Designing hues of transparency and democracy after WikiLeaks: Vigilance to vigilantes and back again

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Abstract
This article offers an interpretive critique of the political affordances created through iterations of the WikiLeaks project. The research shows that delineated phases of the WikiLeaks transparency project often correlate with specific paradigms of digital democracy that were previously enunciated in this journal by Lincoln Dahlberg. The research builds upon and extends Dahlberg's democratic paradigms by comparing new objects against the typology and offering a theoretical explanation towards how political affordances are formed in digital democracy. Specifically, the article relates theories of affordance to an informing/deforming design process to explain how political positions are created in new media apparatus. The article traces iterations of WikiLeaks from 2006 to 2011, as well as derivative projects of radical transparency that existed in 2012 and 2013.

Keywords
Affordance, design, digital democracy, radical transparency, WikiLeaks

Introduction
The research in this article is designed to critically examine for democratic value in the affordances of the online radical transparency apparatus that evolved from WikiLeaks. It asks how specific socio-technological apparatus create transparency and what types of
democracy this transparency affords. Democracy itself is understood through the ‘position’ paradigms of digital democracy introduced by Dahlberg (2011) in a previous issue of this journal. The research here hopes to build on Dahlberg’s fertile trajectory by determining which, if any, design iterations of WikiLeaks can fit within democratic paradigms. Scholarship on WikiLeaks is fashionable across multiple disciplines (Brevini et al., 2013; Roberts, 2012; Žižek, 2011). However, these analyses have not yet considered WikiLeaks as a socio-technological media apparatus that can afford specific political goals, to what extent these goals shifted as the design of WikiLeaks iterated, and to what extent they can relate to paradigms of digital democracy. This article contributes to the current literature by delineating phases of WikiLeaks as distinct media apparatus with distinct affordances, and compares these to Dahlberg’s descriptive schema of liberal, deliberative, counter-public and autonomist-Marxist paradigms of democracy. Delineating WikiLeaks in this manner offers a more accurate picture of WikiLeaks, its affordances and their place in democracy. The article also offers the explanatory lens of apparatus design to compliment Dahlberg’s descriptively useful paradigms of digital democracy. Specifically, it combines the work of Flusser (1999) with Foucault’s understanding of apparatus to argue that the materialised instances of radical transparency can be explained by understanding that only through deforming ideas like ‘democracy’ and ‘transparency’ can these ideas come to inform an empirically mediated world.

The article is structured to first situate its own critical approach to democracy and transparency in relation to Dahlberg’s theory. It then shows how Dahlberg’s conceptualisation of democratic governing is solid inductive theory-building that relates to other disciplines that attempt to understand mediated democracy. However, these descriptive democratic positions can be augmented by an explanatory mechanism. After a brief section to justify research design, the article then details its ‘affordances by design’ thesis, explicating how tying Foucault’s dispositif to Flusser’s philosophy of design is helpful to explain empirical instances of transparency and democracy mediated online. The article then engages with the empirical instances of WikiLeaks’ evolving constitution, affordances and effects. It concludes with an appraisal of digital leaking after WikiLeaks.

Conceptual contexts

The two foremost conceptual assumptions are the relationship between transparency and democracy, and that the design of democracy affects unique outcomes. Discussions that relate design to democracy have recently encountered a populist revival in policy circles (see Thaler and Sunstein, 2008), with behavioural economists suggesting that ‘architects’ can design choice structures to ‘nudge’ specific, yet democratic decisions. Mounting a critical response to those claims includes measuring the openness of the information flows that create and report choice for both citizens and governors. As such, transparency in governing processes and outcomes is viewed as a tenet of democratic accountability (Hood and Heald, 2006). Transparency not only reveals pertinent information to guide choices (Fung et al., 2007), but opens the frameworks that govern to the voice of common citizens (Roberts, 2006: 194). Thus, transparency links to more general claims of democracy. Held (2006: 264) famously considers equitable access to frameworks that generate and limit opportunities in society without negating these rights for others as a
measure of democratic efficacy. This definition can be linked back to the first experiments with democracy (in Mesopotamia before Greece) that were defined through the construct of isonomia, or equality in voice when determining autonomy rights (Otanes in Held, 2006). What Held discusses in terms of equitable rights towards opportunity and limits, Crozier (2008) claims will increasingly become synonymous with information flows. This suggests that equitable information flows are democratically important. Transparency projects seem ideally designed to fulfil these flows.

However, radical mechanisms of transparency are not without controversy. Critiquing the radical WikiLeaks project as a failure of democracy, scholars of transparency (Roberts, 2012) and technology (Lessig, 2009) argue that involuntary transparency mechanisms create negative externalities for current democratic institutions and rot them from within. Even proponents of an irresponsible networked fourth estate see ample evidence against WikiLeaks’ democratic merit (see Benkler, 2011). Although in the immediate term these concerns may be warranted, histories of democracy and media suggest that (the radical idea of) facilitating the right of citizens to publicly judge the quality of governing can become institutionalised (Heemsbergen, 2013; Keane, 1992, 2009).

