The Hybrid Media System

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Abstract

This paper combines theory and empirical analysis to explore recent systemic change in the nature of political communication. Drawing on evidence from Britain and the United States on the changing relationships among politicians, media, and publics, I argue for the concept of the hybrid media system. This system is built upon interactions among old and new media and their associated technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizations. Actors in the hybrid media system are articulated by complex and evolving power relations based upon adaptation and interdependence. We now require a holistic approach to the role of information and communication in politics—one that does not exclusively focus on new or old media, but instead empirically maps where the distinctions between new and old matter, and where they do not. The focus of my attention in this article is news. First, I outline an ontology of hybridity. Next, I discuss assemblages of hybridized news making. Then I examine the phenomenon of WikiLeaks as an example of power and interdependence in the construction of news.

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This is a cross-sectional slice of an ongoing project (Chadwick, forthcoming). The focus of my attention in this article is news. I proceed as follows. First, I outline an ontology of hybridity. Next I discuss the assemblages of hybridized news making in the "political information cycle." Then I examine the phenomenon of WikiLeaks as an example of power and interdependence in the construction of news.

The Ontology of Hybridity

Hybridity offers a powerful way of thinking about politics and society, a means of seeing the world that highlights complexity, interdependence, and transition. Hybridity captures heterogeneity and things that are irreducible to simple, unified essences. It eschews simple dichotomies and it alerts us to the unusual things that happen when the new has continuities with the old. The original Greek sense of the hybrid as something that questions conventional understandings and the accepted order points to how the metaphor usefully unsettles some of our fixed conceptions. Hybridity is inevitably associated with flux, in-betweenness, the interstitial, and the liminal. It is about being out of sync with both a familiar past and a half-

grasped future. It provides a useful disposition for studying contemporary political communication.

Hybridity in the Social Sciences

In recent times, hybridity has diffused across a diverse array of social science disciplines and fields, as well as broader categories of social and political thought; it is one of the few genuinely interdisciplinary ideas. The term is now endowed with a loose but identifiable set of themes about the workings of the social world. In other words, thinking in terms of hybridity amounts to an ontology: a theoretical disposition that enables us to ask and answer some new and different questions about the nature of contemporary societies. A central appeal of this ontology of hybridity is its means of capturing and explaining the significance of processes that might be obscured by dichotomous, essentialist, or simply less flexible orientations.[1]

In political science, comparativists have recently turned to the concept of "hybrid regimes" as a means of quelling growing frustration with the steadily expanding range of cases that display messy mixtures of democracy and authoritarianism. Larry Diamond (2002) argues that many countries now have regimes that are best seen as "pseudodemocratic." There has been a proliferation of "adjectival" regime types, such as "competitive authoritarianism." In Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way's extensive study, this captures the integrated coexistence of what appear to be formal democratic rules, such as free and fair elections, with religious or military elite coercion, excessive patronage, and the flouting of the rule of law by those in power (Levitsky & Way, 2010). A key theme here is transition. Many African, Asian, and Latin American countries have embarked on what, during the early phases, appeared to be journeys toward liberal democracy. But for a variety of reasons some regimes have become frozen in a pseudodemocratic stasis which those living in the West may find counterintuitive and normatively objectionable, even though the regimes are stable and broadly legitimate (Karl, 1995). As Richard Sklar (1987: 714) has argued, democracy is "an

increasingly complex form of political organization. From that perspective, every country's democracy is, at best, a composite fragment. Everywhere, democracy is under construction." Political scientists have therefore started to question teleological assumptions about the inevitability of democratic transition. Increasingly, the focus is on hybridity as a "new and resilient" type of regime (Brownlee, 2009: 517; see also Ekman, 2009).

This literature contains several important assumptions that have broader relevance for the study of media and politics. The static and universalizing analytical frameworks for the categorization of regimes that were dominant during the Cold War era have now been jettisoned in favor of more complex, differentiated approaches. Hybrid regime theory reveals how democratic and authoritarian political practices intermesh and simultaneously coevolve. An important part of this shift is a renewed emphasis on understanding how regimes transition from one from to another, how old and new institutional forms and behaviors blend and overlap, and how messy those transitions are when judged against fixed and abstract criteria. The notion of a hybrid regime draws attention to change and flux, the passing of an older set of cultural and institutional norms and the gradual emergence of new norms. But hybridity is not always and everywhere a state of obvious transition. In the case of regimes that began to democratize but then froze at some point along the way, hybrid status has become the norm because it offers a lasting settlement enjoying broad legitimacy, or it concretizes the balance of power among societal groups. Alternatively, hybridity may be based on the creation and continuance of "reserved domains" in which elites have the capacity to retain strategic control over pockets of resources essential to their ongoing power and influence, alongside domains in which they tactically cede control (Valenzuela, 1992). Nonlinearity is an important principle here. The paths to a hybrid regime are several and depend in part upon the characteristics of preceding arrangements.

Approaches in which regimes are the unit of analysis have been accompanied by new directions in a cognate field: the social science of governance and regulation. This literature emphasizes complexity, diversity, and the simultaneous coevolution of seemingly contradictory social, cultural, economic, and political practices. Ash Amin, an economic

geographer, has written of new "micro worlds" of regulation, in which informational flows and networks constitute "an unfolding regime of heterarchical order that is topological, hybrid, decentered, and coalitional in its workings" (Amin, 2004: 217; see also Bulkeley, 2005). Karin Bäckstrand argues that there has been a general shift towards "hybrid, bifurcated, pluri-lateral, multi-level, and complex modes" of governance based on multistakeholder dialogs and partnership agreements (Bäckstrand, 2006: 468; see also Risse, 2004). Marc Allen Eisner portrays U.S. environmental governance as a "hybrid of traditional command-and-control regulation, government-supervised self-regulation, and corporate voluntarism, reinforced by the market and procurement" (Eisner, 2004: 161; see also Lockwood & Davidson, 2010). The work of Nobel-prize winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom suggests a hybrid approach to the governance of scarce common-pool resources, blending centralized enforcement of community rules and privatized competition. Ostrom's work highlights the complexities of contextually-specific, hybridized incentive structures in shaping power relations among actors (Ostrom, 1990; Sandler, 2010).

Hybridity has also proved influential in an area that overlaps with governance and regulation: the study of organizations. This encompasses interpretations of the shifting nature of life *inside* organizations but also the increasingly fluid interactions *between* them. It is a genuinely interdisciplinary trend, as scholars from fields as diverse as management, sociology, political science, information science, and communication have become increasingly preoccupied with explaining the dialectical co-presence or the integration of a huge range of variables, such as: hierarchical and networked modes of coordination (Fimreite & Lægreid, 2009); elite control and individual autonomy (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Courpasson & Dany, 2003; Hodgson, 2004); centralization and decentralization (Ashcraft, 2001, 2006); technological artifacts and organizational norms and routines (Bloomfield & Hayes, 2009); voluntarism and directive planning (Langlois & Garzarelli, 2008; Shah, 2006); bureaucratic and market-based interorganizational and intraorganizational relationships (Bruce & Jordan, 2007; Foss, 2003); formal and informal divisions of labor (Ashcraft, 2001, 2006); expertise and lay knowledge (Bjørkan & Qvenild, 2010; D. Scott & Barnett, 2009);

rationality and affect (Ashcraft, 2001) online and offline mobilization repertoires (Chadwick, 2007; Goss & Heaney, 2010) "entrepreneurial" and "institutional" modes of engagement (Bimber, et al., 2009); "protest" and "civic" forms of collective action (Sampson, et al., 2005); "alternative" and commercial models of news production (Kim & Hamilton, 2006); advertising-funded and state-regulated broadcasting (Born, 2003); institutional isomorphism and individuation (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006); and "Americanized" election campaigning styles and nationally-specific approaches (de la Torre & Conaghan, 2009; Nord, 2006; Plasser & Plasser, 2002). This is an impressive body of research.

