

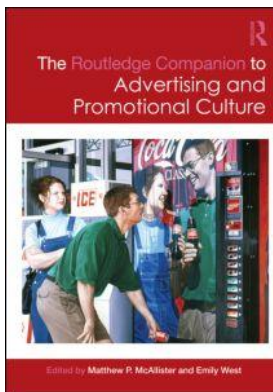
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Section VI

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

THE NEW REFEUDALIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Jamie Warner

[Democrats] want to blame the economy on us, and the reason default is no better an idea today than when Newt Gingrich tried it in 1995 is that it destroys your brand.

(Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell warning his fellow Republicans of the danger of refusing to raise the debt limit, *National Journal*, July 16, 2011)

The ideal of a public sphere, a space in which all citizens can critically, substantively, and rationally debate public policy, has captured the imagination of many scholars interested in communication and democracy. Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) is perhaps the most important statement of this position.¹ While most scholarship critically examines the historical accuracy, theoretical and normative applicability, and limitations of Habermas's conception of the public sphere(s), I would like to focus on a different aspect of his argument. Rather than looking at what Habermas considers to be the pinnacle, the "bourgeois public sphere," and how it did, could, or should function, I would, instead, like to examine the decline or what Habermas calls the "refeudalization of the public sphere" with an eye to how the current situation has changed since Habermas first wrote the book in 1962. Here, Habermas discussed the pincer-like movement in which late modern consumer capitalism attempts to turn us into unthinking mass consumers on one hand, while political actors, interest groups, and the state try to turn us into unthinking mass citizens on the other.

In a new twist on the neoliberal trend, I would like to suggest that the wholesale adoption of marketing techniques by the state and political actors connects the two in a way only glimpsed by Habermas in the early 1960s. Specifically, the rise and entrenchment of a class of specialized political professionals into both the campaign and the governing apparatuses has forced a shift in more than merely campaign tactics; the very logic of governing has changed. Not only is the public sphere still refeudalized by Habermas's definition, but the language, philosophy, and techniques of consumer capitalism have so thoroughly infiltrated the language, philosophy, and techniques of governing that they are practically one and the same.

Habermas's Refeudalization of the Public Sphere, circa 1962

Before we can analyze this *new* refeudalization of the public sphere, it behooves us to take another look at the definition and evolution of Habermas's original concept. Habermas begins his discussion by looking at the feudal notion of "public," a very different notion than what we have today. The feudal public referred to a particular rather than the mass subject, someone—like a king, prince, or lord—who was an embodiment of a higher power, someone who was unique and special. Habermas calls this "representative publicness" or "representative publicity" (1989: 7). "Public" in this sense was in contrast to the "common" people, who were, by default, considered private. The rank of "private" or "common" soldier is a linguistic remnant of this feudal idea. Representation, thus, had none of the democratic connotations that today's definition provides. The king, prince, or lord was, literally, the realm; King Louis XIV's famous declaration "*L'état, c'est moi*" makes sense only within this context (Calhoun 1992: 7). This nobility, with all of its accoutrements, represented the realm to the people, who were nonparticipants, bystanders, and private spectators.

With the advent of early capitalism, however, Habermas argues that the concept of the "public" changed. A civil society between the state and the home developed in the eighteenth century in which a new form of capitalistic economic activity took place. The men of the new middle class, the bourgeoisie, soon found themselves with both the time and the means to frequent public places. According to Habermas, out of this marketplace of early capitalism another marketplace was cleaved: the marketplace of ideas. In the coffeehouses, salons, and reading clubs of Europe, men (and a few women in the French salons) began to develop their "rational-critical" skills by reading early trade-based newspapers, novels, and other reviews of artistic works, forming what Habermas calls a "literary public sphere" where one's status was less important than the quality of one's argument (1989: 36). Eventually, Habermas claims, these argumentative skills turned from literary subjects to the political, and the "bourgeois public sphere" was born, a sphere where private individuals (in this case men of property and education) came together to discuss, argue about, and, most importantly, critique the state. Instead of the feudal public with its representative publicity, the bourgeois public made demands for a more democratic type of representation, a "critical publicity" in Habermas's terms, in which bourgeois men were actively insisting that the state take their views, honed and tested by rational-critical argument, into account.

