

**A War Room in Canada: Politics, Journalism, Publics and the Competition
for Credibility**

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ABSTRACT

A War Room in Canada: Politics, Journalism, Publics and the Competition for Credibility

James S. McLean, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2008

The central objective of *A War Room in Canada* is to develop a richer understanding of the subsumed motivations behind the practices of political war rooms, the organizations that drive political communication at election time. To do so, this dissertation examines the role of the war room of the New Democratic Party during the general election campaign of 2005-06, providing an insider's view with respect to the underlying stakes in play for political actors, journalists, and publics. It considers an arc of theoretical positions from Durkheim's notion of organic solidarity and its conceptual link to contemporary democracy, to neofunctionalism and its concern for legitimation and symbolic action. Theoretical gaps in the neofunctionalist view are employed as a platform to project a line of thought that brings together notions from Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of capitals and fields, scholarly debates arising from Jürgen Habermas's theorization of the public sphere, and recent conceptualizations of the relationship between publics and counterpublics. From these articulated theoretical relationships, the notion of credibility is posited as a specific form of symbolic capital, one that acts as a medium of exchange within and between the fields of politics, journalism, and the field of power/publics. A series of war-room communication measures, strategies and tactics mobilized through the competition for credibility, are then considered with respect to their resonance among voters and, ultimately, the exchange of credibility for votes and votes for constitutionally-credited power.

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CONTENTS

Chapter One	
Introduction: A War Room in Canada	1
Chapter Two	
Bourdieu's Fields and Capitals: The Implications for Political Life	32
Chapter Three	
The Public Sphere, Politics, and Journalism	63
Chapter Four	
Methodology	91
Chapter Five	
The War Room	114
Chapter Six	
The War Room in Action: Tactics	144
Chapter Seven	
The War Room at Work: Strategies	173
Chapter Eight	
The War Room, Journalism, and Public Discourse	204
Chapter Nine	
Political Communication and the Journalistic Field	236
Chapter Ten	
Conclusions	271
Works Cited	303

Chapter One

Introduction: A War Room in Canada

It is late morning on a biting December day in the nation's capital. In a room full of cubicles in a nondescript building on a street lined with similar buildings, people emerge from their work spaces, drawn to a bank of television monitors on a rickety stand in one of the few common areas. None of the television sets match in size, make, or model, but one of the larger ones is tuned to CBC Newsworld, the all-news, English-language cable channel run by the national public broadcaster. The anchorperson, veteran journalist Nancy Wilson, reads a standard script promoting the upcoming round of leaders' debates (they will be carried on Newsworld in the coming days), then throws to a "live hit" in Regina, Saskatchewan. It is week three of the winter election of 2005-06 and the New Democratic Party, represented by leader Jack Layton, has come to the birthplace of publicly funded medicare in Canada to invoke the spirit (metaphorical and possibly otherwise) of T.C. "Tommy" Douglas in a bid to bolster its "ownership" of the issue of universally accessible, single-tier health care.

The people back in Ottawa, the ones who normally occupy the cubicles, are NDP campaign workers and this staged event, carried live on national television, is a rare opportunity for them to join in a good, old-fashioned stump speech (albeit from a few thousand kilometers away). This is because the real star of this show is not leader Layton but Shirley Douglas, daughter of the late T.C., an actor of long-standing who can be counted on to rally the troops behind her father's health-care legacy. It is one of the few times that Jack Layton, after a brief declaration of intentions, seems content to stand in the background in support of this living connection to the party's social-democratic past.

There is general quiet as Douglas begins to speak and nods of approval as she lashes out at those “right wing politicians like Stephen Harper and the prime minister.” The mood in the room turns electric as Douglas, her voice rising, declares: “We will not permit the dismantling of Canada’s single-payer health care system!” There are nods of approval. The group breaks into heightened applause when Douglas attacks the Liberal government’s plan to inject billions into health care and “just hope it gets to where it’s needed!” The odd “Hallelujah!” would not be out of place, but nobody obliges.

The point is made. The climactic moment comes and goes. But Douglas continues to talk, to extol the virtues of equal, accessible health care for all. Her speech becomes repetitious. Those who are watching seem uncomfortable. A few quietly slip away, returning to their cubicles and the day’s campaign responsibilities. The manager of the strategic communication unit, the so-called “war room,” mutters that the event has gone on too long, that Douglas is losing momentum, losing her audience. Jack Layton, still in the televised crowd behind Douglas, claps and nods with each point made and remade, but his smile is beginning to look a bit forced. The war-room manager repeats his concern more loudly. This draws the attention of a senior party strategist. He crosses the room to ask if there is a problem. “She’s going too long,” is the reply. “She’s on national TV live,” responds the strategist. “This is *not* a problem.” Those who have stayed to watch the performance are suddenly more attentive, more willing to clap when a major point is repeated, more willing to cheer on this firebrand link to a glorious past because she is, after all, *their* firebrand. And if the spirit of Tommy Douglas, Baptist preacher turned cornerstone prairie socialist, isn’t exactly in the room, with a little prompting his political inheritors can still be made to feel a touch of the spirit. Hallelujah indeed!

This episode from the NDP war room is characteristic of a great deal that drives contemporary election campaigns in Canada. There is an appeal to historic tradition, a reaffirmation of the party's commitment to its fundamental values, recalling the old-time politics of a previous age, an age when things seemed less complicated, when it was easy to tell (as T.C. Douglas would have it) the black cats from the white cats from the mice.¹ But beneath this veneer of traditional sentiment lies a twenty-first century communication machine delivering sophisticated messages crafted for an overarching objective: to ensure that the NDP faithful *remain* faithful and that those from other political traditions who show the slightest drift toward temptation are enticed into the New Democrat tent, at least for as long as it takes to cast a ballot. In short, this communication machine, the war room, is in many ways the voice behind a latter-day secular evangelism, half midway hawker and half prairie revival meeting, using any means available to convince voters that the promise of what lies behind the NDP (or Conservative, or Liberal, or Bloc) curtain deserves their support. And for the party workers who labour at the rock face of electoral politics, it matters not at all that the Shirley Douglas stump speech may be taken on almost every level as pure fantasy especially if, for a time, it reaches a national audience (Chapter Eight).

This example, the technologically resurrected old-time stump speech, is a reminder that political communication has always had a proselytizing aura about it, often

¹ Douglas famously used the self-constructed parable of Mouseland to explain the success of his Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party in Saskatchewan. "Mouseland is a troubled village of mice ruled by cats. But a lone mouse comes forward with a radical suggestion: the mice should elect one of their own to parliament. 'My friends,' Douglas says passionately, 'watch out for the little fellow with an idea.' The "idea," however, is simply a political strategy to split the vote between the two establishment parties, permitting the CCF to run up the middle and win successive elections. The Mouseland political parable may be heard by accessing the CBC Radio archives at: http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-73-851-4958/politics_economy/tommy_douglas/clip4.

lubricated with a generous dose of snake oil.² Scholars of media and democracy sometimes choose to downplay this side of political communication, preferring instead to dwell upon loftier matters such as the free access to information and its role in the democratic process, often intimating that free access to information is somehow under attack and, therefore, so is democracy. Indeed, by the time Nicholas Garnham published *Capitalism and Communication* in 1990, this intimation had become an assumption or, as Garnham suggested, it had become *commonplace* to insist that the very idea of a democratic nation-state rests upon universal open access to information and the “equal opportunities to participate in the debates from which political decisions rightly flow” (Garnham, 1990: 107). Similarly, for political theorists such as William Kaplan the “right to know” is taken as virtually indistinguishable from the definition of a free citizen because people who are prevented from fully participating in their community are also prevented from sharing equally in “the economic, political, and social bounty of their society” (Kaplan, 1993: 252). Each author infers that citizens have somehow been excluded from the general discussion around important political decisions (or that such exclusion is imminent), or that the right to know has somehow been curtailed by powerful, vested interests that see the control of information as the way to direct a greater share of society’s bounty toward themselves. Bare-knuckled, partisan speech is seldom discussed except as a manipulative deviation from the ideal and, therefore, in need of correction.

² Such proselytizing speaks to the ritual aspect of elections put forward by Talcott Parsons (and echoed in the work of Durkheim): “Elections do not have to be involved in the real transfer of power or in rational decisions of issues for them to be socially effective. Elections instead are a ritual by which loyalty to the political system itself is mobilized and demonstrated” (Parsons, 1960; Collins, 1988).

For all of this, it has become difficult to see how access to information is being restricted in a mediascape that is increasingly wide open to anyone (Appadurai, 1996). As Robert Jensen has argued, the relentless inundation of information, the unceasing competition for eyes, ears, and minds among media practitioners, ensures that average people going about their daily business not only have unfettered access to vast amounts of information (including political information), they are bombarded by messages:

There is more information than ever before. Even if one brackets out the huge amount that is about celebrities, entertainment, sports and other non-political topics, the quantity of political information available is staggering. Quantity, yes, but of what quality? (Jensen, 2005: 1).

In this scenario, the problem for the average person is to distinguish between what is worthwhile and what is not. Yet the evidence of the everyday suggests that citizens are quite ready to pick up the telephone and participate in open-line radio programs, write letters to the editor of their local newspaper, or go on-line to post their opinions in the form of weblogs. They are able and willing to select topics and issues in general circulation and add their voices to the general discussion. They manage information dross on their own terms and by doing so make a hearty contribution to “the debates from which political decisions rightly flow.” Of course, in Jensen’s view, they might well be contributing to the *quantity* of information overload. But if average people, invested in their own democracy in such a manner, merely contribute to a glut of meaningless information who, then, decides what information is of an acceptable quality? Nicholas Garnham? William Kaplan? Robert Jensen? The political strategists who organize stump speeches during an election campaign? The journalists and editors at the CBC who carry such speeches live to a national audience?

On a significant level, this dissertation is about rethinking the power dynamics of the democratic form as it is practiced in contemporary Canada and questioning some of the assumptions that have grown up around practices associated with political communication, or, more precisely, the way that those practices have been framed as manifestly detrimental to a deliberative democratic model. It does not deny that certain aspects of strategic political communication are manipulative. Nor does it throw out the notion that certain elements in our society spend a great deal of time and money in the pursuit of communicative control. But it does question whether that investment is as effective as those doing the investing would have us believe. It does not dispute that the average person is confronted daily with a wall of information, or even that this “glut of occurrences” can be difficult to navigate at the best of times.³ But it does suggest that people going about their daily business are willing and able to negotiate their way through the generalized information clutter and clamour with a degree of freely applied goodwill that often seems astounding to everyone except the people doing the navigating.

To get at some of the central concerns pertaining to communication and democracy in our time, this dissertation looks into a moment in the recent history of the Canadian democratic nation-state, an election campaign, and examines how strategic political communicators compete to make their messages resonate above the din of the daily glut of occurrences. It discusses the emergence of the political war room as an organizational entity and its role in the contest for democratically conferred power. It delves into the complex relationships between war-room operatives and journalists and

³ The term comes from the first line of the first edition of *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*: “It is designed that the Country shall be furnished once a moneth (or if any Glut of Occurrences happen, oftener) with an Account of such considerable things as have arrived unto our notice.” *Publick Occurrences* is thought to be the first newspaper published in North America. It was produced by Richard Pierce in Boston, 1690.

among political strategists, journalists, and publics. And it poses a core question: What is that key measure, the essential quality that generates an enthusiastic public embrace of some truth claims while consigning others to the information landfill? In other words, what lends *credibility* to certain ideas, proposals, and statements, and how might we consider credibility as a concept?

Admittedly, such an examination gestures toward a vast sub-field of interests that straddle the crowded boundary between communication studies and political science. It ranges over areas of interest as diverse as political advertising (Valentino, 2004; Richardson, 2001; Pinkleton, 1998), polling (Graber, 2005; Lipari, 1999), political rhetoric (Reinemann and Mauer, 2005; Botan and Taylor, 2005; Boyd, 2003), and matters pertaining to issue framing and communication strategy at election time (Mendelsohn, 1993; Woong Rhee, 1997; Edy, 1999). Yet few of these areas of more-or-less discreet inquiry investigate the complexities of the relationship between political-communication specialists, journalists, and *publics* even if some notion of *the public* is always assumed. For this reason, a critical strand of inquiry will deal with re-conceptualizing and repositioning publics as *the* dominant partner in the processes of democratically-motivated political communication.

Such a repositioning is overdue. The most influential attempts to theorize the relationship among Canadian journalists, political actors, and the public have taken the position that this relationship has been so heavily skewed toward powerful media and political interests that the public scarcely matters anymore. A case in point is The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing of 1991—the last comprehensive survey of political and media practices in this country. Here, in a policy document

generated for government, the public has been virtually expunged from the vision of just how Canadian governments are supposed to be chosen. Journalists and political operatives are portrayed as opposite sides of the same coin, acting in a near-conspiracy to position their own narrow objectives before a voting public that has been all but divested of its participatory rights:

Electoral campaigns have become media events. Increasingly, the voter is removed and/or insulated from the practice and process of campaigns, forced to become a passive observer and consumer of prepackaged messages and news reports. Where once the site of the contest might have been in the mind of the voter, the first line of struggle has now shifted to the contest between the journalist and the candidate's advisers for control of the campaign agenda and the interpretation of events and statements. At best, the voter is left with a strategic decision of where to place his or her vote, based on the predigested information provided by the candidate or the journalist (Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991).

With respect, Gilsdorf and Bernier's description of the flow of political and journalistic communication is greatly oversimplified. It assumes a "pipeline model" for complex communicative actions and by reducing election-time communication to a basic transmission model common to systems of corporate or business communication it also reduces citizens to consumers (Manning, 1992). Voters are characterized as exceedingly "passive observer[s] and consumer[s] of prepackaged messages and news reports" incapable of performing the intellectual work required to act in their own interests.

While it is certainly the case that contemporary media organizations hold a great deal of sway over much of the traditional political information that citizens see, hear, and read the reduction of average people to mere consumers of prepackaged political messages is highly problematic. This dissertation proposes that the work of political communicators and journalists is essentially meaningless without the validation of publics. Indeed, in this age of the civic or citizen journalist (enabled by the ubiquitous Internet) there is a fundamental contradiction to the claim that citizens are marginalized

in the processes of political decision-making while having access, simultaneously, to more political information than ever before (even if the idea of public political discourse *sans* traditional journalists seems threatening to some interested observers) (Lemann, 2006; Compton, 2000). Political discourse thrives with all of the warts and scars of its most outrageous practices, as does journalism, because engaged publics have never surrendered an ounce of their real power to decide what is important to them. *Publics* are the ultimate arbiters of information currency (in both meanings of the term): that which is current (or indicative of this time) and that which has a symbolic exchange value (in the manner of a kind of coin of the realm, a *currency*). And information currency, with its necessary exchange of certain kinds of communication within the collective public mind, is deeply implicated in questions of confidence, trust, legitimacy, belief, and credibility.

The question, then, is how to bring the public, or publics, back into the scholarly debate around matters pertaining to contemporary journalism and politics? The first step is to recognize that journalists, political actors, and publics engage in a complex and ongoing set of negotiations that form the contours of an ever-evolving set of relations. The public cannot be excluded from the public's business because the public's business, the *actions* of people going about their lives, is what motivates journalists and political actors to do what they do. It is the public, after all, (in the sense of a broad collective with certain values, understandings, agreements and methods of conduct), which foundational social theorists such as Émile Durkheim remind us is responsible for a collective conferral of power on specialized elements of complex societies. Indeed, the socio-historical backdrop to Durkheim's conceptualization of the division of labour (mechanical solidarity) holds that the state is nothing less than the will of the collectivity

made manifest. In such a view, the institutions of the state are reified at the pleasure of the collective (public) will and act on its behalf. To make the public subordinate to these institutions is to turn the world on its theoretical head.

To be sure, this position opens a theoretical can of worms. At the very least it invokes the divisive structure *versus* agency debates of late twentieth-century sociology. But it also reminds us that Durkheim's influential early seminal work, *The Division of Labour in Society*, is a document concerned with, as Anthony Giddens puts it, "the changing nature of order in the context of a definite conception of social development" (Giddens, 1971: ix). Certainly an objective of *The Division of Labour* was to account in some hopeful way for the rise of the individual and the assumed freedom to act that is carried within a shift from a homogeneous society, what Durkheim called "solidarity by similarities," (Durkheim, 1893/1984: 31) to a more heterogeneous and specialized society, an accounting that also needed to acknowledge a societal structure dominated by omnipresent and very powerful institutions, and dominant groups and cultures (Andersen, 2000). For our purposes, the conditions that emerge from this shift—theorized by Durkheim as a foundational-relational change across two social orders—may be used to examine a number of social and political relationships including how the public stands in relation to the state.⁴ Here the connected notions of mechanical and organic solidarity, together with a theorization for the empowerment of the state apparatus, offer a means to interrogate the rise of certain social and political organizational bodies (such as political parties) that have developed as discreet communicative divisions. Even Durkheim's controversial notion of the *conscience collective* (which he uses interchangeably with

⁴ Durkheim's notion of the public is caught up in his theorization of the *conscience collective*. A more fragmented, relational view of the public as *publics* forms a central line of inquiry for this dissertation.

collective consciousness and *common consciousness*)⁵ is a useful conceptual point of entry into the rich, varied, and ongoing inquiry surrounding our understanding of the public, the public good, and ultimately the conditions of participation in the processes of democracy including, arguably, the most important process of all and a central frame for the object of study for this dissertation: an election campaign.

This conceptual ground, extracted from Durkheim's oeuvres, may be followed as a kind of path through the theoretical woods, a path that widens to a track, a track to a road, and a road to a highway as related concepts from other scholarly positions are introduced. In this respect, the work of the neofunctionalists is valuable as a point of departure, as a bridge from Durkheim into more contemporary concerns (Alexander, 1998). This is not because neofunctionalism unearths revolutionary insights in its attempt to address the mechanistic structural conservatism of Parsonian functionalism—or as Hans Joas has observed, “to include everything that functionalism has been criticized as lacking” (Honneth and Joas, 1988: 100)—but because in its struggle to incorporate a concern for vigorous human initiative, neofunctionalism constructs a tool kit of concepts that may be employed to situate political actors, journalists, organizational structures, and publics, within the unique conditions that characterize the institution of democracy. In this manner, for example, the theorization of the free vote as a “transformation rule,” a moment when individual agency has the potential to initiate significant change, hearkens back to the empowerment of the individual in the state of organic solidarity. Concepts with a basis in individual and group agency—conditions for “legitimation,” action with respect to cleavage structures such as class and race, the emergence of the institutional

⁵ Durkheim describes the common consciousness as: “The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society [which] forms a determinate system with a life of its own” (Durkheim: 38-39).

entrepreneur, and the importance of influence and value commitments as symbolic media of exchange—continue to inform our understanding of democracy as a socio-political practice (Colomy, 1985; Collins, 1988; Müller, 1988). Each presents a link to Durkheim’s transformative moment, the massive shift in social equilibrium wherein the rituals of power and control in societies of little internal differentiation began to give way to a society of great complexity “with an elaborate division of labour ... more formalistic in its collective consciousness, less given to violent punishment and ceremonial observance” (Collins, 1988).

“In a general way,” writes Durkheim, “the precept which commands us to specialize appears everywhere to be contradicted by the precept which commands us to follow the same ideal” (Durkheim: 44). Similarly, he posits that “two consciousnesses exist within us,” one that is individual and another that is collective (Durkheim: 61). This tension between individual and collective identity marks the boundary between basic social organizational forms; the more “primitive” mechanical solidarity based on “juxtaposed politico-familial groups which are very similar to each other in their internal organization,” and the form that emerges in complex societies, organic solidarity, which stems from a “functional interdependence in the division of labour” (Durkheim: 61; Giddens: 76-77). For Durkheim and his adaptors, therefore, the crux of the problem has always been to account for the increased individualism that arises from an expansion in the division of labour while explaining the residual power of the clan, the tribe, the basic human organization, or the institution, each with its arcane codes of conduct and sometimes eccentric value commitments.

The natural tension, reflected in the shifting power relations between the group and the individual, may be mobilized as a basic contextual frame for exploring both the genesis of the democratic form and its persistence. It permits us to think relationally about the living, breathing composite parts, the human beings with individual *and* group identities that quite literally animate the daily realities of our social world. One need not excavate too deeply before realizing that a shift in communication practices is embedded in the conditions for emergence of the organic social form and is, therefore, deeply implicated in the negotiation of group and individual concerns. For Durkheim, it is inevitable that distinct societies will grow and eventually come into contact with other communities with “differing modes of life and belief.” Contact “breaks down the isolated homogeneity of each group, and stimulates economic and cultural exchange” (Giddens: 78). However, increased *physical* contact (the mode of exchange put forward by Durkheim) can only go so far in a society that is simultaneously acquiring more people, becoming more heterogeneous, and becoming more individualistic. This question of *how* people communicate in a complex society is a problem Durkheim does not directly address. To seek to fill this gap in the theorization of organic solidarity is to open the door to a parallel line of inquiry, one directly related to the emergence of political and journalistic communication practices as a function of the division of labour, and the connection of these practices to the rise of the modern democratic form.

In Durkheim’s specialized society, contact between people increases naturally as a function of the everyday contracts that people enter into to facilitate all manner of human exchanges. Eventually, “a body of moral practice develops out of the increase in individual contractual obligation” (Giddens: 77). It follows that the rules of moral

obligation must be disseminated to the largest possible number of people if they are to have any standing in normative practice. Two related responses arise from this need to disseminate. First, a specific “area of social life,” journalism, (a division of labour) opens up and begins to develop its own internal culture. The journalist assumes the unique functional role of bringing individuals into non-physical contact by disseminating information of interest to the moral life of the community (Desbarats, 1990; Sloan, 1982). Second, technologies of communication become increasingly available to more individuals for one-to-one communication (telephony is a good example) and to fewer, specialized *public* communicators (journalists) practicing one-to-many communication. This is especially important in the Habermasian sense of a commitment to *publicity* and its twin notion of vigilance as a means to expose and test the exercise of power with respect to concerns for the public good (Habermas, 1962/1991). Therefore, journalists emerge as a specialized division of labour; their practice involves technologies of mass communication; and they have a communicative role that includes reporting on those with institutional power, those charged with setting the moral and legal standards for society.

Communication may also be regarded as the motivating factor behind changes to the way society is governed. Under conditions of mechanical solidarity, the “authority with power to govern” is a simple reflection of the *conscience collective*, empowered to uphold “respect for beliefs, traditions and collective practices—namely, to defend the common consciousness” (Durkheim: 42). In this form of society, there is no room for individual challenges to the governing authority. The very purpose of the “authority,” legitimized through its representation of a homogeneous collectivity, is to keep everyone

in line, to protect the *conscience collective* by enforcing the conditions of its being.

Durkheim writes:

[T]he energy immanent within the consciousness is communicated to that authority, just as affinities of ideas are transmitted to the words they represent. This is how the authority assumes a character that renders it unrivalled. It is no longer a social function of greater or lesser importance, it is the embodiment of the collectivity (Durkheim: 42-43).

It is worth noting that this moment wherein the authority, the state, is empowered is a moment of *communication* based on an expression of all-inclusive (if highly problematic) consensus. The authority that is created in this manner acts in the common interest because it is *of* the common interest and, as such, assumes the power of the group “over the consciousness of individuals” (Durkheim: 43).

Yet as organic solidarity gradually supplants mechanical solidarity, a profound shift also occurs in the nature of the state. Where homogeneity once (literally) reigned, slowly, as individualism arises, there is a concurrent rise in the variety of individually held beliefs and sentiments. If the governing authority is to continue to represent the organically consolidated *conscience collective* it must adjust to reflect this diversity, otherwise it is left to enforce beliefs, traditions, and practices that have increasingly limited meaning within a changing and fragmenting collectivity. Modern democratic government may be viewed as a practical reification of the need for authority to adjust in the face of increasing diversity, the shift from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous social formation. In this light, the genesis of the political party may be viewed as an accommodation to democratic diversity, an accommodation that addresses the continuing requirement for a measure of mechanical solidarity (the retention of a collective entity to

address collective concerns) that incorporates a fragmentation of the political spectrum among competing representative entities.⁶

This accommodation to democratic diversity has generated much ink among neofunctionalists. Paul Colomy's work on uneven structural differentiation, for example, uses the rise of the mass political party to discuss how different socio-cultural groups embraced populist (as opposed to elite) political structures at different rates and with differing levels of intensity in the antebellum United States (Colomy, 1985). Central to Colomy's position is recognition of an underlying "group solidarity" based on commonly held "internalized norms, expectations, value orientations and sets of moral standards" (Colomy, 1985; Anderson, 1991). In other words, the evolution of democracy in practice places the Durkheimian trend toward greater individualism directly in the path of deeply held cultural influences that motivate individuals to express solidarity with those who are of like mind. From this perspective, the emergence of the mass political party may be viewed as an ideological-cultural division of labour, a response arising from group cohesion that simultaneously seeks to fulfill the constitutional essential that codifies "one person, one vote" as an inviolable right (Rawls, 1973). In effect, the democratic form charges political entities to communicate individual difference and group solidarity simultaneously.

The *practice* of partisan political communication must therefore serve two objectives. First, it must appeal to the broadest possible base in order to garner the greatest number of individual votes. Political communication accomplishes this largely

⁶ Durkheim asserts that it is not possible for mechanical solidarity to disappear altogether because a society founded purely on restitutive law (contracts) would eventually dissolve. Punishment of crime, offences to the body of moral practice, is still handled by a socially empowered body charged with enforcing the common will in these matters (Durkheim: 204).

by appealing to universal themes or registers, by aligning with broad moral standards calculated to situate a political entity within a kind of generalized consensus across disparate social, cultural, and ideological formations; that is, by seeking to bypass embedded societal cleavage structures.⁷ Second, political communication appeals to ideological codes, symbolic elements of representation that are intended to penetrate group solidarity and at least appear to align with the most deeply-held value orientations of the group (or groups). One communicative process makes a transparent appeal to universal morality; the other claims common ground with the viscerally understood value commitments held by those of like cultural mind. From this orientation partisan-political communication (which lies at the structural core of democracy itself) both reflects and responds to the Durkheimian contradiction to simultaneously specialize and follow the same ideal; in other words, partisan-political communication is largely about adapting communication practices in order to navigate *the* fundamental socio-political contradiction of complex societies.

If journalism is charged with bringing individuals into non-physical contact by disseminating information of interest to the moral life of the community, then journalists have a particular obligation to both report and contextualize the partisan communication generated by political actors. Certainly, political actors need journalists to transmit their messages. In this respect, the traditional and idealized function of journalism as a “core institution of democracy” is addressed by a disseminative practice that is ideally meant to provide a means for the greatest number of individuals to obtain easy access to information that might then be applied to the “debates from which political decisions

⁷ The application of registers as a tactical element of partisan political communication is explored in Chapter Nine.

rightly flow” (Gasher, 2007; Garnham, 1990). Yet the less traditional function of journalism, the contextualizing, hermeneutic aspect that involves identification and interpretation of the symbolic aspects of communication deployed by those competing for power, is arguably of much greater importance.

This form of journalistic practice has much in common with James Carey’s ritual view of communication (Carey, 1990). Certainly, the journalistic interpretation of political communication draws upon a collective record of social reality, the history of past discourses and decisions that contribute to the “maintenance of society in time” (Carey: 18). This specialization within the journalistic division of labour may be theorized as a response to the increasing sophistication of political communicators as they attempt to employ social rituals for their own purposes. In short, the need for specialized interpretive journalistic skills has increased as partisan-political communicators have sought new ways to adapt to the increased complexities of a diverse, multicultural, multilingual, and mobile polity. The emergence of the “expert” political journalist in the field of journalism has been coeval with the emergence of the strategic-political communicator, and while it may be a stretch to suggest that these highly specialized divisions of communicative labour are mutually constructed, it is certainly the case that they are mutually dependent in a kind of functional symbiotic parasitism.

For political communicators, the construction of partisan messages is a wholly legitimate practice founded in the requirement to distinguish a partisan position and in a response to the perception that journalists are necessary adversaries. L. Ian MacDonald is the editor of *Policy Options*, an influential monthly publication published by the

Montreal-based Institute for Research on Public Policy.⁸ He is also a journalist of long-standing with columns on political affairs published regularly in Montreal's *The Gazette* and the *National Post*. He occupies a rare position in Canadian media circles because he has also worked as a high-level political communicator, as chief speechwriter for Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and, later, as the head of the public-affairs division at Canada's embassy in Washington. With credentials that straddle both sides of the political/journalistic divide, MacDonald is uniquely placed to comment on the recent history of the competition between political and journalistic actors:

What has really changed in the past 20 years is the difficulty of controlling the message if you're on the inside. And there's always this constant struggle between the media and the parties for control of the agenda, getting the message out, staying on message (MacDonald, 2008).

The rise of organizations such as political war rooms, according to MacDonald, is in direct response to a perceived increase in the competition for control of meaning, the struggle between political actors and journalists over the meaningful content of messages. The unnamed participant in this struggle is the public, or publics, the target receiver(s) of political communication that is, at its best (at least from the political perspective), circulated without media "distortion."

Why is message control so important to strategic political communicators? Part of the answer lies in the conditions of "legitimation." As Hans-Peter Müller has proposed, political systems are made legitimate by the performance of those in power across three "dimensions"—the economic, the political, and the socio-cultural (Müller, 1988). A "legitimation crisis" occurs when the governing authority, singly or concurrently, fails to

⁸ The Institute for Research on Public Policy takes as its mandate the improvement of public policy in Canada "by generating research, providing insight and sparking debate that will contribute to the public policy decision-making process." It is funded through an endowment and characterizes itself as an "independent, national, nonprofit organization" (*Policy Options*, 2008).

maintain economic equilibrium, fails to maintain “an agenda of important issues” that enables widespread political participation, and/or fails to maintain “active communication with the public.” It is centrally important to the maintenance of legitimacy that political action around issues and policies is “factually accepted as binding by the people” (Müller: 1988: 130). Legitimacy is, therefore, conferred through public confidence. From the political insider’s point of view, public confidence is forever in danger of being undercut by journalists who, in the normalized practices of their daily work, compete to question, contextualize, and interpret the messages of those who are elected (or who seek to be elected) to govern.

A second set of related conditions has had considerable influence on the emergence of strategic-political communication and its preoccupation with message control. In Ian MacDonald’s words, since the late 1980s in Canada (earlier in the United States) there has been “an explosion in the number of media platforms” (MacDonald, 2008). This began in 1989 with the appearance in Canada of Newsworld, the first 24-hour television news service in this country. For MacDonald, wearing his political insider’s hat, the movement toward a highly specialized, sub-organization wholly devoted to crafting and disseminating political messages is in direct response to a dramatic increase in the volume of critical journalistic voices working across an ever-increasing number of outlets of transmission, outlets that today include a potentially limitless number of Internet sites. Partisan political actors, therefore, regard themselves as underdogs in a struggle to remain distinct in the face of an ever-increasing fragmentation of the mediascape, a fragmentation that supports an increase in the distribution of competitive journalistic voices interpreting the debates from which political decisions rightly flow.

The political war room, then, may be viewed as an organizational response within the ideological-cultural division of labour to a technologically motivated shift in the political economy of media, an organizational response that has occurred hand-in-hand with the development of argument strategies in response to issues of message control in the competition to maintain distinction, credibility, and legitimation.

Since message control is nowhere more important to partisan political actors than during an election campaign, we might expect to see the war room emerge as a distinct organizational entity during such a constitutionally appointed moment. This is indeed the case. Most sources credit Bill Clinton's campaign architect, James Carville, with creating the first full-fledged political war room during Clinton's bid for the Democratic nomination in the U.S. presidential election of 1992 (Stephanopoulos, 2000; Kinsella, 2003). The Clinton campaign's decision to grant access to a documentary film crew resulted in a record of actual practices, released as the film *The War Room* after Clinton had won the presidency. *The War Room* is credited with making the practice of strategic-political communication transparent and creating an "insider's view" that could be studied and replicated (Hegedus and Pennebaker, 1993).⁹ Clinton's war room "machine" was, in turn, adapted and refined by Republican political strategists in the United States, names now associated with the electoral successes (and excesses) of the George W. Bush presidency; notably, the late Lee Atwater and Karl Rove, Bush's chief political strategist.

⁹ Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles have challenged the true transparency of *The War Room* as a dispassionate record of the Clinton campaign. In their discussion of meta-imaging and hyper-reality as it pertains to image construction in U.S. politics, the Parry-Giles' credit *The War Room* with revealing a shift away from concealment of image construction by political candidates and their operatives to a campaign strategy that not only acknowledges image construction but acknowledges the competition for "control over the candidate's image." The acknowledgment of image construction is itself developed as a control mechanism employed by the war room, a means of orienting "the image construction of a presidential candidate in particular, self promotional ways" ((Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 1999).

The genesis of the war room has, therefore, been documented; it is a real phenomenon, recorded, embedded, and circulated in forms of cultural production; and the organizational *form* and its adaptive *function* have been adopted, refined, and implemented across the political spectrum.

There is general agreement that campaign war rooms came to the Canadian political stage after the concept was imported by the Liberal election machine following Clinton's upset presidential election victory (and the release of *The War Room* in 1993) (Kinsella, 2001; MacDonald, 2008). Much of what is known about the internal workings of these organizations in Canada is anecdotal and comes from a single source: Warren Kinsella, a former "political aide" to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Kinsella's blustery account of his time in the Liberal party's campaign war room, outlined in *Kicking Ass in Canadian Politics*, is largely anecdotal and unabashedly partisan. For this reason it is questionable as a scholarly source of thoughtful comment. However, *Kicking Ass in Canadian Politics* has been widely circulated among war-room strategists in all political parties and is worth considering as a starting point for a more thorough analysis.

A significant objective of this dissertation, therefore, is to offer an independent, disinterested reflection on the inner life of an important and comparatively new organizational phenomenon that has been adapted to Canadian politics and constructed for the sole purpose of winning elections. It holds that political war rooms, as centrally organized, highly specialized, outwardly transparent political communication entities have affected a shift in their primary objective—to provide a "clear channel" for partisan communication—by engaging in non-transparent strategic communication initiatives in order to undermine competing views, change minds, channel votes, and reconfigure the

power relations within the democratic structure. In this respect, the position of political parties in the debates from which political decisions are intended to rightly flow, the quality of ideological-cultural division that is intended to make them distinct, is largely used to screen increasingly bare-knuckled forms of distorted symbolic communication. By examining a series of distinct strategic and tactical gambits deployed by the war room of the New Democratic Party, this dissertation undertakes to examine the connected, subsumed intentions of all the major players in the 2005-06 election and situate those intentions within the complex and ongoing set of negotiations that characterizes the relationship between journalists, political actors, and publics.

Clearly, a great deal of the communication generated by political war rooms is intended to resonate at a symbolic level, through the rituals “by which solidarity groups are both formed and mobilized” (Collins, 1988: 117). The unrepentant theatricality of the Shirley Douglas stump speech, for example, was naturally intended to spark a chain of symbolic associations, to evoke the memory of T.C. Douglas; his mythic status as a champion of the average person, his appeal to collective solutions, his commitment to individual and group agency and, most important, his success as the leader of a home-grown political movement (McLeod and McLeod, 2004; Whelan and Whelan, 1990).¹⁰ Arguably, these associations are more important than the words spoken by his daughter, a living connection to the “great man.” However, for our purposes, the stump speech may be used to elicit a number of provocative possibilities that have little to do with the actual event. It is, for example, a fairly uncomplicated example of symbolic exchange in action, an expression of “the resources to re-enact and reproduce the symbols emotionally

¹⁰ T.C. Douglas’s speeches, his preacher-politician’s use of homily and metaphor, and his comfort with the then “new” mass medium of radio have been widely documented. See: McLeod, Thomas H. and Ian McLeod. (2004). *Tommy Douglas: The road to Jerusalem*. Calgary: Fifth House.

charged by participation in a history of past rituals” (Collins: 117). This key concept permits us to begin to conceptualize what is at work within the non-transparent strategic-communication initiatives employed by war-room operatives.

One way to begin to conceptualize such strategic-communication initiatives is to position them as practices within a very broad system of symbolic exchange, a socially-based democratic system such as the one proposed by Heine Andersen (paraphrasing Parsons) wherein power, influence, and value commitments are considered as *media* of exchange; that is, they contain a measure of meaning in their communicative form (Andersen, 2000). In the case of power, writes Andersen, the exchange is both physical and symbolic: “Under representative government it can be said that voters exchange their votes for expected benefits from a political system, implying an obligation, enforced by law, to obedience to legitimate decisions made by government” (Andersen: 227). Influence, on the other hand, is seen as a practice of purely symbolic exchange within a community founded on “a capacity to bring about desired decisions in the interest of collectivities through persuasion” (Andersen: 228). Significantly, the ability to persuade is based on “position in a prestige hierarchy.” Finally, value commitment operates through a “general conviction of legitimacy of norms and moral values, and a readiness to implement them into moral action.” In this manner, says Andersen, “value commitment appeals to concepts of moral duty, honour, and guilt (Andersen: 226).

Each of these symbolic media of exchange has a direct connection with an underlying feature of Durkheim’s notion of organic solidarity. Implicit in a social structure that privileges contractual arrangements between individuals as the foremost basis for the rules that govern human conduct (restitutive law) is a fiduciary assumption,

an assumption of trust. Each time we enter into an exchange with another human being, including communicative exchanges, we presume a degree of good faith, of honest dealing, of accurate truth claims on the part of the person we are involved with. Complex societies would simply grind to a halt if every common transaction among people had to be parsed to its minutest detail.¹¹ In the special case of the choice of a government, however, the expectations of trust are held to a higher standard. The requirement to obey and the power to coerce that is part and parcel of the transfer of power demands serious consideration simply because the individual and collective stakes are so much higher (Andersen, 2000; Rawls, 1993).

Therefore, in a democratic system of government, with its innate sense of a social contract between the governors and the governed, and the commensurate dependence on political and journalistic communication in the service of transparent universal understanding, the assumption of a public trust must be unassailable. It is deeply aligned with the conditions of public confidence that underwrite legitimation and is regularly cited as an official justification for institutional action (Müller, 1988; Senate of Canada, 2006; Government of Canada, 2004). In Durkheimian terms, the empowerment of the governing authority is itself dependent on an honest representation of a complex collective will, one constructed from an accumulated agreement of support made by a majority of individuals (and publics); that is, a true social contract in every sense of the term. Furthermore, the accumulated agreement of support is not represented only in the

¹¹ As Giddens points out, Durkheim regards social and economic inequity, class conflict, as a passing phase, achieved when the rules of society are “unilaterally imposed by one class upon another” (Giddens: 80). The moral problems that arise when one class imposes its economic will upon another are, in Durkheim’s world, addressed by the division of labour, the trend toward individualism which leads inexorably to the absence “of anything that might, even indirectly, shackle the free employment of the social force that each person carries within himself” (Durkheim: 377).

practice of the symbolic transfer of power during an election campaign, it is also based in “the very ‘transferability’ and ‘storability’ of symbols to subsequent situations” (Collins: 118). To calculate influence and persuasion on the basis of an intentionally distorted appeal to the legitimacy of norms and values for the purpose of obtaining power is to instill a continuous moral crisis. In effect, the risk of a permanent crisis of legitimacy rises with the transfer, storage, and reproduction of manipulated symbols.

At this point there is a risk of falling into the same trap as Gilsdorf and Bernier. After all, the “interpretation of events and statements” that Gilsdorf and Bernier claim is central to the struggle for electoral success has a great deal in common with the contest to control the transferability and storability of symbols as well as their reproduction (Gilsdorf and Bernier, 1991; Collins, 1988). The key to avoiding this trap lies in a re-evaluation of the conditions of legitimacy or, rather, an evaluation of the conditions under which legitimacy is itself legitimated. In Müller’s assessment a legitimization crisis occurs after the fact. It is a withdrawal of public confidence based on the performance of those with power. There is an assumption that those with power (at least in a democratic system) have already had legitimacy conferred upon them through the electoral process. But if the legitimacy to govern is based on performance, as Müller rightly observes, how might legitimacy be conferred upon those who seek power yet have no record of performance? Clearly, there are transformation moments when the public trust is based on the evaluation of incumbent performance, and transformation moments when public trust is based on unproven truth claims from competing partisan voices. Prior to a conferral of legitimacy, the public (or publics) must have some basis for passing judgment. This dissertation posits that this basis, this underlying condition, is credibility.

An objective of this dissertation, then, is to illustrate how credibility, as a specifically theorized currency of symbolic exchange, lies at the heart of every communicative practice that engages political actors, journalists, and publics. Credibility is, therefore, central to concerns about the way that power, including the very real power to coerce, is conferred and maintained, accumulated and dissipated in a democratic nation-state such as Canada. To follow the flow of credibility in an election-time political war room is to open a window onto a refreshed view of the political world, one where the ability of political actors to obtain a measure of power and influence is directly tied to a symbolic economy where credibility is the coin of the realm. It is a complex world where actions always contain an intention, often subsumed or concealed but just as often transparently projected, that is somehow tied to credibility. In this symbolic economy, communication specialists (institutional entrepreneurs) craft each moment of a political campaign with an eye to its credibility dividend. It is a place where journalists have great influence because of their ability to extend or withdraw credibility based on endorsement, itself a form of symbolic exchange that is implicated in matters pertaining to legitimacy and public trust. It is a place where publics are much more independently in control of the credibility sweepstakes than we have previously imagined.

To attempt to excavate the conceptual heart of credibility calls for a shift in the theoretical ground away from the kind of deterministic arguments that arise from debates about structure, and even agency, to an orientation more attuned to subsumed symbolic interaction. While the neofunctionalists tinker with notions of symbolic exchange, it is Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical work on the forms of capital that provides a means to delve beneath the surface of complex concepts such as legitimation, the logic of argument

strategies, prestige hierarchies, or the transferability and storability of symbols in order to construct a relational map of the human and organizational forces in play. Bourdieu's notion that there are many different kinds of capital operating in social systems—and that most of them are not of the economic variety—unzips a universe of capital exchange that is on many levels a theoretical reflection of the actually existing communicative practices adopted and refined by political war rooms, journalists, and especially publics (Benson, 2005; Champagne, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998a; Bourdieu, 1990b).

This dissertation posits that credibility, as a specific kind of symbolic capital lying at the very heart of every human exchange, possesses a fluidity of value that is greatly implicated in the symbolic exchanges that characterize the pursuit (and retention) of power in our democratic system. For this reason, credibility as symbolic capital is key to understanding the competitive motivations behind the communicative actions of strategic-political practitioners; that is, the *people* who comprise political war rooms. It is of particular importance in understanding how political war rooms have attempted to influence political life in the face of the tensions that accumulate around political (and journalistic) communication in the public circulation of partisan appeals.

A second, related area of conceptual inquiry from the work of Bourdieu, one directly linked to the division of labour, may be used to enhance our understanding of the competitive differences that distinguish political from journalistic communication. The concept of fields—of distinct areas of social practice complete with their own rules—is directly on-point for any examination of the attributes that make all formalized areas of human endeavour distinct (Bourdieu, 1990a). However, Bourdieu is particularly useful in discussions that centre on politics and journalism because he has specifically theorized

these fields and their position in a third, more abstract field: the field of power (Bourdieu, 1995/2005; Benson and Neveu, 2005). The theoretical relationships that exist *between* fields and capitals may therefore be superimposed upon the observed web of complex relationships that are seen to operate in the daily production of strategic-political communication at election time, the response to that communication by journalistic practitioners, and its resonance among publics and in the field of power.

By animating credibility as a specific kind of symbolic capital and by situating it in the play of political, journalistic, and public communication, an articulated line of force begins to develop (Slack, 1989). It connects Durkheim with the neofunctionalists, the neofunctionalists with Bourdieu, and points directly to Habermas and his concern for a deliberative model of democracy. The critique of Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, when contemplated in the context of the practices of "actually existing democracy" (Fraser, 1992) and recent concepts concerning the manner in which publics and counterpublics are formed (Warner, 2003), may itself be deployed as a means to peer into actually existing communicative practices. These practices include the Habermasian concepts of communicative action and strategic action—of communication intended to generate consensus as opposed to communication intended to change minds—that are directly related (often in the same breath) to the tactics and strategies employed by contemporary strategic-communication specialists (Charney, 1998; Phillips, 1996; Fishkin, 1995; Keane, 1995; Calhoun, 1992; Deetz, 1992; Habermas, 1984;).

By the same measure, this articulated line of force may be used as an interpretive tool for actual circumstances; as applied theory to trace the uses, excesses, and limits of

partisan-political speech. In this respect, the general election campaign of 2005-06 is particularly apt as the core primary source for this study because, on a fundamental level, it turned on heightened issues of legitimacy, public trust, confidence, and credibility. While Justice John Gomery's inquiry into what became known as "the sponsorship scandal" does not figure prominently in this study, it was certainly the backdrop, the frame, the declared and hidden motivation, for virtually every decision made by political communicators during the campaign. The legitimation crisis that arose from a much-publicized inquiry into a fiduciary betrayal served to bring credibility into stark relief, to make questions about credibility a part of the circulation of daily public discourse, aided and abetted by journalists. As political war rooms gear up for future elections it is certain that the tactics and strategies employed by partisan communicators will be subject to increasingly sophisticated public discussions around credibility concerns. This dissertation proposes that such public discussions are already underway in the inter-election period and that partisan-political communicators would do well to consider the limits of their craft in light of the discourses around credibility that are now part of the daily circulation of public communication.

The following chapter examines Bourdieu's work on capitals and fields with an eye to refining our understanding of the often-unexpressed stakes in play within the political war room (and the implications for political life). It seeks to extend and enrich our understanding of the competitive communication practices that exist between the highly competitive fields of politics and journalism. Bourdieu's conceptualization of a field of power is adapted to incorporate a theorization of publics as deliberative bodies, fully capable of engaging in complex discourses and drawing the distinction between

symbolic representation made in good faith and the reproduction of manipulated symbols. Finally, systems of capital exchange operating within fields are developed as a means to explain the nature of credibility and to posit this species of symbolic capital as the necessary condition behind Bourdieu's concept of the "legitimate vision of the social world," a concept with direct implications for the exercise of democratic choice at election time.

Chapter Two

Bourdieu's Fields and Capitals: The Implications for Political Life

The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and, with it, accumulation and all its effects. (Bourdieu, 1983: 241)

The quote above, the opening line from Pierre Bourdieu's 1983 essay "The Forms of Capital," marks a fundamental disagreement with the debates circulating at the time around issues of structure and agency. Bourdieu's dismissal of the "mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles" is used here to herald a different regard for the social world, one that simultaneously critiques conditions of dominance while making room for the "dialectic of strategies" which, says Bourdieu, "allows for individual intervention against the model" (Bourdieu, 1990c: 3-9) In this case the "model" may be taken as the entire functionalist paradigm with its overriding concern for dominant functional imperatives over human initiative. Bourdieu's concern is to "make explicit the power relations inscribed in social reality" by introducing the relations of power that operate as a result of "differences in position in the social hierarchy" (Lechte, 1995; Poupeau, 2000). But he is also interested in human social practice as a "relationship of meaning" between individuals based on the recognition of a socially constructed connection between dominance and legitimacy.

From the outset, then, a relationship exists in Bourdieu's work between the communication of meaning and relations of power. Whereas Durkheim speaks in an almost mystical sense of "the energy immanent within the consciousness," an energy that is somehow communicated to the authority with the power to govern, Bourdieu theorizes

the nature of that energy and the means of its communication in distinct areas of social practice. Where Müller speaks of economic, political, and socio-cultural performance as conditions for legitimation, Bourdieu introduces a different grammar to expose legitimation as a key element of hegemony, achieved when a dominant group controls the communicative terms of rational justification and, therefore, controls the conditions of its own legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1977; Müller, 1988; Poupeau, 2000). Where Heine Andersen speaks of power in the polity, influence in the community, and value commitment in the culture as media of exchange, Bourdieu theorizes complex fields of human interaction where symbolic forms of capital are accumulated and exchanged in the competition for distinction within the social formation, a competition that requires strategic acumen, an understanding of the rules of the social game, and a sense of the cultural and social resources that are available. These theoretical configurations (*habitus*, capitals, and fields in Bourdieu's parlance) are especially useful for dissecting and examining the forces at play in complex spheres of social action and reaction such as journalism and politics. These configurations are also useful in situating these spheres in the much broader, much less contained realm of public space.

In order to contextualize Bourdieu's vision of these specific and interrelated areas of theoretical concern it is worth taking a side trip into the Anglo-American canon, specifically with respect to Anthony Giddens and the concept of structuration. Whereas the neofunctionalists share many of Giddens's concerns through an interest in the broad strokes of "conflict and interactionist approaches" (Alexander, 1985), Giddens's examination of individual action and its relationship to institutional power opens the door to a richer understanding of Bourdieu's theoretical creativity. "Action," according to

Giddens, “depends upon the capability of the individual to ‘make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to ‘make a difference,’ that is, to exercise some sort of power” (Giddens, 1984: 14). For Giddens, systems (reproduced practices) and institutions (reproduced rules and resources) cannot exist without human action. Similarly, institutional change (usually over time) is dependent on human action. This interrelationship is the central feature of structuration.

But while human beings do “exercise some sort of power,” it is the routines of daily life that characterize social reality. For Giddens, “ontological security” is founded on the autonomy of bodily control within predictable routines and encounters (Cohen, 1989). This “routinization,” which Giddens describes as a “fundamental concept of structuration theory,” is itself underpinned by the notion of “practical consciousness: all things that actors know about how to ‘go on’ in the contexts of social life” or the “taken for granted, common sense, naturalized way of thinking about things” (Giddens: xxiii; Cohen, 1989). In such a world, the routines of daily life, the reproduced practices of social systems, are both enabled and constrained by reproduced rules and resources even as “tacitly enacted practices” gradually become the very “institutions or routines” in which the rules and resources reside (Cohen, 1989; Layder, 1998). For Giddens, this is a framework for theorizing how “the structural properties of social systems exist only in so far as forms of social conduct are reproduced chronically across time and space” (Giddens: 17).

Yet to accept Giddens' view of social reality is to also accept an inexorable drift away from the very freedom to act that is central to his definition of agency. It is difficult to reconcile routinized individuals acting within systems as agents capable of motivating organic changes to the application of rules and allocation of resources. Indeed, structuration theory acknowledges a "constitution of power" in social systems in which practices and activities are related through their consequences (Cohen, 1989). Such "relational power" is at work in what Giddens calls "administered systems," where particular actors know from experience that certain actions will elicit specific responses and use that knowledge to their own ends. As Cohen has noted, relational power operates in the presence of "dialectical control," a notion borrowed from the "double contingency of interaction" theorized by Parsons to explain the relational responses among parties that lead to either favourable responses or sanctions (Parsons, 1954; 1978). In a social reality where elite actors, de Certeau's famously named "subjects with will and power" (de Certeau, 1984), possess exceptional control over the means of dispersing rewards and sanctions within administered systems (after all, they are the administrators), it is comparatively easy to envision how the power to act, the central characteristic of agency, may be diminished to the point of in consequence.

In such an administered system the dribs and drabs of power that accrue to subaltern actors, the ability to make a *meaningful* difference, is vastly overshadowed by the ability of privileged individuals to control and operate the levers of institutional power. The institutional object may be unable to function without agents, but the quality of agency, the power to act, is enabled and/or limited by the position occupied by individuals within systems of administration. If average people have very little real power

in the places where they live and work, indeed if they are drawn toward routinization for their ontological security, then Giddens's notion of agency is a rather watered-down abstraction. It is pressured to revert to the functionalist paradigm, with its roots in Taylor's scientific management and its emphasis on managerial control for the purpose of maximized efficiency, rather than addressing in any significant sense the "adaptive and evolutionary aspects of social organization" that is supposed to form the basis for structuration theory (Manning, 1992).

In Bourdieu's sense of social reality actors learn and internalize the "rules of the game" in an atmosphere of pitched competition. Social structures are not done away with so much as reconsidered in order to accommodate a range of relational forces that individuals use, consciously and unconsciously, to obtain status. Thus the rules and resources that characterize the institution give way to Bourdieu's field: "the site of actions and reactions performed by social agents endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experience of these social fields" (Bourdieu, 2005: 30). Actors within fields inhabit a terrain characterized by relational thought and action "vis-à-vis others in an ongoing process that is enacted for the most part unconsciously" and bounded by its own rules and customs (the doxic "universe of presuppositions" that organize actions) (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this conceptual arrangement, distinction among actors within fields and among fields, and the relations of power that arise from the competition for recognition, lie behind the "ongoing struggle that is society" (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 3).

For Bourdieu, the competition for recognition is “a fundamental dimension of social life.” This provides him with a means to distinguish his theoretical approach from contemporaries such as Giddens (whose notion of routinization, for example, is of the same conceptual genus as Bourdieu’s habitus and has much in common with the “universe of presuppositions” cited above) and also to introduce a related concept: the permutations of capital. The competition for recognition permits Bourdieu to talk about the stakes in play in terms of the *symbolic* resources available to those in competition within fields. In “The Forms of Capital,” Bourdieu sets up categories of capital that may work in tandem with the economic form, but operate in a different kind of economy, a *social* economy. Actors use social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital in systems of accumulation and exchange. Thus, certain actors may mobilize social capital, “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition,” to give them an edge in systems of established power (Bourdieu, 1983: 188). Other actors may offset a deficit in social capital through the accumulation and exchange of cultural capital, tied to the investment of time required to obtain educational qualifications, cultural knowledge, official certification, and other kinds of knowledge-qualification. The result is a vision of the social world that accounts for the structures of power, but establishes a means to think about change, even radical change, in terms of an individual’s willingness to mobilize the symbolic resources at hand. Within this system of exchange it is the idea of symbolic capital (and its relationship to other forms of capital) that leads us to a conceptual ground that, in turn, permits us to theorize the motivation behind the struggle for recognition that characterizes complex social

relationships, relationships such as the one between political actors, journalists, and publics.

The concept of symbolic capital possesses a certain heft, largely because of a provenance that is directly related to its origins in observed human practice; specifically, the anthropological field studies conducted by Bourdieu among the Kabyle people of Algeria. It was here that he witnessed complex systems of capital exchange in a society where money and other forms of exchange property, economic capital, were generally subordinated to symbolic expression, the predominant means of validating power relations within the group. *The Logic of Practice* devotes a great deal of space to the discussion of the intricacies of symbolic capital exchange among the Kabyle—the conversion of economic capital, usually in the form of gifts, into symbolic capital in the form of prestige—in order to propose a sociological point that Bourdieu suggests can be extended to social practice in general:

When one knows that symbolic capital is credit, but in the broadest sense, a kind of advance, a credence, that only the group's belief can grant those who give it the best symbolic and material guarantees, it can be seen that the exhibition of symbolic capital (which is always very expensive in material terms) is one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) make capital go to capital. (Bourdieu, 1990b: 120).

