. A technical object expresses

mediation between man and the natural world. This technical mediation is unveiled when a certain kind of culture of technology grasps its effective reality and implications for human beings and the social field in general. However, despite its potential to affect social dynamics, the technical object reproduced and marketed by industries loses its “surreal value.” Anesthetized in its daily use, it effaces its singularity and potential. As a mere tool, the technical object does not have the same meaning for the individual: It is appropriated by society, it takes on a specific role, it is normalised and loses its dynamic essence (Simondon, 2006: 251–3).

Still, it is possible to rediscover an object’s essence by drawing on a specific sensibility and creativity —technological taste— that enables us to move beyond its function as a tool (Simondon, 2006: 263). When endowed with its technological aura, the technical object can inspire a reconfiguration or creation of assemblages. Insu^{tv}’s practice of repurposing can be understood in this context, as the ability and act of drawing on the aura of technical objects to create something new. This is Telestreet’s practice of reverse engineering and interoperability pushed to its limit and it is not confined to the re-use of material resources for logistical purposes, for ecological reasons and for cutting down costs—or for the displacement of power dynamics.

Repurposing functions on multiple levels because it consciously facilitates encounters and exchange (Ch. 7). The *insulini* can be said to recognise in the technical object’s aura the possibility to re/invent their role as a “connective.” For instance, I do not see the documentary on the illegal dumping of toxic waste in Naples as simply the work of a group of media activists trying to remedy a lack of information about this issue (insu^{tv}, 2009d). Much more than this, as we will see, *Wasting Naples* is the outcome of years of activities and support on the territory and one more occasion to bring people together around issues that affect them directly.

Moreover, these encounters often create an interest in the insu^{tv} project and spark invitations and ideas for collaborations. The *insulini* recognise and size up the potential for repurposing this “surplus energy” into new modes of affection. Information production and distribution are repurposed; the momentum of creative repurposing takes

on a contagious force (Ch. 7). Importantly, insu^{tv}'s openness to process and change, their refusal to maintain rigid structures, and the ongoing reconfiguration of the collective territories in which they situate themselves are first of all a way to persist as individuals: they are not inscribed in any programmatic political strategy (Ch. 6).

As a system continuously individuating herself, the individual is always in a metastable equilibrium (Simondon, 2006: 232). In a rather Spinozian move, Simondon discusses the acceptance of and engagement with the metastability of certain structures (that include the individual) as an ethical comportment towards ourselves and others: "ethics is the sense as well as the direction of individuation, the sense of the synergy among successive individuations" (2006: 229). This is the line that informs the connection between subjectivity and politics, and it is only at this threshold, at this limit as an ethical frontier, that it becomes possible to repurpose the social field for politics.

CHE CENTO FIORI
SBOCCINO
CHE CENTO RADIO TRASMETTAN
O

CHE CENTO FOGLI
PREPARINO

Un ALTRO

'68

con ALTRE

armi

(A/Traverso, 2007)⁶

Chapter 3

Books, Radios and D.I.Y. Factories of Desire⁷

The madness of creativity: a brief history of the 70s

A young man, a soldier, is taken to the psychiatric ward after refusing to leave his sentry post once his shift is over: he shall remain on guard for as long as he has any strength left. During the ten days under medical observation the soldier is passive, yet claims to be fine. The only problem is his uncontrollable impulse to remember and sum up car number plates whenever he sees any. The doctor that releases him from military duties compliments him on “having learned the lesson well, if he is faking” (Bifo, Interview). Indeed, the man’s performance had been very successful; his diagnosis is a perfect case of obsessive delirium, the fruit of hard reading labour.

It is 1974, one of his friends gave Franco a book by a French psychoanalyst who looks at

⁶ [Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred radios transmit, let a hundred pages prepare another '68, with different weapons.]

⁷ The conversations used in this chapter took place in Bologna in the summer 2008 and in Toronto in March 2009. Franco Berardi (Bifo) and Ambrogio (Giancarlo Vitali) were among the founders of Radio Alice in the 70s and of OrfeoTv/Telestreet in 2002.

the world from the perspective of a patient (2008). Indeed, Felix Guattari's *Una tomba per Edipo* (1974) proved to be a great book to learn to "play mad" and get out of the compulsory military service. "During my experience, I understood something about schizo-analytic thought", he tells me, "that folly—madness—entails a strong element of choice, of desire, of intention, and construction. [...] I started seeing Guattari as my saviour" (Bifo, Interview).

Three years go by, and Franco, this time on the run to avoid prison, invokes his "Saint Guattari" once more. Like many of his comrades, he is hiding in Paris, where he goes looking for Felix.

When I tell the story like this, you see, it says nothing, but if we follow the thread of madness, things take on a different meaning [...]. My encounter with Guattari was like a kind of cry for help. I was like a patient searching for help but not to get out of madness, like Breton says: 'It is not the fear of madness which will oblige us to leave the flag of imagination furled.'⁸ In a sense, it was a reversal of the fear of madness. Madness should not be scary, madness seen as delirium, from *de-lire*, to exit, to get out from the reading, from the structure, from the text... Madness can be a way of finding your way... (Bifo, Interview).

The ideas Franco is referring to are articulated in Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, the first volume of "Capitalism and Schizophrenia," published originally in French in 1972, and Italian in 1975. The book had made its way to Franco's prison cell, during another unfortunate accident in March 1975, when he was accused of having placed a bomb in the headquarters of the Christian Democrats. Franco was subsequently acquitted (Berardi (Bifo), 2008: 3) but reading *Anti-Oedipus* left a mark on him, as it did on many other political activists who read it in that period (Berardi (Bifo), 2008: 3; 145). In my interview with him, Franco places special emphasis on the fact that reading *Anti-Oedipus* enabled him to operate on the basis of a new conceptualization of political subjectivity and agency. Overall, the book had very important implications for the development of alternative practices of cultural production and political militancy in the

⁸ André Breton. "Manifesto of Surrealism," 1924.

seventies, especially in Bologna.

The idea of ‘madness’ as a source of creativity, as the ability to use signs not just for signification but as affective devices and platforms for experimentation is premised on a different conceptualization of the unconscious. No longer seen as the hegemonic theatre of signification, the unconscious is presented as a factory in which a-signifying elements are invested with meaning and functions (only) in contexts and through practices. When harnessed, these elements partake in a process of subjectivation. More precisely, the role of the sign moves away from fixing a signifier to a signified, and from establishing an interpretive relationship with the imaginary and the symbolic. Attention to the sign is diverted from discovering links with the unconscious/conscious and becomes an option to affect constituent elements of social reality (and ‘reality-perception’), relaying processes of subjectivation and socialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983 [1972]; Intro: prop. 6).

Drawing on Charles Pierce and Louis Hjelmslev, Deleuze and Guattari describe the sign (and language) as entirely immanent and socially determined by stratification. This complicates any binary correspondence between signifier and signified, between form and substance, content and expression (and between semiotics and pragmatics). Of course, there is reciprocal presupposition of the terms. Yet, a double articulation moves the sign and the unconscious, thought and subjectivity, away from any identity/hierarchy-based grids in the direction of a differential relation, at each strata of the sedimentation (1983 [1972]: 240–62, 1987: 39–74). In this sense, movements of double articulation and differential stratification refer to a dynamism that requires the interjection of external elements to trigger change, before it crystallizes at the next level of signification. Through the transversal infiltration and connection of external elements, it becomes possible to pragmatically shift the collective flows of signification and communication.

Between 1975-76, Franco co-founds *A/traverso* [transversal crossing] with a group of intellectuals from Bologna. This collective publishes a cultural and political agitation pamphlet that reflects on the possibilities of a critical use of the media (A/Traverso, 2007: 10). This publication attempts to elaborate new languages and forms of expression to sabotage traditional communication flows. As with their name and their slogans, *Anti-*

Oedipus' words echo throughout their work: the denunciation of the sadness, oppression and irrefutability of traditional (Oedipal) family structures, of the laws of the economy and of the sign. Against all this, *A/traverso* celebrates the interjection of desire as a productive force that can abolish "the split between sign and life, let loose the signifying subject [...] in the outrageous space of practice" (2007: 11–12). It calls for new socio-cultural arrangements based on love, friendship, the pleasure of being together, since practicing collective happiness is seen as a subversive act in itself (A/Traverso, 2007: 53).

In this context, desire has very little to do with repression or pleasure. While pleasure is only a temporary interruption of desire, the latter is an assemblage of drives that constitute what is commonly perceived as 'an individual' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983 [1972]: 35). This is a positive conception of desire that refutes the transcendent, idealist or psychoanalytic approach to desire as lack—the drive to fill a lacuna and procure pleasure (e.g. Plato, Hegel, Lacan). Instead desire here moves in the direction of 'desire as production' (e.g. Spinoza). In fact, for Deleuze and Guattari desire can only be understood as a category of production (2004: 232), hence the subtitle to their volumes "Capitalism and Schizophrenia", in which the role of production within libidinal and political economies is analyzed from the two perspectives.

Drives determine how we think, and the subversive connection between a political economy of the social and a libidinal economy of desire is one in which desire and affect are productive of collective subjects: "desire is revolutionary by nature because it builds desiring-machines which, when they are inserted into the social field, are capable of derailing something, displacing the social fabric" (Deleuze, 2004: 233).

A/traverso, as a 'desiring machine,' combines different elements and reinserts them into the social in a new configuration. The newly imported, more sophisticated technology of the off-set press is combined with text and fonts rearranged from the mainstream press, and of course, with many words, ideas and readings from books pushed to their limit of signification. The resulting colourful and chaotic lay-out, *A/traverso*'s form of expression doubles its form of content in which it is still possible to see the collage of concepts and

ideas. In the result is an open invitation to join in a play of language and thought compositions. As is the case with the books they got their hands on, the material encounter with the magazine also had an effect on those who read it. This encounter did not occur at the level of meaning but was also a sensory one. *A/traverso*'s affective function opened up new possibilities for social connections through experimentation and autonomous cultural production.

Radio Alice's techno-social wonderland

The story about the 60s and 70s in Italy is also a story about books, not because they can help us understand their history and political turmoil but because the books, together with the people who wrote and read them, can be said to be actors, important, indispensable elements in the concatenation of ideas, technology, practices and events. Like the viruses described in William Burroughs' stories that inspired activists like Franco, these books travelled across borders. They were translated and read collectively and in connection with other ones, with the realities in which they appeared. They produced new political and aesthetic options.

Like a virus, or a book, the first issue of *A/traverso* introduced the collective as a small group in multiplication (2007: 10). What is more, this group did not limit itself to making words proliferate on paper but announced events that "will reinstate life in place of the economy" (2007: 10): actions but also situations for affective encounters and proliferation. Radio Alice, one of the first independent radios in Italy, was born from one of these encounters that brought together: Lewis Carroll's heroine, a cheap military transmitter, the *A/traverso* people and many other things at a time that were conducive of experiments in communication. It is worth mentioning that the abovementioned political movements included many artists, intellectuals and cultural producers, highly educated but relegated to the margins by a conservative cultural system (Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 25). For this reason, apart from using the newly developed typesetter for the development of independent, DIY magazines and presses, as well as radio, artists and activists started experimenting with video (Betamax and VHS) and audio recorders. Video in particular was used for the first time to document the protests and political events of the time, or to

experiment with the fusion of art and politics. The documentations include works by Pier Paolo Pasolini and Alberto Grifi (see: Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 77).

Radio and television in Italy had been under State control until 1974, when the Supreme Court declared this monopoly unconstitutional, enabling the birth of the so-called ‘free’ radios. Within a year from this ruling, the Italian airwaves were already populated by 150 free radios, and by the end of 1976 there were 1500 (Orrico, 2006: 5), run mostly by youth eager to infiltrate a mediascape that left very little if no space to their needs and tastes. However, this opportunity was not only seized to finally air the newest international developments in music and counter-cultures that had captured the imagination of young Italians. It also catalyzed activists to reflect on the role of communication in political practice. Many radios became the voice of the students’ and of the young workers’ movement, which was active on the political stage from the late 60s to the end of the 70s. It is in that climate that some of the radios that are still supportive of the extra-parliamentary Italian left were created, for e.g. *Radio Onda Rossa* in Rome, *Radio Sherwood* in Padoa and *Controradio* in Florence.

The institutional Italian Left, especially the ICP (Italian Communist Party), traditionally opposed the privatisation of the mass media for fear of a capitalist take-over of the communicational superstructure. In contrast, the groups active in the free radio movements recognised the potential of the medium and in general of communication technologies more generally to bypass the control of a clerical and conformist Italian culture.

If there is a buzzword that characterises the mixture of aesthetics and politics of the 70s, it is certainly Radio Alice’s “*Mao-Dadaism*.” The old Dada utopia to abolish art and life by blurring the distinction between art and daily life was enacted through new forms of communication. More precisely, for *Mao-Dadaists* the practice of proliferating communitarian situations that use pervasive and polycentric communication technologies rethinks the relation between socialization and production outside the capitalist system (Moroni and Balestrini, 1988: 604–5).

Communitarian indeed was Radio Alice’s approach, insofar as it promoted an existence

outside of the conventional logic of individual identity (A/Traverso, 2007: 14). The latter is discussed, for example in Deleuze's book *The Logic of Sense* (1969), through the example of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* (Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 78). As an alternative, the radio crew attempted a process of collective subjectification that was all-inclusive, while retaining all elements of heterogeneity. Alice's founders kept their editorial role to a minimum, and opted for an "open mic" concept instead of a program schedule. This brought together different ideas and people without losing their identity, since the radio's mandate simply consisted of representing "the movement of differences" at a time when identities were very strong (Ambrogio, Interview).

Similar to the magazine they published, composed with chaotic layouts and playful texts, the experimentation with alternative uses of language and structures was one of the main tools of Alice's subversive *Mao-Dadaism*. Humour, satire, fake news, music, rants, avant-garde literature and anything else that people brought to the programming were interspersed with direct phone-in interventions from the audience. This ground-breaking feature, one that will be soon adopted by the mainstream, opened up the microphone to multiple narratives—from policemen to sex workers, from nurses on night shifts to street cleaners (Ambrogio, Interview)—and quickly made Alice into a reference point for many *Bolognesi*.

The openness and euphoria that characterised 1976 were legitimated by a series of positive political events that included an electoral victory of the Italian left against the Christian Democrats (with their oppressive ties to the Vatican), the end of the Vietnam war and a series of successful opening of autonomous "young proletarian centres" throughout the country (Berardi (Bifo), 2007). However, behind the radio's carefree façade, there laid the drama of a generation of youth torn by internal political friction and external government repression.

As I explain below, the sixties had been a period of intense economic and social change. The government, while making promises, had not been able to address this change with suitable reforms. By the end of the 60s, Italians started questioning the values and

organization of their society, and grassroots collective action spread among schools, universities and factories, and eventually all over the country (Ginsborg, 1989: 404). While some educational reforms and a higher standard of living had rapidly increased the number of men, and especially women, continuing their education, the school and university system were not functional enough to cope with the new numbers of students, who eventually started protesting in 1967-8.

These material problems were combined with a critique of the older generation's values, such as traditional family structures, authoritarianism, individualism and uncritical consumption; to engender the movement of 1968, which in Italy, while not as strong as in France, lasted for nearly a decade. Distancing themselves from rigid forms of communism, and not unlike their counterparts in other parts of Europe and North America, both Italian students and workers celebrated new forms of music and art, free movement and travel and counter-cultural fashion styles.

Many also shared an interest in alternative models for gender roles and sexuality, as well as a concern for peace and social justice. These had reached Italy through socialist political struggles in Latin America and China, and through ties with the US. Above all, the Vietnam war contributed to shattering the Italian myth of the United States as a country of dreams come true to show its imperialist power. The new image and role model became the rebelling universities, the hippie communes and the Black Panther movement (Ginsborg, 1989: 406–9).

After the intensity and cohesion of the 1968 revolt all over Italy, at the beginning of the 70s some political groups dissolved, and many of the people involved in political organizing went through a period of disillusionment, inactivity, depression and solitude. Alice's founders belonged to the dissolved political organization *potere operaio* (Workers Power, 1968-1973) and spilled from the latter into new politico-aesthetic experiments.

Sitting in a house in Bologna's old historical centre that saw so much of the political ferment and upheaval of the time, Ambrogio told me about the birth of Radio Alice and political militancy at the time: "there were a few years of silence, years made of many

discussions, many doubts, many deaths” he pauses. “Many deaths, mainly by heroin, by police bullets. My very first girlfriend was shot dead in a Turin bar, basically executed by the *Carabinieri* (Italian military police) because she had become a *Prima Linea* [Front Line, an armed militant cell, similar to the Red Brigades.] militant, well, she had gone underground...” (Ambrogio, interview). Ambrogio is referring to the armed struggle against the Italian State that brands the history of that time as the *anni di piombo* (years of lead):

The movement became fragmented, we went from spending most of our time together to clashing in a hard way, some decide to take up arms, some of us decided that that could not be the way. [...] What happens is that a twenty-five year old, like me, loses his friends. Some disappear; they go underground, some overdose. At the age of 25 you experience what usually happens to someone who is 70 or 80, because friends die of old age or illness. They were tough years. Now, the discussion divided those who decided to face life with weapons and those who decided to do it with words, because this is what the dilemma was really about...this created a difficult situation where, for instance, my friends called me traitor because of my decision to take up words. The same applies to the group that was behind Alice. So that, to start Alice at that time was not only an idea that turned out to be beautiful, and reasonable, but it also represented a choice that did not only have to do with politics but with our daily life in general. [...] You have to imagine groups of people, men and women, who had lived together, had all woken up at six in the morning to distribute fliers outside the factories, boyfriends and girlfriends...and then this sudden, violent separation. Our decision to start Alice was a choice that brought together once more long friendships and loves; it was a deeply important choice. Some others, those who had made a different choice even tried to stop us [...] I am telling you these things because I am sure that Franco and the others haven't. These are things that are rarely told. When Guido Chiesa started his interviews to make the movie about Alice,⁹ I realized that these things are never told, but they are very important. This is one of the things that are not told, that that situation had created a sort of war: friendship had turned into betrayal, love into hate (Ambrogio, 2008).

By telling me about the time when the Communist Party took his membership away from him because it considered Radio Alice a hideout for terrorists, Ambrogio helped me

⁹ (Chiesa, 2004)

realise the importance of this radio project. Four flatmates, Ambrogio, Luciano, Stefano and Paolo, and some friends and lovers, faced with a choice between weapons and words chose the latter: a life choice. The desire to be on the part of life and creation: this was an opportunity to resist State repression with words for many of those trapped in the dregs of heroin, passivity, or violence. What is more, Alice also became a constituent element of a small techno-social revolution, or better, *revolt*.

Social unrest had been building up for years, 1977 started under the aegis of violent clashes between demonstrators and police. The past had been marked by a harsh government response against workers and student protests, and in 1975, the Christian Democrat (CD) government passed the ‘Reale Law’ that enabled the police to shoot and kill any time they felt a threat to public order. A year earlier, other laws had already increased preventative jail sentences to 8 years and targeted individuals in possession of weapon-like items and garments that may be used for disguise.

In the first 15 years under the Reale Law (nr. 152 on 22/5/1975), the Italian security forces shot 625 people (254 dead and 371 wounded), of which 208 had not committed and were not about to commit any crimes (Centro di iniziativa Luca Rossi, 1990). These tactics did little to reduce State opposition and kindled more protest fires. In March 1977, a Bolognese student was shot dead by the police, during a protest. The event triggered three days of riots, which only ended when Minister of Interior Francesco Cossiga sent tanks into Bologna.

Because of the combination of radio and telephone, Radio Alice’s function surpassed simple reporting about the clashes. After an initial call denouncing the shooting—a few minutes after it took place—the radio became a coordination mechanism for the riots. By night time, the police raided the studios, confiscated the transmitter and arrested those who could not flee. Thirty years after the events, police chief Ciro Lomastro, reflects on the efficiency of Alice’s bio-social-technical assemblage (Ch. 1: Prop. 5): “they were better organised than us. We had our walkie-talkies but it was one-to-one communication [...] they sent instructions to everyone who had a transistor radio, collected information through the phone calls and broadcast them. Incredibly efficient” (Smargiassi, 2007). If a

revolt is a failed revolution, the seeds had been planted for the guerrilla communication that will become full-fledged from the 90s on (Ch. 4).

Exodus, autonomy and composition: Autonomia

It is not possible to understand contemporary Italian activism without revisiting the political ferment and violence of the 70s and there are various terms that describe the movements that developed in Italy from the mid 60s onwards. I have chosen to use *Autonomia* to avoid confusion and because it tends to sum up an important aspect of the relationship between politics and subjectivity within various social formations. In its most generic sense, the word autonomy refers, first and foremost to a disenfranchisement from party politics, orthodox Marxism and from mediation with the state as a political strategy. Its more subtle inflexions will be discussed below. The term ‘workerism’ (*operaismo*) is also often used, albeit more in connection with the wave of labour struggles that took place before 1968 and in which the student movement played a minor role.

Understanding the originality of the so-called *Autonomia* movement is important for a series of reasons. First of all, because the ideas and practices that broke down traditional modes of political engagement reached a threshold, after which they will come to us under a different guise. In fact, though not simply a direct causal filiation from this past, the ideas, the activists, and autonomous media of today’s Italy would not make sense if we did not pass through the same threshold and followed this mutation.

This means that we need to understand the reasons for the exodus from spaces engaging with traditional politics at the institutional level to completely autonomous sites for politico-social practices, that started in the 70s and characterizes the present (Ch. 4). Second, this exploration is important because to look at the conflicts of that period means to map relationships among the cultural, technological, economic and political events that engendered those changes. Finally, to look for the seeds of the present in this troubled past also enables us to unveil the importance of certain practices and discourses whose connections are often ignored because of a seemingly indissoluble and problematic link between political ideas, the use of organised violence and the increased sophistication of the State’s repressive apparatus of dissent.

The first decade after WWII was marked by endeavours to rebuild Italy whose economy, for the majority, still consisted of a backward agrarian sector and some small, technologically outdated factories and small businesses and shops. With the help of the United States through the Marshall Plan for reconstruction, and with the Italian financial sector protecting the currency (as well as ongoing austerity measures and hard working conditions), it became possible to complete huge infrastructural public works, gear up for resource extraction, develop the car manufacturing, heavy and petrol-chemical industries and increase the internal demand for goods (Ginsborg, 1989: 283–93).

In the 60s, huge numbers of young people who did not cross the ocean in search of better lives were flocking from the poor south to the north of Italy. Here, the construction boom and the factories—whose technological innovations now required unskilled labour (e.g., for the assembly line)—were contributing to the so-called “economic miracle.” While Fordist automated production of goods and consumption became the two pivotal points of the economic growth of western countries, Italy too enjoyed increased wealth and became an important player in the economic field. With the end of protectionist policies at this time, Italy’s diversifying economy fully integrated into expanding European markets by setting up to deal with the competition. Yet, while the economic miracle made Italy into an important international economic actor, it also widened the social and economic gap between the North and South of the peninsula.

The reconstruction effort was accompanied by a stalemate in the Italian Workers movement, during which the institutional left and the managerial classes worked together to prevent any form of labour struggles. The lack of support for factory workers later became one of the main points of critique against, and eventually rupture with the ICP, which chose a moderate line of cooperation with conservative parties to stay in power (Borio et al., 2002, Moroni and Balestrini, 1988). This, together with animosity towards the ICP’s disengagement from the needs of the workers, and the dissociation of many workers from communist-framed ethics of labour as duty and a mode of emancipation, factored into the specific form of the political groups to come.

Factories, together with schools and universities, fostered a generation of youth

demonstrating a marked antagonism towards the rigid social structures they inherited and optimism towards the possibilities for social change. Here too, the feeling was fuelled, among other things, by the introduction to Italy of foreign literature and philosophy, by an attention to the emergence of social movements and struggles outside their borders (e.g., pacifism, feminism, anti-colonialism, the Black-Panthers and later the gay and lesbian liberation movements), and by the contact with counter-cultures like the beatniks, hippies, and later punks and drop-out cultures.

Migrants from culturally different, poorer zones of the peninsula, the young workers from the industrialized North (whose fathers' belief in the advantages of a collaboration with the bourgeoisie had been shattered), the students and intellectuals connecting with them, all became the protagonists of the intense political struggles from 1968 onwards. These groups started interacting already at the beginning of the decade and eventually set the stage to reframe the theoretical basis as well as the practices of communism outside of party and union structures (Moroni and Balestrini, 1988: 20–30). Works like *Anti-Oedipus*, discussing and criticizing the theoretical tenets of the time—Marxism and psychoanalysis—are very important actors in the socio-cultural shifts that characterise the 60s–70s. Yet their analysis and use cannot be properly grasped without talking about the journals that played a catalyst role in the development of a new form of Marxism.

The pages of journals like *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks, 1961–65), *Classe Operaia* (Working Class, 1964–67), *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power, 1969–73) and *Rosso* (Red, 1973–77), to name a few, were the canvases on which political theory and analysis on the new economic conditions, cultural models and subjectivity of the worker mixed with a critique of the institutional communist credo, producing shapes unseen so far. Much of the cultural work of the journals mentioned revolved around researching and understanding the composition of the new class of workers and their relationship to the local capitalist system. The journals tried to map the hidden modes of struggle in the factory as constituting and revealing the organization of capital at that given moment (Ch. 6). Here, sociological inquiry played a major role, through the activity of *conricerca* [co-research] or *inchiesta* [inquiry] (Alquati, 2003: 6), functioning as an interface that harnessed

theoretical reflection and the actual experience of the workers, thus facilitating contamination and innovation on both ends (Moroni and Balestrini, 1988: 38).

While Marx's *Das Kapital* still functioned as a staple text, a creative reading of the *Grundrisse* is what enabled a basic re-conceptualization of the figure of the worker and of the relationship between resistance, labour and production (and technology). Rather than as an objective analysis of capitalist development, the two books were read as representing the point of view of the worker, who ought to reflect on the historical stages of capitalism and understand their intrinsic forms of bourgeois antagonism to devise suitable strategies of emancipation (Moroni and Balestrini, 1988: 38).

Marx's analysis of the technologization of the production process had rendered manifest a separation of labour into mental and menial that spoke to the economic context of the period. In fact, the economic development of post-war Italy had deeply affected the social fabric, giving birth, among other things to (equally exploited) specialized workers and the so-called unskilled *Operaio massa* (mass worker). In particular, Marx's concept of the *Gesamtarbeiter* (total worker)—i.e. the combination of the workforce for production—paved the way to rethink exploitation as inherent to the production process (rather than to specific modes of labour).

Attention then, moved from labour to the worker: while part-workers are paid individually for the production of goods, their social role in the production of absolute surplus value is neither recognized nor remunerated (Marx, 1961: 531–2). At the same time, the valorization produced through their assemblage, exceeding the sum of the goods produced while still only actualized in the production process, points to a reciprocal presupposition of workforce and capital. It points to working class agency to enable or prevent production—to 'become' capital or to divert their cumulative force towards the production of other forms of value. Against the traditional ICP line, Mario Tronti was one of the first thinkers to invert the idea that class struggle can only take place once a certain level of economic development has been reached. Rather, he advocated for ongoing class struggle that reoriented the production process and forced capital to adapt to workers' needs (2006 [1966]).

More importantly, since at this stage of capitalist development, social relations are entirely subsumed by capital, society itself is seen as an extension of the factory and an articulation of production. This is one of the theoretical breakthroughs that led to the conceptualization of the “social factory,” a concept that still plays a fundamental role in the discussion of contemporary modes of struggle against capitalist exploitation (Ch. 3). Within this framework, antagonism is displaced from the factory to the social level through a refusal of participation in the process. A cooperative articulation of time spent outside of the capitalist production process becomes the explicit practice of resistance, especially after 1968, and then all the way to the present. In the words of Antonio Negri, resistance against capital becomes a “movement of productive co-operation that [...] presents itself as the refusal of capitalist command over production and as the attempt, always frustrated but not less real, of constituting an autonomous time” (2003 [1997]: 73).

The refusal of work becomes the line out of capital in order to subordinate labour to the needs of the working class. This practice dovetails with a belief in the possibility of more equal distribution of work to increase the development of a general social knowledge, or general intellect, that is also partly connected with technological innovation (Marx, 1973 [1857-8]: 706). Ultimately, the social liberation of the subject can only take place once an awareness of her own agency “within the contradictory structure of the relations of production” is reached and time can be devoted to alternative practices of self-valorisation, and hence of subjectivation (Negri, 1999 [1979]: 160–63).

Un-figured, on-going, autonomous struggle immanent to capital’s dynamic: this is where the meaning of Autonomy goes beyond a disengagement from institutional politics to refer to the autonomy of the worker from capitalist development (through self-valorization of needs and desire). It refers to the main characteristic of the subject in a communist society in which she has control over her own multilateral productive potential (Negri, 1999 [1979]: xxx). Autonomy stays open to directions that can only form *during* the struggle, rather than before it.

This libidinal economy takes shape against the power of capital and of the State as a fundamental element in the composition of a class of resistant subjects in radical and irreconcilable opposition to the majority. For nearly two decades, the part-worker increasingly detaches herself from the part-owner to enter a process of re-subjection (Borio et al., 2002: 72–3) through a long period of production sabotage, factory and university occupations, permanent assemblies, wildcat strikes, and auto-reduction of prices for transportation or leisure. In general, much time is devoted to the theoretical analysis and development of alternative forms of socialization to exit the rigidity of inescapable subject positions and the context they play within.

