Making (a) Difference: Paperwork and the Political Machine

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Dumfries and Galloway, this article describes how Conservative Party activists put a variety of discursive artefacts to work as they sought to mass produce and distribute leaflets during the 2003 local Government and Scottish Parliament elections. The leaflet, called *In Touch*, rendered explicit the need to demonstrate that a political candidate and political party are connected (*in touch*) with a wider community. This leaflet was therefore designed to invoke a set of connections between person (the candidate), place (the Council Ward/community) and political party (the Conservatives) that might register with even the most disinterested elector. At the same time, the production of these leaflets facilitated the generation of an activist network amongst the party's volunteer base, which exhausted itself by the time Polling Day passed. I argue that addressing logistical and organizational questions – that is, activist methodology – in the production of the *In Touch* leaflet focused the attention of political activists more than the 'issues' on which they intended to campaign, which were 'found' or 'produced' as artefacts or contrivances of activist labour. In addressing such questions, Tory strategists hoped to 'make (a) difference' given that they tended to view previous campaigns to have been executed in an amateur and disorganized fashion. Through the sheer scale of their production and distribution throughout Dumfries and Galloway, it was hoped that the *In Touch* leaflets would produce social as well as electoral effects.

KEYWORDS: activism, difference, documents, electioneering, Scotland/U.K.

Introduction

As an object of anthropological analysis, paperwork has until recently escaped direct scrutiny despite constituting an implicit and sometimes central concern in ethnographies of bureaucracy, organizations and the state (e.g. Herzfeld 1992; Wright 1994; Scott 1998). Over the last decade, U.K. anthropologists have come to apprehend paperwork through a set of bureaucratic practices constitutive of auditing (Strathern 2000) and policy making (Shore and Wright 1997). Paperwork has also attracted explicit anthropological attention in the form of documents, the importance of which is apparent to legal anthropologists and others interested in immigration, passports and the policing of state borders (cf. Kelly 2006; Riles 2006; Yngvesson and Coutin 2006). Paperwork is also central to politics and statecraft; during elections, for example, the secret ballot performs a central function in legitimizing certain kinds of democratic, 'transparent' facts over others (cf. Coles 2004; Bertrand et al. 2007). This article seeks to contribute to the small but growing anthropological literature concerned with

the role of documents and paperwork in elections, in so doing drawing particularly on recent research into so-called 'new' ethnographic objects represented by anthropologists like Hiro Miyazaki (2003), Jeanette Edwards (2000), Annelise Riles (2001, 2006) and Marilyn Strathern (1992, 1995). However, my focus is on a discursive artefact that is almost always overlooked by scholars of British elections, a piece of paper that is central in the making of a political campaign: the leaflet. Political leaflets stuffed through letterboxes during Parliamentary elections nevertheless retain power for party activists at a time when anthropologists and others have increasingly come to foreground the electronic mediation of 'visibility' at the expense of paper.[1]

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the rural southwest of Scotland, I focus on the *In Touch* leaflet that local Conservative Party activists extensively used during their campaign for elections held on Thursday, 1 May 2003, for the Scottish Parliament and Dumfries and Galloway Council. These elections were the first to be held since the Scottish Parliament opened in 1999 following a long campaign for greater political autonomy in Scotland (cf. Paterson 1994; Shore and Wright 1997; McCrone 1998; Bogdanor 1999; Taylor 1999; Hearn 2000; Hutchison 2001). A vital instrument in their campaign's discursive armoury, the *In Touch* leaflet was designed to invoke a set of connections between person (candidate), place (community) and political party (the Conservatives). Rendering these connections so explicitly, senior Tory[2] strategists sought to demonstrate that their local Council candidates remained 'in touch' with a wider community. Following their annihilation at the 1997 General Election, there were many reasons why Scottish Tories were anxious to assert their links to local communities across a Local Authority area containing approximately 150,000 people. Losing every one of the eleven Parliamentary seats they had won in Scotland in 1992 – including the previously 'safe' Dumfries constituency