For Habermas, this is the ideal, and much of the book is spent detailing its rise, its philosophical justification, and its functions. It, however, was not to last long, and Habermas provides a complicated, detailed description of its slow demise. Newspapers and magazines, which also embraced political content as the public sphere itself became more political, were bought up by major corporations throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus their function began to change, moving from the distribution of political ideas to the distributing of advertising with its attending profits. The rational-critical debate that Habermas argued once both fed and fed off these publications waned (1989: 165). On the other hand, the recipients of the demands of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century—the state, political parties, and interest groups—became very adept at manipulating the same sphere in the nineteenth. According to Habermas, the protected space of the bourgeois public sphere disintegrated in the rush to manipulate it for profit on the one hand and political power on the other; subsequently, "public opinion" began to lose both its rational-critical function

and its autonomy. It regressed, morphing back into a type of representative publicity that Habermas terms “the refeudalization of the public sphere” (195).

As the twentieth century progressed, advertising and marketing actually discouraged rational-critical thought through sophisticated opinion manipulation that sought only to create the happy feeling around their products conducive to purchase. From the other direction, the state, political parties, and interest groups also began to “address its citizens like consumers” with the goal of increasing sales/votes (1989: 176). According to Habermas, “Publicity once meant the exposure of political domination before the public use of reason; publicity now adds up the reactions of an uncommitted friendly disposition. . . . The ‘suppliers’ display a showy pomp before customers ready to follow” (195) or, to put it another way, “Critical publicity is supplanted with manipulative publicity” (178). With the refeudalization of the public sphere, “[t]he public sphere becomes the court *before* whose public prestige can be displayed—rather than *in* which public critical debate is carried on” (201). Or, in other words, the public reverts to its passive status, with citizens waiting to choose between the regular version of product/politician and the new and improved version that promises 10 percent more (or, in the current climate in the United States, perhaps 10 percent less).

Habermas ends the book with an attempt to suggest that we might be able somehow to reinvigorate the public sphere by finding ways of democratizing, publicizing, and rationalizing institutions existing within consumer capitalism and the social welfare state (1989: 222–235). As Craig Calhoun argues, however, even Habermas himself didn’t seem to find his own argument very convincing, moving from a socio-historical lens to a more abstract, theoretical, and seemingly more promising lens in his later work.² In what follows, I would like to argue that the refeudalization of the public sphere has gotten even more complex and entrenched in the almost half-century since the original publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Capitalism and politics have now melded together in a troubling, unforeseen way. Specifically, I will claim that three tendencies—the rise of professional political consultants, their movement into the governing apparatus, and the promotion of a “market-oriented” approach—have not only vindicated Habermas’s original pessimism, but moved into a realm that not even he could have predicted.

The New Refeudalization

The first stage of the economy’s domination of social life brought about an evident degradation of *being* into *having*—human fulfillment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed. The present stage . . . is bringing about a general shift from *having* to *appearing*—all “having” must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances.

(Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 17, 1967/1995)

As Habermas noted above, the use of strategic oral, written, and visual rhetoric by those involved in politics is certainly nothing new. In fact, it’s not a stretch to say that there has always been an element of “marketing” involved in politics. Bruce Gronbeck, for example, argues that even in Ancient Greece rhetoric and politics were so interconnected in the minds of rhetoricians that they had a tendency to collapse the two terms into each other (2004: 135–136).

In today’s environment, it is easy to understand why parties and politicians would see

a marketing concept like brand loyalty, for example, as a desirable outcome. Citizens, like consumers, are busy, distracted people, and cultivating trust in the “Republican” or “Democratic” brand would provide the politician or party a solid base of support. As political/corporate consultant Frank Luntz remarked in a follow-up interview for the *Frontline* documentary *The Persuaders*, “The technique is a little bit different because politics and corporations are a little bit different. But in the end you’re still using the same focus groups; you’re still using the same dial technology; you’re still using the same quantitative data” (Luntz 2003). The ultimate goal in political marketing is thus the same as in commercial marketing: to “win” a loyal customer base, one that trusts your brand to do the thinking for them, a stance antithetical to the rational-critical discussion so important for Habermas.

