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An 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. It captures heterogeneity and those things that are irreducible to simple, unified essences. It eschews simple dichotomies and it alerts us to the unusual things that often 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 suggests 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 a familiar past and a half-grasped future. It provides a useful disposition for studying political communication.

Hybridity's Origins

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word hybrid has its origins in Latin and in ancient Rome. From the very beginning, the term has held connotations of the unusual or exotic. During the late nineteenth century the *Encyclopedia Britannica* referred to its Greek usage for "an outrage on nature" (Warren, 1884). Latinized versions of hybrid began to work their way into English texts during the early seventeenth century, and the first recorded usage emerged in the 1601 translation of the *Natural History*, first published in A.D. 79 by Roman statesman and philosopher Pliny the Elder. Pliny's thirty-seven-volume work includes a series of bizarre animal and part-human creatures drawn from far-flung corners of the globe, descriptions of which he had gathered during his traveling conversations with storytellers. Pliny's imagining of the hybrid as the unusual continued to exert an influence through to the late medieval period. Traces of this connotation survive to this day.

During the seventeenth century, hybridity acquired a racial meaning as a label for mixed racial inheritance. More importantly, however, during this period the term's meaning was "transferred," and it began to be used in a figurative sense to describe any entity derived from "heterogeneous or incongruous sources" or with "a mixed character." The formal codification of the word and the acquisition of its modern scientific meaning began in 1775, when John Ash's English dictionary included the definition "begotten between animals of different species, produced from plants of different kinds." The same sense was used in 1801 by U.S. president Thomas Jefferson, and in 1828 a botanical definition was included in Noah Webster's famous *American Dictionary of the English Language*.

This usage of hybrid spread during the mid-nineteenth century and found its way into the writings of several scientists, including most notably Charles Darwin, as it gradually acquired a more neutral inflection associated with the expanding science of genetics.

These two broad sets of usages—the specialist one common in scientific discourse, especially genetics, and the figurative one characteristic of literary, artistic, and everyday discourse—continued throughout the twentieth century and into the contemporary period. Specialized associated meanings include, for example "hybrid computer," used in the 1950s to describe machines that combined emerging digital technologies with the features of older analog computers based on hydraulics, mechanics, or simple electronics.

There are limits to etymology. But this brief sketch hints at several useful preliminary aspects of hybridity as a metaphor for thinking about politics and society. It is intriguing that the figurative meaning of the term emerged early in its English usage. This points to the attraction of the metaphor as a tool for capturing heterogeneity. Hybridity alerts us to the unusual things that happen when distinct entities come together to create something new that nevertheless has continuities with the old.

Hybridity in the Social Sciences

In recent decades, 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 trends. The idea 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 something like an ontology, where ontology is understood as a theoretical disposition that enables us to ask and answer some new and different questions about the nature of contemporary society. 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.

I use ontology here in a very basic sense. A philosophical term, originally from metaphysics, it refers, in the words of Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, 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, as John Scott and Gordon Marshall argue, "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).

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. For example, 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 that those living in the West may find counterintuitive and normatively objectionable, even though these 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 and systems 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 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 system 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 systems 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 what are termed "reserved domains." These are areas where elites have the capacity to retain strategic control over pockets of resources essential to their ongoing power and influence, and they exist alongside domains in which elites tactically cede control (Valenzuela, 1992). As we shall see throughout this book, attempts to create reserved domains are an important part of the struggle for preeminence among those associated with older and newer media logics.

Nonlinearity is an important principle here. According to some scholars of comparative politics, the paths to a hybrid regime are several and depend in part upon the characteristics of preceding arrangements. Simple authoritarian regimes may gradually grant minor concessions as a result of internal pressures, crises or international stimuli, as has been the case in sub-Saharan Africa, for example. New electoral regimes may emerge rapidly out of the old authoritarian settlement but may also have strong vestiges of the past, such as over-mighty executives, as is the case with Russia and several other post-communist systems. And democracies may sometimes "regress" toward authoritarianism, by retaining democratic elements like elections while executive power is gradually extended, as is the case in some Latin American countries.

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. Scholars in this field emphasize 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). Henry Farrell, an international relations scholar, traces the emergence of "'hybrid' forms of governance . . . in which states seek—individually or in concord—to set general rules or principles under which transnational private actors implement policy and adjudicate disputes" (Farrell, 2003: 278). Karin Bäckstrand argues that there has been a general shift toward "hybrid, bifurcated, pluri-lateral, multi-level, and complex modes" of governance based on multistakeholder dialogues 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). Meanwhile, political theorist Terry McDonald sketches out a model of democratic regulatory governance that derives its legitimacy from a hybrid blend of principles associated with state and non-state institutions, the assumption being that neither sector has the capacity to provide an integrated system (see also P. S. Berman, 2007; Macdonald, 2008). Finally, the work of Nobel-prize winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom suggests a hybrid approach to the governance of scarce common-pool resources, one that blends centralized enforcement of community rules and privatized competition. Ostrom's work thus highlights the complexities of contextually specific, hybrid 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* organizations. This is an 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); 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 (Foss, 2003); formal and informal divisions of labor (Ashcraft, 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 diverse and impressive body of research is informed by hybrid thinking.