as well as the neighbouring seat of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale – Conservatives north of the English border were cast to Scotland's geographical and institutional periphery. Local Tories generally believed that the Conservative Party was engaged in a struggle for electoral survival in the 'new' political landscape of post-devolution Scotland. Drawing locally on a much-diminished base of support, senior Party strategists often worked from the assumption that they had endured their own 'crisis' in representation, the material consequences of which entailed losses of financial and other resources, legitimacy and local knowledge. From this perspective, the *In Touch* leaflet could be said to have been designed to 'embed'[3] a moribund Conservative Party in the local communities from which senior Tories believed they had become alienated and from which they hoped to solicit electoral support.

In this article, I argue that the invocation and weaving together of people, place and political party in the making of such leaflets appealed to an aesthetic that, at the very least, could be said to have caught the imaginations of local Tory Party activists (if no one else). Devoting many hours to the writing, publishing, mass production and distribution of such leaflets, local Conservatives increasingly invested their *In Touch* leaflets with political significance as they came to see them as constituting a vital 'cog' in the making and mobilization of a successful political machine. Viewed in this way as both an instrument and a building block of the local Conservative Party campaign – as both an 'object' and 'operation' designed to 'produce social effects' (cf. Strathern 1996: 522) – activists considered this leaflet vital to their wider attempts to 'catch up' and overtake a better-organized Labour Party. As a result, senior Tories were seduced by problems of form, concentrating less on matters of content, issues and 'substance' and more on logistical and organizational questions – that is, activist methodology – in the production of the leaflet. Put simply, key Party strategists tried to address

the electoral challenges before them primarily in terms of overcoming the difficulties of building a political campaign that could be described as 'modern' and 'professional-looking' (cf. Jean-Klein 2002: 47). Furthermore, persuasive force and the ability to convince potential supporters that by voting Conservative one could 'make a difference' was thought to reside in the aesthetic appearance – the 'look' – of such leaflets. The connections between people, place and political Party invoked by the *In Touch* leaflet were therefore put to work externally – to persuade 'local people' to support the Scottish Conservatives – and internally, to build a 'professional-looking' campaign. Through the sheer scale of their production and distribution throughout Dumfries and Galloway, local Conservatives hoped that the *In Touch* leaflets would produce positive electoral and social effects.

Marginalized Elites

The so-called 'wipe-out' of the Scottish Conservatives at the 1997 General Election came after years of decline for which there were several contributing factors impossible to cover in detail here (cf. Seawright 1999). Importantly for my discussion here, many came to equate political progress in Scotland during the late 1990s with the successful campaign for a Scottish Parliament (cf. Hearn 2000) – a campaign to which the Thatcher-Major Conservative Governments had remained stubbornly opposed. As a result, the anti-devolution Scottish Tories came to be associated with a hostile, Anglo-centric Other – a throwback to a Scotland that could be considered politically 'pre-modern' (cf. Fabian 1983) – an association that many Conservatives found discomforting. For instance, one cloudy afternoon in October 2002, I attended a book launch at the Wigtown Book Festival in rural Galloway for the autobiography of the former local Conservative MP, the Rt. Hon Ian Lang. A staunch anti-devolutionist, he had lost his seat

to the Scottish National Party in the 1997 General Election. Reading extracts from his book, the Rt. Hon Lang described the campaign for a Scottish Parliament as 'a catalyst for all political opposition' that particularly 'rankled' when his opponents alleged that he and his colleagues 'did not love or care for Scotland and its historic destiny' – a 'low blow', he said, that he 'always found hurtful' (Lang 2002: 199). With a hint of bitterness, he then read out a lengthy passage describing his attachment to the Scottish countryside before declaring: 'I defer to no man in my love of Scotland – my own, my native land' (Lang 2002: 200).

