

THE DAY BEFORE ELECTION DAY

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ABSTRACT: *After beginning with a brief review of traditional approaches to studying official politics, this article then turns to an analytical reconstruction of the day before Election Day on the “Johnson for Congress Campaign.”¹ It uses an extended first-person narrative format to break with the top-down, disembodied and disembodied tendencies of extant social scientific research on politics and brings into relief the look, sound, and feel of politics-in-action. Specifically, this account highlights the lived experience of politics, including the politico’s categories of thought, the living suffering body of the politico, and the distinct temporality of politics. It concludes with a brief consideration of the passion of politicians – their unique ways of inhabiting, relating to, being in, and looking at the world.*

KEYWORDS: Political Ethnography, Theories of Practice, Political Passion

What little evidence we have of the lived realities of political life comes to us not from rigorous on-the-ground ethnographic observation and analysis, but from popular portrayals and (pre)conceptions of politics bandied about in mainstream media and popular culture. Rather than palpating and probing the lived realities of official politics, both sociology and political science have chosen to operate at a good distance removed from the nitty-gritty reality of political life.

Undoubtedly, one can hardly say of sociology that it shies away from political discussions. It is hardly a discipline where there is any shortage of scholarly exchanges employing the term “politics,²” research identifying new factors influencing political

¹ Names, locations, and other pertinent details have been changed in order to ensure anonymity of people and place. To further ensure the anonymity of people and place, this account of the day before Election Day on the Johnson for Congress campaign is an analytic reconstruction that draws on anecdotes from in-depth interviews and works of political non-fiction and weaves them together into a first-person narrative format.

² The omnipresence in sociology of the phrase “the politics of...” can hardly be understated. To name just a few examples: the “the sexual politics of difference” (Meeks 2001), “the politics of truth” (Brown and Malone 2004), “the politics of Therapeutic Cancer Diets” (Hess 2002), “the politics of production” (Collom 2001), and “the politics of the ‘Forbes’ 400 Richest Americans (Burris 2000), to name just a few. The point here is not to question the

participation (for a review see Alford and Frieland 1975) or political outcomes (for example Giugni, McAdam, Tilly 1999), or studies examining the factors that affect political engagement in civil society (Almond and Verba 1963, Bellah 1985). All of which is not to mention the scholarly debates that erupt from time to time over the relative chances for success among different political strategies (for example Gamson 1975) or the roll sociologists should play (or not) in on-going political struggles (Clawson et al 2007, Burawoy 2005). Notwithstanding these political tendencies, sociology has, with only a few exceptions, examined the world of ‘official’ politics.³ Thus, while undoubtedly political, sociology has not been a discipline that has focused a great deal of attention on the actual *practice* of politics itself, including the routines and rituals of professional politics and what it looks like, feels like, and means to those for whom it is their vocation⁴.

In contrast with sociology, political science has devoted significant attention to official politics, but here too, there is a significant disciplinary lacuna in how politics has been studied. For political science, to risk an overly crude generalization, the study of official politics has most often meant an analysis of *who* the political elites are who enter politics,⁵ what *psychological*

political importance of any such studies, it is merely to highlight the notable absence of a properly sociology study of official politics itself not to mention the politics of official politics.

³ Undoubtedly there are exceptions to this observation, including most notably the figures of Seymour Lipset and Sidney Verba within contemporary American sociology. Robert Michels and his seminal work *Political Parties* (1962), along with Gaetano Mosca (1939), Wilfredo Pareto (1935), and other elite scholars also stand out for their important contributions to the study of political elites, as do C. Wright Mills and his analysis of “The Political Directorate” ([1956] 2000) and Weber’s work on German politics³ and of course his trenchant “Politics as a Vocation” ([1946] 1956). The other field within sociology that could be said to study official politics is the school of political sociology represented by Theda Skocpol (1979) for which the study of politics is the study of the modern bureaucratic state and its changing forms, policies, and institutional structures.

⁴ This same point holds even in those instances, previously mentioned, when sociology has examined official politics – the object of analysis is not the actual *practice* of politics itself – and certainly not on what it looks like, feels like, sounds like and means to those who practice politics. Skocpol has been rather explicit in arguing that political sociology *should forego* such an analysis, arguing that political sociologists should “rise above” the “viewpoints of the participants” in political life (1979, 18).

⁵ The classic examples of such scholarship include *Political Life: Why and How people Get Involved in Politics* (Lane (1959), *Political Man* (Lipset 1960), and *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics* (Milbrath 1965).

dispositions define them (Shamir 1991, Sullivan et. al 1993, and Winter 1987), the *choices* they make,⁶ and what *variables* affect those decisions⁷.

What is lost as a result of such approaches, however, is any consideration of the specifically *political* nature of politics itself. Rather than analyzing the logics unique to politics – the particular modes of thought and ways of being that set it apart as a world all its own – the tendency present in much social scientific research is to treat politics and political action as though they are derivative of other baser logics. Thus, political scientists often assume that models of economic calculability can be transferred unproblematically from the study of markets to the study of politics, or as is often done, the irrational rationality of game theory is used to represent the *nomos* of political life. A similar reductionism is present in approaches that treat the logic of politics as nothing other than the simple logic of power⁸ – thus, turning all political action into teleology – and in those approaches which relate the logic of political life to nothing other than the logic of interacting variables and statistical modeling.

Current understandings of official politics within social science, then, are largely based on an “externalistic, top-down, individualistic perspective,” which “imputes a host of individual motivations⁹” to politicians and politicians in general, but seldom examines politics from the inside, as it were, not only from the perspective of politicians themselves but also from the point

⁶ Early works that helped set the stage for the later dominance of rational choice theory within political science include Arrow [1951] 1963, Black 1958, and Buchanan and Tullock 1962. For a more recent statement on the role of rational choice in political science, see Riker 1990.

⁷ Gary King is at the forefront of efforts within political science to develop and apply statistical methods (relevant) to the study of political processes. See for example King (1989). Fenno’s (1989, 1990, 1996) qualitative research on politicians stands as the exception to the trend of increasing mathematization of political science.

⁸ Lasswell’s (1936) pithy formulation that politics is a battle over “who gets what, when, and how” and his encyclopedic efforts to document how politics offers power seekers the opportunity to compensate for deficiencies of self are representative of the commonly held assumption among social scientists that to study politics is ultimately to study the pursuit of and maximization of power.

