

The Job of Creating Desire: Propaganda as an Apparatus of Government and Subjectification

Cory Wimberly

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, RIO GRANDE VALLEY

ABSTRACT: This article addresses shortcomings in the way that philosophers and cultural critics have considered propaganda by offering a new genealogical account. Looking at figures such as Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, Bourdieu, and Stanley, this article finds that their consideration of propaganda has not necessarily been wrong but has missed some of the most significant and important functions of propaganda. This text draws on archival and published materials from propagandists, most notably Edward Bernays, to elaborate a new governmentality of propaganda and public relations. Through focusing on the concept of public opinion, I argue that propaganda is best thought of as an apparatus whose function it is to construct, modify, counter, and destroy relations of force within public opinion in order to produce the subjectivities and conduct that its disseminators and their clients desire.

KEYWORDS: Foucault, propaganda, public relations, public opinion, Jason Stanley

The term *public opinion* first appeared in English in Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1689. Locke described public opinion as the judgments made by private people about the "virtue and vice" of others.¹ Public opinion was not something Locke embraced unambiguously as he suffered the slings and arrows of his peers over the supposed vices of

his own radical ideas.² His contemporaries Hume and Rousseau followed his usage of the term *public opinion* to the extent that they associated public opinion with the private judgments of the people. Hume expanded the centrality of the concept of public opinion to politics and asserted that “it is, therefore, on opinion only that government is founded.”³ He asserted that the approval of public opinion is necessary to government on the grounds that people do not surrender their power of judgment upon entering a political regime and they will continue to obey only as long as they judge fit. As a result, opinion is the foundation of government because consenting opinion is necessary to avoid rebellion. Kant had a different take on the centrality of public opinion to politics; he suggested that the people have a duty to correct the sovereign’s mistakes so that an outcome is not produced that neither the sovereign nor the people want. In other words, the place of public opinion is not just in forming the consent that is the bedrock of government (Hume) but also in serving as a check and corrective for the state.⁴

In the last hundred years, there has been a strong critical current that has lamented the transformation of public opinion from something critical, rational, and independent that Kant would have celebrated into something shallow, fickle, and submissive. These critical accounts conclude that propaganda of various kinds—public relations, advertisements, marketing—have transformed public opinion into something that it should not be: whereas public opinion once served as a check on power, now it has been co-opted to serve the powerful. In order to make this reversal of the function of public opinion possible—from check to power to its support—the critical accounts claim that something important about public opinion has been falsified. Depending on who you read either we are infested by lies, we are alienated from ourselves, or a false chimerical representation of the public has been manufactured by the mass media. I sort these accounts of falsification into three different types for clarity: epistemological, ethical, and ontological. I want to recount these three arguments in order to offer another account of contemporary public opinion, one that does not take falsehood to be the central function of public opinion but, rather, government and the transformation of subjectivity.

Several thinkers focus straightforwardly on the epistemological falsity of public opinion. One tradition, stretching from Upton Sinclair to the recent publication of Jason Stanley’s *How Propaganda Works*, sees public opinion as false in the sense that it lies, distorts, or omits the truth in order to get people to come to false conclusions about the social and political

situation. Upton Sinclair was a muckraking journalist and author. In his 1919 *The Brass Check*, he focused a chapter on propaganda and Ivy L. Lee's work for the Rockefellers. Sinclair's primary thesis was that propagandists marshal their clients' fortunes in order to get the press to print outrageous lies. Sinclair argued that there were a myriad of ways in which money could buy enough influence to result in the printing of falsehoods. For instance, here he writes about the influence the Rockefellers exerted on the press during the Ludlow strike and massacre in 1914:

When the miners of Colorado go on strike, and the Rockefellers proceed to fill every daily and weekly newspaper in the state of Colorado with full-page broadsides against the miners, this of course is not a bribe; the fact that on the page opposite there will appear an editorial, reproducing completely the point of view of the advertisements—that is a pure coincidence, and the editorial is the honorable and disinterested opinion of the newspaper editor! When the United States Commission on Industrial Relations exposes the fact that these attacks on the miners contain the most outrageous lies, and that the thousand-dollar-a-month press-agent of the Rockefellers knew they were lies—it is a pure coincidence that very little about this revelation is published in Colorado newspapers!⁵