The idea that capital can be converted from one form to another, sometimes with relative ease but more often at a considerable 'rate of exchange,' is central to Bourdieu's vision of fields as actor-motivated relations of power. In a sense, fields turn the economic world on its head because they are both constructed by and serve to facilitate a specific space of mostly invisible relations, the ongoing rules of a particular "game" (such as politics and/or journalism) where all forms of capital, including economic capital, are used in a

process of conversion whose aim is “the accumulation of a particular form of capital, honour in the sense of reputation and prestige” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 135).

The above set of relationships also contains an embedded concept that is key to *all* processes of social exchange: the idea of credence. To unpack the meaning of credence is to introduce a cascade of interrelated meanings—creed, credential, credit, credibility—all of which are tied to the connotative sense of a belief that something is true or to be trusted. In his later works, Bourdieu will reflect upon notions of reputation and prestige and refine the predominant objective of all agents operating in all fields as the “struggle for the production and imposition of a legitimate vision of the social world” (Bourdieu: 137). It can be argued that credibility is the symbolic capital that legitimates this “legitimate vision of the social world.” And while Bourdieu never fully articulates the role of credibility as a specific force within his system of symbolic exchange, this discreet form of symbolic capital may be brought forward as the *central motivator* in the competition to define the social world. For this reason, an enhanced understanding of the nature of credibility is essential if we are to comprehend the work of those who deal in the truth claims that define democratic discourses; notably, political communicators, journalists, and publics.

If “symbolic capital is credit” then it is a kind of credit, according to Bourdieu, that is based solely on the confidence of a group of actors who have an arranged collective stake in setting and maintaining the specific rules that govern a field. The group underwrites matters of cultural, symbolic, and economic repute when individuals in competition for distinction make specific claims. In such a relationship, credibility comes into play in three senses: first, by extending symbolic credit to an individual with the

understanding that she or he will fulfill his or her end of the bargain, thus paying a symbolic dividend through association with success to those who advanced the credit; second, in inducing a symbolic debt to be repaid (in the manner of a gift) after a suitable interval, an obligation of gratitude and support of greater consequence than the original debt that may be used strategically by the “creditor” in the pursuit of prestige (Bourdieu, 1977: 4-6); and third, in sustaining the distinction of those with prestige and reputation and by doing so maintaining the legitimacy of the field in which all participating actors have a stake. Symbolic credit may also be withheld or withdrawn if matters on offer are seen to be “inadequate” according to the immanent laws of the field. This form of symbolic violence (akin to ostracization) is manifestly concerned with a refusal to confer credibility. In all of these examples credibility, as a distinct category of symbolic capital, acts as a central motivating force, possessing a quality that is directly related to the nature of a particular field.

Those who practice within fields of strong autonomy (Bourdieu uses academic disciplines as examples) acquire prestige in a formal (yet still complex and competitive) system of capital acquisition. In Bourdieu’s view, strong autonomy is a function of a field’s control over its own social, cultural, and symbolic capital and its independent ability to resist incursions from the economic sphere. Such “homologous” fields administer their own “immanent laws” of capital exchange and conversion (Benson and Neveu, 2005). Thus, in a chain of practice that might extend over a lifetime, individuals acquire credentials such as degrees (accumulated cultural capital). They seek ways to convert cultural capital into a measure of symbolic capital (status) in order to gain entry to successive levels of prestige within the field. Those who succeed embark on a program

of ever-greater status acquisition until, through the continued accumulation of symbolic capital, they may be elevated by the group to representative status, a level of empowerment dependent on the ability of the subject to continually, through force of reputation and prestige, “reproduce and reinforce the power relations which constitute the social structure of the social space” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 128). Of course, an individual may be denied advancement in the field at any step along the way if his or her capital resources are deemed by the group to be inadequate or illegitimate according to the immanent rules of the field.

Each conversion of capital in the chain is underwritten by symbolic credit advanced by the group. Credentials are deemed to be legitimate according to the standards of the field as endorsed by those who practice in it. Credence is extended to practices intended to obtain status based on a legitimate expectation of the fulfillment of a promise, a fiduciary claim. Representative status with its connection to the naming of the “legitimate vision of the social world” is obtained through the recognition by those of considerable status of the extraordinary accumulation of creditable symbolic capital (and power) by a peer. In fields of strong autonomy, therefore, credibility is behind virtually all processes of capital acquisition and conversion.

As Bourdieu has pointed out, this is essentially a description of social change based on the elevation of one social group over another through extended competition within a field. It amounts to an exchange of dominance. However fields, as more-or-less bounded areas of specific practice, do provide for a significant measure of individual action; an ability to legitimately persuade that is tied directly to the belief that a certain vision of the social world is to be trusted relationally. It is a vision based on the

possibility of an exchange of non-economic capital in a formal assessment of reality that is itself contingent on the communication of a credible critique of the *status quo*.

Credibility, therefore, is a central relational force in fields, one that is deeply implicated in a legitimate exercise of action in support of change.

Yet it is the circulation of credibility in fields of *weak* autonomy that is most salient to the discussion of politics, journalism, and publics and their part in the processes of democracy. For Bourdieu and his adaptors, notably Patrick Champagne, both politics and journalism are fields of weak autonomy; that is, the actors practicing in each field according to its immanent laws are subject to forces, notably economic influence, that lie outside of the field. In his polemic, *On Television* (1998a), Bourdieu attacks what he describes as a decade-long trend toward commercial, popular, mass-market journalism in France arising out of the deregulation of broadcasting (particularly pertaining to news programming) and the commercialization of public air space where a state monopoly had previously existed. This is characterized largely as a conspiracy between the market and the state. Similarly, Champagne portrays journalism as a field of unstable autonomy that must always be “re-won because it is always threatened” by the “social, especially political and economic conditions in which it is organized” (Champagne, 2005: 50). In short, the political economy of the media sets up conditions that journalists must constantly struggle to overcome in order to fulfill the obligations of cultural capital that accrue to their field. Among these is a concern for the free flow and exchange of information that foregrounds the “equal opportunities to participate in the debates from which political decisions rightly flow.”

Champagne theorizes a media landscape where journalism is practiced along a continuum bounded by economic capital on one side and cultural capital on the other. The changing face of journalism in France (echoed in similar quarters in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere) is attributed to a shift by deregulated (or re-regulated) media organizations toward the economic pole. For Bourdieu, this shift is reflected in an obsessive pursuit of advertising revenues and profits that “favours those cultural producers most susceptible to the seduction of economic and political powers at the expense of those intent on defending the principles and values of their professions” (Bourdieu, 1998a: 70). The unrelenting pursuit of economic gain means that cultural producers are themselves made into commodities, their value determined by the popularity they generate as measured by ratings. Bourdieu regards this as an abandonment and betrayal of the very life of the culture through the corruption of those in a special position to shape and form the vision of the social world. For this reason, as Champagne puts it without apparent irony, “the press is too serious a matter to be left to journalists” (Champagne: 49).

Economic capital is perceived to possess such influence over this critical aspect of social and political life that Bourdieu pronounces journalists (especially television journalists) to be “caught up in the structural processes which exert constraints on them such that their choices are totally prestrained” (Bourdieu, 2005: 45). Gone are the days of the Office de radio diffusion-télévision français (or its counterparts, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States) when state intervention into the affairs of licensed broadcasters set standards for content in news and information

programming on the nation's publicly-held airwaves. Gone, too, are the days when journalism "pur et dur" was the hallmark of "serious" publications such as *Le Monde* with its commitment to fact-based reporting underscored by the analytical skills, educational qualifications, fluency of language, and general expertise; in short, the attributes of cultural capital held and expressed by its contributors. In each case, Bourdieu and his adaptors lament the loss of a role for the state, acting on behalf of society-at-large, to subsidize publications such as *Le Monde* and provide support through licensing controls and direct funding for national public broadcasters. In this respect they complement the position of theorists such as Nicholas Garnham who proposed that an arm's-length national public broadcaster is vital to achieving real (credible) consensus in a democracy because it is the only institutional mechanism able to guarantee unconstrained access for all citizens to the debates that inform public opinion (Garnham, 1990).

This theorization of the political economy of weak autonomy deserves reconsideration. For Bourdieu and Champaign to make their case it must be assumed that the influence of economic capital is great enough to compromise the autonomy of vast swaths of field of journalism (and politics). But Bourdieu's own theorization of capitals provides for, indeed requires, exceptions to the *status quo*. In the field of journalism, as in the field of politics, specialized individuals and groups continue to operate in a system of capital exchange where the influence of the marketplace is largely offset by the *practice* of symbolic capital; that is, the dissemination of ideas, critiques, and commentary that is grounded in an accumulated body of cultural and symbolic capital that resists market pressures to conform. To use the journalistic field as an example, it can be seen that

certain practitioners have accumulated representative status both within the field and within their area of specialization. In such cases what matters is not so much the position of a newspaper or broadcaster in relation to its commitment to cultural or economic capital as the relationship of journalists with representative status to the field in general. In other words, journalists with strong autonomy do exist, indeed flourish, within a field that to a greater or lesser extent is weakly autonomous. How is this possible?

According to Bourdieu, the influence of the journalistic field and the political field is directly related to the position that each occupies within in the *field of power* (Benson and Neveu, 2005; Champagne, 2005). If there is competition among agents within fields for the “claim to the legitimate vision of the social world” then there is also competition among fields for ascendance within the field of power. For Bourdieu, the fields of journalism and politics occupy elevated positions in the field of power that derive from the assumed power to consecrate certain views of the social world and reify them on behalf of society in general (the public). In each case, in ways that are different yet related, politics and journalism exercise inordinate influence over the acceptance or rejection of claims to legitimacy of every other field except the field of power.

An act of public communication must take place in order for these consecrated views to be widely known. This is in keeping with the conceptualization of journalism and partisan politics as discreet and competitive divisions of communicative labour that emerge from the conditions of organic solidarity (Chapter One). But the very act of communication in conditions of organic solidarity is predicated on an exchange of information *among* increasingly specialized individuals. It is based on social exchange rather than the transmission of authority. This opens the door to a more flexible

consideration of the conditions of weak autonomy. If, as Bourdieu proposes, fields are weakly autonomous because they admit influence from the economic sphere, is it not also possible that weakly autonomous fields such as journalism and politics are equally open to non-economic influences, cultural influences, that originate in the field of power and guide the acts of consecration? If, as Bourdieu suggests, the field of power is theorized as the space of “symbolic struggle for the production of common sense” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 135) it is entirely possible, indeed necessary, to include the common sense that arises from a wider social formation among the influences that inform these influential fields. Consecrated views must, after all, resonate somewhere.

Furthermore, the concept of a field of power is needed to explain and somehow contain fields as well as the vast expanse of relevant social activity that is not confined to them. While it may be true that actors are greatly influenced, even habituated or routinized by the conditions of competition in a particular field, it does not follow that their entire life-world is a function of the field. Factors such as gender, ethnicity, language (elements that Bourdieu would agree contribute to habitus) have significant influence on the way that individuals support or reject visions of the social world, even visions that may be endorsed by highly credible individuals of representative status. Actors have home lives: they go to church, they belong to clubs; that is, they participate in what Raymond Williams identifies as primary areas of social communication (Williams, 1984). Opinions, ideas, the accumulation of mundane and important thoughts and actions that form the texture of everyday life; all of the concerns that are held and reproduced in this manner lie, in large part, beyond the direct influence of the relational forces at work in fields. They are circulated through various forms of discourse in public

space or discussed in the private space of the home. Some actors may risk their status within the field, motivated by factors such as a sense of justice or a particular moral or ideological stance to take a position that appears contrary to their own interests (whistleblowers are an example). They may sacrifice cultural, symbolic, and even economic capital within their field to gain public credibility, in effect exercising “some sort of power” to affect change for the greater good. Often their actions are confirmed and endorsed and credibility is publicly conferred by like-minded people who are drawn to the symbolic content in this exercise of personal power. This reflects a power formation of much greater complexity and consequence than the one confined to fields, one that mirrors the pursuit of distinction within fields but is played out in a wider domain, a public domain where the broadest *societal* sense of credence contributes to a social formation that self-constructs around the resonance of credibility produced by particular discourses.

The central issue here is that the field of power, theorized by Bourdieu as a place of struggle among fields, must be refined to include individual agency of a kind that recognizes average people—many who are deeply committed to the *illusio* of the field in which they compete in one manifestation of their life world—as capable of commitment to a range of public discourses that may run contrary to the received wisdom of their field. The conceptual underpinnings of the field of power must be made to admit notions of public opinion, consensus formation, and deliberative democracy. This is uncomfortable territory for Bourdieu. He is more at ease with formal systems of capital exchange within fields of struggle, or the sociology of closed cultural practices such as that of the Kabyle. Yet if we retain Bourdieu’s basic map of the field of power and import

the idea of multiple publics, forming and dispersing around certain discourses according to the perceived credibility of the matters at hand, it becomes possible to put forward a concept of a field of power as a space where the “imposition of the vision of the social world” is made legitimate not just by competition among fields, but also (and predominantly) by the willingness of publics to deem the vision to be credible. In this theoretical configuration, the field of power is, first and foremost, a field of publics.¹

If the fields of journalism and politics, then, are seen to occupy elevated positions in the field of power/publics it is because actors within these weakly-autonomous fields have a special relationship with the structures of communication that enable them to place certain visions of the social world forward for consideration. Bourdieu is quite correct in pointing out that a great deal of influence has accrued to media organizations and journalistic agents who are motivated primarily by economic capital. But it would be wrong to conclude that the accumulation of economic capital, even with all of the incentives for organizational compliance that it is able to exercise, acts as a commensurate measure of credibility within the field of power/publics. On the contrary, where actors in the journalistic and political fields are concerned, the ability to circulate messages, to lend serious credence to visions of the social world based on economic means, is greatly tempered by the cultural considerations that constantly inform the flow of debates in circulation within the wholly autonomous field of power/publics.

We are faced then with a system of shifting and competing tensions and forces that shape practice in the fields of journalism and politics. On one hand are all of the conversions of capital, material and symbolic, that occur *inside* these fields that permit

¹ The place of diverse publics acting within the field of power and the special role of fields vis-à-vis the public sphere is the subject of the following chapter.

actors to accumulate reputation and prestige (credibility), impose a legitimate vision of the social world within the field and, according to Bourdieu, reproduce and reinforce the relations of power that make up the structure of the social space (Bourdieu, 1998b). On the other hand, the validating *external* function of publics reserves and constrains the conferral of power by ensuring that the extension of credence from the group at large is well invested in any vision of the social world that is put into public circulation. If journalism and politics are viewed as a fields where autonomy must always be re-won because of the social, political, and economic conditions in which they are organized (Champagne, 2005), this is not least because the credence that is extended or withheld by publics confirms or destabilizes the processes of autonomous practice at every instance. This is as it should be: actors within the fields of journalism and politics rightly compete for credibility in the field of power/publics because that is where they are held to account. The organizations that employ journalists or underwrite politicians may have significant influence at an economic level, but as individuals accumulate credibility within the field the less these organizations are able to impose structural compliance and the more these actors are judged independently in the field of power/publics.

Veteran political reporters, notably members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, spend decades observing and reporting on the maneuverings of diverse players in the political field. Top political reporters may have professional lives that outstrip by decades those of their political counterparts². To achieve this kind of tenure they must become intimately familiar with the public record and equally familiar with the internal and external forces that motivate individuals and political organizations to act. They cultivate

² At the time of this writing, for example, Craig Oliver, the senior bureau chief for CTV News on Parliament Hill, has been employed as a journalist for 49 years, 40 of those as a political reporter.

long-term sources in party offices. Armed with knowledge of the public record *and* a version of the internal collective history of a political organization, these journalists are formidable forces. They have accumulated enormous social, cultural, and in some cases considerable economic capital. On a day-to-day practical level they are also well aware of the critical importance of symbolic capital, of credibility.

Chantal Hébert has been a political journalist for more than three decades. From her start as a reporter at the Ontario Legislature in the late 1970s she now occupies a position as a lead political columnist, commenting on federal politics for the *Toronto Star*. Hébert is also a regular contributor to political discussion panels on the CBC's *The National* and the French-language RDI network.³ I asked Chantal Hébert (in an exchange of e-mail messages) how she decides whether a particular politician, political party, or political position is credible:

A track record in government and the relationship between actions and promises undoubtedly helps to shore up or undermine credibility. A capacity to continue to make a case in the face of adversity and to do so on the basis of solid arguments. A demonstrated capacity to own an issue on the basis of facts (Hébert, 2008).⁴

Each of these deciding factors is directly related to an exchange of some form of non-economic capital. The “relationship between action and promises” directly reflects the relationship between the journalist’s belief in the “credence” of a position, a promise, (acting on behalf of some understanding of the public good) and the material fulfillment of that promise. This is the basis for a “track record in government,” the accumulation of a body of fulfilled expectations. To use solid arguments to continue to “make a case in

³ See: <http://www.thestar.com/comment/columnists/94656>

⁴ Hébert, Chantal. (2008, January 21). In e-mail correspondence with the author. Montreal/Ottawa.

the face of adversity” speaks to matters of commitment, an investment in the symbolic value of a position arrived at through critical thought, itself a basis for “solid arguments” and requiring the investment of cultural capital as a means to form those arguments. Commitment to a position may also be regarded as a reasoned expectation that the investment of cultural capital will convert to symbolic capital, prestige, if the position or argument prevails. Finally, the demonstration of a capacity to “own an issue” based on “facts” reflects both the symbolic (credibility) value of the issue (since it is worth “owning” in the first place) and the need to continually reinforce its credibility value through substantive reinvestment of cultural capital (facts). It is worth noting that this exchange makes no reference, either directly or obliquely, to money or any other form of economic influence.

A reliance on facts and a solid track record were also cited as factors when Hébert was asked what contributes to her own credibility as a journalist. But two other factors were included, each addressing (albeit indirectly) matters pertaining to her relationship with some sense of public awareness or responsibility:

[The] perception that I am independent and non-partisan. Avoidance as much as possible of the “preacher syndrome” or to be clear, the temptation to tell others how they should think rather than what they might consider on their way to formulating their own opinion (Hébert, 2008).

The *perception* of independence and non-partisanship is directly concerned with reputation. This perception certainly carries weight among Hébert’s peers: the immanent laws of the journalistic field call for credibility to be withdrawn should a practitioner be deemed to speak for partisan reasons. This is largely an exercise in reinforcing the value of independence and non-partisanship as conditions for validation within the field of power/publics. Hébert’s reading and viewing publics expect her to weigh the facts and

arguments in circulation in the political field, to sift and consider them through the filter of her own investment in cultural capital, and to present them in a manner that is the best reflection of a rational-critical assessment in the public good. In return, the *publics* who turn to Hébert's columns for information on the political life of their community confer, restore, and maintain her symbolic capital, her credibility, on the basis of an assessment of the truth-value that is extracted from her work. It is not the lure of the marketplace that rewards a journalist such as Chantal Hébert, but the prestige that accrues from the relationship she has developed with her publics.⁵ So valuable is this relationship that the temptation to proselytize, "the preacher syndrome," is excluded from the terms of communication in order to maintain the perception of a commitment to fact-based reason.

Candidates for political office are engaged in their own accumulation and conversion of the various forms of capital. Significantly, at certain stages the process of capital accumulation is parallel to the one undertaken by journalists. With rare exception, political actors must build a portfolio of community service and demonstrate an aptitude for building consensus (accumulate social and cultural capital), be elected to a local or regional political position (exchange cultural capital for symbolic capital), raise money to finance their campaigns (obtain economic capital), and so forth. They must develop written and spoken communication skills to a level that permits them to compete with political opponents *and* convince an often-skeptical electorate (usually via journalists) that they are best suited for the position they hope to attain. Over time, the accumulation and exchange of capitals may permit political actors—those who manage to get elected—to acquire enough reputation and prestige, enough credibility, to assume a certain (formal

⁵ Of course, Hébert is well rewarded for her work, but this is a capital exchange where economic reward flows to the journalist because she has credibility, and she has credibility because her publics are drawn to the independent credence of her political assessments.

and literal) representative status. This is, of course, apparent in the institutional forms of government with their infused regard for rank: prime minister, cabinet minister, leader of the opposition, committee chair, member of parliament, etc. This institutional conferral of representative status, complete with control over certain significant rules and resources (on behalf of “the public”) significantly raises the stakes in the relationship between the journalistic and political fields and their agents.

To speak with practicing journalists such as Tom Parry of CBC Radio is to be made aware of the extent to which *social* capital foregrounds the relationship between politicians and journalists. Parry has been a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery for almost a decade. He has reported from Parliament Hill on a daily basis and has covered three federal election campaigns. For daily political reporters like Parry there is a direct connection between social capital and credibility, in this case arising from the relationships that form over time between a politician and a reporter:

Credibility comes in part from personal relationships. Over time working on Parliament Hill, I’ve come to trust certain MPs on certain issues. I’ll go to them for a comment because I think what they will say will be intelligent and relevant (Parry, 2008)⁶

The cultural capital of the reporter, his experience as a working journalist, together with the social capital engendered through a long association of professional and personal trust with certain political actors, creates conditions where an act of communication, the dissemination of “relevant and intelligent” information to the public, results in the accumulation of prestige for both parties. Once again, there is no exchange of economic capital in this relationship. It is based entirely on the exchange of social and cultural capital, and the accumulation of symbolic capital for political and journalistic actors.

⁶ Parry, Tom. (2008, February 5), In e-mail correspondence with the author. Montreal/Ottawa.

This, according to Parry, characterizes the normal course of journalistic practice for most of the political cycle. However, once an election is called the relationship changes.

An election campaign in a democratic nation state such as Canada shifts the rules of the game by leveling the field of politics and vaulting journalists into positions of prominence. Political actors are relieved of their institutionally conferred power and forced to return to the field of power/publics in order to have their record, their contribution to the legitimate vision of the social world, confirmed or reaffirmed. They must spend their accumulated social, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital in order to remain literally “in power.” In a very real sense, credibility (the form of symbolic capital at the crux of all capital exchanges) is extended and expended in the exchange of favourable public opinion for votes and a majority of votes for institutional power. The central objective of political actors, then, is the accumulation of as much credibility as possible and its conversion in the field of power/publics into the currency of power.

Political actors engaged in an election campaign have an array of communication vehicles at their disposal. They may attempt to “speak directly” to the public through advertising campaigns; they may hold town-hall meetings and political rallies; candidates might hand out flyers as they make their way door-to-door through their constituencies; mass electronic “mail outs” via the Internet have become the norm as have Internet sites that outline virtually every aspect of a party’s campaign position. However, the most coveted channel for campaign communication remains so-called earned media (Kinsella, 2003). It is well recognized that a word of support from a prominent political journalist such as Chantal Hébert, Tom Parry, CTV’s Craig Oliver, the CBC’s Don Newman, André Pratt of *La Presse*, or Jane Taber of the *Globe and Mail* (to name a few) is

perceived to carry much more weight than many full-blown advertising campaigns. But access to these people and their colleagues (those with representative status in the field of journalism) is limited and, for the reasons discussed above, often symbolically dangerous. A nod of agreement may be extraordinarily valuable because of the credibility that transfers and accrues to the political position, but a shake of the head may mean that an entire line of political strategy must be severely modified or abandoned altogether. In large part, political war rooms have been functionally inserted between politicians and journalists in an attempt to maximize positive earned media and avoid communication disasters. But on a significant level war rooms are also there to leverage social, cultural, and symbolic capital away from political opponents; that is, to negatively influence their ability to acquire various forms of capital and exchange it for the symbolic form, the form that permits a credible case for a partisan position to be made in the field of power/publics.

For this reason political-communication operatives regard journalists in purely partisan terms. Social capital is severely restricted as political operatives, their eye on message control, set aside the normal relationships of accumulated trust between journalists and politicians-turned-candidates. The political strategist's function is not to report the news of the day or to be overly concerned with relevant and intelligent commentary on matters of public concern, but to lend credibility to certain partisan positions and strip it from others. To achieve this, war rooms import strategies and tactics from election campaigns in other countries, they watch rival domestic campaigns for opportunities to appropriate creative techniques and, significantly, they borrow from the world of corporate communication. This commitment to a singular purpose is reflected in

the way that political war rooms promote themselves to reporters as information-*service* organizations. These organizations, according to CBC reporter Tom Parry have cleverly inserted themselves into the traditional heart of the field of journalism; the newsroom's editorial nerve centre:

On a practical level, the war room has changed the way journalists work on the campaign by eliminating the middleman; the desk. It used to be that if you wanted to know what the other campaigns were saying about an issue, you'd have to phone Toronto and speak to an editor who'd spoken to the reporters traveling with the other leaders. Now the talking lines are sent directly to your Blackberry (Parry, 2008).

Parry is quick to note that this kind of information is useful only as a stock response to claims made by competing campaigns, permitting "reporters to offer slightly more balanced stories on very tight deadline." The immanent rules of the field of journalism still apply to war-room truth claims that are not provided as either context or response in the greater discussion of campaign issues already in circulation; in other words, truth claims that are circulated by strategic communicators as a matter of fact when they are, in fact, partisan positions that require substantiation are still subject to the most basic journalistic test of news-worthiness: "Check if it's true. Judge whether it's relevant to your story. Then decide whether to use it" (Parry, 2008).

These two varieties of communicative practice actually serve as a general bracket to delineate the "working space" of the political war room. One side of the bracket handles responses to journalists that contextualize a party's position vis-à-vis a generalized political discourse around an issue. The other floats truth claims as fact. And because war-room operatives know that such information will be checked, judged, and decided upon by journalists it is often accompanied by "inside" information provided to selected journalists (as a "scoop") that includes bits of research from the public record not

immediately available to the journalistic competition. This is where the real game of strategic-political communication starts: with the attempt to slip partisan positions into the public debate by using journalists as surrogates. To scratch the surface of such practices is to expose the true stakes in play; the intent to manipulate public opinion in a party's favour by presenting a truth claim that garners credibility by being filtered through the journalistic process. In short, a central objective, a significant part of the grand strategy of political actors, is to affect the transfer of journalistic credibility to partisan truth claims. By tracking the strategic objectives and the tactical measures employed by war rooms, all aimed at making this transfer of credibility happen, by sifting through the symbolic objectives of the war-room apparatus with respect to the manipulation of various exchanges of non-economic capital, it is possible to bring to light practices that have remained largely hidden from public view during election-time, a time when, arguably, the utmost transparency of motive and action is demanded by the inherent rules, the constitutional essentials, of democratic practice.

If we are to fully understand how political war rooms use the various forms of capital exchange to influence their standing in the field of power/publics it becomes necessary to build a theoretical bridge from Bourdieu's conceptual terrain into that of Jürgen Habermas. This is an uneasy prospect, largely because of Bourdieu's dismissal of Habermas's notion of communicative action, a concept that Bourdieu found wanting in its attempt to bracket out embedded and underlying strategic objectives, the "feel for the game" grounded in conditions of habitus that "account for the practical elaboration of strategies without having recourse to some specific strategic calculation (Bourdieu, 1990b; Poupeau, 2000). Yet Habermas's work on the public sphere and the critiques that

arise from it must be taken into account if any reasonable discussion of communication in the public sphere is to take place. From this perspective, the work of Stanley Deetz offers some grounds for accommodation. First, Deetz's interest in communication among actors in corporate settings addresses a gap in Bourdieu's work; that is, his general failure to address the considerable influence of powerful corporate organizations on the "ongoing struggle that is society." Second, Deetz's concern for systematically distorted communication in corporate culture may be used to address Bourdieu's regard for strategic practice even as it draws from the Habermasian distinction between communicative action and strategic action. Third, since Deetz's work is primarily concerned with a specific form of organizational communication it is broadly applicable to an organizational structure such as a political war room. If we import the concept of registers and the idea of the institutional entrepreneur and situate them within the broad communicative processes outlined by Deetz, a basic template of war-room strategy begins to emerge (as well as a basic explanation for the limits to war-room practices).

The concept of registers (outlined in Chapter One) may be employed to illustrate how war rooms use universal thematic categories of moral concern to appeal simultaneously to broad swaths of a generalized "public" *and* clusters of individuals that are predisposed to react to a specific set of circumstances because of a community and/or cultural investment. These thematic categories usually correspond to areas and treatments of political action claimed by a party and often guide the party's platform during an election campaign. These registers (argument strategies) deploy the broadest rhetorical resonance in order to create a sphere of discussion that makes it virtually impossible for contrary views to challenge the underlying moral stance that is put forward. For example,

the New Democratic Party's list of "official" registers is actually posted on its website under the category of "issues." A visitor to the site would see such offerings as "Better Health Care, Clean Air, Economic Security, Accessible Education, Equality for Women," and so forth. This appeal to the integrity of a particular stance creates a kind of safe zone, a legitimized boundary around an issue that provides the space in which a debate can take place over the partisan details of *how* the particular issue should be handled (Rodriguez, 2008). This is the basic bounded ground for strategic political communication. On a significant level the work of political war rooms is largely concerned with discovering ways to push these boundaries back (Chapter Nine). This is where the notion of the institutional entrepreneur comes into play.

The idea of institutional entrepreneurs (later re-named strategic groups by neofunctionalist theorists such as Colomy) arises from the work of S. N. Eisenstadt. In Eisenstadt's view institutional entrepreneurs are:

Small groups of individuals who crystallize broad symbolic orientations, articulate specific and innovative goals, establish new normative and organizational frameworks for the pursuit of those goals, and mobilize resources necessary to achieve them (Eisenstadt, 1971; 1973; Colomy, 1985: 138).

This is precisely what characterizes political war rooms as organizational entities. If we add to this list the time constraints that are built into every election campaign, the motivation to act quickly, the aims and objectives of war rooms come into clearer focus. War rooms *practice* not just the "crystallization" of broad symbolic orientations, but the *implementation* of specific symbolic transfers within a window of opportunity that (ostensibly) closes quickly and firmly once the election ends. Their purpose is not just to articulate "specific and innovative goals," but to put them forward in a contest for real power often as a reactive response to a competitive gambit. War rooms invent and re-

invent themselves daily in order to better achieve these goals, the strategic objectives that have been self-identified as important. Political war rooms *are* the resources—human, economic, and symbolic—that have been mobilized to achieve strategic objectives.

If this list of interrelated practical attributes is applied to the strategic and tactical objectives in play during an election campaign, the urgent measures taken in pursuit of stakes that are deemed to be very high, a sense of the strategic motivation behind war rooms—the communicative creativity that prods them to push against the boundaries of the safe zone of political discourse—begins to emerge. To be sure, the conditions of an election campaign create an urgency to win that is related to economic wellbeing—parties with fewer elected members are able to employ fewer support staff, but strategic-political communicators, like specialized political journalists, have more at stake than a good job. They too compete for prestige, but they do so at the cutting edge of the “immanent rules” that govern conduct in the field of politics. They are true entrepreneurs in the sense that they are willing to risk more in order to achieve greater gains.

If we apply the notion of the strategic group, together with the notion of argument strategies, to the various strategic and tactical practices outlined by Deetz in his conceptualization (by way of Habermas) of systematically distorted communication and manipulation, a picture of the strategic tools available to war rooms (and the opportunism that often lies behind their use) takes on greater clarity. Indeed, the concept of systematically distorted communication, “the latent strategic *reproduction* of meaning rather than participatory production of it,” its similarity to “strategic manipulation, but without overt awareness,” is essentially what war rooms do within the registers, the argument strategies, that are laid out by the political parties that construct and support

these strategic-communication entities. However, war rooms also participate in strategic manipulation *with* overt awareness, communicative practices that opportunistically mobilize the symbolic resources available to meet strategic objectives, even if those resources are theoretically contrary to the fundamental objectives of strategic communication. This is where the bridge to Habermas has its foundation.

If Bourdieu takes exception to Habermas's theory of communicative action and its commitment to "openly formed agreement," transparent consensus, as a basis for human action, he does so at the expense of underestimating the field of power/publics. The following chapter explores in detail how publics are self-empowered by the acceptance or rejection of appeals that circulate in "public space." However, to foreshadow that discussion it is useful to consider that an *understanding of communicative consensus*, held as a worthy value commitment among publics, is a very real and very valuable (if mythic) cultural resource that is regularly appropriated and used by partisan political strategists. In the pursuit of credibility, political strategists and tacticians are not above using elements usually associated with communicative action—communication aimed at consensus—to mask intentions that are aimed solely at affecting a shift in the political commitment of voters; that is, intentions that have little or nothing to do with sincere consensus.

Behind this mask, and within the feverishly pitched competition that characterizes contemporary election campaigns, the group strategists that run political war rooms have been pushing the basic bounded ground of partisan communication in yet another direction. The election campaign of 2005-06 may yet emerge as the moment when "strategies" based on "pure tactics," the tactics of *dis-credit*, first made an appearance on

the Canadian political radar (MacDonald, 2008). A response from the field of power/publics has been set in motion, via the field of journalism, which reminds us that publics are the ultimate arbiters of partisan conduct in a democratic nation-state. In all of their manipulative strategic complexity the actual practices of political war rooms, mobilized to facilitate the exchange of symbolic capital, of credibility, may have ultimately served to set the limits of their own credibility (Chapter Ten).

By tracking the actual practices of the NDP war room during the 2005-06 general election campaign, by situating those practices within a conceptual terrain that permits us to plot the exchange of various capitals across and within the fields of politics and journalism, by examining the pursuit of symbolic credit and *dis*-credit through the manipulation of the broad expectations of goodwill associated with participative democracy, we are able to better understand how these specialized organizational entities have contributed to a shift in the way that politics is “done” in this country. However, the real story, the story behind the story as it were, is how publics, the sometimes ephemeral and often rock-solid configurations of real people who populate the field of power/publics, have responded to the ministrations of political war rooms. The nature of publics and the pursuit of symbolic capital within a refreshed conceptualization of the public sphere is, therefore, the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Three

The Public Sphere, Politics, and Journalism

Next to, and interlocked with, the hegemonic public sphere, a plebian one assumes shape (Habermas, 1992).

Any study of deliberative democracy and, by extension, any critique of the conditions of communication within and between the fields of journalism and politics must eventually acknowledge Jürgen Habermas's contribution to the theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1991a). His notions about the origins and inevitable corrosion of an ideal social and political space for rational and critical debate, and the role of the mass media in the subversion of this public sphere, continue to foster an extensive and expanding body of scholarly work. Given that both Habermas and Bourdieu are generally interested in forms of social-civil organization, and that both give questions of politics and the media prominence in this formation, it should come as no surprise that Bourdieu's work on fields is frequently cited (Crossley, 2004; Benson and Neveu, 2005) as a parallel terrain to Habermas' public sphere theory and *vice versa*, or that attempts have been made to somehow synthesize these two bodies of conceptual concern.

As Rodney Benson and Erik Neveu have asserted, "the 'public sphere' as an empirical concept would be much improved through the kind of detailed specification of structures and processes that field theory could provide" (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 9). Similarly, Craig Calhoun, in his influential overview of Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, identifies a critical gap in the Habermasian model and foresees a corrective that could conceivably have been written by Bourdieu:

What we critically lack is an analysis of the ‘internal organization’ of the public sphere, in other words, a mapping of the public sphere as a socially organized *field*, with characteristic lines of division, relationships of force, and other constitutive features [emphasis mine] (Calhoun, 1992: 38).

Yet for all of the considerable theoretical insight that might be generated from joining these two weighty worldviews, an elegant consummation remains elusive.

Part of the problem, as Benson and Neveu have themselves pointed out, is that Habermas and Bourdieu may also be regarded as a study in contrasts:

[I]f Habermas wants to restore the possibility of attaining an “ideal speech situation,” Bourdieu is interested foremost in maintaining the optimum social conditions for the production of specialized knowledge and modern forms of enlightened citizens (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 9).

In other words, Habermas’s long-term objective vis-à-vis the public sphere has been to attempt to answer those critics who have challenged the very notion of the “ideal speech situation”—the idea that reaching mutual understanding is intrinsic to speech and, therefore, consensus is a built-in alternative to predominantly strategic modes of communication. Such “communicative rationality” is seen by Habermas to address (more-or-less as a condition of being human) the “systematically distorted communication” that has emerged in late capitalism as a mechanism of mass control (Habermas, 1984; Phillips, 1996, Crossley and Roberts, 2004). Such “real communication” is hailed as the antidote to pseudo-communication, reciprocal misunderstanding and false assumptions of consensus, that form the backbone of hegemonic power structures (Crossley and Roberts, 2004). Only through a commitment to ideal speech acts, says Habermas, can we hope to restore something like an ideal public sphere and legitimize true consensus through deliberative democracy in our time.

In contrast, Bourdieu's interests veer away from any concern over an elusive ideal such as the public sphere. He chooses instead to dissect the forces at work in more-or-less distinct areas of human action, reaction, and interaction. As we have seen, his theory of fields leads Bourdieu to hive off specific areas of human conduct, *doxic* categories complete with immanent laws, and situate the messy, raucous, unpredictable world that washes around and surges against these islands of specialization in the relationally complex if somewhat vague field of power. More to the point, as Habermas posits the ideal-speech situation as a universal communicative possibility, so Bourdieu posits strategic intentions as a universal attribute of habitus and implicates them deeply in a subject's commitment to "the game" and, therefore, to his or her ability to enter into exchanges of capital. Whereas Habermas's challenge is to find a means to include legitimate if marginalized elements of communicative action, Bourdieu assumes that distinction (and by extension, exclusion) is at the core of the human social condition and, therefore, must be embraced and incorporated into any realistic understanding of human endeavour and the possibility for social change.

These two positions might never be fully reconciled, but the differential tension that lies between their respective conceptual cores is aptly suited to an examination of political war-room practices. While the devotion to strategic ends is wholly acknowledged during an election campaign, partisan communication operates in the field of power/publics where an expectation of speech for the purpose of consensus holds serious sway. It is a world where the ideal-speech situation, even as myth, has been incorporated as a value commitment into the general culture of democratic practice. Habermas's early conception of the bourgeois public sphere is largely founded on an

incorporation of the expectation of ideal speech, of rational communicative goodwill for the purpose of consensus. Yet its concern for an emergent class that sets the public sphere apart from the state and the market as a place of reasoned discourse also holds a subsumed strategic logic. The emergence of the public sphere as an historical phenomenon *also* documents a conscious shift in social and political power relations, strategic concerns that plainly resonate with Bourdieu's sense of fields and capitals. In order to place this differential tension in full context it is useful to refresh the basic conditions outlined in Habermas's theory of the public sphere and to match those conditions to some key points from Bourdieu's theoretical terrain.

For Habermas the public sphere is founded on the accumulation of economic capital by an emerging class; the bourgeoisie. The security afforded by wealth is converted in part into the leisure time that is a precondition for entry into the realm of civil discourse. The immanent laws of conduct among members of the public sphere—particularly the elevation of the rational-critical debate over matters of status—act to set the conditions for the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital, most notably in the form of “the better argument” (Habermas, 1962/1991a). And what is “the better argument” if not an expression of Bourdieu's central notion of a “legitimate vision of the social world” with its cascade of connections to the strategic accumulation and representation of credibility? While the phrase is never used in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* it is clear that the “legitimate vision of the social world” is key to the very *raison d'être* of the bourgeois public sphere: the extraction of a measure of power from the sovereign body achieved through the agency of publicity and founded on the legitimate, rationally engendered concerns of an emergent class that

presumes to speak for society at large. Yet Habermas's notion of the public sphere has been widely criticized and often attacked, while Bourdieu's notions of capitals and fields have been largely ignored within the Anglo-American tradition. At best, Bourdieu's work has been selectively applied to the fringes of the intellectual conversation about democratic practices.

In Habermas's case, this may be largely due to a line of force that has grown out of feminist theory and develops around what is now largely regarded as an inherent contradiction in his theoretical model. Carole Pateman's observations on feminist theory, especially with respect to the use of private and public space as divisions of control, may help to explain why Habermas seems to draw so much fire: "The dichotomy between the private and the public," writes Pateman, "is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about" (Pateman, 1989: 118). This helps to situate Nancy Fraser's oft-quoted critique of Habermas's public sphere as "[a] discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies" but which "is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction" (Fraser, 1992: 115). In Fraser's view, those who are permitted to participate in the ideal public sphere are fundamentally interested in preserving the *appearance* of full representation and support for a transparent debate on the full range of public concerns. The true purpose of the public sphere, masked by its outwardly projected representative intentions, is to protect the hegemonic interests of those who are engaged (as Adam Smith would have it) in the efficient employment of productive capital (Smith, 1776). This view is supported by a coterie of scholars, each exploring a variation on the

theme of exclusion (Stallybrass and White, 1986; Eley, 1987; Felski, 1989; Scott, 1990; Mansbridge, 1996; Benhabib, 1992; Dean, 1992).

From this angle the public sphere emerges as a space of intentional exclusion with the boundary set and maintained by a price of admission—the accumulation of economic means and the class status that derives from it—that prohibits real participation by women, poor people, people of colour, and so forth. In short, the public sphere purports to represent “the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interests of all” (Habermas, 1991: 83) while simultaneously blocking and discouraging real participation in the building of consensus by a majority of those whose visceral interests are at stake. In a related chain of critical reasoning that descends from Hannah Arendt, the bourgeois public sphere is critiqued as a reconfigured place of agonistic competition.¹ In this view, the rational-critical debate becomes little more than the jockeying for “recognition, precedence and acclaim that stands in for consensus” even as it employs the appearance of public solidarity to protect the interests of an elite (Benhabib, 1992: 78). Arendt’s counter to the agonistic model of public space, the associational view, is positioned as an alternative space that emerges whenever and wherever people assemble to act in concert (Arendt, 1958/1998; Benhabib, 1992). The ongoing debate about the nature of contemporary public discourse may be seen to fracture along these competing interpretations of participatory reality (agonistic versus associational) and the relations of power that emerge from the analysis of that fracture.

¹ It is an enduring irony of public sphere theory that Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere is attacked by supporters of Arendt’s associational view of communication-as-empowerment while Habermas’s later thoughts on consensus-through-communication, a central feature of deliberative democracy, is acknowledged as having its roots in Arendt’s conceptual ground.

As Seyla Benhabib has observed, the associational aspect of associational space arises from a more-or-less organic drawing together of interested individuals at “sites for power, of common action coordinated through speech and persuasion” (Benhabib: 78). Such association, with its emphasis on consensus through *persuasion*, is meant to present structures of power (such as the traditional liberal democratic notion of public reason) with an alternative view of the public good, one that is less beholden to class and gender interests, is empowered in its own right by the simple act of assembly, and is therefore potentially more democratic. The purpose of common action is to engage “the struggle for justice and freedom” manifested as a “struggle over what gets included in the public agenda” (Benhabib: 79). It is a call to a united front (or fronts) to wrest the power to decide what is important from those who control (for their own purposes) what is to be discussed and decided in the service of all. It is, in short, a call to have the people decide the people’s agenda.

Those who defend the institutional boundaries set by liberal democracy do not deny the “struggle for justice and freedom.” On the contrary, they argue that any limits placed on public discourse exist only to ensure that the reach of the state is constrained even as all individuals (citizens) are equally protected in their right to freely engage and disseminate their private concerns (Rawls, 2001; Rawls, 1993; Charney, 1998; Dahlgren, 1991). As John Rawls has written, the forum for the exercise of public reason must, by necessity, be narrowly defined. Indeed, the very definition of public reason is narrow:

In a democratic society public reason is the reason of equal citizens who, as a collective body, exercise final and coercive power over one another in enacting laws and in amending their constitution (Rawls, 1993: 214)

In Rawls's firmament, only questions involving "constitutional essentials" and "basic justice" are appropriate matters to be decided by public reason. He defines constitutional essentials as the strictly defined powers given to the various levels of government (legislative, executive, and judicial) and to the scope of majority rule. The idea of basic justice embraces "equal basic rights and liberties of citizenship that legislative majorities are to respect" including "the right to vote and participate in politics ... liberty of conscience, freedom of thought and association and protection under the law" (Rawls: 214-215).

In this view, an individual's right to freedom of thought and speech are jealously guarded in law, the codified measure of core values. Everything else is a matter of private conscience and balanced self-interest. Rawls and his adaptors are saying, in effect, that the people are to be trusted, collectively, to do what is morally and politically right in day-to-day political life so long as certain fundamentals of constitutional organization and basic justice are conservatively upheld. If some members of society feel excluded from the process they need only exercise their right to assemble like-minded individuals and vote to change the course of daily politics, but they are not entitled without significant majority consent to change the fundamentals.

If there is a weakness in Rawls's position it lies in embrace of constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice as lines in the sand, as real limits to the reach of the state. By way of example, as Nick Crossley, John Roberts, and others are quick to point out (Crossley and Roberts: 5), it is Habermas who reminds us that the welfare state has reached into the lives of individuals and assumed their private concerns and interests as its own (Habermas, 1991; Calhoun, 1992). In Habermas's view, this intervention by

the state into the lives of private citizens, together with the rise of market oriented mass media, has undercut the very possibility of rational and critical debate (Schudson, 1992; Fishkin, 1995). Professional politicians are now marketed as goods. Public opinion has lost its democratic authority, converted into an “object and target for intervention strategies designed to manipulate and control it.” The mass media are concerned only with the sale of goods and services, including “public communication” packaged and disseminated for the purpose of extracting acclaim from distracted information consumers rather than hard-won consensus through rational and critical debate by engaged citizens (Crossley and Roberts: 5-6).

In such a world a central concept such as “conversational constraint,” so necessary to the practice of public reason in any traditional or conservative view of liberal democracy, seems quaintly absurd. As Bruce Ackerman has noted, conversational constraint is founded on rules of dialogue that call upon those in conversation to willingly set aside differences that do not directly pertain to legitimate political discourse in the interests of the common good. This rule of formal discussion draws near to Habermas’s claim that elements of social capital such as status can be bracketed out of the rational-critical debate. Matters of moral difference and disagreement, says Ackerman, need not be eternally suppressed, but are best left to “countless other, more private contexts” while the public dialogue should be employed only “to identify normative premises all political participants find reasonable” (Ackerman, 1989: 17). However, Ackerman does not tell us how authentic normative premises are to be identified, let alone found to be reasonable, in a mediascape where rational deliberation and critical argument have become distorted by the intervention strategies of political and media interests.

The overarching concern with the liberal democratic model of public space lies in the assumption that all matters of concern to all groups within society can be systematically categorized: relegated either to a realm of private discussion or somehow deemed worthy of attention in the rarefied realm of public reason. As Benhabib has pointed out:

The liberal theorist of conversational restraint assumes that the primary groups to the conversation already know what their deepest disagreements are even before they have engaged in the conversation ... Take, however, issues like abortion, pornography, and domestic violence. What kinds of issues are they?
(Benhabib: 83-84)

This is the point where so-called “issues of the good life” run headlong into questions of justice. Critics such as Benhabib and Fraser claim it is pointless to argue for a moral geography that includes a strict boundary separating the private and political from the public and political. Issues of the good life cannot (and should not) be bracketed out of discussions about basic justice. How then are we to address the question of legitimacy, the submerged determinant behind issues such as abortion, pornography, and domestic violence? As Robert Asen suggests (with reference to Rawls), this remains the principal concern of liberal political philosophy: “[H]ow citizens may justify to one another the installment of a political regime and the exercise of power, which entails some coercion” (Asen, 2003: 435) especially if the coercion is used to limit action on legitimate matters of public concern.

The response, proposed within Fraser’s critique of Habermas and echoed in one form or another by various critical adaptors, is the counterpublic (Fraser, 1992; Asen, 2003; Warner, 2002). In Fraser’s conception, it is counterpublics (she calls them subaltern counterpublics) that emerge in response to “exclusions within dominant publics” (Fraser:

124). Far from accepting subaltern status and ceding power to an elite, counterpublics form in order to challenge not only the views held by dominant publics, but their legitimacy to determine what those views will be. This is an outright assault on the hegemonic premise of a structure such as the ideal public sphere, a declaration against the interests of bounded political space exercised through the willful creation of a discursive counter-space. No longer do “women, workers, peoples of colour, gays and lesbians” and other subordinated social groups vie to place matters of individual concern on an agenda controlled by subjects with will and power; rather, they set their own counter-agendas against normalized dominant interests with the intention of expanding discursive space into ever widening arenas (Fraser: 124).

In essence, this is a description of deliberative democracy at work. It is founded on the consensual empowerment of Arendt’s associational space and the ability to persuade coupled with a subsumed political strategy that brings counterpublics into confrontation with dominant forms through a reflexive assumption of those very forms. Yet there is nothing in the work of Arendt, Fraser, Mansbridge, Benhabib or any of their adaptors to suggest how real power, the power to affect change, would shift from dominant publics to subaltern ones. Indeed, Fraser acknowledges that the “weak publics” that may form in response to exclusion from a dominant public sphere can at best engage the “practice of opinion formation but not decision-making” (Fraser: 134). And in a peculiar rumination, reminiscent of the work of Rawls, she half-wonders about the nature of a sovereign parliament. Is parliament a public sphere within the state? Is it a “‘superpublic’ with authoritative discursive sovereignty over basic societal ground

rules?” Is parliament the only legitimate site for the discursive authorization of state power? (Fraser: 134).

It is here, at the site of the struggle to determine how opinion formation might transform into decision-making, together with an understanding of the role of counterpublics vis-à-vis the so-called parliamentary “superpublic,” where Habermas and Bourdieu can be seen to substantively overlap. Publics and counterpublics, capitals and fields and, most importantly, the aspects of communication occurring among and between groups and individuals within these structures, offer a basis for theorizing how certain publics are able to direct public reason toward goals that lie, in the broadest sense, at the heart of a collectively-acknowledged public good. Such an overlap of theoretical terrain involves just that “detailed specification of structures and processes” that Benson and Neveau claim could much improve our understanding of the public sphere. Likewise, Calhoun’s call for a “mapping of the public sphere as a socially organized field” finds a point of genesis at the site where Bourdieu’s vision of fields of forces and the competition for capitals meets Habermas’s discursive organizational space. But of greatest interest is the possibility of an articulation of views, bridged by notions of symbolic capital in action, acting to deepen and broaden our understanding of publics, their relationship to power, and the nature of collective deliberation in actually existing democracy.

For Habermas, largely in response to critics of his transformation theory of the public sphere, the road to the restoration of an inclusive rational-critical debate runs through a reassessed form of public sphere, one that lies at what he calls “the institutional core of civil society”:

[C]onstituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy and ranging from churches, cultural associations, and academies to independent media, sport and leisure clubs, debating societies, groups of concerned citizens and grass-roots petitioning drives all the way to occupational associations, political parties, labour unions and 'alternative institutions' (Habermas, 1992: 453).

It is a conceptualization of societal organization occurring in both private and public space that recognizes the reality of the diversity of discourse that makes possible the contemporary debate over matters pertaining to the public good. Yet Habermas is not willing to relinquish the notion of an overarching public sphere, even if it must coexist with a plethora of "plebian" discursive spheres, each contributing to the larger civil debate. On one hand, he recognizes that a significant nexus of "publics," each engendering "intraparty and intra-associational" discourse may represent the "potential centers of a public communication still capable of being regenerated." On the other, he reminds us that "discourses do not govern" (Habermas, 1992: 452). In this, Habermas borrows directly from Fraser's rumination on "weak publics" with their ability to engage the "practice of opinion formation but not decision-making." Opinions generated in the give-and-take of civic deliberation, he says, "must be given shape in the form of decisions by democratically constituted decision-making bodies." Yet Habermas concedes a tiny point, introducing a concept familiar to Bourdieu. The influence of discourses is "limited to the procurement and withdrawal of legitimation" (Habermas, 1992: 452).

By acknowledging that different discourses are located in societal structures, whether those structures are highly formal (academies and churches) or informal (cultural associations and sport and leisure clubs), Habermas, in effect, affirms a sliding scale of power distribution external to democratically constituted decision-making bodies, or what

Rawls would call “constitutional essentials.” Furthermore, it is odd that Habermas should claim that discourses do not govern but are limited to the procurement and withdrawal of legitimation. On the contrary, legitimation *through* discourse is precisely what empowers democratically constituted decision-making bodies, a point that Habermas himself makes in his development of the historical manifestation of the public sphere as outlined in *Structural Transformation*: that the better argument will prevail because it is rational and critical and, together with publicity, assumes the authority to force the sovereign power to concede a share of governance to a legitimate external force. Discourses do indeed govern in a healthy democracy simply because decision-making bodies cannot act legitimately without the conferral of the authority to act predicated on a consensus arrived at through discourse, however achieved.

It is the notion of legitimation that is of central importance. As Habermas, Arendt, Mansbridge, Fraser and others have noted, discourses are not immune to the self-interested distortions wrought by interested and powerful parties. If various forms of systematically distorted communication are to be identified, limited, or expunged from civil discourse then some sort of societal structure must exist where the rules of discourse are determined and upheld. Bourdieu’s related concepts of fields and capitals offer a means for articulating the manner in which this happens. For impressed upon the sliding scale of organizational diversity—the long list of institutions, societies, and associations that Habermas places at the “institutional core of civil society”—is a second sliding scale derived from the work of Bourdieu, one that embraces historically grounded formal fields at one pole and informal, *ad hoc* human interactions, nascent publics, at the other. The genesis and flow of power among and between these organizational entities, and to and

from decision-making bodies, is deeply implicated in the accumulation of symbolic capital (credibility) and the conditions of legitimation.

In order to more fully appreciate these conditions of credibility and legitimation it is useful to consider Michael Warner's recent theoretical work on publics and counterpublics. While his examination is by no means comprehensive, Warner does offer several intriguing observations that may be employed to tease out the contours of a conceptualization of contemporary publics. To begin with, he offers three different senses of "a public," each capable of resonating (however unevenly) in the individual and collective consciousness.

