POSTDIGITAL POLITICS:
or, How To Be An Anti-Bourgeois Theorist

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PART 1: ON THE COMMONS AND THE CRISIS OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

What Does Postdigital Mean and Why Is It Important?

I want to begin with a proposition. A lot of work in the arts, humanities and social sciences of late has been taken up with the commons. It's a fascination that is only likely to increase following the coronavirus pandemic that began in late 2019, early 2020. Attention will understandably be paid over the next few years to the manner in which communities all over the world spontaneously self-organised to fill the gaps in care left by the state and market.[1] They did so by collectively providing those in need with critical resources: everything from information and accommodation, through medical supplies (masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, goggles, gowns), to financial aid packages, emergency childcare, free meals for children, even companionship during periods of lockdown and quarantine, be it by telephone or video call.[2]

As we know from the Creating Commons project of Cornelia Sollfrank, Shuhsa Niederberger and Felix Stalder, the commons, put very simply, can be understood as non-proprietary shared spaces and resources – both material and immaterial – along with the collective social processes that are necessary for commoners to produce, manage and maintain them and themselves as a community.[3] My proposition, then, is this: if we want to help transform society by actually creating such commons, we need to work, act and think very differently from the ways in which most of us do now. And I include in this 'us' many of those who are well known in the fields of art and culture for writing about community, collectivity and the commons. I'm thinking here not just of authors who address the issue from within the liberal tradition of Garrett Hardin, Elinor Ostrom and Yochai Benkler. I also have in mind radical theorists and philosophers such as Isabelle Stengers, Judith Butler, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.[4]

How can we do this? How can we act differently with a view to transforming society through the creation of more commons-oriented ways of being and doing? It's this question that I'm going to endeavour to answer in what follows, as it's one that together with a number of collaborators I have been engaged with for some time.

Like the last group of writers on the commons I mentioned, a lot of those I work with, as well as being media artists, activists or practitioners, identify as being

radical theorists. However, we're theorists who are also exploring ways of reimagining theory and what it means to be a theorist. We're doing so by challenging some of the taken-for-granted categories and frameworks concerning what critical theory is considered to be, especially the highly individualistic, liberal-humanist model that's performed by most theorists and philosophers today, regardless of whether they're Marxists, post-Marxists, feminists, new materialists, posthumanists or accelerationists.[5] Instead, we're endeavouring to work, act and think in terms of the commons by experimenting with the invention of what can be called – rather teasingly, I'll admit – 'anti-bourgeois theory'.[6] This is theory that, in its 'habits of being', to borrow a phrase from bell hooks, is:[7]

1) **more consistent with the kind of progressive politics many of us in the arts, humanities and social sciences espouse.**

It is important to be aware that neoliberalism is not directly opposed to liberalism. Rather neoliberalism is a version of it, as its name suggests, the wider historical tradition of liberalism having provided the discursive framework of modern capitalism. The singularized neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is not necessarily always struggling *against* the liberal-humanist rights and values that the vast majority of theorists continue to adhere to in practice, then. Consequently, while most critical theorists position themselves as being politically on the left – some even writing books and articles about the importance of equality, solidarity and the radical redistribution of wealth and power – many end up operating as

rampantly competitive, proprietorial individuals nonetheless. Driven by a goal-fixated instrumentalism, what's important to them are the number of books published, grants captured, keynote lectures given, followers acquired, or likes and retweets gained. (Elsewhere I've associated this behaviour with being a 'micro-entrepreneur of the self'.[8])

2) **in tune with the changing political zeitgeist, especially the shift from representative to direct forms of democracy.**

In the U.K. this shift can be traced at least as far back as the *horizontal* groundswell against the 'old politics' of the liberal and neoliberal establishments that was such a prominent feature of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. More recently, it's been apparent in the decentralised manner in which the Extinction Rebellion movement operates: the refusal of top-down hierarchal organisation in favour of bottom-up 'affinity groups'. It's not just a progressive phenomenon (in a leftist sense), though. The move to more direct, participatory forms of democracy is apparent in the rapid rise to a position of political influence of the U.K. Brexit party (now rebranded as Reform U.K.) under the leadership of Nigel Farage immediately prior to the 2019 general election. In large part this rise was achieved through the adoption of the digitally savvy electoral strategy of the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy, which entered government in 2018, having become the largest individual party in the Italian Parliament. It used data gathered from the online activity of members to help

shape M5S's direction and policy.[9] So successful was the Brexit party's adaptation of this electoral strategy that in the run up to the election the ostensibly more mainstream, one-nation Conservative politician Boris Johnson found himself forced to take up many of its more radical right-wing ideas and forms of rhetoric (albeit on occasion in detoxified form). And this in spite of the fact Farage himself has never won election to Parliament in the seven attempts he's made over a span of two and a half decades.

3) **a more appropriate mode of engagement for today's *postdigital* world** than are printed and closed-access books and journal articles**.**

We arguably find ourselves in the midst of a fourth great transformation in communications technology. Crudely put, if the first transformation involved the development of speech and language, the second writing, and the third print, the fourth entails the change from analogue to digital that is associated with the emergence of Facebook, Google and Twitter (not to forget Weibo, Baidu and WeChat in China). In fact, it can be said that we are already living in a postdigital era, if we take this term to name 'a technical condition that… is constituted by the naturalization of pervasive and connected computing processes… in everyday life', to the extent that 'digitality is now inextractable from the way we live while its form, functions and effects are no longer necessarily perceptible.'[10] Historically, such transformations have often been followed by social and political upheaval and unrest, even war. The development of printing was at the heart of the

Protestant Reformation in sixteenth century Europe, for example, resulting in the breaking of the religious monopoly of the Catholic Church. A key figure was Martin Luther with his Ninety-five Theses. However, although many book historians regard print as having subsequently led to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the development of modern science and democracy, we need to remember that print has its dark side, too. Given the anti-Semitic attack at a synagogue in the East German town of Halle in October 2019, it's worth recalling that shortly before his death in 1546 Luther published a pamphlet called 'Warning Against the Jews'. Nor was this a one-off. 'We are at fault for not slaying them', Luther proclaimed in an earlier 65,000-word treatise titled 'On the Jews and Their Lies'. The latter text was exhibited publicly in the 1930s during the Nuremberg Rallies. (So it's not that the disruption brought about by print is good, while that inflicted by digital media is bad.)

We're all probably going to be long gone before anyone knows if we're currently living through a period of change as profound as the Reformation – although some have heralded the Sars-CoV-2 outbreak, to give the virus its proper name, as a sign that we are. This is because of the high degree of interconnectivity of global capitalism in terms of travel, trade, tourism, migration, the labour market and supply chains, all of which depend on postdigital information processing. Together with the associated destruction of biodiversity accelerated by the climate emergency and human population growth, such interconnectivity is held as having created the conditions for new, infectious, zoonotic diseases such as

Sars, bird-flu and Covid-19 to cross over from wildlife to humans as a result of their greater proximity to one another. Nevertheless, it's important to make an effort to come to terms with the shift from analog to postdigital, not least for political reasons, as the above examples drawn from German history suggest. Of course it's questionable to what extent the traditional political division between left and right is still applicable. (The origins of this divide can be traced as far back as 1789 and the revolutionary assembly in Paris, where the antiroyalists were physically located on the left side of the chamber.) The situation is complicated today by the fact this division has been overlaid, at the very least, by that between populist nativism and elitist cosmopolitanism. Both the U.K. Conservative party under David Cameron, and the Labour party under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Miliband were socially liberal, for example. Cameron has said that the passing of the law enabling same-sex marriage in 2013 by the Conservative-led coalition government was one of his most significant achievements in office. The main difference between the two parties was that the Conservatives were even more economically neoliberal than New Labour. This is why the rejection of significant elements of both in the 2016 European Union referendum as primarily representing the interests of the metropolitan liberal establishment came as such a shock to many commentators. It revealed that the electorate was no longer voting largely out of loyalty to either party on the basis of their class position, with the working-class, and large parts of the Midlands and north, traditionally selecting Labour. People were voting on the basis of whether they were nativist or cosmopolitan too. Actually, what the

2019 general election made clear is that if you're poor, working class, older and less educated in England you're increasingly likely to vote Conservative.

It's going to be interesting to see what changes there are to the public mood post-coronavirus. Will the populist backlash against the liberal establishment continue, fuelled by the economic fallout from the pandemic: mass unemployment, large-scale public debt, and austerity in all but name? Or will a loss of trust in figures such as Boris Johnson and his cabinet of all the Brexiteer talents see it being replaced by a newfound respect for scientists and journalists, and for institutions such as the NHS and BBC? Johnson's charismatic performance – the blundering, the laziness, the flippant frivolity, the obvious lack of preparedness right down to the crumpled suit and unkempt hair – may be effective in setting him apart from the business-as-usual politicians of the EU. Yet a certain level of Kier Starmer-like – or indeed Joe Biden-like – sober seriousness and attention to issues of professional competence (rather than the big transformative questions facing society in Starmer's case) begins to look rather appealing when there's a national emergency and its fall-out to deal with. Then, again, it was the desire for something different to the professional political class and their adoption of a centrist third way between left and right in order to champion a *modernizing* neoliberal consensus that led many people to vote for Johnson – and Donald Trump – in the first place.

Retaining the left/right political distinction for the time being, however, we can say that it's mainly those on the populist, nativist right who, to date, have realised the possibilities created by the new communication technologies. It's as if they've read their Gramsci and figured out that if you want to change politics, you need to begin by changing culture.[11] To return to an international frame for a moment, recent years have provided us with examples such as: Trump, who was deemed a Twitter genius (until he was eventually banned from using it) and the first meme president of the United States; Jair Bolsonaro, the first president of Brazil elected using the Internet, Google's YouTube especially, as his main means of communication; and the Vote Leave campaign in the UK and its sophisticated exploitation of Facebook data to intervene in the 2016 E.U. Referendum, as revealed by the Cambridge Analytica scandal. What the actors behind these developments have done is create a new model of political communication by seizing on the opportunities created by the fourth great transformation in media technology to precipitate the cultural crisis in representative politics.