⁹ Here I intentionally borrow Wacquant’s (1995) words to draw attention to the fact that popular (mis)conceptions regarding the purported motivations of a specific social group are often the primary obstacles hindering sociological knowledge of that group: in his case boxing, in this case professional politics.

of view of rank and file politicians¹⁰. To twist Marx, political science and political sociology both share a tendency to “abstract from the historical process,” and to define political sentiment “by itself, and to presuppose an abstract – isolated – human individual” (1998: 570) as the agent of political life, without considering how political agents are socially produced through exposure to and immersion in the world of politics. The underlying assumption behind such research is that politicians are inculcated with the categories, capacities, and/or desires for political life prior to their involvement in politics, and as a result, the actual ‘stuff’ of politics, the ins and outs of political life can be bracketed off from analysis. Any consideration of what the ‘it’ of political life is¹¹, what the meanings and experiences are that constitute that ‘it,’ and how that ‘it’ is produced in and through the daily routines, rituals, and struggles of politics is ignored. Cast aside is any consideration of the “moral and sensual attractions” (Katz 1988) of practicing politics, the ‘taste and ache’ (Wacquant 2004: vii - xii) that is unique to political life, and how these in turn affect the actual practice of politics.

This lacuna in social scientific research on politics exists even though many folk sociologies of political life, in the form of works of political non-fiction, hint at the fact that for those who are “in the arena,” to borrow the words of Theodore Roosevelt, the act of practicing politics is hardly defined by the rules that one follows, the simple act of holding power, the choices that one makes, nor the policy outcomes one pursues. *A contrario*, according to many of the accounts in political non-fiction, much of what is meaningful in practicing politics is a product of the game itself, the comings and goings, the daily interactions and routines. As one former Republican operative described the basic logic of political life: “Be good, be bad, but don’t be indifferent – that [is] the framework. Be competitive, be in the sport” (Raymond 2008: 18).

Moreover, works of political non-fiction are quite often telling for the metaphors politicians use to describe their experiences of and relationships with politics. Take for example, the following description

¹¹ The notable exception to this rule is the work of Comaroff (1978) and Comaroff and Roberts (1981) who skillfully dissect the political culture in a Tswana chiefdom and argue that its inherent logic lies not in the ascriptive rules that are often said to determine political outcomes but in the dialectical relationship between ascription *and* achievement.

from Dick Morris¹², a well-known political consultant who has advised countless candidates, both Democratic and Republican, ranging from local level candidates to Gubernatorial, Congressional, Senatorial and even Presidential candidates, of what it felt like to receive a call from President Bill Clinton in September 1994:

“In the past two years, I’d spoken with Hillary Rodham Clinton frequently and with the president six or seven times as I presumed on our relationship of nearly seventeen years to offer advice, more often disregarded than followed. I still felt the electric jolt, the wonderful high, the temporary sense of being summoned to a cloud above when one of them returned my call – a few days later – on my pager. But [this time], I hadn’t called them. *They* were calling me. The high went higher... The *president*. What did he want? Get ready, I coached myself. He hasn’t called you in the year since his election [in 1992]. Brace yourself. Remember how smart he is and how strong he comes on. Get up, get up, *get up!* You’ve got to meet him straight on. Don’t let him ride over you. The people in the storefront faded. My body was there, but my mind walked on a high plain somewhere else, somewhere I longed to be. For one phone call, I was going to be there. A fix, rushing, warming, stimulating, enticing, addicting...” (Morris 1999: 3-4).

If, Morris’ description of one of the *highs* of his political life is revealing, then so too is how an unnamed aide to then Governor Reagan described one of his *lows* in the Governor’s office. For this aide, the experience of waiting, expectantly, to learn if journalists would discover (and report) that the Governor had dismissed a group of aides who had been implicated in a sexual-scandal, was, to mimic his own words, heart wrenching:

“It was a heart transplant where one wasn’t replaced and where the operation was performed with a dull knife... The trauma was so severe that the patient – the governor’s office – went into a state of shock for four months. And the governor cut himself off from a lot of things that he shouldn’t. The governorship went into receivership” (Cannon 1982: 134).

If “[m]etaphor reveals, not the ‘thisness of a that’ but rather that ‘this *is* that’” (Jackson 1989: 142), then these metaphors offer a window into the sensual and embodied character of political life and testify to the fact that what is meaningful to politicians is not simply a product of the symbology of politics or some abstract commitment to maximizing power, but their very engagements with that world – engagements that can produce transcendent highs and heart wrenching lows. Yet, these are the engagements that are most frequently ignored by existing social scientific scholarship.

While these folk sociologies of political life help to underscore the lacuna in existing scholarship, what they do not answer, and the question that is left for ethnographers to take up, is *how* these meanings *make sense* for politicians as part of their “ongoing practical accomplishments” (Garfinkel [1967] 1984: 4).

¹² He is perhaps most well known for his on-and-off-again relationship with President and Hillary Rodham Clinton, beginning in 1978 when Clinton ran for Governor of Arkansas for the first time and ending in 1996 when he resigned from Clinton’s re-election campaign after the revelation of his ongoing relationship with a prostitute.

Yes, these embodied sensitivities have meaning for politicians, but they have meaning because they are indeed embedded within an existing cultural fabric with its own logic and social necessities.

What is needed, then, in order to break with this ahistorical and often rather asociological perspective to understanding and explaining politics, and what the following synthetic reconstruction of the day before Election Day on the Johnson for Congress campaign attempts to do, is to descend from the heights of abstract political thought to dissect empirically the everyday nature of politics¹³. In contrast to the predominant theory of political action which views political practice as being shaped by underlying individual dispositions (i.e. a psychological predisposition for seeking power), it shows, *in situ*, how political practice is shaped by the collective rituals of everyday political life. And in contrast with a prefabricated problematique that treats the logic of politics as nothing other than the logic of power and brackets off everything else from analysis, this account encompasses the “total social fact” of politics and includes not just the actions of politicians but also the aides, advisors and staffers that constitute a campaign staff. Rather than focusing on the purportedly momentous decisions of politicians which are said to shape the course of history, it focuses on the more mundane routines that are the nuts and bolts of everyday life in politics – the strategy sessions, the phone calls to colleagues, interactions with constituents, press appearances, fundraisers, etc.

It does so, because it is only once the specific social relations, interactions, experiences, and meanings that constitute the world of politics are dissected that one can arrive at a properly sociological explanation of *why* politicians practice politics and *what* politics really means for those for whom it is their vocation. Yes, there is indeed an objective logic to political practice,

¹³ This is not to suggest that what is required in order to understand why politicians practice politics is an entirely internalistic analysis of politics. But in order to identify what categories, capacities, and desires do *predispose* one for a life in politics, one cannot exclude from analysis the ins and outs and the very logic of the game of politics itself.

but just as important to understanding and explaining the logic of that practice, are the representations and understandings that political agents have of their own actions, which are developed in and through their collective engagement with that world – through the ins and outs of their daily lives. And just as important as the ‘choices’ that political agents make is the intentionality inherent in their lived experience(s) of politics that brings certain choices into relief, making them logical, even necessary, and casting others aside without ever necessarily having been posited as such.

