

Editorial

Analyzing Communication Strategies

“Communication strategy” seems often to be just another of those over-used ideas favoured by bureaucrats—like “knowledge mobilization” or “moving forward”—that indicate nothing more than the wall-eyed militarism of management speak (see Pullum, 2014). But as the present issue of *CJC* shows through eight studies of communication strategies in very different contexts, a superficial view of the concept is just that: superficial. On the contrary, the authors contributing to the issue, in a sparkling display of the value of academic research, peel back the different layers of the uses and meanings of communication strategies, expose the underlying debates and bodies of literature on which they rest, and foreground the resulting—often willful—constraints upon democracy, the media, and social actors.

The issue leads with **Duncan Koerber’s** timely “Crisis Communication Response and Political Communities: The Unusual Case of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford.” Much has already been said about the redneck and red-faced mayor who has changed the image of Toronto, if not Canada, in ways the usual elites would rather not consider. Koerber, however, moves into that forbidden territory that ruptures many of the Peaceable Kingdom platitudes on which Canadian consensus politics have rested. Instead, he argues for the recognition of the deeply partisan bases of political communities, whose needs and wants overlap and oppose each other. There is accordingly no one model of a communication crisis response; rather, crises should be seen as “discursive breaks” in the discourse of communities. A seemingly rogue character like Ford is not that at all, as long as he retains the support of his community of partisanship. Koerber’s article makes explicit a factor that has long underlain Canadian politics.

Shane Gunster’s “Storylines in the Sands: News, Narrative, and Ideology in the *Calgary Herald*” examines the public discourse on the oil sands as a struggle over legitimization, with the proponents trotting out the familiar arguments about significant economic benefits, domestic energy security, and so on. Gunster notes that with a few exceptions, critical academic scholarship on the oil sands has been “relatively sparse,” but the main thread has been to argue for the normalization of capitalist exploitation of the oil sands and the legitimization of the Alberta government as a petro-state with the obligation to facilitate, coordinate, and subsidize such exploitation. The news media are, of course, a frontline for the discursive contests over the representations of the struggle for legitimization. Gunster’s analysis of the *Calgary Herald’s* coverage from May 2010 to 2011 reveals an attempt to narrativize the oil sands as a public good under attack from radical, foreign opponents. Rather than suppressing or censoring the growing public criticism of the oil sands on health and environmental grounds, Gunster argues that the newspaper not only helped to further insulate the oil industry from

criticism, it also vigorously encouraged the Alberta government to become a more aggressive and muscular petro-state.

Terry Flynn's "Do They Have What It Takes? A Review of the Literature on Knowledge, Competencies, and Skills Necessary for Twenty-First Century Public Relations Practitioners in Canada" delves into the "contested and conflicted" history of public relations in Canada, surely one of the key sites for thinking about communication strategies. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, a field that has been under taught in university Communication Studies, in part because the R & D component of the field was abandoned to American academics over 20 years ago, though this has begun to change in recent years at the teaching level. Research in Canada, however, remains "almost non-existent," Flynn argues. Reviewing the literature on 21st century PR skills and competencies, Flynn generates two ideal-typical lists of skills derived from various studies from 1999 to 2013. ICTs rate top place, unsurprisingly, followed by cultural competence and communication skills, while strategic planning, measurement competence, and crisis management fall significantly further down the list. Flynn's is ultimately a plea for understanding public relations as "a communicative discipline," based on the mastery of communication skills well suited to educational programs.

Ann De Shalit, Robert Heynen, and Emily van der Meulen's "Human Trafficking and Media Myths: Federal Funding, Communication Strategies, and Canadian Anti-Trafficking Programs" is particularly timely on several counts, one being the recent House of Commons hearings on Bill C-36. The discourses over de/re-criminalizing sex work are so complex that one needs a program to keep track of the positions of intervenors. Where labour, migration, and sex work come together, as the authors show, is also an especially murky territory, as discourse is affected by funding strategies, the current political climate, and problematic anti-trafficking policies. The article concentrates on a textual and visual analysis of NGO websites, since NGOs are especially constrained in echoing government communication strategies. The authors call for more scholarly and independent organizations to generate counter-discourses that are critical of dominant narratives and policies.