For populist politicians this new model has two important features. The first is that it allows those who don't already have control over their state media (à la Jarosław Kaczyński and Mateusz Morawiecki in Poland and Viktor Orbán in Hungary) to sidestep the old, established forms of political communication that rely on the major newspapers and influential TV and radio programmes. They have thus avoided being held to account by journalists, even when they have fabricated, lied, doctored blogs and videos and rebranded fake 'fact-checking'

websites.[12] Consider Boris Johnson's keeping of his live interview appearances

to a minimum during the 2019 U.K. election campaign; and, once in power, the

attempt of his government to select which news outlets were allowed to cover it

by barring critical journalists from official briefings and boycotting leading BBC

news programmes such as Newsnight and Today. Until the need to keep the

population informed about Covid-19 made such a rigid stance untenable, that

is.[13]

The second important feature of this new model is that it nonetheless provides

populists with a means of overcoming the apparent disconnect between

professional politicians and 'the people' – the latter being constructed

antagonistically as a self-identical and essentialised mass that is prevented from

reaching its full potential by an establishment elite, also homogenised, which of

course doesn't include these populist politicians themselves. The nativist right

have overcome this disconnect by using the repetition of slogans – most

famously 'Make America Great Again', 'Take Back Control', 'Get Brexit Done',

'Levelling Up', 'Build Back Better' – to link the grievances of a number of different

sections of society. These are grievances that have arisen over a long period,

stretching from the so-called 'migrant crisis' of 2015, through the 2008 financial

crash, at least as far back as the 9/11 attacks in the U.S.. They include a sense

of abandonment and betrayal by elites, resentment against women, Muslims,

immigrants and the 'woke', along with a general lack of control over their lives felt

by many of those living through late-stage capitalism together with an anxiety

about the future. (Trump's stronger than predicted showing in the 2020 US presidential election indicates that these are still the important issues for nearly half of all Americans.) By articulating such sentiments with a patriotic pride and sense of cultural nostalgia and loss – consider the fake reports that Rule, Britannia! and Land of Hope and Glory were to be dropped from the BBC's 2020 'Black Lives Matter Proms' as result of pressure from movements for racial justice – the radical right have been able to create chains of equivalence across those parts of the population that have been adversely affected by the results of neoliberal globalization.[14] In this way populist politicians have managed to mainstream their ideas by tapping into those affective forces – those drives, desires, fantasies and resentments – that motivate people to become part of a group such as precisely 'the people', and constitute the basis of collective forms of identification.

Reactionary nativists have been aided and abetted in the creation of this new model of political communication by Silicon Valley companies. The latter are aware it's not logical reasoning and verified information and evidence but extreme displays of dopamine-generating emotion that keep audiences hooked, and so drive their profits by maximising attention. Not only do Facebook, Twitter and YouTube render indistinct the difference between making carefully thought-out comments on the current issues of the day, and hastily announcing one's unconsidered feelings about them, they actively *amplify* and *reward* expressions of anger, hatred, insecurity and shame. Contributions to these platforms don't

need to be true to get a reaction and go viral, just hugely captivating. Being controversial, intrusive, crude, vulgar, moralistic, narcissistic, sentimental, contradictory all works.

Similarly broadcast media often prefer adversarial debates. In the U.K., the BBC regularly invites speakers with explicitly opposing views to discuss a given topic. It does so partly out of an attempt to provide journalistic balance (although what it frequently ends up delivering is false equivalence: just because someone is on the opposite side of an argument doesn't make them qualified to speak about it). But the corporation also opposes contributors in this fashion because reputable professional journalism outlets and other high-quality mainstream sources such as Sky News and the *Guardian* constitute only a low percentage of where the public receives its information in the era of smartphones and social media. The situation is similar in the U.S. where two thousand local newspapers have closed in recent years. So the issue is not just Russian interference or false news. It's that the mediascape is now highly diverse and disordered. What are needed therefore are combative debates that can cut through the chaos to be heard and get attention. (Piers Morgan's entire career as a presenter on ITV's *Good Morning Britain* has been built precisely on his ability to offer provocative opinions, be they about racism, gender fluidity, Meghan Markle or the response of the U.S. to Covid-19, in contrast to the more nuanced, easy going approach of his co-host, Suzanna Reid.)

All of which goes some way toward explaining how small numbers of people have been able to use communication technologies to move large numbers of others in the direction of nativist forms of populism characterised by an emphasis on authority, group insecurity and an exclusionary nationalist pride. How much any of Trump, Bolsonaro, Johnson et al actually understand the implications of the shift from analogue to postdigital media is another question. No matter, they have certainly profited from it. Indeed, such was the impact of Trump's presidency that almost immediately after his 2020 defeat commentators were already labelled this *new* way of conducting politics Trumpism. Of course, in a situation of chaos and confusion there's often a desire for a strong authoritarian leader who doesn't play by the rules and who can get things done regardless. Yet the media's emphasis on hyper-emotionalism has played straight into the hands of the reactionary right, which defines itself negatively against those it considers 'the other'. Hence the rise in sexism, racism and white supremacism we've experienced in recent times, both online and off, together with the presentation of the coronavirus as a 'wartime' (Johnson) or 'invisible enemy' (Trump), and description of it as the 'Chinese disease' (Trump again). (Even a pandemic is seen as national emergency, not an international one.) Indeed, those on the anti-liberal right have been so successful in making their ideas acceptable – many produce brilliant viral videos and memes, often containing language and images that are full of humour, irony and ambiguity as well as 'frightened bitterness'[15] – that they can be said to have completely transformed the political landscape. As a result, we find ourselves living in a 'post-truth' world

of 'alternative facts', 'deepfakes', Holocaust deniers, climate-breakdown deniers, pandemic minimizers, lockdown sceptics, COVID-truthers, Q-Anon social activists and people who are anti-immigration, anti-LGBT+ rights and (albeit indirectly perhaps) anti-diversity in terms of the biosphere too.

If We Can Have Disaster Capitalism, Why Can't We Have Emergency Marxism?

Granted, the left has its own affective-emotional themes and tropes. (When it comes to theory you just have to say words like 'commons', 'collaborative', 'Anthropocene', 'environment', 'material' or even 'affect' at an arts event such as Transmediale to realise this.)[16] Yet whereas the right *has* succeeded in using affect as a mobilizing political force, the (non-neoliberal) left has been conspicuously bad at turning its representations into actions that are compelling enough to make different people, especially those in the mainstream of society, want to constitute themselves as a group – a 'we', an 'us' – around issues such as community and the commons. Sure, both before and during the coronavirus outbreak a spate of large-scale youthful street protests unfolded in places such as Hong Kong, Chile, Ecuador, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Barcelona and Poland, orchestrated by 'the children of the financial crisis of 2008', as they have been called. Some have gone so far as to claim there have been more mass movements calling for radical change in the period since 2010 than at any time since WWII. Little of this rebellious energy has fed into a mainstream political change of the kind the populist right have achieved, though. On the contrary,

research shows that far right parties in Europe have tripled their share of the vote in the last three decades, with one in six choosing them at the polls.[17] (Meanwhile, in 31 countries across Europe 'social democratic parties that once commanded over 40 percent of votes have collapsed to the low twenties, teens, or lower'.)[18] Even the impact of the Extinction Rebellion (XR) protests, Greta Thunberg and the global wave of Friday school climate strikes have so far been mainly cultural. XR has yet to achieve its goals of getting the U.K. government to tell the truth about the climate and ecological emergency, commit to reaching zero net carbon emissions by 2025, and set up a citizens assembly to provide leadership on the issue. (While parliament *has* convened a citizens assembly on climate, there is as yet no clear means by which its suggestions can be turned into policy.) Nor have the school strikes translated into 'real action' from governments, according to Thunberg, speaking in 2019. In effect they have 'achieved nothing', she insists, greenhouse gas emissions actually rising 4% in four years after the 2015 Paris accord was signed.[19] (Again, it's going to be interesting to observe how much anything changes in this respect following Covid-19, given that pollution levels in cities such as Bangkok, Beijing and Bogotá dropped dramatically thanks to the lack of traffic and closing of industry and airports during lockdown. The election of Biden and his signing of an executive order to pause and review all fossil fuel activity on public land and offshore waters also seems to bring some hope.)

Don't get me wrong: the left has its memes. Witness the one-time popularity of

the 'Oh, Jeremy Corbyn' chant in the U.K., and the fact terms like 'gammon', 'centrist dad' and 'bullshit jobs' have now entered the language. The pink pussy hats, Handmaid's Tale-style cloaks and Un Violador en Tu Camino (A Rapist in Your Path) performance piece adopted by various groups of feminist protestors around the world are also worth mentioning in this context. Still, there's arguably been no really successful progressive equivalent of the kind of forceful play found on 'White Boy Internet' platforms such as 4chan, 8chan and Reddit.[20] The left has been conspicuously lacking in such politically effective 'meme magic'. It seems significant that, as yet, neither the #MeToo nor the Black Lives Matter movements have led to considerable reforms of the law, for instance. By contrast, Trump as president signed an executive order enabling protesters who damage a public statue to be jailed.

Perhaps this is not surprising. Generally speaking, the left is less concerned about the kind of extremes of emotion that drive the reactionary right, and more about social justice, hospitality and mutual aid. Because it's starting point is the position that things need to change, radically, it's also harder for the left to convince large numbers of voters it understands their existing values and beliefs, let alone shares them. Moreover societies are so diverse, pluralistic and fragmented these days it's far easier to unite people nationally and internationally around what they are *not* than around what they *are*.[21] The protests in Hong Kong, for instance, after initially calling for the withdrawal of an extradition bill introduced by China, were widened to a demand for democratic reform, and

subsequently to push back against the Chinese government's introduction of a new national security law during the pandemic. The demonstrations in Chile, however, started after an increase in metro fares and subsequently took in a broad range of demands for 'better pensions, education, health, a minimum wage; but also water rights and action on environment degradation'.[22] Meanwhile, those in Tunisia and Algeria were about price and tax rises; those in Beirut about a tax on users of messaging apps such as WhatsApp; and those in Poland about a patriarchal and religious state introducing a near-total ban on abortion. In Barcelona the protests were different again: there they were about independence for Catalonia from Spain. The problem is, unless these different passions, and the heterogeneous demands and conflicts they give rise to, have a legitimate democratic means of expressing themselves – which is precisely what did *not* happen in the period of austerity, during which many social groups felt ignored and 'left behind' by the city-dwelling, multi-cultural, liberal elites – there is a danger that a 'confrontation between essentialist forms of identification or non-negotiable moral values' will take their place, with all the attendant negative consequences.[23] The latter is what we have seen with the rise of populist right-wing political figures and parties in many countries: not just Trump in the U.S. and Johnson in the U.K., but Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet and the Forum for Democracy in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen and the National Rally in France, Beppe Grillo and the Five Star Movement in Italy, along with Matteo Salvini, former deputy prime minister and leader of the far-right League there. Indeed, as Timothy Garton Ash notes, for the first time in the 21st century 'there

are now fewer democracies than there are non-democratic regimes'

when it comes to those countries with populations of over a million.[24] Radical

right politicians also lead or have led three of the world's four largest

democracies: the U.S., Brazil and India. They are at the head of two members of

the European Union: Poland and Hungary. The third largest parties in a further

two – Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany and Vox in Spain – are also

far right, with populist parties having entered government in almost twelve

European countries all told.

