potential for disruption had been partially realized but, to have any significant impact on the nature of power, it has to be sustainable over time. To achieve that requires more than protection and revenue. As this phase showed, it also needs credibility and a much more sustainable editorial and organizational practice. What this phase of WikiLeaks also shows us is that journalism itself is now changing. As we shall examine in chapters 3 and 4, there is a further responsibility for journalism – and that is to adapt to the new networked age with an ethical framework.

3

WIKILEAKS AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The arrest of Julian Assange by the British police on 7 December 2010 was the moment when the news narrative around WikiLeaks shifted directly to the personal. His fight to avoid extradition and the show of solidarity by his supporters meant that the ensuing legal struggle was centre-stage in the drama of WikiLeaks' future. This coincided with the period from autumn 2010 when divisions within WikiLeaks were made explicit through the departure of key figures like Daniel Domscheit-Berg, who also published a critical memoir. The Guardian, which had been WikiLeaks' partner, also rushed to bring out a book on WikiLeaks which contained significant allegations of unethical and eccentric behaviour on the part of Julian Assange personally, as well as implicit criticisms of WikiLeaks as an organization. This book sealed the rift between the two organizations, which were probably as close ideologically as any mainstream and
alternative media entities could be. As we saw in chapter 2, the relationship between WikiLeaks' collaborators was strained and this came to the fore during a difficult phase for Assange personally. He challenged many of the criticisms and even threatened legal action against the Guardian, several of its staff, and Daniel Domscheit-Berg. The man whose own organization had sidestepped so many legal sanctions was now apparently prepared to use the courts against former partners.

Unlike many of his critics, Julian Assange saw no disconnect or irony in these actions. In his view, actions against WikiLeaks were an assault on the right to freedom of speech against governments who want to squash dissent. Whereas his own threatened legal actions – none of which had materialized at the time of writing – related to personal smears against his reputation.

The allegations within the Guardian material that drew his particular ire centred on his attitude towards those named in the reporting of the cables. The Guardian book3 contended that at a meeting with reporters from that paper and Der Spiegel, Assange had said those named in the documents were 'collaborators' who deserved any consequences they would face if their information was made public. He has publicly denied these claims, but has also said in front of staff from the UK's Bureau of Investigative Journalism and Sweden's SVT channel that any deaths resulting from the publication of documents would be justified in the pursuit of 'greater good'.

As we have seen, Assange also complained about the use of leaked documents from WikiLeaks relating to Israel Shamir, a known anti-Semite and defender of dictators including Belarus' Lukashenko, who was deeply involved in the distribution of Eastern European and Russian diplomatic cables for WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks persistently downplayed Shamir's involvement, but the Guardian published documents showing Shamir had invoiced the organization for payment, and had been entrusted with distributing WikiLeaks material. Shamir, the book revealed, had even stayed with Assange in the run-up to the cables' publication.4

This was a period of high drama, but what does it tell us about the significance of WikiLeaks? The (almost) unraveling of WikiLeaks from the autumn of 2010 showed that the organization was inherently unstable but also remarkably resilient. Despite the personal difficulties of its 'chief executive', it continued to publish material, although at mid-2011 it was still not accepting new leaks. In that sense, it was living off its archive: almost entirely the material believed to have originated from Bradley Manning.

Control and distribution of the Manning material was becoming a growing problem for WikiLeaks. With submissions closed, the organization's reliance on this was growing, but WikiLeaks' control over it was slipping. As early as October 2010, UK freedom-of-information campaigner Heather Brooke had obtained a full copy of the Embassy cables from an ex-Wikileaks source, but chose not to distribute these independently, instead working with the Guardian. In the following months, Norwegian newspaper Aftenpost also obtained a full copy of the cables without Assange's consent. Tranches of cables turned up as far afield as Lebanon, where Al Akhbar obtained several hundred cables without WikiLeaks' knowledge, though Assange later claimed credit for it.

By the release of the last set of documents obtained from Manning – the prisoner records of the 779 individuals detained at Guantanamo Bay – WikiLeaks' loss of control of its documents for the first time nearly jeopardized the organization's ability to scoop the mainstream media. WikiLeaks had once again built a global coalition of media partners. The Guardian and New York Times, as a result of their soured relationship, were excluded, replaced in their respective
countries by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Washington Post*. However, without WikiLeaks' knowledge, the *Guardian* and *New York Times* had obtained the Guantánamo papers and prepared them for release in April 2011, weeks ahead of the proposed publication date of WikiLeaks' new partners. Assange learned of the move just hours ahead of publication, leading to a scramble of his new coalition to get the material out. WikiLeaks managed to publish the files in part on the same day, and in full two days after the *Guardian* and *New York Times* went live, somewhat recovering its position.

By managing, even if just barely, to see through the release of the Guantánamo papers successfully, coupled with a carefully rationed distribution of Embassy cables to outlets across the world, WikiLeaks managed to continue its publication run in the first half of 2011 despite a lack of new material and funds, and mounting political pressure.

At the same time, WikiLeaks had become a rallying point for a range of political groups and individuals. During a panel debate in London, Julian Assange was being criticized by conservative commentator Douglas Murray for undermining trust in mainstream democratic institutions. A heckler in the 800-strong and fervently pro-WikiLeaks crowd shouted out, 'that's WHY we like him, it's because we DON'T trust you lot!' In this sceptical age, WikiLeaks taps into a general distrust of authority and a decline in deference. It also draws strong support from more overtly anti-establishment, anti-corporate, anti-American groups, often but not exclusively of the Left. Libertarians and even Fox News have been enthusiastic at times. The group of supporters in London directly supporting Assange personally at this time were mixed. They included former soldier and TV news cameraman turned journalism club proprietor Vaughan Smith, left-wing investigative journalist John Pilger, and heiress Jemima Khan. WikiLeaks was now a cause as well as a media organization.

The public debate around the allegations of sexual misconduct by Julian Assange were one example of this process at work. In this book we have not dealt with them in detail because they are part of a continuing legal process but also because, in themselves, they are not relevant to an analysis of the significance of WikiLeaks. However, the allegations and the legal proceedings were an opportunity for people with differing views on WikiLeaks to take sides. In supporting Assange's legal efforts or in criticizing those who brought the charges, people demonstrated how partisan feelings had become about Assange and WikiLeaks. Some Assange supporters claimed that the criminal process had been instigated and prolonged by individuals and authorities keen to damage WikiLeaks. These supporters made a range of accusations including over-zealous 'media feminism', intelligence agency conspiracies and judicial arbitrariness. The critics attacked Assange, according to John Pilger, because WikiLeaks is dangerous: 'The attacks on WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange, are a response to an information revolution that threatens old power orders, in politics and journalism.' However, critics such as feminist journalist Libby Brooks said that claim was being used as an excuse to avoid taking the charges seriously:

Assange's status as embattled warrior for free speech is taken as giving permission – by those on the left as well as right – to indulge in the basest slut-shaming and misogyny. It's terrifying to witness how swiftly rape orthodoxies reassert themselves: that impugning a man's sexual propriety is a political act, that sexual assault complainants are prone to a level of mendacity others are not (and, in this case, deserving of the same crowd-sourced scrutiny afforded leaked diplomatic cables).
This all personalized the debate around WikiLeaks in the figure of Assange. This personalization does not seem, in general, to be something that he sought to avoid: 'I am the heart and soul of this organization, its founder, philosopher, spokesperson, original coder, organizer, financier, and all the rest.'

