

# Critique and reflexiveness in cyberculture

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TRIVINHO, Eugênio (2007).

Cybercultural democracy.

The logics of human life in advanced mediatic civilization.

São Paulo: Paulus, 455 p.

## RESUMO

O texto, primeiro, sumaria as principais teses do livro, ressaltando a singularidade de seu enfoque e proposições em meio à literatura brasileira sobre a cibercultura para, em seguida, confrontar-se criticamente com suas premissas epistemológicas. O autor da resenha contesta o alcance da reflexão pretendida pela obra, argumentando que ela não logra escapar intelectualmente das circunstâncias que impõem seu próprio objeto de estudo.

**Palavras-chave:** Eugênio Trivinho, cibercultura, crítica

## ABSTRACT

First, this review summarizes the main thesis defended in the book, stressing the singularity of its approach and propositions amidst the Brazilian literature on cyberculture. Following this, there is a critical confrontation with its epistemological foundations. The author of the review believes that the reflection the book aimed at has not been achieved, arguing that it does not escape intellectually from the circumstances that impose its object of study.

**Key words:** Eugênio Trivinho, cyberculture, critique

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### **Critique and reflexiveness in cyberculture**

There are only few people, here and elsewhere, who have a critical attitude when thinking about the situations in which men are put into as a result of the development of new communication technologies. The fetishism of merchandise is a dominant characteristic in our time, from which the reflective conscience seldom escapes. The programmed word and the market-oriented behavior have invaded the intellectual spheres, so that almost everyone that participates in them wants not only to be listened with success, but to be successful just like everyone, virtually, desires: I mean, intermediated by the acclamation of the market and the recognition of the advertising industry.

Cybercultural dromocracy, a rather uncommon title, goes on the opposite direction of all this, confirming Eugênio Trivinho's title of critic of contemporary technoculture's illnesses. Pioneer in studies on this subject, the author has established himself as an important analyst of our condition in the midst of the mercantile and technological culture. Founder of the Work Group on media and new technologies of Compós (National Association of Post-Graduate Programs in Communication), in the years 1990, he has been building a career as a professor and researcher not

only in the field of critical thinking, but also in the academic organization of communication studies, and who finds in the book *Cybercultural dromocracy* an important moment in terms of literary synthesis.

The work is less a research monography than a theoretical treaty on cyberculture whose basis is the idea that “has not yet been sufficiently dissected by the category of theoretical critique” (p.135). The length of the book and the systematic characteristic it ended up acquiring allow this assertion to be made. The concept of dromocracy, which supports the analysis, is the basic structure of the argumentation. The text follows a plan, through which its ten chapters are distributed in sections until a global synopsis is reached.

In Trivinho’s point of view, cyberculture is the scenario in which a new power regime is brought about, a transpolitical one. A regime he names dromocracy: the book is a conceptual clarification and a systematic analysis of this category, which the author elaborates, inspired in Paul Virilio’s writings. The democratic movement that would exemplify our modern times hides the escalate “non-programmed, tortuous but progressive, indiscriminated and unresisted of dromocracy” (p. 70).

The considerations about velocity proposed by the French philosopher subsidize the elaboration of a more critical view of the processes that are at stake in the field of cyberculture.

Cyberspace is, per se, a war machine. One that is immaterial, impersonal, symbolic (for decades civilized, which means, made civil and, therefore, domesticated) against the body itself, the field itself and the alterity. It is socially evident, under the protection of this info-network, a technological dynamics with cynical power that, entirely deprived of a central command, it ‘corrodes’ and pulverizes alterities with the market-oriented excuse of acting in its name, of creating a zone of action and entertainment for them and of making their social relations easier than ever, in international scale (p. 349).

It correctly seems to us that the author puts at stake the appropriateness of the idea of politics to experiment contemporaneity in terms of practice and theory. The expansion of technologies shows a process that has neither control center nor aim, but whose meaning would be clear: “to civilize bodies, minds and social structures for cybercultural dromocracy” (p. 199).