I have detailed elsewhere the impact the destruction of the Scottish Conservatives had on local Tories in Dumfries and Galloway (Smith 2006, 2008, 2011a). Like the Rt. Hon Ian Lang himself, many Conservatives found it difficult to accept their newly acquired status as marginalized elites in Scotland, where their political and sometimes other forms of capital could no longer be translated into valuable electoral currency. Now unable to assert a political claim to being able to represent, or identify with, Scotland, senior Tory strategists sought to target a local electorate across Dumfries and Galloway. In part, this decision was informed by a desire to reclaim the region as a Conservative stronghold within an anti-Tory nation. Some thought this might be possible given that, along with the Orkney Islands, the region was one of only two Scottish local Authorities not to vote overwhelmingly in favour of a Scottish Parliament in the devolution referendum of 1997.

Furthermore, unable to rely on much support from Scottish Conservative Central Office in Edinburgh, local Tories felt compelled to improvise in their activism (cf. Levine 2004). Indeed, Central Office failed to exert much authority over a political party that had been reduced to fragments after 1997. Local Tory activists were sometimes concerned that Central Office was not in a position to provide them with assistance but, more often, they were relieved that 'national' Tories were unable to 'in-

terfere' with their campaign in Dumfries and Galloway. This left them to borrow ideas from an eclectic range of sources, including the local Labour Party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats and fellow Conservatives in South Ayrshire. In addition, an important assumption informed the production of Tory leaflets and other discursive instruments: local people were not interested in what the local Conservatives had to say. Believing that much of their 'target' audience remained disinterested in political issues, key Conservative strategists placed emphasis on questions of form over expectations of a 'critical' reading (cf. Agger 1989, 2004: 4) from the recipients of their 'literature'. Through the repetition of language and form, the instruments with which local Conservatives fought their campaign were thought to be capable of registering some form of recognition in the minds of disinterested potential voters. As Edwards (2000: 69) might put it, such forms constituted 'visual reminders' capable of triggering 'connections' in the minds of 'readers' who might otherwise just glance at these documents in passing.

Catching Up

Local Tories felt that they were working from a much-diminished base of support with significantly depleted financial and other resources, legitimacy and, with the departure of long-serving MPs and key activists in the immediate aftermath of the 1997 General Election, local knowledge. How did local Conservatives address their own 'crisis' in representation (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988)? At that time, many of the Conservative activists I met despaired that their past campaigns had relied on the ad-hoc skills of the political amateur rather than the strategic planning of the party professional. With further co-ordination and an injection of 'professionalism' into their campaign planning, many believed their chances of winning 'back' the region's two Par-

liamentary constituencies at the 2003 Scottish Parliament elections would be significantly increased. Given that local elections to Dumfries and Galloway Council were being held on the same day as the Scottish Parliament elections, it is perhaps unsurprising that local Conservative strategists viewed their potential success in one election as dependent on their performance in the other. Getting organized for both meant attempting to coordinate their efforts centrally across the region so that local Tories could maximize their chances of 'catching up' (cf. Miyazaki 2004) with what many considered the well-oiled campaigning machine of their principal political opposition: the Dumfries Labour Party.

To this end, key Party strategists formed a Core Campaign Team, which would seek to co-ordinate the Scottish Parliament campaign in the two local constituencies alongside that for the local Council elections in a 'joined up' way.[4] This Core Campaign Team met at 8.30am every Monday morning, from 6 January until Polling Day on 1 May 2003, in the local Conservative Party's Castle Street office in Dumfries; in April, it met twice a week in order to 'keep up' with the increased pace of the campaign. The local Conservative MP for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale chaired the Core Campaign Team, which also included the two Members of the Scottish Parliament running for the Dumfries constituency as well as Galloway and Upper Nithsdale. The Leader of the Conservative Council Group was also part of the Core Campaign Team, as were two Election Agents.[5] Finally, I was invited to attend these meetings, partly in the hope (from the perspective of my ethnographic subjects) that I would 'make a difference' to their campaign by contributing a critical, yet dispassionate perspective to their discussions. I had not expected to receive such an invitation as I was pursuing ethnographic fieldwork as part of PhD research I was carrying out on local politics in post-devolution Scotland. However, I embraced my role as a participant-observer in the Core Campaign

