"Imagery" as Political Action

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Abstract: Most of us would admit that the content of thought and action may be affected by its form. In short, charisma, style, and rhetorical skills may act as allies to content. But this is a minimal claim. The stronger claim would be that form may constitute content rather than merely adorn it. We shall argue that this claim is not an intellectual romance but crucial to understanding how meaning is made and shared. We shall note further that the emergence of a particular sense of form or what we shall term imagery may be less a strategy than an ontological and epistemological condition, more familiar perhaps in the realm of the arts – i.e. how something becomes has a lot to do with what it is and with the status we give it as knowledge. Imagery is no less than the process by which the Arts work. At first glance, an image appears as a shortcut - an act of economy - a picture is worth a thousand words, a logo makes a product present, and clothing suggests personality. But an image may present essential newness – i.e. it may be neither a short or long cut – but perhaps the only cut. There is an important sense in which we must explore the idea of image if we are interested in the mechanics of making and exchanging meaning. Academics of varying stripes investigate how metaphors work, how signs come to mean. Moreover, the Greeks began these inquiries long before the doubts of post-Modernist minds took hold. So why would professors of political studies and art be inclined to swap notes now on an apparently well-trodden field? We believe that the confluence of these two disciplines brings mutual benefits – i.e. the study of politics gains new strategies for understanding plays of power, and art comes to derive clearer strategies for making meaningful social change. We have taken as our theoretical starting point George Lakoff's interest in metaphor and framing, and Murray Edleman's conviction about the power of art in constructing political reality. A model is presented that describes the role of artistic process in constructing imagery and examples are given of these processes at work in contemporary political situations.

Keywords: Imagery, Obama, Politics, Leadership, Art

Preface

MOST OF US would admit that the content of political thought and action may be affected by its form. In short, charisma, style, and rhetorical skills may act as allies to content. But this is a minimal claim. The stronger claim would be that form may *constitute* content rather than merely adorn it, and this is the claim that we shall defend. But what kind of claim is this? What kind of evidence could be adduced to make the claim plausible? We shall argue that this claim is not an intellectual romance but crucial to understanding how meaning is made and shared. We shall note further that the emergence of a particular sense of form or what we shall term *imagery* may be less a strategy than an ontological and epistemological condition, more familiar perhaps in the realm of the arts - how something becomes has a lot to do with what it is and the status we give it as knowledge. Imagery is no less than the process by which Art *works* and in turn, a process which we shall show may determine political fortunes.

COMMON GROUND

There can be few issues that have received the level of interdisciplinary study that now surrounds the ways in which language operates. From the essays of Orwell to the structuralist theories of Lacan and Levi Strauss, we have become used to the idea that language is a lot more complicated than vocabulary and syntax. For fifty years, we have become more sophisticated in our understanding of particular aspects of language – of, for example, the mechanics and function of tropes such as metaphor. We have witnessed a resurgence of interest in semiotics and rhetoric, and the humanities have continued to develop theories around language and the media, structuralist, post-structuralist, or otherwise. We believe that this interest in part at least reflects recognition of the power of the *image*. We have taken as our starting point the work of two theorists – George Lakoff and Murray Edelman. Through Lakoff's interest in metaphor and framing, and Edleman's convictions about the power of art in constructing meaning, it seems to us that political science has an opportunity to reexamine some of its assumptions about how power is negotiated, and the visual arts may see potential in developing strategies for social change.

Part 1

Frames and Narratives

In the interests of constructing meaning, we continually assemble wholes from what may be disparate signs – i.e. we seek connections that will constitute templates for interpreting the world. In short, the world is not simply *out there* - we participate in producing the lenses through which we see. George Lakoff notes that cognitive sciences show that mental frames are formed and activated by words, pictures, and combinations of the two. Some of this framing occurs at the unconscious level - it happens whether we will it or not. In *The Political Mind,* Lakoff argues that we acquire frames through the process of *neural binding* which leads to acquiring ever deepening narratives (2008). For example, the label *Prime Minister of Canada* immediately evokes a mental image. Even if we are not aware of the physical characteristic of the current prime minister, an image appears in our mind's eye. That image comes from a frame(s) - perhaps one featuring a picture of an older man in a business suit, and phrases such as *24 Sussex Drive*, or *Parliament Hill*. In turn, these pictures and phrases conjure up political parties, policies, debates, and the evening news. If we allow ourselves another level of reflection, we reach a plethora of personal convictions – senses of right and wrong action. All this culminates in ever deepening narratives - our senses of community, democracy, freedom, equality and justice.

