

RADICAL MEDIA

*Rebellious Communication
and Social Movements*

JOHN D.H. DOWNING
with Tamara Villarreal Ford • Genevè Gil • Laura Stein



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Italy: Three Decades of Radical Media

Italian political history since Mussolini, and especially since the end of the 1960s, has been tremendously complex. For many casual observers, only the fact that Italian governments have tended to come and go with amazing rapidity has really caught their attention, along perhaps with occasional spectacular stories of the Sicilian Mafia, evoking the *Godfather* movies. And so, Italy remains a sun-drenched tourist trap dripping with ancient and medieval history, *pasta con sugo*,... and the Pope.

Let us complicate this picture a little, just enough to set the scene for the daily newspaper (*Il Manifesto*) and the two radio stations (Radio Popolare, Milan, and Controradio, Florence) that we shall be studying.¹ These three radical media are interesting in part because of their sheer longevity, which contrasts with the fairly short-run if epochal story of Portugal's *República* and Rádio Renascença. Longevity was also a fairly important criterion for the case studies I included in the first edition of this book (Downing, 1984), because I wanted to show that media of this type were by no means all just a flash in the pan. In addition, I was anxious to explore how radical media could not only function but actually survive over time with self-managed structures and on low budgets. These considerations, along with their intimate relation with social

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movements and oppositional cultures, made these Italian examples particularly intriguing.

BRIEF BACKGROUND

The political turbulence in France was more or less confined to 1968 and 1969, and in Portugal to 1974 and 1975. Italy and Poland, in very different ways, continued to evince political unrest over a much more sustained period. The sources of unrest varied in Italy (for an overview, see Smith, 1997, pp. 455-497; McCarthy, 1995): Leftist student and factory worker upsurges and strikes; terror tactics from the ultra Right (see Ferraresi, 1996 (such as bombs in public places); terrorism from the Left (the Red Brigades' murder of premier Aldo Moro² in 1978 and of numerous policemen); Mafia terror (the murder of top police investigators, and public critics, rivals); secret governments within the government and heavy-duty financial corruption (the P2 scandal and the Vatican Bank³); the seemingly impending electoral victory of Western Europe's largest communist party (the PCI), and its corresponding alienation from the rebellious younger generation of Italians; the emergence of a wildly implausible government coalition for a short period in the 1990s, composed of three entirely new political agencies (a somewhat reformed neo-fascist party, a northern separatist party, and a new party headed by Berlusconi, Italy's media mega-entrepreneur, a man barely known until 10 years earlier).

Yet, despite the turmoil, Italy also enjoyed a remarkable core of social and economic stability, to the point where sometimes these dramatic events, screaming from banner headlines and endlessly chewed over on TV and in the press, could seem almost epiphenomenal. Italy's average living standards—which meant the rich north was really remarkably affluent—surpassed Britain's in the early 1980s. Perhaps the most striking change, at least in terms of Italians' frequent national self-understanding, was the switch during the second half of the century from being a nation that always exported its people to the United States and elsewhere in the Americas and Europe to being a nation that began by importing labor from its own poverty-stricken south to northern factories and then finally began to import workers from various African countries, south Asia, the Philippines, and elsewhere.⁴ Within this complex mixture of change and stability, the three radical alternative media

originated on which we will now focus. All three, however, were born at particularly intense points in political time and against a background of seemingly unending Christian Democratic Party rule, combined with the PCI's move to the Right—toward common sense for some, toward collaboration with a reactionary and archaic system for others.

IL MANIFESTO, ROME

On April 28, 1971, a new daily newspaper was launched, *Il Manifesto*,⁵ selling for the absurdly low price of 50 lire. The first issue had only four pages, no advertisements, and uncompromising political analysis. In its first year, the newspaper sold 30,000 to 40,000 copies a day. Even given the weak national presence of the Italian daily press, this 1% share was still quite creditable. Moreover, *Il Manifesto*'s readers were activists.

The newspaper was founded by a group expelled from the communist party in 1969 for critiquing what they saw as the PCI's steady rightward drift. They were also pro-China rather than pro-Moscow in the split within the world communist movement at the time, albeit based on a false international image then current of China, where Mao's supposed encouragement of vigorous popular participation contrasted with the dour Soviet commitment to hierarchy. Some, but not all of its first staff members had journalistic experience. Their primary affiliation was with the splinter party they had formed when they were expelled from the PCI, the Party of Proletarian Unity, whose acronym was PdUP. This affiliation would lead to problems for the newspaper, as we shall shortly see.

Il Manifesto's internal organization set out to be democratic. Both the chief editor and a switchboard operator received the same miserably low salary, as did everyone else. Internal open meetings were held daily to review policy, so that specialists could hear alternative views before writing their columns. The printers, three floors down, were not part of the collective, for their communist party affiliations would have made this impractical in view of *Il Manifesto*'s split from the PCI. Predictably, however, despite good intentions, technical staff often felt less a part of the paper than the journalists, and from time to time women journalists, too, found themselves subtly excluded, sometimes by attitudes, but more often by structural factors. A key instance of the latter was the daily 7:30 p.m. production meeting. Women with children typi-

cally felt they had to be home before that hour—or were pressured by their husbands to be—and so they could not participate.

Over the 1970s, the newspaper's fortunes rose and fell with different political tides. However, with the explosion of the student movements of 1977 and 1978, and with the Red Brigades' kidnapping of Premier Moro, *Il Manifesto* found itself suddenly squeezed from numerous directions. For student revolutionaries, the paper was simply a minor variation on the PCI theme and part of an antirevolutionary edifice. For the PCI, it was unacceptable that the newspaper argued for negotiating Moro's release (on the ground that the terrorism problem was being used by the then government to frighten the public into sticking with a conservative law-and-order politics). Four national dailies mounted a campaign against *Il Manifesto*, claiming its stance was tantamount to a concealed argument in favor of terrorist tactics. PdUP's women members were deserting it in droves to join the feminist movement, which suddenly mushroomed at that time. And because the paper defined itself as PdUP's mouthpiece, on the Leninist transmission-belt model of party-controlled radical media, its journalists found they were permitted to critique any political stance in Italy *except* this small splinter party's.

Something had to give, and the chain binding the paper to PdUP was finally broken in 1979. This helped considerably, because it enabled *Il Manifesto* to become what its journalists mostly wanted it to be: a forum for the Left. The newspaper opened itself to a wide range of contributors, from an unknown caller reporting on a demonstration in a town in Sicily that no other media were covering through informed commentary on U.S. politics from a professor up north in Turin. In major cities, *Il Manifesto* organized members' groups whose activities were similarly ecumenical, and open national conferences were held on hot political topics. The newspaper was trying to develop a different and closer relation with its readers than was conventional with the press.

Il Manifesto's language and intellectual level, however, were very demanding. Although in 1981, it finally admitted photos, cartoons, and sports reports, it was still a tough read for anyone without a university degree. One whole page of an issue of the paper (in July 1980) was devoted to the French neo-Freudian Jacques Lacan and his relation to feminist theory. In early 1982, after heated debate, two pages were set aside daily for everyday issues and popular arts, but much of the paper continued to be rather hard going.

The years from 1983 through 1997 saw a series of shifts in *Il Manifesto's* contribution to Italian life. The earlier years, during which conservative government policies seemed to be carrying all before them, were inevitably a rather dispiriting era for the newspaper. Its one major campaigning moment in those years came in response to the Craxi government's attack during 1984 and 1985 on *la scala mobile*. Literally meaning "the escalator," the term was used in Italy as political shorthand for the automatic indexing of wages and pensions, a major achievement of the 1970s that had been negotiated by the unions to offset consumer vulnerability to price inflation. In the end, Craxi won,⁸ and the public's protections were indeed slashed, but *Il Manifesto* staffers who had been active in the campaign felt they had fought with intense energy and resolve. "It was a good fight, the right fight," said one.

