PANEL DE CONTROL

INTERRUPTORES CRÍTICOS

PARA UNA SOCIEDAD VIGILADA
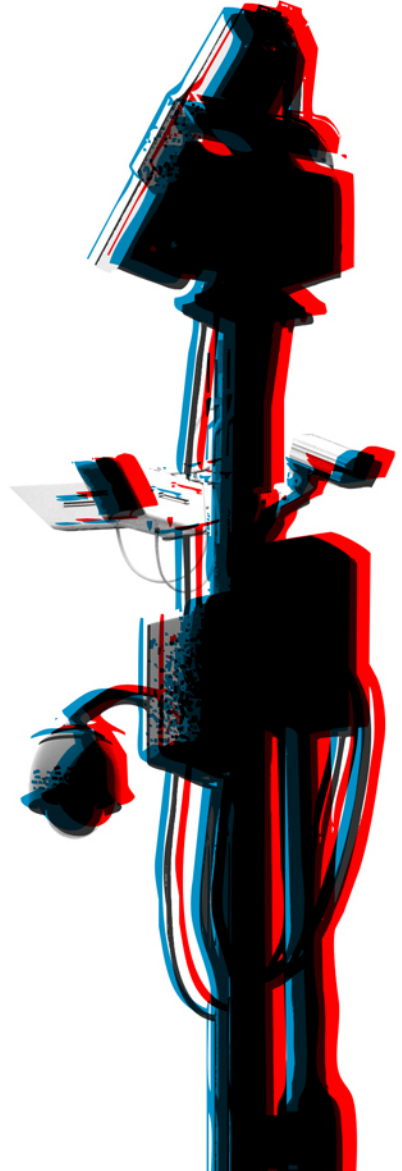
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ZONE 0 TIBESTI
ARTAMUGARRIAK FIFTH COLUMNIST
COUNTER-INFORMATION ACTION

Cibergolem
andoniap@unex.es - inakiarzoz@masbytes.es

The original core group of Cibergolem is Andoni Alonso, a professor of the philosophy of technology at the Universidad de Extremadura and Iñaki Arzoz, a painter and writer. They have been working for over ten years on the philosophy of technology, critical cyberculture and fifth columnist activism. As a theory collective, they produce text, collaborate on online projects and carry out actions in collaboration with other collectives and initiatives. They are currently collaborating with the Free Knowledge Foundation.

Abstract

The dominance of surveillance technologies and global control can be confronted by articulating activist or artivist tactics and strategies that use the same technology collectively, from a "fifth columnist" angle. This strategy has to rely on theoretical reflection as well as artistic actions. There is a particularly urgent need for counter-surveillance of the geopolitical operations of world powers in forgotten conflict zones, known as "O Zones" - empty areas like former battlefields that have been sown with landmines, etc. There is a need to show-display, counter-surveill and use text and actions to mark these areas on *Google Earth* and Internet campaigns. This was the aim of the Bardenas-Tibesti action, organised by the collective Artamugarriak, in solidarity with the Toubou village in Tibesti, in which the Digital Fifth Column has taken part.

Keywords

fifth columnism, counter-surveillance, counter-information, war, geo-strategy, O zones, desert, Sahara, Google Earth, Toubous, Tibesti, artamugarriak, digital fifth column.

"What makes the desert beautiful," says the little prince, "is that somewhere it hides a well."
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The desert constantly talks to those who know how to listen.
Nadia Tadzi

Fifth columnist reflections on control and surveillance in a globalised world

It's evident that our globalised world is headed towards a scenario of total control, at a speed that has accelerated since 9-11. From Echelon to the satellites orbiting the planet, from the proliferation of video surveillance cameras to personal GPS, certain technologies have taken on an evil and totalitarian aura. But no matter how fearsome and Orwellian it may be, the "total control" must inevitably be imperfect and fallible. We could formulate a rudimentary equation in which an increase in control equals and exponential growth in the amount of sensitive information that has to be analysed and interpreted in order to become useful. The result is a hyperinflation of information that not even intelligence services or the most advanced data analysis systems can solve, because they have to take into account the human factor, which ends up being overwhelmed and going wrong at some stage of interpretation or execution. It is the human factor that has led to failures as striking as 9-11 and the resulting Afghanistan and Iraq fiascos in the military technologisation process (star wars, the war for aerial supremacy, the war a simulacrum, etc). Because the culmination of the doctrine of technological surveillance and control is, precisely, the goal of abandoning the irreplaceable human factor in intelligence work.