Our values reside deep within us, such that they guide our felt responses even before we translate our responses into language - i.e. we *feel* or *intuit* before we know. Deep frames inform our surface frames. The implications of Lakoff's work, and the scholarship related to cognitive and neuro-sciences for investigating political activity, are profound. From the outset, Lakoff directly confronts the tenets of the liberal Enlightenment's conceptions of reason. He argues that liberal reason conceived as being conscious, universal, disembodied, logical, unemotional, value-neutral, interest-based, and literal, is simply misconceived: "Enlightenment reason does not account for real political behaviour because the Enlightenment view of reason is false" (Lakoff, 2008, p. 8). But it is this Liberal reason that informs many of the theoretical frameworks that guide contemporary political science. For example, *rational*

choice theory and *classical realism* are both rooted in the notion of the individual agent as a self-interested, rational being. Lakoff's thesis demands that we re-think these assumptions.

Threats to conventional assumptions have not come just from Lakoff. For example, some social science theorists use a *narrative analysis* framework to interpret reality (see Clemons and McBeth, 2009, pp. 197 -199 and Emery, 1994). Some historians too have subscribed to such analysis. For example, W.B. Gallie understands all social activity as *narrative* - a concept parallel to our concept of *deep frame*. Gallie describes history in terms of an effort to a follow a story:

> Following a story is, at one level, a matter of understanding words, sentences, paragraphs, set out in order. But at a much more important level it means to understand the successive actions and thoughts and feelings of certain described characters with a peculiar direct-ness, and to be pulled forward by this development almost against our will: we commonly appreciate, without needing to articulate to ourselves, many of the reasons and motives and interests upon which the story's development up towards its climax depends (Gallie, 1964, p. 22).

Lakoff too uses the idea of narrative:

> We live our narratives. The lived story is at the center of modern personality theory. The theory of neural computation…shows how our brains not only permit this, but favour it. The typical roles played in narratives include Hero, Victim, and Helper…The roles in narratives that you understand yourself as fitting, give meaning to your life, including the emotional color that is inherent in narrative structures (Lakoff, 2008, p. 33).

Within political science, the work of Murray Edelman directly challenged the discipline from a vantage point sympathetic with Lakoff *et al.*. He defends the notion that art, rather than *decorating* political concepts, actually *defines* them.

It is worth acknowledging Edleman's work in order to set a context for Lakoff's notion of *framing,* and figuration as a lens for viewing political behaviour.

Edelman's *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* was engaging and innovative for the worlds of both art and politics. Artists search constantly for affirmation and politicians seek consistently to theorize the essentially practical endeavour of keeping community in tact for somebody's benefit. So potentially, artists can feel less marginal and decorative, and political scientists can potentially gain insight into the nature and role of a social engineering tool often invisible to the theorizing eye. Edleman's work was largely an account of twentieth century art objects seen from a political perspective. Edelman's most important observation was that the arts could be seen as means for the construction of plausible and convincing narratives. He notes that there is no "immaculate perception" and that our sense of the world is gained through a variety of constructs that we strive to interpret as objective and rational, but which are the results of artistic images:

> Works of art generate the ideas about leadership, bravery, cowardice, altruism, dangers, authority, and fantasies about the future that people typically assume to be reflections of their own observations and reasoning……Political beliefs and actions spring from assumptions, biases, and news reports. In this critical sense politics is a drama taking

place in an assumed and reported world that evokes threats and hopes, a world people do not directly observe or touch. (Edelman, 1995, pp. 1-3).

Like Lakoff, Edelman maintains that we perceive and conceive in the light of narratives - seeing is "based on expectations and imagination" and politicians of any persuasion deal in fictions - they "protect fantasies from challenge" (p.16).

   It must be said that Edelman's ideas have not changed the direction of political science. We suspect that had he reflected upon art as a form of thinking, a set of processes, a way of engaging the world, rather than as an aggregate of objects, his influences would have been the stronger. It is easy to be blinkered by personal, domestic experiences with art objects and our ensuing judgments – after all, we know what we like. But suppose we put on hold both our preferences and evaluative criteria such as virtuosity, beauty, verisimilitude etc. Suppose instead that we imagine Art as a complex *process* featuring three temporal phases – free envisioning (or *art*), engagement with constraints (or *design*), and making (or *craft*). We shall argue that the optimum result of this process is the production of an *image*. We shall then contemplate the role of the image in constructing and maintaining frames.