While Habermas presciently anticipated much of our current situation, three inter-related aspects of political marketing go far beyond Habermas’s concerns in the early 1960s: (1) the ubiquity of an army of highly specialized, highly paid, technologically savvy professional political consultants, who are now integral components of every major political campaign; (2) the movement of these consultants from the campaign into the governing apparatus once the campaign is won; and (3) the overt championing of such a complete immersion of the political into the logic of capitalism that all aspects of politics—even ideology, belief systems, and values—become items to be focus group tested, packaged, and sold back to the citizen/consumer.

The Rise of the Consultants

They are permanent; the politicians ephemeral.

(Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign*, 1980)

Because, Habermas argues, the public sphere only exists in its refeudalized form, a semblance of a political public sphere of some sort needs to be manufactured for “period staging when elections come around” (1989: 215) to preserve the “liberal fiction” of public debate and discussion that we need for our own self-image as a democracy. This job had been formerly held by the political parties and what Habermas calls “old style propagandists” during eras of stronger party organization (211); today, however, it has been completely captured by professionals in political consulting. Thus, the attending publicity that surrounds all things political today is far removed from the “critical publicity” that Habermas argued helped question the limits and proper actions of authority during the heyday of the bourgeois public sphere. It is instead generated by professionals for a fee, a “manufactured publicity” created solely to help the person/organization who is paying them to “win” the election or policy debate.

While the refeudalization of the public sphere is described by Habermas as a long, slow process, the colonization of politics by professional political consultants happened much more quickly. Habermas caught the beginning of this in the early 1960s (1989: 181–222), but it has expanded exponentially with the rise of new technologies and areas of specific expertise that only professionals could fill. This new type of consultant first made its way into the political scene during election campaigns, where experts in “selling” a candidate and his or her party are at their most blatant. Michael John Burton and Daniel M. Shea put professional consultants at the contemporary end of the evolution of the modern campaign. The modern campaign, they argue, started with what they call “party-centered campaigns” of the nineteenth through mid-twentieth

centuries in the United States, the door-to-door “retail” politics of volunteers and the party machine and patronage politics. In the mid- to late twentieth century, campaigns slowly morphed into “candidate-centered campaigns” with their attendant mass marketing and personality- rather than party-based politics. The most current category, what they call “consultant-centered campaigns,” is a more recent phenomenon (2010: 18), non-coincidentally coinciding with the growth of television.³ Coupled with the resurgence of political parties reengineered from the boots on the ground/party machine of earlier times to be providers of expertise, services, and, especially, money, consultant-centered campaigns are managed by what Burton and Shea call a “campaign intelligentsia”: hired guns, increasingly separate from the party apparatus, who will both craft and disseminate a candidate’s message for a fee (13). This new intelligentsia is made up of people who often have master’s degrees in political management and marketing and/or specific technical expertise in advertising, marketing, opposition research, fundraising, public relations, the media, direct mail, or polling, thus making itself indispensable to candidates who, by definition, lack such necessary and specialized expertise. As Dan Nimmo foresaw in 1970, “campaigns may no longer be battles between candidates but between titans of the campaign industry, working on behalf of those personalities” (Nimmo, cited in Thurber 2000: 2–3). Since then, consultants have only become more entrenched. They are now so important to contemporary political campaigns that the hiring and firing of high-profile consultants often becomes a news item in itself (Burton and Shea 2010: 14).⁴ And many consultants have become media celebrities in their own right: David Axelrod, Mark Penn, Bob Shrum, Ed Rollins, James Carville, Mary Matalin, Dick Morris, Paul Begala, and perhaps most famous—or infamous, depending on your point of view—Karl Rove.⁵

In a modern campaign, the tools that consultants have at their disposal to manipulate publicity are vast, if, of course, the candidate has the money to pay for them: sophisticated uses of polling and survey research, direct mail, multimillion-dollar campaign commercials, six-second sound bites, complicated donor tracking software, computer-generated robo calls, email campaigns, YouTube channels, opposition research, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and Internet marketing; all of these are used by candidates and elected politicians alike in the never-ending quest to gain and hold office. Indeed, it seems almost inconceivable in this day and age that any serious national candidate or incumbent would not rely on these tactics.⁶

