

**❖ WikiLeaks: power 2.0? Surveillance 2.0? Criticism 2.0? Alternative media 2.0? A political-economic analysis**

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**Abstract**

The task of this paper is to analyse how WikiLeaks relates to capitalism. It deals specifically with the questions: Is WikiLeaks a counter-surveillance medium? Is it a form of alternative medium and alternative journalism? How does WikiLeaks relate to the liberal and socialist worldviews? The role of WikiLeaks as a watchdog organisation is analysed and the role of surveillance, counter-surveillance and transparency is discussed (section 2). The paper assesses how ideology and worldviews shape WikiLeaks self-understanding (section 3) and WikiLeaks is connected to journalism and alternative media theory (section 4). Finally, some conclusions about the role of WikiLeaks in contemporary capitalism are drawn (section 5).

**Introduction**

WikiLeaks is a non-commercial and non-profit Internet whistleblowing platform that has been online since 2006. It was founded by Julian Assange and is funded by online donations. Whistleblowers can upload documents that are intended to make misbehaviour and crimes of governments and corporations transparent – that is, visible in the public. Documents can be uploaded anonymously by making use of an online submission form. WikiLeaks's main servers are based in Sweden.

In April 2010, WikiLeaks published a video titled "Collateral Murder" that showed a situation where US air forces killed civilians and journalists in Iraq. The topic making the news with respect to WikiLeaks in late July 2010 was that the platform had published more than 90 000 top secret documents from American military sources about military operations in Afghanistan.

According to news sources (Der Spiegel 2001:70-86), the documents:

- show that special command forces such as the US Task Force 373, have killed enemies who were listed on death lists
- outline failed operations (including the killing of civilians)
- show that the Americans and their allies are facing serious problems in the military conflict with the Taliban and Al Qaeda
- point to the fact that unmanned fighter drones used in Afghanistan are error prone and have been involved in many accidents.

WikiLeaks released almost 400,000 US Army documents about the Iraq war ("Iraq War Logs") in October 2010 and one month later released more than 250,000 files documenting correspondence between the US State Department and diplomats ("Diplomatic Cables"). These are just some of the most well known leaks.

In December 2010, WikiLeaks was permanently in the world news because Julian Assange was sought with a European arrest warrant issued in Sweden for the suspected sexual assault of two women. This event followed shortly after the release of the US Diplomatic Cables, which spurred speculations of a relationship between the two events. After Assange turned himself in to British authorities on December 7, 2010, there were reports that the US Justice Department planned to accuse Assange of espionage (New York Times 2010). The fact that an Internet-based political project has had the power to become the subject of world politics shows the relative importance of political online communication today and illustrates the importance of studying WikiLeaks in the area of media and communication and Internet studies more broadly.

The circumstance that has led WikiLeaks to becoming a subject of world politics has resulted in academics such as Yochai Benkler and Manuel Castells, two of the most prominent techno-optimistic Internet scholars, to once again in a techno-euphoric manner, stress the political power of the Internet and social media. According to Benkler (2011),

WikiLeaks can be said to be an exercise in counter-power, because it disrupts the organisational technical

form in which governments and large companies habitually control the flow of information about their behavior in ways that constrain the capacity of others to criticize them – that is, affect the behavior of those others so that it is different than what those others would have preferred – and because it increases the probability that the outcomes of their behaviors will be closer to those they prefer (728).

Castells (2011) has said that WikiLeaks is indicative of the fact that “cyberspace, populated by autonomous sources of information, is a fundamental threat to the ability to silence, on which domination has always been based.”<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to this deterministic optimism, this paper suggests it is necessary to critically assess WikiLeaks based on a political economy framework in order to evaluate its limits and potential.

Dwayne Winseck (2011) provides a map of the landscape of political economy research in media and communication studies by identifying four approaches to the political economies of media:

- Neoclassical Political Economy of the Media
- Radical Political Economy of the Media
- Schumpeterian Institutional Political Economy of the Media
- The Cultural Industries School.

The second paradigm, which can best be called Critical Political Economy of the Media or Marxist Political Economy of the Media, questions the connection of the media to exploitation and domination and aims at providing intellectual means that contribute to emancipation. The second paradigm is the only way for intellectually working towards a truly participatory, democratic, commons-based and public media system within a just society.

Important topics of the Critical Political Economy of Media and Communication include: media activism, media and social movements; the commodification of media content, audiences and communication labour; capital accumulation models of the media; media and the public sphere, communication and space-time; the concentration of corporate power in the communication industry; the media and globalisation; media policies and state regulation of the media; communication and social class, gender, race; hegemony; the history of communication industries, media commercialisation, media homogenisation /diversification/multiplication/integration, media and advertising, media power (Mosco 2009; Murdock & Golding 2005; Wasco 2004; Hardy 2010).

Critical Political Economy analyses the media and communication in the context of exploitation, class, domination, power structures, ideology, contradictions and struggles. The methodological approach employed in this paper is Critical Political Economy, therefore WikiLeaks' role in contemporary capitalism is analysed and special consideration is given to its connection to liberal ideology, alternative worldviews and struggles.

The overall task of this paper is to analyse WikiLeaks relation to capitalism. One subtask of this paper is to discuss what kind of medium WikiLeaks is: is it a counter-surveillance medium? Is it a form of alternative medium and alternative journalism? The analysis of the application of the notions of surveillance/transparency and alternative medium is the focus of this paper. Furthermore, the paper tests degree to which the worldviews of liberalism and/or socialism underlie the WikiLeaks projects.

In section 2, WikiLeaks is analysed with the help of the categories of power, surveillance and transparency. In section 3, the political worldview underlying WikiLeaks is assessed. The notions of journalism and alternative media are applied to WikiLeaks in section 4. Finally, some conclusions are drawn in section 5.

### **WikiLeaks, power, surveillance and transparency**

WikiLeaks explicitly establishes a connection to surveillance theory by describing itself as “the first intelligence agency of the people” (WikiLeaks 2010: paragraph 14). It also describes itself as a watchdog project: “We believe that it is not only the people of one country that keep their government honest, but also the people of other countries who are watching that government” (WikiLeaks 2010: 4; WikiLeaks 2011: 10). From the perspective of WikiLeaks as a counter-surveillance project, it is interesting to further explore the theorising of WikiLeaks with the help of surveillance theory and media theory. In general, one can distinguish between general and more specific definitions of surveillance. General definitions see surveillance as having both normatively positive and negative aspects, whereas the more specific definitions see surveillance as a normatively negative form of coercive power and domination.

General concepts of surveillance make one or more of the following assumptions:

- There are positive aspects of surveillance (Haggerty 2006: 36). Surveillance has two faces, it is enabling and constraining (Lyon 1994: ix; Marx, 2007: 535; Zureik 2003: 42).
- Surveillance is a fundamental aspect of all societies (Norris & Armstrong 1999: 5; Rule, 2007: 14).
- Surveillance is necessary for organisation (Dandeker 1990; Giddens 1984, 1985, 1987).
- Any kind of systematic information gathering is surveillance (Ball & Webster 2003: 1; Bogard 2006: 98f; Dandeker 2006: 225; Haggerty & Ericson 2006: 3; Hier & Greenberg 2007: 381; Rule 2007: 14; Wall 2007: 230).

There are a number of problems that general surveillance concepts face:

- A general notion of surveillance places both negative and positive aspects of surveillance on one categorical level and

therefore may trivialise repressive information gathering and usage.

