

Of Politicians, Populism, and Plates: Marketing the Body Politic

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In liberal democracies such as the United States, law emerges from a core ritual of the electoral-representation system, the theater of elections. From these cyclical rituals of consent, the “people” (re)discover political voice in embodied agents who ultimately do the work of governing. Lawmaking as a craft, or increasingly as a multibillion-dollar industry (CRP 2010a, 2010b), is performed by those who must first pass through an arena where political commitments are mediated by a space in which mass suffrage and mass consumerism dramatically converge. The experience of popular democracy for most citizens unfolds within this secular ritual that “makes” lawmakers. The very phantasmagoric spectacle of elections is the muse through which social relations are translated and reified into positive law.

The state regulates everyday life through the discursive and material force of law. But what renders law so productive in the modern state’s quest to control, surveil, and differentiate populations? Per Max Weber’s classic formulation, the state is the “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force” (Weber 1947), a totalizing fantasy at once impossible to realize and yet utterly essential for statecraft to imagine. But law is not simply a unitary instrument to shape subjectivities, ideology, and cultural life. As Rosemary Coombe argues, law is nothing less than the “authoritative means and medium of a cultural politics in which the social is articulated.” This social world itself “must be represented, performatively expressed, and institutionally inscribed” (1998, 36). Law then is also simultaneously a social, cultural, and political process, and one that leaves behind a genealogy of artifacts that help us to unpack the forces behind these modes of

social regulation, ranging from outright coercion, to spontaneous consent, and counterhegemonic dissidence (Gewirtz 1996, 3).

But if we begin our examination from within the courtroom, where law is interpreted, or even start our analysis within national political institutions, where law is drafted and executed, then our study falls prey to the tautological nature of state power: the law is the law because it is the law; it has a distinct legal dialect, formal procedures, and institutional avenues. Hegemonic power is always self-referential. But the legal sphere especially strives for autonomy and relies on its ability to strictly separate those actions backed by the coercive apparatus of the state from those that are not. "Let literature borrow from law and life . . . but let law develop its own rules and structure and editing," declares Alan Dershowitz (1996, 104–5) in his polemic against the use of popular narrative as one strategy to combat systematic exclusions in the courtroom. For Dershowitz, the fantastic and the imaginary are external to law and should be permanently expunged in favor of the real, which must exist as a distinct category if there can be a potential for justice.

Richard Sherwin, too, worries about policing the borders between law and its other, popular culture. *When Law Goes Pop* overflows with concerns about systemic "corruption," potential "imbalance," and the negative effects of "artificially enhanced passions," all pop-culturally driven tendencies that might potentially lead to "a state of affairs . . . in which tyranny rules" (Sherwin 2000, 240–41). Sherwin observes that the culture industries progressively invade the courtroom, with an immeasurable capacity to shape popular legal consciousness and even judicial interpretation. One consequence, he suggests, is that justices, lawyers, and jurors alike are increasingly prone to conflate fiction with reality. Although Sherwin disavows the possibility of a total separation between popular culture and law, he does believe that the sheer proliferation of visual imagery in film, television, and on the Internet may have permanently forced law to a tipping point where it no longer finds legitimacy or consistency exclusively within its own domain.

There are several problems with the perspectives offered by Dershowitz and Sherwin. The state and law are themselves based simultaneously in abstraction and concrete social fact (Bratsis 2006). The state is always already a collectively imagined unity, as are the national and the popular. Lauren Berlant (1997) suggests that it is precisely the task of Washington, DC, to territorialize and manifest these contested and fluid abstractions

within the capital's built environment, where racialized patriarchal capitalism is imprinted into monuments and museums celebrating national memory, official history, and political institutions. If we take the state and law, the language of the state, as a priori concepts, then we conveniently ignore the crucial role played by imagining, internalizing, and naturalizing power relations, as well as the tremendous exertions that enable forgetting in the first instance.

Since it plays such a formative role in social reproduction, the risk is that law as a secular religion of power will sanctify and subsequently reinforce hierarchies, exclusions, and social imbalances. Of course, misrecognition is crucial for the reproduction of ideology (Žižek 1998, 15–16). “Law dreams, and forgets,” lyricizes Sherwin (2005, 106). But from a critical standpoint, it makes little sense to banish from view the very mystical processes that solidify and establish in practice what travels under the auspices of state authority. Scholars cannot conveniently begin the positivist funnel of causality after the point of legal reification, when a law is codified and invested with state power. If we do so, then the pervasive influence of pop culture on politics appears as a curiously external “thing” imposing itself on a “pure” field of operations. Such a problematic approach assumes the impossible: that the law is above, outside, or beyond the political.