Team,[6] relishing the opportunity to focus on the efforts of the Core Campaign Team and analyze their campaign-in-the-making.[7]

In addition to recruiting candidates, developing media strategies and gathering intelligence on local politics, the Core Campaign Team sought to co-ordinate the mass production and distribution of campaigning materials. It also discussed a wide range of other issues relating to the making of the Party's campaign across the region. These discussions focused on three discursive artefacts that constituted – for organizational purposes – essential components of the campaign. The first of these was a standard agenda, the items of which structured the meeting. The main items on the agenda – 'Candidates and Council Group', 'Media and Message', 'Literature and Leaflets' – were grouped alliteratively and provided members of the Core Campaign Team with 'cues' to remind them about those organizational issues that demanded ongoing discussion at each meeting. Along with two spreadsheets that I describe below, a document like this one was designed for an internal audience of decision-makers and strategists from the Core Campaign Team and was therefore considered confidential. Such discursive artefacts were rarely made available (and certainly never in full) to the Conservative Party membership more generally or a wider public. In this chain of paperwork, however, these (internal) documents anticipated the production of the (external) *In Touch* leaflets, which I discuss later. I will now outline the two spreadsheets senior Tories used to lay out the 'building blocks' with which they would construct a new 'whole' (cf. Strathern 1992): the local Conservative campaign.

Building Momentum

The first of these spreadsheets, entitled 'Dumfries and Galloway Council Campaign – Campaign Plan', was produced during the first couple of weeks of January 2003. Providing a breakdown of what items of 'literature' were to be distributed on which days of the campaign, the Campaign Plan enabled the Core Campaign Team to anticipate when and which discursive objects would be required. As a result, key Tory strategists could project their campaign into the coming weeks and months. Time from Polling Day was marked in a column on the left-hand side of the spreadsheet, numbering 'D –' however many days were left in the campaign. Working to this plan, senior Conservatives could build a sense of prospective momentum (cf. Miyazaki 2003). This was achieved by combining two, contradictory temporal orientations: the first driven by anticipation of the work that had been planned and the second from an anxiety that one is 'running out of time' in which to complete this work. By bringing one temporal orientation to the foreground at the expense of the other – with which it remains otherwise incongruous, the latter therefore requiring relegation to the background – prospective momentum is generated (Miyazaki 2003: 256; cf. Edwards 2000: 248).

These two orientations created a sense of temporal incongruity that I suggest proved productive for senior Party strategists trying to address a theoretical problem with which anthropologists and social scientists are also confronted: 'how to access the now' (Miyazaki 2003: 255). If local Conservatives felt that they had 'fallen behind' the Dumfries Labour Party, then building prospective momentum by imaginatively projecting their campaign into the future became an exercise in trying to 'catch up' to the 'present'. Viewed in this way, temporal incongruity is written into a spreadsheet like the Campaign Plan (Miyazaki 2003: 256), a discursive instrument that Party strategists felt local Tories had embraced belatedly. In addition, the sense that activists were 'running out of time' as they approached Polling Day grew especially acute given the fact that the workload detailed within the Campaign Plan was very demanding. Conservative activ-

ists found 'delivering' on this Plan extremely burdensome but they nevertheless laboured hard to outperform the local Labour Party. After all, the use of spreadsheets to plan a campaign in this way was considered by many Party activists to be 'novel' and 'innovative' compared to the allegedly ad-hoc fashion in which they had previously organized.

