OPEN-ACCESS COMMUNISM[1]

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Abstract

As the West loses its political credibility, the search has opened for alternatives to neo-liberal parliamentary democracies, failing on their own scale of good governance. Several contemporary critical thinkers, such as Alain Badiou, turn towards a communist horizon. In this paper, we want to explore the idea of commons in contemporary Internet-based groups, as a quest for contemporary appearances of communism in the Badiouian sense. From wiki formats to the hacktivism of Anonymous, there are various Internet-based initiatives that are built on a philosophy of open access to all, regardless of their identity, and a horizontal, rhizomatic organisation. We think that the organisational features of these initiatives make them suitable to carry out a struggle for new, more democratic political alternatives.

Keywords [suggested by the editorial staff]

Commons. Open-access. Badiouian sense. Communism.

COMUNISMO EM TEMPO DE LIVRE ACESSO

Resumo

À medida que o Ocidente perde credibilidade política, inicia-se a demanda por alternativas às democracias parlamentaristas neo-liberais, falhas em sua própria escala de governança. Vários críticos contemporâneos, como Alain Badiou, voltam-se para um horizonte comunista. Neste trabalho, desejamos explorar a ideia de "commons" (Comuns) nos grupos atuais com base na Internet, enquanto busca às aparências recentes do comunismo no sentido badiouiano. Desde os formatos "wicki" até o "hacktivismo" dos Anônimos, há várias iniciativas com base na Internet que são construídas partindo de uma filosofia de livre acesso a todos, não importando a identidade, e uma organização rizomática, horizontal. Acreditamos que as características organizacionais destas iniciativas as tornam adequadas no sentido de proceder ao esforço por novas alternativas políticas, mais democráticas.

Palavras-chave [sugeridas pela equipe editorial]

Comuns. Livre acesso. Sentido badiouiano. Comunismo.

1   THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

Since the first outbursts of the recent economic crisis, much talk has been made of the necessity for transparency and ethical consciousness in matters of governance. Not only corporate governance, but also political governance should be opening up their backdoors and dirty laundry bags to the common man, for them to be trusted as good governance. As we can learn from the United Nations (UN), good governance should not only be effective and efficient, but also be accountable, participatory, transparent, responsive, equitable and inclusive (UN 2013) – all words which hint at open access and a close relation to the people whom the governance concerns. These keywords plus the two remaining characteristics, which the UN ascribes to good governance, consensus orientation and obedience to the rule of law, lead in the direction of neo-liberal, parliamentary democracies as the political example in which good governance is practised at its best. UN development policies are largely based on the illumination of the third world in the light of good governance as it is practised in Western democracies. However, these Western democracies seem to be struggling with their own crises of good governance.

> The institutions of secular liberal democracy simply do not sufficiently motivate their citizenry.On the contrary, at this point in time, the political institutions of the Western democracies appear strangely demotivating. There is increasing talk of a democratic deficit, a feeling of the irrelevance of traditional electoral politics to the lives of citizens, and an uncoupling of civil society from the state, at the same time as the state seeks to extend everincreasing powers of surveillance and control into all areas of civil society. I think it might be claimed that there is a motivational deficit at the heart of liberal democratic life, where citizens experience the governmental norms that rule contemporary society as externally binding but not internally compelling. (CRITCHLEY, 2007, p. 7).

This analysis of the English progressive philosopher Simon Critchley is an apt description of the ever-growing gap between the domain of political governance and the worries and interests of the common man. Since the universal acceptance of the neoliberal model of Western democracies, politics has ceased to be the platform for ideological debate and the breeding ground for governance values. When only one model dominates the political arena, no debate on the best way to organise society is possible anymore, and politics becomes

a management issue: how to manage society. Even more, the neoliberal model embraces corporate management as its mode of governance. Politics has become management, and society is governed as if it were a corporation. It is not surprising then that politics does not touch upon people's concerns at a crucial internal level, rather it is reduced to a mere organisational strategy for society that regulates people's lives from the outside. Those who should be represented in democratic institutions find themselves at an increasingly large distance from the political process. This deficit has become apparent not only in politics but in the corporate model altogether. The recent economic crisis makes painfully clear that the corporate model lacks a moral ground of social sensibility and altruism. The freedom of the market does not lead to justice and harmony for all, as Adam Smith hoped. Egoistic enrichment does not lead to general altruism but to social disintegration and to a general economic crisis that awakens a cry for transparency and ethical consciousness. Too much liberty for individual leaders to decide leads to a greedy elite and not to a balanced protection of the common interest, whether this greed is focused on power or money.

Common people feel a growing need to be able to control the management of both businesses and society or at least have a say in governance. Populist parties and movements tune into this development and win support by claiming to tear down political ivory towers and to give the people back the power to decide in matters of public interest. Despite the fact that also on the progressive left side voices are heard to incite citizens to 'reclaim the state' (WAINWRIGHT, 2003), it is mostly right-wing, nationalist and conservative parties that are effective in regaining the trust of people in seemingly 'honest' and 'transparent' governance (although not in matters of corporate governance). A convincing and engaging alternative form of governance, which can reform, or maybe even replace, existing institutional politics, which has passed its expiry date, has yet to come from the progressive side.