Furthermore, the view that pop culture imperils the legal sphere is misplaced when we consider how much it is constitutive of law in liberal democracies. Law refracts and then reifies the cultural forms and manifestations that mix, churn, and boil over to create a Frankensteinian body politic. One such moment in which popular culture is deliberately incorporated into the legal process is found within the electoral arena. Politicians emerge as makers of law only after passing through a trial of their own, when they are judged by suffrage-wielding citizens acting as a *de facto* jury of peers. Studying elections, then, might be an illuminating way to consider the roots of popular influence as a generator of legitimacy and law.

Elections are the main arena of enchantment in liberal democracies. They represent an extended theatrical moment when the state calls upon elite competition to tap into the masses, to organize and mobilize them coherently. In performances from the banal to the entertaining, the time-space of elections represent a ritual that must necessarily project a unitary mythology of consensus from an unendingly complex constellation of intersectionalities and social positions. In the era of mass consumerism this is the case as never before, as public spectacle and infotainment have

become major axes of power, proving that it is not just in the courtroom that “law goes pop” (Rogin 1990). It is the hyperproductivity of a “pop-baroque culture of spectacle,” argues Sherwin (2005, 121), that frantically attempts to provide cover for the instrumental deployment of naked violence and power at home and abroad. In a feat of social and cultural alchemy, a new political majority is interpellated within and by this electoral spectacle so that law may become endowed with a monopoly of the *legitimate* use of force.

Elections are a space where the Society of Spectacle encounters democratic folk culture in contemporary American politics. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of carnival is a useful framework for understanding conflicting tendencies within a context of the mass amusements and delights provided by our technodemocratic apparatus. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin excavates the medieval practice of carnival, a participatory festivity that entailed a temporary suspension of hierarchy and rank but ultimately served to further underscore larger inequalities experienced as daily routine (Bakhtin 1984). The carnival was characterized by ritual spectacle, verbal comedy, and popular speech (McGuigan 1992, 18). Yet the subversive elements of carnival were essentially a “licensed form of play” contained within the broader limits of social obedience; hence Jane Blocker (1996) proposes that the carnivalesque is “disruptive only to the extent that official culture allows it to be so.” Nevertheless, among the visual parade of elections, carnival is a useful category to envision cycles of political death and renewal, subversion and hierarchy, and a symbolic mixing of the high (elite) and low (popular). When citizens cast their ballot, the utopian impulse of formal political equality consecrates a system of immanent social inequality.

Thus, it is within the system of electoral representation that the social, cultural, and political imagination is corralled and disciplined. “The very availability of the vote and the ritual of the periodic election,” explain Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, “are like magnets attracting and channeling popular political impulses” (2000, 12–13). Here the “normal” and “good” are rallied in a show of discursive force. Deviants are pinpointed and condemned. Former heresies transform and convert to state orthodoxy. Popular neuroses overflow and are either recognized or officially repressed and ignored. Long-suffering political coalitions, heroic narratives, and exhausted ideologies come here to vividly stage their own deaths, so that there might be a future symbolic rebirth. The result is strikingly similar to Jean Baudrillard’s description of the “implosion of

the social in the media.” Individual voters, affinity or identity groups, and classes: all these formations and their contradictions temporarily disappear, absorbed into the “undivided coherency of statistics,” to be reconstituted in wholly new form as the political majority that can give life to law (Baudrillard 1988). We thus renew our ruling institutions by endowing them with the wellspring of popular sovereignty.

An Immense Collection of Politicians

One empirical consequence of the coupling of mass suffrage and mass consumerism is that politicians, the makers and executors of law, are now also commodities. We have yet to fully consider the ramifications of this development in democratic capitalism, in particular how it relates to the hyperproductivity of modern spectacle. “We have the best brand on Earth: the Obama brand,” says Desirée Rogers, former White House social secretary. “Our possibilities are endless” (Chozick 2009). Rogers’ statement is revealing. Obama is a now more than a man, even more than a president constitutionally invested with executive power. The “endless” nature of the possibilities to which Rogers alludes suggests that the image of Obama is now infinitely reproducible. Obama’s likeness, his image, proliferates because it is both commercially and politically fecund. What impact will this ultimately have on politics and neobaroque law? I propose to deconstruct this phenomenon of politicians as commodities by investigating two cases from the 2008 presidential election. Both Barack Obama and Sarah Palin, as aspiring transcendental leaders, rode a wave of populist antipolitics within their respective parties and underwent spectacular transformation during the campaign, from politician to commodity, and then to carnivalesque parody.