In response to this crisis situation, terrorist organisations skilfully use a combination of human and the technological factors when acting in the same context, giving way to what we could call a "black fifth columnism" that enters global society and easily takes root. However, in spite of appearances, the terrorist plan is not fated to triumph by defeating North American imperialism or implanting the universal Caliphate or whatever. These are mere decoys or self deceptions in the global logic of control. The obvious and immediate consequence of successful terrorist campaigns is to encourage the path of total control, towards a para-fascist regime of weak democracy all over the world. Compulsory ID cards, bar codes, subcutaneous chips, electronic bracelets, GPS, surveillance cameras all over, etc, are no longer inventions for a futurist dystopia, but perfectly commonplace artefacts, accepted by the population in the interests of protecting their security, supposedly threatened by terrorists and criminals. The only tool that can be used to resist this gradual model is to prepare information on surveillance and

control systems and, as far as possible, publish this critical information in publications, books, the media and especially on the Internet, the most flexible and collaborative medium. To fight against intelligence information - intelligent counter-information that alerts citizens, raises their awareness and activates them in small networks or activist multitudes. In spite of the size of the Leviathan, counter-information actions can at least contain or delay the rise of this surveillance and control scenario that, while imperfect due to its own rabid impotence, can be ominous and brutal. But there's no point in looking for a comfortable resistant marginal position, when what's at stake are basic rights that give us greater freedom to act. That's why the highest priority is to attack standardised public spaces, even in the legal and political fields of surveillance and control regulation and restriction. In this sense, the role of the alternative world movement and/or artivists as a trigger for activating the critical mass is essential, in spite of its small numbers. Furthermore, in the context of the aesthetically pleasing and multi-form but decadent and inward looking contemporary art world, the role of socially committed art is even more important. As a laboratory of ideas for the present and the future, as a launching ground for activism and actionism, as a platform of critical visualisation for the global society.

Geo-strategic 0 zones

In an increasingly urbanised society, surveillance and control measures clearly focus on the urban fabric and its invisible connections. But a singular situation still exists: empty, deserted zones that are scarcely populated, where it seems like "nothing happens", except the romantic, slow passing of nomadic life. But in reality, indisputable, decisive things do take place in some of these areas, and they are fundamental for all of us. These are disputed, frontiers of migration and war, and often, under sand and rocks, they are full of hidden resources important to today's economy (oil, gas, uranium, coltan, water...). They are true geo-strategic O Zones - the opposite of the Ground Zero of bombs - the scene of conflicts that have either become deeply entrenched or been abandoned, where hegemonic or regional powers play out their geo-strategic game with impunity. And they aren't even the object of media attention, which puts a premium of information as spectacle. But in surveillance and control are also present in these scenarios, apparently secondary but decisive elements for intelligence agencies. They are used to prepare the ground for political negotiation-seduction operations and, if they don't bear the desired fruit, for armed interventions. The most obvious case of a desert area with no apparent economic value that became unexpectedly decisive due to political circumstances is Afghanistan. There are many other spaces of emptiness that haven't had the luck or the misfortune of reaching the same level of global relevance.

The desert-like border between the United States and Mexico is another paradigmatic case between the first world and the developing world. Here, activist initiatives to provides maps showing border crossing and supply areas have been, in the eyes of some, counterproductive (1) apart from a focus of tension between the two countries.