As the West loses its political credibility, the search is opened for alternatives to those neo-liberal parliamentary democracies failing on their own scale of good governance. Alain Badiou is heading for a communist horizon, and he is not the only one (BADIOU, 2010a; BOSTEELS, 2011; DEAN, 2012; ZIZEK, 2013). However, it remains unclear how we could imagine a realistic, contemporary appearance of communism in a time in which large political ideologies are no longer convincing to people. Badiou describes a form of communism based on the ontological notion of the commons rather than on the idea of a

model of state politics. In this paper, we want to explore the idea of commons in contemporary Internet-based groups as a quest for contemporary appearances of communism in the Badiouian sense. From wiki formats to the hacktivism of Anonymous, there are various Internet-based initiatives that are built on a philosophy of open access to all, and a horizontal organisation. Rhizomatic organisation and anonymity play a crucial role in their strategies. We think that the organisational features of these initiatives make them suitable to carry out a struggle for new, and more democratic, political alternatives.

2   THE WIKI IN WIKILEAKS

A temporary stir in what Simon Critchley calls the motivational deficit in Western European democracies was caused by the major disclosure of classified state documents by Wikileaks in 2010. Suddenly, the back-door politics of even a super power like the USA became accessible to everyone. Some enthusiasm was felt about a new power of the people to call their governments to account and about new possibilities for transparency. On the other hand, the centres of institutional power were very keen to condemn the publication of 'secret documents' on the grounds that it did not help, but rather harmed, common people. Apparently, in order to serve a common cause, governments need to be secretive about what they think and do with their citizens. Governmental reactions to the revelations of Wikileaks seemed to imply that good governance could only flourish under limited democratisation.

In other areas, Wikileaks was applauded as the sign of a new and necessary democratisation of governance. However, although left-wing intellectuals and activists cheered, public debates were dominated by concerns for damaged reputations, threatened international diplomatic balances and the compromising sex life of Wikileaks' public face Julian Assange. Established media were more concerned with the illegal status of Wikileaks' activities and information on personal quarrels between heads of states than with digging in the piles of shocking dat on international power plays, war tactics and crimes against humanity. The coming out of the truth was not as widely and warmly welcomed as one would expect from recent debates on good governance. Traditional media seemed to make use of a censoring rhetoric to conceal the political importance of information shared via Wikileaks by focusing on the identity of Wikileaks itself (OUDENAMPSEN, 2010).

Wikileaks' goal to disclose the truth in order to 'keep governments honest' and address 'suppressed injustices', as is written on the front page of the website, was thus covered over by its own rise to fame (WIKILEAKS, 2013). The ideals of Wikileaks no longer seemed of more importance than Wikileaks itself.

This ironic twist is stimulated by the way in which Wikileaks presents itself. The status of Wikileaks as merely a hatch between the truth and the people is undermined by the prominent exposure of Wikileaks frontman Julian Assange and other representatives whose personal struggles with the system take up a lot of attention. This is not only the fault of mainstream media but also a choice of Wikileaks itself. When we first visited the website, the first thing we saw was the face of Julian Assange. At the time of his indictment, Assange used sensitive political information in his possession as ransom for his own safety and health, which makes the claim that transparency is the most important goal of Wikileaks at least a bit dubious. This might all be a clever trick to divert the attention of state surveillance mechanisms from the real sources of sensitive material to Julian Assange, who might thereby put himself on the frontline for a greater cause. However, this exposure of the people behind Wikileaks might also be part of the slightly contradictory character of a traditional singleperson organisation (LOVINK; RIEMENS, 2010), which at the same time claims to be a universal platform for information, understood as a commonly created good.

The name Wikileaks suggests that it concerns a horizontal platform in which everyone can provide for and share information without external selection mechanisms; it is after all a wiki. A *wiki* is one of the Internet 2.0 activities, where users themselves provide the content. In good wiki tradition, Wikileaks is presented as a platform where all users can publish documents, which would otherwise be concealed from the public, for others to read and share. Wikipedia defines wikis thus: 'A wiki is a website that allows the creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages via a web browser using a simplified markup language or a WYSIWYG text editor. Wikis are typically powered by wiki software and are often used collaboratively by multiple users. Examples include community websites, corporate intranets, knowledge management systems, and note services. The software can also be used for personal note taking' (WIKIPEDIA, 2013). Wikis are online databases, called 'wiki' after the Hawaiian word for 'fast'. Wikis form communities and enable users to work together on a common project. In this sense there is no hierarchy in a wiki. It is the users themselves that

