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The Emotional Deficit in Political Communication

BARRY RICHARDS

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As a consequence of social changes which have weakened the boundaries between different spheres of life, politics is now interwoven with popular culture. This means that we now seek certain kinds of emotionalized experience from politics. The relationship of people to politics has changed, and has come more fully to resemble a mode of consumption. While this consumerization of politics has been much described (and criticized), its implications for the place of emotion in political communications have not been explored. From a base in the sociology of emotion, this article undertakes such an exploration. It notes how some analysts of political communication have already registered the influence of emotional states, and stresses how contemporary emotionality differs from traditional conceptions of the emotional as a domain separable from rationality and as an optional button for message strategists to press. The complexity and omnipresence of emotional states is emphasised. Political advertising is taken as one area where a sophistication of messages to match the complexity and power of audience emotions might have been expected to develop, but does not appear to have done so yet to a great extent. Making good this "emotional deficit" in political communications is not primarily a way for particular parties or candidates to gain electoral advantage (though it could be that), but is essential for the regeneration of the democratic process and the creation of a more viable settlement between reason and emotion in contemporary society.

Keywords emotion, emotionalization, leadership, political advertisements, popular culture, sociology of emotion

One contribution that sociology can make to the study of political communication is to identify broad social and cultural changes which are influencing the democratic process and so are likely to have effects on political communication. This impact may be indirect, via changes in the societal context within which communications take place, or more direct, by affecting the aims or content of communications. Some recent work in sociological research and theory has focused on *emotion* as a previously neglected field of empirical inquiry (Bendelow & Williams, 1998; Featherstone, 1999; Fineman, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Jamieson, 1998; Williams, 2000; Wouters, 1992), and sought to establish its centrality for general sociological theory and for understanding contemporary society (see Lupton, 1998, and Elliott, 2001, for reviews of some of this work, of which important examples are Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; and Giddens, 1992; the work of Elias, 1939a, 1939b, also offers an important paradigm for the sociological study of emotion).[1]

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This "affective turn" in sociology of course reflects changes in the world outside academia. Drawing upon the sociology of emotion, this article will argue that a cultural trend that may be called "emotionalization" has already transformed the context for political communications, and that the style of many of these communications needs to be adapted to this new context, with implications for their aims and content.

In summary, the argument is as follows. First, as a consequence of social changes which—as a key feature of the "postmodern"—have weakened the boundaries between different spheres of life, politics is now interwoven with popular culture. By this, I mean that modes of engagement and judgment which characterize our experience of popular culture are now increasingly applied to our experience of politics, though our awareness of this development and of its implications for political communication is as yet limited.

Second, since popular culture is substantially about feeling, about the expression and management of emotion (Richards, 1994; Elias & Dunning, 1986), the incursion into political experience of the values of popular culture means that we now seek certain kinds of emotionalized experience from politics that we have not done in the past. This can have one of two consequences. Either politics, and particularly the communication of politics to the public, begins to offer more of these experiences in tune with the concerns of popular culture, or it becomes increasingly alien to the preoccupations of the majority of the public, and the democratic deficit grows.

The democratic deficit has been the object of much commentary and analysis in recent years. Here it is understood as a growing disinterest in or distaste for politics, and is seen to be in part a function of an emotional deficit in political communications—that is, the failure of these communications to satisfy the contemporary taste for certain kinds of affective experience. The revitalization of democracy therefore requires that the everyday business of political debate at all levels, and of presenting politics to the public, acquires something of the emotionally compelling narratives offered by, for example, television soap operas.

To the objection that democracy should be a rational contest, and that emotionality is antithetical to a balanced and mature political process, there is a simple rejoinder (though following it through in practice may be very complex). This is that much contemporary psychology, and much common sense, recognizes that far from being an oppositional dichotomy, the relationship between feeling and reason is one of deep interconnection and complementarity. To invite emotional engagement is to facilitate rational discourse, not to banish it.