Specifying what makes transparency radical will clarify how it interacts with democratic practice. Radical transparency is defined in this article in two dimensions. The first explains traits specific to digital media, including abundant networked information access to previously confidential organisational process or outcome data (Sifry, 2011). The decentralised nature of the network often means that there is a global aspect to radical transparency. The second dimension accounts for the position of the transparency apparatus in relation to the object to be made transparent. Transparency projects positioned inside target organisations are voluntary. When positioned outside, projects (racially) evoke what Lord (2006) terms ‘involuntary’ transparency. For example, Transparency International was designed to be radical in position. Its founder, Peter Eigen, worked for the World Bank before deciding his inquiries would be more effective positioned outside of the machine (Holzner and Holzner, 2006: 194–198). Thus, radical transparency apparatus are outside of their target institutions and rely on disruptive new methods to capture or disseminate information. This article questions the specific democratic nature of materialised radical transparency apparatus.

Specifically, the research project is situated in response to Dahlberg’s call for further research on online democracy. The article Re-constructing digital democracy (Dahlberg, 2011) published in this journal seems to be a project of inductive theory-building described as interpretive categorisation of empirical instances of identification and practice regarding specific understandings of (online) democracy. It is evident that the approach taken was built ‘to provide a resource for researching and evaluating’ the possibilities of democracy online with a tentative hypothesis on four ‘positions’ (Dahlberg, 2011: 2). This article engages that framework by providing Dahlberg’s positions with new research on materialised sites of democratic governing. To quickly explain the democratic paradigms that are employed in his research, Dahlberg’s positions are reviewed here. The organising dimensions for all four positions are democratic subject, related understanding of democracy and the democratic affordances that digital media feed back into the former two elements:
The liberal individualist conception’s subject is (appropriately) the liberal individualist; a rational utility maximising individual that knows their own best interest. Democracy is understood as an expression and aggregation of individual wills and competition between representatives for the support of these individuals. Digital media afford opportunities to individuals to have their particular interests (broadcast or narrowcast and) realised through the liberal (institutional) system (Dahlberg, 2011: 4).

Deliberative democracy online implies transforming individuals from their state as described above into democratic subjects interested in the public good. Democracy is understood as a deliberatively constituted consensus that requires reflexivity, reciprocity and inclusiveness – no small feat. Digital media help this project by affording two-way, low-cost, rational debate and public opinion formation (Dahlberg, 2011: 5–6).

For Dahlberg, the counter-public conceptualisation of online democracy includes groups as well as individuals as its subject. It is my contention that the democratic subject here is more usefully described as the act of group formation within society. Thus, in line with Dahlberg, understanding counter-public democracy rests on the assumption that with every group formation comes an inclusion/exclusion mechanism and the subsequent growth of ‘counter publics’ that contest hegemonic meaning. Digital media afford otherwise excluded voices a way to form, link with similar others, and test the discursive boundaries of the mainstream public. Tests can include culture jamming and denial of service attacks on other members of society. It is important to note these activities and effects take place within the public sphere/space/place (Dahlberg, 2011: 7–8).

Finally, the autonomist-Marxist subject of democracy is the self-organising and inclusive networks of participation for common productive activities that bypass state and capitalist systems. Democracy is understood as entering into that (performative?) act by constituting individual and group at once – what Negri and Hardt identify as the Multitude. In this sense, to become the Multitude ‘is to become democracy’ (Negri in Dahlberg, 2011: 9).

Dahlberg’s diverse conception of democratic paradigms is welcomed because it hints at a methodology that is not limited to a singular ‘ideal type’ scholarship. Simply put, democracy is voiced as different things, to different people, at different times (Keane, 2009). Thus, Dahlberg’s research explicitly accepts positions as empirically based, value-laden instances (2011: 2), instead of abstracted or aggregate ideal types. His approach shows interest in accuracy over precision for assessing claims to democracy.

Broader literatures on democratic governing both online and offline reach similar conclusions to Dalhberg’s limited scope. Sullivan (2009) rebuffs the offline neoliberal consensus of ‘new public management’ governance by empirically identifying pluralistic needs and functions within a typology that deconstructs ‘governance’ to paradigms of civic empowerment, stakeholder partnership, political-representative and market efficiency. Scholarship tied to Sullivan’s work (see Torfing et al., 2012) identifies different paradigms on ontological (rational/cultural) and epistemological (consensus/conflict) axes. The diverse democratic positions acknowledge evidence of paradigms of democratic agonism (see Mouffe, 2005) and what cultural fatalists describe as governmentality (see Miller and Rose, 2008), among more typical deliberative and competitive paradigms.