This “tale from the field” is based on over a year’s worth of intensive fieldwork in professional politics, both on a Congressional Campaign and in a Congressional office, over thirty in-depth interviews with politicians from across the spectrum of politics (i.e. Democrats and Republicans, men and women, political veterans and political novices), as well as an extended survey of works of political non-fiction. The fieldwork was carried out with the express goal of gaining, through immersion and “moral and sensual conversion to the cosmos under investigation” (Wacquant 2004: vii), a practical understanding of the world of politics, and the categories, competencies, and desires that define competent political agents¹⁴. Rather than following a more traditional model of fieldwork, according to which ethnographers observe a setting for several hours at a time, followed by a similar period of time where they consign their experiences, observations, queries, etc to field notes, I made the deliberate choice to subject myself as much as possible to the demands, expectations, and requirements of that world, even if that meant sacrificing, at times, the overall quality of my field notes. The fact of the matter, however, was that I had little choice. Try as I might, even just one month into the campaign, the

¹⁴ As evidence of the fact that I managed, to a large degree, to successfully become a politico, it is worth noting two facts: following our successful campaign against then Congressman Kraemer, Johnson asked me to serve on his Congressional staff in Washington DC, and, second, after I left the Johnson office to return to my PhD studies, both the Congressman’s office and several of my contacts from the campaign asked me to return to politics to work with them.

fatigue caused by 13, 14, 15, 16 hour days, with little or no sleep, was such that I would often return home, open my laptop, and succeed in entering a paragraph or two at most before falling into the deepest of sleeps, only to wake up the next morning with the lights still on and my laptop still in my lap.

As a result, I was forced to quickly adopt new strategies, strategies that, although not ideal in every ethnographic setting, worked quite well for me considering the uniqueness of the world I was immersed in. Whenever possible, I wrote down periodic observations on my ever present notebook, something that was not at all out of the ordinary, given that virtually all aides on the Johnson campaign carried some sort of note taking device with them (some used laptops, some used notebooks, others who were less organized, used scrap paper) in order to keep track of the interminable number of tasks we encountered on a daily basis. On other occasions, I was able to use a digital recorder, whether it was at a press event, in order to have a precise record of what Johnson said in case we were ever questioned by the media about his comments later on, or whether it was to have a precise record of what Johnson or an outside media advisor might want included in a press release or campaign memorandum. With these recordings, I could then go back at a later time and reconstruct a specific day or a specific event of interest. But by far the most effective technique was using the 15 to 25 minute drive home from campaign headquarters as an opportunity to speak off the cuff, with my recorder running, and to reflect on the day's events, as though it was recording an audio field-note.

What follows, then, is an analytic reconstruction of campaign life, which draws upon my own fieldwork, in-depth interviews, as well as anecdotes from works of political non-fiction and weaves them together into a first-person narrative format¹⁵ to create a quasi-ideal type of the

¹⁵ As such, it is not a rich description of one day on the Johnson campaign, but a reconstruction drawing on multiple anecdotes and examples from various sources.

lived-experience of official politics. Rather than debating how politics *should* be carried out, and rather than using mathematical or economic models *to predict* political outcomes, it seeks to document and describe the world of politics *as it is actually practiced*, and it highlights as it were, from the inside looking out, the various elements that together constitute, shape, and provide the texture, feel, and meaning that is the lived experience of political life¹⁶.

THE DAY BEFORE ELECTION DAY

That day in November began for me as so many other days had on the campaign – with the vibration of my cell-phone, sitting on the nightstand next to my bed, rousing me from the deepest of sleeps. The viewer pane on the phone indicated what my body already knew too well: “Alarm, Alarm, Alarm.” It was time to get up, after another night, like so many others during the campaign, when I had immediately fallen into the deepest of sleeps – a sleep that, my disgruntled body was loudly telling me, was nary long enough to satiate it after months of serious deprivation. That night my sleep was broken only with the omnipresent worries of the campaign parading as dreams: what possible last-minute surprises might come from the Kramer campaign? Would Johnson be visible enough in the final day before the election? Could we manage to pull off our election night gathering of volunteers and supporters without any snags, despite the fact that it felt like we were stretched so thin in the run-up to the election?

Seven months prior, before I joined the Bill Johnson for Congress campaign, four to five hours of sleep would have seemed woefully inadequate most mornings, but it now seemed almost ‘normal,’ coming as it did after months of other nights with similar amounts of sleep.

¹⁶ While there is no one singular experience to politics, no singular political point-of-view, in a world defined as much by opposition and differentiation as singularity and conformity, there is similarity among these differences, even say, between running for office and holding office, so that it is possible to offer an analytically (re)constructed ideal type of the political point-of-view.

During those months, my body came to appreciate six hours of sleep as a lifetime of sleep, and while nights with two to three hours of sleep might send me into a temporary zombie-like trance, the speed of the day's events would inevitably quickly snap me back into full consciousness. Now that such fitfully small amounts of sleep had become 'normal' for me over the course of the campaign, I no longer questioned whether I could function on such little sleep. Such questions had long since proved fruitless. I could keep it up, or at least I kept *telling* myself that I could keep it up, at least for the duration of the campaign: "just another five months," "just another four months," "just three more months," 'we're really in the home stretch now – gotta keep going.'" After all, *I* was tough enough to persevere. I wasn't a "pansy," the word of choice in the lexicon of Johnson staffers, reserved for whomever might complain too vigorously about a lack of sleep.

But in those few occasions when I snuck away from the campaign, I was quickly reminded of just how tired I really was. No longer subject to the constraints and demands of the campaign, I quickly learned the full extent of my fatigue. In one such instance, I had returned home to Washington DC for a weekend to reclaim warmer clothes and other items needed for the final months of the campaign. I had agreed to go out to dinner with friends that Saturday night, but before we could even leave their home, I unexpectedly, and in mid-conversation, nodded off to sleep on their couch. Thankfully they both knew me well enough to not take offense at, what in other settings, could easily have been perceived as a rather significant social slight. Both would comment to me: "Damn, Matt, you have to get more sleep!"