Sociologically, this argument posed so far in terms of *popular* culture can be put in another way, which is that we inhabit a *consumer* culture in which there is a cultivated prominence of feeling (Campbell, 1987; Featherstone, 1991). Forms of social participation which do not embrace and build on this key feature of contemporary experience will decline. Marketing—especially advertising—has developed in part as an expertise in addressing the emotionality of the consumer, often via highly aestheticized imagery, with the aim of giving goods and services the power to generate strong and attractive emotional resonance in the public mind. "Political marketing," if it is to achieve its ambitions, will need to do the same with politics, both generically for the whole domain of politics and for the particular "brands" available within it. It is beyond the scope of this article to go fully into the debates around the idea of "political marketing" (Newman, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001), though I will be referring to it, and some of the argument presented here could be seen as providing a defense of the application of certain marketing principles to politics.

In the remainder of this article, I (a) expand the argument about the relation be-

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tween politics and popular culture; (b) review some examples of recent work that has begun to identify and explore the question of how political communications must adapt to an emotionalized culture; (c) discuss the nature of contemporary emotionalization as it may be reflected in communications, in contrast to traditional message strategies with "emotional" appeal; (d) illustrate a possible direction for the empirical study of the emotional content of political communications, noting how psychologically unsophisticated much political communication typically is at present; and (e) provide some concluding remarks on the concept of "emotional labor" and its implications for reason in politics.

Politics, Popular Culture, and Emotion

Much recent controversy about political communication has tended to focus around the nature and consequences of promotional techniques in contemporary politics (e.g., Wernick, 1991; Franklin, 1994; Scammell, 1995; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Jones, 1999). The high profile critiques of spin, media manipulation, and presentational packaging take us directly to questions about the fundamental nature of politics in the present day. As Street (1997) has pointed out, they require us to ask about the relationship between culture and politics. How is politics influenced by culture? It may be suggested that politics has been influenced by a culture of marketing. In a sense that is true, but this is too narrow a way of putting it. It is not a case of one specific cultural influence—marketing or promotionalism—impacting from "outside" on politics as a particular sphere which, in theory at least, could resist this influence.

Instead, as Ryfe (2001) and Schudson (2001) remind us, politics *is* culture. It is therefore a case of broad cultural changes unfolding partly *within* politics, as in many other spheres of life. There is an inexorability about this process, because there are powerful forces driving it. It is carried both by corporate and other social structural agendas, and also by changes within us as individuals. There are forces for change both arising spontaneously within particular spheres such as politics and filtering across from one sphere to another. As one aspect of what is sometimes described as the arrival of the "postmodern," the boundaries between different social spheres are much more permeable than previously, so politics, work, leisure, personal life, and so on are now in more direct and deep interaction with each other. Technological developments mean that time and space undergo "compression" (Harvey, 1989) and can no longer separate people to the extent they did; this underpins the compression (or condensation, to use the Freudian term) of different cultural and psychic elements into the same social spaces (Richards, 2000).

The broad cultural changes which are transforming politics can be described and analyzed in various ways. The specific feature to be taken here as a starting point—because it is assumed to be a fundamental one—is, crudely put, the increasing influence in politics (though it affects other spheres also) of popular culture (Street, 2001; Dorner, 2003). There are complex drivers of this trend, which I cannot go into here: the proliferation of mass media; the vigor and creativity of popular culture in areas such as music, sport, humor, and other forms of entertainment; and perhaps most basically a deep historical trend toward the democratization of life.

