

# **Berardi, F. (2012) *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*. Semiotext(e).**

## ***Introduction***

We are experiencing a situation in which techno-linguistic automatisms associated with financial power (a masculine form of reason) are taking precedence over political decisions produced through social autonomy and democracy. What we need is the conscious mobilization and self-organization of the social body and its general intellect, along with a poetic revitalization of language, affect, and voice, with its associated ambiguity, sensuality, sociality, and singularity. The techno-linguistic automatisms of finance get people to follow the path it favors by making that path the path of least resistance (by codifying complex affective flows into financial signifiers, code abstracted from material bodies), and we become a swarm, all funneling to the easiest (rather than the best) option. In response to this automatization and crisis, we will see the rise of aggressive populist reaction.

## ***Chapter 1: The European Collapse***

We have moved from 1) territorialized industrial capitalism that produced material, useful things using concrete skills, bodies, and knowledges, to 2) financial semio-capitalism that produces (deterritorialized) signs referring to other (deterritorialized) signs rather than concrete referents. The response to the latter will be **an uprising**, one that will be long and hard. It can involve a massive democratic reaction that increases solidarity and autonomy, or a massive fascist reaction of racism, nativism, masculinism, and cynicism. The latter is made possible by the ongoing process of desolidarization under neoliberalism (Thatcher's "there is no such thing as society") after which each group experiences precarity as threatening only *them*. We will not be able to stop or guide the uprising, but we should try to create "autonomous structures" within which we can make the best of life inside the uprising.

Semio-capitalism is accompanied by the dereferentialization of language, and the dereferentialization of money post-gold-standard. It is governed by techno-linguistic rules: e.g. competition is the best relation, you must pay back debt, ECB experts are the best deciders (e.g. consultants installed to rule Italy and Greece), privatization is good for all, salaries are too high, etc. These rules are just economic dogma, but they are installed as unavoidable common sense. One task of the revolt of the precarious is to disrupt, through poetry, these sign-sign connections that determine common sense, but the other is to reactivate the social body and connect it to the general intellect. We must rebuild/develop solidarity-autonomy. We must put the social body on a regimen. It does not need to grow infinitely through hyper-production and consumption, it just needs to persist and be happy. It does not need to be young, thirsty, energetic, aggressive, masculine. It needs to know its limits: exhaustion, slowness, and know its real needs: enjoyment, happiness, health.

## ***Chapter 2: Language, Economy, and the Body***

Economics is not a predictive discipline but the moral articulation of dogma: grow, be competitive, etc. The new semio-bourgeoisie is hard to identify as persons; it is more algorithms that amass and mobilize wealth (produced by the general intellect and displaced from workers) in markets. Growth and profits are the goal rather than happiness/welfare. Because the sign refers only to other signs, only violence can determine which decision to make. In this world, labor has been pulverized, fragmented, precaritized; it no longer produces material things, but signs (that refer to other signs). Buzzwords of the current ethos (and of Italy in the 1910s-1920s): energy, quality, competition, (farical) aggressiveness, masculine conquest, winning, futurism, speed, potency, (ludicrous) masculinity, misogyny, warriors, amphetamines. To this ethos Berardi proposes: cooperation, sharing, solidarity-autonomy, compassion, good cognition, femininity, slowness, tenderness, care, attention.

## ***Chapter 3: The General Intellect is Looking for a Body***

Capitalism abstracts from human activity to get labor, financial abstraction abstracts valorization from the production of use value. Debt is the method to extract value now, not physical force. This latter abstraction begins the destruction of the real world, and the acceleration of flows of information and money, which leads to psychic disorders like ADD, depression, anxiety, attention overload. Meaning and use value can slow this acceleration down, and 2011 may have been the first glimpse of self-organization on the part of the precariat.

In this financialization process, desire is turned from production/creation into lack/need/debt, and individuals are conceived of as free agents who are responsible for their own fortune and well-being -- even cognitive labor is being made precarious. As a result, the social body is liquidated, the general intellect is overloaded and breaks down (even though it is the producer of great value), because psychic energy is finite. The idea that we can have infinite mental energy and potency is shown to be a lie. But because we are deterritorialized, isolated, and disconnected from each other as workers, our capacity for empathy, solidarity, friendship, and love is diminished.

We are being reformatted, away from **conjunction** (the linking of individuals in which each is changed in the linkage, each is undone by the other, each becomes-other, and relations are personal and concrete, and marked by interpretation, ambiguity, nuance, love, solidarity, and con-spiracy) and toward **connection** (the linking of individuals that are discrete and are unaffected by the linkage, each is unmoved by the other, each is being-the-same; each is given a common protocol (TCP/IP) under which to connect, and it is algorithmic, binary, impersonal, abstract -- and the relation lacks love, solidarity, and con-spiracy). This is profoundly troubling to Bifo, and the uprising must respond by reactivating the conjunctive body and urge it toward healing and therapy.

## ***Chapter 4: Poetry and Finance***

[Whole hell of a lot of rehashing.]

Money and language have lost their referents, use value does not matter, only exchange value.

Language is not an attempt to articulate truth, but to convince the other. Poetry spills out over the container that language sets for it. This latter act can contribute to the goal: the reactivation of the social body, which is the *precondition* for the deployment of the general intellect (GI). Perhaps 2010 and 11 aimed (in part) to recompose the social body. Insurrection [not uprising?] is a decade-long process, and it must aim at the deployment of the full power of the GI. That power spills out over the container that capitalism has set for the GI. Now, Bifo says, the GI is "reconstituting the social body." The idea is that the social body and its GI will reactivate solidarity and create an autonomous life beyond capitalism. Part of this insurrection will also be to reconstitute sensibility, or the ability to understand what can't be verbalized. Poetry is a key strategy for sensibility. The latter is slow, bodily, nuanced, complex, empathetic, and it overflows techno-linguistic interfaces, and makes new ground [Puerta del Sol? (which he calls "Plaza do Sol"!!)] for common understanding and happiness. The trick is to do poetry/sensibility that touches chaos but composes a cosmos. In touching the chaos, it creates the possibility of a becoming-other of the order of expression, a going beyond the semiotic limits of the world to create a new life form in which we open ourselves to each other. The way we do this is to use irony, not cynicism. The latter believed in communism as the end of history [as Marx frames it in the EPM], and was disillusioned, and gave up. The former never believed in that, but instead understood the world as unending social interpretation and valuing. So, the ironists say, don't play the techno-linguistic game that financial capitalism sets for you, but connect with others on your own terms to create these new realms of shared meaning.