

**Democracy in the Age  
of  
Google, Facebook and  
WikiLeaks**

**John Keane**

## *Communicative Abundance*

In the beginning there was the grand spectacle of a worldwide satellite television broadcast, featuring Maria Callas, Pablo Picasso and the Beatles. Then came fax machines, photocopiers, video recorders and personal computers. Now there are electronic books, scanners and smart phones converted into satellite navigators and musical instruments; cloud computing, interactive video technology and speak-to-tweets, used in the current Egyptian uprising, should be added to the list. It is unclear even to the innovators what comes next but these and other media inventions, commercially available only during recent decades, have persuaded more than a few people that we are living in a revolutionary age of communicative abundance.

In the spirit of the revolution, fascination mixed with excitement is fuelling bold talk of the transcendence of television, the disappearance of printed newspapers, the decline of the book, even the end of literacy as we have known it. There is broad recognition that time is up for spectrum scarcity, mass broadcasting and predictable prime-time national audiences. Symbolised by the Internet, the age of communicative abundance is widely seen as a whole new world system of overlapping media devices that integrate texts, sounds and images in compact and reproducible form. The perception is correct: this is indeed a new multi-media world system that enables communication to take place, for the first time in human history, through dispersed user points, in chosen time, either real or delayed, within modularised and ultimately global networks that are affordable and accessible to more than a billion people scattered across the globe.

Communication poverty persists, certainly. A majority of the world's population is still too poor to buy a book; less than half have ever made a phone call in their lives; and only around one-sixth have access to the Internet. Yet in the heartlands of the revolution, growing numbers of people routinely sense sideways motion and forward movement in the way they communicate, even in the little things of life. Gone are the days when children played with makeshift telephones made from jam tins connected by string; or (I recall) the evenings when they were flung into the bath and scrubbed behind the ears, sat down in their dressing gowns and told to listen in silence to radio

broadcasts. People no longer own telephone directories, or memorise telephone numbers by heart. Everybody chuckles when mention is made of the wireless. Typewriters belong in curiosity shops. Pagers have almost been forgotten. Even the couch potato seems to be a figure from a distant past.

Few people think twice about the transformation of the word text into a verb. Websites devoted to the pitfalls of working the Web flourish. Journalism proudly committed to fact-based 'objectivity' declines; 'gotcha' journalism gains ground, but so too does blogging, said by some to resemble the work of armies of ants in the nest of what is called public opinion. Then there are the epochal shifts in the ecology of news: savvy young people in cutting-edge countries such as South Korea and Japan are no longer wedded to traditional news outlets. They neither listen to radio bulletins nor watch current affairs and news on television. Digital natives do things differently. Refusing the old habit of mining the morning newspaper for their up-to-date information, as four out of every five American citizens once did (in the early 1960s), Internet portals have become their favoured destination for news. It is not that they are uninterested in news; it is rather that they want lots of it, news on demand, in instant form, delivered in new ways, not merely in the mornings but throughout the day, and night.

As in every previous communications revolution, the age of communicative abundance breeds hyperbole, false claims and illusory hopes. Yet when measured in terms of speed and scope and user-friendly methods of copying and publishing, there is no doubt that the emergent galaxy of communicative abundance has no historical precedent. It is not only that time-space compression has become a reality for growing numbers of people and organisations, for whom the tyranny of distance and slow-time connections is abolished. In contrast to the centralised state-run broadcasting systems of the past, the spider's web linkages among many different nodes within the distributed networks of communication make them intrinsically more resistant to top-down control. Networks function according to the logic of packet switching: acts of communication, so-called information flows, pass through many points en route to their destination. If they meet resistance at any point within the system of nodes then the information flows are diverted automatically, re-routed towards their intended destination. Messages go viral.

It is this networked and viral quality of media-saturated societies that prompts some observers to claim that the powerless, tired of top-down communication, readily find the means through which to take their revenge on the powerful. We live in times, says Clay Shirky, when ‘group action just got easier’. Some pundits go further. Networked communications and easy-to-use tools incite grand political visions. There is provocative talk of digital democracy, online publics, cybercitizens, electronic intifadas and wiki-government, even visions of a digital world where ‘citizens hold their own governments accountable’ and ‘all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and power’ (the words used by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a January 2010 address at Washington’s Newseum).