Commonplace illustrations of this influence as it affects politics abound. Political broadcasts, rallies, sometimes whole campaigns take theme tunes from pop music. There is nothing surprising or distinctive about this: Pop music is now the soundtrack of life for most people, omnipresent in public and private spaces. The more televisual the political process has become, the more "we 'read' our politicians through their gestures

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and their faces, in the same way that we read performers on television" (Street, 2001, p. 5). Party political communications make frequent references to images and phrases from contemporary popular culture (e.g., the U.K. Labour Party outdoor ads from the 2001 general election campaign which satirically likened the Conservative Party to disaster movies). Overall, the democratic process is now played out on a stage where—alongside traditional resources from ideology, ritual, and the values of older civic cultures—there are scripts, actors, and props which could be seen as "borrowed" from popular culture (though in fact they soon become part of the political fabric itself). So the influence of culture within politics is a growing one, in the sense that popular culture is increasingly entering and shaping politics, *constituting* everyday politics in the content and channels of political communications, in the dynamics of public opinion, and in the values and decisions of individual citizens.

From the point of view of individual politicians or parties, this process brings tensions and possibilities for failure. The song may not be right for some target audiences, or the stylistic gesture may backfire (as in the derision which greeted the public appearance of then Conservative Party leader William Hague in a baseball cap). Indeed, it might be argued, drawing on these negative examples, that popular culture cannot really be infusing politics as suggested, because if it were then politics would be much more popular than it is. The problem we face is, after all, the *un*popularity of electoral politics.[2]

This, however, takes us to the main point: The unpopularity of politics can be attributed in part to the failure of political actors (from national leaders and their advisors to local activists), and of the professional communicators they work with, to respond and adapt sufficiently to the ways in which popular culture has now transformed society. While the experience of citizens has been transformed, the modes of political address to them have not always matched these transformations. Despite all of the hype about spin and about politicians' enslavement to the media, and despite the undoubted energy with which control of media agendas has been pursued, political communications often remain unattuned to some key dimensions of this new cultural reality. In particular, there is an *emotional deficit* in contemporary political communications, a lack of crafted, sustained attention to the emotional needs of the audience. There is at best only an implicit and patchy recognition that popular culture is an emotionalized culture dense with desires and anxieties.

The popular has always to some extent been a domain of passion, and of emotional release. There are, however, particular qualities to the present preoccupation with feeling. It is not a carnivalesque festival of pure expression or catharsis. It is more reflective, and is as much concerned with the management of feelings as with their expression. It is therefore better described as a "therapeutic" rather than "emotionalized" culture, since in its most positive and developed forms it is characterized by reflexivity as well as by expressivity, by the conjoining of emotion with thought (Richards & Brown, 2002). This is what differentiates it from earlier types of public emotionality. In some respects, the rise of popular culture has involved a simple or quantitative emotionalization of everyday life, as may be observed in, for example, aspects of the uninhibited mourning seen after the death of Princess Diana. But typically this emotionalization is qualitatively different from earlier forms, and is characterized by particular concerns with acknowledging and reflecting upon feelings, both in private and in public (e.g., Walker et al., 1995).[3]

The distinctive nature of this development can be highlighted if we consider it in terms of Elias's theory of the "civilizing process" (e.g., Wouters, 1986). Therapeutic culture is not a remissive reversal of the increasing restraint placed upon us by the

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civilizing trend, but on the contrary a further stage of the internalization of restraint through the capacities for self-monitoring and self-management which it promotes. The expressive, disinhibitory aspects which are required for this—and which may sometimes appear, at least on the surface, to be the major component of the trend—are best thought of as a "controlled de-controlling," a psychic loosening necessary in order to build firmer structures overall.

Empirical evidence for this "therapeutic culture hypothesis" can be sought in a variety of cultural and sociological data. The most direct and self-sufficient evidence across the developed world is probably to be found in the rise of the therapeutic professions, particularly counselling in all of its forms in both private practice and organizational settings. Studies of changes within other professions such as teaching, medicine, nursing, and social work would also show the increasing influence overall since the 1960s of "therapeutic" discourses, as presciently identified by Rieff (1966) and Halmos (1965). At the same time as the proliferation of professionalized techniques for exploring and managing emotional life, there has been a rapid growth of media output and social activity in the areas of self-help, lifestyle, and personal development which is oriented toward agendas of emotional self-exploration and self-management.