Tired as my body might have been, getting up was a rather simple exercise that morning. I *had* to be at headquarters on time. I had worked *too hard*, as had so many others on the campaign, to let down everyone else and myself *now*. There were no ifs, ands, or buts about it,

that is, as long as I did not slow down long enough to allow lingering doubts (and fatigue) to creep back in. It was a certain tunnel vision – a unity of purpose – that got me out of bed that morning, as much as I craved just a couple more – just a couple more minutes of sleep. People were depending on me, counting on me to be there, yes Johnson himself, but also everyone else who had fought so hard on that campaign: LaVon, Rebecca, Chris, Ben, Michelle, Jenn, David, Ross, and so many others.

So, after the quickest of showers, the quickest of shaves, and after quickly throwing on some of my last remaining clothes that were both clean enough and non-wrinkled enough to wear, I was out the door. Coffee and food? No time. I'd get them both once I was at headquarters... if there was time. If not, I'd have someone get them for me.

I checked out the local NPR station. It had nothing of great interest to listen to – just the usual “election countdown” coverage. Experts were said to be expecting greater than normal turnout, etc, etc. A quick check of the other major news station in Kerrville did not turn up anything of great interest either. It, too, was reporting the usual campaign narrative: voters were dissatisfied with the direction of both the country and the state, and they were projected to turn out in greater numbers than they had in non-presidential election years. Those were all things we had heard before from the media and all things we were counting on as a campaign in order to be successful.

I pulled up outside Ross' apartment, and called him on my cell phone. “Hey, I'm here.”

“Alright, give me just a second, and I'll be down.”

Ross, an up-and-comer in Democratic circles, was a natural at politics. He had a great political sense, a great ability to sense an opponent's weaknesses, and (what's more) the know-how to not only pinpoint such weaknesses but also the tactical skills to quickly gauge how to

most effectively expose them. Not to mention the fact that he had the presence and confidence to carry him through the ups and downs that were inevitably a part of political life. A latecomer to the Johnson campaign, Ross had joined the campaign with less than three months before the election. He had previously worked on the re-election campaign of the state's Democratic Senator, Mark Gray, and he now worked in Washington DC as one of the aides for the Representative from Kerrville, Patrick Alexander. When Ross told his boss he was interested in getting more campaign experience, Alexander agreed to 'loan' Ross to the Johnson campaign, as a way of supporting Johnson's Congressional bid.

As promised, Ross was downstairs before long, and we were on our way to headquarters. The rest of the drive went as so many others had for us during our time together on the campaign. Using his Blackberry, which was for him, as it was for me, and for so many other politicians, a fifth appendage, fitting Heidegger's notion of a tool that is "ready-to-hand" perfectly, he glanced through the news stories covering the race. "Did you see the Dodd story?" he might ask, referring to Spencer Dodd, the main political reporter for *The Herald*, the largest paper in the state. Alternatively, he might query me on what I thought about the quotes coming out of the Kramer campaign. "Damn, they sure sound desperate, don't they?" or "Kramer's really being effective with his 'man of the people' rhetoric isn't he?" Thankfully traffic was light that morning, and before long I was pulling into the Johnson for Congress headquarters parking lot, which despite the early hour was nearly full with the cars of the field operatives and volunteers who were putting in extra long hours readying the campaign's get-out-the-vote operations.

I reached into the back seat of the car, grabbed my laptop bag, shut the door, slung the bag over my shoulder, took a deep breath, and silently reminded myself as I had so many other mornings on the campaign that: "it was go time." As Ross and I strode through the creaky back

door of headquarters, my stomach tightened, adding yet another knot to those that had been there since I had awoken, and to those that had plagued me throughout the campaign. What surprises would today bring? Would we be ready for them? Surely, we would, right? We had already gone through so much as a campaign.

Serving as a palliative for the knots in my stomach was the electricity that was already in the air at Johnson headquarters that morning, an electricity made palpable not only by the fact that the election was just a day away, but also by the fact that headquarters, even at that early hour, was already bursting with energy. The former real estate office, which had been home to the campaign since its early days, had become uncomfortably cramped in those last days and weeks before Election Day, as the number of volunteers who came through its doors grew exponentially. Whether it was students, housewives, stay-at-home-dads, retirees, or full-time employees who stopped by during their lunch breaks or after work to volunteer, there were plenty of new faces around headquarters. Adding to the sea of new faces were politicians – both aspiring young politicians and older more veteran politicians – who had either taken temporary leave from their full-time jobs or who had used vacation time to volunteer for the campaign. Their presence elicited both resentment and a pride of place among those of us who considered ourselves to be veterans of the campaign. That morning as we were settling into our desks, Chris, the campaign’s Communications Director, Ross, and myself all debated the possible motivations that might have led the politicians to join the campaign in its final weeks. “Isn’t it funny?” I asked, “They want to come volunteer *now* that *we’ve* already done all the hard work!”

“It’s the bandwagon thing,” proffered Chris. “They probably just want to be able to say that they worked on the campaign so that they have a better chance of getting a job with him when we win.”

“Ah hell, they just recognize what a good campaign we’ve run, and they just want to be part of it,” observed Ross, with a slight grin showing on one side of his mouth, mixing equal parts sarcasm and sincerity.

With the greater number of people, came a greater cacophony of voices – a densely textured and staccato clamor that reached every corner of headquarters. Some volunteers could be heard phone banking or calling potential voters. Others were charged with answering incoming calls, adding to the existing chorus of voices as they repeated the pithy refrain, “Johnson for Congress, may I help you?” Still others conversed while hurriedly bundling campaign literature. And of course, all such activities were done in greater numbers – and greater volume than what had been done in just the previous weeks – or even days.

“Hi, this is Maggie, and I’m a volunteer calling from the Johnson for Congress campaign,”

“Johnson for Congress, how may I help you?”

“Does anyone know where can I get more palm cards for bundling?”

“... with the Johnson for Congress campaign, and I was just calling to remind you to vote, tomorrow...”

“... to vote tomorrow...”

“Yes? You want to speak to the campaign manager? Well let me see if he’s available. What was your name again?”

Directly related to the volume of voices throughout headquarters were the volume levels on each of the television sets throughout headquarters, which were now set at or near their highest levels of the campaign. With multiple TVs all on the same channel, and none of them

perfectly in sink, every news story could be heard not just once, or twice, but sometimes even, three times.

“Next up on CNN...”

“... on CNN...”

“... CNN...”

“What issues will decide this election? Our election experts weigh in...”

“...experts weigh in, coming up after this commercial break.”

Amid the ongoing round of TVs and volunteers... TVs and volunteers... TVs and volunteers, campaign aides could also be heard calling across the different rooms to one another.