This generational-‘anti-social’-technologically-equipped composite is defined by Alberto Asor Rosa as the “*seconda società*” (Asor Rosa, 1977). A ‘second society’ made of students and young factory workers, feminists, the unemployed, organised political groups like *Lotta Continua* or *Potere Operaio*, and in general, youth and outcasts, thriving in their alterity and marginality. Many of the practices that originated between 1960 and 1977 are marked by a strong desire for the creative development of an autonomous infrastructure for cultural and social production; by a lack of prefigurative goals of the struggle and its vision, if not contextually; by a constant attempt to undermine normalised language and modes of expression as is the case with *Mao-Dadaism*; by the exploration of sexuality that with the aid of contraceptive technology, countered the influence of the Catholic Church. The 70s are also the time of the legalization of divorce and abortion.

This is the time of the first “centres of the young proletarians”, what will later become the CSOA’s (Ch. 4): squatted houses that run communes, self-managed initiatives, laboratories for counter-cultures and counter-information; spaces of aggregation against the isolation of young people and the valorisation of free time. This is the time in which humour, irony and parody become important tools of critique and contestation. This is also the time of the *indiani metropolitani* (metropolitan Indians)—groups of protestors that used humorous, non-violent tactics to contest the seriousness of politics, constantly redefined the limits of language through Situationist and ‘Mao-Dadaist’ practices. It is a time where, in general, the tactics of avant-garde artistic movements and new philosophical currents seeped into daily life mediated through independent music,

journals, radio and other means of circulation, reaching a broad public (Eco in: Moroni and Balestrini, 1988: 608–12).

By 1968-9, the CD government attempted to put an end to a decade of successful workers and student struggles. The so-called “*strategia della tensione*” (strategy of tension) brought together the secret services and collaborating fascist groups to undermine the movement’s credibility through a series violent terror attacks.¹⁰ By the early 70s, police repression; the weight of the oil crisis; unaddressed inflation and unemployment; as well as an attempted fascist *coup d’état*¹¹ moved discourses about the relationship between subjects and the State from one of exploitation to one of domination. This condition, for some, could only be overcome by force.

As the ICP came even closer to moderate politics through the “Historical Compromise” with the CD, armed cells like the *Brigate rosse* mushroomed across the country. The steady escalation of conflict among *Autonomia*, State and fascist movements reached its peak in 1977 with protests in cities like Bologna, Rome, Genoa, Turin and Milan and eventually culminated in 1979. That year, the kidnapping and killing of DC president Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades triggered a witch-hunt that put entire groups of intellectuals, together with activists, behind bars. In his analysis of the relationship between Italian politics and violence, the “Anatomy of Autonomy” (El Kholti et al., 2007), Bifo makes a distinction between forms of violent struggle when necessary for action (picketing, occupations, taking to the streets) from the militarization of the movement through autonomous armed cells, i.e. terrorism. This distinction clarifies the paradoxical connection between Radio Alice developing as a project that takes up words rather than weapons, and the Radio’s support of the Bologna riots in March ’77.

¹⁰ For more information on this issue see for e.g.: Philip Willan, *Puppetmasters: The Political Use of Terrorism in Italy*, London: Constable and Company, 1991 and Giuseppe De Lutiis, *Storia dei servizi segreti in Italia*, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1984(1994).

¹¹ The reasons and dynamics behind this attempt are yet not clear. After a series of harsh sentences, the appeals to the trial, which connected the fascist group with the government, its secret services, the Free Masons and the mafia ended up with an acquittal of all the individuals involved (apart from some jail sentences for illegal weapon possession). For more information see: Gianni Flamini, *L’Italia dei colpi di stato*, Newton & Compton Editori, 2007.

In September '77, a convention against repression brought together 70,000 members of *Autonomia* groups (and international intellectuals interested in the phenomenon) to rescue the movement from its crisis. The event merely resulted in the re-emergence of an old fracture on the forms of political organization, and left the groups ill-equipped to produce any alternatives to the “armed struggle” and to their own looming (and nearly total) demise (El Kholti et al., 2007: 160).

The debate between Luxemburgian *spontaneisti* (spontaneists) and Leninist *Organizzazionisti* (organizationists) had been an underground force that shaped and re-shaped the various groups of the movement ever since its beginning. On the one end of the continuum were those who refused any kind of structures that shaped the movement from the inside, and who opted for complete self-organization based on the needs of the class (Rosa-Luxemburgists). On the other were those who advocated for a clear political direction of the movement to reach political mediation with the dominant powers (Leninists). Moreover, the movement was never successful in conceptualizing “spontaneous organization” or in developing any cultural and social strategies that drew from the heterogeneity of political movements—rather than merely political structures (Borio et al., 2002: 99–101). This hard to theorise relationship between class subjectivity and political subjectivity is still a major part of the debates and tension that shape the movement in the present (Ch. 6).

The escalation of violent actions permanently etched a homology between terrorism and Autonomist political practices in the collective imaginary of Italians. The condemnation of the entire movement took place despite the fact that the make-up of groups like the Red Brigades was shaped by a rigid adherence to Marxist-Leninist dogmatism, distinctly Stalinist in theoretical-political grounding. Similarly, their actions were cut off and independent from collective class struggle, increasingly setting them apart from the development of *Autonomia* (El Kholti et al., 2007: 160). The reasons for the use of the expression “the years of lead” to sum up a movement that involved hundreds of thousands of people in the most heterogeneous activities and lines of thinking, go deeper than a simple value judgment regarding some modes of struggle.

In fact, while the police and the legal system fulfilled their function of ‘establishing order,’ it was the sensational coverage by the media that steered public opinion about the events. The rampantly pro-government media disseminated contradictory, unfounded accusations against thousands before they could be legitimated by the judiciary. It hid proof of secret services’ infiltrations, stool pigeons and unjustified life jail sentences and it even became the target of Guy Debord’s bitter irony:

Italy is also the most modern laboratory for international counter-revolution. Other governments, coming out of the old bourgeois democracy, “pre-spectacular” in nature, look on with admiration at the Italian government for the impassiveness which it can maintain at the tumultuous centre of its degradation, and for the calm dignity with which it sits in the mud. It is a lesson which they will have to apply in their countries for a long time to come (El Kholi et al., 2007: 98).

And while many countries did indeed learn the lesson, the Italian government perfected its skills. More spectacularly than even Debord could have fathomed, on 23rd October 2008, in the midst of clashes between the police and protesters against the privatization of Italian universities (Gelmini Law), the ex-Minister of the Interior Francesco Cossiga gave an interview to the major Italian newspapers about the current violence against protesters (among which were elderly teachers and school children). Cossiga reminisced about the successful strategies of his term in office, and advised Prime Minister Berlusconi to reduce police presence in the streets and in universities, infiltrate the movement with agents provocateurs “capable of anything” and let the demonstrators destroy the city. Once public opinion is against them, “the sound of the ambulances should cover up that of police sirens, [...] beat them up [*the protestors*] and also beat up all the teachers that support them [...] maybe not the old ones but especially the young female teachers [...] indoctrinating our children” (Cangini, 2008). To the suggestion that these may be fascist practices, Hon. Cossiga retorted that he regards his method as a “democratic recipe” justified to nip terrorism in the bud.

The use of the media and of the state of emergency as tools for repression not only succeeded in boosting the public image of the government but especially set the stage for future confrontations between state powers and demonstrators (Ch. 4; 7). As the next chapters will show, this model also shaped the government’s strategies for dissent pre-

emption and repression during the Naples and Genoa global social justice protest in 2001, and the migrants and garbage revolts in 2008-10 in Naples.

L'absence d'oeuvre

To write about politics in Italy in the 60s and 70s, we could have started anywhere. No matter what the entry point, it is never possible to capture the variety of experiments and ideas that characterise that period. There are far too many theorists, too many collectives, too many factories and university occupations, and too many dead, imprisoned or exiled. I chose to navigate this map of events in the wake of some books because the ways in which books functioned take us to sites of social change that historical or political-economic analysis could not so easily reach.

What I here called *Autonomia* (or autonomist activism), for the sake of gross simplification, indissolubly links the constitution of a polymorphous socio-cultural-political configuration to a re-composition of the subjectivities of its intellectuals and activists—which are no longer kept separated by a Gramscian conceptualization of the organic intellectual (Gramsci, 1971). How many layers can be added to a genuine attempt to bring theory closer to praxis, and what happens in the process of doing it? As with the past we just looked at, and with the present described in the next chapters, the possibilities of layering are open and plentiful.

Autonomist activists invested in reading and criticism, using theory to incite action while thinking theory through political experience. Their break with former models of political culture explicitly unfolded through a search of sources and connections beyond the humanities into the fields of social science and techno-scientific culture (Borio et al., 2002: 49–50). Sociology—in particular field-work— became a foundation stone in the methodological and epistemological base of the immanent “cultural labour” (Alquati, 2003) required to produce change.

Yet, there is more: knowledge and cultural production were not only prioritized due to their properties and use value but also because of their structures (as determined by capitalist functioning). Overturning the functioning of knowledge from control and

exchange value to a productive force that consciously looks at the modes, the procedures and the instruments of its unfolding has the effect of modifying the epistemological and operative structure of knowledge itself (El Kholti et al., 2007: 168). In addition to the refusal of work as a strategy against the total subsumption of productive forces and the valorisation of desire as a force for producing change, we can add here a refusal of thought (as intellectual labour) without contradicting what has been said so far. Indeed, since, as we saw above, “Delirium [...] madness can be a way of finding your way” (Bifo, Interview), the connective synthesis of refusal of work and ‘of thought’ doubles the bet of self-valorisation.

As Eleanor Kaufman elegantly explains in her book *The Delirium of Praise*, madness has often been equated with the absence of work (*l’absence d’oeuvre*), insofar as it is a language that merely folds onto itself while producing either nothing, or too much (2001: 63; 82). Madness, ‘delirious cultural production,’ can be seen as a choice to undermine the authority of sense as established by capital’s axiomatics, and thus as a refusal of production altogether, as was the case for instance with Radio Alice. Beyond (capitalist) production or reproduction, thought and creation only function “as thought from the outside” (Kaufman, 2001: 79), that is, they only function as a reading, a folding of others’ works onto themselves: the *de-lire*, i.e. the exiting from the structure, takes place in the conversation ensuing.

This “beautifully inoperative (*désoeuvre*)” (Kaufman, 2001: 82), delirious conversation on the outside of thought does not unfold merely at the level of signification (the saying nothing or too much) but also at that of the event. It functions as an unexpected encounter that shocks into thinking, when least expected. This encounter can take place *in* (i.e. while folding into) the thought of the madman, the thought of fairy-tale characters, that of the avant-garde, or of the proletarian seen through the work by a political economist long gone. It is (t)here, that Autonomists linger, loiter, assemble but refuse to produce new thought. It is in this refusal of the fetishism of the new that thinking differently, or differentially, becomes once again possible (Kaufman, 2001: 83). And it is within these very encounters, with the materiality and language of books but also of the radios and

journals, that a process of subjectivation unfolds and proliferates in practice and thought, in the singular and the collective, transforming one.

While prior discussions of cooption and of societies of control (Intro: prop. 2) now seem to render futile, or simply naïve the attempt to produce knowledge that is not automatically reinserted in the circuit of ‘culture industry’, there is still much to learn from the madness of *Autonomia*. Of particular urgency is a discussion about the flourishing of an academic industry that churns the force of many ideas into hollow knowledge products. Very little can be done against capital’s power of capture, and academia is no less a site for this process than many others.

While so much work on post-structuralist, post-Marxist, Autonomist ideas is emptied out of its dynamic capacity for affection and of its political charge, we do well to remember how a little madness can enable us to function in-between production and reproduction, and thrive in the absence of work. In a review of a recent symposium featuring many eminent Autonomist theorists, anarchist anthropologist David Graeber generously describes a potentially ‘shamanic’ or ‘prophetic’ function of their work, after a critique of many of their ideas (Graeber, 2008). Although their theories may have faults, our energy should not be wasted in sterile critiques that sell so well on the shelves of bookshops and on resumes. As Graeber and many others have shown, it is possible to take inspiration *in* others and think *from* their work.

Chapter 4

Differential Accumulation: Berlusconi and Political-Economic Power

Thank you for this statement. I was indeed a little mad [...] true wisdom does not come from reason but from a farseeing, visionary folly, I believe guided me throughout this political adventure.
(Berlusconi, 2009)

Power is confidence in obedience (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 398)

On September 24th, 1974, an attractive young woman, chosen among the secretaries of the *Edilnord* Construction Company, announces the birth of the cable television channel *Telemilano2* (Gambino, 2001: 105). Four years after broadcasting to the “satellite city” that Berlusconi’s company built on the outskirts of Milan, this channel settles into the city-wide airwaves under the name *Telemilano 58*. By 1979, Silvio Berlusconi has accumulated enough capital to invest more money into the mass media than any other entrepreneur, exploring the still uncharted territory of post-State-monopoly broadcasting.

Two and a half billion Italian lire is indeed an incredibly high sum of money for an investment with unpredictable capitalization in the newly liberalized broadcasting market. Still, the right to 300 TV-premiere movies bought from bankrupt Titanus Productions can be easily sold to the many local broadcasters blooming throughout the country¹² (Gambino, 2001: 105). What’s more, it is possible to bypass legal restrictions on the local broadcasting radius by intervening in the perception of space itself.

It must have been his often-flaunted passion for philosophy more than his law degree that led Silvio Berlusconi to understand space and its geometry differently from his business

¹² In 1978 there were 434 private television channels (Barbacetto, 2004: 38) Today there are 1800 local TV channels in the 20 richest countries in the world. Of those, 1/3 is in Italy and 1/3 in the USA (Di Toro, 2008).

competitors. In fact, although many still see space as an absolute construct acting on its content while not being altered by it, in this Leibnizian turn, Berlusconi redefines space as emerging from the relations among the entities that constitute it (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 278). From now on, his business career will no longer be marked by Euclidian-style measurements, as with his construction work. Berlusconi's new topological inspiration builds on the structure of space *as* space (*topos*) and on the essential structure of figures despite their continuous variation. This means that the soon-to-be richest man in Italy is no longer concerned with measuring metric space in absolute terms. Rather, he composes spaces that, like patchwork, have connections or tactile relations, they are amorphous, smooth but not homogenous (Plotnitsky, 2003: 99–102). This is how, Berlusconi's incipient broadcasting career smoothes the striated space of local television into a manifold of national broadcasting. Berlusconi's approach consists of simply recording his newly acquired movies on VHS tapes and mailing them to the local channels that have signed up into his network. In exchange for competitive prices to transmit the movies, all these local channels keep identical schedules, offering synchronized programming across the nation, and showing advertising from Berlusconi's other communication venture, *Publitalia*—already edited into the tapes containing the shows.

Manifolds can be explained as a kind of patchwork of (local) spaces that can each be mapped through Euclidean-based coordinates while the overall structure, or coordinate system, cannot be translated into Euclidian terms. Simply put, a manifold cannot be treated as containing homogeneous geometries because not all the points are the same. Yet each point can be considered homogeneous in its own way. Mathematician Bernhard Riemann talks about differential or smooth manifolds whose distance between points can only be metrically defined through differential calculus (Plotnitsky, 2003: 101–2). The passage from a purely mathematical approach to a more conceptual and philosophical one takes place through a move from manifolds to assemblages. Similarly to manifolds, assemblages can be made visible by mapping the potential relations among various terms and the processes of actualization through which they come together without assigning a specific value to each term (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). This operation can map the relationships among human, non-human actors, and different *foci* of political, historical,

economic, cultural and social forces underlying specific struggles for the accumulation of power and capital—as well as the resistance to said accumulation at given times and in given places.

Not unlike Riemann's space of manifolds, Berlusconi's nation-wide television assemblage is a collection of heterogeneous pieces not attached to each other. Every local channel is a fragment of the national space. The manifold character of this assemblage can only be defined in terms of conditions of frequency and accumulation of their parts (Plotnitsky, 2003: 102). From this angle, the Italian mediascape can also be analyzed by looking at the connections with other parts that continuously characterize and inform them, enabling many modes of (differential) accumulation. In particular, in order to understand how the shifts that took place in the eighties and early nineties crystallized at the turn of the new century, it is necessary to look at the relationship between Berlusconi's business career, Italian culture, political institutions and organized crime. Berlusconi's empire accumulated over more than three decades, and this illustrates perfectly how the power to generate profit cannot be isolated from a structure that includes both corporations and governments as one and the same (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 8). Importantly, the ongoing consolidation of power into the media tycoon's Midas hands (and into those of his associates) is also the story of the rise of the new dominant Italian entrepreneurial class and of Italian neoliberalism. Looking at this political economic context enables us to provide an analysis of the formation, transformation and opposition of organized power under capitalism in Italy (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 327).

Berlusconi is often considered a key historical agent of change in Italian society. This is because he has gained ontological primacy as pre-existing and engendering the shifts I engage in this chapter by being disconnected from the broader field in which neoliberalism unfolded nationally and globally. However, the meaning and value of the story of Berlusconi's rise to power, as well as his topological approach to business (and politics) lie in using his figure as an entry point to understand the relation among disparate terms that come together and engender what could be called 'the Berlusconi assemblage.' Contextualising his story makes explicit how figures like Berlusconi emerge as the product of a specific context while they can reap (political and economic)

benefits by claiming to be responsible for change. Moreover, from this perspective, Silvio Berlusconi merely functions as a metonym for a broader assemblage that is characteristic of our times (Ch. 2). This particular assemblage folds together the general geopolitical and economic shifts that I have previously associated with neoliberalism, changes in Italian party politics, the institutional and social reactions to the 70s political climate of protest (Ch. 3), the rise of organised crime as an economic stakeholder, as well as developments in technology, the expansion of the entertainment and financial sectors, to only mention a few.

This chapter will be informed by the theory of differential accumulation, not only as it pertains to the processes through which the Berlusconi assemblage came into being but in relation to the kinds of practices that obtain and consolidate power. Finally, the questions posed will pertain to the strategies, conflicts and contradictions informing discursive and non-discursive formations of this assemblage (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 327). Understanding the emergence of such elements, and how they interact with each other can help us map the field of relations within which certain forms of power affect social structures, as well as help us think about new political strategies that address political and economic powers simultaneously.

I argued in proposition two of chapter two that it is possible to understand change from disciplinary societies to societies of control by laying an emphasis on the shifts from a product-based economy—that is factory production—to immaterial production. However, this analysis already presupposes a dynamic interaction between the economy and society in the form of ‘social production’ (Ch 2). By focusing solely on the concept of production it becomes harder to identify some of the points of intersections among the forces that make up both the economy and modes of government.

In this account, the state and the economy remain two separate entities that may or may not interact. Alternatively, it is possible to start from ‘capitalization’ and consider it not merely as an economic category, but as “an encompassing mode of power.” The real power of accumulation here does not lie in productivity itself but in “the ability to subjugate creativity to power” (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 217–218): that is, in the ability

to harness creativity and, knowledge, and thus productivity, to accumulate power. Not every owner of assets can differentially accumulate. The great majority of people own assets for their use and survival. It is the owners of financial instruments, those who can afford to accumulate, that have power over others. These do not function individually but as a group/assemblage, because forces in the economy limit the agency of single capitalists. This is why corporations and corporation-government alliances are a profitable strategy (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 314).

Both disciplinary and control societies' modes of governmentality bear on profitability in different ways, depending on the dominant material or immaterial economic structures that characterise them (Deleuze, 1995). Yet, in both systems, any kind of earning will be the outcome of a struggle among dominant capital groups to shape and restructure the direction of social reproduction in order to create the conditions for capitalization (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 218). Hence, the latter is precisely what drives struggle and change, especially since many actors aim at increasing, rather than retaining, their relative capitalization. As a mode of power, increased capitalization means increased power to transform society, and since the accumulation of power is never absolute, but always in a relation to other powers, the concept of the differential becomes useful (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 309; 312).

The higher or more predictable the profit with respect to competitors, the more 'differential power' is accumulated through a quantitative redistribution of ownership—with qualitative repercussions on the distribution of power (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 325). To return to 80's Italy, elements like religion, communist or autonomist ideologies, organized crime and violence, the law, the state of technology and modes of production, labour relations or television programming and other forms of cultural production all influence the differential level of earnings. Discounting these earnings into capital values turns elements like the ones just listed into parts of capital, thereby commodifying power and making the line of demarcation between politics and the economy untenable (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 9).

It is dominant capital that determines the possibilities of accumulation and is in constant

conflict with small firms to maintain their differential power. Small firms tend to maximize in absolute terms—i.e. they aim to reach capitalization benchmarks—whereas dominant ones tend to undermine and sabotage them to be able to consolidate power. In this context, accumulation takes place by limiting access to resources through laws and norms, by excluding others from the game and by taking away the power from them. This operation often requires ‘distributional coalitions’ in which different actors come together to increase their chances to accumulate, (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 315), hence the strong link between governments and corporations that characterises neoliberalism. In other diagrams this kind of exclusion may be due to rigid social norms and conventions such as class or gender.

Generally, because of the hegemonic character of the neoliberal doctrine, small firms still believe in the free market and criticize government intervention, believing that under conditions of absolute freedom they would be able to capitalize more (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 315–319). This is the case with the small business owners that support the secessionist/federalist party *Lega Nord (per l'Indipendenza della Padania)* [North League (for the Independence of Padania)] and are part of the Berlusconi government coalition. They are staunch opposers of the super-state structure of the European Union and strong believers of the power of the free market.

Processes of differential accumulation constantly shift the positions of the actors involved and usually revolve around a cohesive group connected through tight business deals and through government agencies. The connections are enabled by a complex web of regulations, contracts, and shared worldviews. Since industrial production is deeply embedded into more rigid disciplinary diagrams of power, it is finance that functions the best through these complex webs of fluid relations. Finance, best exemplified by the fluidity, mobility and power of corporations, thrives in societies of control to the point of controlling and limiting industry for its own differential gains (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 319). As already mentioned in chapter one, societies of control are marked by diffuse forms of hyper-connection, control and surveillance in which life answers to the logic of capital. Those who accumulate the fastest end up at the top, as is the case with Berlusconi. Here, more than a single person, Berlusconi should be considered as a

multinational brand, since his empire has the agency of a transnational corporation that is fragmented only to bypass control.

From rags to riches: undoing the Berlusconi myth

Silvio Berlusconi begins his career in construction in the late 60s, during the economic miracle. He is soon able to build entire suburban neighbourhoods and shopping malls, pooling together considerable amounts of investments—often from mysterious Swiss banks accounts and companies (Barbacetto, 2004, Gambino, 2001). He also seems to have no difficulties in receiving any building permits and even succeeds in deviating flight routes from one of the construction sites, for the peace of its future dwellers.

From this point on, his career is marked by the continuous creation and relocation of sister companies registered under relatives' or friends' names. *Fininvest*, his main (investment) company, is created in 1979 to coordinate and organize this fragmented empire and is soon after divided into 23 to 38 holding companies, to save money on taxes, and to avoid transparency during financial operations (Barbacetto, 2004). With a seemingly endless flow of cash, Berlusconi's activities start branching out into finance and insurance, the entertainment business, advertising, publishing and television that are emerging in the Italian economy, in resonance with other western countries. In all these sectors he beats the average accumulation rate by bringing his competitors to their knees through rock-bottom prices and takeovers, differentially accumulating at a higher and faster rate than his competitors.

By the early 1980s he has purchased two more channels (*Italia 1* and *Retequattro*) from two of the major publishers in the country and is able to wage war against the Italian public service broadcaster RAI. The first battleground is the field of advertising, where *Publitalia 80*—*Fininvest*'s advertising wing—offers such low advertising rates for his TV network that it enables even small companies to access this market. In the 1990s, television advertising had only been open to businesses with enough capital to meet the high investment costs demanded by RAI. With the arrival of Berlusconi, advertising becomes such a bargain that one would think *Publitalia 80* is heading for a financial

crash. Yet, because the frequency and accumulation of ads during each show on its channels is unprecedented and the introduction of American movies and series through the VHS tape system allows nationwide distribution, Berlusconi steals RAI's audience and surpasses the average accumulation rates.

Fininvest started thriving during dark and depressing times: at the peak of the brutal repression of social movements, and during the fragmentation of the political scene due to terrorism and heroin abuse, while the spread of organized crime seemed uncontrollable. To make things worse, inflation was on the rise and the country's economy has entered into recession. Nitzan and Bichler demonstrate how, contrary to what is commonly thought dominant capital thrives during periods of inflation because there is a redistribution of capital from small to large firms. This is also partly due to the ability to raise profits faster than it takes for wages to catch up (2009: 370–5). Indeed Italy's economy once again found wind in its sails.

In the 1970s, the State had sustained industry with subsidies and increased public spending. The low exchange rate of the Italian currency had stimulated exports and increased demand for national products, triggering growth and inflation. In the 1980s, both Europe and North America started seeing the decline of industry that moved to developing countries and the consolidation of corporations and oligopolies through the implementation of neoliberal policies. Italy too invested in service-based and immaterial economies, contributing to the expansion of the tertiary sector.

During the period of passage from industry to business, under the aegis of the Craxi government, one of the first systems to go was the so-called *scala mobile*, a mechanism that automatically raised wages in relation to prices. Now Italians had less money and more time to spend at home. Moreover, due to police repression and drug-related crimes, the streets no longer felt safe to many, who therefore preferred to sit comfortably in front of a TV. Fininvest's *Canale 5*'s motto aptly sums up the climate of the times: “*Corri a casa in tutta fretta, c'è Canale 5 che ti aspetta*” [Hurry, hurry home, channel 5 is waiting for you] (Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 28). In this climate, Berlusconi's cutthroat competitive strategies met the needs of both investors and of audiences looking for

entertainment, and easily overtook RAI's role of "family sitter." As an alternative to austere and conservative television programs, the new channels offered the latest movies; the sappy romanticism of soap operas and thrills of TV series; the best TV hosts that had jumped ship, and countless variety shows and quizzes. The superficial and carefree nature of this programming immediately captured the Italian imaginary and contributed greatly to a climate of "cynicism, opportunism and aggressive hedonism", exemplified in one of the biggest successes of the time, the television series *Dallas* (Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 28).

While the economic prosperity of the 80s was reflected in the television programs that reached Italy, the restructuring of the economy that had started at the global level was also reflected in what was called the "second economic miracle" (Ginsborg, 1989: 547). 1980 opened with a defeat of the Unions by FIAT's industrialist that will permanently achieve the upper hand over workers. Thus, while some Italians were only left with the spectacular, consumption-oriented and predominantly sexualized television programmes as compensation for the drab reality they were immersed in (Ch. 5), many others were able to enjoy the opportunity for new investments and wealth. The new investments and wealth were stimulated by the flourishing global economy, lower oil prices, and increased exchange of goods, as much as by the backdoor deals taking place in the government offices and palaces. Together with the 'secularization' of culture from the church on the one hand, and from the religion-like doctrine of the communist party on the other, a new generation of socialist politicians emerged. They took away the power from the old guard of the CD party and from its jeopardized alliance with the PCI (Ch. 2; Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 29, Virno, 1996).

The politicians' rhetoric was marked by a similar (Dallas/Reagan-style) superficial optimism, hedonism and individualism, and by an unprecedented openness to lobbying and corruption. The collaboration between entrepreneurs like Berlusconi and parliamentarians like Bettino Craxi transformed the Italian economy, transitioning from modes of material production, once based on agriculture and factory production, to high finances and communication-entertainment businesses. Their power however, was not only wielded through political decisions and seats in parliament but especially through

the influence that politicians exercised on the so-called *sottogoverno* (subterranean government). This term describes the highly pervasive state-funded sector of the Italian economy and culture industry that includes anything from state corporations and banks to museums, hospitals and research centres—all run by government officials.

Rather than decisional autonomy, the links between this lower level of State apparatus and the government are the tight relationships of nepotism, patronage and debt that run along the lines of party politics (Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 47). In the 1970s, 45,000 state corporations controlled 80% of banking, $\frac{1}{4}$ of industrial employment and $\frac{1}{2}$ of Italian fixed investment (Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 47). The direct and underground links between the heads of many financial institutions and state industry with private entrepreneurs facilitated secure investments, the allocation of tenders and contracts and the privatization of important sources of profit. Traditionally, patronage has been present in Italian culture under different guises for centuries: from specific relationships to the church, to god-parenting and community ties between powerful and powerless individuals. In particular, after the unification of Italy in 1861, the patronage often mediated between citizens and malfunctioning administrations and institutional structures. Eventually, after WWII, the DC incorporated this practice in its fundraising and vote collection activities (Berardi (Bifo) et al., 2009: 44–49). By the time Berlusconi arrived on the market, patronage within politics had already turned into bribes and corruption; it reached its apex with the Craxi government.

Working hand in hand, the new class of politicians and entrepreneurs were responsible for Italy's entry into the world of global business, for the privatization of much of its infrastructure, and for the slow demise of an allegedly too costly welfare state. These changes enabled more circulation of capital and new investments that consolidated the power of some economic (and political) actors, while eliminating many others. Events like the reconstruction after the devastating November 23rd, 1980 earthquake in southern Italy became triggers for speculation and theft, and solidified collusion among politics, business and the mafia (Ch. 6). Most importantly, while rising inflation and huge deficits paralyzed the country, the government started to implement a series of economic measures that were supposed to curb inflation and raise the GDP. Thus, optimism and

hedonism could continue unabated, sustained by the work of the Bank of Italy, occupied with issuing investment bonds to finance the public debt and trying to contain the damage caused by inflation; by the Italian entry into the European common currency; and by the expansion of the tertiary sector and of employment.