With specific regard to online interactions of democratic governing, Cammaerts’ (2008) study of communication and participation rights enunciates similar pluralistic
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democratic forms to Dahlberg. For Cammaerts, a lens of communication rights shows democracy spanning from consensus to agonism across centralised to decentralised decision-making. Mirroring Dahlberg’s inductive positions, this heuristic deductively situates differing concepts of democracy on how and what people, groups and governments are actually doing in networked contexts. Important to this article is Cammaerts’ contribution of communication rights as political. Democratic communication rights suggest WikiLeaks can be a comparable case to study for Dahlberg’s paradigms of democracy: leaks as communication rights can relate to self-autonomy, deliberation, counter-public formation and even liberal individualism via increasing information flows to reduce asymmetry. These paradigms are interpreted here not as ideal types but, instead, as related instances to the positions to which Dahlberg attributes materialised forms of democracy.

Research design

Evidence towards the positions discussed herein are operationalised via the author’s cited textual correspondence with WikiLeaks founders from 2007 to 2009, and leaked internal email correspondence from 2006. In addition, a corpus of 340 internal emails to the WikiLeaks Volunteer listserv and from the WikiLeaks press office from 2007 to 2009 was analysed to discern moments of discussion around the purpose and structure of WikiLeaks. Finally, as WikiLeaks evolved, the author archived its websites (e.g. wikileaks.org, collateralmurder.com, anonleaks.org) for later interpretative analysis. Open coding of these texts allowed groupings of elements and practices to emerge that showed distinct evolutionary phases of WikiLeaks. Next, available relations within each grouping and the affordances of media design were analysed by the author in terms of democratic ends. These ends were then compared to Dahlberg’s democratic positions.

As stated, my research interest concerns how the ideal ‘disinfecting’ sunlight of transparency becomes deformed to actual empirical sites of democratic utility. To critically address this research question, the scope is constrained to WikiLeaks and its derivative radical transparency projects. On the one hand, the theoretically sampled iterations of WikiLeaks allows an extreme case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) to stretch the limits of Dahlberg’s democratic positions. On the other, WikiLeaks also allows transparency to be used as a least likely case to show that media apparatus inform a political hue on even the most objective of democratic ‘goods’ (transparency). Thus, methodologically, this study of the transparency phenomenon uses a number of cases in what Stake (2000: 437) identifies as a ‘collective case study’ in the hopes of leading to a better understanding. Only the most paradigmatic evidence for these groupings is relayed in the text below due to space constraints, reader familiarity with the leak stories and a purposive sample based on impact. Selecting these cases may limit claims on internal validity, but the main research goal remains understanding how certain affordances can come about, not proving that they must. The approach serves to gain knowledge rather than prove effect.

Any claims of insight filter through the author’s own biases – no claims of deciphering an unmediated reality are made. Rather, in line with Dahlberg’s original inquiry to democratic democracy positions, critical interpretation is used to explore how knowledge is constituted through contextual–relational practices and meanings into convincing
wholes (Glynos and Howarth, 2007). Foucault’s study of apparatus and Flusser’s thesis on design require an epistemological worldview that allows value-laden objects, their makeup and their shared relations to, in conjunction, constitute political subjects. In this way, critical interpretation provides some explanatory power to the creation of Dahlberg’s democratic positions by showing how these meanings are constructed through the elements, relations and designs of media apparatus.

**Affordance, apparatus and design thesis**

Any claims to a contribution to the literature of new media and WikiLeaks are made available via Vilém Flusser. He explains design as a ‘tragic’ process that informs *hyle* (matter, ‘stuff’, the medium of production), as it deforms the idea or *morphe* (form), by distorting form into a medium (Flusser, 1999: 24). An example of Flusser’s argument is seen in the act of designing a plastic table. Informing the plastic (tragically) deforms the ideal table to a flimsy and inexpensive approximation or model. To continue our example, what does a flimsy plastic table afford? How would this differ from a model of ‘table’ made in mahogany? Or glass? They are all designs of the form of table, deformed in configuration and medium, to produce certain affordances. I leverage Flusser’s design philosophy to argue that, online democracy and, specific to this case, online transparency, will also be deformed from the ideal in their materialised designs.

However, in the digital age, if the medium can be the message, ‘formal’ oriented design should be without the constraints of actual material to ‘stuff’ in to fill a form. According to Flusser, information communication technologies can move ‘past formalising a world taken for granted’ and realise ‘forms designed to produce alternative worlds’ (Flusser, 1999: 28). New media should be able to design any type of affordance and create new formal relationships in a democratically open ecology of creation. Yet, we do not live in such utopia. What information communication technologies can create are abundant and diverse design iterations in rapid and parallel time spans. Analysing the differences between these iterations becomes possible when the wider socio-technological relations that make up technological affordances are included in the critique.