The Campaign Plan, then, worked to create a sense of temporal incongruity that enabled Conservative activists to build a sense of prospective momentum to 'catch up' with the local Labour Party. However, another important spreadsheet – entitled 'Council Candidates' – provided them with a means of assessing the progress of their campaign by situating their support base spatially. This spreadsheet became important once key Conservative strategists decided to nominate a Tory candidate in every one of the 47 Council Wards across Dumfries and Galloway, a goal they had never attempted before. However, local Conservatives eventually succeeded in finding a candidate for every Council Ward across Dumfries and Galloway. This meant that the costs of campaigning for both elections could be shared across dozens of candidates as, for example, local and Scottish Parliament candidates 'doubled up' on the same leaflets. This, then, enabled the Core Campaign Team to achieve a kind of economy of scale when it came to financing their campaign by ensuring that costs would be shared across the maximum number of candidates running for both the local Council and the Scottish Parliament.

As a result, discussions of the Core Campaign Team often focused on identifying prospective candidates in particular Wards (under the agenda item 'Candidates and Council Group'). These discussions usually constituted a kind of *para*-ethnography (cf. Marcus 2002) where Party activists were invited to speculate about the political allegiances of leading, local opinion-formers – usually in terms of their family or occupational backgrounds – that they then might attempt to recruit as Council

candidates. Informing these discussions, the spreadsheet would be used to identify those Council Wards that constituted 'gaps' needing to be 'filled' (cf. Riles 2001) with a local Tory candidate. As these gaps were progressively plugged, activists could cast their eyes across this spreadsheet and the Conservative campaign appeared to come in and out of focus 'like a picture with a low resolution' (Coutin 2003: 201). This continued until the picture became bold and clear, with all the gaps filled, just a few days before the close of nominations in April 2003. Taken together, the two spreadsheets described here enabled senior Conservatives to imagine their campaign working as if it was a machine whose parts had started to function, like clockwork across time and space.[8] The discursive instruments and paperwork employed by the Core Campaign Team contributed to a sense that in the act of its very deployment local Tory strategists were building a political machine.

In Touch

Of all the external documents this internal activity was designed to generate, perhaps the most important was a political leaflet called *In Touch.* A vital instrument in their discursive armoury, local Party activists distributed hundreds of thousands of these leaflets in the months before the 2003 Scottish Parliament and local Government elections. The Core Campaign Team took comfort from the idea that several dozen Tory Party activists were each delivering hundreds of *In Touch* leaflets to local households across the region on an almost daily basis during the build-up to Polling Day. Local Council candidates were also involved, often using the leaflet as a prop when canvassing local electors on the doorstep. As one key Party strategist explained to me, candidates 'needed' something to give potential supporters when they visited them at their homes. This statement served to highlight not just

its discursive function but also the material significance of the paper-based artefact, even if Tory strategists worried that local residents would not read the leaflet itself.

Viewed as the main instrument for promoting local candidates in specific communities across the region, there were a number of different versions of this leaflet. Here, I focus on the first, 'introductory' *In Touch* leaflet as it tended to be the version a candidate would seek to distribute the most widely. It also contained biographical and other information that tended to be recycled in subsequent leaflets. The introductory *In Touch* – a glossy, A4-sized leaflet that was professionally produced at a local printing firm – was a particularly useful tool for Tory candidates in small, rural Council Wards composed of approximately 2,500 electors or less. In one example, the successful Conservative candidate for the Moffat Ward, Safa Ash-Kuri, is photographed shaking hands with the Scottish Conservative MSP David Mundell. The lead story on the leaflet is devoted to a local issue considered important to the community, in this case uncertainty surrounding the future of the local school. However, a smaller text box at the bottom of the first page details biographical information about the candidate, including the fact that he lives in Moffat with his wife and is 'looking forward' to the birth of their first grandchild:

> Safa is active in many local organizations including the Wildlife Club, Probus, the Badminton Club, Golf Club and is a member of the Parish Council of St Luke's Church. He is a keen computer user and is campaigning to bring broadband to Moffat.