### *Media Decadence*

What are we to make of such claims? The printing press spawned fantasies of ‘liberty of the press’; the telegraph created visions of a world without war. So is it true that there’s something like a ‘natural’ affinity between communicative abundance and democracy, understood (roughly) as a type of government and a way of life in which power is subject to permanent public scrutiny, chastening and control by citizens and their representatives?

It is safe to say that there are no laws of automatism at work; the ultimate effects of communicative abundance will be decided by the political choices of designers, manufacturers, governments and citizens themselves. There are certainly worrying counter-trends. The age of communicative abundance is littered with rumour firestorms, media bombing, mean-spirited bloggers and digital Maoists. Google has its secret algorithms. Whole organisations are victims of spiteful hacking and spying and denial of service attacks. There are media tycoons and experimental media cities like Abu Dhabi, the new Hollywood without the old democratic California. Media-saturated societies are the grazing grounds of hungry lobbyists, public relations agents and sly politicians skilled at the arts of telling lies and releasing bad news on busy days (what Tony Blair’s tacticians called ‘throwing out the bodies’).

There is low grade news, flat earth news and no earth news produced by what the English call ‘churnalism’. The Internet shows signs of morphing into the ‘splinternet’, so that for growing numbers of people the experience of using smart phones, tablets, e-readers and other new gadgets to access the Web is governed by platforms designed by Microsoft and Apple and other hyper-giant corporations to trap their users within an ecosystem of pre-determined gadgets, content and advertising. And of course there is China, the new global power which is more than just the hub of the world’s telecommunications industry and (according to Reporters Without Borders) the world’s biggest prison for netizens. It is also a giant political laboratory in which crafty methods of harnessing and manipulating digital media by a one-party state might just succeed in securing a uniquely 21<sup>st</sup>-century post-democratic order in which communication media are used to promote intolerant opinions, protect inequalities of wealth and income and to restrict the public scrutiny of power by encouraging blind acceptance among citizens of the way things are heading.

Media decadence is dangerous for democracy, but for the moment its destructiveness should not be exaggerated. It forms only part of a wider upheaval marked by much unfinished business. Many revolutionary things are happening inside the swirling galaxy of communicative abundance. Its complexity is elusive, too complex to be captured in smooth or slick formulae, in statistics, in hard-and-fast rules, in confident predictions, one way or the other. Communicative abundance is a harsh mistress. She keeps her secrets. We live in a strange new world of confusing unknowns, a thoroughly mediated universe cluttered with tools of communication whose political effects have the capacity to hypnotise and overwhelm us. Hence the need for bold new probes, fresh perspectives, ‘wild’ new concepts that enable different ways of seeing the novelties of our times, the democratic opportunities they offer and the counter-trends that have the potential to snuff out democratic politics. Just as in the sixteenth century, when the production of printed books and the efforts to read codex type required a fundamental shift of perspective, so today a whole new mental effort is required to make sense of how democracies are being shaped and re-shaped by the

new tools and rhetoric of communication - and why our very thinking about democracy must also change.

### *Monitory Democracy*

A potentially fruitful move is to take note of the ways in which the communications revolution of our time powerfully reinforces the post-1945 shift from representative democracy in territorial state form towards a new historical form of democracy, monitory democracy, in which many hundreds and thousands of monitory institutions are now in the business of publicly scrutinising power. Watch dog, guide dog and barking dog institutions, such as courts, human rights networks, professional organisations, integrity bodies, civic initiatives, bloggers and other web-based monitors, play a fundamental role in today's democracies. Acting in the name of citizens, these monitors help stir up questions to do with who gets what, when and how. They draw breath from communicative abundance, to the point where monitory democracy and computerised media networks function as fused systems. The consequence, speaking figuratively, is that communicative abundance cuts like a knife into the power relations of government and civil society. It challenges elite monopolies of power by stirring up the sense that power monopolised by a few can be dangerous, that people and their representatives must rein in their power so that citizens can shape and re-shape their lives as equals.