A century later, Jason Stanley's *How Propaganda Works* replicates Sinclair's fundamental position on the corruption of public opinion. Stanley writes that propagandists seek to produce public opinion based on "flawed ideologies in the form of false legitimization narratives."⁶ In Stanley's understanding, wily propagandists fabricate lies to mask the perpetration of injustice. The issue here is that people are purposely led to hold false beliefs that undermine democracy and enable unjustified harm to come to them or others while providing unjustified benefit to others. On the closing page of his book, Stanley writes, "By investigating a particular example, I have aimed to make plausible Weber's claim that in societies with, for example, large and unequal distribution of goods, the elite are able to transmit their flawed ideological beliefs to the negatively privileged groups as a mechanism of social control."⁷ Like Sinclair, Stanley finds that purposely spread false beliefs—lies—serve as a form of control, propping up elite control with capital resources. Public opinion is false because it is epistemologically false, a tissue of lies.

Yet another sense of falsehood guides the critical work on public opinion that has its roots in Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* and *German Ideology*, including Adorno and Horkheimer's *Culture Industry* and Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*. The *1844 Manuscripts* was first published in German in 1932 and in combination with *The German Ideology* had a significant impact on Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno. In fact, Marcuse wrote one of the first reviews of the *1844 Manuscripts* in 1932 about the time he parted from Heidegger; some scholars have tried to link the influence of this text with Marcuse's break from Heidegger.⁸ In the *German Ideology*, Marx identifies the ruling ideas of any time period with the "ruling class," who dominate the production of ideas just as they dominate the production of goods. Marx argued that the ideas the ruling class produced were an idealized version of the "relationships which make one class the ruling one."⁹ The ruling class ideology spread a false understanding about how society works and the place of the human within it. Individual subjects caught in this false ideology resultantly came to a false consciousness of themselves and their world. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx referred to this false consciousness as "alienation": the process of making what is familiar (one's own humanity in this case) alien.¹⁰ Capitalist ideology alienates the laboring class from itself because the laboring class understands itself through the capitalists' perspective as a labor commodity, that is, as a thing. The lower classes' ideological public opinion produces an alienated and so false sense of itself and its needs.

Marcuse, like Marx, claims that the public today suffers from "false needs" stemming from a "false consciousness": "The novel feature is . . . the depth of the preconditioning which shapes the instinctual drives and aspirations of the individuals and obscures the difference between false and true consciousness."¹¹ Although the broad outlines of Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* echo the Marx discussed above, Marcuse departs from Marx with the inclusion of Freud. From Freud, Marcuse gets the idea that humans have "instinctual drives" that, though they are invariable, can be satisfied in more repressive and false ways or more liberatory and true ways. Marcuse diagnoses us today as suffering from the imposition of false repressive needs. That is, material conditions have led to the rise of a dominant capitalist class that gives the lower classes a false sense of themselves and their needs that prevents them from a true and liberatory development of their instinctual drives. This is different from Sinclair and Stanley in that the implication here is not just that propagandists lie to propagate injustice

but that their lies give people a false understanding of themselves and their needs. Public opinion is false in that it covers over the true needs and flourishing of the subject with a false ideological *ethos*.

Bourdieu and Habermas, though in tension on many issues, have some common ground in their shared sense of the falsehood of contemporary public opinion. Both specifically fault public opinion as false in the sense that it purports to be a representation of the public's opinion when it is not representative of the public at all. This may sound the same as Sinclair's and Stanley's claim that public opinion is epistemologically false, but Bourdieu's and Habermas's claim contains a further ontological dimension. Namely, when public opinion misrepresents the public, it not only lies about what the public opines but implies a false public that holds those opinions. In other words, opinion polls claim that there is a public who as a considered body has come together in agreement on the position that the opinion polls report, but in reality, the polls are a manipulative assemblage of individual ideas, not representative of any whole but a series of single opinions.¹² Bourdieu writes, "At present, the opinion poll is an instrument of political action: perhaps its most important function is to impose the illusion that there is something called public opinion in the sense of the purely arithmetical total of individual opinions; to impose the illusion that it is meaningful to speak of the average of opinions or the average opinion."¹³ Bourdieu's essay on public opinion is appropriately titled "Public Opinion Does Not Exist" because public opinion cannot be produced without a public. The truly devastating falsehood that public opinion propagates is that the public body exists, when it in fact does not.