Media and cultural shifts have of course played important roles in the constitution of these new hybrid domains, creating new relations of complex interdependence in the local-translocal and national-transnational spheres. It should therefore come as no surprise that the field of cultural studies has been inscribed with conceptual disputes about hybridity. Central concerns have included the production, transmission, and contested reception of media texts (Gilroy, 1993), and, more recently, digital technologies of transnational communication. Hybridity has emerged in postcolonial studies as a critical response to the dominance of "cultural imperialism" (Holton, 1998: 161–185). While cultural imperialism suggested the relatively effortless export of western cultural values to non-western contexts, hybridity scholars argue that the reality is messier (Kraidy, 2005). Central to this usage of hybridity is cultural resistance through ironic subversion—the idea that historically "subaltern" cultural movements have selectively engaged in the integration and adaptation of aspects of dominant cultural genres in order to blunt the latter's potential hegemony (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1994).

These cultural treatments of hybridity have drawn attention to fundamental questions of ideology and political power. The construction of hybridity is often portrayed as a heavily politicized and competitive process of interaction at critical historical junctures, as groups engage in struggle to assert their power and autonomy. Studies of cultural hybridity also reveal that the flow of cultural power is never unidirectional (Glynn & Tyson, 2007; Shim, 2006; Wang & Yeh, 2005). Some forms of hybridization are best seen as constructing "strategic inauthenticity," whereby cultural creators deliberately incorporate non-indigenous

genres as a means of challenging dominant or stereotypical expectations (see also Luvaas, 2009; Taylor, 1997: 125–146). More broadly, the turn towards hybridity in cultural studies has presented a challenge to analyses based on the oppositional interaction of static social phenomena. My aim here is not to argue for the importance of these specific examples, nor for the particular importance of cultural studies, but rather for a general orientation towards power and change in the underlying dynamics of a social system. It strikes me that these insights on power, appropriation, and counter-appropriation offer some useful conceptual resources for studying a system of political communication.

Linked in part to this literature on hybridity in cultural change is a broader concern with the ever-evolving nature of media genres. Attention is now gradually refocusing on the increasingly porous boundaries between "hard" news and "entertainment" genres in political communication. Emblematic of this shift is of course the popularity of the political comedy talk show in the United States (Baym, 2005: 262). Documentary, long considered a "serious" media form for politics, has undergone a transformation over the last decade, with the rise of hybrid genres such as fictional or semi-fictional "mockumentaries," "docu-soaps," "game-docs," and "biopics" (Kilborn, 2003; Mast, 2009). Meanwhile, genres such as cookery shows are putting the "info" back into infotainment, as public health campaigns and political mobilization occurs in the old-media-meets-new-media networked spaces facilitated, but by no means dominated by high-profile "celebrity chefs" like Jamie Oliver.

The internet and new media are, of course, especially powerful in these processes. They hybridize and integrate a wide range of "ancestral" (Miller & Shepherd, 2004) genres in the process of creating new ones (Chadwick, 2006: 4–9; Crowston & Williams, 2000). They also encourage users and audiences to engage in what Clay Spinuzzi terms "subversive interactions": the injection of familiar genres and routines into new and unfamiliar information environments (2003: 3) But new media are not uniquely powerful here. Old media have been reinventing themselves. Television is now a prolific hybridizer of genres, especially since the emergence of so-called "reality" formats in the 1990s (Wood, 2004). Televisual style is now shot through with digital style and vice versa. Various concepts have

been proposed to capture these trends, from the "multimodality" approach which first emerged in the field of sociolinguistics (Kress, 2010), to "remediation" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), "interdiscursivity" (Fairclough, 1992), "interpractice" (Erjavec, 2004), and "convergence culture" (Jenkins, 2006).

Finally, the sociology of science and technology has given rise to what is probably the most radical understanding of hybridity: actor-network theory. Most obviously associated with Bruno Latour, the central claim here is that modernity has been based upon a seemingly "natural" but actually artificial ontology that distinguishes between "nature" and "society," or between the human and "nonhuman" domains. Actor-network theory posits that the world is based upon "hybrid networks" of human and nonhuman hybrid subject-objects. Nonhuman "actants" have a form of agency that emerges, not from the intrinsic capacity of nonhuman "things" to act alone, but rather from their interdependent interactions with other resources in a sociotechnical system. These hybrid networks must be analyzed holistically (Latour, 1993: 10–11; see also Latour, 2005). Actor-network theory, by freeing us from Enlightenment modes of either/or thinking, and by creating a generalized principle of "symmetry" between people and "things," enables us to identify sociotechnical systems whose functioning depends upon the intermingled agencies of the social and the technological.

Actor-network theory's relational theory of agency and power is controversial primarily due to its notion of hybridity, but the approach has radiated out from its origins in the sociology of science and it is now starting to influence many fields of inquiry, including anthropology, political theory, the sociology of organizations, social psychology, communication, and cultural studies (Saldhana, 2003). Its influence has been particularly strong in human geography (Lulka, 2009; Thompson & Cupples, 2008; Whatmore, 2002) and is now growing in information systems research (Heeks & Stanforth, 2007; Ranerup, 2007). Situating power and agency in the context of integrated but still conflict-ridden systems comprising people and technologies offers a creative orientation for the study of contemporary media systems.

Analytical Challenges

Despite these rich resources, the ontology of hybridity has its challenges. To what extent can hybrids be understood as something analytically unique "in themselves"? Is the whole notion of hybridity logically dependent upon prior and coherent fixed categories? Do hybrids entail the ultimate resolution of contradiction? While not a wholesale solution, one way of addressing these problems is to distinguish between two basic modes of hybridization. In one sense, hybrids may be seen as "diluted" versions of their antecedents. But a more suggestive approach is "particulate" hybridity, in which antecedents' characteristics are always in the process of being selectively recombined in new ways (Wade, 2005: 609). Thus, particulate hybrids are recognizable from their lineages but they are also genuinely novel.

Hybridization is therefore a process of both integration and fragmentation. Competing and contradictory elements may constitute a meaningful whole, but their meaning is never reducible to, nor ever fully resolved by, the whole. Particulate hybridity is the outcome of power struggles and competition for preeminence during periods of unusual transition, contingency, and negotiability. Over time, these hybrid practices start to fix and freeze; they become sedimentary, and what was once considered unusual and transitional comes to be seen as part of a new settlement.

The social sciences have been riddled with "boundary fetishism" (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 220). The ontology of hybridity constitutes an important and suggestive critique of that thinking. It nudges us away from "either/or" and toward "not only, but also." I believe this ontology provides a fruitful approach to understanding the interactions between old and new media, broadly understood, in contemporary politics and society. It can help to shed new light on the relative power of actors in media systems. Attempts to control, police, and redraw boundaries, and the power struggles that criss-cross domains are now defining features of political communication. For every example of a boundary between old and new media in the communication of politics, there are examples of that boundary being transgressed.

In the rest of this paper I show how this ontology may animate the analysis of certain aspects of the evolving media systems of the advanced democracies. The focus of my attention in this article is reserved for what is arguably the most significant area in the study of political communication: the construction of political news. In the next section, I discuss some recent research on hybridized news making in the "political information cycle." Following that, I examine the phenomenon of WikiLeaks.

The Political Information Cycle

The hybrid media system creates subtle but important shifts in the balance of power shaping the production of news. A crucial arena in which this balance of power now plays out is what I term the "political information cycle" (Chadwick, 2011a; 2011b).

Consider what is now happening to the "news cycle." Traditionally, the literature in this area has been united by the fundamental assumption that the construction of political news is a tightly-controlled, even cozy game involving the interactions and interventions of a small number of elites: politicians, officials, communications staff, journalists, and, in a small number of recent studies, elite bloggers (Barnett & Gaber, 2001; Bennett, et al., 2007; Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Davies, 2008; Davis, 2009; Gans, 1979: 116–146; Golding & Elliott, 1979; Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Molotch & Lester, 1974; Patterson, 1998; Roshco, 1975; Schlesinger, 1977, 1978; Sellers, 2010; Stanyer, 2001; Tuchman, 1978; Young, 2009). While these elite-driven aspects of political communication are still much in evidence, the hybridization of old and new media requires a rejuvenated understanding of the power relations shaping news production. Ultimately, however, this may require a different understanding of how the news cycle now works.

As I have recently argued in analyses of two cases—the 2010 "bullygate" scandal and the mediation of Britain's first ever live televised prime ministerial debates—political information cycles are complex assemblages in which the personnel, practices, genres,

technologies, and temporalities of online media are hybridized with those of broadcast and press media. This hybridization shapes power relations among actors and ultimately affects the flows and meanings of news (Chadwick, 2011a; Chadwick, 2011b).