### *Democratisation of Information*

The most obvious example is the way communicative abundance drives the democratisation of information: thanks to cheap and easy methods of digital reproduction, we live in times of a sudden widening of access to published materials previously unavailable to publics, or once available only to restricted circles of users. Democratisation involves the dismantling of elite privileges. At the click of a mouse, often at zero cost, people gain access from a distance to materials formerly available only on a restricted geographical basis, or at a high cost. Examples include the New York Times online, Harvard University's vast collection of Ukrainian-language materials and Piratebay.org (a Swedish website that hosts torrent files). But there is democratisation in another sense: the process of drawing together, often for the first

time, new data sets that are made publicly available to users through entirely new pathways. Examples include Wikipedia (it currently has 5.3 million entries, less than a third of which are in English); the Google Book Search; TheEuropeanLibrary.org (a single search engine in 35 languages formed by a consortium of libraries of the nearly 50 member states in the Council of Europe); and the Schlesinger Library's initiative 'Capturing Women's Voices', a collection of postings by women from a wide range of blogs.

The contemporary democratisation of information invites comparisons with the Reformation in Europe, which was triggered in part by the conviction that access to printed copies of the Bible could be widened, that there were no spiritual or earthly reasons why reading its pages should be restricted to a select few who were proficient in Latin. Such comparisons are probably overdrawn, but communicative abundance undoubtedly opens gates and tears down fences separating producers and users of information. The consequence: new and vitally important information banks are now accessible to many more users, often at great distances, more or less simultaneously, at zero or low cost.

### *Making the Private Public*

There is a second trend that feeds the spirit and substance of monitory democracy: communicative abundance stirs up bitter controversies about the definition and ethical significance of the public-private division. Gone are the days when privacy could be regarded as 'natural', as a given bedrock or sub-stratum of 'a priori' taken-for-granted experiences and meanings generated in the 'world of everyday life' (Edmund Husserl).

In media-saturated societies, private life is no longer private. Thanks to such genres as Twitter, television chatter shows and talkback radio, an endless procession of 'ordinary people' reveal publicly what privately turns them on, or off. Millions act as if they are celebrities by displaying their intimate selves on Facebook. Hyper-coverage of the private also triggers media scandals, of the kind that recently rocked the Catholic Church in Germany after the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported how a brave

citizen, quite by accident, discovered online pictures of the priest who had cruelly abused him in private three decades earlier.

Everything that happens in the fields of power stretching from the bedroom and bathroom to the boardroom to the battlefield seems to be up for media grabs. With the flick of a switch or the click of a camera, the private suddenly becomes public. Unmediated privacy is abolished. Yet backlashes develop. Some accuse high-pressure media coverage of killer instincts. Others, sensing that a private life is vital for cultivating a sound sense of self, make considered decisions *not* to tweet or purchase a smart phone or to use e-mail. There are widespread objections to invasive junk mail, calls for the paparazzi to exercise moral self-restraint, and court action to dissuade journalists from unlimited fishing expeditions, as in the case brought by Max Mosley before the European Court of Human Rights against the News of the World for its headline story that he had engaged in a ‘sick Nazi orgy with 5 hookers’. There is great interest in the development of privacy-enhancing technologies (PETs). There are tensions triggered by employers’ use of sordid details of the private lives of prospective employees; court battles in defence of the right of individuals to jettison their past identities, through declarations of ‘moral bankruptcy’; and companies such as Google, Twitter and Facebook find themselves on the front lines of a tug of war between citizens’ rights to privacy and law enforcement agencies demanding information about their private lives.

These myriad developments point to an important trend in monitory democracies: communicative abundance exposes the deep ambiguity of the private-public distinction famously defended as sacrosanct by nineteenth-century liberals. Communicative abundance encourages individuals and groups within civil society to think more flexibly, more contextually, more contingently about the public and the private. They learn to accept that some things should be kept private; but when confronted (say) with mendacious politicians, or by men who are duplicitous about their sexual preference, or by leaders (as in Berlusconi’s Italy) desperate to confirm that they are men, they also learn that privacy can be a refuge for scoundrels, so that within a democracy embarrassing publicity given to ‘private’ actions - ‘outing’ - is entirely justified.

## *Muckraking*

The politicisation of definitions of the private-public underpins another key development: high-octane efforts to flame power elites with ‘publicity’.

The new muckrakers of our age put their finger on a perennial problem for which monitory democracy is a solution: the power of elites always thrives on secrecy, silence and invisibility; gathering behind closed doors and deciding things in peace and private quiet is their specialty. Little wonder that in the age of communicative abundance, to put things paradoxically, unexpected revelations become predictably commonplace. Being is constantly ruptured by ‘events’ (Alain Badiou). It is not just that stuff happens; media users ensure that shit happens. Muckraking becomes rife. Sometimes it feels as if the whole world is run by rogues.