The commodification of the politician, the embodied political agent of lawmaking in liberal democratic society, is not simply coequal with the vast proliferation of money into the electoral sphere. Of course, the growth of political contributions has been a tsunami-like wave of capitalization. Adjusted for inflation, presidential candidates spent \$244 million during the 1980 election. In the most recent campaign they spent \$1.3 billion, well over a 400 percent increase in merely three decades (CRP 2010c). Evolving with the deregulation of markets over the same time period and what Randy Martin has termed the “financialization of everyday life,” there has been nothing less than a symbiotic “merger of business and life cycles,

as a means of acquisition of self” (2002, 3). As Berlant explains, “Identity is marketed in national capitalism as property. It is something that you can purchase, or purchase a relation to” (1997, 17). If spectacle is indeed capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image, as Guy Debord (1995) suggests in his modernist critique of visual capitalism, then we should not be shocked to discover the dramatic separation of politicians from the image that they project onto the electorate.

The meteoric rise of Barack Obama and Sarah Palin in the national political scene in 2008 is exemplary in this merger of popular sovereignty and visual culture into technodemocracy. Both Obama and Palin are politicians who have succeeded in translating a public career into private fortune in qualitatively and quantitatively new ways. The trajectory of political influence has typically run in two directions: either the wealthy elite exchange private wealth for public influence (for instance, the Rockefellers, the Kennedys, or Michael Bloomberg) or the professional politician exploits bureaucratic control over vast public resources for personal profit (Riordan 1963; Shefter 1976).¹ However, the new political-economic windfall is remarkably speculative in nature and in large part based on the unknowable future horizons of a candidate viewed through the prism of his or her charismatic public image. Obama quite literally parlayed his personal narrative into millions of dollars in the form of two best-selling books, *The Audacity of Hope* and *Dreams from My Father*, turning a book tour selling his story into the embryonic stages of a presidential run (Bohan 2010; Heilemann and Halperin 2010, 58–59). His tale of meritocratic uplift and his plural background, racially and geographically, presented the ideal floating signifier upon which different individuals and groups might project their desires and wishes.

The marketing of Obama’s fluid personal and political identity as a commodity was, of course, a methodical and expensive process. Naomi Klein observes:

The nation found that [transcendence] in Obama, a man who clearly has a natural feel for branding and who has surrounded himself with a team of top-flight marketers. His social networking guru, for instance, is Chris Hughes, one of the young founders of Facebook. His social secretary is Desirée Rogers, a glamorous Harvard MBA and former marketing executive. And David Axelrod, Obama’s top adviser, was formerly a partner in ASK Public Strategies, a PR firm which, according to *Business Week*, “has quarterbacked campaigns” for everyone from

Cablevision to AT&T. Together, the team has marshalled every tool in the modern marketing arsenal to create and sustain the Obama brand: the perfectly calibrated logo (sunrise over stars and stripes); expert viral marketing (Obama ringtones); product placement (Obama ads in sports video games); a 30-minute infomercial (which could have been cheesy but was universally heralded as “authentic”); and the choice of strategic brand alliances (Oprah for maximum reach, the Kennedy family for gravitas, and no end of hip-hop stars for street cred). (2010, 2)

Yet the unparalleled reach of the Obama phenomenon is not simply reducible to the top-down success of his campaign’s public-private sector blend. One journalist from the *Washington Post* referred to Obama as a “living, breathing stimulus package” employing “a modest sized group of entrepreneurs who are slapping Obama’s image on any surface that it’ll stick to” (Segal 2008). Indeed, Klein cites the underground “Obama economy” at upward of \$2.5 billion globally, connecting a chain of production from proletarian factory workers in the global South to formal and informal urban merchandisers in the North. While estimating the Obama market at billions of dollars sounds extravagant, comedian Stephen Colbert has joked on his satirical *Colbert Report*: “The market has spoken! Barack Obama can sell crap. I mean *worthless* crap” (“P. K. Winsome and Obama Collectibles,” 2009). In fact, this was one major advantage that Obama enjoyed over Hillary Clinton while raising money during the Democratic primary. In the words of one Clinton supporter, it was clear that “he’s got a retail merchandise business going” selling T-shirts, hats, buttons, posters and other campaign paraphernalia (Heilemann and Halperin 2010, 93).