There is much to be said about how the image of the Canadian military has been transformed by the current government. **Janis L. Goldie's** "Fighting Change: Representing the Canadian Forces in the 2006–2008 Fight Recruitment Campaign" examines a key turning point in the Forces' image in the wake of the Somalia scandal of 1993, as the military attempted to repair its damaged reputation. This took the form of three 60-second commercials released on TV and in movie theatres. The campaign seemed to be a great success earning several awards, and by 2009 the Forces were turning away infantry recruits. But as Goldie shows, the success of the re-branding caught the military in the ironies of its own representations. The idea of the Canadian military as peacekeepers is so ingrained that, despite the first ad's attempt to show the Forces in action in dangerous, fast-paced, international combat situations, by the second and third ads, the representation of the Forces had reverted to what she calls "helpful heroes," focusing not on combat but on helping civilians, at home and abroad. Goldie's findings make it imperative to further consider and analyze the culture of militarization in Canada.

Johannes Wheeldon and **Alex McBrien's** "(Mis)Representing the 2008 Prorogation: Agendas, Frames, and Debates in Canada's Mediocracy" compares survey results five years later on the prorogation crisis, drawing on leading Canadian journalists and commentators, as well as 30 constitutional scholars and former advisers to the Crown. The crisis offers, they argue, an important case study in how the media communicate essential information on parliamentary democracy. The authors argue for several models of agenda-setting by the media: 1) bottom up, in which the media prioritize public concerns to influence the political agenda; 2) top down, in which political elites influence the media's agenda and thus the public's; and 3) mediocracy, wherein the media is the central agenda setting institution, creating pseudo-events that shape cognitions of the real world. Since Canadians are not generally well versed about parliamentary democracy (and that includes journalists), the role of the media in the prorogation crisis was a "farical" one. The media failed on several counts, failing to fact-check claims by the prime minister, and also by prematurely accepting the veracity of dominant frames.

In **Adam Lauder's** "Temporality as Bergsonian Critique in the Advertising and Visual Art of Bertram Brooker," it is Brooker's advertising career and writings in the 1920s and 1930s that takes front place. Some scholars situate Brooker's work as part of a "pre-McLuhan body of media theory." The present article is the first scholarly article to frame Brooker's engagement with the temporal thinking of philosopher Henri Bergson. Brooker urged "fellow admen" to adopt Bergson's ideas on time as part of the modernist values embraced by the advertising profession. Brooker was critical of the behaviourist psychology and statistical techniques fashionable in American advertising. He argues instead for a politics of flow, reflecting Bergson's critique of duration. Lauder claims that Brooker's views of radio as an interactive and synesthetic alternative to print-based forms of advertising influenced Harold Innis' gloss on the latent dialogism of radio.

Rounding out this issue, **Peter Zhang's** "McLuhan and *I Ching*: An Interological Inquiry" explores the under-examined resonances between *I Ching* (*The Book of Changes*) and the work of McLuhan. He shows that McLuhan's "tetrad" (or four laws of media) have precursors in *I Ching*, and argues for the relevance of *I Ching* in the age of digital simulation and cybernetic control; for example, the collapse of the alphabet with the rise of technical images. Zhang's perspective is grounded in the interlogical "zone of proximity" of media ecology.

To conclude, this issue shows the considerable wealth of ideas and insights that lurk within the seemingly banal idea of "communication strategy" and the different, creative ways of analyzing the term.

References

Pullum, Geoffrey. (2014, July 17). The Etiology of Turgid Drivel. [Blog]. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. URL: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/07/17/the-etiology-of-turgid-drivel/> [July 28, 2014].

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