Each of these contexts is of course different and needs to be analysed in its

specificity. Authoritarian nationalism is combined with neoliberalism in some

more than others. Orbán, for example, used the coronavirus breakout to assume

'emergency' powers that enable him to rule Hungary as an autocrat by decree.

Meanwhile it was perhaps only Trump's inconsistent coupling of authoritarianism

with libertarianism that prevented his politics from descending into fascism

proper. We also need to remain alert to the difficulty those of us who are

European have with reading any political script other than the one with which we

have traditionally translated the world. It's a trait that often leaves us blind to the

need for a new political language and 'radical transformation of the regime of

knowledge' when it comes to understanding ideas and events generated outside

the 'global North'.[25] (I'm placing this term in quotation marks as I'm aware it's not

without problems.) Nevertheless, I want to take the risk of saying that something

of a global trend *does* seem to be at play here. For these are all parties and

politicians that by one means or another are placing liberal democracy under threat, along with its values of truth, civil rights and rule of law. Taken together, what this shows is that the 2019 election of Boris Johnson in the U.K. cannot be attributed simply to the shortcomings of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour party (e.g. the failure to deal with anti-Semitism, to unite both the left and centre of the party, or to a form a collation with the Lib Dems, Greens and SNP): the phenomenon is larger and more international than that. Could we even go so far as to suggest that, Trump's narrow 2020 defeat notwithstanding, those on the nativist right have been successful in utilising communication technologies to transform the political landscape in recent years, ironically, by acting as many on the progressive left say people should: that is by operating as cosmopolitan communities with the shared goal of collectively redistributing knowledge and ideas in order to build alliances and coalitions? (While there has not been just one form of nativist response to Covid-19 anymore than there is just one form of populism, there was nevertheless a period in 2020 when Trump, Salvini and Farage all seemed to be working to deflect blame for the coronavirus pandemic onto the Chinese government.) It's certainly interesting that, almost in a reverse of the situation with New Labour under Blair and the Conservatives under Cameron, many of these governments are combining right-wing cultural polices with left-wing economic ideas such as nationalisation and welfarism. This is true of Poland's Law and Justice party, and was increasingly the case with regard to the Johnson government in the U.K., even before Sars-CoV-2 rendered (temporarily) uncontroversial the kind of state interventionism, deficit spending

and general veneration of welfare and the public sector that would previously

have been condemned as Marxist.

PART 2: INFRARED

Fuck Business As Usual

How are those of us who are on the left to challenge this dominance by the

populist right? Can we employ communication technologies for more radical

purposes that *are* attuned to today's rapidly changing political landscape?

As we've seen, over the decades the left has found it difficult to devise collective

forms of identification that are able to successfully counter the two main kinds of

neoliberalism dominant in much of the West: the global technocratic

neoliberalism of Barak Obama, David Cameron, Angela Merkel, Emmanuel

Macron and Joe Biden, which depends on a rule of law-based system of

economic governance; and the libertarian neoliberalism associated with Donald

Trump and Boris Johnson that wants to destroy much of this rules-based system,

as embodied by the E.U., NATO and WHO, in order to generate new, disruptive

business opportunities free from regulation out of the ensuing chaos and

confusion. 'Fuck business' here means fuck the existing business.[26] Of late,

however, there have been signs that a practical and relevant left alternative,

capable of capitalising on the possibilities created by the fourth great

transformation in media technologies to shift toward more direct forms of

democracy, may (just *may*) be beginning to emerge. As reasons for optimism we can point to phenomena such as the grassroots upsurge against the political establishment associated with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the U.S. and her use of social media, the rise of the platform cooperativism movement,[27] and calls for the monopolies of Google and Facebook to be broken up and for people and communities to control their own data. The latter idea is being explored in Barcelona by housing-activist-turned-city-major Ada Colau.[28] Nor is Barcelona the only city interested in engaging its population in mass participatory politics. Places as different as Porto Alegre in Brazil, Preston in the U.K. and Reykjavik in Iceland are experimenting with forms of municipal socialism, many aspects of which are made possible by online tools such as open consultation forums for citizens.[29] More recently still, there have been the self-organised collective responses to the coronavirus epidemic, as I say. These have included a hackerthon held in Germany in late March 2020 under the title #WirVsVirus (Us v. Virus).[30] 42,869 participants collaborated remotely for 48 hours to come up with 800 different technological innovations for combating the virus. Popular themes included: 'How can we organise neighbourhood assistance through helper platforms?' (#58 projects); 'How can food be provided to all citizens?' (#50 projects); and 'How can we support local businesses and protect them from insolvency?' (#45 projects).[31]

It's with this kind of emphasis on engaging with postdigital technologies for purposes grounded in principles of social responsibility, solidarity and mutual

care coupled to the collective redistribution of knowledge and resources that my collaborators and I align ourselves. And since a number of us are theorists, as I say, one of the issues we're interested in as part of this is reimagining theory in the aftermath of the digital. In contrast to the worlds of music, film, TV and even politics, it seems to us that the transition from analogue to postdigital has really only just begun as far as many of the practices of the arts, humanities and social sciences are concerned. In this respect, one of the questions we're raising with our work is: might exploring new modes of authorship, ownership and reproduction that are more in tune with this fourth great transformation in communications technology have the potential to lead to non-neoliberal – but also (and this is extremely important) non-liberal – ways of being and doing as theorists? Ways that are more consistent with the kind of progressive politics many radical theorists advocate, in their writings on community, collectivity and the commons especially?

Over the last twenty years we've been involved in a number of bottom-up projects for the production and sharing of free resources, infrastructure and knowledge (objects). To briefly take my own trajectory as an example: in 1999 Dave Boothroyd and I launched *Culture Machine*, one of the first open access journals of critical and cultural theory. In an attempt to avoid limiting the geopolitics of our work to that of the global North, this journal has recently been relaunched out of Mexico, under the editorship of Gabriela Méndez Cota and

Rafico Ruiz, complete with a redesign by the hackerspace El Rancho Electrónico.[32]

In 2008 *Culture Machine* became a founder-member of Open Humanities Press (OHP).[33] Directed by myself and two colleagues based in Australia, Sigi Jöttkandt and David Ottina, this initiative involves multiple semi-autonomous, self-organising groups around the world, all of them operating in a non-rivalrous fashion to make works of contemporary theory available on a non-profit, free/gratis open access basis using Creative Commons licenses. Open Humanities Press currently has twenty-one journals, forty plus books distributed across nine book series, as well as experimental, *libre* texts such as those in its Liquid Books and Living Books About Life series.

OHP in turn became a founder member of the Radical Open Access Collective, a community of international presses, journals and other projects formed after the 2015 Radical Open Access conference.[34] Now consisting of over seventy members, this collective seeks to build a progressive alternative ecosystem for publishing in the humanities and social sciences, based on experimenting with a diversity of non-profit, independent and scholar-led approaches.

Meanwhile, in the Centre for Postdigital Cultures (CPC) at Coventry University, we're working on reinventing knowledge infastructures, especially those involved in the production and sharing of theory.[35] Since its launch in 2018, the CPC has

brought together many people involved in such 'aesthetic' practices. They include myself and Janneke Adema from OHP, and Samuel Moore who works with us as part of the Radical Open Access Collective.

The latest of these initiatives is the Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs (COPIM) project, which emerged in 2019 out of a consortium of six open access presses called ScholarLed.[36] An international partnership involving universities and libraries as well as infrastructure and technology providers, COPIM is designed to realign open access book publishing by moving it away from the surveillance capitalism model of competing commercial service providers. Its aim is to respond to the fact that companies such as Elsevier and Springer are increasingly looking to monetize not just academic content, but the 'entire knowledge production workflow, from article submissions, to metrics to reputation management and global rankings' and the related data extraction.[37] COPIM represents an alternative, more horizontal and collaborative, knowledge-sharing approach. Here the scholarly community collectively owns, manages and governs infrastructures, systems and revenue streams for the common good in such a fashion as to enable a diversity of initiatives – including small, non-profit, independent and scholar-led presses – to become part of the publishing ecosystem.[38]

How to Be An Anti-Bourgeois Theorist

Hopefully, the activities I have described go some way toward explaining how

and why my collaborators and I are trying to operate differently to the individualistic, liberal humanist ways of working and acting traditionally associated with being a theorist in the fields of art and culture, especially of the 'star' variety. There are a number of further dimensions to this mode of practicing commons-oriented, anti-liberal, anti-neoliberal, anti-bourgeois theory (ABT) we're experimenting with. I don't have space to go into any of the related projects in depth. Besides, engaging with these ventures in their contextual site-specificity is actually the most interesting way to understand and experience them. But I would like to quickly sketch a few here, albeit more in the spirit of an artist's talk than a full-blown philosophical argument.

ABT Is Post-literary

In the era of YouTube, Instagram and Zoom, 'Gutenbergian' media technologies such as the written and printed text are no longer the natural or normative means by which knowledge is necessarily generated and research communicated. Accordingly, while my collaborators and I still publish conventional print books and journal articles, our theory might not take the form of a piece of writing at all. We are increasingly involved in opening knowledge and research up to being not just postdigital, but post-grammatological or post-literary too.

We're doing this by creating, publishing and sharing work in the form of films, videos and virtual, augmented and immersive media environments. Take Oliver Lerone Schultz et al.'s collectively produced *after.video*. Published by OHP in

2016, this is a collection of annotated digital video essays that explore the future for theory after both books *and* video.[39] It does so in two different instantiations: a freely available online version; and an offline version produced as a distinct physical object in its own right: namely, an assembly-on-demand video book stored on a Raspberry Pi computer and packaged in a VHS (Video Home System) case. *after.video* is therefore both an analogue and digital object manifested, in a scholarly gesture, as a 'video book'.

after.video also points to another way in which my collaborators and I are endeavouring to open theory to being post-grammatological: this is through the reinvention of hardware, software and network infrastructures. Included in this reinvention are facilities concerned with the production and circulation of research on a radical open access basis: books and journals, for example, as with Open Humanities Press and COPIM. But we are involved in cultural/artistic projects that operate at a larger scale, too, such as museums, galleries and archives.