“Invisible social regime”, the concept of dromocracy therefore intends to explain the overcoming of the political form of existence by the technological form of existence implied in cyberculture. Many other sections of the work argue that it would be the most accurate theoretical expression to name “the advanced and invisible social-historical organization of the violence of sophisticated technique” (p. 81).

Following a tradition that goes back to the luddistes, the work is axiologically structured around the problem of the violence of the technique. First, the process of disqualification of artisanal activity took place. Then, there was the incorporation of men in the industrial discipline. Now, the author believes, we are moving towards the violence of the machine-like velocity. Men are thrown in a series of games whose common denominator would be the demand for a progressively greater dromoaptitude.

Cyberculture hides the rise of an order in which it is increasingly demanded from us a cognitive capital and a technical competence that meets “a totalitarian social scheme, subordinated to the logics of a daily invisibility that only occurs in order to keep it untouched, in the dissuasive and metamorphic frame of the technique’s symbolical violence” (p. 137). Creatures that are incapable of fitting semiotically and practically into the accelerated rhythm of technological institutions tend to be excluded, becoming obsoletes, and, therefore, disposable, a technological garbage, in this case, as suggested by Kroker and Weinstein.

Thus, it is verified the emergence of an explosive, for being permanently excluding, form of integration whose format is post-ideological. The velocity that guides the institutions determines an

info-technical indexation of existence. Put in perspective, it is through the junction of the body to the machine, by means of the fusion of minds and telematic networks, which not all people are part of, that from now on humanity's catastrophic march proceeds.

So, cyberculture could well be seen as an expression of this "depoliticized joy" emerged from "the technical emptying of the symbolic", that is, as daily emanation of the "post-ideological values of which North-Americans cyber-technological capital, mediatic-advertising culture and state war machine have been, by far, and with plenty of evidence, the greatest international representatives" (p,131).

In Trivinho, the attitude is critical but, in this specific case, it is confirmed the author's tendency for a systemic sociological grounding that moves him away from a reasoning that would be, at the same time, lighter, more reflexive and more provocative, as we ourselves have indicated in reviews about his previous books: *O silêncio no prato* (Silence in the plate), *Contra a câmera escondida* (Against the hidden camera) and even *O mal-estar na teoria* (The malaise of theory). In other words, the critical and dialectical comment on the aberrations of our times and civilization opens space for a sort of conceptual phenomenology whose provenience is clearly functionalist. As he affirms: We are interested in focusing on the group of operational principles that guides the processes and phenomena of such a dynamics; premisses that make them be what they are, processes and phenomena, and beyond its utilitarian, and supposedly favorable or beneficial, dimension, and also below the order of the current phenomenology, the given being and the structured existent (p. 337-338).

Our affection and admiration for the author cannot allow the loss of this reduction of proposal and objectives go unnoticed. The critical thinking on the configuration of cyberculture is something urgent in a context where communication studies are increasingly more conformist and integrated. However, we might not have great advances when the task, even though stabilized with critical attitude, aims at what is concrete, but limits itself to abstract experience with empty concepts, to reconstruct in a purely categorical way its general conditions of existence. Trivinho provides few

objective historical elements in order to characterize what he calls dromocracy and, as a result, it is not clear why dromocracy has become “in self-identitarian consonance”, the “invisible social regime” of democracy. By reading the text, very abstract idea remains of what this empire would be and there is no concrete record of its damages: material circumstances that would give the necessary historical objectivity seldom appear.

Not by chance, one of the greatest moments of this work is, in our view, the section in which the author analyses and comments internet chats. Although there is no presence of empirical material, the reflection is successful in making a connection with what has been experienced in order to point out how in the phenomenon lie, invention and truth are put at the same level: protected by anonymity with the use of a nickname, symbolic possibilities expand and are refracted up to the infinite, joining the ‘anything goes’ way of living and the confusing idea of a dull, instinctive-natured and verb-reactive democracy, processed within the context of a relatively objective anarchy, ironically self-organized as a technological structure with a pulverized and self-nullified power: each one receives its share, the exercised word, in the foam of fast, agonizing and unstable senses (p. 389).