Affordance for Dahlberg is ‘the specific ways in which digital media is [sic] seen to be supporting the development of’ the democratic subject assumed and the related understanding of democracy. Dahlberg cites the work of Gibson and Norman who, in sum, refer to a relational complimentarity of both humans and their technological environment (in Dahlberg, 2011: 2–3). Seemingly implicit in this value-rich view is the social ecology that technologies and humans share: objects are shaped or deliberately designed to have both spatial and social place (Costall, 1995). However, production of affordance remains relational. It requires – in conjunction – the socio-relational designed aspects of these objects to interact and, constrained through their interdependence, create specific effects. Thus this article focuses on the ‘constraining conjunction’ of producing new online media. In this sense, new media denote the constitution and result of interplay between mediums, social processes and (digital) technologies that decentralise and disrupt established communication flows. WikiLeaks and its derivatives seem to fit this definition while opening a diverse case for studying democratic affordances.
Definitions of media that imply a relational apparatus through capacity and constraint are not new (see Baudry, 1986 [1975]). This general idea is explained as ‘technopoiesis’ in cultural studies of media (Hand and Sandywell, 2002) and ‘soft cultural determinism’ in positivist political science (Howard, 2006). The classic critique of apparatus with capacity and constraint is found in Foucault’s interpretation of dispositif: heterogenous elements that in conjunction relate to each other in certain ways as a response to an ‘urgent need’ of both function and form (Foucault, 1980: 195). Function with form speaks to design. As such, media is explained here as a socio-technological apparatus that follows in the tradition of Foucault’s use of the term dispositif. Providing a substantial critique of dispositif remains outside the scope of this article. Nonetheless, matching the logic of dispositif with the work of Vilém Flusser allows for a unique explanation of affordances with regard to mediated transparency and its incarnations in digital democracy: media apparatus (de)form this ‘ideal’ into specific hues of transparency.

To better acknowledge design and affordance in media apparatus, I will quickly detail the three aspects Foucault identified in dispositif. First is ‘a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble,’ which in this study includes people, their globalised social space and time, the technology itself and the discourse of democracy (or subject assumed in the language of Dahlberg). Second ‘is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist’ or the available relationships between those ensembled elements. In Costall’s language, Foucault seems to mark intra-apparatus affordances that may help define the whole. Third, apparatus are a ‘formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment’ a response to an ‘urgent need’ (Foucault, 1980). I read the phrasing of ‘formation’ with ‘function’ in the presence of a need to mean design. Thus, the first two elements of the apparatus speak to the re-conceptionalisation of digital democracy per Dahlberg’s empirical observations of heterogeneous elements and the available relationships between them. Yet it is in conjunction with the third trait from Foucault’s apparatus, the trait of design, that a sufficient theoretical premise for productive affordances in new media is created.

By incorporating Flusser’s informing design philosophy to Foucault’s description of apparatus, the method described here specifies how Foucault’s three elements of the apparatus are involved in new media affordance. Specifically, a media apparatus informs its concept of democracy by deforming the ideal of democracy itself through its own internal constraints. It is this deformation that constitutes certain affordances over others. Thus, a precursory theoretical contribution of this article’s attempt to evaluate WikiLeaks against Dahlberg’s ‘positions’ of online democracy is a theoretical explanation of how each of the democratic positions is constituted. WikiLeaks’ configurations provide examples that fit Dahlberg’s inductive data on online democracy positions, while the concept of dispositif gives a deductive explanation for their affordances. The article will now examine the diverse phases of WikiLeaks and the affordances therein.

A new apparatus for transparency

Julian Assange’s writings on how to disrupt undemocratic network flows in the accelerating velocities of a networked society gave the idea of WikiLeaks’ basic form in 2006. In a communication to solicit support from Daniel Ellsberg, WikiLeaks stated that:
Table 1. Digital democracy positions and WikiLeaks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Position' paradigm</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>_Leak design</th>
<th>Affordances include</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal–consumer</td>
<td>Self-sufficient, rational-strategic individual</td>
<td>Competitive-aggregative</td>
<td>PR-activist, editorial, contractual</td>
<td>Aggregating, calculating, choosing, competing, expressing, fundraising, informing, voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>Inter-subjectively rational individual</td>
<td>Deliberative-consensual</td>
<td>Wiki-based</td>
<td>Deliberating, arguing, meeting, opinion forming, publicising, reflecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-publics</td>
<td>Discursive–antagonistic group formation</td>
<td>Contestational</td>
<td>Par:AnoIa</td>
<td>Articulating, associating, contesting, grouping, identifying, organising, protesting, resisting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous–Marxist</td>
<td>Multitude of singularities</td>
<td>Commons networking</td>
<td>Anonleaks</td>
<td>Collaborating, cooperating, distributing, exchanging, giving, networking, participating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Dahlberg (2011: 11).

Fomenting a worldwide movement of mass leaking is the most cost effective political intervention available to us*. We believe that injustice is answered by good governance and for there to be good governance there must be open governance. (Email to Ellsberg in Cryptome, 2006)

The asterisk on 'us' foreshadowed the evolution of the WikiLeaks apparatus. Sifry (2011: 171) suggests three models: a wiki-fed conduit for raw information, tight editorial control and production, and a third where deals are negotiated with major media. However, my analysis suggests a finer categorisation provides more useful analysis of apparatus design. WikiLeaks is delineated here as: (a) a wiki-based anonymous drop box; (b) press-release soliciting advocacy network; (c) distributor of editorialised content; (d) mainstream print media partner. This is not to mention the flourishing recombinants of leaking-transparency websites that exist ‘post WikiLeaks’ (more than five). Each of these phases will now be analysed through Dahlberg’s reconstruction of democratic concept positions. As a reminder, Dahlberg categorises: democratic subject assumed, role in and of democracy and the affordances produced that feed back into the former two traits. The discussion below presents evidence that the researched WikiLeaks phases informed liberal individualist, deliberative, autonomist-Marxist and counter-public mechanisms of transparency. For a summary see Table 1.