Sarah Palin, for her part, parlayed a slot on the presidential ticket alongside John McCain into entrepreneurial opportunity, emerging from the campaign a defeated candidate but “CEO of Right-Wing America” (Sherman 2010, 30). By choosing Palin as a running mate, the septuagenarian McCain strove to find a symbolical midwife to birth conservatism anew after the disastrous effects of the Bush administration on the electoral prospects of the Republican Party. After all, she was the mother of five children and yet a self-proclaimed political virgin, barely into her first term as governor of Alaska and virtually unknown on the national scene. Channeling the forces of sentimental populism, Palin fused the supposed inherent goodness and patriotism of market fundamentalism and heteronormative culture together with the possibility of a national-capitalist future. During the election, Sarah Palin brought infantile citizenship to

the forefront of American politics as never before and demonstrated its potency as a national fantasy, as well as its internal contradictions. Despite, or more likely because of, her electoral defeat, Palin has become a “singular national industry,” amassing a twelve-million-dollar postelection bonanza from her book deal; her Fox News show, *Real American Stories*; her reality television show on TLC; and lucrative speaker fees (Sherman 2010). For example, mixing personal business and politics, she recently keynoted the National Tea Party Convention in Nashville for the hefty fee of one hundred thousand dollars.

Obama and Palin show that in technodemocracy, political popularity also means commercial success. It is not epiphenomenal to the synthesis of voter as consumer. But there is also a profound unease about the disconnect between the consumption of privatized citizenship and public spectacle united together in the act of casting a ballot. Two brief satirical texts expose this gap through carnivalesque degradation: Stephen Colbert’s comedy sketch with P. K. Winsome (Tim Meadows), fictional “entrepreneur, pundit, and black Republican,” and comedian Tina Fey’s portrayal of Sarah Palin on *Saturday Night Live* (SNL).

Tim Meadows portrays P. K. Winsome as the ultimate opportunist huckster of consumer kitsch, who calls an Obama presidency a “historic opportunity for all Americans to come together and make some fast cash.” (P. K. Winsome and Obama Collectibles 2009). In his performance as megalomaniacal conservative pundit, Colbert wholeheartedly asserts that although he is not in favor of Obama’s policies, he is nevertheless enthralled with the president’s uncanny marketability. They discuss, in turn, selling a “Yes We Can’ of energy drink,” a commemorative butter substitute called “Obamargarine,” an Obama egg timer, and an autobiography of Winsome (plagiarizing Obama’s), titled *Dreams from My Father*. Colbert and Winsome are in agreement: “The merchandising of Barack Obama is the dream that Martin Luther King envisioned” (P. K. Winsome and Obama Collectibles 2009).

Then in a riff on the just-in-time production of national mythology, Colbert offers his tribute to Obama: a commemorative plate from “Stephen Colbert’s Historical Collectables of History Collection.” Colbert intones deeply in the voice of a cheesy infomercial:

In November of 2008, history was made. Now you can own a part of that history. On a plate. Be the first to reserve order “Zenith of Change,”

the commemorative plate depicting the historic inauguration of Barack Obama, as viewed on this Zenith television, by Stephen Colbert. Each richly detailed machine-colored plate features the touching inscription: "Not For Use in Microwave." This is a strictly limited edition. Once people stop ordering these plates, they will be ground into pumice and sold to a Korean nail salon. Then, complete your collection with "A Plate That You Can Believe In." This finest-quality ceramic keepsake features the moving image of a Barack Obama collectable plate, admired by Stephen Colbert, and painted onto an old John F. Kennedy collectable plate. Over the years, this timeless heirloom-quality dish is guaranteed to change in value. The Kennedy plate alone was worth a hundred dollars before we painted on it. You'll never forget where you were, when your credit card was charged in full. Order now.

