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# FIFTH-COLUMN HYPERPOLITICS AND HACKTIVISM

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*“How subtle and insubstantial, that the expert leaves no trace; How divinely mysterious, that he is inaudible. Thus, he is master of his enemy's fate.”*

*Sun Tzu*

I would first of all like to thank CIBERGOLEM for their invitation to participate in their fifth-column project, a project of collective intelligence whose core contains the pure essence of what has come to be called “hyperpolitics”; quite honestly I am greatly seduced by the idea of acting like computer worms (Trojans) from within the system in order to obtain positive results favouring political intervention in the logical subjects.

It would be a good idea if we were to stop for a moment and reflect on the meaning of hyperpolitics. For Peter Sloterdijk, the creator of the term, hyperpolitics is the politics of the last men: he is quite right—evidently we are the last men in historical evolution which (though some people seem to want to bury it) is not dead yet. It has not come to its end, it is still developing, it continues to be experienced, feeding off praxis and not theory and this is fundamentally important in an activist sense. As the cliché goes, the path is made by walking on it and the last thing hyperpolitics needs are dogmas; this is nothing new—activism has been practised for a long time, rebellion, civil disobedience, the right to complain or whatever you want to call it, was not invented by Sloterdijk; I think we need to be cautious and not place all our hopes in some publishing coup

The appearance and development of new information and communications technology (NICT) has broken down the classical spatial/temporal coordinates. We now live in two dimensions, the real and the virtual, and not only do we live; we act, think, share, love, conspire... in two dimensions. NICT and in particular the Internet have opened up new fields for human communication but also for human action; the time has come to champion the action as a condition which is inherent to human beings and become owners of our future and our “absent” everyday life. Activism—be it political or social—is a mechanism of self-defence, a micropolitical activity.

In terms of their influence on politics, the NICT have set in motion what is known as the “**global civil society**”, new forms of organisation such as networks of social movements and virtual communities and new forms of action such as **Netactivism** and **Activism**. These are aimed at building a transnational civil society. Development of these new virtual communities has opened new horizons to human action; one of these new practices is **Hacktivism or Electronic Civil Disobedience**, which is a fusion between hacking and activism. Sociology professor Tim Jordan has given a good definition of hacktivism:

*” A direct action by a virtual crowd which accompanies and extends non-violent real-life activism.”*

This type of action is intended to create a specific damage, which can be of different types (economic, aimed at public opinion, moral). The actions range from “virtual sit-ins” and blocking websites through computer attacks (the most commonly used computer attack is ROS - Refusal of Service), to altering the contents of a web-page (Cybergraffiti).

The fifth-column hyperpolitics CIBERGOLEM proposes is very closely linked to Activism. Indeed **collective intelligence** is one of the pillars of this practice: **experimentation** through node-work (like the E-TESTER project), the **opening up to the exterior** demonstrated with this invitation, the **development in the conflict** (the conflict is the source of inspiration from which all activists take their inspiration). In other words the elaboration of a mature thought or theory while at the same time carrying out praxis; all these characteristics make your/our project a serious cybercultural project.

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Hactivism might be said to be a movement of movements (like the antiglobalization movement). The guidelines for action of this type of activism are set by the **Tactical Media** We need to differentiate between tactic and strategy: Hactivism retains the logic of the tactic and not that of the strategy because its aim is not to take power and crystallise itself in it; instead its goal is to question power, and therefore the most suitable tactic for this task is the “guerrilla” tactic. Here the “Communication Guerrilla” is of vital importance (*Communication Guerrilla handbook* a.f.r.i.k.a., G. A., Blisset, L., and Brünzels, S. 2000. Virus.) ; the communication guerrilla sees the forms of communication themselves as a powerplay and uses the structures of power through a fifth-column method by distorting and appropriating its signs and codes and this begs the question: is the best form of subversion not to alter the codes instead of destroying them? ( Roland Barthes)

, a means of implementation which is different to the strategies of previous protest movements, its action—as I have said before—is experimental; Tactical Media (TM) is ephemeral, its action ends in itself. TM does not pursue the conquest of power; what it seeks is to take advantage of the spaces left by that power to question it. TM is therefore fifth-columnist by nature because it encompasses that Trojan spirit I referred to earlier.

Another of the sources from which hactivism feeds is civil disobedience *per se*. As a pioneer in this area we have the Critical Art Ensemble platform, a group of artists and activists who explore the intersections between art, technology, radical policy and critical theory. They have developed the concept of Electronic Civil Disobedience based on the model of street-based civil disobedience. Their texts are an important critical contribution, arguing in favour of an attack against the authoritarianism of the social order and the ideology of power: *Electronic Disturbance*, *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, *Flesh Machine* and *Digital Resistance* ([www.critical-art.net/books/digital/](http://www.critical-art.net/books/digital/). ) are just some of the books published in this area. They introduced this model for the first time, developing the tactic of the **symbolic threat** based on the blocking of websites or virtual sit-ins. The symbolic threat is another of the premises of hactivism; it proposes simulation as opposed to real action, the simulation used by this type of activist opposes the theory of simulation which tells us that “*the act of simulation requires a preliminary knowledge of the subject which will subsequently be denied as an immediate step for achieving a required goal*”. Mediactivist simulation retains that simulation by creating a space of hyper-reality (or virtual reality), which lies outside traditional time/space coordinates. We could say that reality escapes through the computer screens.

But is hactivist practice hyperpolitical? To be honest, I don't know for sure, although everything seems to suggest that it is; what I do know is that it is fifth-columnist, conceived for questioning the current relations of power; it is an instrument for political intervention albeit at a micro scale. Activism acts against the structures of vertically-established power. In other words it rejects the governing authoritarianism of current corporations. I think it would be fair to say that the activist trend is intended to be a permanent bottom-up reconfiguration and reconstruction from local to global in contrast to a globalised top-down structuring which is what we are experiencing today from institutions, political parties and bureausyndicates. Hactivism is developed at a molecular or micropolitical scale, based on the intuition that: “*Power is not something that comes to the subject from the outside: something which is possessed, which one conquers or strives after. Power is the universe of relations in which one is. The set of relations that form a subject*”. Between us all, therefore, we have to dismantle those relations of power that hoard power in an authoritarian way and use it to their own benefit. It is within this framework that CIBERGOLEM, in my humble opinion, should move to really build the foundations of the long-awaited CyberAthens.