In the first sense, Warner asks us to consider the public as "a kind of social totality," not unlike the "imagined communities" that Benedict Anderson has posited as the core motivation behind the rise of nationalism and the collective human characteristic (disseminated through mass media) metonymically represented in the nation-state (Warner, 2002: 65; Anderson, 1983). The second sense of a public considers "a concrete audience" that sees itself in place as a totality "bounded by the event or by the shared physical space" (Warner: 66). This public is represented through the act of witnessing within a visible space. Warner's third sense of a public is "related to texts and their circulation" which may be based "in speech as well as writing" (Warner: 66). Of course, each of these views may be seen to operate in any number of events based in modern spectacle: mass political rallies come to mind, as do national and international sporting events reported on and disseminated by national media.

These three senses—an imagined political/cultural collectivity, a self-regarding audience, and discourse that is somehow circulated—are core features of Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere and are implicated in Bourdieu’s theory of fields. In the case of Habermas, the historic bourgeois public sphere comes about because of social conditions, identifiable in the emergent nation-states of early-modern England, France, and Germany that both provoked and facilitated its rise. The private individuals who met face-to-face in the bounded space of the coffee houses and salons of these nascent nation-states were self-regarding by virtue of the reasoned arguments that brought them together in the first place (Roberts and Crossley, 2004). Their reliance on publicity, notably the circulation of texts within an emerging literary public, provided a means to create and uphold a space of influence and authenticity in contradistinction to the closely held authority of the sovereign (Calhoun, 1992).

In Bourdieu’s case, the political/cultural collectivity legitimates the accumulation of cultural capital and its transformation into symbolic capital as a function of collective belief. The group decides, based on “the best symbolic and material guarantees,” to extend or withhold symbolic credit to an individual so that he or she may compete for distinction (Bourdieu, 1990b). The self-regarding “audience” is reified in the sociological notion of fields—spaces of relational forces with distinct players and immanent laws. Finally, it is a core condition of any field that those who seek or who have acquired representative status are required by the competitive conditions of the field to promote and defend their legitimate vision of the social world and cause it to be brought into circulation both within and beyond the boundaries of the field in order to maintain its legitimacy in the field of power (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Yet it is a second set of observations, operating within the first, that offers key insights into how and why publics form and why, having formed, some publics disperse while others gain in substance, organizational complexity, and (given time and tenacity) may become core institutions of the social and political constellation. For Warner, these observations take on the force of self-evident rules. A select few of these rules, when unpacked, have the potential to act as a kind of connective tissue between competing notions of the nature of the public sphere and publics in general. They help to inform the relationship between notions of communicative action and strategic intent within the basic circuits of communication that operate in the field of power/publics. In this respect Warner's prescription for understanding communication among publics resurrects the more hopeful aspect of Giddens's notion of action as "the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events" (Giddens, 1984).

Warner's first "rule" states baldly that a public is "a space of discourse organized by nothing more than discourse itself" (Warner: 67). Self-organization around discourse points to the moment of empowerment, of action, that occurs when similarly motivated individuals come together to share and discuss their regard for a common cause. This autotelic moment, a node of rudimentary commonality, speaks not just to Giddens's sense of "making a difference," but to Arendt's associational moment where people come together to act in concert (Arendt, 1973; Benhabib, 1992). Furthermore, it crosses the Habermasian idea of the public sphere (as an emergent social formation where rational and critical discourse occurs) with Bourdieu's sense of the immanent rules that organize human action within fields. In each case the seminal moment of change, the shift from

individual regard to some degree of collective involvement, is predicated on discourse, on communication.

It is Warner's fourth "rule," however, that sets the stage for a cascade of considerations that are deeply concerned with the relative tenacity of publics and counterpublics as well as the related issue of the relationship between publics and power.

It is Warner's position that a public "is constituted through mere attention." He writes:

Public discourse craves attention like a child. Texts clamor at us. Images solicit our gaze. Look here! Listen! Hey! In doing so they by no means render us passive. Quite the contrary. The modern system of publics creates a demanding social phenomenology. *Our willingness to process a passing appeal determines which publics we belong to and performs their extension*" [emphasis mine] (Warner: 89).

This passage embraces several related lines of inquiry and presents an articulated model of constantly shifting public space imbued with uneven power relations and the appellative energy of the constant cry for attention and recognition. Our *willingness* to process a passing appeal places the power of free choice with the individual. Based on personal and *private* motivations, we select the publics we belong to: we give them attention according to our own measure of their worth. At this point we may claim a public as our own and do nothing more. But if we choose to recognize the goals of that public as worthy of greater symbolic investment, then we may *actively* perform its extension within discursive space; that is, we invest our own appellative energy and enter into the competition for attention and recognition on behalf of that public.

This raises some intriguing questions about the very nature of the social world. Warner's assertion, like that of Bourdieu, is that the social world is competitively dynamic. Like Habermas, he also claims a communicative role aimed at some level of consensus; the pursuit of like-mind. But the idea of the passing appeal or, more to the

point, the decision by an individual to perform its extension, brings a new consideration to the table: the role of free choice. The notion of the passing appeal paints discursive space as a raucous and continuous assault on the senses, a marketplace of competing truth claims of all stripes communicated through speech acts, textual and pictorial representations and, notably, mass media. In such a world, individuals are not confined to membership in one public; they may choose to symbolically (and materially) invest in a plethora of publics, engaging each to a greater or lesser extent. Similarly, they might choose to divest themselves of membership in one public should the passing appeal of another resonate more credibly.

This is the crux of the dynamic behind the *willingness* to process a passing appeal. Such a willful extension of the self (with its resonances of goodwill, of trust) is the relation of individual belief to the extended offer of a group claim to a legitimate, credible vision of the social world. Publics, like fields, are spaces of internal and external competition for symbolic capital; however, unlike fields they lack the structure of immanent laws. They are more nascent forms, drawing upon claims to legitimacy, forming and dispersing according to an appellative energy that derives principally from the rational and critical extension of symbolic credit. They represent a moment of formation, reified decision-making of the most basic kind, and in their success or failure manifest a collective will that is fundamentally important to the practice of democracy. This is the space where the ground is decided for the opening gambits of a much larger game. It is also the space where all other forms of social and (especially) political organization must return for renewal and reaffirmation.

This conceptualization of a field of publics, forming and dispersing, reforming and transforming in competitive social space around matters of credibility (claims to the legitimate vision of the social world) may be used to address, adjust, and revise a great many of the competing concerns that arise out of field and public-sphere theory. In this theoretical terrain, the constellation of subaltern counterpublics that Fraser posits as antithetical to a paternalistic and agonistic formation such as the bourgeois public sphere, arise in appellative space as a natural response to the truth claims of an exclusive and privileged group. Such nascent publics, if their passing appeal is indeed credible, accumulate support and social momentum in direct proportion to the legitimate vision of the social world that they put forth, but they also *remove* support and social momentum from the dominant formation. They do indeed represent “sites for power, of common action coordinated through speech and persuasion” (Benhabib: 78) And as they accumulate participants, drawn to the passing appeal of the credibility of their truth claims, such sites cease to be subaltern and, in fact, may cease to be counterpublics in the received meaning of the term.

Within this conceptual terrain no social formation, including publics, is static. No social formation is an island unto itself. Habermas’s previously mentioned list of “voluntary unions” may be deployed to illustrate the diversity of formation and transformation that is constantly being enacted in this discursive space. In each case it is possible to imagine the genesis of the common action, the beginning of a public, that formed the basis for the rise and maintenance of the organizations cited. Some, such as labor unions and occupational associations represent and preserve the interests of an exclusive membership (not unlike the members of a field). Others, such as churches and

academies have an institutional presence woven into the very fabric of the greater social entity (and immanent laws, rules and resources, to shape and guide the competitive practices of those who embrace the field-like qualities of these domains). An entire genus of social formations—cultural associations, debating societies, clubs, groups of concerned citizens, grass-roots petitioning drives, and so forth—reside in a sphere of public discourse that is once-removed from nascent publics, differing only in the presence of some form of organizational structure to shape and define meaning and purpose and, in doing so, to ensure a degree of longevity through reproduced practices. This is especially important because reproduced practices, however rudimentary, infer conditions of agreement, of consensus, over what those practices will be.

Emerging from this deconstruction of the “institutional core of civil society” are complex relations of communicative practices that must constantly reach back, with varying degrees of force, to expend appellative energy in the continuous pursuit of reaffirmation. These necessary practices are akin to the act of drawing credibility from the deepest wells of the culture in order to preserve the legitimacy of the vision of the social world, the presentation of an appeal to nascent publics through an offer of inclusion that seeks affirmation of legitimacy through the willing bestowal of symbolic (and actual) membership. Certain social formations require more, or different, affirmation than others—the requirements for legitimacy of a football club are not the same as those for a political party. But regardless of the quality of the stakes in play, the power to decide, to act, to change, to reproduce practices is legitimated by symbolic credit, a belief in the credence of the cause (*illusio*), continually reaffirmed in the competitive space of public discourse and renewed by the willingness of strangers and committed participants

alike to process a passing appeal and continue to invest in the performance of its extension. If Bourdieu envisions a field of power and Habermas (at the behest of his critics) envisions a sphere of publics, then it is the relations of communicative practice in pursuit of the *affirmation of credibility* that binds one to the other and confirms the field of power as a field of publics.

This invites two questions. Where do fields, in Bourdieu's sense of the term, fit into the dynamic shift and play among publics? How are fields and capitals, especially symbolic capital in the form of credibility, implicated in the willingness to process appeals and perform their extension? Until now, this discussion has placed matters of symbolic capital; specifically, credibility and its part in the processes of legitimation, at the centre of every relation—within, between, and among all organizational entities that compete to extend their vision of the social world in discursive space. It would be legitimate at this point to say, simply, that structures called fields are merely refined and formalized social constructions specifically intended for the pursuit of a specialized form of legitimacy. In this view, fields would simply be one of many different social entities that contribute, through the pursuit and accumulation of credibility, to the constitution of society in general and democratic society in particular. But this would be too simplistic.

Fields perform a quintessentially necessary function in civil society. They confirm the legitimacy of credibility. Those who compete for distinction within autonomous fields acquire the weight, the *gravitas*, of accumulated cultural and symbolic capital. Those with representative status, having accumulated the credible means to impose a legitimate vision of the social world, are in a position to enter into the wider discourse on matters of public interest with the weight of the entire field behind them. They are limited, of

course, by the boundaries of their field; nevertheless, on concerns of specific relevance the expertise and prestige of the representative voice of the field carries considerable power of influence over the acceptance and dismissal of truth claims. In complex late-modern societies, the divisions of labour that arise as hyper-specialized areas of expertise—fields, sub-fields, and micro-fields to name a few—are an assurance that an expert voice is available to pronounce on virtually any truth claim arising from anywhere. In this respect, fields are able to operate as a wide reservoir of checks and balances on claims to credibility. They offer a rational and critical assessment of those claims wherever they might arise in civil discourse. And the claim to a legitimate vision of the social world arising from a field is itself subject to the rigors of the field of power/publics, competing from its own position to extend a specific appeal within general discursive space.

In this context, social limits are imposed upon the power to consecrate certain views of the social world, the power assigned by Bourdieu to the fields of journalism and politics (Champagne, 2005). Since the fields of journalism and politics must look with daily regularity to the field of power/publics for affirmation and reaffirmation, each is justifiably subject to a continuous evaluation of its truth claims. Regardless of the position of the journalist or the political actor vis-à-vis economic concerns, the power to control aspects of the transmission of messages, their truth claims must be presented as a passing appeal that somehow garners willingness among *the people* (however organized) to process that appeal and perform its extension. Over time, the affirmation of those appeals whose extension has been performed, those appeals whose credibility is sustained in civil discourse, becomes apparent in both the expanse of their presence in the

collective consciousness and in the accumulated social weight of their affirmed, credible acceptance as collective values. If there is such a thing as the public sphere it lies in the rational and critical debate held in the widest possible public space, the competitive space that surrounds this distribution of the willingness to process a passing appeal and, over time, confer credibility on those appeals that have stood the test in the field of power/publics.

Within the frame of an election campaign, however, the time available for processing passing appeals is heavily truncated. The intensity of the appellative energy invested by political actors increases dramatically in the rush to put competing messages in front of as many publics as possible. The fervent hope of every political organization is that its vision of the social world will catch fire in public space and become the “ballot-box issue,” that it will be extended and valorized in the field of power/publics, pushing all other claims into the background. Message control is assigned the highest priority lest a party’s appeal be drowned out in the heightened competition for attention. On this level, political war rooms assume responsibility for clearing a space for the party’s passing appeal to be processed and extended, a “clear channel” where political actors invest in strategic communication to convince participants across the broadest collection of social formations to invest their own appellative energy and thereby enter into the competition for attention and recognition on behalf of the political actor in question. This is a natural and necessary element of partisanship arising from the division of ideological-cultural labour at the centre of the Durkheimian explanation for the rise of the democratic form (Chapter One).

But if the strategic communicators who work in political war rooms are to have a sustained impact on the life of an election campaign they must be prepared to do more than open a channel for partisan speech. In addition to circulating appeals on behalf of the party, political war rooms constantly seek appeals that are already in circulation; that is, selected appeals originating in public space may be appropriated and re-circulated by political strategists in order to extract a measure of credibility through a claim to consensus. By aligning with issues and concerns that have resonance with voting publics, war rooms are engaging in a form of systematically distorted communication. The act of seeking out passing appeals in order to re-present them in partisan terms is a kind of reverse persuasion, aimed at attracting votes by appearing to be of like-mind with those who originated and circulated the appeals in the first place. The originators of the appeals being re-presented see only a reflection of their concerns in the truth claims of an organization that seeks to represent them. Those doing the re-presenting see an opportunity to obtain credibility by performing the extension of a popular appeal and exchanging the acquired social credit for votes.

It is worth noting that in neither of these war-room practices—the creation of a clear channel to place partisan communication into circulation and the appropriation of appeals to be re-presented—is there any consideration for rational-critical debate in the public good. The debate function is reserved for interaction with the appeals put forward by competing political camps. Here the offer to join (on behalf of publics) in the debates from which political decisions rightly flow, the offer to engage in the core attribute of deliberative democracy, may be used to mask a tactical purpose that itself conceals a strategic objective. The pure tactics of dis-credit are often constructed to appear as a

legitimate challenge to the position of a political opponent, an invitation to engage a discussion on the merits of a particular position. The subsumed strategic intention is simply to “ruin the other guy’s day” (MacDonald, 2008), thus providing an opening to divert credit for the “better argument” to the home team. War rooms in the 2005-06 election campaign took the tactics of dis-credit to a new level, calculating for maximum credibility-damage by holding information deemed to be sensitive for release at just the right moment. The case of Paul Martin’s airplane is instructive in this respect.

Early in the campaign Conservative war-room operatives had collected information on the make-and-model of the jetliner the Liberals had rented to ferry the prime minister and his election team around the country. They discovered it was a Boeing 727, an airplane not known for its fuel efficiency. Conservative strategists were also aware that the prime minister had a planned campaign stop at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Montreal on December 7th. There Martin would try to make hay with environmentally sensitive voters when he “chastised the United States ... for refusing to ratify the Kyoto Protocol” (Taber, 2005). Martin’s finger-pointing at the U.S. would eventually cause a backlash from the Bush White House, but the Conservatives had more immediate plans: they simply released the fuel consumption specifications for the Liberal plane to the media in a news release entitled “Paul Martin: The High Flying Polluter” (CBC.ca, 2005). This release came with authoritative quotes from the European Commission and the Air Transport Association of Canada indicating that the Boeing 727 “is noisier and burns almost double the fuel of an airbus 320,” a similar aircraft with much more efficient fuel-burning technology (CBC.ca, 2005).

This tactical action undertaken by a war room had a single purpose: to strip credibility from Paul Martin at the very moment when he was presenting himself to Canadians as an international leader on issues related to climate change. Inasmuch as Martin was willing to promote himself as a representative voice on a possible ballot-box issue, to expend cultural and symbolic capital by pointing the finger at the U.S. record on greenhouse gas emissions and alluding to a higher purpose for a future government led by him, his political opponents were able to paint the prime minister as an insincere advocate of restraint by simply pointing to his own travel practices. Of particular interest is the forum: an international conference dedicated to reaching *consensus* on a global issue through a rational exchange of information and ideas. No opposition party leader went to Montreal to debate Martin on the merits of a Liberal plan to curb greenhouse gases (although the NDP attempted to exploit the conference in a different manner. (See Chapter Six). The intention was to simply nullify Martin's own attempt at accumulating credibility by pointing to the apparent hypocrisy of his deeds with respect to his truth claims and by timing this tactical action to generate the greatest circulation in the field of journalism and, therefore, the field of power/publics.

The case of the gas-guzzling plane is instructive in another respect. It points to the constraints that are placed on all political war rooms and the people who work in them. The single biggest constraint is factual accuracy. Political-communication strategists do not have *carte blanche* to say and do what they please; they have no special status that grants immunity from the libel laws of the land. Even the traditional defense of fair comment on matters of public interest, a justification for wide action that should have special resonance during an election campaign, provides little protection when tactical

and strategic measures have no factual basis. This is why political war rooms put considerable resources into their so-called opposition research teams (Kinsella, 2001). While opposition research will be discussed in Chapter Five it is worth noting here that the stock-in-trade of “oppo” researchers is the *public* record of political parties, their candidates, and the people who are hired to work for them. It forms the basis, literally the information bank, for arguably accurate and well-timed responses to the truth claims of any and all political opponents.

If war-room operators understand the communicative constraints imposed by the rules of the partisan information “game,” they are also fully cognizant of the means to impose limits within their own purview. The following chapter introduces the war room of the New Democratic Party through two lenses. First, the war-room is presented as a human organization, unique in its collaborative structure but subject to its own expression of systemic value commitments. Second, the war-room is presented through the lens of organizational constraint; the limits placed on basic research techniques, notably restrictions on freedom of access to internal strategic-communication initiatives, restrictions on the time allotted to make observations, and certain physical constraints intended to limit a researcher’s freedom to move and observe. It suggests that organizations such as war rooms, if they are to be studied at all, require an adaptation of traditional field methodologies (such as ethnographic observation) to address, among other concerns, an organizational ethos based on information control. Chapter Four also introduces the notion of the electronic conversation and the power of the list-serve as a research tool, and outlines how a well-timed request can sidestep the limits placed on access by opening the door to a different kind of war-room space.

Chapter Four

Methodology

A War Room in Canada is a case study. It employs an articulated method involving elements of organizational communication, discourse analysis, and ethnography. It also adopts and applies a theoretical terrain that integrates notions of capitals and fields with matters pertaining to communicative and strategic action, systematically distorted communication, and communicative manipulation. Within this matrix of relationships, it extracts and theorizes concepts of “the public” with the objective of rethinking and resituating the very idea of “a public” within the generalized democratic discourse. By doing so, it seeks to enrich our understanding of the complex and ever-adapting practices that motivate contemporary partisan-political communication and journalism at election time and to interrogate these modes of public communication with respect to their influence on the processes of democracy. To this end, this dissertation takes as its core object of study the structure and practices of a specific and comparatively new sub-organization, the war room, within the larger organizational structure of the New Democratic Party of Canada’s election “machine.”

This study of a political war room in action was originally intended to borrow from the model of a “workplace ethnography” of the kind used by David Hogarth in his case study of CBC Newsworld (1992), Barry Dornfeld’s study of public television in the United States (Dornfeld, 1998) and, more recently, Georgina Born’s exhaustive examination of the BBC with the near-unfettered access she gained within this public institution (Born, 2004). John van Maanen’s examination of work practices at Disney (1993) and Ester Reiter’s study of the culture of minimum wage work at Burger King

(1991) are also useful guides to this genre of ethnographic research. In each of these cases, researchers were able to “embed” themselves within the work structure of the organizations in question and, in the manner of a traditional ethnography, grow into the social structures of the workplace as (mostly) accepted members of the localized organizational culture. With relatively few constraints, these researchers observed and recorded the practices of employees in order to take note of the relations at work in the management systems and corporate cultures of the places that employed them. This was my conceptual objective in proposing to study the NDP war room. However, it soon became apparent that this approach, for reasons that are inherent to the organizational structure and purpose of a political war room at election time, simply would not work.

Political war rooms are *ad hoc* organizations in every sense. They are formed for the specific purpose of generating partisan political communication during an election campaign. For this reason, they have a life span that is roughly commensurate with the dates of any given campaign. In the case of the 2005-06 general election in Canada, this was the 56 days spanning the dropping of the election writ at the end of November until election day on 23 January 2006. Any “ethnography” involving such an organization would be impossible in the traditional sense because legislated time constraints limit the life of the organization being studied. There is simply not enough time to permit an observer’s presence to become normalized.

This is exacerbated by the culture of the war room. The NDP war room in the 2005-06 election campaign, unlike its counterparts in the other federal parties, was made up of a collection of party operatives—anywhere from a dozen to about 30 people depending on circumstances—gleaned from pools of New Democrat talent from across

the country. On any given day, party workers from Manitoba worked together with employees of the federal caucus. Communication specialists from British Columbia laboured side-by-side with their counterparts from Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Atlantic Canada. Whereas the Liberals and the Conservatives have adopted a more corporate approach to their war room organizations—the Earncliffe Strategy Group, for example, handled much of the “file” for the Liberal campaign in the 2005-2006 election and is widely credited with engineering Paul Martin’s accession to the Liberal party leadership—the NDP continues to draw upon its grassroots talent, notably from provinces where it has actually formed a government.¹ This is a unique arrangement within the Canadian political mosaic, and because the NDP talent pool is relatively small (and the war chest comparatively shallow) war-room workers tend to get called upon to work on successive campaigns, both provincially and federally, in a kind of lend-lease system that has grown up among political kin. They are a close-knit group and are wary of “outsiders.”

The challenge, then, was to gain entry to an exclusive political “club” with a limited life span in order to make sense of its core communicative practices during the most intense period of the political cycle, a time when most of those involved considered the stakes to be particularly high. This is where some very human connections came into play. In the previous federal election, the one that elected the minority government of Paul Martin, my wife’s former boss, Brian Topp, had asked her to work in the NDP war room in Ottawa. I had met him there and chatted briefly while visiting. This became the basis for some synchronic opportunism. When Topp was elevated to the position of co-

¹ See: <http://www.earncliffe.ca>

chair for the NDP campaign in the fall of 2005 I got in touch. Topp was the former political strategist and assistant chief of staff in Roy Romanow's NDP government in Saskatchewan. I had known him during my years as a television producer for the CBC in Saskatchewan, albeit at arm's length. His job had been to prime and prepare the politicians in Romanow's government to adhere to the party line, to implement the communication strategies that would move the government's agenda forward. When the federal election drums began beating in the fall of 2005 and it was announced that Topp would be the campaign co-chair it occurred to me that he would be in a position to admit me to the war room. Thus began two months of negotiation, subtle give-and-take, reasonable persuasion, and at least one temper tantrum that culminated in my apparent *carte blanche* entry into this unique organization.

These negotiations were conducted mainly by electronic mail (e-mail) and constituted an extended game of "twenty questions" on my part and very little response on the part of Brian Topp. I began by simply asking for open access to the NDP war room in order to study the organization at work. I submitted a précis of my intended research project. This direct approach yielded a muted response, a sense of limited interest but also of reluctance to open the door to a non-partisan researcher. There may have been some suspicion about my past work as a journalist, questions about whether I would revert to my "journalistic ways" and betray confidences that might undermine the NDP during the election campaign. To be fair, I believe that Topp was genuinely interested in the kind of study I was proposing, but the direct approach (I later learned) would likely have required authorization from political higher-ups, perhaps even agreement from the entire party caucus where a veto from just one member would have

effectively shut me out. Without entirely understanding the obstacle, but certainly sensing that something was standing in the way, I made the NDP an offer: I would “volunteer” my time and media experience as a party worker—watching news reports for interesting stories and answering phones—in order to gain access to the war room. It was understood that I would use this access to pursue my field research without being hindered by the party. This understanding was acknowledged in a final electronic message from Topp.² He then handed me over to the war room manager, Raymond Guardia.

Guardia’s job was to handle the daily, hands-on work of the NDP war room. He authorized news releases, assigned people to specific roles, assigned resources, and generally guided the war room in fulfilling its daily communication commitments. When I contacted Guardia with my negotiated agreement to “volunteer,” he brushed me off, explaining in a brief note that he had all the people he needed. This is where the temper tantrum came in. Faced with the prospect of watching two frustrating months of give-and-take go down the drain, I adopted a tried-and-true journalist’s technique. I bluffed. In a series of electronic discussions I outlined how my (sacred) agreement with Brian Topp had been violated! I insinuated how the NDP would be negatively impacted by its callous treatment of an aspiring scholar! I appealed to reason and to the greater good! In the end it got me a face-to-face meeting with Ray Guardia to discuss the terms of my “association” with the NDP war room. This is where the real negotiations began and where the concept of a “limited ethnography” had its genesis.

² The message, in full, reads: “Basically I think what we’re going to do is take you up on your volunteering offer. What you write afterwards is up to you. Just need to clear it with our warroom [sic] manager. bt” (Brian Topp in e-mail correspondence with the author, 27 October 2005).

In retrospect, Brian Topp's magnanimous offer to permit access to the war room and remain uninvolved in the written report about my experiences was nothing of the sort. Topp has handled government communication for long enough to know that he has no control over what journalists (or university-based researchers) write. Control begins, as it were, at the beginning. It was Ray Guardia's job to limit my access to the war room or, where access could not be reasonably limited, to ensure that I was watched. It was Guardia who, at our initial meeting, "negotiated" my physical presence in the war room down from a volunteer commitment for the full 56-days to two weeks at either end of the campaign and "a few days in the middle."³ The reason? Limited resources. There was no desk for me to occupy. Even chairs were in short supply! For this reason, much of my time in the war room was spent at the end of a desk that was technically occupied by someone else. It just happened to be directly across from the desk occupied by Ray Guardia. I scavenged a chair from an apparently uninhabited corner at the other end of the building.

This left me with a dilemma. While I had at last been granted access to the inner sanctum, the conditions of that access were in direct conflict with any of the generally recognized norms of traditional ethnographic research. In particular, the time available to grow into a normalized relationship with one's "co-workers" had been negotiated down to less than half of what had previously been expected: about 21 days out of the full 56-day campaign. Fortunately, two factors intervened. One emerged as a part of the campaign culture: I was required to wear a security pass on a string around my neck. This gave me access to the war room at virtually any time of the day (provided I could make it

³ In his "day job" Raymond Guardia is an executive director with ACTRA in Montreal. As such, and as I discovered, he is a polite, able, experienced, and persuasive negotiator.

past the card-access security system in the elevator by piggybacking on someone else's clearance). The second and most important factor had to do with the secure, internal list-serve that had been set up to permit political operatives to communicate among themselves, a kind of electronic-mail service restricted to those who had been cleared for access. On the first day of the official campaign, my first day in the war room, I noticed that a young woman was entering e-mail addresses into this system. So, I simply gave her my coordinates and to my surprise this was approved by Ray Guardia. For the first half of the campaign—until one of the computer maintenance people removed my address under suspicion that it belonged to a spy from another political party—a window was thrown open to the internal strategic and tactical conversations of the political communication team, those charged with originating and implementing the strategic communication for the NDP war room. This material forms the backbone of this dissertation.

A Limited Ethnography

The idea of a limited ethnography arises directly from the actual limits, both temporal and organizational, that inform war-room practices. It is a methodological invention intended to permit the study of particular aspects of an organization by adopting certain ethnographic methods while recognizing that some fundamental attributes of that organization prevent a full, traditional ethnographic approach. In this case, the limit on the life span of an *ad hoc* organization such as a political war room required methodological flexibility if the organization were to be studied at all. Even greater flexibility was required if the length of time was further limited, as it was with this organization, by the negotiated conditions of participation. Faced with these basic

time limitations, a researcher has two choices: either abandon the study altogether, or look for other ways to apply the ethnographic elements of the research project. With respect to an organization such as the NDP war room, certain insights emerged from the very limits that were placed on free observation, attributes of the organization that are self-reflexive. For instance, since war rooms are all about control, notably of information, it should come as no surprise that an outside observer would be subject to limitations on access. The notion of a limited ethnography, therefore, arises from conditions inherent in the object of study.

However, the limits to an ethnographic approach extend in a number of other directions. For example, while I was permitted to range across the extended geography of the space dedicated to the campaign and take extensive notes on the layout of the organizational structure, most attempts to interview people about their work were politely rebuffed. After a time it became apparent that relative outsiders such as myself were regarded with suspicion because we were not part of the internal culture of the organization, members of the fairly close-knit (if widely dispersed) community of political actors either employed by the federal party caucus or the various provincial NDP machines. This should not be overstated: people were certainly civil, but my “volunteer” credentials did not wash in an organizational culture where people knew one another either personally or by reputation from past experience in federal and provincial election campaigns. My credentials also did not wash because I had made the decision to reveal my research interests to anyone who asked. This confirmed my outsider status.

Personal relationships would have been difficult to engender anyway. Any preconceptions about *internal* war-room communication, that is, the way people in the war room communicated among themselves, were quickly dashed. If I had envisioned group discussions about political strategy, open communication that could be observed and recorded, it became immediately apparent that this was not going to be the case. Computer network technology and internal list-serve messaging had largely overtaken face-to-face communication. People sitting at desks in the same workspace, often next to one another, were more likely to exchange e-mails than simply ask questions out loud. This use of computer networks indicates one way that communication technologies have been adapted to the internal exchange of information in the workplace. In the case of the workplace of the NDP election campaign this happened for practical reasons related to urgency, recordkeeping, and control. Electronic messages are instant in their delivery, but remain intact until opened by the receiver; they leave a trace in time and electronic space; and they offer a method of quick and clear response that can be opened up to wide distribution or limited to a single receiver depending on the circumstances. However, it also means that most workplace conversations and the decisions that arise from them take place behind an electronic wall. They were largely unseen and inaudible in “real” space and time.

None of this is meant to suggest that all elements of a traditional ethnography were abandoned. I was able to take notes during the restricted time that I was in attendance in the war room. Certain conversations, although limited in scope, did take place in the open. Campaign workers did come into the media area, the place where my desk was situated, to celebrate victories and commiserate over defeats. Tensions between

campaign workers, the normal conflicts and resolutions of people working under pressure, were there to observe. I was able to wander at will through the warren of cubicles that housed the various logistical arms of the campaign (See Chapter Five). I was able to sketch the physical layout of the place in relation to the various functional branches of the larger organization. This was critical in terms of gaining a descriptive sense of the organization, of understanding the relationships—in physical space, among people of differing temperament, and in terms of hierarchical power—that drove the organization and produced its communicative fare.

From my desk in the middle of the “media area” of the war room I was also able to witness the daily routine of the organization. In a broad sense I was admitted to the lowest level of strategic and tactical planning. While I never gained access to the main morning meeting that set the communication agenda for the day, it would have been impossible not to overhear the small discussions (mainly on points of clarification) that came about when people returned to their work stations.⁴ Furthermore, the communication team made no attempt to conceal the general themes and “lines” to be disseminated to all party workers and candidates across the country. Since I was in the media area, literally facing the bank of televisions set up to monitor the daily news cycle, it would have been impossible not to notice when people gathered to watch a specific program or overhear the responses when something unexpected occurred. The traditional work of “spinning” the media, usually handled by the party’s press secretary, Ian

⁴ My requests to attend and observe a morning strategy meeting became a running joke with Ray Guardia. I would make the request and Guardia would agree to look into it. There always seemed to be a reason to exclude me: either a sensitive matter, such as poll results, was up for discussion or I would have impeded an important planning session, such as the one dedicated to the televised debates that political parties take so seriously. By the end of the campaign Guardia and I had worked out a kind of communicative shorthand: I would ask to attend a morning meeting and he would smile. Nothing would be expected to come of it.

Capstick, took place over the telephone two desks away from where I was positioned. Since Capstick spent the better part of every day fielding media questions and putting forward the party's position for the daily news cycle, it became difficult *not* to tune him out.

From my perch I was also able to observe the organizational hierarchy of the war room. As a former (television) journalist, I was struck by the similarities between the war room and newsrooms that I had worked in. The campaign chair, director of communications, press secretary, research division, and rapid response team could be seen to parallel the executive producer, senior producer, various editors, researchers, and reporters that populate a typical newsroom. The main difference seemed to lie in the addition of a layer of human-relations management, a manifestation of a working culture that, in order to compete, had to draw heavily upon the goodwill of the people it relied upon to get the various jobs done. This is because most of the "workers" were, in fact, volunteers. Certainly there were some whose future employment depended on a favourable election outcome, but for the most part the people who held "executive" positions were, by necessity, sensitive to the needs of the workers/volunteers in ways that would be alien to a working newsroom full of journalists. This did not mean that those involved in political communication were not expected to put in long hours in pressure-filled circumstances, but they were accommodated in a very nice hotel, given a generous allowance for food, treated with respect and, since this campaign straddled the holiday season, were treated to a fairly lavish party by the standards of the Canadian left

(although in the best NDP tradition, those who attended were asked to pay a minimum fee.)⁵

War Room Discourse

It is worthwhile to keep in mind that the NDP war room, like its counterparts in other parties, was set up to serve many different groups and individuals in locations across Canada. These included constituency offices and individual candidates, the leader's tour (which was always on the move), and local and national media. Like all political organizations, the NDP has embraced computer network technology as a means to communicate among workers and candidates spread out across a vast geography. Because it had become normalized as a means of general transmission, electronic mail was the preferred means of communicating among war-room workers. My request to be included on the war room list-serve therefore opened the door to a universe of internal communication that would otherwise have been inaccessible. This daily exchange of messages developed into a formal electronic record, time-coded and lodged in my personal files. It remains a moment-by-moment index of more than 12-hundred messages, many tracing the paths of what was said and done in response to breaking news stories or the human, decision-making side of strategic and tactical impulses. These are the internal discourses that motivate contemporary election campaigns, discourses that often appear as traces in media reports and which may be tracked to indicate the motives behind the communication in play. While researchers such as Janice Radway

⁵ I attended this party in the hope of generating some interpersonal discourse. It was not to be. When I approached groups of people the conversation dried up or the group dispersed. Attempts to start conversations were politely ignored. At one point, a young party worker made the rounds handing out tickets that could be redeemed for a drink at the party's expense. When he got to me he exclaimed, "No, not you. You're not on the list!" I half-jokingly replied that this was no way to buy my vote. He returned a few minutes later and handed me a free ticket.

have alluded to internal memoranda as documentary evidence of organizational communication (Radway, 1989), to my knowledge this is the first time a series of ongoing electronic conversations has been collected and used in this manner.

These messages of record represent a body of communication distributed across a range of functional fields. By far the most numerous were daily news stories generated by newspapers and wire services, and what are known in journalistic circles as advisories. These sources were normally taken verbatim from an electronically published source (notably Canadian Press, but also the major dailies) and cut-and-pasted into e-mail messages that were sent out to all interested parties in the NDP campaign. Relevant reports by television and radio stations and networks were more labour-intensive. In these instances, transcripts were generated by party workers and circulated some hours after the material was broadcast. Often a précis of long-form journal stories would be circulated and sometimes, if the material was deemed to be critical, full-length magazine articles were circulated in this fashion. Some of these files ran to several thousand words.

The main responsibility for “clipping” and circulating this material fell to one person (with an assistant) whose designated task was to observe and report on the media. This was an extraordinarily difficult job given the sheer volume of media content generated on any given day of the campaign. The “media person’s” job, in general, was to forward anything that mentioned the New Democratic Party, its leader, policies and positions, and what the competing political parties, via journalists, had to say about these and other areas of interest to the NDP. Furthermore, information from competing camps that *might* be of interest to the war room was also to be forwarded. This could include news releases posted on a competitor’s web site or statements made by a party leader

from an obscure source such as an Internet weblog. This was a tricky proposition since it required a fairly sophisticated understanding of opposition intentions and how they might coincide with NDP objectives. In the absence of a crystal ball, the general practice was to forward virtually any story that could, however remotely, be deemed important at some future point. As a result, of the 12-hundred e-mails available to be studied, about two-thirds are either informational background or chaff—material that was, at best, of limited interest.

In general, advisories were circulated as a means of informing the organization about the location of the main players in competing campaigns. Their strategic value was considered to be extremely limited most of the time. However, in some notable cases advisories led to a push by the rapid-response team to generate so-called “earned media” from an opportunity that presented itself around geographical considerations. One of these opportunities, generated by a campaign stop in Newfoundland by Paul Martin, brought about a so-called “pit hit” (Chapter Six) and is a key element of the analysis of tactical measures in support of strategic communication discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten.

While most electronic messages collected from the NDP war room list-serve deal with the re-circulation of media reports, they are interspersed with one-to-many exchanges involving members of the war room. Often these exchanges are in response to a news story that has been recently posted, a call for ideas on how to exploit the information contained in the report. Usually, those participating in the discussion agreed that there was limited value in trying to exploit a particular posting; however, these discussions sometimes evolved into a decision to mount a response. These cases dealt

mainly with claims made by competitors that were seen to stake out policy positions on matters of public concern (for example, the Liberal position on gun control) or deal with perceived attacks on the credibility of an NDP position (for example, Finance Minister Ralph Goodale's dismissal of calls for an inquiry into income trusts).

In these circumstances, the discussion usually privileged the opposition-research and rapid-response arms of the war room (Chapter Five) and resulted in an electronically delivered media release. Discussions mainly revolved around the use of quotes from the public record and whether they could be credibly used to counter competitors' claims. In some cases, decisions were quickly made to adopt a strategy of non-engagement. Sometimes these were at odds with the general view expressed (and observed) among war-room workers. An example of this kind of treatment was the Buzz Hargrove/CAW affair, broadcast live on CBC Newsworld. Hargrove's decision to break with protocol (and historic support for the NDP) by presenting Paul Martin with a union jacket was witnessed by most war-room workers (who had been alerted to gather around the television). Those in the war room reacted with emotion to what they saw as raw betrayal. The on-line comments were more controlled, constructed to take the high road and by doing so to portray both Martin and Hargrove as untrustworthy scoundrels (Chapter Six).

In every case, the decision to engage in strategic-political communication was reified in a self-declared "official" response. These official responses took two forms: News Releases and Rapid Responses. These "official" documents were posted to the official list-serve as well as to the official party web site. On the NDP web site, the news releases occupied one column, a list of activated "headlines" where the full text could be

accessed by clicking on the title. The rapid responses occupied a second column. Taken together they appeared, intentionally or otherwise, to represent “positive” and “negative” positions of the party on dozens of issues. For the most part, these postings constituted the end product in the communication process. They also represented the formal, published record of the party on every position taken on every issue during the campaign. Similar lists of positions were posted by the other federal parties and collected for the purpose of comparison. All parties removed these “published” positions within hours of the election results.

This index of circulated messages, in all its component forms, is the key body of evidence in support of this dissertation. It contains the communicative processes that were used to debate and implement strategic and tactical decisions. By closely examining these decisions—their origins, internal development through circulation and discussion, and their external circulation—we are, in effect, being handed the opportunity to witness first hand the construction of the basic building blocks of political discourse at election time. Once conscious considerations of credibility and public resonance (discussed later in the methodological context) are taken into account, the contrived nature of strategic political communication, its manipulative and systematically distorted intentions, become apparent. The extent to which journalists are complicit in the mass circulation of these distortions may be traced by examining the content of various media offerings. In this manner it is possible to track political communication from its inception (often in newspaper or wire stories) through the discussion of its strategic and tactical importance, to its re-construction by the war room as communicative weapon of offensive or

defensive response, to its reappearance as a credible truth claim re-circulated across various media.

Journalism

Three prominent English-language daily newspapers were retained for each day of the election campaign: the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post* and the *Ottawa Citizen*.⁶ The *Globe and Mail* is a Toronto-based publication with a national reach and an editorial policy that is centre-left. The *National Post* is a self-proclaimed national newspaper of the right. The *Ottawa Citizen* is a local newspaper with considerable influence in national affairs because it serves official Ottawa. It is owned by the Asper family, which also owns the *National Post*. In each case, daily news stories, opinion columns, and editorials were analyzed to ascertain the level of response (or non-response) reporters and editors gave to matters pertaining to the NDP and, more specifically, the extent to which language developed in the NDP war room was reflected in the reporting of each publication.

In addition to the above-cited publications, particular attention was given to *The Canadian Press* wire service (CP). CP is a source of journalistic content and context for virtually every newspaper and broadcaster in Canada (CanWest has recently opted out of its use-agreement with the wire service, but was a full member of the CP subscriber “family” during the election of 2005-06). *The Canadian Press* is also available to non-

⁶ The NDP did not elect a single member in Québec, making it the only established federal party without a representative in the second-most populous province in the country. While the party would heartily deny it, there is a pervasive sense, reflected in certain internal party documents, that Québec’s left-leaning voters are lost to the left wing of the Liberal party and Bloc Québécois. At any rate, the vast bulk of campaign communication was directed at English Canada and, specifically, forty ridings in English Canada that the NDP calculated were most likely to support the party.

journalistic subscribers including the major political parties who use it as a source for tracking reports about themselves and competing campaigns. The NDP relied heavily on the CP wire service in order to track the main stories in circulation during the daily news cycle, to incorporate any reports that might offer a potential platform to develop war-room communication, and to gauge the extent of circulation of communication originating in the war room and in opposing camps. As such, CP wire stories became a record of the immediate journalistic response to political news. The information included in CP reporting was often taken as the factual basis for editorials and columns in subscriber papers. Therefore, the content of material generated by CP was taken as a direct reflection of the communication that occurs when the political and journalistic fields overlap. Often the exchanges between political actors and journalists could be tracked as stories were haggled over and updated in the daily struggle to “own” an issue.

Journalists who specialize in political opinion often augmented and contextualized the stories reported by journalists on the campaign trail. Where the latter group was and is responsible for reporting the “facts” of events, announcements, and other matters pertaining to the various party campaigns, political columnists were responsible for “interpreting” this daily journalistic fare. These journalists include Paul Wells (*Maclean’s Magazine*), Andrew Coyne (*National Post*), Jane Taber and Jeffrey Simpson (*Globe and Mail*), Chantal Hébert (*The Toronto Star*), and Susan Riley (*Ottawa Citizen*). Each is recognized as a journalist of considerable standing (symbolic capital) in political circles. The opinion columns produced by these and other journalists represented a particular kind of campaign discourse, one that often stood in direct opposition to the strategic communication that was being circulated by war rooms. By analyzing the

content of stories generated from the campaign trail against the interpretive content of political columnists who directly commented on the matters under discussion, it is possible to gauge how strategic-political communication was being handled within this area of journalistic content production. This analysis acknowledges that these columnists write from a particular (often declared) stance: Andrew Coyne makes no secret of his advocacy of the free market while Susan Riley is openly left-leaning, and so forth.⁷

Limited use has been made of certain journalistically situated Internet-based resources, notably weblogs and column postings generated by working journalists. In the case of Paul Wells and Andrew Coyne, for example, genuine working web logs offered a daily, informal account of the various political campaigns; observations and that were often used to inform material circulated by political actors and other journalists. Antonia Zerbisias of *The Toronto Star* played a different role. Her company-based weblog, *azerbic*, offered a daily open forum for general discussion on matters pertaining to the media and the election campaign. Her thoughts, and those of her readers, were often cited on other weblogs including two which have gained a measure of credibility in the realm of political commentary: *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*, operated out of Ottawa by Stephen Taylor and *CalgaryGrit*, now also operated out of Ottawa by Dan Arnold. The work of both Arnold and Taylor was often indistinguishable from the daily production of so-called mainstream journalists; indeed, their respective practices during the campaign were often seen to enliven the debate around specific issues because they

⁷ In addition, interviews were conducted with selected journalists specializing in political reporting. Their views on political and journalistic credibility are reflected in Chapter Three. Some overview responses on the campaign and on political communication in general are included throughout *A War Room in Canada*.

were not constrained by many of the conditions that apply to traditional journalists such as production deadlines and traditional editorial oversight.

The level and volume of public discussion on these sites around key election issues provided a different slant on politically motivated communication, one that was often at odds with the received wisdom generated by political war rooms. This was certainly the case with the NDP. While concerns remain about the ability to verify identities on the Internet, a discussion of the general positions that were presented in the public-response areas of these two well-known weblogs (weblogs that were monitored by the parties) has been employed as a means to gauge certain aspects of public opinion with respect to strategic-political communication. Moreover, much of the communication that was generated on these sites around specific issues of interest to the NDP offers an indirect window onto some of the core thought processes that influence political war rooms, processes that often seem at odds with a true representation of public opinion on significant matters pertaining to the public good. A specific analysis of the public discourse on *CalgaryGrit* and *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit* generated around what would become the central election issue, income trusts, is presented in Chapter Eight.

Qualitative Considerations

The media outlets listed above, both mainstream and non-mainstream, represent a tiny proportion of the total number of newspapers, wire services, magazines, radio and television programs, and web-based media sources that are potentially available to circulate political messages generated by war rooms. In order to make sense of the truly staggering volume of election-related partisan-political and journalistic production, a

number of specific issues, all seriously considered by war-room operatives and prominently reported by journalists, have been selected for detailed discussion. These include events that are loosely related because they occurred within the same time frame, typically the first three weeks of the campaign, and because they may be viewed as tit-for-tat responses to tactical gambits launched by competing campaigns. For example, the Buzz Hargrove affair is related to the NDP's attack on Paul Martin over a weather research station in Newfoundland and Labrador, and both are somewhat related to NDP Leader Jack Layton's decision to make a constitutional position announcement at an international climate-change conference in Montreal, and so forth. (Chapter Six).

Similarly, the income-trust affair offers a continuous line of inquiry that may be used to interrogate strategic intentions designed to support the overarching aim of the campaign: to discredit the moral authority of Liberals and offer the NDP as a substitute. It occupied a time frame that intersected with the tactical manoeuvres mentioned above, but also generated a thematic backdrop that began prior to the official election campaign and effectively ended with the mid-campaign announcement of an RCMP investigation. In this manner, it influenced the fortunes of all parties right up to election day. The income-trust issue, so deeply implicated in questions of credibility, is dissected in detail. It offers a means to plot the larger strategic intentions of the NDP war room, the manner in which those intentions were dealt with by journalists, and the way that war-room operatives used journalistic production to keep the issue alive for partisan purposes. In many respects, the income-trust affair *became* the communication strategy for the NDP in the 2005-06 general election campaign. It is the subject of Chapter Seven.

In summation, the primary source material for this dissertation is based on traditional observation techniques practiced within the physical and cultural space of a distinct organizational formation. This is supplemented by a significant body of printed messages, circulated internally among members of the organization. In specific cases, these messages represent the non-public discussions of political-communication strategists in the act of preparing tactical and strategic communication gambits for public consumption. The efforts of these communication strategists may be observed and studied by tracing their treatment in daily journalistic production, the manner in which journalists presented, questioned, and re-presented the messages generated by political operatives. This journalistic response to strategic-political communication may then be traced back to the war room where modifications to the partisan message were discussed and implemented by war-room communicators. This circulation of discourse, observed through the tactical and strategic communicative treatment of specific issues and the response of publics, may then be employed to debate the role of credibility in the contemporary electoral process.

The following chapter develops the New Democratic Party war room as a physical space with significant symbolic attributes, each working relationally to implement strategic-communication measures aimed at electing NDP candidates to Parliament. The importance of opposition research and rapid response—functions common to all political war rooms—is developed through Bourdieu's lens of capital exchange and through the Habermasian concern for systematic distortion and manipulation. The role of journalists in legitimizing and circulating strategic and tactical gambits is developed from the point of view of the internal, organizational intentions and

practices of the war room. In short, by viewing the war room as an organizational structure and by situating the organization relationally to core aspects of the critical terrain of Bourdieu and Habermas, the following chapter examines how this organization positions itself for maximum influence at an extraordinarily fluid moment in the life of a democracy, how it views the role of journalists in the competition to extend that influence, and how facts have become weapons in the complex processes of political communication.

Chapter Five

The War Room

The reality is that as a result of the changing context in which 21st Century communications operates, the media are facing a hugely more intense form of competition than anything they have ever experienced before. They are not the masters of this change but its victims. The result is a media that increasingly and to a dangerous degree is driven by “impact”. Impact is what matters. It is all that can distinguish, can rise above the clamour, can get noticed. Impact gives competitive edge. Of course the accuracy of a story counts. But it is secondary to impact (British Prime Minister Tony Blair, 12 June 2007).

This assessment of the hyper-competitive British media landscape is lifted from the final speech in a series of eight delivered by outgoing Prime Minister Tony Blair on the future of the United Kingdom. The speech/essay is posted in its entirety on the official web page for Number 10 Downing Street. This excerpt is revealing for several reasons. First, it represents a timely view of the shifting terrain of journalism from the point of view of an experienced political actor of considerable international repute. Second, it does so with only passing acknowledgment of the role of political-strategic communication in the generation of the “impact” that Blair considers so deleterious to communication in public life and, in a related point, makes no mention of the complicity of “New Labour” in the establishment of an internal organization devoted to strategic and tactical communication. This was immediately seized upon by most of the British dailies, including the influential *The Guardian*, in an editorial titled “Right sermon, wrong preacher”:

[I]t is pretty rich to be lectured on such matters by this prime minister who, more than any other, has marginalised parliament through a combination of sofa government, selective leaking and sophisticated media manipulation. His "complicity" in such methods was not simply—as he implied—a feature of early New Labour. It has been a consistent pattern—witness recent terror briefings to the Sunday papers. Truly, he helped feed the animal he now wants to chain (*The Guardian*, 13 June 2007).¹

Third, Blair's speech/essay is a political document. It claims to deliberately step back from blaming anyone while in reality laying blame squarely on the shoulders of journalists and the organizations that employ them. In other words, this is a bit of well-timed political manipulation. And it was almost certainly constructed for Prime Minister Blair in the Downing Street equivalent of a war room.

It is of special interest that Blair's message was crafted for release in the final days of his mandate. The date of his widely anticipated departure from Number 10 Downing had, by this time, been announced for June 27, 2007. Yet here we have an example of strategic political communication at work in the attempt to create a legacy for a prime minister increasingly marginalized by criticism of his stances on both domestic and foreign policy; notably, the abrogation of civil liberties at home as a response to threats of terrorism and Britain's continued involvement in the War in Iraq. It is also worth noting that the release of Blair's essay, on the official web site of the Prime Minister's Office and residence, is intended to deliver his message directly to the world, to bypass the news media he so richly criticizes, all the while knowing that his words will be picked up, circulated, and critiqued by that same media. Clearly, Mr. Blair has taken a

¹ The full *Guardian* response to Blair's speech was published in the June 13th on-line edition at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story,,2101481,00.html>. Communication issues are also covered by Lord Hutton in his inquiry into BBC reportage on the Blair government's handling of information in the ramp-up to the Iraq invasion. The full text of Lord Hutton's findings may be viewed at: <http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/report/index.htm>

page from Dylan Thomas and has no intention to “go gentle into that good night.” The strategies of political communication deployed in the early electoral successes of New Labour and maintained as *daily* working strategies through successive parliaments are here employed to construct the image of a thoughtful, caring, and concerned political leader about to leave the world stage while simultaneously leveling a last rhetorical broadside at his media adversaries.

Perhaps of greatest interest, however, is the response of readers to Blair’s essay and *The Guardian* editorial. *The Guardian*, like many of its competitors in the U.K., provides an electronic “comments section” in its on-line version.² While there are glaring problems with accepting this material at face value—contributors are identified only by web aliases; we have no sense of who these voices represent in sociopolitical or economic terms; no submissions were possible from those who are restricted from Internet use by various economic, technological, and literacy or linguistic divides (Warschauer, 2003); and so forth—in an anecdotal and vernacular sense, these respondents show a great deal of fluency with the issues at hand. A sample of this material reveals a sense of independent thought, an aptitude for comparative analysis, and a willingness to challenge truth claims that no truly passive public could be accused of possessing:

² Both *The Independent* and the *Telegraph* posted similar responses to Blair’s speech: <http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/article2651061.ece> and <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2007/06/13/d11301.xml>

Tony Blair is right—there is a need for a radical revision of the media beginning with a resistance by journalists themselves to the current malaise. He is right that everyone makes a mistake in their work or personal relationships without it needing to ruin their whole lives. Holding politicians to scrutiny is a different matter and Tony Blair needs to be prepared to put himself in that position (“JuanP,” *The Guardian*, 13 June 2007).

It’s little wonder that the general public has little interest in politics when the people reporting on it, treat the politicians like idiots (“icin,” *The Guardian*, 13 June 2007).

Blair is one of the most honest and open PMs we’ve ever had, yet you are quite happy to peddle the urban myth that he goes around telling devious half truths and lies all the time. This is nonsense ... Instead of indulging people’s ignorance you should be trying to educate them why a politician can’t speak in the same terms as Dave the barman down the pub (“MarkGreenO,” *The Guardian*, 13 June 2007).

Most people would think that ‘awful’ is just not good enough for anything – including journalism and the media – but, as you do at least admit, unfortunately it too often is. And I see little evidence that your profession, with the exception of a few individuals, or your institutions are interested in doing much about it (“buryboy,” *The Guardian*, 13 June 2007).

And, finally:

Gosh, I really pity Mr Blair for not having the subservient press that Mr Bush has had [sic] (for nearly all of his presidency at least). Stick all the editors (bar the Sun’s) in Guantanamo ASAP (“MistressG,” *The Guardian*, 13 June 2007).

Keeping in mind that this is a non-representative sample of British public opinion, it is fairly clear that these respondents (and others not quoted here) are reluctant to buy into the editorial position of *The Guardian*.

We must also keep in mind, of course, that these readers are not responding to Blair’s speech/essay so much as *The Guardian’s* response to it. *This* public is constructing its own messages well outside of the wished-for limits to discourse that are embedded in the text of the editorial (Allen, 1998). “JuanP” supports Blair in his call for more responsibility among media, but makes it clear that this does not let politicians off

the hook. “MarkGreenO” suggests that the constant competition for quotes among journalists forces politicians to communicate differently. Journalists, therefore, have a responsibility to explain this to the public. In a related thought “icin” clearly blames journalists for constructing the poor public reputation of politicians while “buryboy” makes the argument that media institutions are not interested in producing quality journalism because, presumably, it is not in their interests to do so. Only the comment by “MistressG”, with its somewhat cryptic ironic intonation, seems to challenge Blair’s claim of irresponsibility among media by drawing a connotative inference to the Bush administration’s perceived regard for journalists who do not toe the White House line. On balance, Tony Blair fares well. His message to the public-at-large, disseminated directly via the Internet, remains largely intact. The expected criticism from media sources has, at least in the case of *The Guardian*, been turned back upon the critic. Game and set (if not match).