Form and *Image*

We have become accustomed to the minimal claims of form as *style*. For example, we note that "it ain't what you say, but the way that you say it". And so we acknowledge the *spinning* of political content - the selective limiting or tilting of content so that rhetorical effect is maximised. There is sleight of hand involved - *spin* is a design strategy to achieve a prede-termined end – and it is this predetermination that renders spin what Collingwood called a *craft* rather than an art (1938). Similarly, Lakoff (2004) noted that subject matter, whether in words or pictures, operates within a "frame" – i.e. that words connote other words and ideas or that linguistic lint attaches to every sign. These connections are cumulative and build wholes just as atomic valencies build molecules. We can attempt to build or amend frames consciously. By way of example, Lakoff notes the Republican history of reliance on the word *taxation* operating in a negative frame – we are, for example, "oppressed by a government taking what is ours". He notes the Democrat reliance on a more positive frame - that taxation is what "provides services for, and builds community". The point is that a frame may be crafted and recrafted. Spin and style are the strategies of frame crafters (Lakoff, 2004).

   In our everyday discourse, an *image* is a construction - "she took care to keep up her im-age". We may note that image here, like *spin* has an almost fraudulent sense – it is constructed as a mask. But it is worth probing the nature of *imagery* a little further. If we say on leaving an art exhibit that "I admire the artist's skill but remain unmoved by her imagery", we have lost the fraudulent sense. We are also referring to more than simple representation. We are not referring merely to literal subject matter, but to the range of ideas that the subject connotes – i.e. the narrative or *frame*. In this sense, imagery presents an artist's *world* - a particular nexus of ideas and values. If *re-presentation* is merely a vehicle for literal components of the frame, the "tenor" (Wheelright, 1962), the message of art, is always indirect or *presented*. This was Langer's point (1953, 1957, 1967-82) in arguing that an "art symbol" differs from a regular symbol in that the art symbol stands only for itself. This is the sense in which an art work must be presentational. Put differently, the artist cheats conventional language and

finds analogies for or *images* of human feeling, where feeling is not limited to *emotions* (which in turn may be interpreted as symptoms of feeling). We may succeed or fail in our conscious efforts to mould form or *to image*. But we should remember that presentational content must also be interpreted by those who engage it and so meaning may always be more or less than we intend.

Imagery *becomes* as an amalgam of mind's eye pictures (remembered and imagined) and words, stated or tacit, – an amalgam that is not reducible to its components. In short, idea is *embodied* in form; picture in word and vice versa. The implication of this is that politicians and political scientists might consider that Art is not so much a decorative device or strategy but more like a *way of being*. Art provides entrance to *worlds* that we are strongly invited to inhabit. As Max Black noted, metaphors "demand uptake" – they *interrogate* us (1977). The power of Churchill was in his being Churchill, not in his acting capabilities. In a sense, Churchill became an *image* or a *world*. To recognise the power of the *image* is in turn to be empowered. Some will argue that it was simply Churchill's *character* or *personality* that made him an icon of leadership. These are elements in the frame as are the historical context, his voice, his pacing, his clenched expression, his clarity, his cigar, his dog etc., and his un- canny sense of competing frames. The medium of political discourse is language - clarity, insight, and persuasiveness are prerequisites for success. But this language and the thought it permits is not merely communicated – it is *imaged*. A number of thinkers (Collingwood, Langer, Gadamer, Dufrenne), have used the distinction between *speech* and *language* precisely to make this point. Language is a historical concept. Speech is emergent. Speech describes a new space which the conventions of discursive language may eventually come to fill.

Picture and *Image*

There are few who fail to see the power of pictures in our cultural life. We understand that the Internet and TV are visual media, that consumerism depends on attracting our attention (Lanagan, 2008) and pictures do that well. For half a century, we have expressed concern over the power of the media and particularly the visual ones. The power is derived from the fact that media messages are broadly-cast, biased by selection, and often significantly visual. We have even ensured that children receive courses to help them interpret and even resist this power. Part of our concern is that we have long recognised that *a picture may be worth a thousand words*, whether for good or ill. Pictures are economical and ease the burden of imagining. Many parents still believe that comics will likely stunt their children' s intellec- tual growth. But it is *images,* not merely *pictures* that they should fear-for it is *image* that carries ideas and values.