“Stephanie, What’s on Bill’s schedule for this afternoon?”

“Mike, the captain over in Ward 8 in Hutchinson wants to know when he can pick up his lit¹⁷. I need to know NOW. Damn! He’s already called me twice. Come on! We need to get this stuff out the door if he’s going to be able to deliver it.”

“Have we confirmed 100 percent where and when Bill’s going to be tomorrow? I’ve already promised his schedule to reporters and TV stations and they’re going to be calling me any minute asking for it.”

Not only did the headquarters make for a virtual symphony of voice and sound but it was also a constant blur of motion – a perpetual motion machine incarnate – with people continually going to and fro: volunteers or supporters walking through the doors to pick up lawn signs, campaign literature, buttons, and bumper stickers; others leaving to go canvass neighborhoods; aides coming and going, quickly heading from one side of headquarters to the other, whether it was to pass a message or ask a question of another aide; while other aides were at a virtual trot as they scurried across the room to share the latest information with the candidate or campaign

¹⁷ Lit, in the vernacular of politics, is short for literature, or campaign literature.

manager. In toto, the look, feel, and sound of the campaign in those days could easily be summarized as ‘collective effervescence.’

Such effervescence carried with it a whole range of consequences for the campaign. For those aides and a candidate who had worked interminable hours throughout the duration of the campaign – in my case, 14 to 16 hour days (and often longer), 7 days a week, for close to 6 months – and had done so under tremendous stress and pressure to perform – this effervescence was a sociological analogue to a shot of adrenaline or the wonder drug of politicians everywhere – caffeine. Indeed, the excitement, energy, and dynamism that could be found in headquarters had a phenomenological immediacy to it such that I never had to question it or actively work to make sense of it in order for it to have meaning for me. This ‘it’ simply was what it was: excitement, energy, reassurance, and so much else, a super-abundance of meaning and sensation, all at the same time. Whatever ‘it’ was, it resonated deep inside me and seemed to answer all questions, spoken or unspoken, conscious or not, that had passed through my mind during the campaign: Why am I here? Is it all worth it? Does any of this really matter? And what was ‘it’s’ answer? A resounding “YES.”

At the same time, the increased number of people at headquarters presented a new challenge for the campaign: how could it continue to ensure that the flow of campaign information was purposively controlled by campaign insiders and not disrupted by outsiders who could use such information against the Johnson campaign. With so many new faces constantly coming and going it became increasingly difficult to determine or even guess which faces in the crowd of volunteers, now continually milling about headquarters, might be friendly and which ones might have more nefarious intentions – so much so that a favorite topic of conversation among many staffers was just that – who the new suspicious individuals were who had to be

watched closely (“Rebecca, what do you know about that new volunteer, the one who was working with Andrew? Where does he come from? Why is he here?”) – who could be trusted (“Margaret’s o.k. right? We can trust her, can’t we?”) – and who could not be trusted (“I don’t know about him – something’s just not right”). Conversations were now carried out with an eye to who might be within earshot, and the question was always asked whether it might be more advisable to carry on the conversations in more private settings such as outside in the parking lot or online using instant messaging where the virtual silence of typed words would provide greater secrecy than words spoken amongst a roomful of anonymous bodies.

On that day in November, however, the surfeit of bodies at campaign headquarters had a rather practical benefit when the call came in from a local television station a little after 10:30 that morning. Chris, the campaign’s Communication’s Director, whose desk was immediately behind mine, took the call.

“Hello this is Chris... Oh, Hi. How are you?... uh-huh. 12 o’clock?... Well I have to check our schedule and talk to a few people here to see exactly where he’s going to be. But I’ll get back to you and let you know.... Yep –that’s great. Will do... thanks...bye.”

As Chris turned 180 degrees in his chair, and began to recount the details of the call to me, I turned to listen. “Alright, so that was Sarah – one of the producers at the ABC affiliate in Kerrville,” he said. “They’re planning on doing a pre-election day round up on their noon news – discussing what each of the campaigns are doing in the final hours before the election – that sort of thing. Anyhow, they want to know where Bill’s going to be so that they can shoot live coverage.”

“What did it say in that advisory we sent out yesterday?” I asked. “Where are we supposed to be right now?”

“Hmm – let’s see.” Chris turned again, this time to face his desk and his computer, so he could pull up the media advisory that we had sent to media outlets in the area the day before, notifying them of Bill’s schedule for the following day. At first glance, media advisories can appear to be nothing more than innocent communiqués from a campaign to the media, straightforwardly announcing a candidate’s and/or a campaign’s activities in order to attract media coverage. However, veterans of politics know that advisories can serve myriad purposes beyond a simple declaration of events to come. Although the traditional form of advisories follows a basic script that coincides with the sacred four w’s of the journalistic canon – who, what, when, where – their content can be crafted with any number of goals in mind: from getting under the skin of an opposing campaign, to shaping media perceptions and its future coverage of a campaign, and deftly creating or reinforcing ‘contrasts’ with other candidates. Our’s was relatively simple: to create the impression that Bill Johnson was traveling throughout the district in the final days before the election – meeting, shaking hands with, and talking to as many voters as possible. The challenge with creating such an impression, and the challenge that we faced in drafting our media advisory, was that, try as we might, we had yet to fully convince Johnson that it was indeed in his best interest to glad-hand across the state, all the while television cameras and reporters documented his comings-and-goings, including potentially awkward encounters with less than friendly voters.

As a staff, we felt that as a challenger campaign, running against an incumbent, we couldn’t be seen as being too passive. Chris had been adamant in this belief, and Johnson had generally agreed with him, although there were moments when a concern to do things ‘the right way’ and ‘to be smart’ caused him to be a bit more cautious. While the polls showed we were comfortably ahead, we were taking nothing for granted, not allowing ourselves to think about

winning – at least not yet – not allowing ourselves to sit back, even though the energy of the Kramer campaign seemed to wane in the closing weeks of the campaign, as poll-numbers continually showed him behind Johnson. Rather than sending out an advisory with exact times and locations, which could come back to haunt us if it turned out that Johnson preferred to play his cards close to his chest and chose not to do any mainstreeting, the one we sent out only included general times and locations: “Mainstreeting. Weston and Kerrville. 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM.” That way, if any news outlet wanted to follow Johnson, they would have to first contact the campaign, and we could control the encounter.

“It says he’s mainstreeting all morning in Weston and Kerrville,” Chris said matter-of-factly.