The planet is plagued with O Zones, no man's lands, bad country, where overlapping legal conflicts are played out. There's a strip of O Zones in Asia (Afghanistan, Iraq, the Middle East Chechnya, etc.), but there's another, equally important, strip in other continents like Africa. Our interest centres on the great African O Zone that affects us Europeans directly: the zone of the Sahara desert and the Sahel countries. This is an O Zone of border wars, rebellions and North-bound migrations, apparently rich in energy and mineral resources. For decades, a silent war has been played out among the dunes for the geo-strategic control that has become fundamental, given the high level of conflictivity of the Middle East. For example, there's the Western Sahara conflict, the repression against the Amazigh people in the Algerian Kabylie, the Darfur conflict and the civil war in Somalia. France, and now the United States and China have entered the game to control it. But territorial disputes, decolonialisation, the thirst for fuel and minerals, the fight against Islamic terrorism, etc. mean that their strategic value still doesn't have a corresponding interest for the media.

These 0 Zones, absent from the media except when neo-colonialist events like the Paris-Dakar rally (2) are involved, and only subject to secret control by world powers, have become zones of chaos and suspicious manoeuvres, where the solidarity of activist counter-information initiatives has become necessary. So, our activist and artivist approach has a fifth columnist approach that consists in turning control and surveillance measures onto the controllers themselves, using their technologies in a civil use version. The strategy is to provide text and graphic information about these false no man's land, that are the ancestral home of desert villages and tribes, and the scene of a dirty geopolitical war in the West's backyard.

There have been 0 Zones like the migratory borders between Northern Africa and Southern Spain, which have attracted more media attention and even appealing multidisciplinary projects like *Fadaiat* (UNIA Arte y Pensamiento), on migration in the Gibraltar Strait (3). But there are still 0 Zones within 0 Zones, territories that are virtually unknown and could become conflict zones at any time, or that have been so in the past and need fifth columnist activism to avoid a return. So they can cease being information deserts, or places only suitable for falsity and rumours, for disinformation based on specific interests. This is the aim of the project in which The Digital Fifth Column collaborated – to help change the situation of one of the worlds most extreme and ignored 0 Zones

on the planet. But to do this, we have to tell the story from the beginning, through the intervention of the collective Artamugarriak.

Artamugarriak's *Bardenas-Tibesti* action

Artamugarriak, an artivist initiative in favour of the peace process and participative democracy, is a small Basque collective of artists and citizens who have been working for just on a year to give impetus to the damaged peace process in the Basque Country (based on an earlier one-off initiative in 2004, the *1st Navarra Art and Peace Conference: A way out is possible*). *Artamugarriak* have carried out several symbolic actions in Navarra (Larra, Huarte, Pamplona), the Basque Country (Gernika), Cáceres (Aldea Moret) and Castellón, as well as organising activist meetings and workshops. They also collaborate with the initiative *BatzArt!* (Asamblarte!) with the collectives *Gernika Gogoratuz, Parte Hartuz and Bidea Helburu,* in the area of active non-violence in favour of dialogue. The latest of these initiatives is the virtual exhibition Zona 0 - Pax Avant!. Soon after they formed, Artamugarriak was asked by the NGO Tibesti of the Toubou people in Northern Chad to carry out a kind of monument to peace in the area of the battle of Zouar, in commemoration of the end of the border wars and rebellions between 1980 and 1989. The Toubou people do not want to go back to war with their neighbours, or to find themselves involved in the zone's geo-strategic operations, and so they want to declare their territory a peace zone, and signpost it as such in some way. They want to stop their inhabited desert from becoming an area for speculation, war and disinformation.

Artamugarriak immediately accepted the invitation, but with the intention of adapting the initial idea to the field of activism and net.art. They drafted a proposal for a *Bardenas-Tibesti/Tibesti-Bardena* double action, which creates a kind of sisterhood bond between the two areas linked by violent conflict. The aim was to use geo-strategic control tools to counter-surveill military operations in desert areas, opaque zones in terms of information, by providing critical information and public coverage that brought them to light as places of conflict. The Bardenas firing range in Navarra is a major training area for the air forces of the Spanish and NATO armies, and the towns in the area, together with anti-military and environmentalist collectives, have long been calling for them to be moved out.