Language and *Image*

Philosophers such as Langer and Collingwood were among the first to recognise that language (which was not for either restricted to spoken or written code) has twin powers – the abilities to *communicate* and to *express*. Communication requires that two people share a common code – e.g. English language or math notation. Since the code is relatively stable, meaning passes between us. "I opened the car door" requires only that I understand what cars and doors are and what kind of action opening entails. Similarly, $2x - 4 = 10$ may be solved as $x = 7$ because the conventions are stable. But if I am assured that "man is a thinking reed"

(Pascal), my concept of communication seems inadequate to the task of understanding how meaning is to be derived. We must consider the *reed-man* or *man-reed* possibilities and engage the interaction and tensions of the combination. Clearly, more is intended than the literal meaning of the word labels used. It is possible that we may not understand the intention of the speaker – i.e. figurative language, unlike literal language, may "require uptake" (Max Black, 1977) and we must contribute to meaning by speculating how the image may feed a larger frame. So we could conclude that there are two kinds of language – one literal, discursive or communicative, the other figurative and expressive [1]. What relevance has the discussion thus far have for the interpretation of political action? Even if we were to bring to the table only the distinction between *communication* and *expression*, or between *style* and *world*, we would have gained a potentially powerful interpretive tool. Imaging is the process of expression and the power of intuiting a world.

Art & Image

The use of the word *Art* is itself accompanied in our minds by pictures, images, and frames but not the same ones for all of us. Confident that, for the majority, the idea of art brings with it notions of "Starry Night", Mont St Victoire, Beethoven, and Shakespeare, we think it may be important to try our observations thus far on images that may test our categories of *Art*. Then at least, we will know that we are not resting on memories of objects, but rather thinking about the processes that Art entails. For that purpose, consideration of the work of Jenny Holzer is useful even though we could choose painters, poets, architects, or musicians since the process of imaging is endemic to all art forms.

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[1] Lakoff notes that, in one sense, all language is figurative since words are arbitrary labels.

Holzer began writing her *Truisms* instanced above in 1977. We might suggest that *insight* appears to take precedence over skill, materiality, or representation. In the case of her electronic billboard plea - "Protect Me From What I Want" - the appearance of the words in terms of font seems of little importance. But the placement of the phrase over the New York Freeway or in Time Square, or Las Vegas is not only relevant, it is crucial, for geographic placement determines much of the *frame*. Moreover, the contrast of the banality of the electronic ad. with the depth of the philosophic intent helps to constitute the *image*. Her work is marked by contrast and surprise. But it is the ambiguity and insight – qualities of an image charged with value that are primary. As Edelman notes, "explicitness terminates wonder" (1995 p.64). The uncertainties of meaning make us participate and we recognize the insight by the way that we refocus the world through a new lens. As importantly, content is engaged as much by feeling as by cognition. The only thing that separates Holzer from poetry is the visual play of her work – she develops *imagery* by allowing text and visual context to mingle and embody one another.

Political science has perhaps struggled with the question of where to place cultural studies and the humanities as contexts for providing insight into political action. This is partly because imaging does not distinguish between fact and fiction or between what Tolkein would call the *primary* and *secondary* worlds (1988). Thus it is that the narratives of Shakespeare, Hardy and Tolkein are all as true as the stories of Canadian political parties. Both Churchill and Tolkien were successful in world-making. Those that understand imaging create worlds where the frame can expand beyond the author's initial intent - this is an act of trust. They must be willing to let go and allow others to dwell in both primary and secondary worlds. Tolkien, like Lakoff, believed that powerful fiction helps us to recall and perhaps modify deeper frames.

In sum, an Art *image* is more than a picture. Five properties of the image are important to our analysis.

1. imaging is the primary *Art process*. This process involves three phases – envisioning, controlling, and acting. Put differently…
   a. *art* wonders
   b. *design* constrains
   c. *craft* delivers
2. an image may be actual or imagined. After all, poetry as well as paintings may "conjure up rich imagery".
3. an artist's imagery refers to more than subject matter – we are invited to enter a *world* of connections, a nexus of insights and values.
4. imagery has the power to transform us since we agree to inhabit this world and indeed to complete it.
5. we engage imagery through feeling or intuition which always trumps our capacity to reason.

