

Blogofascism and the Cybermob

Laura E. Ruberto (February 01, 2008)



Meta-blogging on the (virtual) use of fascism.

Apropos of my recent posting on Gramsci and cyberwriting, I've had a few exchanges about blogging with colleagues, friends, and family (some at the Op-Ed version of the Gramsci piece, others via email and face-to-face). And then the February 14th edition of the New York Review of Books arrived (yes, mine is one of the handful of households that still subscribes), with a lengthy review of not one,



not two, but ten recent books on blogging, written by Sarah Boxer, herself an editor of a [printed anthology of blogs](#) [2].

I was struck by the second book listed, [Against the Machine: Being Human in the Age of the Electronic Mob](#) [3], by Lee Siegel. For those who need a gloss, Siegel, an editor at The New Republic, was outed in 2006 for creating his own counter blog, an alias to “rein in his own critics,” as Boxer puts it. Siegel used an Italian word for his alias, sprezzatura, and in so doing nicely alluded to the kind of arrogance expressed by his virtual deception.

But more interestingly is Siegel’s appropriation of the term fascism. (The “electronic mob” he refers to is not directly of the Tony Soprano variety but rather of the angry crowd type.) Indeed, Siegel is known in the blogosphere for coining the term blogofascism (“bloggers’ attempts to control their critics,” again, courtesy of Boxer). Manipulation of cybertext! Dictatorial power of the ‘net! Say it ain’t so!

A journalist who breezily throws around such weighty words as fascism is generally okay by me—I get the irony, I appreciate the effect it has on our ultra self-conscious pop culture. And yet, call me old fashioned, but I’m a tad uneasy about it too.

In fact, I’ve always been annoyed when I see the word fascism used generically rather than with historical accuracy. I guess my reaction comes from a perhaps pedantic commitment to historicity and my personal background of having one grandfather who was conscripted into Mussolini’s army and taken prisoner in Africa, another who fought for the Italian Resistance, and an uncle who bailed on Badoglio’s army, got discovered by the SS while in hiding and who, according to my grandmother, did not end up at the Fosse Ardeatine in great part due to the intervention of the Madonna del Divino Amore. But those are all stories for future posts...

Now, what would Gramsci say (WWGS) indeed!

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