Behind the glossy façade painted by Berlusconi's media and by the politicians' declarations that convinced even struggling Italians that all that matters is to look good and consume, in reality, public debt kept on spiralling up. To enable the new financial ethos to thrive, the illegal and/or flexible and precarious worker stole the role of the protagonist away from the factory worker, through new temporary contracts and part-time work positions. Still, in both cases, the worker also doubled as a consumer. Indeed, precarious workers will later become one of the major focuses of the labour rights movements. This shift in 'character roles' is best exemplified by the increased reliance on financial loans and the use of instalment purchases and credit cards. Here 'virtual' money transactions enable the economy to thrive even in the absence of 'real' capital in the hands of consumers who are subject to job and financial insecurity. Moreover, debt itself takes over the function fulfilled by state assistance in accessing basic rights such as housing and education (Lazzarato et al., 2009).

Instead of information, the sensationalism, sex, (macho) vulgarity, violence and common people's exhibitionism on TV helped shape many Italians' perception of the world. Exit the metropolitan Indians and the intellectual labourer, enter the *yuppie* and the *paninaro*, the cynical consumer and logo-oriented youths who meet outside the newly arrived MacDonald's restaurants. Thus the coalitions between the media, business and politics became even more instrumental in pacifying discontent and stimulating consumption.

In this continuous subtle and not-so-subtle movement of capital and power, the relationship between government and economy started taking on a different shape. As discussed above, to look at capital from the side of production, as a material-economic substance, does not shed light on the effects of differential accumulation. But when looking at assets as capitalized power, government is incorporated into capital and its influence is discounted into corporate stocks and bond prices. In a context in which this

process can be made predictable and manipulated through corruption and other practices, accumulation increases more easily, affecting the market/social make-up through more concentration of power into the hands of fewer capitalist groups. These groups, in turn, can condition institutions and shape the logic of capital, often making powerful corporations into *de facto* regulators (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 297–9).

Much of the Berlusconi brand's ability to dominate the market derived from his capillary expansion in many emergent sectors of the economy, and from personal connections to high-ranking government officials supporting the neoliberal *credo*. *Fininvest Inc.* could bring together different fields of investment, facilitating capitalization. Above all, the firm could lobby politicians and the government itself (Barbacetto, 2004: 39). This power gave Berlusconi and those working with him the ability to sabotage competitors within the entertainment business by offering unbeatable deals and by having a say in broadcasting regulations that would cater to their own interests, and thus impeding the development of a truly competitive market. What may have seemed like a very risky investment was in fact a safe way to differentially accumulate. This is also how, by 1984, *Publitalia* was already leading the market with 30% of the Italian advertising revenues. Its (differential) accumulation tendency remained steady for the following decade while RAI's once powerful advertising company *Sipra* ended up with 20% of the revenues and less power on the market (Barbacetto, 2004: 39–40).

Ironically, it was not until a concern with media democracy was raised at the end of the decade that Berlusconi became officially free to dominate the airwaves. Indeed, when the Craxi government was finally forced to regulate the field, the Mammi Law simply normalized the situation and only caused some minor disadvantages for the media magnate. More precisely, since it is not possible to control both the print and the broadcast media, Berlusconi was forced to sell one of his newspapers, *Il Giornale*, to his brother. Still, unlike in any other European country, *Fininvest* was allowed to keep three national channels and the law does not include any anti-trust regulations, nor any limitations on advertising.

In addition to this, five months later, Berlusconi was allowed to launch three pay-tv

channels. Although the law only allows him to own 10% of these assets, later investigations by judges in Milan revealed how the pay channels were controlled through a series of offshore companies and straw men. The Mammi law was passed despite the protest resignation of five ministers. In 1991 and 1992, Berlusconi paid a total of 23 billion lire into Craxi's offshore bank accounts from an underground of *Fininvest* (The Economist, 2001). In his collection of documents and transcripts of all the trials and investigations, Gianni Barbacetto also mentions Berlusconi's membership of the secret Masonic Lodge P2, involved, among other things, in an attempted *coup d'état* (Ch. 3). In 1981, fellow members, P2 head Licio Gelli, Communication Minister Michele Di Giesi and other high ranking government officials procured Berlusconi the exclusive rights to broadcast live and nation-wide a world soccer championship, despite legal restrictions. On many other occasions, Berlusconi's channels were rescued and RAI sabotaged by the prompt intervention of other friends (2004: 40–41). The secretary to Minister Mammi left his job right after the law was passed and received from *Fininvest* a gift of 460 Million Lire (2004: 61). This is how the Italian mediascape ended up divided into in two poles: the RAI, controlled by the government and the channels owned by *Fininvest* (Barbacetto, 2004: 40).

Many of these illegal practices—Swiss bank accounts and offshore warehousing of shares, money-laundering, association with the Mafia, tax evasion, price inflations, complicity in murder and bribery of politicians, judges and the finance ministry's police for mergers and take-over—started surfacing in 1992–93 when the so-called *Mani pulite* [clean hands] team of judges started an investigation. They basically brought most politicians, many lawyers, judges, business people—including Berlusconi's brother and *Fininvest* CEO—to court and/or behind bars. While Craxi fled to Tunisia and was sentenced *in absentia* to prison for corruption, the Left was ready to take over the government in the upcoming elections. Berlusconi was left under investigation, with Spanish authorities trying to lift his European Parliamentary immunity to persecute him for breach of anti-trust laws and alleged illegal warehousing of a 52% stake in *Telecinco*, a Spanish television station (The Economist, 2001). With his business on the verge of financial collapse, no one in the government to back him up and the possibility of the new government taking up punitive measures urgent action was needed.

Folding topology: from business to politics

In 1994, the Silvio Berlusconi Publishing House launched a new series dedicated to great thinkers (Raboni, 1994), starting with the ones that had most influenced its owner's "apprenticeship and his audacity" (Letta, 2008). Hot off the press come *Utopia* by Thomas Moore, Machiavelli's *Prince* and Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*. In his personal introduction to Erasmus, Berlusconi shares how *The Praise of Folly* left the most indelible mark on him, engendering his visionary philosophy of life and work. Most of all, he wrote, what fascinates him about Erasmus is his thesis about folly as a creative, vital force. The introduction explains:

an innovator is at its most original when his inspiration comes from the depth of irrationality. The revolutionary intuition is always perceived [...] as absurd, when it first comes. It is only later that this is recognized and accepted. [...] True wisdom does not lie in rational behaviour, necessarily conforming to premises and therefore sterile, but in a farsighted, visionary 'madness' [...] it was those very projects that people were opposed to and I was passionate about, my dear friends, those that came from the heart, not from cold reasoning, that were my biggest successes (2001).

A few weeks later, it is Erasmus' symbolic power that Berlusconi draws on again to back up his sudden entrance onto the political stage with the formation of a new party: *Forza Italia* (Go Italy!)-led and supported by his business collaborators—who, if elected, will enjoy political immunity from prosecution. Berlusconi's visionary madness is what drives him beyond the reasonable act of selfishly looking after his own family and business, and to rescue Italy from an "imminent danger: a new electoral law and inept minority politicians who may end up governing and inflicting upon us a smothering and illiberal future" (1994a: 10). It is his vision of a new mode of *clean* politics (1994b: 11–12) that he wants to share with his fellow Italians. Thus, his 'revolutionary' vision and passion for (neoliberal) freedom lead him to enter the field of politics and to resign his position as publisher and entrepreneur, offering his expertise and commitment to the "country he loves" (1994a: 1).

Of course, there is no mention of politics being the only way to avoid losing his faltering business and being charged with corruption. What Berlusconi did not invent but seems to have come to dominate and strengthen, is a space (of manifolds) in which State and finance are not the only actors, but their relationship is mediated, or even augmented, by crime. This does not simply mean that crime has seeped into the economy, something that is known to everyone, especially in Italy, but that crime is a link between business and government. This link has therefore become a key factor regulating the Italian economic market. This can be noticed by looking at the ability to differentially dominate the market by companies whose precarious relationship to the law should, in principle, weaken investors' trust and hinder their revenues. Despite ongoing financial difficulties of companies like *Fininvest-Mediaset*, it was only at moments in which there was an actual danger of prosecution that investments declined. It was never simply because some of the deals funding the businesses were illegal in themselves. Former *Fininvest-Mediaset* has differentially accumulated and come to dominate the market despite the chance of prosecution of its majority owner, because Berlusconi's changes to the legal and judiciary systems made that chance increasingly more remote.

Data taken from the S&P 500 and MIB index confirm this trend. The chart attached in the appendix shows how, since Berlusconi's entrance into politics, *Mediaset* has been holding steady, only slightly losing ground until the global credit crisis happened. At that point, their absolute valuation changed little, while the overall index took a nosedive. This seems to indicate that investors believed *Mediaset* was at some sort of accumulatory ceiling. But, they also believed those earnings would be safe, while other earnings seemed at risk. Further investigation is required to look at the relationship between investors and Berlusconi's government (Appendix 1). Yet, it seems safe to add that when the majority shareholder of a corporation runs a country, any financial rescue package will ensure that his business is safe and shareholders can retain their confidence in their shares.

To look at Berlusconi's past terms in office and to the current (coalition) government simply as a powerful group of corrupt businessmen who control the media is not enough to understand how Italians—whose interests are not represented but actually damaged by

this situation—have so freely bought into Berlusconi’s “visionary folly”. Pointing at media monopoly as the sole cause of Italy’s corrupt government and dire social problems would bring us back to looking for solutions to the problem in counter-information. The media has certainly played a major role, controlling the circulation of information, boasting about the possibilities of a new Italian miracle 24-24 hours and constructing a dream-like world of family business and politics. But it is in works like *An Italian Story* that we may find another angle from which to discuss the relationship between the figure of Berlusconi, the assemblage connected to it and the media.

The two volumes of *An Italian Story*—a glossy, high-budget picture books—tell the story of Berlusconi and his family to Italians, and reveal the secrets of his success. They were mailed free of charge by *Forza Italia* to every household of the country in 2001 and 2006, and lured voters with the exemplary story and role model of Berlusconi as a self-made, family man. *An Italian Story* points to the use of discursive practices that harness into his powerful image, in a very accessible way, the sense and hopes of an entire epochal shift that took place in Italy and that, from the 80s on, has come to be associated with wealth and freedom. Through such discursive practices, as well as through a dominant tendency to identify in strong figures the agents of history, the figure of Berlusconi rises strong from a messy web of events and elements that generally characterise the current political-economic context which commonly associated with what I called neoliberalism.

Thinking about Berlusconi’s success through the concept of the differential, and especially differential accumulation, other threads have come to surface: the relationship with the media is the most evident, but there is also that between the State and business, and between the media (and entertainment) and the economy. In addition to this, discourses about the economy commonly establish that big financial businesses will automatically boost production and help industry thrive, thereby also supporting small businesses. These arguments are the basis on which smaller entrepreneurs, the ones who do not have lobbying power like the bigwigs of *Forza Italia*, will support their economic, political and social agenda. This support by small businesses can be explained with the example of the northern separatists of the *Lega Nord*, discussed above. Similarly, the

small fish in the electorate are convinced that a boost in the economy cannot but lead to a betterment of their lives, to more secure job conditions and to a reduction of inflation. Among other things, voters' trust is also boosted by xenophobic and racist discourses (especially by the *Lega*) that, while diverting the focus of attention from local problems to the danger of alien infiltration, mask the truth about the need for flexible, low-cost workforce for the current economy to thrive. This truth surfaces in the process of looking for the sites of differential capital/power accumulation.

Forza Italia's agenda is not much different from the mantra of many other states embracing neoliberal policies: less state control on the economy; less investment in government bonds, more trust in privately owned saving and investment plans, less taxes, privatization of state services like health, education, insurance, more consumption to promote the economy, more surveillance (Berlusconi, 1994a, b, Berlusconi, 2009). They promote a free market (though in reality only free for a few) and private initiative, profit and individual leadership. Yet, more than anything else, *Forza Italia* can be made sense of through what I previously called Berlusconi's topological approach. For *Forza Italia*, change is the differential outcome of "the free input of many people, each different from the other" (Berlusconi, 1994b). As an assemblage, *Forza Italia* is a "free organization of voters of a completely new kind" (Berlusconi, 1994b), it is not the homogeneous, ideology-based space of the party but a new force that unites and smoothes the space of politics, eliminating any distinctions between government and economy, entrepreneur and politician, citizen and consumer, in the name of the freedom to (differentially) accumulate.

Returning to the question of madness, it is important to remember that Deleuze distinguishes between the *paranoid* and *passional* regimes of madness, where the paranoid is connected to processes of semiotization through codified signs and the passional to processes of subjectivation forging new connections among signs. Deleuze calls these two qualitatively different kinds of madness the "I-will-not-leave-you-alone" of the paranoid and the "leave-me-alone" of the passional. The regimes associated with each of them are mapped onto social formations, where imperialism is associated with the paranoid/coded signifier and capitalism with the subjective/passional. The first is a

process of expansion and coordination of signs, while the latter establishes subjects as the agents of capital and detaches bundles of signs from its centre (capital), to recode them as needed (2006: 14–16, Demers, 2008).

Although, to many, Berlusconi's madness may seem more like a kind of paranoia—a delusion of grandeur—it is, in fact, closer to the passional regime of madness explored in the previous chapter. Without hyperbole, when talking about Berlusconi, it is possible to draw on Deleuze's parallelism highlighting the passional love-affairs or orgiastic connections among capitalism's main actors: the multinationals, with their mergers, alliances and differential accumulation. The success of Berlusconi's visionary, topological approach lies in his ability to forge new connections, in the same way Bifo and his colleagues did in the realm of micro-politics. This 'folly' is a source of creative ability to manipulate signs—*pace* Erasmus—not just for signification, but as affective devices that draw on our 'common sense' assumptions about social reality to order and rearrange power (Ch. 5).

This was the case with the first nation-wide broadcasting strategies, with the politician-entrepreneur aggregate that grew stronger and more powerful as the connections among its elements grew more intricate. This is the case also with the famous 'contract with Italians', a spectacular and theoretically meaningless gesture that still has the performative function of affectively engendering Berlusconi's connection with Italian citizens/spectators (and granting him a second electoral victory in 2001). It is his ability to recompose his companies, like *Fininvest* and *Mediaset*, boosting up investors' trust precisely in connection with other events that create the conditions for such boosts. It is finally the case with his political career that, as of 2010, still sees Berlusconi's majority ruling unchallenged. Ultimately, it is by learning to beat the average and accumulate in relation to others that he is and will be able to control this topological space, skirting around accusations of conflict of interest, avoiding trials and charges, and always being able to lay the blame for any failed policies on others in the opposition. Always smiling, Berlusconi and his colleagues are able to mount countless attacks on the judiciary system, on civil society and on the new generation of Autonomist activists that emerged in the late 1990s (Ch. 4–7).

At the same time, this *de-lirium*, this ability to move out of regimenting structures merely puts the Italian Prime Minister on par with most other global multinational powers, which understand the dynamics of differential power accumulation through capital. Although magnified by the dystopian Italian example, Berlusconi's relationship to the economy and to the State ought to be seen as an example of how power is inextricably linked with capital (e.g.: Nitzan and Bichler, 2002). While it is still important to look at the modes of struggles between the 'capitalists' and the workers to devise strategies of resistance to the forces of capital, we must also start looking at the relation among different forms of capital and the power struggles they enable, as well as their effects on the social field.

To borrow again from a Spinozist vocabulary, the strength of this passionate, topological type of capitalism lies in its ability to reconstitute itself like a *potentia*, while still maintaining a connection to *potestas* through legislation, material production, certain institutions and accumulated capital. The force of current capitalism affects what comes within reach, reordering society through processes that control, shape and transform opposition. Nitzan and Bichler call this power *creorder* "a word that connotes the paradoxical fusion of being and becoming, state and process, stasis and dynamism" (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 17). The commodification, structuration and restructuration of capital unfolds according to a differential logic that, since the accumulation of power is always relative, compels actors to always try and augment their capital to maintain their differential accumulation and its attendant divisions of power (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 18). This results in a strong gravitational force in which the power to differentially accumulate (*potentia*), becomes the virtual side of accumulated power (*potestas*), in which *potentia* is actualised (or captured).

On the whole, struggles for differential accumulation continuously order and reorder society at the global level, and their (quantitative) analysis can help us outline a topology of qualitatively changing power arrangements and the discursive and non-discursive formations that sustain them (Cochrane, Forthcoming: 7). This operation embeds the accumulation process within various social and cultural events, and relates them to both private and institutional actors. Autonomia's analysis of (economic) production as a mode of power and control enabled activists to map the relationships between capital and

workers in order to develop creative ways of forcing (social) production outside the logic of capital (Ch. 3). It shifted the focus of resistance from conceptions of constituted to constituent power. The use of theories of differential accumulation adds a further dimension to this analysis in that it can help us understand the significance of production, beyond providing the material conditions for social life. In this process, productivity bears directly on power, while capital accumulation, state formation and criminal activities are all key elements of a single process to accumulate capital as power (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 280).

Looking at the interaction among these elements enables us to map the relationships between *potentia* and *potestas* emerging in contemporary social formations in order to address such relationships with new practices. This is not so much necessary to take over constituted power but to be able to practice autonomy without falling victim to the criminalization of dissent that has recently developed in many countries, including Italy. Although the study of differential accumulation is in its early stages, and it has not yet yielded enough studies to help activists devise new practices of resistance, my brief analysis of the Italian politico-economic field is helpful in contextualizing insu^{tv}'s work, as well as that of other activist projects. In fact, in a context in which conflicts of interest, violent repression of dissent and the outright violation of human rights take place in the name of an assemblage that includes private and criminal interests as integral parts of a process of accumulation, the forces activists are up against cannot be confronted only through appeals to legality or democracy nor through practices that are completely autonomous (Ch. 4–7). Experimentation becomes key in finding ways of engaging the power of creorder effectively.

The following chapter starts taking a closer look at media activism, drawing connections among the development of communication guerrilla and other activist practices from the perspective of informational dynamics and technological innovation. The focus on information and the non-linear character of emergence enables an important transition in the analysis of activism. Specifically, we can move from thinking about media activism as circulating alternative content to thinking through new practices of socialisation and resistance that emerge from engaging media, technology and information proper. Herein

lies the power and importance of projects like Telestreet, and especially insu[^]tv. The focus on Italian and on global activism will help us make connections between the micro and macro dimensions of resistance to social injustices caused by political-economic powers and to explore some of the solutions that have emerged in the last fifteen years. At the same time the discussion of information theory bridges my analysis of the rise of finance capitalism and the entertainment/communication industry with a discussion of how projects like Telestreet use information and communication to function outside of the logic of capital (Ch. 5). It is the engagement with information from different angles that will help us gain new insights about contemporary media activism. Ultimately, in societies of control, it is information itself that takes on a role of a structuring force in processes of emergence of resistant social formations.

Chapter 5

Guerrilla Communication against the Information Glut: Contemporary Italian Activism

Tens, hundreds, thousands Aguascalientes, we would say out of habit from past movements

(Laboratorio Occupato SKA and C.S. Leoncavallo, 1995)

Person 1: They are in the courtyard!

Person 2: the police [...] they are trying to take down the door behind which we are barricaded. We are like trapped mice [...] calm down, calm down, stay seated with your hands up [...]

Person 3: here they come, they are inside [...] they have just entered the radio studios holding their batons...(silence).

(A/Traverso, 2007)

Despite an uncanny likeness, this transcript is not from Radio Alice's final moments during the riots in 1977 but from another raid at Radio Gap. Only, this raid happened in Genoa in July 2001, during the notorious protests against the G8 summit, where this radio station and the Independent Media Centre (IMC) were documenting the widespread police abuse that led to the killing of activist Carlo Giuliani. Commonalities aside, these two events should not lead us to consider the history of 25 years of Italian media activism as a smooth progression from the free radio movement in the seventies to the alter-globalization movement's guerrilla communication (and little progress in police tactics).

Rather, looking at the connections among past and current struggles for the circulation of independent information can provide us with a multilayered map of micro-political

practices that engender social change. The shifts foregrounded on this map are not simply related to the meanings and discourses sustained by the circulation of information, instead, they refer to the actual emergence or changes in social structures and formations that are triggered by the ‘side-effects’ of informational dynamics (Simondon, 2006).

As discussed in chapter three, the years following the crackdown on the *Autonomia*, marked the crisis of the movement, producing an overall climate of depression and disillusionment. The 80s in Italy saw a general recoiling from politics, especially from grassroots political activism, however, by the early nineties people started waking up to the changes in the social structure brought about by the liberalization of the economy. As in many other countries, parts of the national infrastructure had been privatised, the welfare state was weaker, and industry had been outsourced to make space for a service-oriented economy.

The precarization of life was the unforeseen, dystopian outcome of the autonomist dream of flexible employment (Berardi (Bifo), 2004). Furthermore, after the fall of communist regimes and the crisis of communism as a doctrine, there surfaced a renewed need for different modes of political critique and struggle. Some of the autonomous centres squatted in the seventies became more lively, and new ones appeared on the scene. A new (minor) wave of student unrest swept some Italian cities, opposing a reform of the education system.

The panther and the fax

December 1989 inaugurated a series of protests against the privatization of research funding and the inclusion of companies and private stakeholders into the university administration councils. By early 1990 the student protest movement had rapidly spread throughout Italy under the name of *La Pantera* [the panther]. It took its name from an uncatchable mysterious feline sighted at the outskirts of Rome. Like the runaway animal, feared yet secretly admired by the Italians following its escape from captivity, the *Pantera* movement seemed to come out of nowhere. It raised troubling memories from a not-so-distant past of politically motivated terrorism.

Despite this spectre, it also pointed to new, creative directions for organising that could work outside of the framework of political violence. The *Pantera* students declared themselves political, without party affiliation; democratic; non-violent; and anti-fascist. Their protests consisted of occupations, self-managed classes and research groups in collaboration with professors. Overall, the movement tried to foster experimentation and interaction, rather than the hierarchical knowledge transfer and organization reinforced by the reform.

Pantera's image campaign was the first example of non-violent activist practice that made mainstream headlines after the Years of Lead. In Italy, activism is often called *militanza politica* [political militancy], a term that calls forth the idea of belligerence, and that is viewed by many non-activist citizens as a form of extremism, rather than as the action of groups of citizens. The idea of a 'public relations campaign' was a way of addressing this problem by appropriating not only the language but also the strategies of advertising, for the sake of self-promotion.

Two former *settantasette* [seventy-seven] student activists turned into successful advertisers created a logo and an advertisement for *la Pantera*. They donated it to those occupying Rome's university to clean up the students' image, help them attract attention, and even raise some funds (Garbesi, 1990). Their intention was to explain to the new generation that posited itself on the new front lines of struggles in the 90s how to use the "infinite resources of mass communication" for fundraising and for the effective circulation of ideas (Garbesi, 1990).

Drawing on the actual figure of the run-away panther, the ad juxtaposed images of harmless individuals —students, poor people and social justice activists— to those of politicians like Craxi, media owners like Berlusconi and big industrialists like FIAT's owner Gianni Agnelli. Playing on catchy puns like the one on Agnelli's name—which literally means 'lambs'—the ad grouped together all those who should be afraid of being eaten and claimed that all the rest are indeed the panther waiting to strike. *La Pantera siamo noi* [the panther is all of us] was the slogan trying to reinforce the link between communities in struggle and those watching (somewhat fearfully).

Despite the help from the older generation, the *Pantera* had already jumped on the information guerrilla bandwagon incorporating emerging information technologies into its communication strategies. The ad donation offer took place via fax, and this was not an isolated incident. Dubbed “*il movimento dei fax*” [the fax movement], these students created an internal fax grid to circulate information and updates about the protests and occupations. In 1989-90 faxes were fundamental in the coordination of actions among faculties and universities across the country, as well as to interface with the government and the press. In addition to this, students tapped into the DECnet grid – a system similar to Facebook that used (VAX) computers to connect worldwide science departments. This system was turned into *Okkupanet*: a social network to discuss politics. *Okkupanet* became a particularly important point of connection and information exchange with China, where students were protesting against their government in Tiananmen Square.

When it shut down all communication and blocked every source of information about the events, Chinese state censorship seemed to be unaware of DECnet, which remained active during the unrest. Every day, *Pantera* students cleaned up the messages from their masking headings and passed them on to the mainstream press, together with their own communiqués (Mazzucchi, 2009). While this link became important to bypass censorship of the Chinese protests, the fights at Tiananmen also resonated with the movement. The use of *Okkupanet* created a direct and immediate link with other protests, anticipating some aspects of contemporary global activism. One of the social centres squatted that year in Naples was indeed named Tienament (1989 – 1997)–as homage to Chinese students and as a pun on a Neapolitan dialect expression meaning ‘remember, or keep in mind.’ *Okkupanet* disappeared with the end of the protests, leaving very little information behind.

Fragmented as soon as the government gave in to some of the students’ requests, the *Pantera* was incapable of giving the newly emerged student movement enough momentum to develop sustainable political solutions to the crisis of the university and branch off into new socio-political spaces. However, it is fair to say that the *Pantera* (and its later resurrection in 1994 under the name of *Sabotax*) pumped some new energy into a rather dormant activist scene, bringing new individuals into political action, prompting

new occupations of social centres and generally creating the space to socialise and rethink the political, both with and against the old *Autonomia* movement (Ch. 6). My own introduction to politics took place in 1990, through the involvement of high school students in the *Pantera*, which in Naples mainly gravitated around the occupied faculty of architecture, and later, the CSOA Tienament.

Importantly, these new waves of protests were characterized by two elements that were becoming a mark of activism all over the world. As in the examples above, one was the attention paid to the use of new communication technology, and the other was a new form of internationalism. Of course, attention to and solidarity with struggles abroad has often been a marker of social justice movements. Yet, movements like *Autonomia* and their foreign counterparts influenced each other across borders, but mainly acted at the local level. They conceived of their action as aimed at modifying the socio-political conditions within the nation state. New communication technologies opened up the possibility of new forms of exchange, support and, above all, intervention.

Translocal assemblages: the Zapatistas of Chiapas

By 1994, while Berlusconi was getting ready for elections to the football-like cheers of his new party (Ch. 3), and Italian students were once again in the streets, another important political event was taking place further away: the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was fighting the Mexican government in the region of Chiapas.

Following a series of unsuccessful peaceful protests, on January 1, 1994, upon implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) agreement, the Zapatistas had taken up armed struggle. For the (mainly indigenous) peasants struggling to keep their land, NAFTA finalized their oppressive condition (Castells, 2004: 78). Hence, while clearly opposing the oppression of their colonialist past, much of the EZLN critique targeted the new forms of injustices deriving from the State's efforts to modernize the country in accordance with neoliberal policies.

These forms of economic discourses and reforms, epitomized by agreements such as

NAFTA, not only become the mechanisms that enable capital accumulation of a powerful few while leaving behind minority groups like the indigenous populations of Chiapas, but they also present themselves as the inevitable and necessary result of progress and economic growth. The EZLN was one of the first groups to connect and fuse anti-colonial, local struggles with a clearly articulated critique of global oppressive economic mechanisms.

The novelty of this approach was accompanied by another innovation: as soon as the struggle began, they enacted a quick move from guerrilla warfare to guerrilla communication. Previous work by NGOs had facilitated the construction of Internet networks to connect groups in Chiapas. By way of the Internet, as well as through letters and communiqués, news about the rebellion quickly spilled over the borders and offset the official government version on the uprising as foreign infiltration that needed to be suppressed.

The guerrilla-like circulation of information brought the case of the Zapatista to global attention, it stimulated the emergence of a solidarity movement and prevented the violent repression of the EZLN (Castells, 2004: 83–4). In particular, the stories of the Zapatista leader (the masked, pipe-smoking Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos) spoke to minority groups all over the world. These stories bridged the gap between an isolated problem in the jungle of Chiapas and global civil society by making visible the direct connections between neoliberal policies and their effects on the territory.

In January 1998, in solidarity with the Zapatista struggle, an Italian group of activists, the Anonymous Digital Coalition, called for a globally coordinated Net Strike, i.e. a virtual sit-in at five Mexican financial institution's web sites (Anonymous Digital Coalition, 1998). The sit-in consisted of continuously clicking on the browser's reload button for the websites to bring down the servers. Within a few hours, the sites were shut down, wreaking havoc among shareholders. Inspired by this action, the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, a US-based group of media tacticians specializing in Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD), developed Flood Net, a software that sent an automated reload request every few seconds, blocking websites more efficiently. This software has become

a fundamental resource in the process of swarming, not only of Mexican websites but also of other targets of social justice struggles. Flood Net and similar ECD practices have been such successful tools for social justice movements that the US Army commissioned RAND corporation to research the use of such information technologies during the Zapatista struggle (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997a: 369–95, 2001: 171–199, Ronfeldt et al., 1998: xi–xii).

The Zapatista movement stimulated the imagination of students, workers, independent journalists, activists and people from all walks of life who flocked to Chiapas to show their support (and were sometimes jokingly called the *Zapaturistas*). For EZLN rebels, the idea of community is not only the basis for better local subsistence but also a model of global resistance and an alternative to the capitalist machine (Pacos & Rio, 1997: 12). In 1996, they hosted the first Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against neoliberalism (27th of July–3rd of August 1996), also known as the “*Intergalactic Meeting*” (EZLN, 1996).

The event took place in the Lacandon jungle and brought together 5000 participants from over 42 countries. Although its outcome confirmed the difficulty of translating different realities into a common language, it also sowed the seeds for new events, including the Second Intergalactic Meeting a year later in Spain (in which the Zapatistas also took part). These kinds of meetings, and their later incarnations such as the World Social Forum and European Social Forums, can be seen as instrumental in the assembling of what is now called the alter-globalization movement, or global social justice movement.

The meetings at Aguascalientes also spurred a number of collaboration projects, among which many were set up by Italian CSOAs like Leoncavallo in Milan and the Laboratorio Ska in Naples. These projects of collaboration played an important part in supporting the rebel groups in the construction of more infrastructure, including medical facilities and economic resources (e.g. a chicken farm) that facilitate autonomy and self-determination. (Laboratorio Occupato SKA and C.S. Leoncavallo, 1995, Pacos & Rio, 1997). Yet, the exchange between Italian activists and Zapatistas was by no means a one-way affair.