In addition to the well-established use of talking points or sound bites and ads playing on emotion rather than reason, one of the more interesting (and hidden) contemporary techniques that would be worrisome to Habermas revolves around consultants with expertise in social science-based data mining and narrowcasting. Candidates for political office (or, indeed, any organization that wants to “sell” a particular message) can now buy giant amounts of voter data, ranging from congressional districts, telephone numbers, ethnicity, voter history data, party data, GIS data, and census data to very specific types of consumer data most Americans don’t even realize are being collected, such as online activity and buying preferences. Following the exponential growth of CRM (“customer relationship management,” where huge amounts of data are used to design everything from sales to customer support⁷) in business, political consultants have increasingly utilized the exact same formula for campaigns (called “constituent relationship management”), especially since the success of President Obama’s 2008 campaign. The Obama campaign bought much of its new media and data management technology from NGP VAN, which, according to its website, is “the leading technology

provider to progressive campaigns and organizations, offering an integrated platform that combines the best fundraising, compliance, field, organizing, and new media products” (NGP VAN 2011).⁸ Hundreds of companies now sell data and database management software, as well as provide database consultants to campaigns.

What do consultants do with all this data to help them win an election? One newer tactic is called “narrowcasting” or “high-interest, low-backlash” communication, for example sending homeowners with children direct mail with a candidate’s position on the mortgage tax deduction or No Child Left Behind. Renters or those with no children would, of course, receive different messages, tailored just for them, or at least for the particular demographic slice that the consultant determines that they are most likely to fit (Friedenberg 1997: 100). Just as Facebook or Google target online ads based on complicated algorithms created from what you click on or search for online, consultants now have the technology to tell constituents/customers only what (they think) each individual wants to hear.

This, of course, is a problem for Habermas. Moreover, the process described above actually creates what Habermas calls “nonpublic opinion” (1989: 211). For opinions to be “public,” according to Habermas, they must meet two criteria. First, they have to be formed rationally, “in conscious grappling with cognitively accessible states of affairs,” in contrast to kneejerk, untested opinions, opinions like those, for example, manufactured by professional political consultants. Second, “public” opinions have to be formed through discussion “in the pro and con of a public conversation,” in contrast to opinions “that remained private in the sense that they were not exposed to correction within the framework of a critically debating public” (221). The tactics described above do not meet these criteria. In fact, the job of political consultants is actively to prevent “public” opinion from forming. Instead of providing the democratic grist for rational-critical discussion of issues, consultant-centered tactics attempt to circumvent rational-critical discussion as much as possible, as rational-critical discussion is much harder to manipulate. Candidates get far more for their money if their consultants craft individualized messages designed to play off hot button issues with carefully manufactured phrases that have been honed in focus groups for maximum emotional impact. In effect, the contemporary political consultant works directly against the Habermasian ideal. The one and only job of the consultant is to help whoever happens to be paying him or her at that particular moment to win. In fact, the kind of discussion that Habermas labels “public” is actually incompatible with winning in the sense that it presupposes that people will be swayed by the better argument, which cannot be decided before one hears rational-critical discourse from all sides. Even without discussing unethical campaign practices, such as push polls or overtly or covertly disseminating lies about competitors, the notion of a “critical publicity” is antithetical to consultants’ own self-interest. After all, their future employment depends almost exclusively on how many and what kinds of campaigns they lead to victory. Thus the only kind of publicity a consultant would strive to cultivate would be that which was artificial, manufactured very strategically to work towards what is calculated to help the candidate win that particular election.⁹

The Permanent Campaign

The permanent campaign mentality bears some of the blame. Throughout the campaign, building public support by making the strongest possible case for war

was the top priority, regardless of whether or not it was the most intellectually honest approach to the issue of war and peace.

