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**"A NEW BEGINNING": A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF TELEVISUAL
POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Temple University

PH.D. 1987

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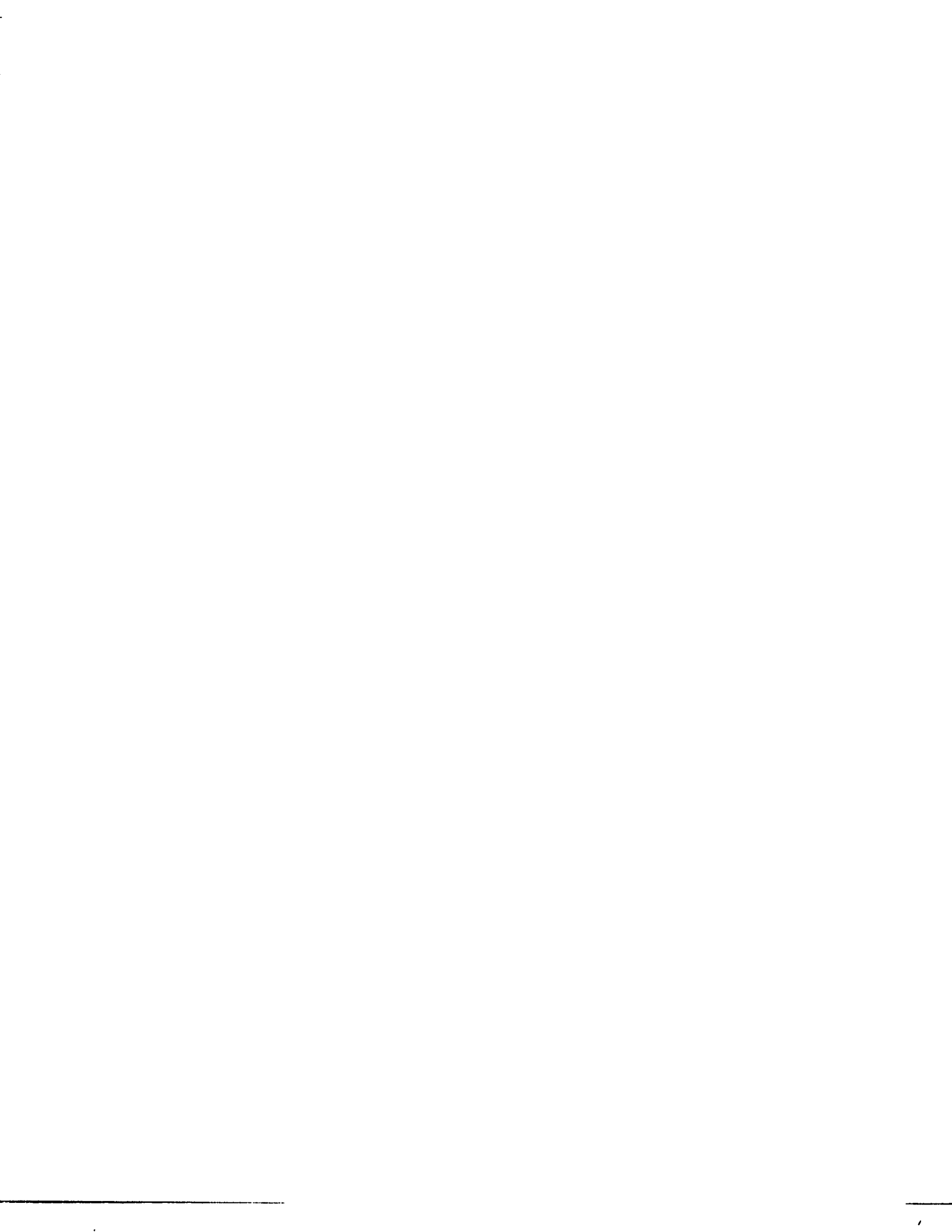


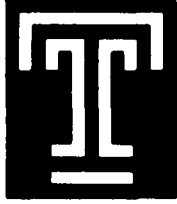
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Title of Dissertation: A NEW BEGINNING: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS
OF TELEVISUAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

Author JOANNE MORREALE

Read and Approved by. . . *Hubert Lewis*.....
Hubert Lewis.....
Hubert Lewis.....
Anthony Carregan.....
.....

Date submitted to Graduate Board:December..6,..1986.....

Accepted by the Graduate Board of Temple University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**.

Date . *Feb 15 1987* *William Tash*.....
(Dean of Graduate School)

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The following rhetorical analysis of televisual political communication is a study of Ronald Reagan's 1984 campaign film, A New Beginning. A New Beginning was a videotaped film which was first shown at the Republican National Convention. This eighteen minute encapsulation of the Reagan Presidency itself marked a "new beginning" in American political discourse. Not only was it offered as a replacement for the traditional Nominating Speech at the Convention, but the Republicans insisted that it was a documentary form, despite the fact that it was produced by a team of creative advertising experts. This controversial crossing of categories was an integral part of the Republican campaign communication strategy, and A New Beginning, as the Republicans' most comprehensive display of Ronald Reagan and the America which he represented, illustrated the Republicans' ability to use television to effectively communicate their conservative ideology to the American public.

The rhetorical message of A New Beginning, apparent from its title, was that America was experiencing an economic and spiritual "rebirth." This study examines the way that this message, communicated through televisual means, was presented as reality. The analysis begins with a description of the historical context within which such a claim could be made. Reagan's peculiar mix of Populism, conservatism, and supply-side economics was a response to a perceived crisis of the

liberal democratic welfare state. Reagan's conservative revolution, couched in the language and imagery of rebirth, purported to offer Americans an alternative.

"Mythic Rhetoric in A New Beginning" then accounts for the way in which this message was conveyed. Following the work of James Hoban, A New Beginning is considered to be a rhetorical ritual of rebirth. Unlike rhetorical rituals which are primarily verbal, A New Beginning communicated principally through mythic images rather than discursive argument. These mythic images invoked not only the American myth of rebirth, but proposed the renewal of American myths which were linked to Ronald Reagan's conservative beliefs. Furthermore, television, itself a mythic medium, was the tool which enabled the Republicans to accomplish this task.

"The Innovative Use of Visual Cliché" explores the specifically televisual means of communication which differentiated A New Beginning from other forms of political discourse. Not only is modern culture more oriented toward visual communication, but repetitive, mythic images--referred to as clichés--increasingly serve as the ties that bind people together; they help to create a common ideological stance. A New Beginning's innovative mosaic structure was unified by clichés drawn from different genres of televisual discourse. Together, these conveyed the "reality" of America's "new beginning." However, the use of visual clichés, gathered together and reproduced for political purposes, served to

stifle rather than extend the democratic principles of discussion and debate.

Finally, in "Def(r)aming Frame," it is suggested that the Republicans orchestrated communication context, in addition to form and content of A New Beginning. Through their framing of the film, the Republicans were able to occlude the boundaries which differentiate genres, levels, and spaces of televisual discourse--and thus between mediated and immediate reality. This was both a "de-framing" of the film and a "defamation" of the viewer, for the viewer was left with no position from which to ascertain fact from fantasy, performance from reality, or story from discourse. Only the fictive voice and figure of Ronald Reagan provided the viewer with a reference point for reality.

Through their manipulations of the televisual medium, the Republicans were able to construct a vision of reality and to position viewers in relation to it. Through their use of televisual communication, the Republicans managed to assure the priority of myths, clichés, and anecdotes which were only implicitly argumentative. In this way, they created the fiction of unity and consensus which they proposed. America's "rebirth" did become the reality which defined and was defined by the voting majority of the American people. This study concludes that there is a danger that those with resources and access to the media can frame a reality which is tenable to great numbers of people. This frame becomes non-negotiable, a definition rather than a proposition to be evaluated.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY OF A NEW BEGINNING

Introduction

On July 23, 1984, Ronald Reagan was re-nominated as the Republican party's candidate for the November Presidential elections. He went on to win the election by the largest margin of electoral votes in American Presidential history. At a convention otherwise remarked as "low-key, and sometimes outright dull. . .with no suspense to be found. . ."1 a controversy arose over A New Beginning, an 18-minute "documentary" videotaped film produced by the Republicans, which was to be presented in place of the usual introductory speech for the candidate. Airing the film became an issue because the three major news networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, had truncated their 1984 convention coverage, and only events they considered "newsworthy" were to be broadcast. Attention was drawn to the film when Charles Manatt, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, protested that it was unfair to broadcast it, as the Democrats' film about candidate Walter Mondale had not been transmitted by any of the three networks. The substitution of A New Beginning for the introductory Nominating speech was, by the Republicans' own admission, a calculated attempt to ensure network coverage of the extensive, \$425,000 project.² They argued that since the

networks had aired the Democrats' introductory speech for Mondale, their party's introduction should also be shown.

Amidst the furor, the networks were forced to decide whether A New Beginning was an unpaid commercial, which they would not air, or a documentary, which they could accept as an alternative to traditional political oratory. One unidentified network source expressed their predicament by saying that if they ran the film, "we're running propaganda." However, if they did not, the Republicans could accuse them of moving away from the convention program.³ An ABC spokesperson dismissed the film in the following terms: "It is symbolic of an attempt to use the coverage of a news event for a non-news activity."⁴ CBS commentator Bill Moyers expressed an even stronger opinion: "It's a commercial, and like every commercial it exaggerates, accentuates, and manipulates. That's normal for propaganda."⁵ Reuven Frank, NBC's executive producer for convention coverage, was most disparaging of all: "I hate the film. It's demeaning, an obvious attempt to manipulate the public."⁶

When network representatives stated generally negative reactions to the film, the press dutifully recounted them. The resulting publicity heightened public interest and made it impossible for the networks to ignore the film, even if they did decide that it was not a legitimate news event. Despite this dilemma, ABC and CBS chose not to air the videotape in its entirety. Ironically, NBC decided to show the tape, reasoning that the controversy surrounding the

videotaped film made it a news event. Reuven Frank defended the decision which conflicted with his personal distaste for the film: "You don't make value judgments. . .It had become, through no participation of ours, sufficiently interesting to the public that we were obliged to show it."⁷

That the videotape may have been propaganda in documentary form only partially explains the networks' reluctance to broadcast it. Beginning in 1956, they had shown a total of 27 political convention films, and many of these were also controversial.⁸ Further, it is questionable whether rational viewers of any political persuasion considered the tape to be a completely unbiased, impartial record of the Reagan Administration. It was, after all, part of the Republican National Convention. However, the networks' reactions suggested that they did not believe that A New Beginning was simply an aggregate of images masquerading as news or as documentary. Rather, they were wary of the film because it was perceived to be an extremely slick and powerful presentation. They realized that airing the highly produced visual presentation would enable the Republicans to secure eighteen minutes of well orchestrated, unpaid, prime-time media coverage for their candidate.

In order to counter the film's potential effect, all of the network commentators discussed the issues which were raised and reminded the viewers that the film was a selective and one-sided presentation. Even though NBC had decided that the film was newsworthy, commentator Roger Mudd prefaced the

showing with the admonition that the videotape ". . .will not tax your mind, it will not challenge your intellect but it will assault your emotions head-on. . . .About halfway through, you'll forget you're watching a masterful piece of political propaganda, and think you're watching a commercial for leisureworld or one of those lumber companies that's always replenishing the earth."⁹

During their broadcast, NBC intercut the tape with a few 'live' shots of the convention floor, presumably to remind the home viewers that they were watching a videotape that was part of the Republican convention. However, the convention hall in Dallas had been wired to transmit good television images both from the floor and from the oversize videoscreen on which A New Beginning was projected. As a result, NBC's cutaways merely rendered the shots of the 'live' convention almost indistinguishable from the videotape itself. Even ABC and CBS, which showed only excerpts from the film, had no option but to include shots of the cheering conventioners who were watching the videoscreen which appeared in the background. To add to the orchestration of the event, American flags and red, white, and blue balloons were distributed to the delegates when the lights went out on the convention floor so that television coverage would more readily convey the impression of an exuberant celebration. Perhaps NBC announcer Tom Brokaw summed up the situation most succinctly when he observed that, "It's difficult to tell if you're on TV or in the hall itself," and that, "The

differences between reality and electronic reality are very thin sometimes."¹⁰

Most importantly, this suggests that the Reagan campaign managers used their sophisticated understanding of television to obscure the differences between mediated levels of reality. It was no accident that A New Beginning was designed for a television audience, or that the differences between reality, electronic reality, and videotaped reality were difficult to ascertain. This was one of the most outstanding features of the videotaped film. Its structure reflects this confusion of levels of representation--fact and fiction, news and advertisement, history and myth, reality and appearance. Crucially, it is the voice and figure of Ronald Reagan that unifies and provides the point of reference for the intermeshed levels of reality. Even Ronald Reagan appeared to have been moved by his own image. He was reported to have remarked upon viewing the film, "Boy, is that a powerful documentary. . . .Is that really me?"¹¹

Objectives and Rationale

Proposed herein is a rhetorical analysis of A New Beginning, aimed at accounting for the apparent success of the film, both in terms internal to the film, and in the manner in which it was used by Reagan's media managers. My concern is to better understand how the Republicans were able to use visual communications, such as A New Beginning, to achieve their ends. I wish to explore how the Republicans'

vision of resurgent hope and optimism was presented as reality; how the Republicans were able to orient the political majority to Republican frames of mind; and most importantly, how a communicative form such as A New Beginning contributed to Ronald Reagan's landslide re-election victory in 1986.