However, the momentous chain of events that would eventually see the entire Soviet system dismantled in 1991 was also emerging at the same time. Gorbachev was installed as Soviet leader in 1985 and by 1986 was beginning to call a halt to the war in Afghanistan and to negotiate nuclear disarmament with the West. By 1988, there were pronounced signals of a growing openness in certain Moscow-based print media. This openness, in turn, gave space to increasingly insistent demands for national independence, both in the Soviet republics and in some of the Eastern European nations within the Soviet bloc.

These developments would have very disturbing effects on the newspaper's self-definition, not least as a result of the PCP's decision—following the Soviet bloc's collapse—to retile itself the Party of the Democratic Left. Even then *Il Manifesto's* general line was as follows: Gorbachev was the urgently needed reformer who would purify the Soviet system and bestow on it—or unleash within it, it was not clear—a new energy and moral force that would change the global political equation to the pronounced disadvantage of much of capitalism's fundamental dynamic. In other words, their view and Gorbachev's own perceptions of his role were very much in sync.⁹ This meant, however, that the reports coming from their own correspondent in Moscow were often most unwelcome, to the point of leading to many queries about his information. Sometimes, a dual definition of Soviet realities appeared in the newspaper, one in the stories he filed, the other in the political commentary columns. The correspondent's stories indicated with ever-increasing clarity that Gorbachev was losing his ability to lead a more and more disgruntled Soviet public, which was angered and frustrated

by the decline in living standards and the economic disruption generated by *perestroika* policies. This messy situation did not fit with the leading editorial staff's preferred view of things. It was a disquieting omen of the difficulty the newspaper might have in coming to terms with some admittedly seismic political changes.¹⁰

During the middle and later 1980s, the newspaper clunged along with about 30,000 to 35,000 daily circulation. Two events in the first half of the 1990s, however, lifted its fortunes briefly, and it found itself selling 65,000 to 70,000 copies daily for certain periods of time. *Il Manifesto* took on a considerable number of extra staff, totaling about 160 at the peak, and to its surprise switched from being what one staffer called an "artisanal" newspaper to becoming a moderately substantial—and therefore much more complex and necessarily businesslike—operation. At this time, *Il Manifesto* was among the first daily newspapers in Italy to computerize its operations. (This expansion and its problematic implications will be reviewed below.)

The events that stimulated these changes in fortune were the 1990–1991 war against Iraq by the United States and its allies¹¹ and the 1994 ascent to power of the new coalition between the separatist Northern League, media magnate Berlusconi's Forza Italia, and Alleanza Nazionale (their to a neo-fascist party). *Il Manifesto* was the single Italian newspaper that denounced the second Gulf war in unequivocal terms, whereas the rest of the major media were offering a Hallelujah chorus in support. This meant that its information and critiques of the war were the only national source of genuinely dissonant information.

The government coalition only lasted about 6 months, but during that time, its most insistent media opponent was *Il Manifesto*. The heart of its opposition was directed at the participation in government of Alleanza Nazionale, which it defined as effectively a resurrection of Mussolini (symbolically, even the dictator's granddaughter ran for office in Naples). The newspaper organized a huge antifascist demonstration in Milan on April 25, the 50th anniversary of Mussolini's execution by the Partisans and their public display of his body in Milan's Piazzale Loreto.

Thereafter, however, the newspaper's fortunes began to subside again, with a 2-year period from 1995 through 1997 during which the newspaper was being subsidized by *cassa integrazione* funds.¹² This culminated in a deep crisis in the summer of 1997, when the Banca di Roma refused to extend further credit without either a major new infusion of

cash or substantial firings. Because the former option was unfeasible, the firings were the only recourse. For a newspaper that had organized itself as a collective for 26 years, this was an extremely bitter prospect. Long-time staffers found the situation intensely depressing and very alarming, too: Few of their numbers could automatically assume they would be exempt from whatever cuts would have to be made.

The newspaper's procedure in handling this crisis is important to note, because the quality of a collectively run media enterprise is not only determined by what it does at the outset or in periods of success but also—and perhaps especially—by how it copes over time with crisis and the threat of collapse.

Two general assembly meetings were called, held in the morning so as not to interfere with the production of the newspaper, to discuss how to proceed. These were composed of journalists and technical workers, following *Il Manifesto's* traditions. Each meeting stretched over 2 days, and both were more heavily attended by technicians than by journalists, probably because the former felt more vulnerable to cost-cutting measures. The second meeting was held to ratify the decisions taken by the first. Few attended second time around, probably because the first meeting had already approved two motions with 72% approval from those present. In general, discussion at these meetings was far less energetic than had been the case in earlier years.

The two motions were to institute a specific program of cuts in positions, totaling up to 40, and to set up a union committee to oversee the needs and situations faced by those cut. The union committee (*comitato di redazione*) was standard in other newspapers, but the *Il Manifesto* collective had always hoped that the management-labor divide could be avoided within its own ranks. Equally, the fact that the new management board would be composed of two journalists and two technical workers, elected in each case only by their peers, represented another retreat from the collective's steady attempt to elide, where possible, those professional differences.

There was considerable agreement among those with whom I spoke about a number of the causes of *Il Manifesto's* decline and critical situation. In particular, two were singled out as major factors, one the general crisis of the Italian daily press and the other the protracted confusion of the Italian political system in transition. Some staffers, however, pointed further to internal organizational issues within the news-

paper," others to what they felt were issues of the newspaper's problematic identity and inadequate attempts to resolve it.

It was certainly true that the situation of the Italian daily press had gotten considerably worse in the 1980s and 1990s. By 1997, to try to persuade a reluctant public¹² to read its products, the mainstream newspaper industry was offering a whole series of "gadgets," as the Italians themselves named them, from cheap videos to special glossy fashion supplements, and from CDs to pocket-size short stories by famous authors (Maupassant, Dostoevsky). These came with the newspaper, sometimes costing as much or more than the actual paper itself. The fact that the industry had opted for this approach and was busily competing to see which gadgets would offer the greatest inducement to readers already proved that daily newspapers were uninteresting to the Italian public. This situation, however, made it all the harder for *Il Manifesto*, which did not have the corporate backing to issue all these incentives. *Il Manifesto* was typically the second newspaper that people bought, and the extra gadget cost of the first paper would often soak up the lire otherwise available for that purchase.

As regards the transition in Italian politics from the relative postwar stability of permanent Christian Democrat dominance and PCI challenge, it was unclear how the Italian government would be organized in the future, but it seemed certain that it would not revert to the old system just as it had been.¹³ For *Il Manifesto*, the difficulty was acute. It had always been a sympathetic critic of the PCI, it had argued during the debate over renaming the PCI that it should hold on to its original name, and the paper still enshrined the word *communist* on its own masthead. With whom could it align itself, in an era when the PDS seemed to be competing with the British Labor Party ("New Labor") for the title of which, among traditional European parties of the Left, could be named the most dedicated convert to free-market policies?

The newspaper's traditional political space had simply closed up. The original parties of the Left had moved to the Center Right, whereas their effective alternative was represented in one way or another by the parties of the Berlusconi coalition. Only *Communist Refoundation*, offering the comforting reassurances of the pre-1989 scenario and a classical transmission-belt newspaper¹⁴ to the surviving faithful, was to be seen on the Left. What is more, from having been a newspaper principally identified in the public mind with campaigns as a mobilizing news-

paper, *Il Manifesto* was now being forced to re-evaluate that role, along with its inherited internal culture.

I was told that the roots of the political problem lay very deep, buried, indeed, in the perspective of the senior staff on the significance of the Gorbachev phenomenon, which was discussed previously. If the future politics of the planet indeed had lain with a reformed Soviet system and the flourishing of relatively independent Marxist parties committed to democracy, such as the old PCI, then the long-term heretical role of *Il Manifesto* would have been sealed with history's approval.

Such was not to be the case. Nor was it, perhaps, to be the case that a visceral appeal to antifascist sentiment (represented by the April 25 Milan march), to admittedly well-founded fears and memories, would be sufficient to respond effectively to the new political trends represented by a largely converted party of the traditional ultra Right (Alleanza Nazionale), a party fusing tremendous media power with political power (Berlusconi), or a separatist party led by frothing racist demagogues but drawing its support from within sectors infuriated by the effects of overcentralized government (the Northern League).