During a weekend in February 2010, just a few weeks before the most closely-fought general election campaign in living memory, Gordon Brown, then prime minister, became the subject of an extraordinary media spectacle. The crisis was sparked by revelations in a then-unpublished book by Andrew Rawnsley, one of Britain's foremost political journalists (Rawnsley, 2010). Extended extracts were printed in the paper edition of the Observer, one of Britain's oldest and most respected newspapers, as part of its "relaunch" edition. The Observer's extracts centered on the prime minister's alleged psychological and physical mistreatment of colleagues working inside his office in Number 10, Downing Street. Bullygate was potentially the most damaging political development of the entire Brown premiership, not only due to its timing—on the verge of a general election—but also its shocking and personalized nature. These were potentially some of the most damaging allegations ever to be made concerning the personal conduct of a sitting British prime minister. The bullygate affair became a national and international news phenomenon.

During the course of that weekend and into the early part of the following week, bullygate took several momentous twists and turns. New players entered the fray, most notably an organization known as the National Bullying Helpline, whose director claimed that her organization had received phone calls from staff inside Number 10, Downing Street. This information created a powerful frame during the middle of the crisis. As the story evolved, events were decisively shaped by mediated interactions among politicians, nonprofit group leaders, professional journalists, bloggers, and citizen activists organized on Twitter. Seemingly clear-cut revelations published in a national newspaper became the subject of fierce contestation, involving competition, conflict, partisanship, but also relations of interdependence, among a wide variety of actors in a wide variety of media settings. Over the course of a few days, following a range of largely citizen-discovered pieces of information, serious doubts about the veracity of the bullygate revelations resulted in the story being

effectively discredited. Close, real-time, observation and logging over a five-day period of a wide range of press, broadcast, and online material, as the story broke, evolved, and faded, enabled a detailed narrative reconstruction of these interactions between politicians, broadcasters, the press, and key online media actors.

The analysis of Britain's first ever live televised party leaders' debate reveals the same dynamics. Commentary on the prime ministerial candidates' performances was orchestrated, produced, co-produced, packaged, and consumed across online, press, and broadcast media in real time during the event, but it was also integrated into later stages of the political information cycle. Real-time news frames were mobilized and augmented and eventually became the subject of fierce contestation between the right wing press and left of center online activists organized on Twitter and Facebook. Within a few minutes of the end of the first debate, all of the instant polls revealed Nick Clegg, leader of the third-party Liberal Democrats, to be the clear winner. The immediate increase in support for Clegg unsettled broadcasters but it greatly troubled Conservative-supporting newspapers, especially the Daily Mail, the Times, and the Daily Telegraph, who were torn between reflecting Clegg's rise—a major political story with a popular grassroots narrative—or attacking the Liberal Democrats. Once it became clear that "Cleggmania" was not likely to dissolve in the short term, the right-wing press turned, producing torrents of critical coverage in the run up to the second televised debate.

The night before that second debate, the Daily Telegraph announced that its front page would feature what it claimed was an investigative scoop: a report that Clegg had received party donations from three businessmen directly into his personal bank account. The Telegraph had trawled back through the archive of documents it had bought in 2009 order to run its months-long series of exposés on MPs' expenses. That night, Clegg was given a chance to respond to the story before it published. He issued a statement saying that he had used the money to pay for a member of staff and that these donations were reported in the parliamentary register of members' interests.

But during the morning of the second debate there unfolded an extraordinary series of events. As news of the Telegraph's "scoop" reverberated through media and online networks, it became obvious that a large proportion of journalists—on both the right and the left—were skeptical of the story. By mid-morning, a satirical online flash campaign had emerged, in which several high-profile journalists also participated. Tens of thousands of Twitter users sardonically added the hashtag "#nickcleggsfault" to their status updates. By the middle of the day this had become the third most popular shared hashtag, not just among the 7.5 million Twitter users in Britain, but the entirety of the service's 105 million global users. Suddenly the Telegraph was thrown on the defensive. Sensing that the Clegg donations story was not being as well-received as he had perhaps hoped, Deputy Editor, Benedict Brogan, took the highly unusual step of issuing a defense on the paper's political blog. The story collapsed.

While the Liberal Democrats' surge fell away during the final week of the campaign, "Cleggmania" had two important tangible effects on the outcome of the election. It established momentum for the Liberal Democrats and as a result they avoided being wiped out in some seats by the powerful voter swing to the Conservatives. And it enhanced Clegg's overall credibility with the media and the public, smoothing the Liberal Democrats' historic transition into coalition government with the Conservatives, and Clegg's personal rise to the position of deputy prime minister.

News-making Assemblages

The bullygate and leaders' debates studies both develop the broader concept of news-making assemblages. Key here is the idea that there are permeable boundaries between different modular units of a given collective endeavor. As social theorist Manuel DeLanda writes: "We can distinguish… the properties defining a given entity from its *capacities to interact* with other entities… These relations imply, first of all, that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different." Assemblages, then, are "wholes characterized by *relations of exteriority*"

(DeLanda, 2006: 10 emphasis in original). They are composed of multiple, loosely-coupled individuals, groups, sites, and temporal instances of interaction involving diverse yet highly interdependent news creators that plug and unplug themselves from the news-making process, often in real time.

Certain points flow from this conceptualization. Political information cycles may involve greater numbers and a more diverse range of actors and interactions than news cycles as they have traditionally been understood. They are not simply about an acceleration of pace nor merely the reduction of time devoted to an issue. Though these facets are certainly evident, they are characterized by more complex temporal structures. They include many non-elite participants, most of whom now interact exclusively online in order to advance or contest news frames and fragments of information, sometimes in real-time exchanges but also during subsequent stages of the cycle of news that follows a major political event or the breaking of a story. Fragments of stories can lay dormant for weeks or months before new pieces of information erupt and are integrated into the assemblage. The sources of these pieces of information may be very diverse. Political information cycles work on the basis of cross-platform iteration and recursion, loosening the grip of journalistic and political elites and enabling greater scope for timely intervention by online citizen activists. Some of these interventions are at the individual-to-individual level and may easily fall beneath the radar.

Broadcasters and the press increasingly integrate non-elite actions and information from the online realm into their own production practices and routines. Using digital tools, non-elite activists may sometimes successfully contest television and press coverage of politics. The more that professional broadcast and press media use digital services like Twitter and Facebook, the more likely it is that media will become open to influence by activists who use those same tools. Yet television and press journalists also seek to be selective in their own coverage, as they try to outperform new media actors in an incessant and often real-time power struggle characterized by competition and conflict, but also negotiation and interdependence. Broadcasters and the press also use digital marketing techniques and intermediary consultancies, not only to convey to audiences the increasingly

important online activity taking place around political events, but also to marshal specialized techniques, such as the appealing presentation of behavioral data in real-time, which broadcast media and newspapers are still surprisingly ill-equipped to provide for themselves. Established television and newspaper genres sit cheek by jowl with newer digital genres in a hybrid but integrated flux of "remediation" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). In contrast with older news cycles, much of this now takes place in public or semi-public online environments and this presents new opportunities for non-elite actors to engage in direct, one-to-one, micro-level interactions with politicians and professional journalists.

This is not "crowdsourcing" or the "wisdom of crowds" (Howe, 2008; Surowiecki, 2004). Though political information cycles contain pockets of engagement that may momentarily bring greater numbers into news making, intra-elite competition is still a dominant feature of this environment. In addition, the non-elite actors in the bullygate and leaders' debates episodes were mostly, though not exclusively, motivated and strategically-oriented political activists whose behavior suggests an awareness that carefully timed interactions with elite politicians and professional journalists will occasionally be able to play a role in shaping the news. Small numbers of individuals made the truly decisive interventions, and we need to pay careful attention to who actually does the powerful "work" in this environment. At the same time, however, we should not lose sight of the fact that ordinary citizens, operating away from what was once the traditional elite political-media nexus, can, on occasion, affect the flow of information.

In sum, the construction of political news is now a much more fluid and dynamic process than it was during the heyday of linear broadcast television. In these news making assemblages it is difficult, but not impossible, to trace and accurately document who does what, when, where, and to whom, as well as the difference made by discrete actions. Detailed narrative case studies will capture rich and useful data in this emerging environment; so, too, will more quantitative approaches. But narrative will prove particularly advantageous for staying close to the events that matter for illustrating the role of assemblages.