create and maintain the wiki. In general, the term wiki has become synonymous for online community forming and cooperation between users, with a wide-open access for everyone to the creation and sharing of knowledge as a consequence. Tapscott and Williams, for example, use wiki as the general name for collaboration in *Wikinomics, How mass collaboration changes everything* (TAPSCOTT; WILLIAMS 2006; SHIRKY, 2008). Therefore, the wiki itself does not evaluate or select the content. Control is reduced to a minimum and often implies only general rules. The most well known example is of course Wikipedia, but one finds all different types of wikis on the Internet (street map wiki, facebook wiki, among others). Wiki technology is based on a principle of open cooperation between users who engage in a common goal. This cooperation is not based on membership, but it remains an open community. In a wiki, the users regulate the flow of information themselves without falling into chaos. User groups, for instance, control the veracity of the entries in Wikipedia. The more popular a Wikipedia article becomes, the more likely it is that detailed and trustworthy information is given. However, many media and Internet theorists have noted that the operation of Wikipedia is not as rosy as it seems. The openness of its user-driven structure has its limits, and mechanisms of selection and censoring also take place on Wikipedia as they do in the world of academic science (e.g. see LOVINK; TKACZ, 2011; NIEDERER; VAN DIJCK, 2010).

This idea of user-driven content has become very popular on the Internet. Although other well-known sites for the sharing of content, like Flickr andYouTube, are technically not wikis because they use other technologies, they also allow participation by users and are based on roughly the same principle of organisation. Although wikis have a much more horizontal organisation form than YouTube or Flickr – which are corporate sites making profit out of the content which is created by their users – they share the idea of open-user participation and minimisation of control. YouTube's system administrators only control the morality (pornography) of the videos that are uploaded, as does Flickr with photography. It is this (relative) freedom and the wide accessibility of participation and exposure that account for the popularity of wikis and other forms of user-driven creation on the Internet. Everyone can write an entry on his or her favourite subject on Wikipedia. Everyone can publish his or her footage on YouTube. Everyone can post pictures on Flickr. Wikipedia works, and it has become the major source of information worldwide. It continually expands,

and slowly, it has attained a certain authority of trustworthiness and reliability. As we are quite sure, everyone of us consults Wikipedia occasionally.

Wikileaks works in a slightly different, less democratic way. The use of the 'Wiki' in 'Wikileaks' is therefore misleading. Wikileaks is not a website run on wiki technology, nor is it the users of the site who control the data. However, the underlying motivation for user-driven sites like wikis is shared in the initiative of Wikileaks. Wikileaks does give everyone the opportunity to leak information to its website, but works with a team of editors and journalists who verify the authenticity of the material and write a new report on it. Original documents are published, but Wikileaks reserves the right to delay or abstain from publication if this seems the right thing to do. Still, the main point we want to emphasise here is that the content of Wikileaks comes from users worldwide. It is the users who are the engine of Wikileaks; anyone motivated by a need for transparency and openness of information can provide content for the site. Assange *et al.* do not generate the content, and in that sense are not the owners of the documents. At least they should not be. Wikileaks presents itself as a totally open source of information, not selected or censured by other considerations. In practice, however, the potential of this open source is overshadowed by the controversies created around the 'management' of Wikileaks. This is, in our opinion, the problem with Wikileaks. It should have worked as a wiki, but it fell back into a classical, hierarchical organisation structure controlled by a management, that is, Assange.

For us, Wikileaks is much more about Bradley Manning than Julian Assange, and with him, the anonymous users who feed the site. However, Bradley Manning is in solitary confinement, punished for bringing the 'secret' documents to the fore, whereas Assange became a famous spokesperson for transparency and political innovation. As we noted earlier, Wikileaks might have worked deliberately on the central personification of their initiative in order to protect their diverse sources of information. In its earlier stages, Wikileaks was criticised for endangering the lives of people named in their reports. The team behind Wikileaks accepted this criticism and started editing the documents in order to depersonalise them. In this sense, Wikileaks acted like a corporation, presenting itself as a legal body and at the same time depersonalising the issues it brought out. In corporate strategy, it is only the CEO who shows his face and is the spokesperson. Personal responsibility is therefore transformed into corporate responsibility. Corporate secrecy is

guaranteed, and the personal ethics of those involved is subdued to a general ethics of the corporation. We do not wish to suggest here that the names of those involved should have remained openly accessible, but we wonder how such a move into a centralised business ethics affects a distributed network with wiki features. Apparently, it is difficult to imagine an ethical framework that does not rely on the agency and accountability of a subject that can be clearly identified. Even within the context of Wikileaks, no other ethical framework could be imagined that would both keep the anonymity of its sources intact and do away with the centralised claim to responsibility of traditional business ethics. It seems that even Wikileaks accepts the fact that complete transparency and distributed responsibility are not possible in a world dominated by institutions and corporations, and that ethical behaviour has to be understood inside the framework of corporations.