Let me provide an example of one such initiative that can be copied and reproduced relatively easily (unlike *after.video* perhaps, which requires a certain amount of technical know-how). Mandela27 is a website and digital platform created in 2014 by Jacqueline Cawston and her partners for the Robben Island Museum in South Africa.[40] Included in the project is a hybrid physical/digital DIY Exhibition of the prison cell in which Mandela was held for the majority of his 27

years on the island. The exhibition consists of a few pieces of standard wood and plywood, arranged to form the exact dimensions of the space, together with a bucket, blanket, bench, plate and cup – the items the prisoners were allowed to have with them in their cells. The wood frame is also used to hold ten specially designed posters addressing topics such as colonialism and apartheid, along with a number of screens linked to the digital platform and its content. The latter features an interactive cultural map of Europe and South Africa, a 360-degree experience of the prison, images from the UWC Robben Island Museum Archives, video interviews with a former political prisoner and a prison guard, a crowd-sourced timeline and a digital game about life in Robben Island Prison. The original Mandela27 DIY Exhibition has toured South Africa, the U.K. and Europe and has been visited by over 170,000 people.[41] However, Cawston and her colleagues also put together a kit containing details of how to construct the DIY Exhibition, and made it available on an open access basis, along with the contents of the digital platform and the ten posters.[42] Because the physical materials are extremely low cost (all that's needed really is some wood, a bucket and a blanket), this means any school or community can create their own pop-up version of the Mandela27 DIY Exhibition easily and cheaply – they don't need to travel to a traditional bricks-and-mortar museum or art gallery to experience it.

What *after.video* and the Mandela27 DIY Exhibition both show is that, as far as we are concerned, postdigital culture does not necessarily come *after* the digital in any simple temporal sense. Open access and the postdigital are not *just* to be

associated with online communication technologies and the 'digital commons', for instance. It's important that they are understood as being potentially physical, offline and analogue – as well as hybrid combinations thereof – too.

ABT Is Low Key

Another dimension of our anti-bourgeois mode of theory is apparent from the way in which, although my collaborators and I may identify (or be identified) as radical theorists, we don't always function as virtuoso individual authors. In a period when the self-organizing, leaderless mobilizations of the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) and Hong Kong protesters have experimented with new forms of subjectivity and social relations, isn't the cult of the highly individualistic 'rock star' theorist or philosopher coming to an end? Even if it isn't, shouldn't it be – especially after Covid-19 has made a shared sense of social responsibility, solidarity and collaboration within a common struggle not so much a matter of political persuasion but of survival for many people? In keeping with this notion, we often refuse to occupy centre stage, preferring to operate in a more low-key, at times anonymous manner as part of collectives and communities of thinking and doing, such as the Radical Open Access Collective and WeMake. The latter is a makerspace fablab in Milan, with whom our fellow members of the Centre for Postdigital Cultures at Coventry, Valeria Graziano and Maddalena Fragnito, have been investigating the relationship between open technologies and healthcare.[43]

ABT Builds, Develops, Maintains and Repairs

In fact, our activities as theorists frequently don't involve *authoring* at all. Along with affective labour such as supporting, encouraging and inspiring, they can on occasion involve operating in the background to build, develop, maintain and repair more than actually *author* – as with the work of another collaborator as system administrator for the file-sharing shadow libraries Aaaaarg and UbuWeb.[44] This is because we see theory not just as a means of imagining our ways of being in the world differently. It is a means of *enacting* them differently too. (Staying in the shadows can of course also serve as a 'defence mechanism' that enables a given project to 'thrive and prevents its destruction', as the design collective Kaspar Hauser write of these and other digital libraries such as Monoskop and Library Genesis.[45])

ABT Is Performative and Pre-figurative

Many of our projects are similarly *performative*, in the sense they're concerned not only with representing the world, but also with *intra-acting with* it in order to make things happen. Some have referred to this kind of approach as hacking the situation or context.[46] However, our theory-performances can also be understood in terms of the pre-figurative practices Graziano has written about: of 'being the change we want to see'.[47]

As I say, this often involves us in experimenting with the form of scholarly communications in the shape of books and journals, and also lectures, seminars, conferences, even the very gestures of reading and writing.[48] When Clare

Birchall, Joanna Zylinska and I wanted to explore the theory of books being liquid

and living, for instance (rather than finished and frozen or dead), we didn't just

write about it. We actually made some liquid and living books that could be

continually rewritten and republished: two series' worth, in fact.[49] Janneke Adema

and I took a similar intra-active approach to editing 'Disrupting the *Human*ities:

Towards Posthumanities', a 2016 issue of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing*

(JEP). [50] What we wanted to do there was take on, as theorists, some of the

implications of the idea that a presentation isn't simply a re-presentation of the

written, text-on-paper argument delivered by the author. It's rather a relational

and processual meshwork of presenter, event organizers, facilitators and

audience, along with the associated cultural practices, technologies, institutions,

buildings, materials, tools, infrastructure and so on, all of which contribute to the

presentation *in its becoming*. So we produced an edition of JEP consisting of a

selection of video-presentations/articles cum theory-performances. Heavily

annotated using the *InterLace* open source software program developed

by Robert Ochshorn, these were designed to break down the divisions between

the research and presentation, as well as between the 'real time' and online or

'virtual' audience.

Other projects we are engaged in concentrate on pre-figuratively reinventing the

museum, gallery, archive, library or university in a postdigital context.[51] Public

Library: *Memory of the World*, for example, launched by Marcell Mars and

Tomislav Medak in 2012, is an 'artist-run' online shadow or pirate library that

currently contains more than 150,000 titles that it makes sure remain widely

accessible without charge and without any other restrictions, including those

associated with copyright law.[52] It consists of a network of private libraries that,

although independent and maintained locally by a community of 'amateur

librarians', are connected with the project's server through the 'let's share books'

software developed by Mars. The software allows people to search all the

collections in *Memory of the World*, discover a title they want and import it

directly to their own virtual library that, like the others, is organized using a

version of the Calibre open source software for managing digital books.

ABT Is Concerned with Infrastructure

Memory of the World, the Mandela27 DIY Exhibition and COPIM are all also

examples of our development of radically open and inclusive knowledge

infrastructures in support of commoning. Infrastructure is particularly important to

us in this respect because, as Leslie Chan emphasizes, it concerns the power

(otherwise hidden) to: set agendas and decisions – which are never neutral but

embedded with ideological assumptions and biases; mobilize and accumulate

resources; set standards and norms; set boundaries of participation; discriminate

– or not, hopefully; and control what gets built, what's possible.[53]

Given the controversial nature of *Memory of the World*, it's perhaps helpful to say

a little more about why, as anti-bourgeois theorists, we're interested in something

like piracy (although *Memory of the World* can also be understood as a material

enactment of the *Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto* attributed to internet hacktivist

Aaron Swartz). Quite simply it's because one thing even the left finds it hard to

question these days is the idea of private property. Yet it's private property that

helps to construct and shape our subjectivities as both possessive individuals

and members of the bourgeoisie. So-called piracy thus provides my collaborators

and I with one starting point from which to develop an affirmative critique of

private property and bourgeois subjectivity that is designed to help us be more

consistent with the kind of radical politics many theorists espouse (but don't

necessarily perform themselves) when writing about the commons.[54]

Having said that, *Memory of the World*, like a number of our other projects, does

not, as Sollfrank points out, itself constitute a 'commons in the strict sense of

involving not only a non-market exchange of goods but also a community of

commoners who negotiate the terms of use among themselves' as equals in a

voluntary, unforced, non-hierarchical fashion. That, in her words, 'would require

collective, formalized, and transparent types of organization'. It would also, I

might add, require governance, including the establishment of rules for resolving

conflicts between individuals, the community and society at large, and the

agreeing of sanctions for those commoners who do not comply. Moreover, most

of the books that are made publicly accessible by *Memory of the World* are

'privately owned and therefore cannot simply be transferred to become commons

resources.' As Sollfrank suggests, such projects are perhaps best understood

instead as a 'preliminary stage' in which commoning is performed in an

emergent, participative manner. They are moving us toward a horizon of '*culture as a commons*', while at the same time providing the kind of 'experimental zone needed to unlearn copyright and relearn new ways of cultural production and dissemination beyond the property regime.'[55]

Certainly, one of the shared aims of our pre-figurative projects is to disarticulate the existing playing field and its manufactured common sense of what it means today to be a theorist, a philosopher, an academic, an artist or a political activist. They seek to foster instead a variety of antagonistic spaces both *inside* and *outside* of states and capital – spaces that contribute to the development of institutions and environments that are able to counter the hegemony of the traditional, liberal, public institutions such as the university on the one hand, and private, for-profit companies such as Elsevier, LinkedIn and Academia.edu on the other. This is the reason for our interest in the commons and commoning. Creating commons is one way we have chosen to describe our work producing, managing and maintaining such alternative, emergent spaces that are neither simply liberal nor neoliberal, public nor private. The fact of the matter is, 'coming prior to adequate legislation, we currently lack even a vocabulary to talk about' the commons in this sense, as the philosopher Roberto Esposito acknowledges. 'It is something largely unknown, and even refractory, to our conceptual categories'. (And that includes communism, I would add.) Nevertheless, as Esposito insists, the struggle for an alternative 'must start precisely by breaking

the vise grip between public and private … by seeking instead to expand the space of the common'.[56]

The coronavirus event, with the huge systemic shock and suspension of *business as usual* it has delivered, provides us with a significant strategic opportunity to do just this, if only we can take it. After all, Covid-19 has made it clear that, as the climate emergency develops and we continue to face health crises and other disasters, neither (globalist nor libertarian) neoliberalism nor an highly individualistic liberal humanism is going to be fit for purpose. Now more than ever it is important to experiment with ways of working, acting and thinking that are different to both. For us, this is precisely what an (symbolic/functional) entity such as the Centre for Postdigital Cultures, or indeed a university, is for. One of the purposes of a university is to create a space where society's common sense ideas can be examined and interrogated, and to act as a testing ground for the development of new knowledges, new subjectivities, new practices and new social relations of the kind we are going to need post-pandemic, but which are often hard – although not impossible – to explore elsewhere.

We're Not Necessarily Going Back To Arguing From Evidence Anytime Soon, Deal With It

I want to make two points that I realise some may find counter-intuitive. For all my emphasis on enactment, pre-figuration and the performance of theory, I

would not like the commons-oriented initiatives my collaborators and I are involved with to be positioned in terms of concrete, *material practices* as distinct from, say, *immaterial theory*. In articulations like this it's often forgotten that the practices that produce theory are *always already* concrete, while the theory that privileges the concrete and the material is often very weak.[57]

Although I can understand the temptation to do so, we should also take care when it comes to understanding such enterprises as 'aesthetic practices', no matter how much they may occupy the intersection between the commons and art, and for all art is another field with the potential to create such a space where new realities can tested and constructed. To be sure, we need to interrogate the manner in which art and culture in the twentieth century became, as intellectual historian François Cusset puts it, 'on the one hand, the most thriving industry of the new capitalism, if not its laboratory of ideas; and, on the other, a collection of devices and situations that were mostly disconnected from the social and political field, a kind of refuge cut off from the exterior world'.[58] Research commissioned by the Art Fund in 2018, for instance, shows that one of the main reasons those in Britain under thirty years of age give for visiting an art gallery or museum is 'specifically to "de-stress"'.[59] But this should only encourage us to ask: even if our commons-supporting projects *can* be perceived as expanding conceptions of aesthetics, so the two discourses (i.e. the commons and aesthetics) come into close contact and can potentially create something new, might there still be something conservative about interpreting the likes of *after.video* and *Memory of*

the World primarily in artistic terms? Isn't there a danger in doing so of going along too much with the belief that the right is interested in politics and power, while what the left cares about is art and (self-)expression?