I now turn to a different account of political news in the hybrid media system, though one with obvious affinities with what I have just discussed.

WikiLeaks

What is WikiLeaks?[2] Is it a website, an email list, or a globally-distributed technological infrastructure based on secure encryption standards? Is it a publishing business, a professional investigative online news magazine, or a public relations agency acting on behalf of anonymous clients? Is it an elite-centric lobby group, a netroots social movement pressing for radical transparency in all areas of life, or a secretive group of dedicated activists? Is it a collective of radical poets and artists, a transnational, distributed online network of hackers, or an educational foundation funded by charitable donations? Is it a loosely-connected series of hacker conferences and alternative festivals? Is it truly global or embedded in specific national media systems? Or is it just one person: Julian Assange?

WikiLeaks is all of these things and more. Its hybridity raises fundamental questions about the creation of political news, but it also reveals much of significance for understanding political organization and mobilization in the contemporary era.

Leaking, Publishing, Producing, Mobilizing: WikiLeaks as a Hybrid Media Actor

WikiLeaks sits within broader networks of affinity. It is steeped in the traditions of libertarian hacker culture and the free and open source software movement. It is influenced by the technologically-enabled transnational leftist movements that were first established during the 1990s by environmentalists, feminists, anarchists, and human rights groups. For all the talk of WikiLeaks being a virtual online network, face-to-face interaction has always been an important aspect of its operation. The hacker-run Chaos Computer Club's (CCC) headquarters in Berlin have provided space for meetings of its activists (Domscheit-Berg,

2011: Kindle edition, Ch. 1, para. 17). The CCC's annual Chaos Communication Congress and its numerous workshops and events have provided a platform for Julian Assange, Daniel Domscheit-Berg, and others to spread the word and solicit technological expertise and donations. The CCC has also been a key player in developing the structure through which WikiLeaks is funded. WikiLeaks is a nonprofit, but it operates according to a slightly unusual arrangement: staff are not paid directly but are permitted to claim expenses associated with running the organization from the Wau-Holland-Stiftung, a German charity (Wau-Holland-Stiftung, 2011). Some of the weaknesses of WikiLeaks' hybrid role as news-maker, technology platform provider, and activist movement are illustrated by its constant financial worries. Even the increase in donations during the headline-making leaks of 2010 was insufficient to put it on a more permanent and sustainable footing. But to what extent does funding matter?

Internet and mobile communication have been absolutely central to WikiLeaks' routine operation and publishing strategy. Encrypted Jabber IRC chat rooms are key sites of daily decision making, encrypted email provides links between the key organizers, and the website has evolved over time into a secure network of servers installed by local volunteers in several countries (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 10, para. 10). Skype is used in preference to ordinary telephone lines (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Kindle edition, Ch. 4, para. 11). Non-networked encrypted notebook computers are routinely used to transport leaked data. After long periods of rather chaotic instability, this system gradually acquired enough capacity to deal with large amounts of leaked data and the several million web hits per day that have become common during major releases. Web hosting was deliberately placed in the hands of PRQ, a company based in Sweden, where there is a relatively liberal free-speech tradition and a comparatively strong record of resisting internet censorship (Khatchadourian, 2010). Established by Gottfrid Svartholm and Fredrik Neij, two founders of the Pirate Bay, PRQ specializes in protecting the identity and security of its users.

This infrastructure for *leaking* is buttressed by technologies that have evolved over the last decade, bolted together to provide anonymity for whistleblowers: SSL, secure FTP,

FreeNet secure peer-to-peer networks, numerous pre-paid mobile phone SIM cards, satellite pagers, CryptoPhone mobile devices, and Tor, the volunteer-driven secure network protocol (United States Army Counterintelligence Center, 2008). These technologies enshrine in code WikiLeaks' founding: the identity of leakers, in all of its digital traces, is to remain entirely hidden, even from WikiLeaks staff (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 14, para. 16).

Based upon multiple web servers scattered across a range of legal jurisdictions, as well as distributed peer-to-peer systems like BitTorrent, WikiLeaks' *publishing* infrastructure also has built-in redundancy and can be quickly mobilized by volunteers to counter legal or hacking attacks on the main site (Arthur, 2010; Brian, 2010). This infrastructure has also made it easier to quickly publish private correspondence and legal threats provoked by data releases. WikiLeaks soon developed an informal rule that it would always seek to publish the particularly aggressive responses (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 17, para. 43). The belief that it is the duty of journalists to provoke the subject of a leak to file a lawsuit on the grounds that it will provide more publicity for the leak itself makes for a radically destabilizing approach, one not characteristic of traditional news media.

This is a sociotechnical system with affordances that structure the principle of anonymity and it rests upon a keen awareness of how the internet has changed the traditional dynamics of source-journalist relations during whistleblowing. The internal infrastructure is suited to communication at a distance, among small groups, on highly-specialized subjects, involving large amounts of digital data that must be quickly moved across national borders. And the desire to be "a neutral submission platform, pure technology" (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 17, para. 19) initially marked it out as radically different from a strong current in traditional investigative journalism, where knowing information about a source has been a key part of verifying a leak.

If all this gives the impression of a slick and well-organized entity it would be far from the truth. The principle of total anonymity through pure technology has been applied selectively. For example, in May 2009 WikiLeaks volunteers actively solicited information by compiling a public wiki listing their "most wanted leaks" (WikiLeaks, 2009a). Guardian

journalists David Leigh and Luke Harding report that Adrian Lamo (the hacker whom U.S. soldier Bradley Manning is alleged to have informed of his role in leaking the embassy cables) claims that Assange "developed a relationship" with Manning and established encrypted FTP channels for him to upload materials (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 6, paras. 13–15). In other words, the total anonymity principle has sometimes been dropped in the interests of the safe delivery of verifiable leaks. WikiLeaks has constantly mutated. It has shifted its mode of operation, selectively applied aspects of its self-created sociotechnical system, and even before the leaks of 2010 it sometimes behaved more like a team of traditional investigative journalists.

WikiLeaks has been polymorphous, chaotic, often reliant upon the personal resources of its key protagonists, and sometimes slow to live up to its own ideals. Constantly beset by technical problems—it went offline completely for a month in the winter of 2009–10 and its archive remained inaccessible for a further six months—the picture that emerges is of small groups of volunteers lurching from crisis to crisis. Daniel Domscheit-Berg claims that during his involvement, which ended in the autumn of 2010, it was a network of "around eight hundred volunteer experts" but there was no effective way of integrating their efforts, particularly when it came to verifying leaks (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 17, para. 14). Minimal volunteer participation stems from an absence of governance mechanisms suitable for building trust in decentralized and fleeting online encounters. There is an essential contradiction at the heart of WikiLeaks: how is it possible for a distributed army of volunteers to safeguard secrets? Even the WikiLeaks name itself is partly misleading. The organization began as a traditional wiki and it developed an email distribution list, but open online co-creation has seldom been a meaningful part of its operations due to the need for absolute secrecy and expert judgments on how to edit and distribute leaked materials. The email list members have been mostly inactive (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 2, paras. 28–29).

Yet it is equally important not to lose sight of some of the key strengths of this operation. WikiLeaks has exploited digital technologies' capacity for enabling very small groups and even individuals to project substantial organizational power. In their external

communication they have referred to personnel in the "tech department" or "legal services," and according to Domscheit-Berg he and Assange established email inboxes under pseudonyms to convey the impression that there was a bigger permanent staff (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 2, para. 24). Despite its patched-together and contingent nature, nothing approaching WikiLeaks' infrastructure exists in the world of mainstream media. This assemblage of secure hardware, encryption software, networks of interdependent sources, activists, and journalists *is* WikiLeaks. Sporadic bursts of volunteer activity and donations aside, this sociotechnical system is effectively what has enabled it to function as a global news-making entity without a central headquarters and staff. It has a working policy of verifying leaks, a 350,000-strong email list (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 2, para. 43), and it has been able to draw upon the network resources of Anonymous, the online hacktivist network. Assange has occasionally been able to mobilize the volunteer labor of hundreds and sometimes thousands of others: the 9/11 pager messages were mirrored across volunteers' servers in 2009 and there was a large-scale distributed effort to redact information from the Afghan war logs via a web-based system that had been custom-built by WikiLeaks technical staff in 2010 (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 10, para. 16).