This study is premised upon the assumption that A New Beginning was an effective mode of communication, both in and of itself and as part of the larger Republican strategy. I believe that the form and the context in which the Republicans presented A New Beginning exemplified the communication strategies which enabled them to successfully attain their goals. I suggest that the film is also significant because, as a replacement for the traditional convention eve Nominating Address, it was itself a "new beginning." It marked the first time that a film was substituted for a speech. It took the place of an established political ritual, the Nominating Address; in so doing, it underscored the Republicans' belief that visual images were at least as important as words in order to communicate to the American public. Thus, a traditional form of political oratory became a made-for-television presentation, and a political film became a central rather than a marginal part of the re-election campaign. A New Beginning both condensed and defined the Republicans' message; it recalled and incorporated past presentations of Ronald Reagan while it set the tone for those which were to come.

That this mode of address was successful can also account for one of the puzzles of the Reagan Presidency. That is, opinion polls have consistently found that people like Ronald Reagan while disagreeing with his policies.¹² He is one of the most popular Presidents in modern times even though he has made many gaffes which reveal gaps or inconsistencies in his knowledge. However, throughout his presidency the Republicans increasingly made use of the sort of pre-planned televisual communication which A New Beginning exemplifies. They were able to orchestrate both paid and unpaid media events. A New Beginning demonstrates their mastery of this art, and correspondingly, their ability to effectively "sell" Ronald Reagan to the American public.

A New Beginning thus warrants critical attention for at least three reasons. Most simply, the film may be the best of its kind; it was ballyhooed by the press as ". . .not only the best creative advertising. . . . It's the best advertising. . . .It's the kind of advertising that is usually reserved for a parity product,"¹³ ". . .widely considered the most luxurious, symphonic, technically proficient advertisement ever made,"¹⁴ and as ". . .a presentation so skillful that some experts feel it may alter the art of political filmmaking."¹⁵ Like the traditional speech which it replaced, A New Beginning served to introduce the candidate--to identify him and to reiterate his qualifications and accomplishments. Similarly, its message was structured to favorably dispose its audience toward the

candidate. Far more effectively than through use of oratory alone, the Republicans were able to employ visual communication to shape positive perceptions of Ronald Reagan's identity and ideology. Certain of the film's features--its emphasis on basic values, on the themes of family, patriotism, and optimism, have already served as prototypes, not just for political advertisements, but also for product advertisements.

In addition, the film serves as a display--indeed, the quintessential display--of the Reagan campaign strategy. A New Beginning and the manner in which it was used were indicative of the Reagan strategists' awareness and ability to exploit the dominant role of television in American life. (A Roper Poll conducted in 1980 reported that 64% of the population rely on television for their news, and that Americans consider television a more credible news source than newspapers.¹⁶) Television has been referred to as the context for the Reagan Presidency, and the frame of reference for most Americans.¹⁷ It is primarily through television that Ronald Reagan and his representation of reality have been so successfully communicated to the American public. As noted by one observer of the Reagan Presidency:

To an unprecedented extent, Reagan and his staff have made television a major organizing principle of his Presidency. His day is planned around opportunities for television coverage. Every effort is made to assure a constant flow of positive visual images and symbols from the White House.¹⁸

Thus, A New Beginning provides a unique point of reference from which to explore the televisual "construction" of Ronald Reagan and his America. The videotape presented the image of Ronald Reagan that his campaign managers most wanted the public to see and remember. Its producers acknowledged that it was their most extensive, coherent, and carefully crafted presentation of the candidate. Phil Dusenberry, the advertising executive responsible for writing and editing the film, underscored this point when he stated that, ". . .the film established the tone for all future advertising for the Reagan-Bush '84 campaign."¹⁹ Dusenberry's remark also indicated that the labeling of the film as a "documentary" and a "news event" was indeed a political strategy which played on the public's differing perceptions of documentary, news, and advertisements.

A third reason that A New Beginning warrants critical attention--one that is closely related to the former--is that both the style and manner of presentation evidence the Reagan campaign's ability to manipulate the electronic media. Throughout his campaign, Reagan was noted for his ability to manipulate television images so that similar messages were conveyed by both news and advertisements. Both the structure and style of "A New Beginning" recall the following:

Unlike Walter Mondale's campaign, Reagan's appearances were as meticulously staged as his commercials. Unlike Mondale, Reagan moved away from the traditional spots--direct, issue-oriented, slightly jarring--and embraced the sleek, atmospheric, slow dissolve appeals usually reserved for selling Coke and Almost

Home cookies. The marketing of the President, both through paid political commercials and the "free media" provided on news clips, was so skillfully co-ordinated that it'll almost certainly change the standards for future national campaigns.²⁰

Purported "news events," such as the videotape (and some of the events included in the videotape), were consistently planned to maximize their visual impact. A New Beginning exemplifies this strategy extremely clearly, such that many words, actions, and compositional details of both news and more fabricated images are artfully arranged to convey a positive, upbeat picture of Ronald Reagan and America. The videotape, much like the televised image of the Republican convention and the campaign itself, is aptly characterized by the following:

The essence of the Reagan campaign is a never ending string of picture stories, designed to place the President in the midst of a throng of wildly cheering Americans.²¹

The landmark spot of smiling people is what the campaign is all about: emotions, simplicity, and repetition.²²

The importance of this strategy is that although the news networks attempted to provide impartial coverage, the Republicans were able to debilitate their efforts. Their ability to undermine the electronic media's ability to function as political watchdogs has obvious ramifications for future political campaigns.

Quite apart, then, from what the film teaches us about the Reagan campaign are lessons of a more general, more theoretical nature that it can provide us about the modern

day rhetoric of political campaigning. Several features seem to warrant particular attention. These are:

1. The emphasis upon symbolic as opposed to pragmatic appeals.

Throughout the re-election campaign, the Republican strategists' attention to televisual communication was enhanced by the "Tuesday Team," an ad-hoc group of advertising experts assembled to assist with the campaign. They were allocated more than one half of the entire campaign budget--close to \$25 million--in order to produce innovative, high production value political advertisements.²² Rather than the traditional hard-sell commercials which consisted principally of "talking heads" of candidates arguing for or against issues, the Tuesday Team opted for a "soft-sell" advertising approach.²³ They used state-of-the-art advertising techniques which addressed issues minimally, just as current product ads may hardly feature the product, but associate it with positive images. Instead of using traditional rhetorical techniques of argumentation, they attempted to use predominantly mythic appeals in order to elicit a favorable response to Ronald Reagan by evoking emotion, facilitating identification, and by associating him with positive, upbeat images of America. This will be addressed within the dissertation in Chapter III, where I discuss the use of mythic rhetoric in A New Beginning. I will suggest that while traditional political oratory may be regarded as mythic rhetoric, A New Beginning may be more usefully be considered to be a "rhetorical myth."

2. The use of rhetorical depiction. One rhetorical feature of the videotape is that it communicates through visual images as much as it does through words although the Republicans used it as a substitute for a "speech." I have already indicated that the Reagan Administration has frequently demonstrated an astute understanding of the differences between linear and non-linear communication forms, and a corresponding belief in the power of visual, rather than simply verbal communication. In an interview before the election, Chief of Staff Michael Deaver stressed this point, "Television changes everything so much. . .the image becomes all important. . . .Visuals become necessary to get something across."²⁴ Similarly, Deaver has remarked, "Television elects Presidents."²⁵ This will be explored in the body of the dissertation, particularly in Chapter IV, where I indicate how political gains may be made by exploiting the fact that contemporary American culture is more visually than verbally oriented.

3. The confusion of different levels of mediation. This rhetorical strategy was apparent in both the form and structure of A New Beginning. Although the Republicans publicly paraded the film as a documentary, and thus a news event, it was widely regarded to be an extremely effective political commercial. This was compounded by the fact that it was composed of a combination of news, documentary, and more obviously fabricated images. The Republicans clearly hoped to benefit from interpretations typically accorded news

and documentary forms, and a survey taken by Adweek after the second showing of the film in September suggested that they may have succeeded. The survey found that respondents confused unpaid and paid media coverage of events, and further, that Reagan appeared to be benefitting from those misconceptions.²⁶ This is particularly important because of what it suggests about politicians' new found ability to construct a rhetorical reality through the television frame. My analyses of the structure and framing of the film will elaborate on this point.

Method And Organization

The method of this dissertation is rhetorical/televisual analysis. I wish, in studying A New Beginning, to provide insight into the way that it constructs a picture of the world, the way that it makes this world intelligible, and the way that it works ideologically--that is, how it masks its own work of construction and creates subjects who support its picture of the world. In other words, I am concerned with how its meanings are made; how they are presented and re-presented, and how these meanings relate to modern society. I consider reality to be a social product which is constituted by discourse; all discourse is then essentially persuasive; it is rhetorical.

It is in this way that I use rhetorical analysis to provide insight into this persuasive process whereby a reality is created through television. I am primarily

concerned with how, rather than what, the film means, and therefore my rhetorical criticism must necessarily incorporate televisual criticism. I approach A New Beginning as a text which is itself rhetorical; I criticize this text in order to generate discourse about discourse. My method aims to animate the conversation that is culture, a task which is particularly important given the text which I have chosen to analyze, a text which I believe aims to stop the flow of discourse.

I thus encompass elements of film theory and criticism, television theory and criticism, political theory and criticism. . .the list goes on. It is by incorporating insights from a number of different areas, by interrelating multiple perspectives, that rhetorical criticism as an analytic tool finds its strength. This is my method and my task. . .to use rhetorical criticism in order to provide insights into the ways that the film signifies which may not be overtly apparent. In so doing, I hope to increase our understanding of not only what, but how political rhetoric means in the electronic age, and in the process, to increase our understanding of rhetoric as well.

In Chapter II, I will provide a brief and necessarily selective history of the aims and objectives which marked Reagan's first term in office. This will set the context and provide an interpretive frame for an analysis of A New Beginning. This will help to account for the mix of image, message, and personality which identified Ronald Reagan to

the American public, and will also identify the public to whom Ronald Reagan appealed. It has been suggested that Reagan's conservative politics are a response to a "crisis of liberalism," and in many ways, Reagan's conservatism may be considered as a movement against the liberal democratic welfare state. His changes addressed four areas which were in disarray prior to his election in 1980: economic, social and moral, patriotic and nationalistic, and institutional. Reagan's program for change was a blend of supply-side economics, populism, and appeals to consumer culture. He used populist rhetoric to reaffirm the values which were consistent with his proposed reforms, and thus sold the majority of Americans a positive vision of the future. I suggest in this chapter that in the short term, Ronald Reagan's conservative ideology was able to offer, and even manifest, hope and reassurance. His conservative "revolution" did appear to allay the social unrest and disillusionment which had pervaded the country since the late 1960's. However, I point out that Ronald Reagan's positions are merely the obverse of liberalism, replete with its limitations. I suggest that Ronald Reagan's conservatism may ultimately perpetuate the problems which it purports to resolve.

In Chapter III, I will examine the Republicans' use of myth to communicate their ideological positions to the American public. It is my position that myths are ideologies in that they work to naturalize history, and to reinforce the

notion that a particular set of beliefs, values, and attitudes are right, true, absolute. I suggest that all political campaigns have mythic elements and that on specific occasions they may be "rhetorical rituals," in James Hoban's sense of the term. I suggest that A New Beginning was a rhetorical ritual of rebirth, one which aimed to both establish and exploit a renewed positive sense of national identity, and in this way, to orient the political majority to conservative frames of mind.

I also suggest, moreover, that the visual form and communicative techniques which differentiated A New Beginning from traditional political discourse increased its ability to communicate on a mythic level. It was structured as a myth of rebirth; within this structure it proposed the rebirth of fundamental American myths, and it did so through specifically televisual means of communication. In this way it became a powerful tool in the constitution of a new American "reality."

Chapter IV, then, will explore the specifically televisual means of communication which differentiated A New Beginning from other forms of political discourse. I suggest that rhetorical depiction has become pre-eminent in a culture which is increasingly oriented toward the visual. This implies that there is a relation between sociocultural conditions, technology, and communication forms, a relation which the Reagan Administration was able to make use of to its fullest advantage. I propose in this chapter that in A

New Beginning, the Republicans replayed mythic images which were familiar to the majority of Americans to whom they were addressed; these were drawn from a variety of different discursive genres and unified in one presentation. These familiar images, or repetitive rhetorical depictions, I here consider to be visual clichés which were co-ordinated in order to convey a coherent myth of rebirth. This strategy was effective, I suggest, because of the innovative style and structure of the film, within which images that people conventionally interpret to be "real" or "true" were unified with those which were more obviously fictional and fanciful. The film's message of rebirth then placed the familiar, the clichéd, in a new context and in so doing, provided a positive means through which to interpret present day realities. I suggest, further, that this use of the media was more of a subversion than an extension of the democratic principles which were espoused within the film.