Aside from the inspirational force that the group transmitted, the Zapatista practices of resistance left an indelible mark on the activism of the social justice movement, while they also resonated with past Autonomist practices. In particular, their orientation towards community building, and their subversive use of the dominant language of neoliberalism to expose the effects of its discourses and policies on individuals, are now part and parcel of contemporary Italian and global activism.

Ultimately, the EZLN critique helped draw the connection between forms of oppression through neoliberal economic policies in rich as well as poor countries. As explained in chapter three, the link between governments and dominant capital has become indissoluble, to the point that powerful corporations can often influence and shape a state's social and economic policies in more efficient ways than ever before. This has always been the case in most developing countries, where colonial and post-colonial structures facilitate economic subjection to richer countries, where external actors consistently affect economic restructuring programs, and where development is dependent upon foreign investment.

In the case of Mexico, this process relied on financial speculation through government bonds, as well as on trade deficit and debt. Prosperity (or the illusion thereof) was entirely conditional on the confidence of foreign investors (Torres, 1997: 56). The EZLN's use of informational guerrilla tactics became proof of the possibility to tamper with the relationship between government and investors that is key to the flow of capital, by affecting the dominant power's potential to use information for economic gain.

Beyond counter-information

Leaking information about the Mexican unrest outside the country's borders posed a direct threat to the economy, and forced the government to negotiate with the rebels: "copycat protests (spread via the Internet rather than CNN) in front of literally dozens of Mexican consulates in the U.S., Europe and Japan, were perhaps more effective at scaring the government than much larger protests on the Zócalo in Mexico City" (Torres, 1997). In this analysis of the Zapatista rebellion, Maria Torres rightly emphasises that, while information constitutes one of the most valuable commodities in the New World

Order, that information can also be *a source of resistance more powerful than bullets* (1997).

Torres' reference to the materiality of information is more metaphorical than literal. Still, information actually can be considered a structuring material force. Traditional models of communication based on a linear movement from sender to receiver tend to underplay the indirect impact of informational dynamics on cultural and political expression. The latter are shaped—yet not determined— as much by information resonance, proliferation and interference as by the events these can trigger. We can investigate how communication techniques play out within a broader information environment to engender transformations that are not of the order of meaning, but produce new modes of social engagement (Terranova 2004: 60–69; Ch. 4).

This approach to a social analysis of information dynamics builds upon concepts derived from information theory, and on their introduction into the social realm through fields like cybernetics, communication technologies and marketing (Terranova, 2004b). Information theory mainly deals with two problems: the compact representation of information, and its reliable transmission over a channel in the presence of noise and interference. Here, rather than referring to meaning, information is defined as a quantitative relation between signal and noise, according to which a signal is likely to emerge from the noise (Cover and Thomas, 2001 [1999]).

A selected number of impulses (patterns of redundancy and frequency) emerge as 'information', causing a transformation of a system's state. This process—one that literally in-forms—i.e. gives form or shapes—applies to communication and other technologies as much as to the development of any structure, whether it is bacteria, genes or humans, as is the case with the DNA. From an informational perspective, information is a process of giving form—ontogenesis through reorganization and emergence—which can also be connected to the organization of individual perception (Ch. 5) and to the modulation of social dynamics (Terranova, 2004b: 6–20; Ch. 6).

Telecommunications engineer Claude Shannon described information as the measure of the probabilities for the occurrence of an event that selects one among many possible

structures or configurations (Shannon in Terranova, 2004b: 21). Information is involved in a process of restructuring and containing of metastable systems. Many possible structures are present virtually in these systems—which are always open to new restructuring processes whenever new elements trigger a ‘crisis’ in their structure. They are only limited by codes, channels and media.

For our purposes, this definition points to the structuring process of this system of possibilities as a set of ‘relays’ between the technological and the social. In particular, my emphasis is on the struggles to push the limits and options for social change by drawing on technology to develop social practices and vice versa. In her discussion of the space of the virtual in information—the occurrence of unlikely events that produce quantum leaps in a system—Terranova stresses the intrinsic non-oppositional character of informational politics. In fact, the latter is not marked by struggles against “a monolithic social technology of power”. Rather, we are dealing with positive feedback mechanisms (of emergence) of metastable, informational cultures (2004b: 26–27). Furthermore, information as such tends to escape the boundaries of circulation channels to engage a wider milieu that codes and recodes them. Technologies, knowledge and power are all implicated in information flows: they constantly re/shape the social field and engender changes that reach further than simple struggles over the representation and signification of reality.

Reframing some of the communicational processes through the concept of differential accumulation can offer an additional insight into the role of information for Italian activism (and beyond). As explained in the previous chapter, power struggles do not merely take place between dominated groups and dominant capital but are also a structuring force among powerful actors seeking to differentially accumulate. Societies of control can be said to undergo rapid material and societal transformations that are capitalised upon by translating and reducing these heterogeneous transformations of quality into universal changes in quantity. The mediation of these processes through the market gives capitalists the power to affect social structures in ways that no other ruling class has ever been able to. For Nitzan and Bichler, owners can lever technical change – rather than techniques per se – as a tool of power. At the same time they can reorganize

power directly, by buying and selling ownership claims over the information that is produced and circulates (while simultaneously capitalizing on the structures that emerge and sustain it). In this context, the capitalist market does not facilitate a diffusion of power, but is the very precondition of power (2009: 306). A fundamental part of the struggles among capitalists takes place through the constant engagement with the diffusion of information, while making sure that messages are not distorted or dispersed.

In an over-crowded and over-saturated market where capital is competing for niche markets to sell products and services, together with the lifestyles that require them (and the political discourses that legitimate them), the shorter the message and the faster information reaches its target, the more chance there is of success. Repetition, short slogans and ever-present logos themselves become forces that shape the informational milieu, outside simple channels of communication. This is a pervasive world traversing our imaginary, resonating with different media: from television to books, from telephony to the Internet. In this world, modulation of signal to noise increasingly takes precedence over meaning (Terranova, 2004a: 54–58).

New forms of activism emerge as the flipside of sophisticated marketing strategies and communication tactics, to experiment with information and directly intervene into the relations among members of the dominant capital assemblage. The plane connecting information and economy becomes one on which activist groups across the globe try to lodge themselves, however fleetingly, by sabotaging the capitalist communication machine.

At the end of the nineties, creative informational practices established themselves alongside the marches, rallies and other protests that make demands for social justice. Culture jamming, tactical media campaigns, anti-branding, “subvertising” (subvert + advertising), sweat-shop boycotts and so on gained popularity as activists, artists and computer hackers joined forces to develop autonomous spaces and tools for communication.

No Logo activism (Klein, 2000) takes aim at corporations from the side and agency of the consumers that threaten the corporations’ power to accumulate differentially. At the same

time, DIY information production and diffusion platforms facilitate practices of socialization that thrive on the entropy of capitalist info-dynamics. The information overload of images and messages is folded back into a field of experimentation through blogs, viral videos and mash-ups, websites and so on that are used to convey political messages, and to articulate the critical actors' subject positions (Renzi, 2008).

Beyond the circulation of information, we find a physical network of actors coordinating these experiments, often using their work time and skills to undermine the system exploiting them.¹³ The fluctuation and propagation of the informational milieu engenders a new cultural politics and shapes contemporary Italian activism because information takes on a function that surpasses that of clearing out channels from noise and becomes an attractor for creations and transformations that are not contained in information itself.

As a younger generation became involved in politics, they brought with them new ideas about cultural production, the use of technology and aesthetic strategies for politics. The social centres now offered a solid infrastructure that aimed at supporting autonomous culture and networks of global solidarity and collaboration. With the aid of recording studios and independent labels, concert venues and a wide network of actors as audience there developed a vibrant music scene. Here, political international styles like hip hop and reggae were mixed with traditional local and folkloric tunes producing exciting new blends of music, like the *etno-beat mediterraneo* [Mediterranean ethnic beats]. These bands and their records not only functioned as very efficient vectors for the circulation of political messages, but they also became a source of income for the CSOAs and their musicians, who wanted to stay outside of commercial circuits.

With computer literacy becoming a priority, the development of free software fulfilled the multiple aims of bypassing corporate monopoly on hardware and software, guaranteeing more anonymity for users, and creating programs and interfaces that could function as platforms for information production and circulation.

¹³ The data supporting this argument was collected during the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project: "Rethinking Media, Democracy And Citizenship" (2005-8). PI: Prof. Megan Boler, Theory and Policy Studies department, OISE/University of Toronto. My analysis of the findings is part of this project.

Similarly, communication technology became a playground for experimentation to create and strengthen networks of solidarity through independent Internet providers like the European Counter Network and its Italian counterpart *Isole nella Rete* [Islands in the Net]. Attentive to technological innovation, Italian activism has followed the development of the proto Internet from the Bulletin Board System (BBS) and Cybernet through multimedia rave and cyberpunk cultures, all the way to the World Wide Web. *Isole nella rete* was one of the first autonomous structures that provided Internet services to activist groups who needed anything from mirroring services and listservs to discussion sites. This kind of work had consequences that went beyond facilitating communication because it caused contamination among the groups involved and brought new issues to the attention of a broader public (Lovink, 1997).

The issues included a discussion on cyber rights and on intellectual property which eventually engendered projects like Creative Commons (Italy), a transnational “copyleft” set of licenses that guarantees the preservation of some rights for authors, while leaving out corporate interests. In terms of a cultural politics of information, we can say that these are the events that enable a quantum leap of the system, engendering new possibilities.

Most important of all, with this strong socially useful basis, the movement managed to garner support from outside the scene of the social centres, commonly defined as composing the *movimento antagonista* [antagonist movement]. The work of this new movement, still deeply rooted in the thought of the *Autonomia* while open to innovation, offers the possibilities of new forms of collaboration and solidarity with other grassroots groups that share a concern for social equality. These include, but are not limited to, Fair Trade associations, cultural groups, citizen assemblies and NGOs. Many of these centres have succeeded in becoming reference points for entire neighbouring communities through the institution of services that range from child care to libraries and migrant collectives (Casagrande, 2009).

For this reason they are also sites that play a major role in the coordination of the Italian wing of the global movement for social justice. Needless to say, these networks are also strongly reliant on means of communication to coordinate collaborations and campaigns.

In fact, in the global movement for social justice each protest against a summit is the result of the synergy of local and foreign groups that give vitality and coordinate the events through shared languages and frameworks of analysis. These encounters usually strengthen the forms of solidarity and the modes of collaboration, while also facilitating the construction of common languages, discourses and practices.

Some Italian theorists describe *sincretismo antagonista* [antagonistic syncretism] as a model for contamination that builds coalitions among groups with different identities and practices. It refers to one of the main motors for the composition of a manifold under the aegis of the “no-global generation”. The composition of this movement, or rather, of this assemblage of movements, manifests its strength through non-hierarchical self-organization, absence of party or union politics, or by fragmentation (and sometimes incommunicability) among various groups. Acephalus, heterogeneous and non-hierarchical, the structure of the global social justice movement develops in the autonomous folds of the Internet as much as on the ground (Rete No Global and Network Campano per i Diritti Globali, 2001: 11–19).

Dominant discourses on globalization often present this phenomenon as a homogenizing force. This would mean that the combination and recombination of difference that are considered to engender globalization would resolve themselves in the mere creation of homogeneity. In reaction to this, we can think of globalization as the speeding up of inter-communication and contamination that enlarge the scale at which encounters can take place (Chiocchi, 2001). This process of intercommunication of difference cuts across the technological and social realm as they become sites for the emergence of new cultural and political modes of engagement that produce relays between global and local levels.

It is in this context that we can better understand Italian media activism in general and Teletreet/Insutv in particular. The line of development between the latter and projects like Radio Alice and Radio Gap, the *Autonomia* and the global justice movement is not one of direct filiation, but rather a non-linear process of relays and positive feedback between the technological and social realms; between micro and macro levels of formations: from the forests of Chiapas to local experiments with technology; from a critique of corporate

capitalism to an attack on Berlusconi's media control; from the streets of Bologna to those of Genoa. Ultimately, whether some of the Telestreet channels are connected to the hackers-social centres scene and/or to older traditions of media activism, or simply to some neighbours getting together, Telestreet itself is an event that draws from the virtual potential of a metastable system of possibilities to actualize new practices (Ch. 5).

The present analysis of the use of technology and information has described some forms of activism as tapping into, and aiming to expand the virtual field from which to develop new practices of resistance. The following chapter discusses the Telestreet project as one example of the ways in which technology and information enable the emergence of assemblages whose social function reaches past the production and circulation of information, to the creation of alternative modes of sociability. In particular, we will unpack the model and role of television within semio-capitalism from the perspective of information and sensory stimulation.

Chapter 6

Hacking the Sensorium: Telestreet and Communication in Italy

Television unpacked

European analogue television technology consists of scanning images with a television camera and reproducing them in a television receiver 25 times per second (30 in North America). The scanning process functions by dividing the images into two fields of horizontal lines and then interlacing them into a frame. Every second, 25 frames (or 30) are created and read as continuous movement, since the human eye cannot perceive fast changes of light and image. The television camera converts images into a field of varying electronic signal, stores the information and then sends out these signals representing the image. The television receiver reverts the process. Here, the phosphorous material that coats a picture tube in a television set is struck by a beam of electrons, glowing long enough for the human eye to perceive an image on the screen (Runyon, 2009).

In 2001, the images that predominate on Italian television screens are those of Silvio Berlusconi during an election campaign, smiling to his potential—nearly certain—voters. In the background, members of his party sing the *Forza Italia* anthem while his waving silhouette glows with a rather supernatural halo, and the audience weeps in a trance-like state. The lights, the halo, the crowd, the sounds overwhelm the senses; the viewer is mesmerized. How does the mesmerized viewer make sense of this ‘data overload’ that no longer signifies ‘electoral politics’? The stimuli reaching her seem to originate from and recede into an undifferentiated flow of information that primarily targets the senses.

The first part of this chapter discusses the role played by affect in securing Berlusconi’s place in politics. My argument supplements the better-known explanation that the media tycoon could win the elections thanks to his monopoly over the circulation of information and complements my previous analysis of his rise to power as part of a broader political-

economic setting in which figures like Berlusconi could thrive. As the field of advertising teaches us, public opinion is hardly steered by the content of messages, but audiences are still very sensitive to advertising's very sophisticated forms, which appeal to their senses and desires. Since the affective character of television images is not limited to advertising, it is necessary to understand the general mechanisms behind the influence of television on the Italian imaginary.

The second part of this chapter will analyse the role of affect in resisting the effects of the mainstream media on people's subjectivities and socio-cultural frameworks. My argument is that looking at Telestreet only as a source of counter-information does not suffice to grasp its role as a practice of resistance. Instead, it is necessary to investigate Telestreet's use of affective strategies to better understand how the relationship between an individual and her world unfolds through moments of affectivity and emotivity that are engendered when information is organised into perception (Simondon, 2006: 100–2). In turn, the resulting emotions and actions are made sense of according to the social and cultural frameworks that are available to us, and by those which Telestreet harnesses through its work.

Affects are moments of intensity, which might resonate with linguistic expression but do not operate on the semantic or semiotic level. When decoding a message, affective responses primarily originate from a gap between content and effect. More precisely, if coupled with images, language amplifies the flow of images on another level. This creates a tension that may play itself out in any number of creative ways, causing a reconfiguration of the flow of meaning (Massumi, 2002: 20-25). Insofar as perception has to do with a selection and modulation of certain signals and the exclusion of the rest as noise (Ch. 4), each viewer picks up the loose strands of information contained in the new leader's confident and contagious gestures (*cum* music and halo in the background), and gives them meaning. Here, affect turns into emotions: "No need to panic about the dwindling Italian economy and welfare state, *Papi*¹⁴ is looking after me."

¹⁴ *Papi* is the nickname used by many of Berlusconi's employees (especially young women on his television channels) to address him. While it literally means 'daddy' and points to his alleged father role for the country, it also has a very strong sexual connotation. For an excellent sociological analysis of the

In the constant, chaotic flux of data, unrealistic promises acquire a life of their own because they resonate with similar spectacular and benign visions of reality characterizing populist media culture. Television is *the* mirror of the world for many Italians, and Silvio Berlusconi generously gives it to them all as a personal gift. The reflected image is a shallow composition of artificial perfection, hyper-real narration, and a highly sexualized and aestheticized reality. Yet, it functions as a template for an imaginary that easily spills over from entertainment and fantasy into everyday life.

Analyzing the 2001 election campaign, researchers have noted how its electoral battle established a new grammar for the language of Italian politics. No longer resting on a clash between opposing ideologies, the race relied on the images and appeal of two opposing leaders—Francesco Rutelli and Silvio Berlusconi— and their possible influence on voters’ opinions. Indeed, a case study of voters’ perceptions of these two politicians showed that, just before going to the polls in May 2001, the characteristics most associated with Berlusconi were: “he is a strong leader” (64,9 %); “he is enthusiastic” (60,2 %); “he is persuasive” (58,9%) (Grasso, 2003: 2).

While all these qualities were fundamental for Berlusconi’s entrepreneurial career, none of them directly relates to a politician’s required skills. Similarly, for 51% of Italians an important characteristic attributed to Berlusconi was his good looks. Only 38,4% of voters identified with his political mandate or that of his party (34%), and 25,5% and 24,7% believed respectively in the leader’s honesty and capacity to keep his promises (Grasso, 2003: 2–3). The same study found a direct correspondence between the time (and time slots) dedicated to each politician on different channels, viewers’ relationship with TV and votes. On the whole, (unsurprisingly) more time was clearly dedicated to showcasing Berlusconi (Grasso, 2003: 9), who was successful in reaching those voters who had not yet made up their mind (Grasso, 2003: 15).

However, airing time is not the only factor that can steer voters’ sympathies, especially when political coverage strongly relies on affective strategies. The visual/acoustic

relationship between Berlusconi as a (rather perverted) father figure and Italian patriarchal systems informing the social positioning of women, as well as social relations in general see “Papí and the Patriarchal State” (Anonymous, 2009). This anonymous samizdat circulated on academic mailing lists in 2009 after a series of sexual scandals that involved the Italian Prime Minister and a series of young women.

language used in advertising, and increasingly in televised electoral politics is so sophisticatedly sensory that even dedicating equal time to different leaders can affect viewers' opinions and actions, according to "the light" under which the politicians are presented. Of course, the flows of information reaching the audience are not the sole factors for their choices but they harness and amplify a series of values and needs that sustain dominant power formations.

For Simondon, there is an intensity of information, which presupposes a subject as a metastable system (of relations), where information is what allows her to situate herself in the world (see also Ch. 4). This is because every received signal triggers moments of intensity during which she rearranges her relationship to the outside (Simondon, 2006: 95). Perception here refers to the resolution of the relation of incompatibility between the subject and her environment, which is triggered by this intensity of information and solved by ordering the information into a (meta)stable arrangement of sensations.

Perception is the act of increasing the information about a system. It enables the preservation or invention of an arrangement of stimuli that cannot be separated from the affects that polarize it (2006: 96–98). More precisely, from a sensory perspective, if the non-coincidence of sensations requires an active selection to engender perception, the non-coincidence of affects triggered by the perception of intense images (and sounds) engenders emotions.

Affects and emotions actualize into the present what is still indeterminate for a subject and sustain her relationship to a collectivity. They refer to a transformation, which constantly orients action along this relation between what comes to be identified as an individual, and the collective (Simondon, 2006: 109). Importantly, an individual's perceptions and affects are given meaning within a collective field of socio-cultural norms and institutions. Or, in Simondonian terms, personal and collective individuations take place with the emergence of new meaning within the transindividual field (2006: 185).

In this sense, perception does not draw on some universal or innate structures, but addresses the relationship between an already individuated subject (with her value

systems and socialized practices) and her world—the pre-individual and the individual (2006: 14–15). Berlusconi's confidence is harnessed within a social imaginary, which is strongly mediated by television and his electoral campaign's capture of affect engenders emotions that successfully give sense to (or trigger) actions such as voting.

Since affect functions within a pre-individuated field, an individual's sense-making is influenced by processes such as learning and habituation to certain stimuli, which can act on the potential of affect itself to actualize certain actions (Simondon, 2006: 95). Similarly, Walter Benjamin discussed the crisis of perception, and its implications for action already at the dawn of consumer capitalism. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes about the standardization of perception deriving from visual (and acoustic) techniques that draw on new knowledge of the body of the observer, such as studies on colour perception (quoted in McDonough, 2004: 459).

A few decades later, Benjamin's phantasmagorias—the optical illusions that entertain a public by effacing its machine operation—were perfected into what Debord called Spectacle (Debord, 1983) and Jean Baudrillard defined as simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994). Flows of information are loosely harnessed on a plane that actualizes sense (if at all) as a function of perceptual consumption, capitalist axiomatics and conservative politics. Berlusconi's halo and choirs may not be directly read as equating him to Padre Pio's newly certified sainthood, but like many other disjunct spectacular images, they resonate together with other levels of Italian life (Ch. 3), acquiring ontogenetic potential—from emotions to actions through affects.

What the television cameras are not transmitting in Italy in 2001 are the images of activist Carlo Giuliani being shot dead by a policeman during the infamous protests in Genoa. These, however, together with other footage censored or distorted by the Italian mainstream media, are stored in the media archive of New Global Vision, developed by Roman hackers and hosted by *Isole nella Rete*. Ngvision, the Italian activist predecessor to Youtube, is an archive that circulates video material through peer-to-peer sharing on the Internet, enabling low budget distribution to users with slow Internet connections. It is a DIY, open source platform for all independent media producers whose work is anti-

racist, anti-fascist and anti-sexist. The platform also functions as a repository for the material that Telestreet's channels air directly into their neighbourhood's households (Ch. 1). Peer-to-peer sharing cuts costs and facilitates exchange and collaboration among the different nodes of the network.

Television repacked

The sending and receiving of broadcast televisions images is made possible by assigning a specific transmitting frequency and operating power to a mass media channel, which will be used to transmit video and audio signals, as well as other specialized ones (Hartwig, 1995). The signal is carried through space by a wave according to the characteristics determined by the frequency assigned to it. The process used to carry the signal through a higher frequency wave is called modulation. Antennas receive the modulated carrier wave of a television station from a transmitter and irradiate the signal into space following a designated pattern. After removing all unnecessary signals, a television receiver amplifies and converts the audio and video that will reach the viewer through a monitor for pictures and sounds (Runyon, 2009).

This is also how Telestreet's DIY system functions. Video material is transmitted from a source (often a computer) through a small transmitter to an antenna. However, the DIY antenna connected to the transmitter works as a TV station, relaying the signal to other antennas in its proximity. Street television channels make use of areas where stronger transmitting carrier waves are not present (shadow cones), thus facilitating the reception and circulation of their own signals. By not conflicting with already occupied frequencies, Telestreet avoids getting into trouble for the infringement of communication regulations and reduces the white noise that could drown its own transmission.

Curiously, what one of these squatted television frequencies carries are the signals transmitted from another electoral campaign. A series of small-scale political meetings has made its way onto the phosphorescent cathode tubes in many houses of the city of Gaeta, in central Italy. The creator of street TV Telemonteorlando (TMO), Antonio Ciano, claims the paternity of pirate television. He started transmission in 2001, before Orfeotv created the official Telestreet circuit in Bologna in 2002. Ciano immediately

joined the network, and enthusiastically supported it through a series of institutional attempts to legalize the project with help of some left wing politicians. To the *telestrittari's* dismay, the proposed regulation came to nothing after the collapse of the centre-left government and the rise of a centre-right one. I interviewed Antonio Ciano in the summer of 2008. He had recently won a number of seats in the local council, with his Southern Italian federalist party *il partito del Sud*.

For me, investigating the political strengths and social potential of Telestreet beyond its struggle against Berlusconi's media monopoly, Ciano is paradox. His failure in the 2001 local elections, while Silvio Berlusconi and his party triumphed locally and nationally, led him to set up his own pirate television channel. He described to me how over 7 years of work with TeleMonteOrlando, which includes a broadcasting of his (as well as others') political speeches, his party strengthened its roots in the town and eventually earned electoral seats. It is not by equating Ciano to Berlusconi, or by justifying his miniature success story that I can find useful answers to my research questions. Indeed, some unexpected differences emerge when looking further into this paradox. They are not differences in the degrees of perfection of mediatized politics, they are differences in the kind of relationship between media producers, viewers and TV. That is, they are qualitative, rather than quantitative, differences.

In more concrete terms, the separatist politics signified by the flag of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (XVII-XIX cent.) filling the screen on TeleMonteOrlando's first day of transmission, the revision of Southern Italian history through movies and political discussions have no pretence to imitate or contrast mainstream stylistic choices, or content. Rather, if the spectacle discussed earlier can be related to a habituation of the senses (and sense-making) to certain stimuli, TeleMonteOrlando and all other street TVs precisely upset those perceptual habits. This means that the effects of their attempts to "reinvent the language of television" (Fieldnotes Eterea II) are most salient at the sensory-perceptual level, rather than simply in the practice of wresting cultural capital from the powerful hands of custodians of the mainstream media (Ch. 2: Prop. 3). As Telestreet contributes to an experimentation with the forms of content and expression of television, its undoing of the spectacle directly affects the emotions and actions of its

members/audience. More precisely, Telestreet's productions and production processes intervene directly into the members' and audience's processes of individuation and into the emergence of alternative subjectivities. Yet, while innovative, DIY visual language (and some content) is routinely coopted by the mainstream to derive more profit through advertising campaigns and MTV-style programs, the political potential of micro-stations like TeleMonteOrlando persists in the ability to affect those who come into contact with them.

There is no need for further sociological analysis of the relationship among the dominant Italian cultural and political imaginary, and the spectacular, hyper-mediated, hyper-aestheticized rendering of the world in their media (see also Ch. 3). It suffices to add that most Italian female teenagers dream of becoming *veline* (the ubiquitous bikini-clad girls who frame male television hosts) and use their looks and micro-dance moves to secure a career in entertainment and a rich football player as a husband. In addition to this, the *veline* are becoming ministers and parliamentarians for the Berlusconi cabinet, redefining the skills and trajectories required for such roles. Eighteen year old Noemi Letizia, one of Berlusconi's alleged sexual escapades has been quoted in the Italian press as saying: "[I want to be] a showgirl, I am interested in politics, too ... I'd rather be a candidate for the Chamber of Parliament. Papi [daddy] Silvio would take care of that" (Quoted in: Power, 2009). Meanwhile, Mara Carfagna, a former *velina* and topless model is already the new Minister for Equal Opportunities and four other girls have earned a candidacy for the European Parliament. For Alexander Stille, author of *The Sack of Rome*, a book on Berlusconi's power tactics, the media tycoon's control of commercial television has facilitated a shift from a culture of austerity dominated by the Catholic Church to one of sex and luxury. Furthermore, Berlusconi appears to be "the only politician in the world who helped create and shape his own electorate before it elected him" (Quoted in: Power, 2009). One of the unexpected side effects of these shifts is the so-called *velinization* of Italy.

As a counter-point, Telestreet's affective stimuli can be embedded in and processed through a web of alternative discourses and practices that emphasize community building, the sharing of knowledge and an engagement with social justice and/or local

issues (Ch. 6). The heterogeneous character of the different Telestreet nodes, collaborating along lines of affinity with communities and organizations, provides fertile ground to harness the affects and emotions engendered through their work. Thus, Telestreet's impact is noticeable primarily at the level of personal and collective individuation where it provides an alternative form of mediation between individuals, cultural-political formations and practices like the ones described in the previous chapter. These dynamics are present in the work of many channels. For instance, Orfeotv, a reincarnation of Radio Alice combining old free radio enthusiasts like Bifo and Ambrogio (Ch. 3) and younger media activists. Among other things, Orfeotv functions as the glue among some of Bologna's neighbourhoods with an open storefront window that beckons people to stop by, bring their own work, or simply have a chat. Candida TV and Teleimmagini's work, closer to the social movements scene, produce new media and DIY urban interventions as well as documentary projects like the very successful *Fratelli di Tav* [The TAV brotherhood]. The latter is an investigation into the recent implementation of high speed trains and their impact on people and the environment (Luppichini and Metallo, 2008).

Telestreet's impact on the processes of individuation is best exemplified by the success of Disco Volante TV and of TeleMonteOrlando. Disco Volante TV was successful not only in producing documentary work on disability that was officially acclaimed by professional journalists and used as template for architectonic improvements. Their work also established links with other minorities (such as local migrants) and with the local government and the citizens of the town of Senigallia (Renzi, 2006), breaking down assumptions and stereotypes on disability and other manifestations of difference.

The Telestreet Disco Volante TV —flying saucer— was set up in 2003 as a project to empower disabled people through art and media and to connect the community through programs that focus on local social topics and events, broadcasting documentaries and reportage but also local fairs and cooking recipes. With Disco Volante TV, we have a situation in which the different individuals, aesthetic language and contents compete for 'viewing space' with mainstream shows. Especially in Italy, where very little, if no physical, cultural or social space is ever devoted to disabled (or other kinds of different)

bodies, Disco Volante's productions are a wake up call for the audience. It is important to stress that this project is not about taking action 'for the disabled' but about relaying disabled people's own agency and self-determination. Thus, while breaking down dominant assumptions about the abilities of individuals with Down syndrome or paraplegia by simply exposing what they can do, the presence of these 'self-defined aliens on a flying saucer' also questions the lack of anything that does not match normalised standards of 'able-ism' and beauty in the mainstream media.