While it is not upon us yet to such a degree, this is likely to be the future of strategic-political communication in Canada. Blair’s communication machine, like that of the White House of George Bush and Bill (and Hillary) Clinton before him, was adapted from an electoral organization and applied to the daily dissemination of partisan-political communication (Stephanopoulos, 2000; Kinsella, 2001). Upon the ascension of the Clintons to the White House, Hillary Clinton, who was closely involved in the presidential campaign, is quoted as saying, “I think you have to run a campaign for policy just like you do for elections” (Newman, 1999: 111). Recent observations about the Harper government’s management of communication—control of all political communication through the Prime Minister’s Office, attempts to coerce and control the

Parliamentary Press Gallery, the muzzling of most ministers—suggests that the current government in Canada is familiar with the models of communication control that have been applied in the U.S. and the U.K. (Wells, 2007). For this reason, it is imperative that we understand as much as possible about how this kind of political communication works and the internal party organizations that generate it. These organizations are almost impossible to study once they become embedded in the internal routines of a political apparatus that holds power. They tend to be secretive, fiercely protective of both the strategies and tactics of daily political communication and the aura of power they are charged with enhancing and upholding on behalf of the party leadership. Still, since they are modeled on political war rooms they are not entirely opaque. By studying a war room in action, both in its functional and symbolic sense, it might be possible to anticipate the future shape of political communication in Canada.

The war room of the New Democratic Party, like its counterparts in opposing political camps, is a place and a space. As a *place* it occupies coordinates on a city map: an address corresponding to the third floor of the three-storey building on the northeast corner of Bank and Laurier Streets in downtown Ottawa. As a *space* the war room was (and is) a transient organizational phenomenon, claiming a symbolic position in the firmament of competing interests in a federal election campaign and communicating the party's point of view in the heavily mediated space of public political discourse. In the case of the NDP, place and space, the physicality of surroundings and the communicative purpose that emits from them at election time, are tightly interwoven. This is because the place that houses the war room normally houses the business offices for the party. It is the site where everyday activities happen, everything from paying bills to ordering

stationery to communicating with stakeholders. While government is in session, political work mainly takes place in the caucus offices on Parliament Hill. At the drop of the election writ, everything changes: the *place* shifts in functional purpose—the political actors move downtown from the Hill—and the *space* is utterly transformed.

On an average day between elections anyone out for a stroll in downtown Ottawa may, if they choose, open a street-level door at 279 Laurier Street and walk up a few steps to a nondescript foyer. Against a wall are four Canadian flags hanging languidly from short poles jammed into portable stands. It is unclear whether they are there as decoration or because of a shortage of storage space. More likely they are kept handy in case an impromptu news conference requires a colourful, patriotic backdrop for the television cameras. The only direct hint that this is the business headquarters for a major federal political party is the understated party logo on the building directory. NDP? Third floor. Less obvious but much more informative is the etched glass plaque hanging on the wall directly across from the rickety elevator that carries visitors to the upper levels. On it are listed the names of forty Canadian unions and labour organizations, together with a short statement informing the reader that “working people” contributed the cash to buy this building for the New Democratic Party. The powerful Canadian Auto Workers’, the CAW, heads the list—a bit of alphabetical synchronicity that predates a very public falling-out over the antics of union president, Buzz Hargrove. Union politics aside, the NDP is the owner and landlord of this prime piece of urban real estate in the heart of the nation’s capital.

Once the elevator makes it to the third floor (often it seems an impossible task) the doors open on a typical reception desk fronting a thoroughly bland warren of cubicles

upholstered in a fabric of neutral federal gray. This is where the daily grind of running a political party takes place. There are executive offices around the perimeter of this nondescript workspace and a fairly elegant “board room” with a transparent glass wall. Small reminders of the party’s history appear from time-to-time, mostly printed artifacts from provincial and federal election campaigns that hang, framed and unframed, on the few common walls. The floor of a corridor leading to the washrooms houses the real treasure trove of the party’s electoral memory: leaned against a wall are posters from T.C. Douglas’s CCF victories of the forties and fifties and campaign material from the Ed Broadbent years through to the current leadership of Jack Layton. Nobody seems to pay these traces of history much attention. Telephones ring. Party workers go about their daily routines.

Certain subtle changes begin to happen at the NDP offices when election speculation heats up. Security tightens. The elevator suddenly requires a swipe card to access the third floor. Party workers begin to wear photo identification cards on cords around their necks. Political workers in the caucus offices on Parliament Hill show up more frequently at the Laurier Street address. Senior campaign coordinators leave their day jobs in cities across Canada and take up residence in an Ottawa hotel. Strategic planning begins in earnest. If the election call seems imminent the call goes out to selected political operatives in the party’s organizations across the country. These are mainly experienced political communicators who work in provinces where NDP governments have held power—British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario—or where there are significant seats in play such as southwestern Ontario or, to a lesser degree, Atlantic Canada. As political journalist Paul Wells has noted in *Right*

Side Up, his account of Steven Harper's rise to power, the NDP is unique among Canadian political parties. Since it has never held power at the national level, the party relies heavily on expertise from places where it *has* formed government (Wells, 2006).

It is important to note that the people who undertake the normal routines of daily party life are, for the most part, not involved in the war room *per se* at election time. While party workers who occupy the offices at 279 Laurier do take on different roles during the campaign, most are involved with more-or-less discreet organizational "units" involved with logistics. These include tour planning for the leader and his entourage: chartering the party's airplane, reserving hotel rooms, and so forth; booking special events such as specific news conferences and appearances for the leader and other party spokespeople on various media offerings (*Music Plus* in Montréal was a big hit as was *Politics*, fronted by Don Newman on CBC Newsworld); administering support in the ridings through budgets for party literature and lawn signs; and maintaining links between local candidates and the central party apparatus. Most election workers are involved with these and other matters that are concerned primarily with keeping the system up and running. However, there are two specialized units that stand apart from the others: the research department and the rapid-response team. Together they form the backbone of the war room, a separate organizational unit concerned specifically with communication.³

³ The organizational structure of the NDP campaign has been constructed here from a combination of observations made by the author while observing the war room in action during the 2005-2006 election campaign and material is taken from informal conversations with campaign workers. These workers agreed to speak about matters of organization rather than party policy and asked for confidentiality concerning their identity. Where matters of organizational structure are clarified by such conversations and confirmed by observation their wishes have been respected.

The research department is responsible for facts and figures. In this respect it performs two functions. First, it is the keeper of the party's political memory. When a candidate or political operative says something publicly, any past position adopted by the party is taken into account. This is intended to provide continuity to the party's point of view, but is also meant to give candidates—from the leader, to incumbents, to first-time candidates—a body of credible, debated, and adopted organizational history to draw upon. In this respect, the political memory of the party also acts as an inoculation against attacks by political opponents who have their own easily-accessed data bases of statements and positions made by competitors, including the NDP. This leads to the second function of the research department: opposition research.

Opposition research, or “oppo,” is the flip-side of research in support of the party memory (Kinsella, 2001). It deals in facts and statistics about the political opposition. The New Democrats spend time during the normal political cycle compiling information about the Conservatives, Liberals, Bloc Québécois, and other political entities. This may extend to the provincial organizations for each party and even to municipal players, particularly in large urban centres. The idea is to amass as much information as possible on political opponents from public sources. This is important because public sources are creditable; that is, they leave a trace in the public domain that can be referenced. *Hansard* is a valuable resource for this kind of research since it is the official record of everything said in both the House of Commons and the Senate. The minutes of committee meetings are also gleaned for position statements by members of opposing political parties. This kind of information may be especially valuable to political operatives since it is public and represents a succinct record of policy stances, but is largely unknown to average

Canadians since parliamentary committees in Canada generally go about their business with little or no media attention.

Statements made by politicians and disseminated by mass media are another important source of opposition research. Newspapers and magazine articles, radio programs, and television news and public affairs offerings are scoured for quotes from political leaders, members of parliament, those who might wish to make the jump from municipal or provincial political office to Parliament Hill, workers in various political campaigns, indeed, anyone in the public record who has an opinion about anything. It is a wide net that, increasingly, includes statements made on various partisan and non-partisan sites on the Internet.⁴

The Internet has become a valuable resource in another sense. Web sites dedicated to political campaigns of all stripes regularly publicize constituency meetings, planning sessions, and other political gatherings that are unlikely to be covered by traditional media. Political opponents regularly send operatives to such meetings to record the “grassroots” discussions and the positions adopted by those seeking political office. Such information may be held for years, to be released at precisely the moment when it will cause the greatest damage to the credibility of an opponent. Increasingly, however, political operatives are branching out. On 26 January 2006, two days after election night, a self-identified Conservative party supporter named Stephen Taylor—the hand and mind behind an Internet site entitled *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*—speculated, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that leaks that had plagued the Liberal campaign

⁴ In the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day a potentially libelous posting was uploaded to the personal weblog of one Mike Klander. The blog showed a photograph of Jack Layton’s wife, Olivia Chow, who is of Chinese extraction, next to a photograph of a breed of dog known as a Chow Chow. Mr. Klander was identified as the executive vice president of the Ontario Liberal Party. He was forced to resign. (See: Mills, 2005)

were, in part, attributable to the proximity of Conservative and Liberal war rooms to a specific coffee outlet in downtown Ottawa: “On the corner of Metcalf and Slater is a Starbucks,” posted Taylor, “which was often frequented by Liberal war-room staffers in need of some java and by their Conservative counterparts who liked to sit around and ‘read’ the newspaper (while eavesdropping on the competition). Granted, it was a good place for bloggers to pick up tips too” (Taylor, 2006). If true, (and let’s keep in mind that Taylor is a political partisan and, therefore, not above spinning his own brand of manipulative communication), opposition research has pushed the boundaries of the public record to accommodate elements of amateur espionage.⁵

This vast reserve of information about political opponents, collected and stored in the research department’s data banks, is the “ammunition” available to the rapid-response team. When asked about the function of the rapid-response team, one war room participant who asked to remain anonymous said, “It’s about using opportunistic information on opponents. Undermining your opponent by going on an immediate attack and trying to make dirt stick.”⁶ It should be noted and underlined that such opportunism is *not* concerned with inventing the “dirt” that is intended to “stick.” All information used against political opponents is factual inasmuch as it can be confirmed by a reference to the public record (Kinsella, 2001). The real power of rapid response lies in its ability to present a contrary point of view to an opponent’s truth claims as quickly as possible, in some cases even before the questions and answers posed by the news media on a position announcement by a competing camp have ended. Indeed, part of the objective of rapid response is to prompt reporters to ask questions that have been generated in the war room

⁵ Taylor’s Starbuck’s “thesis” may be viewed at:
http://www.stephentaylor.ca/archives/2006_01.html

⁶ In conversation with the author in the NDP war room, December 2005.

or to use war-room material as factually-based information to round out their reports (Parry, 2008). Opposition research and rapid response are generated specifically to use a competing point of view to challenge the truth claims of opponents in order to undermine their credibility and, by doing so, to garner credibility for the home team.

In order for opposition research and rapid response to work effectively, however, the war room requires two other elements: an individual or team to coordinate and direct the strategic-communication resources and a person or team to monitor what the opposing political camps are doing at any given time during the campaign. A group of experienced political communicators, a specialized organization within the larger party operation, decides the strategic and tactical priorities on any given campaign day and how those priorities will be communicated. This group is mainly based in the party offices in downtown Ottawa, although a significant and influential element of the organization travels with the leader. In the election campaign of 2005-06 this contingent was led by the NDP's Director of Communications and long-time political activist Jamey Heath and was instrumental in conveying the concerns of the political leadership back to those in Ottawa, dealing with matters as they arose on the ground, and generally advising colleagues at "headquarters" how communication strategies were being received across the country. The campaign strategy from Ottawa was handled by a team directed by Brian Topp, a former deputy chief of staff in the Saskatchewan NDP administration of Roy Romanow and now a leading administrator with the Canadian performers' union ACTRA. Other members of the team included Brad Lavigne, a party communication specialist and now the director of communications for the NDP in Ottawa and Ray Guardia, recruited from ACTRA and charged with managing the daily operations of the

war room. Press Secretary Ian Capstick, a full-time caucus employee with the NDP, was the media contact charged with handling media requests (including requests to tour the war room), ensuring that perceived inaccuracies in media reports were clarified, and communicating general information about the campaign, such as the leader's schedule, to media sources and others.

The final element in the organizational structure of the NDP war room was, perhaps, the most critical and the least recognized. Two regular party workers were assigned to monitor and report on the daily news cycle. This was no small task. It involved disseminating a daily synopsis of the political reporting in all of Canada's big daily newspapers; monitoring radio sources such as CBC/Radio Canada for reports on opposition campaigns; monitoring CBC Newsworld and RDI for similar material, including live reports of announcements and other campaign related material; monitoring similar offerings on CTV, Global Television, and CSPAN, the all-politics cable channel; reporting on the content of national newscasts from all network television sources; and keeping a close watch on *The Canadian Press* (CP) news service for breaking information about the NDP and rival campaigns. This was particularly important because CP was (and is) regarded as the agenda-setter for political news of the day; that is, other news outlets subscribe to CP not only as a source of information on political campaigns, but as a dominant influence in deciding the importance of stories and, therefore, the prominence they will be given in the various national-news offerings.

From a general and purely functional point of view, the war room institutes a strategic-information campaign on two fronts. It promotes and disseminates the daily position of the party on issues dealing with the ideological position of the organization

and, conversely, it attacks and attempts to undermine the position of competing parties. Submerged within these two functions is a defensive mode: the war room must, as much as possible, anticipate attacks by competitors and respond to them. When a competitor scores a surprise “hit” it is the responsibility of the war room to deflect the damage. Various tactics are employed in these circumstances, from stony silence, to traditional “spin,” to full frontal assault. The objective in all cases is to gain credible ownership of the issues that are of greatest importance to voters and to enter into a series of parallel conversions. All parties seek to convert cultural capital to symbolic capital and garner the credibility, as Bourdieu would put it, to impose a legitimate vision of the social world. This is practically obtained by attempting to control the flow of information to the complicated collectivity that makes up the voting public(s), the collectivity that must embrace a particular vision and manifest it in the votes that will elect members of parliament if a particular political party is to control the concrete representation of collective power.⁷

In order to control this concrete representation, political war rooms have taken a page from a series of classic studies and theoretical positions on the way that journalists “frame” reality (Goffman, 1974; Tuchman, 1978; Gitlin, 1980; Parenti, 1993; Mendelsohn, 1993; Woong Rhee, 1997; Jamieson, 2003). Todd Gitlin’s use of Goffman’s theories on strips and frames is particularly useful. In Gitlin’s view, frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (Gitlin, 1980: 7). It is Gitlin’s position, subsequently adopted and adapted to specific areas of study such as

⁷ Chapter Six contains a detailed examination of a number of instances of war-room strategies and tactics intended to control this “ownership” of issues.

the journalistic treatment of political communication and electoral reportage (Parenti, 1993; Mendelsohn, 1993) that the media, as symbol-handlers, are complicit in ensuring that discourse is constructed and organized in a manner that favours the state (Gitlin, 1980). Gaye Tuchman, also borrowing from Goffman, posits that media organizations have significant influence over “strips”—the slices of defining reality chosen by intelligent observers from a “seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences” (Goffman, 1974: 21)—and the ideological conditions that frame them. According to Tuchman, those ideological conditions, embedded in the organizational structure of newsrooms and the culture of news work, ensure that the legitimized institutional view predominates in news accounts (Tuchman, 1978). Michael Parenti extends Tuchman’s critique by contending that personality trumps issues, events are favoured over content, official positions are considered more important than popular grievances, and the atypical and sensational is considered “more interesting” than the everyday because news organizations make a conscious choice “to withhold the informational and ideological tools” which citizens need to question elite constructions of reality (Parenti, 1993; Mendelsohn; 1993). Finally, the media, especially television, are specifically credited with framing election campaigns “as war, as a game, as drama, but rarely as a competition between alternate visions” (Fiske, 1987; Mendelsohn, 1993: 3).

All of the cited studies and theoretical positions that arise out of Goffman’s work on frame analysis are focused on the news media. All allude to journalists as agents of limited free expression, overtly or indirectly influenced by the ideological (and economic) limits imposed by the companies that employ them (Tuchman, 1978; Schulman, 1990; Hogarth, 1992). Yet by focusing on the media, these critiques fail to

address a lacuna in the relationship between journalists and political actors. If the game is so fixed along the ideological lines that favour elite consensus, how are political parties such as the NDP, parties that stand in openly-stated ideological opposition to the corporate aims and objectives of media companies, able to garner any coverage at all? Part of the answer lies in Canadian law and policy, particularly the sections of the Elections and Broadcasting Acts enforced by the CRTC that specify coverage on an “equitable basis to all accredited political parties and rival candidates” (Public Notice CRTC 1988-142, 1988). Another part of the answer lies in journalistic convention, the institutionally normalized “rule” that eschews one-sided or partisan reporting in favour of stories representing competing views, a “convention” which is itself open to criticism (Durham, 1998). War rooms have become adept at using law and policy, together with journalistic convention, to justify the seamless insertion into news stories of opposition research through rapid-response techniques. In other words, the competition for credibility at election time is being shaped by political operatives who seek to influence, at the most basic strip and frame level, the way that journalists construct their reporting.

It is not enough to say, as Mendelsohn has suggested in his study of the 1988 federal election “horse race,” that “the frames used will be negotiated between parties and the media, but will never be allowed to challenge the elite consensus and dominant ideology (Mendelsohn, 1993: 3). Rather, the competition for credibility is *all about* challenging the dominant ideology. The challenge is put into practice at the very level where the bits and pieces of everyday reality, worked upon by the rules and resources of institutional life and enabled by law, policy, and convention, are assembled into a representation, a construction of credible understanding, *a legitimate vision of the social*

world that seeks to resonate with a public or publics to affect a shift in elite consensus and dominant ideology through democratic expression. The question is whether the means justify the ends. With the struggle to impose a legitimate vision of the social world now conducted by all political war rooms at the most basic level of message construction, concerns about the rapid deployment and strategic placement of opposition research and the possibilities for manipulation and systematic distortion are of utmost importance; that is, does the opportunistic insertion of opposition research at this fundamental level, often without regard for context, remove the very possibility for reasoned debate on matters of public concern? The fact that political war rooms have constructed a layer of myth to insulate and conceal their core communicative practices is indicative of a general reluctance to openly engage this core question.

The act of concealment lies within the symbolic identity of the war room, the *space* of political communication that extends beyond the *place* where the party organization constructs its daily offerings. This extension reaffirms the place as something greater than the sum of its parts while simultaneously shielding its most closely held practices from public view. As social geographer, David Harvey observes, “concepts of space and time affect the way we understand the world to be” and are therefore deeply implicated in how we construct meaning around the concept of “place.” The layering of meanings around and within places is, as Harvey points out, powerfully normative. Such meanings contribute to the creation of dominating conventions that “operate with the full force of objective facts to which all individuals and institutions necessarily respond” (Harvey, 1996). War rooms of all stripes are deeply implicated in the creation of dominating conventions, layers of meaning that shield their purely

functional aspects. These meanings are intentionally constructed to represent the beating election-time heart of the party organization, enabling the *idea* of the war room to transcend its physical place, to become normalized as a powerful metonym in Canadian party politics. It is at once the transparent public heart of the party (inasmuch as the leader is its face) *and* a supra-organizational entity that stands in for the functional entity, its hip, postmodern, alter-representation that diverts scrutiny from the nuts-and-bolts practice of manipulating communication to obtain and hold political power.

This concern for the war room as an organization that is simultaneously transparent and secretive is addressed on a significant level in the work on meta-imaging undertaken by Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles. The brothers examined the documentary film, *The War Room*, by Chris Hegedus and Da Pennebaker, a film based on an “insider’s view” of the presidential campaign of Bill Clinton and promoted as a “revealing, behind-the-scenes journey to the White House” (Hegedus and Pennebaker, 1993). The Parry-Giles brothers contend that the film is a “political-rhetorical genre wherein campaign outsiders attempt to ‘get inside’ presidential campaigns to unmask the image” and reveal the ‘real’ candidate, but are thwarted by campaign operatives who turn the documentary into a device to promote a highly controlled image of the candidate and campaign (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 1999: 29). In this view, the credibility of the documentary film genre with its emphasis on capturing “reality in as pure a manner as possible” (Nichols, 1981: 170) is appropriated by political operatives in order to construct and project an image of the political candidate in keeping with the communication strategies of the campaign.

However, *The War Room* differs from other examples of “behind-the-scenes” documentary reportage. Its principle subject is supposed to be Bill Clinton and his political campaign for the presidency, but as the film unfolds the subject shifts to James Carville and George Stephanopoulos, the people responsible for running Clinton’s war room and, therefore, responsible for controlling the flow of access and information to the filmmakers. The political strategists behind the Clinton campaign become the representational foreground for the politician. Their “war room”—a term coined, according to Stephanopoulos, by Hilary Clinton (Stephanopoulos, 1999)—becomes a metonym for the entire campaign. While Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles rightfully point out that the *film* is an example of meta-*imaging*, “the communicative act in which political campaigns and their chroniclers publicly display and foreground the art and practice of political image construction” (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles: 29), it is also worth noting that that war room itself is a meta-*language* signifier (Barthes, 1984). This symbolic role for the war room, constructed by grafting a functional purpose onto the mythic/historic language of organized hostility, is the *idea* that has been refined, adapted, and imported into the Canadian political context.

This *idea* of the war room has been constructed in part by the insertion of its metonymic presence by political actors into daily news and information cycles, a process that has resulted in its valorization by journalists. For example, *The Globe and Mail* of 30 November 2005, a day after the federal election call, devoted a half-page to a “behind the scenes” look at the war rooms of the competing political parties. This arose from a request from various media organizations for access to competing party war rooms, a

request that the NDP capitalized on by permitting a general media tour.⁸ For a brief period, camera crews from CTV, the CBC/Radio Canada, and Global Television were given more-or-less free reign to collect images. In addition, reporters from various publications wandered through the place, taking notes about ambience and asking superficial questions about organizational structure. The result for the NDP was a small “earned media” coup. A photograph of the NDP war room was published in the prominent centre space of *The Globe and Mail* story. It represented a literal picture of party openness and media accessibility with a descriptive line that reads: “Cameramen film the NDP war room in Ottawa yesterday, after the kickoff of the federal election campaign.” Surrounding the photograph are submissions from four *Globe* reporters outlining in the starkest detail the names and abbreviated political pedigrees of the senior strategists for the Liberals, Conservatives, NDP, and Bloc Québécois. A sub-headline reads: “Think it’s the leaders who mastermind the campaigns? Think again. Meet the men and women who are really in charge” (Clark and Galloway, 2005).

Yet the story provides no detail about the daily functional grind of strategic-political communication at election time. There is no description of opposition research or rapid response. There is no sense of the way that communication priorities are set, followed, adapted, or abandoned. The *Globe* report purports to reveal the secret workings of the war room by breathlessly uncovering “the men and women who are really in charge,” but it never tells us exactly what they are in charge of. Instead, the war room is pictorially portrayed as a transparently normal part of daily life, a part of political life that just happens to house the “masterminds behind the campaigns.” The war room as a physical place becomes normalized, through its mediated representation, as the symbolic

⁸ The author was observing the NDP war room at this time.

space of political grand strategy, a post-modern Olympus where the singular pronouncements of the masterminds represent the Zeus-like voice of the party while concealing the intimate inner workings of the organization.

The extent to which the war room protects its functional side may be glimpsed in a short episode that was witnessed about two weeks after the publication of the *Globe and Mail* story. A reporter from an unknown news organization contacted Press Secretary Ian Capstick to request access to the war room in order to write an “in-depth” story about party strategy. This conversation took place in the common space of the war room and, like many conversations of this sort, no attempt was made to conceal its content; that is, it was an open conversation in open space overheard by numerous people including myself. While the NDP was willing to accommodate the reporter’s request, there were definite limits. For example, in response to a presumed question about attending the morning war-room “strategy meeting” the reporter was told: “No, no. That would be like my asking to come to your story meeting.” This was in reference to the standard morning news meetings held among reporters and editors in every newsroom across the country. The fact that most news organizations would likely be willing to accommodate a representative of the NDP, or any member of the public, is immaterial. By turning the question of accessibility back onto an assumed *inaccessibility* on the part of the reporter’s own newsroom, the press secretary was able to effectively constrain access by a journalist. This had the effect of protecting the symbolic space of the war room while heading off the process of demystification that may have come about by the dissemination of a story about the nuts-and-bolts of strategic-political communication. In the end the reporter dropped the request.

This small anecdote demonstrates the level of control over reflexive communication practiced by the war room. It is indicative of the constraints placed upon any “outsider” intent on examining the inner workings of this organization, constraints that had significant ramifications for the methodology of this study (Chapter Two). However, these organizational constraints and the tactics used to implement them are also markers or signposts that direct the way to the communicative control mechanisms used to conceal the practices of strategic-political communication. Nothing piques curiosity like a locked door. The challenge of unraveling the practice of strategic political communication lies in avoiding the tactical diversions that, for example, led to the quashing of a perfectly legitimate request by a reporter for access to the party’s communication apparatus, a request for transparency that would certainly have been in the interests of any number of publics.

A further example, this time from the pages of the 5 December 2005 edition of *The Ottawa Citizen*, illustrates how a certain form of meta-imaging has become commonplace. It has, in Harvey’s words, taken on the force of “dominating conventions that operate with the full force of objective facts.” The story, by *Citizen* reporter Doug Fischer, is entitled “Media focus on lobbyists in the war room.” Its photo and text take up more than a half-page. The gist of Fischer’s story is that firms of lobbyists—the Earncliffe Group and its close ties with the Paul Martin campaign is specifically profiled—are no longer able to work behind the scenes because of a higher expectation of transparency on behalf of the public (attributed to the work of the Gomery Commission in exposing questionable practices by the previous Liberal government). A sub-headline for the story sums up Fischer’s thesis by declaring: “The people who help politicians win

elections no longer do so without public scrutiny” (Fischer, 2005). Fischer goes on to detail the cozy and sometimes murky world of alliances between professional lobbyists who change hats, seemingly at will, to become senior strategists for political parties and, once the job is done, return to their lobbying work. Concerns are raised about valuable information on policy being passed to corporate clients from inside the political campaign. The alarm is raised over the possibility of serious conflicts of interest, of ethical misdeeds in pursuit of profit.

While all of this is certainly worthy of journalistic scrutiny, the true value in Fischer’s account lies in the tactics of justification and diversion that the story unwittingly brings to light. In other words, the response to Fischer from those being profiled is its own communication strategy. It is pointed out that MacKenzie-King used “advisers drawn from high-powered outside firms” as early as the 1920s. It is revealed that party strategists had been anticipating questions from reporters about the role of lobbyists. In anticipation of these questions, the Liberal party’s national director, Steven MacKinnon, was assigned the task of responding. His defense of the practice offers its own study in tactical response. Says MacKinnon:

Look, there’s nothing wrong with using people from the private sector on campaign. This is not policy-making—this is the work of getting a political party elected and I would submit to you that the day people cannot participate in the democratic process will be a dark day for the country (Fischer, 2005).

MacKinnon’s strategy is to push the issue into a safe register, the argument strategy of “democratic rights” or “democratic inclusion.” Democracy itself will be undone, a pall will be cast over the land, if certain people are denied their right to participate in the democratic process just because the work in the private sector! Tactically, MacKinnon first attacks the very premise of Fischer’s inquiry, implying that the reporter does not

know the difference between making policy and working on an election campaign. He diverts attention by refusing to discuss the possibility of inside knowledge of policy or personal connections with powerful politicians being used to generate future profits, instead pointing out that nothing illegal is taking place. To top it all off, a photo of the principals of the Earncliffe Group, gathered around a smiling Prime Minister Paul Martin, is prominently displayed in the story. It shows a group of grinning, happy, *normal* people, casually attired, perhaps a bit sheepish over all the fuss, presenting themselves for the television cameras in what is obviously a staged event. The Earncliffe Group, the core of Paul Martin's campaign war room, is therefore portrayed in text and image as a group of reasonable, everyday people who have nothing to hide. They just happen to have a devoted interest in the exercise of democracy. Not once is the question of what these people actually *do* (or how they do it) asked or answered. The strategic and tactical practices of the war-room operatives are employed to construct a meta-image of the war room which is itself employed to divert attention from and conceal the true strategic and tactical practices being used. And it is all done in plain sight.

How, then, is it possible to penetrate this protective shield, the meta-image and meta-language representation of the war room as the normalized reality of a political campaign? With so much energy expended on diverting attention from the functional heart of the war room, researchers (like the journalists who attempt behind-the-scenes reportage on political organizations) are faced with a matrix of constraints, both apparent and subsumed, aimed at framing the realities of strategic communication in a manner that supports the metonymic, symbolic, sanitized character of the war room. The danger for researchers is reflected in the Parry-Giles' critique of Hegedus and Pennebaker's

documentary: that the “truth” of an “objective” outsider’s point of view will be manipulated to support the normalization of a constructed image of the war room and, in doing so, contribute to the opacity of the true communicative acts undertaken by war-room actors (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 1999).

One way to penetrate the protective shield is to recognize from the beginning that not all political war rooms are created equal. As Ian MacDonald points out, they all perform essentially the same *functions*; they all engage in opposition research and rapid response; they all generate lines around issues for their political “clients” to use in the daily struggle for distinction; they are all concerned with message control (MacDonald, 2008). But each is also an organization with its own internal culture: the war room of the New Democratic Party that I witnessed bore no resemblance to the *Globe*’s description of the Earncliffe Group. Where the Liberal war room was, by its own description, connected to private-sector lobbyists and a coterie of political and communication professionals, the NDP organization was made up of union activists and administrators, and (mostly) young people brought in from the party’s provincial offices. Whereas the group photograph of the Earncliffe strategists published in the *Globe* shows a collection of mainly white, middle-aged males, the NDP war room was the very picture of diversity. While it is true that the senior strategists in the New Democrat organization were “pale and male” it is also true that (from my observations) women outnumbered men across the board, sexual preference was not an issue, nobody paid attention when the Moslem campaign workers stopped for prayers, and the place was profoundly colour-blind.

Issues of “corporate” power and hierarchy were also in keeping with what one might expect from an “NDP” organizational culture. I observed a workplace where

people spoke their minds, but also listened to the reasoned arguments of others—a place where passionate positions were often laid out in open space at a fairly high-decibel level. The very existence of an organizational hierarchy became apparent only when one outspoken war-room worker complained about the power relations that “everyone had agreed needed to be dealt with.” She was referring to a group decision that had been made at some point prior to my arrival to “flatten” the organizational structure, to disperse the decision-making and power patterns of the war room over its workforce. This may have caused the application of some daily strategic decisions to move more slowly than “management” would have liked—some meetings were quite lengthy because everybody felt they had a stake in discussing the matters at hand—but in general the rapid responses of the NDP war room were as fast as anyone else’s and the institutional entrepreneurship of the group was always in evidence. Everyone understood the objectives. Everyone understood the resources, both human and material, that were available to make the objectives possible.

Indeed, in many respects it was the institutional “fit” of the war room that seemed to be at odds with the political culture of many of the people who worked in it. The kind of organizational discipline portrayed in the film, *The War Room*, with its commitment to winning at any cost, did not appeal to the value commitments of many people who were volunteering their time to a political party that at times seemed to be ignoring its own press. I have no proof of this assertion, merely a set of passive observations. Some war-room workers would become unusually quiet when certain tactical gambits were put in play, notably practices aimed at dis-credit rather an engaging core issues. Some people would roll their eyes. Others would leave the room. Conversely, there was anger and

outrage when “pure” tactics were employed against the NDP. In such cases the sentiment was openly voiced that the opposition was not “playing fair” (Chapter Six). The greatest approval for strategic and tactical measures came when the party’s position was well-represented by journalists as a reasonable alternative to the ones on offer from competing camps; that is, when the credibility of an NDP position was given its due.

However, as the campaign moved forward and the election drew closer, the practices of war-room operatives seemed to become more programmatic, more inclined to rely on the tactical playbook than on a keen desire to engage a rational-critical debate, even on issues such as publicly-funded health care that lie at the core of the NDP identity. This was partly because the NDP was simply outgunned by the “communication professionals” employed by the Liberals and the Conservatives (the Bloc, of course, was concerned only with Québec where the NDP was a marginal presence at best). As a result, the NDP war room felt pressure to respond in kind, to conform to the tactics and strategies that were being deployed against it. This often put the party out on a limb with journalists who, using their own experience and understanding of Canadian political history (their cultural capital), were able to ask uncomfortable questions to which the party (usually represented by Leader Jack Layton) appeared ill-prepared to respond. On more than one occasion, the NDP undermined its own credibility, expended its own symbolic capital for no return, because it was unprepared or unable to support its own truth claims (Chapter Eight).

This is not an indictment of the way the NDP conducted itself in the 2005-06 general election campaign as much as an observation on the way that political war rooms in their symbolic representation, in their own meta-imaging, can become a prescriptive

solution for the very people who work in them. It is an observation on how the war room, having established itself as its own objective fact across the Canadian political firmament, has come to command the response of the individuals engaged in its own structured *being* largely in response to the competition among different variants of the same organizational structure. For the NDP this might have resulted in an electoral disaster; the party all but disappeared from the media spotlight in the second half of the campaign, relegated in the main to providing reaction quotes to “balance” stories being generated in other political camps. Yet voters did move to the New Democrats. The party did pick up seats on election day. There was resonance in the field of power/publics for the NDP as an alternative to the dominant political options. Why? And why, given the sound and fury of partisan-political communication, the expenditure of considerable economic capital, the constant positioning and tactical challenge over matters of credibility that characterized the 2005-06 election campaign, did Canadian publics choose a minority government?

The following chapter assesses these and other questions as it begins the process of unraveling war room practices from the inside. It illustrates how tactics and the responses they generate can overshadow larger strategic concerns. In many ways it is a lesson on just how ruthless Canadian politics can be and how committed the people who play in the field are to its *illusio*. But it is also an exploration into some of the inherent weaknesses of war-room communication practices, of how strategic-political communicators can find their own strategies and tactics coming back to bite them. Above all, the following chapter begins to reveal how credibility lies behind every communicative exchange engaged by competing war rooms and journalists, and the

lengths, symbolic and otherwise, that those in competition for power will employ to obtain this rare and important species of symbolic capital.

Chapter Six

The War Room in Action: Tactics

Buzz Hargrove, president of the Canadian Auto Workers Union, has been found in a very public embrace with Prime Minister Paul Martin and the feathers are flying (Alan Ferguson, 2005).

On Friday December 2nd, five days before Alan Ferguson's column in the *Vancouver Province* hit the streets, workers at the New Democratic Party headquarters in Ottawa gathered in the media area of the war room. Word had spread that something was up. All eyes were on CBC Newsworld which was broadcasting live from the floor of the Canadian Auto Workers' (CAW) annual convention in Toronto. CAW President Buzz Hargrove had taken the stage to ask delegates to support "strategic voting" in the upcoming election, something the NDP considered to be utterly contrary to its own interests. By Hargrove's logic, confirmed NDP voters could stop Conservative candidates in their tracks by switching their votes to the Liberal candidate in ridings where New Democrats had no chance of winning. This would stop the "common enemy" from winning in ridings where the vote was split on the left and centre. By the NDP's logic, the Liberals were *also* the enemy, perhaps even the greater of the evils confronting them in this election. Hargrove was asking committed New Democrats to endorse, in the view of the war room, a hare-brained scheme that was doomed to backfire at their candidates' expense.

Hargrove's initial speculation on this "strategy" had been met with a certain amount of incredulity in NDP circles, but nobody had anticipated the spectacle that had been engineered for the Toronto convention. Waiting in the wings was Prime Minister Paul Martin and, on cue, he walked out before the assembled representatives of the largest union in the country, embraced its president, and accepted a CAW bomber jacket

as a symbol of solidarity with the workers on the convention (and shop) floor. The symbolism was unmistakable. It was certainly not lost on the campaign workers watching from the NDP war room. Stunned silence gradually gave way to unflattering epithets about Hargrove's sanity and character, and some rougher language likening him to certain anatomical features not normally discussed in polite company. The shock and sense of betrayal—after all, a great many New Democrats, especially in Central Canada, see the party as a political extension of the union movement—was assuaged somewhat by a telephone call from a campaign worker on the convention floor. The caller pointed out that large numbers of delegates were sitting on their hands, refusing to openly endorse Hargrove's new deal with Martin, a scene that was confirmed by the CBC cameras. For all of this, the prevailing sentiment among party workers was anger and dismay over what was universally regarded as an act of out-and-out treason.¹

Then something interesting happened. The war room communication “machine” kicked into high gear. Strategists met briefly and in very short order the war room issued a series of “lines” to be used in response to the inevitable questions that journalists would ask. These lines, along with a synopsis of the issue at hand, were immediately conveyed on the internal list-serve by the campaign's press secretary to all candidates and political operatives who might be approached for a comment:

BACKGROUND

At the CAW national conference in Toronto today, CAW President Buzz Hargrove endorsed Liberals in ridings in which “NDP has no chance in hell” and said he wanted increased Liberal representation in Parliament. Said

¹ In fact, later that evening CAW delegates would endorse the Hargrove/Martin alliance in a vote from the convention floor (Leslie, 2005). The following February, less than a month after the election, the Ontario wing of the NDP would suspend Buzz Hargrove (Oliviera, 2006). In April, the union would retaliate by severing financial and other ties with the NDP (CP Staff, 2006a).

minority should have continued because it was getting good stuff done.

LINES

Parliament was getting things done because NDP got results for people. Just look at majority Liberal record.

Mr. Hargrove's entitled to his opinion. What's important to remember is if you want to vote NDP chances are very good your neighbours do too. That's why a vote for the ndp [sic] elects an NDP MP.

Working people need pension protection, better training, E.I. [employment insurance] that's there for them and Liberals haven't delivered. In this Parliament alone, the Liberals opposed a ban on scab labour in areas of federal jurisdiction (NDP War Room, 2 December 2005).

This is a common response in political communication circles—classic “spin” used to counter unforeseen circumstances that might be seen to negatively affect the party's fortunes. The idea is to re-frame the issue by attempting to direct attention away from its perceived negative substance to matters that are more favourable to the party. But under the circumstances—a perceived betrayal by a key member of the NDP “family” coupled with a strike by the Liberals into the very heart of NDP territory—these lines had a secondary purpose: to maintain discipline by constraining everyone in the party, coast-to-coast, to the same set of responses.

As tempting as it would have been to launch a frontal attack on Hargrove's credibility, to hit back at a perceived betrayal, the lines were intended to take issue with the union president's *position* without alienating the *person*. Political strategists recognized that, disagreeable political bedfellows aside, Hargrove was still in a position to influence a great number of voters in ridings where support for the NDP remained strong, voters who might be tempted to stick by their union boss rather than the party in the event of a public showdown. After all, Paul Martin had reached out to Hargrove because the Liberals were convinced he could deliver NDP votes. The NDP was not

interested in lending further help to Martin's cause. A reasonable and respectful tone, reminding CAW members (and other union voters) of the New Democratic Party's record in Parliament, of the need for solidarity among "neighbours," of the party's values vis-à-vis its support for programs to benefit workers and, most significantly, of the mistrust that working people should hold for the Liberals based on their record in government, would paint Hargrove's plan for strategic voting as ill-considered and out-of-step with the larger community of working people. Furthermore, the very act of suggesting that "Mr. Hargrove's entitled to his opinion" planted a seed of doubt about whether strategic voting had originated solely with Buzz Hargrove. The Liberals (embroiled in the "sponsorship scandal" inquiry and questions over the possibility of illegal dissemination of insider-knowledge on income trusts) were master manipulators, inferred the NDP, and not above leading Hargrove astray. As their record showed, they were not to be trusted.

For reporters working for national news organizations, the NDP response could not hold a candle to the spectacle of the mutual embrace of Martin and Hargrove. *The Canadian Press*, reporting from the convention, proposed in its introductory paragraph (lede) on the story (and seemed to confirm a measure of NDP suspicions) that this was an ingrained Liberal manoeuvre:

The time-honoured Liberal tactic of poaching New Democrat support got an early start Friday as Paul Martin warned Canada's largest union that only he and Steven Harper stand a chance of becoming prime minister. (Leslie, 2005).

Keith Leslie's report quotes Martin's speech to the CAW delegates at length, but makes no mention of the NDP position in the lines being circulated to party spokespeople. A follow-up story by CP's Gary Norris, filed an hour later, shifts to quoting Hargrove's

position rather than that of Martin and seems to reflect an attempt by the union boss to clarify matters:

A Liberal minority government with the balance of power held by the New Democratic Party would be the best outcome in the federal election, Canadian Auto Workers president Buzz Hargrove said Friday (Norris, 2005a).

Norris is also among the first to quote NDP Leader Jack Layton in response to Hargrove's actions. Layton's words are adapted directly from the lines issued by the war room:

"Mr. Hargrove is well known for having his opinions and expressing them and *he's entitled to them* in terms of how the house should be composed," said NDP Leader Jack Layton. "Our view and my job as the leader of the New Democratic Party, which is *the party most clearly associated with getting results for workers*, is to get as many New Democrats elected as possible" (Norris, 2005a) [emphasis mine].

The Globe and Mail picked up on the drama of the Hargrove/Martin embrace in its Saturday edition, the day after the event, playing the story prominently under a front page headline that reads: "Liberals touted by CAW leader". This is followed by a lead-in line in less prominent print: "Hargrove's endorsement bitter pill for NDP to swallow" that sets up a lede that reads:

Autoworkers union boss Buzz Hargrove cut the legs from under the NDP's election message when he delivered a qualified endorsement of Paul Martin's Liberals yesterday (Clark and Curry, 2005).

The NDP reaction is reserved for the "jump" on page six under a secondary headline that reads: "Merely one person's view, NDP says." The words divide a prominent photograph of the Hargrove/Martin public embrace from the remaining text of the story. Layton's response, once again taken from the war room lines, attempts to underscore the personal nature of Hargrove's position while attacking the Liberal record (and simultaneously underscoring the NDP position) by stating: "Our view is that the Liberals don't deserve

people's support. What have they done in the 12 years they've been in power to improve the lives of working people?" (Clark and Currie, 2005) The *National Post* and the *Ottawa Citizen*, both owned by CanWest, published stories on the Hargrove/Martin embrace in their Saturday editions. Each plays down Layton's response. Indeed, the *Ottawa Citizen* story (published at the bottom of page three) contains no mention of the NDP leader.

The real stakes here are, of course, votes: the currency of exchange at election time that, theoretically, permits one vision of the social world to predominate. *The Globe and Mail* story contains an inkling of the overall NDP strategy and gestures toward an underlying reason for the party's very real concern over Liberal attempts to poach votes:

In places like Hamilton, Oshawa and Saskatchewan, where the NDP narrowly lost in 2004, Mr. Layton has been attempting to polarize the vote between the New Democrats and the Conservatives. "Don't waste your vote on the Liberals," he said yesterday morning in Regina (Clark and Currie, 2005).

The NDP strategy is underscored by comments from Saskatchewan Premier Lorne Calvert who, in a somewhat confused joint news conference with Layton, revealed "he would be happy with a minority Liberal or NDP government."² Says Calvert:

This election again I think there will be a building of New Democratic Party fortunes—not to put us into government this election, but I think positioning this party very well for a government not so far down the future (Clark and Currie, 2005).

The objective for the NDP, then, was not necessarily to form government, but to obtain enough seats to permit the party to, once again, hold the balance of power in a minority *Liberal* government (although the party would always take the public position that its intention is to form government). Hargrove's foray into federal-election politics,

² Calvert headed the New Democratic Party in Saskatchewan. It formed the provincial government at the time of the 2005-06 federal election.

therefore, was not necessarily off base with the overall election strategy of the New Democrats, but his *tactics* were highly problematic. On a significant level this was a turf war over who would decide which marginal ridings the party had a hope of gaining or retaining and how “NDP votes” should be dispersed in order to influence the outcome. It was also a dispute over the scope of Hargrove’s vision. Whereas the union leader bore responsibility for the rank and file of the CAW, the NDP was, and is, a national political party and, as such, was concerned with the way that Hargrove’s “strategy” would play out in even places far beyond the scope of his influence, for example, in ridings such as Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing.

The Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing constituency takes in a huge swath of Northern Ontario. It is a riding long-held by the Liberals. In recent years, the economy has shifted from the traditional (and still strong) resource sector to tourist-related and other service industries, industries that are often seen as growth opportunities by organized labour. In the election of 2004, the NDP came within 3225 votes of overturning Liberal incumbent Brent St. Denis. Recent history holds that candidates of the right tend to come in a distant third on election night in Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing.³ Within days of Hargrove’s call for “strategic voting” and his (by then) notorious embrace of Paul Martin, the Liberal candidate’s communication team issued a “news release” to say how happy he and other Liberals were to have the labour leader’s

³ A riding profile is provided at: <http://www.cbc.ca/canadavotes/riding/109/>
The Liberal candidate, Brent St. Denis, polled 14,276 votes in the 2004 federal election. His NDP contender, Carol Hughes, polled 11,051 for a difference of 3225. The Conservative Party candidate garnered 8093 votes. Results may be viewed at: <http://www.sfu.ca/~aheard/elections/2004-ONT.html>. In the 2006 election, the Liberals polled 14,652 votes (virtually unchanged) and the NDP polled 13,244 for a difference of 1408. The Conservative candidate received 8957 votes. Results may be viewed at: <http://www.sfu.ca/~aheard/elections/2006-ONT.html>

support.⁴ However, St. Denis's contribution to the discussion was to ignore the issue of strategic voting altogether and selectively claim Hargrove's endorsement for entire swaths of unrelated Liberal policy:

Mr. Hargrove's statement shows that our government's focus on a strong economy and a balanced approach to investment in social programs, tax cuts and debt reduction is the best approach for Canadians, particularly those who depend on labour-related sectors of our economy such as forestry.

(Liberal party News Release, 5 December 2005)

Clearly, this is not what Hargrove or anyone else on the political left was actually saying.

An exchange of messages in the NDP war room outlined the concern and framed the response:

To: War Room
Date: Dec 5, 2005 5:58 PM
Subject: NDP FIGHTS BACK LIBERAL
NONSENSE IN NORTHERN ONT

Not sure if there's any use for this, but here's an example of how Liberals who really face no competition from Conservatives are using Hargrove's comments to defeat New Democrats.

pretty rich given that St. Denis voted:
against federal anti-scab legislation (22 Oct 2003)
against allowing his OWN employees to benefit from federal labour laws including the right to collectively bargain (3 June 2003)
(NDP War Room, 5 December 2005)

This example of opposition research at work illustrates a wider concern. While the war room was ready and able to challenge St. Denis on his perceived distortion of Hargrove's position—the opposition research provided is intended for use by the NDP candidate to undercut the Liberal's position based on his own record—there was also a sense that the

⁴ The "release" was published verbatim in local papers such as the online version of SooToday.com where the company motto, apparently without irony, is: "We do news differently." The story may be viewed at: http://www.sootoday.com/content/news/full_story.asp?StoryNumber=14666

limited resources of the war room could have been put to better use. If part of the overall Liberal strategy in the Hargrove affair was to disrupt the NDP in its own back yard, forcing it to use resources to put out brush fires in ridings such as Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing, it had succeeded. Following the “news release” of December 5th, St. Denis seems to have dropped this line of attack, but Paul Martin and Buzz Hargrove certainly had not.

On December 9th, precisely one week after the Hargrove/Martin embrace, the NDP war room received a message from a campaign worker entitled: “Hargrove with PM in Windsor???” The message was based on an exchange on CTV’s all-news channel, Newsnet, between Rosemary Thompson, the reporter traveling with the NDP leader’s entourage, and Ravi Baichwal, the anchor on the network’s morning news program. Editorial staff at CTV had heard a rumour that Buzz Hargrove was headed for Windsor to link up again with Paul Martin, this time on a campaign swing through several disputed ridings in the area. Thompson was unable to confirm that possibility, preferring to discuss how weather conditions had grounded the NDP campaign jet the night before, preventing the leader from making it to his own planned campaign stop in Windsor. The New Democrats were unaware of Hargrove’s plans but justifiably concerned about a Liberal *tour de force* at Layton’s expense, even the truly bizarre possibility, posited by CTV, of a media coup by the Liberals: “It would be very interesting,” said Baichwal, “to see if Buzz Hargrove finds a way to get close to Jack Layton and link some arms and show some symbolism that way as well” (Baichwal, 2005).⁵ All the NDP war room could do at this

⁵ As it turns out, the “weather conditions” that had grounded the NDP campaign plane made it impossible for Layton to make his early appointments in Windsor, something that was unknown to the CTV journalists at the time of the morning broadcast. More likely, the “weather” had made Windsor radioactive for Layton, at least until a plan of action could be worked out to ensure that

point was to plaintively ask: "Can someone look into this and confirm/deny???" (NDP War Room, 9 December 2005).

Confirmation arrived via Broadcast News (BN), the radio arm of *The Canadian Press*, with a story filed early in the afternoon and circulated by the war room:

Dec 09 2005 13:34:00 - Source: BN [Broadcast News]
National Audio 1:45 p.m. ET 09 12 05 (NATIONALAudio145pmET0)
114 - (FedElxn-Liberals-Hargrove)

WINDSOR, Ontario. x--10s. It was a strange sight at the Chrysler announcement this morning. Canadian Auto Workers President Buzz Hargrove was on stage with Prime Minister Paul Martin during his campaign visit in Windsor.

That, despite the fact N-D-P Leader **>Jack Layton<** will be in the city today as well. During his speech Hargrove made a joke out of his support.

("...hug you today." - laughs fade) (SOURCE:CHYR) (145p)

TAG: Hargrove says he supports the two N-D-P candidates in Windsor, but he supports Liberal Susan Whelan in the county because according to Hargrove, the Essex N-D-P candidate doesn't have a chance to win (BN Staff, 2005a).

From the NDP's point of view, the injury continued with an announcement later that day of federal and provincial support for upgrades to two automotive plants in Windsor and Brampton, Ontario. The provincial Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty would contribute almost \$77-million and the federal government \$46-million. Hargrove joined McGuinty, Paul Martin, and company executives on stage at Windsor's Daimler-Chrysler plant to join in the announcement and, presumably, deliver on his *quid pro quo* of support for the Liberals. Furthermore, as quoted by CP, Hargrove was now on a first-name basis with the prime minister:

there was absolutely no chance of him being manipulated into an appearance alongside Hargrove and Martin .

“I’ve been forewarned, though, Paul,” Hargrove said.
“We have two NDP members of Parliament in this city, and I’ve been instructed ahead of time not to hug you today, even though I feel like hugging you based on this wonderful announcement” (Panetta, 2005).

Jack Layton, who had finally arrived in Windsor, was left to make a tepid planned announcement before a student audience at the University of Windsor on his party’s support for enhancing the system at border crossings (a big issue in Windsor) and, belatedly, the NDP’s position on support for the auto industry. He ducked the inevitable “reaction” questions from journalists when asked his opinion on Hargrove’s latest gambit.

Canada’s major newspapers carried the story the following day, though none placed it on the front page. *The Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Saturday Star* each homed in on the new “relationship” between Hargrove and Martin pointing out that this was the second time in as many weeks that the CAW boss and the prime minister had joined forces at the NDP’s expense. Both the *National Post* and *The Globe and Mail* ran their stories below a wire-service image by *Reuters* photographer, Chris Wattie, showing Hargrove beaming with goodwill as he grasps the hand of Paul Martin. In each case, the growing rift between the New Democratic Party and the union chief was played up.

Reaction from the NDP is actually more muted in these reports than it had been the previous week. While Jack Layton was cited in the stories, mainly with respect to his campaign stop at the University of Windsor the previous day, the on-point reaction to Hargrove was handed over to Joe Comartin, an NDP member of parliament for Windsor.

Comartin's response to Hargrove's actions was direct and widely quoted. The *National Post* report is typical:

Joe Comartin, NDP MP for Windsor-Tecumseh criticized Mr. Hargrove for "going off on a tangent" and confusing CAW members ... "The reaction from the membership ... in Windsor and Essex County has been very negative to that position ... Just overwhelmingly, 'What's he doing? That's not our traditional position'" (Dawson and Gordon, 2005).

Comartin goes on to ask why Buzz Hargrove is campaigning with the prime minister and not an NDP candidate? In one of the least ingenuous responses of the entire campaign, Hargrove was later quoted as saying he did not show up at [the Daimler-Chrysler event] at the behest of the Liberals and had not been asked by anyone to campaign for the NDP. "I was invited here by Daimler-Chrysler," said Hargrove, "not the prime minister" (Chase, Taber and Clark, 2005).

The two Hargrove events, a week apart, exemplify offensive and defensive war-room strategies. Clearly, the Liberal strategy was to reach into NDP territory and reach out to union members in the hope that they would support the Liberals in certain contested ridings. This was precisely the strategy the Liberals had used in the previous election when Paul Martin had made last-minute entreaties to NDP voters in a bid to shore up the Liberal vote. That the Liberals managed to leverage the *credibility* of Hargrove and his position as the CAW boss to their advantage was nothing short of a minor coup. The relative silence of the NDP with respect to Hargrove and the literal silence of Layton during the second episode spoke to the level of damage to its own credibility that the party sensed in Hargrove's actions. When, later in the campaign, the CAW president tried to extend his "strategic voting" initiative to Québec, suggesting that

NDP voters should support Bloc candidates to defeat Conservatives, NDP Campaign Co-chair Brian Topp once again advised silence:

I don't favor [sic] doing anything that outs Hargrove [sic] back in the news. He's being relatively quiet let's try to keep it that way (NDP War Room, 16 December 2005).

Indeed, it was journalists and Conservative strategists who went on the offensive over Hargrove's plan for Québec by asking disquieting questions about the wisdom of attempting to align a federalist party with one that favours sovereignty (CP, 2006). When Hargrove, on a mid-January campaign swing through southwestern Ontario with Paul Martin, accused Conservative Leader Stephen Harper of holding separatist views and urged Québec voters to support the Bloc because "anything is better than the Tories," it ignited a small storm of incredulity and put Martin (who had repeatedly and forcefully declared his federalist credentials) in a thoroughly awkward position (CP Staff, 2006b). Shortly thereafter, the Liberals quietly deserted Hargrove. The NDP maintained its silence, neither condemning Hargrove nor coming to his defense.