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 suggests the relatively effortless exporting of western cultural values to non-western contexts, hybridity scholars argue that the reality is in fact 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). Some scholars have explored the construction of racial and ethnic identities through mediated communication in postcolonial settings such as diaspora communities (Arnold & Schneider, 2007; Gillespie, 1995; Shome, 2006) and there is now a growing body of work examining hybrid media genres such as world music, the Latin American telenovela, the Bollywood film industry, and the subtle but significant changes that are made to "localized" television format shows that now form an important sector of the global entertainment industry, such as *The X-Factor* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, to name just two.

These cultural treatments of hybridity have often drawn attention to fundamental questions of ideology and 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 rarely unidirectional (Glynn & Tyson, 2007; Shim, 2006; Wang & Yeh, 2005). Some processes 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 in their respective cultural fields (Luvaas, 2009; Taylor, 1997: 125–146). More broadly, the turn toward hybridity in cultural studies presents 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 explanation per se, but rather to establish a general orientation toward power and change in the underlying dynamics of a 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 in which there are ongoing struggles between older and newer media logics.

Linked in part to this literature on hybridity in cultural change is a broader concern with the ever-evolving nature of media genres. For example, attention is now shifting to the increasingly porous boundaries between "hard" news and "entertainment" genres in political communication (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011). Emblematic of this shift is of course the popularity of political comedy talk shows like *The Daily Show* in the United States (Baym, 2005: 262). Talk shows, especially those featuring audience participation, have always hybridized and integrated news and entertainment

genres (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994; see also Wadensjö, 2008). But *The Daily Show* takes this to extremes, combining humor with serious discussion of politics, media bias, and political hypocrisy, all through a highly entertaining satirical lens. As Geoffrey Baym writes, "Discourses of news, politics, entertainment, and marketing have grown deeply inseparable; the languages and practices of each have lost their distinctiveness and are being melded into previously unimagined combinations" (2005: 262; see also D. G. Young, 2011). 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). Very recent political events are now routinely adapted by television dramatists, a good example being the BBC show *On Expenses*, which aired in 2010, within less than a year of the 2009 MPs' expenses scandal, one of the biggest crises in the history of the British parliament. At the same time, fictional shows, like HBO's *Veep* and the BBC's *The Thick of It* increasingly integrate highly detailed plot lines and contextual information from real or half-real contemporary political events, in what Kay Richardson, Katy Parry, and John Corner term "secondary performance" of the political (Richardson, et al., 2012: 19). Meanwhile, genres such as cookery shows are putting the "info" back into infotainment, as public health campaigns and political mobilization occur in the older-media-meets-newer-media networked spaces facilitated, but by no means dominated by, high-profile "celebrity chefs" like Jamie Oliver.

The internet and digital media are, of course, especially powerful in these processes. The internet and digital media hybridize and integrate a wide range of "ancestral" (C. R. Miller & Shepherd, 2004) genres in the process of creating new genres (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). Journalists now routinely appropriate the genres of social media sites and hybridize these with their preexisting routinized, professional practice. But newer media are not uniquely powerful here. Older media have been steadily reinventing themselves. Television is now a prolific hybridizer of genres, especially since the emergence of so-called "reality" formats in the 1990s (Wood, 2004). And televisual style is now shot through with digital style. Various concepts have been proposed to capture these trends, from the "multimodality" approach that first emerged in the field of sociolinguistics (Kress, 2010) and which has been taken in new and fruitful directions by Manuel Castells with his concept of "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009), 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 often associated with the philosopher Bruno Latour, actor–network theory's central claim 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. In this perspective, nonhuman "actants" have a form of agency that emerges, not from the intrinsic capacity of nonhuman "things" to act alone, but rather from these things' interdependent interactions with other

resources—both technological and human—in a given sociotechnical system. These hybrid networks must be analyzed holistically in order to understand the interplay of technologies and social actants (Latour, 1993: 10–11; see also Latour, 2005).

Actor–network theory is heavily dependent upon the idea of hybridity. By freeing us from modes of either/or thinking, and by creating a generalized principle of "symmetry" between people and "things," it enables us to identify sociotechnical systems whose functioning depends upon the intermingled agencies of the social and the technological. Indeed, Latour's assumption is that the very terms "social" and "technological" are merely labels of convenience that do not hold any substantive meaning. As he vividly puts it "…when we find ourselves invaded by frozen embryos, expert systems, digital machines, sensor-equipped robots, hybrid corn, data banks, psychotropic drugs, whales outfitted with radar sounding devices, gene synthesizers, audience analyzers, and so on, when our daily newspapers display all these monsters on page after page, and when none of these chimera can be properly on the object side or on the subject side, or even in between, something has to be done" (Latour, 1993: 49–50).