Finally, in Chapter V, I explore the framing of the film--the orchestration of communication context in addition to form and content. I aim here to further demonstrate how the Republicans controlled the reality which, ostensibly, they simply allowed to appear. Through their framing of the film, the Republicans were able to obscure the differences between genres, levels, and even spaces of televisual discourse, and thus between mediated and immediate reality. I suggest that because of this "def(r)aming" of frames, the viewer was left with no position from which to ascertain fact

from fancy, performance from reality, or story from discourse. As a result, the voice and figure of Ronald Reagan became the viewer's reference point for reality, and the Republicans' message of rebirth was perceived to be a plausible representation of reality. I assert, however, that the Republicans constructed only a fiction of discourse and a fiction of reality, a fiction in which their definition of reality was disguised as a dialogic exchange, and in the end, A New Beginning did not stimulate dialogue and debate so much as it stifled it.

I will then conclude this study with a summary which weaves together the various strands which I construct in the first five chapters. I will explore the implications of this study in a manner which demonstrates the utility of this mode of rhetorical criticism which is simultaneously televisual criticism. This study points to future trends for the political use of the media, and it is my hope that it will help people to become more aware of the ways that visual communication forms operate rhetorically to influence them. This verbal discourse about visual discourse, finally, aims to make all discourse which constitutes reality the privilege of the many rather than the few.

Review of Political Campaign Films

Although A New Beginning initially gained notoriety as a hybrid news event, documentary and political advertisement, it fits quite comfortably into the genre of political

campaign films which has existed since 1956. In 1960, both John Kennedy and Richard Nixon produced thirty-minute campaign "biographies" which were shown at their respective conventions. These established the genre. Like later campaign films, these were primarily representations of the candidates' personal and public qualifications for the job. Their themes set the tone for political campaign films: all candidates promise to improve the economy, to keep America strong militarily, and to achieve or maintain peace. All are shown to be leaders and men of the people, although one of these characteristics may be emphasized more than another. If possible, they are shown meeting with the military and with foreign leaders, and always at the film's conclusion, their commitment to peace is stressed.

Structurally, the early campaign films simulated newsreel footage, complete with stark black and white images, the anonymous voice of a narrator, and a static camera. In large part, they consisted of pre-recorded campaign speeches. In fact, in Kennedy's film, there were no close-ups, nor did he appear "live" on camera at any time. Rather, he was filmed as if he were oblivious to the presence of the camera. The only indication of the media's presence was a microphone which Kennedy held in his hand as he spoke amidst crowds of people.

The Kennedy film also included a chronological record of the candidate's life, featuring his school career, military duty and public service. As is consistently the case with

later campaign films, he was shown to be a family man. The film did not, however, dwell upon his personal characteristics. His catch-phrase, America as the "New Frontier," was reiterated and an attempt was made to illustrate his vision of an America that was prosperous, militarily strong, and at peace. This was done primarily through clips of his oratory, delivered on the campaign trail. In this case, some of the negative issues which plagued the Kennedy campaign were addressed. He was shown speaking to disgruntled coal miners in Virginia; he also responded to a question regarding his Catholicism. At the time, there was much public concern that his religion would interfere with his ability to govern effectively; Kennedy assured the questioner, and thus the viewer, that it would not.

After 1960, as politicians increasingly made use of media techniques based upon advertising, political campaign films became correspondingly more sophisticated. Further, as they have become more expensive to produce, they have been put to broader use in the ensuing campaign. Initially, these films were shown exclusively at political conventions, and some of them were aired on national television as part of the networks' convention coverage. In 1972, Richard Nixon had two campaign films. Portrait of a President was shown at the Republican National Convention, while The Nixon Years: Change Without Chaos (which incorporated footage from the first film) was aired as a half-hour paid political program.

In 1984, the Republicans spent nearly a half-million dollars on A New Beginning, and the film was put to many uses. When the three major news networks announced truncated convention coverage, the Republicans responded accordingly. A New Beginning was offered as a substitute for the Nominating Speech at the Republican National Convention. This ploy was meant to insure both network coverage and a large viewing audience, for its presentation immediately preceded the first "live" appearance by Reagan himself. A New Beginning marked the highly charged moment prior to the convention climax when President Reagan made his Acceptance Speech. Although only NBC (and CNN, which provided gavel-to-gavel coverage) carried the film in its entirety, A New Beginning, combined with footage from the convention, was later re-broadcast as a paid thirty-minute television commercial. Moreover, parts of the "documentary" film were used as television spot commercials. At the very least, these multiple functions helped Reagan to keep his message simple and consistent; even more pragmatically, the Republicans reaped the returns from their investment.

The distance traversed between the 1960 campaign films and A New Beginning indicates the continuing evolution of the genre. Probably the film which most sharply contrasts with A New Beginning, while still showing the development of the genre, is The Democratic Faith: The Johnson Years. This film was somewhat unusual in that it was produced in 1968 for the Democratic Party rather than for a particular candidate. It

summarized the legacy of the Democratic Party, with a focus on Lyndon Johnson's term in office. It is most likely that if Johnson had run for re-election, this film would have been used exclusively for his campaign. After the convention, it was shown on NBC as a half-hour political "special."

The Johnson Years does, however, indicate the embellishment of the genre. The film opens with Johnson, wearing a cowboy hat, standing by a river as he reflects upon the course of the country since the New Deal. There is sentimental music; then this quiet moment is followed by newsreel footage of every Democratic president since Roosevelt. There is powerful, emotional footage of Kennedy's funeral, with close-ups of burning candles and people in mourning. Johnson provides the voice-over narration here, although his commentary is not "live," nor does it pertain to the images. It is, rather, commentary taken from earlier speeches. Unlike the Kennedy film, which merely depicts the candidate as he delivers speeches, the Johnson film begins to match the candidate's words with emotional images.

Further, Johnson does not narrate the entire film. Instead, Gregory Peck serves this function. There is a move toward famous, recognizable voices which speak for the candidate. In 1976, for instance, Joe Garagiola speaks for Gerald Ford and E.G. Marshall speaks for Jimmy Carter. So, it was not a surprising development when, in 1984, ex-movie star and professional narrator Ronald Reagan spoke for himself.

In was in content, as well as structure, that the Johnson film differed so sharply from A New Beginning. The Johnson Years was a testament of commitment to the principles of the New Deal, a program which it was Reagan's goal to dismantle. Johnson and the Democrats were lauded for achievements which were of little importance to Ronald Reagan. Civil Rights, Affirmative Action, Medicaid, Headstart, Education, and Johnson's "War on Poverty" were central issues in the earlier film. There were images of Johnson visiting indigent families in Appalachia; urban ghettos existed in this film. The film was extremely issue-oriented; foreign policy and the war in Vietnam were discussed even though these issues were detrimental to the Democrats in 1968.

As a political campaign film, The Johnson Years did share some important characteristics with A New Beginning. It moved from a presentation of the man, to his domestic accomplishments, to foreign affairs. Like Reagan, Johnson was presented as he visited the military troops. He did not, however, dress in army uniform as Reagan did. Johnson also appeared at a summit with foreign leaders. Finally, like all campaign films, this one ended with a final affirmation of Johnson's commitment to peace.

In contrast to The Johnson Years, the campaign films used by Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter in 1976 illustrated the increasingly sophisticated media techniques of the genre. In both cases, there was a movement toward highly stylized

images although both were still rooted in the "documentary" mode of exposition. Ford's film, for example, opened with former baseball player Joe Garagiola seated in Air Force One. He introduced the film, telling the viewers the theme (Ford's candidacy) and how it would be developed. He began, "We'll see a documentary about his background, job, family, hopes for America. . .and then we'll hear from Gerald Ford himself."

The film developed chronologically, although the "documentary" footage of Ford as an athlete, scholar, military man, family man and public figure was intercut with interviews of "authoritative" figures. Singer Pearl Bailey voiced her support for Ford as part of Garagiola's introduction; later, members of Ford's college football team, friends from Yale, and members of Congress and the Senate testified to his character and leadership skills. Unlike Carter, Ford primarily needed to establish his authority in 1976. His appeal was not populist; unlike Carter he did not rely upon the voices of ordinary people on the street to lend credibility to his candidacy. A New Beginning, on the other hand, illustrated Reagan's ability to reconcile these two opposing requirements, for he managed to present himself as a leader and a man of the people in a seemingly non-contradictory manner.

The Ford film did, however, make use of strategies which were similar to those which structured A New Beginning. There was much use of visual cliché: Air Force One, the

American flag, the Statue of Liberty, productive farms, lush harvests, construction workers, people streaming out of factories. Ford's message was strikingly similar to Ronald Reagan's in 1984--he promised to cut taxes, to reduce inflation, to decrease government bureaucracy, to make the United States strong militarily, and to be a man of peace. There was even an attempt made to portray an American "rebirth." There were images of the Bicentennial celebrations, and Ford claimed that Americans had endured a period of conflict and strain. This claim was supported with documentary footage of Americans gathered in large demonstrations (of what it was not clear, nor did Ford specify the hardships which Americans had experienced).

In contrast to A New Beginning, the Ford film depicted vivid images of the conflicted past. The Reagan film made little direct reference to troubled times. Past struggle and strife were explicitly addressed only through a sequence of newspaper and magazine headlines. Besides reinforcing the authenticity of Reagan's claims, these served to mitigate the dispiriting tone of such reminders. A New Beginning portrayed a revitalized America; the Ford film merely hinted at the possibility. It concluded with a song, "I'm Feeling Good About America," and a vignette of positive, upbeat images of America. But perhaps 1976 was just too soon for a Republican President to be leading a spiritual revival. The themes, aims, and objectives of the candidate were similar to

those of Ronald Reagan in 1984; however, unlike Reagan, Ford could not associate himself with American resurgence.

The Ford film was not as highly produced as A New Beginning; nor was the candidate. Ford was not a central figure who rendered all of the images coherent. Further, Ford was hardly adept at televisual communication. In his one attempt to address the television audience directly at the end of the film, he did not use a teleprompter, and thus was obviously reading his speech rather than "conversing" with the audience. He was filmed in a medium shot as a static "talking head," and there were no extreme close-ups which would have conveyed a feeling of intimacy with the viewer.

Overall, the visual techniques which structured the Ford film were not unified. The images and figures did not all work together to convey the authority and authenticity of the candidate, although the attempt was made. Singer Pearl Bailey, for example, voiced her support for Ford by proclaiming, "Lord knows he's made mistakes. . .but he is trying."

In the opposing camp, Carter's 1976 campaign film, Jimmy Who, also shared some important characteristics with A New Beginning. It, too, included a song and had a musical score. It was not issue-oriented; interviews were conducted with people on the street who made comments such as, "I think he's sexy," and "What's wrong with a peanut farmer?" The film was in tune with the times, as it emphasized Carter's

status as a Washington outsider and a (millionaire) man of the people. Overall, the film was light-hearted--there were several advanced visual techniques such as animation and split-screen video. In one sequence, political cartoons of Carter, with his huge grin, appeared on screen. Like A New Beginning, the film was fast paced and primarily a visual communication form. The situational constraints surrounding both films also suggest that neither needed to be issue-oriented. In the wake of Watergate, Carter needed to stress his integrity rather than his command of political issues; in the aftermath of Carter's dismal four years and Reagan's apparently successful first term in office, the 1984 election was virtually no contest.

In 1980, Reagan produced an eight-minute campaign film which tentatively established the theme of a "new beginning." Carter, on the other hand, stopped smiling. His thirty-minute film in 1980 was less innovative and visual than the 1976 film. It was issue-oriented and filmed in the traditional campaign "documentary" style. Carter was, at this time, preoccupied with re-establishing his credibility and in order to do so, he reverted to familiar forms. The film stressed Carter's leadership qualities and his experience on the job. In many ways, it was too forthcoming, for it also referred to his weaknesses and the problems which remained unresolved.

A New Beginning, like the Reagan 1984 campaign in general, emphasized only the positive. Though the Reagan

Administration was indeed subject to criticism, this was not made apparent in A New Beginning. In this way, it also contrasted with Mondale's thirty-minute film. This, like all of the others, consisted of an exposition of the candidate's personal life and public accomplishments. It did not dwell upon Mondale's term as vice-president during the Carter Administration, nor did it offer a positive vision of Mondale's America. The structure of the film supported Reagan's contention that the Democrats suffered from old and tired ideas. A New Beginning had a theme--that America was experiencing an economic and spiritual "rebirth." Its visual and structural devices, notably the presentation of the President himself as narrator, all worked to strengthen and reinforce this vision. The Mondale film, on the other hand, emphasized that there were problems. In striking contrast to A New Beginning, the candidate was presented as mortal rather than divine. "What was your nickname in high school?" an off-camera voice asks Walter Mondale. "Crazy legs," he replies, with a self-deprecatory grin.