Public disaffection with official ‘politics’ is one result. Under conditions of communicative abundance, politicians are sitting ducks. The media vulnerability of parliaments is striking. Despite recent efforts at harnessing new social media, parties have also been left flat-footed; they neither own nor control their media outlets and they have lost the astonishing energy displayed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by political parties, such as the German SPD, which championed literacy and were leading publishers of books, pamphlets and newspapers in their own right.

By contrast, we live in times when the core institutions and characters of representative democracy become easy targets of rough riding, as when a candidate (Barack Obama) in a fiercely fought presidential election campaign switches to damage control mode after calling a female journalist ‘sweetie’; he leaves her a voice mail apology: ‘I am duly chastened’. Our great grandparents would find the whole process astonishing in its democratic intensity. In the era of media saturation there seems to be no end of ‘-gate’ scandals. Corporations are given stick about their services and products, their investment plans, how they treat their employees, and their damaging impact upon the biosphere. Power-monitoring bodies like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International publicise abuses of power. There are even initiatives (like the Democratic Audit network, the Global Accountability Project and Transparency International) that specialise in providing public assessments of the

quality of existing power-scrutinising mechanisms and the degree to which they fairly represent citizens' interests. At all levels, governments are grilled on a wide range of matters, from their human rights records, their transport systems and energy conservation schemes to the quality of the drinking water of their cities. Even their secret military strategies and arms procurement policies run into trouble, thanks to media-savvy citizens' initiatives guided by the spirit of monitory democracy.

WikiLeaks is so far the boldest attempt to lunge at the heart of secretive, sovereign power. Pundits are saying that it is the novel defining story of our times, but that fudges the point that its spirit and methods belong firmly and squarely to the age of communicative abundance. Engaged in a radical form of muckraking motivated by conscience and supported by a shadowy small band of technically sophisticated activists led by a charismatic public figure, WikiLeaks takes full advantage of the defining qualities of communicative abundance: low-cost digital reproduction, easy-access multi-media integration organised through networks capable of transmitting vast quantities of data around the world, virally, more or less instantly.

Posing as a *lumpen* outsider in the world of information, but helped in fact by mainstream media, WikiLeaks has mastered the art of total anonymity through military-grade encryption; for the first time on a global scale, WikiLeaks created a viable custom-made infrastructure for encouraging knowledgeable muckrakers within organisations to release classified data on a confidential basis, initially for storage in a camouflaged cloud of servers, then to push that bullet-proofed information into public circulation, as an act of radical transparency, across multiple jurisdictions.

WikiLeaks feeds upon hypocrisy. It supposes that individuals become whistleblowers not merely because their identities are protected by encryption but above all because there are intolerable gaps between their organisation's publicly professed aims and its private modus operandi. Hypocrisy is the night soil of muckrakers. Its rakes in the Augean stables of government and business have a double effect: they multiply the amount of muck circulated under the noses of interested or astonished publics, whose own sense of living in muck is consequently sharpened. Muckraking in the style of WikiLeaks has yet another source, which helps explain why, even if its platform is criminalised and forcibly shut down, it will have many more successors than

Balkanleaks and EuroLeaks. Put simply, WikiLeaks thrives on a contradiction deeply structured within the digital information systems of all large-scale complex organisations. States and business corporations take advantage of the communications revolution of our time by going digital and staying digital. They shun red tape, stringent security rules and compartmentalised data sets, all of which have the effect of making these organisations slow, clumsy and ineffective. They opt instead for dynamic and time-sensitive data sharing across the boundaries of departments and whole organisations. Vast streams of classified material thus flow freely - which serves to boost the chances of leaks into the courts of public opinion. If organisations then respond by tightening controls on their own information flows, a move that Julian Assange has described as the imposition of a 'secrecy tax', the chances are that these same organisations will both trigger their own 'cognitive decline', an incapacity to handle complex situations swiftly and effectively, as well as boost the chances of resistance to the secrecy tax by employees convinced of the hypocrisy and injustice of the organisations which (they insist) do not politically represent their views.