“Well, he is in Weston now, but we both know how he feels about mainstreeting with cameras around. I doubt he’s going to want the cameras there following him. Damn – it’s so frustrating,” I muttered under my breath. “Why couldn’t he be more comfortable with that? It’s hurt us over and over again – but whatever – it’s not going to change now. Do we just not do it?”

“You know him – he’s going to want to do something,” Chris said. “And this would be an easy media hit for us. It would show that we’re out and about, and going strong up until the very end. We really should do it – but if we’re going to do it, we’ve got to come up with something quickly and get moving now.”

For the next few minutes, Chris and I tossed ideas back and forth about what kind of event we could put together for ABC – an interaction that was similar to countless other instances throughout the campaign when we ‘gamed out’ possible scenarios and determined what the best course of action would be. Chris had joined the campaign in mid-summer after being

recruited by both senior campaign staff and other senior members of the statewide Democratic Party organization. He was by all counts a hard-driver, a trait that endeared him to Johnson, who often commented that what he loved about Chris was the fact that he was “an animal” who “wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

Putting on an event that was ‘media friendly’ was hardly something that was new to the campaign. For the last six months, holding such events had been a staple of the campaign, something we did at least once a week, increasing to two times a week, and later to three or even four or five times a week, and ultimately to even four or five events in a single day. Usually, however, there were several days in which to plan the logistics for such an event – from securing a location, whether it was a borough hall, a gymnasium, a restaurant, a coffee shop, a supporter’s home, or a union hall, to recruiting people to attend the event and settling on a specific message and/or talking points for the candidate. Any or all of these components could prove troublesome if they were not handled properly – and any or all of them could undercut an event’s chances for success. None of which is to mention that the candidate always had veto power over any part of the proposed event. If ever there was an aspect to a proposed event that proved to be problematic, then the planning would have to begin again, but it would begin again with even less time to come up with an agreeable solution than before, which would only ratchet up the pressure and stress further – a perilous cycle proven to induce knots in even the most hardened of stomachs.

What was unique to this situation was the fact that it contained the dynamics present in those other campaign events – but in a much more compressed form that made them even more visible, more pressing, more urgent, given that we had less than an hour to settle on a plan. Among the host of questions that had to be answered within the next 15 minutes or so, in order to

allow ourselves enough time to go to Bill for his approval and to properly implement the plan were: What was the location going to be? Could we reasonably and legally expect to hold a campaign event there? Who would attend? To what extent would it be at a controlled environment where it would be difficult for the opposition to create mischief? What materials or supplies would be needed? What was the general message that the event would convey? Was it reasonable to expect Johnson to be able to assimilate whatever additional knowledge he might need in order to pull the event off? What questions were likely to be asked by those who would attend the event, including the press? To what extent would we be able to control what questions were asked? Would any of those questions pose difficulties for the Johnson and/or would they undercut the intended message of the event?

“So – the bottom line,” I said, “Is this. We know we have to be able to put something together quickly – we know we want there to be a lot of energy – and the ultimate goal is to be able to showcase how much excitement our campaign is generating out there in the community leading up to the election. If nothing else, we could just have them come by campaign headquarters and show Bill talking to supporters here before they go out canvassing? I mean, come on, this place is buzzing, and since we have so little time to put this together, what else is really possible?”

Chris, leaning back in his chair, with his hands behind his head, quickly retorted: “No, no, no – that’s not going to work. Damn it! One – we already said yesterday in our advisory that Bill was going to be out mainstreeting. It’s a little suspicious, if he’s here, the day before Election Day, holed up in headquarters, talking to friendly volunteers, don’t you think? Second – that’s not our goal. We don’t want to show how well Bill does here in headquarters one day before the election. What’s the point of that? Our goal isn’t to show that he’s holed up here in

headquarters. The Johnson campaign is bigger than that. We have to be! We want to show the excitement we're generating *out there!*

Quickly picking up where Chris left off, I said, "Fine. So the question is where can we go out there – where can we go – where we know we'll have a lot of energy – where there'll be a lot of people – where Bill will be comfortable – and where we know we can put together an event in a hurry..."

Before I could continue, Chris, with an obvious note of excitement in his voice, interrupted, and said, "Why don't we have him meet up with volunteers out in the field at a staging area to thank them and to rally the troops before they go out canvassing?"

Then, while practically still in mid-sentence, Chris bolted up out of his chair and darted across headquarters to the 'war room,' where the campaign's field operations were being run.

In a space where there were few dividing walls between offices, and a dearth of rooms whose access could be controlled by lockable doors, the room was a logical choice to serve as the campaign's war room. Its only entrance was off a narrow hallway, which was on the opposite side of headquarters from the two main entrances. Although the room's position did not altogether eliminate the possibility that people unfriendly to the campaign could access the sensitive information, including election targets and fundraising figures, contained in the room, it made it much less likely that an outsider could walk into headquarters and easily stumble upon it.

While the room did have the advantage of security, its low ceilings and lack of ventilation carried with them their own disadvantages – namely, that any time the room had more than a few people in it, it turned into an echo chamber – an echo chamber doubling as a sauna. Thankfully, though, on that day, when I caught up to Chris, it was only him, Ben Orlovsky, the campaign's

field director, and Jim Jordan, the campaign manager, who were in the room. For once, the echoing and the temperature in the room were at bearable levels.

On one of the walls was an oversized map of the state, overlaid with clear plastic, which was in turn colored with dry erase markers to indicate which precincts the campaign was ‘targeting’ with its ‘Get Out the Vote’ or GOTV operations. The whole room was bathed in the yellowish glow of fluorescent lights, which were the only sources of light in the room, since it was an inner room in the building and had no windows. The three aides were standing in what was almost a perfect equilateral triangle: Ben and Jim were arms length apart, facing the door, while Chris was an equal distance from them, with his back to it. As Chris talked, Ben flipped through a binder that contained the field team’s schedule for election week.

“Basically, what we’re looking for is a staging location where there’ll be a good number of people gathered to go door-knocking, canvassing, or lit dropping,” Chris said. “Is there anywhere like that where Bill can show up at around noon?”

“Sorry Chris, but I can’t help you on this one,” Ben said, as he continued to flip through the binder, as though he still hoped to find something that would work. “People are either meeting here at headquarters before going door to door, or in those cases when they are meeting up at staging areas, they aren’t meeting until later today. We just don’t have anything that’ll work right now.”

“Alright, Ben, thanks. We may still may need you to help pull this thing off, but we’ll let you know,” Chris said, as he and I turned to walk out of the room, and quickly headed back to the other side of headquarters. Jim followed Chris and I out of the room. The three of us continued to discuss ideas as we walked, carefully squeezing between the bodies that were in the main room of headquarters. There were now so many people milling about that we had to resort

to a litany that went: “Excuse us! Excuse us! Excuse us!” in order to clear a path for ourselves as we hurried by.