Nor is this an issue that can be resolved by 'challenging established notions of contemporary aesthetic practice' through the adoption of the kind of 'truth and evidence' approach that has been proposed as a means for artists to resist post-truth politics.[60] Media artist and activist David Garcia offers as an example the 'Evidentiary Realism' of Lawrence Abu Hansen, Trevor Paglen, Lev Manovich and !Mediengruppe Bitnik.[61] The 'gold standard' of Evidentiary Realism as far as Garcia is concerned, however, are the investigations into cases of state violence and human rights violations conducted by the Forensic Architecture art and knowledge research group at Goldsmiths, University of London. Yet when it comes to engaging with postdigital political issues such a pro-evidence, pro-data stance is not without difficulties of its own.

In response to a question as to whether 'identifying their outputs as art might... "take the edge off the truth he is trying to show"', Garcia quotes Eyal Weizman, leader of Forensic Architecture, countering as follows:

> Think about it. When the most important piece of evidence coming from battle fields world wide are video graphic. You need video makers to make sense of it… And to understand how one piece of video might relate to

another. Indeed aesthetic sensibilities. The sensibilities of an architect an

artist or a film maker are very useful in figuring out what has taken place.[62]

Weizman is surely missing the point here, though. The problem is not whether

Forensic Architecture needs to include aesthetic sensibilities in their truth-

seeking investigations – and let's not forget their public art installations and

exhibitions they put together using charts, diagrams, infographics, models, audio-

visual installations, digital imaging and so on, which are arguably what they are

best known for nowadays. The problem is that in positioning what they do in

terms of art and aesthetics, Forensic Architecture get all the advantages that

accrue from that, in terms of being nominated for the 2018 Turner Prize and so

on. However, they get the disadvantages too. Not least among the latter is that

Forensic Architecture's projects are indeed vulnerable to being considered *just

art*. Nowhere is this danger more apparent than in the main example Garcia

gives of 'the role Evidentiary Realism can play in countering politically motivated

obfuscation': Forensic Architecture's report to the parliamentary commission

investigating the role of a state intelligence agent in the 2006 murder of Halit

Yozgat in an internet café in Kassel, Germany. The day before they were due to

submit this report Germany's Christian Democratic Party (CDU) published a

counter-report. The aim was to 'de-legitimize' Forensic Architecture's findings on

the grounds it was the 'work of artists' and, accordingly, 'should not be taken

seriously as evidence'. And, to be sure, the risk of de-legitimation is very real for

aesthetic practices and sensibilities, no matter how much they may show truth to

power, nor how reflexive their relationship may be to the complex systems we inhabit. This is one of the reasons the projects of my collaborators and I constitute a plurality of forms of intervention that are responding to particular issues across a number of different sites: forms of intervention associated not *just* with aesthetics and with the practices of artists, or even theorists, but also (where appropriate) with those working in the fields of activism, education, business, politics, technology or the media.

A further concern with Evidentiary Realism's pro-data approach relates to the way in which the liberal establishment has found the politics of figures such as Trump and Johnson difficult to deal with on the basis of the agreed facts. Now there is a perfectly good explanation for this difficulty: it's because these right-wing populists are not actually operating on the level of consistent, reasoned argument. Consider Trump's description of first the climate crisis and then the coronavirus as a 'hoax' – hardly an evidence-based response to the science and data on his part. (Bolsonaro likewise accused large parts of the media of 'tricking' the people over the dangers of the coronavirus, which he likened to a 'little flu'.) Nevertheless, it's a challenge to knowing – what, borrowing a phrase from the Rand Corporation, Barak Obama has referred to as 'truth decay' – that a lot of commentators still find hard to accept.[63] Instead, they continue to insist that the anti-liberal right can be contested on a truth-seeking level. Witness the spectacle of Alan Rusbridger, ex-editor-in-chief of *The Guardian*, arguing that the way to counter Johnson's evasions and lies is with good, responsible, 'independent and

decently crafted' journalism, in which the 'lines between truth and falsehood;
facts and propaganda; openness and stealth; accountability and impunity; clarity
and confusion; news and opinion' are retained rather than blurred.[64] Similarly,
many scientists and journalists resort to evidenced-based information and facts
to counter false rumours and conspiracy theories: that 5G networks lower
people's immune system to Covid-19, for example, a false claim that led to
numerous mobile phone masts being set on fire in the U.K. and elsewhere.[65] Yet
as we've seen with anti-vaxxers and climate-breakdown deniers, such an
approach has repeatedly been found to be futile, counterproductive even, in that
it often only succeeds in eroding social trust further.[66] The trouble is, the roots of
the current crisis in both epistemology and democracy lie much earlier than the
rise to power of the likes of Trump and Johnson: they stretch back, through the
failure of the political class to hold those responsible for the financial crisis of
2008 to account, at least as far as the refusal to heed the 2003 protests against
the invasion of Iraq. Both events left large numbers of people feeling they could
no longer rely on professional politicians, the liberal establishment (to which
Rusbridger, now head of an Oxbridge college, is a fully paid up member), or the
institutions of state to arrive at the correct decisions based on the evidence – as
opposed to, say, dodgy dossiers about weapons of mass destruction being
'ready within 45 minutes of the order to use them'.

It is this collapse of confidence in the processes of representative democracy and
its valuing of truth and justice that the nativist right have capitalised on. They

have thus been quite prepared to undermine any attempts to question their authority that privilege facts over opinion. This includes those that have come from the direction of *good journalism* – or indeed science, the media, academia and the judiciary. One way populists and their supporters have done so is by dismissing such challenges as hailing from the very partisan, city-dwelling liberal elite they denounce as being the 'enemy of the people'; a people for whom they of course are speaking. Another is to undermine the veracity of the challenge by producing 'alternative facts'. As late as February 26, 2020 Trump was publicly claiming the total number of Covid-19 cases in the U.S. would be 'close to zero'. 'On February 28, Trump said that coronavirus will "disappear" like a "miracle".'[67] He then predicted that the forthcoming spring weather would kill it off and prevent its spread. Together with the disbanding in 2018 of the National Security Council pandemic unit established by Obama – and indeed a deeply rooted antipathy toward both government intervention and systems of public health, welfare and infrastructure that is quite characteristic of the radical right – it's an attitude that led to an astonishing sluggishness to mobilise against Covid-19 on the part of the Trump administration. (Some have gone so far as to call it inept, incompetent and downright dangerous.) 'I think the 3.4%', the World Health Organization's calculated death rate for those with Covid-19, 'is really a false number', Trump told Fox News in March 2020. 'Now, this is just my hunch', he said, privileging his own guesswork over the expert research of the medical and public health professionals. 'I think that that number is very high… personally, I would say the number is way under 1%'. To be sure, it's effectiveness with regard to the

coronavirus outbreak is highly questionable, to say the least. Witness the reaction to Trump's April 23 suggestion that injecting disinfectant could kill it, or his May 18 revelation that he was taking the antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine as a preventive. Indeed, for some, the November 2020 presidential election revealed the coronavirus to have been one opponent that Trump could not defeat by tweet. Nevertheless, the general strategy behind producing alternative facts is not so much to offer a counter-truth or even disinformation. It's rather to spread confusion in order to convey the overall message that no truth can be believed. (That Trump subsequently claimed he knew about the threat posed by the virus very early on but deliberately lied about it to prevent creating panic among the American people only added to the confusion. Even when Trump tested positive for Covid-19 in October 2020, the statements given out by the White House about his health were conflicting and contradictory. The threats and lawsuits about the election having been stolen issued by Trump after he lost to Biden and his failure to concede had a similar effect.) In the words of Hannah Arendt: 'If everybody always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer'.[68] Or as journalist Kai Strittmatter put it recently with regard to authoritarian leaders in both China and the West: 'If you're a liar and a cheat, there's no way for you to win in a world that is repelled by these things, a world that differentiates between truth and lies.' What you need to do is 'make everyone else a liar and a cheat, too. Then you will at least be *their* liar.'[69] (So strongly did Trump's supporters feel this to be the case some of them stormed

the U.S. Capitol building in a bid to prevent Biden's election victory from being certified. It was an act of political violence that Trump characteristically both encouraged *and* condemned.)

Dissembling like this and getting away with it has the further advantage of making such authoritarian figures look strong, confirming their dominance and status. They lie and cheat and break the law because they know they can. The rules apply to everyone else – they don't apply to them. Only little people are held responsible for the consequences of their actions. The appeal of such calculated displays of transgression explains why Trump was able to continue in his role as president, despite having made what the *Washington Post* calculated to be 19,127 false or misleading claims in his first 1,226 days in office;[70] and how he got 70 million votes in 2020 regardless. That's almost half of all those cast. It also explains why the attempt to counter Johnson's constant fabrications during the 2019 election campaign with endless fact checking did little to prevent his ultimate victory. Indeed, it can be argued that the reason many people vote for such populist politicians is not because they actually believe their lies, or because they are necessarily right-wing nativists. It's because they know doing so is the best way to get back at a cosmopolitan liberal establishment that has ignored them for so long.[71] It thus remains to be seen whether over the longer term it's the libertarian neoliberalism of Trump and Johnson that turns out to have been the blip, or the return to the global neoliberal orthodoxy represented by Biden and Starmer (as compared to Corbyn).

