Theory and Media
Castells and the Media
Philip N. Howard

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Philip N. Howard, *Castells and the Media*
Paul A. Taylor, *Žižek and the Media*
Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Kittler and the Media*

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PHILIP N. HOWARD

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For Professor Castells, an inspiring social scientist

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This book was inspired by a series of lectures given by Professor Manuel Castells at the University of Washington in 2010. As a visiting Walker Ames lecturer, Castells also met with students, and joined my graduate seminar for several long conversations. The grace with which he encouraged students to pursue their own lines of inquiry inspired me to find ways of making his ideas and work accessible to a broad audience. And I believe he would say that the participants in the graduate seminar, a well-read group from across the social sciences and humanities, offered constructive critiques and comments on his latest research. I am very grateful to the Simpson Center, directed by Dr Kathleen Woodward, for initiating and supporting the graduate seminar.

Even as a book, this work is a result of digital media networks. First, this book was written and edited in the cloud. It did not appear in material form, and will not appear as such, unless you buy it in material form. The file didn't even really reside on my hard drive while I was working on it; it

was located on a server somewhere in the network. When software crashes or network disconnects necessitated, I used a backup file that did reside on my hard drive, but for the most part I was saving the file to the network. The research for this book was done online; the journals consulted were electronic. I have copies of Castells' books, but used digital versions of them for searching within the text and interrogating the ideas in non-linear ways.

Second, Castells' ideas need to be situated in the wider network of media researchers. This book is dedicated to Castells and is about his ideas (though I may put my interpretive spin on some things). It would make for rough reading to offer citations at every sentence, so this book is not an annotated bibliography. I provide direct citation to entry points for important themes and sources of criticism, but the goal is to interest readers in moving on to the original ideas and primary texts. Sometimes this may mean moving on to other scholars and their texts.

Figures I.1 and I.2 appear courtesy of Chris Harrison from http://chrisharrison.net/projects/internetmap/index.html. Figure 3.1 appears courtesy of Gene Keo from http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/anderkoo/2008/10/14/a-network-analysis-of-the-obama-08-campaign/. Figure 3.2 was made using the graphing tool at www.theyrule.net. Figure 4.1 is from Manuel Castells and Amelia Arsenault, "The Structure and Dynamics of Global Multi-Media Business Networks" in the *International Journal of Communication* 2 (2008), 707–748, and appears courtesy of the authors. Figure 5.1 appears courtesy of me.

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Penang, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Manuel Castells is one of the most important contemporary social scientists. His nicely crafted research questions have captivated many students and his findings have both inspired and provoked other scholars. His ideas about media networks and power are simultaneously among the most widely accepted and most often critiqued. Today, conversations about media, networks, and power begin with Castells' ideas.

At an intuitive level, many of us have seen significant changes in our economic, political, and cultural lives, and explaining these changes often seems to include stories about digital media. To help make sense of these distinctions that we can intuit, Manuel Castells advances a network perspective on the media, and this introductory chapter serves to outline the kinds of things that a network perspective reveals, and the kinds of things it obscures. In the final pages of this chapter I will introduce the conceptual approach of the book and outline the rest of the chapters. Throughout the book, key terms—and the definitions for these terms—are italicized in the text and repeated in a glossary at the end of the book.

A NETWORK PERSPECTIVE ON THE MEDIA

There are many analytical frames through which we can study the media, and I will argue that Castells has done much to develop one of the most prominent frames: that of the network perspective. Competing analytical frames might reveal how inequities in gender, race, ethnicity, or other forms of social inequality explain how media shape information skills, content production, or political knowledge. Other analytical frames privilege particular units of analysis, and could reveal how political actors such as nation-states or large corporations build and manipulate the power of the media. But a network perspective on the media has three fundamental assumptions.

The first assumption of a network perspective on the media is that we should do more than look at large groups and organizations as our unit of analysis. Sometimes media conglomerates, state regulators, and major political parties exert an enormous influence on and through the media. But the digital era is replete with examples of how individuals used cheap consumer electronics to have a significant impact on our political, economic, and cultural lives. Moreover, digital media artifacts themselves, such as websites and social networking applications, can be meaningful units of analysis and offer good evidence about the structure of social interaction. In this way, studying the media must involve studying large organizations that build and manage media infrastructure, the individuals who produce and consume content over media, and the content that is produced and consumed over media.

The second assumption of a network perspective on the media is that the links between units of analysis—whether organizations, individuals, or content—are more revealing than the units on their own. Understanding the media