- General surveillance studies support the ideological celebration and normalisation of surveillance.
- A general surveillance concept does distinguish between information gathering and surveillance, therefore no distinction between a surveillance society and an information society and no distinction between surveillance studies and information society studies, can be drawn.
- A dialectic should not be assumed at the *categorical* level of surveillance, but at a *meta-level* that allows one to distinguish between surveillance and solidarity as positive and negative respectively at the side of systematic information gathering.
- Etymologically the term surveillance implies a relationship of asymmetrical power, domination, hierarchy, and violence.

General surveillance concepts can also be characterised as being 'neutral' or 'neutralising' because by identifying potential positive meanings of the term 'surveillance', they neutralise the critical potential of the term for engaging in a fundamental critique of power and domination and create a conceptual confusion and conflation that poses is a disservice to a critical theory of society.

WikiLeaks makes information about organisations that abuse power available to the public by allowing the anonymous submission of secret documents that are analysed, summarised and presented on the WikiLeaks website. If WikiLeaks were understood as being a form of surveillance in the general neutral understanding of the term, then it could not be distinguished from other Internet projects like Wikipedia because both Wikipedia and WikiLeaks are systematic forms of gathering and assessing information, which is the core of neutral surveillance definitions. The difference, however, is that WikiLeaks is engaging in political struggles, is an explicitly politically motivated project, and wants to make information public that has to do with the abuse of power.

Wikipedia is an encyclopaedic knowledge dissemination project aimed at presenting "well-written, balanced, neutral, and encyclopaedic, containing comprehensive, notable, verifiable knowledge" (Wikipedia 2011). In contrast,

WikiLeaks is a buttress against unaccountable and abusive power. [...] We propose that authoritarian governments, oppressive institutions and corrupt corporations should be subject to the pressure, not merely of international diplomacy, freedom of information laws or even periodic elections, but of something far stronger – the consciences of the people within them (WikiLeaks 2010: paragraphs 16f).

A notion of surveillance different from the general, neutral concept of surveillance is needed for theorising WikiLeaks because it is a project that makes knowledge, that stems from political conflicts and struggles, available. We therefore have to turn to negative, critical notions of surveillance for better understanding WikiLeaks.

There are no purely normatively positive concepts of surveillance (approaches that see that surveillance is always a good phenomenon), however there are approaches and theories that say that surveillance should be conceived as negative phenomenon. For Max Horkheimer, the "method of negation" is "the denunciation of everything that mutilates mankind and impedes its free development" (Horkheimer 1947,1974: 126). For Herbert Marcuse, negative categories are "an indictment of the totality of the existing order" (Marcuse 1941: 258) and at the same time "already contain their own negations and transcendence" (Marcuse 1936,1988: 86). Negative concepts "contain an accusation and an imperative" (Marcuse 1936,1988: 86).

A negative concept of surveillance characterises an aspect of the negativity of power structures, contemporary society, and heteronomous societies. It uses the notion of surveillance for denouncing and indicting domination and dominative societies. By doing so, it wants to point towards emancipation and a 'dominationless' society, which is conceived as also being a society without surveillance. In a negative theory, surveillance is a negative concept that is inherently linked to information gathering for the purposes of domination, violence, and coercion and thereby at the same time accuses such states of society and makes political demands for a participatory, cooperative, dominationless society that is not only a society where cooperative modes of production and ownership replace classes and the exploitation of surplus value, but also a society where care and solidarity are substituted for surveillance. Such a concept of surveillance is inspired by critical theory's analysis and accusation of domination and exploitation and its identification of the need of struggles against dominative and exploitative orders of society. A neutral concept of surveillance provides a disservice for a critical theory of surveillance as it makes critique more difficult and may support the ideological celebration and normalisation of surveillance.

The most well known negative theory of surveillance is the one by Michel Foucault. For Foucault (1977), surveillance is a form of disciplinary power. Surveillance prepares "a knowledge of man" (Foucault 1977: 171), a knowledge about "whether an individual" is "behaving as he should, in accordance with the rule or not" (Foucault 1994: 59). WikiLeaks wants to make public knowledge about powerful institutions in order to monitor if they are behaving, as they should, in accordance with certain normative rules:

The power of principled leaking to call governments, corporations and institutions to account is amply demonstrated through recent history. The public scrutiny of otherwise unaccountable and secretive institutions forces them to consider the ethical implications of their actions. Which official will chance a secret, corrupt transaction when the public is likely to find out? What repressive plan will be carried out when it is revealed to the citizenry, not just of its own country, but the world? When the risks of embarrassment and discovery increase, the tables are turned against conspiracy, corruption, exploitation and oppression (WikiLeaks 2010: 13; WikiLeaks 2011: 30).

For Foucault, surveillance is also a purposefully systematically organised act of observation for controlling human subjects. Surveillance is “permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent” (Foucault 1977: 214). Surveillance is based on “a principle of compulsory visibility” (187), it is a “system of permanent registration” (196), in which “all events are recorded” (197). Foucault argues that in order to secure domination, disciplines make use of certain methods such as the hierarchical observation, the normalising judgment, and the examination (170ff).

The instrument of hierarchical observation establishes the connection – disciplines-surveillance – because the “exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation” (170). WikiLeaks as an organisation is a contrast to the cases of a detective agency, a secret service, corporate workplace surveillance or consumer surveillance, as it is not involved in systematically gathering data about powerful institutions that show how they abuse power. Others, who have access to certain data, supply them to WikiLeaks. These data might sometimes be the result of systematic data gathering that is permanent, exhaustive, and omnipresent and the data might sometimes be deliberately recorded without the knowledge of the powerful organisation that are monitored. In many cases, the documents submitted to WikiLeaks are not external and unknown to powerful institutions, but rather are known to them and stem from the inside of these institutions. They want to keep certain information unknown to the public in order to protect their own power.

The analysis shows that the documents submitted to WikiLeaks share the aspect of the negative surveillance concept as disciplinary power that wants to show if powerful organisations are abusing power or not. The task that WikiLeaks has set itself is to discipline powerful organisations: leaking “is a motivating force for governments and corporations to act justly” (WikiLeaks 2010: paragraph 20; WikiLeaks 2010: 36). Further, “[w]hen the risks of embarrassment and discovery increase, the tables are turned against conspiracy, corruption, exploitation and oppression” (WikiLeaks 2011: 30). The documents submitted to WikiLeaks are normally not the result of systematic, purposeful, permanent surveillance operations carried out by WikiLeaks, but rather only partly stem from systematic, purposeful and permanent acts of surveillance and to another degree from the circumstance that individuals, who have access to data that documents power abuse and that stems from the actions and information generated by powerful organisations themselves, submit material to WikiLeaks, which then analyses, systematises and presents this material to the public.

A main difference between WikiLeaks and corporate- and government-surveillance is that the latter remains hidden, secret, and in many cases unknown, to the subjects under surveillance. In contrast, WikiLeaks wants to make data about powerful organisations available to the public. WikiLeaks does not employ the term surveillance for describing itself, but rather employs the notion of transparency:

Today, with authoritarian governments in power in much of the world, increasing authoritarian tendencies in democratic governments, and increasing amounts of power vested in unaccountable corporations, the need for openness and transparency is greater than ever. WikiLeaks interest is the revelation of the truth. Unlike the covert activities of state intelligence agencies, as a media publisher WikiLeaks relies upon the power of overt fact to enable and empower citizens to bring feared and corrupt governments and corporations to justice (WikiLeaks 2011: paragraph 31; see also: WikiLeaks 2010: paragraph 13).