Despite its limited democratic structure and this turn to a centralised and corporate ethics, we still believe that Wikileaks gives us a view on the subversive potential of a wiki framework for organisation. Our interest in Wikileaks originates in its wiki potential and the influence that a wiki format could have on mainstream politics. Wikis demonstrate that people are able to organise something with the minimum of central management and control. There are forms of cooperation which do not need to be led nor managed, but organise themselves, and which are nevertheless able to have a considerable impact on power relations within a corporate or political institutional order.

3   RHIZOMES

We would like to call wikis examples of spontaneous organisations, based on common interest, and existing independently of managerial control. This proves to be quite difficult to grasp, as when we analyse organisations, we tend to focus on the way they are managed. Indeed, in the analysis of the organisation of Internet 2.0, it is often mentioned that a decentralised and user-driven organisation structure does not imply a complete lack of regulation. Alexander Galloway (2004) has already made us realise that the Internet is highly controlled by means of the technical protocols, which enable various forms of networking. Galloway states that the Internet is far from a completely anarchic phenomenon but rather exemplifies how distributed control functions are. It is a question of who is in charge of such

mechanisms of control and how they are applied. The political potential for resistance and subversion does not lie outside of the domain of the protocol but depend on the ways users are able to play around with it. There is always someone who founds a wiki site, and administration is carried out in order to keep the danger of misuse at bay. However, in a wiki form of organisation, these mechanisms of control are ideally not monopolised but stand at the service of the selforganising power of communality. In such an organisation, it is of no importance who exactly takes on the role of administrator. Those taking up this role are interchangeable. The fear of getting completely out of control makes it difficult to understand such a common use of the protocol. It is almost impossible to think of a spontaneously organised, common movement without an identifiable central management. We see this happening in the case of Wikileaks. The leading figures of Wikileaks attempt to manage the documents, and by doing so, they appropriate and monopolise content that does not belong to them. Wikileaks becomes a personalised enterprise with media exposure, whereas Bradley Manning is in solitary confinement. This move de-anonymises the commonality of its origins and obscures the wiki potential. In this sense, Wikileaks is ambiguous and by this ambiguity conceals the power of spontaneous organisation.

As Deleuze & Guattari (1987) demonstrate, tree structures can only understand trees and are utterly incapable of dealing with rhizomatic structures because – among other things – they are anonymous. Hence, we can only grasp Al-Qaeda where it becomes Osama Bin Laden, or grasp the Colombian drug export when we imagine cartels with Bond-like baddies at the top. The tree logic is simple: eliminate the top and you have eradicated the whole tree. The trouble with a rhizome or grassroots is that they are indestructible by this means. A rhizome is a structure not organised around a central axis like a tree. It has no centre. Deleuze and Guattari oppose the rhizome to the tree, 'unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature' (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987, p. 21). Although both models are not strictly opposed to one another – a rhizome may contain a tree – the tree is the classical hierarchical structure that reproduces itself around its axis and claims univocity. Our world is a tree world, but it is changing rapidly into a rhizomatic world. The tree has dominated Western thought with its emphasis on roots (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987, p. 18). 'We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer

too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growth and rhizomes' (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987, p. 15). A rhizome is multiplicity; it is movement at the same time, and it forms a complex structure that produces effects. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome is characterised by four principles: (1) connection and (2) heterogeneity – any point in the rhizome can be connected to anything other (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987, p. 7) – there is no origin from where everything starts or an end towhere it leads, but there are heterogeneous connections between points; (3) multiplicity – 'There is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject' (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987, p. 8) – there is no unity but only lines of interacting elements (4) asignifying rupture – 'A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or new lines' (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1987, p. 9). A rhizome rejuvenates itself and is therefore extremely difficult to break or destroy. Because there is no unity, each component has a relative autonomy and engages in relations with other components. A rhizomatic structure works as a virus. This is something that the Western armies encounter on a daily base in Iraq, for example, where there are no identifiable enemies. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome concept has given rise to a whole literature about the political and organisational power of spontaneous or viral organisation forms (RONFELDT; ARQUILLA, 2001A, 2001B; RHEINGOLD, 2002; HARDT; NEGRI, 2004). Although rhizomes might be seen as chaos and a low organisation form, they definitely produce results and have a big impact in the world.

4   ANONYMOUS

One aspect of the rhizome that makes it quite different and difficult to understand, although we are accustomed to the logics of a tree organisation, is the anonymity and depersonalisation of its development. As the rhizome is about lines and the connections between points, the points themselves are of less importance. Multiplicity means a certain depersonalisation. Identification and personalisation are instruments of control as they are applied in modes of centralised organisation. They are also the main instruments of discipline, as Michel Foucault (1977) demonstrated in extent. Foucault made it also very

clear that discipline is a central feature of classical organisations, or in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, tree structures. Prisons look like factories; factories, hospitals and offices all look like prisons. Spontaneous organisations, rhizomes and wikis are anonymous and derive their strength from the anonymity of the users. They are not easily disciplined by external powers. If rhizomatic movements are used for the purpose of insurgence, then anonymity and non-identity become strategies of insurgence. In this sense, it is understandable and of great importance that one of the insurgent groups on the Internet is called *Anonymous*. According to us, the 'hacktivism' that is practised by this group is a more interesting example of the way Internet protocol can be bent according to the interests of the common people than the semi-wiki experiment of Wikileaks (LUDLOW, 2010).