How was the newspaper to respond? How was it to secure a committed readership among the younger intelligentsia? How was it to carve out a role for itself, in the midst of downsizing and within the general collapse of enthusiasm for the daily press in Italy? Some respondents felt that attempts had been made, although they disagreed about their effectiveness, to address this: the launch of the tabloid format of the paper in 1994; the failed attempt to launch a weekly special for younger readers, *Extra*, which was put out in extravagantly postmodernist computer screen format; or the intermittent graphics and layout changes in the main newspaper.

A critic of these attempts described them as obsessive but superficial, failing to grapple either with the actual interests of a younger readership or with the deep implications of the collapse of Sovietism and its ramifications within the Italian political spectrum or with the new realities represented by Berlusconi or the Northern League. In this view, *Il Manifesto* had never acted as a forum for readers and correspondents to debate the significance of these tumultuous and perplexing developments. Instead, it had sought to give its readers wise political guidance, not far removed, perhaps, from the traditional desire to provide them with the correct line. Was the problem, as other staffers suggested, that their "bishops"—the nucleus of former PCI heretics who had

founded the newspaper—were still overly dominant in its policies and direction.

In some ways, a poster and T-shirt published at the time of the 1994 switch to tabloid format, with the aim of publicizing it, may suggest a part of the problem that was still to be addressed at the core of the *Il Manifesto* project. It showed a smiling baby's face and by its side the words, *La rivoluzione non russa*, a wordplay that signified both "The non-Russian revolution" and "The revolution is not snoring." The question left in abeyance by this major attempt at self-redefinition—a large version of the poster was still hanging at the main entrance to the offices in summer 1997—was how far the discourse of revolution, any discourse of revolution, Russian or not, snoring or not, still had any purchase on the Italian public's deepest aspirations, hopes, or fears. Was *Il Manifesto* in danger of having to supply to the public the key questions as well as the answers? Would a tabloid format, as such, have a profound impact? (Journalists always attribute far more significance to layout changes than do their readers.) Would not a baby be, unfortunately, a rather witless and naive, even cheap expression of the rising generation?

Bringing together (a) a sustained attack on neoliberal dogma and its destructive policy impact with (b) a nuanced, exploratory probing of new modes of political life and cultural expression would probably fill a rather large niche in Italian media production. It would certainly be of interest to the youthful intelligentsia who were the key to *Il Manifesto*'s future. A final comment on a further aspect of *Il Manifesto* is in order. Over its lifespan, the newspaper had also acted as a training school for numerous future journalists who could have gotten their professional seasoning in no other way. In the process, seeing not only the downside of internal democracy but also its many pluses, their eyes were permanently opened to alternative possibilities for organizing media.

RADIO POPOLARE (PEOPLE'S RADIO)

This station was started in 1976 by a group of five people then working at one of Milan's first socialist stations, Radio Milano Centrale. Characteristically for Radio Popolare, called Radiopop, they worked carefully to prepare the project for practically a year before setting it in motion. The five had grown increasingly restive at the continual encroachment of PCI domination over Radio Milano Centrale. They were committed

from the start to enabling everyone on the Left to communicate with each other—hence the station's name.

Their preparation had involved discussions with both the PCI and the socialist party as the two major parties in Milan's city council. Each of the parties had representatives on the station's board. This early determination to have a satisfactory relationship with the immediate realities of official politics in Milan undoubtedly contributed to the station's initial positive image in the city. The mainstream parties were not attacking it as a juvenile ultra-leftist project and, indeed, were among its political sponsors. Very fortunately, too, for Radio Popolare, the parties never made any attempt to colonize it, as they had consistently done with state broadcasting.

There was also a degree of stability of personnel at the station. Although the five original organizers had all left by 1980, 9 out of the 11 full-timers in summer 1980 had been involved from the moment the station had actually gone on the air. Possibly, the regular payment of salaries had something to do with this: In summer 1980, every full-timer, including the technician, received 350,000 lire a month. This was hardly a princely sum—especially if its quite frequent nonarrival 2 months out of 12 is taken into account—but all the same, such compensation was quite uncharacteristic of the other independent leftist stations. Also, the collective's method of handling wages during financial difficulties was to pay those most in need first, the degree of need being established as best as could be by collective discussion.

Milan, sometimes called the capital of the north in Italy, is a city with the wide range of economic activities that characterize the average metropolis. It is neither a cultural center like Venice and Florence nor a city dominated by a single industry like Turin. Factory and office labor, professionals and businesses, the university, fashionable and spacious neighborhoods, grayer and tougher quarters, air pollution during the winter months leading to heavy fogs—all these combine to make Milan a city similar in its ambience to a large number of northern European cities. Its political culture is and was definitely to the Left, however.

Radiopop was and is situated not far from the famous Piazzale Loreto where Mussolini's body was displayed after his execution. In 1980, the station was on a side-street in a row house that it occupied entirely. Inside, furnishings were functional at best. Soundproofing in the studios was homemade, consisting of cheap curtain material draped around the walls and ceilings. The premises were distinctly crowded,

with members of the collective having to edge past each other in the tiny studios as one program drew to a close and the next program's producers came to take up their places at the microphones. By 1997, Radiopop had moved to larger premises in the same neighborhood, and its technical fittings had been considerably upgraded.

The unique feature of Radiopop from the very outset was its members' determination to enable the socialist public to communicate with itself. Their first elected director, Biagio Longo, had expressed this goal in an article in the journal *aut aut* in 1978:

[For us, what is crucial is] the recognition that the class, the proletarian masses, are never the same thing as the organizations and even the movements in which they express themselves from time to time. We refuse to reduce the multiplicity, the richness, the diversity of people's perspectives . . . (not) flattering them into a mono-language, and without dispersing them into ghettoized or colonized spaces. (pp. 24-25)

This shows clearly the distinctive character of Radiopop as a project: its attempt to encourage and develop a lateral communication outside the existing channels of communication that regularly separate people into social categories of sex, age, party membership, political activism, educational background, and the rest. To develop people's capacity to communicate on a mass level across these barriers, neither accepting the barriers as inevitable nor denying their existence, is indeed fundamental.

The usual criticisms leveled by the far Left against Radiopop were twofold. The first was that it had lost its ability to attack the city government, because of its desire not to alienate members of the parties that ran the city. The second objection was that Radiopop was gradually becoming a little institution, developing its own professional journalists who could then claim the right to interpret reality for the rest of us: "to choose what slice of reality to put first, to decide which protagonists to consider," as Longo put it in summarizing this accusation.

Radiopop's reaction to these charges was that they were preconceived and schematic. The station pointed to its involvement in numerous Milan campaigns involving abortion rights, compulsory military service, and factory issues. The clarity critics professed to enjoy about the key struggles and who was leading them, or what was the next phase of the revolutionary movement, was bogus. Who could claim un-

erring insight into these matters? Yet, if Radiopop were to become simply the voice of one or more groups, it would effectively be claiming this bogus clarity for itself.

The Radiopop *compagni* insisted, however, that to accuse them of that kind of negative "professionalism" blurred certain vital issues. Their argument was as follows: It is a hollow pretense to claim that radio workers should or can be exactly the same people as those involved in struggles in the community or at work—in the terms used on the Left in Italy then, the "subjects of information" and the "subjects of struggle" must become the same individuals. The only way to approach the real distinction between people who operate a radio station and those who are active in particular campaigns, they argued, is to be honest about it: "to make this contradiction clear as a means of controlling it," as Longo (1978, p. 20) put it in his article.

Second, constant instant access to the airwaves for those involved in particular struggles means the station becomes identified as only concerned with those particular sections of the public. The station ceases to be a forum for the widest possible spectrum. Furthermore, not to recognize that unpaid people at the core of a radio station are always those with the time, energy, and interest to be involved—and perhaps, financial support from their families—presupposes that radio activists automatically represent "the people." Yet, again and again in its early days, Radiopop found it was recruiting its activists from the same pool: young people and students. In no way did immediacy guarantee representativeness.