Another set of quantitative indices of the rise of the therapeutic could be derived from analyses of media content. In the U.K. there has been a self-evident transformation of broadcast media content in the last two decades, in which action genres have been almost entirely displaced in the ratings by emotion-led programming with an emphasis on personal, affective experience, on identity and relationships, as in "soaps," reality TV, chat shows, and some studio discussions. Crime, comedy, and drama genres have remained popular but now typically have characters, scenarios, and plots drawn in emotionally complex and reflective ways. Quiz shows and sports coverage often have clear dimensions of psychological interest. Similar trends are evident in print media, where for example large sectors of the magazine market have developed to cater to these new sensibilities. While the uses that audiences and readers make of this material have not yet been extensively researched, there is a prima facie case for stating that emotional reflexivity now has a premium place in popular culture.

Despite all of these indicators, and the profusion of commentary on these trends, the coming of the therapeutic is not much acknowledged in political discourse. One implicit patch of recognition is in the rise of political marketing. As noted earlier, the development of popular culture is inseparable from the development of consumer culture, and contemporary emotionalization is both cause and effect of marketing communications. Despite the influence of some rationalistic models in marketing, most marketers have always known their audience to be emotional, in the sense of being influenced by paralinguistic cues and nonrational message content.

It is important to note that this is a matter of human nature, not necessarily of human weakness. Paying deliberate and systematic attention to factors such as the dress, demeanor, and general personality image of political figures is a much-derided practice. It may indeed not be a most edifying contribution to political culture, but it is a recognition of the importance now of the impression that politicians as persons make on citizens as persons. Policy alternatives come with persons attached to them, and the public are quite legitimately interested in the emotional qualities of these persons. At root here is an old question, that of trust: Can this person be trusted? We now ask this question in ways informed by psychological understandings, and we seek answers that tell us about the person as an emotional being. In a promotional culture, there will inevitably be some overlap or convergence of political campaigning with emotionally oriented marketing

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techniques in the effort to win trust in individual politicians, and this should not be summarily dismissed as superficial or cynical manipulation.

Pointers to Affect in Political Communications Research

Alongside the developments in sociological theory and cultural analysis which have foregrounded the "turn to affect," there have been a number of empirical research studies in the specific area of political communications which have begun to highlight the emotional life of the citizen.

A study conducted in the mid-1990s by Rahn and Hirshorn (1999) used the concept of "public mood" (see also Rahn et al., 1996), which the researchers defined as a "diffuse affective state that people experience as a consequence of their membership in a national political community." They found that exposure in their experimental design to attack advertising made some children feel less happy and more angry about America, and that these shifts in "public mood" mediated lower opinions of government. This effect occurred among children low in "political efficacy," that is, low in their belief that government could be influenced by people like themselves. In other words, attack advertising had detrimental and divisive effects on democratic participation through the medium of its impact on *diffuse emotional states*.

Merelman (1998) introduced the concept of "mundane political culture." This refers to the ways in which ordinary people spontaneously talk with each other about politics. Unlike formal political culture in which there are rationally mediated and explicit contests of ideologies and values involving political institutions, individuals participating in mundane political culture deal in ideas and statements which are often implicit, hazy, symbolic, and multivalent in inconsistent and sometimes contradictory ways. Reasoning is "associative." This culture is fundamentally emotional. The conversations studied here were replete with "nostalgia, anxiety, pride, hope, regret and anger" (op. cit., p. 530). (In fact, Merelman's account of this discourse sounds close at times to the functioning of the emotional unconscious as described by psychoanalysts in the concept of "primary process" [Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973]—as illogical, over-inclusive, and lacking substantive reference to social realities.)

Merelman despairs of this mundane discourse, seeing it as undermining democracy by miring people in a disabling ambivalence and muddle, disconnected from institutions and procedures of effective participation. His prescription is to transform it in the direction of conventional democratic culture. If, however, we take seriously his observation that people are emotionally grounded in mundane culture, then we must conclude, first, that they will not be simply educated out of it, since passions are not that readily tutored, and second, that it may contain *resources* for democratic renewal as well as impediments to it. Our emotional selves support our creative and prosocial endeavors as well as our defensive and irresponsible tendencies.