Actor–network theory's relational theory of agency and power is controversial primarily due to this understanding of hybridity, but the approach has radiated out from its origins in the sociology of science and is now starting to influence many different 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). More recently, some scholars have integrated some of the themes of actor–network theory with broader philosophical ideas in poststructuralism and empirical developments in political communication. Most important here is the idea of the assemblage, which I discuss in chapter 4. Originally introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), the idea of the assemblage has recently been stripped down to its essentials and used as a means of capturing the heterogeneous social and technological aspects of collective action in news making and political campaigning (Chadwick, 2011a, 2011b; Kreiss, 2012; R. K. Nielsen, 2012). 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 media and politics.

Hybridity's Analytical Challenges

Despite offering these rich theoretical resources, an ontology of hybridity also presents challenges. To what extent can hybrids be understood as something analytically unique "in themselves," and as something new? Is the whole notion of hybridity logically dependent upon prior and coherent fixed categories? Does it always entail the ultimate resolution of contradictions? One way of addressing these problems is to distinguish between two basic modes of hybridity. In one sense, hybrids may be seen as "diluted" versions of their antecedents. A more suggestive approach, however, is "particulate" hybridity, which sees antecedents' characteristics as always in the process of being selectively recombined in new ways (Wade, 2005: 609). Particulate hybrids are recognizable from their lineages but they are also genuinely new. Newness derives from the particulate recombination of

prior elements. Though I did not use the terms diluted and particulate, I have previously argued for the importance of both of these forms of hybridity as outcomes of the influence of the internet on political organizations. Older organizational forms—political parties and interest groups—now blend together their own preexisting campaigning styles with mobilization repertoires typically associated with social movement organizations. Particulate hybrid organizations, such as MoveOn, the American political movement, selectively recombine mobilization repertoires typically associated with political parties, interest groups, and social movements (Chadwick, 2007).

This particulate idea of hybridity is similar to cultural theorist Edward Said's notion of the "contrapuntal," which he borrowed from musicology. As Said put it, "in the counterpoint of western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work" (Said, 1994: 59–60). Counterpoint is an intriguing musical technique, found most vividly perhaps in Bach's well-known work, *The Goldberg Variations*. It relies not upon strict harmony—compatible notes played simultaneously—but the weaving together of quite distinct melodic lines that may occasionally intersect at certain points to create a harmony that is substantial but often only temporary. As Marwan Kraidy has convincingly argued, this contrapuntal thinking is "well suited for understanding the relational aspects of hybridity because it stresses the formative role of exchanges between participating entities" (Kraidy, 2005: 13).

Hybridization is therefore a process of simultaneous 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, but that new settlement is never entirely fixed.

The social sciences have arguably been riddled with what Jan Nederveen Pieterse has termed "boundary fetishism" (2001: 220). The ontology of hybridity constitutes an important and suggestive critique of that thinking. I believe this ontology provides a fruitful approach to understanding the interactions between older and newer media logics in contemporary politics and society and it can help shed new light on the relative power of actors in a media system. Attempts to control, police, and redraw boundaries, and the power struggles that criss-cross domains are important defining features of contemporary political communication. For every example of a boundary between older and newer media in the communication of politics, there are examples of that boundary being transgressed. Throughout this book I show how this ontology may illuminate important aspects of the evolving media systems of Britain and the United States.

Power and System

I now turn to discuss how this ontology of hybridity informs three further core themes of this book. First, the power relations among political actors, media actors, and publics

associated with older and newer media. Second, the idea of a system. And third, the idea of media logics.

The concept of power and the concept of a social system have each been central to the social sciences and this is not the place to rehearse these long-running debates. But working on the basis that evidence and theoretical hunches coevolve interdependently as one moves forward with any research, it is important that I sketch out the theoretical assumptions that I have found useful when writing this book. Throughout and in the concluding chapter I revisit these ideas as I reflect on the cases and examples.

As I argued in the previous chapter, a useful starting point for studying media and politics is Denis McQuail's deceptively simple definition of a media system as "simply all relevant media" (McQuail, 1992: 96). I say "deceptively simple" because, while McQuail's definition may have been reasonably self-evident during the late period of mass communication toward the end of the twentieth century, "simply all relevant media" has a more challenging edge to it in the highly diverse media system in which we now find ourselves.

Any understanding of power must involve an examination of the relationships between social actors, but less obviously it must also encompass the relationships between social actors and technologies, because technologies enable and constrain agency in the hybrid networks and sociotechnical systems identified by actor–network theory, as I discussed above. As the Weberian tradition in the social sciences has maintained, the exercise of power must always involve an interactive social relationship of some sort. However, as Steven Lukes has argued, these interactions may be understood very broadly as the social relations that create the cultural and ideational contexts in which the essential precondition of power—the construction of meaning—takes place (Lukes, 2004). But only by exploring concrete interactions and exchanges among social actors, and how media are used in and come to shape those interactions and exchanges, can we get inside the power relations that prevail in a given setting (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2005). The many and diverse interactions among social actors may aggregate to constitute systems, as David Easton's influential approach in political science has maintained (Easton, 1957, 1965).