Further, WikiLeaks:

...is a global group of people with long standing dedication to the idea of improved transparency in institutions, especially government. We think better transparency is at the heart of less corruption and better democracies. By definition, spy agencies want to hoard information. We want to get it out to the public (WikiLeaks 2010: paragraph 55).

Corporate watch platforms (such as CorpWatch Reporting, Transnationale Ethical Rating, The Corporate Watch Project) and WikiLeaks, are attempts by those resisting asymmetric economic and political power relations to struggle against the powerful classes by documenting data that should make power transparent. There is a difference between surveillance used for erecting visibility over oppressed groups and which is the attempt to control and further oppress them, and the attempt to make the powerful transparent and which is a self-defence mechanism and a form of struggle of the oppressed or on behalf of the oppressed in order to try to defend themselves against oppression. “‘Surveillance’ suggests the operation of authority, while ‘transparency’ suggest the operation of democracy, of the powerful being held accountable” (Johnson & Wayland 2010: 25).

Johnson and Wayland (2010) point out that the notion of transparency should be used in relation to economic and political power. WikiLeaks is a mechanism that tries to make power transparent by leaking secret documents about political and economic power. WikiLeaks does not so much itself engage in collecting information about the powerful, but relies on anonymous online submissions by insiders who realise wrongdoings of institutions and want to contribute to more transparency of what is happening. WikiLeaks has to a certain degree both a focus on political and economic transparency:

Publishing improves transparency, and this transparency creates a better society for all people. Better scrutiny leads to reduced corruption and stronger democracies in all society’s institutions, including government, corporations and other organisations. A healthy, vibrant and inquisitive journalistic media plays a vital role in achieving these goals. We are part of that media (WikiLeaks 2011: paragraph 8).

WikiLeaks has some parallels with corporate watch platforms. They have in common that they are both Internet projects that try to make powerful structures transparent as part of the struggle against powerful institutions. The Internet provides means for documenting such behaviour. It can help to watch the watchers and to raise public awareness. In recent years, corporate watch organisations that run online watch platforms have emerged.

Examples of corporate watch organisations include:

- CorpWatch Reporting (<http://www.corpwatch.org>)
- Transnationale Ethical Rating (<http://www.transnationale.org>)
- The Corporate Watch Project (<http://www.corporatewatch.org>)
- Multinational Monitor (<http://www.multinationalmonitor.org>)
- crocodyl: Collaborative research on corporations (<http://www.crocodyl.org>)
- Endgame Database of Corporate Fines (<http://www.endgame.org/corpfines.html>)
- Corporate Crime Reporter (<http://www.corporatecrimereporter.com>)
- Corporate Europe Observatory (<http://www.corporateeurope.org>)
- Corporate Critic Database (<http://www.corporatecritic.org>).

For example, Transnationale Ethical Rating aims to inform consumers and research corporations. Its ratings include quantitative and qualitative data about violations of labour rights, of human rights, layoff of employees, profits, sales, earnings of CEOs, boards, president and managers, financial offshoring operations, financial delinquency, environmental pollution, corporate corruption and dubious communication practices. Dubious communication practices include an "arguable partnership, deceptive advertising, disinformation, commercial invasion, spying, mishandling of private data, biopiracy and appropriation of public knowledge" (Transnational Ethical Rating 2011). The task is to document corporate irresponsibility.

Figure 1 shows an example of Transnational Ethical Rating's entry for Google. The 'infocom' violations include 'spying': "By downloading Google's browser, Chrome, users agree to give up copyright to their own files" (Transnational Ethical Rating 2011). Online corporate watchdog organisations document and gather data about the corporate irresponsibility of corporations.

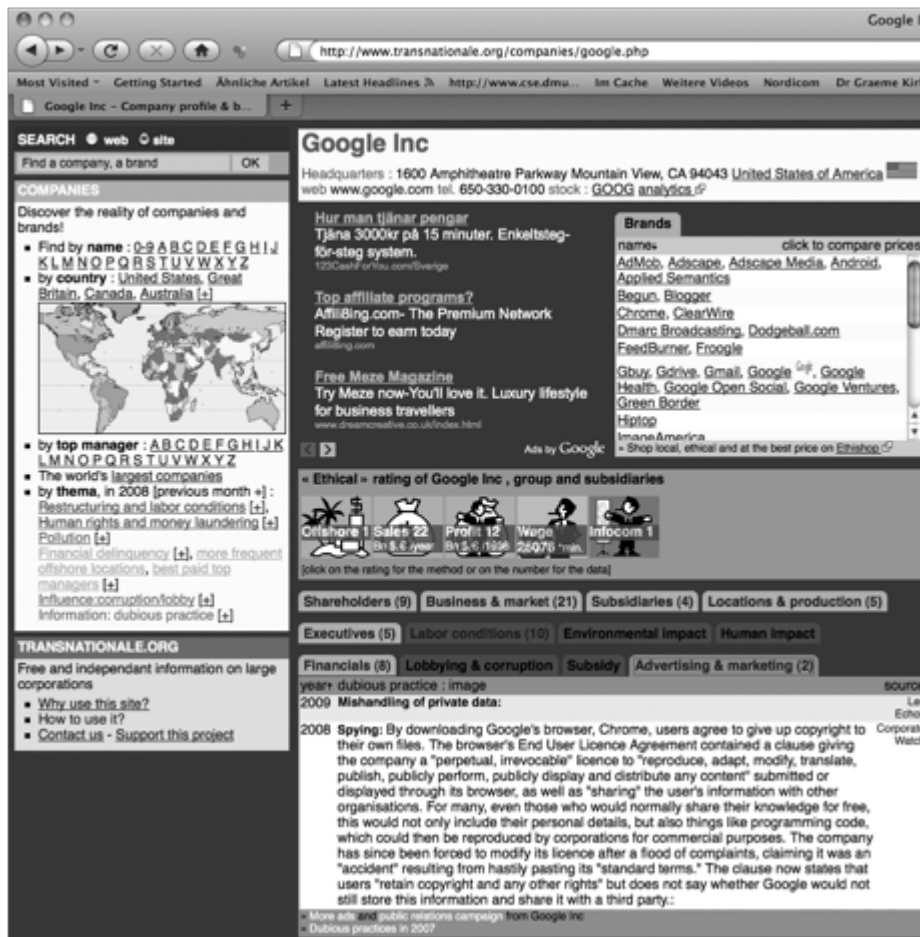


Figure 1: A sample page about Google from transnationale.org

Using media (such as the Internet in the case of online watch organisations and WikiLeaks) to resist and struggle against domination by making the latter transparent is not new and not specific to the Internet. Parallels in trying to establish watchdog media can be found in relation to earlier media, such as the video camera: The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) stopped the Afro-American Rodney King in his car on March 3, 1991 after a freeway chase. King resisted arrest, which resulted in a brutal beating by the police, from which he suffered a fracture of a leg and of a facial bone. The four police officers Briseño, Koon, Powell, and Wind were tried for police brutality and acquitted by a LA court in April 1992. George Holiday filmed the beating of King with a low technology home video camera. When the news of the acquittal of the officers

and the video made their way to the mass media, outrage spread and many observers came to hold the view that both the LAPD and the justice system engaged in racism against Afro-Americans. The event triggered riots in Los Angeles in April 1992.

John Fiske (1996) discusses the role of video cameras in the Rodney King example and other cases in order to show that the miniaturization, cheapening, and mass availability of video cameras changes surveillance. "Video technology extends the panoptic eye of power [...], but it also enables those who are normally the object of surveillance to turn the lens and reverse its power" (Fiske 1996: 127).