This is also different from Marx, Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno in that Habermas and Bourdieu do not assert that the lies being manufactured are believed and internalized by the public. This is not a case of a public internalizing an alienated consciousness. The implication here is not primarily that the public takes on falsehoods or a false sense of self but that the public spoken about today does not exist at all. It is manufactured broadcloth: both thinkers agree that a true public opinion—in the sense of a broad debate in the public that produces a group position—does not exist in the contemporary age. Habermas argues that the public sphere has undergone structural transformations that have resulted in the dissolution of the public. However, even after the dissolution of the public, various entities in society continue to assert the existence of the public because it facilitates rule: "The feedback of group opinions, defined in terms of

the categories employed in research on governmental and administrative processes or on political consensus formation (influenced by the display of staged or manipulative publicity), cannot close the gap between public opinion as a fiction of constitutional law and the social-psychological decomposition of its concept.”¹⁴ For Habermas what is of primary importance is not the particular lies or distortions given in a piece of propaganda but the effect they have in manufacturing a false representation of the public. The public has dissolved due to changing structural conditions, and if we want something like the public to reemerge, then our institutions will need to change to make that possible.

In the last century, philosophers have found public opinion false in an epistemological sense, an ethical sense, and an ontological sense. To some degree, they are all right: propagandists lie, lead us into unhealthy and unhappy ways of living and thinking about ourselves, and misrepresent opinion results to manufacture a false representation of the public. We are deceived, set against ourselves, and an image of our consent is produced and attributed to a body that in many ways does not exist. Who we are, they argue, is deeply false because public opinion has falsified us. Rectification of the problem is to sweep aside the false and reveal the abiding truth: either by reasoning critically and correctly to the truth, through discovering the truth of our humanity and desires through revolution, or by banishing that chimera of who we are—the public invented for the opinion polls—and grappling with who we truly are.

To an extent, the critical literature on public opinion in philosophy parallels what Foucault found in extant critical studies of sexuality. Foucault found that many critics claimed that true and healthy sexuality was being censored under an “imposed silence” that had been enforced since the Victorian era.¹⁵ The critics claimed that the solution to this repression was “to discover it, to liberate it, to articulate it in discourse, to formulate it in truth.”¹⁶ The claim the critics of public opinion make is much the same: The truth of public opinion must be recovered from the propagandists and articulated, its truth revealed; the repression of the truth of public opinion must end. Foucault argued that this “repressive hypothesis” was itself false; likewise, I want to argue that examining public opinion as a kind of repression of the truth, the true human self-relation, or the true existence of the public misses many of the most socially and politically salient features of public opinion. Undoubtedly, all these accusations of falsehood are right in the sense that propagandists have produced various kinds of

falsehoods, but to end the analysis there misses important insights about public opinion and the character of the propagandists' interventions there.

Why have the critics missed these other aspects of public opinion? Perhaps it is because they all failed to read the archives of the propagandists. All of their works stand on analysis of received propaganda; they significantly examine neither the archives nor the writings of the propagandists. Propaganda is a field that deliberately hides its purposes and effects; it seems to me to be hubris not to investigate how propagandists conceived of and used public opinion. In the case that propagandists were successful in hiding at least some of their effects from us, then it is worth exploring their archives in order to see what those effects were and how they were mobilized through public opinion. Moreover, to the extent that propagandists do impact us and we fail to recognize the force and shape of those impacts, we are blind not just to the full extent of public opinion but also to who we are. This question here is about not just propaganda and public opinion but its impact on contemporary subjectivity. For this reason, the critical examination of how public opinion and propaganda works is also an examination of contemporary subjectivity: Who are we?

While I find plenty of evidence of falsehood in public relations both in my archival research and without, it is also clear that falsification is not all propagandists aimed to do, and what is more, I think that there is a grave risk of misunderstanding propaganda when falsehood is taken too centrally. I do not want to be mistaken on this point: each of the above analyses of public opinion has something to offer and strikes an important point. Nonetheless, they are missing an important, if not the most important, way that public opinion has been mobilized since the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁷

In order to explore a different critical reading of public opinion, I will focus on Edward Bernays's 1923 *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. Bernays's text was the first book by a propagandist focused on public opinion and a "seminal" work in propaganda.¹⁸ While many other texts consider public opinion in consonant ways, none of the early work from propagandists considers it so systematically or in such a sustained way; I will refer widely to other texts but focus on Bernays's deeper account. I argue that public opinion should be understood foremost as a space in which the multiplicity of forces produced by the public encounters the forces of those seeking to govern the public; public opinion is a space formed in the establishment of governmental relations of force between the public and those seeking to conduct its

conduct. By *government* here, I employ Foucault's definition as the "conduct of conducts."¹⁹ I borrow Foucault's definition not out of theoretical fealty but because it is a historically derived definition whose lineage and primary conceptual contours are operative in propaganda. As we will see, the notion of public opinion as a space for the struggle over the direction of conduct emerges from the propaganda texts. For instance, John Price Jones, a pioneer and leading figure in propaganda, wrote, "The work, therefore, of persons who are guiding and advising in public relations deals fundamentally with problems of human conduct, human action, human thinking, human emotions."²⁰ I will argue that public opinion was not primarily a means to distribute lies of whatever type for Bernays and other propagandists but, rather, to transform subjects and their conduct. His propaganda aimed to be not just a film of falsehood that was laid over the truth but a transformation of who we are and how we comport ourselves. If propagandists have mobilized public opinion as a means to transform who we are, then there may not be a "true" subject left to liberate; the liberated subject may need to be created first. It might be the case that "that which is should not be," as John Stuhr has noted, but it must nevertheless be accepted as that which is—not a falsehood covering it over.²¹ Resultantly, combating propaganda cannot just be consciousness-raising and truth-seeking but must include reflection on how we might conduct ourselves differently, be differently—it must be a transformation of self and not just a liberation.

In order to give substance to this argument, I want to turn to Foucault again for another useful term: *transactional reality*. Examination of Foucault's deployment of this term in his own studies of government can help to sensitize us to an aspect of Bernays's thought that might otherwise be easily missed: namely, that public opinion is a region constituted by the interaction of governmental forces.

For Foucault, "transactional realities" are spaces that "although they have not always existed are nonetheless real, are born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them, at the interface, so to speak, of governors and governed."²² Foucault analyzed civil society and sexuality through such a lens, pointing out that they are real (not false) domains that take their contour from the ongoing struggles to conduct the conduct of others. For example, he argued that civil society is a reality even though at one point it did not exist; civil society is formed through a particular liberal configuration of the struggle by the state to govern the population and by the population to govern the state.

Civil society is a real domain but formed only through the interaction of the forces of the state and private citizens seeking each to govern the other. This struggle does not mask a deeper truth or way of being but forms a reality whose only basis and depth is found in its “transactional” relationships of force.

Bernays’s analysis preceded Foucault’s by fifty-five years but described public opinion in shockingly close affinity to Foucault’s “transactional realities”: “The public and the press, or for that matter, the public and any force that modifies public opinion, interact. Action and interaction are continually going on in between the forces projected out to the public and the public itself. The public relations counsel must understand this fact in its broadest and most detailed implications. He must understand not only what these various forces are, but he must be able to evaluate their relative powers with fair accuracy.”²³ For Bernays, public opinion was that domain where “the public” interacted with those forces that would govern it and which the public sought to govern in return; public opinion was precisely a spot of contestation and struggle formed by the interaction of relations of force. Public opinion was the domain formed by the struggle between the public and a variety of agencies to constitute each other and each other’s conduct according to their own agenda.

For Bernays, in the end, public opinion is composed of any force operative in the struggle to govern the public and the public to govern those forces seeking to govern it. Bernays quoted Walter Lippmann to convey the point that the “significant revolution of modern times is not industrial or economic or political but the revolution which is taking place in the art of creating consent among the governed.”²⁴ The domain in which that revolution was happening was public opinion. Bernays stated that the public relations counsel “helps to mold the action of his client as well as to mold public opinion.”²⁵ In other words, his picture of the propagandist was as the mediator of force: the one who sits among the forces and molds the impact of the public on businesses and the state and the impact of businesses and the state on the public. The question public relations counsels and other propagandists navigated as their profession was this: “What forces are currently governing conduct, and how can we intervene to alter those forces so that public conduct might be constituted in ways more desirable to our clients?”