There is nothing rigid or mechanical about seeing social life as based upon systems. It is not necessary to suggest, along with functionalist sociologists such as Talcott Parsons, that there is a single, overarching social system that integrates all social functions to produce a stable order (1951). Nor is it necessary to assume that there is a single "system level" to which all aspects of social life are said to conform. Indeed, unlike a related concept common in the social sciences, "regime," system may often connote flexibility, adaptability, and evolutionary change emerging from the sum of social interactions. Regime, on the other hand, connotes hierarchy, fixity, and asymmetries of power in social relations. Systems will often exhibit these features, but they may also exhibit horizontality, fluidity, and equality. And, as Manuel Castells has argued, institutionalized power relations frequently meet with "counter-power," as the social movements that are increasingly built upon networked communication come to challenge state and corporate institutions (Castells, 2007).

We may extend this analysis further. Following Brian McNair, I assume that all systems are characterized by varying degrees of inherent complexity, instability, and messiness. Systems contain many nonlinear elements and often undergo long, unpredictable, and chaotic periods of change. As McNair says, systems "exhibit structure, but of an irregular

kind. Communication systems are never in exactly the same place twice" (McNair, 2006: xiv). Systems are based on competition, conflicts over resources, and desires for preeminence, but systems analysis also carries an assumption that a great deal of interdependence exists among the salient actors. Actors compete and some gain the upper hand, creating what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye have termed relations of "asymmetrical interdependence" (Keohane & Nye, 1989). But even the most powerful in any system must cooperate with those who are less powerful, in the pursuit of collective goals. Cooperation of some sort is required for the maintenance of a system, for the production of useful social goods and the authoritative allocation of resources, however broadly those resources may be defined (Easton, 1957: 386–387). This sometimes gives those with fewer obvious resources the power to act in ways that force adaptation among those who seemingly had greater resources before specific interactions began. And as the pluralist approach of Robert Dahl and many others has maintained, those who are powerful in one social field may not necessarily be powerful across all social fields (Dahl, 1961).

A recent twist on these ideas of emergence and interdependence is David Singh Grewal's theory of "network power." Power, Grewal argues, may be based on simple sovereignty in the Weberian mould, which is understood as the power of an individual or group to compel others to do something they would rather not do. This power is often but not always backed by legitimized forms of collective decision-making. On the other hand, power may also be based upon what Grewal terms "relations of sociability," which are defined as "the accumulation of decentralized, individual decisions that, taken together, nonetheless conduce to a circumstance that affects the entire group" (Grewal, 2008: 9). These relations of sociability increasingly exist in network form, but these networks are not entirely chaotic and spontaneous. Over time, networks come to rely on emergent standards, which are shared norms and practices that facilitate cooperation. If we assume that in any given social field the value of a network is directly related to its size (because larger networks grant access to greater amounts of resources like money, communication, audiences, social support, or whatever the relevant resource happens to be) we may also generalize that social actors will want to belong to those larger networks. (The relevant networks in a given social field may be comparatively large or comparatively small—size is not an absolute but a relative concept.) It is the social value of the norms and practices in the larger network that make individuals want to join it. By joining, one gains access to the resources, or the "network power" that resides in the cooperative relationships facilitated by those different norms and practices. This is why individuals constantly adapt their norms and practices to join networks that will provide them with advantages of varying kinds. There are many examples of this process in action in this book. Actors constantly mobilize but also constantly traverse the logics of older and newer media to advance their values and interests.

Conceiving of power as relational, as evolving from a series of interactive exchanges among those who are articulated by chains of dependence and interdependence allows us to move away from abstract, structural prejudgments and generalizations about the specific categories of people who are supposedly powerful or the specific roles that people must supposedly always perform if they are to be powerful. It also enables us to move beyond abstract statistical approaches to media systems. Instead, it suggests a focus on the diversity of mechanisms and behaviors that enable power to be exercised in discrete contexts (Reese, 1991). In this sense, the idea of a system as I use it in this book

also involves the idea of "practice" as it has recently been elucidated by media scholar Nick Couldry. As Couldry argues, "A practice approach starts not with media texts or media institutions but from media-related practice in all its looseness and openness. It asks quite simply: *what are people* (individuals, groups, institutions) *doing in relation to media* across a whole range of situations and contexts? How is people's media-related practice related, in turn, to their wider agency?" (2012: 37, emphasis in original). Power in a media system might be understood, then, in a non-reductive and multifaceted sense, as the use of resources, of varying kinds, that in any given context of dependence and interdependence enable individuals or collectivities to pursue their values and interests, both *with* and *within* different but interrelated media.

Systems are based upon social differentiation; divisions of labor emerge among actors and there is a recognition that the pursuit of goals, especially in important large-scale societal projects like politics, media, or business, for example, cannot be undertaken without some embedded, regular structures for managing cooperation and conflict over time. These structures that make up a system may take the form of organizations, but now, in an era of digital media that are best understood as forms of communication *and* organization, these structures for cooperation may be relatively loose, spontaneous, and supple, and continually adapted and readapted according to the goals being pursued (Bennett, 2003; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Chadwick, 2007, 2012).