WikiLeaks was originally highly identified with Assange and this drama did little to dispel the idea that it was still a Single Person Organization, a relatively common phenomenon in alternative media according to media theorists:

Like small and medium-sized businesses, the founder cannot be voted out, and, unlike many collectives, leadership does not rotate. This is not an uncommon feature within organizations, irrespective of whether they operate in the realm of politics, culture or the 'civil society' sector. SPOs are recognizable, exciting, inspiring, and easy to feature in the media. Their sustainability, however, is largely dependent on the actions of their charismatic leader, and their functioning is difficult to reconcile with democratic values. This is also why they are difficult to replicate and do not scale up easily.

So we can see how any discussion of WikiLeaks' future is bound up with 'what Julian wants'. It underlines how an organization without a governance structure, code, mission statement or accountability mechanism will inevitably be considered in relation to the declared ethics and ideas of its most prominent individual member. In that sense, Assange is WikiLeaks and so his personality does condition the wider analysis. Some opinions of Assange's character managed to combine admiration and disdain: 'I have never known such an extreme person as Julian Assange. So imaginative. So energetic. So brilliant. So paranoid, so power-hungry, so megalomanic.'

Innovators and renegades in the media are rarely personalities who conform to conventional social norms. Even traditional investigative journalists are exceptionally motivated to practise their trade in its most arduous and often least popular form. This often means they are odd characters, especially when politically driven: 'I don't like Julian Assange's goals and methods, but corrective reformers are mostly unlikable weirdos.'

This confluence of the personal and the public perhaps reached its most intense moment when the leak was leaked. The Guardian published confidential court documents that detailed the accusations against Assange. When, in a series of interviews, Assange complained about this, it was perhaps not surprising that he was accused of hypocrisy by the mainstream media.

That individual psychology has to be taken into account as, in this chapter, we will seek to place WikiLeaks' significance in the wider context of the future for new forms of investigative, disruptive and political journalism. This will be a more theoretical consideration of WikiLeaks as an organization and its significance, but lurking behind it remains the unusual personality of Assange himself. One of WikiLeaks' disruptive strengths is its unpredictability. Assange in some ways embodies that uncertainty principle.

In this chapter, Assange will remain at the centre of the analysis, but we will now try to put WikiLeaks and its future into a wider context. We will first look at WikiLeaks as part of the struggle to define the way that the Internet allows for the open distribution of information. In a sense this is about the eternal battle between those in power, with an interest in controlling information, and the journalist and citizen who wants it to be free. WikiLeaks is the subject of this argument about the open Internet, but also a significant actor in determining what happens. Then we will look at WikiLeaks as a model for imitators and adaptors of some of its principles and
practices. What forms of journalism is WikiLeaks inspiring? What impact is it having on other kinds of journalism?

3.2 WIKILEAKS AS PART OF THE BATTLE FOR THE OPEN NET

Part of the significance of WikiLeaks in the future will be what it represents in terms of the struggle to maintain an open Internet. It is a case study of what is happening and so a good subject for the debate about the principles and policies that will govern cyberspace. It is one location for the power struggle that is emerging over the nature of the global digital public sphere.

We saw in chapter 2 how there was a concerted attack upon WikiLeaks following the major leaks of 2010. It was described as a ‘terrorist’ organization, and calls were even made for the assassination of Assange. US Vice President Joe Biden was the most senior of politicians to describe WikiLeaks as a threat: ‘I would argue that it’s closer to being a hi-tech terrorist. This guy has done things and put in jeopardy the lives and occupations of people in other parts of the world. He’s made it difficult to conduct our business with our allies and our friends . . . It has done damage.’

The US Justice Department has begun an active criminal investigation and has considered charges under the Espionage Act. A federal Grand Jury has begun investigating the possibility of prosecution, but, as it meets in secret, it is difficult to tell what the line of inquiry and the terms of the case might be. Prosecution would be difficult because of the First Amendment protections for journalists, even when they re-publish illegally released material. Nor is it clear how the US Espionage Act might apply to an Australian. Some commentators have described the actions taken by the US Federal Government as a ‘fishing expedition’ designed to flush out activists and to intimidate supporters of groups like WikiLeaks. However, considering the scale of the security breach, the current inquiries may be exceptional, but they are not necessarily disproportionate in the context of mainstream Washington politics. It is difficult to imagine how the American authorities could not have instituted some kind of legal process after such a significant illicit action. How hard they can or will pursue this in practice is another matter.

What was more unusual than the American government response was the reaction by private companies who provided services for WikiLeaks. Amazon ended its agreement to provide server space, although WikiLeaks was able to find alternative facilities. Visa, PayPal and other banks no longer provided payments services, so making fund-raising harder, though not impossible, for WikiLeaks. In June 2011 WikiLeaks claimed these actions had cost it $15m in donations. The number, based on an assumption that WikiLeaks would receive its highest one-day donation total every day that its payment providers had been unavailable, might be implausible, but it shows the importance the organization placed on the private blockade.

There is no evidence that the American government directly instigated the actions of these companies against WikiLeaks. The office of Senator Joe Lieberman admitted that publicity following his remarks may have played a part in the corporate decisions to stop hosting WikiLeaks servers and fund-raising systems. Certainly one of his aides had contact with Amazon. However, it is claimed that there was no direct communication between government and the companies. The companies argued that WikiLeaks was in breach of their User Service Agreements. While their actions may have been justified under the letter of those agreements, it seems odd that WikiLeaks, rather than other criminally suspect organizations, has had its facilities terminated. WikiLeaks'
supporters highlighted organizations including the Ku Klux Klan as those Visa and Mastercard were willing to supply. News organizations that had worked with WikiLeaks were also unaffected. The episode seemed to confirm fears that the curtailment of unrestricted communications on the Internet will occur indirectly through corporate as much as government actions.

Despite setting out a wider global agenda for an open Internet, the Obama administration did nothing to discourage those corporations who control the Internet's infrastructure from acting in a way that made WikiLeaks' journalism harder to publish. As we have pointed out, the whole point about WikiLeaks' fundamental exceptionalism is that it is outside of a specific geographical legal framework. This gives it a large degree of immunity from normal legal sanctions on the media. However, it could be argued that it also makes it ethically and practically harder for WikiLeaks to claim the protective rights enjoyed by mainstream media.

In addition, some make the case that the WikiLeaks approach of having its freedom of expression cake and eating it could backfire for those organizations that remain within the traditional state/journalism compact. American First Amendment specialist lawyer Floyd Abrams acted for the New York Times in the Pentagon Papers case in the 1970s but he said that WikiLeaks may have, at best, killed off chances of a new law to extend protection for journalists and, at worst, precipitated a more censorious backlash:

> Mr Assange is no boon to American journalists. His activities have already doomed proposed federal shield-law legislation protecting journalists’ use of confidential sources in the just-adjourned Congress. An indictment of him could be followed by the judicial articulation of far more speech-limiting legal principles than currently exist with respect to even the most responsible reporting about both diplomacy and defense. If he is not charged or is acquitted of whatever charges may be made, that may well lead to the adoption of new and dangerously restrictive legislation. In more than one way, Mr. Assange may yet have much to answer for.