WikiLeaks' organizational structure is therefore best seen as an array of overlapping circles of constantly changing size, in the middle of which is Assange as "editor-in-chief," surrounding by the "core team." Daily operations are managed by a small number of key players. The most important members of the core team have been activists—a mix of anarchists, greens, and libertarian hackers interested in internet and information policy issues—but the personnel has quite frequently changed. Assange is undoubtedly the most powerful individual, but his power is dependent upon assembling networks of expertise. The core team has changed in reaction to events, the task at hand, and the geographical context. During periods when leaks are being prepared, they have led a nomadic existence, shifting from city to city as the job demands it and tapping into pools of resources provided by sympathetic political activists and media workers on the ground in locations around Europe, Scandinavia, the United States, Africa, and Australia. WikiLeaks has a global purview but it

has plugged into existing national and local networks of expertise and activism; these are important resources in its ability to shift repertoires from activist group to government lobbyist to quasi-professional news organization. In 2009 it operated as a technical advisor and lobbyist during a period when Germany's parliament was considering a controversial new Access Impediment Law designed to filter online criminal content (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 8, paras. 1–32). The Iraq war documents release of 2010 were carried out with the assistance of the activist NGO, Iraq Body Count. By the time of the embassy cables leak a couple of months later, Assange had, in addition to the deal brokered with newspapers, built further networks among London media. These included journalists from Al Jazeera, Channel 4, and staff at the Bureau of Investigative Journalism at City University. Assange worked with the Bureau's in-house production company to devise two television documentaries that were sold to Channel 4 and Al Jazeera (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 11, para. 16).

Periods of intense activity involving small dedicated teams working in close proximity have presaged the publication of fresh leaks. Again, this capitalizes on the affordances of digital media. Routine tasks of journalism can now be performed successfully and convincingly on the fly, far away from the confines of the newsroom. Video and audio editing, the digital enhancement of images, and subtitling have all been carried out by WikiLeaks to a level that matches professional broadcast news and documentary.

The creation of the Collateral Murder film in early 2010 well illustrates how WikiLeaks has used digital tools to behave like a professional media production company. But it also reveals its role as an activist lobby group eager to present its own version of events to try to set the news agenda. After acquiring the leaked video, Assange assembled a small team of colleagues in Iceland, where WikiLeaks had recently become known due to its leaking of a list of generous loans made to shareholders of failed Icelandic banks. The editing and production tasks were carried out during a month-long house rental in Reykjavik. At this time, with the assistance of legal advisors and Icelandic activists, WikiLeaks was also lobbying the Icelandic legislature, business leaders, and telecommunications providers to support the establishment of the Modern Media Initiative, a legal settlement for media

freedom and technological development on the island (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 9, para. 14; Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 5, para. 12).[3]

Those who joined Assange included Birgitta Jónsdóttir, MP for the newly-formed Movement Party; Rop Gonggrijp, a Dutch online activist, businessman and WikiLeaks donor; Smári McCarthy, a volunteer computer programmer; Kristinn Hrafnsson and Ingi Ragna Ingason, both television journalists; and Gudmundur Gudmundsson, an activist and experienced audio editor (Khatchadourian, 2010). Hrafnsson and Ragna Ingason traveled to Baghdad using their own money to interview eyewitnesses and conduct background research for the press package that accompanied the film's release.

Collateral Murder reveals strengths and weaknesses of WikiLeaks' hybridity. Eager to make an immediate impression on professional news organizations, they forensically analyzed and edited the raw video material, even to the extent of overlaying animated arrows highlighting key people and events. Assange directed the team, acting as a kind of program producer. They took fine-grained editorial decisions. For example, fragments of conversation were removed from the audio soundtrack during the opening, to avoid encouraging viewers to "make an emotional bond" with the helicopter pilots (Khatchadourian, 2010). Here was WikiLeaks acting something like a professional news organization, one with a clearly discernible anti-war message. It morphed from intermediary to committed news producer.

This created new dilemmas. Collateral Murder was a significant media intervention, one that free speech advocates across the globe were quick to praise. There were also immediate reverberations across the U.S. media system. For example, Ethan McCord, the soldier caught on camera lifting the wounded children to safety, left the army and became a public figure after speaking out in support of the film on several television shows. And yet the same forces shaping the production and publication of Collateral Murder also clouded its reception. Critics argued that the edited version decontextualized events, but arguably the biggest problem was the "packaged" nature of the release. Collateral Murder symbolizes WikiLeaks' partial metamorphosis from whistleblowers' intermediary and activist network to ideologically-committed documentary filmmaker. But this metamorphosis threatened to

undermine its legitimacy as journalism. From that point on, it switched to yet another approach.

Power and Interdependence in the Construction of Political News

It is clear that from the very beginning WikiLeaks planned to engage with professional media. In 2006 they asked Daniel Ellsberg, the famous whistleblower who had released the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times in 1971, to act as the "public face" of the new initiative (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 3, para. 55). Relations between WikiLeaks and some sections of the German press, such as Zeit Online and the business paper WirtschaftsWoche were cordial long before the big leaks of 2010. There were also early links with the British press. In November 2008 WikiLeaks published a report on post-election political killings among members of Kenya's banned Mungiki sect. The story achieved greater impact through a temporary alliance with Jon Swain, a journalist at the Sunday Times. This collaboration was significant: Assange went on to win the 2009 Amnesty International New Media Award for his role (WikiLeaks, 2009b). There were also various experiments designed to stoke interest in leaks. In an early release of U.S. Army equipment lists WikiLeaks created an interactive searchable database that merged secret and freely-available sources. They issued detailed instructions on how journalists could run reports against it (United States Army Counterintelligence Center, 2008).

A basic collaborative model started to emerge. WikiLeaks would provide the raw data to journalists, perhaps with some summaries and guidance about a leak's most significant elements; the journalists would publish selective excerpts but link back to the full data on the WikiLeaks site. But this model did not become embedded as a consensual norm and this is significant in explaining WikiLeaks' move towards a more integrated approach. Journalists selectively quoting and editors running stories without attribution were the subject of much concern and led to a sense of resentment about the hyper-competitive nature of contemporary news-making. Experiences heightened suspicions, such as when a journalist working for the

German weekly magazine Stern covered a leak related to a Franco-German electronic toll road system without giving credit to WikiLeaks (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 4, para. 16).

Despite their initial policy of publishing all leaks in the order in which they were received, WikiLeaks gradually learned the importance of sifting out the data most likely to make an impact. They wanted to avoid becoming too dependent upon the "mainstream media" but they prioritized leaks for preparation and publication (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 7, para. 2). It soon became clear that the mere publication of vast quantities of data did not on its own generate interest among professional journalists. WikiLeaks' perspective on this is intriguing and it suggests some ambivalence about their original goals and a further explanation of their switch to fully-fledged collaboration. According to Assange, the problem was one of oversupply. Journalists were swamped by too much data. The trick was to restrict its quantity in order to increase its value and then follow this up by collaborating more closely with professional news organizations. This would generate greater interest, more manageable stories, and impact (Mey, 2010).

By the time of the Afghan war logs release of the summer of 2010, WikiLeaks had decided that working closely with journalists would be its chief mode of operation. The core team "looked around for reliable partners" before settling on the New York Times, the Guardian, and Der Spiegel (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 15, para. 12). Der Spiegel journalists held regular weekly meetings with WikiLeaks staff during the run-up to the publication of the stories. Meetings with the Guardian and New York Times staff were also a regular feature by this time, as participants regularly shuttled between London and New York. Assange worked for a time alongside the journalists at the Guardian's London offices (Ellison, 2011) And as WikiLeaks' strategy evolved they began to involve broadcasters: in the run-up to the "exclusive" launch of the Afghan war logs, Assange offered interviews to Channel 4, Al Jazeera, CNN, and a freelance reporter, much to the chagrin of the press partners (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 8, para. 29).

By mid-2010, then, the relationship between WikiLeaks and traditional media was symbiotic. But the precise nature of power relations in this context of interdependence is a matter for analysis and interpretation.