Then, as we continued to debate options, ABC called again to see if we had figured out yet where Bill would be during their broadcast, which only increased the tension further. Chris told them we still hadn’t nailed down exactly where he’d be – but that they shouldn’t worry because we’d know shortly and would get back to them as soon as we did.

“You know, Chris,” Jim said, in his deep baritone voice, “Why don’t we just gather up all the volunteers who are here and stage an impromptu event? There have to be at least 100 people here right now. We could easily pull them away from what they’re doing for 30 minutes or so. Uh, you know, maybe have Bill talk to them, thank them for their efforts, rally the troops that sort of thing. Maybe even have it set-up as though they’re getting ready to go lit-dropping near headquarters.”

Neither Chris nor I were convinced. We exchanged quick glances, as Jim finished describing his scenario, and I could tell Chris was as skeptical of the suggestion, as I was. After, all, what Jim was suggesting, wasn’t all that different from what Chris and I had already thought about, and more importantly, it wasn’t all that different from what we had already rejected. But what if...

“Jim I like your idea, but we all agree we can’t be here at headquarters. What if...”

“Well that’s fine,” Jim interjected, cutting Chris off. “What if we just took all the volunteers, and moved them somewhere? Hell, we could set up an impromptu staging area in that parking lot adjacent to the Oakton strip mall. I mean, that’s just down the street, there’s never anyone there, and we could set it up like *that* was a staging area where people were leaving to go lit-dropping. We could, you know, set a bunch of boxes with lit in them out there, set all of

them on card tables, that sort of thing. We could even give the volunteers clip boards, as though they had the addresses of the homes where they would be dropping the lit, and then Bill could give them a quick pep talk before they headed out into the neighborhood...”

And in that instant, without anything else having to be said, all three of us knew we had a solution to our problem. Moving the volunteers down the street to the strip-mall parking lot would create the impression that Bill was *out* in the community. And with the number of volunteers we had, we could easily create a scene with plenty of energy. As long as we moved quickly to put all the pieces in place, it would be real, ABC would get their footage for the 12 o'clock news, and everyone would be happy.

We all expressed our official agreement that that was indeed what we would do, “Yep, I love it,” “Great idea,” “Let’s do it.” And as soon as we had done so, I sensed, then and there, a small change. I couldn’t tell if something in me had changed or if something in the environment had changed, but in that split second, something *had changed*. It was a small change, a change that was almost imperceptible, and yet, it was a change that was definitely *there*. It was something I recognized only because I had felt it at other moments during the campaign. It was an urgency – an extra urgency – that had been absent in just the previous instant, despite the fact that we had all recognized the importance of making a decision and putting a plan in place, ever since the call had come in. It was a sense that *that moment was* decisive and we would either act decisively or we would fall on our faces, and fail collectively. Contemplation was no longer appropriate, in fact, it was a hindrance. We could seize the moment, or it would seize us. And at that instant, I noticed another small change. This time, however, it was a change in me. It felt as though my posture had changed, as though I was now leaning forward, ever so slightly, reaching

out, not with my hands, but with my entire being, to both seize the moment but also to throw myself into the fatefulness that was pregnant in that moment.

Then, all at once, a flurry of action unfolded. Chris picked up the phone, and speedily dialed Ryan, who was Bill's body man¹⁸, so he could get Bill's OK to move forward as we had planned. "Ryan, give me Bill, I need to speak to him." As Chris was talking, I sprung out of my chair and headed into the front room of headquarters. There, the volunteers were bundling the literature into packets to be dropped off at houses throughout the day. I quickly estimated how many boxes of literature we would want at the strip mall, set them aside, and started to think through what else we might need.

As I was doing so, Jim came up beside me, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "Alright Matt. Tell me exactly what you'll need, and I'll make sure you get it. Do you need people to help you get everything down to the strip mall? What supplies, other than lit, will you need?"

"I think I'm good for now, I'll wait for word from Chris that Bill's given us the green light, and then I'll grab an extra body, six boxes of lit or so, as many clip-boards as I can find, and we'll head down there to get things set-up."

"Hey guys," Chris said as he ran up behind Jim and I. "We're all set. Bill's given us the green light. He loves the idea. I'm going to go call ABC and I'll tell them where we're going to be."

¹⁸ In politics, the body man is the candidate or politician's right-hand man or woman. The body man (the term is inevitably gendered whenever it is used by politicians) is always at the side of the candidate, ready to pull her out of one event and take her to the next one, ready to take the name or number of an individual the candidate may have just met at an event, and who she may want to call-upon later. In short, the body-man is there to serve the every whim of the candidate, all the while keeping the candidate on schedule, and protecting the candidate from unflattering individuals or situations.

While Chris called ABC, Jim and I worked out the remaining logistics. (How many boxes were needed, what time would Jim show up with the volunteers, etc.) Once logistics were settled, I enlisted Sarah, a colleague of Chris' from state politics, who he had recruited to help out on the campaign during its final days, to go with me to the strip-mall. She, like Chris, was a veteran press secretary, who was well versed in the ins and outs of politics. She had willingly jumped in to assist with the completion of any number of tasks on the campaign from pitching stories to media outlets, to writing press releases and advisories and coordinating logistics for the campaign's final GOTV rallies, and I knew she'd be a great help at the strip-mall.

Before long, boxes were being carried outside and loaded into Sarah's car, as were two card tables, and a seemingly infinite number of Johnson for Congress placards and yard signs, with which to frame the site where we'd set up the staging area. I glanced at my watch. It was 11:15. Time was scarce. We figured the ABC news van would be there sometime between 11:30 and 11:45. We had to be set-up before then. Otherwise it would be all too obvious that this was nothing other than an impromptu event.

After a quick five-minute drive, Sarah parked her car, and in another flurry of action, we unloaded it, determined what the best direction would be for the camera to shoot, and set up the staging area accordingly. We were in the farthest corner of the parking lot away from the stores to avoid as much traffic as possible. The staging area – the boxes and the card tables with the clipboards and stacks of literature on them – were set in such a way so that the camera wouldn't shoot into the sun. The final arrangements would be made once Jim arrived with all the volunteers. There was no better backdrop than a crowd of eager, energetic faces, which we knew, and we would position the volunteers to take advantage of that.