Anonymous is an activist Internet community advocating for freedom of speech on the Internet and developing rapidly into a global activist group not only on the Internet but also in real time, demanding freedom and democracy in several parts of the world. It is a decentralised online community acting loosely on communal projects. It sees itself as a global brain or swarm with no hierarchical or fixed organisation structure (HALUPKA; STAR, 2011). It derives its name from image boards and chat rooms where unidentified users post comments and receive a tag as anonymous. It became a name of multiple use, denoting collective anarchist actions mainly directed at governments and large corporations, which are perceived as censuring the Internet (ANONYMOUS, 1998). Anonymous is the most well known hacktivist group on the Internet, hacktivism being a contraction of activism and hacking: hacking with a political goal (HIMMA, 2007). Their actions consist mainly of distributed denial of services (DDoS) attacks where central computers are 'attacked' by sending so many spam messages that they overflow and become out of service.

Anonymous is not organised in any traditional way but brings people together to act for the duration of a protest. The collective goal is temporary. Because anonymity is paramount, it is not known how many people are active. 'Membership is conditional but easily achieved, being as simple as concealing oneself while performing online activities. Conversely, the simple act of having one's identity revealed automatically removes oneself from the group' (WIKIPEDIA, 2011). '[Anonymous is] the first Internet-based super consciousness. Anonymous is a group, in the sense that a flock of birds is a group. How do you know they're a group? Because they are traveling in the same direction. At any given

moment, more birds could join, leave, peel off in another direction entirely' (Landers 2008). It is nosurprise that Anonymous communicates through wikis and very seldom identifies themselves as a group, although several manifestos have appeared on the Internet such as the video manifesto 'The Hackers Manifesto and the Ethics of Hacking' (Nowpublic 2012). Anonymous has campaigned in real life, and sometimes, members appear in demonstrations around the world. When people affiliated to Anonymous appear in public, they invariably wear a Guy Fawkes mask, which is not directly inspired by the historical 16th century activist but mainly by the comic book and film *V for Vendetta,* about a revolutionary hero struggling in a totalitarian future of the UK after a nuclear disaster (MOORE; LLOYD, 2005).

Activities of Anonymous have been highly effective. Project 'Chanology', which took place in 2008, attacked the scientology church after it was revealed that the church demanded censorship of YouTube videos dealing with the scientology church. The Iranian Green Party Support was launched by Anonymous after the presidential election in 2009. The site still has over 22,000 supporters and is one of the main sources of free information on Iran. Despite attempts by the Iranian government to close it down, it still functions. Operation Titstorm took place in

2010 against plans of the Australian government for Internet filtering legislation and censorship in pornography of small-breasted women (who are perceived to be underage). It consisted of DDoS attacks of government websites. Also, of course, there was Operation Payback (or Avenge Assange), a DDoS attack against Amazon, Paypal, Visa and Mastercard, in retaliation for their anti-Wikileaks behaviour. Anonymous was also active during the Tunisian and Egyptian revolution and have supported the alter globalisation movement, Occupy movement and protest raids. The list of activities is, as one can expect, very broad, and it is not entirely certain in all cases if they were truly carried out by Anonymous.

This description is not meant to imply that Anonymous is the only successful example of putting on pressure in order to democratise governance and make sure freedom of speech is observed, nor is it our intention to idolise their activities. However, we think that the way Anonymous operates is of great importance as an expression of democratic power. What we wish to illustrate here is the existence and power of anonymous, non-identifiable, highly unarticulated and low-organised movements with the capability of demonstrating

communality and presenting results that question the classical structures of corporate power and politics. Such a form of spontaneous organisation can produce all different kinds of results: from Wikipedia, to flash mobs, cyber war, or swarm intelligence. They lay at the base of what Hardt & Negri (2004) called the 'multitude', with the difference that they do not need to be chartered to exist. In fact, we believe that one of their qualities is to be unchartered and not conceptualised. When such spontaneous organisations are related to a striving for political innovation, we think they can have an explosive impact on rusted conventions around good governance.

5   COMMUNISM

Why we think wiki formats and hacktivism can be interesting tools and strategies of insurgence becomes clearer when we evaluate our understanding of spontaneous organisations in the light of Alain Badiou's idea of communism. A recent, renewed interest in communism can be detected among leftwing intellectuals, as we can conclude from initiatives such as the well-attended conferences on 'The Idea of Communism', organised by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Zizek in London in 2009 and in New York in 2011. However, in the case of Alain Badiou, this renewed interest in communism should not be seen as another manifestation of nostalgia or 'ostalgia'. First of all, Badiou's affiliation to the idea of communism is nothing new but has been ever present throughout his work. Secondly, Badiou does not understand communism as an alternative political system, which could replace neoliberal parliamentary democracy despite the fact that he does make use of the idea of communism to consequently criticise the dominance of this political system and its marriage to capitalism (2010b). Badiou's criticism is inspired first and foremost by the Idea of communism, which has manifested itself in specific historical situations but which cannot be limited to these historical situations (2010a). The idea of communism rather implies a possibility of change, a promise of the overthrow of unjust state structures in favour of the collective emancipation of the masses. This promise of emancipation of the masses has to be understood in a generic sense. Badiou calls for a community without a specific identity but with a clear political goal: to end the suppression of those with no institutional power, those who have no right to exist within dominant state structures.