Like all good comedy, this sketch does multiple things at once. First, it perfectly captures the role of iconography in mediating national identification and private citizenship. Whether it is monumental architecture in the nation's capital or a plate depicting an inauguration on your living room shelf, we must visualize and mythologize our national symbols and rituals in order to sufficiently believe them to be invested with power. After all, this is not a plate for eating from, but one for *looking at*, for revering as one would a museum piece, and for consuming, not food for the physical body, but ideological nourishment for the body politic. Indeed, Colbert purposefully foregrounds the simulacric nature of the national symbolism by exaggerating the claims of the importance of the plate; this is not just history but mythology so self-conscious that Colbert is sure to repeat himself to bolster its legitimacy: it is the "Historical Collectables of History Collection."

Second, by displaying a drunk Colbert perched in a comfortable armchair watching Obama on television, the sketch brings an immanent critique to technodemocracy. Visual culture mediates the practice of citizenship. We experience democracy through spectacular performances. Democracy is no longer something for which to aspire as an ideal, but in this parody it becomes base materiality, something that we can "own" as a degraded shell of the vanishing ideal of equality. Even "owning" democracy is clearly alienating and exhausting, as we can see the image of Colbert slumped in his chair, a dissatisfied alcoholic. Yet political "change," meaning rebirth and regeneration, is not only represented by the sacred image of Obama onscreen within the larger illustration itself, it is literally written

in bold letters across the front of the commemorative plate. This critique manifests the shallow absurdity of plastic democracy simply by taking its images seriously and quite literally representing it in commercial kitsch.

Much like Barack Obama, Sarah Palin is no longer simply an individual politician. Her image has proliferated endlessly and floated across the public sphere, rematerializing in unexpected and even unwelcome places.² After her several disastrous interviews with journalists such as ABC's Charlie Gibson and CBS's Katie Couric, the comedian Tina Fey, who bears a striking resemblance to the vice presidential candidate, took up Palin's character in a series of *SNL* skits. During the climax of the presidential campaign, Fey performed Couric's interview of Palin and brutally lampooned the Alaskan governor, reproducing much of what Palin had already told Gibson and Couric, in some places word for word.

Fey portrayed Palin as a lovable incompetent who has difficulty with basic facts and struggles with questions about substantive issues such as the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout, foreign policy, and the economic crisis. Katie Couric, played by Amy Poehler, presses Palin for programmatic specifics beyond folksy catchphrases and superficial analysis ("Couric/Palin Open," 2008):

Couric/Poehler: But again, and not to belabor the point. One specific thing?

Palin/Fey: [*Extended awkward pause.*] Katie, I'd like to use one of my lifelines . . .

Couric/Poehler: I'm sorry?

Palin/Fey: I want to phone a friend.

Couric/Poehler: You don't have any lifelines.

Palin/Fey: Well in that case I'm just gonna havta get back to ya!

Couric/Poehler: Forgive me, Mrs. Palin, but it seems to me that when cornered, you become increasing adorable. Is that fair to say?

Palin/Fey: I dunno. Is it? [*Shoots fake pistols in the air making gunshot sounds and then gives the facial impression that she is posing for a headshot.*]

What is remarkable about these sketches is how well they encapsulate the contradictions of Palin's conservative populist appeal. Palin adopts a sentimental disposition that embodies the centrality of infantile citizenship to hypernationalist discourse. As Berlant explains, the childlike adult is a "political subjectivity based on the suppression of critical knowledge and

a resulting contraction of citizenship to something smaller than agency: patriotic inclination, default social membership, or the simple possession of a normal national character” (1997, 27–28). As with Colbert’s parody of the Obama plate, Fey’s performance of Palin reveals a desire for representing the nation with unitary symbolism. However, Palin’s right-wing populist vision is not an image of symbolic political incorporation via passive consumption. The fantasy norms projecting small-town Wasilla onto the national body politic are ascriptive and exclusionary: “real” America, which Palin seeks to represent, both literally and figuratively, is a category in which membership is based on building a facade of normalcy and conformity.

Ultimately, these two cases are concrete manifestations of the contradictory paths of spectacular democracy. As Obama rose to the most powerful public office in the land, he simultaneously became privatized and consumed in the way of infinitely reproducible objects. When Palin utterly failed to pass the electorate’s judgment and rise to the vice presidency, it only proved her true patriotism and therefore reinforced her marketability as symbolic leader of right-wing America, defender of the American Dream in crisis. In *The King’s Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz (1957) locates the history of the state abstraction in medieval Christian theology, where the king was seen as a Christ-like figure, both god and man. Over time, legal scholars interpreted the king to possess “two bodies,” the mortal body that could die and was subject to the law, and the divine one who lived on in perpetuity, which became the legal basis of the modern state (Bratsis 2006, 33–43). In the case of Barack Obama and Sarah Palin, there is a similar split between the physical body of the politician and its representation as simulacra. In neoliberal democracy, a politician’s image is a capital-intensive investment. Their financialization has resulted in a spectacularization, separating the politician into a physical corpus, the living individual, and a mass-mediated image, the simulacra.