In the midst of our hurried preparations, Chris had called to alert us that the ABC news van was in the area. He was right. No sooner had Jim arrived with Rebecca, the head Johnson advance staffer, David, one of our regional field-coordinators, with throngs of volunteers in tow, than the ABC news van pulled up. Rebecca, who had an expert way with volunteers and an expert knack for setting up events, speedily marshaled the volunteers into a shape of a large ‘V.’ Her plan was to have Bill, his wife, and two children in the opening of the ‘V’, facing the camera, with volunteers around them on each side. As Rebecca was organizing the volunteers, Sarah and I handed out Johnson for Congress placards to those who didn’t have them. It had to be clear to the camera that there weren’t random people milling about behind Johnson; they were supporters who were ‘fired up’ and ready to do whatever it took to ensure his victory on election day.

I glanced at my watch again. It was 11:50. ABC would go live just a few minutes after 12:00 Noon. Where was Chris? He was supposed to make sure Bill and his family were here by now. I reached for my phone and started to call him, but by the time it started ringing, the volunteers, led by Rebecca, who had carefully inserted herself among the volunteers, so as not to be seen by the camera, had begun chanting, “John-son, John-son, John-son.” The Johnson chants soon transformed into one loud raucous cheer. I knew what that meant – Johnson was here.

I looked up, and saw Johnson walking over to the crowd of volunteers. He had a huge smile on his face, as did his wife, Elizabeth, who was walking hand-in-hand with him. With their two children, Peter, 12, and Mikala, 6, on either side of them, they were a striking family – it was as though they were taken directly from a Norman Rockwell drawing or some other quintessential piece of Americana. This was something volunteers and reporters alike had mentioned multiple times throughout the campaign and was something we made certain to

capitalize on as much as possible as a campaign (“We have to get you out there with your family as a much as possible”).

While Johnson shook hands with the volunteers, I walked over to Chris and checked in with him, but did so as inconspicuously as possible, so as not to detract from what was already the perfect shot. What did Chris think? Everything look O.K.? What had he told Johnson? This is something Johnson is totally going to hit out of the park, right? As I talked to Chris, I could see Rebecca, out of the corner of my eye, adjusting the volunteers one last time to make sure there was a tight group of them around Johnson when we went live. I could also see Sarah making sure the front row of volunteers all had placards. Johnson turned to face the camera. Everything was in place. We had done our part...

Forty-five minutes later, Sarah and I, after breaking the down the impromptu staging area, returned to headquarters. When we walked back into the press shop, the looks on everyone’s faces said it all: the event had been a resounding success. We had pulled it off. Rebecca’s excitement pervaded her every word. “Oh my god. You guys have to see this,” she said. “It was perfect! It looked amazing!” She queued up the TiVo to exactly the right point, pressed play, and stepped back in order to be able more properly gauge the reactions of Sarah and myself as we watched the news clip...

“We now go to ABC 5’s political reporter, Adam Nokowski, who’s with the Johnson for Congress campaign. Adam what’s happening out there? What’s the mood like? We’re less than 24 hours away from this all-important election.”

“Well Ed, as you can hear behind me...

“John-son! John-son! John-son! ...”

... there is plenty of energy here among Johnson volunteers at this staging area. Bill Johnson is here, himself, and he's giving his campaign's volunteers a quick pep talk before they go door knocking in the neighborhoods of Kerrville, where they will remind people to vote tomorrow and try to spread Johnson's message of change. Excuse, me, Bill, if I can interrupt just for a second... we're just one day away from Election Day. What are you telling your volunteers?"

"Adam, I'm telling them, the same thing that I've been telling the people of this district since I entered this race a year ago: this state needs a new direction and new leadership, leadership that will stand up for the people of this state day in and day out, and who will fight for the issues that matter most to them – health care for all – economic opportunity..."

As I watched, I could feel the smile spreading across my face, until it felt like it encompassed my entire body. Rebecca was right. It looked amazing. The event had been a resounding success.

A THEORY OF SOCIAL PASSION AND THE PASSION OF THE POLITCO

Moving from richly textured accounts of "how" an action occurs to explanations of "why" an action occurs (see Katz's trenchant articles "From How to Why" 2001, 2002) is more than just an ethnographic practice or a trick of the ethnographic trade (Becker 1998). Just as importantly, this trick of the trade carries with it an implied theory of social practice. Following phenomenology, pragmatism, and Bourdieu's genetic structuralism (1990), social practice unfolds not through a specific quantum of structural force or external influence acting upon agents, nor through a specific ideational motivation pushing them into action, but through an

active engagement and inhabiting of both being and world. To put it differently, the motivation for action is developed through a dialectical relationship between habitus and world.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the study of political life, it is all too often assumed that the study of *whats* (institutional processes, statistical regularities, structural forces, ‘rational’ choices) or *whos* (elites defined by specific underlying dispositions or structural locations) necessarily presupposes or leads to explanations of *why* one practices politics. What is needed in order to understand why one practices politics,¹⁹ in contrast with these dominant modes of thought, is to reconstruct the *hows* of political life, from its routines and rituals to the intentionality and lived experience of everyday political life. To put it differently, what is needed is to delineate the specific passion of the politico – not in the sense of some purported state of motivational excitation held by those who practice politics – but passion in the sense of a specific modality of engagement with the world – the politico’s unique ways of inhabiting, relating to, being in, and looking at the world. This passion is at once *how* one gives oneself over to the seduction of politics, and in möbius strip fashion, an answer to why those who practice politics, practice politics.

With this in mind, this reconstruction of the day before Election Day brings into relief the marking, production, and fleetingness of time on a campaign; it highlights the living, suffering, sentient body of the politico; and it discloses the mutual suspicion and cynicism that characterize the self-enclosed nature of the political world. Furthermore, it richly describes many of the rituals of political life that include staying abreast of media coverage; distributing campaign literature; analyzing, rehearsing, and refining ‘message;’ planning, implementing, and carrying out press events and/or rallies; meeting constituents; organizing volunteers; and determining

¹⁹ The question of “why one practices politics” is analytically distinct from the question of “why one enters politics” – a question which is much more difficult for ethnographers to answer, as they are wont to arrive on the scene after politicos have already made the ‘decision’ to enter politics.

which areas, precincts, or voters to target. Finally, it unveils the symbolic strategies and acts of collective impression management that are central to politics – acts that are aimed at cultivating the transcendent self of the politician. Together, these elements help to comprise the unique passion of the politico, a modality of engagement in which the politico is continually reaching out, carving up new possibilities for action, and identifying the fatefulness pregnant in everyday encounters that both puts their being on-the-line but also enables the construction of the transcendent universal self of the politician.

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