### *Unelected Representatives?*

Patterns of political representation undergo profound transformations in the age of communicative abundance. Especially striking is the rapid multiplication of unelected representatives, figures who stand publicly for causes that are often at odds with the words and deeds of established political parties, elected officials, parliaments and whole governments.

Whatever may be thought of their particular causes, unelected representatives are public figures who win media attention. They are famous but they are not simply 'celebrities'. Unelected representatives are neither in it for the money nor fame-seeking 'million-horsepowered entities' (McLuhan). They are not exaltations of superficiality; they do not thrive on smutty probes into their private lives; and they do not pander to celebrity bloggers, gossip columnists and tabloid paparazzi. Unelected representatives instead stand for something outside and beyond their particular niche. More exactly: as public representatives they simultaneously 'mirror' the views of their public admirers as well as fire their imaginations and sympathies by displaying leadership in matters of the wider public good.

Unelected representatives widen the horizons of the political even though they are not chosen in the same way as parliamentary representatives. Unelected representatives typically shun political parties, parliaments and government. They do not like to be seen as politicians. Paradoxically, that does not make them ‘second best’ or ‘pseudo-representatives’ or any less ‘chosen’ or legitimate in the eyes, hearts and minds of citizens. It often has the opposite effect.

Unelected representatives enjoy robust public reputations and they exercise a form of ‘soft’ power over others, including their opponents. Some draw their legitimacy from the fact that they are deemed models of *public virtue*. Figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Princess Diana and Han Han (China’s hottest blogger) are seen to be ‘good’ or ‘decent’ people who bring honesty and fairness into the world. Other unelected representatives - Mother Teresa or Desmond Tutu - win legitimacy because of their *spiritual or religious commitments*. There are unelected representatives whose status is based instead on *merit*; they are nobodies who become somebody because they are reckoned to have achieved great things. Amitabh Bhachan (India’s screen star whose early reputation was built on playing the role of fighter against injustice), Colombian-born Shakira Mebarak and the Berliner Philharmoniker (the latter two are Goodwill Ambassadors of UNICEF) belong in this category of achievers. Still other figures are deemed representatives of *suffering, courage and survival* in this world (the Dalai Lama is an example). Then there are unelected representatives who win legitimacy because in a world of political ‘fudge’ they have taken a principled stand on a particular issue, in the process appealing for public support in the form of donations and subscriptions. Bodies like Amnesty International are of this type: their legitimacy is mediated not by votes, but by means of *moral monetary contracts* that can be cancelled at any time by their admiring supporters.

Unelected representatives can do good works for democracy. Especially in times when politicians as representatives are suffering (to put it mildly) a mounting credibility gap, unelected representatives stretch the boundaries and meaning of political representation, especially by putting on-message parties, parliaments and government executives on their toes. They contribute to the contemporary growth of monitory forms of democracy, for instance by drawing the attention of publics to the

violation of public standards by governments, their policy failures, or their general lack of political imagination. Unelected representatives also force the citizens of existing democracies to think twice, and more deeply, about what counts as good leadership. Thanks to their efforts, leadership no longer means bossing and strength backed ultimately by cunning and the fist and other means of state power. Unelected representatives remind citizens that leadership is better understood as the capacity to mobilise 'persuasive power' (as Archbishop Desmond Tutu likes to say). It is the ability to motivate citizens to do things for themselves by reminding them that leaders are always dependent upon the people known as the led - that true leaders lead because they manage to get citizens to look up to them, rather than hauling them by the nose.

### *Cross-border Democracy*

Communicative abundance enables one other trend that is of life-and-death importance to the future of democracy: the growth of cross-border publics whose footprint is potentially or actually global in scope.

The Canadian Scholar Harold Innis famously showed that communications media like the wheel and the printing press and the telegraph had distance-shrinking effects, but genuinely globalised communication only began (during the nineteenth century) with overland and underwater telegraphy and the early development of international news agencies like Reuters. The process is currently undergoing an evolutionary jump, thanks to the development of a combination of forces: wide-footprint geo-stationary satellites, weblogs and other specialist computer-networked media, the growth of global journalism and the expanding and merging flows of international news, electronic data exchange, entertainment and education materials controlled by giant firms like Thorn-EMI, AOL/Time-Warner, News Corporation International, the BBC, Al Jazeera, Disney, Bertelsmann, Microsoft, Sony and CNN.