This view has validity in the American political context. It may well be that in the short-term it will be harder to press for greater protection for journalists who obtain classified information through illicit channels. It would be easy to dismiss this as the inevitable reactionary backlash by a patriotic legislature that resents the assault on its national security. However, there is a deeper problem going forward for WikiLeaks, and disruptive journalism in general, in their relationship with the state in the Internet era. Abrams contrasts the selective leaking by Daniel Ellsberg, who withheld sensitive diplomatic documents, with what he sees as the wholesale alleged handover of information by Bradley Manning to WikiLeaks. The implication is that WikiLeaks has not been discriminating in its disclosures. And yet, WikiLeaks has also been selective in its release of the diplomatic cables. However, the rationale for selection was not to avoid harm to American foreign policy. WikiLeaks’ principles were not aligned with national interest in the way that, say, the New York Times felt obliged to consult with the US government. WikiLeaks’ eventual acceptance of thorough-going redaction was not entirely voluntary. Instead, as we saw in chapter 2, it was part of the process of accommodation to the editorial principles of its mainstream media partners. Yet even the New York Times editor Bill Keller, who felt real disquiet at Assange’s ethics, still felt that WikiLeaks’ actions merited protection:

> while I do not regard Assange as a partner, and I would hesitate to describe what WikiLeaks does as journalism, it
is chilling to contemplate the possible government prosecution of WikiLeaks for making secrets public, let alone the passage of new laws to punish the dissemination of classified information.21

Keller may hesitate to describe what WikiLeaks does as journalism, with all the cultural and political assumptions that the editor of a great mainstream newspaper would associate with that term. Few news organizations match the New York Times as an embodiment of mainstream, commercial journalism as an institution, constantly in tension between the dynamic of its reflective, critical faculties and the inertia of its historic capital and established social and political roles. However, WikiLeaks is not the New York Times, but it is an example of a new kind of journalistic act made possible by the Internet.

In the wider context, the problem for American and other legislators in the liberal democracies now goes beyond the traditional balancing of powers between the fourth estate and government. In political terms, WikiLeaks is a typical Internet phenomenon in the way that it disintermediates the relationship between government and the public. It enables the citizen to access government data without the mediating influence of mainstream journalism. So the news business faces the danger of losing its classic role as the conduit for information and the arbiter of critical processes that hold power to account. This makes it harder for the nation state to establish the rules of engagement. The wider question in the digital age then becomes how to reconcile support for this liberating potential of the Internet with the threat to the security of government information systems. So is WikiLeaks ‘another example of the Internet overthrowing our settled habits?’ ... By this formulation, WikiLeaks is to the state and corporations what Napster was to music or Google to media-as-a-business.22

The challenge for government and the news media is how to cope with the variable geometry of journalism and regulation on the Internet. Before WikiLeaks, there was a relatively level playing field for different media organizations across different platforms or genres. Now there are different laws or rules for the various organizations that operate in the same space. Apart from national differences, there are those that are willingly subject to state regulation and those, like WikiLeaks, that operate beyond national boundaries. Another example was the role in spring 2011 in the United Kingdom of the micro-blogging site Twitter in undermining the use of injunctions by celebrities.23 So-called ‘superinjunctions’ were being used to create a blanket ban on any media reference to stories that were deemed by a judge to be private and beyond public interest. The media were not even allowed to report the existence of these superinjunctions. However, details did emerge through the Internet and especially on Twitter, allowing the British tabloid newspapers to argue that the facts were now in the public domain and so reportable. The British government is now reviewing the whole basis of privacy legislation and the role of the courts in setting the terms of media freedoms. It is another example of how an open Internet is a challenge, if not a contradiction, to the idea of national limits on freedom of expression.

There are broadly two sources of the threats to the open Internet for journalism. First, there is the threat of state regulation: censorship and control mainly motivated by a desire to suppress dissent and to protect privacy. There is also state censorship related to national security, especially at times of war. Second, there is the possibility that corporate interests - especially those that help to provide the infrastructure for the Internet - could adopt policies and support government actions that allow for a more restricted Internet. They might do this to gain the benefits of collaboration with government
or for commercial advantage. Either trend would potentially compromise the communicative power of the Internet in general, and WikiLeaks-type disruptive journalism in particular.

What WikiLeaks does is journalism and, therefore, is part of any liberal democratic settlement for the Internet Age. This is the legal judgement that WikiLeaks supporter and media law professor Yochai Benkler has shown is the base of its defence as journalism in American law: 'We hold that individuals are journalists when engaged in investigative reporting, gathering news, and have the intent at the beginning of the news-gathering process to disseminate this information to the public.'

As Benkler goes on to point out:

The critical definitional element here is intent at the time of gathering and function, not mode of dissemination: intent to gather for public dissemination. There simply cannot be the remotest doubt that the entire purpose of WikiLeaks is the gathering of information for public dissemination; and the use of traditional media outlets as the primary pathway emphasizes this fact, although it is not constitutive or a necessary element of the defense. The professionalism, niceness, or personal hygiene of the reporter are not germane to the inquiry.

This very American defence of free speech was given global expression by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her seminal speech that established this principle as a vital part of the new digital world order and something that should be looked on as a human right:

We stand for a single Internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas. And we recognize that the world's information infrastructure will become what we and others make of it. Now, this challenge may be new, but our responsibility to help ensure the free exchange of ideas goes back to the birth of our republic. The words of the First Amendment to our Constitution are carved in 50 tons of Tennessee marble on the front of this building.

At the same time she outlined how Internet freedom, like any other, is conditional: 'Those who use the Internet to recruit terrorists or distribute stolen intellectual property cannot divorce their online actions from their real world identities. But these challenges must not become an excuse for governments to systematically violate the rights and privacy of those who use the Internet for peaceful political purposes.'

A year on, Hillary Clinton updated that statement in the wake of both the WikiLeaks controversy and the uprisings across the Arab world. She spoke of how the Internet was an agent for freedom but also recognized the relatively neutral nature of the technology itself:

There is a debate currently underway in some circles about whether the Internet is a force for liberation or repression. But I think that debate is largely beside the point. Egypt isn't inspiring people because they communicated using Twitter. It is inspiring because people came together and persisted in demanding a better future. Iran isn't awful because the authorities used Facebook to shadow and capture members of the opposition. Iran is awful because it is a government that routinely violates the rights of its people.

So for Clinton the Internet is a remarkable new technology, but still subject to conventional power politics. When considered in policy terms it requires an agreed international
framework to sustain the open Internet. At the same time her department was also interventionist in promoting the freedom of expression through direct investment in initiatives that would help in circumventing Internet censorship by other states:

We are taking a venture capital-style approach, supporting a portfolio of technologies, tools, and training, and adapting as more users shift to mobile devices. We have our ear to the ground, talking to digital activists about where they need help, and our diversified approach means we're able to adapt the range of threats that they face. We support multiple tools, so if repressive governments figure out how to target one, others are available.9

So how is this reconciled with the hostility to WikiLeaks? At the same time, she made it clear that her criticism of WikiLeaks was based not on its use of the Internet for disclosure, but on the fact that it had handled stolen government property:

I know that government confidentiality has been a topic of debate during the past few months because of WikiLeaks, but it's been a false debate in many ways. Fundamentally, the WikiLeaks incident began with an act of theft. Government documents were stolen, just the same as if they had been smuggled out in a briefcase. Some have suggested that this theft was justified because governments have a responsibility to conduct all of our work out in the open in the full view of our citizens. I respectfully disagree. The United States could neither provide for our citizens' security nor promote the cause of human rights and democracy around the world if we had to make public every step of our efforts. Confidential communication gives our government the opportunity to do work that could not be done otherwise.10

It is fairly easy to find relatively minor contradictions within this policy that critics would suggest show that the American approach to an open Internet has been compromised, even apart from the legal pursuit of WikiLeaks.11 It has been suggested that the US was involved, for example, in cyber attacks on other states. The New York Times reported that America had been working with Israel on a computer virus, Stuxnet, that was used to disable computers running Iran's nuclear programme.12 The Homeland Security Service is allowed to search electronic devices that allow access to the Internet, such as laptops, at US Customs - even where there are no suspicious circumstances.13 Famously, the Federal government also told its employees not to access the diplomatic cables on WikiLeaks, thus denying its own staff further knowledge of a story that everyone else was able to access.14 These are semi-anecdotal, separate incidents or policies in applied circumstances. However, Benkler alleges a further more general contradiction, in the American government's response to WikiLeaks in particular, between Hillary Clinton's asserted principles and actual practice - in what the administration did not do, rather than what it has done. A sin of omission as much as commission. It brings together the corporate as well as governmental threat to Internet openness. If the American government believes in the open Internet and thinks it should foster critical oversight of other states, why was it not more magnanimous about WikiLeaks' assault upon its own practices:

At a minimum, on the background of these actions and the presence of public appeals from Lieberman, the continued refusal of the U.S. government to distance itself from these
actions suggest that these acts of corporate vigilantism were undertaken with a wink and a nod from the federal government. Together, they present an image of a government able to circumvent normal constitutional protections to crack down on critics who use the networked public sphere. This occurs through informal systems of pressure and approval on market actors who are not themselves subject to the constitutional constraints. This extralegal public–private partnership allows an administration to achieve through a multi-system attack on critics results that would have been practically impossible to achieve within the bounds of the constitution and the requirements of legality.35

The reality may be less deliberately conspiratorial than Benkler suggests. It is possible that both corporations and the US government are internally conflicted over the open Internet. There is an ideological and pragmatic argument going on in places like the State Department, just as there is within the corporate affairs departments of companies such as Google or Facebook. Institutionally, their over-riding motives must be Realpolitik or profit, but strategy may conflict with tactics. The open Internet has advantages in terms both of business for corporations and of soft power for American foreign policy. However, as WikiLeaks shows, it also presents threats in the short term. The cyber-optimists working in the State Department ‘21st Century Statecraft’ initiative were undermined in their efforts to convince their diplomatic colleagues of the power of the Internet to deliver positive political outcomes by the WikiLeaks revelations. Internet sceptics within the foreign policy machine in Washington were emboldened by the Embassy cables release to question the wider wisdom of promoting an open Internet. They understood that it was a challenge to their institutional control of flows of information. Just two weeks before the WikiLeaks publications, Alec J. Ross, the State Department’s digital guru, had spoken about the Internet, as ‘the Che Guevara of the 21st Century’.37 Not surprisingly, his more hard-nosed colleagues did not share his enthusiasm for this kind of revolution when it turned their own world upside-down.

The Arab uprisings in early 2011, partially facilitated by new communications technologies, helped to restore political credibility to the open Internet approach. Indeed, so much so that Ross was able to restate his association between political revolution and digital technologies: ‘If hierarchies are being levelled then people at the top of those hierarchies are finding themselves on much shakier ground. What’s remarkable is the speed, this is lightning fast change taking place and I’ve got to be honest, I think this is fun. It’s going to be wildly disruptive in the next few years and I think this is a good thing’.38 Within this wider enthusiasm for Internet-inspired change, the State Department has settled on an instrumentalist approach to digital communications. It deploys all aspects of social media – including diplomats using Twitter – to spread its messages and engage with a global public. It will continue to invest in infrastructure, through its 21st Century Statecraft programme, that facilitates its policy of ‘complementing traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments of statecraft that fully leverage the networks, technologies, and demographics of our interconnected world’.39 What remains to be seen is whether America’s national self-interest will continue to coincide with a commitment to promoting the open Internet and whether that extends to protecting critical voices such as WikiLeaks.

In theory, the commercial companies that largely provide the infrastructure for the Internet – the cables, servers, ISPs, platforms, networks and channels such as email – also have
an interest in a relatively open Internet. The easier the connectivity, the more likely they are to reach customers and to improve access for goods and services flowing through digital marketplaces. At the same time, companies like Google, Amazon and Facebook have had to make pragmatic compromises in the face of pressure from authoritarian regimes such as China. They either accept a less open Internet in those spaces or they remove themselves from them. Either way, freedom is compromised. However, there is a larger danger that Timothy Wu has set out in *Master Switch* of a trend towards consolidation of new media technologies into less open systems. One main aspect of this he describes as the 'Kronos Effect', as larger companies eat up smaller competitors or new market entrants. Wu shows historically how this distortion of new media markets has benefits for society in promoting long-term investment, universal services and robust producers. However, it also militates against innovation and competitive efficiency. Crucially, in the field of journalism, it could reduce plurality and open access to the public sphere for critical voices like WikiLeaks. Wu suggests that this matters more today because 'the information industries are collectively embedded in our existence in a way unprecedented in industrial history, involving every dimension of our national and personal lives – economic, yes, but also expressive and cultural, social and political'. He warns that the openness of the Internet is not immutable:

The Internet inaugurated a principle so fundamental and powerful that it cannot be abolished; ever after, all will agree that open beats closed. It is an attractive notion; but in fact it is an article of faith in a domain of experience where fact, not faith, should guide us. It is true that the Internet naturally harnesses the power of decentralization and defies central control, but in the face of a determined power, that design alone is no adequate defense of what we hold most dear about the network.\(^4\)

WikiLeaks circumvented the problem of control by finding other servers and different payment systems. However, as we become more dependent on 'cloud computing', general freedom of speech becomes more reliant on the corporate-controlled infrastructure. Instead of storing our personal or our organization's data on our own servers, the idea of cloud computing is that we will, in effect, hire space on the web provided by commercial companies' servers. It is a very effective way to increase computational power and storage for individuals but it does mean that, technically, you have less control over your information. WikiLeaks could not have operated a 'cloud' controlled by Amazon or PayPal. Open Internet campaigners fear that we are increasingly dependent on privately owned communication spaces of democratic discourse and that private companies will not uphold wider constitutional safeguards to protect them:

While Amazon was within its legal rights, the company has nonetheless sent a clear signal to its users: If you engage in controversial speech that some individual members of the U.S. government don't like – even if there is a strong case to be made that your speech is constitutionally protected – Amazon is going to dump you at the first sign of trouble. Let's hope that there will always be other companies willing to stand up for our rights as enshrined both in the U.S. Constitution and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – and by extension their right to do business with us.\(^4\)

Despite the action taken against it in 2010, WikiLeaks was able to publish. The organizations who worked with
it to publish were also untouched. However, other organizations may not wish to take the risk of alienating media corporations that provide the channels and infrastructure for transmission and funding. This hostility to dissent may not be omnipotent but it could have a ‘chilling’ effect. The fear is that, in the future, if a few media corporations become more dominant, then that restrictive effect might increase regardless of governmental legislation or regulation. At present, only a few companies such as Google are prepared to have this debate about their responsibilities in a relatively open and accountable fashion. However, there is no obligation upon them to do so beyond the pressure that the public – their consumers – puts upon them.

There are states, of course, that do not have the constitutional safeguards for freedom of speech enjoyed by Americans. The governments of countries like China do not want an open Internet at all. Indeed, various authoritarian regimes have tried to control, filter and even turn it off. While the Internet is a dramatic extension of the ability to communicate for individuals and networks, it also offers tools for authoritarian regimes to exert power and restrict dissent. As Evgeny Morozov has shown, this is more than the denial of access to the Internet. Repressive regimes such as Iran used the connectivity of social networks and digital communications to identify, track and pursue critical voices. Morozov points out that the Internet and social networks put more traceable information online about citizens than ever before. This allows intelligence agencies to track conversations, monitor debates and intercept organizational communications. In addition, authoritarian regimes are increasingly capable of generating online propaganda with their own bloggers, websites and social networks. These regimes can also close online platforms, block selected messages and slow down undesired traffic. In extremis, they can, like Mubarak in Egypt, actually ‘turn off’ the Internet itself.