(Scott McClelland, *What Happened*, 2008)

The second aspect of the new refeudalization is an extension of the first. The constituent/customer has bought the “product” and the candidate and the team of consultants have won the election. Now what? Not only have consultants come to dominate political campaigns, but they are now a ubiquitous presence after the candidate takes office, triggering what Sidney Blumenthal has called the “permanent campaign”: image-based, winner-take-all, focus-group-tested, emotionally manipulative, strategic calculations about governing. These techniques, designed by consultants originally to “sell” a specific politician during the campaign, are now routinely used after the politician wins office. And this, according to Blumenthal, “remakes government into an instrument designed to sustain an elected official’s popularity” (1980: 7).¹⁰ According to this mentality, governing is not about legislating and/or implementing policies; government is about accruing and keeping power by selling the American people a coherently and often expensively branded political product. With the help of this consultant expertise, all communications, all policies, and all legislation must be “spun” in a way that highlights the strengths of the politician’s or political party’s brand while, hopefully, drowning out or denigrating one’s opponents.

Strategic thinking by those who hold public office and their advisors is not remotely new, but, like the rise of the professionalized cadre of consultants, the universality of their entrenchment in the governing apparatus has completely changed how politics now works. Pat Caddell, Jimmy Carter’s campaign pollster, was the first consultant to move to a prominent, if unofficial, post in the Carter administration, and most consultants still occupy “advisory” positions (Lathrop 2003: 3). President Clinton had at least four well-known political consultants on “staff” (although most officially worked either for the party or for free to prevent the appearance of conflicts of interests): James Carville, Paul Begala, Mandy Grunwald, and pollster Stan Greenberg.¹¹ Über-consultant Karl Rove, however, was the most famous professional consultant appointed to a named position, specifically Deputy Chief of Staff for President George W. Bush from 2004 to 2007. In this role he was also in charge of the Offices of Strategic Initiatives, Political Affairs, Public Liaison, and Intergovernmental Affairs and was Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy, which oversaw and coordinated the White House policy-making process.¹² David Axelrod, Barack Obama’s chief political consultant in both the 2004 and 2008 campaigns, moved into the White House as a “senior advisor” after Obama was elected. According to *Businessweek*, Axelrod runs not only a very prestigious political consulting company out of Chicago, but also ASK Public Strategies, which specializes in “astro-turfing” or running public advocacy ads through front organizations with banal names crafted to look like genuine grassroots organizations (Wolinsky 2008). Axelrod was, not coincidentally, also integral to Obama winning *Advertising Age*’s “Marketer of the Year” award for 2008, just weeks before the election (Creamer 2008).

Interestingly, despite the ubiquity of consultants in important positions within the administrations of both parties, the overt and explicit insertion of purely political considerations into the governing process is still considered unseemly, part of the “liberal fiction” that Habermas argued we still need for our self-image as a democracy. When Rove’s move to the Deputy Chief of Staff position occurred, for example, the Democrats were quick to use the move to criticize the President. Said Democratic National

Committee Chair Terry McAuliffe, for example: “Empowering Rove in this way shows that Bush cares more about political positioning than honest policy discussions.” The Bush administration also felt a need to address the discrepancy: “Karl’s always been a very substantive contributor on the policy side,” Office of Management and Budget Director Josh Bolten said in an interview. “He’s better known for his political hat, but he knows how to take that hat off” (Baker 2005: A21). Whether Rove was actually able to stop thinking like a consultant when he assumed the Deputy Chief of Staff position is up for debate. Many who study political marketing, however, are not quite so sure that he should.

The Marketing-Oriented Approach

Political marketing is the new black . . .

(Heather Savigny, *The Problem of Political Marketing*, 2008)

The approach described in the previous section is what political marketing professor Jennifer Lees-Marshment has called a “sales-oriented” approach.¹³ Specifically, politicians and their consultants using a sales-oriented approach design their “product” (the policy officials would like to pursue) according to principles or ideology. After the “product” is set, they then use marketing intelligence to tailor and disseminate their messages: “Communication is devised to suit each segment, focusing presentation on the most popular aspects of the product, while downplaying any weaknesses” (Lees-Marshment 2009: 46). Those within the sales-oriented approach will not change their principles or behavior to reflect what the people want, but instead try to persuade the people to want their “product” as it is. Compared to a “product-oriented” approach where the politician spends her time governing and takes for granted that voters will know what her principles and ideals are and vote for her because of them, the sales-oriented politician is disproportionately concerned with all facets of communication and approaches governing the same way as the campaigning, hence the *permanent* campaign. Political consultants are crucial to this orientation. It is they who devise and implement the communications blitz that is designed to change and hold the minds of the public.