The politician as commodity is therefore a body that is pop culturally bounded and analytically distinct. This second, immaterial body is infinitely reproducible. It endures in the public sphere and may rematerialize in various forms. In the cases presented here, Obama becomes a plate, and then a parody of a plate. In Tina Fey, Palin becomes an exaggerated caricature, but one that is productive for the reemergence of conservative populism from political disgrace. Within the mass-mediated electoral arena, both Obama and Palin subsequently become commodities subject to the carnivalesque. This is because in the space of the electoral ritual,

“laughter degrades and materializes,” revealing the inner tendencies that come together to form the existence of the second immaterial body. For Bakhtin, “degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one” (1984, 20–21). Thus, Obama and Palin are dragged into the orbit of parody.

Ironically, this carnivalesque lowering through humor also has the contradictory effect of reinforcing the entertainment-value of the commodity itself and therefore the penetration of the politician’s image among the consuming electorate. For Palin, this is doubly true, since the invisible hand of the market is also that of the god of evangelical Christianity (Philips-Fein 2009, 29–52); commercial success is only more religious proof of her righteousness and preordained political mission. By reinforcing and multiplying political performance, the spectacle not only captures the attentions of the democratic public, but also channels disparate cultural flows onto a single unitary national image. The natural body represents the voter in a conventional sense, physically occupying elected office; the immaterial body figuratively represents an abstract vehicle for national belonging, political stability, and secular rejuvenation.

Visualizing the Market State

The “second bodies” of Barack Obama and Sarah Palin absorb the sovereign gaze of consumer citizens from all sides, both of supporters and of those who are hostile. The law, however, at some point must by definition apply coercion toward a particular end. It punishes some and elevates others. In the face of slippage between “autonomous” spheres, law seeks to reconstitute borders. From the self-referential logic of political identification as private property, a bureaucratic cultural politics unfolds within the articulation of the technicalities of law. The growth of spectacle seems to be in direct proportion to this black box populated by a field of legal and political experts operating amid technocratic drudgery beyond view.

“It is through enchantment,” contends Sherwin, “that law and culture converge” (2000, 263). Although they work in tandem, enchantment in his view ultimately undermines the meaning and legitimacy of law, rendering both contingent and provisional. Yet with the ritual of electoral politics, we see how pop culture is constitutive of lawmakers and therefore indirectly of law as well. Political identification eventually becomes incorporated into law through images of the sovereign unity of the democratic

public, projected onto the “second” immaterial body of the politician. Legitimacy then is always being imagined and reimagined in the electoral arena, constructed and reconstructed. In this sense, pop culture hardly invades the legitimacy of law, but works instead to redeem, reconstitute, and solidify it.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the editors, Joe Rollins and Mara Einstein; the anonymous peer reviewers; and Joanna Tice, Taylor Ramsey, and Flan Amdahl for their invaluable insights. Thanks are also due to Alex Zamalin and Shira Roza for their ongoing critiques.

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Notes

1. The nexus of public influence and private profit refracts the contradictory siren call of democratic capitalism for both naked self-interest and public-spiritedness. The upper classes have been able to convert their private resources into various forms of public power in the way of capturing office themselves or supporting preferred candidates. As Max Weber observes, a second route was born with the institutionalization of politics as a vocation. Political entrepreneurs found ingenious ways to leverage the expanding powers of the modern state for private accumulation, in some instances building vast personal fortunes. In the contemporary era, politicians routinely cash in on their influence through the revolving door by becoming lobbyists and consultants for private sector clients. Obama and Palin, however, represent a new phenomenon in their ability to convert the intangibles of political popularity into direct commercial appeal.
2. According to Sherman’s article, the publisher of Palin’s memoir recalled, “When the cover was revealed, every screen I turned to, every television show I turned on, was showing it. As a publisher, I’ve never experienced that” (2000, 33). However, Heilemann and Halperin (2010) document that during the 2008 election, the McCain campaign clearly worried about the timing of Tina Fey’s satirical performances for their potential negative impact on the presidential ticket as a whole.

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