Having said all that, none of this is an either/or (more of a Deleuze-and-Guattarian '"and… and… and"').[72] Anti-fake digital literacy initiatives, such as that set up in Finland to teach people 'how to counter false information designed to sow division' by recognising and adopting a critical attitude to fake news, are incredibly valuable. (A study of thirty-five countries has ranked the population of Finland as the most resistant to anti-knowledge politics).[73] This is especially the case in a time and space of contagion when rumours are rife (e.g. that Sars-CoV-2 was engineered in a lab by Bill Gates so he could profit from a vaccine, or by the Chinese government as a bioweapon). Also important are the projects and investigations of Forensic Architecture and others associated with the Evidentiary Realism movement in art. I'm thinking in particular of the former's reconstruction of the events of August 1, 2014, when Israel launched 2,000 bombs, rockets and shells against the Palestinian city of Rafah. Forensic Architecture's investigation contributed to a subsequent change in policy on the part of the Israeli government and military: namely, the withdrawal of the 'Hannibal Directive', whereby the Israeli army was authorized to kill any of its soldiers taken prisoner 'with maximum available firepower', rather than risk them being used as hostages.[74] Still, the above concerns go some way toward articulating why, in the present postdigital conjuncture, many of my collaborators and I have taken the decision not to focus on resisting the hyper-emotionalism of post-truth politics by opposing it with empirically-based evidence presented aesthetically. When it comes to our anti-bourgeois theory-performances, we are more interested in

tapping into some of the left's own affective-emotional themes and tropes –

encapsulated by words such as 'commons', 'community', and 'collective' – in

order to help create specific institutional and infrastructural projects that are

capable of acting as a political force.

This involvement on our part with actuating some of those 'left' affective forces

that motivate people to become part of a group and form the basis of collective

forms of identification, is also why I wouldn't want any of what I've said to be

taken as somehow shifting the focus from an emphasis on community to an

emphasis on the provision of shared knowledge objects and resources. The

majority of the resources I've pointed to are created and maintained by

communities working collectively. In fact, I'd argue these communities are among

the most import 'resources' we produce. One of the motivations behind our

production of free, radical open access or 'pirate' resources and infrastructures is

to encourage other initiatives and movements around the world by showing what

can be achieved – how things might look if the transformed habits of being and

doing I'm talking about were accepted. Another is to make it possible for *chains

of equivalence* to be established between our projects and a diversity of other

struggles locally, nationally and internationally. In addition to those I drew

attention to earlier (platform cooperativism, municipal socialism etc.), these

struggles include those for a four-day working week, Green New Deal,

Unconditional Basic Income and Flatpack Democracy.[75] There are also those

featured in our Pirate Care project, the last of our initiatives I'm going to mention.

We use the term 'pirate care' to refer to two processes that are particularly prevalent today. First, to the way in which basic requirements for care of a kind that were once regarded as essential to society – such as public libraries, which in the U.S. are now not allowed to buy digital books[76] – have been driven towards illegality thanks to the commercialisation of social services. Second, we use pirate care to refer to those 'technologically-enabled care networks' that have sprung up 'in opposition to this drive toward illegality' around a range of issues, from housing and healthcare provision to education and income support. [77] Some of these networks deliberately run the risk of being considered unlawful. To confine myself to those that took part in our 2019 Pirate Care conference, I can mention in this context: SeaWatch, which tries to save as many people as possible from drowning in the Mediterranean in defiance of European border policy which criminalizes both migrants and rescuers;[78] Planka.nu, a group of organizations in Sweden that pays the fines of any of its members caught 'fare-dodging' as a means of advocating for free public transport for all;[79] and the Docs Not Cops campaign group of healthcare workers in the U.K., who refuse to enforce immigration checks and charges on patients.[80] Other such 'pirate' networks have decided to operate in the 'narrow grey zones' of ambiguity 'left open between different technologies, institutions and laws' in order to expound care as a collective political practice:

For instance, in Greece, where the bureaucratic measures imposed by the Troika decimated public services, a growing number of grassroots clinics set up by the Solidarity Movement have responded by providing medical attention to those without a private insurance. In Italy, groups of parents without recourse to public childcare are organizing their own pirate kindergartens (Soprasotto), reviving a feminist tradition first experimented with in the 1970s. In Spain, the feminist collective GynePunk developed a biolab toolkit for emergency gynecological care, to allow all those excluded from the reproductive medical services – such as trans or queer women, drug users and sex workers – to perform basic checks on their own bodily fluids.[81]

Part of the idea behind the pirate care project is to offer these practices 'some degree of protection by means of visibility'.[82]

It's Not a Bug, It's a Feature

I would like to end by bringing us back once again to the commons. Notwithstanding our endeavours to establish chains of equivalence between our anti-bourgeois theory-performances and a diversity of other struggles, it's important for this network of networks to remain multi-polar, antagonistic and, to a certain extent, *messy.* 'More often than not, the commons is allegorized as a mythical ideal governed by principles of sharing, access and collaboration that was lost after the first enclosure movement', intellectual property expert

Lawrence Liang writes regarding the 'metaphor of the modern commons' and the danger it is held to face from the 'limitless expansion of intellectual property'. A warning is then issued 'against a similar enclosure movement in the realm of information ecology that threatens to privatize every aspect of information, thereby threatening creativity'.[83] Yet contrary to the impression that is given in a lot of work on the commons, achieving some kind of *mythical* unity, harmony or 'oneness' – a Kantian perpetual peace, as it were – is not what creating commons is actually about, regardless of whether its the natural, social, civil, cultural, knowledge or intellectual commons that's being referred to. There is no common understanding of the commons. The open access, Creative Commons, free software, open source, copyfarleft and anti-copyright pro-piracy movements all have very different and conflicting conceptions of the commons.[84]

That said, we have learnt from political theorist Chantal Mouffe that the making of a decision in such an undecidable terrain – the refusal, in this case, to take the commons as a *given* and decide what it is in advance of intellectual questioning – is actually what politics is. Just as Facebook has data points that it uses to target ads at its users, so the left has data or datum points of its own; and often these *givens* take the form of the very affective-emotional fantasies and desires that constitute the basis of collective forms of left identification.[85] Does saying the kind of words that underpin most accounts of the commons – democracy, human, freedom, sharing, caring, cooperation – not produce something of a dopamine rush in us?

My collaborators and I are aware challenging petrified positions around community, collectivity and the commons (and also around our ideas of writing, the book, the author, the seminar, university, library, museum, art gallery, copyright, private property and so on) is difficult. The tendency is to lapse back into what seems self-evident, taken-for-granted, common sense – for all one may be aware doing so maintains the bourgeois, liberal humanist status quo, as Gramsci makes clear. Retaining a degree of plurality, multi-polarity and antagonism is therefore important. Such diversality ensures no single project, platform or conception of the commons becomes *the one to rule them all*. At the same time, it provides affective drives and resentments with a means of expressing themselves that helps avoid the kind of conflict between essentialist, non-negotiable identities and values that, as we've seen, has led to the rise of the populist right in so many countries around the world. This is why it is crucial to keep the question of how to create non-proprietary shared spaces and resources, along with the collective social processes that are necessary to manage and maintain them, radically open. Doing so enables the collaborative means of creating commons we're engaged in to *remain political*, now and in the future.

An earlier and shorter version of 'Postdigital Politics' was published in Cornelia Sollfrank, Shuhsa Niederberger and Felix Stalder, eds, *Aesthetics of the Commons* (Zurich: DIAPHANES): https://www.diaphanes.com/titel/aesthetics-of-the-commons-6419

[1] David Bollier, for example, was doing so as early as March 26, 2020. For him, such actions can be understood as commoning rather than '"volunteering"' because they are 'more deeply committed and collective in character than individual "do-gooding"" (David Bollier, 'Commoning as a Pandemic Survival Strategy', *David Bollier: News and Perspectives on the Commons*, March 26, 2020: http://www.bollier.org/blog/commoning-pandemic-survival-strategy. Similarly, by June 2020 Marina Sitrin and Colectiva Sembrar had already published their edited collection, *Pandemic Solidarity: Mutual Aid During the Covid-19 Crisis* (London: Pluto, 2020).

[2] For more details, see 'Flatten the Curve, Build the Care': http://syllabus.pirate.care/topic/coronanotes/. This is part of the Pirate.Care.Syllabus collective response to the coronavirus crisis offered by my colleagues Valeria Graziano, Tomislav Medak, Marcell Mars, Maddalena Fragnito and others: https://syllabus.pirate.care. I will come back to say more about Pirate Care below.

At the same time we need to remember there were also displays of racism against South East Asian people during this period, along with sporadic instances of looting, violence and theft. And that's without mentioning the extensive use of the #covidiot hastag to publicly 'corona-shame' those not adhering to the advice about social distancing.

[3] This definition of the commons is derived from the Creating Commons research project, run by Cornelia Sollfrank, Shuhsa Niederberger and Felix Stalder. Launched in January 2017, Creating Commons is based at Zurich University of the Arts: http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch. For more on the concept of the commons as used in the context of this research project, see Felix Stalder, 'The Notion of the "Commons"', *Creating Commons*, July 17, 2017: http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch/the-notion-of-the-commons/.

[4] In 'Learning From Shadow Libraries', her keynote talk at the launch of the Centre for Postdigital Cultures at Coventry University on February 7, 2018, Corneila Sollfrank provided the following list of radical theorists of the commons: Isabelle Lorey, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, Paolo Virno, Isabell Stengers, Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Roberto Esposito, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. To Sollfrank's list I would add, at the very least, the names of David Bollier, Massimo De Angelis, and Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval.

If the liberal approach focuses on the normative frameworks and principles of governance and self-organisation that best allow a shared pool of spaces and resources to be managed and maintained as a specific property regime, radical theory is less concerned with associating the commons with things – land, sea, water, air, music files, digital books, software, code – and more with the social relations of commoning; with constructing the commons on the basis of shared political activities, practices and principles. For a recent account of the differences between liberal philosophy and radical theory when it comes to the commons, see Marek Korczysnki and Andreas Wittel, 'The Workplace Commons: Towards Understanding Commoning Within Work Relations', *Sociology* 1-6, 2020.

[5] Duncan Bell is just one of many political theorists to have developed an argument to this effect. In 'What is Liberalism?', a history of how liberalism has been variously understood as a category

of political analysis, he insists: "'Thomas Nagel is surely right to proclaim that "… most political argument in the Western world now goes on between different branches of [the liberal] tradition." … Most inhabitants of the West are now conscripts of liberalism: the scope of the tradition has expanded to encompass the vast majority of political positions regarded as legitimate … and most who identify themselves as socialists, conservatives, social democrats, republicans, greens, feminists, and anarchists have been ideologically incorporated, whether they like it or not' (Duncan Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', *Political Theory*, Vol. 42(6), 2014: 689; citing Thomas Nagel, 'Rawls and Liberalism', *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: CUP, 2003) 62).

[6] I developed the concept of anti-bourgeois theory, in part, through a critical (in the Foucauldian sense) engagement with a text by the theorist McKenzie Wark called 'On the Obsolescence of the Bourgeois Novel in the Anthropocene', *Verso* (blog), August 16, 2017: https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3356-on-the-obsolescence-of-the-bourgeois-novel-in-the-anthropocene). Wark's text was published on the blog of Verso Books as an addition to the collection of critical appreciations she provides in *General Intellects: Twenty-One Thinkers For The Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2017). For more, see my 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory', *Media Theory*, Vol.3, No.2, December, 2019: http://journalcontent.mediatheoryjournal.org/index.php/mt/article/view/91.