Beyond this, Morozov goes on to question more generally how the Internet and digital communications may fail to generate a counter-culture of any real potency:

It seems highly naive to assume that political ideas – let alone dissent – will somehow emerge from this great hodgepodge of consumerism, entertainment, and sex. As tempting as it is to think of Internet-based swinger clubs that have popped up in China in the last few years as some kind of alternative civil-society, it’s quite possible that ... the Chinese Communist Party would find the space to accommodate such practices. Under the pressure of globalization, authoritarianism has become extremely accommodating.  

Morozov argues that, on balance, the case for the open Internet as a force for liberation has not yet been made when the negative effects are taken into account:

If it turns out that the Internet does help to stifle dissent, amplify existing inequalities in terms of access to the media, undermine representative democracy, promote mob mentality, erode privacy, and make us less informed, it is not at all obvious how exactly the promotion of so-called Internet freedom is also supposed to assist in the promotion of democracy. Of course, it may also be true that the Internet does none of those things; the important thing is to acknowledge that the debate about the Internet’s effects on democracy isn’t over and to avoid behaving as if the jury is already out.

The jury may not even be out, but evidence in support of the case piled up in the winter of 2010 and the spring of
2011. Morozov’s book *Net Delusion* came out too early to deal with the WikiLeaks revelations of late 2010 and 2011. Its sceptical take on Internet democracy also appeared just before the Arab uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. Both those events provide empirical evidence that further possibilities for enhanced democratic communications are being opened up by the Internet wherever the Internet becomes more open. Even ‘traditional’ journalists say the evidence is now ‘irrefutable’ that social media had a significant role in those popular rebellions:

Facebook and other digital networks can speed political communication and provide efficient tools for organizing protests. In combination with satellite broadcasters such as al-Jazeera, online networks can document government abuses quickly and spread awareness of them. Even more, the promises of free speech, modernization, generational change, and global inclusion that these media offer – their very newness, and the way they connect people and ideas across borders – may also foster an incipient form of political identity for some in the fed-up urban classes in Arab societies and Iran.47

Coll is a hard-nosed foreign policy analyst, so that judgement does not spring from cyber-utopianism. However, as the euphoria of early 2011 turned into a longer, hotter summer where the reforms slowed down and further dominoes did not fall, it became clearer that the Internet is a remarkable tool, but still only a tool. Politically, it is both limited and ambivalent. Interestingly, the idea that the Internet can challenge individual and journalistic freedom as much as it supports it is one echoed by Julian Assange himself. In a March 2011 talk to students at Cambridge University in the UK, Assange said:

While the internet has in some ways an ability to let us know to an unprecedented level what government is doing, and to let us co-operate with each other to hold repressive governments and repressive corporations to account, it is also the greatest spying machine the world has ever seen. It [the web] is not a technology that favours freedom of speech. It is not a technology that favours human rights. It is not a technology that favours civil life. Rather it is a technology that can be used to set up a totalitarian spying regime, the likes of which we have never seen. Or, on the other hand, taken by us, taken by activists, and taken by all those who want a different trajectory for the technological world, it can be something we all hope for.48

Despite his accomplishments relying on technologies only made possible thanks to the Internet and its infrastructure, Assange and other WikiLeaks supporters recognize the technology is in a period of transition, during which its consequences for open information, activism and reporting are still far from clear. Much more evidence is needed on the political impacts of this cycle of new technological development. We will discuss the wider relevance of the media and the Arab Spring in chapter 4, but in itself the latter cannot be a confirmation of the progressive political power of the open Internet. Media effects are notoriously difficult to quantify, and causality is especially hard to define. So it makes more sense to focus attention on the dynamics and ethics of policy-making in relation to media, and on an analysis of how information flows are being reconfigured, rather than attempting to reach any firm conclusions about the intrinsic nature of the Internet. It is vital to heed Morozov’s warning that a naïve faith in the automatically democratic nature of the Internet can lead to policy mistakes by governments and other agencies seeking to promote liberal ideas.
Excessive technological determinism can mean opportunities are missed to foster or protect the democratic opportunities of the Internet. Morozov advocates a 'cyber-realism' that seeks to promote locally relevant and sustainable initiatives.

We will look at those possible initiatives in more detail in the following parts of this chapter, but if WikiLeaks is part of opening up the Internet, then how effective has it been in closed societies? Is WikiLeaks a vehicle for driving the open Internet agenda into currently restricted parts of cyberspace? Despite its earlier claim to be targeting China, WikiLeaks has not been able to obtain leaks from states that adopt more authoritarian controls over their information security and a tighter management of their mainstream and private social media. As we see in the following section on WikiLeaks as a model, there is no 'ChinaLeaks' (except in the realms of satire). Clearly, in authoritarian states, Assange cannot collaborate with independent mainstream media partners to amplify the revelations. It is difficult to measure to what degree the WikiLeaks cable revelations about these countries reached the publics concerned. Certainly, state-owned and mass media outlets ignored anything critical of their ruling elites. There is some evidence that WikiLeaks did have an impact in the Tunisian revolution. The WikiLeaks cable in which American diplomats confirmed allegations of corruption by President Ben Ali were quoted by activists. In that sense, Gideon Rachman of the Financial Times is right when he suggests that WikiLeaks might actually be a positive development for American foreign policy as it attempts to expose repressive regimes to the wider world and their own people. Rachman points out that generally the cables show that America is acting in private according to the liberal values it expresses in public:

There have been a few revelations that do not reflect well on the Americans. There is the order to US diplomats at the United Nations to hoover up personal details of UN officials, including credit card numbers. . . . Overall, the picture of the US that emerges from WikiLeaks is positive. America's foreign policy comes across as principled, intelligent and pragmatic. That was, perhaps, the best-kept secret of all.

Inevitably, the debate around the cables was constructed in relation to America because that is where they came from. However, the real impact has been on countries such as Saudi Arabia, where the information they contained was not part of the public political sphere. Even in a closed state like Saudi, the Internet means that some people will now have become aware of the degree of their rulers' hostility to Iran and their enjoyment of rather risqué parties. What we do not know is the effect that the very act of the release will have as an instructive example of the power of unauthorized information release.

Julian Assange still thinks that WikiLeaks will have impact on closed societies as well as open liberal states, and that ultimately China is a better target. This is not because it is more likely to respond in a liberalizing way regarding information or the Internet. Instead, he argues that the commercialization of democracy in America means that they have traded radical politics for material comfort. Other societies are still fundamentally political, according to Assange, and therefore open to real change:

we believe it is the most closed societies that have the most reform potential. The Chinese case is quite interesting. Aspects of the Chinese government, Chinese Public Security Service, appear to be terrified of free speech, and
while one might say that means something awful is happening in the country, I actually think that is a very optimistic sign, because it means that speech can still cause reform and that the power structure is still inherently political, as opposed to fiscal. So journalism and writing are capable of achieving change, and that is why Chinese authorities are so scared of it. Whereas in the United States to a large degree, and in other Western countries, the basic elements of society have been so heavily fiscalized through contractual obligations that political change doesn’t seem to result in economic change, which in other words means that political change doesn’t result in change.53

That argument feels rather hopeful and not a little convoluted. It is typical of the unusual world-view that Assange has evolved. Neither does it explain how WikiLeaks is going to have an impact in China in practice. For there to be a political effect it still requires acts of ‘journalism and writing’ that challenge power. In the digital era, those acts depend on something that Hillary Clinton and Julian Assange agree with. This is the idea that the open Internet will ultimately strengthen open states while those that restrict digital networks will weaken their economic as well as their political power. The hope is that political communications will be able to swim in the same digital channels as the commercial or social streams. One of the key insights of Assange was that, strategically, he was forcing his targets to make a choice about how they related to the Internet:

If their behavior is revealed to the public, they have one of two choices: one is to reform in such a way that they can be proud of their endeavors, and proud to display them to the public. Or the other is to lock down internally and to Balkanize, and as a result, of course, cease to be as efficient as they were. To me, that is a very good outcome, because organizations can either be efficient, open and honest, or they can be closed, conspiratorial and inefficient.54

So far, in China’s case at least, this has been a sacrifice that the ruling classes have been prepared to make. Their economy does not appear to be collapsing within the Great Firewall. Indeed, they are globalizing their economic and political strength while maintaining internal ‘harmony’. It may be that freedom of expression campaigner John Kampfner is closer to the truth with his argument that citizens in states like China are more likely to accept minimal reform around issues such as freedom of expression in exchange for material and social security.55 This is a view consistent with the presence of a large and well-educated middle class in China, many of whom are able to travel outside of the country and can hardly be said to be ignorant of the outside world. This middle class is potentially the only one an organization such as WikiLeaks could hope to reach. At the moment it seems to prioritize stability and strong economic growth over democratic reform.