It is important to keep in mind that the Hargrove "affair" was just one moderately high-profile series of political incidents that took place within an extraordinarily complex nexus of competing campaign issues. For a short time it overshadowed the highly controlled, daily roll-out of the NDP's position on a handful of major campaign issues—publicly-funded medicare, child care, gun control, support for workers and senior citizens, the environment—that the party and its opponents were jockeying to frame as ballot-box issues. While Buzz Hargrove's actions were likely of little help to the NDP, they must be taken contextually. The surprise Hargrove/Martin embrace of December 2nd may have made the front page of the following day's *Globe and Mail*, but the story found itself in fierce competition with the announcement-a-day strategy of the

Conservatives who at this time were presenting their GST tax-cut plan and their controversial child-care program. Indeed, *The Globe and Mail* of December 3rd gives substantially more space to stories about these Conservative initiatives than to either the Liberals or the NDP.

There is also a difference in the *texture* of the coverage. Once again, *The Globe and Mail* of December 3rd is generally indicative of that day's print coverage: a soft and speculative piece about Liberal campaign strategy (Laghi, 2005) was followed by a hard-edged report on Stephen Harper's promise to force provinces to reduce hospital wait-times (Galloway, 2005). The report on Hargrove's embrace of Paul Martin was juxtaposed with a quantitative analysis of Harper's announcement earlier in the week of planned cuts to the Goods and Services Tax (Tu, 2005).

Stories also get knocked off of the news agenda. The staged events of December 9th with Hargrove and Martin reprising their CAW convention act, this time at Daimler-Chrysler, were an obvious Liberal tactic intended to keep the NDP off balance and the new Hargrove/Martin alliance in the public eye. This was widely reported. But just two days later, Liberal Director of Communications Scott Reid made his now infamous "beer and popcorn" comment on national television.⁶ This provided an opening for the NDP, through Jack Layton, to attack both the Liberals and the Conservatives on their respective child-care plans:

⁶ Reid, representing the Liberals on a panel discussion on CBC Television said of the Conservative child-care plan (inaccurately as it turns out): "It's going to give people 25 bucks a day, they [parents] can spend it on videos. Don't give people 25 bucks a day to blow on beer and popcorn" (CP Staff, 2005).

And as wrong as Mr. Harper's plan is, it's also wrong for Liberals to attack parents and suggest somehow [that] parents would take the money for beer and popcorn," he said. "The Liberals' mask on child care came down for a minute there and showed their real point of view" (Oliveira, 2005).

Layton then went on to outline the NDP's multi-billion dollar child-care proposal, a proposal in stark contrast to the Conservative plan and made all the more distinct by the self-inflicted discomfort of the Liberals. As one NDP wag put it in a general message to the war room: "Memo to Scott Reid and popcorn: The worst time to shoot yourself in the foot is when it's in your mouth" (NDP War Room, 11 December 2005).

The point here is that the daily grind of war-room strategies and tactics is, more often than not, thrown into an incomprehensible muddle by the unintended consequences of very human actions. The negative consequences of launching a full frontal assault on Buzz Hargrove were not lost on the NDP—the party could scarce afford to lose those voters tempted to buy into Hargrove's strategic-voting scheme as well as those who would vote with their feet *and* their ballots if they concluded that the party was unfairly beating up on their duly elected union brother. On the other hand, beer and popcorn became an unimaginable gift for the NDP, manna from heaven washed down with pure ambrosia delivered nationally in a neat, thoroughly exploitable media package. It was precisely the kind of relief from "the buzz about Buzz" that the party needed. Both incidents illustrate how war rooms of all stripes are constantly on the lookout for opportunities. However, while these widely disseminated, heavily choreographed incidents represent important practices at the mediated surface of the campaign there is a daily routine intended, mainly through a kind of symbolic mischief, to troll and hook into manufactured issues that may then be turned into larger-scale tactical assaults.

On any given day of the campaign, two streams of “media” releases would appear on the NDP’s official web site.⁷ News releases—presented as an ever-growing list of activated titles that could be “clicked on” to reveal the document—formed one information stream; rapid responses, presented in a similar manner, formed the other. News releases, in general, offered the “good news” about the party’s position on core election concerns as identified and promoted by the NDP (the core campaign planks mentioned above). Rapid responses were attempts to challenge the position on any issue that had been put into circulation by a competing party or to “hit back” at claims of competitors by “setting the record straight.” Rapid responses were also used to signal the party’s intentions on a matter of core concern; to attempt to place the NDP in a position of control over a specific important agenda item. For example, in the lead up to the first French-language debate held in Vancouver on the evening of December 15th, the NDP circulated the following rapid-response item to journalists and simultaneously posted it on the party web site:

NDP Rapid Response: Paul Martin’s Child Care Promises:

Paul Martin claims to have kept his promise on creating a national Child Care program.

Here’s the promise:

“In each year following a year of 3% economic growth, a Liberal government will create 50,000 new child care spaces to a total of 150,000.” - *The Red Book, Creating Opportunity*, 1993, p. 40

Economic growth of more than 3% occurred 6 out of 7 years between 1993 and 2000, no national child care program.

Why did it take 12 years to get going on this priority? Jack Layton pointed out that the government only got going on childcare once it lost its majority, and found itself forced to work with the NDP (NDP War Room, 15 December 2005).

⁷ The NDP’s regular web site at <http://www.ndp.ca/> served as a clearing-house for war-room communication during election campaigns. At the conclusion of the election of 2005-2006 all rapid response and news release materials were expunged from the site.

This rapid response is a bit unusual because it *anticipated* a point of contention that was almost certain to be dealt with both in the French-language debate and, one day later, in the English-language version. It also came at a time when the Liberals were still smarting over the “beer and popcorn” episode. Indeed, the timing of this posting served several tactical purposes: it telegraphed the NDP position and laid claim to the issue for all voters who were unlikely to support the Conservative plan⁸; it put the Liberals on the defensive by suggesting that, as government, they only moved on universal child care when forced to do so by the New Democrats; and, finally, it challenged the veracity of Paul Martin’s promises and priorities by citing statistics that appeared to show an unwillingness to act even when conditions supported action. According to the war room, the public record showed that Paul Martin was not to be trusted, whereas Jack Layton was indeed trustworthy. Layton used the essential points outlined in the rapid-response posting during the French-language debate.

The Liberal war room, clearly annoyed with the NDP attack, responded the following morning with a detailed rapid response of its own:

Layton Misrepresents Support for Child Care Plan
December 16, 2005

During the first French language debate Mr. Layton claimed, “it was only when he [Paul Martin] was in a minority government situation with N.D.P. Members that we were able to make progress on this issue [early learning and child care].”

FACT

In Budget 2004, the Liberal Government delivered on its promise to create a national early learning and childcare system.

The Liberal government allocated \$5 billion over five years to deliver on that promise and that money will begin to flow next year in 2006.

⁸ The Conservatives had released their child-care proposal the previous week.

Since Budget 2004, the Liberal government has signed agreements with all 10 provinces -- 3 final agreements and 7 agreements in principle—to put a national early learning and childcare system in place.

Mr. Layton voted against Budget 2004 and the \$5 billion for early learning and childcare. When Mr. Layton had the opportunity to highlight the issue, in his proposed budget additions, there was no request for further childcare funds. It was Paul Martin's Liberal government that achieved this important evolution in our social foundation, not Jack Layton and not the NDP. (Liberal party Rapid Response, 16 December 2005).

This response also provided a platform to restate the Liberal party position on child care.

Most major newspapers made mention of the child-care issue in their debate coverage.

Greg Weston, a syndicated columnist with the Sun Media group and Susan Riley of the *Ottawa Citizen* each provided a widely circulated breakdown of each party's child-care offerings (Weston, 2005; Riley, 2005). On balance, then, the NDP managed to get its message out prior to the debate and during the debate; its full platform plank on child care, together with reportage on the NDP position, was picked up by most major newspapers and two widely circulated columnists; and the party position was reiterated in the Liberal rapid response to Layton's debate performance, all in anticipation of the English-language debate which was itself widely reported.

This kind of rapid-response dueling among parties was not unusual during the course of the campaign; indeed, the thrust and parry of low level, rapid-response tactical communication has in large part come to characterize the day-to-day life of Canadian political campaigns. On any given day, the NDP would disseminate as many as five or six rapid responses depending on the claims being made by the competition. Journalists would normally ignore this background squabbling over the minutiae of "who said what when" or use the material as a prompt to develop their own stories or analyses, as in the case of Weston and Riley. But once in a while the war room would score a calculated "pit

hit,” a situation where information gathered and circulated by the opposition research and rapid response teams would be picked up and disseminated virtually unchanged. One such situation occurred when Paul Martin attempted to spread around some Liberal largesse in Newfoundland.

The story begins innocuously enough with a standard posting of Paul Martin’s upcoming itinerary on *The Canadian Press* wire service, a “lookahead” to the following week’s schedule for the Liberal campaign:

ST. JOHN'S, N.L. (5:39 p.m.) -- Prime Minister Paul Martin speech to St. John's Board of Trade. (12 p.m. at St. John's Convention Centre) (CP Staff, 2005b).

The date and time are relevant. At this point, the NDP war room was still reeling over the Buzz Hargrove/Paul Martin embrace at the CAW convention in Toronto, a story that would dominate news coverage through the night and into the following day. CP also advised that no campaigning by the Liberals was planned for the weekend of December 3rd and 4th. Nobody knew what Martin planned to say to the St. John’s Board of Trade the following Monday, but any opportunity to make the Liberals pay for the Hargrove affair would be greatly welcomed by the NDP campaign team. The opportunity came at 9:23 on Monday morning, December 5th:

ST. JOHN'S, N.L. (CP) Prime Minister Paul Martin says Newfoundland and Labrador should become a centre for the study of weather and issues such as the impact of global warming.

Martin kicked off Week 2 of the federal election campaign with a brief appearance on a St. John's radio station (VOCM), where he was asked what the federal government would do to increase its presence in the province.

He said with the cold war a thing of the past, CFB Goose Bay would not be seeing more military, but suggested the base could be used to study the effects of global warming on climate and fisheries (CP Staff, 2005e).

The story was picked up by CP’s national radio service, Broadcast News, and circulated

widely in several re-write versions meant to serve radio listeners that were tuning in as the country woke up across multiple time zones (CP/BN, 2005). Clearly, the Liberal intention in releasing this information without prior notice, on a morning radio program in St. John's, was to take the campaign initiative in a widening circle of exposure: first in Newfoundland and Labrador, then in Atlantic Canada and, as a secondary consideration, in the big Québec and Ontario media markets where the story would have less resonance but still provide a measure of exposure.

At 11:00 (all times are Eastern Standard Time) a campaign worker in the Ottawa office brought attention to a possible weakness in the Martin announcement and sent an inquiry to the war room on the internal list-serve:

To: **War Room**
Date: Dec 5, 2005 11:00 AM
Subject: **Martin in NL**

Hi- Martin is claiming NL should become a centre for the study of weather and global warming...

I'd fact check this- BUT I believe the Liberals closed the Gander weather station - Newfoundland sitting in the North Atlantic now gets all its weather from Halifax (NDP War Room, 5 December 2005).

The opposition-research group rushed to confirm the facts in the tip and handed the information to the rapid-response team. Immediately the information was sent out by electronic messaging to reporter contacts across the country. This included reporters covering the Liberal campaign on its stop in Newfoundland and assignment editors at all the major news organizations including *The Canadian Press*. Twenty-three minutes later, CP/BN released a story that included the information circulated by the war room:

FedElxn Roundup

Source: The Canadian Press - Broadcast wire

Dec 5, 2005 11:23

(Liberals)

Prime Minister Martin says Newfoundland and Labrador could serve as home for a centre to study weather and the impact of global warming.

He told a St. John's audience that with the Cold War over, C-F-B Goose Bay could be used to study the effects of global warming on climate and fisheries.

The N-D-P notes it was Martin's government that moved most of the jobs at the Newfoundland Weather Centre in 2004 to Nova Scotia and Quebec (BN Staff, 2005b).

The CP/BN story was then picked up and re-circulated on the war-room list-serve as a means to advise all involved that the media was running with the NDP "story." The message bore a simple subject heading:

War Room, Media Monitoring

Date: Dec 5, 2005 12:27 PM

Subject: **PIT HIT: PM weather station**

(NDP War Room, 5 December 2005)

War-room workers, tipped off by the list-serve acknowledgement, began to gather in the media area. Everyone was eager to see what would happen next. The minutes ticked by. There was no further mention of the CP/BN story with the "new" angle provided by the war room. This should not have been surprising. Journalists on the ground with the Martin campaign were preparing to cover his speech before the St. John's Board of Trade, due to begin in a half-hour. The story appeared to disappear from the national news agenda. But it had been a fairly good run for a rapid-response "fact" inserted like a burr under the Liberal saddle. With any luck it wrecked Paul Martin's Monday morning and stripped his promise of a weather-research station of all credibility, at least in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Later that afternoon as war-room operatives gathered around the televisions in the media area, a great roar of approval went up among the assembled. The afternoon roundup from journalists on the various campaigns has yielded another “pit hit”:

Date: Dec 5, 2005 5:39 PM
Subject: PIT HIT: the closing of the Gander Stn
pick up in the Newsworld piece on PM in NFLD
(NDP War Room, 5 December 2005)

Susan Bonner of the CBC, traveling with the Martin campaign, included the NDP-supplied “fact” on the closure of the Gander weather station in her report. The NDP rapid-response “information” had obtained a second lease on life, at least for the moment. In fact, the *CBC National* was to make no mention of Newfoundland except in passing. Like other electronic media its main story of the day would focus on the Harper campaign’s announcement of a plan to give child-care dollars to parents (and reaction from the other parties). Coverage of the NDP campaign would deal briefly with a promise, made earlier in the day, not to raise personal taxes and, in more depth, with the leader’s weekend admission that he would not ban private-health clinics (Ormiston, 2005). The following day’s national newspapers made no mention of the Liberal plan for weather research in Newfoundland or the NDP’s position.

Attempts to generate credibility can go desperately wrong in an election campaign. Talk around the war room on the afternoon of December 6th centred on a planned appearance by Jack Layton in Montreal the following day. The war room had scheduled a news conference at the Guy-Favreau Complex, an island of federal-government buildings in the city’s downtown. News releases had been prepared indicating that Layton was going to seize the initiative on the “unity file,” code for the relationship between the federal government, Québec, and the rest of Canada. There was also some verbal joking

in the war room (though not too loud) about the need to clarify the NDP position on clarity. This was a reference to Layton's declaration during the election campaign of 2004 that The Clarity Act, the federal act outlining the terms of any future referendum on secession for Québec, should be repealed because "it only aggravates Québec and accentuates division in our country" (Chase and Currie, 2005). Layton's comment had been widely viewed as a gaffe, drawing support from the sovereignty-supporting Bloc Québécois and condemnation from just about everyone else.

Layton's plan to clarify his position on clarity was developed as a tactic to address a number of strategic concerns. First, it was thought that it would resituate the NDP as a federalist option for Québec voters. The New Democrats, without a seat in the province, were desperate to elect a Québec candidate. Without an MP from Québec, the party could not claim legitimacy as a truly national political voice. Second, the NDP was seeking to poach votes from Paul Martin's Liberals in much the same way as Martin had attempted to steal away votes from the NDP in the Hargrove affair of the previous week. The Liberals, engineers of The Clarity Act of 2000, owned the federalist position in Québec and were not above using the emotion of the sovereigntist/federalist debate to obtain votes.⁹ Finally, the NDP saw a news conference on clarity as a means to "cut through," to present a dramatic moment for the media that would garner some positive "airtime and ink" for the party. This was in response to an underlying concern that both the Liberals and Conservatives were getting more attention from reporters than the NDP. Layton's plans presented an opportunity for me to observe war-room tactics as they affected the

⁹ Martin would trot out the Clarity Act during the English-language debate the following week, pointing his finger at Gilles Duceppe of the Bloc Québécois and declaring: "This is my country and my children were born and raised in Quebec, and you're not going to go to them and say that you're going to find some back-door way of taking my country or dividing Quebec family against Quebec family" (Panetta, 2005).

campaign in the field. The following day's news conference would also be an opportunity to observe the journalists covering Layton's announcement. I caught the bus to Montreal.

As forecast, the morning of December 7th dawned cold in Montreal with the mercury dipping toward minus 17-degrees Celsius. A brisk breeze made it feel much colder. Members of the NDP-media entourage, print and radio reporters, television journalists with their technical crews, and at least one researcher (me) grumbled through the maze of interlocking spaces on the ground floor of the Guy-Favreau complex looking for the site where Jack Layton was scheduled to hold his news conference. Dozens of organizations (some private but most representing various arms of government) had set up information booths. This was overflow from The United Nations Conference on Climate Change being held at Montreal's main conference centre a few blocks away, a venue that Paul Martin would visit just hours later to state his party's position on climate change, exhort Canadians to produce lower greenhouse-gas emissions, and charge the Bush administration with a failure of leadership on the issue. Martin would then jet off to Toronto for an announcement on handguns planned for the following day.¹⁰

The NDP advance team had been out the night before plastering light poles around the Guy-Favreau complex with election signs.¹¹ These were posted directly across the street from the small, exterior courtyard where Layton would make his announcement, positioned to be picked up by the television cameras should they have reason to point in

¹⁰ Martin's scolding tone on climate change would draw the ire of Washington. Journalists would point out that the Liberal campaign plane was the least fuel efficient of all. But two days later Martin would return to the climate change conference for an impromptu public meeting with former U.S. President Bill Clinton before flying off to meet Buzz Hargrove for the Daimler-Chrysler announcement in Windsor. Martin would deny vehemently that he was grandstanding with Clinton for political points. (Dugas, 2005; CP Staff, 2005d).

¹¹ The NDP election signs extended only for the length of the block directly in front of the federal building. On either side of the Guy-Favreau complex, Bloc Québécois signs were attached to light posts as far as the eye could see.

that direction. However, the main visual backdrop to the announcement was a large poster, several metres long and wide, attached to the building directly behind the courtyard. Its prominent text (underscoring a photo of the earth taken from space) read:

Un monde de/A world of
Solutions

This poster had been put up by the UN climate-change conference organizers to convey a meaning that almost certainly had nothing to do with the NDP's position on the Clarity Act. Opportunistic party workers had simply appropriated the sentiment of the poster for their own purposes, positioning a microphone for Layton's use in a manner that would bring the poster into frame for the television (and print) cameras. Those viewers who made the connection with the climate-change conference would have a visual reference to a key NDP campaign concern (the environment) even if the substance of Layton's announcement had nothing to do with the climate. Viewers who did not make the connection would simply accept the poster's message as a reflection of the party's general sentiment. Few of the 35 national, regional, and local journalists who assembled in the courtyard remarked on the position of the poster, though some of the photographers positioned themselves to capture Layton in profile, thus cutting it out of the shot.

As reporters stamped their feet and joked among themselves about the winter weather, a technician rolled out an extension cord, carried out two large ground-level electric heaters, pointed them towards the general area where Layton would stand, switched them on, and left. By the time Layton made his entrance a short time later the heater elements were red-hot, blasting out a comfort zone for the leader to stand in. Waves of heat could be seen cutting through the cold and dispersing, kissing that climate-change poster, wafting away on the December wind, and thoroughly discrediting any

NDP claim to environmental stewardship. Camera operators quietly moved back into position, gently jockeying to get the heaters, the poster, and Layton in the same shot. Layton's announcement on the Clarity Act, in reality a flip-flop on the party's previous position, elicited a few questions from reporters about motive and timing. Journalists seemed slightly incredulous when Layton claimed the act now had "broad support" in Québec, but generally let him have his say. Only one reporter, Terry Milewski of the CBC National News, asked Layton about the heaters. This was done in a semi-joking tone, framed as a half-serious inquiry about why reporters had to freeze while the leader stayed warm. Layton shrugged off the question, finished the news conference, walked to his waiting chauffeured limousine, and departed for the next event. The journalists packed up, climbed on the waiting "campaign bus," and followed.

The staff-written story from *The Canadian Press* on Layton's "cut through" announcement hit the newswire within minutes. It made no reference to heaters or climate change, but pulled no punches on the NDP flip-flop:

MONTREAL (CP) _ Jack Layton says he now backs the Clarity Act setting out rules for future Quebec votes on independence.

The statement is a reversal for the NDP leader who annoyed his own caucus in the 2004 election campaign when he said he would get rid of the law if the opportunity arose.

Back then Layton said the law only accentuates division in Canada.

Layton says he now supports the act because the Supreme Court of Canada set out many of the same rules.

He also says the law is now accepted by a broad range of people, including former sovereigntist leader Lucien Bouchard (CP Staff, 2005f).

Wire-service accounts for the remainder of the day made no reference to the heater gaffe. Few newspapers, the notable exceptions being *The Gazette* in Montreal and the *Ottawa*

Citizen (which ran a photograph), made reference to the heaters the following day. But the NDP did have to bear some prodding from the two main television networks. A story filed by Rosemary Thompson of CTV for the Newsnet service and an election “roundup” piece by Eric Sorensen produced for CBC Newsworld’s *Politics* played with the imagery of the heaters. The person monitoring the television networks in the NDP war room recorded a point-form description of the stories in question and posted it to the list-serve:

To: **War Room, Media Monitoring**
Date: **Dec 7, 2005 9:31 PM**
Subject: **Afternoon broadcast scan, 3:00 -- 8:00 Dec 7**

CTV Newsnet, 3:00 – 4:30

Thompson: NDP ethics package; by-election proposal for floor-crossers: mentioned Martin, Brison and Stronach; “warm and fuzzy message” from Layton on unity; Layton’s support of Clarity Act, Layton says Clarity Act has broad support in QC; prediction: Layton will be commenting on income trusts, NDP asked for investigation and got things going on this; Layton nothing to say on Harper’s small business tax cuts.

Tone: whining about Jack having heaters while making announcement in -16 degrees; scoffed at idea of Clarity Act having broad support in QC

Politics with Don Newman, CBC Newsworld, 4:30 – 6:00

Sorensen: PM has advantage of being prime minister during campaign: can appear at UN Conference and deliver campaign msg; PM slammed by opp for hypocrisy re: Canada’s environmental record; referenced Layton “heating up the sidewalk” in Montreal; clipped Layton on poor record of Canada – worse than US, clipped Harris.

Standup: Martin seemed to acknowledge criticism, saying Canada’s record is far from perfect.

Tone: second reference to heaters used by Layton – didn’t go over well (NDP War Room, 7 December 2005).

Later that evening, Terry Milewski, reporting for the CBC National News, would use pictures of Layton and the heaters in the setup to his report on the NDP flip-flop on the Clarity Act.

The Buzz Hargrove affair, the reaction to the Newfoundland weather station, and the “cut-through” of the Clarity Act announcement reflect the complexity of the communicative competition engaged in by political actors at election time. In each case,

the actions and reactions among the competing parties may be viewed as a competition for credibility, an attempt to either discredit the opposition by questioning their motives and/or truth claims or to acquire credibility by taking a position or, in the case of the clarity act, by attempting to clarify one. While the strategies and tactics employed will be dissected and discussed in detail in Chapter Nine, it is worth making note here of some general characteristics of this kind of political communication.

Clearly in the day-to-day life of this election campaign, political parties were challenged to be constantly vigilant, constantly aware of the strategic intentions of their opponents and constantly in touch with their own symbolic resources in order to mount their own tactical initiatives and parry those of the competition. Sometimes, as in the case of Buzz Hargrove's overtures to the Liberals, a tactical coup in the service of broad strategy (poaching NDP votes) was simply unanswerable because of the predilections of the individual involved. Often, as in the case of the Newfoundland weather-research centre announcement a simple reminder about past actions, and possible hypocrisy, could have wide-reaching (if limited) consequences. Once in awhile, as in the case of the announcement on the Clarity Act, the best laid plans of mice and men are undermined when practicalities meet up with symbols, especially when the symbols actually belong to someone else.

Each of these instances demonstrates how tactical circumstances can turn on a dime. The finest calculations in the competition for credibility, the jealously guarded accumulation of the symbolic capital to be exchanged for votes and power, can easily come to naught in the aftermath of a thoughtless utterance about beer and popcorn. But we would do well to keep in mind that both unforeseen circumstances and best-laid plans

are played out against the backdrop of larger strategic issues. Indeed, the election campaign of 2005-06 is especially revealing because each small, daily battle was fought out against the backdrop of *one* overriding strategic issue: integrity. And if credibility is a specialized form of symbolic capital, integrity may be viewed as a specialized form of credibility. The following chapter deals with the overarching strategy of the NDP war room, notably its tactical use of institutional symbols to target the integrity of the Liberal party. In very real terms, the NDP (along with the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois) set out to effectively prevent the prime minister's campaign, in spite of clever tactical coups, from effectively accumulating enough credibility to win the day. The NDP did so by relentlessly exploiting a single incident that was transformed by political strategists into a meta-language signifier for corruption: an incident that became known as the income-trust scandal.

Chapter Seven

The War Room at Work: Strategies

OTTAWA (CP)—On the eve of an anticipated federal election, the governing Liberals announced new tax guidelines Wednesday that make dividends more attractive for investors but leave tax policy on income trusts unchanged (Brewster, 2005).

OTTAWA—Federal Conservatives kept up the corruption allegations against the Liberals over the weekend, claiming that insiders benefited from last week's announcement on income trusts. Deputy house leader Jason Kenney says there must have been a leak of the decision because of heavy trading on the Toronto stock market before Finance Minister Ralph Goodale's announcement on Wednesday. (CP Staff, 2005g).

For the Liberal government of Paul Martin, the much-anticipated decision on income trusts—an obscure but lucrative way for companies to avoid paying corporate taxes by passing on more of their profits to investors—must have seemed a small (if calculated) godsend on the eve of an election call. By deciding to leave income trusts alone *and* cut regular taxes for investors, Martin's Minister of Finance Ralph Goodale had inoculated the government (and the party) from a potentially nasty backlash. Indeed, not only had a backlash been avoided, but it was hoped that small and large investors of all stripes would be predisposed to view the Liberals favourably. Cynics might say that the Liberals were engaging in the time-honoured strategy of vote-buying, a practice that would pay particularly high dividends in this case because tax breaks would accrue to people from all points on the political spectrum as long as they had money in the markets. Such a strategy would be deemed particularly successful if Conservative investors could be enticed to vote their self-interest by putting Liberals into Conservative seats in the House of Commons. Then rumours of a leak turned into questions about insider-trading, strategy came face-to-face with ongoing suspicions about Liberal integrity, and the

Liberal train began slowly and inexorably to go off the rails.

There are literally hundreds of published reports about income trusts in the time leading up to, during, and following the election of 2005-06. They fall into two categories: those about companies who announced that they were converting or thinking about converting to income trusts; and stories about the politics of income trusts and what would eventually develop into the income trust “scandal.” The two categories are obviously related. The Finance Department’s November 23rd announcement of support for income trusts began a cascade of movement within corporate Canada toward these lucrative tax structures, a movement that brought high-profile players such as Bell Canada Enterprises and Air Canada into the income-trust fold and carried tens of thousands of small investors along for the ride. At times during the election campaign *The Canadian Press* carried a story every other day about yet another company considering the move to income trusts. There is no question that Ralph Goodale let a genie out of its bottle on November 23rd or, rather, two genies. One took corporate Canada by the hand and trumpeted what amounted to a government-sanctioned tax dodge; the other opened the door into a darker place of unintended consequences where many Liberals, scarred by the Gomery Inquiry, surely feared to tread. But if the Liberals rightly feared the corruption genie, their political opponents saw an opportunity.

The true, head-shaking irony of the income-trust scandal is that, on paper, it had few if any downsides for the Liberals. It could be played as a simple ruling favouring investors necessarily decided on the eve of an election as a bit of required government housekeeping; a way to leave a pressing matter well-managed while the election was

underway¹. Indeed, the bald *politics* of income trusts broached little opposition criticism. Later in the campaign, when the Liberals were virtually assured of an election-night loss, the Conservatives under Stephen Harper felt obliged to make the point that they *would not change* Ralph Goodale's November 23rd decision. Months later, having formed a minority government, the Conservatives would renege on that promise. But during the election campaign the question of whether income trusts were good public policy never became an issue.

Instead, it was the appearance of wrongdoing, of leaked information and the possibility that Liberal friends in the business world would benefit that dogged Goodale, the Liberal party and, by association, Paul Martin. This was directly linked to lingering suspicions over the former Liberal government's role in diverting money into party coffers from its discredited sponsorship program. These suspicions had swirled around the prime minister, who just happened to be the former federal minister of finance and Québec lieutenant for the Liberals under Jean Chrétien. Martin claimed no knowledge of a government program that had been all but looted in his own backyard (the Gomery Inquiry had concluded that most of the sponsorship irregularities had occurred in Québec and involved advertising agencies with Liberal connections), but the question that continued to float in the ether as the country went to the polls was: How could Martin *not* have known? The mere suggestion of income-trust wrongdoing, of using the public trust invested in a department of the Crown to benefit a few cozy insiders, was like setting a match to gasoline. It is not too great a claim to suggest that the income-trust scandal,

¹ In fact, Goodale had floated a trial balloon about a week before the November 23rd announcement suggesting that a decision on income trusts would not be made until January. This was met with an outcry from the financial community and likely led to the decision to move on the issue prior to the expected election call (Perkins, 2005).

played out in the full light of the election campaign, was instrumental in turning the tide of public support away from the Liberals to the Conservatives, giving the Tories enough of an edge to form the government.

The problem is that the income-trust “scandal” was largely the product of political war rooms. It was constructed to deal in a minimum of fact and a maximum of nuance for stakes that were largely about using forms of symbolic violence to undermine the Liberals. Indeed, the income-trust tale may be thought of as the defining strategic battle of the campaign, one where opposition war rooms showed the most dogged persistence in symbolically battling it out among themselves for ownership of the self-legitimized right to define *Liberal* credibility. In this, the NDP was a central player.

By November 27th, four days after Goodale’s income-trust announcement and two days after the first published rumblings about an apparent spike in trading having *preceded* the announced government decision, both the Conservatives and New Democrats were calling for an investigation into insider trading. Both parties would ask the Ontario Securities Commission (OSC), the body that regulates trading on the Toronto Stock Exchange, to conduct an inquiry. But the NDP would go a step further and ask for an investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Brown, 2005). This, by its nature, would be a *criminal* investigation. In effect, the New Democratic Party was through connotation accusing the minister of finance (and the Liberal government of which he was a part) of criminal activity while in office. NDP Finance Critic Judy Wasylycia-Leis was designated to be the point person on this major strategic file. She would later confide to Paul Wells of *Maclean’s* magazine that she did not expect the call for a criminal investigation to yield a response because the RCMP had *never* responded

to such NDP requests in the past (Wells, 2006). In other words, this was pure political posturing intended to attach the taint of criminality to the Liberals through an as-yet uninitiated, even unacknowledged, association with Canada's national police force. Yet if the Conservatives or the NDP expected the Liberals to simply swallow the allegations of wrongdoing, they were mistaken. On November 28th, following the official defeat of the government of which he was a part, Ralph Goodale rounded on the opposition:

OTTAWA (CP) _ Finance Minister Ralph Goodale accused opposition MPs on Monday of trying to smear his reputation on the eve of an election campaign with their demands for a probe of the way new tax policy announcements were made.

Financial markets surged last Wednesday in late trading shortly before Goodale made an unexpectedly early announcement on new tax policies related to income trusts...

"What we saw today was a baseless, very nasty personal attack," Goodale said outside the Commons, shortly before his minority Liberal government faced a non-confidence motion triggering an election campaign.

"I have made inquiries within my office and within the department and I'm satisfied that all of the proper rules were followed appropriately" (Cordon, 2005b).

The Liberal strategy, the party's *communication* strategy, was quite remarkable and, as it turns out, quite effective. Ralph Goodale, whose "squeaky clean" reputation had been profiled in news reports since he took over the "cleanup" of key ministries in the wake of the sponsorship scandal, effectively charged his opponents with stooping to *ad hominem* attacks; that is, attacking his character rather than substantiating the claims against his department's handling of the income-trust announcement. Both the NDP and the Conservatives were forced to back off. In the absence of hard evidence of wrongdoing (neither the OSC nor the RCMP were involved in the matter at this point) the opposition

parties were in a tight spot. By stepping outside of the House of Commons to make his announcement Goodale had effectively raised the stakes by setting the issue beyond the bounds of parliamentary privilege. This was libel territory. The last thing the Conservatives or NDP needed during an election campaign was to be forced into court to respond to a statement of claim for libel, especially if it originated with the minister of finance.

At this point (the beginning days of the election campaign) the Liberals were close to scotching any controversy over income trusts and insider trading. Without a smoking gun, the NDP, Conservatives, and later the Bloc were forced to keep their own counsel on the matter. But the list-serve communications within the NDP war room indicate that the issue was not dead. Indeed, even as journalists gradually shifted away from an initial surge of reporting on the *optics* of the income-trust announcement of November 23rd—the *appearance* of an increase in trading volume on the Toronto Stock Exchange prior to Goodale’s announcement—the war room began to roll out a tactical campaign based on the release of information aimed at pressuring a regulatory or investigative body to assume responsibility for the income-trust issue. In other words, in the absence of any direct evidence unearthed by the party, the aim of war room vis-à-vis income trusts shifted from directly exposing the possibility of wrongdoing to convincing an institutional player *with the credibility to investigate and announce its findings* that perceived irregularities around income trusts were worthy of *public* scrutiny.

It is worth noting that any investigation by the OSC or the RCMP would, at the very least, take months to complete. By then the election would be long over. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the overarching objective of the strategic minds in the war

room was to continue to chip away at the issue of Liberal credibility and integrity; that is, to draw the public's attention to the *likelihood* that a breach in the public trust had occurred. Proof could come later.

In the meantime, media players such as CTV were keeping close watch on the OSC and RCMP in the event that one or the other (or both) would announce that an investigation was in order, or even if an investigation into the *need* for an investigation should take place. On November 30th, just two days after Ralph Goodale had faced down his political opponents, CTV.ca (the web-based arm of CTV News) reported that the RCMP was indeed reviewing the income-trust matter. The report was framed as a follow-up to the NDP's call for an investigation and quoted a stock response by an RCMP spokesperson about the inappropriateness of commenting on the situation. But it also went a step further by quoting a guest on a popular political interview program hosted by CTV's chief political journalist, Mike Duffy:

RCMP reviewing complaint on income trusts

CTV.ca News Staff

The RCMP have begun a review of reported heavier-than-usual trading in income trusts and dividend-paying stocks ahead of an announcement last week that the federal government was increasing the tax credit on corporate dividends ...

"The RCMP will review the information provided to determine if there is a basis to proceed with a criminal investigation," Marsh said. "It would be inappropriate to speculate what action may or may not be taken." ...

A forensic accountant told CTV Newsnet's Mike Duffy Live that he thinks the probability there was insider trading is between 75 and 85 per cent.

Either "someone had tremendous good luck ... or there's a leak," said Al Rosen.

(CTV.ca, 2005).

In addition, buried within the CTV.ca story are quotes lifted from a market analyst interviewed by the *Globe and Mail*. Doug Maybee, a spokesperson for an organization

called Market Regulation Services Inc., an arm of the Ontario Securities Commission, acknowledges that there was heightened market activity prior to the announcement on income trusts:

"The markets did move prior to Mr. Goodale's announcement, there's no denying of that," he said.
"What caused the markets to move, that's something we're still looking into." (CTV.ca, 2005)

The report then paraphrases Ralph Goodale's position on the matter, his denial that any information was leaked in advance coupled with a claim that no-one should have been surprised at a surge in the stock market in anticipation of his announcement simply because the government's decision had been a matter of investor speculation for months.²

At this point a member of the NDP war room's rapid-response team seized on Goodale's position, paraphrased within the CTV.ca story, as possible fodder for a short but direct release of a tactical response:

Date: Nov 30, 2005 6:52 PM
Subject: **RC to keep pushing income trusts?**
To: **War Room**

Perhaps a couple of line release saying

"maybe Ralph Goodale should let the RCMP decide based on the paraphrases. It's a sad day for democracy for Canadians when a minister of the crown is speculating about an ongoing investigation. And it's more example of how the Liberals are stubborn arrogant and don't deserve your vote."

...and if he keeps up his "there's nothing to see here" in a couple of days I think we can think about asking him to step aside during the investigation. (NDP war Room, 30 November 2005)

The rapid-response suggestion would never come to pass. However, the inquiry about

² Goodale's "position" is lifted directly from news reports circulated by *The Canadian Press* and adapted for the CTV.ca story. See: CP Staff. (Reporters). (2005, November 28). "FedElxn Income Trusts Update (adds Commons)." *The Canadian Press—Broadcast News Wire*.

whether such a release would be advantageous speaks to the resonance of the income-trust file within the political-communication arm of the NDP war room. Of particular interest is the revelation of a strategic aim or goal not yet expressed by any of the competing political camps: that a time was fast approaching when the next blow to Ralph Goodale would be in order, that his continued denials would lead the NDP to (inevitably) demand that he “step aside” during the investigation (an investigation which, at this point, was still nonexistent). Effectively, the NDP was warming up to demand Goodale’s resignation, a demand that, if followed, would take him out of the election campaign and possibly end his political career.

However the following day, December 1st, brought the first indication that the Ontario Securities Commission was unlikely to cooperate with the NDP. A message from the OSC and an internal response was circulated on the war-room list-serve:

Date: Dec 1, 2005 11:03 AM
Subject: **RE: ON regulator - no need to investigate income trust situation MORE TO COME**
To: **War Room**

At this point, we should be careful not to let them [the Liberals] spin this as an exoneration.

The OSC has a bad track record on cracking down on corporate crime – which is why Judy WL referred the matter to the RCMP.

I'm not advising we smear the OSC (necessarily) but we cannot say that this ends the matter. It doesn't.
(NDP War Room, 1 December 2005)

It is worth noting that the initial concern of NDP campaign strategists was to keep an eye on the Liberals to ensure that they did not attempt to portray the OSC non-involvement in the case as an “exoneration.” The second response by NDP war-room operatives was to question the credibility of the Ontario Securities Commission by claiming a “bad track

record on cracking down on corporate crime.” This claim was made without reference to any substantiating evidence and likely for this reason the line was drawn at “smearing” the OSC “(necessarily).” The final, somewhat cryptic comment foreshadows a game of formal requests and responses between the NDP and the OSC that would continue throughout the first half of the election campaign.

For their part, the Liberals continued to defend their position (while making no direct reference to the OSC matter) by reinforcing the minister’s initial claims and alluding simultaneously to what amounts to a factual negative. The finance minister’s general position, that nothing untoward occurred with respect to the income-trust announcement, was juxtaposed with a bit of information that was essentially empty of meaning. It was a sly conceit, inferring that there was nothing to investigate because those who would conduct an investigation have not been in contact. Therefore, went the logic, there must be nothing *to* investigate:

OTTAWA (CP) _ Finance Minister Ralph Goodale is continuing to brush off allegations his department may have crossed ethical and even legal lines in the way it handled the release of new tax policies related to income trusts.

Neither the RCMP nor the Ontario Securities Commission have contacted him concerning the issue, Goodale said Friday in an interview from London, England where he was at meetings of the Group of Seven finance ministers (Cordon, 2005c).

It was an advantage to the Liberal position that Goodale was quoted as he attends a prestigious international conference with his peers in the Group of Seven. This is a reminder that he still holds the position of Minister of Finance for Canada and, as such, retains the symbolic capital that comes with the job title. Ralph Goodale’s defining vision of the social world was, at this point, consumed with convincing voters that nothing

questionable had happened on his watch. With no indication of impending action by the RCMP or the OSC, the income-trust issue was effectively pushed into the background. It was likely of great help to the Liberal position that Goodale was out of the country for a few days and directly unavailable to reporters. But when he returned to Canada he faced a bombshell dropped by CTV News.

A report on the *CTV National News* of December 6th by journalist Kathy Tomlinson, later posted on her CTV weblog *Whistleblower*, suggested for the first time that there was written proof, an electronic "paper trail," pointing to insider knowledge of the content of the income-trust announcement:

More important, perhaps, CTV discovered evidence, in writing, that seems to suggest some people had advance knowledge of exactly what the finance minister was going to say.

That evidence is in public bulletin board postings on a popular investor's internet site called "Stockhouse". The first posting -- at 11:14 that morning -- came from someone who wrote: "Skuttlebutt is that he (Goodale) will soon announce a reduction on dividend taxation to "even the playing field'." This information was posted a full seven hours before the minister's press conference, and possibly viewed by many potential investors before the markets closed ...

The finance minister used very similar wording when he made his announcement two hours later.

"We're going to help to level up the playing field as between corporations and trusts and we're going to be doing that by ending double taxation on dividends," said Goodale in his media conference that evening (Tomlinson, 2005).

For the NDP war room this was like rain in a parched land. Unable to make much mileage out of what it saw as a major opportunity to undercut Liberal integrity, war-room strategists all but appropriated Tomlinson's report in a peculiar kind of combined

news/rapid response release titled “In Case You Missed It,”³ a treatment that permitted the war room to assume the appearance of participation in bringing the story to light without actually having done anything:

From: NDP Communications
Date: Dec 7, 2005 9:06 AM
Subject: IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: More Evidence of Alleged Goodale Leak

Last night, CTV reported that insiders were posting news of Ralph Goodale’s November 23, 2005 income trust announcement hours before he made it:

Reporter [Kathy Tomlinson]: We found evidence in writing that some people seem to have advance knowledge of exactly what the finance minister was going to announce.
(NDP War Room, 7 December 2005)

But it was another CTV story, released in a standard thumbnail treatment just before the evening broadcast on the network’s daily advisory to *The Canadian Press* that returned the income-trust matter to the front ranks of campaign communication concerns. The report involved a little-known investors’ group known as CARP, the Canada Association for the 50 Plus:

TORONTO _ Advisor to Finance Minister Ralph Goodale alleged to have tipped someone off about upcoming announcement on income trusts; a representative for CARP, a powerful seniors’ group, says the group was tipped off in the morning about an announcement coming that afternoon, although he was given no details; Goodale says it does not appear that there was any untoward conversation that revealed either the nature or the timing of the announcement.
(CTV/CP, 2005)

The problem, as CARP would explain in a news release the following day, was that CTV’s information was inaccurate. The group distributed a clarification on the afternoon of December 8th via the widely received *Canada News Wire* service stating

³ The “In Case You Missed It” releases were frequently used during the campaign, usually as a means to draw attention to claims or gaffes in competing political camps that had been reported on by journalists or, in some cases, to clarify or underscore “factual” information that had appeared in news stories.

unequivocally that it had *not* been tipped off by anyone in the Department of Finance.

The clarification was received and circulated on the NDP War Room list-serve:

Date: Dec 8, 2005 2:40 PM
Subject: **RE: NEWS: CARP Income Trust Announcement**
To: **War Room**

CARP in the Dark About Income Trust Announcement

Toronto, Dec. 8/CNW/ - There is no truth to the serious accusations that CARP had inside information about Minister Ralph Goodale's announcement regarding Income Trusts ... The record must be set straight! At no time was CARP given an indication by the Minister's office of when the announcement would be made or what it would say (NDP War Room/Canada News Wire, 8 December 2005)

The Conservatives, who surely would have received the CARP clarification at the same time as the other political war rooms (and journalists), nevertheless went forward with a call for Ralph Goodale's resignation. The release of the story by CP reporter Lorraine Turchansky, filed from the campaign trail in North Bay, Ontario, quotes Stephen Harper in a tone of great indignation:

NORTH BAY, Ont. (CP) _ Ralph Goodale should resign as finance minister in light of allegations that a leak from his department allowed insiders to profit from a change in tax rules, Conservative Leader Stephen Harper said Thursday.

Harper was commenting on a report that an official of CARP, Canada Association for the 50 Plus, got a warning call several hours before Goodale announced that he was dropping the tax on dividends from income trusts ...

"It's very disturbing, it's very troubling," Harper said.

"I would say, given the information we now know, that in any other advanced democratic country where we have a government that operated according to normal ethical standards, the finance minister would have already resigned, rather than continuing to deny and stonewall information."
(Turchansky, 2005)

Turchansky was careful to cite the CARP news release in the following paragraph, offering her readers the opportunity to question the "information" that formed the basis for Harper's attack on Goodale:

CARP has denied the accusations as ``absurd."
``There is no truth to the serious accusations that CARP had inside information about Minister Ralph Goodale's announcement regarding Income Trusts," the organization said in a release Thursday.
(Turchansky, 2005)

NDP strategists (who the previous week had been searching for a reason to call for Goodale's resignation) became uncharacteristically silent at this point. With the CARP denial in hand and time-stamped as a matter of record, the NDP ran the risk of being called on its own ethical standards should it follow the Conservative lead and demand the minister's resignation. On the other hand, Stephen Harper was on the record firmly calling Goodale's ethical standards into question based on "information we now know" (inferring it is information we know *to be true*). For the NDP it is a win-win situation. The attack on Goodale continued (even if it came from the Conservative camp), but the questionable nature of the "information we now know," cited in the Turchansky report on Harper), helped to undermine public confidence in the judgment of the Conservatives, the other major player in this rush to define Liberal credibility. That the NDP had been in possession of the CARP release for several hours (indeed, since 2:40 that afternoon) and had not publicly questioned the integrity of the CTV report; that is, had not made any effort to set the record straight, speaks volumes about the strategic and tactical priorities at work here.

In fact, the NDP war room's decision to remain silent on the CARP issue occurred while it is casting about for another avenue of attack on Ralph Goodale's integrity. At 5:46 p.m. a reason (if not an opportunity) presented itself on the specialty service *Report on Business Television* (ROBTV). The rapid response team immediately circulated the gist of an interview with an "investor advocate" by the name of Diane Urquhart. Urquhart was described as a "validator" in the list-serve message, less as a comment on her

abilities than an indication of her usefulness as an outside source with certain credentials who would lend credence to the NDP's call for an OSC investigation into income trusts.

The last line of the message recapitulated the war room's prime objective:

To: **War Room**
Date: Dec 8, 2005 5:46 PM
Subject: **FW: ROBTV on Investigation of Illegal Insider Trading**

One of our validators on the income trust leak was on ROBTV demanding that the OSC should investigate and make it public that they're investigating.

Another excuse to push this story.
(NDP War Room, 8 December 2005)

In calling for Goodale's resignation, the Conservatives had provided the risk-free fodder for continued NDP attacks. Financial "experts" were now (opportunistically) providing televised reasons to pursue the NDP call for an OSC investigation. Momentum was building. And there seemed precious little that Ralph Goodale and the Liberals could do, even when the minister of finance took to the airwaves on Newsworld's influential *Politics with Don Newman*.

Buried in the NDP war room's daily list-serve correspondence is a daily roundup of election-oriented material from various television programs including segment five of *Politics* for December 8th. Captured in the "shorthand" of the war room worker charged with transcribing broadcast material is an exchange between Monte Solberg of the Conservatives and Ralph Goodale of the Liberals:

To: **War Room, Media Monitoring**
Date: Dec 8, 2005 7:38 PM
Subject: **Afternoon broadcast scan, 3:30 -- 7:00**
Politics with Don Newman, CBC Newsworld, 4:30 – 6:00
Segment 5:
* Panel: [Monte] Solberg, [Ralph] Goodale
Solberg: clouds over Goodale's office, questions re: his officials;
he should resign

Goodale: CARP has today thrown CTV story into doubt
Solberg: minister doesn't know, he's not an investigator
Goodale: CARP misrepresented by CTV; "I've made all
necessary inquiries, I'm satisfied"; CARP called us that morning
Solberg: impression was it would be a positive announcement:
that's the problem: insiders used that
Goodale: it was speculation only that it would be good news

Tone: no mention of NDP even though we got the ball rolling.
(NDP War Room, 8 December 2005)

Questions about the accuracy of the CTV report on CARP, the story that initiated the call for Goodale's resignation, would fall on deaf ears. The media monitor, the person transcribing the exchange, eschewed an assessment of the *tone* of the segment in favour of a partisan observation. There was "no mention of the NDP," she writes, "even though we got the ball rolling." From this point forward the income-trust file would be all about which party would get the credit for taking down the finance minister.

The following day, December 9th, CP ran a report (circulated on the NDP war room list-serve) that reiterated the Conservative call for Ralph Goodale's resignation. By now it would be clear to everyone that CARP had withdrawn any claim to prior knowledge of the income-trust announcement. Indeed, the lede line of the CP report includes the information that there is *no evidence* at this time to support the Conservative position:

Date: Dec 9, 2005 5:26 PM
Subject: **MORE: Goodale Moves Business (B) and General (G)
(FedElxn-Goodale-Trust)**
To: **War Room**
OTTAWA (CP)_ Conservatives continued to demand Finance Minister Ralph Goodale's head Friday, accusing his office of leaking valuable financial information, but observers say they've still seen no evidence to support the charges (NDP War Room, 9 December 2005; Cordon, 2005a).

But this was no longer about proving wrongdoing by the finance minister. War-room strategies and tactics were now concentrated on appearances; the optics of casting

Goodale in a bad light. To this end, the NDP war room circulated a news release outlining its intention to send a letter to the head of the Ontario Securities Commission, the same body that just a few days previously had indicated it would not investigate the income-trust matter.

To: War Room Media Monitoring
Date: Dec 9, 2005 5:49 PM
Subject: PR NDP: Wasylycia-Leis Asks OSC to Clarify
Position on Possible Income Trust

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA--(CCNMatthews - Dec. 9, 2005) –
>NDP< MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis sent the following letter to the Ontario Securities Commission today.
The **>NDP<** finance critic is asking for clarification from the OSC about a possible investigation into alleged insider trading in high-dividend stocks and income trusts in the hours leading up to the announcement of November 23, 2005.
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis is available for comment.
(NDP War Room, 9 December 2005)

As a helpful addition, the full text of the letter was included with the news release. It called on the OSC to follow its own guidelines and declare an investigation into a matter that the NDP says is clearly “in the public domain,” a matter that speaks directly to the confidence of Canadians in the stock market. However, as “evidence” of the public-domain argument that would justify an investigation the NDP’s finance critic cites media reports of questionable accuracy and the RCMP review of November 30th, which was a preliminary examination of some highly disputed claims about increased trading around the original income-trust announcement. Furthermore, this RCMP preliminary examination had been motivated in the first place by political players who called for a police investigation in full knowledge that the RCMP would, at the very least, be required to review the case:

It is abundantly clear that these issues are in the public domain. I attach a survey of media coverage of this issue. Furthermore, the RCMP has publicly stated that they have begun a review of trading in income trusts and dividend-paying stocks prior to Ottawa's announcement. The matter is clearly in the public domain (Wasylycia-Leis/NDP War Room, 9 December 2005).

Wasylycia-Leis's letter to the OSC managed to garner some media attention, but not until the following day. The war room media monitor referenced the 8:00 p.m. election coverage on CBC Newsworld, noting that Wasylycia-Leis was "clipped" in a story by veteran CBC reporter, Paul Hunter. Hunter's story, however, is at pains to note that evidence of a leak on income trusts has still not been forthcoming:

[Paul] Hunter – income trust scandal is following the PM (clip of him getting questions on it at gun newser), Judy clipped asking for OSC investigation - Hunter standup "still no hard evidence of leak by anybody" (NDP War Room, 10 December, 2005).

This small media "hit" passed largely unnoticed in the war room, coming as it did in a late report broadcast on a Saturday evening. It should also be kept in mind that the war room was preoccupied at this time with the fallout from the second chapter of the Buzz Hargrove affair; the appearance at Daimler-Chrysler with Paul Martin, and the subsequent tour of "strategic ridings" in the Windsor area. It is less certain why comparatively little excitement was generated over a journalistic offering published that morning in the *National Post*, a column by Andrew Coyne that may well be credited with turning the "income-trust matter" into "the income-trust scandal."

Under the title, "It's not about CARP," Coyne leveled a scathing verbal broadside at the Liberals, all but accusing the party of systemic corruption while reserving some vitriol for both the RCMP and his colleagues in the Parliamentary Press Gallery:

The mushrooming income trust affair has all the earmarks of past Liberal scandals: well-connected insiders, the incestuous commingling of public and private business, press gallery indifference and RCMP inertia. All that is needed for the picture to be complete is for the government to threaten to sue its critics ... (Coyne, 2005)

Coyne goes on to build the case that some stock traders had information that permitted them to cash in on the government's impending announcement. He brushes off the CARP denial of insider information and points a finger at the Department of Finance (not Ralph Goodale) before backing off of a charge of corruption in his last paragraph and, simultaneously, assigning a possible political motive to the entire episode:

At any rate, CARP is hardly the issue: it appears that many more people had some knowledge of what was coming—or at least, that something was coming. And the result was, in a word, a scandal. Millions of dollars were made in those hectic few hours of trading on the 23rd, which means millions of dollars were also lost. Those who were buying that afternoon knew something that those who were selling did not. If it turns out that, indeed, they were tipped off by someone at Finance, wittingly or unwittingly, then heads should roll—at a minimum.

No one is suggesting anyone at Finance had corrupt intent. But might someone have gotten a little sloppy—a little too eager to prepare the political ground, perhaps, to ensure the minister's "decisive action" got the desired glowing reviews, and in time for that night's newscasts? Let's just say it fits a pattern.
(Coyne, 2005)

For all of the nuances in Coyne's column it is certain that he did indeed think that something unethical had occurred prior to the minister of finance's November 23rd announcement on income trusts. And even if Coyne does not name Ralph Goodale specifically, he draws us a road map of ministerial pressure tactics, timed public announcements for political gain, and a culture of shady Liberal practices that lead directly to Goodale's office.

In the meantime, the NDP had started a contest of letters with the head of the OSC. On December 12th the head of the commission formally responded to the request for an

investigation by politely, if officiously, telling the NDP finance critic to mind her own business. David Wilson's response was circulated on the war room list-serve, including the passages that essentially advise the NDP that it is not the party's responsibility to determine what is "appropriate" for the OSC:

Please note that the Ontario Securities Commission (OSC) and Market Regulation Services Inc. (RS) routinely monitor trading and review instances of unusual trading. In conjunction with other market regulators, we determine the appropriate course of action including whether an investigation is warranted.

The OSC practice is neither to confirm nor deny the existence of investigations. Under OSC Guidelines for Staff Disclosure of Investigations, the Commission does not generally comment publicly as to the existence, status, or nature of an investigation until the matter becomes one of public record (NDP War Room, 12 December 2005).

The NDP response was to draft and send yet *another* letter to the OSC demanding an investigation. The re-response from the Chair of the OSC was short, to the point, and entirely non-committal:

Thank you for your letter dated December 14, 2005 regarding the OSC's mandate pertaining to enforcement and public disclosure and your concerns regarding possible conflicts of interest.