Bill Keller, executive editor of the New York Times and one of those directly involved in brokering the arrangement that led to the publication of the 2010 leaks strongly argues that the press were the leaders throughout. Describing Assange as "a self-important quasi-anarchist" Keller says that WikiLeaks was always treated as the outsider. In fact, so keen is he to depict the relationship in these traditional terms that, in a post-mortem describing the cablegate affair from the perspective of his editorial office, he pointedly and repeatedly refers to WikiLeaks as "a source." As Keller puts it:

> we have treated Julian Assange and his merry band as a source. I will not say 'a source, pure and simple,' because as any reporter or editor can attest, sources are rarely pure or simple, and Assange was no exception. But the relationship with sources is straightforward: You don't necessarily endorse their agenda, echo their rhetoric, take anything they say at face value, applaud their methods or, most important, allow them to shape or censor your journalism. Your obligation, as an independent news organization, is to verify the material, to supply context, to exercise responsible judgment about what to publish and what not, and to make sense of it. That is what we did (Star & New York Times Staff, 2011: Ch. 1, para. 68).

The other major partner in the 2010 stories was the Guardian. Its attitude is very different. The paper had used WikiLeaks data early on. During 2009 the British high court upheld so-called superinjunctions preventing the Guardian from reporting on Barclays Bank's alleged tax avoidance and oil trading company Trafigura's alleged dumping of toxic waste in the Ivory Coast. (Superinjunctions forbid all media discussion of the injunctions they cover.) WikiLeaks agreed to host documents that it had been ruled must be kept secret, undermining the court's decision. These cases demonstrated that mainstream media

organizations had much to gain from forming an alliance with a group of activists who were not shaped by the regular routines of the news industry and much less likely to capitulate when faced with legal threats. In March 2010, the Guardian offered to reciprocate by publicizing the Collateral Murder helicopter film (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 5, para. 16). In the event, WikiLeaks chose to launch at a high-profile press gathering at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. But the Guardian's July 2010 publication of Afghanistan war documents is tellingly labeled a "Guardian/WikiLeaks publication" (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 9, para. 10). This was clearly seen as a collaborative endeavor.

It was the Guardian's analysis of the predicament in which WikiLeaks found itself by mid-2010 that proved so important in shaping how the Afghanistan, Iraq, and embassy cables stories emerged. They argued that WikiLeaks was becoming weaker because it was under threat of legal action, black propaganda campaigns, and hacking attacks. They suggested some sort of multinational alliance of newspapers, WikiLeaks, and NGOs. Fearful that the American embassy in London would seek a legal injunction from British courts before the stories emerged, the Guardian also suggested that the aim would be to publish simultaneously on the WikiLeaks site and across several outlets in a range of countries.

WikiLeaks too, were contributing to the strategy at this stage. They suggested that simultaneous publication by the New York Times, where they had contacts, would make it less likely that the alleged U.S. military source, Bradley Manning, would be charged under the U.S. Espionage Act (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 7, para. 47). And although the Guardian were initially reluctant to accede to WikiLeaks' request that Der Spiegel be allowed into the Afghanistan collaboration, it soon became obvious that the Germans had a great deal of expertise that could be brought to bear in verifying the leaks, including access to secret supporting documents for the German parliament's investigation into the war (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 8, para. 18). The outcome was a historic international collaboration involving WikiLeaks and several elite national news organizations: the Guardian, the New York Times, Der Spiegel, Le Monde, and El País. The ultimate prize was the embassy cables leak of November 2010.

While it is clear that the publication of these enormous leaks was heavily dependent upon the professional and organizational resources of traditional news organizations, a key point here is that this pool of resources was itself subject to rapid evolution during the collaboration.

A custom search engine was coded by the Guardian's in-house technology staff, enabling its foreign affairs team to run queries against the huge database of around 300 million words of jargon-riddled text. An editorial decision was made to redact material that might endanger sources and military personnel, but deciding this was the easy part; following through, when faced with such huge amounts of textual data, proved far more difficult. The embassy cables were the equivalent of around 2,000 printed books (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 11, para. 20).

Suspicion and differences of opinion bedeviled all involved. The journalists had several concerns: the status and credibility of the leaks; the possibility that the U.S. government and private individuals named in leaks might bring lawsuits against the editors of the European newspapers; the potential harm that might come to informants inadvertently named in secret documents; and Assange's claim to act as the sole intermediary between his sources and the media. The legal concerns were particularly acute with the embassy cables because these contained numerous descriptions of financial corruption involving not only politicians but also business leaders from around the world. In the British context, where high court injunctions have become more common in recent years, it was possible that individuals might succeed in restricting publication before any of the stories saw the light of day. There was thus a "safety in numbers" approach girded by simultaneous international publication, the linchpin of which was WikiLeaks' publishing infrastructure.

The Guardian's and the New York Times' accounts both stress Assange's unpredictable behavior but also his desire to avoid becoming too dependent upon a narrow group of media actors. There were undoubtedly conflicting norms. With the Afghanistan documents, WikiLeaks wanted to share the data more widely, including among known sympathetic freelancers. The Guardian and the New York Times wanted to retain exclusivity

(Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 15, para. 16). The Guardian's Nick Davies says of Assange: "The problem is he's basically a computer hacker. He comes from a simplistic ideology, or at that stage he did, that all information has to be published, that all information is good" (quoted in Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 8, para. 24).

For its part, WikiLeaks was concerned that the journalistic norms for reporting insider information from government sources would not apply in the case of such enormous leaks, particularly in the United States. They had mixed results. The New York Times, in a plan to avoid charges of unethical reporting, decided to inform the U.S. State Department before proceeding with each new set of revelations. This decision was made on the grounds that it would enable journalists to use official reactions to gain a better sense of the authenticity of the documents. It would also enable them to identify the redactions necessary to safeguard U.S. informants and military personnel (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 14, para. 59). In its coverage, the New York Times exercised a cautious approach to redaction and it refused to link to WikiLeaks because it claimed the site contained sensitive information (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 8, para. 29). Bill Keller warned the White House of his plans in advance of the launch of the cable stories and four of his staff attended an off-the-record meeting with officials from the White House, the State Department, the CIA, the FBI, the Pentagon, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. The administration asked that sources on the ground be protected but they also demanded that secret U.S. intelligence operations and any potentially embarrassing remarks made by top U.S. officials should be removed from the articles. Keller agreed to redact but was "unpersuaded" by the other arguments. However, this initial meeting was followed by a regular series of daily conference calls and ad hoc gatherings to discuss the content of the forthcoming stories. The White House did not seek to prevent publication. As Keller says, "in our discussions before the publication of our articles, White House officials, while challenging some of the conclusions we drew from the material, thanked us for handling the documents with care. The secretaries of state and defense and the attorney general resisted the opportunity for a crowd-pleasing orgy of press-bashing" (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 11, para. 64). The U.S. military and intelligence authorities, working

through the usual channels, therefore played an important role in shaping how the cables stories were handled at the New York Times. Meanwhile, the Guardian and the other press partners also indirectly considered State Department responses when deciding what to redact, because Keller and his team in New York fed information across from their briefing meetings (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 14, para. 46).

The discourse that emerges from some of the professional journalists' accounts, particularly that of Keller, is of the need for professional news organizations to tame an "anarchist" WikiLeaks hell-bent on publishing everything in its possession. Yet there is little hard evidence that WikiLeaks had a cavalier attitude to sensitive information. As the Guardian journalists themselves admit, by the time of the embassy cables Assange was as eager as the professionals to be selective in what was published and to redact the documents, not only to protect sources but more pragmatically to avoid provoking hostility to the project. Indeed, during the Afghan war documents release earlier that year WikiLeaks had removed a batch of 14,000 files because they may have contained identifying information (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 15, para. 25). The Iraq war logs of October 2010 were also heavily redacted (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 8, para. 25). And yet the perception that WikiLeaks was an irresponsible organization and "not journalism" was very widespread. According to a content analysis of newspapers from November 14, 2010 to January 28, 2011, some 60% of stories misleadingly referred to the "dumping" of "250,000" cables (Benkler, 2011). In fact, by the end of December 2010, a total of 1,942 had been released.