[7] bell hooks, 'Postmodern Blackness', *Postmodern Culture*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (September, 1990).

[8] Gary Hall, *The Uberfication of the University* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

[9] See Darren Loucaides, 'Where Farage Learned His Digital Tricks', *The Guardian*, May 21, 2019.

[10] Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston, *Post-digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018).

[11] In the U.K, Minister for the Cabinet Office Michael Gove has in fact been quoting Gramsci in his speeches for some time. See, for one recent example, 'The Privilege of Public Service' given as the Ditchley Annual Lecture, July 1, 2020: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-privilege-of-public-service-given-as-the-ditchley-annual-lecture. Gove begins this lecture with the following quote from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*: 'The crisis consists precisely of the fact that the inherited is dying – and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'

[12] Of course some populist authoritarians don't have this problem: both Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński and Mateusz Morawiecki in Poland having more or less gained control over their nation's media.

[13] How significant is it as far as its understanding of postdigital communications is concerned that the Boris Johnson government is lead by journalists? Johnson famously wrote for the *Telegraph*, Gove for the *Times*.

[14] For more in this context, see Chantal Mouffe, *For A Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2019).

[15] Luke Winkie, 'I Was a Teenage 4chan Troll – Until I Learned to Change My Ways', *Daily Dot*, August 26, 2015: https://www.dailydot.com/via/4chan-troll-white-boy-internet-sexism/.

[16] An early version of 'Postdigital Politics' was presented as part of the Creating Commons: Affects, Collectives, Aesthetics panel at the Transmediale Festival, Berlin, February 1, 2019. This panel was hosted and organised by Sollfrank and Stalder on behalf of the Creating Commons @Zurick ZHdK research project.

[17] Matthijis Rooduijn, Stijn van Kessel, Caterina Froio, Andrea Pirro, Sarah de Lange, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Paul Lewis, Cas Mudde & Paul Taggart, *The PopuList 2.0: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe* (2020): www.popu-list.org.

[18] Giacomo Benedetto, Simon Hix and Nicola Mastrorocco, 'The Rise and Fall of Social Democracy, 1918-2017', *American Political Science Review,* 2020: 1-12, 2.

[19] Greta Thunberg, speaking at the UN climate change talks, Madrid, December 6, 2019; see 'Irresistible Greta Thunberg Meets Immovable UN Climate Talks', *Climate Home News*, December 7, 2019: https://www.climatechangenews.com/2019/12/07/irresistible-thunberg-meets-immovable-un-climate-talks/.

[20] Luke Winkie, 'I Was a Teenage 4chan Troll'.

[21] In *How To Be An Anti-capitalist in the 21st Century*, Erik Olin Wright explains that 'this is why the names for social protest movements so often have the prefix "anti." Antiwar mobilizations oppose a war. Anti-austerity protests oppose budgets cuts. Antiglobalization protests oppose the neoliberal policies of global capitalist integration with rules favorable to multinational corporations and global finance. And even when a movement is named by its positive aspirations – the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, the women's movement – the demands are often frames primarily as the end to something: the end to Jim Crow laws; the end to housing discrimination; the end to racial profiling by the police; the end to fracking; the end to gender discrimination in employment; the end to restrictions on marriage for homosexual couples' (Erik Olin Wright, *How To Be An Anti-capitalist in the 21st Century*, (London: Verso, 2019) 65).

That it's easier to be *anti* and unite people around what they are *not* than be affirmative and unite people around what they *are* also helps explain why the populist right have been so good at campaigning to win power, but (with the exception of Orbán and Kaczyński) so bad at governing once they have actually achieved it. Instead, they have preferred to operate as if they are still in campaign mode. That it's not easy to govern if you're anti- most of the established elements of government that might prevent you from doing exactly what you want – the civil service, judiciary, the legal system and so forth – doesn't help.

[22] Maisa Rojas, 'The Climate Crisis Plus Inequality is a Recipe for Chaos', *The Guardian: Opinion*, December 9, 2019.

[23] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Verso, 2005) 30.

[24] Timothy Garton Ash, 'The Future of Liberalism', *Prospect*, Winter Special, 2020, 19.

[25] Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (London: Zed Books, 2015) 21. My thanks to Priya Rajasekar for pointing me in the direction of Dabashi's book.

[26] 'Fuck business' was an aside made by Boris Johnson at a 2018 private reception. See Robert Shrimsley, 'Boris Johnson's Brexit Explosion Ruins Tory Business Credentials', *Financial Times*, June 25, 2018: https://www.ft.com/content/8075e68c-7857-11e8-8e67-1e1a0846c475. The

libertarian neoliberal disruption of existing business is accompanied by assaults on institutions such as universities, the civil service and the supreme court that, from a liberal perspective, are designed to serve as a check on political power precisely by remaining separate from it. As early as 2014 the New Frontiers Foundation thinktank, then directed by Johnson's former chief adviser Dominic Cummings, was calling for rightwing politicians to challenge the standing of the BBC, for example. This was with a view to creating a U.K. equivalent to Fox News in the U.S. that would not be constrained by rules such as those concerning broadcasting impartiality.

[27] For more, see the Platform Cooperative Consortium: https://platform.coop. For a brief introduction to platform cooperativism and its history, see Maira Sutton, Cat Johnson and Neal Gorenflo, 'What is a Platform Co-op? A Shareable Explainer', *Shareable*, August 16, 2016: http://www.shareable.net/blog/a-shareable-explainer-what-is-a-platform-co-op.

[28] https://decodeproject.eu.

For another example of a project designed to allow citizens to retain control of their own data, see the MyData Global project in Finland: https://mydata.org/about/

Michel Bauwens, Vasilis Kostakis and Alex Paziatis take Barcelona as a case study of radical municipalism in *Peer to Peer: The Commons Manifesto* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2019). For more examples of municipal socialism, see Barcelona en Comú, eds, *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement* (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2019).

[29] See those resources for citizen engagement made available by the Belgian 'digital inclusion' start-up CitizenLab: https://www.citizenlab.co/resources.

[30] https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/coronavirus/hackathon-der-bundesregierung-1733632.

[31] Dietmar Gattwinkel, 'Fight Against Covid-19: Germany Organised "We vs Virus" Hackathon', *JoinUp*, March 24, 2020: https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/collection/innovative-public-services/news/covid-19-we-vs-virus-hackathon-de.

[32] https://culturemachine.net; https://ranchoelectronico.org.

[33] http://openhumanitiespress.org.

[34] http://radicaloa.disruptivemedia.org.uk.

[35] https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/postdigital-cultures.

[36] https://scholarled.org.

[37] Leslie Chan, 'Platform Capitalism and the Governance of Knowledge Infrastructure', Digital Initiative Symposium, University of San Diego, April 29-30, 2019: https://zenodo.org/record/2656601#.XNCUS-FR1Ta,%20consultado%206%20de%20mayo%20de%202019.

[38] https://copim.pubpub.org. COPIM is funded in large part by Research England, as the project has as one of its aims to show how open access books – and not just journal articles – can be included in the U.K.'s 2028 Ref exercise. Again, it seems indicative of the changing zeitgeist that Research England have chosen to fund a decentered, horizontally organized, community-led and owned project, rather than the kind of the top-down, 'one platform to rule them all' approach most funders have supported in the past. For more on COPIM, see the interview conducted with Janneke Adema and myself by Paula Clemente Vega for the Open Library of the Humanities blog: 'Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs: An Open Insights

Interview with Janneke Adema and Gary Hall', *Open Insights*, January 13, 2020: https://www.openlibhums.org/news/356/.

[39] Oliver Lerone Schultz, Adnan Hadzi, Pablo de Soto and Laila Shereen Sakr, eds, *after.video* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016): http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/titles/after-video.

[40] https://www.mandela27.com.

[41] A video of one of the exhibitions, held at the Delft Civic Centre, Cape Town in 2015, is available here:
https://livecoventryac-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/aa5237_coventry_ac_uk/ESeaLQJJuftMoMU9yWu1D80BgE_u5nVCUMlbMf7OzHrlsQ?e=agTufF.

[42] https://www.mandela27.com/assets/downloads/Mandela27%20DIY%20Exhibition%20-%20Building%20Instructions.pdf.

[43] http://wemake.cc.

See also Valeria Graziano, Zoe Romano, Serena Cangiano, Maddalena Fragnito, Francesca Bria, *Rebelling With Care: Exploring Open Technologies for Commoning Healthcare* (Milan, Italy: We Make, 2019): http://wemake.cc/digitalsocial/cure-ribelli/.

[44] Operating like this is actually closer to the etymological origins of the word 'author'. As Eva Weinmayr makes clear, derived from the 'Latin "augere", to increase, to augment, the "auctor," "autour," "autor" was somebody "who causes to grow, a promoter, producer, father, progenitor, an instigator, maker, doer – a responsible person, or a teacher, a person that invents or causes something"' (Eva Weinmayr, *Noun to Verb: An Investigation Into the Micro-politics of Publishing Through Artistic Practice*, thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Artistic Practice at HDK-Valand – Academy of Art and Design, Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg, 2020: http://wiki.evaweinmayr.com/index.php/6_Analysis:_Micro-politics_of_Publishing#cite_note-etymology_author-28).

[45] Kaspar Hauser, 'The Comforting Shadow of Knowledge', *Migrant Journal*, 6, 2020, 184.

[46] Mark Amerika, *remixthecontext* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[47] Valeria Graziano, 'Prefigurative Practices: Raw Materials for a Political Positioning of Art, Leaving the Avant-garde', in Lilia Mestre and Elke Van Campenhout eds, *Turn, Turtle! Reenacting The Institute* (Berlin: Live Art Development Agency & Alexander Verlag, 2016).

[48] For the latter, see Janneke Adema and Kamila Kuc *Unruly Gestures* (2015): http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v11/a11/unruly_gestures.mp4; and Janneke Adema and Kamila Kuc, 'Unruly Gestures: Seven Cine-Paragraphs on Reading/Writing Practices in our Post-Digital Condition', *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, 11(1) 2019: http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/article.asp?DOI=10.3384/cu.2000.1525.2019111190.

[49] Clare Birchall and Gary Hall, eds, Liquid Books (London: Open Humanities Press, 2008): http://liquidbooks.pbwiki.com; and Clare Birchall, Gary Hall, and Joanna Zylinska, eds, Living Books About Life (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016): http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org.

[50] Janneke Adema and Gary Hall, eds, Disrupting the *Humani*ties: Towards Posthumanities', *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, Vol. 9, No.2, Fall, 2016: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jep/3336451.0019.2*?rgn=full+text.