Disco Volante TV quickly rose to the level of mainstream journalism by collecting national awards, broadcasting on satellite and by attracting the attention and support of some political parties and critical media. In particular, the documentary *Barriere* [Barriers], on accessibility barriers in urban spaces, received the national Ilaria Alpi award for journalism, with compliments from (a rather patronising) jury that found the DIY post-production techniques—like the paper headline and the abrupt transitions—“excellent solutions.” In *Barriere*, the style is willingly plain, home-movie like, avoiding imitation of mainstream television, reporting a new point of view and a personal narrative. The language is openly subjective, this is due to the recognition that television is unavoidably biased because of the limited way it can frame reality. In general, Disco Volante's work aims at offering a plurality of perspectives. This is why it often tells the story in the first person, be it a disabled person, an immigrant or a Bosnian media activist. This is also where its social power resides, not in a surrogate media language but in a new tool to bring up issues and stories that have not yet attained objective and collective existence in the community.

Indeed, it is the sense of community that is the focus of Disco Volante and of many other Telestreet nodes who are aware of being easily instrumentalised by more powerful groups to flaunt the support for the network as a way of gaining social status among more progressive sections of society. This was especially the case at the beginning of Berlusconi's term in office, when opposition parties would use any means to gain the support of civil society. Among Disco Volante productions there is a report on the Ilaria Alpi award ceremony that is representative of how sometimes the legitimization received by dominating groups is itself a means to maintain their own position in the social space.

In one scene, the disabled Franco Civelli collects the award (which is blatantly directed into the hands of the person pushing his wheelchair, who, in turn gestures towards Franco). While handing him the plaque, the presenter asks Franco whether he thought that his own biased position as a disabled person got in the way of “journalistic objectivity”. Franco replies by saying “I am not a journalist and I express myself in the first person as if I was speaking to any other person who is willing to listen [...] we have to eliminate other barriers, like the psychological, sociological and communication barriers” (Disco Volante TV, 2003a). The mainstream media’s claim to objectivity can be seen as a strategy of powerful groups to naturalise their dominating position by incorporating their view of the world as the natural one. Yet, as Franco disavows any claims to objectivity he is careful to underline that individual points of view are favoured as a way of finding value in diversity and heterogeneity. At the same time, Franco underscores Disco Volante’s vision of television language as a tool to communicate within and outside of their community, without claiming a privileged position of the producer vs. the audience and without needing to produce spectacular content to retain viewers.

Disco Volante TV’s contributors and their national and international supporters fought together to reopen the channel closed by the communication authorities. In the year and a half while Disco Volante TV’s transmitter had been confiscated, its members and allies continued to produce material, which was then distributed through the web and through local tape delivery in the community. On 10 May, 2005, the charges of illegal broadcasting were dropped. A judge’s sentence read in part: “Because of its very small broadcasting range, Disco Volante TV does not require a licence. This is due to the fact that using a shadow cone in the airwaves, the channel does not create any interferences with other broadcasters or signals” (Procura della Repubblica presso il Tribunale di Ancona, 2005). On 12 May 2005, Disco Volante TV, Telestreet and some supporting politicians held a press conference at *Montecitorio*, seat of the Italian parliament. Although this victory did not officialize Telestreet’s status through much needed regulations on small range media transmissions, Disco Volante TV’s case legitimized the right of the network to exist. In addition to appeals to Article 21 of the Italian constitution on freedom of speech, the main argument for their defence was an appeal to a right to use

the language of television to communicate: “there cannot be a democratic place where citizens are not allowed to use a language they can speak” (Disco Volante TV, 2003b). For Disco Volante TV’s lawyer, the language of TV has become a readily available tool for creativity and expression for everyone, not only the disabled.

In addition to explaining the legal consequences of their victory for the Telestreet network, the press conference announced a draft legislation to regulate the street television phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, “ddl Gentiloni,” the draft legislation that Telstreet proposed, was never approved because the left-wing coalition supporting it lost the elections and Berlusconi came back to power. Still, the meetings and discussions for its preparation mark an important moment because of the conflict and of the self-examination that ensued. They were also the last moment of intense collaboration among the different Telestreet nodes before a general dispersal. All in all, during the time Disco Volante TV operated, it productively unsettled their producers and viewers’ perspectives on the media, it stimulated criticism and alternative approaches to the issues treated, and built strong alliances with other groups.

TeleMonteOrlando’s members and collaborators are proud supporters and animators of Gaeta’s cultural and political life. They volunteer as producers of interviews with fellow *Gaetani*, as well as with the numerous tourists visiting the city and its beaches. TeleMonteOrlando carries out weekly studies of local food prices, they broadcast local sports tournaments and council meetings, they show homemade videos. Finally, TeleMonteOrlando runs live political and cultural debates with politicians and intellectuals on issues that directly affect the area. Ciano says that they are followed on TV by 60% of the population, which sustains the channel through donations. As was the case with Disco Volante TV, the people from Gaeta have often stood behind their street television during moments of crisis.

Not unlike mainstream TV, street television relays multiple realities and (re)directs their codes and flows of meaning, on more than one level. Yet, rather than immersing a subject into chaotic and hyper-abundant streams of disjointed affects typical of the spectacle, we see a qualitative transformation of the relationship to television through the practices of

autonomous production used to self-fashion meaning (and meaning-making). Telestreet's proxy-vision approach—*from many for many* (Ch. 1)—partakes in the ontogenetic process of emergence of new communities *and* of their members. The *telestrittari* attempt to develop different values and needs that function outside of market dynamics. During this process of 'meaning-making/action' both individual and collective emerge through reciprocity and resonance between the personal and its environment, between inside and outside of the subjects and their groups. Affect is what triggers the ongoing reconfigurations that lie at the basis of these dynamic processes. Emotions link affective reactions to action (Massumi, 2002b, Simondon, 2006).

Not an Obituary

The Telestreet project was officially declared dead on its listserv in 2008 in part because of frustration with the constant harassment and provocation by an incredibly persistent listserv "troll" (a person that rudely disrupts communication and harasses other list members), and especially due to its own (online) inertia. Yet, although there has been little activity at the level of the network, many of its nodes are still alive and productive on their territory (and the listserv still mails a rare post and the odd obnoxious provocation). Can we talk of Telestreet's failure? And, if so, how can such discussion be turned into a productive one? Still, it is by questioning the rhetoric of success and failure altogether and the measurement and selections this binary implies that Telestreet's existence is best grasped. That is, what, for many can simply be considered markers of a futile project, or of the inability to reach the initial aims, can be for others an opportunity for reflection on the potential of collective practices. Thus, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss some of the factors that contributed to a slowdown and erosion of the connections keeping the whole network together in order to start a reflection on the necessity of tending to the connections among groups as much as to each individual activist project.

For Franco Berardi, Telestreet was outdated very soon after its birth by the diffusion of Youtube and other web 2.0 spaces. In fact, although internet-based media does not fulfil in Italy the same function as traditional television, always on in the background of household activities, platforms like Youtube have become more accessible for Italians.

Increasingly, people have turned to the Internet for both autonomous media and entertainment and with them many Telestreet nodes have started focusing on an online presence, abandoning the airwaves, for which transmission is often rife with technical and financial problems. Some channels were never able to muster the transmission technology and opted for a webtv from the start.

Financial difficulties and threats of legal action also discouraged some projects from persevering, especially when they were also hampered by a high volunteer turnover. It is not unusual to hear that the activities of the pirate channels slowed down or halted because their members had to devote more time and energy to for-profit work. Indeed, a discussion and search for sustainable financial models is a recurrent theme in the network. I have often sat through long debates in which members attempted to think of solutions to financially support such enterprises while retaining the autonomy and flexibility that must often be relinquished when funding is received.

Attempts at solving the sustainability issue have ranged from collaborating with private entrepreneurs to forming video cooperatives that offer media education and production services, and an income to some individuals. For example, NowarTV saw a handful of Telestreets broadcasting on a satellite channel that was supported by Arcoiris TV owner Rodrigo Vergara at the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003. The collaboration ended due to a conflict over intellectual property and ownership claims (Ciro, Interview). Telestreet's productions are "copylefted" under Creative Commons licenses that are often not suitable for commercial use but facilitate content sharing and transmission. Some members of Orfeotv are currently setting up a network of public access community media centres in collaboration with Bologna's ward councils for a new experiment in sustainable citizen journalism (Ciro, Interview).

As we will see in the following chapters, insu^tv is organising with other media projects that include other Telestreet members to find a financially sustainable solution to access digital transmissions, now that the Italian broadcast system switched from analogue to digital technologies in January 2010. In some cases the issue has been one of finding the

money to run a TV channel, in others it is the actual livelihood of its members that is at stake.

Overall, since Telestreet was a very heterogeneous network, it was hard to retain cohesiveness after the initial euphoria. This was as much due to the difficulty of sustaining individual street channels while tending to the life of the network as to the challenge posed to some more radical nodes to collaborate with more conservative, even religious ones. Fragmentation had already started when discussing the official position towards the legalization and possible financial support of Telestreet, as well as when drafting the law that could potentially legalize the network. Later on, in April 2008, an important split happened during discussions to participate in a national Telestreet convention organised by a Telestreet run by youth affiliated with a parish. Here, the presence of a priest overseeing the programming of the channel had outraged some activists. Indeed, while generally questioning the role of the catholic church in the possible democratic running of the channel, many were concerned that religious values infringed on the only rule to be part of the network: no fascism, no racism and no sexism (and homophobia). Other issues about the transparency of the organising process were also raised during the debates and sparked more conflict.

Ultimately, Telestreet never went out with a bang. A few months after the final national meeting, activity slowly died down on the Internet and the Telestreet website run into technical problems and has since gone in and out of maintenance breaks. It is not to exclude that it may pick up some momentum again, if enough nodes are willing to work together at a bigger project than the ones taking place in each community. To return to Berardi's personal analysis, Telestreet was a strong political project but a weak media activist one. Its "media activism" remained limited to the territorial level, without functioning at higher scales as a model against the white noise of isolating and homogenizing mass media. In other words, the overall agency of the network never exceeded the sum of its parts. Hence, Telestreet did not contribute a strong enough model that could help find a balance between the ever-expanding race to participate in the overwhelming cyber-(over)-production hyped by web 2.0 and catatonic, passive submission to the disjunct flows of information discussed earlier.

For Berardi, this must be done by setting up the space for alternative and therapeutic forms of human interaction that produce examples of different media imaginaries at a broader scale than the local one (Bifo, Interview). In this vision, the ideas of the *Internationale situationiste* (Ch.1)—as well as those of Felix Guattari (1995)—resurface through the practice of setting up ‘situations’ that can be picked up by others due to their contagious capacity to produce happiness. The Situationists’ response to the Spectacle is reinterpreted in the practice of bringing people together to combat the psychopathologies and isolation characteristic of an environment oversaturated with information and with affective imperatives to accumulate.

While I agree with Franco’s theories of the role of media activism and recognize that this was certainly not achieved under the general label of Telestreet, I am more reticent to discuss the weakening of the Telestreet network in terms of failure. Above all, it is not by listing the difficulties that Telestreet faces that we can avoid falling into the binary of success and failure. Rather, looking at social change from a perspective of ontogenesis and thinking about it through the concept of repurposing it is possible to offer a different angle of analysis. Telestreet as a network may have not produced a situation that effectively tackled these problems; what it did do was to engender many situations that thrive, sometimes as part of a cohesive network, some others in isolation, sometimes under new names, often by connecting with other projects and engendering new potential. Telestreet started something that may be continued by other projects.

As others like Orfeotv’s Ciro and Nisa recognize their experience was certainly successful in forging new alliances among members of the neighbourhood, cultural associations, and even the local ward councils. From this perspective, Orfeotv and many other channels also created and activated new social webs that cut across generations of activists and organizers contributing to challenging and stimulating debates and knowledge exchanges. Many new projects have spurred from work initiated at a Telestreet, where video has never been the aim but always the tool to facilitate a process of interaction and individuation. These are creative projects that express a need and desire to communicate. Moreover, some of them also function as tools for a kind of ethnography—a practice of research that aims to understand the territories in which media

activists act. On the whole, the potential that Telestreet has engendered is not exhausted like its online discussions; it is virtual, and is actualized in different forms that grow from a strong belief that it is important to develop ways to be together under different conditions than those proposed by the dominant system. The connection among these practices and technological platforms has the potential of bringing media activism to broader scales.

The analysis that follows in the next three chapters draws precisely on the concept of the ontogenesis and connections among activist groups from a perspective that disregards the start and end of a movement. From this angle, it no longer makes sense to talk about Telestreet as a failed or successful project. Rather, we will examine how the configuration and agency of groups constantly change and mutate in interaction with their environment and with each other. However, while discussing the ongoing change that characterises the activist field, I will pay special attention to any insights that can help activists make activism stronger while it changes.

What the three final chapters will present is also an example—one situation that attempts to bring media activism up to the level through the practice of repurposing. Insu^{tv}'s dimension is not merely a territorial one, but one that brings together many practices and situations, strengthening the activist assemblage while it evolves. In chapter seven we now turn to analyse the recomposition of Naples' activist field and the role insu^{tv} plays within it. With the help of Frantz Fanon's theories about the relationship between colonised and coloniser, and Simondon's concept of collective individuation, I will set the stage for the final discussion of insu^{tv}'s work in chapter eight.

Chapter 7

Frantz Fanon in Southern Italy: Neapolitan activism

Each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity.

Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*

As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything, they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts it "thus and not otherwise." [...] in such corners, one can scarcely discern where building is still in progress and where dilapidation has already set in, for nothing is concluded. Porosity results not only from the indolence of the southern artisan, but also, above all, from the passion for improvisation, which demands that space and opportunity be preserved at any price. [...] So everything joyful is mobile: music, toys, ice cream circulate through the streets. [...] Porosity is the inexhaustible law of life in this city, reappearing everywhere.

Walter Benjamin, "Naples" (1925)

17 March 2001, *Universita' Federico II*, Architecture faculty: the 3rd floor of the building is an autonomous research lab run by some of the students. Since 1995, the lab offers computers and video editing technology, something rather hard to come by for many who cannot afford the high prices, especially at the time when the rooms were first squatted. All along, the *Terzo Piano Autogestito* [self-run third floor] has been the training and playground for many activist students investigating the social and architectural transformations of Naples' urban and industrial spaces. During its years of activity, TPA has collected hours of VHS and digital tapes that document their *inchieste metropolitane* [metropolitan inquiries], exploring the effects of the shift from industrial to post-industrial economies in Naples, the presence of abandoned spaces in the old industrial areas, and mapping the arrival of migrants to the city. The results of the inquiries contribute to the collective and autonomous organization of non-profit political and cultural initiatives, where not only students but also others, like workers and the

unemployed, can reflect upon and articulate their needs independently from any institution, and determine their own practices of socialization (TPA, 1995).

Today, some of these students and many of their national and international *compagni* [comrades] are running the temporary Independent Media Centre (IMC) that covers the third Global Forum. In previous years, they have learned about the potentials of communication (Ch. 4), and are now wielding their cameras like weapons. In the few minutes left, they will feed into the projector installed the images collected during the clashes with the police that had taken place in the streets only three hours earlier and screen them in the baroque court of the Architecture building. In the audience are the representatives of the independent and mainstream media waiting to hear what the activists have to declare.

Many of the journalists were invited to this press conference because they accidentally contacted the Global Forum authorities through cloned versions of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; in Italian: OCSE) website: www.ocse.it and www.ocse.org. In the true spirit of tactical media, the sites look identical to the original but redirect visitors' inquiries to activist groups impersonating the organization (Rete No Global and Network Campano per i Diritti Globali, 2001). Aside from a few subtle subversions of the text that now presented the OECD as protecting the vested interests of multinationals at the expense of developing countries, the website looked perfect. Once discovered, the OECD prank attracted a lot of attention to the activist preparation to protest the Global Forum, while very little was known about the event itself. All in all, months of information campaigns, events, and debates on the Global Forum issues preceded the events and proved a successful strategy to circulate information, to use the information as a weapon as much as functioning as channels for coalition-building (Festa, 2003: 30). Other tactical media interventions for the Global Forum included a netstrike against the online trading company *Fineco* to block their financial transactions. This strike – a very innovative practice in 2001, before the invention of “Flood” – was physically carried out by students lining up for hours to manually click on the browser reload button in the universities' computer labs. Other attention-grabbing media stunts included *In-fest-Azione* [in-fest-action], a street parade

with allegorical charts commenting on economic globalization and an invasion of a McDonald's with goats and chickens, followed by an organic feast outside the fast food store.

Other journalists present at the press conference are interested in reporting about the motivations behind the 30,000 protesters once again flooding the streets. After Seattle, Prague, Davos and other contested summits, there is a need to understand this new wave of political dissent. Already after Seattle, Indymedia, the international network of Independent Media Centres (IMC), has become the protesters' megaphone. As the images of police brutality appear on the giant screen at the architecture faculty, the journalists film them and transmit them live on the national and international news. The media exposure that the riots receive forces the government to comment on the events and start an investigation into police action.

Minor histories of struggle in the streets

I can sense pride and excitement, as well as some disappointment, in my friends' voices, when, one after the other, they tell me a version of this story. As I explain below, only four months after this intervention, the violent events in Genoa will throw the principles of media activism into question again. Raising endless discussions about modes of sustainable collective organizing and action, they will slow down the momentum that has propelled the global justice movement since it emerged a few years earlier. During the interviews, all the members of insu[^]tv who were in Naples in March 2001 started their personal stories by telling me about this event, a moment in which the sense of purpose and the strength of community were felt vividly. The Global Forum represents an important moment in the coagulation and diversification of Neapolitan activist practices, and in the growth of practices of media activism, followed closely by a new bifurcation after Genoa.

Starting from this point, this chapter follows the tales told by my *compagni*. It traverses the past and present political history of the city, following its restless movement as it constantly recomposes and layers its pieces, folding in old and new worlds, the multiple histories, cultures and social realities that traverse it, the hard struggles for bare survival.

Through this analysis, it becomes clear that Telestreet in Naples is even less about Berlusconi's personal media empire than it is in other cities hosting Telestreet channels. For Neapolitans, the Berlusconi regime is just the mediatized and spectacular reincarnation of the same old story of the looting of public funds and relentless economic accumulation in the hands of the powerful. It is the same old story about those who maintain and even exploit the century-old, huge economic and infrastructural gap between the north and the south of the peninsula. The history of this harbour city—one of the first European metropolises—goes back too many centuries, dominations and revolts to provide a simple explanation of the structural problems that affect life here, yet historic memory plays a big role for Neapolitan activists. The following investigation into the composition of the field of Neapolitan activist practices teases out some of the myriad threads that will lead to insu^{tv}.

Neapolitan activists call the Global Forum days *le quattro giornate* [the four days], harking back to the historical days in World War II, during which Neapolitans chased the German army out of the city (Rete No Global and Network Campano per i Diritti Globali, 2001). Despite the often-paralyzing hardships, the over 3 million inhabitants (ISTAT, 2009) now densely populating Naples and its outskirts sit on a rich history of creative survival strategies and successful social and political struggle. Yet, for most people this memory is hidden behind the countless tales of crime, stereotypical laziness, criminal inclinations and picturesque urchin folklore that frame representations of Naples.

Naples' histories of struggle haunt the old industrial sites and port, the working class areas, and the pockets of informal and black economies. Among the most recent episodes, the groups and actions set up during the cholera epidemic in 1973 and the devastating earthquake of 1980 do not only stand out as exemplary moments in the history of Neapolitan activism, but also (indirectly) pave the way for *Rete no global forum* global social justice struggles and the Faculty of Architecture's *terzo piano* media activist incubator.

The early 70s and 80s saw the banding together of unemployed and underemployed people—the so-called reserve proletariat—pressuring the government to introduce new jobs

and legalize many unofficial interventions that independently tried to deal with the emergencies (from garbage removal and disinfection to reconstruction). In addition to this, autonomous “unemployed lists” were created to bypass the patronage system supported by the Christian Democrats in power and were used to secure training programmes and jobs without having to go through political backdoors.

The groups and committees that emerged in the 70s, especially the *Movimento Disoccupati organizzati* (MDo) [Organized Unemployed Movement], had such strong footing in Naples’ different wards, that in 1980, within three months from the earthquake, they were able to squat 20,000 empty dwellings to house its victims, leaving a slow and unorganized government with little else to do than legalize the action (Festa, 2003: 6). When I asked Raro from insu^{tv} how he first got into politics, he told me he had grown up at these squatted houses’ weekly meetings, which he attended with his parents (Raro, Interview). In a city where no support ever comes from institutional politics, autonomy seems the only possible answer to instigate social change. Indeed, rejecting institutional politics, the committees and groups worked together with Autonomist activists and students to reclaim stable and secure jobs, work-oriented education and public health services for the collectivity, opposing the hegemonic individualism supported by the patronage system (Festa, 2003: 3–6). Their work set the stage for the demands that have been the basis of much of the political work going on in Naples for over thirty years.

Since the 70s, the right to a guaranteed basic income for every citizen has been the solution proposed to deal with the weakening of the welfare state and the precarious conditions of the labour market. Many Italian political formations stemming from the *Autonomia* increasingly consider this the only viable solution to the social problems of unemployment, and increasingly to the underemployment engendered by neoliberal policies. In Naples, in particular, these struggles for labour rights, housing and basic subsistence are an expression of the disastrous conditions endemic to the city, as much as the result of political discourses connected to communism (Festa, 2003: 1). Similarly, the groups involved in grassroots activism present at the Global Forum express these needs as much as their opposition to global economic forces. It could be argued that their coming together as collective actors has much to do with being entirely immersed in a

field of struggle over basic rights and less to do with a more abstract interest in general social justice.

Having grown up in Naples and knowing its history, I was not entirely taken by surprise when, in more than one conversation, people told me that I should read Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* to understand socio-political struggle in Naples. While recognizing the theoretical differences between Fanon's existentialist and phenomenological approach on one hand (as well as the importance of race in Fanon's theories), and Autonomist thought on the other, the author's focus on the psycho-affective dimension of resistance dovetails with the autonomist emphasis on the production of subjectivities and the need for self-determination.

The struggle for social justice in Naples does indeed often resemble one of liberation from distant powers (political, economic and criminal) depleting the area of resources, exploiting the labour force through actual sweatshops and criminal activities, polluting the environment, and swapping services for votes and favours. Yet, it is Fanon's psychiatric analyses of the emergence of the "colonized" self-perception that underlies the development of alternative forms of struggle, rather than the literal comparison between forms of resistance, that attracted my friends' attention.

The psychological blockages and dependency on the oppressor typical of the colonized complex lead, for Fanon, either to negative or positive identification with the oppressor, where assimilation or self-isolation are two outcomes of the same process of alienation. The effects can be seen in people's tendencies to completely lose cultural roots, or in the crystallization of identities (Fanon, 2004: 15–17; 51). Fanon analyses in detail the processes through which the value systems of the colonized emerge under the influence of colonial powers, and how this affects the very same strategies that resist such powers, especially in the cultural realm. That is, Fanon underlines not only how colonial hegemonic forces inflect counter-hegemonic practices, but he also emphasizes the need to escape this vicious circle through conscious efforts to retain or reshape the value systems and social models that affect the emergence of subjectivities (Fanon, 2004).

Drawing on the colonized complex, where one internalizes the inferior and/or criminal

image and identity moulded for her by more powerful others (Fanon, 2004: 221), the southern Italian in general, and the Neapolitan in particular, often “suffers” from low self-esteem, lack of autonomy and self-determination. This is especially the case in a context where the struggle for social justice is not successfully articulated at a collective level against those who wield power, and conflict falls back onto the social terrain of struggle. In addition to inaction due to a lack of self-esteem, inter-group conflict conditions the way in which people relate to each other.

On a more general level, neoliberal discourses on the relationship between the individual and the economy tend to celebrate the entrepreneurial potential of social actors and their contribution to collective (economic) wealth (see. Ch. 1: prop. 5). Simultaneously, in case of a collapse of the socio-economic structure, they tend to reroute the causes of failure onto the individual. This can be illustrated with the example of the current financial crisis during which the causes of collapse were identified as lying in the individual greed of buyers, rather than in the banking and financial systems that financed their debts. At the same time, these backlashes tend to be amplified by the effects of institutional and governmental classifications —as is the case with migrants legislation and security mechanisms – or with fear-mongering discourses about difference typical of the mainstream media (Alfo, Interview). The material correlate of such institutional discourses that structure society becomes manifest especially during moments of crises in which a lack of resources pitches groups against each other. For instance, migrants are usually the scapegoats of both politicians and citizens in moments of high unemployment.

The economy in Southern Italy has always been in critical condition; with high unemployment rates, most unskilled people who cannot or choose not to emigrate have little choice. They can mainly consider working in a backward and fragmented agricultural sector, in the small manufacturing industries that rely on cheap and black labour to survive, or they can opt for criminal activities. Even there, resources are scarce and the possibility to maintain an acceptable standard of life very limited. Only those who are able to live below the poverty line manage to survive in this market, and they often happen to be immigrants. It comes as no surprise that in many areas of the Italian

south, the political populism and xenophobia echoed by the media provide the frameworks through which Italians define themselves. What seems to be missing in an analysis of conditions for the survival of the southern Italian economy that is promoted in the media is precisely the reliance on informal and illegal labour that keeps costs and prices competitive. The reliance on migrant labour has the additional advantage of enabling many farmers and businesses to benefit from financial support plans by the European Union, while cutting down on production costs by hiring low-cost workforce (Ch. 8).

Much of the social interaction among groups and individuals, whether Italians or migrants, takes place in this tension between superficial and optimistic analyses of the economic potential of the country and the wealth of its (legitimate) inhabitants, and the reliance on forms of labour that have no bargaining power to negotiate their working conditions. So, while the government wins voters' support by building entire electoral agendas on urban safety and border security, Italians are faced with a constant influx of foreigners who are the only ones capable of enduring the work that is required for (southern) Italian products to stay competitive on the local and global markets. Public discussion of these problems hardly mentions global and local legislations that still enable the exploitation of those who make it into a country, while patrolling national borders. The various degrees of exploitation lead to a war among the poor.

In this context of conflict and isolated struggles, Fanon's work provides the tools to better understand the emergence of heterogeneous collective political actors that are not merely definable according to categories such as 'working class'. This is precisely the case of the socio-political struggles in Naples from the 70s to the present. For Festa, the 'potentially colonized' groups include the unemployed and underemployed, the migrants, but also many other individuals who coagulate around autonomous practices of self-determination and have a "porous political conscience" (Festa, 2008). That is, their positioning to the outside and with respect to each other is subject to constant reshaping along external cultural, symbolic and social, as much as economic, forces. The activist work performed in Naples in the last thirty years can be seen as a project of liberation first and foremost from subjugated subjectivities "that drive our collective instinct for survival, nurture our

ethical affiliations and ambivalences, and nourish our political desire for freedom” (Bhabha in Fanon, 2004: xviii). This project from liberation is directed towards images of inferiority and articulations of agency that no longer conceive of isolated individual struggles and of scrambling for social services.

The capillary work of unemployment lists, grassroots committees and social centres is not merely a strategy to organize on the territory, but it is also the outcome of the mobilization of different social meanings through embodied practices that attempt to gain agency by developing and sharing resources and knowledge that speak to a collectivity. Neapolitan activism seeks to rebuild or rediscover a spirit of community and a value system that can be “the glowing focal point where citizen and individual develop and grow” (Fanon, 2004: 40).

In addition to strategies to recompose the subject positions of the actors involved through an alternative understanding and articulation of their own needs and desires, activists take from Fanon a social-therapeutic model that draws on sociality and modes of relation to produce autonomous subjectivities that oppose dominant individualism and defeatism (2004: 11). Finally, it is precisely the autonomous aspect of a struggle that asks for no recognition or acceptance from dominant powers—where the community discovers itself and “speaks to *itself* through this voice” (Sartre in Fanon, 2004: xlvi)—that enables the emergence of practices and discourses that can effect positive changes such as in the social tissue (as was the case with the *Movimento Disoccupati organizzati* for nearly 20 years).

All the way through the 80s, the *Movimento Disoccupati organizzati* and their allies worked in the background, often in conflict with the authorities to amplify this voice. With the end of the *Pantera* student protests in 1989-90 and a second (*Sabotax*) wave in 1994, many who wanted to harness the momentum of social engagement and conflict took their work outside of schools into the community. In particular, the restructuring of the economy to immaterial and service-based production, with its attendant changes to the social fabric, had dispersed the potential subjects of struggle, once concentrated in the factory. As Alfo eloquently puts it in his interview: “When the connective energy

dissipates, Naples discovers its own fragmentation, the deep-rooted social divisions. The city is described as porous due to its historical and urban characteristics but also, especially, when there is enough energy for processes of connection. Without that energy, all that is left are the different forms of geographical and social confinement” (Alfo, Interview). The *Pantera* can be seen as one of those moments of bifurcation, after which the activist field needed once more to find ways to retain its cohesion. More precisely, in 1989, the *Pantera* had once again brought activists together after the end of the long period of mass protests that ended in 1979 and was followed by a slump in social struggles during the 80s (Ch. 5). Once the student protests were over in 1990, there was a need to draw from the newly found momentum into local struggles and relay the wave of actions, which had emerged in the universities and had found allies from the labour movement.

The project of inter-communication of forces (or groups) requires an opening to external actors with different political perspectives and languages. Squatting became a strategy to open up new spaces of coagulation where social life took up an important role in the recomposition of subjectivities. It was the direct outcome of a political analysis of the new territories of struggle (Festa, 2003: 13) and an attempt to create new connective energy. In the newly occupied social centres like Tien’A’ment (1989), Officina 99 (1991) and the Laboratorio Occupato SKA (1995), groups took up the issues of the redistribution of social wealth and the disengagement from the pressure of “labour time” through the concept of a guaranteed income.

