

## Cultural subversion and disinformation in the thought of Frans Van der Hoff and the Slow Food movement

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### *Abstract*

The scope of this article is an analysis of the mechanisms of psychological warfare applied in the use of the thought of the Dutch theologian Frans Van der Hoff and the Slow Food movement through the methodological approach developed by the Ecole du Guerre Economique and Roger Mucchielli.



# Slow Food®

As is widely known in the history of psychological warfare, the definition given to subversion by the French psychologist Roger Mucchielli in 1976 has wielded particular significance. According to his interpretation, subversion is considered substantially as a preparatory action conducted solely for the purpose of delegitimizing and weakening established power and demoralizing the citizenry. Subversion acts on public opinion through a subtle and sophisticated instrumentation.

Reflecting on the interpretation provided by the French psychologist, the decisive importance of the offensive nature of the term emerges immediately. Specifically, subversion is implemented through propaganda oriented to the irrational dimension of the target's mind by means of the publicity with which such subversion is transmitted to the vast public to be influenced through intoxication consisting in the supply of erroneous information for the purpose of inducing the target to make damaging decisions and lastly, through disinformation that is nothing but the manipulation of public opinion for political reasons. More specifically, subversion aims at the accomplishment of three objectives: the first is the discrediting and disintegration of social cohesion by creating distrust in the values on which the society is based, and making the individuals who share such values feel guilty. In other words, subversion must provide its targets with the impression of how pointless it is to oppose its influence, and must therefore be capable of reducing the systems of defense by disseminating discord. Subversion's second objective is to weaken existing institutions while contributing to the strengthening of society's antagonists. Its third objective is to neutralize the groups that legitimize existing power, also by means of the infiltration of subversive agents. These objectives are pursued at the same time as subversive propaganda is waged, which in pursuit of its own ends engages in recruitment and proselytizing to convert and indoctrinate, and lastly integrate otherwise resistant groups; in this way laying the foundation for

subversive action on a wider scale. Subversive propaganda cannot but make appeals to liberty and justice in order to alter public opinion on one hand, and to create indignation against the holders of existing power on the other. Another technique adopted by subversion is Manichaeism, in which a radical and clear contrast is created between good and bad. On one hand, in fact, subversion will emphasize the presence of a situation dominated only by wars, poverty, tyranny, injustice, and inequality, while making advocating positive values such as liberty and justice or other sets of values considered universal on the other. The biggest risks posed by subversion come not only from competing commercial and industrial groups, but also from ecological and no-global groups. The particularity of this form of subversion is derived from its ability to instrumentalize the mass media and Internet and amplify its voice and actions. The most commonly used techniques are those capable of creating greatest effect, such as public demonstrations, counter-opinion polls, appeals to non-impartial experts, the construction of observatories, and the drafting of white papers. Another commonly adopted technique is to cover the adversary with ridicule, while emphasizing its own role of martyrdom served by injustice from the institutions or industries in power. The use of legal action as an area of maneuver is also undoubtedly one of subversion's most efficacious techniques; legal experts are, in fact, capable of defeating the giant, multinational corporations. Recourse to the law also provides excellent media resonance

by underlining the degree to which the cause is just and justified. Bringing the adversary to court also enables the use of the imagery of ancient and modern myths in which the Hero battles for Truth against the Tyrant. If the legal action taken is sentenced victorious, civil society will end up judging the winners as good and the losers as bad, with all the negative consequences foreseeable in the mass media. What's more, when conducted wisely, legal action can create an authentic climate of terror with paralyzing effects, especially on company directors. In other words, taking effective legal action is certainly one of the weapons of preference in information warfare and subversive destabilization. In the current state of affairs, a company must be capable of implementing a strategy of its own that is capable of opposing subversion, but in order to do so, the generation gap at managerial level must first be overcome. In other terms, its managerial culture must first be thoroughly versed in the techniques of subversive culture if defensive and offensive measures are to be simultaneously taken in order to oppose competing companies and no-global associations. Inaction and/or static defense are entirely inefficient against subversion in the long term and consequently the managerial directorate must be able to take the initiative if the offensive must be countered. With guidance from a team of information warfare experts, the managerial directorate can prove capable of dialectically turning the table using the adversary's own arms and using subversive techniques against the subversive elements themselves: also utilizing the instruments

offered by civil and penal law in order to quickly neutralize the attacks against it.

In order to illustrate the above, we shall take into consideration two examples from the enormous amount of alter-global literature available: the reflections of one of the founding fathers of the fair trade and solidarity movement, Frans Van der Hoff, on one hand, and the organization known as Slow Food, on the other.

The Dutch theologian of liberation, Van der Hoff, a former '68 peace movement activist and Vietnam war protestor, provides a crystal clear formulation of the principles underlying solidarity, using the typical technique and characteristic aggregate of demonizing his adversary. In his view, globalization is nothing but the final stage of the death of culture. The principal malaises of individual society include not only individualism but also instrumental rationality and self-referential bureaucracy, to which the Dutch theologian naturally adds the role of vassal to Capitalism played by plutocratic governments. Adopting language widely known in the context of Marxist theory, the Dutch theologian reveals how the Capitalistic system is actually a form of alienation based on its own centuries-old religion, in other words, faith in the free market. Similarly, Liberalism, which expresses this blind faith in the free market at theoretical level, undoubtedly contains its own obscure and perverse sides. In a language clearly inspired by mythology, the author demonstrates how globalization has brought in its train a series of monsters and