The Mondale film had no song or slick visual techniques. Like A New Beginning, it incorporated many visual clichés which symbolize America. These were highlighted when CBS reporter Jeff Greenfield compared and contrasted the two films on the evening of the Republican National Convention (in lieu of showing A New Beginning). The split-screen video upon which images from both films were placed emphasized their differences. For example, while both

included images of the Statue of Liberty, the Mondale footage showed the statue before its massive reconstruction project had begun. The footage was old and outdated; the image presented a static figure to the viewer. In A New Beginning, however, a dynamic camera zoomed in on the Statue which was being repaired. It, like America, was being "rebuilt." Even this simple cliché conveyed the message of the film. More importantly, A New Beginning pointed to present day reality, while the Mondale film was a reminder of the past.

All indications point to the continuing development and entrenchment of political campaign films. In 1984, A New Beginning assumed a prominent position as part of the re-election campaign. As the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, it served as a microcosm of the tone, themes, and strategies of the 1984 campaign. It was offered as a substitute for a speech; it provided a condensed version of the aims and accomplishments of the Reagan Administration; finally, it encompassed the best of the advertising strategies and the media management skills of the Reagan advisers. All of the political campaign films surveyed provided overviews of a particular candidate--summaries of who he was and what he stood for. A New Beginning, though, indicates a trend toward depicting a candidate, toward using images, symbols, and visual communication conventions to create a positive climate which surrounds a candidate. Most importantly, A New Beginning does not concede a separation between filmic and off-screen reality. In 1984, Ronald

Reagan addressed viewers rather than readers. In the following study, I will explore the implications of such a development.

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CHAPTER II

RONALD REAGAN AND THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

Prelude To A New Beginning

A New Beginning was the Republicans' most comprehensive presentation of Ronald Reagan and his political message during the 1984 Presidential campaign. The film may be regarded as a mediated record of the aims and accomplishments of the Reagan Administration; most importantly, its very manner of presentation illustrates, even emphasizes, the highly selective and constructed nature of this record. Whether considered to be news, a documentary, an advertisement, or even propaganda, the mediated images offer Ronald Reagan and his vision of reality to the American public. The juxtaposition of words, sounds, and images--some news, some staged for the film, some both--are organized into sequences which incorporate elements of a variety of themes, visual forms, and genres, all of which are made coherent by the film's narrator, Ronald Reagan. The result necessarily highlights some aspects of the world according to Reagan, and suppresses others.

However, this view of reality must appear in some way tenable to those viewers whom the film addresses. People do (and did) vote for a real-life President whose decisions may have a real-life effect upon them. The majority of the voting public, in 1980 and again in 1984, voiced their

overwhelming support for Reagan's view by providing him with consecutive landslide victories. This was particularly surprising, given that the Republican party has not traditionally been the party of the majority in the United States. The Democrats, at least since Populist William Jennings Bryan set the tone and direction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, have traditionally been the progressive and reformist party of the middle and working classes.¹ In 1980 and 1986, however, Ronald Reagan managed to represent the Republicans as the party of the majority and the party of change. This enabled him to secure many traditionally Democratic votes, and has led to hopeful speculation by Republicans that Reagan's Presidency marks the beginning of a new conservative political era.

In light of this, A New Beginning deserves attention regardless of whether it had any measurable effect upon its audience. It is important as an articulation of Ronald Reagan's ideology and of his rhetorical appeals to his constituencies and supporters. An analysis of these prior to examining the film may help to account for some of its communication strategies--what themes and images appeal to whom, and how? It is also important to ascertain how Ronald Reagan promotes his views. It is most ironic that while the 1984 campaign has frequently been decried as one which lacked substantive argument and specific policy rationales, the Reagan Administration's policies have made some of the most radical changes in government since Roosevelt's New Deal

programs were introduced in 1933. Reagan has been heralded as offering "an alternative vision of what American society and government ought to be,"² a man who "has altered the prevailing mode of political discourse,"³ and whose objectives are a "self-conscious effort at revolutionary change."⁴ Such laudatory remarks are obviously biased, and it is still unclear whether Reagan supporters were largely dissatisfied with Democratic policies by 1980, or were offering him a genuine mandate for change. Nevertheless, Reagan was able to effect a shift in party alliances in 1980 and again in 1984; further, his Administration has been able to re-define the nation's political agenda. These are no small accomplishments.

Indeed, Ronald Reagan is often referred to as an ideological President, driven more by his principles than by situational exigencies. However, more insightful analyses are quick to note his ability to merge ideology with pragmatism,⁵ or more negatively, with utilitarianism.⁶ Throughout his career, Reagan has shown a willingness to compromise in the face of overwhelming adversity. While this may be regarded as one key to his political success, Reagan's ability to secure ideological commitment, or at least complacency, from the majority of the voting public needs to be explored in depth. Reagan has attained his goals more often than he has compromised his positions; he has managed to shift the United States to the right, a task which has involved more than simply eliciting agreement on particular

issues. Rather, Reagan's rhetoric, consistent since he delivered speeches on the virtues of capitalism to General Electric employees in the early 1960's, has aimed at promoting conservative Republican as opposed to liberal Democratic frames of mind.

In effect, Ronald Reagan's conservatism may be regarded as a movement against the social philosophy, economic theory, and political ideology of the liberal democratic "welfare state" which had dominated American politics since Roosevelt's New Deal was implemented in 1933, even when Republican Presidents were in office. Conservative Reagan supporter James Q. Wilson notes that Reagan's encompassment of social and economic issues may indeed be regarded as a movement which attempted to re-align party loyalties as a means to making major political changes.⁷ While there have been few major changes in political structure or party loyalties in American history, those which have occurred have been responses to crises, and they have either accompanied or followed what Wilson refers to as periods of "Great Awakening."

Awakenings are periods of cultural revitalization that begin in a general crisis of beliefs and values and extend over a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place.⁸

Wilson names three periods which have accompanied or preceded political changes: one preceding the American Revolution, one preceding the formation of Jacksonian

Democracy, and the Populist period from 1890-1920. Wilson also relates these periods to religious revivalism, which occurs predictably at times of crisis.

Strangely enough, Wilson does not mention Roosevelt's New Deal as a Great Awakening, although he hopes that the current period is a fourth, in which Ronald Reagan resolves the personal, political, social, and economic crises which marked the late 1960's and 1970's. The outer workings seem to be in place: Ronald Reagan's rhetoric holds the liberal welfare state and the machinations of Big-government and bureaucracy responsible for economic, social, political, and private woes, and thus offers a refutation and permutation of many of the beliefs, values, and attitudes through which Americans have defined themselves and experienced their world for the past 50 years. Many scholars have described the previous two decades as periods of great turmoil and social unrest indeed marked by crises in both personal and public spheres. Ronald Reagan not only makes use of Populist rhetoric (a feature of each of the three periods Wilson names), but he unites himself with a wave of religious revivalism that is evident in the United States. It is quite likely, however, that while conditions may satisfy Wilson's criteria for a general crisis in beliefs and values, and there may be a "crisis" of liberalism, Reagan's rhetoric aims to create the appearance of a Great Awakening. Like Populist rhetors before him, Reagan recognizes the need to merge ethics and economics, myth and theory, in order to achieve

major long-term change.⁹ This is evident in the campaign film, A New Beginning. By doing so, the Republicans, through Ronald Reagan, are able to define a cohesive and positive reality for the American voters, a reality which is far more palatable than the darker vision, and reality, of life portrayed by liberal Democrats Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale.

To elaborate on this point, I will briefly describe 20th century liberal theory and practice. Using Kevin Phillip's framework for analysis, I will then demarcate four areas which were in a state of possible crisis prior to Reagan's 1980 election: economic, social and moral, patriotic and nationalistic, and institutional. Next, I will describe Reagan's program for change, particularly as it relates to these four areas. I will then suggest that he used Populist rhetoric to offer the majority of Americans a positive vision of the future by evoking values which were consistent with his proposed reforms. In so doing, he was able to enlist the support of the religious New Right, other middle class voters, neo-conservatives, Big-Business, and moderate Republicans, unified as "the people." It is quite likely, however, that Ronald Reagan's "new beginning" is simply the conservative side of the liberal coin, with all its limitations. In the short term, Reagan's conservative ideology offers, and even manifests, hope and reassurance. Ultimately, it perpetuates the deeper conflicts and contradictions which it appears to resolve on the surface.

20th Century Liberal Theory And Practice

Twentieth century liberal social philosophy, economic theory, and political ideology may be regarded as a response to the social changes wrought by industrialization and the emergence of the market economy. With industrialization, which began roughly in the post Civil-War period, the United States gradually became transformed from an agrarian to an industrial society. Film theorist Will Wright, who analyzes westerns with regard to social and economic changes, notes that economic relations had, prior to industrialization, been legitimated by social values. However, with the emergence of the market, or early capitalism, economic relations were no longer determined by social goals or values, as was the case in pre-industrial societies. For the first time in American history, the self-regulating market became the sole determinant of economic relations. In his description of the relationship between the economy and values, Wright borrows Karl Polani's simple definition of a market economy as:

. . .an economic system controlled, regulated, and directed by markets alone; order in the production and distribution of goods is entrusted to this self-regulating mechanism.¹⁰

Wright draws out the implications of the market economy by explaining that economic relations were no longer legitimated from "above"--by institutional structures such as myth, kinship, or religion. Rather, it was believed that the self-regulating market, because it was based upon the values

of freedom, equality, and just exchange, would produce the "good society."

Similarly, neo-conservative Irving Kristol, writing in Capitalism Today, identifies underlying goals and values which, he says, are the basis of the American social and political system, and which were transformed with the emergence of the market economy:

Capitalism represents a sum of choices about the good life and the good society. . .

What did capitalism promise? First of all it promised continued improvement in the material conditions of its citizens, a promise without precedent in human history. Secondly, it promised an unprecedented measure of individual freedom for all of these same citizens. And lastly, it held out the promise that, amidst this prosperity and liberty, the individual could satisfy his instinct for self-perfection--for leading a virtuous life that satisfied the demands of his spirit. . . and that the free exercise of such individual virtue would aggregate into a just society.¹¹

According to Kristol, prior to the formation of the market economy, social and economic relations were legitimated by the Protestant work ethic which equated work with virtue. Social and economic relations were premised upon the belief that work was rewarded with self-fulfillment, as well as power, privilege, or property, and that this was a sign of a just society (not merely a free one). Kristol laments that with the coming of industrialization, as capitalism strove to provide affluence and liberty to all, it became severed from its ties to the Protestant ethic. As he states, "The United States went from being a just society to

a free one, where the will to success and privilege became severed from its moral moorings."¹²

Like Kristol, Wright also believes that the reality of a market economy contradicted its values. The self-interested individual, striving to attain power and privilege, did so at the expense of just exchange. Not only did the self-regulating market fail to produce the good society, but the consequent periods of boom or bust produced greater inequality and instability. Eventually, this situation led to the Great Depression in 1929.

As a result, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's liberal New Deal was an attempt to restore social order by making major structural changes. Roosevelt, like Reagan (who emulates some of Roosevelt's rhetorical strategies while dismantling his programs), recognized the need to affect basic values in order to achieve change. The policies instituted during his presidency have been credited not only with transforming the market economy, but with establishing the modern democratic liberal welfare state and the values which sustained it.

As conservative James W. Caesar notes:

The core of liberal theory from its inception has been to expand the purview of government--and in particular the federal government--into new domains of society in order to prohibit, modify, stimulate, or create certain activities and forms of behavior. Underlying this expansion has been a fluid and evolving notion of social justice, energized in recent years by an appeal to the sentiment of compassion.¹³

Initially, the intervention of government as manager of industry, agriculture, and the economy was intended to produce economic growth and prosperity in response to the Great Depression. During the World War II war effort, the centralized role of government became intertwined with Keynesian economic theory and the "planned" economy. This theory, which became increasingly accepted by both Democratic and Republican Presidents after Roosevelt, assumes that supply creates demand; briefly stated, technological innovations and the continuing availability of new goods and services would satisfy demand, provide employment, and lead to economic growth. During the period of increased industrialization and growth which followed the war, government regulations became a means of coping with the proliferation of technological developments in order to ensure that supply did not exceed demand and that demands could be satisfied.

James W. Caesar relates such developments to the liberal idea of progress:

Liberalism conceived of progress as resulting from the steady management of the material conditions by government and from a wider range of human growth and experimentation in the moral realm.¹⁴

Government commitment to progress meant an increased role in maintaining economic and technological growth, and in providing for social, economic, and personal well-being. If the self-regulating market could not fulfill the promises of capitalism, then the government would take over this task.

Liberalism aimed to establish a generalized middle class, with increased personal freedom, equality, and material prosperity. This necessitated a de-emphasis upon individualism and self-interest, and an emphasis upon the democratic and egalitarian aspects of capitalism. Thus, liberal policies were responsible for entitlement programs, such as Social Security and unemployment insurance, as well as Medicare, Medicaid, and Welfare. Through the years, government grants and student loans made it possible for the economically deprived to attend college, and legislation was passed to assure civil rights and equality of opportunity for minority groups.