Bernays was not alone among propagandists. For John Price Jones, propaganda was about the transformation of subjectivity through psychology: “And when psychology discovered which stimuli bring favorable

responses and which bring unfavorable responses, it made considerable progress in solving the problem of human behavior. . . . It is probable, by a certain amount of study, to come to know more about the minds of your workers in order to bend them to your will as you must in order to achieve the desired results.”²⁶ Jones, like Bernays, aimed to exert force—psychologically honed—to govern the conduct of the public, in this case the working public.

Another example can be found in Abram Lipsky’s book *Man the Puppet: The Art of Controlling Minds*. Although it might often be trepidatious to judge a book by its cover, in this case you would certainly not guess wrongly about its contents. The book is about how one can control the public mind. The primary goal is not to instill false beliefs, or to provide a false sense of human needs, or even to fabricate an illusory public: it is control. But the control is not control through deception but, rather, by transforming the publics so that they willingly do one’s bidding, “controlling minds.” Lies, false self-understanding, and illusory beings are all secondary to that universal aim of control for Lipsky: “The universal urge to control the minds of others, for the satisfaction of which the methods we know today have been developed, is not new.”²⁷

The evidence of propagandists defining their work in terms of government and subjectification could continue well beyond the patience of most readers to indulge it. But the evidence goes beyond just the propagandists’ self-conception revealed in their archives. It was a fairly widely held understanding of propaganda that its function was to transform subjectivity and govern conduct. In this quote from President Hoover in 1928 he says exactly that: “You have taken over the job of creating desire and have transformed people into constantly moving happiness machines. Machines, which have become the key to economic progress.”²⁸ Calvin Coolidge, also while he was president, said much the same thing two years earlier: “Advertising . . . is the most potent influence in [adapting] and changing the habits and modes of life, affecting what we eat, what we wear, and the work and play of the whole Nation.”²⁹ The understanding of propagandists and at least some of those outside propaganda was that they worked to create and govern subjects, even if that notion has not deeply penetrated most philosophical discourses on propaganda and public opinion.

How does falsehood fit into this view of public opinion as a space for the interaction of forces seeking to constitute the conduct of others? Everyone is familiar with the way that propagandists lie and distort information,

desire, and the very existence of the public—every day advertisements promise things about products that are impossible to deliver (e.g., “Wear these shoes—everyone will find you sexually desirable!” or “Buy this fitness equipment and you will look like a Greek god in sixty days!”), and public relations professionals claim things about their clients and their employees that are clearly not true (“The environment of the Gulf of Mexico is British Petroleum’s top priority!”). Propaganda’s falsehoods are legion: How does falsehood fit in with this notion of public opinion?

To answer this question, it is first necessary to take a step backward for a larger picture of public opinion. For Bernays, the forces circulating in public opinion preexist the propagandists’ efforts, and any attempt to govern opinion must have a “fundamental understanding and appreciation” of how those forces are currently laid out at the time of intervention. Propaganda has to be constructed to operate within an already ongoing movement of relations of force. This point cannot be overstressed: while it is possible to fabricate any lies whatsoever about the public, those lies will circulate and produce their effects within an already existent set of force relations known as public opinion. The forces within public opinion are “transactional,” and so the introduction of any new force, including a falsehood, produces a series of ripple effects, realigning and transforming the existing relations. As Vincent Colapietro notes, “A purely spatial sense of *in* can be set in contrast to a *transactional* sense” (this issue); in this context, the transactional nature of public opinion results in mutually related forces of government.³⁰ Bernays saw the forces in public opinion as transactional, sending out ripples of reinforcing, countering, combining, and creative force along the various lines of government and subjectification. With the proper study those ripple effects can be forecast, and precise interventions may be plotted.

It might be possible to tell lies that circulate within the transactional reality of public opinion and produce effects, but they must be judged for how they interact with the forces there as a related whole. But do not mistake the calculated lies for the character of public opinion as a whole. Public opinion is much more than an epistemic endeavor, and neither truth nor falsity is an exhaustive descriptor of its activity. Lying is just one tactic to achieve larger strategic aims in governing the public. Stanley, Bourdieu, and others understand the propagandist too shallowly, as if the falsehood were the aim of the propagandist instead of one way among many to sculpt conduct through the modification of force relations. Public opinion is not a

truth value, a means to alienate humanity from itself, or a false projection of the public: it is a transactional reality in which some falsehoods operate to amplify, diffuse, reinforce, or constitute lines of force. In the context of public opinion, falsehoods of various types must be seen in terms of the force they produce and how they alter conduct and subjectivities. If a falsehood helps accomplish the conducting of conduct, then the falsehood will be disseminated, but do not confuse the intervention into public opinion with the nature of public opinion. Lying or any other action is thought of as a tactical intervention immanent to an already existing set of force relations, in order to act on those forces already in play governing conduct.