As part of its work to promote non-violence, *Artamugarriak* joined the movement through this symbolic media action as their contribution to the de-militarization of the Basque conflict. Meanwhile, over the last few years Tibesti has attracted a high degree of geo-strategic interest from powers in the area, like Libya and France (the former colonial power in Chad), and been approached by the US and China in the fight against Islamic terrorism (Darfur, etc.) and the search for energy resources. The idea of this double action, which

culminates with the building of a peace monument in Tibesti, was to rescue this supposedly marginal conflict from oblivion and to hamper attempts to conquer a zone that is desert-like but inhabited by the Toubou nomads. Bardenas, a desert-like land, grazing area and natural reserve in southern Navarra (in the north of Spain) has been used as a training ground by Spanish and NATO armies for forty years. It's an example of a European "no man's land", which is "everyone's land", a commons or "faceria", where the information block on dangerous activities may even hide the experimental use of munitions with enriched uranium. It should also be noted that it is the training ground for NATO planes or those of its constituent armies (like the French air force) that may have bombed areas like Tibesti. In a way, our small desert (arid zone) is the testing ground for acting with impunity in the big African desert of the Sahara.

The design process for the action went through various phases of definition until it, following a collective workshop, it took on its definitive form. The proposal basically consisted of carrying out a symbolic, participative action in Bardenas in homage to *Tibesti*, documented using digital video and still cameras. The exact geographic location of the action would be indexed on the appropriate *Google Earth* virtual map with a link to the *Artamugarriak* and the NGO *Tibesti* web sites, which would compile texts and graphic documentation of the action. The final aim would be to place an information node about *Tibesti* on the most popular virtual map in the world and on the information medium par excellence, with details of its current situation and its desire to become a peace area. The second part of the *Tibesti-Bardenas* action consisted of carrying out a similar action in Tibesti, adapted to the conditions of the area and carried out by the NGO *Tibesti*. This second part of the action would consolidate the opening of the information channel of/about this area and its forgotten conflict, which, as a result of past conflict, has become the biggest land mine area on the planet. This is a serious problem that constantly causes victims and holds back its economic development (especially in terms of adventure tourism) and which deserves the solidarity of the international community to help resolve it. On the other hand, the action strengthened Tibesti's media image as a peaceful area that wants to remain free of neo-colonial threats and conflicts in the area.

The action was launched through a series of liaisons and phases. There was a proto-action that involved placing a simple circle of chairs below the Castil de Tierra, a curious geological formation that is emblematic of Bardenas, which was filmed by a crew from the Basque channel ETB 1 and broadcast in March 2007 in the program *Posdata*. In the meantime, an invitation was received from the organisers of the 20th March against the Bardenas Firing Range, asking *Artamugarriak* to carry out the action at the end of the march. The workshop on the *Bardenas-Tibesti* action held on May

12 at the Fundación Buldain de Huarte (Navarra) gave the action its final shape. Finally, the action was carried out as planned on Sunday June 3, barely 300 meters from the entrance to the firing range and the Spanish army's military barracks, with the collaboration of ten members of *Artamugarriak* and of other similar collectives. After reading a declaration on the action, in solidarity with the 20th March and with the situation in Tibesti, and distributing a letter from the NGO Tibesti to the Basque people. The tree or the "May of conflicts" was erected at a point specified earlier with a GPS, with 20 signs of countries, regions or cities devastated by the war or bombardments, such as Tibesti itself. Around it, a circle of wooden chairs for dialogue were placed and, finally, an equilateral triangle, 100 meters a side, was formed by the marchers. Once the action had been graphically documented, the installation was dismantled and the area was left as before. The documentation consisting of copy left texts, photos and videos was finally posted on *Artamugarriak's* web site.