many-headed dragons that are basically the multinationals. One of the consequences to which Liberalism has led is certainly a generalized homologation by means of which the world's entire population will end up living – according to the Dutch theologian – in the same way, and every difference between its cultures will eventually be diminished. Social bonds also obviously come to be corrupted by globalization. Continuing his use of the image of the monster to represent today's globalization, the Dutch theologian claims that it has left behind a long trail of victims in its rush towards progress – victims it has devoured for its own nourishment and growth. Furthermore, if Capitalism has had such evident success, the merit goes only to the exploitation of the planet and its peoples. The way to fight the system is not only to criticize it mercilessly – mercilessly criticizing the logic behind multinational corporations – but above all, to construct fair and economic alternatives and solidarity, which according to the Dutch theologian are naturally inspired by principles entirely different from those on which Capitalism is based, and promote justice and equality instead. On the other hand, did the '68 peace movement protest not show contesting the system to be legitimate and believable only and in the degree to which concrete alternatives can be constructed? More to the point, did the Seattle movement and the Zapatista struggle in Mexico not teach that the time is ripe to build an international conscience against multinational corporations and the current form of Capitalism in order to overcome the

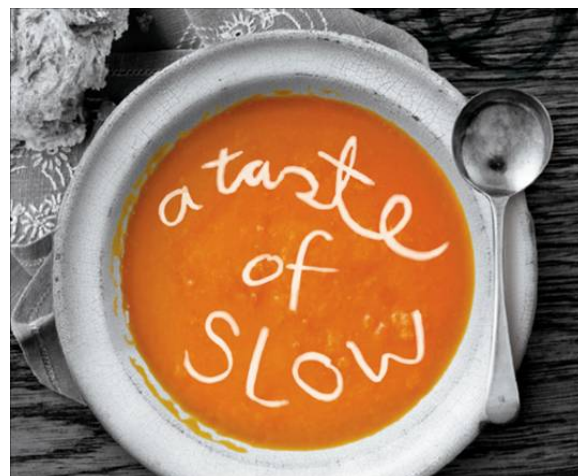
imbalance and inequality present in the world today? In conclusion to his manifesto, the Dutch theologian observes that contributions from the academic world and micro-credit, are no less significant than the indispensable role played by civil society in supporting fair trade and solidarity.

Among the various techniques of disinformation enacted by the Slow Food movement, certainly the most important includes mystification by omission, and resort to mythification and demonization that inevitably lead to a Manichean vision of reality. In the movement's outline documents, the movement founded by Carlo Petrini (recently sponsored also by the director, Ermanno Olmi) makes frequent use of a place typical of the counter-culture and above all, Romanticism – the identification of speed with modern industrial civilization, which is opposed in contrast to the peaceful slowness of farming culture. Another argument is certainly the identification of modernity with the machine that is typical of both European Romanticism and critics of modern civilization. As regards the mythification process, it is sufficient to remember the way in which the movement's documents describe farming culture – which is praised and exalted – and is opposed in dichotomy with Capitalistic civilization. This mythification procedure is also a process of omission because it omits all the historical and economic data that clearly demonstrate the artificial reconstruction of farming culture. The thesis that pre-Industrial life in the Italian countryside offered an abundant food supply and a healthy, savory diet, cannot be historically

supported. As we have already shown in regard to the assumptions on which the fair trade and solidarity movement is based, Carlo Petrini's movement too provides an interpretation of the world that is clearly derived from the '68 counter-culture. In this sense, it is well worth noting that the movement's long-term political program consists in the intention to radically change current society's nutritional patterns along with the means of food production and distribution. On the other hand, in the opinion of the Slow Food people, modern civilization effects are evident in sensorial deprivation that dulls modern people's faculties of hearing, seeing, tasting, and smelling. Through an implacable consequential logic, this ideological legacy leads to the demonization of Capitalism and consumer society. Yet another form of mystification that is extremely interesting for our research, regards the interpretation given to scientific knowledge, which is first of all divided into good and bad with the refusal of determined implications – such as those regarding biotechnologies, for example – and the acceptance of others that legitimate the movement's point of view. Secondly, using the technique of omission, only the scientific results that confirm the movement's dictates are accepted. Another example of similar interest to mystification regards the concepts of Nature and agriculture. Contrary to the movement's claims otherwise, in fact, the concept of Nature applied to agriculture is simply fictitious because just as none of the crops cultivated by Man ever existed naturally in such form, domestic animals as well are the

fruit of an accurate selection by Man. In other terms, agriculture as a human activity was one of the first examples of human intervention on Nature for the purpose of modifying it and better suiting it to human needs. As regards the process of demonization, it is sufficient to recall the apocalyptic scenarios described by the movement from which it may be inferred that human civilization is reaching its end. Capitalism would be the most radical and selfish form of individualism because it leads to the debasement and impoverishment of every public resource, including the world's soil, the water, peace and happiness. Together with the technique of demonization, Carlo Petrini's movement uses the disinformation technique of mythification by omission – the alternative civilization proposed by the movement has much in common with primitive, pre-industrial societies where the social and economic system was based on gift-giving. This premise appears believable because through the technique of omission, the movement avoids directing the reader's attention to the findings of anthropological research, which on the contrary, demonstrate the degree to which pre-Industrial societies were based on robbery, violence, and the systematic exploitation of Nature and human slavery. Coherent with its anti-Capitalistic and anti-Liberal ideology, the movement proposes radical long-term reforms also at moral level on the basis of which the utilitarian and individualistic spirit of commerce will be transformed into an altruistic, community-minded spirit, and especially reforms of economic type, thanks

to which the mass agriculture developed by the multinationals will be replaced by traditional, pre-Industrial, non-intensive farming.



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### Images

Accessed: 11/09/2012

Slow Food logo:

<http://www.vinch.be/attic/slowfood.jpg>

Slow Food image:

[http://gastronomicdigest.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/slow\\_food3.jpg](http://gastronomicdigest.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/slow_food3.jpg)