For Badiou, the communist hypothesis is no nostalgic utopia from the past but a concrete and contemporary striving for practices and thoughts, which will lead to collective emancipation (BADIOU, 2012b). Communism is a collective political organisation that eliminates existing inequalities in the economic, social or intellectual domain. Emancipatory politics makes it possible to think of a 'we' as a multiplicity of fundamentally different human beings who are nevertheless fundamentally equal. Mechanisms of cultural differentiation or class differentiation, which lead to the political and socioeconomic advantage for some and oppression or marginalisation for others, oppose the axiom of what Badiou calls generic equality. Generic equality does not lie in a shared identity or in who we are, but in the fact that despite differences of conviction, identity or behaviour, we find ourselves in the same world.

We cannot start from an analytic agreement on the existence of the world and proceed to normative action with regard to its characteristics. The disagreement is not over qualities but over existence. Confronted with the artificial and murderous division of the world into two – a disjunction named by the very term 'the West' – we must affirm the existence of the single world right from the start, as axiom and principle. The simple phrase, 'there is only one world', is not an objective conclusion. It is performative: we are deciding that this is how it is for us. Faithful to this point, it is then a question of elucidating the consequences that follow from this simple declaration. A first consequence is the recognition that all belong to the same world as myself: the African worker I see in the restaurant kitchen, the Moroccan I see digging a hole in the road, the veiled woman looking after children in a park (BADIOU, 2008B, p. 38–39).

The ability to evoke a 'we' to call upon a generic, egalitarian humanity has been lost after the last episode of historical manifestations of communism, which ended with the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1976 according to Badiou. What is named the 'death of communism', announced by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of communist parties from European parliaments are merely a 'lack of communism' which already existed for a much longer time. This mistake is easily made when communism is associated with a communist party or a communist state: communism as an institutional political organisation. However, the idea of communism seems to revolve around the power of the commons rather than around the construction of a communist state

apparatus or any other concept that would reduce communism to an adjective status (communist regime, communist party, and communist militants).

> The word (communism) no longer covered anything other than representation, the party, the state, the ineluctable usurpation by the One's deadly lock down of what was for a time the glorious upraise of the multiple. The 'Death of communism' signifies that, in the long term, what is dead in presentation – the emblematic 'we' under which, since October, or since 1793, political thought conditioned a philosophy of the community – must also die in representation. Whatever no longer has the force of the pure multiple can no longer preserve the powers of the One. We must rejoice in this: it is the mortality of the structural capacities of usurpation. (BADIOU, 2005, p. 96).

Any true actualisation of the communist hypothesis can only be a collective political organisation, which stays away from incorporation within state structures and hierarchical power plays. Contemporary communism should therefore be a communism without a party in the eyes of Badiou.

6   TRUTH

The fixing of the irreducible multiplicity of those who share the world in one homogeneous state representation is a betrayal of the communist idea. The idea of communism exceeds temporally specific examples of political organisation and implies the 'infinity of the people' (BADIOU, 2010a, p. 10). The idea of communism operates as a political truth within a historical dimension, which can simultaneously be perceived as infinite by the people involved. In the historical sequences of communism that stayed faithful to the communist idea, this dimension of infinity was clearly experienced in day-to-day activities.

> In the context of the idea of communism, subjectivation constituted the link between the local belonging to a political procedure and the huge symbolic domain of humanity's forward march towards its collective emancipation. To give out a flyer in a marketplace was also to mount the stage of history. (BADIOU, 2010A, p. 4)

When Badiou speaks of truths, he never means objective or transcendental truths but always truths that are derived from a singular event, which are set in time and therefore have a historical dimension (BADIOU, 2007A). At the same time, each event that leads to new truths could have happened any time as a disruption to any given situation. No specific signs could have predicted the event to happen, nor could there have been any pre-given historical circumstances that made the event possible in a specific context. This would mean that certain parts of the structure of the situation that are interrupted by the event have made the event possible, but the event necessarily springs from that which is not possible in the existing situation. A consequence of this surprise effect of the event is that each situation can again be interrupted by a new event. The possibility for an event to emerge is therefore infinite. An ultimate truth on which we can found the ultimate organisation of society does not exist. The idea of communism therefore also implies an infinite openness to possible changes of the *status quo*.