Embedding norms and acting with regularity are important parts of exercising power in any system. But so, too, is acting with timeliness, which is to be distinguished from acting with regularity. Timeliness and the mastery of temporal rhythms are important but surprisingly neglected social forces (but see Adam, 1990; Gershuny, 2000; Goodin, et al., 2008; Rifkin, 1987). Yet attention and the ability to create and to act on information in a timely manner are both key to successful communication. Actors try to master time by shaping its social understandings according to their own values and interests. Actors often flout regularity in order to cause shock and surprise and get ahead of the game. These aspects of temporality and how they are enabled and constrained by different media are on show at many points in this book.

A further key aspect of systems is their continual recreation. Systems must be constructed, enacted, and continuously reenacted, often with incremental modifications, by social actors. With the passing of time, the modifications that emerge from the interactions among actors may amount to the decisive reshaping of a system. As Michael Mann's macro-historical account of social power has argued, the reshaping of power relations may emerge from direct challenges to existing institutional forms, or it may emerge "interstitially," from new practices that cannot be fully integrated into the existing institutionalization settlement, but which grow at the edges of existing institutions and in the boundary spaces between those institutions (Mann, 1986: 15).

Systems, then, are always in the process of becoming, as actors simultaneously create and adapt. As Couldry argues, drawing upon the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu, a system "generates the conditions under which the practice is itself possible" (2012: 39). Only through analysis of discrete practices and moments of interaction are we able to identify these conditions. They cannot be generated in the abstract or by statistical snapshots but must be illustrated through specific examples of things in flow. In this book, this means analyzing how the technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms associated with older and newer media shape politics.

From Media Logic to Hybrid Media Logics

Identifying how older and newer media shape politics must also involve some basic assumptions about how the practices of media interact with the practices of other social fields. A fruitful concept here is "media logic." First introduced by sociologists David Altheide and Robert Snow (1979), the concept of media logic was originally developed to identify how the assumptions, norms, and visible artifacts of media, such as templates, formats, genres, narratives, and tropes have come to penetrate other areas of social, economic, cultural, and political life. Peter Dahlgren has usefully condensed the idea of media logic as "the imperatives that shape the particular attributes and ways of doing things within given media and even within specific genres." This, he argues "pertains to the procedures of selection, form, tempo, informational density, aesthetics, contents, modes of address, and production schedules" (Dahlgren, 2009: 52).

In the media logic perspective, media logic comes to shape the practices of those working outside the media field, and over time the boundaries between media and non-media fields become highly porous. Here I use "field" in the sense articulated by Pierre Bourdieu, to refer to a social category with its own norms and practices that provide the resources (or forms of "capital")—be they cultural, professional, bureaucratic, emotional, or aesthetic—for exercising power, often in small-scale, everyday contexts (Bourdieu, 1984). Fields are permeable and the logic of media frequently intervenes in other fields. Media treatments of sport, religion, politics, and terrorism, for example, have over time shaped the practices of actors in these respective fields, transforming key aspects of how they behave, blurring the boundaries between media and non-media. In politics, for example, Altheide and Snow have argued that practices derived from entertainment formats have increasingly become "folded" into the production of political news, hence the hybrid formulation "infotainment" (Altheide & Snow, 1992: 466). Lance Bennett has drawn attention to the growth of dramatic soundtracks and "action movie editing" in television's reporting of war (Bennett, 2005: 175). Over time, those working in other fields become dependent upon media logic and must conform to it in order to access the resource media offer: the ability to communicate with mass publics. As Altheide and Snow pithily explain, "today all social institutions are media institutions" (1991: ix).

Media logic provides a useful approach to understanding the power of media and the power relations within media. It moves us away from accounts that begin from the perspective that media systems and political systems are somehow separate and that the former are largely explained by the characteristics of the latter (though for a greatly nuanced approach see Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Siebert, et al., 1956). Media logic points us toward a different approach, one focused on studying how the discrete interactions between media elites, political elites, and publics create shared understandings and expectations about what constitutes publicly valued information and communication. The who, when, how, and why questions that inform the daily practice of political and media actors evolve over time to create a shared media culture based upon an underlying media logic (Altheide, 2004: 294). This media culture shapes the public's expectations of what "politics" is. In the long run, it means that those seeking to influence public discourse must adapt their communication strategies to fit the dominant formats required by media logic.

Media logic can explain why political actors and publics often seem to behave in ways that indicate that they have "internalized" the expectations and norms of the media field. The staging of pseudo events designed with favorable media coverage in mind is a classic example of media logic (Boorstin, 1964), but so too are the perpetually evolving yet commonly shared understandings of what constitutes a "good story" or "exciting visuals," what is "too long" for television or "won't work on the internet," and so on. Media logic theory suggests that "effective" political communication comes to be seen as that which taps into embedded social expectations of what makes for "appealing" media coverage in a context of hypercompetition among media. And all of this takes place within a commercial media environment that serves as the primary context within which information about politics is produced and communicated. Media logic theory therefore suggests that we try to understand the processes of sense making that emerge in the daily practices of those in the fields of media and politics; the ongoing decisions about "what goes where" in the construction of mediated political discourse. These are the decisions that shape the emergence and subsequent evolution of media logic.

Despite its obvious strengths, however, the media logic approach has some limitations. It was developed in the era of mass communication, when the dominance of electronic broadcast media was more firmly entrenched than it is today. It also attributed great power to formal media institutions. And while Altheide and Snow observed differences between how print and broadcast media shaped non-media fields, they had in mind a singular media logic that was said to pervade social and political life.