Emphasis was also laid on coordinating different movements while preserving their autonomy and heterogeneity, something that has yet to prove sustainable outside of sporadic moments of catalysis around specific events. In particular, while resting on the shoulders of two generations of activists, groups in the 1990s and 2000s have been consistently confronted with the challenges of collectively rearticulating resistance in the light of mutated social and economic policies, of increasing social repression (especially after 9-11), and a strengthened criminal-patronage system. Thus, there is an ongoing effort in activist circles to understand and reflect on the mutated make-up of the subjects and practices of struggle, which now permeate various strata of society (Festa, 2003: 11).

To do so, local activist inquiries look into the micro-conflictual level of everyday struggles, into the new targets of such struggles, and into the trajectories of communication among struggles. Importantly, inquiries into the composition of social antagonism are not limited to the work environment but look especially at the ‘production of the workforce’ itself, i.e. processes of subjectivation and unpaid, so-called ‘affective labour’ (Palano, 2007). The Neapolitan *inchieste* aim to understand how complex webs emerge and create continuity between different mechanisms and levels of socialization and diffusion of resistant movements, and the actions of those struggling (Alquati, 1975: 225). In other words, the *inchiesta* is directed towards the entire social field where needs are articulated and resistant traditions and behaviours solidify; where minor histories are brought together with ongoing processes of individual and collective self-valorization to function as methodology for future struggles (Palano, 2007). Needless to say, all this is also always framed according to an analysis of the current economic forces, as is the case with the analysis of societies of control or of immaterial labour economies.

Before circling back to the climax of the Global Forum (like the *pantera* strike, a short-lived moment of porous cohesion), my interviewees try to make sense of the events leading up to it by talking about the trials and errors of the 90s. Piece by piece, and layer on layer, I am provided with a collective narrative and an analysis of the ripening and difficulties of a movement that, by 2001 did not only count thousands of sympathizers in the streets but also welcomed an unrivalled number of participants in the organization of events and activities—with coordination assemblies bringing up to a 1000 people in one room at a time. Contributing to this growth is a diffused sense of disillusionment with the centre-left government of the city, which, through the election of mayor Antonio Bassolino in 1993, under the guise of progressive political interventions, slowly eroded what was left of the formal and informal models of welfare precariously sustaining much of the local population (Festa, 2003: 18).

Some interviewees tell me about their medical assistance and solidarity work with the Zapatista in Chiapas, the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and with migrants and other marginalized people at the CSOA [social centre] *SKA* in Naples. Others tell me more in detail about the challenges faced by the movement to find the tools and strategies

to bring together and relay the energy of so many groups that were seeking alternative models of political practices. There was conscious reflection before the Global Forum and Genoa on the need to finally “leave the extreme left discursive ghetto and set up a web of relations that could harness the heterogeneous groups emerging from the recomposed social tissue of the area” (Alfo, Interview).

Groups were diffused on the territory and only became visible during moments of contestation like the summits. Developing inclusive practices of participation seemed to be critical to a project of social change that truly addressed the needs of the local groups. Communication proved to be indispensable for the re-articulation of a vocabulary of struggle, both through autonomous media sites like the media centres that reached out to broader audiences (often by using easy to access tools vs. high tech), and through the creative info-guerrilla practices engaging the mainstream media and sparking debate (vs. just making headlines).

Starting from the mid 90s, debates on the use value of communication and experiments with media become more frequent, enriched by the contribution of *Pantera* and *Sabotax* activists who were more versed in new technologies (Festa, 2003: 21). Magazines and newspapers like the internationalist magazine *Blue Line* (1997) and the independent press sheet *Infoaut - Agenzia di comunicazione antagonista* (2000-2001) appeared (and vanished) from the scene. With inherited transmitters, pirate Radio Sarracino (2003) and its other temporary incarnations circulated information and covered events like *Adunata Sediziosa* (since 2000, the yearly festival of the Campania Region’s social self-organising that showcases autonomous cultural production and political debates while fundraising for projects). The final and permanent incarnation of a pirate radio at *Adunata* was Radiolina, which since 2003 is affiliated with Indymedia and shares the same antenna and workspace with insu^tv, also born that year.

Activist experimentation with media peaked during Naples’ Global Forum that brought together government representatives from 40 countries, multinationals and other institutional bodies like OCSE and the World Bank, to discuss e-government and electronic security. Their experiments drew attention to what they saw as the Global

Forum's uncritical championing of technology and profit, of the commodification of life through biotechnologies, of the colonization of the free Internet (and media), constantly threatened by multinational consolidation and by repressive measures in the name of security (Rete No Global and Network Campano per i Diritti Globali, 2001).

While the Global Forum itself is not so important on the international map of global meetings, it is precisely through the successful use of electronic disturbance tactics and of independent media reporting on police violence that Neapolitans raised awareness about the city and its problems: "all in all we created the event, betting on this chance to give Naples and its contradictions the centre of attention for a few days, as Seattle and the alter-globalization movement had done elsewhere before us" (Activist quoted in Festa, 2003: 27).

Events like the Global Forum created the momentum for the collaboration of different groups, from institutional parties, to NGOs, to schools, to social centres. For many, the collaborations enabled the exchange of knowledge, the encounter with issues and projects and practices (violent and non-violent) they were unfamiliar with, and the construction of trust among individuals outside of ideological positioning. These linkages spurred some collaborations during subsequent mobilizations, like the one against the NATO Summit at Naples' South European Command, in September 2001.

The porosity and intercommunication engendered by the Global Forum events and projects was the outcome of the experiments with the recomposition of the social tissue described above, as well as of the coming into contact with global activism. In the time leading up to the Global Forum activists had been successful in articulating common foci of resistance (often the struggle against economic forces) that could hold the social tissue together, while allowing for difference. Unfortunately, this was only a short-lived moment in the new cycle of struggles and fragmentation took over.

With the end of 2001, much of the energy field holding the Neapolitan movement together (not unlike other places) started dissipating. In addition to a repressive wave raised after 9/11 and the activist burn out that affected many involved in the massive preparation work for the Global Forum, the inter-group conflict that had been kept under

control for the protests started emerging. With the energy around the Global Forum gone, the illusion of having come closer to creating functional internal and network dynamics and a central field for collective struggle also disappeared.

In particular, tensions created through the choice of tactics and strategies, together with the inability to keep the collaborative momentum after the initial burst of energy, left the movement fragmented. Even the more radical, autonomist groups distanced themselves from each other. Indeed, while it is easier to understand the difficulties emerging from collaborations between social centres and associations, or NGOs and independent unions, the rift that (re)opened among autonomist groups is a harder one to grasp. As Steve Wright emphasizes, although the different theoretical positions among Autonomist Marxist frameworks may be reflected in the Italian movement itself, anyone with personal experience will find this only an imperfect explanation (2007).

As Guattari and Negri point out (1990: 91), any process of recomposition also carries dogmatic and sectarian elements from old stratifications, which threaten collaboration from inside and complicate the articulation between immediacy and mediation, tactics and strategy established through multilateral and practical relations. This has often been the case in Autonomist activist circles where, for instance, the discussion between *spontaneisti* [spontaneists] and *Organizzazionisti* [organizationists] (See Ch. 3; Borio et al., 2002: 99–101) has very often drawn the line that split groups from the inside.

To give just two examples of internal fragmentation, in some parts of Italy, autonomist groups like the *disobbedienti* have faced internal conflict due to their decisions to interact with institutions (and even run as councillors in connection with progressive party lists). In Naples, one of the contentious lines seems to divide practices of organization on the territory (*Militanza* in itself) from cultural activism. Activists often see cultural activism and even media activism as collateral activities that can sustain or relay more ‘serious’ forms of activism, yet these practices are hardly incorporated in organizing strategies as form of *militanza*. While this separation has had the positive effect of engendering creative projects like pirate radio and other forms of independent media, it has also

prevented possibly useful discussions about and experimentations with the media to facilitate sustainable organizing practices that involve different collective actors.

To say that organising among groups always ran smoothly and productively even during the preparation of the Global Forum and other events would not only be false, but would also be counterproductive for anyone who sees self-critique as a necessary political practice. In particular, the difference in the positioning of groups on a continuum between peaceful process and direct action to more violent strategies is certainly one of the contentious elements in the discussion and organization of political dissent.

In Naples, this rift intersected with the one created by the choices of the communication strategies and the language of the logo of the social forum: a traditional Neapolitan *commedia dell'arte* character wearing a gas mask and wielding a baton (See Appendix 2). For many civil society groups (like civic associations and independent trade unions) that were not part of the antagonist movement, the aggressive connotation of the image did not reflect the attitudes and strategies with which they were about to take to the streets for the protests.

Similarly, the choice of a spokesperson for the unified movement to convey its message to the mainstream clashed with the principles of horizontality and self-representation at the basis of many organizations involved (Festa, 2003: 25–31). The choice of a media representative also posed a problem later on when the mainstream media developed the tendency to look for a voice of the movements to talk about actions that were eventually pigeonholed as belonging to specific antagonistic groups. This kind of pigeonholing of actions and groups usually detracts from the weight that many of the issues contested have on people's everyday lives and prevent broader social identification with the practices (Hydrarchist, 2005).

Despite these points of intersection that show the implications of the use of media in political organising, there was hardly any debate devoted to media activism as a political practice that could go beyond the circulation of information. On the contrary, as I will explain later on, many felt that media activism could also be a trap for militants, since it circulated images of the protests and could be used by the authorities to prosecute them.

For the activists organizing the forum, media activism was a tool, rather than a mode of struggle to experiment with and make organizing more effective. Eventually after the Global Forum and Genoa, the tension between violent and non-violent practices/language, the split between cultural and militant activism, and the contentious role of communication in the protection of the privacy of activists, became issues that needed urgent reflection.

The successful intervention through the press conference at the architecture faculty that, only three hours after the beatings, refuted the police accusations of hooliganism on the part of activists, did not set the standard for the future role of communication for the Italian social justice movement. Nor did media activism remain the protection shield that it promised to become in Seattle and Naples. While the Independent Media Centre set up in Genoa became the site of unprecedented (and unpunished) police violence and human right violations, the over 40 documentaries produced on the protests and the information on the computers confiscated by the Italian police will often be used to prosecute activists. Moreover, with Berlusconi's newly elected government, the movement was not able to open up a debate on the events in the mainstream media in the same way it did in Naples. By demonizing any kind of violent clash as a deliberate attempt to silence the voice of other protesters, the media contributed to deepening the split between more and less radical groups, thus hampering future collaboration and dialogue.

The Italian chapter of Indymedia (IMC) was set up in September 2001, with members of Architecture's *Terzo Piano* collective spearheading the Neapolitan node already during the Global Forum. At the time, before blogs and other forms of instantaneous communication, IMC offered an unprecedented opportunity for open publishing on the Internet. Their interface allowed activists to enter into a relation with the mainstream by representing themselves, and by distributing independent information that the Berlusconi regime would otherwise censor (Wadada, Interview). Still, Genoa dealt a powerful blow to debates about the role of media activism for a unified movement, especially when it came to discussing privacy and accountability. In fact, after the police confiscated the computers and hard drives with the footage of the protests and used them as evidence in the trials, and turned their weapons into instruments of repression, even Indymedia

activists became self-conscious about their role in the struggle for social justice and dedicated a lot of their energies to discussing the problem.

As a result, two general lines of media projects emerged: 1) Global Project—closer to certain areas of the social centres that included the *disobbedienti* and were more selective in the choice of their contributors, and 2) more heterogeneous groups coagulating around the national Indymedia. The latter took “a reflection break” in January 2006, to eventually reopen in July 2008. This pause for reflection was due in part to the internal disagreements about the adoption of a diversity of tactics, the split between cultural and militant activism, and the protection of activists’ privacy. Another factor leading to this pause was due the difficulty of coordinating long debates using a consensus method in crowded online meetings and through the listserv. A third factor was the emergence of web 2.0 applications like blogs, which opened up more spaces from which to circulate independent information, adding options like commenting or multimedia and profiling single authors. Upon reopening, in order to facilitate collaboration, decision-making and the building of trust among members, the organization dissolved its national node coordinating the different local chapters and created a lighter structure with easier face-to-face interaction (Wadada, Interview).

This localized model applied to the new chapter of Indymedia in 2008 is also one that different autonomous media collectives from the area around Naples had already adopted to come together and coordinate a local media centre, MINA (*Media Indipendenti Napoletani*) to support each other and share resources. In fact, soon after the initial success of Indymedia in 2001, it became clear to many Neapolitan media activists that the Internet was not enough as a channel for independent communication to reach different strata of society, inspiring the creation of other projects like Radiolina, various newspapers, and eventually insu^tv in 2003. This kind of media could reach a wider audience that was not only computer illiterate but also outside of the restricted circle of activists, by using a language more accessible to outsiders. This can be said to be a conscious attempt at grounding media activism by transplanting it from information networks onto the territory. Insu^tv and Radiolina are part of MINA.

Most members of insu^tv had been involved in the mobilizations for the Global Forum and Genoa in 2001 and had been previously part of other cultural production projects like the *terzo piano*, Blue Line, some free radios and the IMC. For them, opening up communication to actors that did not identify with the radical language or practices of the movement was one of the reasons why they gravitated towards the Telestreet model of pirate television. Moreover, many felt an intense exhaustion after the global protests. The internal fractures that had emerged in the movement were polarizing activists into new clusters. These more defined identities with which some could not directly identify reduced the scope of dialogue with the outside, risking a return to older times of isolation from wider communities.

There emerged what some described as a “grey zone” in the movement, with some people “deciding not to decide” whether to be part of one group or the other. For some, it made no sense to go back to before the experiments that had taken place in Naples before the Global Forum and which they considered successful. The soon-to-be members of insu^tv (*insulini*) remained interested in the communicational dimension of activism, which had meanwhile grown in scope and potential, from the Hacklabs, the web to open publishing media and now pirate television. Insu^tv was engendered outside any direct affiliations with the movement, yet it remains embedded in a field of activist and grassroots practices with high potential for supporting social justice. As shown above, Naples has a rich historic memory of struggles and is subject to an energy whose force quickly switches between centrifugal and centripetal. Insu^tv’s work is located in this field of tension, together with many other groups.

Porosity and collective individuation

My work so far has devoted a considerable part of the analysis to explaining the links between theory and practice and to how different waves of Italian activism have been accompanied by the development of new concepts and tools for analysis. As we have seen, this is not limited to frameworks to analyze economic forces or power dynamics. Much of the work done to shift the emphasis from subjects (as the protagonist of history) to subjectivities (as the *loci* for the unfolding of new practices of resistance) has

engendered forms of struggle that move away from oppositional practices to practices of autonomous self-determination.

This approach now animates grassroots groups experimenting with alternative practices to create more equitable living and work conditions. At the same time, they try to come together as collective actors to engage dominant powers. In general, contemporary global and local activism is constantly faced with the challenge of finding modes for the efficient coexistence of different actors in order to constitute a strong front, while allowing for a plurality of discourses and practices. To go back to different conceptualizations of power, one of the challenges for activists is how to engage *potentia* while reckoning with *potestas*.

It seems that now, especially in the case of Naples, despite the invaluable contributions to the theoretical aspect of activism, and despite the invaluable contribution of each single group to social justice, there is a dire need for more analysis and experimentation directed at working together. In particular, returning to previous discussions of Fanon's work, there is a need to attend directly to the psycho-affective dimension of activism through the development of social-therapeutic models that not only pay specific attention to the emergence of subjectivities but also, and especially, to the ways in which the latter function at the collective (intra-group) level. This is particularly important within pluralistic activist environments like the global social justice movement and its local actualizations.

My discussions of the past and present of activism aimed at setting up the problem of interaction among activist groups as much as at mapping the multiple lines and forces that lead to insu^{tv}. While I make no pretence to offer a model for contemporary activist practices, I do hope that the following analysis of insu^{tv}'s work will inspire some to experiment further and to continue such an analysis through the mapping of other instances: instances that consider the ways in which individuals and groups come together through processes of collective individuation; and instances that contribute to inquiries into the composition of the social antagonisms making up the Neapolitan activist terrain.

To this end, and borrowing again from Simondon's work, we can work from the assumption that the social field is a system of relations that mediates between the individual and others (out-group), presupposing a passage through smaller groups of reference/identification (in-group). From a perspective of psychic and collective individuation, the expression "social field" itself is not entirely apt to describe a system of relations. This is because the social field would constitute an environment in which individuals act only if we considered individuation as a concluded process, rather than as an ongoing process through which actors *and* their field are engendered reciprocally:

society is not the result of the reciprocal presence of several individuals, nor is it a substantive reality to superimpose on individual beings, as if it was not dependent on them: society is the operation, the operative condition which determines a mode of existence more complex than the presence of an isolated individual being (Simondon, 2006: 172–3).

Thus, the social field is not a substantive term of a relation: it is a system of relations; and if there is one, the line of separation does not run between the individual and the social but between the in-group and out-group—since the first still constitutes an extension of the individual.

Looking at the relation between groups, we can consider the in-group as an individual (actor)—at a different stratum. This is not because a group is a sum of individuals but because the in-group can be seen as the social body of the individual, to which she relates through a system of values and beliefs (Simondon, 2006: 171–3). The sense of belonging to a group is a "dimension of an individual's personality, not the relation of a term distinct from the individual" (Simondon, 2006: 175). This means that what makes up a group is an assemblage of individual tendencies, instincts, beliefs, meanings and expressions—what is called here personality—and that affect the emergence of a group itself, much in the same way individual beings with their subjectivities are engendered (Simondon, 2006: 177–8; see Ch. 4).

This implies that individuals are not preconstituted entities who join a group, nor that the group is what moulds the individual's personality: priority is given to group individuation

in which, however, “individuals are both environment and agents of a sincrystallization (Simondon, 2006: 178). The process of individuation takes place for the individual (Ch. 4), at the same time as the group emerges from the communication and augmentation of each individual process. What constitutes a process of collective individuation, in the same way as the individual one, is an (ongoing) process of problem solving of a tension between individual and environment in a metastable equilibrium. The in-group is a supplement to individuation on a broader level. Individuals feel ‘integrated’ in the social whenever their social individuation does not conflict with their personal individuation. That is, if there is no need to consciously engage with their sense of belonging to the group (from the inside or outside), an individual’s system of beliefs is not necessarily structured, although it underlies interaction (Simondon, 2006: 174).

The articulation of individual (opinions) and collective beliefs (myths) that characterize the group (and relate it to the outside) is usually the product of a moment in which an individual has to structure and define her belonging to the group in a way that is intelligible to the out-group (Simondon, 2006: 181). Similarly, in the case of internal conflict, she has to redraw the line between in and out-group. Hence, while it is one of the ways we often make sense of groups, the articulation of beliefs and identities is the manifestation of a moment of ‘crisis’, rather than the basis of a group’s emergence and persistence. It is worth clarifying that crisis here is a neutral term that refers to a moment of intensity in which a structuration begins to take place as a response to an event.

What can we see when we think through contemporary (Neapolitan) activist practices as strongly dependent on the ability to restrict or extend the boundaries between the in-group and the out-group, (while still allowing productive encounters)? How does this framework impact any conceptualization of activism as a mode of subjectification—or individuation? While, as stated, the boundary exists between individual/in-group and out-group in the (co)constitution of the social field, it is not by looking at these two extreme poles as the sites of change that it is possible to grasp the movement of ontogenesis of the social (Ch. 1: Prop: 1). Indeed, we do not want to focus here on these already formed realities as engendering the relations between individuals and groups. Rather, as

previously explained, it is the relationality that constitutes these extreme terms which is the subject of this inquiry.

To look at the process of becoming of groups and the exchanges that are enabled among them means to consider the individual/in-group as in tension with the environment (not as terms in relation to each other), and to work from that tension (before there is a resolution to the crisis). It means to understand and affect the conditions in which the individual individuates from one stage to the other through temporary structural resolutions (Simondon, 2006: 216–22). At the same time, we must develop practices that add to the numerous autonomous experiments that focus on modes of subjectivation outside of dominant consumer culture (including Telestreet). This contribution takes place when understanding and affecting the conditions in which groups individuate in relation to other groups. As I explained in chapter six, for the individual interacting with its environment, this is a process that strongly relies on affect to trigger the transformations. That is, for an individual watching a Telestreet program or producing one and/or being part of a Telestreet crew or audience, affect and perception trigger processes of individuation. Insu^{tv}'s work shows how this can also apply to groups interacting with media and with other groups.

Chapter eight will demonstrate how insu^{tv}'s work addresses directly the psychological and embodied reality of collective individuation—the collective awareness and collective corporeality which set the limits and structure processes of interaction—by looking for ways to keep the discursive and the physical/practical as close together as possible through frequent individuations. More tangibly, the following chapter offers examples of how media activism can attend to the psycho-affective dimension of political struggle through the development of social-therapeutic models of interaction that rely on media production. In this context, together with Fanon, we can think with Felix Guattari because his work draws on alternative approaches to therapy that experiment with processes of subjectification, away from hardened reference structures (which cause psychic impasses such as paranoid group subjectivity): “the invention of new analytic nuclei capable of bifurcating existence” (1995: 18). As discussed in previous chapters, these modes of

individuation tend to distance themselves as much as possible from the dominant and oppressive forces of labour production and consumption.

Guattari's therapeutic practices aim at putting in motion unforeseen a-signifying chains that were previously hindered by dominant assemblages of meaning, by obsessions, by social and linguistic norms, and by "communicative double binds that generated neuroses and pressure to repeat" (Berardi (Bifo), 2008: 131, Guattari, 1995: 70–1). This can be done through art and other aesthetic practices (Guattari, 1995), but also by defusing the tension between bodies to the point of connection through the insertion of different energetic catalyst like videocameras. We can think of this kind of insertion-connection as an ethico-aesthetic mode of social interaction that uses media to re-pattern the activist political field, breaking away from the cycles of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of group identities described in this chapter. In other words, while retaining the conceptualization of the in-group as the continuation of the individual, we can focus on this empathic mode of coexisting among in-groups, without having to focus on the group boundary.

We will investigate how insu^tv's media activism functions and how, with them, the media aspect becomes the attractor and we see the emergence of connections not only among individuals but also among groups. The connections that are produced reshape the assemblage of groups through the use of information technology in a way that draws energy from the tensions among its parts. If Guattari foretold the use of media as the field of possibility for the creation of new collective assemblages of enunciation (i.e. group subjectivities), finally, we will see how insu^tv pushes this inorganic-organic, inter-group-focused mode of existence further towards what could be called *connective assemblages of enunciation*. The final chapter will then consider the effects and challenges of such practices.

Chapter 8

From Collectives to “Connectives”

We cannot, in the common understanding of the term, know individuation, we can only individuate, individuate ourselves, and individuate within ourselves. This understanding is--at the margins of what is properly considered as knowledge--an analogy between two operations, a certain mode of communication. The individuation of the reality that is exterior to the subject is grasped by the subject using the analogical individuation of knowledge within the subject; but it is through the individuation of knowledge, and not through knowledge alone, that the individuation of non-subject beings is grasped. Beings may be known by the subject's knowledge, but the individuation of beings can only be grasped by the individuation of the subject's knowledge.
(Simondon, 2009: 13)

We are a connective, not a collective
Nicola Angrisano, Interview

I am driving through the central train station area of Naples, or at least this is what people used to call it. This overcrowded criss-cross of trains, bus terminals and vendor stalls is now called Chinatown. The transformation has been fast and nearly total, with Naples' port stocking over 3 million tons of legal and illegal, mainly Chinese, merchandise that is distributed throughout Europe (Saviano, 2007: 7). Most shops here are now Chinese-owned and they are surrounded by street markets where the rest of the migrant population from Eastern Europe and Africa also mixes and tries to survive on a day-by-day basis. Surveys estimate at least 100.000 legal migrant workers from over 150 countries in the Campania region alone. About half of the entire migrant population of the south is concentrated here and the area is undergoing profound social transformations. Naples and its province host 45% of this population due to the location, the services and businesses available, the work opportunities, the port and the railway that connect to other parts of the country. One in four migrant workers lives in Naples. There are at least 45.000 migrants, that is 2% of the total residents of Naples (Mira, 2009).

On this particular evening, with the vendors and shoppers gone, the place is a little eerie and unfamiliar. I stop my car to ask a sex worker if she knows how to get to Officina 99, in the industrial area behind the station. “Sure, I'll take you there if you drop me off to

work. I am Anna and I am a trans woman”. During the brief drive with Anna I am left to wonder why she is so familiar with the kids from the social centre but her clients are already queuing in their cars and we have no time left to talk.

The CSOA Officina never changes; since its squatting when I was in my late teens, the building is still run down, the ceiling leaks, and even though the city council has entrusted the building to the activists who run it, there is no money to fix it. Nevertheless, for over eighteen years, the youth of Naples has congregated in this old industrial building dancing to Neapolitan indie bands in the crowded concert hall, discussing politics and culture at meetings and performances, recording music and programming software in the hack-labs, or sharing food and wine on the massive roof terrace. Many friendships and alliances were shaped or broken in these rooms, while we leaned against the walls painted with graffiti. One could write the history of Neapolitan activism by peeling off the layer upon layer of colourful posters and flyers that cover many of Officina’s walls.

Some things I notice are different: the TV headquarters have incorporated a control room, a room for live talk shows, a music recording studio for bands to play, and the kitchen for the cooking shows. Everything is rigged with cables and interconnected, so that when other groups are not using the facilities, there is a lot of space for creative television programmes. The control room has all sorts of technology, DIY, refurbished PCs, digital cameras, mixers and so on. I can see what’s on air from the monitors: children talking about their ideal neighbourhood. The shaky camera tells me it is probably the product of a workshop in a school. On the PC screen, I see how the open source media player I heard so much about automates the programming, so that the TV can be remote-controlled and no one needs to be at the studios 24-7.

Soma, a Linux-operated programme, has been adapted for insu^{tv} by free software hackers who had originally developed a program to operate a pirate radio. The platform is also used by Radiolina, which has its studios here. Apart from not relying on proprietary software, and having made the broadcasting system much more reliable and efficient, Soma also offers the possibility of inserting a message crawl at the bottom of the screen.

This is how insu^tv viewers can find out about upcoming events and find the information to contact them.

With the antenna sending a signal of quality as good as any other local channel, and with the high density of population of Naples, insu^tv offers its transmissions to thousands of viewers in the central and eastern areas of Naples. Naples is the one of the largest cities in Italy, with a population of 1,000,449 and a greater metropolitan population of 3,085,447. Because it has the highest population density on the Italian peninsula (8,334.5/km²; 21,586.3/sq mi), insu^tv potentially reaches more viewers than other micro-broadcasters of the Telestreet network. For many, it 'looks good' but the *insulini*—or like their neighbours call them, “the television people”—are still surprised when they are stopped in the street and complimented. With so much on their plates from the production side, they have little time to wonder about their virtual audiences.

As I start spending more time at Officina, I realise that it is not only the physical place that has changed. On my second day, I open the door to *signora* Franca, a middle-aged lady who has come to bring us cake (and wants to help clean the place!). Franca and many of her friends live in the neighbourhood and have become comfortable with the squat during a wave of protests against a proposed dumping site in an old tobacco factory around the corner. Activists from Officina were involved in the protests, and the squat became a meeting place for the neighbourhood. Some of the people still come here, after the little victory they had against the dumping plans (Petrillo, 2009).

There is a considerable difference from the times in which Officina attracted Neapolitan youth to its overcrowded events and concerts but had not managed to forge strong alliances with the inhabitants of the area. Now, the events are no longer crowded, partly due to a slump in the activist scene, but also because there are other social centres in downtown Naples, which attract those who are not willing to travel so far. At the same time, Officina has now won the trust of many in the neighbourhood, who have become comfortable frequenting the place. I see some of them again at the cinema downtown. They have come to watch the videos on gender freedom and women's issues some of them took part in. We are showing the videos during *Maygay*, a festival on gender and

sexual minorities insu^tv has helped organise.¹⁵ This is one of the many public events the group supports and organises. This chapter discusses some of insu^tv practices and their role in the mediation among activist groups in the city.

Domenica Aut and Other Productions

Locals come to Officina to be a live audience for the shows, especially *Domenica Aut* [Sunday out]. *Domenica Aut*, insu^tv's most popular format, is a talk show that takes place on a Sunday, usually once a month or every two months, depending on the other projects running at the same time. The show involves studio guests, video features, live entertainment and theme cooking which concludes the show by sharing the food with guests and audience. For those familiar with Italian popular culture, the title itself already points to the concept behind the show. *Domenica in* [Sunday in] is a mainstream TV Sunday afternoon show that, since time immemorial, has kept entire families glued to the screen with music, dance, games and comedy (and a lot of *veline* in bikini).

Domenica Aut is “the first television show that invites you to turn the television off” (insu^tv, 2007a). This two-to-four-hour-long program asks you to leave the house and come to the studios to enjoy the smells, the touch and warmth of television, and to meet the groups involved in the production of the show (insu^tv, 2007a). All of insu^tv's features are licensed under Creative Commons and can be freely circulated through non-commercial events. Some of the video material used for *Domenica Aut* has been turned into documentaries that are downloadable online and are screened around Italy. This is the case with *In^sostanza*, who focus on the relationship between drug use, the economy and the territory (insu^tv, 2009a), as well as with *Onda su onda*. The latter is a documentary on the Anomalous Wave, the latest student movement that took to the streets in 2009 following a (successful) attempt to reform and privatise the education

¹⁵ A detailed analysis of the role of gender within insu^tv is beyond the scope of this dissertation because it would require a long excursus into the development of Italian feminism and the opposition to it, as well as a discussion of the construction of gender roles through religion, the media, and popular culture. It suffice to say that I find insu^tv to be one of the rare spaces in Naples in which gender roles do not shape or polarize interaction. This is particularly worthy of notice because, often, the work connected with technology and media is male-dominated, whereas this is not the case with the *insulini*. There is also a clear interest in many members of the group in exploring the issues of gender and sexuality from alternative perspectives. This is visible in the collaboration with queer collectives like the *transgeneri*, in the support of queer cultural events and in the inquiries into alternative relationships to the body and into sex work.

system. *Onda su onda* was produced together with the Neapolitan students involved in the protests (insu^tv, 2009b).