These brief 'biographical statements' were common to all leaflets distributed in Council Wards where local Tories thought they could win. As potential candidates were progressively identified and then selected, an introductory *In Touch* leaflet was produced and distributed, detailing such information. For instance, the local Tory candidate for Caerlaverock Ward, Chris-

topher Carruthers, was described as 'a retired schoolmaster, having spent most of his career teaching classics':

> However, his passion is cricket, and Chris is currently the President of Scottish Cricket (the governing body of the sport in Scotland) after being Chairman for six years in the 1990s. Christopher is also the Secretary of the Dalton and Carrutherstown Community Council.

Following this summary of Mr Carruthers' interests, his contact details, including residential address and home telephone number, were listed should any potential voter wish to ask him a question. Similarly, personal information and contact details were listed for incumbent Tory Councillors like Andrew Bell-Irving in the Hoddom and Kinmount Ward. '[Attending] community council and other local meetings, holding regular surgeries and dealing with local people's problems personally', Councillor Bell-Irving was described as having 'worked tirelessly for his ward [sic] over [the] past 4 years.' Furthermore:

> Andrew lives at Kettleholm with his wife Fiona and their two daughters. He was born and brought up locally and is a passionate advocate for the area. Andrew is well known as a countryside campaigner and is now a part-time farmer, having been badly affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. He is a country sports enthusiast, particularly enjoying shooting and fishing.

By its very name, the *In Touch* leaflet sought to literally render the connection(s) between a political candidate and the community/constituency s/he aspired to represent. Of course, the desirability in rural communities of making such connections, as well as the presumed uniqueness of such connections to the communities involved, has been well noted in the literature on the anthropology of Britain (cf. Edwards and Strathern 1999: 152, 2000: 248; Smith 2006, 2011a). As an instrument, however, the *In Touch* leaflet was designed to mediate (link) a person with a place (cf. Edwards 2000) – and then, in turn, to connect this with

a political party. For local Conservatives, the need to assert such connections was considered vital as a means of grounding a political party that many had thought had 'lost touch' with those it had formerly represented. Understood in this way, local Tory activists involved in the composition of such leaflets were not so much trying to link up 'the textual formation … with social relations and a larger cultural system' (cf. Hanks 1989: 102, 1996). Rather, they sought to assert the existence of such links with such relations and systems. Precisely because these links remained weak and unstable, such connections had to be invoked literally and materially via paperwork in the absence of such links being otherwise apparent to the 'casual' readers and disinterested voters whose support local Tories solicited. As political outsiders in post-devolution Scotland, senior Tory strategists hoped that through the invocation of such connections these leaflets would help entrench Conservative candidates in local communities to which their claim to belong (cf. Cohen 1982; Lovell 1998) – and therefore their aspiration to represent – might be challenged. Put simply, they hoped that the *In Touch* leaflet would produce social in addition to electoral effects.

Making (a) Difference

Key Tory strategists worked from the assumption that these leaflets functioned as instruments capable of generating effects. Indeed, senior Conservatives acted as if persuasive force and the ability to convince potential supporters that by voting Conservative one could 'make (a) difference' was thought to reside in the aesthetics and the forms of these various leaflets – that is, in their 'look'. Preparing, producing and distributing these discursive artefacts therefore dominated the time, energy and resources of not just the Core Campaign Team but also local Tory activists. Once the leaflets had been written and formatted on the

computer in the Castle Street office, Council candidates, Party office bearers, staff and other volunteers were recruited to help with menial tasks like printing, folding and sorting the leaflets. This, in turn, brought a local (Tory) activist network into view, giving it definition and a sense of mission. One Conservative MSP was particularly encouraged when large numbers of enthusiastic volunteers from the Dumfries Ladies Lunch Club dropped into the office to help with this task. He had initially been unsure whether many Lunch Club members would assist with a campaign to elect Tory candidates to the Scottish Parliament, an institution to which many of them remained opposed. This particular candidate, however, told me that he had been 'genuinely touched' by their support. Such efforts reinforced the sense that the Core Campaign Team were succeeding in their efforts to build a political machine behind which momentum was growing for a strong electoral performance on Polling Day.