Designing (Wiki)Leaks

The launch of WikiLeaks leads us to examine two distinct democratic positions afforded through the design of the apparatus. In preparation for its launch, the then anonymous WikiLeaks.org website was building a wiki-centric form of leaking that delineated specific roles and responsibilities to the public. From 2007 to 2008 the front page of
Wikileaks.org spoke of four human elements in the apparatus as truth tellers (leakers), editors (to help with analysis), volunteers (for donations and site upkeep) and visitors (journalists looking for ‘resources’). Each had distinct portals with specific technological affordances: truth tellers could submit anonymously but would not interact directly with staff; they remained anonymous and removed from their whistleblowing. Editors had rights to view and then summarise leaked documents on the wiki; their portal contained guides on writing and researching to use truth over spin to ‘achieve maximum political impact’ (WikiLeaks, 2007a). The editorial wiki features, according to Assange, were meant to appear to the user ‘very much like wikipedia. Anybody can post to it, anybody can edit it.’ (Email to Wired in Cryptome, 2007).

The seeming affordance of this configuration was to promote rational and public debate to channel or change public opinion from the revelation of each leak. This model was to answer a need for good governance by the wiki-logged sharing of the truth. Building from Habermas among others, Tapscott and Williams (2006) provides a popular explanation of what wikis create as subjects. Tapscott and Williams claims wikis transform individual interest via communicative action into a group of subjects interested in finding the common good – a demos performing a role that in so doing discovers the public good. This wiki model correlates to Dahlberg’s instances of the deliberative ‘position’ of online democracy that require reflexivity, reciprocity and inclusiveness to create consensus (Dahlberg, 2011: 5–6). Democracy’s subject becomes the productive deliberation where the constraints of logged comments and horizontal and open editing afford (the heterogeneous public elements to produce) a rational debate and discover public opinion. Deforming the pure transparency to an open media leak platform would afford new voices a more equal chance to be vigilant and discern if not determine the frameworks that govern.

However, these design goals were superseded by autonomist design elements that actively excluded traditional governors and challenged traditional forms of power through exponential leak volumes. These designed-in affordances circumvented legitimate methods of dissent and produced autonomist forms of democratic power. For example, the organisations targeted in the leaks were not given a forum to participate in the discussion and mainstream media was also shut out. Designing in the exclusion of powerful media actors to deliberative consensus had the effect of usurping established flows of resistance or dissent (Giri, 2010). Further, the exponential volume of leaks transformed a process of dissent from a ‘legitimate’ safety valve into a more radical attempt to dismiss power and transform its very function. Žižek (2011) understood this point when writing that it was WikiLeaks exposing the ‘necessary lie’ in public that held power. WikiLeaked lies provided ideological falsifiability. The design of WikiLeaks actively excluded traditional institutions of power. In this sense, WikiLeaks afforded the negation of legitimate power structures. According to Dahlberg’s paradigms, transparency created by WikiLeaks deformed towards an autonomist (Marxist) position of democracy. WikiLeaks’s radical musings about creating its own intelligence agency to ‘subsidise investigative journalism’ (WikiLeaks, 2008) offer further evidence of that path.

The paradox of the wiki-based leaking apparatus being ostensibly created to improve democracy, yet deforming transparency to two seemingly irreducible democratic
positions, shows evidence towards the thesis on affordance and media apparatus. Information communication technologies were able to rapidly create abundant and diverse design iterations in parallel. There were two sets of needs being answered and two different understandings of the subject of democracy being mediated. In the deliberative categorisation, the wiki-centric apparatus seems to fulfil a need of equal voice in discerning the frameworks that govern (isonomia). The apparatus was designed to do so through anonymity to assure equality before the law and equality in political debate via deliberative communications rights. However, the autonomist affordances were based off of a democratic subject that denied voice in the same instance it denied the legitimacy of the traditional democratic system. The urgent need to be answered through form and function in the autonomist understanding is framed as autonomy to create isonomia, rather than that of isonomia to create autonomy.

The different expectations and affordances put on transparency in the first phase of WikiLeaks, and the easily recombinant nature of Information Communications Technologies (ICT) design, did not lead to a stable apparatus. In September 2007 a message to the WikiLeaks volunteer list read, ‘We have (experimentally) opened up Wikileaks for editing by journalists and volunteers…Be good people’ (WikiLeaks, 2007b). However, the most significant leak of that time was not engaged openly in this manner. The leak of the so called Kroll Report released in late August 2007, which detailed the looting of Kenya by its own government, and the related leak on Charter House bank released in September 2007, took place outside of open analysis. As WikiLeaks was experimenting with an apparatus that crowdsourced political autonomy, other leaks and analysis modes iterated in parallel through a closed apparatus of core WikiLeaks technology and members.