Part 2

Two Canadian Case Studies

It is our contention that the processes we have described underpin all political behaviour successful or otherwise. Imagery can propel candidates into office or send them into exile. It is our view that former Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau (1917-2000), had an extraordinary knowledge of the elements of a *charged* image and was able to connect them to a frame. In general, Trudeau was framed as the philosopher-king battling the reactionary forces of provincial premiers and an unsophisticated mass media. His mantra was "reason over passion". However, he consistently demonstrated an understanding of passion and so while he immersed himself in the rhetoric of liberal and enlightenment philosophers, his lapel rose and his use of pirouettes at public functions became his trademark. Perhaps his most dramatic display of judgment occurred during unscripted moments, particularly his signature image - his curt response to a reporter who quizzed him on how far he would go to suppress Quebec separatism. The glib "just watch me" was hardly the height of reason but few would argue with its power to evoke feeling. Former Trudeau staffer, Jim Coutts writes that Trudeau consciously exploited the potential for image-making - "Just as his speeches were carefully rehearsed, he acted quite deliberately in striking the several memorable photographic poses that became icons of the man" (Coutts, 1998, p. 158). Some examples of Trudeau's "heroic" images are the news photos of him defying hecklers at the St. Jean Baptiste parade on the eve of the 1968 election, and the image of Trudeau as a "gunslinger" - standing alone facing all challengers. Coutts provides another interesting example of how Trudeau used imaging to reinforce his world-making:

> The public saw Trudeau as a quick-witted, almost insouciant man who tossed off casual remarks, slid down royal banisters, or made faces and gestures on whim. But he did and said little publicly that was not carefully rehearsed in advance... Most people assumed that the notorious pirouette Trudeau enacted in Buckingham Palace, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, was simply a spontaneously rude and impulsive gesture. In fact, he planned it hours before because he strongly opposed the palace protocol that separated heads of state from heads of government. The well-rehearsed pirouette was a way of showing his objection without saying a word. (Coutts, 1998, p. 149).

Clarkson and McCall criticise such descriptions of Trudeau as an oversimplification or caricature (1990). Yet, the uses of symbolic gestures were not superficial and tactical adornments, but rather actions that speak to the heart of understanding his process of framing or world-making. We suggest that the *form* Trudeau presented became his *content*. His appeal resided in his authentic and artful images, which many of his observers absorbed and tried to emulate.

A clear example of a political leader who failed utterly to appreciate this essential concept is former Liberal Party of Canada Leader, the Honourable Stéphane Dion. Dion is one of only two leaders of this long-established Canadian political party not to attain the office of Prime Minister. Indeed, all seven previous party leaders elected by party convention won this office. It was surprising that Dion struggled as party leader as his professional credentials suggested to most that he would be well suited for the role. He served as a cabinet minister in the governments of Prime Ministers Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin (1996 - 2006) and was a highly regarded political science professor at the Université de Montréal. Yet, Dion proved

to be a miscast political campaigner, and his public presentations of his political program were often inept. For example, during his leadership campaign keynote speech, his remarks ran over the allotted time and he was unceremoniously cut off in mid-sentence by music (CBC, Dec. 2, 2006). During the 2008 federal election, the opposing Conservative party focused its strategy on raising questions about Dion's leadership abilities. A few days before the vote during a widely televised interview, the interviewer had to repeat questions several times and Dion appeared hapless and overwhelmed – it seems that poor craft trumps the best of design strategies and he led his party to one of the worst defeats in its history (CBC, Oct.11, 2010). In the following parliamentary session as Leader of the Opposition, Dion helped negotiate a coalition agreement with the other two opposition parties designed to topple the Conservative government and install him as Prime Minister. However, his crucial five minute televised speech justifying the coalition was filmed out of focus and the tape was delivered late to the media networks by his staff. Adding insult to ineptitude, a book titled "Hot Air" was clearly visible over his blurred shoulder (Canwest, Dec. 4, 2008). Dion announced his intent to resign the party leadership five days after the broadcast of what one observer wryly coined 'the hostage video' .