Today, the media environment is far more diverse, fragmented, and polycentric, and new practices have developed out of the rise of digital communication. Lance Bennett has put this in stark terms: the theoretical challenge begins with "the core question of just what we mean by 'media' these days" (Bennett, 2003a: 18). This calls for a reappraisal of the idea of media logic and its disaggregation into different competing yet interdependent *logics*. Writing about news, for example, Mark Deuze has argued that a new logic of "multimedia journalism" emerged in the early 2000s (Deuze, 2004). A further point is that while those in "non-media" fields like politics may have been shaped by media logic, they have in turn acted back on the media field as part of a continual process of mutual adaptation and interdependence. Altheide and Snow maintained that media and culture are reflexive (1992: 466), but these processes of mutual adaptation are arguably neglected in media logic accounts. Thus, while media logic has had an influence on the conduct of politics (as the related literature on "mediatization" has demonstrated (Mazzoleni & Schultz, 1999)) this logic is best seen, not as a force that emanates from media and then acts upon politics, but rather as a force that is *co-created* by media, political actors, and publics.

A convincing and refreshing perspective on all of this has recently been outlined by Sam Popkin. Popkin argues that political actors compete to best respond to media change, while media actors compete to best respond to political change. But he goes a step further. The practices of media and political actors become so interpenetrated, and the alliances between them so strong, that the disruptions caused by the emergence of newer media affect the status and power of both media *and* political elites. In other words, it is not that newer media technologies simply become new and different tools that existing media elites can use to more effectively hold politicians to account, nor is it the case that newer media technologies simply provide existing political elites with

new opportunities to outsmart media (Popkin, 2006: 336). Instead, existing media and political elites both have much to lose from the emergence of newer media. Both must (and generally do) adapt, or see their power decline, and occasionally newer media technologies may create new elites.

This book therefore begins from a more expansive idea of media logic. It seeks to understand the interactions that determine the construction of media content but also how these interactions take place across and between different older and newer media. Competing media logics can emerge that disrupt the dominant media logics that were previously established. Today, does media logic still derive from the mass broadcast media that so decisively shaped political communication during the second half of the twentieth century? Altheide and Snow argued that over time publics become familiar with media logic and expect to see its characteristic formats applied across all content, including politics. But in the early twenty-first century the media system is a much more fluid and contested place. The range of sources of information has expanded in ways that were unimaginable in the era of broadcast dominance. Audience familiarity is still an important aspect of media logic, but disruptive media logics may now come from online networks that seek to shape representations of political life according to their own interests and values, using digital communication tools that previous generations could not access. This creates alternative and competing sources of authenticity and audience familiarity, outside of those that were dominant in the era of mass broadcasting.

Given the panoply of newer ways in which politics can now be communicated, it therefore makes sense to move away from Altheide and Snow's idea of an all-encompassing, hegemonic media logic driven by the values of commercialism and entertainment. Instead, today we can conceive of politics and society as being shaped by more complex interactions between competing and overlapping media logics, some of which may have little or no basis in, or are antagonistic toward, commercialism. Indeed, given the long-standing traditions of public service provision in the United States and Britain, which commit broadcasters to the creation of public affairs content, together with what we are now discovering about how audiences learn about politics from "nonpolitical" entertainment formats, perhaps the original media logic approach was overstated, even during the heyday of broadcast media.

It also makes sense to move away from the idea of a relatively passive mass audience whose frames and perceptions are heavily shaped by a dominant media logic, and toward a model that foregrounds not only the increasingly diverse sources of audience frames and perceptions, but also the growing ability of some, though not all, activist "audience" members to play direct and concrete instrumental roles in the production of media content through their occasionally decisive interventions. It makes better sense, then, to use the plural, media *logics*; or what Dahlgren terms "an ensemble of simultaneously operative media logics" (Dahlgren, 2009: 54).

As this book shows, in politics, older and newer media have what we might term, borrowing from the hybrid regime theories I discussed earlier in this chapter, their own "internal" reserved domains of practice that actors seek to defend and protect. At the same time, however, the boundaries between older and newer media are always porous, as the disruptions caused by the emergence of newer media are gradually working their way through the institutions of the previously dominant print and broadcast media system. Importantly, the hybrid media system constantly requires judgments and

interventions about which medium is most appropriate for communicating a political event or process. How political and media actors shape and are shaped by older and newer media logics, and the extent to which they mobilize, traverse, and integrate these logics to exercise power, is what this book is about.

The Hybrid Media System as an Analytical Approach

A final word about the design of this study. In this book, I situate the analysis in the context of Britain and the United States. Not only is this for pragmatic reasons—these are the countries which I find most compelling to study and which have provided the main focus of my previous research—it is also because these are historically important liberal democracies. As such, the trends and patterns in these countries ought to be of interest and significance for those concerned with political communication more generally. However, in this book I do not seek to make any claims about the media systems of countries other than Britain and the United States.