In the day-to-day processes of news production the worlds of WikiLeaks and the journalists were sometimes uncomfortably far apart. The Guardian's David Leigh and Luke Harding reveal that there was a good deal of muddling through in handling data and digital tools. The sheer size of the 200 million-word embassy cables database forced Guardian journalists to run keyword searches using TextWrangler, a basic piece of Macintosh text editing software (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 11, para. 16). Terms that were too generic would produce thousands of results, so they would sometimes resort to searching for unusual phrases in the hope of hitting some bizarre description of events. In discussing how to publish

stories based on the Afghanistan war logs, the Guardian's journalists spoke of coverage in the anachronistic language of paper and the old news cycle: "14 pages, on the day of launch" (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 8, para. 20). Far more readers would encounter this material on the paper's website, where "page" space was not a constraint. As if to force this new reality home, the official launch of the cables stories was scooped by an anonymous individual named freelancer_09, who tweeted page scans of all of the major headlines from a paper copy of Der Spiegel picked up from a batch left by mistake at Badisher Bahnhof station on the Swiss-German border (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 15, para. 14).

But however much they struggled to get to grips with WikiLeaks' infrastructure and working practices, we also need to recognize that the journalists offered their own network resources. They improvised their own form of secure transnational network infrastructure, meshing their practices with those of WikiLeaks. Email was out of bounds; Skype video calls were used instead. During these sessions the code numbers of relevant cables would be silently held up to the camera as a means of evading interception. Access to the cables was also provided over encrypted VPN connections. The Guardian's cables team were given temporary "burner" pay-as-you-go cell phones as a means of evading wiretaps (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 14, paras. 19–21).

Journalists adapted to the demands imposed by the huge volumes of data, some of which required great effort to verify. A team of experienced war reporters was assembled to undertake these tasks, including Jonathan Steele and James Meek of the Guardian, Eric Schmitt of the New York Times, and John Goetz and Marcel Rosenbach of Der Spiegel (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 8, para. 16). Their team also included Alastair Dant and Simon Rogers, whose role was to create compelling visual displays for the website, integrating leaked data with temporal and locational information.

The news organizations also provided a further set of resources: legal expertise, legitimacy, and widespread recognition among their publics. This helped the partnership as a whole resist political pressure in the run-up to publication. Two days before the launch, Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger fielded a conference call from senior figures in the U.S.

administration, including the U.S. assistant secretary for public affairs, Philip J. Crowley, secretary of state Hillary Clinton's private secretary, and members of the Department of Defense, and the National Security Council. The administration's aim was to establish precisely what was about to be leaked. Rusbridger conceded the broad themes of the first three days, but no details. Georg Mascolo, the editor-in-chief of Der Spiegel took a similar call from the U.S. ambassador to Germany (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 14, para. 56).

This was in stark contrast to what happened with WikiLeaks. Assange wrote to U.S. ambassador Louis Susman in London asking that the U.S. authorities produce specific examples of how publication of the cables might put individuals in danger. The response came from Harold Koh, a legal adviser to the State Department. Koh ignored Assange's request, declared that the cable leak was "provided in violation of U.S. law," and demanded that WikiLeaks return the stolen files (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 14, para. 65).

These episodes are revealing. In contrast with WikiLeaks, the senior journalists had much experience of bargaining with elite government sources. Their editors possessed the legal resources that would enable them to craft stories to avoid provoking lawsuits. The news organizations also had clout: all of the partners were revered national institutions in their own right. Any decision by the governments of the United States, Britain, Germany, France, or Spain to attempt to suppress publication by the newspapers would have instantly provoked outrage among a significant section of each country's population. Suppression would in any case have proved futile because the stories were scheduled to appear simultaneously elsewhere—on the WikiLeaks website. The likelihood of concerted action by five governments was minimal. The likelihood of coordinated collective action by the newspapers, WikiLeaks, and its distributed networks was high.

The power of the traditional news organizations was thrown into sharp relief when Assange was accused of alleged sexual assault in Sweden. Journalists instantly faced a significant problem. Even though Assange was a partner in their efforts, to downplay a potential personal scandal would have threatened the credibility of the entire deal. The New York Times started to shift their emphasis and ran a front page extended profile of Assange

dealing in some detail with the sexual allegations. The Guardian and the other partners eventually followed suit, as Assange's personal character began to emerge as part of the WikiLeaks narrative.

These evolving power relations were exhibited during a fraught and revealing episode a few weeks before the cable stories went public. Despite Assange agreeing that he would grant the press partners exclusive access (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 13, para. 12), WikiLeaks started to leak. The entire embassy cables database had been acquired by Heather Brooke, a London-based freelance journalist and freedom of information campaigner. This led to a confrontation at the Guardian's headquarters on November 1, 2010. During this meeting, involving Assange and his legal team, the Guardian's senior editors and their lawyer, Der Spiegel and Guardian journalists, and the New York Times' Bill Keller (via phone), the interdependence among these actors was played out in vivid fashion.

Assange was angered by the hostile profile in the New York Times and now wanted the paper to be kept out of the deal. He mentioned potential collaboration with other papers, including the Washington Post. Meanwhile, the Guardian had been negotiating with Heather Brooke in an attempt to bring her into the fold to eliminate the risk that she might take her copy of the cables to another paper. They responded to Assange with the argument that the cables had in fact already been leaked and neither they nor the New York Times was now dependent on WikiLeaks for the data required to run their articles. But they could not be sure that they would be able to secure Brooke's compliance, nor would they have the WikiLeaks web infrastructure to guarantee the availability of their evidence. Assange still had power resources to deploy. Assange then asked that the embassy cables partnership be widened to include El País and Le Monde and that the New York Times publish on their front page his response to their unfriendly profile. Though Bill Keller refused Assange's request, the meeting did agree to include the Spanish and French papers. The original partners' exclusive was therefore diluted, but Assange failed to exclude the New York Times from the deal because the Guardian later passed the cables over to Keller (Leigh & Harding, 2011: Ch. 11, paras. 11–49). This was, therefore, a victory through compromise for all involved. The terms

of this deal crystallize the interdependence among WikiLeaks and the professional news organizations. The first embassy cables articles went ahead as planned, save for the Twitter/Der Spiegel accident, on November 28, 2010.

This marked the end of an episode of collaboration, but WikiLeaks' polymorphous network resources came to the fore in the immediate aftermath of the cables launch, providing symbolic reinforcement to the mainstream journalists. There erupted a sprawling, symbolically-charged cyber conflict, pitting activists engaged in electronic civil disobedience against a group of politicians, public authorities, and private companies intent on weakening WikiLeaks' organizational capacity. The unprecedented series of attacks on WikiLeaks led to "Operation: Payback" and "Operation Avenge Assange": decentralized online campaigns of politically-motivated retaliatory hacking. The action was minimally coordinated by a loose, leaderless, memberless, and constantly shifting transnational network of around 10,000 hacktivists named Anonymous. Some of these were associated with the "doing it for the lulz" culture of the libertine web forum, 4Chan (Shapira & Warrick, 2010). Media reports at the time suggested that Anonymous' support for WikiLeaks was a new development, but in fact the group had played important supporting roles in the past. In 2008 they had assisted with organizing website material from a leak detailing secret aspects of the Scientology movement (Domscheit-Berg, 2011: Ch. 3, para. 22).

Hacktivism in itself is nothing new (Chadwick, 2006: 114–143) though there is much more that might be said about these reactions and counter-reactions to the cables leaks. But my specific point here is that this was part of an ongoing public drama in which WikiLeaks' networks of affinity were mobilized, mostly in support of Assange, but partly in support of the collaboration between WikiLeaks and the press. These actions should be seen as an essential aspect of the hybrid media system. They were a show of strength of sorts, by the members of an online "anti-leader" network who had become politicized and who were willing to take personal risks in order to demonstrate their support for freedom of expression and the principle of whistleblower anonymity. And those risks were very real: in July 2011 the U.S. State Department and the British and Dutch police announced that sixteen

participants in the Anonymous denial of service attacks on PayPal had been arrested and charged with crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011).

WikiLeaks and the Hybrid Media System

What are we to make of these fascinating episodes in the evolution of news media and political mobilization?

Part news producer, part social movement, part public information provider, part broadcaster, part direct action network, whether you agree with its political mission or not, WikiLeaks has had an undeniable impact. The series of leaks in 2010 were arguably among the most important global political news "scoops" of the past few decades.

This impact has been achieved through interdependent power relations built upon the integration and exploitation of old and new media practices: the hybridization of professional investigative journalism and online volunteer activism; of established institutional power and distributed network power.