Third, the practical results of immediacy, spontaneity, and lack of professionalism were a habit of muddling through the day's programming, confusion and ignorance about how to program, and an ever tighter circle of mutually reinforcing station activists, despite an avowed commitment to open access.

The use of language was an important dimension of this issue for Radiopop, distinguishing it from *Il Manifesto*. Fofi (1978) wrote on the station's policy in its early days, contrasting it with the briefly famous Radio Alice in Bologna. His basic point was that the Radio Alice collective could easily identify the subject of struggle with the subject of information exactly because, in their case, the contributors and the listeners came from precisely the same narrow social band. As he put it, the strength of Alice's language was that it could be

richer and fresher, because it is the language of a particular cultural and social stratum, which is created and invented every day . . . [though] the risk is of creating a ghetto communication that is not concerned to speak with "the others," but [with] only its peers. (p. 48)

His comments on Radiopop are lengthy but informative:

[Radiopop's] network of "informers," contacts, listening points, while not perfect, has guaranteed an interchange between informers and informed, between transmitters and receivers, which has no equivalent in any communication initiative in postwar Italy. . . . It is clear that Radio Popolare's language is less innovative, given its problems of mediating, that it does not require liberated invention and creativity, but the discovery of a median language, because the ordinary person and the worker do not, or do not yet, speak the same language as the kids in the clubs, or the student, or the feminist. . . . What is taking place is the fruit of a process of cultural exchange, following on the class redefinitions of which we are part, an exchange constructed inside the class, where the stably employed and the unstably employed have the possibility of speaking and listening to each other in turn. (Fofi, 1978, p. 48)

Equally significant is the use of imaginative material in programming. Any discussion of communication democracy that omits this dimension omits the fact that the democratic subjects themselves are flesh and blood, not concrete and steel; that they have feelings, fantasies and fears, humor and pain. The discussions in the first two parts of this book about art, performance art, situationism, street theater, satire, song, and dance all serve to underscore the significance of this issue. Straight political news always risks becoming simply a hobby, elevated to be sure, but still a hobby, not a mission.

As of the mid-1990s, the imaginative dimension—described by one activist as *radiofonica* rather than journalism—was alive and well in Radiopop, although still struggling for space with the hard news types. Satire was a quite popular program feature. One instance was a Sunday program called "Bar Sport," first begun in 1984, which poked fun at typical conversations between sports fans. Another took on TV programs: For example, in one case, a song contest was held regarding a program with material that was notoriously full of schlock; viewers were invited to turn the sound down on their TV sets and listen to parodies of the

songs broadcast simultaneously from Radiopop (the station's everyday name). In 1994, 100,000 people attended a maxi-screen Bar Sport event centered on the soccer World Cup. This *Mystery Science Theater 3000* style was used to considerable effect over the years in a variety of programs.

Music programming was another area of importance, although it took rather different paths at Radiopop than at commercial radio stations. As of 1997, the station was a sufficiently strong presence on the music scene to be able to get musicians and bands passing through Milan to give live studio performances. The plan for 1998 was to try to devote a half hour every day to a live performance, from improvised acoustic guitar to African groups to rock, or to a live interview with a musician. The programming by then was very diverse: "World music" was certainly very strong, but there was also a lively European classical music program, and the station had steered a path into rock music without—as some of its staff initially deeply feared—becoming a prisoner of the record companies.

Marina Petrillo, one of the two coproducers of the weekday show, "Patchanka,"¹⁵ which ran from 2 to 3:30 p.m. daily, explained her programming strategy as an attempt to "widen the landscape" for younger listeners in particular. Political issues delivered straight from the shoulder constituted pretty "heavy luggage" for the contemporary audience. Introducing them via music was much more likely, in her view, to develop a questioning attitude. It was pointless complaining that younger audiences were not articulating themselves within the discourse adhered to by the 1968 generation. The issue was to start from where they were.

In Petrillo's strategy, this meant devoting special programs to the music in films such as *Dead Man Walking* to provoke discussion of issues such as capital punishment. It also meant analyzing all the current trends of rock music and including in this a discussion of cartoons, books, video games, fashion, comics, the cinema, the whole gamut of rock culture. "An easy song can lead to a heavy issue," said Petrillo, both summarizing her approach and simultaneously chiding the sector of Radiopop's audience that wanted the station simply to reaffirm its own long-honed political instincts. "Let's just help people develop their own critical skills for a commercial world," she concluded, underlining that too much talk on the airwaves alienated young people.

Radiopop's journalistic function and its more generic cultural function did have a mildly competitive relationship with each other. In the

view of the news staff, the journalistic function represented the station's most heavy-duty contribution.¹⁶ From this section, a significant proportion of the staff had been able to move into mainstream media, using the station in part—not necessarily instrumentally—as their training ground. Those who used radio rather as a popular art form, who were entranced by its technical possibilities rather than seeing it as a convenient tool for journalism, were sometimes regarded by news staffers as contributing but not as the station's backbone. The technical and creative staff tended to have less career mobility, with more of a commitment over the long haul to the Radiopop project.

Too much should not be made of this division in analyzing the station. It is simply an honest reflection of the way in which cultural divisions will emerge in political projects of this and other types. The division is considerably less damaging than the contemptuous tendency visible in a number of these media, around the time of my 1980 research, to write off the administrative and financial staff's work as tedious stuff fit only for drones with no balls. Or for women.

Three further dimensions of Radiopop will be addressed now: its finances, women's roles in the station, and the station's relation to the city's public.

Radiopop's Finances

The question of finances will be subdivided for the present purpose into financial structure and advertising/programming software policies. As of 1990, Radiopop had adopted a new corporate status. From 1983 through 1990, it had been an unusual type of limited liability company, owned 50% by political parties and labor unions and 50% by the staff and registered members of the station cooperative. The change took place to put party and union influence at a greater remove, and so, all political bodies were limited to a collective maximum of 15% share ownership, the station cooperative to 35%, and individual listeners invited to buy into the remaining 50%. As of 1997, these latter totaled 13,000 people, some of them owning just a single share, some larger numbers. (Annual donations were also provided by 12,000 listeners, many of them also shareholders.) Besides raising needed money, the purpose was to give the listeners a tangible sense of a stake in the station and its community of listeners.¹⁷

Radiopop's adaptation of advertising and program management software makes for a particularly interesting story.¹⁸ At standard commercial radio stations, it was normal by the mid-1990s to have software programs installed to ensure that commercial breaks took place on a set schedule; disk jockeys or producers were compelled to conform strictly. Radiopop sought and managed to achieve a modified package, warning that ads would interrupt the programming automatically in 5 minutes' time unless a moment for the "commercial break" was selected before then. The difference in philosophy is clear: For the commercial stations, ads took absolute priority; for Radiopop, the contents and the pacing of the programs took priority. Suggesting the iron laws of commercialized communication priorities, the company technicians selling the software had considerable difficulty in coming to terms with Radiopop's request to adapt it in this way. Not that the operation was particularly complex. It simply did not seem to make sense.

The station met with similar bafflement in regard to the musical program management software it wanted. Again, at a standard commercial station, the software package gives the executive music programmer total control over which tracks are played and which are replayed. This enables a tight relationship to be realized between the record companies and the station, to the probable commercial advantage of both, but to the disadvantage of fresh (as opposed to merely new) music, especially if produced by small labels. Radiopop, by contrast, wanted each of its program producers to retain autonomy in this sphere. The software company's technicians simply could not believe their ears, and seriously supposed they had misunderstood the request.

Women at Radiopop

The story of women at Radiopop is illuminating. At the beginning of the 1980s, although women were involved full-time and part-time, they did not constitute a power bloc but participated as individuals. Many more had been involved in 1977 and 1978, with numerous programs on women and work, women and culture, women and health, and other themes, most of which had been organized by a separate women's collective within the station. Then, the number of women involved had shrunk, for a range of reasons including practical personal problems, switching to better paid media work, or simply experiencing exhaustion. Also, separatism had disappeared as a major feature of the

Italian women's movement by the early 1980s. One part-timer said the men had had time by 1980 to adjust to feminist perspectives and that the real difference within the *compagni* was between those committed to personal politics and those more committed to external politics, rather than between men and women as such. In the collective's discussions on personal politics, there was often much more tension in the air than on the external realm.