In European political communications research, we can also find examples of studies which register in various ways the emotional nature of contemporary politics and argue for a need to recognize this in communication practices. Mazzoleni (2000) suggested that the expressive dimension of political participation has become increasingly important, and can and does coexist alongside instrumental dimensions of voting decisions.

Reviewing the political condition of a number of European countries, Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) see that this recomposition of the voter as a more "volatile" and emotional being is driven partly by the decline of political parties. In many Western democracies, parties are now trusted less than all other political institutions, and although we should not

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assume this is completely irreversible, it is probably a long-term trend. It is grounded in deep social changes, including the rise of the educated and "volatile" voter, and it means that voting decisions are made on more *personalized* bases, with the personalities and emotional qualities of candidates therefore being more important.

Again, it cannot be assumed that this is a one-sidedly negative trend, or one that in itself cancels out a politics of more traditional values. Mazzoleni and Schulz argue that while the mediatization of politics (the creation by mass media of the public spheres in which political debate takes place) does involve some degradations of political discourse, it has not amounted to a complete subjugation of politics to the media. One could in fact take a more positive line and suggest that the more thoroughly mediatized our society and therefore our politics become, the greater the opportunities to reshape and reinvigorate democracy. This scenario assumes a creative approach to political communication which would redefine politics, not in opposition to the domains of the personal and emotional but as overlapping with them and in fruitful exchange with them.

So there are various ways in which political communications research has begun to register the growing importance of the affective dimensions of politics, whether in the form of diffuse affective states in the public mind, emotionalized forms of political discourse, or the individual personalities of political actors. Moreover, there have been broader theoretical moves in political psychology to focus on emotion. Goodwin et al. (2001) assemble a collection of essays looking at diverse case studies in "social movement" politics: AIDS activism, Gdansk in 1980, the Christian New Right, and so forth. Using a social constructionist approach related to that of Hochschild (1983), they argue for the crucial importance of theorizing the emotional dimensions of these movements if we are to understand their internal dynamics and their impact. Marcus et al. (2000) propose a theory of "affective intelligence" as an alternative to dominant rational choice theories of voter behavior. Drawing on advances in neuropsychology, they argue for the role of anxiety in stimulating attentiveness. Although they see their theory as in the end complementary to that of rational choice, their work is a further indication that political communication research will have to address itself to the question of affect if it is to continue to absorb developments in the social sciences.

Contemporary Emotionalization

An objection to the general argument being developed here is that politicians have always used emotional appeals, as Aristotle recognized in his analysis of rhetoric. The so-called "fear appeal" is, for example, a long-established technique of commercial and political advertising. In their study of television advertising in U.S. presidential campaigns, Kaid and Johnston (2001) found that emotional appeals were more often dominant than logical or ethical ones, and that this dominance had not increased over the five decades they examined.

However, the traditional emotional appeal is not the same as a sophisticated discourse of emotionality. The former may use images of childhood innocence, human vulnerability, national pride, strong leadership, and so on, and be deliberately crafted to "pull the heart strings." Whether done cynically or not, this approach will have a limited conception of emotionality, as a transparent and compartmentalized aspect of the human condition, a known faculty that may or may not be brought into play. A contemporary discourse of emotionality, however, will involve a different understanding of emotion or affect and its place in everyday life. Drawing on studies integrating psychodynamic theory with social theory (e.g., Prager & Rustin, 1993; Brown, 2000; Richards & Brown, 2002), one can suggest that such a discourse would understand emotion as:

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1. An intrinsic and continuous dimension of human functioning, not an optional or episodic response—it does not only matter or come to life in moments when it is explicitly present, as when stimulated by a recognizably "emotional" passage in a speech or a scene in an advertisement.
2. Complex and multilayered, and at times contradictory and obscure. It is therefore not always easily observed or understood.
3. Not just expressive or cathartic but also reflexive. As suggested earlier, there is a tendency to acknowledge and process emotional life. Areas of emotional difficulty, involving anxiety or conflict, may be confronted and addressed rather than ignored or denied. In the language of psychotherapy, there is an effort toward the containment and working through of difficulties, rather than their suppression or expression through acting out.
4. Increasingly recognized as the ground of self-identity. Emotional narratives about feelings and relationships (the "soap" formula being a theatrical type of these) provide the material for contemporary narratives of oneself. Politics also is increasingly experienced through such narratives, which are constructed around individual politicians as they are around other public figures (Kline, 1997). These narratives are psychologically realistic, which means that they include the anxieties, doubts, conflicts, and dilemmas which are to be found in our everyday emotional lives.

This list of features, particularly those of reflexivity and containment, indicates some key differences between present and past forms of emotionality in the culture as a whole, not just in political messages. The broad cultural changes which are the starting point of this article can be located roughly in the last three decades, and seen as the unfolding of trends begun in the 1960s. Historians would, however, want to install a longer-term picture in which the roots of these trends extend back into earlier centuries. Martin's (1981) historical sociology of popular culture, Campbell's (1987) history of consumerism, and Gay's (1998) history of affect all point to Romanticism as the original source of today's emotionality. However, the alloying of earlier "sentimental" orientations with the 20th-century rise of psychology, particularly psychoanalysis and its project of exploring—and, as far as possible, managing—the life of feeling (Rieff, 1966), has produced the particular "therapeutic" quality of contemporary culture. Within this culture, an emotional politics will have strong sensibilities for the feelings of others (as in Zeldin's, 1994, global picture of the changing affective self), and so be very different from the rowdily disinhibited forms of emotional political communication practiced, for example, in the mid-19th century United States (Schudson, 2001).

The ever-present, complex, and reflexive narratives which characterize this culture will embody all of the major themes of human emotional life, the "great oneiric themes" as Barthes (1988) calls them in his discussion of the power of advertisements. To identify and track their presence in messages, communication analysts must then turn to psychology for help in defining these themes, and face a choice from among the various models of emotional life produced by different schools of psychology.

Following an eclectic version of psychodynamic theory, for example, we might begin with the following list of basic themes:

- dependency versus autonomy
- loss and mourning
- gender and sexuality

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- authority (including leader-follower relationships)
- rivalry (within and between generations)
- guilt and forgiveness

All communications will draw on these themes, or ones like them, because they are the stuff of human psyche and culture. We can see such themes as the emotional correlates or consubstantials of rational politics. There is no suggestion that rational debate should or will collapse into a politics of irrationality. It is instead a case of engaging with the roots of political commitments, with our emotional responses to policies and politicians, and with our emotional needs as we find these dramatized on the political stage.

Inevitably, this argument draws replies that raise the problem of demagogy, which in liberal-democratic common sense is sometimes equated with emotion in politics. It is important, then, to emphasize the distinction between the exploitation and manipulation of feeling characteristic of the demagogue, and the articulation and management of feeling that is the potential role of the contemporary leader whose communications reach for containment (see above, and the discussion of emotional labor below). The choice now is not between democracy and demagogy, but between manipulative and containing forms of emotionalized rhetoric.