The videolow allows the weak one of their few opportunities to intervene effectively in the power of surveillance, and to reverse its flow. [...] The uses of videolow to extend disciplinary surveillance can be countered [...] by those who turn the cameras back upon the surveillers (Fiske 1996: 224f).

The difference between the video camera and the Internet is that the Internet functions at the same time as means of information production, diffusion and consumption, it is more global in reach, allows fast, cheap and easy distribution and provides integrated platforms (such as WikiLeaks), where single users submit user-provided content that can reach a mass audience. The separation between private and public communication, personal and mass communication is thereby sublated, something which has led Castells to characterise the contemporary Internet as a form of mass self-communication:

It is mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of a video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links to a number of web sources, or a message to a massive e-mail list. At the same time, it is self-communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic networks is self-selected (Castells 2009: 55).

WikiLeaks is a form of anonymous mass self-communication: the content is provided by individual leakers, who can with this way reach a global public and mass audience and remain anonymous at the same time.

Today, we live in an age where the Internet shapes the lives of many of us. The Internet has become a new key medium of information, communication, and co-production. Therefore, paraphrasing Fiske, we can say that the Internet extends the panoptic eye of power, but it also enables those who are normally the objects of surveillance to turn their eyes, ears, and voice onto the powerful and reverse the power of surveillance. We can in such cases speak of Internet counter-surveillance or 'subveillance'. WikiLeaks and corporate watchdog organisations make data about powerful organisations public; they are attempts to make the secrecy of power public and transparent. Whereas surveillance is mainly kept secret and unknown to those who are monitored, watching is a self-defence reaction on behalf of the dominated to the accumulation of power and the surveillance and oppression of citizens, workers, consumers and 'prosumers.'

The concept of watching the powerful shares with Foucault's theory of surveillance, the idea that subjects are made visible with the help of knowledge. Watchdog organisations do however, not necessarily or only partly, systematically and permanently collect data in a secret way, but rather make existing data available to the public. New knowledge about the powerful are generated (e.g. ethical ratings) and published and unknown facts are discovered and published. The main difference between surveillance conducted by the powerful and by watchdog organisations, is that the latter's main task is the publishing of data about the powerful. The parallel between the powerful surveilling dominated groups and watchdog organisations making power transparent, is mainly the potential effect – disciplinary power. Powerful groups try to advance the accumulation of power (money, decision power, hegemony), by controlling the behaviour and thoughts of subordinated groups and individuals with the help of surveillance procedures. They discipline their behaviour, but keep the collected data secret. Watchdog organisations collect and publish or leak information about powerful organisations in order to try contributing to the limitation or abolition of asymmetric power. The disciplinary power that watchdog organisations try to exert is a form of counter-power that is a reaction to the disciplinary power exerted by powerful institutions (companies, governments, etc) – watching is a information-based, self-defence mechanism and counter-power struggle against domination.

Power can be theorised in two ways. On the one hand, thinkers like Max Weber define power as the "chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber 1978: 926). Power here is necessarily a form of violence and coercion. The problem of this definition is that it does not allow a clear line of separation between power and domination. Weber defines the latter as "probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (Weber 1978: 54), which is quite similar to the definition of power. It is therefore theoretically more feasible to conceive of power as a more general phenomenon than of domination.

Anthony Giddens defines power as "transformative capacity", the capability to intervene in a given set of events so as in some way to alter them" (Giddens 1985: 7), as the "capability to effectively decide about courses of events, even where others might contest such decisions" (Giddens 1985: 9). For Giddens, power is related to (allocative and authoritative) resources, to material facilities and means of control. Power is characteristic for all social relationships, it "is routinely involved in the instantiation of social practices" and is "operating in and through human action" (Giddens 1981: 49f).

Based on this alternative tradition of theorising power, we can define power as the disposition over the means required to influence processes and decisions in one's own interests, and domination as the disposition over the means of coercion required to influence others or processes and decisions. This means that power, (the control of resources like money, political influence, definition capacities), can be distributed in more symmetric and asymmetric way. Dictatorship is a centralisation of economic and/or political and/or ideological power; participatory democracy is a more symmetric or equal distribution of economic, political and cultural power. Watchdog organisations like WikiLeaks exist because we live in societies that are shaped by asymmetrical economic, political and cultural power structures. They are reactions to these situations; they try to

build counter-power to the exertion of asymmetrical power that excludes, dominates, oppresses or exploits humans and struggle for a more symmetric distribution of power by trying to make otherwise information about powerful institutions available to the public.

The power elite – large corporations, governments, and military institutions – distinguishes itself from ordinary citizens and most civil society organisations by two features: one is that these actors have a lot of economic and political power, which allows them to strongly shape our world, and two they also have the resources to keep parts of their activities invisible (Mills 2000). Therefore, for example, corporate crime frequently remains undetected. Power is based on a dialectic of visibility and invisibility: powerful actors want to make their enemies and opponents visible, while they want to remain themselves invisible. They engage in surveillance in order to make visible and in order to keep their own operations and gathered information invisible. Power is always related to making information about enemies and opponents visible, while at the same time making and keeping the collected information non-transparent, inaccessible, and secret. WikiLeaks and corporate watchdog organisations cut into the power dialectic of visibility of those under surveillance and invisibility of the powerful by helping to make invisible power structures visible. This is itself a process of power-making and power-generation because these are processes that try to force visibility on the powerful. WikiLeaks and other watchdog organisations engage in watching the powerful. During the Vietnam War, television made visible the horror of the killing fields that would have otherwise remained invisible. In a similar fashion, WikiLeaks has made visible hidden and secret realities of warfare today.

There are certainly limits to watchdog organisations. They are generally civil society projects because it is unlikely that big corporations or governments would support initiatives that tend to criticise corporations and governments with big amounts of money. Therefore, such projects are frequently based on precarious, self-exploitative labour, and are confronted with a lack of resources such as money, activists, time, infrastructure, influence etc. If political or economic institutions offer support, then there is a danger that they try to influence the activities of such projects, which can severely damage or limit the autonomy and critical facility of such projects.

They seem to be trapped in an antagonism between resource precariousness and loss of autonomy that is caused by the fact that the control of resources is vital for having political influence in contemporary society, and that resources in this very society are unequally distributed so that corporations and established political actors have much more power and influence than other actors. Given this situation, it would be a mistake not to try to organise citizens' initiatives, but one should bear in mind that due to the stratified character of capitalism it is more likely that such initiatives will fail and remain unimportant than that they will be successful in achieving their goals. Only the challenging of different resources towards watchdog organisations can contribute to weakening these limits.

Given that it has now been shown that WikiLeaks is a watchdog organisation, the question arises how the political goals and interests of this watchdog organisation look like. Watchdog organisations are not critical per se, their character rather is shaped by underlying worldviews and political practices. The next task is therefore to analyse the worldviews that are related to WikiLeaks.

### **WikiLeaks, liberalism and socialism**

Reviewing classical and contemporary concepts of liberalism, Gaus and Courtland (2011) in an encyclopaedic article about liberalism, argue that a common characteristic is that "liberals accord liberty primacy as a political value". Liberalism differs in this respect from radical democracy/participatory democracy: "Radical democrats assert the overriding value of equality" (Gaus & Courtland 2011).