As regards other forms of women's participation, the mid-morning "open microphone" program each day attracted many telephone contributions from women, most of them young, often housewives or teachers and much more rarely women factory workers. The other point at which basic feminist politics tended to surface was during the nighttime music and phone-ins, when the station was at its most spontaneous. Feminist politics was not a burning issue inside the collective in 1980. There were no policy discussions on women, although those on youth were frequent. In 1981, however, with two national referenda being organized on the question of abortion, one by Catholic activists and the other by the radical party representing only a moderately pro-abortion position, the issue constituted a prominent topic in phone-ins and in programming. Radiopop declared itself against both positions, although especially vigorously against the Catholic "Movement for Life."

As of the mid-1990s, the situation seemed rather similar. A younger staff member with whom I spoke felt that it would be mistaken to devote too much attention to the persistence of gender issues within the station. This was, she said, because the station had been through the mill of many of the passions and contradictions of feminist movements in the 1970s and early 1980s. By the early 1990s, women staffers had come to feel that some of the positions staked out in those fights had become self-caricatures, and the women had begun to distance themselves somewhat from the sharper positions taken earlier. Men staffers had also felt "in their own skin" the onslaught of the feminists within the station and had matured in some cases in the process.

By 1997, the program staff composition was more or less evenly balanced overall between men and women. The evening show from 5 to 9 p.m. was produced by a team of six, three of each gender. About a third of the directors were women. However, some of these more optimistic signs concealed what were, we might hope, transitional problems. For example, women were much less evident in the news section. Furthermore, a number had been at the station from its early days, when its pro-

professionalism was less in evidence, and thus had much less technical training. This meant their ability to carry out certain functions was limited, and they often found themselves more or less confined within the station, not getting out to do the interviews or other assignments.¹⁹

One particular episode had demonstrated the complexities of the station's transition on gender issues. National elections had been approaching, and three men staffers were chosen to run the live coverage. A huge debate broke out in the station around the question of why it was that women staffers were not thought worthy of contributing to this high-profile, high-status special program. Conceivably, the issue had mixed causes: the less developed professional profile of some women staffers, the enduring gender assumptions of some men staffers, and maybe in particular, an unexamined, rather smug assumption that politically correct attitudes somehow "must" obtain within a highly politicized station such as Radiopop; as a result, there was no call for people to question themselves.

In the end, one woman who had substantial technical training was placed on the election coverage team. She felt that she was being selected more to take the sting out of an internal row than to acknowledge her technical skills, which were perfectly well known at the time of the original selection. Being singled out this way, she also felt some concerns for the other women, although they all talked it through with each other, and the women staffers supported her taking part. It was a contested, although not an epochal event, which demonstrated the ongoing dilemmas of working out gender equity, even within a radical collective that on many levels was committed to taking these matters very seriously.

Radiopop and Milan's Publics

From its original mission of trying to provide a forum for the city's leftist publics, *Radiopop* further evolved to a goal of trying to provide what its director as of 1997, Marcello Lorrai, termed a "radio community." In the Milan of 1976, with a quite strongly interconnected public on the Left, that community already existed, even if it was often divided by varying visions of the path to socialism. Twenty years later, Milan had much less of that texture and felt much more atomized to those of its inhabitants who remembered earlier decades. In the new context, providing a community linked, in the first instance, by its members' habit of listening to the station, represented an interesting second phase of the

station's contribution to the city's life. As of early 1994, Popolare Network's weekly listening audience stood at over 1.25 million.

This radio community was more than simply a metaphor for a radio-listening habit. Several different examples illustrate how.

For instance, the station organized a number of events in the city every year to which its listeners came in considerable numbers. One was Border Trophy (the English words were used), which consisted of a city-wide treasure hunt in which players formed small groups to take part.

Another, in place since 1986, was *Extrafesta*, a play on the words *festa* (festival), *extra* (extraordinary, special), and *extracomunitari* (community outsiders), the official terminology to denote immigrants.²⁰ *Extrafesta* was a 2-day celebration of immigrants and their cultures, including popular music concerts, cosmopolitan foods, and other aspects of the international presence in Milan. The festival's slogan, coined in conscious opposition to the waves of racist hostility that emerged in Italy during the 1980s, was, "No one in my country is a foreigner."²¹ Community, in other words, did not stop with Italian-origin *milanesi*.

Indeed, beginning in 1980, the station ran a weekly Arabic-language program, *Radio Shabi*, the only station in Milan to offer such an opportunity to North African and Middle Eastern migrants. Sergio Ferrentino, long active in the station, said that *Radiopop* was the closest thing Milan had to an immigrants' radio station, offering them a voice in several different ways.

Like *Controradio*, *Radiopop* was also particularly active in the youth music scene. More than any other agency in the city, it was responsible for bringing world music artists to public attention, first in Milan and, on occasion, in all of Italy. The internationally acclaimed Senegalese singer Youssou N'dor was only one example of the station's record in this regard. The station also cosponsored the production of world music CDs. But, the concerts it helped organize were also places in which community was built and a community built on a wider sense of cultural connectivity than a purely traditional, local community.²² Other interesting dimensions of the station's development through the 1980s and into the 1990s included the development of the Popolare Network, which initially included some seven other stations, and its use of satellites.

The network began in 1992. Its founding members were *Radiopop* and the alternative stations in Brescia, Verona, Conegliano, Venice, Bologna, Florence (*Controradio*, which is discussed below) and Rome. By

1996, stations had been added in Turin, Mestre (replacing Venice), Bolzano (two stations), Arezzo, Vicenza, Genova, Taranto, Trento, Pescara, Piacenza, Savignano, and Crema. Some of these stations were very active and even did repeater-broadcasts on a variety of local frequencies in different communities nearby. Others were much simpler operations.

Also in 1994, to improve the signal from and to these stations, Radiopop switched out of traditional land-line communication and leased some transponder time on Eutelsat II. From time to time, this was used for a quasi-national open-microphone program, especially in conjunction with the Bologna and the Rome stations. Every weekday, the programs from 6 to 8:40 a.m. were always broadcast by satellite, as were news bulletins varying between 10 and 20 minutes in length at six other points in the day. On weekends, only news bulletins were aired using the satellite.²³ As of 1996, a couple of stations in Monaco and Innsbruck began pulling down some programs.

To close out on Radiopop, it should be said that there was a very clear split between the station's reputation, which according to Ferrentino became stronger and stronger the further away from Milan people were, and the quite often ruthless self-criticism that was common inside the station itself. "The trouble is," he observed with a touch of humor, "that often our brutally honest self-criticism does not seem to get to solving our problems."

CONTRORADIO, FLORENCE

Until the end of 1980, Controradio (Counter-radio) was located in a narrow street quite a distance away from the tourist centers and expensive shops that make up the visitor's image of Florence. Entrance to the radio station was through a bare hallway and up some well-used stairs. The station occupied three rooms, none of them large. Decor and furnishings were at a minimum, and the studio itself was soundproofed with sheets of black plastic and egg boxes nailed into the wall. By 1997, the station had moved to a rather large house, also well away from the city center. At that time, Controradio was probably the most securely established of the three radical media in this study.

Controradio began its life in 1975. Initially, the station was directly tied to the organization, Lotta Continua,²⁴ seeing itself as a local radio

equivalent of the newspaper. The Florence Lotta Continua group continued, even after the national organization dissolved itself in 1976, to use the newspaper *Lotta Continua* as its central reference point, reading news bulletins directly from it, as though it was the most authoritative source of news and political commentary in Italy. However, it became increasingly difficult to maintain this relationship with the newspaper alone, particularly given the paper's relative weakness as a news source on issues outside youth movements, women's movements, and student movements in Italy. But perhaps the final push toward independent development for Controradio was the weekly newspaper *Lotta Continua's* own move toward a pluralism of the Left after the organization's collapse in 1976.