Lees-Marshment, however, argues that the sales-oriented approach actually doesn’t go far enough, advocating, instead, a complete immersion of the political realm in the logic of capitalism, the third and most serious aspect of the new refeudalization. The best way to get and keep political power, according to Lees-Marshment, is for politicians to adopt a “marketing-oriented” approach, which takes marketing well beyond just the political communication emphasis of the sales-oriented political consultants (2003: 19).¹⁴ While a sales-oriented approach is focused on using consultant-driven marketing ideas, strategy, and techniques to sell a politician or policy, the policy itself is a natural outgrowth of that politician’s political beliefs, as, for example, the invasion of Iraq was an outgrowth of President Bush and his administration’s neoconservative foreign policy. The invasion of Iraq was not something the American people demanded after the events of 9/11, but came instead from elites within the Bush administration and then had to be carefully “packaged” and “sold” to the American people.¹⁵ In a marketing-oriented approach, however, such techniques are purposely used much earlier—actually to design the policy itself. Speaking here about British politics, specifically the New Labour Party of Tony Blair, Lees-Marshment argues: “Political parties no longer pursue grand ideologies, fervently arguing for what they believe in and trying to

persuade the masses to follow. They increasingly follow the people. Parties use modern technology and marketing techniques to understand what voters want” (2003: 19). Thus, under a market orientation, market intelligence (the focus groups, polling, survey research, giant data sets with targeted communications, etc.) would be used not only to “sell” a politician’s policy positions, but also to come up with the very policy positions themselves (what Lees-Marshment calls “product design” and “product adjustment,” 2003: 24). According to Bruce Newman and Richard Perloff, this is already happening: “Political ideology,” they argue, “is being driven by marketing, not by party affiliation” (2004: 25).¹⁶

In general, those within the disciplines of political science and communication have been quite critical of political marketing. Margaret Scammell argues that the political communication literature, coming predominately from the United States, reflects the “contemporary obsessions with voter apathy and the ‘epidemic’ of cynicism toward politics” and thus views political marketing negatively (1999: 721). In the marketing/management literature, much of it UK-based, there is a different attitude, however. While some within the political marketing community take a more nuanced approach—marketing has become a staple in the modern political system and therefore should be very carefully studied¹⁷—the general paradigm inside the political marketing literature assumes that the entire political process *should* be reconceptualized according to the philosophy and language of the market. Taking it to the extreme, Lees-Marshment argues that this would actually make parties *more* democratic in that it would “rend[er] them more responsive to voter demands” (2003: 28). According to Heather Savigny, political marketing regards ideology as one tool in the marketing toolbox, one that can often be adopted or pushed aside by politicians whenever polls and focus groups show that voter preferences have changed (2008: 65).¹⁸

Clearly, this framework does not envision a public sphere in the same way Habermas does, and even those sympathetic to political marketing acknowledge potentially adverse effects: “the deliberate narrowing of the political agenda, an emphasis on message discipline, repetition of messages rather than engagement in argument, and an increasing reliance on negative campaigning” (Scammell 1999: 739). However, rational-critical debate and truly “public” opinion in the way Habermas defines them are not only discouraged, as Scammell mentions (and as they are in the sales orientation), inside of the market orientation, but such Habermasian concepts are precluded altogether. Even assuming that this model could actually work in practice and that it is used by politicians with the best of intentions,¹⁹ citizens/consumers would be asked their personal opinions through focus groups and polling, thus preserving the veneration of democracy. But no one—not the politicians who are setting their ideological agenda based on polling, nor the citizens/consumers who fill out surveys or register their opinions in a focus group or with their vote—is encouraged to test their ideas or even talk to anyone with whom they disagree. There is no allotted space within this exchange-based model for deliberation, compromise, civic duty, or the public good.²⁰