While Dion's fate exemplifies the price to be paid for not paying attention to imagery, the election of Barack Obama as the Unites States of America's 44th President is a dramatic and more positive story. However, we cannot catalogue that entire journey here. Instead, we note how the Obama presidential campaign was able to successfully construct images which reinforced frames. The campaign, including Obama himself, was able to create an enticing world through the Art process (art, craft, and design). This world was, in large measure, established because the campaign "let go of the frame" allowing others to participate in image-making - i.e. the campaign did not try to monopolize the content of the frame. Because spectators *felt* a part of the campaign, they participated in articulating its themes (values). Through forming a felt connection with the candidate and participating with him in world-making, they accompanied him, metaphorically at least, to the White House.

Metaphor and Re-framing

In terms of its main themes of *Change We Need* and *Hope*, the Obama campaign was not unique. Many candidates for political office have evoked these themes. Moreover, many of the elements of this campaign mirror elements of the opposing and previous campaigns. However, it is Obama's approach to these themes which warrants deeper consideration.

Returning to Lakoff, we deduce from his analysis that voters do not base their decision wholly or even mostly on issues or interests of the moment. Rather, they vote based on values that attach to frames already established. Lakoff maintains that Republicans have been more effective at maintaining their frames, resulting in more electoral success. For example, in terms of *family values*, Republicans invoke the *strict father* comparison - the state is analogous to a family unit with a dominant father. Values are siphoned though this frame. He lists them as: strong defence, free markets, lower taxes, smaller government. Conversely, Progressive Democrat values are framed through a model of a *nurturing parent* involving a strong America gained through broader prosperity, effective government, and mutual responsibility (Lakoff, 2004: 81 – 95). Lakoff declares his bias in support of this Progressive frame. He argues persuasively that you cannot win against the Conservative frame by evoking its terms. Progressives are hampered by the old Enlightenment assumption that simply presenting

"facts" related to our interests will persuade Conservatives to the cause. Unframed facts simply bounce off the hostile frame and do more to reinforce it than to change it. The establishment of a Progressive frame must be accomplished by changing the terms of the debate to support the alternative frame - terms that recognise both reason and feeling.

Lakoff was an advisor to the Obama campaign and has stated on website blogs that Obama understands the framing concept. Obama has worked for years to promote a more Progressive-friendly frame. For example, consider his 2006 book *Audacity of Hope*; he writes that: "It is the language of values that people use to map their world. It is what can inspire them to take action, and move them beyond their isolation" (Obama, 2006: 64). *Audacity of Hope* is an eloquently written value-framing document. Simply reviewing the chapter headings suggests this: Values, Opportunity, Faith, Race, Family etc. The content of this work is a personal story of a black man in America weaving together the values of hard work, taking advantage of opportunity, nurturing children and so on (Obama, 2006). This narrative almost perfectly parallels the general Progressive values sketched out by Lakoff (2004).

Consider also his first book, *Dreams From My Father: a Story of Race and Inheritance*. This is a well crafted narrative that transcends a simple biography through the artistic application of imaging. Obama frequently invokes the term *imagining*, *performance,* and *narrative* to describe his life experiences, and those of others (2004). For example, while describing his involvement with the community development movement, he frames his involvement as a form of spiritual quest:

> I would dress up these impulses in the slogans and theories that I'd discovered in books, thinking -falsely- that the slogans meant something, that they somehow made what I felt more amenable to proof. But at night, lying in bed, I would let the slogans drift away, to be replaced with a series of images, romantic images, of a past I had never known…Such images became a form of prayer for me, bolstering my spirits, channelling (sic) my emotions in a way words never could (2004: p134).

Obama and the Power of the Image

Professional staffers on political campaigns do not need to be convinced of the power of the image to sway opinion. For example, Warren Kinsella, senior advisor for Jean Chrétien's Liberal party campaigns, described his *The War Room* (2007), as a guide book toward creating successful political strategies. Kinsella observes,

> …on television, *emotions* count more than *facts* (our emphasis) – or, as B.C. Liberal Premier Gordon Campbell once told me ruefully, 'It's 10 percent what you say, 20 percent how you say it, and 70 percent how you look (2007, p.97).

Kinsella argues that news media content is constructed around fictive melodramas. When assessing the impact of a television political ad or media story, Kinsella states:

> I always watch it with the sound off. That way, I'm forced to consider the visual impact for what is a visual medium (2007, p. 98).