On the other hand, Wright explains the negative consequences of the shift from a market to a planned economy:

The role of the managers is to manage. Their job is not to create a new society but to regulate an economic system. In this system, government is charged with the achievement of security in the form of welfare, employment, and income. . . .Political action is not concerned, as political action should be, with the achievement of social goals established through social interaction, or with the "good life." Rather, it is simply concerned with maintaining the system.¹⁵

With a planned economy, the government, rather than individuals or the market, determined the best way to spend revenues. This meant the development of a technostucture of bureaucracies established in order to correct and regulate the functioning of governmental systems to ensure economic growth and the stability of the system. This led, in some cases, to individual dependency upon government to satisfy

needs. It is this attempt to provide equality and privilege regardless of individual productivity that Ronald Reagan and his supporters rail against. "The long-term cost of government paternalism," he has stated, "may be to destroy an individual's ability to think for himself."¹⁶

Crisis of Liberalism

Throughout the 1970's and on into the 1980's, many scholars were beginning to note the "crisis of liberalism." While their reasons differed depending upon their perspectives, all remarked upon the increasingly perceived inadequacy of the liberal welfare state and questioned the values which supported it. It was apparent that liberalism, characterized by Keynesian economic theory, centralized government and bureaucracy, had become problematic. In the now famous words of Ronald Reagan, "Government is not the solution to the problem, government is the problem."¹⁷ This attacks the heart of liberalism, and thus remains a source of contention between liberal and conservative politicians. Ronald Reagan's conservatism is based upon the premise that liberal solutions do not work; his ideology offers an alternative to liberalism which ostensibly resolves the "crisis." It is for this reason that Reagan supporters such as James Q. Wilson suggests that the current era marks a fourth "Great Awakening" of cultural and economic revitalization. Accordingly, political theorist Kevin Phillips (who calls himself a "Conservative Marxist")

demarcates economic, social and moral, nationalistic and patriotic, and institutional areas which were in disarray prior to Reagan's election in 1980. Examining these areas and some differing interpretations of them may help to put Ronald Reagan's conservatism into a clearer perspective.

In terms of economics, Reagan was only one among many who blamed current problems upon the highly centralized government bureaucracy, with its increased responsibilities for individual welfare and for regulation of business and industry to assure economic growth. Political historian James David Barber points out that by 1979, inflation was at an all time high and a recession seemed inevitable.¹⁹ A world-wide price revolution during the 1970's, coupled with the inflationary effects of excessive government spending, resulted in increased unemployment, high interest rates which prevented middle income people from purchasing homes or cars, and little speculation or investment as people tried to save rather than spend. As a result, the economy, which depended on investment, expansion, and consumption, was stagnating. While liberalism may have worked during the period when America was becoming industrialized, the new "post-industrial" era of inflation, limited resources, and unemployment demonstrated to many that the welfare state did not work. Increasingly high taxes were paid for government programs, such as welfare, which essentially aimed to create equality for all through more equitable distribution and use of wealth and resources. The middle classes, in particular,

became increasingly resentful at seeing their tax dollars funding government programs from which they seemed to gain little or nothing.

Reagan blamed economic conditions upon liberal economic policies, themselves a function of centralization and bureaucracy, and thus sought economic reform and a revision of the welfare state. Others saw the economic crisis and its ramifications somewhat differently. According to David E. Apter, writing in the journal Social Research, it was apparent that the United States was becoming less of a "land of opportunity" and more of a society characterized by "functional polarization" and "marginalization"²⁰--division into rich and poor, producers and users, with the threat that the "users" would become functionally superfluous because they had no way of contributing to the society. In 1985 he wrote:

Liberal assumptions about the social consequences of growth do not work well enough. The generalized middle as an omnibus class is slowly being pulled in opposite directions, downward toward the negative pole, where life shows greater randomness and uncertainty, and upward to the more predictable circumstances of the functionally significant.²¹

Vicente Navarro also attributes the crisis of liberalism to increasing social polarization. He suggests that this polarization is between the corporate class, the actual producers in society, and the majority, rather than between the bureaucracy and the majority as the conservative view would have it.²²

Phillips suggests, moreover, that social and moral breakdowns were most responsible for political developments in the 1980's.²³ This is the position taken by most conservatives who support Ronald Reagan. The continued growth of the welfare state, which attempted to provide equality of conditions regardless of individual productivity, contrasted markedly with the protestant ethic, the traditional basis of capitalism. As neo-conservative Daniel Bell wrote in 1970:

It is the breakup of this ethic and temper, owing as much to changes in the social structure as the culture, that has undercut the beliefs and legitimations that sanctioned work and reward in American society. It is this transformation, and the lack of any rooted new ethic, that is responsible for the sense of disorientation and dismay that marks the public mood today.²⁴

Thus, neo-conservatives such as Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, and George Gilder refer to a social and moral crisis which resulted from the erosion of the Protestant work ethic and the loss of the moral vision of capitalism. From a rather different perspective, feminist Zillah Eisenstein critiques the conservative analysis of the crisis of liberalism. According to her, neo-conservatives oppose the welfare state because it has led people to expect too much from government; liberty has been re-defined as egalitarianism. The neo-conservatives seek a new, conservative welfare state based upon the (elitist) values of self-reliance, liberty but not equality of conditions, and the least amount of government interference. Eisenstein,

however, believes that the crisis of liberalism is due to the inability of liberal capitalism to deliver on its promise of equality. The ideology of freedom and equality contradicts the reality of economic, racial, and social inequality. She writes:

Dismantling the welfare state is not only intended to redirect surplus into the private sector in a period of declining United States industrial power, but it is also supposed to make clear that equality of opportunity for minorities, as well as women, is a privilege reserved for times of plenty.²⁵

Furthermore, whereas with the market economy, legitimation was based on the belief that the market itself was the means to the good society, with liberalism, legitimation was based on belief in the government's authority to make decisions--an authority which was questioned during the 1960's and on into the next decade. Moreover, the liberal emphasis upon secular and humanistic values placed the individual, rather than any absolute authority, at the center of the moral universe. This "crisis" in traditional morality was responsible for the emergence of the religious New Right, groups who were reacting against the perceived immorality of liberal policies. As argued by Eisenstein, the New Right believes that the welfare state is responsible for the demise of the American family. It has not only "forced" women to work, but has also contributed to the lack of economic productivity. The Welfare State took over traditional family functions, such as health, welfare, and education of individuals, and

thus undermined the traditional function of the father.²⁶ Similarly, George Gilder asserts that welfare destroys incentive and family life by undermining the authority of the father, whose responsibility should be to channel his energies productively by providing for his family.²⁷ Thus, for both Reagan neo-conservatives and the New Right, re-establishing the dominance of the nuclear family is necessary to revitalize the economy, to re-establish the moral basis of capitalism, and to make America strong again. In this way, Reaganomics is consistent with the social aims of the New Right, and Reagan has, to some extent, tried to reverse liberal policies with legislation that would make abortion illegal and return prayer to schools; his Administration has dropped Affirmative Action programs and support for the ERA, and it has attempted to reduce Medicare and Medicaid, thus forcing the return of the care of the elderly to the family.

Phillips also makes the case that the 1960's and 70's were periods of patriotic and nationalistic breakdown. This may have been partly due to the crisis of confidence induced by the Vietnam War, and as Phillips claims, this also came from the knowledge that America no longer dominated the world economically or militarily, as it had during the 1950's. He refers to the United States as "an empire in retreat."²⁸ Events such as defeat in Vietnam, the increasing economic power of the OPEC nations; the overthrow of the American-backed Shah of Iran followed by American impotence during the

hostage crisis in Teheran, Carter's surrender of rights to the Panama Canal, and a steady Soviet military build-up (with the threat of expansionism as they invaded Afghanistan) revived American fears of Communism (and the loss of individual freedom which it implied to many) which were so prevalent in the 1950's. Thus, American loss of prestige abroad was reflected in the public attitude at home.

Finally, the American Presidency as an institution was also in a state of disarray. The Watergate affair, and the perceived lack of leadership skill displayed by Presidents Ford and Carter led to a growing crisis of authority and lack of faith in the institution itself. Political theorist James Barber notes that Ford's pollsters advised him in 1976 that Americans wanted a President to demonstrate "moral leadership, strength of character, religious conviction, love of family, and personal integrity above all else."²⁹ However, Ford's inability to project leadership, and Carter's subsequent disappointments led to an estimated 80% of Americans who, in 1979, believed that "we are on the wrong track."³⁰ By 1980, Barber continues, people most wanted ". . . leadership, a sure sense of direction, a firm hand on the tiller, perhaps even a little charisma again."³¹ Enter Ronald Reagan.

It is most likely that the interaction of all of these factors, rather than the dominance of one or the other, set the stage for Ronald Reagan and the conservative movement to shift the United States to the conservative right in the

1980's. There is little doubt that many people were disenchanted with liberalism, and that the country was experiencing stresses and strains in many areas. A large part of Ronald Reagan's appeal may be attributed to his ability to offer the hope of ultimate resolution for all of the difficulties which people were facing. Just as for most people these "crises" were experienced but not articulated, Reagan addressed many of them implicitly. While the content of his rhetoric focused upon the economy, his themes, imagery, and non-verbal communication spoke to patriotism and traditional (i.e., pre-liberal welfare states) values. He presented himself as an authoritative figure, both a leader and a man who was responsive to the needs and desires of the people. As will be argued later, not only was television a particularly apt medium for such an orator, but Reagan had the skills which, when combined with his advisers' political acumen, enabled the Republicans to use television to their full advantage.

The Reagan Resolution

Thus it was in the context of severe American disaffection, if not actual crisis, that Ronald Reagan's assault against the liberal welfare state took place. His positions were not new in 1980. Since the 1960's he had been lashing out against centralized government and the liberal

policies and programs which he held responsible for personal and public malaise.

One of Reagan's most basic beliefs has been that to solve current problems, the size and power of the Federal government must be reduced. His position has been referred to as "Jeffersonian Republicanism"³²: it involves decentralization in the form of de-regulation of industry and debureaucratization of society (like Jefferson), a return to the free market economy (a Republican position), and a maximization of individual responsibility, making "enlightened self-interest" the prime mover in relations of exchange (an admixture of the two). Thus, in 1980 Reagan advocated less government control of states and industries; cutting inflation by decreasing government spending; balancing the Federal budget (a goal he would later abandon); reducing income taxes to stimulate the economy; and re-building a strong America by increasing defense spending.

In addition, Reagan offered a specific plan for economic change in 1980 which became known as Reaganomics. This further assisted his cause with the voting public who were looking for answers which Democrat Jimmy Carter did not seem able to provide. Prior to Reagan's 1980 election campaign, he had become familiar with "supply-side economics," a theory which became the thrust of his election bid. According to its conservative proponent Jude Winniski, this is:

. . .an older style of economic thought in which the incentives and motivations of the individual producer, consumer, and merchant are made the keystone of economic policy.³³

Because this theory was such an important part of Reagan's Presidential campaign, and later, of his Administration, a more complete explication is in order here. His plan was a radical, if untested, departure from both Republican and Democratic policies since the New Deal, which incurred the wrath of more moderate Republicans, such as George Bush, who referred to it as "voodoo economics" when he was still a candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination.³⁴ Reagan's synthesis of supply-side economics, or the theory of deep tax cuts, along with minimal government regulation of private enterprise and monetarism--limiting the money supply in order to decrease inflation and budget deficits--became known as Reaganomics. Despite the fact that supply-side economics and monetarism were not necessarily compatible, this program was intended to provide the conditions for optimal economic growth and prosperity.

Simply stated, the theory of deep tax cuts is based upon the assumption that demand creates supply. Like Keynesian economic theory, it emphasizes productivity. However, this economic theory does not assume that expanding supply--whether money, goods, or services--produces economic growth. To increase productivity and assure economic growth, policies have to increase both the demand for productive material, such as people, land, or machines, and also increase people's incentive to be employed. The idea is that removing government barriers to productivity, most notably high taxes, accomplishes this. Welfare programs were also

blamed for reducing incentive to work, especially since with high taxes people could earn almost as much on welfare as they would earn in after-tax income. Thus, across the board tax cuts, for rich and poor, were supposed to increase productivity because employers would be able to pay less, and workers would be able to keep more of the money they earned. This in turn would instigate more investments and business enterprises, which would then create more jobs, which would result in economic growth. While few people claimed to fully understand the as yet untested plan, in the context of 1980's post-industrial capitalism, Reagan was able to provide Americans with an alternative to the Democrats' prospectus of austerity and sacrifice. He offered people hope and promised economic abundance--an offer which was hard to refuse.

It is important to note, however, that while Reaganomics may be regarded as an attempt to return to the free market economy which characterized pre-welfare state American society, there is a pragmatic aspect which suggests that it does not solely aim to recover the past. For instance, Reagan retains the liberal notion of economic growth as a social and political goal. This distinguished him from other Republican candidates in 1980. He stressed the need for economic change which offered prosperity, and prosperity for all. He promised that there would be economic growth, and added, "We can't leave anyone behind."³⁵ This, too, was an appeal to the majority. Further, while he did advocate reductions or eliminations of many social programs (based

upon the rationale that they were wasteful or that, as the economy got better, there would be less need for them), he also retained a safety net of established social programs such as welfare (albeit on a reduced scale), unemployment insurance, and Social Security (although the latter became a somewhat controversial issue). This, no doubt, made the proposed changes less threatening to the middle classes who occasionally had to rely upon such programs, especially as the economy worsened.