Nevertheless, this line of analysis is not strong in the text, and theoreticism is the price it pays: a discursive record highly abstract and deterministic, incapable of concretely justifying why cyberculture is the expression of the intended dromocracy. According to the author, “velocity is necessarily violent” and, therefore, dromocracy is, “in its essence, terror” – but this is not obvious at all, as suggested by the text.

Whoever embarks in a rollercoaster ride or travels hundreds of km/per hour in a highway does not have these experiences only in these memories. In the socially and technically constructed experience of velocity, which we put to action in some moments of our existence, albeit not in all of them, many dimensions don’t have the presence of violence (or even, violence does not allow to be reduced to a morally negative value).

Social factors are always mediated by the conscience of the subject, for we need to consider the dimension of the immediate conscience when the analysis of a case or of a concrete situation is at issues. The treaty in question does not pay attention to this detail, and, as a result, all situations evoked are much more examples derived from its argument than from the field of analysis, or proof, of its thinking.

In short, the intended empire of velocity/speed is dogmatically affirmed and turned into vector of history which once was that category (velocity). Proceeding in functionalist terms, in spite of its critical attitude, the text ends up by forging a sort of dromocratic reasoning, instead of contraposing it with reflection. The concrete history, the history we make in our social relations, is less put aside than mystified, as has said Marx in his critique of Proudhon.

In Proudhon, the material which history is made of are the categories he abstracts from the active and acting life of men, instead of historical processes in which history develops itself and from which categories are mere discursive expression or intellectual moment. So, since these views are apart from this life, these categories are seen as having a substance that does not depend on concrete subjects and all their vicissitudes.

As for Trivinho's book, we could say that, ... everything [cyberculture] being reduced to a logical category [velocity] and every movement [transpolitical], every act [violent] to method [categorical exposure], it naturally follows that every aggregate of products and production, of objects and of concrete movement is reduced to an applied metaphysics (The Poverty of Philosophy, Ch. II, § 1, 1<sup>st</sup>. observation).

In other words, the concrete historical movement lived by men within certain structures evaporates in the train of ideas linked in the reasoning of its thinker. This one believes to be explaining the world by the connection of categories, when he actually orders, according to a dogmatic discourse, the visual relations people create and experience in a conflictive and unequal way in their concrete reality.

Trivinho seems to defend that the logical formula of velocity, of acceleration in time, explains how cyberculture works and structures itself. However, effectively, this only can be explained by the concrete processes of collective creation and social interaction, which are always contradictory and varied. The point of view of the subjects towards this, even though not entirely, needs to be taken into account, if we want to elaborate a less arbitrary and, therefore, more concrete knowledge of the existent.

Cyberculture is not one of these objects that allow a purely categorial apprehension. The categories by which cyberculture is articulated refer to the evolutions of profane history, they come from situations created by men and their own acts. The velocity through which it is intended to explain cyberculture must not be seen, therefore, as key for interpreting history, but, as a category that is emerging in our times and which symbolizes its circumstances.

We have concluded that velocity and dromocracy are words that do not explain anything; words that are actually used in a mere attempt to suppress a hermeneutical vacuum, the one created by the era of cyberculture. The shocking expressions used to diagnose cyberculture are, above all, rhetorical terms for paraphrasing facts that result from it.

Thinking further, what we are polemizing with our author and friend is not the velocity that explains cyberculture but, the social relations and historical processes that build it; so, it is not by means of intellectual emanations, along with concepts originated from them, such as dromocracy, that his critical reflection would be well carried out. Critique needs to elaborate concepts, which should come less from the replacement of the already existing ones than from the analysis of how these concepts, derived from reality, serve for the mediation of objective social contradictions of a given historical process.

Being a synthesis of many years of work, the book in question deserves, for all of that, attention and debate. Many believe that the applause for what is finished is a sign that improvement has taken

place. Trivinho is among the ones who know that there is no improvement without critique and re-examination of what is affirmed. This was the thesis that guided us in this review of Cybercultural democracy.