[51] With regard to the university, see the account of Coventry University's Open Media classes provided in Pauline van Mourik Broekman, Gary Hall, Ted Byfield, Shaun Hides and Simon Worthington, *Open Education: A Study in Disruption* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2014). These classes were also featured in: Lou McGill and Tim Gray, *Open Media Classes at Coventry University*, Jisc, July 2015, http://repository.jisc.ac.uk/6069/1/JR0041_OPEN_EDUCATION_REPORT_V3.pdf; and to a lesser extent, *Massive Open Online Courses: Higher Education's Digital Moment?*, Universities UK, May 2013 http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/massive-open-online-courses.aspx.

[52] Marcel Mars and Tomislav Medak, Public Library: Memory of the World: https://www.memoryoftheworld.org/blog/2015/05/27/repertorium_public_library/.

[53] This list concerning the hidden power of infrastructure is taken and adapted from Leslie Chan, 'Platform Capitalism and the Governance of Knowledge Infrastructure', Digital Initiative Symposium, University of San Diego, April 29-30, 2019: https://zenodo.org/record/2656601#.XNCUS-FR1Ta,%20consultado%206%20de%20mayo%20de%202019.

My title for part two, 'InfraRed', is also linked to the importance infrastructure has for us. 'Infra' is taken from infrastructure and 'red' refers to the way in which my collaborators and I align our work with the politics of the left, as I say.

[54] A different although related take on ideas of the subject and the private can be found in the work of our CPC colleagues Adrienne Evans and Miriam de Rosa on how the distinction between the public, the domestic and the familial is changing with the transformation in media communications technology from analogue to postdigital. See, for example, their 'Domestic, Private, Familial' event, held at Coventry University on January 22, 2020; and also Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley, '"He's a Total TubeCrush": Post-feminist Sensibility as Intimate Publics', *Feminist Media Studies*, Volume 18, Issue 6, 2018. Here, TubeCrush and phenomenon such as the #MeToo campaign show how aspects of subjectivity, sexuality and gender inequality that were once kept private are now being revealed on a public scale, thanks to the likes of Twitter and Facebook.

[55] Cornelia Sollfrank, 'The Surplus of Copying—How Shadow Libraries and Pirate Archives Contribute to the Creation of Cultural Memory and the Commons', in Michael Kargl and Franz Thalmair, eds, *Originalcopy: Post-digital Strategies of Appropriation* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019).

[56] Roberto Esposito, 'Community, Immunity, Biopolitics', *Angelaki*, volume 18, number 3, 2013, 89.

[57] For more, see my treatment of new materialism in *Pirate Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

[58] François Cusset, *How The World Swung To the Right: Fifty Years of Counterrevolutions* (California: Semiotext(e), 2018) 20-21.

[59] Art Fund, *Calm and Collected: Museums and Galleries: The UK's Untapped Wellbeing Resource?,* 2019: https://www.artfund.org/assets/national-art-pass/artfund_calm-and-collected-wellbeing-report.pdf.

[60] http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch/about/; Tatiana Bazzichelli, Truth-Tellers: The Impact of Speaking Out, 10th event of the Disruption Network Lab, Studio 1, Berlin, November 25-26, 2016: https://www.disruptionlab.org/truth-tellers.

[61] David Garcia, 'Beyond the Evidence', *New Tactical Research* (blog), September 25, 2019: http://new-tactical-research.co.uk/blog/beyond-the-evidence-2/. According to Garcia, the term 'evidentiary realism' originates with the artist and curator Paolo Cirio and his 2017 group exhibition of the same name: Evidentiary Realism, Fridman Gallery, New York, February 28 – March 31, 2017: https://paolocirio.net/press/show_evidentiary-realism_nyc.php.

For an earlier engagement on my part with the work of Lev Manovich, see 'There Are No Digital Humanities', *Pirate Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016).

[62] Eyal Weizman quoted in David Garcia, 'Beyond the Evidence' (punctuation as in Garcia's original post).

[63] Josephine Harvey, 'Obama Says Trump Has Accelerated "Truth Decay" In America', *Huff Post*, November 16, 2020: https://www.aol.com/obama-says-trump-accelerated-truth-061324918.html?guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9zZWFyY2gueWFob28uY29tLw&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAHrvtwHhtrDiNMIp70nAkBg0fKKtcM1YXHgE9qmWA9_98OgJ-DWqtrPwdTJ4455Cn9UKRM5bMdFu-DI8KLIxkLP9amZGWw7UkgoN6YIYdzjL_JK0chdIx-wxC5hchEpjNxu3ehZ8qXnVm4sKNgJtHtZlXXSBBkbVySk4RuM_-S73&guccounter=2.

[64] Alan Rusbridger, 'The Election in the Media: Against Evasion and Lies, Good Journalism is All We Have', *The Observer*, December 15, 2019, 47.

[65] A further academic variation on the theme has come from the social sciences. It concerns the idea that 'public faith in expert knowledge can only be regained not through reasserting the authority of facts but by rediscovering ways of knowing-in-common' in order to make the case for what Noortje Marres – taking notions of both 'democracy' and the 'public' as her datum points in doing so (see below) – refers to as 'knowledge democracy'. Eva Haifa Giraud and Sarah-Nicole Aghassi-Isfahani, 'Post-Truths, Common Worlds, and Critical Politics: Critiquing Bruno Latour's Renewed Critique of Critique', *Cultural Politics*, Volume 16, Number, March 2020); Noortje Marres, 'Why We Can't Have Our Facts Back', *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 4, 2018.

[66] Social Science in Humanitarian Action, 'Social Dimensions of the Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) Outbreak and Response: Meeting Report', Roundtable at the Wellcome Trust, London, February 3, 2020: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15121/SSHAP_Social_Dimensions_nCoV_outbreak_response_meeting_report_Feb2020.pdf.

[67] Katelyn Burns, 'Trump's 7 Worst Statements on the Coronavirus Outbreak', *Vox*, March 13, 2020: https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/3/13/21176535/trumps-worst-statements-coronavirus.

[68] Hanna Arendt, in Roger Errera, 'Hannah Arendt: From an Interview', *The New York Review of Books*, 26, 10, 1978.

[69] Kai Strittmatter, *We Have Been Harmonised: Life In China's Surveillance State* (Exeter: Old Street Publishing, 2019) 18.

[70] Glenn Kessler, Meg Kelly, Salvador Rizzo and Michelle Ye Hee Lee, 'The Fact Checker's Ongoing Database of the False or Misleading Claims Made by President Trump Since Assuming Office', *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?.

[71] At the same time, a lot of those on the nativist right seem to believe that the establishment rules don't apply to them too. Which is why they're not overly concerned if a populist government, say, prorogues parliament or violates international treaties on behalf of 'us', 'the people'. What's

important is that these politicians should continue to apply the rule of law with full vigour to 'them', those considered to be the enemy 'other': the EU, minorities, migrants, left-liberal elites.

72 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone, 1988) 25.

73 Eliza Mackintosh, 'Finland is Winning the War on Fake News. What It's Learned May Be Crucial to Western Democracy', *CNN*, May 2019: https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/05/europe/finland-fake-news-intl/.

74 Forensic Architecture, The Bombing of Rafah, July 31, 2015: https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-bombing-of-rafah. For more, see Eyal Weizman, 'Hannibal in Rafah', *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: ZONE, 2018). Significantly, Weizman begins this book with a warning drawn from history, namely the 2000 libel trial launched by David Irving against the historian Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin Books for calling him a Holocaust denier. Weizman's warning is that 'an independent forensics analyst challenging officially sanctioned truths with the typically limited means afforded to activists is not a guarantee of progressive politics' (20).

75 'Flatpack Democracy 2.0 – How the Independents for Frome Triggered a British and Global Wave of Community Empowerment', *The Alternative UK*, October 3, 2019: https://www.thealternative.org.uk/dailyalternative/2019/10/7/flatpack-democracy-two-zero.

76 Marcell Mars, 'Public Library', interviewed by Cornelia Sollfrank, *artwarez*, Berlin, February 1, 2013: http://artwarez.org/projects/GWYDH/mars.html.

For example, in June 2020 it was reported by Brewster Kahle that 'four commercial publishers chose to sue the Internet Archive during the global coronavirus pandemic'. This forced them to close early the temporary National Emergency Library (https://blog.archive.org/national-emergency-library/) the Internet Archive had set up to 'provide books to support emergency remote teaching, research activities, independent scholarship, and intellectual stimulation' over the course of the Covid-19 outbreak. For Kahle, it is a complaint that 'attacks the concept of any library owning and lending digital books, challenging the very idea of what a library is in the digital world' (Brewster Kahle, 'Temporary National Emergency Library to Close 2 Weeks Early, Returning to Traditional Controlled Digital Lending', *Internet Archive Blogs*, June 10, 2020: http://blog.archive.org/2020/06/10/temporary-national-emergency-library-to-close-2-weeks-early-returning-to-traditional-controlled-digital-lending/. In this context it becomes easy to see why, for Sollfrank, 'the emergence of pirate libraries has to be considered as a systemic symptom, as the materialisation of social and economic flaws... The global demand for learning and scholarship is not being met by the contemporary publishing industry, all over the world, but especially in Latin and South America, in China, in Eastern Europe, in Africa and in India' (Cornelia Sollfrank, 'Learning From Shadow Libraries', Centre for Postdigital Cultures, Coventry University, February 7, 2018).

77 https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/about-us/research-news/2019/pirate-care/.

78 https://sea-watch.org/en/.

79 https://planka.nu/.

80 http://www.docsnotcops.co.uk.

81 https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/about-us/research-news/2019/pirate-care/.

For more on pirate care, see Valeria Graziano, 'Pirate Care - How do We Imagine the Health Care for the Future We Want?', *Medium*, October 5, 2018: https://medium.com/dsi4eu/pirate-care-how-do-we-imagine-the-health-care-for-the-future-we-want-fa7f71a7a21 ; and also The Pirate Care Project, a series of exhibitions, talks and reading groups organized by Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars and Tomislav Medak: https://pirate.care/pages/concept/; as well as 'Introduction to Pirate Care', pirate.care.syllabus: http://syllabus.pirate.care/topic/piratecareintroduction/.

[82] Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars and Tomislav Medak, 'Pirate Care: Against the Crisis', Kunsthalle Wien, March-May, 2020: https://kunsthallewien.at/en/pirate-care-gegen-die-krise/.

[83] Lawrence Liang, 'Beyond Representation: The Figure of the Pirate', in Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz, *Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 69-70.

[84] See Gary Hall, *Pirate Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

[85] Caitlin Dewey, '98 Personal Data Points That Facebook Uses to Target Ads to You', *Washington Post*, August 19, 2016.