In addition, I have chosen not to organize this research according to the traditional model of cross-country comparison. That there are important differences between how political communication has been and continues to be conducted in Britain and the United States is undeniable and there are many valuable ways these differences may be studied. For this book, however, I considered it more important to begin from the inevitably contested but defensible premise that Britain and the United States share sufficient basic similarities, such that it is possible and desirable to develop ideas that speak to some enduring concerns of readers in both countries.

My aim with this book, then, is to present the hybrid media system as a general *analytical approach*, and to do so in a way that remains rooted in empirical examples drawn from the two countries upon which I focus. None of this is to say that the idea of the hybrid media system will not travel. It might be used to explore other liberal democratic systems as well as authoritarian or semi-authoritarian systems. Indeed, any context in which it is important to try to make sense of political communication by exploring the interactions between older and newer media logics will hopefully benefit from the approach.

Conclusion: Politics and Power in the Hybrid Media System

That was the river, this is the sea.
—Mike Scott[1]

In this book, I have endeavored to show that political communication in Britain and the United States is now shaped by what is best described as a hybrid media system. By exploring a range of examples of this systemic hybridity in flow, in interactions and exchanges in the fields of news making, election campaigning, citizen activism, and government, I have shown how the interactions among older and newer media logics—where logics are understood as technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms—shape the power relations among political actors, media, and publics. Power in the hybrid media system is exercised by those who are successfully able to create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable others' agency, across and between a range of older and newer media settings.

The hybrid media system is based upon conflict and competition between older and newer media logics but it also features important pockets of interdependence among these logics. Actors in the interpenetrated fields of media and politics simultaneously generate and shape the very hybridity that they then seek to exploit. As I argued in chapter 1 and have shown throughout, systems must be constructed, enacted, and reenacted, in ongoing acts of modification that over time become significant. Power in political communication is relational. It is shaped by hybrid networks of social and technological actants whose agency derives from their interdependence with other social and technological actants in interactive exchanges.

Political communication actors constantly mobilize but also constantly traverse the networks and logics of older and newer media to advance their values and interests. They do this in order to access the network power that resides in the norms and practices that animate these networks (Grewal, 2008, see also chapter 1 herein). To revisit my definition from chapter 1, power in the hybrid media system should be understood

as the use of resources of varying kinds, that in any given context of dependence and interdependence enable individuals or collectivities to pursue their values and interests, both with and within different but interrelated media.

As I have demonstrated, the patterns of interaction between older and newer media logics are complex, heterogeneous, and variegated, both within and across fields. Hybridity empowers and it disempowers. But what, then, are the implications of all this for the different fields upon which I have focused?

In the field of news making, hybridity is creating an emergent openness and fluidity, as grassroots activist groups and even lone individuals now use newer media to make decisive interventions in the news-making process: in real-time assemblages in the case of the political information cycles I identified in chapter 4; through a mix of sociotechnical assemblages and elite/insider negotiation in the case of WikiLeaks, which I covered in chapter 5; and through the emergence of new hybrid norms among amateur bloggers and professional journalists that I identified in chapter 8. The hybrid media system exhibits a balance between the older logics of transmission and reception and the newer logics of circulation, recirculation, and negotiation.

And yet, all of this must always be set in the context of the ongoing power of professional broadcasting and newspaper organizations, who are in many respects successfully co-opting newer media logics for their own purposes while at the same time restating and renewing the logics that sustained their dominance throughout the twentieth century. While actors associated with newer media have come to see that they can exert power by adapting their norms and practices as a route to embedding themselves in positions of fruitful and negotiated engagement with actors associated with older media, this process also works in the other direction: older media have found important resources in newer media and will continue to do so. Hybridity also empowers those associated with older media logics, provided they are willing to restate their significance—and adapt.

Grassroots activism fueled by newer media logics must be set in the context of the broad and continuing power of the political and media elites who have carved out reserved domains that enable them to control what are still the main vehicles for politics in a liberal democracy: organized parties, candidates' campaigns, and of course the extremely powerful, and increasingly renewed, mass medium of television. These political and media elites had much to lose from the emergence of newer media logics at the end of the twentieth century, not least because these logics disrupted what had, even with the onslaught of media fragmentation that began during the late-1980s, become relatively fixed and settled patterns of interaction among elite political actors and elite broadcast and newspaper media. Older media's adaptation means that while power in the hybrid media system is relational and based on cooperation, divisions of labor, and interdependence with newer media, this interdependence is often asymmetrical (Keohane & Nye, 1989, see also chapter 1 herein). In some areas, older media logics continue to powerfully shape practice, though it is important to stress that this dominance is newly contingent and prone to fracture. The key point is that this contingency is now integrated into the media systems of Britain and the United States and it is not going to disappear in the near future.