Considered in a slightly different fashion, Reaganomics is an economic attempt to return America to the pre-liberal state market economy, to return America to the position of military supremacy which she occupied in the 1950's; and ethically, to restore the independence and self-reliance of the individual who reaps the material and moral rewards for his or her labor and initiative. Along these lines, Reagan's 1980 campaign has been critically described by Alexander Cockburn:

The election of 1980 revolved around uncomplicated emotions: fear for the future, nostalgia for the past, uncertainty about the present. . . .Most of the campaign rhetoric, most notably that of Governor Ronald Reagan, was bogus, designed to produce the willing suspension of disbelief. "Supply-side economics" was the mechanism employed in this task."³⁶

Cockburn clearly believes that Reagan's rhetoric was illusory, consisting of emotional appeals and invocations of conservative values as the answers to contemporary fears and

uncertainties. Similarly, political analyst Walter Dean Burnham notes:

Still, the overriding issues of this election were almost certainly economic and imperial-maintenance issues, with the former the more important. Perhaps the most durable interest most voters have is the maintenance of the "American Dream" itself: the promise of a better life, and particularly the promise of a better life for one's children. . . . Ronald Reagan promised above all that the American Dream could be revitalized. Perhaps even more important, he projected a boundless faith and optimism that the traditional ways could work; and in this, stood in sharp contrast to a Carter whose message appeared to be gloomy, pessimistic, and confused.³⁷

Reagan's "nostalgic" evocation of values which were consistent with a market economy enabled him to address, and appear to resolve, social and moral as well as economic issues. By re-instilling faith in the American Dream, and conveying an image of a strong America with a sure leader, he appeared to offer hope that many of the conflicts and contradictions which perplexed the majority of Americans could be resolved.

Ronald Reagan And Populism

In many ways, Ronald Reagan's appeals may be regarded as an attempt to renew popular faith in the ideals of capitalism by affirming the Protestant work ethic and its manifestation in myths such as those of the individual, the frontier, and the American Dream. If successful, this merger of myth and theory would re-instate the market economy and effectively allow him to redirect the course of American government and

society. This could only be accomplished through Populist rhetoric.

Not only has Populist rhetoric been a factor in major political changes throughout American history, but great Populist rhetors have recognized the need to merge ethics and economics in order to achieve change. Thus, it is important to recognize the connection between Reagan's proposed economic reforms and his use of rhetoric which embodied many traditional Populist themes. He urges a return to the free enterprise, self-regulating market economy which is based upon the Populist assumptions that individualism, private incentives, and traditional values (such as equality of opportunity, self-help tempered by good-neighborliness, and even patriarchal sex roles) are necessary to create the good society.

Populist movements, rooted in the Declaration of Independence, have historically been concerned with asserting individual rights, free from any outside (especially governmental) interference. Populism is often related to Jacksonian Democracy, which is credited with the enshrinement of the common man, the "active participation of voters qualified only by age, sex, color, and citizenship, not by property, in all American affairs."³⁸ It is a testimony to the increasing democratization of American society through the years that these qualifications became limited to age and citizenship. Jacksonian Democracy, and the Populist movement which grew out of it, was committed to the American ideals of

liberty, equality, and pursuit of happiness as the fundamental rights of all Americans. The Populist vision is that of a struggle between the common man and powerful interests (either corporate, or in Reagan's vision, bureaucratic) which threaten to encroach upon the individual. Gary Woodward summarizes American Populism as follows:

American Populism was a diffuse and rural-based movement against concentrations of wealth and power in the urban centers along the eastern seaboard. Its appeal crossed traditional political lines because its enemies were members of the political and economic mainstreams of both parties. . . . William Jennings Bryan, and countless teachers, editors, and small businessmen argued that the wealth of ordinary Americans was being stolen by corporate and governmental bureaucrats. Building on Thomas Jefferson's fears, they offered hundreds of variations on the theme that "paper wealth" was being created not by hard work and honest toil but by speculation in commodities and gold.

Further:

The Populist vocabulary was peppered with condemnatory references to the ignoble "interests" and praise for "the people." Made from a romantic regard for the virtues of the rural landscape as well as the hard realities of the uncontrolled greed of industrial baronies, the "interests" were portrayed as largely acquisitive, speculative, urban wealthy, and entrenched east of the Alleghenies. "The people" were poor, hardworking, pious, and tied to their virtuous roots on the farms and small towns of America.³⁹

Populism became a bona fide movement in the period from 1890-1920 when, headed by Williams Jennings Bryan, Populists primarily from the rural parts of America banded together to

ward off the growing strength of the manufacturing and industrial realms. This was also the last period which conservative James Q. Wilson referred to as a "Great Awakening," marked by a crisis in beliefs and values. It should be noted that the Populist targets were located in the Northeast, and it is the Northeast liberal establishment which Ronald Reagan attacks. He gives Populism a twist, however, by portraying the liberal Big-Government bureaucrats, and not corporate "interests" as the villains who oppose the ordinary American. At the same time, he extols the virtues of rural and small-town America, and in his vision, even the cities are populated by hard working, would-be achievers. This is particularly evident in the 1984 campaign film, A New Beginning, which is full of images of this America, rather than the highly automated and industrialized society which some would claim that it has become. Even when workers in urban environments are depicted, they are physical laborers who are delighted to be "producing" again through activities such as welding or building construction. They, too, are tied to their roots in good, honest labor.

Although William Jennings Bryan and the Populist Party never did win the Presidency, they did exert a strong influence on the subsequent direction of the Democratic Party in America. Woodward even claims that FDR was a pseudo-Populist, directly influenced by Bryan, and that Reagan is also a pseudo-Populist who echoes the rhetorical strategies

employed by both of these men. These strategies are elevation of the common man; presentation of corporate or bureaucratic malevolence toward the common man (in Reagan's case, solely bureaucratic); emphasis upon personal welfare (i.e., Reagan's 1984 slogan, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?"); a producer/user dichotomy (the basis of supply-side economics); and the use of the idiom of the common man (hence, Reagan's anti-elitism which manifests as anti-intellectualism, and the popular appraisal of him as 'able to get his message across.'⁴⁰)

Most importantly, Reagan's use of Populist rhetoric corresponds with the values required in a free-market economy. Jeffrey Richards claims that central to populism is the doctrine of self-help, which emphasizes individualism and equality of opportunity as the necessary conditions for the pursuit of happiness.⁴¹ So it is the individual's responsibility, not society's, to improve his or her own condition. Needless to say, this directly contradicts liberal theory which assumes it is society's responsibility to improve the individual's condition, and that inequalities are the result of the system rather than due to individual defects. Thus, Reagan promotes the idea that individuals who are willing and determined to get ahead will be able to do so if they are free and unimpeded by the government. A typical example of his rhetoric occurred during his first term in office when he went on television to promote his Economic Renewal Program. He stated his wish to,

". . .restore the freedom of all men and women to excel and create. . . .Leave our children liberty in a land in which every individual has the ability to be what God intends us to be."⁴²

Richards also suggests that the Populist movement in the early twentieth century, a reaction against Industrialization and its social and economic dislocation, advocated tempering self-help with good neighborliness. His description seems as pertinent to Ronald Reagan's views in the 1980's as it was to the situation in the earlier era, except that Ronald Reagan is opposed to bureaucracy and the liberal intellectuals rather than corporate America:

They took the view that there was nothing basically wrong with the country and that if friends rallied round and people loved and helped each other, everything could be solved without government interference. In this way, they could restore the "world of the day before yesterday." . . .These then are the elements of Populism: equality of opportunity, self-help tempered with good neighborliness, leadership by decent men, opposition to Big Business complexes, political machines, the intellectuals, obtrusive central government.⁴³

In a sense, this suggests that Reagan is playing a part in a larger historical drama, one which has been taking place throughout the twentieth century (if not longer). In this drama, the Populists--small town, traditionalist rural classes--have been pitted against the urban, liberal modernists. As conservative Daniel Bell writes:

Along a different sociological axis, one can see the politics of the 1920's and to some extent the 1950's within the framework of "tradition" vs. "modernity," with the rural, small town Protestant intent on defending his

historic values against the cosmopolitan liberal interested in reform and social welfare. The issues here are not primarily economic but cultural. The traditionalist defends fundamentalist religion, censorship, stricter divorce and anti-abortion laws; the modernist is for secular rationality, freer personal relations, tolerance of sexual deviance, and the like.⁴⁴

Bell asserts that traditionalists have historically mobilized during times of ideological crisis, and Bell, like many conservatives, believes that the present era is just such a state of crisis. While traditionalist Populism was subdued by the New Deal and the growth of the highly centralized welfare state (i.e., the dominance of liberalism), Richards argues that this liberal domination was supported primarily by the underprivileged and intellectuals.⁴⁵ The conservatives argue that Populism may have briefly re-emerged in the 1950's; however, a new, stronger Populist movement is forming today in response to what it perceives as the excesses, and resultant crisis, of liberalism.⁴⁶ By the early 1980's, the time seemed to be right for a change, particularly in the "Sunbelt," the south and midwest of the United States. This area had been growing in population and strength throughout the 1980's, as high-technology industries and agri-businesses gained a firmer foothold. Not only did supporters of the New Right come mainly from this area, but the Sunbelt States provided a large part of Reagan's political support in 1980 and again in 1984.

Thus, not only did Ronald Reagan espouse Populist principles, but in so doing he re-affirmed the myths of small town America and the moral concerns associated with the New Right. It is not coincidental that Populism, evangelical and fundamentalist religious movements have typically been based in rural regions in America, and that these movements have been related to major social and political changes. It is quite possible that Ronald Reagan, seeking to mobilize popular support in order to make major changes, sought to unify "the people" through Populist rhetoric. By pointing to (and in a sense, constituting) the failure of liberalism and its values, Reagan was able to establish a new majority consisting of those traditional, small town (in spirit, if not in reality), "ordinary" Americans. In 1980 and again in 1984, Reagan supporters formed a coalition of those otherwise disparate Americans who were disillusioned with the course and direction that America was taking, and who wanted to believe that Ronald Reagan could be the new captain of their fate.

The New Republicans

Ronald Reagan's Populist rhetoric indicated that while he may have been principally concerned with making economic changes to bolster corporate America, he recognized the need to unite this concern with personal--i.e., social and moral--issues in order to gain popular support, and that major changes could not be achieved without popular support.

He presented himself as the instrument, rather than as the manipulator, of "the people's" will. In A New Beginning, for instance, he claims that, "You don't become President; the Presidency is an institution and you have temporary custody of it" (Scene II).

Yet, after his election in 1980, Reagan determinedly set out to direct public opinion in favor of his economic reforms. He emphasized the problems which liberal policies had caused, and offered his Economic Renewal Program as the first step toward change. This was a calculated strategy. Immediately after his election, his aides studied the first one hundred days in office of every President since Roosevelt and concluded that this was the crucial time to establish the Presidential persona, the general character of the Administration, and to avoid big mistakes. As a result, the President was advised, "Keep a strong focus on the economy. Other moves would distract from the main event and--so the argument went--tend to weaken the Presidency."⁴⁸

The economy was one area where Reagan could unify not only the public, but the various constituencies whose otherwise tenuous support had helped him to win the White House. Naming moderate Republican George Bush as Vice-President has won him the grudging support of Republicans who were opposed to supply-side economics. These were traditional Republicans, basically unconcerned about social issues, who wanted incremental rather than radical change. They wanted to get the Federal budget deficit down

before implementing tax cuts. There were also the competing views of the monetarists and the supply-siders who disagreed about the best means to promote economic growth. While many of these Republicans remained ambivalent throughout Reagan's first term in office, George Bush's professed support for Reagan (after he accepted the Vice-Presidency), and Reagan's synthesis of monetarism and supply-side economics, muffled these voices of dissent within his Administration.

Reagan was also assured of the backing of neo-conservatives. This group consisted of many prominent intellectuals such as Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol, Jude Winniski, Norman Podheranz, and George Gilder. Primarily ex-liberals grown disenchanted with the welfare state (like Reagan himself), most were pro-business, in favor of the free market economy, and for a strong defense policy. Their aims were, however, not to destroy the welfare state but to establish a new, conservative version of it; they were primarily opposed to the egalitarian aspects of the welfare state which led people to expect too much from government and led to the erosion of the capitalist ethic. George Gilder has remarked that work, faith, and family are the cornerstones of capitalism--three themes which are recurrent in Reagan's rhetoric, and which dominate A New Beginning. However, Reagan appealed principally to work--i.e., the economy--while generally aligning himself with faith and family. These latter concerns were those of the religious New Right, led by men such as Jerry Falwell (leader of the

Moral Majority) and Richard Viguerie (organizer of the National Conservative Political Action Committee, a powerful fund-raising group which supported Ronald Reagan). These more radical groups wished to dismantle the welfare state entirely, holding it responsible for the demise of traditional morals and the American family. Before his election, Reagan aligned himself with their causes. In a 1980 speech to a group of fundamentalist conservatives known as the Religious Roundtable, he asserted the need for the rehabilitation of the American family and promised to base his policies on the primacy of parental rights and responsibilities.⁴⁹ However, once in office, he focused upon the need for economic reforms before social changes could be made, and it was primarily his economic achievements which were stressed during the 1984 campaign.