In 1977, the station hit the national news in Italy, accused by the right-wing daily, *La Nazione*, of being the headquarters of urban guerrilla warfare in Florence. The accusation was made during a period of media paranoia about student upsurges in Rome and Bologna. Police swooped into the station and made off with some supposedly incriminating tapes, but nothing ever came of the whole affair. The incident was dramatic but not at all revealing of the station's actual political role then or since. By 1980, the station no longer saw itself as one link in a national revolutionary strategy coordinated from any central point. Its politics were still to the Left, but it had redefined its place in the revolutionary process—and, indeed, had redefined that process itself. One of its members defined three established routes for former movement activists in Italy: joining the left wing of the PCI, joining a terrorist group, and surrendering to political apathy. Controradio, he said, was struggling to create a fourth path—a path without existing models, except the negative models of American "free" radio stations, and perhaps the positive models of northern Europe's social democratic politics.

The Controradio collective at that time did not see itself as a party or a group but defined its task as being a facilitator, putting the radio at the disposal of Florence's public to express itself, as Radiopop did in Milan. The station also adopted the same shift toward a new professionalism. Back at the height of the 1977-1978 movements, Controradio policy had been to open the microphone to anyone on the Left who wanted to say anything. This had led to a serious degree of disorganization on the radio, particularly when the decline of those movements and the end of the novelty of democratic radio stations meant that fewer people were anxious to communicate by radio. The result had been that music had

come to dominate the station's output, simply because it was the easiest way to run the station on an ad hoc basis. If a yawning gap opened up, they could always put on a record. And then another, and then another.

This drift began to provoke intense discussion within the Contoradio collective on the practical implications of their policy. The eventual outcome of these discussions was that they rejected once and for all the notion that the radio was simply an empty box to be filled with anything or everything. It also meant that once having defined themselves as information activists, they were bound to make decisions about whether they agreed with the political perspectives and practical abilities of the people who came to them with a project for broadcast communication. The project might be excellent, but the necessary experience to realize it successfully might well be lacking.

The collective was not establishing itself as a little clique. Although it had a core of 10 full-timers and 15 part-timers, a considerable number of other people also worked with Contoradio on a variety of short-term and long-term projects. Each morning was given over to the open-microphone phone-in program, where listeners could and did express their views spontaneously. The station also took considerable time and trouble to help people use the medium effectively.

Financial Issues

In 1980, however, Contoradio had put itself in a position of overwhelming financial dependence on the Florence Socialist Party. This relationship, entailing considerable political dependence, did not lead to the station's prospering. It was still very much a "politics-in-command" station. By the latter part of 1982, the station was teetering toward collapse, and indeed, it closed down, bankrupt, for 2 weeks in November of that year. Some members paid off the debts, and the station was re-established as a limited liability company. It then re-opened, with a different mandate, remaining open 24 hours a day through the end of the 1990s.

This is not to say that *nirvana* has reigned ever since. There was a particularly traumatic, quite protracted battle within the station in 1986. Three staffers, active within the station, attempted over an extended period of time to agitate to have the station taken over by a Florence businessman (whose paychecks they already were covertly accepting in addition to their Contoradio salaries). In immediate financial terms, the proposition was not unattractive, potentially offering stability and

higher salaries for those retained under the projected new management. The conflict raged on, but eventually, the offer was rejected, and the three left the station.

This was a battle for the station's soul. Contoradio had made a definitive decision as of the crisis of its closing in 1982 that it would run itself on advertising income or not at all.²⁵ Its commercial direction, then, was not at issue. At the heart of the struggle was whether that was to be all. Contoradio's distinctive mix was to maintain financial stability based on commercial realities and a clearly defined organizational hierarchy, but to combine that structure with socially conscious programming. Mario Bufono, the director, described it as "generically progressive, but completely un-ideological." Contoradio had always had an especially strong track record with young people, and it was not prepared to risk that role in the life of the city by signing itself over to an individual entrepreneur.

Perhaps the most interesting issue to address about the remodeled Contoradio is how these dual imperatives of commercial success and social commitment were handled. Organizationally, the advertising staff and the programming staff, although on perfectly good terms individually, maintained an arm's length relationship. This meant that if a program was being prepared that would in some way be likely to annoy a given advertiser, it was the program makers' responsibility to inform the advertising department in a timely fashion—but not to negotiate the program contents in any way. This gave the advertising department a chance, if it chose, to initiate contact with the advertiser to maintain a good working relationship with them. But that was all. Some advertisers were lost as a result.

The advertising staff's comment on this situation is interesting. On balance, argued Marco Imponente, these intermittent confrontations actually helped the station. They extended its credibility with its listeners and even generated a measure of public trust among more casual listeners. In turn, that contributed to listener loyalty and served the station well over the longer term. During the 1986 conflict, the station's advertising profile became much less clearly defined for a while as a result of the tight relationship pursued by the three "fifth column"²⁶ staffers with the would-be owner. In Imponente's view, Contoradio had suffered a temporary decline in listener confidence as a result. After that experience, said Sara Maggi, a long-time station activist, it was resolved never again to become dependent on any one advertiser.

Controradio served a particular niche in the market, namely, young people, most of them 14 to 30 years old. Often, those who advertised most were discos or record companies whose products had a special youth appeal.²⁷ Yet, even the larger record companies, which often pursue aggressive tactics to promote their wares in both radio stations and record stores, were well aware that for their purposes, Controradio was a pivotal outlet to young people in Florence—not excluding the many young tourists and temporary students from abroad who populate the city virtually 12 months of the year. For this reason, the station found itself less at the mercy of these firms than is often the case. Indeed, Controradio's advertising rates were actually higher than those of a number of its competitors in the city. Even the Chamber of Commerce was keen to advertise with the station.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the station canceled its contract with an advertising broker on the ground that its specific market needs were being insufficiently targeted. Along with similar stations such as Radiopop, Controradio set out to develop its own advertising chain contract, based on the needs of the stations in the Popolare Network. By mid 1997, this process was largely computerized, and by then, the network could offer advertisers up to 20 stations, nearly all in the affluent center and north of the country.

Controradio's technical base had also been upgraded with these funds, with the result that its programs could now be heard as far away as Pisa and Livorno, and—importantly during the summer months—on the coast as well, where the station held the No. 2 spot in that period of the year. Only two counties in Tuscany province were out of its range.²⁸

Examples of Controradio's social responsibility would include its coverage of issues of racism and of police violence against young people. At intervals in the later 1980s, sudden outbursts of racist violence in Florence targeted small communities of migrants from Africa, who were often concentrated in street selling. These attacks were not encouraged by the power structure, except by one particularly virulent Florence city councilman. At the same time, the violence did reflect one current of Tuscan opinion. Controradio decided to report directly from Piazza Fiorentina, the site of one particular outbreak, and to set up interviews and discussions in the square among those affected by the violence and their supporters. The station even invited the councilman to air his views, with the intention of letting the public know clearly what it was for which he stood.

Influence With Listeners

The general public response was positive to the station's role during these events. Massimo Smuraglia estimated that a network of antiracist activist groups in Tuscany had considerably more clout than the racist current in the province and that within that network, Controradio was a very important force.

Another aspect of Controradio's programming relevant to this issue was its foreign language slots. Programs were regularly broadcast in Arabic, Chinese, Eritrean, and Wolof (the principal language of Senegal), with the aid of some funds from both the Tuscan provincial government and the European Union.

On a different occasion, when the state police (the *carabinieri*, noted for their very aggressive tactics) invaded a local *centro sociale*²⁹ known as *La Baracca di Scandice*, Controradio broadcast phone calls from its young residents from the spot. These immediately served to dispute the justifications offered by the police for their attack on the centro. The station then followed up with a major counterinformation exposé on the episode, demonstrating overwhelmingly that the behavior of the carabinieri had been unprovoked.