For example, when Ivy L. Lee claimed in the Ludlow strike that the union organizers were being paid many times more than they actually were, the purpose of such a message was not just to produce belief in the lie. Some might have believed it, but many did not. The currents of force were too strongly arrayed against Rockefeller's mining corporations in Ludlow for many to believe the lies of their propagandists. However, the lie introduced the beginning of doubt and critical space between the miners and unions; it produced seeds of distrust, perhaps even at an unconscious level, that were developed in other ways as time went on. Likewise, during Obama's tenure as president the most outrageous lies have been spread about him—that he is not a citizen but a Muslim, a terrorist, and a radical black nationalist who seeks the downfall of the white race and so on. It is true that some believe the lies outright. However, they also have to be understood as interventions into an already existent set of forces in which xenophobia, evangelical Christianity, and racism are rampant. The aim was not so much belief in the particular claims being made but in reconstituting the public and its relation to the president. The aim was to have the public conduct themselves in ways that hindered Obama's agenda; to that end lies and bringing racism, centuries of religious strife, and fear into the public's relationship with the president, his aims, and the Democratic Party served propagandists well. The lie shifted the lines of force in public opinion but was not constitutive of public opinion as a whole. Public opinion is not a fabric of falsehoods but a set of power relations centering around the government of the public that sometimes makes tactical use of various kinds of falsehood.

Not just to cement this point but also to reveal its further consequences, we should note that Bernays's preferred strategy was not falsification but co-optation. While he did not use the exact term *co-optation*, I introduce it

here as shorthand for the variety of ways in which Bernays wrote of using and bending the forces that already permeated public opinion. For example, Bernays talks about efforts to broaden the use of silk in the American markets by drawing on and co-opting subjects' existing interests: "Thus, to the members of women's clubs, silk was projected as the embodiment of fashion. To those women who visited museums, silk was displayed there as art. To the schools in the same town, perhaps, silk became a lesson in the natural history of the silk worm. To art clubs, silk became color and design. To newspapers, the events that transpired in the silk mills became news matters of importance. Each group of women was appealed to on the basis of its greatest interest."³¹ Bernays's strategy was to co-opt the publics' existing interests and use them to drive interest in his client's agenda, silk sales. In the campaign for silk, the motive force for the government and subjectification of the publics was the publics themselves. It was the publics' interests in fashion, art, learning, color, design, and news that was used to sell them silk. Bernays did not fabricate a false shadow public that wanted silk or produce the illusion that the public wanted silk—he produced real desire for it. He co-opted the existing relationships of the publics by exerting force like a well-trained acupuncturist does—at the point of greatest effect. He had his product displayed in the Luxembourg Museum in Paris as art and had high-level French designers come judge his product.³² The intended result was that women who wanted art and beauty would want silk. The desire for silk was manufactured but not false. Bernays, like many other propagandists, did not want to work to spin falsehoods into a fictional reality like the one Bourdieu and Habermas were concerned about; they wanted to use those forces that already existed and pivot them to work to produce different conduct. We dangerously undersell the propagandists' aims if we think them merely liars. Bernays did not want women to falsely think that they wanted silk cloth; he wanted them to truly want silk cloth as authentically as they wanted anything. The ultimate end is not the illusion that silk is beautiful, artistic, and desirable but that it is so. Propagandists want not our shadows but our souls.