Political Advertisements as Emotional Communications

How might this body of psychosocial theory be applied in the empirical study of political communications? There is one mode of political communication in which we might particularly expect to be able to study the emotional content of messages, and indeed expect to find such content highly developed. This is the political advertisement (including in this category the U.K. party political broadcasts, though airtime is free for these). There are traditions of research that take commercial ads seriously as emotional communications, and the same might apply to political ads. They are highly crafted messages where the influence of popular and consumer culture within politics is likely to be most obvious. They also have an importance for democracy, even if they are completely ineffective as campaign tools. They can be compared to the singing of national anthems at international soccer matches. This has no known effect on the game's result, but it is important for the public experience of the occasion that it is done well. Sung with passion, the anthems testify to the expression of national identity through the sporting encounter. Party ads, though they are one-off artifacts, should carry some of the functions of rituals such as this singing. Preceding the actual moment of contest, they should enable us to feel a passionate involvement in it and to feel the importance of the political contest in the life of the nation. Unfortunately, the national anthems now fail to inspire us to sing—only a few of the players and crowd do it with gusto. And, similarly, the party ads too often fail to inspire a sense of involvement. To do so, they need to address themselves more closely and deliberately to the emotional life of the nation.

Nonetheless, emotional themes are often present across whole campaigns. In the build-up to a campaign, the parties may come to share a basic sense of what the emotional preoccupations of the public are, and this tacit understanding is then reflected in what their ad agencies come up with. For example, in the U.K. party election broadcasts (PEBs) for the 2001 general election, the overarching theme to which a majority of spots subscribed was leadership. How would an emotionally literate party broadcast approach the issue of leadership? Some psychosocial analyses (e.g., Hirschhorn, 1998) would suggest that it would be put together with an eye for the high level of ambivalence

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that is always at the center of our relation to leaders. We crave leadership and the guidance and protection it promises, but we resent the control that leaders can exert over us. We want leaders to be people of extraordinary courage and competence, yet we also want them to be rooted in ordinary life. We need them but envy them. An emotionally sophisticated communication would try to acknowledge and manage this ambivalence.

Typically, such sophistication was not evident in this set of broadcasts, which tended instead to offer either homely or grandiose idealizations of leaders. While there are obvious reasons why a party would not foreground the vulnerabilities or inner conflicts of its leader, there is a tendency of political ads to deal, with no self-consciousness, in idealized images of a kind now largely abandoned by the more creative trend setters in commercial advertising (see, e.g., Goldman, 1992; Leiss et al., 1990; Richards et al., 2000). While one-dimensional messages such as this may lead some viewers into a naive or fragile enthusiasm, more are likely to switch channels in boredom or disbelief. Political communications have to change considerably before they will connect with audiences that increasingly demand more authentic, playful, and emotionally complex representations.

Political Communications as Emotional Labor

Of course, it has long been recognized that voters choose leaders on the basis partly of their personalities, though the older term "character" would for some be a more acceptable way of stating this. We know that we are presented with choices between candidates as objects of trust as well as between parties with different policies, and trustworthiness is a question of individual character. However, this factor of trust is now becoming increasingly personalized, as alternative bases of trust in party traditions (whether based in economic interest, ideology, or vague sentiment) become ever weaker.

We now need more than the capacity to trust politicians' role, since we can rely less on cultural and institutional role structures (whether patrician, technocratic, democratic, or whatever). So political leaders have, to an increasing extent, the task of presenting themselves as *persons* to be trusted for their intrinsic qualities.

This does not mean that we are at the end of ideology, but that we are amidst a cultural transformation in which ideology and politics in the traditional sense are becoming more enmeshed with the personal, with psychological considerations and emotionality. Emotional qualities are increasingly registered and scrutinized, and judgment of them is part of the political process. Those involved in communicating with the public must do so in ways cognizant of the new emotionality.

Traditional political considerations are not now occluded, nor is public life being asymmetrically invaded by the private and personal. The public is not necessarily degraded, nor any less capable of participating in a humane and inclusive civic culture. But traditional separations between domains are no longer viable. There is a compression together in the same social and psychic spaces of the personal, feeling subject and the public figure. The personality of the politician is bound up with the policies she or he represents, and voting is a complex choice between packages of pragmatic, ideological, and emotional values.