This latter episode is typical of the type of relationship forged between young people and the station. Consistently over the years, the station reported on the real undertow of life, in Florence in particular and Tuscany more generally. Controradio was alone in its alertness to social movements and to changing currents of opinion among young people. The rock concerts and disco live performances that it organized were not simply a means of attracting and retaining listeners, although they fulfilled that function as well. They were also means of keeping the station's finger on the pulse of the young. As one staffer put it, when people think of Florence and Tuscany, even in Italy, they think primarily of vacations and leisure, but they are often unaware that the region possesses its own dynamic and energy quite unconnected with tourism.

In turn, along with the reputation Controradio enjoyed for accurate reporting and from time to time scooping the other media in Florence, especially in relation to youth issues, this ongoing rapport made the station a source. The Florence media would quite often cite an event in terms of its having been reported by Controradio, and thus being news. Furthermore, the station's reporters were more energetic than the average Florence journalists. One of them, Osvaldo Sabato, described to me how he would not ask questions at press conferences during the official

session but would stop afterward for specific interviews, thus often giving the Controradio news reports a freshness compared to those prepared by its more lackadaisical competitors.

It was central to Controradio's news policy to cover multiple dimensions of issues to enable listeners to reflect on them and not simply to relay micro-scatters of aseptic factoids, like the on-the-hour news flash at many commercial stations that represents a token gesture toward informing the public. An example would be the station's steady concentration on environmental impact issues related to the supervelocity rail network projected for Milan, Bologna, Florence, and Rome, rather than simply recording the signing of construction contracts. Another example would be the station's constant attention to the housing problem in Florence, which is acute despite the fact that 7,000 apartments often stand empty. At the far end of this concern with information are the occasional multihour public affairs specials the station puts on without commercial interruptions.

Reviewing the Past

Looking back over the 20 years he had spent with the station, Smuraglia felt there had been gains and losses. In the early years, Controradio had known exactly the audience to whom it was broadcasting, namely, the insurgent students and other young people in the city. The station's programming could be extremely spontaneous and flexible (perhaps it had a tendency to be random). Even the ads Controradio took were principally personal classified ads. The energy in the station came from its being composed of enthusiastic volunteers, afire with the excitement of the new media project.

Twenty years later, the news the station provided was broader and more accurate. The station's organization was stable, and people were paid (albeit very poorly). The listening audience now, like the ads, is much more generic, less clearly identifiable. Programming is predictable but perhaps overly routinized. Smuraglia made it clear that this was his sense of the passage of events, not everyone's.

At the same time, he saw some definite progress in the external political context. Until the end of the 1980s, Italy had been dominated by party politics. Now, Smuraglia sensed, a civic society was in the process of active formation, a society that had shaken off the yoke of dependency on political parties. The *mini pulite* scandals and revelations,³⁰ the

virtual collapse of the Christian Democrats, the shrinkage of the communists, had all contributed to a growing movement of political activism in many parts of Italy. The forms this activism took were not conventional ones. They might center around building a car park or a public trash-incinerator, but often, they would generate much more momentum than would be expected from a seemingly single-issue matter. And within that kind of context, Controradio would be exceptionally well-placed.

One final feature of Controradio is its basic organizational structure. In terms of hierarchy, although there was often a cheerful, friendly atmosphere in the station among the 20- and 30-somethings who worked there, authority was clearly defined. The director was the director, and the buck, indeed, stopped with him. A further important feature of the station is that people worked for minimum wages and often interchanged jobs. Margherita Calvalli, for example, worked as news reader, editor, phone interviewer, and general overseer of details for press conferences. Some Italian commentators have suggested that Italian community radio works because it functions at what are called "Japanese levels" of pay and flexibility. Whatever the truth in this, Controradio did seem to be able to combine energy, commitment, and a good working atmosphere with a productive organization of tasks. The station represented a very interesting working model for future radical alternative radio.

Summary: Lipari (1997) has noted the extraordinary mushrooming of energy in the 1970s, especially in popular music but also in "audio-visual production centers, alternative graphics laboratories, sound recording studios, poetry and literature workshops.... The rock concerts were also the occasion to discuss, debate, not just political issues but also music" (pp. 107, 109). Something of the same pent-up energy was visible in Italy, as it was in Portugal, not quite as intense, but longer-lasting. It seems hard to imagine today that the free radio movement talk shows with live phone calls from ordinary citizens would be a vivid irruption of the real world into broadcasting, but the kind of broadcasting the Christian Democrats in power reproduced and monopolized was completely stifling and one-way.

One other major outflow from the free radio movement in Italy was the so-called *Centri Sociali*.³¹ The literal translation, social centers, gives no sense at all of what they were. A whole group of them, independently

organized, were spread out across the nation, and they operated as multipurpose, largely self-managed centers where young people could find basic living information, develop autonomous cultural projects of all kinds, talk politics, and play or listen to music. Sometimes, funds were forthcoming from city councils for certain cultural programs. Conservative media opinion loved to dwell on the centers as centers for drug sales and dependency, "illicit" sexual escapades, crime, and the rest. These places typically had an uneasy and conflictual relation with the police. They represented, however, the continuation of oppositional culture, relatively autonomous zones where young people could work out their own tactics for living and develop their own cultural forms. Together with sections of the Italian ecology movement of the 1980s, these centers for 20 years were the keeper of the flame of resistance and independence.

NOTES

1. My research for this chapter was based on a 3-month period I spent in Italy in 1980, continuous with my time in Portugal and conducting the same type of interviews. With the help of a University of Texas travel grant in 1997, I returned to re-interview staff at the three continuing radical media I had researched and written about in the first edition. Some helpful sources on the Italian background have included Forgacs and Lumley (1996), Passerini (1996), Putnam (1993), Tarrow (1989), Bobbio (1979), and Red Notes (1978, 1979, 1981).
2. Moro stood for a reconciliation between the conservative Christian Democrat party, which had run Italy since the war but was riddled with corruption and steadily losing support, and the increasingly center-leftist communist party, which had no record of corruption at that time but a strong track record in city government. The Red Brigades dumped his body, after negotiations for his release did not pan out, midway between the head offices of the two parties in Rome.
3. P2 was a top-secret Masonic lodge that wielded quite extraordinary power in government and in mainstream media for over two decades. The Vatican Bank was only one of the Italian banks deeply implicated in illegal activities, far from the biggest, but its involvement is an index of how extensive was the network of corruption and the abuse of power.
4. The excellent feature film *Lamerica* (1994, director Gianni Amelio, U.S. distributor New Yorker Films, New York City) beautifully summarizes this transition in the story of some white-collar criminals, making quick money off Italian foreign aid schemes, who think they can do the same with Italian aid to post-communist Albania. The scene at the end is unforgettable, when the lead protagonist finds himself, after a series of mishaps, in shabby clothes looking as destitute as his fellow passengers on an Albanian ship full of illegal immi-

grants headed for Italy. Obviously, he is likely to have great difficulty persuading the Italian authorities he is not himself an undocumented immigrant; he may not even be let off the boat to make his case. He and the immigrants look exactly like a boatful of Italians headed for Ellis Island at the beginning of the 20th century.

5. In Italian, the word means both manifesto and poster.

6. He won that fight. Former premier Bettino Craxi went into self-imposed exile in Tunisia to avoid going to jail on corruption charges involving his years in office. He died there in 2000 and was denied a state burial.

7. Unlike most Western media, however, their interpretation of the collapse was not that it meant a giddy ascent into the wonders of parliamentary democracy and the glories of the free market, but rather that it heralded disorder and misery, a prediction that many, from Bosnian Muslims to Russian pensioners to the 100,000 Chechen and Russian victims of the 1994-1995 Chechnya war, discovered to be only too true.

8. At the same time, there was unity within the newspaper on the question of Yeltsin, Gorbachev's nemesis and eventual successor as leader of post-Soviet Russia, who was seen as power-obsessed and program-free.

9. Often referred to later as "the" Gulf War. Because there had been, from 1980 to 1988, a savage war in the Gulf between Iraq and Iran, in which large numbers of people were killed or maimed on both sides, it seems odd to refer to the second tragic episode as though it had been the only one. The U.S. government, along with some other Western governments, supplied weapons to both sides in the earlier conflict. Is the defining element of a war the on-the-ground involvement of human beings from the United States? Is that how "a" war becomes "the" war?