**Designing (public diplomacy)Leaks**

The next iteration of WikiLeaks can be understood as traditional public diplomacy via private means. Actively recruiting ‘historians, journalists, government policy academics and academic journals’ (WikiLeaks, 2007c) to be part of specific content analysis teams showed a divergent design from a leaking apparatus that passively relies on inclusivity and open-sourced intelligence. The active promotion of specific medium, audience, analysis and dissemination effects mimicked the design of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy goals are defined by practitioners as communicating with foreign publics to establish dialogue designed to inform and influence (Copeland, 2009). Quantitative evidence of this shift was seen via the press releases that WikiLeaks issued. Throughout 2007, one communication containing a ‘WikiLeaks Press Release’ was issued in official communications. The year 2008 saw 63 such occurrences. A new design, and deformation of transparency, was evolving.

This semi-closed leaking model also seemed to offer a qualitative return on investment towards ‘maximum political impact’ compared to the wiki-to-deliberative-truth model. The Kenyan leaks from 2007 to 2009 demonstrate an example of the ‘public-relations’ paradigm at work. In this phase, human-rights activists conducted analysis in Kenya while WikiLeaks staff liaising with these elements hosted documents online including a Kenya National Commission on Human Rights rights report titled The Cry
of Blood. These documents, combined with the fieldwork and coordinated local agitation, created continuing local and global media interest in government embezzlement (Rice, 2007) and the tangentially related institutionalised extrajudicial police killings (Dolan, 2011). Another empirical example of this pattern is the Icelandic bank corruption news stories, but this is outside the scope of this article (see ‘Ice Save’ reporting from the Morgunbladid newspaper 2009 to 2011).

In this phase of the WikiLeaks transparency apparatus, the paradigm of participatory democracy is overshadowed by a democratic need for information discovery and issue representation. The digital media afforded opportunities for individuals to have their representative interests heard and realised through the liberal–democratic institutional system. Further, the target of communication was rational individuals interested in learning of government transgressions to their wealth and safety. The apparatus of WikiLeaks-come-public-diplomacy was designed to afford representation of those needs. Isonomia here is provided in the most basic sense, not constitutive of government, but by the apparatus design fulfilling watchdog and representation roles.

Designing (editorial)Leaks

The Collateral Murder video produced by WikiLeaks shows cockpit gunsight footage from a 2007 Baghdad airstrike in an editorialised form. It was the product of an apparatus that answered a distinct democratic need in distinct function and form. The apparatus itself evolved as well. First, the Icelandic journalists who provided visual analysis of the raw video data through annotating and editing, and the video medium itself, were new value-rich elements in the WikiLeaks apparatus. While both new and old elements were ‘holed up’ in a Reykjavik hotel (Domscheit-Berg et al., 2011) specific relationships were available between them that could create specific answers of design. The external website collateralmurder.com that accompanied the video was itself a change of form and function from both previous projects of Wikileaks.org and the press releases pushed to mainstream news. Whatever the motivations for producing collateralmurder.com (anti-war, anti-American, for radical truth, etc.), it was the change in design that made for a compelling media experience. The video itself was the major new draw, providing a different form of media from the wiki and public relations blasts that WikiLeaks previously employed. There was no space for discussion or entering new information on the site, however donation mechanisms were prominently displayed. Metrics measuring response to collateralmurder.com show a 1900% increase of search traffic for WikiLeaks in the week after the video’s release (Google, 2011b).

The affordances produced were different from previous phases of WikiLeaks. The affordances of this specific editorialisation seem to eschew placement within Dahlberg’s deliberative position – as there was no public space for deliberation. Further, a counter-public was not encouraged as there were no group-building mechanisms. Finally, the site did not reflect autonomist-Marxist arguments as the editorial subject was excess state power, rather than autonomy from it. The site afforded the increased competition between expressions of particular interests. Thus, collateralmurder.com surprisingly shows some evidence toward a liberal individualist paradigm. Its call for funding WikiLeaks’ point of view provides another point of data to suggest a liberal paradigm. However, while the
site may have offered ‘a means for the effective transmission of information and viewpoints between individuals,’ its extra-national nature was not designed to correspond to the ‘representative decision-making processes’ that Dahlberg understands is necessary in the liberal-individualist space. There were no ‘email your congressman’ buttons designed into the interface. Collateralmurder.com may be best understood as highlighting the crisis of systemic disassociation that Castells (2009: 297) identifies between communication power and representative power in democracy. The transparency apparatus in this sense fulfilled a form and function that answered the needs of a vigilante: propositions paying for editorialised information were made before any affordances to equality and openness in the determining frameworks that govern.