One aspect of this development is that politicians now have a clear and major piece of "emotional labor" (to use the term introduced by Hochschild, 1983; see also, e.g., Smith, 1992) to perform. They must present themselves as individual persons of a particular emotional makeup, who (to use terminology developed earlier in the study of group dynamics, as in, e.g., Parsons & Bales, 1955) can offer themselves as social-

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emotional, expressive leaders as well as task-oriented leaders. More is demanded of leaders than previously. They must now be seen as attuned to newly dominant values of expressivity and spontaneity. But our contemporary cultural concerns are not just with the expression of emotions but also with the *management* of emotions. So politicians must also be seen to offer some containment of the emotions of their public. Like other social institutions and cultural forms, politics is drawn into the circulation of feelings and has to contribute to the emotional labor of containing the feelings circulating in the public domain.

In one sense, this has always been the case; the historical shift is complex, and leadership has always been an exercise in feeling management, as has sometimes been apparent (one thinks, for example, of Churchill in the U.K. and Eisenhower in the U.S.). Now, however, there is pressure to offer such leadership very deliberately. Much effort is expended in presentation to achieve this, to encompass within it all aspects of the leader's life and self, and to ensure that these in turn encompass the relevant therapeutic agendas in personal philosophy and policy values. Moreover, there is a fundamental new quality to the emotional role of political leaders. This lies in the much greater potential for awareness of the emotional dimensions of everyday life, and in the increased self-questioning and self-examination characteristic of our therapeutic times. Acknowledgment of error and vulnerability, and honesty about failure and disappointment, for example, are now more widely recognized as important in the conduct of everyday life, but are still remarkably rare in the discourse of politicians.

With this awareness comes greater scope for choice, and for the deliberate management of feelings in certain ways to achieve certain outcomes. Politicians are managers, not only in the technocratic sense of their management of the national economy but also in the sense that they (among other public figures) are charged with the management of massive national reserves of feeling.

To recognize this, and to speak of the possibility that this emotional management might be conducted artfully, is not to invoke a nightmare of social engineering. As in small face-to-face groups, and as in organizations, so it is at the level of national culture: The effective management of emotional dynamics can lead to the development of supportive and creative relationships, and to a vigorous and enabling democratic ethos. The argument is not for a rush into "personality politics," but for the enrichment of politics with communication practices that carry emotional narratives.

One thing that was new about "New" Labour (Richards, 2000) was the attention paid to the emotional tasks of political leadership, to intuiting the anxieties of the public and seeking to respond to them. Some of the emotional attentiveness comes from Tony Blair's own self. He is the first U.K. leader with a social self formed during the 1960s, and so has styles of thought and speech that are attuned to the reflexive and emotionalized modes of today.[4] And some of this attentiveness comes from the much-criticized practices of communication and image management. Evaluations of these differ, from left and right condemnations of the cynicism of spin to other, more complex and potentially favorable assessments. But beneath these arguments we can see wide acceptance that the political scene is more about emotions and their management than it used to be, and that politicians and their advisors are intensely involved in certain kinds of emotional labor, particularly the mass-mediated management of public feeling. This labor at its best fosters a creative approach to political communication, one that inverts the 1960s slogan that "the personal is political" and redefines politics as interwoven with the domains of the personal and wired into the emotional circuitry of popular culture.

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Notes

1. Also, some developments in the psychology of emotion (e.g., Harre & Parrott, 1996) have an interdisciplinary outlook, and converge with the sociological work.

2. This unpopularity is often expressed in terms of politics being "boring." The concept of boredom is a complex one, but one understanding of what people mean when they say they are bored is that they are finding something to be without emotional significance for them, and lacking in scope for identification.

3. There is of course a vigorous debate about the meaning and merits of this trend, and a recurrent strand of hostile commentary on it (see, e.g., Anderson & Mullen, 1998; Furedi, 2003). The position implicitly taken in this article is that on balance, it is a positive feature of contemporary society, though many diverse phenomena are encompassed in this debate and generalizations should be approached with great care.

4. Unfortunately, the prime minister spoils the approach by referring to "all the personality nonsense" which he claims is irrelevant to the real business of politics! Blair here bites the cultural hand that feeds him.

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