> It is always formally possible that the dividing line drawn by the state between the possible and the impossible may once again be shifted however radical its previous shifts – including the one in which we as militants are currently taking part – may have been. That is why one of the contents of the communist idea today – as opposed to the theme of communism as a goal to be attained through the work of a new state – is that the withering away of the state is also an infinite task, since the creation of new political truths will always shift the dividing line between States, hence historical, facts and the eternal consequences of an event. (BADIOU, 2010A, p. 12–13).

7   COMMUNIST HORIZON

Badiou states that we must hold on to the communist hypothesis. We need the horizon of communism (BADIOU, 2008A, p. 115; CF. BADIOU, 2007B, p. 153) in order to be inspired to any kind of emancipatory, collective political agency. Badiou urges us to have an idea, which enables us to anticipate ideologically and intellectually for emancipatory possibilities. However, Badiou does not prescribe exactly how we should navigate towards the communist horizon. Any detailed description in that direction would of course be the prediction of an event, and as we have seen, such predictions are not possible in the theory of Badiou. Nevertheless, Badiou sees an indication of a possible new historical awakening of communism emerge in the uprisings associated with the Arab Spring (BADIOU, 2012A).

Despite the fact that these events lead to the securing of an enduring, central site of protest, such as Tahrir Square, and a generic claim of representation of all people by a highly diverse minority, they are still of a prepolitical nature. These uprisings are still the signs of an 'intervallic period', in which the previous revolutionary idea has exhausted its potential, and a new sequence is yet to come (BADIOU, 2012A, p. 38–39). The events of the Arab Spring have not yet led to the political organisation of a universal emancipatory subject.

Other left-wing intellectuals like Bruno Bosteels and Jodi Dean have adopted Badiou's gaze at the communist horizon (BOSTEELS, 2011; DEAN, 2012). Both also wonder what contemporary practices of communism can be derived from the idea of communism. Bosteels emphasises that communism is no unreal utopia but seems at the same time inclined to describe the idea of communism as an ever-present ideological orientation in more detail, without giving examples of specific practices which are inspired by such an idea of communism. He finds inspiration in the work of Garcia Linera, the vice president of Bolivia and the right hand of Evo Morales, who also speaks of a communist horizon. In order to orient ourselves towards a 'communism not as an ideal to come but as the destruction of the current state of affairs' (BOSTEELS, 2010, p. 66), Bosteels does see it as a necessity to rethink the link between 'the history and theory of the State, and the history and theory of modes of political organisation – with the latter including not only the party but also the legacy of insurrectionary mass action and armed struggle' (BOSTEELS, 2010, p. 64). In that sense, Bosteels seems to have doubts about the insurrectional potential of 'the autonomous action of the masses as the direct effectuation of the communist invariants, albeit this time not *against* so much as *at a distance from* the State' (BOSTEELS, 2010, p. 52).

Dean sees more concrete manifestations of the communist horizon appear in our present time. She pleads for an actuality of revolution, which is firmly based in the force of the common but does not lose itself in a 'playful and momentary aesthetic' and the 'immediate specificity of local project' (Dean 2012:11). This revolution should abolish capitalism and have a global scope. 'The power of the return of communism stands or falls on its capacity to inspire large scale organised collective struggle toward a goal' (Dean 2012: 14). In contrast with Badiou, Dean is convinced that the organisational form of a party is needed in order to destroy capitalism and realise a new sequence of communism. We have grown unaccustomed to think about the possibilities of an actual, effective communist party, but Dean sees the contours of

such a party reflected in the new protest form of occupation as she recognises it particularly in the Occupy Wall Street movement. This movement declares the incompatibility between capitalism and the people (DEAN, 2012, p. 218) and thereby complies with an essential task of a possible communist party. It also signals new ways in which representation could be organised within a party as active and self-authorising without effacing the ongoing antagonisms of class struggle (DEAN, 2012, p. 224). However, a possible future communist party should not be internally dispersed, leaderless and without any hierarchy as Occupy Wall Street is often described. The communist party should take a firm lead in the chaotic process of a proletarian revolution (DEAN, 2012, p. 242). The arrival of this communist party is still not actualised.

8   IN THE NAME OF THE ANONYMOUS COMMONS

In the gaze towards the communist horizon of Badiou, Bosteels and Dean, a longing for an all-encompassing, strictly organised, egalitarian world revolution is present, despite their different perspectives. This focus on a distant horizon of world revolution, yet to come, makes it difficult to fully acknowledge the realisation of the communist idea in practices that already take place in the vicinity. According to said authors, examples such as the Arab Spring uprisings and Occupy Wall Street mention a promising, but not yet actual, communism, which seems to imply that we need to wait for the real communist revolution to arrive. However, we see an effective political power of the commons already expressed in various places. Its capacity to transform neoliberal and capitalist governance should not be underestimated. We think that spontaneous organisations and Internet phenomena like wikis and the 'hacktivities' of Anonymous are tools and strategies of insurgence against an unjust state of affairs, inspired by a generic idea of communism. Spontaneous organisations can lead to the disruption of the state and at the same time take place at a distance from the state. They are organised collectively and inspire people to speak of a common 'we', which is not defined by national borders or ethnic and cultural identities. The anonymity of those who make use of tools like wikis, or take part in hacktivism strategies, enables the emergence of a generic community based on a common recognition of the fact that we are all part of the same world, regardless of any identity markers. These identity markers are often unknown to others who take part in

the collective action, and therefore do not play a role in the formulation of shared objectives. In this sense, we think that the hacktivist is exactly the militant figure, battling for the realisation of the communist idea, which is envisioned by Badiou. For Badiou, a political organisation should depose of the categories in which people are divided by the state.