In liberalism, "freedom is normatively basic, and so the onus of justification is on those who would limit freedom, especially through coercive means" (Gaus & Courtland 2011). The fundamental Liberal principle is that "political authority and law must be justified, as they limit the liberty of citizens. Consequently, a central question of liberal political theory is whether political authority can be justified, and if so, how" (Gaus & Courtland 2011). In an earlier work, Gaus argued that:

Freedom of speech, religious toleration extended to wide toleration of competing conceptions of the good life, anti-establishmentarianism (aimed at both religion and substantive views of human perfection), and a sphere of privacy are fundamental liberal commitments. Liberal public concerns focus on honoring these commitments but also on protecting fundamental civil interests, such as bodily integrity. Civil interests also include the maintenance of some sort of justified system of property rights (Gaus 1996:175).

Socialists in contrast to liberals, think that "the rewards of production [...] are due to society as a whole, and to its members equally, rather than to particular individuals" (Barker 1991: 485). In the realm of property and labour, "means of production are commonly possessed" in a socialist society (Barker 1991: 485). Important values in socialist thought include equality, communal and co-operative production, workers' control of production/self-managed companies (Barker 1991) and socio-political solidarity (Buzby 2010). Socialism maintains that the source of human value is human creativity and cooperation liberated from class power: "Socialist humanism declares: liberate men from slavery to things, to the pursuit of profit or servitude to 'economic necessity'. Liberate man, as a creative being – and he will create, not only new values, but things in super-abundance" (Thompson 1959).

The notion of socialism is not limited to the economic realm, although the economy is seen as important foundation of society. Held (1996: 271) says that a key feature of participatory democracy is the "direct participation of citizens in the regulation of the key institutions of society, including the workplace and local community". Participatory democracy, the political dimension of socialism, involves the "democratisation of authority structures" (Pateman, 1970: 35) in all decision-making systems, such as government, the work place, the family, education, housing, etc. "If individuals are to exercise the maximum amount of control over their own lives and environment then authority structures in these areas must be so organised that they can

participate in decision making” (Pateman 1970: 43).

Participatory democracy theory uses a wide notion of the political that extends beyond the sphere of government into the economy and culture. “Spheres such as industry should be seen as political systems in their own right” (Pateman 1970: 43). So on the one hand, socialism in its economic dimension is a system “within which the means of production are socially owned” and in which on the other hand in general “the allocation and use of resources for different social purposes is accomplished through the exercise of what can be termed ‘social power’”, which is “power rooted in the capacity to mobilise people for cooperative, voluntary collective actions of various sorts” (Wright 2010: 121).

Table 1 summarizes some main differences between liberalism and socialism.

	Liberalism	Socialism
Basic value	Freedom	Equality
View of society	Individualism	Sociality, solidarity
Economy	Private property	Collective ownership
Source of wealth	Capital	Co-operation of creative human beings freed from exploitation
State and politics	Private affairs are not controlled by the state	Grassroots democracy
Culture	Plurality of interests and worldviews	Universal rights and interests
Political struggle against:	Regulating state	Capital interests, exploitation, capitalist state, ideology

Table 1: Differences between liberalism and socialism

How does WikiLeaks relate to political worldviews? In order to answer this question, it is best to analyse WikiLeaks self-description with the help of critical discourse analysis. One principle of critical discourse analysis is applied: focus analysis (van Dijk 2011: 398) Focus analysis assesses how, and to what extent, focus (special stress) is given to certain topics and how these topics are predicated. Until December 3 2010, WikiLeaks was accessible on the website wikileaks.org. On the same day, the domain service provider EveryDNS cancelled WikiLeaks’ URL. With the help of the Pirate Party Switzerland, WikiLeaks moved its official site to wikileaks.ch. The old and the new site have different mission statements (wikileaks.org: WikiLeaks 2010, wikileaks.ch: WikiLeaks 2011). These mission statements express the self-understanding and self-definition of WikiLeaks and are therefore suited for critical discourse analysis. The content of these self-definitions is related to liberal and socialist political worldviews both in a quantitative and a qualitative way.

I numbered each paragraph in the two WikiLeaks’ self-definition. For each paragraph, I classified, which topics are discussed, which resulted in a category system consisting of seven topics. Table 2 shows the total number of occurrences of each topic in the two documents and the corresponding paragraph numbers.

Category	Total number (paragraphs in WikiLeaks’ self-definition 1)	Total number (paragraphs in WikiLeaks’ self-definition 2)
Whistleblowing, leaking documents	10 (1, 11, 12, 30, 36, 37, 42, 45, 46, 47)	6 (5, 6, 13, 22, 28, 32)



Making government transparent, watching governments, open government	22 (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 28, 29, 55, 56, 60)	16 (8, 9, 10, 11, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 37, 44, 45)
Explanation of technology	8 (10, 33, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44)	2 (2, 17)
Making corporate power transparent	11 (13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27)	11 (8, 11, 30, 31, 33, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43)
Free speech	10 (19, 20, 31, 32, 34, 35, 43, 49, 50, 51)	10 (3, 7, 18, 19, 20, 21, 32, 34, 35, 36)
Journalism	3 (48, 52, 53)	7 (1, 4, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16)
WikiLeaks organisation	6 (54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59)	3 (2, 9, 15)

Table 2: Results of a quantitative analysis of topics occurring in WikiLeaks two self-understandings (data source: WikiLeaks 2010, 2011)

The analysis shows that the most important element in both self-definitions of WikiLeaks is that by document leaking, it wants to make government power transparent, watch governments and advance the establishment of open governments. Making corporate power visible is a secondary topic. There are only 11 paragraphs that discuss this topic in both WikiLeaks' self-understandings opposed to 22 respectively, 16 paragraphs that discuss government transparency. In the first self-definition, the word government is mentioned 41 times, in the second 36 times (WikiLeaks 2010; 2011). In the first, company/companies is mentioned one time, in the second three times and corporate/corporation(s) 17 times in the first and 21 times in the second (WikiLeaks 2010; 2011). WikiLeaks (2011: 22) provides a list of its most important leaks: 29 (63%) leaks concern governments, 13 (28%) companies and banks and 4 (9%) religion. This circumstance confirms that WikiLeaks gives more weight to politics than to political economy and ideology.

WikiLeaks defines itself in its self-description as first of all a liberal project that protects freedom of speech and tries to strengthen democracy by making government corruption visible. In the second paragraph of the first self-definition, WikiLeaks defines itself purely in relation to government leaking, not corporate leaking: "We believe that transparency in government activities leads to reduced corruption, better government and stronger democracies" (WikiLeaks 2010: 2). In defining itself as WikiLeaks does as "a global group of people with long standing dedication to the idea of improved transparency in institutions, especially government" (WikiLeaks 2010: 55), WikiLeaks places an emphasis on governments. The problem of the WikiLeaks' self-descriptions is the strong focus on documenting government corruption, whereas documenting corporate irresponsibility and corporate crimes seems to be a subordinated goal. This creates the impression that corrupt governments are the main problem of our world and that corrupt, exploitative and criminal corporations are less problematic.

In addition, the liberal values of freedom and plurality are frequently invoked, for example when WikiLeaks says that governments that conceal information from citizens violate freedom in general, and freedom of speech and the freedom of the press to be unrestrained (WikiLeaks 2010: 18, 19, 21). WikiLeaks sees itself as working for the "defense of freedom of speech and media publishing" (WikiLeaks 2011: 3) and refers in this context to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (ibid.) and Thomas Jefferson (WikiLeaks 2011: 16). WikiLeaks' self-definition has a liberal bias because it sees big governments as the main problem, which reflects the liberal tendency to never trust governments and has a strong focus on the liberal core value of freedom (WikiLeaks is defined as a freedom of speech and freedom of information project) and the value of information plurality.

