
ON FIFTH-COLUMN HYPERPOLITICS

 ENRIQUE SANTOS UNAMUNO

I have become part of the virtual body of Cibergólem, and I am grateful to its encouraging innards for allowing me the chance to metabolise into this digital homunculus infiltrated into the computer arteries. Let me start with the aspects of fifth-column hyperpolitics that cause me greatest perplexity, as I see them in the Cibergólem *manifesto*. To be honest, I'm uncomfortable to find a spokesperson of neoconservative thinking behind the origin of the term in question here. I refer to Peter Sloterdijk, whose allusions to the *last men* and *first politics* remind me of the very worst of Nietzsche's misunderstood slogans. A person who focuses the hatred for the *mass* distilled by the Frankfurt elitists and commends himself to Canetti without even mentioning Ortega (not one of my heroes), does not strike me as being a good starting point for a reflection on the revolution-turned-rebellion. I do not trust heroes and slogans, but if I have to shelter behind phrases and definitions, I'd prefer to choose the one that goes: *There are no masses, there are only ways of seeing people as masses*. I prefer Raymond Williams to Peter Sloterdijk.

Nor am I indifferent to the word *people*, a wild-card, empty of content, which has been deflated to the point where it becomes a mere *flatus vocis* or—worse still—a deictic serving those who express it (one of the many hypostases of that terrible *us*). And to continue with my list of perplexities, I do not trust labels like the *end of history*, or paralysing passwords such as the one that beats beneath *the end of political ideologies*. Rather than *peoples*, rather than a mistrust of *passé ideologies*, rather than anonymous *citizenship*, I prefer the maps of sociology and history. Consumption, expenditure and taste, fields, *habitus*, distinction. In Pierre Bourdieu's words, the transformation of *de facto* differences into officially recognised distinctions. The fictitious terrain of *aesthetics*. In short, the pus from the pimple of ideology. In conclusion, convincing anyone who is economically, mentally and socially bound to and gagged of the infinite potential of life itself. Yes, Gramscian hegemony.

Having said that, though, initiatives like Cibergólem are welcome. I find premises such as activism, fifth-columnism, extended cyberculture especially promising and significant, and I will examine at them in greater detail below.

A century and half ago, Marx concluded his thesis on Feuerbach with a message which, though simple, was none the less incumbent: *Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the important thing is to change it*. The spigot was opened to the philosophy of praxis, the most complex of whose challenges came to a head with Foucault, before drooping in the hands of mental onanists like Lacan, Baudrillard and other subscribers to the glossolalic imposture. I believe that contemporary activism—in association with hyperpolitics and new information and communication technologies—can benefit much more from concepts such as *biopower* than from the old *simulations* or the *decline of the great accounts* (a litany that runs the risk of becoming in turn, the *best selling* story of contemporaneity). E-mail, forums and blogs have done more for the *activist* mentality than all the political rallies of the last fifty years put together.

What I find particularly interesting is the notion of *fifth-columnism*, the idea of infiltrating the system like Trojan-horse viruses. It is the case of this writer, settled in the “comfort” of the university. The danger of such a path consists of a progressive identification with the Other, with the enemy. In my own setting, this is clearly reflected in the transverse faction comprised of university lecturers, which is well represented in the national parliament and which has permitted and backed the iniquitous, tyrannical Universities Act. First the professional category and then the ideological questions.

In the particular area I operate in, the arts, the situation is heartbreaking. Those who rule the resources, the new bureaucrats, look on them as the remains of a world in decline, while the interested parties themselves sanction this situation by turning their backs on most of the instruments of *hyperpolitics* or *hyperteaching* (although they all feed off the *passepartout* of the *new technologies*). The result is that the university is being turned into a *hypermarket* of credit, a pathetic remnant of the nineteenth-century baronies. If there is a hacker ethic, I think it should be transplanted beyond the networks, to the classrooms, providing

models of conduct and collective management that clearly contrast with the viscous, customer-oriented paste we now move in. Not obliging students to buy their own books, giving them the theoretical and practical instruments of hyperpolitics and cyberculture—these are microactions which will undoubtedly have more impact than these reflections in the long run. There remains the problem of participation in the governing institutions, which I consider to be a personal issue, a path paved with well-intentioned cadavers. And so I come to the last of the points I want to comment on here, the supposed identification between hyperpolitics and the *avant-garde*; between life and art. It is an old dream, that of the aestheticisation of the *real-life world*. Some analysts of the postmodern world claim that the aesthetic is not found in some autonomous artistic sphere but also in the *mass media*, in fashion, in consumerist objects. The language of the media has been appropriated by the most significant artistic experiments; has swallowed up the most radical attempts of poetic language, the visual arts, cinema.

And so hyperpolitics can be seen as art, as Cibergólem argues, and that inevitably reminds me of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's idea of *literature as waste*. There are those who believe that art's perception of itself as something dead is a way forward, a *posthumous attitude* to literature and art (a reprehensible attitude, according to the supporters of *committed art*). Jameson reluctantly certified literature's inability to relate that new phase of late capitalism which he identified with postmodernity. And this brings us back to the prefix *hyper-* which places hyperpolitics and hypertext together as generators of textual or personal links, creators of synergies that are not confined to pure linearity. I don't know whether *literature* is dead, but both in its banal manifestation of Da Vinci codes and in its boring expression in black backs of time, it seems to have lost its cognitive capacity, exiled in some other territory, of which hypertextual hyperpolitics might perhaps be a foretaste. These are the principles that rule over the rhizomatic, according to the Deleuze/Guattari vulgate: connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, asinificant breakage, cartography *v* calchomania. *Modernism* dreamed about them and Borges set them out on paper, detained at the edge of a paradoxical abyss. This is where the unknown terrain of postmodernity begins and with it a sense of a digital fifth-column which brings together art and life, language and hyperpolitics. I do not want to give the impression that I approve of a jovial Dionysian acceptance of the *status quo*, an aesthetic palingenesis through digital visual culture and cyberculture. The goals of this apparently innocuous aestheticisation should be viewed in relation to the *sentimental* aspects that cyberculture can promote or inhibit. Perhaps old junk like the concept of *the sublime* and its relationship with the suspension of intellectual activities can help us centre the obstacles with those which will be encountered; a hyperpolitical practice when it comes to infiltrating the social imagination, one of the key aspects of the cybergolemic programme, but also one of the entrances most carefully guarded by the system's semiotic firewalls.