> It is in the latent state of this deposition that a political organisation is going to develop the consequences of a new existence, the existence of what used not to exist: the existence of the anonymous, the purely popular political existence of the people. (BADIOU, 2012a, p. 93).

We think that the contemporary political power of the commons can be found on the Internet. Of course, the wiki structure is but a tool and not the goal of insurgence itself. It was not Facebook that made the revolution in Egypt successful but the shared conviction of the many using Facebook, that change was needed and the government had to be overthrown. Community-driven Internet fora can be used as a strategic tool, enabling people to find each other in the name of an ideal of the commons or idea of communism. Therefore, various community driven and user-generated practices on the Internet can be seen as practices enabling the idea of communism to be realised in our present time and as a disruption of our present neoliberal and capitalist state of affairs. Internet 2.0 and tools like wiki make it possible to join forces and develop a free flow of knowledge and common goods that don't even consider existing boundaries like property rights (as shown in the case of Pirate Bay). Sites for file sharing blur the distinction between piracy and property in the name of commons, even into the territory of state-dominated political governance. When we look at the wiki potential of an initiative like Wikileaks, it hints at the possible construction of global political governance, which can be directly influenced by anyone, even anonymously. As we have seen in Iceland, there are already initiatives leading in this direction. A new constitution was written in Iceland by a delegation of chosen representatives without a professional political background. The election process was, for a large part, taking place through social media, and the actual writing of the constitution was done on a wiki, open for all citizens to comment (SIDDIQUE, 2011). If a wiki is to put the crowd as its main source, it brings us away from individual heroism and free individual action. It is not about heroes but about the commonality of activities. Politics wiki style has no leader. On the other hand, corporations and especially bureaucratic institutions have used anonymity in

order to conceal responsibility for their activities. Bureaucracy is anonymous by definition as it is about the functions and tasks of the bureaucracy and not about property of a place in the tree. We understand the dangers of anonymity as a prominent tool in political strategy. Nevertheless, we think that politics in the name of the anonymous commons is of a different nature than the anonymity of a bureaucratic state apparatus.

In this sense, Internet activities based on the idea of the commons are an answer to Critchley's motivational deficit. They inspire and gather together people in a temporary but powerful community with political potential. This does not always have to be a virtual community, as was demonstrated for example by the Spanish 15 M movement. In the spring of 2011, people took over the squares of major Spanish cities without extensive previous organisation. People went into the squares because they were outraged (*indignado*) by the distance between the political power of the state and the lives of the people. Unlike Badiou, we think that being indignant can suffice to set a valuable political practice in motion (BADIOU, 2012b, p. 97). Again, this is another example of a spontaneous and rhizomatic movement, which invites everyone to participate and to be motivated to oppose injustice. Here again, the power of critique lies not in a classical party organisation but in the commons, in open movements without defined structure.

We began this paper by stating that the very notion of good governance has entered into a crisis. The practice of institutional politics no longer sufficiently reflects the interests of the common people, nor is it accessible to the common people. On the Internet, but also offline, initiatives emerge to critique the contemporary status quo of institutional politics in the name of the anonymous commons. Such initiatives do not only plead for transparency and open access but bend the protocols of governance out of which they originate to their own preferences – in a rhizomatic way. They hereby present a radically different, decentralised mode of organisation, with new ethical implications. In the vocabulary of Alain Badiou, doing good is to follow in the footsteps of truth. For him, truth is not the representation of a certain status quo but rather the disruption of any existing status quo in the light of new possibilities yet to come. Following in the footsteps of truth therefore means to work on the realisation of those possibilities that could change the world for the better according to one's conviction rather than to preserve or protect achievements that are already set within the framework of a given situation.

Thinking about Wikileaks (and wikis in general) from Badiou's perspective, it is therefore not the truths or information about existing powerplays that makes it potentially revolutionary but rather the possibilities it opens to reconsider the working of political governance in itself. The generic, democratic potential of wikis, (illegal) file sharing sites, hacktivism and other community-driven initiatives on the Internet hint at the possible construction of a global political governance which can be directly influenced by anyone, even anonymously. In that sense, it might be an actual sign of what Badiou calls a contemporary communism without a Party. Therefore, we ask ourselves: is it a pirate ship we see emerging on the communist horizon?

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