Bernays often addresses co-optation in the language of psychoanalysis. Freud was Bernays's uncle, and the emphasis is clear and explicit in his works. Bernays wrote, "The basic elements of human nature are fixed as to desires and instincts and innate tendencies. The directions, however, in which these basic elements may be turned by skillful handling are infinite."³³ Here he provides another way to see how he understood his

work as the intervention into an existing set of forces to direct the public otherwise. He saw a given set of instincts as circulating and being satisfied through particular behaviors. He wanted to bend those instincts away from their satisfaction through current habits of conduct so that they might be satisfied by different ones. This sense of working with interests, instincts, and drives casts some doubt on the assertions of thinkers in the tradition that builds out of Marx's *German Ideology*. If we look at Marcuse, for instance, he argues that Western society has been led into "false needs."³⁴ True needs "designate objective conditions to the extent to which the universal satisfaction of vital needs and, beyond it, the progressive alleviation of toil and poverty, are universally valid standards."³⁵ False needs propagate unnecessary toil and unhappiness. The implication is that people have true needs that propagandists cause them to lose sight of, resulting in a public that seeks the satisfaction of false needs at the cost of the true. Bernays casts doubt on Marcuse's hypothesis that public opinion is driven by false needs because, for Bernays, the point was always to draw down to the most basic instincts possible, drink as deeply from the source as possible: "The appeal to the instincts and the universal desires is the basic method through which [the public relations counsel] produces his results."³⁶ The aim was not to graft a false need on top of a true need but to "turn" the true need, to conduct it differently. Bernays wanted to redirect drives—the true drives—to point at new ends. He created desires as true as any by working with their unconscious sources. The instincts for self-preservation, shelter, sex hunger, food hunger, and joining the herd can all lead to a great variety of different behaviors. Propagandists co-opt these drives to lead to the conduct and subjects their clients pay them to produce using "true" desire. Bernays argues that any attempt at propaganda that does not harness the publics' deepest and most governing desires cannot be truly effective.³⁷ For the conduct that propagandists want to create to compete with existing modes of behavior, it must be as deeply felt and as instinctively driven as the older forms of conduct it seeks to replace, if not more so. To change the inertia of habit requires great force that can only come from working with the most basal and powerful of true human motivations.

The point is that contra previous cultural critics, various kinds of falsehoods are not the most defining aspect of propaganda or public opinion. Public opinion and the work of propagandists goes far beyond the manipulation of truth values, ethical blinding, and the production of chimerical publics. Propagandists may intervene in public opinion with a variety of

tactics that go well beyond those three; other examples include architecture, employee vacations, holiday parties, corporate-sponsored health care, interior design, mood music, customer service, landscaping, religious references, and much more. It is hard to imagine how architecture works as propaganda in a solely epistemological account of public opinion like Stanley's: Would it be true or false? However, on Bernays's point of view, it is clear how it works: it is a force that transforms conduct. That force can take any number of different forms, only some of which have epistemology at their core. When a company sponsors vacation sites for its workers as part of a campaign centered around family values, it seeks to inculcate the familiarity and the loyalty that comes with sharing a vacation and aiding families. When a corporation sponsors holiday parties it seeks to transform the relationship with its employees to one of mutual religiosity and revelry. When Bernays seeks to link a corporation's products to the sex drive, it is not claiming a truth but producing a desire that motivates action. What he wants are new subjects, subjects whose own interests and instincts truly and authentically lead them to new conduct as their own: "William McDougall, the psychologist, classifies seven primary instincts. . . . These instincts are utilized by the public relations counsel in developing ideas and emotions which will modify the opinions and actions of his public."³⁸ This is also true with architecture and holiday parties: they serve to develop new conduct based on satisfying instincts in new ways. In this case architecture, especially phallic architecture such as skyscrapers, can serve to constitute new behaviors around group hierarchy, with the corporation cast as the dominant force. Holiday parties can redefine the conduct surrounding group belonging by painting the corporation as a fellow in religion, celebration, and friendship instead of as an adversary and foe. For Bernays, the point is not that the new behaviors triggered by propaganda are false and somehow tricking their targets but that instincts can result in a variety of different conducts and it is his job to mobilize those behaviors most valued by his clients.

Propagandists are not epistemologists and are not focused on a battle to prove things true or false; they are governors seeking to alter the conduct of the public through tactical interventions into public opinion: What interest have they in truth or falsehood except as it produces the conduct that their clients want to see? Anything that will transform who the publics are and make them the kinds of beings who conduct themselves in the way propagandists' clients want is part of public opinion and so within their

purview. False claims, ideology, and illusory publics are just the tip of the iceberg.