Asymmetrical interdependence is most evident in the field of parties and election campaigning. Here, as I showed in my reinterpretation of the momentous 2008 U.S. presidential election in chapters 6 and 7 and the ethnography of hybrid norms in

chapter 9, not only must the power-diffusing aspects of digital media be set alongside the rationalizing and centralizing aspects, the overall systemic balance in campaigning is still skewed toward older media logics, particularly the televisual styles of campaigning and the war-room practice, the ascendancy of which dates from the 1960s. There is a growing systemic integration between television and the internet that sometimes empowers online expression but this also renews war-room televisual logics. Those able to decisively intervene in the online flows of political information are often drawn from the official campaigns or are professional journalists. There is now an established role for online activism at the grassroots, but this is often on the campaign leadership's own terms. Perhaps this would have been a more difficult argument to make in the immediate aftermath of Barack Obama's 2008 victory, when the overwhelming weight of commentary was about how the internet had revolutionized election campaigning and how the Obama model would go on to inform a new style of governance based on openness, transparency, and grassroots mobilization. These ideas proved difficult to fully embed in government and on the campaign trail in 2012. The Obama administration and the 2012 presidential campaign are beyond the scope of this book, but, as I have argued, we might question whether newer media logics of transparency and grassroots empowerment were ever in fact the whole story of the 2008 election. Putting 2008 and Obama in the context of the hybrid media system draws attention to how it is perfectly possible to run an internet campaign that uses all relevant media, most notably television, to blend centralization, control, and hierarchy with decentralization, devolution, and horizontality. It also enables us to see how the impact of newer media are always shaped by assumptions carried forward from the use of older media.

This asymmetrical interdependence between older and newer media logics is also evident in British parties and campaigns. Here, my fieldwork revealed the increasing integration of older and newer media campaign roles, and this is an important development. But also evident are new lines of division between "strategic" and "tactical" norms about the uses of the internet. Strategic norms position the idea of internet-fueled grassroots engagement at the center of the party's ground campaign and appeal to the new media divisions; tactical norms, where the internet is used to grab the attention of older media, appeal to senior politicians and their traditional press officers. In my assessment, the prospects for power diffusion in this field are much less certain than in the fields of news making. This is not to say that the tactical norms cannot lead to important patterns of integration between the internet and older media, particularly real-time television integration that encompasses citizen activism. But as I showed in chapter 9, this is often driven by the logics of the broadcast-era war room in any case.

Today, we might ask whether the average citizen interested in influencing politics but without ambitions for high political office should join a party or create a Twitter account and start interacting with others in the diverse assemblages that now increasingly make political news and set the agenda. Then again, perhaps this, too, is missing an important part of the hybrid picture. For, as I showed in my discussion of political activist movement 38 Degrees in chapter 9, the hybrid media system creates new opportunities for such citizen groups to combine older and newer media logics in compelling and effective new ways. It is not a case of "either/or" but of "not only, but also."

I started this book from the perspective that hybrid thinking could be useful for moving beyond dichotomous modes of thought to understand how the older and the

newer are layered into each other in political communication. The key to this, I believe, is to try to be as specific as possible about the combination of media logics in flow in any given event, process, or context. I have shown how newer media practices in the interpenetrated fields of media and politics adapt and integrate the logics of older media practices in those fields; and, conversely, how older media practices in the fields of media and politics adapt and integrate the logics of newer media practices. There is complexity and there is mess. Overall, though, it seems to be inescapable that political communication in Britain and the United States is more polycentric than during the period of mass communication that dominated the twentieth century. Though there are important constraints on the power of non-elites, and the logics of older media continue to be powerful in shaping politics, the opportunities for ordinary citizens to use the hybrid media system to influence the form and content of public discourse are, on balance, greater than they were during the stultifying duopoly of broadcasting and newspaper logics.

This goes beyond the simple fact that citizens are now able to express themselves online in public forums. In the hybrid media system it is older media's systemic integration and expectation of citizen expression occurring in newer media environments that often makes the difference. Internet-driven norms of networking, flexibility, spontaneity and ad hoc organizing have started to diffuse into our politics and media and these norms are generating new expectations about what counts as effective and worthwhile political action. Changing practices in the world of older media, particularly television, increasingly mesh with these online norms. Nobody should pretend that these behaviors are equally distributed; it is primarily political activists and the politically interested who are able to make the difference with newer media and/or inventive combinations of older and newer media. But the logics of digital media have been genuinely disruptive, even though that disruption has been modulated by the logics of older media.

Many of the shifts in political life that have occurred since the 1950s were based upon an acceptance of the power of the broadcasting-newspaper duopoly. During the heyday of the broadcast era from the 1960s to the 1990s, this preeminence hardened into an increasing self-confidence and self-awareness, particularly among television media, that they were revealing to publics what was self-evidently important about politics. But the duopoly's preeminence has now become partially undermined, as we have seen throughout this book. Indeed, when those associated with older media seek to co-opt the practices of newer media, they always face the risk that they steadily sow the seeds of their own destruction by granting legitimacy to newer media logics.

The complex interactions among media logics matter more now than the preeminence of a single media logic. Political communication has entered a new, more complex and unsettled era, in which power has become more relational, fragmented, plural, and dispersed. The hybrid media system exhibits chaos, nonlinearity, and disintegration but also surprising new patterns of integration. This is the "particulate" idea of hybridity that I introduced in chapter 1. Older and newer media logics sometimes flow independently, but increasingly flow together, creating arrangements for the conduct of political communication that are, on balance, more expansive and inclusive than those that prevailed during the twentieth century.