WikiLeaks mentions as one of its goals to promote "good governance": "Open government answers injustice rather than causing it. Open government exposes and undoes corruption. Open governance is the most effective method of promoting good governance" (WikiLeaks 2010: 13). The concept of "good governance" has been employed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for describing conditions indebted and poor countries have to fulfill in order to get an IMF loan. These conditions include on the one hand the commitment of the debtor countries to fight corruption and on the other hand "improving the management of public resources through reforms covering public sector institutions" and "supporting the development and maintenance of a transparent and stable economic and regulatory environment conducive to efficient private sector activities" (IMF 1997). This means that the concept of good governance is an expression of neoliberal international politics that aim at deregulating, liberalising and privatising the public sector, cutting state budgets for education, welfare, social security and health care in poor countries and opening investment opportunities for western companies that transfer wealth and profit created in poor countries back to the west.

David Harvey (2007) gives examples of how IMF austerity programs have resulted in the increase in poverty and inequality

and argues that the management and manipulation of crises by the IMF and other institutions results in the "deliberative redistribution of wealth from poor countries to the rich" (Harvey 2007: 162) and is an expression of neoliberal accumulation by dispossession. Good governance is a measure for orienting the state on "conditions for economic expansion" (Jessop 2002: 267). Given the fact that WikiLeaks to a certain degree is concerned about the negative effects of corporate power (WikiLeaks 2010: 22-27; WikiLeaks 2011: 29-43), it is surprising and self-contradictory that it employs the neoliberally-connoted notion of "good governance" in its self-definition.

WikiLeaks does not ignore the importance of criticising and watching of corporate power in its mission statements, but subordinates it to government watching. Corporate power is frequently relegated to one form of corruption among others: "WikiLeaks may be at the heart of another global revolution – in better accountability by governments and other institutions" (WikiLeaks 2010: 60). Leaking affects "authoritarian governments, oppressive institutions and corrupt corporations" (WikiLeaks 2010: 17, 2011, 33). One can not only observe here that governments are always mentioned first, but also a strange separation that implies that corporations are not necessarily oppressive institutions, but only in those cases where they are corrupt.

The problem of WikiLeaks' self-understanding is that it idealises freedom of speech and information and liberal values and separates corporate domination from state domination. The very liberal values that WikiLeaks embraces (freedom of speech, freedom from government intervention, freedom of information) have in modern society never been realised because markets and capitalism privilege corporations that tend to dominate public expression and opinion by privately controlling large parts of the means of expression, information and speech. Liberal values are their own immanent critique because they have never been realised in capitalism and are contradicted by liberalism's emphasis on private property rights.

Jürgen Habermas has stressed – in this context – that the liberal public sphere limits its own value of freedom of speech and public opinion because citizens in capitalism do not have same formal education and material resources for participating in public sphere (Habermas 1991: 227) and that it limits its own value of freedom of association and assembly because big political and economic organisations "enjoy an oligopoly of the publicistically [sic] effective and politically relevant formation of assemblies and associations" (Habermas 1991: 228).

The non-transparency of power that WikiLeaks criticises is not external to liberal values, but is an integral part of liberal-capitalist regimes. Corporate power and the support of corporate power by the capitalist state is kept secret in order to maintain and expand capitalist rule, it is legitimised by liberal values such as privacy and private property. Corporate domination and state domination are not separated in modern societies, but are connected. Contemporary states support corporate rules by protecting private property, enforcing neoliberal policies and fighting wars that install a global new imperialist rule (Fuchs 2010b; Fuchs c, 2011; Harvey 2005). WikiLeaks has a liberal bias, it argues for liberal values and thereby ignores that liberalism is a core cause of the phenomena WikiLeaks questions. The question that will therefore be covered in the next section is if WikiLeaks has the potential to act as a socialist alternative medium.

### **WikiLeaks, journalism and alternative media**

McQuail (2010: 561) defines a journalist as a person, who creates "informational reports of recent or current events of interest to the public". In an earlier version of the same book, McQuail (2000: 340) defined journalism as "paid writing (and the audiovisual equivalent) for public media with reference to actual and ongoing events of public relevance", which led Harcup (2009: 3) to ask: "Can journalism never be unpaid?."

McQuail's shift towards a more general definition of the journalist may reflect the rise of phenomena like political blogging, participatory journalism (Deuze 2010), grassroots journalism (Gillmor 2006), citizen journalism (Allan 2010; Bruns 2008), alternative online journalism (Atton 2009; 2010) and radical online journalism, which "questions taken-for-granted forms of doing journalism" (Atton 2004: 60) and provides news are created by those affected by power.

The question "who is a journalist?" remains contested, with on the one hand traditional scholars arguing that journalists are professionals that "are hired to make profits by selling their products. This has always been the case throughout the development of the profession" (Donsbach 2010: 39). On the other hand, there are observers saying that "participatory journalism is any kind of news work at the hands of professionals and amateurs, of journalists and citizens, and of users and producers benchmarked by what Benkler calls commons-based peer production" (Deuze 2010: 271). Notwithstanding this discussion, there seems to be a general consensus that at the most basic level the definition of journalism has to include a focus on "finding things out, then telling people about them via newspapers, radio, television or the Internet" (Kinsey 2005: 124). If an important aspect of journalism is the systematic creation, publishing and provision of news stories, then the question arises if WikiLeaks is a journalistic project.

The question of whether WikiLeaks is a journalistic medium has been of practical relevance in Sweden. Chapter 2 of the Swedish constitutional Law on Freedom of Expression (Yttrandefrihetsgrundlagen) guarantees the right to anonymity of journalistic sources. Public authorities and others are not allowed to inquire such sources, breaching this regulation can be fined and punished with imprisonment of up to one year. The Personal Data Act (Personuppgiftslagen) does not apply to journalistic media, which means that it is easier for such media to reveal information that is of public interest about humans without violating integrity/privacy rights. Journalistic production is exempted from the Personal Data Act, privacy rights are in these cases overruled by the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression. This means that if WikiLeaks is recognised as a journalistic medium in Sweden, it is hard for it to be censored and controlled and it is strongly protected by the laws of freedom of expression. In order to be guaranteed these constitutional rights, a website has to obtain a certificate of publication (utgivningsbevis) by the Authority for Radio and TV (Myndigheten för radio och TV). For example, the conditions are that the site can only be changed by the editors, is a coherent product, a connection to Sweden and has a

competent publisher (Myndigheten för radio och TV: 2011). WikiLeaks' servers are based in Sweden, but it did not apply for a certificate of publication until August 2010.

In the first version of its self-understanding, WikiLeaks defined itself as a public service that is designed to protect journalists, whistleblowers and activists (WikiLeaks 2010: 1) and as "an excellent source for journalists" (2010: 48). In its revised self-understanding, WikiLeaks (2011) defines itself as journalistic medium, which reflects the discussions about constitutional protections for WikiLeaks. The revised self-understanding already in the first paragraph points towards WikiLeaks journalistic qualities: "Our goal is to bring important news and information to the public. We provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way for sources to leak information to our journalists (our electronic drop box)" (WikiLeaks 2011: 1). WikiLeaks furthermore says that it is a "media outlet [...] conducting investigative journalism" (WikiLeaks 2011: 4) and an "inquisitive journalistic" medium (WikiLeaks 2011: 8) that "has provided a new model of journalism" and like "a wire service [...] reports stories that are often picked up by other media outlets" (WikiLeaks 2011: 12). Leaked document summaries are interpreted as news (WikiLeaks 2011: 52f).