The second part of the action is still pending and is technically more complex due to Tibesti's political and geographic characteristics. A representative of the NGO Tibesti is expected to visit Gernika in late 2007, and at this point the *Tibesti-Bardenas* will be given a boost and take on its final form.

Paralelo 42

Artamugarriak's action was carried out with the collaboration of various people and collectives. The technical design of the action was put in the hands of the arts project *Paralelo 42*, directed by Jabier Villarreal, and included the hybrid artistic processing of *Google Earth* maps, as well as the design of a new critical cartography. This project, currently in development stage, aims to track and mark geographical, social, geo-strategic and political anomalies around *Parallel 42* and its "opposite", *Parallel 24,* through artistic versions of *Google Earth* virtual maps, digital photos and videos, and the production of information texts and other collaborations. Their interest in major North American cities as sites of conflict is complemented with an exploration of deserts and no man's lands, and the search for signs of scenes of conflict or socio-economic contrasts. In the midst of an ocean of superficial, aestheticist *Google-art, Paralelo 42* tries to introduce a critical and potentially activist register through *Google Earth* indexation and interaction with the *Google Earth* Community. Google, as an Internet macro-company characterised by the ambiguity of its approach to user protection (4) is re-used, in its *Google Earth* version, in a fifth columnist way, to provide critical information within activist micro-projects like Paralelo 42 and Bardenas-Tibesti. Especially in those two extreme scenarios - in the deserts, where its digital maps are low-resolution (an opportunity for dirty war, lack of control, and neo-colonialist attempts) and in the high-resolution maps of big cities (Chicago, Cleveland, etc.),

where the information inflation hides the obvious: inequality and injustice. However, in the context of information control, both kinds of places – city and desert – are the same or similar in the sense that they alternate between occupation and dis-occupation, as places or non-paces of information significance. In the last instance, the emptiness of the desert and the O Zone emptiness of bombarded cities or victims of bomb attacks (Hiroshima, New York 9-11, Madrid 4-11, etc.) become an information mirage between appearance and disappearance, control and lack of control of interventions over insurgency or counter-insurgency. Together with the use of the *Google Earth* satellites that give us a macro view – digital still and video cameras are needed to get to the micro – that is, a vision of action on the field and the flow of the multitudes in action.

Another fundamental element for fifth columnist activism, together with a critical digital cartography, is the work of "smart mobs" (Howard Rheingold), multitudes connected in an activist network through the Internet and mobile phones. In this respect, the desert, as well as the jungle, has been the ideal stage in which to develop strategic-tactical perspectives, as T.H. Lawrence pointed out in his classic work *Guerrilla* (5). For new activists and artivists, this foundational desert is again the inspiration for the (counter)information guerrillas' playing field. And as General von Ravenstein said, desert warfare is a nightmare for logistics but paradise to the tactician.

The contribution of the digital fifth column

The digital fifth column is a production of the collective Cibergolem and the Corso Quitacolumnista (fifth columnist parade), based on the project TESTER and the publication of the essay *La Quinta Columna Digital* (6). The digital fifth column is a theory and activist initiative that explores fifth columnist infiltration strategies. Their principal work involves producing theoretical texts and collaborating with other activist projects, like *Artamugarriak* and *Paralelo 42*, to which they bring their theoretical work and their modest technical resources, through participative work and work in progress. In this sense, the digital fifth column's contribution to the action Bardenas-Tibesti involved liaison and advice, with the aim of testing the effectiveness of fifth columnist methods that use systems of surveillance and control. Fifth columnist use of GPS, mobile phones, satellites and *Google Earth's* virtual map, digital still and video cameras, and online information platforms is a practical example of the creative, critical and activist counter-use (and double-use, for civil and intelligence communication) of standard communications gadgets for surveillance and control systems. In a way, we watch the watchers. We engage in counter-surveillance by offering new information, displaying information in an appealing manner and applying "agitprop" to the physical and information desert. We give rise to a small critical and

insurgent expectation, enriching the infosphere and the cyberworld.