I soon found out that Anna knows *Officina* because of a *Domenica Aut* episode on sexual freedom. The episode involved, among other things, a series of investigations and interviews with sex workers. Members of insu^tv also accompanied nurses and social workers during their night visits to popular sex work sites, onboard of a mobile clinic that offers assistance to street workers. The people who were interviewed by insu^tv were invited to participate, and to come to a screening of *Mater Natura* (Andrei, 2004), a movie on transgendered people. A group of sex workers showed up at the squat, and even brought another movie that a French independent director had made on them.

Domenica Aut is not only successful in bringing people together during the show. The production process is exemplary of how insu^tv works. After choosing a topic at an initial meeting, and starting research to find out some of the threads that lead to the territory and to the local communities, the crew establishes contact with a number of people to define a point of view and collectively produce the show. Subsequent meetings are held with the groups involved to decide how to structure the show, what to give priority to, carry out the interviews and mini documentaries, whom to invite as experts in the studio, and so on.

For example, the episode on the *Città e periferia* ([the city and the outskirts], 2007b), produced an entire web of connections with and among projects functioning at the centre and the margins of the city. The media activists of *Pietra Lavica* (in the province of Naples) presented their video-inquiry exposing the environmental damage caused by the construction of a motorway. Their work denounces the cement industry's interests and manoeuvres to bury the region under a sea of concrete, thanks to legal and illegal deals with the authorities. In a similar vein, the members of the citizen advocacy group *Assise Cittadina* from Bagnoli (an important site for the production of steel and asbestos until the late 80s) discussed their nation-wide campaign for the transparent management of the area.

Here, although clean-up work has been ongoing for over a decade, with billions of Euros

spent on ineffective methods of asbestos removal, the area and its coastal beaches are still highly polluted, withholding potential benefits from the tourism industry. At the same time, the “regeneration” of the area seems to be only functioning according to the speculation and economic stakes of private investors, with little concern for Bagnoli’s inhabitants and for any rights to public space (Assise Cittadina per Bagnoli, 2007, insu^tv, 2007b). As I will explain in greater detail below, these environmental catastrophes are deeply connected to the political choices of the institutions and cannot be separated from on-going and often hidden struggles against criminality and corruption to which local media activists have made an important contribution.

Particularly worthy of notice in this *Domenica Aut* episode is the attention given to the area of Scampia, north of Naples, whose notoriety is due to high unemployment and criminality rates, and to one of the bloodiest recent Camorra wars (fictionalized in the movie *Gomorra*) (Garrone, 2008). *Domenica Aut* presents another face of this unemployment and criminality-ridden place through the work of *Gridas* [*Gruppo risveglio dal sonno* [group awakening from sleep] and *Vo.di.Sca* [*Voci di Scampia* – Voices of Scampia].

Gridas’ aim is to awaken citizens, and stimulate social involvement through street art and other creative activities in which the street is re-appropriated. Among other things, they organise an annual carnival with self-produced allegorical floats and masks that offer social critique, murals painted by the local youth on the grey walls of the housing projects, children’s art workshops and public screening of films and documentaries that can stimulate reflection (Gridas, 2005, insu^tv, 2007b). *Vo.di.Sca* is a youth-run project set up after a young person was accidentally killed by the Camorra, in order to raise awareness about the issues faced by young people from the area. During the show, the launch of the book by one of the members served as an occasion to talk about *Vo.di.Sca*’s theatre work and to showcase the movie on the area in which the group’s members live. The movie was produced during a media workshop with insu^tv (*Vo.di.Sca.*, 2010). More recently, in July 2010, insu^tv and fellow MINA member *Radioazioni* supported *Gridas* during a series of protests and initiatives to retain the (squatted) building that had housed the project for thirty years. The collaborative initiatives, that included floats, music and

dancing in public squares convinced the local administration to support *Gridas*, thereby securing them access to the building.

The episode 'City and Suburbia' could not ignore the presence of immigrants who were so close to Officina itself. In particular, at the time the show was being produced, a sudden wave of police repression was targeting the street markets run by (mainly African) immigrants around the railway station. With some help from *insu^tv*, a group of Senegalese migrants was able to produce a video inquiry that identified the reasons for the sudden prosecution of the migrants in new projects to redevelop the area. In addition to some interviews with the *ambulanti* [itinerant street vendors] that drew connections between the destruction of cultural diversity, the displacement or elimination of businesses with regular permits and social problems like homelessness and unemployment, the group started a conversation with the authorities. During the conversation, they uncovered plans to gentrify the area, without any consideration or involvement of the local migrant population, which has been a constant presence for over fifteen years. A public meeting between over 300 migrants and the authorities followed this investigation. During the event, the screening of the video inquiry was received by the city council representatives with promises to include the migrant population in the urban planning of the area.

Domenica Aut is a means to meet groups doing community and social justice work in Naples, to bring people together (and incorporate some in the crew), and to know and inspire each other. It is one of the ways in which connections are engendered. Yet, the show is also, and especially, a tool for research and inquiry. It is a way to better understand and talk about the problems that affect local communities. At the same time, the collaborations offer the possibility of initiating new projects that address what has emerged during the show.

Officina seems to be one of the few places in Naples where migrants mix with locals during activities of cultural production that are self-determined and autonomous, rather than part of any specifically targeted assistance project. For a while, both Radiolina and *insu^tv* have had migrant-run projects, especially news in different languages. After, the

initial project on the persecution of street vendors, the *TG migranti* [Migrant newsreel] was, for a while, a regular programme. Unfortunately, because of fast turnover of the crew (immigrants often have to chase work opportunities around the country), this is not yet a sustainable project. Even during the video-editing course I attended with a new group of immigrants, it is pretty clear that it is hard for them to honour their commitment due to their precarious life and work conditions.

Insu^tv's crew are consistently trying to think of new ways to stabilize the migrant contribution to media activism, but so far, they have not been entirely successful because this would require financial resources that are not available. At the same time, through the contacts and previous collaborations with migrant rights organizations, insu^tv is among the very few groups who follow and report on the dramatic events affecting migrant communities in Southern Italy, to the point that they are sometimes contacted by the mainstream for their footage.

Indeed, in January I received a very frustrated email from an *insulino*:

we are fucked...apart from insu^ from Naples, basically no one moved their arses, not even in Calabria!!! Someone from Cosenza, talk about independent media...we are really fucked here...there is a desert here...can we handle this???

He was coming back from Rosarno in the far south of the Calabria region, after an impromptu trip with little economic resources and a borrowed car that broke down on the highway. Still, the 30-minute documentary that was ready for screening only 8 days later is a visually stunning, charged piece that talks about the evacuation of 500 migrant workers from an abandoned industrial site by the Italian police.

On January 9th, 2010, after a riot following one more attempt to shoot dead some of the migrant workers hired to pick oranges from the fields, a group of farmers had blocked the road to ensure the successful completion of the raid. All around, groups of people threatened and attacked some of the more isolated migrants with bats and guns. *Il tempo delle arance* [Gone with the Oranges] is an unmediated documentation of the reasons for the migrants' rebellion against this violence and apartheid.

While devoid of narrative commentary, the juxtaposition of interviews with migrants,

farmers, anti-racist groups and the authorities offer up a clear context in which to place the vendettas by the local mafia who have high stakes in the farming industry, and the deportation of many of these (legal) migrants by a racist and repressive State. In the midst of the pogrom, the extreme close-ups of the angry and shocked African men speak directly to the audience. They not only denounce the shootings, the exploitation and racism, but above all, they blame and criticize the media for fomenting the hate. With no faith left in journalists who represent blacks as “troublesome, destructive and as cannibals” (insu^tv, 2010b), they do not see the corporate media as presenting an opportunity to exit their political and media invisibility.

One of the interviewees explains how the xenophobia and hysteria in the mainstream media strongly contribute to the tidal wave of racism that has hit the whole peninsula: “The grassroot of the problem is [...] the Rosarno people are killing us! [...] But Italians don’t know, because you, the journalists, don’t tell them! So now, we take you the journalists and the Rosarno people as the same, because when we speak the reality to you, you don’t tell Italians! So now Italians are taking us as the riot people,” he says standing in front of a wall on which someone has spray-painted: “Avoid shooting blacks” (insu^tv, 2010b). The close-up of the people involved, the setting in which they live and the police escorting the convoy speak for themselves and complete the picture.

Il tempo delle arance is being screened all over Italy at festivals and antiracist events, it has won best documentary at the festival Doc/IT, and is reaching other countries in Europe, starting with Spain and Germany in May 2010. More than just offering an alternative reading of the events, what is important for insu^tv is the opportunity through these screenings to mobilise civil society, which, with the exception of a few migrant rights groups, seems to be in the dark or indifferent to what is happening. Moreover, aside from the need to denounce these violations of human rights, it is the invitation to further investigate and understand the root causes of what is too simplistically branded as racism. For insu^tv, this invitation can be a fundamentally contagious and emancipatory practice.

It is through the practice of always attending to the connections between social, economic

and political issues that it becomes possible to see find effective solutions to the problems confronted, rather than just simply working from the perspective of race. Some of the other testimonies in *Gone with the Oranges* indeed point to the conditions of exploitation under which migrants have to work, and the dismal conditions under which they are forced to live in abandoned and run down buildings. This is not merely a racist issue, but needs to be unpacked further to see how race intersects with a more general role of exploitable minorities within the economy and for political power.

They also show how this situation foments more hatred and conflict than labour rights granted to migrants would. Moreover, while the voices of the farmers echo the stereotypes purported by the media and by the government, the contradictions between the different voices of the movie separate the outright racism of some from the double standards and interests of those who need cheap labour to propel Italian oranges into the global economy. Overall, a contrast emerges between the violent and repressive methods used by the State to face this issue and the lack of protection and assistance that weaker social actors currently suffer from in Italy.

Southern Italy's tidal wave of racist attacks precedes Rosarno. For instance, in May 2008, the local population attacked and set fire to Roma camps in San Giovanni a Teduccio and Ponticelli in the outskirts of Naples (Arcangelis and Zagaria, 2008). Often before anyone else, insu^{tv} has covered some of these stories: the forced evacuation of one thousand Moroccan workers in San Nicola di Varco near Salerno (insu^{tv}, 2009c), the murder of seven African workers by the Camorra in Castel Volturno and the subsequent persecution and deportation of migrants by the authorities (insu^{tv}, 2008), among others. These reports set up, and often answer, a series of questions about what is hidden behind the façade. They attempt to bring to the fore the contradictions that are at the basis of a war between the poor and other minorities.

Overall, borrowing from the Autonomist tradition, the *inchiesta sul territorio* is the force that drives much of insu^{tv}'s productions. Through this process, attention is directed at the micro-conflictual, daily dimension within and outside of the work environment. Migrants have become not only an important element of the labour force, but they are

developing their own strategies of resistance, together, or in autonomy from local groups. They are an integral part of the new composition of the social territory and an understanding of their conditions can help strengthen and relay struggles for social justice.

As explained in chapter six, the process of mapping this territory by paying attention to diverse forms of conflict helps identify social needs, traditions of struggle as well as practices of dissent (Palano, 2003). Drawing connections between these conflicts and the various forces they confront, insu^tv is able to offer up concrete analytical maps that are developed with the help of communication tools. Combining this practice with the direct involvement of others in these inquiries, it is possible to contribute to social transformation, as was the case with the meeting between migrant vendors and the city council authorities.

Ultimately, in the spirit of the Autonomist *inchiesta*, the subjects of inquiry become the real agents of the investigation itself, through the process of collaborative production. When this is not possible, there is an attempt to let the ‘subjects’ of the inquiry speak for themselves, as in *Gone with the Oranges*. Faith in speaking for oneself, without voice-over correction, allows for the emergence of social assemblages in which the video camera does not impose a pre-determined vision of reality but functions as mediator, opening up the space for new experiments. For insu^tv, practices of knowledge sharing and training are key, and in some cases, the media literacy workshops have been a point of bifurcation at which insu^tv production practices could reach a different level of collaboration with groups and communities. These efforts have solidified in the full-feature-length documentary *Wasting Naples*.

Starting from 2005, the crew followed the evolution of the garbage emergency plaguing the Campania region. By 2008-9, its seriousness had turned the entire area into a worldwide spectacle of monstrous heaps of garbage, reaching up to the first floor of the houses and equally horrifying Italian and international publics. In a nutshell, a 14-year-long state of emergency declared to cope with the so-called garbage crisis had seen

periodic avalanches of waste taking over streets and other urban areas for months on end without really addressing the causes of the crisis.

Since 1994, the areas surrounding Naples, Caserta, and Benevento have been the illegal burial ground of toxic waste from the industries in the North of the country. There are uncountable dossiers by the magistrates testifying to these connections. Through collusion between the economic sector, the government and the Camorra, the competitive prices made possible by the low waste disposal costs have enabled these small industries to differentially accumulate and gain power at transnational level, boosting the Italian economy. At the same time, both legal and illegal urban waste has been dumped and buried in cheap and unsafe landfills, adding to the already devastating and tragic consequences for the surrounding territory and for the health of the population.

Any genuine attempt at implementing regulations has been consistently sabotaged by letting garbage flood the streets, so that emergency regulations would take priority over the attempted control (Rabitti, 2008). Overall, the business connected to the management of waste, ranging from transportation and storage to incineration and energy production—which also involve receiving government subsidies—offers such high profit that any sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative has been sidestepped by reckless *for profit* policies. In Italy, garbage is such a powerful source of profit that it is even quoted in the stock market (insu^{tv}, 2009d).

The last few years of this emergency have seen an increase in the level of conflict between a desperate local population and the authorities. The conflict climaxed in 2008-9, and was eventually controlled through the militarization of any area dealing with garbage, through violent repression by police and army, and through the strengthening of criminal persecution for any attempt at dissent by citizens. In 2009, Prime Minister Berlusconi imposed an information ban on any issue regarding waste management, turning the service into a secret sector of social services. He also inaugurated the first of many incinerators planned for the region, and thereby concluded a new cycle of struggle. Since its inauguration in 2009, the incineration plant has already been closed down and

reopened a few times due to corruption scandals, malfunctioning and toxic particle emission (insu^tv, 2009d).

The government has now planned the construction of more incinerators around Italy, as well as nuclear plants (which were banned in Italy till 2008) and other public works, in order to stimulate the economy. Insu^tv's attempt to "open a crack in the official version" about the garbage crisis (Costiera on-line, 2009), through the production and circulation of information, has played a key role on more than one level. Overall, the documentary also offers an analysis of how much of these proposed public works function to provide profit for a few, while not really sustaining the local economies.

While each member of insu^tv was also individually active in the mobilizations at different sites, over the years, the collective trained some groups in the more isolated communities to produce their own documentation. Furthermore, in the summer 2008, together with MINA, insu^tv ran a 24-hour media centre in Chiaiano to cover the ongoing mobilizations. The Chiaiano woods are one of the few green areas in Naples and its inhabitants had barricaded the entrance to the natural park to prevent the construction of a landfill in its centre. For two full months, the woods in general and the media centre in particular became a round-the-clock site of coagulation of many groups involved in the struggle. In addition to being the only source of reliable information available to the citizens, the centre was also a place for meeting, strategizing and socializing. The connections among some groups and people became so strong that, when we were forced to dismantle it, the people from the area would not let us go without promising to be back.

This bond is emblematic of the unfolding of an entire period of struggle in which people, often completely new to organising, met each other, shared knowledge, fought together (and were violently attacked by the police). They also experimented with alternative forms of governance, like the self-organised recycling site set up by the population of Gianturco, and by Officina 99 activists during the protest against a tobacco factory dumpsite in January 2008. Some, like Gianturco, were successful both in stopping the government and in affirming political subject positions otherwise denied to the protesters

by institutional politics (Petrillo, 2009: 118). The blockades to protect Chiaiano's woods and many other attempts to protect citizens and environment failed and because they were suppressed by the army.

Through these protests, groups became more familiar with activist practices. New organizations were set up, like the regional coordination body for waste management and for the public management of water (which has been privatised by the government) (Zanotelli, 2009). Finally, after failure to stop the construction of more landfills and an incinerator in Acerra, a petition was sent to the European Union. Also, as I write, a commission of envoys that inspected the denounced sites in April 2010 is currently completing a report (ami, 2010). A copy of insu^{tv}'s documentary *Wasting Naples* was part of the package handed to the EU inspectors during their inspections by the communities that summoned them.

All throughout the struggles, independent media played a fundamental role as a counterpoint to the national news. It is at this point that Foucault's work on the governing of populations (See: Ch. 1: Prop. 5, Foucault, 1979, Foucault, 2008) meets Fanon's analysis of the construction of the colonized subject (Fanon, 2004) to make sense of the forces and power relations sustaining this conflict. While, in the Campania region, the spatial management of garbage is inextricably connected with the special management of people through the localization of dumpsites at the "spatial, economic, social and political margins of society" (Petrillo, 2009: 14), the "abnormalization" of the population is the oil that makes the governmental machine run smoothly.

This process of categorization and division also applies to the case of the immigrants discussed earlier. Proposition five in chapter two has already discussed the role the state of emergency as a mode of governance within neoliberal governmentality. The creation of the protester as a threat to the social, i.e. economic wealth becomes one more strategy to justify this mechanism, which, in the case of Naples, functions as the screen for all sorts of illegal deals.

Moreover, in a genealogy of the discursive construction of the southern Italian race through centuries of ethnographic, medical and literary studies that underlie political

decision-making about the region, Antonello Petrillo offers an uncanny pendant to Fanon's discussion of the Algerian racialised subject (2009). Superstition, violent inclinations, restlessness, self-destructive drives, pointless revolts with no political claims, irrational aggression and rage, all underlie current stereotypes and assumptions about the South in the same way they did in the past (Petrillo, 2009: 18–19). These assumptions, together with more modern claims about the NIMBY syndrome have been the basis on which the media has framed any forms of dissent from the population during the garbage crisis. “Not in my back yard” (NIMBY) has also been the strategy to attack other social movements currently in struggle in Italy to prevent other environmental catastrophes like the construction of the TAV speed train, military bases or the bridge connecting Italian mainland to Sicily.

Yet, more than the NIMBY accusations, the denial of any political validity of the work of all the committees and associations in struggle has been based on the ability to use these racial discourses to point behind the protest to “natural” effects of a sort of pathology, as well as to the archaism, uselessness and potential criminal drive of the protesters. Media and government discourses have based their arguments on the binary modern/anti-modern in which modernity is represented by incineration technologies and anti-modernity by the opposition to this technology. Similarly, the binary rational/irrational constructed protesters as incarnating a residue of the folkloric tales of the revolting masses thus producing the final verdict on the root causes of resistance as ‘unjustified local selfishness’ (Petrillo, 2009: 8–12). For Petrillo, “like the concepts of Orient and Occident [...] also the concepts of North and South gain a consistency of true reference points for public discourse, or, to say it with Foucault, all the materiality of statements” (2009: 23).

Aside from the de-politicization of conflict in the mainstream national discourse, the naturalization and ethnicization of these protests also has the effect of isolating and dividing the populations in revolt. More precisely, as Fanon would put it, the internalization of the colonized mentality has the effect of pitching one community against the other. This is especially the case when resources are scarce and interaction with the authorities is fraught. Needless to say, the media plays a very important role in

crystallizing the colonized self-representations. The fleeting and unhinged points of resistance emerging and traversing the Campania region during the garbage struggles can be said to partly mirror these mechanisms.

Yet the circulation of alternative forms of knowledge and the collaborations engendered around groups like MINA aim to offset these centripetal forces fragmenting the resistant social fabric. They help harness and strengthen the subjectivities of the protesters through a web of connections and the help of media tools. In particular, the documentary *Wasting Naples* condenses over 500 hours of footage collected and donated to insu^{tv} after the struggles, and provides an important example of inquiry as social-therapy to relay energy among groups.

“Here the “state of emergency” is another form of government, they should teach it in political science: there is monarchy, tyranny, democracy...and “Emergency”!” (insu^{tv}, 2009d). So jokes Ascanio Celestini, popular theatre and radio actor narrating the story of *Wasting Naples*. This seemingly light-hearted joke reveals the question guiding the documentary: “what if “living in a crisis” was just someone’s strategy to make profit?” (insu^{tv}, 2009d). The fairytale-like narration that frames the political economic analysis of the garbage emergency makes it intelligible to the audience, who would otherwise be overwhelmed by the plethora of information, sources, reports and interviews with experts, community workers and those affected by the problem.

Literally framed like a fairytale, with the typical mean characters and heroes that belong to this oral genre, *Wasting Naples* presents a multilayered analysis of the relationships and conflicts among government, the media, the *ecomafia*, powerful corporations, and poisoned areas, crops and inhabitants. It does so by calling forth all aspects and groups intersecting with garbage. Obviously, it was all there before the movie, but no group had brought it all together, not even the judge involved in *ecomafia* investigations who, at the premiere, (somewhat pompously) declared that he “will follow up on the evidence presented to the audience” (Chetta, 2009).

Wasting Naples is a rare attempt to make sense of the confusion surrounding the crisis, and guiding the interaction among many communities scrambling to survive. It is also a

useful tool to start unpacking the differential accumulation dynamics that establish relationships between governments, criminality and the economy (Ch. 3). While it is not yet clear exactly what kind of activist strategies can derive from analyses working from the perspective of differential accumulation, finding the points of relay between economic and political power can certainly help activists identify new sites of intervention.

Much media activist work focuses on the transmission of content, sacrificing the creative and aesthetic aspects of visual language to the immediacy and efficiency of conveying a message. Unlike much grassroots video work neglecting expression for content, *Wasting Naples* language is also constitutive of its production process. Aggressive in its pace, the movie also offers loving images of Neapolitan scenery (and its decay). Violence and frenzy have been a marker of the garbage emergency. Still, the police beatings, expropriations and army incursions did not erase the optimism of protesters. The images are also a celebration of the strength and resilience of the population. Beyond its local value, *Wasting Naples* teaches viewers why we should care about where our garbage goes. It brings garbage into a critique of capital, to see where it intersects with other issues and to use it as a way of doing politics. We are currently living at times in which power plants, waste management plans and other public and reconstruction works are contracted out to private companies under the pretext that they will support struggling economies. Behind the claims to work in the interest of citizens, the health and safety of populations and their territory is often seriously at stake. The inquiries that guide the documentary teach viewers how to ask unwanted questions as much as they show the valuable role of communities that refuse to give up in struggles for healthier economic growth.

More than Celestini's fairytale, this is a choral narration. It is a choral narration particularly because once a documentary becomes the tool to share the stories and the experiences of struggle (as well as the reasons behind it), it is hardly possible to tell this story without contributing to the narrative. It is a choral narration also because insu^{tv}'s director is an assemblage of different subjectivities. Indeed, for many who are used to

projects with a hierarchical and centralized structure, Nicola Angrisano is the (male) brain behind the television. But for those who delve a bit deeper, or read the biography:

nicol* angrisano broke into the media-scape one day in 2003. This mysterious and charismatic character perpetrates guerrilla communication actions to free the info-sphere. nicol*'s stomping grounds are in the Neapolitan airwaves. In 2004, leading a group of media activists, s/he powered the first transmitter, sending an interference signal; cracking the monotonous and smooth surface of the mediascape. This is how insu^tv is born: a Neapolitan pirate television broadcasting in a shadow cone of the S19/UHF frequency. For five years, insu^tv has been exploring the surrounding territory, and together with various social movements it inquires and traverses different experiences. During the production of the documentary *Wasting Naples*, on the local garbage crisis, nicol* has been contaminated by the experience of the communities hit by the events, thereby reinforcing the assemblage of affinity groups and individuals involved in direct narration of reality. nicol* angrisano stands for a multiplicity of visions and perspectives, it is a hybrid form: it uses a low letter case because s/he refuses the concept of authorship; s/he takes the asterisk to inflect for all genders. It is a collective—a connective—identity of a group of media activists radically searching for different reading cues to transform simple narrations into tools of struggle and liberation from the yoke of mainstream dis-information (Toronto Free Broadcasting, 2009).

Wasting Naples was not only a collective, or choral production, because of the donated footage and the editing by the collective, but it was also collectively produced. Many more people joined insu^tv as producers through the site *Produzioni dal basso* [bottom-up productions] (2009). Here video collectives can post a trailer of their movie to sell DVDs on pre-order, thus contributing to its production. What brought everyone together in supporting *Wasting Naples* were not the expectations of box office revenues, but an unstoppable need to tell or hear a story about places we live in, and what we are doing to them while we assume that waste removal is merely a civic service. *Wasting Naples* has been an incredible success story, with a (free) premiere where hundreds could not join the 500 people filling up the cinema. There has been a lot of media attention; the movie was also showed on cable television in December 2009, and it can be downloaded for free from the Internet under creative commons licence.

For Felix Guattari, *nicol** and *Wasting Naples* would be exemplary cases of collective assemblages of enunciation (1995). Still, it is possible to push this assemblage further to think about its *connective* potential. After all, this is also *nicol**'s favourite saying: "we are a connective, not a collective." The connective force of *Wasting Naples* did not end with its release but started with it. As of March 2010, 8 months after its release, there have been at least 90 screenings in Italy, and some others in Europe and North America. The screening sites range from official festivals to schools and community group events. To all of them, *nicol** was invited to speak about the struggle, but also to help with other ones.

Although the victories against the reckless accumulation-driven politics of the Berlusconi government have been few and far between, things among the groups involved in these struggles are no longer the same. Italian activism, beyond the old autonomist and radical activist traditions is in ferment. Overall, the level of conflict escalates in direct proportion to the repressive legislation passed by Parliament and the corruption scandals enveloping its politicians. While there is a need for media activists to provide information and analysis of what is happening, media activist projects like *insu^tv*'s fulfil a role that goes beyond communication to bring different groups into synergy.

In a final note attempting to unpack the import of technology as immanent to processes of collective individuation, Simondon discusses technological innovation as an important theatre for the individuation of thought into matter—and for engendering (social) change (Ch. 3; Massumi et al., 2009: 37). Simondon's conceptual scaffolding around the technical object (see also: Introduction) brings us back to a discussion of the current value of media activism for the creation of social assemblages in which the "media" aspect of activism is no longer limited to being a medium, i.e. a tool, but is an integral aspect of the social assemblage. The media, here, literally *mediates* between individuals and their environment—and among individuals—instituting and developing a relation. That is, it participates in genuinely creative activities (Simondon, 2006: 264).

In first place, through media literacy workshops and programmes like *Domenica Aut*, the technical objects of media production cease to be hypnotic or an easy source of marvel

for the uninitiated. Technology is demystified, but instead of simply functioning as a tool for the production and circulation of information—rather than being simply an object to be activated by the individual to produce something within pre-established parameters—individuals interact with the environment observing it through the machine. Discussing Simondon’s analysis of processes of technical individuation, Massumi describes this process of mediation as a “clinching into a synergistic relation of a diversity of elements, across the disparity of information and toward the emergence of a new level of functioning realizing the potential of the preindividual” (2009: 43). The video camera and the other objects required engender a new field of relations and relay the process of individuation between individual and milieu (Simondon, 2006: 263–65).

In this context, *insu*^tv’s—and Telestreet’s—experimentation with alternative visual languages come into play, and so does the practice of *inchiesta*. *Inchiesta* is an epistemological practice, which is itself ontogenetic because, while it unfolds, it informs the emergence of alternative subjectivities, devising new modes of subjectivation and setting up a web of new connections. It also produces alternative narratives about the mechanisms that govern our life and is potentially productive of practices that address these mechanisms. This approach to technology, together with this mode of knowledge, enables a shift from product to process.

Together, they move away from content-driven practices that still function within a framework in which independent information is one more product to share, i.e. consume, with or without any implications for political agency. *Insu*^tv moves towards the affective, connective and creative potential of working together to make sense of issues that directly implicate the groups involved.

As already discussed in Proposition five, technical objects easily lose their singularity and mediation potential in contemporary consumer societies. It takes a specific sensibility to unveil their implications of technology for people and the social field in general (Simondon, 2006: 251–3). The sensibility to perceive the dynamic potential of technical objects is at the basis of what I call *insu*^tv’s practice of *repurposing* (Ch. 1). Repurposing draws on the mediating potential of technology to build further assemblages

(Simondon, 2006: 248) by bringing together video, the practice of inquiry and mapping of territories, the groups involved in media production and consumption, and different communities revolving around the specific issues chosen in each project. The surplus energy that is engendered in this process becomes itself a point of contagious relay for further assemblages, as discussed in previous examples.

Simondon would call this (differential) surplus energy that transduces from one assemblage and can be individuated into others 'information' (Ch. 4). Once again, information here does not refer to content that is transmitted through specific channels, in the same way as *insu^tv* media activism is not restricted to developing practices of communication that circulate their messages. Again, as seen, the connections among all the different elements that come together through the practice of repurposing engender alternative ways of coexisting among groups: *insu^tv* is a media connective, rather than a media collective. The encounters that took place during the various screenings of *Wasting Naples* are only one example of this.