If the connections invoked within the *In Touch* leaflet remained fragile and weak, key Tory strategists were constantly reminded how contingent and tenuous their efforts were. Some activists and candidates viewed members of the Core Campaign Team with suspicion and treated the *In Touch* leaflet and other discursive objects with hostility. I witnessed one occasion when two incumbent Councillors from rural Galloway aggressively demanded that their leaflets not identify them as Conservatives given that such a label, in their view, would discourage people from supporting them. When one exasperated Tory MSP tried to explain that identifying the Tory 'brand' with modern, 'professional' leaflets was vital to 'changing the political culture' of Dumfries and Galloway, he was abruptly cut off in mid-sentence and verbally abused by one of the Councillors. These two candidates remained unconvinced throughout the campaign and constantly bickered with senior Tories over the aesthetics and content of their leaflets. They were eventually dismissed as political 'amateurs'.

As the campaign continued, other difficulties arose. For instance, one of the strengths of the *In Touch* leaflet lay in its potential to be crafted for a specific audience, which was usually defined as an individual Council Ward but in some cases could become even smaller communities within particular Tory 'targets'. However, as the Conservative Party eventually nominated a candidate in every one of the region's 47 Wards, the need to make each individual leaflet 'distinctive' to target them effectively to specific local communities became extremely burdensome on local Conservatives and their limited technological resources. Such difficulties manifested themselves in sometimes very dramatic ways. Ten days before Polling Day, a worn-out riso-graph machine broke down in the middle of reproducing tens of thousands of *In Touch* and other leaflets. At the same time, local volunteers, many of whom were quite elderly, were becoming frustrated at the massive amount of paper the Core Campaign Team expected them to hand deliver to local households across the region. Highly vocal in criticizing senior Tories for promoting such a 'waste' of paper, several refused to distribute any more leaflets on the grounds that it was 'bad for the environment'. By the time Polling Day arrived, there was much bitterness amongst Conservative activists who continued to complain about these leaflets for months after the election.

To produce and distribute so many thousands of leaflets demanded that the Core Campaign Team overcome a variety of logistical problems. These problems were primarily addressed as questions of form and management as Tory strategists sought to avoid a 'crisis' that might be precipitated by a logjam of paperwork around any of the 'deadlines' contained within the Campaign Plan. Form became a means of 'tunnelling' vision (cf. Scott 1998: 11) on this occasion, in turn producing a number of effects that key Tory strategists generally considered to be positive. By standardizing one side of the leaflet with a summary of the

Party's local Government manifesto, members of the Core Campaign Team sought to reduce the amount of work involved in producing different versions of *In Touch* leaflets. They also recycled copious amounts of textual material between different leaflets, the exercise becoming one of satisfying 'the aesthetics of logic and language … in which language [is] cut, arranged, or inserted to produce appropriate strings of words' (Riles 1998: 386). The repetition of language across these leaflets often became a question of aesthetic judgement, the patterns for which key Party strategists had to acquire 'an ear and an eye' (Riles 1998: 387, 2001). Some might describe such language as having become 'impoverished' (cf. Bloch 1975: 13) or emptied of representational content but it nevertheless generated 'a solid linguistic regime' (Riles 1998: 392, 2001) that also helped perpetuate a sense of being organized and, as problems were resolved, building momentum. In addition, it bespoke rational resolution. The visual aesthetic of these discursive instruments – including the Conservative Party 'swoosh' headlining the leaflet, the bold colours, subheadings and text boxes – complemented this effect. For the Core Campaign Team, then, the emergence of form as an important concern in the production of *In Touch* leaflets in turn came to function as an organizing, empowering principle for their campaign-in-the-making.