Ultimately, the aim of the digital fifth column is to help achieve a transparent global republic, which would mean surveillance in the public sphere, and freedom in the private. Rather than simple denunciation or sabotage, from a fifth columnist perspective it is more interesting and effective to appropriate or critically review global counter-surveillance technology such as the satellites that *Google Earth* uses or the video surveillance systems on our streets, as we've already discussed in the text *Cuando Leviatán se convierte en Polifemo* (7). Based on the reflections of the essayist and science fiction novelist David Brin's reflections in *The Transparent Society* (8), our objective is to make a contribution towards generating that transparent global republic as a hyperpolitical expectation that protects personal privacy and displays, the activities of public bodies in entirety, specially those involving espionage or intelligence.

Our fundamental theoretical objective is the discussion of possible fifth columnist tactics in this area (counter-surveillance, counter-information, counter-simulation, new critical cartographies, etc.) as well as ethical codes for action. Participation in the *Bardenas-Tibesti* action and collaboration in the *Paralelo 42* project are the first attempts to put these postulates in practice, while remaining open to participative discussion and improvement.

The origins of fifth columnist counter-surveillance

In response to surveillance - activist and fifth columnist counter-surveillance. Because, the way we see it, the fifth columnist revision of digital technology is the most effective way to reign-in *Leviathan when he turns into Polyphemus.* To avoid the O Zones and the "no man's lands" could be a paradigmatic example: in the pure physical and virtual desert of Tibesti, a small spring or well of information is flowing, helping to hamper the possibility of geo-strategic manoeuvres in a complete vacuum and, more importantly, creating activist networks that connect Tibesti to alternative cyberworld nodes. From this moment, a way forwards in the mid-term opens up for Tibesti, through new projects and collaborations that are in the pipeline. And for us, fifth columnist resistance, a new perspective opens up, of new experiences and trans-vernacular friendship. And all thanks to a micro-action, and the most humble of artivist projects. It may be true that art can't transform the world, but an artivist action is capable of producing real, substantial results. The creativity of a fifth columnist rearguard may one day save us from terrible disasters, if we're able to value and make the most of its immense potential.

Links

http://portal.unesco.org/culture/admin/file_download.php/strategy.pdf?URL_ID=16660&filename=10698584773strategy.pdf&filetype=application%2Fpdf&filesize=1903623&name=strategy.pdf&location=user-S/
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Notes

(1) The National Human Rights Commission decided to distribute 70,000 "risk maps" of the Mexico-Arizona border, showing routes and places were migrants had previously lost their lives, and places with water. Meanwhile, the NGO Humane Borders strategically placed water tanks so that migrants wouldn't die of thirst. In response to North American protests and some incidents – the maps were used by the US migration police to lay ambushes - the project was finally suspended, although the Humane Borders water project continues. See http://www.humaneborders.org/news/news4.html where you can download the maps.
(2) http://www.stop-rallyedakar.com
(3) AA.VV. (2006) Fadaiat. libertad de movimiento + libertad de conocimiento http://www.fadaiat.net
(4) The European Community is investigating Google for practices that may infringe on the privacy of users, given that the content of search queries is archived along with the use of the search engine.
(5) LAWRENCE, T. H (2004) *Guerrilla* (Acuarela, Madrid). The Wu Ming collective has an interesting discussion of his work at http://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/outtakes/lawrence_es.html
(6) CIBERGOLEM (2005) *La quinta columna digital. Antitratado de hiperpolítica* (Gedisa, Barcelona, Madrid)
(7) CIBERGOLEM *Cuando Leviatán se convierte en Polifemo. Una interpretación quintacolumnista de la privacidad tras el 11-S y el 11-M* http://www.quintacolumna.org
(8) BRIN, DAVID (1997) *The Transparent Society* Addison Wesley (New York)