**Designing (contractual)Leaks**

The WikiLeaks apparatus iterated again to form tenuous contractual obligations with mainstream media that foretold a fracturing of the WikiLeaks project. The content disseminated through this new apparatus includes the Afghan and Iraqi War Logs and the US State Department cables. Focusing on the apparatus itself, the relations available between new value-rich objects including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Der Spiegel*, are well documented by the media outlets involved (Leigh et al., 2011, Star, 2011), dissenters (Domscheit-Berg et al., 2011) and, with a rebuttal, Assange himself (Assange, 2011). The activity of bringing substantial and continuing leaks directly to mainstream press audiences created substantial and continuing tension to the available relationships within the apparatus. Fully timing releases to news production cycles, facilitating transfer of substantial editorial control, and ‘harm minimisation procedures’ were all new activities for the elements of WikiLeaks to perform. Interest in WikiLeaks, as measured by Google (2011a), increased by an additional 2000% from the April collateral murder high. Further, *The New York Times* relied on WikiLeaks documents for stories in their print edition every other day for the first half of 2011 (Dicknson, 2011). However, the effect of increased disclosures was mixed. The result of the competitive scramble to distribute the leaks in mainstream media was interpreted in differing ways across varying markets. Local contextualisations seemed to have a more ‘democratic’ impact in places like Tunisia and, to some extent, Yemen, than the tabloid treatment that the materials were given in UK and US media. However, ‘Cablegate’ revelations remained as a motive force for democratic action via concerted ‘glocal’ efforts with smaller print and online media through 2011 (Keating, 2011), even if rarely covered in the major media. Liberal democracy and for-profit journalism defined this phase of the WikiLeaks transparency apparatus.

More apparent were the affordances that contributed to fracturing the WikiLeaks team and idea. The instability of WikiLeaks’ apparatus of contractual leaking may be explained through Assange’s ‘element’ being effectively sidelined by the re-leaking of documents from news companies that Assange trusted to others. The final accidental ‘leak’ by *The Guardian* reporters of the password that protected the full and un-redacted cable database did not help the cohesion of the apparatus. Regardless, democratic affordances shifted as mainstream press outlets published rich headline fodder at their own pace, leaving little room for deliberation on their online commenting forums while crafting
stories for their specific audiences. Thus it is not a surprise that larger news organisations tended to fall under the liberal–consumer ‘position’ that created competitive democracy tropes for rational-strategic individuals.

However, as the raw data became public, new mechanisms outside WikiLeaks and the mainstream media materialised from the eagerly waiting crowd. Sites like Crowdleaks.org offered an interface that allowed the public to share their analysis of major WikiLeaks' releases. Cablegatesearch.net ensured that editorial decisions by WikiLeaks’ mainstream media partners were catalogued to ensure disclosure. Cablesearch.org provided transparency of WikiLeaks’ own publishing decisions by highlighting any published cables that are temporarily removed or republished with further redactions. The plentitude of media apparatus that developed after WikiLeaks publishing iterations fractured speak to the many available designs of transparency apparatus. Further, they show that content and technology alone do not determine the design and expected subject, understanding of democracy or resultant affordances.

A public count of online leaking websites gave a high of 67 independent whistle blowing/leak websites functioning online in April 2012. Twenty-six of these mimic WikiLeaks, 14 attempt to refine the concept, six are directly tied to mainstream press (e.g. Al-Jazeera and The Wall Street Journal), five specialise in financial whistle blowing, and 16 allow whistleblowers to directly contact criminal investigators and intelligence agencies (see Leakdirectory.org, 2012). Systematic study of these diverse groups and their constituting elements, while pertinent to Dahlberg’s positions of online democracy, remains largely outside the scope of the current article. However, one significant apparatus of elements and relations that explicitly relates the limits of Dahlberg’s theory is Anonleaks.org.

**Designing (other peoples)Leaks**

No longer found online, AnonLeak.org was a project by the loosely affiliated group of hackers, Anonymous, which have complex ties to WikiLeaks. One of the basic design choices of all WikiLeaks’ technologies and social relationships was the passive nature of receiving leaks. Even if WikiLeaks’ position outside the organisations they were targeting made for ‘involuntary’ transparency, WikiLeaks did not actively acquire documents from sources that did not wish them published. Radically different was Anonleaks.org. This brief online project attacked, stole and then freely disseminated information from HB Gary Inc. and HB Gary Federal, two information security firms based in Washington DC. Anonleaks’ multitude unearthed emails that suggested that aggressive and plausibly illegal methods to dissuade and damage WikiLeaks, liberal journalists and domestic political rivals were being solicited to firms with ties to the machinations of US government power (Anderson et al., 2011). The repercussions of this attack affected both the targets and the aggressors. Along with the arrest of some Anonymous hackers, the US Congress started two investigations on possible fraud by the exposed firms. One firm opted to close its business as its reputation for security was already destroyed (Anderson, 2011). Interpreting the message left by AnonLeaks on the firm’s defaced website, it seems that the goal of the hack and leak was less focused on wide distribution and public engagement, than it was with destroying specific targets that had ‘angered the hive’ (AnonLeaks, 2011). The elements, available relationships and form and function of
AnonLeaks’ apparatus afforded results for a distinctly different ‘need’ than had been seen before through WikiLeaks.org. AnonLeaks’ ‘democratic’ multitude performed an autonomist creation of positive power that disassembled a conspiratorial firm without public debate. Their technological affordances sidestepped institutional power and created new autonomies through digital means of forced transparency. This apparatus of transparency ‘attack’ relied on new elements and relationships than were previously available between WikiLeaks and its whistleblowers. Clear links to Dahlberg’s autonomist-Marxist conception of democracy is present, but the affordances of AnonLeaks actions did not so much ‘bypass state and capitalist systems’ as dismember them.