The difference between WikiLeaks two self-definitions is that the second one defines WikiLeaks no longer as source for journalists, but as a new form of journalism that is comparable to a news agency. The number of references to journalism is larger in the second document (see table 1) and the definition of WikiLeaks as a form of journalism is the starting point and focus of the first section of the self-definition, which shows the relevance of this question for WikiLeaks.

The Iceland-based company, the Sunshine Press, operates WikiLeaks. Its servers are based in Sweden. WikiLeaks provides content to the public and creates summaries as news stories. It can therefore be considered to satisfy the broad consensus definition of journalism as the systematic creation, publishing and provision of news stories. Swedish law requires professionalism for recognition of a website as journalistic medium that holds constitutional protections. Given the circumstance that Julian Assange acts as chief editor of WikiLeaks, and that WikiLeaks is operated by an organisation, a professional organisation is a given. That this organisation has a non-profit character is no limit, but rather enhances WikiLeaks' autonomy from corporate and political influences. WikiLeaks also has a Swedish context (required for the Swedish *utgivningsbevis*) because its servers are based in Sweden. Servers are the crucial material backbones of online media, so an important Swedish context of WikiLeaks is given. It therefore seems that all conditions that are required so that WikiLeaks could obtain a Swedish *utgivningsbevis* are satisfied.

WikiLeaks is a form of journalism that can best be characterised as watchdog journalism. Watchdog journalists are interventionist by advocating the interests of disadvantaged groups, are critical of power and tend to define their activities and goals in terms of the public interest instead of market interests (Hanitzsch 2007). Deuze (2005) argues that journalism is an ideology that is characterised by five elements that without a doubt can also be found in the self-understanding of WikiLeaks: public service, objectivity, autonomy from power, immediacy/actuality, ethics. Deuze (2003) sees alternative online media as a form of online journalism that questions mainstream news media making.

Christian Christensen (2010) makes three observations about WikiLeaks:

- WikiLeaks' editorial control gives it a certain power that distinguishes it from other social media.
- National laws and contexts are important for protecting whistleblowing.
- The circumstance that the Afghan Diaries became so well-known was due to the circumstance that WikiLeaks released them first to the *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *Der Spiegel*, which would show that the death of journalism-hypothesis is wrong, "that mainstream journalism still holds a good deal of power", that these three mainstream media were "professionally, organisationally and economically prepared for the job of decoding and distributing the material provided" and that "Wikileaks has reminded us that structure, boundaries, laws and reputation still matter" (Christensen 2010).

While I fully agree with the first two observations, I am critical of Christian Christensen's third point because it sounds too much like a celebration of the power of mainstream media.

Yes, mainstream media like *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *Der Spiegel* have the economic, reputational and political power to reach the public, whereas an alternative medium like WikiLeaks is less likely to be recognised, read and mastered by the everyday citizens. It is no surprise, but rather a reflection of the political economy of the media in capitalism, that on the one hand the *The New York Times* is ranked 88 in the list of the world's most accessed websites, *Spiegel Online* 143, *The Guardian* 168, and on the other hand WikiLeaks is much less accessed and known and ranks only 28,167th (Alexa.com 2011). The power of mainstream media is not to be celebrated, but should rather make us worry. Mainstream media are prone to pressures by advertisers, companies, lobbyists and governments that can result in filtered, censored news that are uncritical and exclude critical voices. It is no surprise that *The New York Times* reported that there was US government pressure not to release news about the Afghanistan Diaries (The war logs articles, New York Times July 25, 2010). It is desirable that alternative media like WikiLeaks do not have to rely on corporate channels in order to reach the public, but have the power and visibility to directly reach a mass public. The unequal media and communication power structures characteristic of the capitalist media system make this difficult and thereby create the risk that leaked documents published by WikiLeaks will be censored, distorted or ignored. Changing this situation requires to give more economic- political- and attention-power to alternative media.

Is WikiLeaks an alternative medium? Alternative media can on the one hand be defined as self-organised journalistic production projects and on the other hand as journalistic projects that voice non-mainstream views (Fuchs 2010a; Sandoval & Fuchs 2010; Sandoval 2009). Five main differences between mainstream media and alternative media can be identified (see table 3). According to Fuchs and Sandoval (Fuchs 2010a; Sandoval & Fuchs 2010; Sandoval 2009), the most relevant

dimension for speaking of an alternative medium is critical content. They therefore speak of alternative media as critical media.

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Capitalist Mass Media</b>	<b>Alternative Media</b>
Journalistic Production	Elite journalism	Citizens' journalism
Media Product Structures	Ideological Form and Content	Critical Form and Content
Organisational media Structures	Hierarchical media organisations	Grassroots media organisations
Distribution structures	Marketing and public relations	Alternative distribution
Reception practices	Manipulative reception	Critical reception

Table 3: Potential dimensions of traditional and alternative media (Fuchs 2010a)

Critical media, according to this perspective, provide oppositional content that are alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives that reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism and so on. Such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. So there is counter-information and counter-hegemony that includes the voices of the excluded, oppressed, dominated, enslaved, estranged, exploited, dominated. One goal is to give voices to the voiceless, media power to the powerless as well as to transcend filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies, state monopolies, or cultural monopolies in public information and communication. In order to judge if WikiLeaks is a critical medium, the extent to which it questions contemporary forms of domination and exploitation must be analysed: that is, to what extent it reflects that which in section 3 has been characterised as a socialist worldview.

Section 3 showed that WikiLeaks' goals have a liberal bias, which does not automatically mean that its practices are completely alien to socialism. WikiLeaks' self-understandings have a section that is devoted to corporate power and corporate corruption (WikiLeaks 2010: 22-27; WikiLeaks 2011: 38-43): WikiLeaks posits the criticism that large corporations have tremendous economic and political power. It makes eleven points about what is problematic about corporate power (WikiLeaks 2010: 24; 2011: 40). These points can be summarised as focusing on the following topics: corporations have centralised decision making power, they provide no civil rights for employees (no freedom of speech and association, human rights are limited, no privacy, permanent surveillance) and their economy is centrally planned. These are good points that are certainly elements of a socialist worldview, but one important criticism of corporations is missing: that they are centrally owned by a class of private owners who exploit the labour power of workers and employees in order to accumulate profit that is their private property. Questions concerning class and exploitation are left out. One gets the impression that WikiLeaks sees companies as just another form of oppressive government and reduces corporations to government mechanisms. The difference, is, however that companies not only oppress, they, in contrast to governments, have the general feature of exploiting labour power.

Another problem is the assumption that it is possible to civilise corporations: "WikiLeaks endeavours to civilise corporations by exposing uncivil plans and behaviour. Just like a country, a corrupt or unethical corporation is a menace to all inside and outside it" (WikiLeaks 2010: 27). "Corporations will behave more ethically if the world is watching closely" (WikiLeaks 2011: 43).

One can daily hear stories about corporate irresponsibility: for example, that British Petroleum was responsible for one of the world's worst ecological disasters in the Gulf of Mexico. Others are constantly in the news such as stories that iPods and iPads are produced in China under inhumane conditions by workers who commit suicide because they cannot stand the working conditions, and so on. There are daily stories about child labour, precarious labour conditions etc.