Global media linkages certainly have downsides for democracy. Global media integration has encouraged loose talk of the abolition of barriers to communication (John Perry Barlow). It is said to be synonymous with the rise of a 'McWorld'

(Benjamin Barber) dominated by consumers who dance to the music of logos, advertising slogans, sponsorship, trademarks and jingles. In the most media-saturated societies, such as the United States, global media integration nurtures pockets of parochialism; citizens who read local 'content engine' newspapers like *The Desert Sun* in Palm Springs or Cheyenne's *Wyoming Tribune-Eagle* are fed a starvation diet of global stories, which typically occupy no more than about 2% of column space. And not to be overlooked is the way governments distort global information flows. Protected by what in Washington are called 'flack packs' and dissimulation experts, governments cultivate links with trusted or 'embedded' journalists, organise press briefings and advertising campaigns, so framing - and wilfully distorting and censoring - global events to suit current government policies.

All these fickle counter-trends are sobering, but they are not the whole story. For in the age of communicative abundance there are signs that the spell of parochialism upon citizens is not absolute because global media integration is having an unanticipated *political* effect: by nurturing a world stage or *theatrum mundi*, global journalism and other acts of communication are slowly but surely cultivating public spheres in which many millions of people scattered across the earth witness mediated controversies about who gets what, when, and how, on a world scale.

Not all global media events - sporting fixtures, blockbuster movies, media awards, for instance - sustain global publics, which is to say that audiences are not publics and public spheres are not simply domains of entertainment or play. Strictly speaking, global publics are scenes of the political. Within global publics, people at various points on the earth witness the powers of governmental and non-governmental organisations being publicly named, monitored, praised, challenged, and condemned, in defiance of the old tyrannies of time and space and publicly unaccountable power.

It is true that global publics are neither strongly institutionalised nor effectively linked to mechanisms of representative government. This lack is a great challenge for democratic thinking and democratic politics. Global publics are voices without a coherent body politic; it is as if they try to show the world that it resembles a chrysalis capable of hatching the butterfly of cross-border democracy - despite the fact that we

currently have no good account of what ‘regional’ or ‘global’ or ‘cross border’ democratic representation might mean in practice.

Still, in spite of everything, global publics have marked political effects, for instance on the suit-and-tie worlds of diplomacy, global business, inter-governmental meetings and independent non-governmental organizations. Every great global issue since 1945 - human rights, the dangers of nuclear war, continuing discrimination against women, the greening of politics - every one of these issues first crystallised within these publics. Global publics sometimes have ‘meta-political’ effects, in the sense that they help *create* citizens of a new global order. The speech addressed to ‘global citizens’ by Barack Obama at the Siegestaule in the Tiergarten in July 2008 is a powerful case in point, a harbinger of a remarkable trend in which those who are caught up within global publics learn that the boundaries between native and foreigner are blurred. They consequently become footloose. They live here and there; they discover the ‘foreigner’ within themselves.

Global publics centred on ground-breaking media events like Live-Aid (in 1985 it attracted an estimated one billion viewers) can be spaces of fun, in which millions taste something of the joy of acting publicly with and against others for some defined common purpose. When by contrast they come in the form of televised world news of the suffering of distant strangers, global publics highlight cruelty; they make possible what Hannah Arendt once called the ‘politics of pity’. And especially during dramatic media events - like the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl, the Tiananmen massacre, the 1989 revolutions in central-eastern Europe, the overthrow and arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the recent struggles for dignity in Tunisia and Egypt - public spheres intensify audiences’ shared sense of living their lives contingently, on a knife edge, in the subjunctive tense.

The witnesses of such events (contrary to McLuhan) do not experience uninterrupted togetherness. They do not enter a ‘global village’ dressed in the skins of humankind and thinking in the terms of a primordial ‘village or tribal outlook’. They instead come to feel the pinch of the world’s power relations; in consequence, they put matters like representation, accountability and legitimacy on the global political agenda, in effect by asking whether new democratic measures could inch our little

blue and white planet towards greater openness and humility, potentially to the point where power, wherever it is exercised within and across borders, would come to feel more 'biodegradable', a bit more responsive to those whose lives it currently shapes and reshapes, secures or wrecks.