If connectivity is the form of expression of *insu^tv*, its form of content can be found in the metastability of its supple structure. As the outcome of moments of tension in the Neapolitan activist environment in which there was pressure to define a collective identity, the group lays considerable emphasis on maintaining openness to change, avoiding rigid internal structures and maximising the interface potential with the outside. In this case too, the mediation of certain modes and objects of inquiry contribute to keeping material and discursive practices as close together as possible by focussing on the interaction and collaboration triggered by each project, rather than on the necessity of plotting and defining a position on the social territory.

As a connective, *insu^tv* is constantly in tension due to this potential. This means that its internal organization can mutate and its structure change in interaction with its environment. Each connection with other bodies and objects, each new project is a new individuation. The structure of the group itself is created to incorporate its metastability by avoiding hierarchies and fixed roles for its members. Moreover, it is the readiness to always question and adapt that has made *insu^tv* a sustainable and strong project so far.

There is also a generosity at the basis of these practices that gives priority to acts that extend beyond themselves to become contagious, affect and relay through the pleasure of being and creating together. While building its own metastable equilibrium, the group is interested in finding ways to create resonance with other groups.

The practice of *inchiesta* (with its necessity to develop new ways of asking questions) and the insertion of technological objects like video cameras or transmission technology (that require experimentation even from those who otherwise possess the know-how) help break down in-group boundaries and pre-established modes of communication in a non-conflictive way. They trigger the temporary reconfiguration of group boundaries in relation to their outside. This does not mean that difference is effaced, but only that it is no longer the basis of the interaction. Through mediation of the technical object, the focus of interaction shifts on the process of collaboration around issues that directly affect everyone.

Through the mediation of insu^{tv} (repurposed as a technical object itself) groups can interface with each other upon different premises. These temporary reconfigurations do open up the possibility for more sustainable collaborations, with all the challenges that come with them. Moreover, although they by no means offer up a clear recipe for alternative modes of interaction among groups in every context, they do point to one way of making the boundaries among groups porous, rather than invisible.

Conscious social interaction through the acceptance of and engagement with the metastability of structures/groups can be the basis for an ethics, which creates synergy among successive individuations (Simondon 2006: 229). It seems to me that more than a specific form of politics, what guides insu^{tv} actions is an ethical conduct that brings back the freedom of individuals to actively partake in the emergence of their subjectivities and of their environment. At the same time insu^{tv} attempts to make this the basis for interacting with as many groups and people as possible. As a care of the self (Foucault, 1978b) that considers every individual act as also *informing* collective individuations, ethics can help redefine the direction of politics at a moment of stasis like the one in Naples.

Importantly, collective individuation is not informed by a chain of acts triggered by specific actors but by a web of acts, which can resonate with each other while they attempt to address social, political and economic issues. This is not simply due to discursive practices but to a myriad of affects, perceptions and memories that (at the pre-individual level) affect the openness or closure of systems like groups or individuals: “the value of an act is its breadth, its potential to unfold transductively” (Simondon 2006: 230). Insu^{tv}’s practices for an ethical comportment seem to offer some ways to break down the signifying chains that were previously rigidifying the interaction.

These chains are unavoidably engendered and crystallized by social norms, political ideologies as much as by any constraints posed by the forces that structure the environment in which we act. Repurposing as a mode of ethical comportment locates the subject/group in the tension between inside and outside problematics—between already individuated subjective structures and the milieu that can affect them. It attempts to work from that very place of metastability and change. In this sense, it can be argued that insu^{tv} repurposes ethics for politics, at a time when politics badly needs to be reinvented.

9. Conclusions

An Ethics of Connection

Subject: [insu^tv] *I'm quitting insu^tv*
Date: May 6, 2010 4:50:33 PM GMT-04:00
To: coord-insu@autistici.org

...MWAHAHAHAHAHAH!

...gotcha eh!*

You can't get rid of me so easily.

I'm just playing with this climate of tension and have some good news.

We have a Panasonic 151!

(Wadada)

More than offering a definitive set of conclusions, this final section emphasizes the open and on-going character of the dissertation research. Inspired by the processual and circular approach of co-research, the body of knowledge herein produced can now be rediscussed, verified, and enriched through future experiments that strengthen it and make it more useful (Borio et al., 2002: 36). Starting from what has been done so far, and with the hindsight of what was learned during the process, this inquiry can be adapted to the shifting reality of the challenges that groups confront to actively effect change in a context in which much is dependent on the agency of the subjects involved. Moreover, this example and discussion can hopefully function as a model that other activist-researchers can borrow, criticize and adapt to their needs and struggles.

The map created as my dissertation has woven different lines connecting past and present practices; the forces affecting the different strata of the social field; the subjectivities and desires of actors; as well as material elements like technology, information and images. With the aid of the six propositions in chapter two, we chose the lenses and adapted the tools to the task of making sense of Telestreet and insu^tv from an engaged political perspective. It would have been possible to simply rely on the theoretical considerations outlined in the introduction to start my inquiry into activist practices from the perspective of a processual mapping of relations. However, I chose to explicitly perform a lens-

lathing operation and show one possible thought process behind my search for the right tools. At the same time, the ways in which some of the connections were made—as I explained how to make them—set a style that leaves the dominant tradition of social analysis behind and moves towards experimentation.

Chapter three set up a thread that leads from the sixties' political ferment in Italy to some of our contemporary activist practices. In particular, this line, or better, series of lines, made manifest how concepts like desire, subjectivity and autonomy sedimented in the substratum of Italian activist practices and beyond. Simultaneously, the chapter built on Autonomia's use of theory for praxis not only to make sense of the ways in which discursive and non-discursive formations interacted, but also to further clarify how a refusal of work according to dominant logics of knowledge production can benefit a genuinely political stance within academic research.

Chapter four used topology—the study of the essential structure of figures and spaces despite their continuous variation—to understand Berlusconi's rise to economic and political power. Rather than simply being an abstract concept, topology is another way of conceptualizing the practice of mapping how constituent parts are interrelated in a field of relations without assigning a specific value to each term of the relation. Thus, here too we have worked simultaneously at multiple levels: at the level of the structure of the analysis, we further developed the concept of mapping; then, as Berlusconi was portrayed drawing on topology to compose spaces that, like patchwork, have amorphous, smooth but not homogenous connections, the narrative about his path to glory was also presented as a similar mapping of amorphous connections. Finally, Berlusconi's practices are themselves an example of how the power of accumulation functions through fluid connections (and capture) much in the same way that the practices of resistance described in the former chapter do.

Throughout the mapping process the connections were made through the concept of differential accumulation of power through capital. Capital, beyond simply functioning according to 'the logic of the market,' is as much the condition as an outcome of continuous social reorganization in the light of the interaction between technological and

cultural innovation, power and resistance. Importantly, according to differential accumulation theorists, the power to generate profit cannot be isolated from a structure that includes both corporations and governments as one and the same (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 8), harnessing different modes of power—constituted and constituent—within the same assemblage. In the case of Italy, what becomes evident through an analysis of differential accumulation is how the development and entrenchment of certain political (and criminal) structures cannot be isolated from the global spread of neoliberalism and the local rise of the Italian entrepreneurial class. Here, rather than reinstating a narrative of an entrepreneur changing the face of the Italian economy, the figure of Berlusconi functions as a metonymy for a broader assemblage of relations and forces that facilitated a radical shift from a system of industrial production to one based on financial capital flows and immaterial production. Contrary to the dominant narrative that strengthens its reputation and support, Silvio Berlusconi is at the same time a product and an element of this assemblage, never its mastermind.

Focussing on the struggles among dominant actors to accumulate power and capital, we were able to identify some additional forces that restructure society, offering an additional angle from which to imagine new practices of resistance. For example, we looked at how the struggle for economic power between the public service broadcaster RAI and *Fininvest* took place by bringing down advertising costs to a point where television became a nearly uninterrupted flow of ads. This capillary diffusion of advertising stimulates the desire to buy more products and lifestyles, facilitating the process of individuation of consumer-subjects. In the context of performing an analysis of the differential accumulation of capital and power, new questions can arise, for instance, about ways to manipulate the relationships among dominant actors to intervene in the restructuring of social relations. The focus on actors wielding similar amounts of power (vs. the dominant-dominated perspective) was taken up again for another thread of my inquiry, one that looked at the relations and conflict among dominated groups (in Naples) in order to think of ways to minimize unproductive conflict and maximize the power of collaboration (Ch. 6–7).

Chapter five briefly examined the last fifteen years of Italian activism and the adoption of communication guerrilla as established practices of resistance at a transnational level, looking at groups like the Zapatistas of Chiapas and the Italian student movement in the early nineties. In particular, we discussed some of the practices and formations that emerged as an indirect outcome of the circulation of information and information technologies—and that are not contained in information itself. These practices range from the use of fax machines and the Bulletin Board System to more recent Internet technology. They have engendered alternative modes of interaction that repurpose already existing technology while, where possible integrating or developing it. The non-linear aspect of informational dynamics was brought up not simply to make sense of material social transformations, but also to underline the impossibility of finding lines of direct evolution between specific movements and contemporary activism.

Indeed, the relationship between projects like Radio Alice and Radio Gap, Autonomia and the global justice movement, the Zapatista and tactical media can only be conceived of as one of relays and positive feedback between the technological and social realms; between micro and macro levels of formations. Finally, the emphasis on information enabled us to think of some forms of contemporary activism that involve the appropriation or development of technology as also aiming to push the limits and options to think about social change by expanding the virtual field from which to actualize new practices of resistance. Media activism is one such practice.

In chapter six, the focus was not only on Telestreet as a movement and on its practices, but also on the ways in which Italians make sense of the world surrounding them through what they see on TV—and how they make sense of television according to the world they imagine to be their own. The role of television as mediator between the individual and her world is particularly evident when looking at the predominance of a spectacular, sexualised and carefree image of the world that strongly frames the desires and perception of many Italians. At the same time, this image of the world is deeply embedded within the discourses and aesthetic choices that characterise the political and cultural environment around Berlusconi, creating a system of relays of signs between the field of entertainment, capital and politics.

Chapter six also discussed how affect and perception interact with the circulation of signs (without actual referents), and how the latter are produced and then again harnessed by economic and political forces, in what Franco Berardi calls semio-capitalism. Semio-capitalism, for Berardi, is founded on immaterial labour and the heightened circulation of information (2009: 109). In the info-sphere of high-speed flows of data and signs, where information technologies increasingly play a fundamental structuring role, television is still a very important mediator in the process. While the actual investigation of the relationship between economic and political power through the entertainment business had already taken place in chapter four, the point of departure of this chapter was the sensorium.

The analysis included elements like affects and perception to explain how individuals make sense of sensory stimulation; how they harness the stimuli into already stratified relations to a socio-cultural structure that is itself shaped by consumption, spectacle and aestheticization; and how the act of constantly folding one into the other is productive of certain (pre-packaged) subjectivities (such as the *velina*). As a counterpoint, Telestreet's proxy-vision model of collective video production engages audience and producers alike in a process of alternative sense-making of images, which are harnessed in an alternative web of socio-cultural practices. The ensuing subject-positions unfold outside market principles, along the logic of collaboration, community and social justice. The processes described in relation to Telestreet are simultaneously productive of new collectivities and of their attendant subjectivities.

Chapter seven and chapter eight looked specifically at insu[^]tv, exploring its diachronic linkages with other activist practices in Naples, as well as its synchronic relations to other groups. While attempting to understand the recomposition of the antagonist field in the city, the map that emerged focussed on the centrifugal and centripetal forces that create or prevent porosity among groups and strata, and unify or fragment the assemblages that compose it. This kind of map emerged when examining how individuals and groups reciprocally engender each other through processes of individuation during events like the Global Forum, independent media collectives and eventually insu[^]tv, as well as through everyday political organising. In particular, it was possible to map moments of

more or less cohesion when looking at how the different groups composing the field of activism at different times confronted the external pressure of repression and the internal challenge of finding common notions that enable inter-communicability, while retaining heterogeneity. Looking at the composition of Neapolitan activism in the 80-90s, and then after the emergence of the alter-globalization movement at the turn of the century, made explicit the effects of a shift from mainly material production associated with the working class to mainly immaterial and post-industrial production powered by a class of precarious workers. This shift fragmented the fabric of resistant actors and prompted a series of experiments to rearticulate the tools and modes of struggle in the city. While these experiments have been successful for brief moments, the analysis reveals a need for more sustainable and enduring strategies of intercommunication among groups that integrate current theories of subjectification of individuals within single groups underlying autonomous activism. Indeed, the focus on practices of subjectification that are sustained by alternative circuits of socialization like the social centres (CSOAs) has engendered uncountable projects and groups that play a fundamental role in animating the Italian activist scene. Still, there is a need to think through how stronger collective actors can emerge from the collective individuation of the groups already existing.

Simondon's ontogenetic approach thinks the collective from the side of the individual who is conceptualized through the relations that engender, or individuate, her. Since, the individual is not treated as the basis of the collective but as a set of relations, Simondon's approach requires a rethinking of both our relation to ourselves, and of the emergence of the collective through our relation to others. For Combes, the relationship among individuals consists of a connection to something inside ourselves (on the side of the preindividual) that affects our relation to others. The latter is not only shaped by interaction based on social norms but also by an interiority which constantly informs processes of individuation (in: Simondon, 2006–1).

From a political perspective, this analysis should directly lead groups or movements to ask new questions and devise new practices that sustain their relation to others as a constituent element of their organizing practices—adding a further layer to already established modes of politics that experiment with the subjectivity of individuals.

Bracketing for a moment vertical power dynamics and the dynamics among actors thus engendered (as well as political modes of subjectivation), it is key to critically conceive of horizontal, productive relations among activist groups as a constituent part of social struggles. The questions formulated during this kind of inquiry should engage the articulation of resistant practices and subjectivities that can sustain cohesion, attachment, and engender collectivity—beyond political discourses (Combes in: Simondon, 2006: 19). The concept of *repurposing* emerges in this context as a meta-problem: first, it enables us to describe some of the practices that attend to the horizontal relations among activist groups through insu^{tv}'s connective work; second, it opens up space to think about the potential of other connective practices within and outside academia.

Chapter eight discussed various levels of the concept of repurposing to eventually articulate a definition of immanent ethics that recuperates and reclaims forms of sociability as a political strategy. In relation to insu^{tv}, the concept of repurposing was mainly articulated through their use of the *inchiesta* and of technology as strategies that mediate between individual/collective and their milieu. This mediation facilitates the temporary reconfiguration of group boundaries in relation to their outside and produces new connections. We saw this especially in the process of producing episodes of *Domenica Aut* and with the making and distribution of *Wasting Naples*. Through the practice of inquiry and the engagement with the media, individuals and groups were able to interact by sharing and producing knowledge without having to position themselves according to rigid identities.

As an ethics, repurposing takes into consideration the meta-stable character of assemblages, calling for a set of facilitative principles that are immanent (vs. transcendental) and avoid the crystallisation of groups into rigid identitarian structures. The immanent character of this form of ethics can be summed up with the question “What can I do, what am I capable of doing?”, as opposed to the morality based question “What must I do?”. The latter question can be said to underlie much activism based on rigid norms of political codes of action (Smith, 2007: 67). At the same time, this ethical approach recognises the web-like direction in which individual acts unfold (vs. a chain of

acts), and their potential to resonate with each other, thus functioning as the basis for political practices.

So far, I have produced a description of the general orientation of Telestreet/insu^tv and an attendant theoretical analysis of their work through research, offering a coherent picture of activist practices. No matter how multifaceted and inclusive this analysis has been it will never be able to account for the messiness cluttering the space of relation between theory and practice, and between making sense of what has already happened and the moments in which things are in the midst of a reconfiguration. How does one lodge herself in the ongoing moment of emergence, reconfiguration and recomposition through research? What are the possible threads to follow in the development of practices after this analysis?

While the concept of repurposing is still at the core of insu^tv's work, the project is constantly evolving and so are the challenges the group faces. Militant research can accompany these new developments by carrying out investigations that help the group orient itself during moments of discussion, decision-making, and especially burnout and conflict. The following discussion aims to offer a starting point for future work, emphasising that it is not my intention to provide a substantial analysis of new issues before carrying out the necessary research.

The documentary *Wasting Naples* and its management at national and international levels, were a victory, yet also a colossal effort. The many decisions to take, the responsibility towards the communities involved, the interfacing with the mainstream have all taken their toll on the group. In addition to this, in January 2010, Italian broadcasting switched from analogue to digital, making pirate UHF (analogue) transmission rather irrelevant for the channel. Fortified by the connections made with many groups during their previous work, insu^tv has launched a visionary project: *Assalto al cielo* [Assault on the sky] that brings together media and grassroots organizations in and around Naples to rent a digital frequency and set up what would be the first open community channel in the country. So far, in Campania, most television frequencies have been assigned to commercial channels that are run by the Camorra and

there is no possibility for grassroots organizations to legally access any frequencies at low cost. Since Italian legislation does not even offer the model for such an enterprise, the groups and their lawyers are currently even looking into European Union directives on community media and into international examples as a framework.

This non-commercial television channel aims at “giving voice to the cultural alternatives in the region, to environmental and anti-racist struggles, to bottom up democratic experiments and to social movement” (insu^tv, 2010a). *Assalto* is an unprecedented experiment, which, in its connective potentiality, aims to set up and amplify a community of viewers and users for social, cultural and political projects, and to create a participatory production circuit as well as a participatory structure to guarantee financial sustainability. The project also includes a parallel frequency for community radio, drawing on the experience of local free and pirate radios (insu^tv, 2010a). If successful in its conceptual and organizational stages, *Assalto* has the potential to repurpose media activism as a practice of autonomous collaboration on an unprecedented scale. In fact, the group’s vision is one of a community channel and of a collective effort rather than the enlargement of insu^tv itself. Still, the initial work of mapping the possibilities, coordinating, conceptualizing *Assalto*, and developing the multimedia interface that can facilitate participation, is taxing the already drained energy available. Some members have moved to other cities and their contribution has been reduced. Some new members have joined, reconfiguring the structure and dynamics of the group.

There is new pressure on the crew to speed up and be more efficient in their (voluntary) work, now that new deadlines and accountability to others need to be prioritized. There are important decisions to make about the criteria of inclusion and exclusion for the sources of financial support, decisional autonomy and other issues that can easily bring back the conversation to group boundaries and their relations with others. At the same time, the usual work of production and connection must go on, and the responsibility towards the communities involved in the *Wasting Naples* project must be honoured. There is a lot, perhaps too much, on insu^tv’s plate.

One of the things that struck me about insu^tv when I joined was that, unlike many other groups I had worked with, there were a generosity and light-heartedness to the activists that made this ‘work’ an extremely pleasurable experience. Insu^tv’s meetings were characterized by a joyful attitude and by an ability to manage discussions and conversations without conflict, while still allowing for confrontation and disagreement. Foucault once wrote that one need not be sad to be militant (Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari, 1983 [1972]), and insu^tv is one example of the sense of humour and joyfulness that can be contagious (and possibly make collaborating with others easier). Echoing an old song from the 70s Autonomia, “*Lavorare con lentezza e leggerezza*” [working slowly and lightly], one nicola once told me: “if this becomes a task, then it will stop working.” Another nicola added: “Insu^tv works because it can die any minute.”

Nicola’s beliefs are not symptomatic of a lack of commitment, but indicate a specific perspective on how commitment is possible. In the case of insu^tv, this commitment is to the possibilities of an assemblage that needs to change once its productive potential is exhausted: metastability as commitment. In more concrete terms, rather than being ready to walk out of the door and close it behind, this attitude translates into openness to innovation that does not regard mutation and external influence as threats to the insu^tv assemblage. The *insulini* examine the causes and potential effects of change in order to make decisions based on functionality, without betraying any personal or collective values. The latter orient the project; they do not define it.

Recently, the little glitches in the personalities of different people that were once a source of jokes and teasing, as well as some interpersonal conflicts, are becoming obstacles to the smooth functioning of a machine that needs to orient itself more and more towards efficiency. Because the internal and external pressure and workload for insu^tv are mounting, the focus of its members is shifting from the joy of working together to the mistakes made. This does not mean that mistakes were previously ignored, but that the *insulini* discussed mistakes as a moment of self-analysis and improvement, not as a defining moment in a jeopardised identity of the group.

To look at this moment of rearticulation of affects and emotions from a perspective that investigates the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices of the group: if the form of content of the group is the work done (what *insu^tv* calls the output), then the form of expression of the group is automatically the group subjectivity that is actualized through the work. Interaction is focused on the process of production, rather than on the discursive negotiation and articulation of a position. This focus is reflected in the way in which people talk to each other while working and making decisions, and in the perception they have of their role and that of others as fellow members. Yet, once mistakes and problems become the form of content of the group, then the form of expression of these mistakes becomes the individual. The group *cathexis*—the concentration of mental energy on one particular person, idea, or object—and fragmentation cause a return to the relation between in-groups and out-groups.

The strong collective subjectivity of the group breaks down; this is primarily expressed through the ways in which people communicate and make decisions: conflict, reproach, guilt trips, nagging, finger-pointing. Things become harder when the talk is about people rather than the group. When the habit of paying attention to communication is no longer a priority, stress and sad passions take over and quickly ruin the assemblage because the trust in the group diminishes. The fragmentation returns individual actors to themselves; there emerges a need to constantly reproduce the process of collective individuation at the discursive level to make up for the lack of closeness during the actual work and planning. Here, the endless discussions on group dynamics that emerge as an obsessive refrain are different from the metastability as commitment discussed earlier, because the separation remains between the collective discussion of individual behaviour and the single analysis of them from a personal perspective.

Luckily, the same willingness to self-examine that has driven the group so far is also prompting a collective effort to consider what is happening. Hopefully, the humour and openness that I often still see will be one more threshold that makes the group re-emerge stronger, with new and better interpersonal communication strategies—changed once more. Yet, this is where the work of the researcher is needed the most. Research can

facilitate inquiry and discussion in moments of burn out. Very little literature is available on the topic, and even less from a grounded research perspective.

Moreover, there is no theoretical sophistication that can fully address the messiness that characterises our daily interaction and activist work. As those who have been there know, even the most efficient, generous and joyful projects are at moments fraught with tension and sadness. It is not by devising a one-size-fits-all methodological framework that it becomes possible to participate in social change through research. As I had anticipated, it is only through the practical, hands-on exercise of always producing new lenses and yielding new ways of looking through inquiry and mapping that it is possible to relay social struggle. And as Spinoza also teaches us, it is only through the joyful ways of affecting others that productive connections are engendered. Yet, this joy needs to also characterise the moments of crisis from which it becomes necessary and possible to forge new tools and come out stronger than before, albeit mutated.

Looking for new creative ways of framing the question of burnout, personal conflict among individuals or group depression is a necessary step in the maintenance of sustainable momentum for any activist group. The process of mapping can be particularly useful in this kind of inquiry because it can help us make connections and bring elements together in novel ways—drawing for instance from social therapeutic methods, communication or affective strategies that can provide mediation, neutralize the tension subtending discussions or loosen the specific blockages identified. In the light of our discussion of the collective, this kind of analysis also requires finding the tools for a self-analysis of the individual, re-evaluating her stakes in the relationship to the group, as well as the ways in which these are made sense of at the level of perception and action. Ultimately, a creative co-research project should be able to overcome sad and burned out moments of cathexis to once again feel joyful about the work to be done.

Similarly, co-research can also help choose some reference points in the transition to an ambitious process like *Assalto*, guiding yet not limiting the growth of a group, while preserving its energy. It can help us understand how to undo certain blockages and create new circuits for productive connections. From this perspective, knowledge production is

once again not merely an exercise in understanding how social change takes place, but it also facilitates the continuous creation of new practices by cultivating the potential connectivity—of issues and groups—that emboldens a project.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that these forms of collaboration and research are not simply the tools to understand and capture *insu*^{tv}'s essence, whatever that might be. Instead, they are part of a broader experiment that sees the production of new connections as a fundamentally ethical mode of existing in the social field in general, and in academia in particular. The repurposing of forms of inquiry like co-research aims at folding the results of the analysis back into the project. Ultimately, the concept of *repurposing* is not created to abstractly describe or understand phenomena; rather, it *derives* from reality and must enable us to think of new moves, including new moves within, through, or even against academia.

We have returned to include the repurposing of research as an ethical mode of being within and outside of academia. Social research can help develop effective strategies of respectful and productive collaboration to inform the values that are at the basis of an ethical comportment towards others at the same time as we inquire into the composition of a field of struggle and create an archival memory of minor histories, which are not often told. As explained in the introduction, social research is ontogenetic, informing subjectivities and engendering practices, technologies and histories as they unfold. Repurposing research can engender dynamic and adaptive collaborative frameworks of interaction that produce learning experiences that are themselves repurposed to create new ethical-political practices. The development of these kinds of practices of sociability is first of all an ethics and only subsequently a politics because it does not prescribe the categories and practices of subjectification, as is meanwhile the case with many discourses on political organizing.

Following the initial step of posing the question of Telestreet/*insu*^{tv} in terms of learning and experimentation developed through co-research and immanent critique, we can continue to look for the conditions and potentials for organising networks of solidarity between academics and activists that modulate (rather than isolate or oppose) and

embolden a radical politics for social justice already taking place. In this sense, networking and connecting existing practices of resistance both builds upon and re-contextualises the work done so far, while addressing new problems to be formulated collectively. *Building connections among activists, organizations and individuals is not simply a matter of naming a condition, nor is it a matter of creating a concept that might provide a point of theoretical connection: it is in the actual process of making, or embodying, these connections that new practices of sociability emerge, as the social field is itself repurposed.*

Interviews:

Alfo (2008) Interview with Alfonso De Vito. Napoli.

Ambrogio (2008) Interview with Giancarlo Vitali. Bologna.

Bifo (2008) Interview with Franco Berardi (Bifo). Bologna.

Ciano (2008) Interview with Antonio Ciano of Telemontecarlo. Gaeta.

Ciro (2008) Interview with Ciro D'Aniello of OrfeoTV. Bologna.

Nisa (2008) Interview with Annalisa Pelizza of OrfeoTV. Bologna.

Klash (2008) Interview with Klash of insu^tv. Napoli.

Wadada (2008) Interview with Wadada of insu^tv. Napoli.

Asterix (2008) Interview with Raffele Aspide of insu^tv. Napoli.

Sara (2008) Interview with Sara of insu^tv. Napoli.

Pog (2008) Interview with Pog of insu^tv. Napoli.

Simone (2009) Interview with Simone Veneroso of insu^tv. Skype.

Aurelia (2009) Interview with Aurelia Longo of insu^tv. Skype.

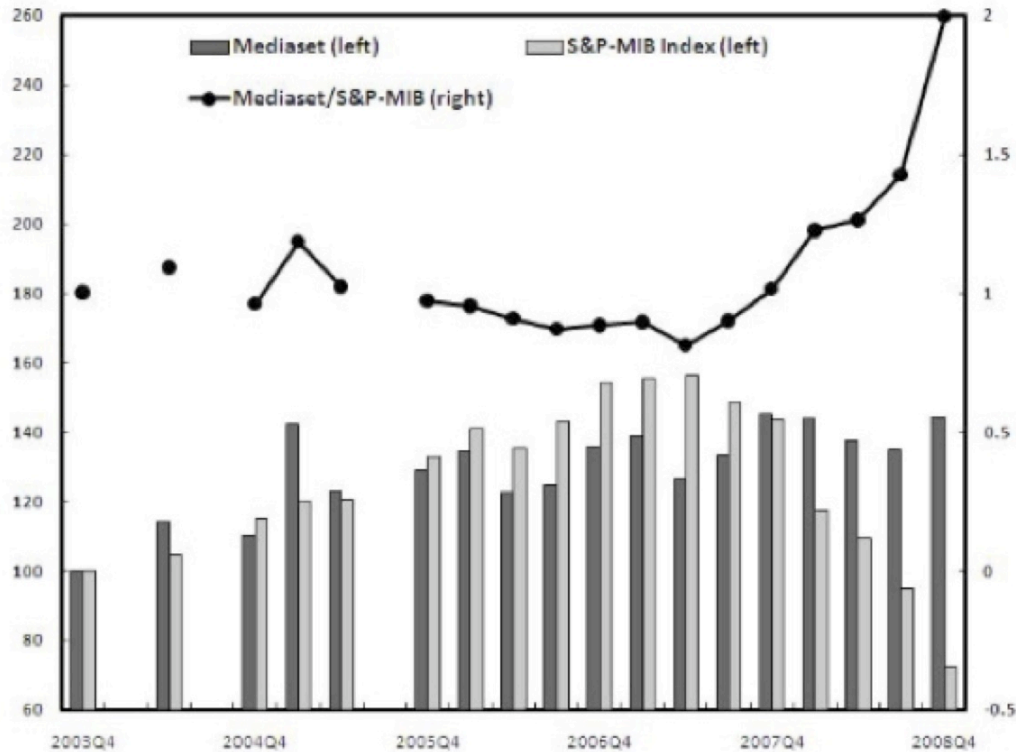
Luca Manunza (2009) Interview with Aurelia Longo of insu^tv. Napoli.

Feldnotes:

Eterea II (2004) Fieldnotes on Eterea 2, National Meeting of Street Televisions. Senigallia.

Appendices

Appendix 1



Berlusconi's firm, *Mediaset* accumulation from 2003-2008.

SOURCE: Compustat via Wharton Research Data Service; Yahoo! Finance.

NOTE: Mediaset's value represents market capitalization (market equity plus long-term debt plus retained earnings). The S7P/MIB (now the FTSE MIB) is a weighted index representing the equity price of Italian public corporations. Both series are indexed (2003Q4=100). Mediaset/S7P-MIB is a ratio. Quarterly data from Mediaset incomplete. Courtesy of D.T. Cochrane.

Appendix 2



Naples Global Forum Symbol

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