Kampfner also warns that criticism of WikiLeaks in America and the attempts to undermine its infrastructure and prosecute Assange will embolden authoritarian regimes in their actions to restrict media freedom:

The hysterical response of many to the WikiLeaks controversy, particularly in the US . . . has played into the hands of the Kremlin, the Chinese Communist party, Robert Mugabe, Burma’s generals and other assorted dictators around the world. Every time now a dissident, activist or blogger is arrested, regimes such as these can wave two fingers at international concern. ‘You did it, so why can’t we?’ will come the response.56
So, in the battle for an open Internet, it is clear that WikiLeaks occupies a complex position. It survives relatively unscathed because of the structural freedom of the Internet. Yet it is unable to gather or disseminate material in the societies where the Internet is more controlled. The impact of its revelations where they concern those states rarely has a sustained political effect. While there is evidence for the liberating power of the Internet in some places over certain periods, there is still no clear sense of the ability of WikiLeaks to play a significant role in those states where it is unable to network into mainstream media. In open systems effectively run by private industry, there is also the danger that corporations seeking market dominance will degrade net neutrality in a way that affects content as well as traffic. WikiLeaks is dependent on the open Internet for its survival, but that alone does not guarantee it will have the impact that it was created to achieve.

3.3 WIKILEAKS AS A MODEL

"Courage is contagious", that is, when someone engages in a courageous act and shows other people that that act wasn’t an act of martyrdom, rather that it was an intelligently designed act, it encourages other people to follow him.97

If WikiLeaks works, then why are there not more of them? Large numbers of people think that Julian Assange is personally brave and politically inspiring. WikiLeaks has attracted widespread support, including fund-raising, hospitality and other forms of active help. However, comparable organizations, or further leaks on the same scale, have not emerged in its immediate wake. Not yet, at least. It may simply be a matter of time. The other possibility is that WikiLeaks was an exception or one-off. By examining the future of WikiLeaks as a media model, we can understand its significance but also explore the potential evolution of journalism in the mature Internet age. Is it a model for others? The fundamental issues surrounding WikiLeaks are not the overblown claims about transparency made by its founder, but the questions of whether the model of the electronic drop box – and protection of sources by software code rather than ethical code – are robust and replicable by others.98

WikiLeaks has already spawned clones and other versions that deploy similar whistle-blowing data techniques. All have in common the desire to benefit from the fundamental exceptionalism of WikiLeaks: that it has removed itself from conventional media’s dependency on a geographical location and a national legal framework. Although many adopt the -Leaks suffix they do vary in their legal status, aims and methods.

Some of the clones have a very niche area, such as JumboLeaks99 based at Tufts University that appears to be a way of holding the university to account on issues like endowments. Some, like ThaiLeaks,60 appear to provide a mirror site for published WikiLeaks documents for countries in which the original site is blocked. Others, like GlobalLeaks,61 are seeking to create a distributed network of secure platforms on the WikiLeaks model, but without taking responsibility for the publication of the information – instead, it would be handed over to journalists. At the time of writing it was still evolving its modus operandi. Some versions have already received the compliment of denunciation and reprisals from governments. JamiiForums62 in Tanzania has provided a popular platform for leaks and anonymous comment. It has been attacked by ministers and bombarded with hostile pro-government postings.63 None of these sites had much in the way of sustained or widespread impact by mid-2011.
This may be simply a question of building momentum. They lack WikiLeaks' first-mover advantage, although many benefit from having a more specific focus. They may also have technical problems, especially around security. It may also be that the big-scale data dump disclosure is much harder to achieve - especially of meaningful information - than was thought. Without hacking it relies on deliberate - usually criminal - insider disclosure. As we have said, that is a very old-fashioned journalistic act that may depend on chance. Bradley Manning may have been an unusual person in a rare position. Perhaps what is remarkable about modern data systems, with the vast flows of information and the thousands of people involved in processing the data, is how rarely they are breached. This may be why, for example, the BrusselsLeaks website is so modest in its claims and, at the time of writing, so slow to publish anything: 'This is a place to get the truth out. Brussels is by no means a sexy place and we want to control expectations.' Many documents might be technical and might, at the time, not seem totally relevant. But they document something very important - they document how decisions are arrived at and where future policy might go.64

As we saw in chapter 1, WikiLeaks had many leaks before Bradley Manning's alleged disclosures, but none achieved the volume of that material. The second problem is the dissemination of those leaks. Assange needed the partnership with mainstream media to process the information into a format that worked on platforms with ready-made mass audiences. That worked in the West and in democratic states like India but not yet in intermediate societies like Russia and certainly not in closed ones like Iran or Cuba. So, inevitably, those that seek to emulate WikiLeaks may well need to reformulate both their intended audience and the nature of the information they handle. There are also some prac-

tical issues that need to be addressed. Those working in these neo-Wikileaks operations will need better training and skills in handling data but also in risk management and secure operating procedures. The organizations will need to keep creating better donation systems, adaptable security and storage facilities.65

3.4 HACKTAVISM REDUX

Some adherents to the disruptive aims of WikiLeaks want a return to its roots in 'hacktivist' culture. The loose network of hackers called Anonymous came to WikiLeaks' aid during the 2010 attacks on its infrastructure. It launched DoS assaults on those corporations who withdrew services from WikiLeaks with great enthusiasm, but with debatable results. An Anonymous 'member' claimed a role for the pure leaker site that can operate without the aid of mainstream media:

I predict that Anonymous and entities like it will become far more significant over the next few years than is expected by most of our similarly irrelevant pundits - and this will, no doubt, turn out to be just as much of an understatement as anything else that has been written on the subject. The fact is that the technological infrastructure that allows these movements has been in place for well under a decade - but phenomena such as WikiLeaks and Anonymous have already appeared, expanded, and even become players within the geo-political environment; others have come about since. This is the future, whether one approves or not, and the failure on the part of governments and media alike to understand, and contend with the rapid change now afoot, ought to remind everyone concerned why it is that this movement is necessary in the first place.66
It is possible governments and corporations may soon hanker for the days of WikiLeaks, and recognize the relative merits of its hybrid, semi-journalistic model. Certainly, when the far more anarchic collectives Anonymous or LulzSec have obtained material, they have been far less reserved in its release than WikiLeaks was with its 2010 releases. Having obtained the internal emails of security firm HBGary, Anonymous published them in full. LulzSec managed to get account details of millions of users from a plethora of sites in its short lifespan. Both groups vowed to target the government and would likely publish material in a less censored — and therefore potentially less safe — but also less accessible way. To that extent, the groups may represent a threat to the mainstream media as well as to the organizations they target.