Bread and Circuses

I have argued that the complete immersion of the political into the language and tactics of consumer capitalism—what I call the “new refeudalization of the public sphere”—has generated another layer of complexity into Habermas’s rather

pessimistic assessment of the possibility of a practical, workable public sphere. The ubiquitous use of the tactics of advertising and marketing by political actors is designed to bypass the rational-critical discussion that Habermas values. With appeals carefully crafted by political consultants, the Bush administration was able to use the sales-oriented approach to sell us a war. Only time will tell if the Obama administration, so quick to successfully adopt cutting-edge marketing techniques in the 2008 presidential campaign, will move into the next phase and use marketing techniques to craft his policy positions, rather than to sell the ones he already has. Certainly in the United States currently, overtly moving into a market-oriented approach is not seen as something admirable. Witness the problems politicians like John Kerry and Mitt Romney have had in changing policy positions (“flip-flopping”) and the popularity of a variety of pledges taken by politicians in exchange for outside group support that allows no compromising for any reason, market or otherwise. Whether their consultants encourage them to do so is another question.

But, beyond the practicality of politicians’ ability to wax and wane with the polls, the move from a product approach through a sales approach to a marketing approach demonstrates an exponential acceleration of Habermas’s worst fears. Regardless of whether one is persuaded by Habermas’s flesh-and-blood account of a historical bourgeois public sphere or even the possibility or practicality of such a sphere, the idea that informed citizens have rational-critical discussions about the limits of political power and the content of political policies is a normative ideal that has no place within the ideology of political marketing except at the basest of levels.²¹ As David McLetchie, leader of the Conservatives in the Scottish Parliament, put it in 2002: “Political parties cannot just become marketing exercises even if they wish to. Ultimately it will fail because the public won’t wear it . . . there will always be a market for conviction in politics” (quoted in Lees-Marshment 2009: 267). Perhaps a “market for conviction” is the best Habermas can hope for.

Notes

- 1 See Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs (2004) for a comprehensive discussion of both the theoretical and the empirical literature.
- 2 According to Calhoun: “In a sense, Habermas himself seems to have been persuaded more by his account of the degeneration of the public sphere than by his suggestions of its revitalization through intraorganizational reforms and the application of norms of publicity to interorganizational relations. . . . No longer believing in the capacity of either the public sphere as such or of socialist transformation of society to meet this need, Habermas sought a less historical, more transcendental basis of democracy” (1992: 32).
- 3 For the history of the American political campaigns, see for example Dulio and Nelson (2005: 25–51), Friedenberg (1997: 1–30), and Jamieson (1996).
- 4 On Friday, June 10, 2011, a front-page story on nytimes.com was the quitting, en masse, of Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich’s consultants, including all of his Iowa staff. The reasons given by the consultants show just who the consultants think, at least, should be running Gingrich’s campaign: According to the *New York Times*: “During a conference call on Wednesday, top strategists confronted Mr. Gingrich over what they believed was a lack of focus. They demanded that he spend 90 percent of his time in three early-voting states and curtail distractions like screenings of his documentaries.” Later in the article, one of the aides who left is quoted as saying: “We have a spouse who controls the schedule”; this statement assumes, of course, that the consultants should be the ones who control the schedule (Zeleny and Gabriel 2011).
- 5 In 1996, *Time* magazine called Dick Morris “the most influential public citizen in America” (cited in Dulio, 2003). And many books have been written on the power of Karl Rove. See for example Dubose, Reid, and Cannon (2003) and Moore and Slater (2003, 2007).
- 6 Interestingly, political science, the academic discipline most obviously interested in political campaigns,