The problem is that such a multitude of stories, and WikiLeaks here is no exception and directly admits this in its self-description, makes us believe that corporate irresponsibility and corporate crimes against humanity are the exception rather than the rule and can therefore be fixed within capitalism by "civilising corporations". But what if corporations are uncivilised as such, if their behaviour is always exploitative and irresponsible? Then capitalism and corporations cannot be civilised and made ethical, and exposing uncivil plans and behaviour should be aimed at transforming and civilising the whole.

But what is a corporation? A machine-like organisation that accumulates capital by exploiting workers who create surplus value that is transformed into profit. Exploitation is always uncivilised and acts to degrade humans to an inhumane status. Therefore, corporations cannot be civilised and can never act ethically. In order to civilise society, corporatism and all other forms of domination need to be abolished. In its new mission statement, WikiLeaks (2011) abolished the passage about civilising

corporations, which could be an indication that it has changed its political assessment of capitalism.

WikiLeaks can be seen as an alternative media project: it tries to provide information that uncovers the misuse of power by powerful actors; it is an Internet-based medium that enables critiques of power structures. It is however, thus far only to a limited extent a critical project because it seems to aim at reforming and not abolishing structures of exploitation and domination, underestimating the exploitative character of corporate power. It therefore falls short of aiming at the categorical imperative of criticism - to help overthrow all relations that alienate them from their human essence by exploiting and oppressing them. WikiLeaks has however a potential to become not only an alternative medium that watches power abuse, but a critical medium that helps and aims at overcoming structures of domination. This requires it to overcome its liberal bias by changing its self-understanding and to embrace more engagement in the practice of corporate watching currently subordinated to government watching.

## Conclusion

Following the leak of the Afghanistan documents, US government representatives and conservative commentators heavily criticised WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. US National Security Adviser General James Jones said that WikiLeaks "could put the lives of Americans and our partners at risk, and threaten our national security" (America.gov 2010). Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commented that WikiLeaks "might already have on their hands the blood of some young soldier or that of an Afghan family" (The New York Times, 2011). Marc Thiessen, a former speech writer for George W. Bush, argued in *The Washington Post* that WikiLeaks "is a criminal enterprise", constitutes "material support for terrorism", and that the "Web site must be shut down and prevented from releasing more documents - and its leadership brought to justice" (The Washington Post 2010). Former Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin said that Assange

is an anti-American operative with blood on his hands. His past posting of classified documents revealed the identity of more than 100 Afghan sources to the Taliban. Why was he not pursued with the same urgency we pursue Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders?" (Alternet.org 2011).

Such statements strongly twist reality. They are ideology at its purest. War is always about killing the enemy. In Afghanistan, US soldiers and their allies kill military enemies and, as is known, (not only since the WikiLeaks documents), this has also resulted in numerous civilian casualties, and Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters kill US and allied soldiers as well as Afghan civilians by suicide attacks. This double-sided violence has created a spiral of attacks and counter-attacks that sadly has caused many casualties. The materials published by WikiLeaks that document violence, do not cause violence. Rather, violence is caused by the military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. One gets the impression that US politicians think that military violence does not exist if it is unknown. One is reminded here of the US coverage of anti-Iraq war protests in many US mainstream media, where the protesters were described with terms such as anarchists, violent mob, vandals, rioters, mayhem, chaos, aggressive and so on and the impression was invoked that the main violent problem is not the war itself, but those protesting against the war (Fuchs 2005).

The truth about WikiLeaks' Afghanistan documents is that the platform has the potential to make visible the scale of brutality, violence, and horror of warfare and military conflicts. These and subsequent leaks about the US government and other powerful institutions has resulted in the circumstance that WikiLeaks is perceived by ruling groups as a threat and defined as an enemy. It is therefore no surprise that following 'Cablegate', in December 2010, EveryDNS cancelled WikiLeaks' domain and Amazon, PayPal, the Swiss bank PostFinance, MasterCard, Visa, Apple and the Bank of America stopped the provision of payment- and other services to WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks' counter-power against dominant powers was answered by the latter powers' turning against WikiLeaks itself.

WikiLeaks is not politically value-free and not neutral in its operations. No journalist and no medium is neutral, but rather is always politically biased because how issues and events are reported, what is not reported, which priority is given to certain stories, which quotation by which person is mentioned first in a story, how often a certain opinion is mentioned in a story, how advertising and funding influences the basic framework of a medium, are all political biases. Therefore, the publication of the Iraq and Afghanistan documents on WikiLeaks is certainly a political move intended to help put an end to the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. It is political in the same sense that any news article carries political messages, interests, and intentions. But in contrast to mainstream news, it is politically honest when Julian Assange talks openly about his anti-war motivations:

This material shines light on the everyday brutality and squalor of war. The archive will change public opinion and it will change the opinion of people in positions of political and diplomatic influence. [...] There is a mood to end the war in Afghanistan. This information won't do it alone, but it will shift political will in a significant manner. [...] The most dangerous men are those who are in charge of war. And they need to be stopped (Spiegel 2010).

Political honesty is a virtue that many politicians and newsmakers are all too often missing. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq not only help to secure the United States' global political hegemony, they also secure the access to economic resources and markets and are therefore expressions of the new imperialism. These wars are examples of how the violence of the political economy of capitalism works. WikiLeaks however does not realise in its self-understanding that these wars and contemporary power structures in general are not matters of bad governance, but of the imperialistic intersection of state, corporate and military interests. WikiLeaks threatens the imperialist military-state-corporate complex and should therefore better realise and acknowledge its own critical potential.

To uncover and document such realities is uncomfortable for those powerful actors, who want to twist reality by making what really happened in the daily reality of war, corporate crime, and corporate and government corruption, unknown. WikiLeaks is a project that makes unknown reality known, it transforms that which is kept secret and invisible by governments and

corporations into visible reality. WikiLeaks can be seen as an alternative media project: it tries to provide information that uncovers the misuse of power by powerful actors, it is an Internet-based medium that enables critiques of power structures.

WikiLeaks is a watchdog journalist organisation that wants to make secret asymmetric power transparent and is therefore an alternative media organisation. It is only to a limited extent a critical media organisation because it fails to realise that liberalism is at the very heart of contemporary corporate-, government- and military-domination. Instead of identifying with socialist values like participatory democracy and equality, it identifies itself with liberal values such as plurality, corporate responsibility and good governance.

At the same time, WikiLeaks' practice poses a threat to the capitalist corporate-military-government complex. WikiLeaks' practice to a certain degree questions liberal institutions that per se result in the abuse of power, domination and exploitation.

There has been, from the outset, something about its activities that goes way beyond liberal conceptions of the free flow of information. [...] The aim of the WikiLeaks revelations was not just to embarrass those in power but to lead us to mobilise ourselves to bring about a different functioning of power that might reach beyond the limits of representative democracy. [...] This is precisely our situation today: we face the shameless cynicism of a global order whose agents only imagine that they believe in their ideas of democracy, human rights and so on. Through actions like the WikiLeaks disclosures, the shame – our shame for tolerating such power over us – is made more shameful by being publicized" (Žižek 2011).

The positive potential of WikiLeaks is that it transcends its own values and realises its potential for becoming a critical, socialist watchdog medium. Socialist watchdog projects are not an end-in-itself, but rather self-defence mechanisms in social struggles that aim at the establishment of participatory democracy.

#### Footnotes

1 Authors' translation from Spanish: "En cambio, el ciberespacio, poblado de fuentes autónomas de información, es una amenaza decisiva a esa capacidad de silenciar en la que se ha fundado siempre la dominación" (Castells 2011).

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