All of the above groups represented an uneasy coalition of political supporters with diverse interests. Reagan's strategy was to focus upon economic reform and to embed general moral principles within his calls for economic renewal. The Administration's initial goal was to gain a consensus on the economy and to avoid the more divisive social issues.⁵⁰ The New Right conservatives were not pleased with this. In 1984 Howard Phillips, national director of the Conservative Caucus, protested, "There are practical things Reagan could have done that he didn't do. He could have taken away federal money going to Planned Parenthood, he could have cut off subsidies for homosexual

and feminist groups."⁵¹ However, Reagan did make enough gestures to maintain the support of the New Right. During the 1982 mid-term elections, he tried to get social issues, such as abortion, prayer in school, and busing, on the legislative agenda. He failed and at that time did not pursue these matters. Nevertheless, he was the first President in many years even sympathetic to the concerns of the New Right, and they had no other option but to support him in 1984. He, too, remained sensitive to their needs, for a large number of voters were influenced by these groups.

Reagan was, however, attempting to create a long-term Republican majority, consisting of the political center in America, which meant that he was aiming to create a consensus of "the people," the generalized middle (in a sense, a "rhetorical fiction" which conveys the illusion of unity⁵²). In order to do so, he appealed to the most pressing concern across all stratas of society--the economy. He aimed to win over the majority (at least of those who voted) by convincing them that they would benefit from his economic changes; at the same time, these changes placated his more powerful and influential constituencies, particularly corporate America, whose activities dominated the American economy and whose contributions helped finance Reagan's election. Reagan also appealed to national pride and patriotism by promising to make America "strong" again--a promise which entailed an extensive military build-up (a proposition which was clearly not antagonistic to Big Business). His unification of "the

people" through his firm opposition to the Soviet Union and other Communist governments cannot be discounted.

Limitations Of The Reagan Theory And Practice

As a result of Reagan's Economic Renewal Program, which he passed in large part in the summer of 1981 (due to a combination of circumstances, not the least of which was the support of corporate America⁵³), not only were there many tax loopholes for businesses, but it was reported that many large corporations paid no taxes at all in 1982.⁵⁴ Yet this program was packaged as beneficial to the individual because his or her taxes were cut (although the effects were minuscule as compared to corporate America). Later, Reagan took credit for an economic recovery which had begun by 1984. While he cited polls and statistics to support his claims, more detailed analyses noted that minorities and those on the lower socioeconomic levels did not make any significant economic gains.⁵⁵

In fact, several factors suggest that the "new beginning" which Reagan heralded was indeed illusory. Not only did the pre-liberal market economy to which Reagan advocated a return (via supply-side economics) produce "possessive individualism"⁵⁶ which conflicted with the moral vision of capitalism (i.e., that of the "good society" as one based upon reciprocity and relations of just exchange), but this view also denied the realities of the post-industrial era. Reagan blames the bureaucrats and the technocratic

"elite" who head the democratic welfare state for fostering dependency, maintaining social inequalities, and for causing economic crises. In so doing, he equates corporate America with the individual entrepreneur. Both corporate America and the individual, according to this view, are stifled by government bureaucracy and regulations; both prosper and are able to become productive when free and unfettered. Reagan and his supporters, however, deny the realities of monopoly expansion and the fact that the only true "producers" in society are the invisible corporate class--the owners of financial capital who must continue to create demand and to maintain patterns of consumption in order to profit.

Thus, the Reagan Administration's attack on bureaucracy sets up a false dichotomy. The bureaucrats are essentially what neo-conservative Irving Kristol terms the "new class" of middle class professionals who attend to the needs of the non-productive members of society and thus are equally dependent upon the welfare state. As Kristol has stated, these are the people whom "liberal capitalism has sent to college in order to help manage its affluent, highly technological, mildly paternalistic, 'post-industrial society.'"⁵⁷ Thus, elimination of bureaucracy increases, rather than decreases, inequality and polarization--contrary to Reagan's asserted position. The bureaucracy is not opposed to the majority; to a great extent, the bureaucrats are the majority.

The technocrats and the bureaucrats, then, do not create, but rather minister to the dependency which results from the individual's loss of control over his or her productivity. The majority of people in an industrial society do not seek or find fulfillment through their work, but through leisure time consumption; some lack the motivation to produce at all. Yet, because Reagan portrays the conflict as one between Big Government as "producers" and the majority as "users" (or consumers), he is able to present Big Business as beneficial rather than antagonistic to the individual. In Reagan's view, not only do businesses provide jobs (no matter how unfulfilling), but the investments of wealthy entrepreneurs stimulate the economy and thus make life better for everyone. (However, in this view happiness is equated with ability to consume rather than produce). In the conservative vision, corporate America is made up of individuals who have achieved the American Dream; they have become producers in society by virtue of initiative, self-reliance, and independence.

However, this implicit equation of corporate America and the individual ignores the fact the corporate profits are not reflected in individual capital accumulation. Corporate gains are made at the expense of the majority, the consumers who make up the lower, middle, and working classes. Less government restrictions and regulations of business and industry simply allow the rich to get richer, while those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder who lack education

and specialized skills, those who are most dependent upon government, gain little from an increased opportunity to produce in a society which offers them little real opportunity.

Because the corporate class is, for the most part, invisible in an American society which espouses the ideals of democracy, freedom, and equality, Reagan is able to divert individual dissatisfactions by naming the liberal welfare state (and, in terms of foreign affairs, the Communists) as the evil which interferes with the individual's ability to achieve in society, and which even rewards those who contribute little to the social good. Thus, according to Reagan, it is government regulations which take away freedoms; it is liberal policy which removes incentives to produce in society. Thus, this appeal is largely to the middle classes, the political center who see themselves as potentially becoming "producers" in society, following the mold of the American Dream. They want to believe that it is possible to become successful, to become self-determining, to be moral, and to accumulate the goods and property which are symbols of success in America. As may be apparent, this vision is less appealing to minorities (including women) and the bureaucrats who are most likely to become functionally superfluous under such a system.

Thus it was that, throughout Ronald Reagan's first term in office, he maintained a concerted focus upon economic recovery, and he used all of the means available to him to

convey an upbeat and optimistic vision of the future along with a sense of national unity and purpose. If the 1960's and 1970's were periods of national crisis, by 1984 Ronald Reagan appeared to be offering a resolution. The economy was better, if precariously and only for some, the United States was stronger militarily, and inspiring deeper patriotism; and people were once again reporting that they had faith in the presidency. Ronald Reagan was able to offer psychological solace, at least to the middle classes. He needed only to reassure them that he would not cut the social entitlement programs which had become entrenched by the liberal state, and he needed to convince them that, although he wanted a strong America, he also wanted a peaceful America. The theme of a "new beginning," reiterated throughout his first term in office, was to predominate in 1984, as Reagan attempted to demonstrate that a new beginning had, indeed, begun.

ENDNOTES

¹Gary C. Woodward, "Reagan as Roosevelt: Elasticity of Pseudo-Populist Appeals," CSSJ34 (1983): 51.

²James Q. Wilson, "Reagan and the Republican Revival," Commentary October 1980: 25.

³James W. Caesar, "As Good As Their Words: Reagan's Rhetoric," Public Opinion June/July 1984: 11.

⁴Rowland Evans and Robert D. Novak, The Reagan Revolution (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981) 3.

⁵Lesley H. Gelb, "The Mind of the President," New York Times 6 Oct. 1985: 21.

⁶Alan Wolfe, "Why the Neocons are Losing Out," Nation 28 Sept. 1985: 283.

⁷Wilson, 28.

⁸Wilson, 28.

⁹Norman Pollack, ed., The Populist Mind (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1967) 469. Pollack writes: Economic democracy was for Populists as much a matter of ethics as of economics. Not only must there be structural changes to correct contemporary abuses, but there must be an ethical content incorporated into these changes if they are to be secured on a solid footing.

¹⁰Will Wright, Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1975) 176.

¹¹Irving Kristol, "When Virtue Loses all Her Loveliness--some reflections on capitalism and the 'free society,'" Capitalism Today (New York: Basic Books, 1971) 4-5.

¹²Kristol, 8.

¹³Caesar, 10.

¹⁴Caesar, 12.

¹⁵Wright, 176.

¹⁶Ron Dalleck, Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984) 101.

¹⁷Ronald Reagan, 1980 Inaugural Address transcript. New York Times 21 January 1981: A1.

¹⁸Kevin Phillips, Post-Conservative America (New York: Random House, 1982) 20.

¹⁹James David Barber, The Pulse of Politics: Electing Presidents in the Media Age, (New York: Norton & Co., 1980) 210.

²⁰David E. Apter, "The Mytho/Logics and the Specter of Superfluous Man," Social Research 52. 2 (1985) 278, 287. Apter states that "functional polarization represents a social tendency opposite to that emphasized in liberal theory, that is, the generalization of the middle sectors as a result of development." He argues that "the developmental tendencies which produced a generalized middle class, crucial to liberal notions of balance, mediation, and democracy, have begun to change to produce what might be called a polarization tendency. . . .It involved dispossession, displacement and marginalization. . . .In turn, the latter can be defined as those who remove more from the social product than they contribute to it. Polarization, in this sense, is between the functionally significant. . .and the functionally superfluous, whose contributions to the rest of the society are negative (ie., a tax on the rest of society)" Apter sees western societies as increasingly representing this tendency, particularly the United States, which is the most developed country.

²¹Apter, 287-8.

²²Vincente Navarro, "The Industrialization of Fetishism or the Fetishism of Industrialization: A Critique of Ivan Illich," Social Science and Medicine 9 (1975) 357. While Navarro focuses upon the health care system, he argues that this represents the conflict in the overall social system in the United States, and that this is between "those who have a dominant influence in the (health) system (the corporate class and the upper middle class who represent less than 20% of our population) and the majority of our population (lower middle class and working class) who represent 80% of our population and who have no control whatsoever over either the production or consumption of those (health) services."

²³Phillips, 20.

²⁴Daniel Bell, "The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism," in Capitalism Today, ed. Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell (New York: Basic Books, 1971) 36-7.

²⁵Zillah Eisenstein, "Sexual Politics of the New Right," Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology, ed. Norman O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara Gelpi (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982) 87-8.

- 26Eisenstein, 77.
- 27George Gilder, "The Nature of Poverty," Wealth and Poverty (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 64-74.
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- 33Jude Winniski, "The Mundell-Laffer Hypothesis-A New View of the World Economy," Public Interest Spring 1975: 51.
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- 36Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway, "The World of Appearance: the Public Campaign," The Hidden Election eds. Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) 79.
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- 39Woodward, 44-5.
- 40Caesar, 10.
- 41Jeffrey Richards, "Frank Capra and the Cinema of Populism," Movies and Methods ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1976) 66.
- 42Dalleck, 66.
- 43Richards, 67.
- 44Bell, 39.
- 45Richards, 67.

⁴⁶See Richard Viguerie, The Establishment vs. the People: Is a New Populist Revolt on the Way? (American Populist Institute, 1983).

⁴⁷Sidney Blumenthal, "Marketing the President," New York Times Magazine 13 Sept. 1981: 110.

⁴⁸Evans and Novak, 204.

⁴⁹Blumenthal, 110.

⁵⁰"What Conservatives think of Ronald Reagan-A Symposium," Policy Review Winter 1984: 9.

⁵¹Walter R. Fisher, "Rhetorical Fiction and the Presidency," QJS 66 (1980) 119+. Fisher argues that the Presidency is a rhetorical fiction. This is "a generic term which encompasses in whole or in part persona, fantasy theme and rhetorical vision, political myth and ideology. . . each of these concepts is a symbolic construction that exerts persuasive force in the making of persons, community and the nation." Fisher asserts that ethos is the salient characteristic of the Presidency as a rhetorical fiction, and that the key to this ethos is the President's conception of "the people." In this sense, the people, as well as the Presidency, are rhetorical fictions.

⁵²Blumenthal, 114.

⁵³"Survey Finds Big Companies paying no income tax," Oregonian 29 Aug. 1985: F1. Citizens for Tax Research, a private research and lobbying groups, found that 50 of the nation's top corporations paid no federal income tax during President Reagan's first term in office. From 1981-4 they shared 2.4 billion dollars in refunds-while making 56 billion in profits. This study said that many of the corporations avoided paying taxes as a result of Reagan's 1981 tax bill, which accelerated the depreciation rate for companies and expanded the investment tax credit.

⁵⁴Randolph E. Schmid, "Concern aired that decline in poverty misses minorities," Oregonian 29 Aug. 1985: A10.

⁵⁵Will Wright, 136-7. Wright makes use of political theorist Colin McPherson's theory of possessive individualism to write: "In a market economy, the efforts of an individual to enjoy the benefits of his society are not directed at increasing those benefits for everyone, but are necessarily directed at preventing others from enjoying those benefits."

The individual must see himself as self-reliant and independent of the wills of others, except through the establishment of economic contracts. He must recognize his abilities and capacities as belonging to himself, not to the social group, and he must utilize these capacities in the most rational manner to increase his own wealth. This is the view of the individual inherent in the market, and it underlies the theory of possessive individualism."