As Chair of the OSC, it is my responsibility to ensure that the Commission's actions are guided by our dual mandate to provide investor protection and to ensure the integrity of our capital markets. I assure you that we are doing our job (NDP War Room, 20 December 2005).

Judging by the half-hearted response to yet another rejection by the commission, it is clear that this line of attack was on the verge of playing out:

-----Original Message-----

Sent: Tuesday, December 20, 2005 1:06 AM
Subject: **OSC response to Dec 14 letter**

Please find attached the scanned text of the OSC response faxed to the Ottawa office today.

To: **War Room**
Date: Dec 20, 2005 7:23 AM

Subject: **FW: OSC response to Dec 14 letter**

Gives new meaning to "brush off".
(NDP War Room, 20 December 2005)

There are two possible explanations for the war-room response (the list-serve equivalent of a shrug). First, the campaign was a day or two away from shutting down for the Christmas break.⁴ Second, the OSC's line of attack had already been superseded by one of the more bizarre gambits of the campaign. Buried in the electronic mail correspondence between Wasylycia-Leis's office and the NDP war room (and dated December 15th) is evidence of a new tactic in the symbolic battle over the income-trust affair:

To: **War Room**
Date: Dec 15, 2005 6:52 PM
Subject: **MP update re: OSC/SEC Letters**

FYI

----Original Message-----

Subject: **Letters**

OSC letter faxed, will go in the mail tomorrow

SEC letter ready, signed and formatted. Will fax from here and email as well, then mail (as soon as I can find appropriate denomination of stamps or a post office)

Do you care which email address it goes from?

Should it go from the MP or campaign account?

(NDP War Room, 15 December 2005).

The SEC in question is the Securities and Exchange Commission, the body that regulates and investigates stock markets in the United States. The NDP, a Canadian political party, was taking the extraordinary step of asking a *foreign* regulatory body to intervene in a

⁴ The 2005-06 election campaign straddled the Christmas/New Year's holiday. By mutual consent, the parties all but shut down their respective war rooms. Many war-room workers left Ottawa to spend the holidays in their home communities. The campaign resumed its "second half" in early January.

highly politicized Canadian controversy over possible financial irregularities during an election campaign, a controversy that was implying wrongdoing by a minister of the Crown. When the war room issued a news release on December 18th, worded and composed in every respect like a news story, a new voice was added to the discussion: that of Paul Summerville, a former economist with a major Canadian bank. The inclusion of Summerville in the news release (he was an NDP candidate) was an obvious attempt to trade on his banking credentials in order to lend substance to the new NDP request for an investigation:

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DECEMBER 18, 2005
WASYLYCIA-LEIS AND SUMMERVILLE
ASK FOR SEC INVESTIGATION
Pattern of suspicious trading prior to income trust
announcement also present on New York Stock Exchange**

WINNIPEG and TORONTO – NDP Finance Critic Judy Wasylycia-Leis and Paul Summerville, the NDP Candidate in St. Paul's have asked the Securities Exchange Commission [sic] (SEC) to investigate the unusual pattern of stock and income trust trading on November 23, 2005. Paul Summerville is a former chief economist with RBC Dominion Securities (NDP War Room, 18 December 2005)

There was little immediate journalistic response to the NDP's SEC overture. It was, after all, a bit of a "Hail Mary" pass in strategic-communication circles. The political campaigns were now crisscrossing the country with their respective leaders concentrating on rolling out as much platform detail as possible prior to the holiday break. Journalists were either caught up with summarizing the campaigns or looking forward to expectations for the election campaign when it resumed in the New Year. The NDP call for an SEC investigation seemed like just another bit of political theatre. Worse, considering the continual rebuffs by the OSC it smacked of desperation. As war room workers and journalists drifted into the holiday hiatus, no-one expected that they would

be returning to a dramatically different election campaign, one where the competition for credibility would be of defining importance.

It is one of the stranger ironies of the 2005-06 general-election campaign that having invested so much in cajoling various investigative bodies to examine the income-trust affair, the NDP very nearly missed its own moment in the sun. On December 23rd RCMP Commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli sent a letter by fax to the Parliament Hill office of Judy Wasylycia-Leis. The letter contained a short official announcement: "Based on the information obtained during the review, the RCMP will be commencing a criminal investigation," wrote Zaccardelli (Russo/CP, 28 December 2005). But because the letter was sent two days before Christmas there was nobody in the finance critic's office to receive it and pass it along to the war room (Wells, 2006). Not until December 28th did Wasylycia-Leis's office forward the announcement to the war room and, simultaneously, to *The Canadian Press*. The wire service issued an immediate advisory citing the NDP as its source and scrambled to get the story to its subscribers:

CP NewsAlert (Income-Trust-Investig)

OTTAWA (CP) _ RCMP launching criminal investigation into alleged Liberal government leak of income trust changes, NDP say (CP, 2005i).

OTTAWA (CP) _ The whiff of scandal was pumped into the federal election campaign Wednesday with confirmation that the RCMP has begun a criminal investigation into the possibility of a leak from the Liberal government prior to an announcement on taxation of income trusts.

"There's sufficient information for us to launch a criminal investigation," said RCMP Sgt. Nathalie Deschenes.

The investigation will determine whether there's enough evidence to warrant criminal charges. The Mounties aren't sure how long their probe will take (Babbage, 2005b).

The RCMP announcement, framed as a validation of the possibility, even the *probability* of wrongdoing by Liberal insiders, is still credited (certainly in media circles) with

changing the course of the 2005-06 campaign. In terms of the competition for credibility, this was the equivalent of winning the lottery. The NDP could now take credit for pressuring the national police force into launching an investigation into the actions of a department under the direction of a senior minister of the Crown who, for all intents and purposes, appeared to have acted against the public interest for purely partisan purposes.

Canada's major newspapers, which had remained largely mute on the income-trust issue throughout the month of December, exploded with the news of the RCMP investigation. *The Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Toronto Star* all ran similar banner headlines with their December 29th editions. "RCMP CONFIRMS TRUST PROBE" blasted the *National Post* headline, followed by a lede line affirming that "Finance Minister Ralph Goodale has rejected opposition calls for his resignation (Leong, Wattie and Tait, 2005). "RCMP launch trusts probe" trumpeted the *Globe and Mail* with a convoluted lede that framed the income-trust issue *and* included the call for Goodale's resignation. "RCMP probes suspected leak at Finance" says the *Ottawa Citizen* with a sub-headline that read "Goodale rebuffs calls to resign over alleged early release of tax policy on dividends, income trusts." *Globe* columnist John Ibbitson was first out of the gate with an opinion piece declaring that "Ralph Goodale may have cost the Liberals this election" (Ibbitson, 2005). In the days to follow, various pundits would echo the sentiment.

Only the *National Post*, in an editorial published in its December 30th edition entitled "Let the RCMP decide," defended Goodale, declaring calls for his resignation to be premature while demanding his full co-operation with the police and suggesting that this was an RCMP matter and should not be politicized (Editorial, *National Post*, 2005).

Sensing an opportunity, the Conservatives returned to their demand for Goodale's resignation. Conservative Leader Stephen Harper cut his Christmas break short to begin what amounted to an early resumption of the campaign in order to take a shot at the increasingly beleaguered minister of finance. The Conservative communication strategy at this point was to heap contempt on Goodale and "his government" [emphasis mine].

(FedElxn-Goodale-Harper)

VANCOUVER. x--16s. Conservative Leader Stephen Harper says Finance Minister Ralph Goodale should resign, even though Goodale says he has done nothing wrong in connection with the income trust scandal. Harper says Goodale and his government don't deserve the benefit of the doubt (BN Staff, 2005e).

Paul Martin was left to defend Goodale and, as best as possible, try to deflect the damage:

(BIZ-Income-Trust-Investigation)

WINNIPEG. x--22s. Prime Minister Paul Martin says Finance Minister Ralph Goodale will not resign his post despite an R-C-M-P probe. Goodale has come under fire after the Mounties launched a criminal probe into allegations a Finance Department announcement was leaked to Bay Street. (Cloutier, 2005)

The major newspapers picked up on the unusual spectacle of a prime minister going public during an election campaign specifically to attempt to restore the credibility of a key member of his government. "Martin defends Goodale in RCMP trusts probe" shouted *The Globe and Mail* headline of December 31st. "Goodale is 'good, honest,' Martin says" declared the *Ottawa Citizen*. But the inevitable endgame to the assault on Liberal credibility began with a New Year's Eve announcement that Ralph Goodale had an appointment with the police:

(Goodale-RCMP)

Finance Minister Ralph Goodale says he will be interviewed next week by the R-C-M-P.

It's part of the Mounties' criminal investigation into whether the government's plans for income trusts were leaked.

The Mounties say that so far, "there's no evidence of wrongdoing or illegal activity" by Goodale or anyone else (CP Staff, 2005h).

From this point forward, journalists would document Goodale's every move with respect to the RCMP. The man who had cockily stepped outside of the House of Commons to challenge his political opponents to *prove* his complicity in a set of circumstances he claimed had never happened was suddenly reduced to remarking (through a communication manager) on how "constructive" his meeting with the Mounties had been.⁵

OTTAWA (CP) _ Finance Minister Ralph Goodale met Tuesday with RCMP investigators probing allegations that Liberal government insiders may have leaked market-moving information related to tax policy on income trusts.

Goodale met in Regina with police for a little over one hour and later described the session as "a good and constructive meeting," said his press secretary Pat Breton (Cordon, 2006).

We are left to wonder how "good and constructive" Goodale would have found his meeting with the police had he known what was about to transpire.

On January 6th, three days after the RCMP interviewed the finance minister on his role in the income-trust matter, the NDP's "Hail Mary" pass connected. Against all odds the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission announced in a letter to NDP Finance Critic Judy Wasylycia-Leis that it would undertake an investigation into the possibility of

⁵ By the time of Goodale's interview with the RCMP I had been expelled from the NDP war room list-serve. A maintenance scan of the electronic address list had turned up my e-mail address as an anomaly. In the general atmosphere of mistrust that characterized the 2005-06 election campaign, my address was deleted and never reinstated despite repeated requests. The general mood around the war room upon resumption of the campaign was of elation for a job well done with respect to the Goodale file and a sense that the tide would turn in favour of the NDP. In the end, however, the Conservatives would become the real beneficiaries of the income trust "scandal."

irregularities in trading on the New York Stock Exchange with respect to Canadian income trusts. The NDP war room immediately released the SEC decision to journalists. In light of the RCMP investigation and no doubt influenced by its American counterpart, the Ontario Securities Commission indicated that it would begin its own investigation:

OTTAWA (CP) _ The American securities regulator is taking "very seriously" complaints of insider trading involving Finance Minister Ralph Goodale's November announcement on income trusts.

There is also a signal that the Ontario Securities Commission may be doing the same.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission revealed it is reviewing the matter in an e-mail Thursday to Judy Wasylycia-Leis, the New Democratic Party's finance critic who filed a complaint with the market watchdog last month.

"We are taking your complaint very seriously and have referred it to the appropriate people within the SEC," the market watchdog's legal counsel, Ann H. Sulzberg wrote.
(Bryden, 2006)

Both regulators made it clear that their investigations would not be conducted in public and the results would be released in due course; that is, both the SEC and OSC went to great pains to distance themselves from the political haymaking that was sure to follow their respective announcements.

For the political operatives in the NDP war room the alphabet-soup string of announcements—from the RCMP, the SEC and the OSC—would be taken as a vindication. The exact war-room list-serve traffic from this time is unavailable. My e-mail address had been swept from the system over the holiday break, consigned to the electronic dustbin by zealous party computer-cops who suspected a spy (and never restored by the war-room brass who may have grown concerned at the level of my access.) By this time, too, my chair and desk space in the war room had been "reassigned" to a party worker. And while nobody had asked me to leave the premises, it

was becoming increasingly clear that people were uncomfortable with my presence. In short, the SEC and OSC announcements came out of the blue and I was not present in the war room to experience the reaction among party workers. But I could imagine the elation, so I asked Campaign Co-chair Brian Topp to recollect the moment:

Certainly we thought it was helpful validation -- it suggested there really was an issue here. As indeed there was, since a senior finance official was ultimately terminated and prosecuted for this matter, despite the finance minister's insistence that no one in his ministry could possibly have done anything wrong (Topp, 2007).⁶

There's that word again: "validation." And yes, as Topp puts it "there really was an issue here." But was it really the issue that competing political camps claimed it to be? As the 2005-06 campaign wound down to its inevitable close *nobody knew the outcome of an RCMP investigation that would take a full year-and-a-half to complete*. What had been validated was a suspicion.

With the RCMP investigation underway, it suddenly became open season on the Liberals. *The Globe and Mail* of January 6th carried a story about possible Liberal wrongdoing from the political and journalistic equivalent of ancient history. The *Globe* story alleged that money had been given to Québec federalists by the governing Liberals in the days leading up to the 1995 Québec referendum, ostensibly as a means to bolster the anti-sovereignty campaign in the province. The RCMP, says the *Globe*, is "looking into" the matter. Nevertheless, the report managed to generate a spin-off story in *The Canadian Press* that kept the Liberal/RCMP connection alive:

OTTAWA (CP) _ Paul Martin could be forgiven for feeling these days as though he's running against an undeclared but powerful rival: the RCMP ...

⁶ Topp, Brian (2007, November 30) In email correspondence with the author. Montreal/Toronto.

Martin's daily news conference was dominated by questions about a published report in the *Globe and Mail* that the RCMP is looking into a controversial \$4.8-million grant awarded to a federalist group at the time of the 1995 sovereignty referendum. (MacAfee, 2006)

The *Globe* story, written around the *possibility* of an investigation into *possible* practices by a *former* Liberal government, does not point a smoking gun at anyone. It merely gestures to an apparent pattern of suspicious Liberal activity. Questionable cash for Québec federalists, the sponsorship scandal, suspicious activities surrounding insider information and income trusts: taken together these incidents surely had to point to a political party too long in power and too arrogant with the public trust to deserve another term in government? This was the message delivered by Jack Layton in the second English-language debate, a message in response to a question raised by the moderator of the Montreal forum and transcribed and posted verbatim by *The Canadian Press* on January 9th, the night of the debate:

Moderator: One of the major stories brewing over the week is the RCMP investigation into whether there was an improper leak from the government on how it would handle the issue of income trusts. You have demanded the resignation of the finance minister, Ralph Goodale. What evidence do you have, if any, that there was, in fact a leak of information?

Jack Layton: First of all, let me say that we're in a very sad time in Canadian politics because of the ethical standards that have not been set properly by the government. First we had the Gomery Commission, and now we have the income trust issue, and most recently the Options Canada story. It's time that we had a real focus on change, and that's why we have emphasized the need for new legislation and new electoral reforms so that we can sweep the Parliament clean of this ethics strategy. Now, it's not for us to show whether there's a particular scandal that the RCMP has begun to investigate. We simply noticed what happened to people's savings, and some people benefited. We drew it to the attention of the RCMP. You know, actually, the finance minister should have done this or the prime minister, and it's sad that they chose not to do so. It shows they don't understand the concept of ministerial responsibility in parliamentary democracy. The RCMP says there's something worth looking into. We'll respect their decision (CP Staff, 2006c).

Layton, speaking directly to the Canadian people in the televised debate, laid out a chain of logic that credited the NDP with blowing the whistle on the income-trust affair. The NDP, said Layton, would be a “clean” alternative to ethically challenged Liberals. The Liberal government is ethically challenged. There is a pattern of scandal. The NDP will clean up Parliament, said the leader. It is not the NDP’s job to prove its accusations. It is the NDP’s job to notice when Canadians are not being treated fairly and to act accordingly. The top Liberals in charge of the income-trust case did not acknowledge that there was a problem. As ministers of the Crown they should take responsibility (resign) but, intimidated Layton, let’s leave it to the RCMP.

On 15 February 2007, more than a year after it announced its investigation, the RCMP charged a bureaucrat in the Department of Finance with benefiting criminally from inside information respecting income trusts:

OTTAWA (CP) _ The RCMP have charged a senior Finance Department official with criminal breach of trust in connection with the income trust decision of November 2005.

The Mounties say Serge Nadeau, director general, analysis at the tax policy branch of the department, used confidential information in the purchase of securities for his personal benefit...

The announcement of the investigation, which came in the middle of an election campaign, sparked a political furor.

The RCMP say the investigation is finished, with Nadeau the only person charged (CP Staff, 2007).

At the time of this writing, Mr. Nadeau has yet to face the charges in a court of law. Until he is convicted or chooses to enter a guilty plea, there is no validation to the claims made by the NDP or any other political party with respect to income trusts. This would lead us to believe that the finer points of due process have little bearing in the rough-and-tumble world of electoral politics.

The following chapter examines how publics absorb and respond to this kind of political gamesmanship. Are publics taken in by the intentional, often nasty distortions of political communication that are used in the fierce competition for credibility? And how do the perceived attitudes of publics play into the systematic distortions and manipulations of communication that increasingly appear to characterize election campaigns? It might come as a surprise to partisan players that publics are far less willing to buy the war-room line than strategic communicators would have us believe.

Chapter Eight

The War Room, Journalism, and Public Discourse

I am more convinced than ever that people are much more advanced than the political and media class (Stéphane Dion, 2007).

At the mid-point of the second week of the 2005-06 federal election campaign *Toronto Star* media columnist, Antonia Zerbisias, posted a paragraph on her weblog, *azerbic*, entitled “Blogopalooza.” It was an acknowledgment of something new in election coverage: in Zerbisias’s words, “a blogging ‘community’” set up by the CTV television network “made up of its own correspondents’ blogs” (Zerbisias, 2005). Here was the so-called mainstream media reaching into a domain that had largely been the bailiwick of individuals with computers working mainly from home, constructing and maintaining sites on the World Wide Web for the dissemination of their personal viewpoints on all manner of issues and concerns. Now, big corporations like CTV and Torstar (the corporate entity behind Zerbisias’s column) seemed to be signaling that they were moving into the blogosphere and things were about to change.

The reality for strategic-political communicators was a bit different. Of course the NDP and the other political parties had constructed their own websites, but these were used mainly as clearing houses for party news releases and other official material such as rapid responses and the party platform; anything that needed to be on the record for the duration of the campaign. For the NDP, the business of operating in the blogosphere was mainly left to a site known as *The Blogging Dippers*, a place where individual bloggers of a left-leaning bent could voice their opinion on anything pertaining to the NDP, the election campaign, or the state of the world in general. The site was, and remains, a loose electronic clearing administered by three bloggers whom, the site declares, “are elected

annually by the members of The Blogging Dippers.” The website is adamant that it is “neither affiliated with nor endorsed by the New Democratic Party of Canada” (*The Blogging Dippers*, 2008). The NDP election website provided a link to the Dippers, but there was no direct evidence during the campaign that the war room was using it to circulate strategic-political communication.¹ All of the major parties had (and have) similar communities of bloggers—the Blogging Tories and the Liblogs, for example—although the organizational structure of these groups varies. During the campaign, each of these websites provided a list of links to individual weblogs. Often these lists were more than a hundred titles long.

The individual addresses in the lists usually represent those individuals with computers mentioned above, who work mainly from home. They are, in essence, computer network-enabled citizens from all walks of life who choose to engage cyberspace on their own terms. Most are simply interested in posting their personal thoughts, logging a kind of stream of consciousness worldview for anyone to access if they are so inclined. But some independent individual bloggers are specifically interested in politics and form a kind of network within a network. They consume the news of the day as presented by the mainstream media. They pick up on tips that are generated by colleagues in their own blogger circles and communities. They comment on decisions made and circulated in the political field and invite comments from anyone who is circulating discourse in the cyber-world. Many provide a “comments section” for discussions around issues that have been raised. By any account, these nodes of

¹ This is admittedly an anecdotal claim. The Blogging Dippers website (since renamed New Democrats Online) does not archive its material. However, the site is constructed as a kind of “weblog of blogs.” Individual postings from many bloggers take the place of a series of postings from one blogger. It would be difficult for a war room operator to post material without being identified.

communication, enabled by accessible computers linked to the Internet, offering appeals for anyone to process, and ideas that may be copied and circulated as far as the technology and human interest will carry them, are sites where publics collide and congregate, discuss and deplore, accept and reject, reside awhile and move on (Warner, 2003). They are spaces where the invisible communicative circuits of publics operating in the field of power are, for a moment, made visible by the wide and flexible practice of computer-network technologies.

This would appear to offer a goldmine for the dissemination of politically motivated communication, a direct channel to the real people behind a massive electronic network, people whom (in the manifestation of the politically interested blogger) generally self-identify as having a predisposition to a particular political stance. Whether those blogging individuals (and the publics that form around their websites) are converts to a political cause or in need of conversion is immaterial: for political war rooms, these publics represent a potential direct line into circuits of communication that were largely opaque until computer assisted one-to-many and many-to-many electronic communication became widely accessible. The flexibility of cyber-messaging makes it simple to tailor strategic intentions accordingly. The corporate media understood this and adopted elements of the blogosphere into its election coverage for the 2005-06 campaign. Growing communities of independent bloggers and their individual contributors certainly understood this. But the NDP war room seemed reluctant to invest significantly in this brave new blogging world.

The reasons are both transparently simple and exceedingly complex. For Brian Topp, the co-chair and chief strategist for the NDP campaign, the sheer number of voices

operating in the blogosphere militates against any direct and concerted participation by the war room. In Topp's words, "the payoff of investing in researching and responding in a blog is low" (Topp, 2008).² This is not to say that the NDP's political communicators ignored discussions in cyberspace during the 2005-06 campaign. Indeed, interventions were made on occasion when individual discussions warranted clarification from a war-room perspective, but always with an eye to the verifiable record; the stock-in-trade of opposition research. "Basically," says Topp, "my philosophy is to let the facts talk—the fewer words and more facts in a war-room intervention the better. So every once in awhile we drop facts into blog discussions."

There is also the overriding concern for message control and the strategies that inform the central function of the war room. As we have seen, it is difficult enough to keep political messages on track amid the sound and fury of competing tactics and strategies, the posturing, the manipulations aimed at distinguishing one political competitor from another. Add in another layer of distortion, out-of-context misplacements, truncated treatments (and even responsible analysis) once those messages enter the freewheeling world of the blogosphere, and the dream of a goldmine of message dissemination turns into a potential nightmare. There is simply no way for political operatives to control their finely crafted messages once they enter a sphere of public communication where the practitioners are largely anonymous, potentially limitless, sometimes predatory, and where it is impossible to recall information or negotiate its use. This runs contrary to every instinct in the political-strategy handbook where issues are

² Topp, Brian. (2008, July 10). In e-mail correspondence with the author. Montreal/Toronto.

positioned and registers applied according to the delicate balance between distinction and credibility.

For this reason, political strategists such as Brian Topp have made the decision to deal in “wholesale” messages:

If the topic is important enough to talk about during a campaign we will generally do so with a statement in some form that goes to all media, on the Internet to our whole list, and onto our website. It will then find its way onto blogs (plural) quoting us. So in other words, look after wholesale and the retail will look after itself (Topp, 2008).

For political parties, then, (and certainly for the NDP) there are two compelling reasons to keep the blogosphere at arm’s length: a practical reason that assigns a limited number of war-room communicators to more value-added tasks than discussing political minutiae with a potentially limitless number of correspondents; and a strategic motivation that seeks to maintain message control by keeping the party’s position on issues upstream from the fracture and dislocation of the blogosphere.

The same concerns apply to information and attitudes circulating within the blogosphere. While it might seem that such material would offer a direct window onto those elusive debates among real people in real time from which political decisions rightly flow, debates that would surely offer political strategists an opportunity to generate credibility by appearing to get behind popular political sentiments, the very nature of communication on blogs makes this a dangerous prospect. Publics are fickle. Yesterday’s passing appeal, duly processed and extended, is today’s outmoded position. Once again, the time and energy expended on trying to discern the movement of public attitudes through cyberspace is seen to have greater value when applied to “wholesale” communication. But the simplest reason to steer clear of too close an association with the

blogosphere has to do with identity and prudence. There is still no way of knowing for certain the true identity of contacts made on the web. War-room operatives who were politely suspicious of a university researcher in their physical space would be unlikely to embrace an uncontrollable electronic space where *everybody* is potentially a political opponent masquerading as someone else. Related to this concern is the matter of credit.

A great part of the practice of strategic-political communication, after all, is supposed to be based on the advantageous placement of opposition research, the use of the facts in a political opponent's record to undermine current truth claims. To get a full measure of credit for challenging such truth claims, the party making the challenge must identify itself and *take* the credit. Yet the very power (and the frustration) of the blogosphere lies in its anonymity, the exchange of the widest possible range of views from the safety of identities that are impossible to prove even if they are openly declared. In these conditions political parties face a conundrum: they can identify themselves, declare the origin of their messages, and attract a thousand negative nibbles from anonymous sources, many of them originating from opposition war rooms. Or they can place their messages anonymously, try to covertly influence the public discourse, and forego all credit or, worse, be identified as the source of communicative manipulation and lose all credibility.

For good reason, then, the traditional methods of gathering and assessing public attitudes still largely hold sway. Public-opinion polls remain the backbone of any election campaign. The work of journalists—reporters, political columnists, contributing editors, *ad hoc* contributors—is closely monitored for any strategic content worth appropriating and for any indication of useful public response. The traditional forums provided by

media outlets for “letters to the editor” are assessed, albeit gingerly, for indications of trends in public attitudes or good ideas worth assuming and promoting. By this measure much if not most of the work of the war room is concerned with taking the pulse of “the public” through an assessment of these “safe” indexical sources. This indexical property, in the sense of a trace left by traditional media, is particularly important for political players, just as the inherent instability of cyber-indexes, their seeming penchant for disappearing at will, (or forever reappearing in unwanted contexts) is highly problematic.

Like most political organizations, then, the NDP has decided to take a conservative approach to the blogosphere. But the pressure is growing for more active involvement. Not only has the corporate media invested heavily in its Internet presence, many politically oriented independent weblogs have inevitably gained in credibility through the rough and tumble of successive campaigns. Some have acquired considerable influence. Those responsible for forming and posting content on these sites have become opinion leaders in their own special way. A few perform journalistic functions that are indistinguishable from those of their counterparts in the so-called mainstream media. Certain of these weblogs have assumed a particular political stance and because of this are positioned to engage the thoughts and attitudes, the lines of opinion force that operate in the all-important field of power/publics. No political war room can long afford to ignore such entities.

As political war rooms assess the enticements and dangers of the blogosphere the very concerns of partisan strategists point the way to a rich terrain for scholarly investigation. Selected weblogs can be adapted and used as a research tool to test certain aspects of war rooms at work. In certain cases they *do* offer an accessible window onto

issue responses, a window common to anyone who cares to access a particular site or collection of sites. These blogs are in the process of acquiring their own reputation, of cashing in their cultural capital in the form of the expertise that has accumulated from practices acquired over time; that is, they are accumulating their own symbolic capital—their own credibility. The public processing of appeals posted in the comments sections on certain of these established weblogs may be employed to examine how the strategies and tactics of war rooms (specifically the NDP war room) worked with respect to the wholesale truth claims put forward by the party. Does “retail” partisan communication really “look after itself?” The short answer is yes, but in ways that may not be entirely in keeping with the overarching objectives of political strategists.

Another reason to consider the research value of selected weblogs has to do with issues of control, accessibility, and accuracy that apply to more traditional methods of gathering public opinion. The “safe indexical sources” of information currently employed by war rooms may or may not be widely disseminated. For example, internal polling data, gathered daily during an election campaign, is closely held among the top party strategists. Publics, the people whose opinions comprise poll results, seldom see how political strategists use their contributions. During my time in the NDP war room I made a request to view the internal polls and to observe how party strategists interpreted the data and formed strategic action around it. My request was denied on the spot. For political communicators, poll results are the Holy Grail, a means to garner specific information about key areas of concern, constituencies, and demographics. Internal polls are akin to trade secrets. To be fair, most workers in the NDP war room did not have ready access to this information except when party strategists chose to release certain

results that reflected positively on the campaign. These releases were generally taken as morale boosters.

Indeed, more credence was assigned by party workers (and greater prominence given on the list-serve) to polls circulated in the media, usually provided by the various polling companies (themselves in a heated competition for credibility) but sometimes commissioned by media organizations. To accurately “call the election” is, after all, money in the bank for companies that deal in the measure of public opinion since many depend on contracts with political parties for their economic wellbeing. To be hired as the “official pollster” for a governing party can be very lucrative.³ During the 2005-06 election campaign as many as 24 separate companies participated in some form of overnight polling for public release. The results, collected and presented daily, form a coarse benchmark indicator of public opinion, usually around a variation on a single question: If an election were held today which political party would you vote for? However, such polls are a very blunt instrument. At best they offer a general aggregate response to the broadest of questions.⁴

The preoccupation with polls, with the “horse-race” aspect of political campaigns, often diverts attention from the host of other factors that war-room operators use to get a sense of public attitudes. Against a backdrop of perpetual polling, war rooms remain in touch with traces of public attitudes across a host of issue-driven areas of identified key

³ Often the relationship between pollsters and politicians becomes very close indeed. Peter Donolo, partner in the market research firm The Strategic Counsel, became the strategic communication director for the Prime Minister’s Office under Jean Chrétien. When Donolo left the PMO in 1999 he was appointed Canada’s consul in Milan, Italy. The Strategic Counsel is now the official pollster for CTV and *The Globe and Mail*. (See: <http://www.thestrategiccounsel.com>).

⁴ Following the election, the Angus Reid Global Monitor polling company published the weekly results of rival pollsters. The aggregate may be viewed at: <http://www.angus-reid.com/analysis/view/10110>.

importance, each embedded in forms of journalistic production and the responses to that production. This explains why fully three-quarters of the daily circulation of material on the NDP war room list-serve was the simple forwarding of breaking news reports or synopses of recent journalistic production. The media watchers in the war room were charged with keeping abreast of the latest news and ensuring its open distribution so that war-room workers might, as a group, spot any emerging trends that could be of use to the organization.

This material, however, has always been treated with suspicion. Journalism is, after all, considered an adversarial practice where war-room operatives are concerned, constructed by individuals and filtered and disseminated through organizations that employ standards and methods normally in opposition to the objectives of political communicators. It is the reason why mediated *public* space—opinions published in the so-called Op. Ed. pages of newspapers, the “letters” sections of magazines, open-line radio programs, or the “talk back” portions of radio and television news programs—seldom get much attention from war-room operatives. While the opinions expressed in these forums might well come from average readers, listeners, and viewers there is no guarantee that such opinions have not been “planted” by competing political organizations (See: Wood, 2005). Furthermore, the editorial filters of the publishing news organizations are applied to reader mail as much as to any journalistic production. Comments are selected according to an editorial judgment, they may be trimmed for space/time and edited for content on the basis of that judgment, and while most journalistic organizations make every effort to retain the core substance of letters to the editor and other publicly generated material, many of the control mechanisms that apply

to general reportage also apply here.⁵ For war-room operators, then, the emergence of “useful” material in the journalistic field is always tempered by the constraints that come with attempting to appropriate heavily-mediated cultural production, production that has been made in an organizational culture that is suspected to be polar opposite of one’s own.

Un-mediated public space is another matter and the reason why the proliferation of politically oriented weblogs has been watched with interest by war-room communicators, even if direct participation in the blogosphere remains problematic. A few of these sites became part of the subtle ritual of daily media surveillance in the NDP war room during the 2005-06 campaign. From time to time references to particular weblogs were posted on the war-room list-serve, especially when a strategic or tactical gambit favourable to the NDP was recognized by a third party with a substantial assumed following on the Internet (see the reference to *Captain’s Quarters* below). Sites such as the Alberta-based *CalgaryGrit* (Liberal), a site out of Saskatchewan with the taste-challenged title *smalldeadanimals* (Independent Conservative), and especially the Ontario-based *Stephen Taylor Conservative Party of Canada Pundit* were regularly viewed. Also on the viewing list were media-generated sites such as Antonia Zerbisias’s (now defunct) *azerbic*, and columnist Paul Wells’s weblog *Inkless Wells*, generated under the *Maclean’s* magazine Internet banner.

⁵ In his essay, “Control Mechanisms inside the Media,” Mark Schulman outlines some of the subsumed mechanisms employed by news organizations to control journalistic content. One of the most effective is simple rejection, a failure by editors to respond to story ideas presented by reporters. Reporters soon learn that, in order to have their material published, it must conform to certain thresholds of expectation. Such thresholds of expectation apply even more dramatically to responses from public sources since these sources have no recourse (except publicity) to challenge the decisions made by news editors (Schulman, 1990).

While the development and expression of publicly held attitudes in the field of power/publics and their dissemination through the constellation of interconnected weblogs deserves a major separate study, certain important insights pertaining to war rooms and the Internet may be obtained by plotting the public discussions posted in the comments sections of prominent political blogs against the emergence and re-emergence of certain strategic issues of special relevance to the NDP. In other words, it is possible to gauge the resonance in a form of public space to prominent wholesale messages deployed by the NDP and other war rooms, and taken up by certain blogs that have acquired their own measure of credibility with a public or publics. Stephen Taylor's *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit* is just such an entity, as is Dan Arnold's *CalgaryGrit*. (Taylor and his blog are partly funded by the Manning Institute, a conservative think-tank; Arnold is a former president of the Alberta Young Liberals and at the time of the 2005-06 election a graduate student in Statistics at the University of Alberta).⁶ The weblogs operated by Taylor and Arnold, two experienced and politically motivated (even partisan) bloggers, represent nodes of orientation on different sides of the political spectrum. Each provides a forum for a potentially full and frank discussion of matters of public concern. Both Arnold and Taylor (as might be expected) are the primary voices on their respective sites, but much of their credibility derives from the free and open access to their respective public-comment spaces enjoyed by voices from across the political spectrum.

This was certainly the case with respect to the income-trust affair. While Taylor branded it a "scandal" from the beginning, many of the voices that entered the debate counseled against jumping to conclusions. Arnold's take on the income-trust affair did

⁶ Arnold, 26, at the time of this writing was employed as a researcher for Pollara, a Toronto-based market research and polling company. Arnold, D. (Blogger). (2008, March 14). In e-mail correspondence with the author. Montreal/Ottawa.

not discount the probability of insider trading, but public responses to his postings generally supported the view that this was not a Liberal Party scandal, but the work of an opportunist within the Finance Department. Judged within discursive space delineated by the parameters of the weblog and the expertise of the respondents, these voices from the field of power/publics—both the bloggers running the sites and the people who responded to their postings—may be used to illustrate how the blogosphere is beginning to shift the stakes around political discourse at election time. Political war rooms may be on the verge of entering a new dynamic in partisan-political communication, one where the lines between wholesale and retail become increasingly blurred.

Throughout much of the first half of the 2005-06 election campaign the NDP seemed to be operating behind the scenes on the matter of income trusts. The party struggled to find a way to use the appearance of insider trading as a means to reify its main strategic objective: to maintain and extend the general finding of the Gomery Commission of Inquiry by reaffirming the governing Liberals as systemically corrupt and, therefore, without integrity, without credence, and undeserving of further public trust. The difficulty in making a case against Ralph Goodale came primarily from the finance minister's own decision to challenge the accusations against him outside the bounds of parliamentary privilege (Chapter Seven). The effect, essentially, was to throw a libel chill over the whole matter and by doing so effectively (if temporarily) remove the issue from the circuits of traditional public discussion in the mainstream media. Of course Goodale had no reason to think that the RCMP would take the unprecedented step of launching a criminal investigation against him in the middle of an election campaign. Neither did the NDP. It is possible that Goodale and the Liberals were lulled into a sense

of security by both the low-key treatment of the income-trust matter in the mainstream media and the initial public sensibilities that were at play in the blogosphere. At any rate voices of reason in virtually every weblog treatment of the income-trust affair seemed to counsel against a full frontal attack by Goodale's political opponents, including the NDP.

It is of interest to note then that the income-trust affair largely *became* a child of the blogosphere. Once mainstream media sources finished with their initial reporting on the matter it all but disappeared from the traditional journalistic agenda. In the main, debate around the issue of income trusts circulated mostly in non-mainstream space until the RCMP declared its criminal investigation late in the first half of the campaign. Journalists employed by media companies were also involved, but in a largely constrained way. "Crossover" media practitioners such as Antonia Zerbisias and Kathy Tomlinson of *Whistleblower* (CTV.ca) were instrumental in disseminating some essential details of the income-trust affair both in the blogosphere and across mainstream media outlets, but always within the strict parameters of source confirmation and fair comment that universally apply to journalistic practice. In the blogosphere, the income-trust issue was picked up, reworked, revitalized, and circulated among dozens of individual weblogs, inviting comments from hundreds of interested individuals.⁷ The issue was

⁷ Zerbisias picked up on Tomlinson's *Whistleblower* web column of December 8th and produced a detailed examination of the claim of a pre-announcement leak from the finance department to CARP (Chapter Seven). Zerbisias's treatment raised issues of "normal trading activity" in the markets in anticipation of the income-trust announcement of November 23rd. This was reflected in the comments section of Zerbisias's weblog over three related postings on December 10th and 11th. After this initial interest in the income-trust matter, Zerbisias made no further significant mention of income trusts for the duration of the campaign. The exception was a January 21st posting, on the eve of the election, where she acknowledged that the blogosphere "probably kept the income trust scandal alive" (Zerbisias, 2006). But she also claimed that, when the vote was tallied, weblogs would be seen to have had little influence on the actual vote.

especially prominent on Dan Arnold's *CalgaryGrit* and Stephen Taylor's *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*.

Dan Arnold's *CalgaryGrit* of December 6th (speculating on the fallout from CTV's initial story on the CARP/income trust connection) was among the first to set out the credibility stakes for the Liberals. In a posting entitled "Trouble, with a Capital T, and that Stands for Trusts!" Arnold all but drew the conclusion that the RCMP *would* investigate and, strategically, it would be better for the Liberals to get the matter resolved quickly:

The real question is what kind of timeline the RCMP has for this investigation, and if we can expect to learn anything else (one way or the other) between now and the end of the campaign. It might almost be better for the Grits to have this resolved because, while I find it exceedingly difficult to believe someone in Ralph Goodale's office leaked this, the rumours and accusations are going to continue to grow (Arnold/*CalgaryGrit*, 6 December 2005).

The respondents to Arnold's posting were almost unanimous in their support for Ralph Goodale. Most agreed that Goodale could not possibly be behind a prior "leak" of information on income trusts. However, most also agreed that there was good reason for suspicion. As a voice identified as "two cents" put it:

I have no doubt that Ralph Goodale is a man of utmost integrity. However, the Liberals will not be able to dismiss this so easily if it can be demonstrated that someone in his office felt "entitled" to provide a little investment advice to his/her friends (two cents/*CalgaryGrit*, 6 December 2005).

Indeed, most voices in the December 6th comments section had no trouble accepting that *someone* in Goodale's office had probably leaked information on income trusts. There was very little discussion (two responses out of 35) around the possibility that market forces may have led to the *appearance* of untoward activity. One anonymous respondent, with apparent prescience and claiming his or her own sort of insider knowledge, even

seemed to confirm that a leak had come from the civil service:

I know with some certainty that indeed the info was leaked (unintentionally) by a senior civil servant the DAY [sic] before the announcement. Having said that the individual that received this info, did nothing and told no one. So it is possible that other senior civil servants or this one told others as well (Anonymous/*CalgaryGrit*, 6 December 2005).

This is where the matter was left until four days later.

By December 10th, income trusts were back on the mainstream-media radar. CARP's claims to an income-trust tipoff from the finance minister's office had been roundly debated. The morning's *National Post* carried Andrew Coyne's column, "It's not about CARP," in which he speculated about the origins and reasons behind a leak at the Finance Department. And Dan Arnold of *CalgaryGrit* drew attention to a spike in the volume of trading around a company named Medisys, offering a quote and a link to another weblog that seemed expose a connection between this management company for private health clinics and Paul Martin. In his posting, titled "Who Can You Trust," Arnold makes a point that many others will make over the days and weeks to come:

If there was a leak (and it looks like there was), I always assumed it was because of negligence, or because some low level staffer was trying to make a few bucks. To assume that this was part of some massive Liberal conspiracy or that Martin was involved seems a little bit rich (Arnold/*CalgaryGrit*, 10 December 2005).

Arnold freely admitted in this posting that he is not an expert on trading stocks. This opened the floodgates for a discussion in the comments section around the circumstances of the income-trust affair and the market activity of November 23rd. While the culpability of Ralph Goodale (or those in his office) continued to dominate the discussion (including a series of nasty attacks from clearly anti-Liberal voices), a significant stream

of discussion focused on dissecting the trading activity just prior to the income-trust announcement.

For the first time, a number of voices entered the discourse apparently unencumbered by the *politics* of income trusts; instead, they began to offer a more dispassionate *market* analysis, including alternate theories to explain why the market acted as it did on November 23rd. Some remained convinced that the numbers represented evidence of insider trading. Others such as “annextraitor” made the case that “this is not the way to take advantage of insider information. You do it using several different brokers in offshore financial centres over a number of days” (annextraitor/*CalgaryGrit*, 10 December 2005). This beginning of a shift away from the political meaning of income trusts to an analysis of underlying market mechanisms (as well as a thoughtful primer on how to conduct an inside trade) would be taken up with a great deal more alacrity on *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*.

Stephen Taylor describes himself as a former Conservative Party nominee for the candidacy of Kingston and the Islands (he lost the 2004 nomination). He describes his weblog in journalistic terms: “During the 2005-2006 campaign,” writes Taylor, “this blog broke many election related stories which got significant play in the mainstream media” (Taylor, 2008). Taylor, according to Taylor, is completing a graduate degree in biochemistry and working in Ottawa. He does not specify what kind of job he holds. He certainly played a significant part in circulating certain “evidence” about the income-trust affair. Like most media watchers Taylor picked up on initial reports of unusual market activity in the week following the announcement by the Department of Finance that income trusts would not be taxed. “If this scandal turns out to be insider trading,” writes

Taylor on November 30th, “then this may end up plaguing the Liberals during most of the campaign” (Taylor, 30 November 2005).

However, Stephen Taylor seemed unsure of what to do with the initial income-trusts story and moved on to other interests. Like *CalgaryGrit*, Antonia Zerbisias, and other bloggers his later interest in the income-trust affair came from web-posted mainstream sources, notably Kathy Tomlinson’s *Whistleblower* column and a CTV.ca staff-written story which quotes a spokesperson affiliated with the Ontario Securities Commission as suggesting that there may be something worth investigating in the income-trust file, the same story that prompted the NDP war room to suggest a release calling for Goodale to step aside until the income-trust matter was cleared up (CTV.ca, 2005) (Chapter Seven).

Taylor’s weblog remained more-or-less mute on the issue of income trusts until December 11th, four days after CTV and *The Canadian Press* circulated their respective CARP reports and one day after Andrew Coyne’s column appeared in the *National Post*. Taylor was to take an interesting tack, assembling a series of charts based on information supplied by various sources in the “Conservative blogging community” that appeared to show spikes in trading activity across nine market entities “prior to the Goodale announcement on November 23rd at 6:00 pm” (Taylor, 11 December 2005). This is much more information than any of the mainstream media outlets had assembled (or dared to publish) and it seemed to show a pattern of investment buying that would suggest prior knowledge of the Finance Department’s decision. Whether these charts proved insider trading was highly debatable, but they did engender a cascade of responses among Taylor’s Internet publics.

It is worth examining these responses if only to note how few thoughtless and purely partisan comments are posted. While some voices offer conspiracy theories and clearly speak from the position of absolute mistrust of Liberal intentions, most probe Taylor's methodology or question the conclusions that he draws from the "evidence" presented in the charts. Many of the voices appear to have more than a passing understanding of the way the stock market works, how to interpret spikes in trading activity, and whether the evidence supports the charge of insider trading. Furthermore, there seems to be a kind of unwritten code among bloggers to permit other bloggers to have their say, even those who come from a declared contrary political point of view. Here is part of a discussion on *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit* initiated by one blogger (self-identified as "Paul") and answered by Dan Arnold ("calgarygrit") who has clearly been following the discussion on the "competing blog):

While insider connections between any of these trusts and the Liberal power structure would be interesting, of more direct importance [sic] of course would be any connections between the specific individuals who made these trades (or the individuals who recommended them) and those same Liberal power structures.

But having the research at the ready is a handy thing to have. Let's not just ourselves fall into the pit on this one (Paul/*Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*, 11 December 2005).

"calgarygrit's" response:

I'm not an expert on stocks, but the connection between these trusts and the LPC isn't really that relevant to the leak, is it? I mean, can't we assume these income trusts would have spiked the day after the announcement regardless?

Like Paul said, the real people you want to find are the ones who made these trades. They'd be the ones who were tipped [sic] early and who profited. If you could tie any of them to Goodale's office, or the LPC, then you'd have a stronger case. (Arnold/*Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*, 11 December 2005)

Later in the comments section another voice, self-identified as "nbob" calls for caution:

I don't want to rain on your parade—because I think something smells and it's sure worth a closer look—but you'll need to expand your methodology if you really want to come up with a valid study.
(nbob/*Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*, 11 December 2005)

This voice then presents a detailed account of publicly available material internal to one of the investment vehicles that had a trading spike prior to the income-trust announcement, the company called Medysis that was so prominently featured by *CalgaryGrit* for its ostensible connection to Paul Martin. “nbob's” information seems to confirm that the company had good reason to expect a spike in trading because it had just announced a payout to shareholders, as had four of the other companies cited by Taylor.⁸ “I think,” writes “nbob,” “that you can safely remove those 5 from the list” (*Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*, 11 December 2005).

This was the final comment in the initial discussion around trading activity as presented on Taylor's December 11th weblog. It reflects a line of reasoned argument presented by several voices, some with obvious market expertise, against jumping to conclusions based on the appearance of suspicious trading activity. To be sure, there were other voices more crudely inclined to see Liberal skullduggery at every turn. One even suggested that the Liberals might be using insider knowledge to buy into the market before the trust announcement, then sell high in order to top up their election war chest! But for the most part the “expert” voices prevailed. Therefore, within more-or-less parallel discussions on the same topic, one conducted on the Liberal-leaning *CalgaryGrit*

⁸ Medisys made an appearance earlier in the comments section under a posting by “Glen” who made the claim that “Dr. Sheldon Elman, who is Paul Martin's personal (private enterprise) physician, is also the Founder/President/CEO of the Medysis Health Group Income Fund (*Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*, 11 December 2005). This relationship would later be picked up by, among others, Don Martin of the *National Post* in his column of December 15th, a column where he challenged Paul Martin to explain his true position on health care (Martin, 2005). For the moment, however, this information belonged exclusively to the blogosphere.

and the other on the Conservative-leaning *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit*, interested publics essentially took control of the logic of the income-trust affair. On the one hand, Liberal-oriented voices conceded that someone (though not Ralph Goodale) had indeed leaked confidential information; on the other, Conservative-oriented voices rejected the argument that the appearance of market activity proved insider trading.

Since the activity on both weblogs appeared to directly address strategic issues that the NDP was then working on, I mentioned it to two war-room workers. This was at a time when the party was pushing the OSC to launch an investigation. Both of the war-room people were aware of Taylor's posting (not of Arnold's) and of the discussion around it. Neither was inclined to talk with me about whether the NDP, for its part, should do some of its own forensic work around the companies that appeared to benefit from information released prior to the official announcement. As it turns out, this was precisely the time frame when the NDP was ramping up the communication offensive that would culminate in a request for an investigation by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (Chapter Eight), Andrew Coyne's CARP column was in circulation, the Conservatives had called for Ralph Goodale's resignation based on the CARP story (Turchansky, 2005), and a number of weblogs, including Taylor's, were discussing what appeared to be a pattern of insider activity in the markets (though none supplied specific "evidence" in the manner of Taylor's "trade spike" charts). On top of this, the circulation in the blogosphere of a purported connection between Paul Martin and the head of the Medisys Health Group Income Fund offered a potential opportunity to draw a direct connection between income trusts and the issue of private medical clinics, opening the door to a direct challenge of Paul Martin's exact position on either

file. This would seem to be an especially rich synergy of strategic opportunities since, in addition to investing heavily in its income-trust offensive, the NDP was about to present its December 13th Shirley Douglas stump speech. Yet the NDP war room, aware of these connected opportunities, failed to bring them to public attention.

There are a number of possible reasons for the New Democratic Party's restraint. All have to do with issues of message control and credibility. First, there was nobody in the New Democrat family of bloggers with the same willingness as Stephen Taylor to post "proof" of unusual trading activity around income trusts. To publicly recognize Taylor's "information" and the discourse around it would therefore lend credence to the work of a competing political camp. Even if the blogger in question was not an official employee of the Conservative Party (and there's no guarantee that this was not the case) the fact that Taylor is a self-declared Conservative would be problematic for the NDP. Journalists also read weblogs, so to appropriate material from a conservative-oriented site and use it publicly would invite questions about the source of the information. To reveal the source would give credence to the Conservatives; to not reveal the source (or claim the information as the NDP's own) would cause questions to be asked about the party's own credibility.

Second, the dominant public discourse carried on Taylor's weblog was both thoughtful and cautious. Those voices willing to jump to conclusions, to see a Liberal conspiracy in the income-trust affair, were vastly outnumbered (by about five to one) by those who had genuine interest in alternate explanations for the apparent spikes in trading or, most significantly, in cautioning that much more work needed to be done in order to prove a causal link between the finance minister's office and pre-announcement activity

on the stock market. This causal link was precisely what the NDP was hoping to accomplish by calling for, variously, OSC, SEC, and RCMP investigative involvement. The difference is that the party was interested in using the credibility of the investigative bodies to further its own ends and knew full well that a proper investigation could not possibly be conducted before the end of the election campaign. The weblog respondents, on the other hand, seemed genuinely interested in getting to the bottom of the income-trust trading activity. These are two very different, even contrary, objectives. It would not serve anyone in the NDP war room to have a thoughtful discussion (generated by a blogger with ties to the Conservatives no less) on income trusts if that discussion were to lead to an exoneration of the Liberals. Even entering into such a discussion would detract from the main strategic intention by introducing elements of doubt into the primary objective: to cast the income-trust affair as one more (perhaps definitive) example of shady Liberal dealing.⁹

However, the biggest impediment to jumping on the Stephen Taylor bandwagon may have had to do with institutional culture. While most war-room workers are relatively young, certainly under 40 years of age, the senior party brass comes from a generation that is more comfortable with traditional mass media and less so with computer-network technologies. A “guest” column in the December 13th issue of the *National Post* situated the issue of income trusts vis-à-vis the “Internet’s most rabid political junkies” (which in this case is code for non-journalists) in a manner that would be in general keeping with such a generational divide (Moore, 2005; Warschauer,

⁹ By the same token, to engage the logic of the developing discussion on Arnold’s weblog would be to introduce the possibility that someone at Finance had released the income trust decision without Ralph Goodale’s knowledge, thus undermining the NDP’s position that the minister was culpable.

2003)¹⁰. In his column, John Moore, host of a talk-radio program in Toronto, went to great lengths to discount chatter in the blogosphere around the income-trust affair by making the case that there are perfectly logical reasons why trading in trusts should increase prior to the government's announcement. (Many of those reasons echoed the dominant discussion on Taylor's weblog). However, Moore also indulged in a bit of questionable inductive logic with respect to the role of the media:

The fact that the media have largely ignored this alleged scandal might be taken as further evidence that it amounts to little more than campaign chicanery—except that in the new Internet age, when a story is ignored by the mainstream media ... that's just further proof of its veracity (Moore, 2005)

Of course, this was very much a confirmation by a practitioner of mass media that the mass media are in charge of determining what is and is not true or, certainly, what does or does not warrant further investigation. This was exactly the embedded position of the NDP's communication strategists: that information in circulation does not exist until it is confirmed by journalists and published or broadcast by so-called mainstream media. This is the safe zone of political communication. Everything else is just a conspiracy theory. And while such a position may seem to be unduly risk-averse (especially to younger political communicators), a small but significant incident in the blogosphere just two days later seemed to lend support to the more conservative position.

December 15th provided the NDP with a number of opportunities and a cautionary tale. Among them was a posting by a weblog known as *Captain's Quarters* operated by a blogger identified as Ed Morrissey and operating out of the Twin Cities

¹⁰ Mark Warschauer's *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide* explores a number of instances, divides, where certain conditions—language, technological prowess, access to infrastructure, etc.—prevent certain socio-political groups from reaping the full benefits of computer-networked communication. While a generational divide is not high on Warschauer's list, the use-practices of different age groups are implicit in his concept.

area of Minnesota. Among Morrissey's postings for December 15th was a rehash of the income-trust affair that ended with some encouragement for the NDP: "The Conservatives and the NDP should continue to press for a federal, independent investigation into the November 23rd trading activity" (*Morrissey/Captain's Quarters*, 15 December 2005). This prompted the NDP war room to circulate the weblog posting on its internal list-serve. The voices in the *Captain's Quarters* comments section included three anonymous offerings representing three distinct points of view:

The Conservatives and the NDP should continue to press for a federal, independent investigation into the November 23rd trading activity (*Anonymous/Captain's Quarters*, 15 December 2005).

Maybe there hasn't been an investigation because the people who really know something about the market haven't seen anything out of the ordinary (*Anonymous/Captain's Quarters*, 15 December 2005).

The RCMP and the OSC are not the only two groups capable of investigating this issue. In 2003 the Liberals themselves passed Bill C-46 which gives the Solicitor General the authority to conduct a concurrent investigation into insider trading activity. So in other words these are the choices...

1. We can have a Liberal controlled police force investigate.
 2. We can have a securities regulator that is headed by someone who has contributed at least [sic] \$1,000 to the Liberal Party in each of the last five years.
 3. Or we can have the Liberal Party investigate themselves.
- (*Anonymous/Captain's Quarters*, 15 December 2005).

The first two comments are indicative of the manner in which the general discourse around income trusts was becoming polarized. One point of view supports Morrissey's position (also the NDP's), that there is good reason to proceed with an investigation by an unspecified "federal [and] independent" authority. Another maintains that there is nothing out of the ordinary. The third introduces something different.