- didn't spend much time studying the influence of political consultants until recently, with the exception of the most obvious cases, e.g., Mark Hanna in 1896 (Thurber and Nelson 2000: 10). In fact, most of the mid-century political science research found that voters made their decisions based on "exogenous predispositions" such as values systems, beliefs, party affiliation, and information from sources they trust, not political campaigns (Steger, Kelly, and Wrighton 2006: 2–3). Even more recently, political scientists have studied things like candidate recruitment, campaign finance, the role of the parties and interest groups, and incumbency advantage, but the role of consultants has largely remained unstudied (Thurber and Nelson 2000: 2). Thus much of the writing on political consultants consists of journalistic and insider accounts (Lathrop 2003: 141–142).
- 7 For a definition and discussion, see DestinationCRM (2010); for a list of companies that provide CRM software, see CRM-Resources.net (2011).
 - 8 For a cross-section of this type of data vendor, see also Campaigns and Elections (2011), Political Data (2011), and Winning Campaigns (2011). For more information on how the Obama campaign made use of these services, see Baker (2009) and Madden (2008). In an interesting aside, I am currently being cyberstalked by NGP VAN. Six months after finishing the research for this chapter, I find it is still, by far, the most frequent Internet ad I see no matter what I'm doing online.
 - 9 Academic language also reflects the metaphors of winning—in some cases, winning a war. Robert Friedenber (1997) calls political consultants "ballot box warriors" and uses battle metaphors to describe the different types of consultants: polling is the intelligence service, speech and debate consultants are the infantry, newspaper and radio consultants are the artillery, television consultants are the air force, and the narrowcast media consultants the submarine service. James Thurber and Candice Nelson (2000) titled their edited volume on political consultants *Campaign Warriors*. Perhaps the most famous war metaphor comes from the documentary on Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign, *The War Room* (1993). The documentary focuses almost entirely on Clinton's political consultants, especially James Carville and George Stephanopolous. In fact, even though it chronicles his campaign, Clinton is rarely seen strategizing for the "battles." It is the consultants who play the role of general here.
 - 10 For histories of the permanent campaign and political marketing, see Hecl (2000), O'Shaughnessy (1990), and Perloff (1999). For an interpretation of this history that argues that the ideology and methods of the permanent campaign began much earlier, see Dan Nimmo (1999). For a detailed discussion of the permanent campaign mentality from a congressional perspective, see Steger (1999).
 - 11 The consultants were (literally) part of almost every decision that came out of the Clinton White House. See for example Woodward (1994) for a journalistic account of the Clinton White House. Clinton, however, must have been extremely frustrating to his consultants, because he often didn't listen to them very carefully or disregarded their advice. Although I have no empirical evidence of this, certainly Monica Lewinsky was not part of his team's marketing strategy, at least before it became public.
 - 12 For more biographical information on Karl Rove, see <http://www.rove.com/bio>.
 - 13 Technically, the "sales orientation," as well as the "product" and "marketing" orientations, comes from Keith (1960), and others have used Keith's evolutionary or similar models. See Scammell (1999) for an overview of the literature.
 - 14 Although most of the literature assumes a progression from product orientation through sales orientation to a market orientation, none of these approaches are mutually exclusive, and politicians and parties can move back and forth among them.
 - 15 For more information on the "selling" of the Iraq War to the American people, see for example McClelland (2008), Rich (2006), and Wolfe (2008).
 - 16 See also Harris and Wring (2001: 909).
 - 17 Newman and Perloff (2004) and Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy (2007), for example, call attention to the potential pitfalls of this approach, both as a description and as a prescription.
 - 18 See also O'Cass (1996). Respected political scientists Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro (2000) argue a similar point but from a very different direction. They argued that the public opinion that politicians were ignoring, especially on the impeachment of Bill Clinton, was a centrist one, rather than the loud, organized, and engaged opinions coming from ideological extremes, and that politicians should have better mechanisms than periodic elections—like polling—to take the quieter middle into account.
 - 19 Savigny and Temple (2010) argue that the scant evidence provided by these theories indicates that parties use voter feedback very selectively, when not using it for overt manipulation (1058–1059).
 - 20 Lees-Marshment does address some of the normative critiques of the wholesale importation of marketing concepts into politics, but her replies are surprisingly superficial. See for example Lees-Marshment (2003: 26–29, 2009: 266–283).
 - 21 See Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs (2004) and Ryfe (2005) for a comprehensive review of both the deliberative democracy literature and those who have tested such ideas empirically.

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