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Manuel Castells’s Networks of Outrage and Hope provides one stop shopping for those interested in learning about a spate of headline-grabbing movements from the past several years, including the “pots and pans” revolution in Iceland, various Arab Spring movements, the indignados movement, and the Occupy movement. Although the book defies easy summary given its complexity, several interrelated arguments are central: (1) major movements for revolution or reform have a common headwater in which a few early movements inspire subsequent movements, with the speed of the diffusion in part driven by technology use; (2) emotions are important to understanding these movements, their diffusion, and the role of information communication technologies (ICTs); (3) the Internet plays a number of roles in contemporary protest, from irrepressible information source, to mood-making conveyer of audio and video from the frontlines, to back-end organizing platform; and (4) networks of institutionalized power are most effectively challenged when protesters work to disarticulate those networks and break down the infrastructure for power. In advancing these arguments, Castells has crafted a book that is likely to be of interest to multiple audiences.

Taking these themes in turn, the book empirically begins with movements in Tunisia and Iceland (chap. 2), which Castells sees as the headwaters for other subsequent movements. Although the dynamics of each case differ, and are richly narrated in turn by Castells, he argues that Tunisia and Iceland shared a key trait: they contributed to a new sense of possibility and opportunity that spread to other countries (often online) and ignited subsequent protests. Egypt followed suit (chap. 3) and then protest diffused even farther across the Arab world (chap. 4). Chapter 5 brings the story to Western Europe through an examination of indignados protests in Spain, which he argues were also inspired by these predecessor movements. He closes with an investigation of the Occupy movement in the United States (chap. 6), positioning the United States as the last beneficiary of Icelandic and Tunisian unrest. In many ways, Castells’s argument about the emergence and then diffusion of these movements is similar to Doug McAdam’s cognitive liberation argument about the civil rights movement (Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970 [University of Chicago Press, 1982]). McAdam argued that although African-Americans had long-simmering grievances, the civil rights movement gained speed when it did, in part, because of events like the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, which allowed African-Americans to believe that a different America was actually possible. However, Castells’s account differs in two ways: he is much more
interested in the catalytic role of emotion than cognition, and Castells’s story
doesn’t end with a discussion of movement emergence—he is also interested
in how early movements change the odds of subsequent movements arising
elsewhere.

Second, throughout the narrative, Castells is focused on the role of emo-
tions, which he positions as critical translators of grievances to action.
Consistent with existing work on emotions and mobilization, he argues that
movements that inspire anger will spur mobilization but that states that
inspire fear will limit mobilization. Researchers interested in emotions and
social movements will appreciate the centrality of arguments about emo-
tions in this book.

Third, as the subtitle of the book suggests, Castells is interested in the role
of ICTs in protest movements. In some respects, he sees ICTs as providing
back-end infrastructure for movements: the Internet is an important orga-
nizing network for protesters and also a critical “free space.” But ICTs also
help to transmit the emotion of events through video, cell phone photos, and
firsthand accounts. And ICTs help to spread information and are a conduit
for inspiration. It is important to note that Castells is not arguing that off-
line action or networks are unimportant—indeed, he sees the urban occu-
pation of spaces from Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park as critical to move-
ments as well. At their best, he argues that movements bring online spaces
into connection with physical places. He also stresses the role of other media,
such as the importance of Al Jazeera in most of the Arab movements. But he
does argue that the scale, scope, and speed of these movements would have
been difficult without technological support.

Finally, this book extends Castells’s prior work on conceptualizing net-
works of power and their either interlocking or disarticulated status. Chapter 1 focuses on his conceptualization of networks of power and the next
several empirical chapters lean heavily on this theoretical scaffolding. He
argues, for instance, that states are strongest when all power networks—such
as political institutions, financial elites, the military, and the media, among
others—are well articulated around common goals. Movements effectively
challenge power by breaking the links between these different power sources
(i.e., by disarticulating those power networks).

A thousand words are too few to cover the riches of this incredibly timely
account of contemporary movements. I have skimmed over many other im-
portant arguments in the book. For instance, I haven’t been able to touch
upon his arguments about conceptualizing the consequences of Occupy
protests or his arguments about importance of cultural or ideational move-
ment impacts.

Of course, no book is perfect. For instance, the individual movement
analyses are at times polemical (e.g., his brief discussion of the Tea Party).
One might also quibble with some of the assumptions or overbroad claims
he makes about the state of social movement theory and research, but this
may be the collateral damage of big theory. And some may find his evidence
about the role of ICTs to be mixed—at times, he engages with existing rig-
rous empirical work but, at other times, analyses seem more inferential. But none of these critiques is likely to affect overall interest in the book, which I wager will be quite wide.


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In November 1999, global justice activists disrupted the summit meetings of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, Washington. The multiday, multigroup protest was the capstone event of many held in different countries over a two year period and was heralded by sympathizers and commentators as the signal that effective street protest was back. With Direct Action, Deliberation, and Diffusion, Lesley Wood has developed a detailed analysis of the way activists in New York City and Toronto interpreted and responded to Seattle. The monograph provides substantive insight into contemporary urban activism and theoretical insight into mechanisms that propel the diffusion of protest tactics.

Wood does a good job of explicating the tactical innovations that occurred in Seattle. One of the most notable was the “black bloc,” where protesters dressed in black with blackened faces move through town in a phalanx formation, in some cases peaceably but in others throwing Molotov cocktails, spray painting buildings, or breaking shop windows. Other tactics central to Seattle included the use of large puppets, locking arms to resist arrest, and forms of “jail solidarity” in which protesters refuse to cooperate with authorities, often leading to mass arrests that are not readily processed. While not literally new—I was reminded of my own brief experience with anti-nuclear protest in the late seventies—this package of practices marked to some extent a tactical sea change. We see right away the diversity of modes of protest within a single “event” and the various messages that tactics can carry to different audiences. Also obvious are the debates that Seattle would provoke in like-minded activists elsewhere.

Social protest provides a rich setting for the study of diffusion in all its complexity (sociologists could get lost in this stuff, and some probably have). Activists are highly motivated to learn from success elsewhere and extraordinarily thoughtful about the potential effectiveness of different approaches and what their long-run implications might be for their group and their cause. They talk to each other all the time, facilitating not only rampant imitation but creative evolution of ideas and approaches. Their success hinges on novelty and on the interpretability of their actions by a non-committed audience, which makes tactics resonant with cultural meaning. Wood’s most valuable insights, for this reader, arose when reflecting the