It has all the earmarks of a well-informed partisan comment. It introduces new elements into the discourse, elements that insinuate a breadth and depth of Liberal

corruption that is breathtaking. First, the RCMP is accused of being in thrall to the Liberals. Second, the head of the Ontario Securities Commission is accused of being a Liberal toady, a cash contributor to the party (with the inference is that he is supporting his Liberal chums by blocking an investigation into income trusts). Third, it is pointed out that the solicitor general (an appointment of the governing party) is empowered to investigate matters such as the income-trust affair, but that a Liberal investigating Liberals would inevitably result in a whitewash. The subtext to this entire line of reasoning is that the whole system is corrupt and only a new government, with a new solicitor general who is not a Liberal, would be able to get to the bottom of the “scandal.”

This is precisely the kind of planted information that might originate in a war room; information crafted to introduce new elements of doubt into an ongoing public discourse with the intention of leading voters to a conclusion. It is a tactic with a clear strategic intention: to shift the discussion into a trust/integrity register, to “cut through” with a distinct position in order to induce a general sense of mistrust in the entire apparatus of any Liberal government. It likely did not originate with the NDP (although nobody in the party would confirm or deny involvement) because its message is at odds with the NDP’s objectives. Indeed, it is unlikely that a solid source for the comment could ever be ascertained (given the anonymous nature of the blogosphere) even if a fairly straightforward process of elimination would suggest a likely culprit.¹¹

¹¹ Late in the campaign Stephen Harper would try to assuage fears over a Conservative “hidden agenda” by claiming (strangely) that any government led by him would be kept in check by Liberal appointees in the bureaucracy, the court system, and other federal institutions. This supposition of a residual “Liberal ideological bent,” presented as a constraint on Conservative power, is not unlike the logical foregrounding that sees Liberal controls at work in the Solicitor General’s Office, the national police force, and in regulatory bodies such as the OSC. It is also interesting that the comment was posted on a weblog that originates in the United States. As such it would be nearly untraceable and protected under the First Amendment.

Should it come as a surprise that war rooms may have infiltrated the blogosphere? Probably not. While strategic-political communicators seem to have concluded that information posted on weblogs is best treated with caution—that it is expensive and time-consuming to confirm, and dangerous to appropriate without some kind of independent verification—they are apparently beginning to realize that basic party positions, widely held strategic partisan messages, may be *added* to the ongoing “public” discourse with relative impunity (and so much the better if a competing war room unwittingly circulates the message).

These well-crafted messages, however, speak to a new level of communicative manipulation and distortion, one that conceals an intention to deceive by assuming the identity of a public voice, just another citizen, a representative of a public introducing his or her thoughts into the debate on a matter of public concern. This is dangerous ground. Given the flow of discussion in these cyber forums, these windows onto the circuits of discourse among diverse views that are reflexive of the field of power/publics, such an insertion of intentionally distorted material is simply a lie, a crossing of the line that separates strategic persuasion through opposition research (checked and balanced against the imperfect filters of the journalistic field) from the out-and-out intention to mislead.

At this juncture, there is no way to know whether such interventions are mere mischief or indicative of something more insidious. For the reasons cited above, the NDP war room was reluctant to enter into anonymous blogging, choosing instead to openly identify itself on the rare occasions when it posted mainly fact-based material in weblog comment sections.¹² However, it is almost certain that this kind of “placement” of

¹² One such instance followed the first set of leaders’ debates. A December 16th posting by Antonia Zerbisias invoked the example of the NDP and Jack Layton during a speculative moment

strategic communication will increase, at least until bloggers obtain the electronic resources, develop the skills, and invest the time to track and identify the sources of such postings. Such tracking is not without its rewards. On a related theme, bloggers were largely responsible for identifying fake political ads commissioned by the Liberals and posted to the party's website on December 5th, a story that was picked up and circulated among mainstream media outlets and on competing political websites (Woods, 2005). These ads featured members of the Young Liberals posing as "ordinary Canadians" lauding the government of Paul Martin on a number of files. While there is some dispute over who first revealed the subterfuge (the NDP gleefully posted the fake ads to its party web site and chided the Liberals for their dishonesty) the ad incident is indicative of a wider, emerging practice: a kind of surveillance system of mainstream journalists, competing political operators, and bloggers acting as independent checks on misleading political communication and blowing the whistle in their own interests.

Therefore, while elements of strategic-communicative action may have already moved to the Internet, the pitfalls of jumping into cyberspace with both feet are still seen by war rooms to greatly outweigh the advantages. For the moment, this has had the effect of reserving large areas of weblog discourse for those publics most willing to process passing appeals on important matters of public concern. In the meantime, most political-communication strategists find themselves restricted mainly to party websites, spaces that are essentially passive: of interest to those publics who are invested enough to find the site and spend the time navigating its offerings.

on how to force politicians to keep their promises. The NDP war room, under a comments section response entitled "From the NDP War Room," attempted to refute any suggestion that Layton and the NDP do *not* keep their promises. It was the longest of the five responses posted.

As Tamara Small has pointed out in her analysis of the political uses of the World Wide Web in the 2004 general election, all parties were experimenting at that time with some form of web interactivity (Small, 2004). All political parties created a limited forum on their official web pages for interaction with “the leader.” But even here, control of the message took precedence over true interactivity. For example, the Conservative “weblog,” associated with that party’s site and meant to personalize a connection with Stephen Harper, did not include a comments section. Indeed, says Small, “the blog was not even written in the first person, but was written about Harper by an anonymous staffer.” In other words, it was not really a weblog at all. The NDP “weblog feature” developed on the party’s site for the 2004 election purported to carry comments from Jack Layton, but here too the site did not provide for an interactive comments section (Small, 2004). This remained the case for the 2005-06 campaign.

Such a unidirectional flow of communication runs contrary to the central strength of the Internet: its ability to facilitate a wide range of discourse around multiple issues engaged by anyone willing to process the passing appeals on offer. But is it surprising that highly sophisticated communication specialists view this as a disadvantage during an election campaign? Their job, after all, is to *limit* the discussion around partisan positions even as they seek opportunities to undermine the credibility of their opponents. The blogosphere may be tempting as a platform for the practice of the tactics of dis-credit, but it also undercuts message control by admitting public opinions that may run contrary to the party’s stated position. The question for future election campaigns is whether war rooms will embrace such tactics while attempting to maintain the control that comes with the upstream dissemination of wholesale messages.

In an odd way, the uncertainty of web-based communication in the 2005-06 campaign produced a set of circumstances that were a mixed blessing for NDP war-room communicators. On the one hand, the income-trust affair remained alive in the face of general reluctance by the mainstream media to engage the issue with the same intensity as individual bloggers.¹³ On the other, the party's strategic-communication people were kept from participating in (or appropriating) important discourses—discussions of central concern to the NDP's own communication strategy. The party could claim a measure of consolation from the knowledge that Dan Arnold's "Liberal" weblog continued to show concern over Liberal party exposure to the income-trust affair, a persistent line of discussion that seemed to accept as *prima facie* the case that something untoward had happened on November 23rd. Such consolation was tempered on *CalgaryGrit* by equal persistence in the belief that Ralph Goodale was not personally responsible, thus detracting from the argument for "ministerial responsibility" that the NDP (and Conservatives) put forward whenever the income-trust affair was mentioned. Similarly, it was troubling that the dominant public on Stephen Taylor's "Conservative" weblog, through three separate discussions in the month of December, was unwilling to concede a full measure of support for the thesis that insider trading was the only explanation for the flurry of trading activity that had preceded Goodale's income-trust announcement. But it was somehow reassuring that Taylor's graphs and charts appeared to show the kind of

¹³ Both Stephen Taylor and Dan Arnold would return to the income-trust matter several times during the first half of the election campaign. Taylor continued to pursue a fact-based substantiation predicated on an analysis of numbers of shares traded versus volumes. However, the discussion in the *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit* comments section always returned to matters of proof and alternate explanations for suspicious trading activity. Dan Arnold also returned to the income-trust affair on a number of occasions during the month of December. Discussions in the *CalgaryGrit* comments section continued to be dominated by concerns over the strategic handling of income trusts, particularly following the announcement by the RCMP of a criminal investigation.

“evidence” that might prod the OSC into action. Ironically, the competition between these competing streams of discourse likely, and on balance, contributed to the NDP’s strategic position, the one that eventually (and surprisingly) came to pass: involvement by the RCMP, a body with the power to subpoena records, conduct interrogations, and apply resources to make sense of the evidence; in short, a body empowered by law to get to the bottom of the matter.

The central importance of the voices, the publics that circulated their opinions on weblogs such as *Conservative Party of Canada Pundit* and *CalgaryGrit*, lay in the simple fact that they were being circulated of their own accord. To be sure, bloggers such as Dan Arnold and Stephen Taylor were able to set topics for discussion: comment sections are, after all, offered as a forum for responses to specific musings by the bloggers. But the discourses that developed over income trusts (especially with respect to Taylor’s efforts to “prove” insider trading) illustrate the limits of the blogger’s influence. Participants made up their own minds about the meaning of the income-trust affair based on the circulation of thoughtfully analyzed data, logical conjecture, knowledge of political strategy, and plain, garden-variety belief. And in each case the conclusion of the participating publics was at odds with the strategic objective of the NDP war room. As for the anonymity of the blogosphere, while it may shield communicative abuses it also supports a kind of freedom to say what is on one’s mind in a manner that is virtually impossible to find in any other public forum. On this level, at this time, it just might be the case that *the people* are showing us all how democracy is done, how the continuing conversation in the field of power/publics sets its own agenda, creates its own conditions

for *communicative action*, and decides what is important irrespective of the machinations of political (and journalistic) operators.

It is anybody's guess how long it will take political war rooms and the communication strategists in them to develop the means to fully exploit the blogosphere. There are likely plans afoot at this moment to create an "independent" weblog to act as a front for a party-supported, purely partisan communication strategy, a weblog paid for and staffed by communication strategists but appearing in all respects as a space constructed and maintained by a traditional blogger. Perhaps a political party will offer an established blogger a great deal of money, in effect purchasing his or her credibility in order to skew weblog comments and postings toward a particular point of view. The prediction, the educated guess, is that the temptation to meddle, to control, to practice strategic action masked by some new incarnation of false communicative action will trump a simple respect for the free democratic discussion, the willingness of publics to process passing appeals and perform their extension, that seems to be the hallmark of much discourse currently reflected in the blogosphere. At that point the credibility sweepstakes will move to an entirely different level of risk and reward.

Chapter Nine

Political Communication and the Journalistic Field

NDP leader Jack Layton is going to great lengths to stick to his script and dodge questions on subjects he doesn't want to address since off-the-cuff comments on private clinics early this week landed him in hot water (Chase and Curry, 2005a).

The strategic and tactical communication generated by war rooms of all stripes is only as good as its effectiveness in out-competing all other "earned media" on any given day. Furthermore, while political-communication strategists might be convinced that their messages are of the utmost importance, those messages, even during the privileged conditions of an election campaign, may be easily overshadowed by news events that have no relationship to the political matters at hand. Worse, unforeseen consequences may arise from the best-laid plans of political-communication strategists. For this reason, much political communication at election time is aimed simply at guiding the party's message through the generalized cacophony that is thrown up by political competitors and the world at large, and squeezed through the editorial filters of various journalistic enterprises. If any political party of any stripe is to connect with the people who will ultimately cast their ballots on election day, it must contend with messages derailed by adversaries, acts of God that hijack the front page of every newspaper on any given day, journalistic indifference and/or hyper-vigilance, and plain dumb luck.

The pressure to "cut through," to get the message out, to compete well in the field of power/publics by structuring and situating messages in such a way that they are cleanly admitted into the circuits of discourse that will ultimately bring voters on side, almost inevitably slams headlong into issues of credibility. In a world of shifting boundaries that often pit good taste and judgment against the opportunity to state a

legitimate concern, enthusiastic political parties and their leaders, sensing an opportunity, often wind up on the wrong side of a sensitive public issue. A case in point is the Boxing Day 2005 shootout on Toronto's Yonge Street, a senseless, unpredictable act that wounded seven gang members and killed Jane Creba, a local high-school student and innocent bystander (Moore and El Akkad, 2005). All three of the mainstream federalist parties used the crime as a "hook" to restate their respective positions on gun control and on violent crime in general (and to gain the attention of voters in the riding-rich Greater Toronto Area). Possibly for good reason, the timely response by politicians to this tragedy was viewed in much of the published public discourse of the time as cynical opportunism, the attempt by shameless political players to jump into the media spotlight and turn the tragedy into a political advantage. While crass opportunism may well have been a motivating factor, the consequences of *not* wading into the debate were not discussed with the same intensity.

By design or instinct (or both) political players, left with the choice of being tarred as heartless opportunists or uncaring, uninvolved automata (and therefore unfit to govern), invariably fall back on practices that reflect aspects of Bourdieu's notion of the relationship between distinction and relations of power: "distinction among actors within fields and among fields, and the relations of power that arise from the competition for recognition, lie behind the 'ongoing struggle that is society'" (Benson and Neveu, 2005:3). This is instructive as a point of entry for discussing the general motivational context for strategic-political communication. In the case of the Toronto shooting and similar potentially "no-win" situations, for example, it has become widely accepted that it is better to be criticized for taking a stance (and receive a measure of distinction through

public exposure that at least permits a discussion of the issue) than to respectfully maintain a dignified silence only to be criticized for apparent indifference (and receive a measure of distinction based negatively on no engagement with the issue).

On a significant level, then, political war rooms are charged with managing this sharp and constant competition for distinction amid the glut of occurrences that comprises both the “field” of daily journalistic production and the field of power/publics. And they do so knowing that recognition and credibility go hand-in-hand, that distinction without credibility is usually not desirable, but distinction that generates credibility on an issue, or that supports and enhances residual credibility is the aim and objective of the entire exercise.¹ Much of the work of war rooms, therefore, lies in framing and driving the issues on which the party may take a distinct position to places where discourse can be positioned, engaged, and enhanced with an eye to generating or protecting credibility. This must be accomplished within the field of power/publics and against a nexus of daily competing interests that operates within a glut of competing occurrences as small as the last Britney Spears faux pas or as large as a killer tsunami.

War rooms spend a great deal of time and energy on this idea of “positioning the discourse.” To more fully understand what it takes to drive a complex public discussion to a place of “communicative safety,” it is helpful to briefly revisit the notion of registers (Chapters One and Three). Simply put, registers or argument strategies may be used to frame an issue within certain thematic categories that resonate broadly with the value commitments of multiple publics. These might include (but are not limited to) argument

¹ It is interesting to note that the meanings that cascade from words such as “distinct,” “distinction,” and “recognition” have resonance with the meanings that emanate from “credit,” “credence,” and “credibility.” To be distinct is somehow to be set apart. To have distinction is to be set apart with high regard. Recognition, too, has a double meaning. Each of these relationships is related to a process whereby symbolic capital (credibility) is acquired.

strategies around law and order, public safety, economic stewardship, employment, and so forth. By their very nature, argument strategies provide a basic communicative frame that may be used by a participant in a debate to advance and/or protect a particular point-of-view (Rodriguez, 2008; Heinich, 1998; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991). On some occasions this frame is set through a kind of unspoken agreement among competing parties when positions are publicly staked out on an issue or concern. Such positions are themselves bounded by the requirement to appear credible with respect to the issue at hand and the requirement to offer a distinct position; a position that is somehow different from those on offer from the competition. Because argument strategies demand that the truth claims of political actors are distinct *and* credible there is always fierce competition for ownership of the ideas that will generate the widest resonance in the field of power/publics.

The positioning of complex discourses within registers has become a kind of default position for political war rooms, a predictable response to complex issues that emerge from the storm of competing interests lodged within the glut of daily occurrences. The NDP, for example, has long positioned itself on the side of “working people” and “average Canadians.” Whatever these broad terms may actually mean, they resonate for the NDP along lines that arise from the ideological-cultural division of labour that distinguishes the partisan communication of New Democrats from that of other political parties. The distinction that accrues to the NDP derives from registers that are positioned within these broad concepts, argument strategies that derive from a concern for economic fairness, social justice, protection for the weak, etc.² For this reason, tracking registers

² The official web site for the NDP has a list of policy areas that the party has claimed as priority concerns: health care tops the list, followed by the environment, economic security, education,

and the ways that they are employed offers a means to locate and study some of the basic motivations for war-room communicators. It should be noted that the discourses themselves may not especially important in the context of an election campaign because most election-time discourses are repetitions of established positions. However, the “ownership” of a particular register *around* a significant discourse (gun control, law and order, health care, the economy, etc.) is vitally important. The objective, as always, is to appear to hold a distinct position on an issue or area of public concern while enhancing or maintaining credibility.

Having constructed a terrain where no political communication occurs without strategic and tactical objectives, and where any gambit is subject to the vagaries of outrageous fortune, political war rooms have opted to generate ever-more political communication that reinforces standard positions and that, as much as possible, avoids engaging messy public discussions or controversies, even if such discussions might be of great importance to some voters.³ This makes the requirement to be distinct an ever-more complicated prospect as the urge to position discourses within controllable registers runs into conflict with the needs to assume safe and defensible communicative positions. War room communicators have addressed this tension (either unwittingly or by design) by

equality for women, and so on. In each case, the description of the party position on an issue/policy area is couched in language that identifies the NDP as a guardian or defender of social justice.

³ This has led on occasion to awkward slips of the tongue by politicians caught up in the heat of a campaign, slips that have been resurrected from the distant political past in order to attack the credibility of political opponents. During the 2005-06 campaign, the NDP war room tried to make hay out of a slip by Paul Martin by linking him to former Prime Minister Kim Campbell who famously stated during the 1993 federal election that “election campaigns are no time to talk about issues.” See: NDP Rapid Response: Paul Martin has a Kim Campbell moment (NDP War Room, 21 December 2005).

putting Habermas's notion of communicative action to use in a manner that ultimately stands as a classic example of systematic distortion of communication.

Briefly, the Habermasian notion of the ideal-speech situation, of communication for the express purpose of reaching consensus, is precisely the *mask* that is adopted by political communicators when issues are engaged in the field of power/publics. It is a very useful mask because it speaks to the very ideals (including the transparent exchange of information) that are widely understood to be among the core values of liberal democracy, ideals that also mesh nicely with Habermas's notion of a public sphere where the rational and critical discussion of common concerns leads to decisions made in the public good. But war rooms are charged with putting *strategic* communication into practice—the “considered choice” of communicative intent whose sole aim is to influence others (Habermas, 1984; Poupeau, 2000).⁴ This intentional construction by political-communication strategists of a binary of communicative opposites, a kind of “debate and switch,” permits political communicators to use the best of democratic ideals and intentions for purely strategic and partisan purposes, and to do so in plain sight.

In this respect, political war rooms have made *communicative action* into a *strategy*. In the wake of the Boxing Day shooting, for example, the Liberals, Conservatives and the NDP immediately promised stricter gun-control measures if elected. Such a promise spoke directly to a core constituency in each party, but more than this, it pushed the debate over gun control into a realm of ideal absolutes, into the register of public safety, a place where nobody could credibly argue that, in the public good, guns

⁴ In the words of Habermas: ‘Whereas in *strategic actions* one actor seeks to influence the behaviour of another by means of the threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratification in order to cause the interaction to continue as the first actor desires, in a communicative action one actor seeks rationally to motivate another by relying on the illocutionary binding/bonding effect (*Bindungseffekt*) of the offer contained in the speech act (Habermas, 1990).

and their criminal use should *not* be more strictly controlled. Each party framed its response to the Toronto shootings from the safe position, the consensus position, that this was (in the words of Paul Martin) “a senseless and tragic act.” But from this safe position, the position of communicative action, the party leaders adopted sub-positions with strategic intentions meant to make their responses distinct from those of the competition, or, in the case of the NDP, from its *own* stated position. Stephen Harper restated his party’s law-and-order hard-line, declaring: “I am committed to doing everything necessary to crack down on gun violence.” Paul Martin and his minister of justice, Irwin Cotler, took a broader view, seen to be consistent with traditional Liberal themes: “Mainly,” said Cotler, “we want to address not only crimes of violence, we want to address the root causes.” Jack Layton seemed to borrow from the hard-line Conservative handbook, possibly because he was speaking to a hometown voting audience:

These crimes remind us that we must get illegal handguns off our streets in Toronto and across Canada. To do that we need tougher border controls, tougher sentencing for weapons offences, and tougher anti-gang policing, prosecutions and sentencing (Galloway, Peritz and Den Tandt, 2005).

The claim to have the solution, to have the means to protect innocent people in the street, the claim to represent the broad consensus, was used in each case to situate the respective party in a protected (credible) space, the position of “something must be done” for the good of everyone. But once the position was established and credibility was assured, each party sought to distinguish its position. And in the case of the NDP, distinction came from temporarily abandoning the party’s traditional support for prevention programs and anti-poverty measures, and adopting a strong stance within the law-and-order/public safety register, the register with the greatest credibility in that place and at that moment.

While the political response to the Boxing Day shooting appears to illustrate a reaction to unique and unpredictable circumstances in reality it is typical of the overarching communication strategy preferred by war rooms. Indeed, the communication strategies and tactics deployed in each of the cases cited to this point—the Buzz Hargrove affair, the Newfoundland “pit hit,” the Clarity Act announcement, and the income-trust affair—are essentially the same, differing only in the intensity of the issue at hand, the surface details, and the registers employed. The enforced control of the response to Buzz Hargrove’s apparent defection to the Liberals spoke volumes on the theme of betrayal. The bloodless affirmation that “Mr. Hargrove is entitled to his opinion” was an affirmation of a democratic ideal within what Nathalie Heinich would call a “purifying register” (Heinich, 1998). The right to speak freely and hold contrary opinions is posed as a “pure” commitment to a greater good. Caught off guard by Hargrove’s actions, the party rushed to protect its credibility with unionized workers, a core constituency, by appearing to take the high road in the sure knowledge, the consensus understanding (but also the strategic objective), that the jilted lover is always more sympathetic than the cad who does the jilting. Of course party workers and candidates quietly redoubled their campaign efforts at the constituency level, attempting to delicately repair the damage. At the earliest post-election opportunity Hargrove was kicked out of the party. And for all of the shock and dismay over Hargrove’s actions, for all of the negative distinction that was placed at the NDP’s door, the union boss’s strange dalliance with Paul Martin also put the party into the headlines of *every major newspaper in the country*, a feat that would not be repeated (with one minor exception) until the RCMP announced its investigation into the

income-trust affair. From a political strategist's point of view, it is, perhaps, not such a bad thing to be in the national spotlight as the (literally) wronged party.

The "pit hit" attacking Paul Martin's pitch for a weather-research station at the defunct Canadian Forces Base in Goose Bay, Labrador was ironically framed around a challenge to Liberal credibility that was itself constructed around an issue on which the NDP had staked a long-term claim (and thus could be used as a register): economic security for working people. Could the same prime minister who stood by for the closing of the Gander weather station (and the subsequent loss of jobs) be trusted to deliver on a promise of an alternate use (and jobs) for the Goose Bay military base? Lost in the brief shuffle of reportage around the NDP attack were some bald geographical facts that might easily have caused problems for the New Democrats.

Goose Bay in Labrador and Gander on the island of Newfoundland are nowhere near one another so "new" jobs for Goose Bay would be meaningless for Gander. Weather research on climate change (proposed for Goose Bay) and weather forecasting (lost to Gander) are two very different enterprises. The jobs "lost" in the closure of the Gander weather station were mostly moved to other locations in the region (Nova Scotia); that is, they were lost to Newfoundland and Labrador but not to Atlantic Canada. However, by challenging Paul Martin and the Liberals on the issue of jobs, that most precious and enduring of themes in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, the NDP was able to use the appearance of *communicative action* in the economic register to generate a measure of consensus around the issue of employment (and credibility for the NDP's role as defender of working people) and *strategic action* around questions of Liberal trustworthiness.

Even the Clarity Act announcement, an apparent about-face on a major party policy position, may be viewed as an act of communicative action that concealed a strategic purpose (albeit a rather awkward one). The requirement to “cut through,” to appear distinct, was balanced against the need to acquire and maintain credibility on a major federal file. In this case, the cutting-through came in response to media attention generated by the Liberals at the UN Conference on Climate Change in Montreal, regarded by New Democrats as an attempt to steal their “green” credentials. The Clarity Act flip-flop, the apparent endorsement of a Liberal-generated law aimed at setting the ground rules for any future referendum on sovereignty in Québec, was framed by the NDP as an issue within the register of national unity, a (somewhat questionable) acknowledgment by the party of the general acceptance in Canada *and* Québec of the act’s legitimacy.⁵ Henceforth, the NDP would stand with the majority including, according to Jack Layton, the former leader of the Parti Québécois, Lucien Bouchard (CP Staff, 2005f).

Yet the location for Layton’s announcement on the Clarity Act, a federal building in Montreal where activities related to the climate conference were in full swing, belies the strategic intentions of war-room communicators. The subtext to Jack Layton’s presence in Montreal was to remind Québec voters, who consistently identify with concerns about the environment, of the New Democrats’ claim to guardianship of the green file. For Québec federalists who were having second thoughts about voting Liberal, the NDP could position itself as *the* party of the environment before the Liberals appropriated the environmental action file (and greenhouse gas emissions *increased*). To

⁵ See: Canadian Legal Information Institute. (2000). “Clarity Act.” Parliament of Canada: <http://www.canlii.org/ca/sta/c-31.8/whole.html>

vote for the NDP, then, would afford a two-for-one bonus: Layton and the NDP would be onside with The Clarity Act, a law protecting federalist sovereign interests and, as an added incentive, the NDP would (symbolically) offer a different environmental approach from that of the governing party (even if the details of that approach were never stated). For its part, the New Democratic Party hoped it might actually succeed in electing a member of parliament in Québec, thus addressing a matter of deep anxiety (and credibility) for a national federalist party.

The interrelated processes of balancing distinction against credibility, positioning discourse around registers, and using communicative action to mask strategy is used across the range of daily political communication. However, the above examples represent relatively discrete instances of war-room communication at work. In reality, this system of political communication is most deeply revealing in its application to the positioning and promotion of areas of interest that have an “ownership” stake for a political party. For the New Democratic Party, health care is the most important piece of political real estate of all.

It is no secret that problems with the Canadian medicare system have been the source of much political haymaking. Indeed, Paul Martin’s Liberals formed a minority government in 2004 largely on the promise to “fix Medicare for a generation” by injecting tens of billions of dollars into the health-care system over a decade (CBC Staff, 2005). This “solution” to a perceived crisis in universal health care effectively removed medicare as *the* election issue in the 2005-06 campaign by reducing the greater debate to a series of arguments over how Martin’s reforms were being implemented. For the NDP, with its historic connection to T.C. Douglas, the so-called “father” of Canadian

medicare, more cash for public health care threatened to turn a major plank in its campaign platform into a sliver. Shirley Douglas's December 13th speech (Chapter One) was an attempt to breathe new life into the issue largely by restating the NDP's commitment to single-tier, universally-accessible medical services. It was also a direct attack on the Liberal government's refusal to rule out the use of private clinics to ease wait times for patients.

On the surface, the NDP's rejection of a private/public solution to health-care access is grounded in an historic consensus-based concern for fairness. Universal access to government-funded medical care is a meta-language signifier of great power, invoking at every turn the register of social justice. It is taboo within the party to even suggest that health-care services should be "privatized." Defending health care is part of the NDP's genetic code. It is listed first among the party's defining issues on the NDP's official website. The description of the party's position affirms that, in many respects, publicly funded health care *is* the NDP:

Canadians want quality, reliable health care for everyone, not just those who can afford to buy it. That's why the NDP created public medicare in this country, and it's why we defend it so strongly today.
(New Democratic Party, 2008)

For this reason, the NDP's political communicators understand all too well that issues pertaining to medicare represent opportunities to reaffirm the party's place as the "watchdog" and "conscience" of Canadian politics. More than this, the NDP treats medicare as a kind of communication franchise, a device grounded in a viscerally defended public policy whereby the party may legitimately speak out whenever changes are proposed to the core values of the system.

It would be expected, then, that as soon as possible in the campaign the New Democrats would want to reaffirm their “ownership” of the health-care high ground. To this end, Jack Layton would visit the British Columbia lower-mainland on the weekend of December 3rd and 4th to denounce a Vancouver private-health clinic that, in the view of the party, represented the thin edge of the wedge that would lead to the collapse of universal health care. This was a golden opportunity for the NDP: a chance to revitalize and position its traditional ownership of a major issue while enhancing the considerable residual credibility that the NDP had accumulated around the issue of public health care for, quite literally, generations.

Up to this point, Layton had been repeating a standard core message: that the NDP would ensure that “Canadians do not need a credit card to access health care” (Curry, 2005a). War room correspondence had laid out the NDP position that very day in response to a Conservative pronouncement on wait times:

To: **War Room**
Date: **Dec 2, 2005 12:35 PM**
Subject: **Lines re Harper's health care announcement**
We share Mr. Harper's view that waiting lists are a big problem after 12 years of Liberal rule.
He is wrong on how to fix it.

We need common-sense solutions to the problem.
Solutions that do not lead to the growth of American-style for-profit medicine.

That's where Stephen Harper is wrong. Just like Paul Martin – whose hidden agenda isn't even hidden after refusing to work with the NDP this fall to stop private care in its tracks. Liberals pose as defenders of health care while allowing the growth of clinics that charge \$2,300 per year just for the right to see a doctor (NDP War Room, 2 December 2005).

Reporters would have had little reason to expect any change in this oft-repeated position, a line intended to reassure supporters in a region that elects NDP members. The message

would also set the stage to *re*-distinguish the New Democrats from the Liberals over the issue that had, ostensibly, launched the election campaign.⁶ As a side benefit, a trip to B.C. would insulate Layton from embarrassing questions and permit him to “change the channel” about the new relationship between Buzz Hargrove and Paul Martin, a relationship that was front-and-centre on the front pages of the Saturday newspapers (Chapter Six). Indeed, on December 2nd, when Paul Martin and Buss Hargrove were shocking NDP staffers with their televised strategic-voting alliance, the war room was preparing the ground for Layton’s swing through B.C.’s lower mainland. Martin’s response, or non-response, to a question about health care, asked in the heat of the Hargrove moment, elicited a rapid response from the NDP war room:

MARTIN DUCKS CLEAR QUESTION ON HEALTH CARE

OTTAWA - Today in a scrum after his speech to the Canadian Auto Workers, Paul Martin was asked by a Globe and Mail reporter whether or not he would close down the first for-profit hospital in Canada.

Vancouver’s Copeman Clinic began providing services at a cost of thousands of dollars per year for patients, and has announced they will be expanding with 37 other clinics across the country.

Faced with a clear question on stopping for-profit health care, Martin refused to give a clear response (NDP War Room, 2 December 2005).

This was an obvious indication of the NDP’s tactical intentions and, indeed, Layton would specifically target the Copeman Clinic (and by association Paul Martin) in a news conference scheduled for the following Sunday. But before any of this could go forward, the NDP had to take care of a not-so-small credibility issue of its own, an issue with a name: Svend Robinson.

⁶ The NDP, with the balance of power in Parliament, had refused to support the government over what it said was the Liberals’ failure to stop the growth of private health care. The Liberals vehemently disputed the NDP claim through Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh, a former premier of British Columbia. Layton’s appearance in Vancouver would appear to take the dispute to Dosanjh’s doorstep.

Robinson had been elected to Parliament seven times in a row, long enough to see his riding change its name twice.⁷ Over the course of his political career, he had crafted a reputation as a campaigning social activist, a member of parliament who would, seemingly, go to any length to advance his oft-declared left wing, social-activist commitments. He remains best known as the first openly gay politician in Canada. Robinson's personal web page lists his involvement in numerous human-rights organizations, past and present; from committees on gay rights to groups opposing apartheid in South Africa to membership in international organizations opposing the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. In short, Svend Robinson was a vintage political activist who had the unwavering support of his constituents until he pocketed an antique diamond ring that did not belong to him. Then his world came crashing down.

The details of case of the Robinson ring theft are of little concern to the larger issues of the federal election campaign of 2005-06. But the fact that Robinson was caught stealing and charged with theft, that he pleaded guilty to the charge and received a conditional discharge based on his courtroom "revelation" of a previously undiagnosed psychiatric condition (an admission that seemed to many to be too convenient by half), and that he reluctantly gave up the riding he had represented for a quarter-century in the face of these circumstances (on the eve of the 2004 election which he would surely have lost) only to surface in another Vancouver riding in the following election, speaks volumes (Currie, Mickleburgh and Fong, 2005). Svend Robinson, who had always been considered a bit of a loose cannon in the party, became a *radioactive* loose cannon in an election campaign whose central strategic theme was integrity and credibility.

⁷ Robinson began his political career in the Burnaby riding in 1979. Over the ensuing years, the constituency changed to Burnaby-Kingsway and Burnaby-Douglas. The candidate did not stand for re-election in the 2004 federal election.

There could have been no hope or expectation that Jack Layton would dodge the “Svend factor” on his swing through the lower mainland. For this reason, he was prepared when reporters cornered him in Saskatchewan the day before his arrival in B.C. They were seeking clarification on Robinson’s relationship with the leader and the party. While *The Globe and Mail* of Saturday, December 3rd reserved its front-page headline for coverage of the Paul Martin/Buzz Hargrove alliance, the newspaper reserved space for two substantial stories about Robinson later in its “A” section. The first, by the *Globe’s* senior west coast correspondent, Gary Mason, is basically an opinion column disguised as a news story. The column/report outlines the battle for the Vancouver Centre riding, held by Liberal incumbent Hedy Fry (considered by many to be the Grits’ loose cannon) and contested by Conservative also-ran Tony Fogarassy and the newly resurrected Svend Robinson of the NDP. Mason’s lede line is a good indication of the overall tone of the story:

It’s already being dubbed the Battle of the Divas. And early indications are that the race for Vancouver Centre between New Democrat Svend Robinson and Liberal incumbent Hedy Fry could develop into one nasty little cat fight (Mason, 2005).

Mason provides a short profile of Hedy Fry. He talks about Vancouver Centre’s substantial gay and lesbian demographic and speculates on Robinson’s strategy, the obvious appeal to voters of like-mind and, presumably, similar lifestyle. He then raises the issue of “the ring”:

Mr. Robinson says he intends to deal with the ring issue head-on if it is raised during the campaign. Know that it will be. And if not by one of the candidates directly, then by some supporter who is put up to it. Besides, does anyone think Dr. Fry is going to be able to restrain herself at the first all-candidates’ meeting where Mr. Robinson delivers a long, stinging soliloquy on Liberal corruption?

“They stole your money,” you can hear Mr. Robinson thunder. “Isn’t that a bit rich coming from you, Mr. Robinson?” Dr. Fry says in return (Mason, 2005).

This short, imagined exchange encapsulated the entire problem faced by the NDP. And as if to telegraph to the party that media dragons would be lining up for a bit of sport at Jack Layton’s expense, a story on the following page of *The Globe and Mail* revisited the Robinson theft issue while focusing on Layton’s often testy responses to reporters’ questions made the previous day. The title of the story was: “Ethics appear to be a hard sell with Robinson as candidate.” It was accompanied by a *Canadian Press* archive photograph of a weeping Robinson, dabbing his eyes with a handkerchief, taken at his 2004 court appearance (Stoody, 2004).

Strategists in the war room did not directly reveal to me their plans or concerns with respect to Robinson, but they are not difficult to divine. After all, *The Globe and Mail* “ethics” story of December 3rd had been constructed around the very question that seemed to be on everyone’s mind:

When asked yesterday how he can accuse the Liberals of having “helped themselves” over the past 12 years when Mr. Robinson was convicted of helping himself to a diamond ring worth more than \$50,000, Mr. Layton lauded the former MP’s behaviour in the wake of the charges.

What Svend did was take responsibility for his actions,” Mr. Layton said yesterday morning in Regina. “He co-operated. He indicated he had done something terribly wrong. He worked with the court. Taking responsibility in many ways is what this [election] is all about and we haven’t seen that from the Liberals, taking responsibility for the issues that [Mr.] Justice [John] Gomery has raised” (Curry, Mickleburgh and Fong, 2005).

It is a neat turn of logic, crafted to turn an embarrassment for the NDP into an attack on Liberal integrity and credibility by placing the emphasis on Robinson’s willingness to accept responsibility for his actions while accusing the Liberals of ducking their own

responsibility for the sponsorship scandal! The NDP was able to position the discourse in the responsibility register, to distinguish the party from the Liberals through a reference to restitution (shades of Durkheim!), the broad social consensus that contrition goes a long way to assuage wrongdoing. Of course, the strategic action lay in a reference to Liberal unwillingness to take responsibility for *their* actions. By the time Layton delivered his health-care speech in Vancouver on December 4th, the matter of Svend Robinson's ring seemed to have been dealt with. Then Layton was sideswiped.

The Globe and Mail's front page headline for Monday, December 5th announced that the "Liberals are surging in Ontario (Ha and Taber, 2005). The story was based on polling commissioned by the *Globe* and, coming as it did on the heels of the Hargrove/Martin reports that had ended the first week of the campaign, it was not good news for the NDP. However, there was not much more to grab a reader's eye until well into the first section (page A3, for example, was taken up by an extended obituary). Then, on page A5, a photograph of a somewhat startled-looking Jack Layton looks out at the reader next to a headline that proclaims: "Not opposed to private health care, Layton says" (Curry, 2005a; Clark, 2005). And in the photograph, gazing over Layton's shoulder, slightly out-of-focus but recognizable, is Svend Robinson.

By introducing Robinson into the pictorial representation of the party's identity on the west coast (candidate, Libby Davies also peeks out from the photo from the lower right corner), and by juxtaposing the photograph with a headline that appeared to signal a major shift in long-standing NDP policy, the *Globe* story was able to conflate two unrelated matters into one large question about NDP credibility. Issues with Robinson's own credibility were literally presented in the photograph as the backdrop to Layton's

apparent about-face on the file that was used to justify withdrawal of NDP support for the Martin minority government and the subsequent dropping of the election writ. Between Robinson's lack of credibility on the ring issue and an apparent new stance on health care, the party and its leader appear either as incompetent or, worse, callous, calculating, and unprincipled political operators. It did not matter that the text of the *Globe* story was focused on a process, suggested by Layton, for denying public money to private-health clinics and *not* an endorsement of the clinics themselves. The damage was done.⁸

The NDP's decision to take its health-care stance to Vancouver in the early days of the campaign was clearly influenced by the background rumble of health-care proposals that were beginning to emanate from competing political camps. The *National Post* and *Ottawa Citizen* of Saturday, December 3rd gave prominent play to the Conservative position on hospital wait times. The *Citizen*, following the lead of its national counterpart, devoted a front-page story to the wait-time debate with a "jump" to a full page of coverage on health care in general. This included a story filed from Vancouver titled "Private care is right for Ontario, MD says" (Blackwell, 2005a) that outlines plans by a Vancouver surgeon to open private health clinics in at least one Ontario city. A second story advises the reader that the Liberals are on the verge of releasing their own wait-time proposal (Greenaway, 2005). In each of these stories, the NDP is relegated to a response to the Conservative position on private clinics (contained as an extension of the original wait time announcement). Predictably, Layton condemns

⁸ Layton's Sunday news conference was conducted with specific reference to Vancouver's Copeman Healthcare Centre, a "mostly private" medical clinic where some services are "covered by the B.C. Medical Services Plan" (Curry, 2005a). Layton's objection was not to the existence of private clinics, something that is quite legal in Canada, but to public funds flowing to such medical entities. Reporters at the news conference interpreted this to mean that the NDP was in favour of private health clinics and, therefore, two-tier health care.

“the augmentation of two-tier health care” as “contrary to the Canadian philosophy” (Woods, 2005). Similarly, Layton’s response is buried in the last paragraph of *The Globe and Mail*’s coverage of the Harper wait-time announcement (Galloway, 2005).

The NDP leader’s appearance in Vancouver, then, could be calculated as a tactically and strategically-timed response to growing media interest in the health-care file; specifically, the issue of wait times and the related, if not overtly stated, connection to the provision of health services through private operators. However, from the position of communicative action, Layton’s trip to Vancouver was meant to position the discourse on health care within the register of defense and guardianship, the NDP’s traditional position and role, a position that has been validated by Canadians from all walks of life and political inclination in successive elections. Strategic distinction would be obtained by attacking private health clinics even while maintaining and enhancing credibility as the defender of universal health care. In this manner, the NDP would remain distinct just as its political opponents would be undermined—their credibility questioned—for refusing to condemn the private health-clinic option.

Therefore, when *The Globe and Mail* published its December 5th story suggesting that Layton had abandoned the very heart-and-soul of the NDP position on health care it threatened both the distinctness of the party’s position and the credibility of its claim to be the true defender of universal health care. In light of this it is scarcely surprising that when I entered the NDP war room in Ottawa on Monday, December 5th the place was in full damage control. The campaign press secretary was on the telephone “clarifying” the party’s position to a *Globe* reporter and angling for a follow-up report to set the record straight. An exchange of messages between Campaign Co-chair Brian Topp and *Globe*

Managing Editor Edward Greenspon was in wide circulation on the internal list-serve. Greenspon had asked for the NDP's position in writing. He was provided with the following detailed synopsis:

Cc: War Room

Date: Dec 5, 2005 3:26 PM

Subject: Health Argument

Layton is saying this:

- (1) Supreme court may have opened the door to the breakdown in the single-payer system.
 - (2) Provinces have put ottawa [sic] on notice they're looking into going through that door after the election.
 - (3) Federal government can help prevent this by more clearly conditioning its transfer - no subsidies to such system.. Seems likely that without subsidies, private-pay systems will die in the cradle.
 - (4) This was the issue we were debating with martin [sic]. They flatly refused to consider point 3 and that, basically, provoked our caucus into withdrawing support.
 - (5) With regard to private clinics, layton [sic] is noting that there are private clinics in the system now, have been for a very long time, and that it likely doesn't make sense to set out to shut them all down.
 - (6) He is also noting enthusiasm for an aggressive expansion of this kind of facility - driven in part by the greenlight [sic] apparently given by the court.
 - (7) He wants the federal government to be out in front to prevent this - a significant further expansion - on the case that health dollars should go to health services - not dividends for shareholders.
- (NDP War Room, 5 December 2005)

The Globe and Mail of December 6th made no mention of the NDP's 'clarification' of its position. The newspaper chose to stand by its story.⁹

In fact, *The Globe and Mail* of December 6th makes no mention of health care at all. Its front page is dominated by a now-famous photograph of Saddam Hussein, arm raised and face contorted in anger, taken in a Baghdad courtroom where the former dictator was on trial for ordering the death of fellow Iraqis opposed to his regime (Furst, 2005). The Canadian political news of the day, also on the *Globe's* front page (but

⁹ The *National Post* of December 5th published a report that essentially regurgitated the NDP's position with respect to private clinics. There was no mention of a 'shift' in the party's position on private care. However, the *National Post* story did use the same photograph of Layton with Robinson in the background (Gordon, 2005).

subordinated to the photo of Hussein), centred on the announcement by the Conservatives of a national child-care program that would provide a yearly allowance paid to the parents of pre-school aged children (Clark and Taber, 2005). In the discussion surrounding the Conservative “cut through” and positioning of the discourse on this major policy initiative, *The Globe and Mail* ran a comparison between the Conservative option and the national day-care plan the Liberals had introduced in the previous session of Parliament (Leblanc, 2005). The NDP is not mentioned. Indeed, the only mention of the New Democrats in the December 6th *Globe* (aside from a paragraph by Jane Taber entitled “Avoiding Svend” that lightly detailed Jack Layton’s weekend on the west coast vis-à-vis Mr. Robinson) was a report outlining the party’s somewhat ambiguous position on taxes (Chase and Curry, 2005).

The NDP fared slightly better in the *National Post* of December 6th. While the newspaper gave the Conservative child-care proposal top billing on the front page, the New Democrats were featured prominently on the inside pages. In a bit of successful spin, the party’s hold-the-line position on taxes was actually reported as a tax cut (Vieira, 2005). The inevitable comparison between Conservative and Liberal child-care options, unlike the treatment in *The Globe and Mail*, incorporated a quote by Jack Layton (Woods, 2005). And there was a short, staff-written story on how Muslims were being encouraged to vote for the NDP rather than the Liberals. But that’s where the good news ended.

The only full-length report dedicated to the NDP, on page A5 of the *National Post*, resurrected the small Vancouver nightmare introduced by the previous day’s *Globe*. It is a “catch-up” story, meant to refresh for *National Post* readers the *Globe*’s “scoop” of the

previous day. And its lede line undercut every effort of the war room to put the “policy-shift” genie back in its bottle:

A surprising comment from NDP leader Jack Layton may have signaled a potentially far-reaching shift in Canada’s health care debate and its emotional focus on two-tier medicine (Blackwell, 2005a).

To make matters worse, in order to freshen up the story the *National Post* quoted the Ontario head of the Canadian Union of Public Employees who said of Layton’s “new position: “It caught me unawares, no question.” On the heels of one union boss getting into bed with the Liberals, of one national newspaper publishing a disputed report about a basic shift in NDP policy, of a second national newspaper picking up on the “shift” and bringing a second union chief into the fray, the war room quietly let the matter drop.

The Globe and Mail of December 7th made no direct mention of health care, though its rival the *National Post* and its sister paper the *Ottawa Citizen* each published a front-page story on a poll identifying health care as the default concern for Canadians in a campaign that seemed to lack any dominant issue (Wattie, 2005). However, the New Democratic Party figured prominently on the inside pages of both the *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*. Each publication offered a very different profile of Jack Layton (with the same *Canadian Press* photograph of Layton, head cocked and hand-to-ear as if listening to a softly-spoken question). The *Globe*’s profile was entitled, “Layton bobs and weaves, keeps to NDP script” and is less about Layton the politician than the NDP’s communication strategy. In fact, the *Globe* story focused primarily on a series of gaffes attributed to Layton during the opening days and weeks of the campaign and during the previous election in 2004. The key paragraph was almost a word-for-word description of the NDP, or any war room’s, basic communication intentions, and the

description comes in Layton's own words:

Mr. Layton says he's trying to stay on message. "There's several hundred issues we could talk about on any given day—on an almost random basis. We're trying to make sure people understand what our key priorities are" (Chase and Curry, 2005).

The bulk of the "profile" then goes on to describe, once again, the "gaffe" over private clinics from the previous Sunday's ill-fated Vancouver news conference. To be fair, the *Globe* story does offer clarification on the NDP's stance on private health care by quoting a "left-leaning" health expert to tell the reader "the best way to phase out for-profit clinics is to starve them of public cash" because to do otherwise would invite a Supreme Court challenge. And none other than Alexa McDonough, a former leader of the party, is quoted in defense of Layton claiming "Mr. Layton has not changed his position 'one iota' on private clinics" (Chase and Curry, 2005). However, these "validators" are shuffled to the last half of the story, their comments coming just before a recap (wedged into the final two paragraphs) of the Buzz Hargrove affair! The overall impression left by the story is that Layton has been tripping metaphorically over his communication shoelaces and now intends to tie them tightly and walk a straight line.

The profile in the *National Post* by veteran Parliament Hill reporter, Don Martin, is based on a one-on-one interview with Jack Layton. It focuses on the prospects of the NDP's return to Parliament as the party wielding the balance of power in a minority government. However, Martin also paints Layton as a coy political player, unwilling to speak in detail about a raft of NDP demands that would emerge in the horse-trading of a government propped up by the New Democrats. Buried in the subtext of Martin's profile is an indirect but overarching interrogation of Layton's credibility. "He won't rule out supporting the Liberals," writes Martin, "despite many angry denunciations of Paul

Martin's ethical deviations and policy shortcomings" (Martin, 2005b). Martin then suggests that Layton would consider getting into bed with the Conservatives if it would help the NDP cause. Buried in the text there is even a paragraph on Layton's position on private clinics:

His health care policy took a weird turn this week when he agreed to tolerate totally private clinics as long as they were not milking a profit from the public system. Sounds almost like a Harper position (Martin, 2005b).

But the most stinging moment for Layton comes over the NDP's position on the environment and *Martin's* placement of this major policy plank into the economic register:

The Layton plan sounds mighty Utopian on paper—drinking water for all, air scrubbed of greenhouse gases to a level 25% below what they were back in 1990, a chemical crackdown and an energy retrofit on one in every four houses within seven years. The cost? Not much, he says. How little? No idea, he adds (Martin, 2005b).

By raising the issue of the public cost of NDP proposals and promises, Martin puts his finger on a sensitive point. Having never been in power at the federal level, the NDP has no experience in administering policies and programs. Yet this election is likely to put the New Democrats into a position of great influence in Parliament. Are Canadians ready to buy into a shopping list of demands without seeing a price tag that could run into the billions of dollars? This speaks directly to matters of credibility in the classical sense of Bourdieu's meaning, that "symbolic capital is credit ... a kind of advance, a credence, that only the group's belief can grant those who give it the best material and symbolic guarantees (Bourdieu, 1990b: 120). In this respect, Martin is asking the "group," Canadians, whether the "material and symbolic guarantees" are good enough, whether they are prepared to sign Jack Layton's blank cheque?

The *National Post* and *Globe* profiles of Layton were not discussed openly in the NDP war room. I did informally ask one war-room worker what he thought of the treatment that each paper had published. There was a sense (somewhat surprising) that it would be foolish to expect more from the news media in general, from *The Globe and Mail* in particular, and especially from the self-declared right-of-centre *National Post*. Then, with a grin, he pointed out that “It *is* December 7th, after all”—a reference to the anniversary date of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Of greater concern to war-room strategists was the party’s apparent inability to get any of its messages out in a significant way. From Saddam Hussein’s day in court, to dueling child-care plans, to a surprise headline on the first page of the December 7th *Globe*, “U.S. slashes softwood duties,” a partial resolution to a major trade dispute involving thousands of Canadian forestry workers (symbolic territory for the New Democrats), the NDP simply could not get its core messages into prominent play in the major newspapers. In the days to follow, the Liberals would propose an outright ban on handguns (December 8th), Svend Robinson would make a return visit to the front page of the *National Post* amid the rising analysis of the exact meaning of the handgun ban (December 9th), former U.S. President Bill Clinton would make the front page alongside Paul Martin at the United Nations climate-change conference in Montreal (following the second get-together in Windsor between the prime minister and Buzz Hargrove) (December 10th). Clearly, the New Democrats were struggling to find an opening. Following the largely unsuccessful Clarity Act flip-flop news conference of December 7th, intended to “cut through” but which was relegated to minor status by the national newspapers, the party went on the hunt for an issue and an event that it could control, an

event that could help to reset its campaign. That issue, once again, would be health care.

When Shirley Douglas stepped before the cameras on December 13th the timing could not have been better, and worse, for the NDP. In the days leading up to Douglas's "stump speech" at Regina's Tommy Douglas House, home of the provincial NDP machine in Saskatchewan, news reports and analysis had continued to trickle out on the state of health care in Canada. Most of this journalistic production framed the issue by questioning whether anything had changed in the system since the Liberals had promised to "fix Medicare for a generation." Then on December 12th the *National Post* ran a front-page story announcing that the provinces had adopted "national standards for medical wait times," a major concern for Canadians awaiting a number of high-demand treatments such as hip replacements and cardiac-bypass surgery. The wait-time announcement was immediately claimed by the Liberals as proof of their commitment to repair the health-care system with federal Minister of Health Ujjal Dosanjh characterizing the news as a major shift: "It is, in fact, a revolutionary process for our health care system," said Dosanjh, "It is the first time we are imposing standards on ourselves as a society" (Blackwell, 2005b). The *National Post* story was likely based on a leak of inside information. It attributes the information to "health ministers" who are expected to make their official wait-time announcement later in the day (meaning the *National Post* story had actually been written the night before). It is an unlikely coincidence that Ujjal Dosanjh just happened to be standing by with a comment on the issue that had been identified days earlier as the prime concern for Canadians.¹⁰

¹⁰ The polling company, IPSOS-Reid had identified health care as the first concern among voters, outstripping issues of integrity raised by the Gomery commission. The poll was widely reported, notably in the *National Post* and other CanWest Mediaworks newspapers. It would be expected

Not to be outdone, *The Globe and Mail* picked up the wait-time story on December 13th, running the details of provincial commitments on its front page under the headline: “Targets set for faster health care” (Howlett and Alphonso, 2005). The *Globe* report deals mainly with responses from provincial health ministers, although Ujjal Dosanjh is referenced in the text as the federal representative on the health file. Neither the Conservatives nor the NDP are mentioned in either the *National Post* or *Globe and Mail* reports. But by blind luck or stellar planning, Shirley Douglas appeared before a national audience on December 13th, riding the wave of two-days-worth of front-page stories on health care and permitting the NDP to step into the spotlight on its oldest, most cherished, and most symbolically valuable policy issue (Chapter One). Every moment of the Douglas stump speech was crafted to position the NDP as the defender of single-tier, universally-accessible public health care in Canada. Every criticism of Paul Martin and Stephen Harper was meant to challenge the credibility of the political opposition and deliver control of the health-care discourse to the NDP, *especially* in the face of reports that would seem to suggest that wait times, a major hurdle in health-care reform, had been overcome.

The Douglas stump speech sought to position this all-important discourse within a web of symbolic elements, each of which would stand as a meta-language signifier with its genesis in a founding political myth. These elements, powerful registers in their own right, are the source of the NDP’s most basic symbolic capital, its credibility on the party’s defining issues. In large part, the founding political myth *is* T.C. (Tommy) Douglas who, as the leader of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Commonwealth Federation,

that the Liberal war room would attempt to capitalize on this news, especially if it deflected attention away from Justice Gomery’s findings on the Liberal role in the sponsorship scandal.

led what many believe to be the continent's first quiet revolution, a revolution distinguished by the assumption of public responsibility for a raft of socio-economic concerns—from socialized insurance, to cooperative electrification of rural Saskatchewan and the creation of a state-owned power corporation, to a state-run bus company, to the first state-sponsored and funded Arts Board. But the CCF's defining (literally) act under Douglas was North America's first comprehensive system of public medical insurance (The Medical Care Insurance Act). Furthermore, T.C. Douglas was the founding leader of the *federal* New Democratic Party. Therefore, Jack Layton occupies a position that reaches in direct succession back to its most eminent (and politically successful) founding personality.¹¹

It is a testament to the war room's *belief* in the power of its symbols that Shirley Douglas, an actor, was flown in to deliver a speech on public medicare in a city that she had not lived in for decades. Here, too, was Jack Layton, a former Toronto city councilor, laying claim to the Douglas legacy in a province where he had failed to elect a single member in the previous election. The two of them were positioned at Tommy Douglas House, headquarters of one of the most successful political organizations in the country, but an organization that had largely failed to respond to the needs of the federal party.¹² In short, the Douglas stump speech of December 13th was through-and-through artifice, meant to transfer the literal connection of the Douglas DNA to the symbolic DNA of the

¹¹ This has a certain resonance with Eric Hobsbawm's notion of 'fictitious continuity' as a necessary condition for creating a sense of legitimacy based on permanence, a reification process he describes as the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm, 1983).