No doubt there are strong opponents of this interpretation in the professional news industry. WikiLeaks threatens traditional investigative reporting because in some ways it offers a more effective model. Some interpretations have been replete with phrases designed to construct a *cordon sanitaire* between the domains of journalism and WikiLeaks. One referred to the 2010 stories as simply a "collaboration of newspaper and Web site" (Ellison, 2011). WikiLeaks is not just a website, and it is more than "just a source."

But while we need to look beyond self-justificatory dismissals of by professional journalists we also need to recognize there are obvious weaknesses in WikiLeaks' approach. This is only partly a story of WikiLeaks' insurgency.

In many ways, as this analysis has shown, to depict WikiLeaks or professional journalists or, indeed, online hacktivist networks only in terms of each group's power to "act upon" a preexisting set of media relations is to miss the truly important point here.

WikiLeaks constructs and occupies an important boundary space between old and new media. It conducts technologically-enabled raids across each side of this boundary in a continual quest for resources that enable it to exercise power. But these power resources are themselves always conditioned by relations of complex interdependence with other political and media actors, whether they be online or offline networks of activists, or professional news organizations.

WikiLeaks relies upon anonymous whistleblowers for its source material and over time it has built a leaking infrastructure able to marshal huge quantities of data, and a publishing operation. It has produced important pieces of journalism from its own resources, as the process leading to the publication of Collateral Murder reveals. It has propelled the ethics and even the caché associated with hacktivism, internet libertarianism, and "data journalism" into the realm of mainstream politics and news media. It has even created a new set of multimedia documentary genres (Collateral Murder again).

But it is an inescapable fact that the information that has had the most decisive impact has been animated and mediated by professional journalism. This journalism has operated in environments where professional status, experience of investigations, and institutional resources have been decisive in shaping events. Even Collateral Murder, an online viral success with 11.7 million YouTube viewings, drew upon television genres. And it was embargoed until a relatively high-profile press release event in Washington, where Assange distributed a press kit to the gathered media before moving on to appear on the Colbert Report, a popular U.S. satirical television news show. Press and broadcast news media have been essential to the WikiLeaks phenomenon.

Yet by the same token we should be wary of according too much power to professional news organizations. We might ask: if WikiLeaks must coexist in symbiosis with the press and broadcasters, is WikiLeaks powerful? Or we might reverse this question: if the press and broadcasters must coexist in symbiosis with WikiLeaks, are the press and broadcasters powerful? These are valid enough questions but they perhaps rest upon an inadequate conceptualization of power. For in the hybrid media system, power is not always

exercised in the context of zero-sum games; it may emerge from physical and mediated interactions that are socially and technologically constructed and which evolve over time, in a diverse range of settings. What actually counts as an effective set of resources for powerful action in the hybrid media system has emerged from the interactions between WikiLeaks and other actors. Some of these interactions were colored by power operating as resources for the issuing of ultimatums and vetoes in focused, discrete environments, often behind closed doors and involving elite players. This was the case, for example, when Assange and the press partners came together at the last minute to hammer out the terms of the deal for the cables release. Sometimes power has been dispersed across a broader network, such as when WikiLeaks used its technological infrastructure to gather data leaks and channel these to the press; or when it has capitalized on the expertise of activists on the ground in various geographical locations. This broader network was also been on display when hacktivists came to the symbolic aid of both WikiLeaks and their press partners, as happened in the aftermath of the cables leaks. And WikiLeaks the networked publisher continues: in April 2011 it partnered with the Washington Post on new cables releases detailing secret plans to depose the Yemeni president (Whitlock, 2011). As of this writing (July 2011), 19,600 of the 250,000 embassy cables have been released (Cablegatesearch, 2011).

Cooperation has by no means been a frictionless process. Much of this suspicion stemmed from WikiLeaks' hybridity. Assange's approach evolved to the extent that he personally began using the WikiLeaks' Twitter account to express his views, including his argument that he was becoming the victim of U.S. intelligence "dirty tricks." His use of Twitter to publicize the cause involved projecting his own persona to try to build a larger online support network and articulate connections among the other elements of the hybrid media system, particularly broadcasters. This became an important aspect of WikiLeaks' overall repertoire of behaviors during the embassy cables affair. Assange seems to have adapted to the glare of publicity and moved easily among celebrities. His December 2010 arrest pending extradition proceedings further amplified the cult of personality, as several wealthy publishers, actors, journalists, and film directors provided money to enable his bail

release. By the time he was released from prison just before Christmas 2010, Assange was a global celebrity, of sorts.

It is interesting to reflect, finally, on why the New York Times' discourse about WikiLeaks differs so markedly from that of the European press partners. In the uproar that followed publication of the embassy cables stories in the United States there was much debate about whether WikiLeaks was "really journalism" (see for example Adler, 2011; Benkler, 2011; Greenwald, 2010; Packer, 2010). There is more than principle at stake. If WikiLeaks can be publicly defined as journalism, any prosecution would need to overturn constitutional precedent. Is WikiLeaks exempt from traditional First Amendment protections and therefore prosecutable under U.S. law?

Fueling this discussion were differing views on whether WikiLeaks is responsible in its approach to redacting leaked data. As I have shown, the evidence in this area is mixed. WikiLeaks has been selective in its approach to publication and it has taken redaction seriously, but it has often been hampered by an inability to mobilize sufficient volunteer labor to systematically carry out these tasks. Its view of political information was also different from that of the journalists, who are well used to protecting sources, cherry-picking the best pieces of evidence, and framing stories to generate the maximum possible interest.

Keller's dismissals were echoed across the American broadcast and press media and the wider debate about WikiLeaks' journalistic credentials were shaped there by the American broadsheet press's comparatively strong professional norm of objectivity and it related ambivalence toward advocacy journalism. In some respects, then, WikiLeaks' hybrid model of journalist, publisher, and mobilization movement is much more disruptive of the media system of the United States than it is of those in Europe, though there are of course many important differences across the European setting. This goes some way toward explaining the distancing tactic of the New York Times.

But overall, WikiLeaks and the professionals have innovated together, effectively blending their preexisting technologies, skills, and operating assumptions at the same time as creating new ones. The news partners and WikiLeaks have shared these resources among

themselves and, in some cases, with the public. The development of meaningful capacity for action in this new type of technology-enabled, not-quite-journalism has involved a process of learning, co-creation and co-evolution in the creative pursuit of new norms and working practices.

This is a story of interdependence among old and new media in the gathering and production of information, and the exploitation of that information as news. WikiLeaks and their press partners in Britain, America, Germany, France, and Spain have, together, played a crucial role in the ongoing construction of a media system in which they have also had the capacity to so decisively intervene—a hybrid media system.

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Notes

1. I use "ontology" here in a very basic sense. A philosophical term, originally from metaphysics, it refers to "assertions or assumptions about the nature of being and reality: about what 'the real world' is… ." Ontologies often contain "hierarchical relations" as "certain entities may be assigned prior existence, higher modality, or some other privileged status" (Chandler & Munday, 2011). Ontologies are necessary because "Any way of understanding the world, or some part of it, must make assumptions (which may be implicit or explicit) about what kinds of things do or can exist in that domain, and what might be their conditions of existence, relations of dependency, and so on." (J. Scott & Marshall, 2009: 531).

2. The analysis of WikiLeaks presented here draws on a fuller account in Chadwick (forthcoming).

3. Collateral Murder was published in two versions—a 17-minute edited package uploaded to YouTube and released to the press complete with guidance notes, and a 39-minute "full-version." The video footage, taken from the on-board camera of a U.S. Apache helicopter, captured that aircraft's role in events during a July 2007 attack on a small group of people in a residential area of Baghdad. Two of these people were armed with rifles; one was carrying a camera lens that appears to have been mistaken for a rocket-propelled grenade launcher. Two Reuters journalists, Saeed Chmagh and Namir Noo-Eldeen, were killed during the attack—Chmagh as he sought to crawl from danger into a van that arrived to rescue the wounded following the first phase of the attack. Twelve others lost their lives and two young children, who were passengers in the van, were badly wounded and later taken to hospital. After the event, in a bid to find out what had happened to their staff and to learn more about the extent to which the Apache helicopter had been under threat, Reuters asked the U.S. military to release the video. This was repeatedly refused. Reuters staff were eventually permitted to watch an edited version of the footage but this omitted the crucial second phase of the attack when the van containing the children that was trying to evacuate the wounded was destroyed by gunfire.