As I wrote up my field notes following the election, I reflected on the seductive power of paperwork, to capture not just the activist but, in my case, the ethnographer's imagination as well. Taking my cues from the people I was studying, I had focused my attention on that which had also captured their imagination: the paper trail that they generated as they built their campaign. As a result, I was drawn into the local Conservative Party campaign. Through my participation, I had become emotionally invested in the fate of my ethnographic subjects, anticipating as they did that these discursive instruments would generate positive electoral and social effects.[9] But

ultimately, these instruments failed to generate the electoral outcomes for which local Conservatives had hoped. Although the Party increased its local representation from nine to eleven Councillors, only one Tory candidate – Alex Fergusson MSP – won the Parliamentary constituency he contested. The other – David Mundell MSP – was defeated, although he was then elected to the Scottish Parliament via Proportional Representation through the South of Scotland Regional List.[10] But although these results fell short of their aspirations, they had achieved an important outcome, as far as the Core Campaign Team was concerned: they had demonstrated that even from the margins of post-devolution Scotland, the Scottish Tories were nonetheless capable of building and deploying a modern, professional campaign.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper (2002) have recently challenged the myth of the paperless office and other similar notions.
2. The term 'Tory' is often used to describe members and supporters of the Conservative Party. To reduce repetition in this article, I have therefore used 'Conservative' and 'Tory' interchangeably. This was a common practice amongst my informants.
3. I draw this metaphor from Ben Agger's discussion (2005) of those CNN reporters who travelled with U.S. troops in the early months of the 2003 Iraq war. It could also be argued that my efforts to entrench myself amongst Conservative Party activists during the 2003 Scottish elections mirrored their efforts to do the same amongst local communities whose electoral support they sought.
4. Of course, notions of 'joined up' working were well articulated by New Labour under former Prime Minister Tony Blair and have been extensively critiqued (cf. Fairclough 2000).
5. An Election Agent is a salaried professional who assists with the administration and management of local Conservative Party Associations and the political campaigns they organize (cf. Fisher et al. 2006). There were two such individuals employed in Dumfries and Galloway at the time of my fieldwork.
6. In doing so, my ethnographic engagement resonates with current work in public anthropology, as recently featured in *Anthropology in Action*

(e.g. Powell 2008; Goode 2009). I particularly endorse Schwegler's argument (2008: 10) that 'working with powerful actors can enhance, rather than inhibit, the possibilities of anthropological data collection', although as I have noted the Scottish Tories could be described as 'elites' that had come to occupy a marginal political space (for more, see Smith 2011a: 18–36). This further unsettles anthropological assumptions about power and the powerful.

7. I borrow this metaphor from Bruno Latour (1987: 2–3) who has observed that scientific inventions are often treated like a 'black box', a complex 'piece of machinery' or 'set of commands' for which only 'input and output count' (1987: 2–3).

8. Some anthropologists have recently reflected on the ways in which anthropological theorizing itself works on an implicit 'as if' logic (e.g. Levine 2004; Miyazaki 2003; Riles 2001). Wedeen (1999, 2003) has also used a notion of the 'as if' in her work on nationalism and statecraft in Yemen while for Navaro-Yashin (2002), acting 'as if' you do not know any better is constitutive of a form of cynicism in her ethnography of the Turkish state.

9. Following the 2010 General Election and subsequent funding cuts introduced by the U.K. Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government to universities and other public services, it seems unlikely to me that I would be able to engage with fieldwork on Conservative Party activists in quite the same way. Ethically, I am uncomfortable with this feeling as I believe social anthropology is richest when we are professionally committed to ethnographically engaging those subjects whom we might consider ideological strangers or even 'obstacles' (as Schwegler 2008 might put it) to our discipline (cf. Smith 2011b). Tory activists form as legitimate a subject of ethnographic inquiry as any of the other communities studied in the long history of the anthropology of Britain.

10. For more on the electoral system and Proportional Representation in Scotland, see Lundberg (2007).

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