¹² The federal and provincial parties have never been joined at the hip. Given the political option, the provincial New Democrats would likely support a measure of publicly funded private health care in order to address concerns over accessibility. At the time of Layton's Regina appearance Saskatchewan, along with the other provinces, was negotiating with the federal government for more money for its public system.

party through that most resonant of NDP areas of political ownership: health care. To put Jack Layton together *with* Shirley Douglas, rallying the troops, repositioning the party, setting the record straight yet again within the social justice register on private *versus* public health care, was to control the message at last. At least this was the party's intention.

The Globe and Mail of December 14th gives play to Layton and Douglas, but not until well into the paper's first section. The photograph accompanying the story frames Layton and Douglas on a "set" with the NDP logo in the background. To the right, perched on an easel, is a portrait of T.C. Douglas, the "third party" in this staged event (Stood, 2005). The text of the *Globe* report begins with Layton's main message on health care, an attempt to situate the NDP's position, once again, on private health-care clinics but now directing responsibility at the *provinces*:

Ottawa should take a hard line with premiers over private health care, slashing federal cash to provinces that refuse to pass laws banning doctors from working in both the public and private systems, NDP Leader Jack Layton said yesterday (Curry, 2005b).

The *Globe* story devotes a single paragraph to Shirley Douglas, describing her stump speech as a "tirade against Liberal Leader Paul Martin for failing ... to act in the face of increasing for-profit activity in the health system." The report goes on to position the NDP in opposition to the both the Liberals *and* the premiers of Québec, Alberta, and British Columbia. It quotes Layton's call for a federal crackdown on these provinces and any others considering private clinics. But when Layton is prodded on the details on such a crackdown he stumbles. He cannot say exactly how the NDP would bring the provinces into line without meddling in a well-defined provincial jurisdiction. It does not help that Québec's Minister of Health Philippe Couillard is quoted in the *Globe* report, essentially

telling Jack Layton to mind his own business.¹³ The symbolic capital of the party, spent so carefully to successfully (if briefly) achieve a position of distinction and position the discourse around health care, foundered on the shoals of questionable credibility.

Perhaps surprisingly, the NDP would fare better in the *National Post* of December 14th with a report that actually begins on the newspaper's front page. A cascade of interrelated registers—Liberal *and* Conservative unwillingness to stop private clinics (trust); the NDP's traditional defense of public health care (fairness); the “stealth” campaign” to “Americanize” the system (national distinction)—are all represented in the introductory paragraphs (Blanchfield, 2005). The use of the term “stealth campaign” is particularly resonant for the NDP because it simultaneously speaks to issues of Liberal credibility while playing off the issue of a Conservative “hidden agenda,” the lingering suspicion (generated largely by war rooms) that the Harper Conservatives would veer to the far right against the mandate granted by the electorate if they were to gain a majority in Parliament. However, the story begins to change after the jump to page A6 when it begins, as the *Globe* report did, to question Layton on his lack of detail on how the federal government should stop the proliferation of private clinics supported by public dollars. The same credibility issues arise when the *National Post*, like the *Globe*, introduces Québec Health Minister Philippe Couillard, who points out the provincial jurisdiction over health care. The NDP's attempt at distinction on its most important file again becomes tangled in issues of substance, of credibility.

The NDP's health-care position, so carefully crafted in Ottawa and performed in Regina, was destined never to gain prominent exposure on this day. Both the *National*

¹³ In fact, the Couillard quote directs Layton to “read the Supreme Court ruling” that earlier in the year had struck down Quebec's law against private health insurance (Curry, 2005a).

Post and *The Globe and Mail* (and all other media outlets) would be preoccupied with the spectacle of David Wilkins, the U.S. Ambassador to Canada, scolding Canadian politicians for making the United States an object of criticism for political gain. Newspapers across the country would run a photograph of Wilkins, finger seeming to point to a Canadian flag (with the U.S. flag to the ambassador's left), in a purposeful pose, a reaction to comments by Paul Martin the previous week on the U.S. role in the climate-change debate. And for the record, the Blanchfield *National Post* front-page report on the NDP's health-care position, pushed to a slim side column by this dominant story of the day, would be balanced on the opposing side of the front page by a story, given similar space and an equally large headline, that proclaimed: "Polar bears can skate if they have the right boots" (Johansson, 2005).

For all of this, the NDP's health-care gambit was not a dead loss. Don Martin, the *National Post* journalist who had "profiled" Jack Layton the week before, turned his guns on the prime minister in his December 15th column. Martin picked up on a fact, circulated by competing war rooms, concerning the *other* Martin's personal physician and a connection to a private health clinic. The effect was to offer a less-than-flattering explanation for Liberal reticence in addressing the issue of private clinics:

"This national trend has been greeted with stoney [sic] silence from the same prime minister who swore to defend a pure single tier of treatment, even while his personal physician runs a private clinic on the side" (Martin, 2005a).

Not to be outdone, the NDP war room immediately issued a so-called "pre-buttal," a list of anti-Martin positions anticipated for the first of the televised debates in the campaign:

Tonight, Paul Martin may present himself as the defender of Canada's public health care system. What he will not say is that: *He was responsible for the growth in private health care clinics under 12 years of Liberal government

in five provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, and that his personal doctor runs a private for-profit clinic.* After years of neglect and rhetoric, when push came to shove, he was unable to work with other parties in the House of Commons to safeguard Canada's public health care system. (NDP War Room, 15 December 2005).

Layton would return to the NDP's health-care position time and again during the first (French-language) debate and there would at last be a payoff. In a war-room "roundup" of the media coverage circulated the day after the debate, voices as diverse as *The Gazette* in Montreal, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and Andrew Coyne of the *National Post* (speaking on a panel on CBC Television's *The National*) would be quoted in praise of Layton's "passionate" defense of health care. But no mention would be made of the health-care issue in the debate coverage in either *The Globe and Mail* or the *National Post*.

The New Democratic Party often claims that it is not well treated by the national media. Several war-room messages circulated on the internal list-serve complained at various times about media bias against the NDP. However, the treatment that the party received over its health-care stance—its attempt to frame itself as the credible defender of a cherished institution and distinguish its position as the only established alternative to for-profit health care—largely foundered not because of media bias, but because war-room strategists endorsed truth claims that were not supported when scrutinized by journalists. Clearly, it is not enough to position an issue within an argument strategy, to frame it as credible and distinct within the competing visions of the social world circulating in public space around that register, and expect that pointed questions will not be asked. Bourdieu reminds us that credibility is symbolic credit extended by the group on the basis of the best material and symbolic guarantees. Such guarantees would surely

include a basic understanding of provincial rights and responsibilities and the limits to federal jurisdiction under The Canada Health Act. Surely those guarantees would also include familiarity with a major Supreme Court decision with direct bearing on the way health care is delivered in this country. These basic elements of cultural capital, knowledge of the ongoing social and politically-determined conditions that apply to an area of claimed expertise, are a minimum condition for credibility. In this respect the NDP strategy on health care foundered because, in the end, its partisan-political communicators were unable to explain to journalists (and by extension the publics they serve) just *how* their vision would be put into practice. NDP credibility on its primary "ownership" file dissipated.

It is a cautionary tale about the limits to strategic-political communication. Credibility on any issue cannot simply be claimed. To do so is to attempt to short-circuit the necessary processes of capital exchange that lie at the definitive heart of fields, especially fields as weakly-autonomous as the field of politics—fields that are subject to interventions from beyond their own boundaries by virtue of their weak autonomy. The social capital invested in a direct link to T.C. Douglas and the invocation of that link through the presentation of his daughter, the cultural capital invested in a long and respected defense of single-tier health care, cannot be automatically converted to symbolic capital. An investment in cultural capital must be continually replenished as circumstances change in order for credibility to accrue to a discourse and for it to successfully circulate in the field of power/publics. Journalists understand this because their cultural and symbolic capital derives from following, understanding, and disseminating news about the changes that affect *their* publics.

Negative fallout from problematic communication strategies is not the only questionable dividend to accrue to war rooms that do not fully embrace the flow of capitals that define the field. With increasing frequency the pure tactics of dis-credit have been substituted distinction. The intent is to undermine an opponent (rather than a competitor) without any intention of entering into a debate on the merits of a particular position. The final chapter of *A War Room in Canada* explores the ramifications of this new tool in the war-room arsenal and how the practice of pure tactics may have broken a threshold of tolerance in the field of power/publics and, as a result, may be signaling a shift in the practice of partisan communication, a shift motivated by new reporting practices in the field of journalism.

Chapter Ten

Conclusions

This dissertation began by proposing an inquiry into the nature of a comparatively new organizational entity devoted to originating and disseminating partisan political communication at election time. The practices of political war rooms, it was argued, could be used to examine some key assumptions about deliberative democracy in our time, specifically whether strategic-political communication works to exclude everyday people from the open debates that are intended to inform participation in a democracy such as ours. After examining the practices of a war room in action during an election campaign, after looking at examples of war-room tactics and strategies applied to election-time concerns, it is fair to say that aspects of strategic-political communication mask the true aims and objectives of political actors. It is also fair to say that the relations of power between the fields of politics, journalism, and power/publics make it virtually impossible for those aims and objectives to remain concealed for any length of time.

The strength of the war room as an organizational entity lies in the conditions of its practical origination: the election campaign. As we have seen, the conditions of an election campaign do not support a long and thoughtful consideration of the issues and concerns that are brought forward by partisan-political players. Senior journalists such as Chantal Hébert of *The Toronto Star* look to the generalized mediatization of the public political debate to explain election-time practices:

Technological change has brought about a 24/7 news environment in which speed to react and speed to report is often more valued than thoughtful constructive contributions to a debate. That means that rapidity is now more valuable than knowledge and that has translated into a poorer political debate both between parties and in the media. That is especially the case in election campaigns

where intelligent debate has been replaced with cheap and often largely irrelevant exchanges via the media proxy between otherwise intelligent men and women. (Hébert, 2008a).

Hébert's comments recall the political insider's viewpoint expressed by Ian MacDonald that strategic political communication, notably methods of message control, was developed in *response* to a proliferation of media platforms (Chapter One). In such a hyper-mediatized reality, election campaigns may be thought of as a distilled version of the already frenetic practices of everyday political life. They are short, sharp affairs where fortunes may rise and fall on the turn of a phrase. Political war rooms are very much creatures of this intense and highly competitive democratic moment, constructed specifically to address tactical and strategic measures for the benefit of the party that employs them. The people who work in war rooms (at least the one I was admitted to) may be well aware of the grand visions of their party and where it stands in the ideological division of labour, but they also understand that campaigns are about getting members elected to Parliament; that grand visions are meaningless without the elected members to represent those visions.

For all of this, contemporary war rooms seldom admit campaign positions that are devoid of some degree of substance; indeed, it is the job of the opposition research and rapid-response teams, sub-organizations that operate at the heart of all war rooms, to ensure that partisan messages are traceable to the public record. Opposition research, rapid response, and all other organizational functions are carried out in a symbolic space intended to lend an aura of transparency to the work of the war room (while concealing much of the inner workings of the organization). The effect has been to create an organization devoted to the accelerated circulation of partisan messages across media; messages that are grounded in a publicly accessible reality but positioned to favour a

particular political viewpoint. In large part this positioning is a function of turnaround speed; that is, the use of any technological means, including mobile computer networks, to insert partisan positions into developing discourses as quickly as possible. The ultimate aim is to cause an opponent's message to be changed even as that message is being framed. This involves a level of cooperation from journalists who lend credibility to rapid responses by including them as "balanced reaction" quotes in their reports.

As the theoretical terrain has been exposed and mapped, as communication practices have been observed and recorded, credibility has been brought forward as the overarching currency of symbolic exchange. Indeed, it is not too broad a claim to suggest that credibility underwrites our entire system of government and governance. The premium that war rooms assign to opposition research and rapid response at election time is directly tied to credible substantiation: the ability to affirm a truth claim through a form of documentation. This is essentially a bid for credibility based on affirmed claims to a particular vision of the social world that is played out in a space of thematic discourse, a register where all parties vie for distinction based on the credibility of their truth claims.

While registers or argument strategies provide a structured means for multiple political positions to be expressed in a credible and distinct fashion, the pressure to excel (a condition of the election campaign arising from the mediatized stakes that are seen to be in play) often motivates war-room strategists to stretch the bounds of credibility, to engage in the manipulation of communication in order to magnify and exploit the short-term benefits of media exposure to a distinct claim. Conversely, credibility might be displaced onto a third party when a position is genuinely distinct, but the truth claims arising from it lack legitimacy. This was the case in the income-trust affair where the

strategic intent of the NDP war room was to shift responsibility for the credibility of its position onto the RCMP and other investigative bodies, thus taking credit for exposing a possible scandal without actually having to prove the truth claim. By deconstructing symbolic exchanges such as this, exchanges that break with or defer the core requirement for credible substantiation, further underlying operational strategies begin to emerge.

Yet if the 2005-06 election campaign illustrates anything it is the extent to which pure tactics, the tactics of dis-credit, have increasingly been used to torque communication strategies based on a manipulation of opposition research and rapid response. The NDP's "pit hit" attack on the prime minister's announcement of a weather-research centre for Newfoundland, for example, was not meant to engage a meaningful debate; rather, its raw purpose was to ruin Paul Martin's campaign stop in St. John's by destroying his credibility on a matter of local public concern (Chapter Six). The NDP war room exploited a Liberal vulnerability—the previous closure of an Environment Canada weather station—to denounce the sincerity of Paul Martin's intentions vis-à-vis a research centre on global warning. There was little else in the NDP attack that could be connected to a convincing debate arising from the public record and much in the timing to suggest that it was an attempt at payback for the Buzz Hargrove affair (Chapter Six). As the case of the pit hit illustrates, a small amount of dis-credit can go a long way when respected media outlets such as *The Canadian Press* run with the story. In the end, however, the pure tactics employed in this instance effectively shut down a potentially meaningful discussion on the merits of opening a weather-research facility in Newfoundland, a prospect that might have indeed provided jobs and prestige for the province.

In general, however, the deployment of pure tactics seems to be tolerated within the frame of an election campaign. The competitive conditions of the political campaign and the competitive conditions of the journalistic field at election time conspire to create a media environment where the normal rules of practice are less stringent. Political actors grandstand to attract media attention; under pressure to file stories to multiple deadlines, journalists often ignore outrageous circumstances while trying to concentrate on core concerns. The image of heaters blasting into the December air, placed by an unthinking NDP staffer to keep Jack Layton warm at a campaign stop outside an international conference on climate change, might have been used to devastating effect. But most journalists at the scene chose to concentrate on the substance of Layton's announcement. Overwhelmingly their stories outlined the NDP's new position on the Clarity Act then took the party to task for changing its previous position, implying that the "flip-flop" was nothing more than a bid to be onside with Québec voters. (Chapter Six).

It is possible that this tolerance among journalists for an *illusio* that is specific to the conditions of an election campaign has permitted a small party like the NDP to survive in a political world where it is outgunned by some very well-resourced competitors. In short, the war-room ethos has had positive results for the party, affording it the opportunity to increase its representation in the House of Commons over successive elections. For this reason, it should not be surprising that the NDP and its competitors have attempted to import war-room methods into the day-to-day workings of the post-election political world of a minority government. Arguably, the continual jockeying for position in an unstable parliamentary environment and the constant threat of an election call reflect the conditions of a continuing campaign. But can war-room methods work

outside of the peculiar conditions of an actual election campaign? The short answer is that some do and some do not. The real issue is whether certain strategies and tactics have been privileged in an effort to circumvent the fullest circulation in public space of issues and ideas of concern to publics, and what this has meant to the complex set of relations that characterize the field of politics, journalism, and power/publics. From this perspective there is no question that aspects of war-room communication; notably, pure tactics and message control, have been elevated by the governing Conservatives as the centrepiece of their post-election communication strategy. And it is of more than passing interest that the pure tactics of dis-credit and the strategies of hyper-message control have engendered a reaction across the field of journalism and within the field of power/publics.

Where does this leave the NDP? It too has imported and adapted strategic communication measures from the campaign, but more as a means to maintain its profile in a Parliament where it is the fourth party. There is also the question of positioning for political survival in the *next* election campaign. The actions of the NDP war room in the final days of the 2005-06 campaign speak to the issue of survival (and offer the possibility of a preview of things to come) by illustrating how a communication tactic disguised as a credible appeal may have favourably influenced the fortunes of the party. By the same token, the NDP has learned that the use of war-room techniques in the post-election world can be a very risky business, especially if you are a small party trying to look big.

On a cold winter's day with two weeks to go to voting day I returned to the NDP war room in downtown Ottawa. The grind of the campaign and the tension of the impending January 23rd vote were taking a toll. The sense of optimism and possibility

that had characterized the first weeks of the campaign had all but dissipated. The sense of validation arising from the RCMP investigation into income trusts that had set the tone for a return to campaigning in the New Year was also gone. The mood of the war room was not exactly grim, but the plucky determination to break through, to take the party to the next step in its *own* legitimation as a force to be reckoned with in Canadian politics, had been supplanted by a more plodding commitment to just get the job done. People were tired. And they were disheartened.

The bald truth is that the NDP had been left behind in the election coverage and it seemed there was nothing the war room could do to command the attention of journalists. After a passing nod to the New Democrats for their role in motivating the income-trust investigations the journalistic community had turned its attention to the “horse race” that was developing between the Conservatives and the Liberals. This was particularly galling for NDP workers because it appeared that the Conservatives were benefiting from the income-trust affair while the NDP was not. At this stage, the “ink and airtime” devoted to the NDP campaign by journalists was mainly relegated to the last half of stories devoted to the leading contenders, reaction quotes that increasingly gave the New Democrats an “also-ran” aura.

I asked war-room manager Ray Guardia (as I always did) how the NDP “numbers,” the internal poll results, were holding up. As always he assured me that they were “stellar.” This had become another of those inside jokes in my relationship with the war room. By this point in the campaign I had no expectation of ever seeing the party’s poll results and Ray Guardia had no intention of ever sharing them with me, but I continued to inquire indirectly and he continued to respond in code and so the game

played out. The difference on this day was that the game seemed hollow. There was no energy in the room. The war room seemed to be struggling to find an issue to get behind, a tactic to exploit, *anything* to distinguish the party from its competitors at this late stage of the campaign.

It would take a tactical gimmick to put the wind back in the NDP's sails. In the final week of the campaign the New Democrats managed to jump back into the public eye with an advertising campaign featuring "real people who used to vote Liberal and are now voting for the NDP" (Curry, 2006). The ad's launch was used as a platform for Jack Layton to make an unprecedented appeal to voters. On a swing through Toronto on January 16th Layton had this to say:

I'm asking people who have supported the Liberal Party in the past to vote NDP. Lend us your vote while the party you've supported in the past cleans itself up. Vote for us just this once so there's a strong voice in the next Parliament that is standing up for the priorities progressive people believe in (Curry, 2006).

While the message was clearly tailored to appeal to disenchanting Liberal voters, it also contained a subtext in the reference to "progressive people." This was aimed at the Conservatives, the "Harperites" (in NDP parlance) who were surely (according to war-room rhetoric) concealing a hidden agenda that would see the dismantling of Canada's social safety net. If voters could see their way through to parking their ballots with the NDP until the dust settled, New Democrats would see to it that Ottawa would be cleaned up while ensuring that cherished social programs were protected. Of course so much the better if the NDP managed to garner enough support to hold the balance of power in a minority government.

There is no question that the “lend me your vote” tactic was a gamble, a hoped-for exploitation of what the NDP saw as enduring weaknesses in both the Conservative and Liberal positions. By now concerns over Liberal integrity had become the ballot-box issue, underscored by a very public and heavily-reported RCMP investigation. The “lend us your votes” gambit was an attempt to regain some of the credit for having motivated the investigation in a bid to cash in on the voter fluidity that seemed to be showing up in public-opinion polls.

In early January, as Ralph Goodale prepared for his income-trust “interview” with police investigators, the main polling companies had noted that the gap between Liberal and Conservative poll numbers was beginning to close. By the time I visited the war room that January day the Conservatives had pulled into a comfortable ten-point lead with some pollsters predicting a Harper majority.¹ The NDP needed to get back on track lest the Liberals, who were aware of their own situation and were campaigning hard for every available vote, managed to repeat campaign history and shore up their support at the expense of the NDP. Conversely, if the New Democrats could continue to hammer away at Liberal integrity while resurrecting oft-cited doubts about a “concealed” Conservative agenda, the party could then present itself as the only credible alternative, a place for confused and disheartened Liberals to park their ballots.

The truly breathtaking element to this unusual proposal was that it did not offer any policy options to Canadians. There was no vision of the social world, no sense of a

¹ Ekos gave the Conservatives 39 per cent support and the Liberals 27 per cent for a spread of eleven points. TSC reported 38 per cent for the Conservatives to the Liberals’ 29 per cent. Most polling companies reported spreads that were more modest, but in every case the Conservatives were leading the Liberals. This was the first time in the campaign the “lines had crossed,” putting the Conservatives in the lead position. The Liberals would not succeed in regaining the momentum. (Source: Angus Reid Global Monitor: Election 2006—The Numbers. See: <http://www.angus-reid.com/tracker/view/10041>).

“better way” being offered for debate. The entire gambit was based on dis-credit arising from a generalized mistrust of the Tories and Liberals that had been framed by the NDP. The New Democrats were, in effect, pushing a generalized characterization of both their main opponents into a very broad register, public trust, and alluding to an as-yet undetermined consensus around Liberal corruption and a Conservative hidden agenda. The party was not even asking for a mandate to govern, but a mandate to earn the trust of those “progressive people” who would usually vote Liberal. This was certainly a distinct position; asking certain voters for their support in order to obtain a mandate to prove that their support was warranted. But was it credible? The proposal left Ed Broadbent, a former leader of the NDP, shaking his head in wonder at the apparent audacity of the move. On an edition of the popular CBC Newsworld program *Politics with Don Newman*, Broadbent, speaking as a pundit on a political panel, wondered out loud when the NDP would *return* all those Liberal votes-on-loan (Broadbent, 2006). Then fortune turned its fickle head toward the NDP and gave the party a big, toothy grin.

On January 17th, just one day after the launch of Layton’s vote-lending appeal, Stephen Harper tried to assuage lingering doubts about a “Conservative hidden agenda.” He ruminated that a “Conservative majority government would be kept in check by the judges, senators and federal bureaucrats who owe their jobs to the Liberals” (Galloway, 2006). The comment exploded across the front pages and became the lead item on radio and television newscasts across the land. Harper would spend the rest of the week explaining that his comments were meant to “reassure those voters who still fear his party may change the Canadian social fabric” (Galloway, 2006). But the damage was done. Clearly, some voters were put off by the remark, sensing that rather than be constrained

by Liberal appointments a Conservative majority would begin to purge the courts and bureaucracy of them. The polls showed the Tories slipping into minority-government territory. On January 23rd the Conservatives elected 124 members to the Liberals' 103. The Bloc Québécois took 51 seats. One independent member was elected. The New Democratic Party elected 29 members with 17.5 per cent of the popular vote, just shy of the number needed to wield the balance of power.²

Of all the statistics from election night, that 17.5 per cent popular-vote figure is most revealing for the NDP. It represents, in effect, the only “real” poll for the campaign since it is based on the number of actual votes counted for the party. It is also *statistically identical* to the overnight poll results from every week of the campaign.³ There was an increase over the 2004 election results when the NDP took 19 seats with 15.7 per cent of the popular vote; however, it is fair to say that the efforts of the NDP war room did not significantly influence *general* NDP support across the country from one week to the next over the course of the 2005-06 campaign. What the party's political strategists *did* manage to influence was a swing toward the NDP in a number of crucial ridings. This was the strategy buried within the tactics of dis-credit that were behind the “lend us your votes” proposal.

The party was able to pick up ten seats in the House of Commons largely on the basis of comparatively small movements in ridings where the New Democrats were the

² This meant that the NDP was three votes shy of delivering a Conservative government from defeat in the event that the Bloc, Liberals, and the independent member combined to bring it down. (For a breakdown of the 2006 election results see: <http://www.sfu.ca/~aheard/elections/results.html>).

³ Typically, the margin of error attached to poll results (with minor variations) is plus-or-minus 3.5 per cent 19 times out of 20. This means that in 95 per cent of polls of the type referenced, the support recorded for any political party may vary up or down by 3.5 points. The NDP's poll numbers for the campaign were all well within the statistical margin of error.

strong second choice, ridings where voters decided or were persuaded to shift away from the Liberals. In many cases the natural second choice was helped into first place by the public profile of the candidate. Olivia Chow, a Toronto city councilor and wife of Jack Layton took the Trinity-Spadina riding from Liberal incumbent Tony Ianno by about 3700 votes. High-profile labour organizer Peggy Nash took the Toronto riding of Parkdale-High Park from Liberal Sarmite Sam Bulte by about 2300 votes. In ridings such as Hamilton East-Stoney Creek the NDP candidate was able to win the riding largely because of issues with the Liberal incumbent. Voters in Hamilton East-Stoney Creek likely remembered the way long-time representative Sheila Copps (a close supporter of Jean Chrétien) had been treated when the Paul Martin team squeezed her out of the riding nomination in favour of Tony Valeri. NDP candidate Wayne Marston won the riding by a mere 460 votes.⁴

None of the results represents a landslide shift in favour of the NDP, but each helps to explain the overarching, by-the-numbers strategic intentions of the war room. If enough close ridings such as Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing (profiled in Chapter Six) could be enticed into the NDP camp, the party could conceivably regain its position as a legitimate alternative, a party on the rise, a possibility not witnessed since 1988 when the New Democrats under Ed Broadbent took 43 seats.⁵ The “lend us your votes” proposition was played out less on the grand canvas of the national campaign than at street-level in ridings such as Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and Parkdale-High Park, places where the tactics of dis-credit would have particular resonance. So, why bother to run a national

⁴ All election results are taken from: <http://www.sfu.ca/~aheard/elections/results.html>

⁵ When the dust settled in Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing the NDP candidate, Carol Hughes, came within about 1400 votes of displacing the Liberal incumbent, Brent St. Denis.

campaign at all? Why invest in the expense of a war room if the real battles were being fought and won in specific, identified ridings?

The answer lies in organizational legitimacy, the ability to represent and affirm (or appear to affirm) a legitimate division of ideological labour within the field of power/publics. While there is little doubt that the New Democratic Party would jump at the chance to form a government it rarely garners more than 20 per cent support in any poll. The underlying strategy, evident in the 2005-06 election, was to shift the vote just enough to command the balance of power in a minority government. Such a strategy has served the party well in recent times, ensuring that even when the NDP comes up a few seats shy of the magic number it has been able to maintain a parliamentary profile much larger than its support would otherwise warrant. In large part this is because the NDP *acts* like one of the major political players. In this respect, the investment in a political war room during successive election campaigns has helped to consolidate the party's position as a legitimate political force through the deployment of a meta-imaged organization tied to the idea of an alternative political voice.

This was evident in the "lend-us-your-votes" tactic. The proposal, made by the leader, supported by an ad campaign, and targeted at Liberals (with a Conservative subtext) permitted the NDP to appear to provide a "big picture" viable alternative while making no mention of its true street-level strategic intentions. This was accomplished by deploying the war room in its symbolic form, with its commitment to the meta-image of the political game at hand presented to publics as a constructed and controlled representation of a political alternative that appeared to be invested in a consensus around some very complicated and visceral credibility issues.

The real objective of the “lend us your votes” appeal was to affect a transfer, in trust, of symbolic capital from the field of power/publics *away* from one ideological division of labour to another. This is the aim of all competition in the field of politics at election time, but *this* transfer sought to effectively reverse the “symbolic and material guarantees” of “the group” by offering a guarantee on the guarantee. The *idea* of the guarantee on offer was of much greater consequence than the offer itself simply because the NDP was in no position to guarantee anything. By placing the idea of a guarantee into wide circulation at the very end of the election campaign when questions about its integrity were less likely to be asked, by convincing journalists that this odd proposal was worthy of a news story or two, by claiming it as a worthy option among competing interests, the war room accomplished much more than would have been possible by acting solely at street level in specific ridings. Simply by facilitating the journalistic circulation of this odd proposal the NDP war room instilled it with enough credibility to help move the vote in ten crucial ridings.

There was (and remains) a second strategic reason for the NDP to have employed and maintained its war room. Campaigns end. Political parties and the people who form and inform their institutional systems return to the procedures and activities that affirm the party’s place in the day-to-day life of Parliament. To bring together related concepts from Bourdieu and Warner, these contributors engage in activities that reflect the processes of capital acquisition and exchange contributing to the “track record” that journalists and publics consider as the measure of credibility, a measure that contributes greatly to the apprehension of passing appeals and the possibility of their extension (Bourdieu, 1990a; Warner, 2003). The NDP war room, in promoting the “lend us your

votes” option also created a *post*-election fiduciary context for the party. It could be claimed that the issue created a legitimization role for the NDP, framed by the war room in the last days of the campaign, and reified by the results on election night. The strategic political communicators working in the NDP war room were able to construct for the party (and themselves) a specific *raison d’être* for the next parliamentary session based on a self-assigned promise to keep everybody else honest. It is a role that the party has taken on with particular zeal in the post-election world and a role that has, ironically, contributed to some credibility problems for the New Democrats.

In December 2007, NDP Member of Parliament Irene Mathysen accused Conservative James Moore of viewing “soft core” pornography on a laptop computer in the House of Commons. The accusation came while members of all parties were jockeying for recognition on the issue of support for women, a discussion that just happened to occur on the eve of the eighteenth anniversary of the massacre at Montreal’s École Polytechnique. The media had a field day when it was revealed that Moore’s girlfriend (modeling a bathing suit) was the subject of the pictures and that Mathysen had seen the photos by looking over his shoulder. Mathysen was characterized as prudish and intolerant; qualities the NDP would rather the public associate with social conservatives! The party went into backpedal overdrive. Mathysen was forced to apologize and has not been heard from since (Bryden, 2007).

In early April 2008, the NDP in Saskatchewan breathlessly released a videotape cassette that had been found in a drawer of the former opposition offices at the provincial

legislature.⁶ The tape contained what amounted to “home movies” of provincial Conservative campaign workers mugging for the camera on the eve of the 1991 provincial election, an election that saw the end of the Grant Devine Conservatives and the beginning of a new NDP government led by Roy Romanow. Among those who participated were Brad Wall, the current premier of Saskatchewan, and Tom Lukiwski now a Conservative member of parliament. Lukiwski’s performance was particularly odious, containing vicious homophobic remarks. The release of the tape in Saskatchewan was immediately taken up by the federal party (and the Liberal opposition) and brought to the attention of Parliament as an example of the intolerance that “permeates that [Tory] party's thinking in everything from immigration to gay rights” (Bryden, 2008). Lukiwski made an immediate and abject apology amid calls for his resignation. With the support of the prime minister he continued to sit as the representative for Regina-Lumsden-Lake Centre.

Each of these cases employed the tactics of dis-credit. Each attempted to exploit a moral objection to an act by a political opponent. Each moral objection was meant to undermine the credibility of specific Conservative MPs by characterizing them as hypocrites. That a Conservative MP would view pictures of a semi-nude woman while the House was involved in mourning a horrific act of misogyny was clear evidence (proposed the NDP) of the secret regard that all Reformers (social conservatives) held for women. Suspicions confirmed! The hatred toward homosexuals contained in taped comments by a Conservative MP constituted evidence of a deeply held homophobia at the very heart and soul of Conservatism. How could it be otherwise? While these

⁶ The party had lost to the right-leaning Saskatchewan Party in the previous election (2007) and had taken up residence in the offices previously occupied by the Saskatchewan Party and its predecessor, the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan.

incidents were certainly of less general importance to the life of the country than the income-trust affair, the tactics of dis-credit were essentially the same: attack the credibility of a Conservative (or Liberal) and imply that all Conservatives (or Liberals) are similarly tainted. Except in this case the tactic backfired.

The Lukiwski incident prompted unexpected criticism from a significant quarter. Jeffrey Simpson, *The Globe and Mail's* respected senior columnist, took the NDP to task in a column entitled "Will someone please explain where the NDP gets its moral superiority?" Simpson identified the Lukiwski affair as the latest example of the NDP's "overweening sense of moral superiority" and described how "with undisguised glee, the NDP made the videotape public and tried to make hay of it" (Simpson, 2008). The columnist then presented a list of incidents that painted the New Democrats as nasty, self-righteous, and annoyingly pedantic. Among the incidents cited was the income-trust investigation, an affair characterized by Simpson as causing "unfounded grief for former Liberal Finance Minister, Ralph Goodale." Simpson's column was a comeuppance for the NDP framed as a lament for lost civility:

Yes, a terrible streak of pettiness and outright nastiness runs through Canadian federal politics. No party has a monopoly on it. It's just that the gap between pretense and nasty behaviour is wider with the moralistic New Democrats (Simpson, 2008).

That "gap between pretense and nasty behaviour" is code for a critical indictment of the tactics increasingly deployed to undermine and discredit political opponents.

Buried within Simpson's indictment of the NDP was an appeal to a moral argument in favour of the established rules of public discourse. However, the *Globe* columnist's critique of the "moralistic New Democrats" also signaled that a gap had been noted between current and past actions; that the promise made during the election

campaign to hold and defend “progressive values” (a promise made to those Liberals whose votes were “on loan” to the NDP) was in danger of being undercut by “moralistic” posturing. Furthermore, Simpson’s reference to the income-trust affair and his public recognition of the “unfounded grief” that was visited on Ralph Goodale was a direct challenge to NDP credibility, calling into question the NDP’s true motives in its pursuit of the income-trust affair. In effect, Simpson turned the tables on the New Democrats by suggesting that this party could hardly take the high road on moral issues when it was as guilty as any other party of practicing the politics of the smear. The NDP did not respond.

Jeffrey Simpson’s column was but one example of an emerging response within the field of journalism to the deployment of practices that could be traced to the culture of the political war room. While the columnist’s criticism in this case was directed at the NDP it is symptomatic of a much larger groundswell of journalistic response aimed at the Conservatives, a response prompted by some of the leading voices in the field as a challenge to the governing party’s post-election communication model.

Arguably, the Harper government (at the time of this writing) has taken information control and the tactics of dis-credit to levels not seen before in this country during peacetime. The governing party has all but declared war on the Parliamentary Press Gallery. All information intended for public consumption must be approved by the Prime Minister’s Office. Many senior cabinet ministers are not permitted to speak to the media. This hyper-control of information has not won the Harper Conservatives many friends among journalists. Indeed, each of the control measures cited above became the subject of widely circulated critiques in opinion-leading publications such as *Maclean’s*, *The Hill Times* (political Ottawa’s insider newspaper), and *The Globe and Mail* (See:

Delziel, 2006; Vongdonangchanh; 2006; Clark, 2006). A recent editorial in the Halifax *Chronicle Herald* summarized the situation as it continues to be viewed from the field:

Stephen Harper runs a tight ship in terms of getting his Conservative party's agenda out. He and his office closely control what messages the government sends out daily, who speaks to those issues, and even which reporters get to ask questions at press conferences on Parliament Hill. MPs and bureaucrats are told to vet what they say with the PMO, and even cabinet ministers must clear their messages in advance. Mr. Harper has become an excessive control freak, intent on crafting, delivering and explaining Conservative policy (Editorial, *Chronicle Herald*, 2008).

Some methods of *delivering* Conservative policy have certainly come under fire. The party's strategists were exposed for using their party web site to recruit sympathetic supporters to pose as supposedly-legitimate non-aligned participants on open-line radio shows. As *The Canadian Press* reported, visitors to the Conservative party's home page were invited to type their postal code into a specified field. They were then supplied with a list of questions, crafted by strategic communicators, to use on open-line programs in their communities (CP Staff, 2008b). This was a clear attempt to influence public opinion through the misrepresentation of a public voice supposedly engaged in worthy debate, but actually involved in the circulation of partisan rhetoric. The party defended the practice when it was brought to light in media reports, but quietly removed the option from its website.

Journalists of all stripes have recoiled from a political landscape where control of the message seems to have taken precedence over the message itself. *The Globe and Mail's* Jane Taber has been a reporter on Parliament Hill since the mid-1980s. She distills the concerns of many senior political journalists when she points out that it is unnecessary and counterproductive for the Conservatives to alienate the Parliamentary

Press Gallery through hyper-control of the political message:

There is too much control from the centre. I understand that discipline is necessary but to clamp down so tightly on individual MPs will end up hurting the party. These MPs have something to say and contribute to the national debate and we aren't hearing their voices (Taber, 2008).⁷

The journalistic criticism of the governing party's message-control measures has continued through the term of the minority government (See: Campion-Smith, 2008; Brennan, 2008). And as noted by Lawrence Martin of *The Globe and Mail*, the Conservative track record in government has been overtaken by the story of Conservative hyper-control (Martin, L., 2008a).

Issues of control and manipulation have been brought to the fore hand-in-hand with an outright condemnation of the use of extreme tactics of dis-credit. Journalists such as Frances Russell of the *Winnipeg Free Press* continue to contribute to a growing list of national, regional, and local voices, each speaking to real people in real communities about what they see as a streak of violence in Tory tactics:

Libel chill to stifle public inquiry. Intimidation to turn national institutions into servants of the party in power. Trash talk to destabilize opponents. A "black book" of procedural dirty tricks to disrupt parliamentary committees. Like former U.S. president Richard Nixon, Prime Minister Stephen Harper wants power "not to govern the nation but to undermine the government" (Russell, 2008).

That Russell was basing her column on quotes lifted from a recent column published in *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, is telling in its own right. Her own subsumed message is that the governing party's control measures have been noted abroad and may be affecting the international reputation of the country. In a bit of synchronicity, less than

⁷ Taber, Jane. (Reporter). (2008, 19 February). In e-mail correspondence with the author. Montreal/Ottawa.

two weeks after the publication of Russell's column all political parties were engaged in a war-room style battle over a literal affair with international ramifications.

On the afternoon of May 26, 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an uncharacteristic stop at a microphone set up in the foyer outside the House of Commons chamber. He stopped to announce that the minister of foreign affairs had resigned. Maxime Bernier had admitted to leaving confidential government documents in the apartment of his former girlfriend, Julie Couillard. Within minutes of the prime minister's announcement the Liberal opposition house leader was taking Stephen Harper to task at a microphone of his own. Harper had been "very dismissive" of the Bernier-Couillard relationship for weeks, Ralph Goodale told reporters, and "that raises some questions about his judgment" (CP Staff, 2008). At another microphone the NDP's Jack Layton characterized the classified document incident as "the straw that broke the camel's back" for Bernier's future in cabinet. The following day, in a move characteristic of the income-trust affair, Layton called for an RCMP investigation into what was quickly being dubbed "the Bernier-Couillard affair" (Leblanc, Curry, Galloway and Taber, 2008).

The roots of Bernier's fall from grace were far less dramatic. Indeed, the prime minister *had* dismissed Liberal queries about Bernier's former girlfriend, characterizing the opposition "gossipy old busybodies" for their interest in Couillard's past, a past that included intimate connections with members of a notorious criminal organization, the Hell's Angels' motorcycle gang. At that time the opposition attack and the government response had resulted in a split among journalists. Don Martin of the *National Post* was still willing to give the Conservatives the benefit of the doubt and chided the Liberals and Bloc Québécois for engaging in a character assassination. As politicians "lined up to

smear [Maxime] Bernier,” wrote Martin, they showed little remorse for launching “an unsavoury assault on a woman who, despite being cleared by police eons ago, is now condemned to guilt by association by politicians” (Martin, 2008). Joyce Warren of The Globe and Mail argued the opposite view citing questions of judgment:

Entering into a relationship with a woman who had had a relationship with bikers, including being married to one, raises a question of judgment—and the capacity to form judgments, which is fairly important in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Warren, 2008).

In the weeks following, as reporters uncovered evidence of Couillard’s continuing association with characters of questionable repute, and as Maxime Bernier stumbled from one foreign-affairs gaffe to another, the tide slowly turned against the Tory position.

What had started as tactical posturing on the part of opposition politicians, an attempt to damage the governing party’s credibility with respect to a major portfolio (and discredit a rising Conservative star from Québec) ended with a breathless tale of secret documents left behind in a love nest, told in detail (and for possible payment) to a Montreal television network. And if Julie Couillard’s revelations about secret government documents were not enough, she also let it drop that “evidence” of an electronic listening device had been discovered in her bedroom, thus ensuring that the story would remain alive and that the NDP would likely get its wish for an RCMP investigation. The prime minister was not in Ottawa to answer questions. He had flown to Europe for a series of planned meetings following the announcement of Bernier’s resignation. However, he maintained the Conservative position that his government would not “intrude on individuals’ private lives” even, it would seem, if those lives were not so private and there were questions about the integrity of national security (Fenlon and Laghi, 2008).

None of the opposition parties had the slightest idea that Julie Couillard would so publicly reveal personal knowledge of a national-security breach when they began to circulate rumours about her questionable past. Their strategy was to stir up controversy, to plant a seed of doubt about the prime minister's judgment, and to undermine a key figure in the party's Québec strategy for the next election. By the time Couillard dropped her bombshell on TVA, the issue of her involvement with Bernier (and her "friendship" with criminals) was actually beginning to get somewhat stale. At the very least, the Conservatives could claim that Couillard was Bernier's *former* girlfriend and that the RCMP *had* cleared her to be the minister's companion although even these "facts" became hazy as more information came to light. The sensation of the secret documents confirmed for the strategic communicators in the opposition parties that given the right circumstances, war-room practices can and do pay off, and in the case of Ralph Goodale pay *back*. But it was the timing of the Bernier-Couillard affair together with a government response that journalists have universally criticized, that has cemented the practice of contextualizing political news and opinion reporting to include its strategic meaning.

Strategic communication practices, many adapted from war-room culture (as in the Bernier-Couillard affair), are being described and included in reports about political matters. Communication practices refined in war rooms are becoming normalized as a standard descriptive element in journalistic practice. It is now common to encounter reporting on hyper-control of communication and pure tactics framed as an assault on the democratic right to participate in the debates from which political decisions rightly flow. The Bernier-Couillard affair in particular has opened the door for journalists to question

the *legitimacy* behind the use of strategic and tactical communication measures and even to turn the tables by employing some communication strategies of their own.

In a *Toronto Star* column published on the return of Stephen Harper from his European tour, Chantal Hébert served notice that the Bernier-Couillard affair would not be swept under the rug. She was referring to the strategy of information control that had been adopted by the Conservatives, the endless repetition of the truth claim that the government had no business investigating the private lives of members of parliament. Hébert's own strategy was to confront the Harper government with a political reality. The tactical dismissal through ridicule of opposition concerns as the work of "gossipy old busybodies" had not worked. The stonewalling would not work. The government was caught in a trap of its own making:

After weeks of self-defeating silence, the notion that the government is embarrassing itself daily to avoid the graver injury of admitting that it brushed off earlier security warnings as to Couillard's past can no longer be ruled out. How else to explain that the government has so far been at such a loss to get ahead of the issue? (Hébert, 2008b).

At the core of Hébert's critique is a larger question of credibility, a question that challenged the Harper government to *defend* its legitimacy to govern. In effect, Hébert had challenged the government to explain why it was expending so much symbolic capital if it was not concealing something far more damaging than the appearance of bungling, the embarrassment of appearing to be inept, would warrant. James Travers, also of the *Toronto Star* was less diplomatic, drawing a direct line connecting government communication strategy in the Couillard-Bernier affair to a raw pursuit of power for power's sake, directly challenging the legitimacy of Conservative motives:

Power isn't the main thing to this government; it's everything. It strips all civility from the public debate, uncouples facts from spin and makes public policy a slave to communications strategy ... Partisan advantage is so aggressively pursued that national interests are put at risk (Travers, 2008b).

This challenge to the Conservative hyper-control of the message, presented through direct or indirect appeals to credibility and legitimacy, would take on a thematic life of its own and be published and republished across the journalistic field (See: Coyne, 2008; Gagnon, 2008; Legault, 2008; Martin, D., 2008a; Martin, D., 2008b; Martin, L., 2008b, Travers, 2008a).⁸

Certainly, much of this journalistic critique was motivated by self-interest; a response to the frustration of dealing with a political communication machine that most perceived as hostile. Certainly, the Conservative stonewall strategy had been employed by other governments at other times. Nevertheless, the Bernier-Couillard affair provided a catalyst for journalists to reinvigorate a generalized public debate over the importance of unfettered access to information in the public good. Paradoxically, the techniques of information control and the tactics of partisanship created a platform for the public discussion of the techniques of control and the tactics of partisanship.

This is a reminder that the weakly autonomous fields of politics and journalism are interpenetrated across a range of capitals. The response in the field of journalism to issues of information control has been to challenge political actors where they are most vulnerable; at the point where their truth claims may be undercut by questions about the credibility of the subsumed intentions embedded in the practices of strategic control of

⁸ Gagnon's column in *The Globe and Mail* of 9 June 2008 actually takes the opposition parties to task over their tactics and strategies while also exposing Conservative practices.

political communication. In effect, this is a threat to invoke a legitimation crisis based on a perception of failure in both the political and cultural spheres, circulated and extended within the field of journalism and projected into the field of power/publics (Müller, 1988). This is made possible by virtue of the special communicative relationship between these influential fields, a relationship wherein the credibility of the reproduced practices of journalists is rightly and continually confirmed by the free response of publics operating in the field of power (Chapter Three).

The response in the field of journalism may also be taken as a protective *reaction* within an entrenched and specialized socio-political structure; a reaction to a perceived threat to the structure's privileged systems of practice. Control of information is, after all, anathema to specialists in political journalism who depend for their own credibility on the freely re-produced responses to ideas put forward by decision-makers as well as access to the decision-makers themselves. Yet this is really neither here nor there since the appeal, made to publics in the field of power, is intended to evoke a wider debate around the efforts of practitioners in the political field to unilaterally change the relationships of power vis-à-vis the fields of journalism and power/publics and, by doing so, change the conditions that define the practice of democracy itself. In other words, even if the journalistic response to post-election war-room communication practices is self-serving the result has been to invoke a wider debate that goes to the substantive core of the relationship between the fields of politics, journalism, and power/publics.

Is it possible to say that the exposure and circulation of the Harper government's communication strategies and tactics have changed the way that publics regard the Conservatives? No. But there is certainly a correlation between the beginnings of a

response in the journalistic field when the Conservatives took power, the heightened responses that include specific references to control issues that came about as a result of the Bernier-Couillard affair, and popular support for the governing party. The Conservatives did come into power with a handful of significant policy-oriented promises: to cut the GST; implement a monthly child-care program based on cheques delivered to caregivers; pass accountability legislation; establish a law-and-order framework; and deal with medical wait times. A year after coming to power four of those promises had been kept and the Conservatives were polling in majority territory. The publics that comprise and animate the field of power appeared to be buying into the new government's "legitimate vision of the social world" and conferring the beginnings of a sense of reputation and prestige (Bourdieu, 1990a). Since that time, however, public support has been draining away. By the summer of 2008 most polls put the Conservatives and Liberals in a virtual tie (Cheadle, 2008).⁹ This after the Liberals had rolled out a controversial "green shift" tax program meant to address concerns about global warming, a proposal that was attacked in Conservative radio ads *before* it was announced, mocked by prominent Tories in the House of Commons on the day of its announcement, and characterized by the prime minister as "crazy economics" and "crazy environmental policy (Delacourt and Wittington, 2008; Wittington and Champion-Smith, 2008). Why would the Conservatives launch a scathing campaign of tactical dis-credit in the face of accumulated evidence that such measures are causing them harm in the field of power/publics?

⁹ The poll was conducted by Ipsos-Reid for 12 July 2008 and asked respondents: "Who would you vote for if an election were held today." The results placed the Conservatives at 33 per cent and the Liberals at 32 per cent. The margin of error was calculated at 3.5 per cent nineteen times out of twenty. See: <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=4004>.

Pierre Bourdieu might argue that the rules governing the competition for recognition are always in flux, especially in the political field where power relations must literally be reproduced and reinforced continuously across divides predicated on ideological distinction (Bourdieu, 1990a). From this theoretical viewpoint the excesses of partisanship are naturally aimed at describing the social world (and struggling to control its legitimate vision) in a manner that is acceptable to like-minded actors. The conduct of strategic political communicators is meant to reinforce the internal “structure of the social space” of the political party for the benefit of those who share that space. This fits with Bourdieu’s understanding of fields as spaces of exclusion, where those who do not understand and practice the immanent laws of the field are effectively shut out.

Such a conceptualization helps to explain the apparent disregard for the negation of self-interest that so often arises when tactical actions conflict with larger strategic objectives. When the division of ideological labour that necessarily characterizes the distinction between political parties becomes inflexible, the divide between ideological positions easily transforms into a barrier. On one side of the barrier are political agents who view themselves very much as practitioners within a field, complete with immanent laws and relations of power that support a narrowly defined vision of the social world. On the other side of the barrier is everything else including journalists, political opponents, and publics. The war room tactics of extreme dis-credit and strategies of hyper-control make perfect sense in such a world. Policy proposals from political adversaries, publicly generated contrary ideas, and journalistic criticism are viewed as an assault on the barrier erected to protect the self-contained vision of the social world. In the absence of general debate on matters of public concern and in the presence of message control intended to

support only the partisan position, a tactical response to perceived incursions into the space of the party is the only action that is seen to be legitimate. This view harkens back to Durkheim's notion of mechanical solidarity, where similarity within a homogeneous *conscience collective* confers the power *and the responsibility* to enforce that similarity upon a governing authority (Durkheim, 1933/1984: 42-43).

The problem with such a theorization is that political parties are not fields and we do not live in a homogeneous society. Political parties are ideological organizational entities competing for power in the weakly autonomous field of politics that is itself lodged in the highly heterogeneous field of power/publics. Organizations are certainly entitled to administer rules and resources, including communicative resources, according to a self-constructed vision of the social world. But the function of a political party—a necessary division of ideological labour that is co-emergent with democracy as a response to the conditions of growing individualism in organic solidarity—is to communicate its position to the individuals and publics that comprise society as a whole. Durkheim reminds us that legitimacy is communicated *to* the authority with the power to govern (Durkheim: 43). Furthermore, the act of communication that is so central to the legitimate conferral of power cannot be severed from the division of labour that responds to the need for the communication of moral obligation, the glue that binds society together in conditions of organic solidarity (Chapter One). In short, by virtue of strong group solidarity the Harper conservatives may be compelled to erect communicative barriers through hyper-control of information, and they may be compelled to lash out with extreme and repellant tactics when their ideological centre is perceived to be under

threat, but such strategies and tactics alienate those very publics the party needs to process and extend its passing appeals beyond the ranks of the already-committed.

The question for the NDP is whether the backlash against extreme tactical and strategic communication will extend to the election-time war-room practices employed by Canada's fourth-place party. Certainly the Simpson rebuke over "the gap between pretense and nasty behaviour" sent the message that the party is not immune to having its own nasty tactics exposed and criticized. A more generalized condemnation among journalists of the treatment of Ralph Goodale in the income-trust affair has also served notice that the party (and the RCMP) may have crossed an ethical line (Editorial, *The Globe and Mail*, 2008; Editorial, *Toronto Star*, 2008a; Editorial, *Toronto Star*, 2008b; Travers, 2008a; Martin, L., 2008b). On the other hand, the party's immediate response to the Bernier-Couillard affair was to call for an RCMP investigation. Shades of income trust! Like the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the Bloc, the NDP must contend with its own internal tensions; after all, the party has its own symbolic capital to acquire and its own ideological distinction to defend.

The larger question is whether political war rooms can be credited with somehow changing the way that politics is practiced at the federal level in Canada. Partisan-political entities such as the NDP would certainly *like* their war-rooms to deliver more votes, more ridings, and more power. There is a *prima facie* case to be made that the NDP war room has delivered more seats out of successive election campaigns. But the practice of strategic communication is subject to so many external and internal variables that it is simply not possible to draw a causal link between war room practices and electoral success. What the adoption of this organizational construct *has* afforded to the NDP is a

system—a structure of reproduced practices—that permits the party to compete on the same symbolic level as its main opponents. This has aided the New Democrats by conferring a measure of credibility on the party beyond what the numbers would otherwise dictate. The symbolic dividends have been to the NDP's advantage.

However, a message has now been delivered to the NDP (and the other political parties) concerning the limits of partisan-strategic communication. Journalists seem prepared to accept that opposition research and rapid response have a place in the election-time firmament. The use of registers to frame issues and the often theatrical rhetorical displays that accompany the quest for distinction are tolerated, even welcomed by journalists as long as political actors understand that the test of credibility for a position lies in the journalistic field and, ultimately, in the field of power/publics.

The 2005-06 campaign tested the NDP war room and found it wanting. Issues of ethics and the income-trust affair aside, the NDP seemed unwilling or unable to prepare for the inevitable questions that responsible journalists were compelled to ask when truth claims were put forward on some major policy issues. Did war-room communicators really think that Parliamentary Press Gallery journalists, specialists in their field, would *not* question Jack Layton about a federally-initiated proposal to force the provinces to comply with a radical edict to ban private health clinics? Did the party really expect that its change of position on The Clarity Act would *not* be characterized as a flip-flop, as a cynical attempt to attract federal-leaning Québec voters? The strength of political war rooms lies in their ability to organize a legitimate exchange of capitals—social, cultural, and symbolic—within the charged conditions of an extremely competitive democratic moment.

That strength is dissipated when strategic communicators try to short-circuit the exchange; when they fail to take into account the role of journalists in the processes of legitimation. To attempt to talk over or around this journalistic role is to invite a legitimate public critique of methods and motives by the representative voices in the field of journalism, by people who have laboured long and hard to accumulate their own considerable symbolic capital, people who owe the means of expressing their own legitimate vision of the social world in large part to the exchanges of capital that occur when the people who read, hear, and view their journalism freely process and extend this privileged form of cultural production. This is likely to be the most socially and politically productive insight that arises from the war-room experience: that credibility and legitimation cannot be assumed through a simple projection of truth claims into the media environment. The mere circulation of a position, political or otherwise, guarantees nothing. Claims to a *legitimate* vision of the social world require their own symbolic and material guarantees.

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