10. *Cassa integrazione* was the official term for state subsidy to ailing enterprises. At that point, the subsidy was worth 5 billion lire a year, one sixth of turnover.

11. These were of considerable interest in terms of developing a bank of experience in organizing radical media. With the newspaper's sudden expansion earlier in the 1990s, large numbers of new staff had been brought on board all at once. There had been no probationary period during which they could be dismissed if unsuitable, nor any systematic attempt to inculcate them with the ethos of *Il Manifesto*'s project. This was a time when, in certain sectors of society, it was quite chic to read the newspaper and thus perhaps even more chic to work for it. Also, many of them, as usual at *Il Manifesto*, had a background in political activism, not in journalism. Thus, with the exception of a few interns brought in on the basis of special scholarships, whose employment was not immediately guaranteed, effectively something akin to instant tenure was extended to a very large new intake of staff who arrived almost simultaneously. The vectors at work in that situation were numerous. The informality characteristic of the newspaper's earlier period, the absence of any explicit set of rules, the often indeterminate nature of the hierarchy, and not least the fact that with no official career structure at the paper, staffers with perhaps a couple of decades behind them preferred to bring on board new people to undertake the boring editing chores, reserving for themselves the more interesting corre-

spondents' tasks, in some staffers' view all combined to make the transition to a more professional project uncoordinated and thus difficult to achieve.

12. It should be said that the problem was squarely with the daily press, not with the public, who read the rather better weekly press in large numbers. The quality of the daily press in Italy would be the subject of another study, but suffice it to say that its coverage of the theatrical antics and arcane mysteries of Italy's governing class "at work" was typically wordy, uninformative, uninviting speculation.

13. Not to say that the old system was finished: The *camorra*, the *'ndrangheta* and the *mafia* were still very powerful forces in Campania, Calabria, and Sicily, and significant money was undoubtedly still changing hands for favors at the top.

14. Although this newspaper, too, had reduced readership because it had siphoned off some thousands of *Il Manifesto* readers, who had stuck until then with *Il Manifesto* because it was the newspaper furthest to the Left. Whether this was a readership the newspaper really needed for its longer term future was unclear.

15. The title was a fusion of different words associated with world music styles, with *Patch* derived from the Latin American *pachugo*, the *ka* redolent of Slavic cultures, and so on.

16. The station did have a number of major scoops to its credit, which got it national attention. Among them was the first announcement of the attack on Baghdad in the second Gulf War in January 1991 and the use of information on the war from Arab nations' radio stations via their Arabic program producers. Later the same year, the station achieved another exclusive, via a direct telephone link set up as a result of a personal friendship network of coworkers, to an apartment in Moscow overlooking the Russian White House parliament building at the time of the attempted coup d'état in August 1991. An Italian-speaking Russian, observing the scene and using reports from Radio Ekho Moscow from within the White House, was able to give an account of the sequence of events unparalleled elsewhere in Italian media. A further instance was the announcement, diffused over the Popolare Network on December 15, 1992, that a court had set Craxi's bail on extensive charges of corruption. This was not exactly a scoop, in that the major media got the story at the same time as Radiopop. But Radiopop was the only media institution with the courage to publicize it. The other media protected themselves by citing Radiopop as the source of the news item.

17. Some commented that this structure of authority had a built-in contradiction, in the classic mode of self-managed firms, in that the same people were forced to choose between raising their salaries and investing in the firm's future, specifically in new technology in Radiopop's case. It is true. Yet, in the longer term, it is to be hoped that dilemmas of this kind will not have to be left to "wise-daddy" managements but that the general public can learn to handle them for itself—potentially more wisely over time than unaccountable top executives.

18. Information on these points, and some others on the technical front, is drawn from an article by Barbara Fenati (1996).

19. It seemed as though a well-structured part-time training and mentoring program might take care of some of these issues, but at the time of my interviews, this did not appear to be on the agenda.

20. The community in question was somewhat blurred, designating either the European Union, formerly known as the European Community, or simply Italy itself.

21. The word for foreigner is *straniero* and for stranger *estraneo* (and for strange, *strano*). Underlying the use of the term for immigrants, although technically correct on one level, is a second undercurrent of meaning, implicitly distrustful and defensive, a sense not too distant from the use of the term *alien* for immigrants in the United States. Within this fuller spread of meaning, the slogan was particularly apposite.

22. The view was expressed by some other community radio activists that the station was always at risk of being held prisoner by its listener members and thus was unable to experiment independently and adapt to changing conditions. A different version of the same comment came from those who saw the station as overly politicized by the *sessantottini*, the generation of 1968. In this view, the leadership of the 1968 generation had largely emerged from extremely well-placed families and had dedicated itself with almost monklike self-discipline to the pursuit of political activism, forsaking in the process the usual involvements in raising children and pursuing a job or a career, while also sacrificing permanently any links with the wealth of the families from which they came. A kind of secular church of the political martyrs, Jesuits for socialism. Now that the political culture had altered, went the argument, leaving that whole era behind amid a welter of recriminations concerning Red terrorism and the descent into drug dependency, and how that the new young generation found most political discourse or activism less appealing than the prospect of living on Mars, Radiopop was in danger of ending up like a beached whale. Even those younger people who were regular listeners were all too often the children, not so much of the hyperactivists of 1968, but of individuals who had been fairly solidly active in the penumbra of those movements. Was it then a community or a steadily aging club?

23. There had been inconclusive discussions about switching again to ISDN-line communication, but the costs, of course, were high whereas the costs for satellites had been plummeting.

24. For an insider's account of Lotta Continua (Permanent Struggle) but one that is reasonably self-critical, see Bobbio (1979). The group was at the center of the student tumults from 1969 to 1976, when it dissolved itself in a famous congress at Rimini. It sought active links with labor militants and was perhaps best remembered for its relentless public campaign against a Milan police superintendent, Luigi Calabresi, whom it accused of dropping a political detainee to his death from a high floor of the police building in 1969. Giuseppe Pinelli, the anarchist who died in the fall, had been detained on suspicion of planting a bomb in a Milan bank that killed a number of people; in

reality, the bomb was one of about 100 planted that year by neofascists to create a climate of tension and anxiety that would lead to public readiness for a dictatorial regime to create order again. Calabresi was shot dead in front of his house in 1972. The saga continued for years, for in 1988, a former Lotta Continua member named, in return for amnesty, two leaders of the organization as having, with him, planned and executed the murder. The trials, Italy-fashion, dragged on for more years, and in 1997, both men were jailed for life, consistently denying having done it (although one, the former Lotta Continua leader, admitted the campaign had set up a climate in which someone would be likely to make an attempt on Calabresi's life). A leftist judge—there are such people in Italy—had concluded during the trials that Calabresi had not murdered Pinelli, although he did not conclude who had. Nobel Literature prize winner Dario Fo wrote a play satirizing the police account of Pinelli's death in custody, which was performed internationally (*The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*), but for a number of Italians, this 25-year saga to some degree served as a sad and dispiriting requiem to the passions and energy of the extraparlimentary Left of a previous generation.

25. In its early years, it had a much more suspicious policy toward taking advertising, although nonetheless recognizing that it could not survive without it.

26. A term used by one of my respondents.

27. Despite being asked to do so, Contoradio did not accept advertising from supermarket chains. The station also refused advertising from any source with connections to hunting, such as leather stores.

28. At Contoradio as at Radiopop, Internet radio was an option that had not been carefully entertained as of 1997.

29. The direct translation of the term as "social centers" gives no sense at all of their cultural and political significance. Emerging first as the student movements waned around 1980, these centers gave space in many different ways to young people's autonomous cultural activities. They were organized in different ways and had varying histories and degrees of impact, but they represented an important element in urban youth culture over the 1980s and 1990s.

30. *Mani pulite* meant "clean hands"; it was shorthand for a series of revelations of official corruption on a scale that surprised even cynical Italians.

31. See Consorzio Aaster (1996) for a good account, organized in cooperation with the young people, of two major *centri sociali* in Milan.