The new affordances of AnonLeaks were not lost on its members. Their design constrained and disciplined an ephemeral gathering of hackers to create a mechanism of transparency that was, in their words, a:

‘remarkable advance of WikiLeaks….instead of the many iterations of Wikileaks [sic] now appearing to receive and publish documents….more of the Anonymous-type hacks simply steal and torrent the family jewels of the spies, officials, lobbyists and corporations believing they own the territory in order to show the extent of their secret predations on the public.’

(Anonymous, 2011)

This call to action and self-organisation sidesteps legitimacy and the productive aspects of the state and current power structures. Whether these radical affordances create isonomia is unclear: equality is only affirmed through the cynical assumption that all parts of the media ecology reside outside of institutionalised codes of law. Specifically, although AnonLeaks might be equalising rights (and obligations) in the specification of the ‘framework which generates and limits opportunities’ (Held, 2006: 264) they do not seem to be refraining from deploying new frameworks that negate the rights of others. By breaking into a corporation to steal ‘leaks’ that included content with damaging personal correspondences unrelated to HB Gary’s businesses (Anderson et al., 2011), AnonLeaks’ normative democratic claims weaken. The urgent need answered by AnonLeaks was not equality or even the noblesse oblige of a vigilante. Instead, AnonLeaks.org afforded an anarchic destruction of other democratic subjects through bypassing the secrecy and privacy of its adversaries. Against any of Dahlberg’s positions, the democratic subject is devised by power alone. The strategic relation that AnonLeaks attempted to create may more closely resemble a democracy ‘position’ described through conflict and decentralised consensus-making (Cammaerts, 2008) or a radical admission and response to a paradigm of governmentality.

At the time of writing this article, the newest iteration of Anonymous’ online transparency apparatus hints of a slight shift of design back toward wiki-centric public vigilance. ‘Par:AnoIA’ (a rough abbreviation for Potentially Alarming Research: Anonymous Intelligence Agency, and available at par-anoia.net) is a website that takes submissions from the Anonymous community (i.e. attack-based transparency) yet aims to act much like the original Wikileaks.org. The apparatus vows to promote widespread use and discussion to arrive at new understandings of the data (various anons in Norton, 2012). In this sense the relations available encourage an interest to re-engage with larger publics. Notwithstanding the plausible methods of capture, Par:AnoIA speaks to a possible nudge
back to radical vigilance and democratic counter publics. Antagonistic group formation to articulate voice and resist power speaks to a contestationary understanding of democracy that creates discursive–antagonistic groups.

Conclusions

In broad terms, this article has provided an interpretive critique that explains how iterations of WikiLeaks informed specific ‘positions’ of democracy via a thesis of apparatus design. It illuminated WikiLeaks as a socio-technological media apparatus that afforded specific political goals that shifted as the design of WikiLeaks iterated. This critique provides an accurate discussion on how WikiLeaks’ materialised effects, at times, correlated with paradigms of online democracy enunciated by Dahlberg (2011). A secondary contribution to scholarship came via Flusser’s understanding of design, which suggests that the materialised instances of radical transparency can be explained by acknowledging that only though deforming ideas like ‘democracy’ and ‘transparency’ can these ideas inform the empirical world. Together these discussions inform a new understanding of how digital democracy is created online, and how radical media apparatus can be measured for democratic imperatives.

I hope this discussion of radical transparency will open future research that can seek to clarify the democratic effects of transparency and leaking, solidify the utility of Dahlberg’s positions of digital democracy in other cases, and comment on the utility of thinking about affordances through the deforming design of media apparatus. To do so will illuminate a diversity of democratic affordances that are often overlooked in essentialist understandings of democracy, media and transparency. This type of research will allow students to consider how the disruptive nature of democracy – this idea of decentralising power – will continue to take new mediated forms. Future research could thus include the global aspect of digital transparency and its role in non-democratic network societies. How specific socio-technological apparatus create transparency, and what types of democracy this transparency affords, will remain a crucial question of democracy. Students of both political science and philosophy of technology must remember that while leaking itself is not a new technology of democracy, each media apparatus that ‘leaks’ should be understood of as unique. Each is made of complex elements and relations in a situated time and space. Being aware of how these design traits can create specific affordances will enable clearer understanding of both the democratic need for the function of radical transparency and the limits of its democratic form.

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