Perhaps the real threat of hacktivism is not to specific channels of secret government information, but to the security of systems itself. The LulzSec group’s attacks on Sony, revealing customers’ data, was in itself fairly innocuous and it only had a temporary existence as a network. If replicated more often, however, exploits like this might have the effect of undermining confidence in the ability of corporations to keep data safe.63 Certainly, major organizations like NATO take the wider threat of cyber-attacks from individuals and groups, as well as hostile governments, seriously. They think hackers, rather than WikiLeaks, could not just compromise their information systems but render their military defences less secure.

The ongoing information revolution poses a series of political, cultural, economic as well as national security challenges. Changing communications, computing and information storage patterns are challenging notions such as privacy, identity, national borders and societal structures. The profound changes inherent in this revolution are also changing the way we look at security, often in unanticipated ways, and demanding innovative responses. It is said that because of this revolution, the time it takes to cross the Atlantic has shrunk to 30 milliseconds, compared with 30 minutes for ICBMs and several months going by boat. Meanwhile, a whole new family of actors is emerging on the international stage, such as virtual ‘hacktivist’ groups. These could potentially lead to a new class of international conflicts between these groups and nation states, or even to conflicts between exclusively virtual entities.64

That kind of geo-political scenario scoping might overstate the dangers. Among the problems that WikiLeaks and Anonymous face are scale and sustainability. How do you maximize the impact of the release, and how do you continue to leak over time? WikiLeaks attempted to solve the problem of achieving reach, impact and influence by networking into mainstream media, something that Anonymous is only just starting to consider.

Anonymous rose to mainstream fame – or notoriety – after hacking the email logs of a security firm, HBGary, who had put together proposals for Bank of America on how to neutralize WikiLeaks. The leaderless organization, and its offshoot LulzSec, were more cavalier than WikiLeaks in both how they obtained and how they published information. Information was grabbed directly through hacking, and disseminated in full, often through peer-to-peer networks. Yet by the summer of 2011, even Anonymous was reconsidering. Having claimed to have obtained 4 GB from the UK’s Sun newspaper, Anonymous decided against publishing – saying instead it would be working with media organizations to disseminate any useful information, to avoid the risk of jeopardizing legal cases in ongoing phone hacking prosecutions of several former News Corporation employees.
At the time of writing, such collaborations were yet to materialize, in part due to a string of arrests of alleged senior members of Anonymous and LulzSec — but the collectives’ decision to mirror the WikiLeaks model has implications for the trend of other hacking or transparency activists on the Internet.

3.5 ADVOCACY NGO JOURNALISM

Assange sees WikiLeaks as a revolutionary project that is a radical ‘intelligence agency of the people’ in the tradition of left-wing and ‘grass-roots’ newspapers. He says that his collaboration with mainstream media is mere ‘realpolitik’ and that WikiLeaks’ real ‘base is more than 50 regional publishers, activist groups and charities, giving them early access to hundreds — or in some cases, thousands — of documents relevant to their countries or causes.’ In practice, there is little evidence of WikiLeaks actually giving any NGOs ‘early access’ or having particularly close relationships with them. But why not take it further and create a WikiLeaks that works on specific topics and with particular supporters and aims?

Charities, lobby groups and NGOs like Greenpeace or Oxfam have been professional media organizations for some decades now. They have hired journalists to create communications for their own supporters, as well as public relations material that can be used by mainstream media. New media technologies now allow them to gather information and broadcast it directly through websites and social networks. The mediation is partly for fund-raising but also for political ends. It can be effective in shaping public responses to specific crises or issues and more generally in influencing decision-makers and helping to construct mainstream media agendas. Most NGOs have gone beyond mere service pro-

... vision and the alleviation of suffering to a strategy where they seek an impact on policy through political advocacy. So that might make them an obvious candidate for collaboration with organizations like WikiLeaks. However, NGOs are not always entirely transparent and accountable in their use of new communications channels. NGOs use information to promote political or policy ends, not necessarily to create a full debate or to engage in self-criticism. Information flows, along with transparency and accountability, tend to be in one direction. So, while working with a WikiLeaks-type organization may give them more ammunition in their assault on power, it may not give the public a complete picture. It may reinforce the tendency to convert public debate into competing lobbying and marketing campaigns: ‘Underlying some NGOs’ ambivalence about participating in the media may be a deeper desire to exercise caution in exposing themselves to critical debate about development issues in the public sphere.’

The former WikiLeaks operative Daniel Domscheit-Berg has created OpenLeaks, a secure data drop facility on the WikiLeaks model. He has indicated that it will work with NGOs who will publish the information, probably in collaboration with news organizations. That would give it structural support but arguably could be seen to compromise its neutrality. The danger for the platform is that it would be seen as an NGO public relations operation. Acting as an information agency for advocacy organizations would end the WikiLeaks model’s claim to be an open platform for whistle-blowers. If its revelations were directly connected to a cause, then the more general credibility it enjoys as a disruptive platform would be replaced with a much more functional, propagandist position. WikiLeaks made no pretense of neutrality over its leaks concerning, for example, the Iraq or Afghan wars. But if it is selecting leaks and fashioning
specific relationships with lobby groups, inevitably it weakens its own claim to independence and therefore, perhaps, to public trust. Conversely, for the NGO there would be the risk of a loss of control over the message and the danger that the act of whistle-blowing would put it into legally and editorially controversial areas. Some NGOs, such as Greenpeace, trade on that kind of frisson, but others might find it too risky a strategy.

3.6 FOUNDATION AND PUBLIC JOURNALISM
We have seen how OpenLeaks aims to team up with NGOs, but, increasingly, investigative and challenging journalism is turning itself into civil society organizations. In the past, investigative journalism was part of the wider news media institution. The famous Insight team at the British Sunday Times newspaper is the classic example. Its reputation may have been somewhat mythologized thanks to the pioneering investigation into the Thalidomide drug scandal, but it remains a benchmark for an investigative journalism strategy. The Insight team was a group of journalists dedicated to longer-term, in-depth and revelatory investigations. Set up in 1963, it was a kind of elite specialist unit, but still financially and editorially part of the wider newspaper. It was financed by the same sales and advertising and it could reach an audience who turned to the paper for its more general news, features and sport. This mixed model of cross-subsidization and cross-fertilization is under threat because of the economic crisis in mainstream media. Paul Starr's warning about American newspapers resonates across any mainstream media engaged in the more expensive task of revelatory and challenging journalism in a time of crisis for the Western journalism business model: 'More than any other medium, newspapers have been our eyes on the state, our check on private abuses, our civic alarm systems. It is true that they have often failed to perform those functions as well as they should have done. But whether they can continue to perform them at all is now in doubt.'

As resources for dedicated investigative and political journalism are reduced, there have been attempts to fund it directly from external sources by creating separate institutions. These are usually non-profit and depend on direct philanthropy for core funding and so have been labelled 'Foundation Journalism'.

Just when mainstream journalism becomes faster and shallower, this subsidized mode of production offers the potential of deeper, more reflective and researched journalism. Investigative journalism is finding new ways to support itself that allow it to do different things. In America there is very little journalism funded directly by local or national government. There is, however, a culture of philanthropic funding for foundations that promote public-service journalism. Increasingly, these have sought to provide funds directly to community and investigative journalism units outside of mainstream media newsrooms. Examples include Propublica, the Huffington Post Investigative Fund, Spot.us and a Knight Foundation-funded multimedia project at the Center for Investigative Reporting. They adopt novel production processes to varying degrees, but they see themselves as a way of correcting a market failure and encouraging editorial innovation rather than challenging 'quality' mainstream media in their role in holding power to account: 'Though these ventures seek, like WikiLeaks, to use new technologies to transform the way in which investigative work is produced and distributed, they are firmly committed to traditional journalistic values and see themselves as preserving an industry at least as much as reshaping it.'