In conclusion, the view that public opinion is false—whether epistemologically, ethically, or ontologically false—has been problematic for the way that it has concealed public opinion as a transactional reality in which the government and subjectification of subjects takes place. The issue is not just the falsity of public opinion but its government as an array of forces constitutive of conduct and subjectivity. The power and threat of propaganda is precisely that it is productive of relationships of government and subjectivity; the aim of propaganda is to get us to become different people, people who conduct themselves in the way that the corporations that can afford propaganda wish. My own deep disturbance in studying propagandists comes not just from the insulting lies they spin but from the fear that I am, to one extent or another, who they made me to be. To the extent that I consume products, interact with corporations, enjoy popular culture, or follow any sorts of trends, I need to ask who it is that is acting. Is it the subject of propaganda? To what extent is the subject of propaganda coincident with myself? To what degree am I the person propaganda set out to make me? These questions belie a simple liberating solution, as if I could simply have the false scrubbed away, leaving the truth, my true needs, or the true public clear and untouched. If I am who propagandists have made me, then to that extent there is nothing to liberate: that person is me. The way forward is not liberation but the transformation of relations of force in order to constitute different conduct and a different subjectivity.

NOTES

1. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: J. M. Dent, 1961), 297, 300.
2. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Public Opinion and the Classical Tradition: A Re-evaluation," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 143–56.
3. David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, vol. I (London: Longmans, Green, 1875), 110.
4. Immanuel Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice,'" in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 84–85.
5. Upton Sinclair, "Poison Ivy," in *The Brass Check* (New York: Arno and New York Times, 1970), 311.

6. Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 8.
7. *Ibid.*, 291.
8. Arnold Farr, "Herbert Marcuse," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified December 18, 2013, accessed August 1, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marcuse/>.
9. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology: Part I*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (London: W. W. Norton, 1978), 173.
10. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (London: W. W. Norton, 1978), 117.
11. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 4, 32.
12. Nick Crossley, "On Systematically Distorted Communication: Bourdieu and the Socio-analysis of Publics," *Sociological Review* 52 (2004): 88–112.
13. Pierre Bourdieu, "Public Opinion Does Not Exist," in *Sociology in Question* (London: SAGE, 1993), 150.
14. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 244.
15. Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 17.
16. *Ibid.*, 156.
17. Most contemporary scholars trace the birth of modern propaganda to 1900 with the founding of the Publicity Bureau in Boston. See Scott Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, a History* (Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994), 10–26.
18. *Ibid.*, 178.
19. Michel Foucault, "Subject and Power," in *Power: Michael Foucault*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 1994), 337.
20. John Price Jones, *At the Bar of Public Opinion* (New York: Inter-river Press, 1939), 28.
21. In John Stuhr's essay, there is a kindred sense of the present and its problems as presented in this telling of public opinion. Namely, the contradictions circulating in American life do not so much cover over or obscure "true reality" as they form an important part of it. See especially the sections "America Dreaming 2" and "The American Dream 1" of his essay. In "American Dream 1," Stuhr opens his essay by laying out a complex set of relationships between "what is," "what should not be," and how the "dream" of what "should not be" operates as part of the "what is." John J. Stuhr, "The American Dream/America Dreaming/Dreams of America: Opportunity, Equality, Education" (paper presented at "American Assemblages," American Philosophies Forum, April 7–9, 2016, Key West).
22. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–79* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 297.

23. Edward Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923; Brooklyn: IG, 2011), 99.
24. *Ibid.*, 68.
25. *Ibid.*, 82.
26. *The History of Fundraising*, August 1930, Box BC, vol. 1, 113–14, John Price Jones Company Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Cambridge.
27. Abram Lipsky, *Man the Puppet: The Art of Controlling Minds* (Binghamton: Vail-Ballou, 1925), 13.
28. Herbert Hoover, *The Century of the Self*, dir. Adam Curtis (London: BBC, 2002), DVD.
29. Calvin Coolidge, “Address Before the American Association of Advertising Agencies, Washington, D.C., October 27, 1926,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed August 1, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=412>.
30. In his essay, originally presented as a paper at “American Assemblages,” American Philosophies Forum, April 7–9, 2016, Key West, Colapietro explores a spatial sense of transaction that is similar to the transactional aspects of force that I am interested in with public opinion.
31. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 152.
32. Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 195–96.
33. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 155.
34. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 7, 241.
35. *Ibid.*, 6.
36. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 171.
37. *Ibid.*, 106.
38. *Ibid.*, 156.