Kinsella understands the role and power of the visual. Political strategists, like Kinsella, offer insight into the design and the craft of political campaigns. But, the art elements of world-

making often elude them. Constraints are framed as finite physical/logistical resources but rarely as felt images. The politician as artist cannot be bound only by the rational constraints of campaign design and craft when forging a world. Yet, the Art-making process is reliant on sound craft and design. This may appear as a contradiction until we remember that art, craft and design are temporal phases of the same process. These were lessons well understood by the Obama presidential campaign. Consider two of his strategies which support our analysis - the *Yes We Can* (viral music video), and Shepard Fairey's *Hope* graffiti posters.

Yes we can

This music video was released on the internet through *YouTube*, in February, 2008. It was written and produced by former *Black Eyed Peas* member, will i am, and it had no official connection with the Obama campaign. The footage features the then primary candidate, Barack Obama, delivering a stump speech in New Hampshire with voice-overs from singers, musicians and actors parroting the words Obama is speaking - a hip-hop style poetic response to a spoken text shot in muted grey tones against a high contrast black-and-white field. Both visual and sound components are compelling - forty celebrities participated including will i am, Scarlett Johansson, Herbie Hanncock, and Sara Wright.

It is estimated that the video was viewed 26 million times (New York Times) before voting day. It won numerous awards including an Emmy and received considerable critical acclaim (Reuters). The campaign eventually posted it on its official website and a live performance occurred at the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver (*Obama for America*).

Yes We Can screenshot

This video supports our claim that a campaign willing to let go of the control of the frame can inspire a *viral* adoption of a powerful image. A traditional approach to campaigning rests on trying to control content, whereas here the content was created by someone outside the campaign. This production served to support the frame designed by the campaign (it featured the text and picture of the candidate) yet created a layer of authenticity because it was produced by a recognizable hip-hop artist. As McLuhan would have been sure to point out, it was not just the message that was absorbed but the medium.

Fairey's *Hope* Posters

Another example of the Obama campaign's nimbleness in relation to frame building is evident in the choice of the designer for its official campaign poster - Shepard Fairey. He

comes from American street art sub-culture and describes his work as "made in anger". He claims to have been arrested thirteen times for public mischief and defacing public property in the pursuit of his art (*Modern Painters*, 2008, pp. 69-73). His previous "Obey" street art posters challenged viewers to be critical of democratic ideology and capitalism. But his association with the Obama campaign had a reciprocal effect - the sub-culture embraced the frame, and he produced the *Progress*, and *Hope* posters followed by the Obama administration's official inauguration poster.

Joshuah Bearman reports in *Modern Painters* that the Obama campaign commissioned 50,000 posters, raising $350,000 for the effort and "other artist followed suit, creating limited editions under the banner of Artist for Obama (Modern Painters, 2008, p. 70). Like the *Yes We Can* video, this poster went *viral* – users of social utilities like *Facebook* and *MySpace* posted it in their profiles, and altered it to suit their taste. In essence, through the contract with the Obama campaign, Fairey created the charged image and others came in to alter the image beyond the control of either the original artist or the campaign. This reinforces the contention that an artist cannot control the frame any more than the political spinner. The Obama campaign, either by design or intuition, did not resist this. Even Obama himself admitted in a *Time* interview in June, 2008 that he did not anticipate the role of the Internet as a tool for reaching supporters - this "was probably one of the biggest surprises of the campaign, just how powerfully our message merged with the social networking and the power of the Internet" (*Time*, 2009, p. 68).

Conclusion

We are not making the claim that the poster art of Shepard Fairey or the *Yes We Can* music video were alone responsible for the election of President Obama. Yet, these images helped to frame narratives that began to build a world. Obama and his team understood the lessons from Lakoff. It will be interesting to see if he and his administration can maintain the coherence of its own frames, and maintain the rhetorical power to extend the political world he bids us enter.

It is common practice for political campaigns to employ a communications team to ensure that ideas are sold effectively and consistently in relation to an overarching value - these players are the engineers of spin. But communication without expression persuades few. Politics is more of an art than a science - it is visceral not merely intellectual. It requires that we understand language as a complex textile woven from passion and reason, feeling and argument, fiction and fact, metaphor and premise. We must recognise the roots of political science in the humanities as much as in the social sciences.

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