WikiLeaks itself originally sought funding from similar
sources but the fact that it exists outside of national boundaries and does not have a clear internal governance structure makes it difficult for it to meet the administrative conditions that govern that kind of resourcing. For the same reasons, it would be difficult for foundation journalism to provide the immunity WikiLeaks enjoys. That does not mean that the two types cannot collaborate—however, they may suffer similar tensions to those between WikiLeaks and mainstream media. As we have seen, the foundation-funded British Bureau of Investigative Journalism struggled to cope with the demands of working with WikiLeaks and its mainstream media collaborators.

These new forms of foundation journalism may reanimate the debate around the American idea of ‘Public Journalism’ that arose in the 1990s. This was the journalistic movement that sought to foreground the ethical impact as well as professional coda of the news media. It stressed the responsibility of journalism to foster citizen engagement in public debate. As one of those involved in implementing the theory at the time has recently written, the new technologies that facilitate networked journalism offer fresh potential for the ideas of public journalism: ‘Citizen-generated journalism based on public journalism principles can help both our public life and the press go well, but only through deliberate, dedicated effort.’

So advocates of public journalism in the digital age hope that increased public participation in a more networked journalism can rejuvenate the role of the news media as public sphere: ‘As a democratic midwife, the Fourth Estate can re-assume the role that has been eroded away by public cynicism about politicians and the political process, and the media’s links to both.’

This is still predicated on John Dewey’s idea that journalism’s job is to keep public opinion informed and to foster debate. It is a fairly general ideal and impossible to realize in any complete sense. It is an aspiration as well as an applied function for journalism. Yet, this moderately reformist ambition is in keeping with Julian Assange’s conception of WikiLeaks’ purpose as part of a healthy democracy: ‘WikiLeaks is part of an honourable tradition that expands the scope of freedom by trying to lay “all the mysteries and secrets of government” before the public.’

So, foundation funding combined with public participation would appear to offer a non-market-based ethical new business model for journalism:

The ability of more traditionally organized nonprofits to leverage their capabilities in an environment where the costs of doing business are sufficiently lower than they were in the print and television era that they can sustain effective newsrooms staffed with people who, like academic faculties, are willing to sacrifice some of the bottom line in exchange for the freedom to pursue their professional values.

There are practical problems. Foundation journalism is dependent upon philanthropic institutions or public generosity. Both are limited and unpredictable. National Public Radio (NPR) in America has shown that those sources of income are sustainable but difficult to grow to any significant scale. Public participation adds value but it still requires curation. Organizations like Propublica still rely upon mainstream media to provide a wider platform to disseminate (and part-fund) their work. There is also the problem that these media organizations can be influenced by the agenda of their funders. A combination of high ethics standards, a desire for high quality, and large editorial boards can occasionally make such foundations more cautious than mainstream media organizations. Their discrete nature may
also mean that they are cut off from wider flows of information and interaction. Much investigative journalism, for example, flows from general news coverage rather than arising separately. Foundation and citizen journalism projects benefit from their removal from mainstream pressure to produce routine news, but they may cut themselves off from the wider context which public journalism must include.

Foundation journalists we have spoken to worry that mainstream media organizations see them as a way of getting quality journalism at a discount. Their work is a subsidy rather than a bold expansion of what mainstream media do. At the same time most of them have to raise extra funds as part of the condition of their foundation funding so they are compelled to deal with the commercial news organizations. That also means that the editorial product has to conform to the expectations of the commercial editors. This is not a recipe for ground-breaking or disruptive journalism. However, foundation news production can offer greater editorial diversity than mainstream media in their increasingly constrained state. It can cover subjects that are not so popular and it can do it in a way that is less sensational. It can also focus on particular aspects, such as investigative journalism, rather than overall coverage. However, generally, foundation journalism still cleaves to the aspiration of objective journalism. It is not so radical as WikiLeaks, but it is seeking institutional sustainability. It is more responsible than WikiLeaks because it is held to account by its funders. In some ways, it is also more responsible than much of commercial mainstream media because it is often beholden to an overtly ethical code or mission statement established by the foundation funding. However, it is still insider not outsider journalism that seeks to reform and enhance existing political and media structures, not change them.

3.7 MAINSTREAM WHISTLE-BLOWERS

By their very nature, mainstream media organizations cannot replicate WikiLeaks as an organization. While whistleblowing and leaking have always been part of mainstream media, they cannot have the same degree of immunity and their calculation of risk will always be significantly different (see section 1.3). Mainstream media organizations have a geographical base and are subject to national laws. They are also under commercial, funding and political pressures to operate within a consensual framework that permits limited transgressions and a relative degree of oppositional discourse. However, some mainstream organizations are using the same technologies as WikiLeaks, such as encryption and anonymized communication, to create similar projects within their more general news production.

The Al Jazeera Transparency Unit, for example, achieved a massive release of confidential data with its publication of the so-called ‘Palestine Papers’. In the area of Middle East geo-politics, that story arguably had as great an impact on current politics as anything published by WikiLeaks. These comprised ‘nearly 1,700 files, thousands of pages of diplomatic correspondence detailing the inner workings of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process ... memos, e-mails, maps, minutes from private meetings, accounts of high level exchanges, strategy papers and even power point presentations ... from 1999 to 2010’.

The papers were presented in the same way as the New York Times and the Guardian published the WikiLeaks cables, with selected highlights, original documents and commentary all provided on the website. The Unit promises leaks the same anonymity and security as WikiLeaks and to an extent it enjoys a degree of immunity itself.

Al Jazeera’s structure of funding and organization gives it
a remarkable degree of freedom to pursue critical journalism around the world. It is very well resourced, as a TV channel (or two channels) but also as a powerful online presence with a wide range of social media platforms and projects. Its funding from the ruler of the rich but tiny Gulf state Qatar precludes criticism of the Emir but also appears to some critics to coincide with a wider editorial bias. Al Jazeera has been accused of not pursuing its enthusiastic coverage of the Arab uprisings when they threatened other Gulf states on good terms with Qatar. Indeed, material contained within WikiLeaks' own editorial cache shows Qatari politicians have not hesitated in using Al Jazeera as a bargaining chip in international negotiations. But that funding also means that, more generally, it does not have to worry about commercial or political pressure from the subjects of its work. So in that sense it is protected to a similar degree to an independent licence-fee-funded organization like the BBC, but with the ability to take editorial gambles such as the Palestine Papers and to pursue more 'campaigning' revelatory journalism. The Transparency Unit still retains editorial control for itself and Al Jazeera. Submissions of video, documents or simply tip-offs can be made securely but the journalists will control the verification and publication process. This is more of an advanced citizen journalism news-gathering exercise than an open whistle-blowing platform.

Newspapers do not get much more mainstream than the Wall Street Journal, owned by Rupert Murdoch and a bastion of quality international financial and business journalism. It has now set up SafeHouse, which provides a secure facility for leakers to release documents and information. However, it is not clear how different this is from the traditional function of newspapers as recipients of leaks. The stand-alone site will have its own servers, but in its terms and conditions it warns leakers that the Journal reserves various rights, such as to disclose information about the leaker as well as the leak to the authorities. It also says that it will not break the law: 'If we enter into a confidential relationship, Dow Jones will take all available measures to protect your identity while remaining in compliance with all applicable laws.' SafeHouse may well end up as a drop box for some intriguing documents, but it is not conceived as, and will not be, a challenge to power. The idea of a Rupert Murdoch-owned newspaper, however independent it might be, actually challenging the status quo seems unlikely. So it seems that mainstream media will be able to do more to facilitate leakers but they will remain within the traditional framework of the rights and responsibilities that apply in the rest of their coverage. As we shall see in the final chapter, there may well be a future for WikiLeaks and its variants, but in a networked world there are a plethora of other potential channels for critiquing authority.