⁵⁶Irving Kristol, Two Cheers for Capitalism (New York: New American Library, 1978) 17.

CHAPTER III

MYTHIC RHETORIC IN A NEW BEGINNING

Myth, Ritual And Rhetoric

Chapter II provided an overview of Ronald Reagan's conservative ideology. This was accomplished by outlining the Republicans' aims and objectives and locating these within an historical context. However, this view of Reagan's political discourse cannot, by itself, account for his overwhelmingly successful appeal to the American people. It was not by making their ideological objectives explicit that the Republicans secured votes. At least, many critics felt that they did not do so. Reagan's 1984 campaign was much maligned by the press and the Democrats because of his disinclination to offer specific policy rationales or programs for the future. Nor was it the case that Reagan's record was beyond reproach. Throughout the 1984 campaign, he offered Americans a vision of hope and prosperity, despite the acknowledged fact that the Federal deficit had reached unprecedented levels, largely as a result of Reagan's policies. Most Americans, however, did not heed opponent Walter Mondale's cries that this situation called for austerity, sacrifice, and higher taxation. Instead, the voting majority opted for the instant gratification offered by Ronald Reagan--a coherent, unproblematic, self-affirming view of America and Americans. In both word and deed, news

and advertisements, Reagan conveyed the same message of optimism and reassurance that America, under his leadership, was spiritually and economically "well" again, that America was not a house divided, that there was unity and consensus in support of Ronald Reagan.

Yet, in counterpoint to critics of the Reagan campaign, political theorist W. Lance Bennett suggests that elections are never principally forums for serious policy debate. Rather he asserts that, contrary to popular conceptions, the ritualistic functions of American political campaigns are as important as the logically argumentative ones. Bennett is one of many political analysts who suggest that all political discourse is grounded in myth and ritual. According to him, political discourse, especially campaign discourse, consists of symbolic appeals which simultaneously serve both ritualistic or mythic ends, and rhetorical or pragmatic ends. He writes:

Pragmatic calculations play a central role in the construction of campaign discourse. However, only in part does the rhetorical discourse of a campaign function to elect a president. The same symbolic appeals that win or lose votes for a candidate also establish the election ritual itself. In addition to its pragmatic functions, campaign discourse also serves as the backdrop against which the public can work out its tensions and satisfy its needs for security, order, leadership, and control over the future. These basic concerns are addressed by elections and all of the other rituals of political succession.¹

Rhetorical or pragmatic campaign discourse, in this sense, refers to logically discriminated argumentative

discourse which serves instrumental, vote-getting purposes. It is important to note, however, that the pragmatic and ritualistic functions of campaign discourse can only be separated for analytic purposes. As Bennett points out, effective pragmatic appeals serve ritualistic ends, while rituals have pragmatic advantages.

Considered in another way, pragmatic and ritualistic discourse can be regarded as two different modes of symbolization which appear to contradict each other. They meet, according to James Hoban, during "rhetorical rituals. . .recurring acts of formalized language or gesture which are both instrumental and consummatory, with neither motive seemingly dominant."² He distinguishes between the rhetorical: the discursive, pragmatic, instrumental (what I term the argumentative); and the mythic: the non-discursive, aesthetic, consummatory. Together these form the dialectical "mythic rhetoric" which characterizes a rhetorical ritual.

Hoban classifies Acceptance Speeches and Inaugural Addresses as rhetorical rituals; A New Beginning, as a substitute for the Nominating Address at the Republican National Convention, was also a rhetorical ritual. By using television as their primary vehicle for political communication, the Republicans were able to take advantage of its centrality in American life and to exploit the fact that it is television which establishes the modern day election ritual. As A New Beginning demonstrates, the Reagan strategists, unlike Walter Mondale's campaign managers,

seemed to be more adept at carefully crafting their symbolic appeals through the medium of television. They seemed to be more aware of television's capacity to evoke myths in order to provide a reassuring and coherent means of interpreting present day realities. They recognized that television is a dramatic medium which lends itself to symbolic appeals far more readily than does traditional political oratory.

With political oratory, the pragmatic function is apparent. Such is not necessarily the case, however, with visual communication forms. There the ritualistic or mythic function predominates, to the extent that visual communication forms often appear to be messages without speakers or unmediated representations of reality rather than motivated propositions about it. A New Beginning, then, as a specifically televisual rhetorical ritual, served both pragmatic and ritualistic functions. However, while traditional oratory was primarily discursive argument but implicitly grounded in myth, A New Beginning was primarily mythic, but grounded in argument. As a result, the ritualistic and mythic "televisual" characteristics provided the frame of unmediated reality within which the film's rhetorical, pragmatic, argumentative message could be interpreted.

Further, while a rhetorical ritual can be a significant moment, an occasion whereby traditional oratory becomes mythologized, inversely, in the age of television it can be the means whereby mythic discourse becomes politicized. So, the success of Ronald Reagan's appeal may be more fully

theorized by examining the Republicans' use of myth and ritual in A New Beginning, in conjunction with their concrete aims and the historic situation. However, before proceeding, the problematic notions of myth and ritual must be clarified, for these terms are subject to diverse interpretations which are not always consonant with each other. The current analysis uses these terms in a particular way.

There are several diverse, although equally compelling interpretations of myth mentioned by Nimmo and Combs in Subliminal Politics.³ One, which they refer to as the "Common Sense School," perceives myths to be essentially false and illusory beliefs based upon emotion and identification rather than upon critical analysis. They cite Ernst Cassirer, to whom Hoban also refers in order to explain his understanding of mythic symbolization, as a proponent of this view. On the other hand, the "Timeless Truths School" suggests that myths are true to the extent that they are believed; that mythic themes explain the origins of the world, and thus timeless truths underlie their surface manifestations. In this view, myths are not demonstrably true or false. A third approach, the "What You See Is Not What You Get School," is a combination of the first two. Adherents of this view believe that the surface content of myths is false, but that truths, or hidden meanings, underlie this.

All of these approaches to myth are primarily concerned with explaining whether they are "true" or "false." Yet, it

is also possible to examine myths from a position which subsumes these concerns, a position which entertains the possibility that meaning is itself a social construction, as is thus the truth or "reality" which underlies myths. Theorists aligned with this approach do not examine myths to determine their truth. The proponents of what Nimmo and Combs term the "Symbolic School" focus upon what myths symbolize in order to ascertain what they mean. Symbolic theories are concerned with the ways that myths make and communicate meaning rather than with whether or not this meaning is true. To varying degrees, these theories may correspond with the three approaches already mentioned; they share a perspective that mythic symbolizations are social constructions, and as such, they can be true, illusory, or both, depending upon the position from which they are interpreted.

A functional approach, for example, examines myths as social products in order to determine what they do in a society. Myths, from this position, are seen as "social glue"--they function as collective representations of a society's interests, ideas, and ideologies, or as functional requisites which serve key social needs such as the establishment of group solidarity or the legitimation of authority. They can also be considered to be symbolizations of unconscious, underlying structures which govern social institutions and activities. Considered in any of these ways, myths are true to the extent that they are believed,

but what you see is what you get. W. Lance Bennett seems to take this position. He describes myths as "the fundamental models of society which give practical meaning to beliefs and values"; whereas "the social routines through which they are applied are called rituals."⁴ These myths, or models, are not necessarily conscious or articulated; they are evoked through symbols which are both pragmatic and ritualistic. Bennett does not, however, underscore the argumentative function of myths. Those who stress this aspect view myths as "political ploys" which are illusory masks that advance the interests of one social group rather than another.

There is yet another symbolic approach to myth, which Nimmo and Combs term "The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of." From this view, myths can be true and, in a sense, illusory. Carl Jung, for instance, considers myths to be products of fantasy (and thus, imaginative and "illusory"). They are, in his terms, products of the collective unconscious, but no less "true" for that. In fact, despite Hoban's reference to Cassirer, and despite Bennett's view of myths as social glue, in neither view are myths necessarily true or illusory. Hoban, in particular, draws upon Jung's work and suggests that it is through mythic symbolizations that "archetypes" are activated. These are "universal images,"⁵ potential forms, or according to Jung, "the a priori conditions for fantasy production."⁶ In this sense, archetypes may be considered to be "timeless truths." Yet, as Hoban suggests, through rhetorical rituals archetypes become manifested in

particular images and patterns of behavior. The activated archetypes which constitute rhetorical rituals are experienced "subjectively" as mythic symbolizations, but they are also recognized to be discursive, argumentative, logically discriminated symbols. In this way, they are situationally and historically contingent, and may, depending upon one's position, be regarded as illusory.

Nimmo and Combs, moreover, define myths in a manner which helps to account for all of these apparently diverse interpretations. It is their view which incorporates these interpretations of myth and which informs the usage of the term in the subsequent analysis of A New Beginning. They define myth as follows:

A credible, dramatic, socially constructed representation of perceived realities that people accept as permanent, fixed knowledge of reality while forgetting (if they were ever aware) its tentative, imaginary, created and perhaps fictional qualities.⁷

They take a view of myth as constitutive of reality. Depending upon whether one is "inside" or "outside" the myth, it can be viewed as true or unreal, logical or illogical, a synthesis of contradictions or itself contradictory. From the perspective of the reader on the inside, myths are true because they are credible representations of reality. At the same time, from an outside stance, myths are illusory in that they mask their own nature as constructions which are both imaginary and intentional (but no less "real" for being so).

Myths necessarily dramatize, and even fictionalize reality in the process of constructing and reconstructing it. They provide credible representations of reality in dramatic form. To dramatize is to give form, and without this form, a meaningful reality could not be perceived or comprehended. As a result, for the reader on the inside of myths, there is no distinction between myth, rhetoric, and reality. Similarly, for a participant in an effective rhetorical ritual, mythic and discursive modes of symbolization interpenetrate and are experienced as a unity. An historical reality is represented in a form which renders it intelligible. The meaning of the rhetorical ritual is not experienced as arbitrary or contingent; rather, through the dialectical union of the participant's "subjective" experience and the "objective" discursive event, it is believed to be true at the same time that it is known to be rhetorical. Out of this arises their transformative nature, where mythic, non-discursive, aesthetic experience is merged with the rhetorical, discursive, instrumental political event.

From the perspective of the myth-maker, myths may be crafted to serve practical ends. Myths are constitutive and in this sense they are always selective and arbitrary. A myth offers an interpretation of reality to which there are always alternatives. It is thus that every society may tolerate contradictory myths (as political theorist Murray Edelman suggests⁸), or that myths may be presented as a means of overcoming contradictions within a society (a view adopted

by rhetorician Janice Hocker Rushing⁹). What remains, however, is that the work of myth is to deny its own arbitrary stature; thus, as Hoban notes, mythic symbolization is like "magical identification"¹⁰ where the reality of that which is perceived appears to be self-evident, a priori, pre-reflective.

Roland Barthes, in Mythologies, suggests that myths are metacommunicative forms of discourse; they are the interpretive frames through which the discursive, rhetorical modes of symbolization can be comprehended. Most importantly, myths do not render these interpretations of reality meaningful. They "naturalize" already meaningful interpretations of reality so that they appear to be absolute, beyond arbitration or negotiation. Myths then appear to present an unmediated reflection of reality. It is for this reason that, even when intention is discerned behind the presence of a myth, it is not rejected as false or illusory.

Thus, myths are dialectical, dynamic frames which simultaneously form and represent reality. Further, myths are always motivated and are put forth to serve the interests of a society or a group within it while appearing not to do so. The American myth of rebirth which Ronald Reagan capitalized upon in A New Beginning, for example, served to justify the American creed, to forge a common identity, and to define a sense of national purpose--in accordance with the interests of his conservative ideology. Reagan both evoked

and revitalized this myth by using A New Beginning to celebrate the rebirth of myth itself in the historical context of his presidency. In this way, A New Beginning was a vehicle through which myths, or credible representations of reality, linked to the accomplishments of the Reagan Administration, were presented to the viewing audience in the dramatic form of televised history. The film both constructed and reinforced the central Republican myth, or interpretive frame, of a new beginning, in which America's problems, struggles, and strife would be overcome with Ronald Reagan as President.

This myth was, however, only one interpretation of reality which was presented in order to serve the practical purpose of gaining support, in the form of votes, for Ronald Reagan's conservative ideology. In this way, A New Beginning provides an excellent example of how myths are advanced with instrumental purposes in mind, in this case the election of a President. In Political Myth, Henry Tudor elaborates on this point:

For the most part, the mythmaker does not invent his facts; he interprets facts which are already given in a culture to which he belongs. What marks his account as a myth is not its content, but its dramatic form and the fact that it serves as a practical argument. Its success as a practical argument depends upon its being accepted as true, if it explains the experience of those to whom it is addressed, and justifies the practical purposes they have in mind.¹¹

Through A New Beginning, seemingly contradictory American myths--the individual or the community; materialism

or moralism, or the president as leader or as man of the people--appear to be reconciled and revitalized. By doing so, Ronald Reagan attempts to maintain the social order by transforming perceptions of it. He accomplishes this monumental task by presenting a positive, reassuring master myth of rebirth, one which proclaims the rebirth of myth itself, in order to link subjective experience and public history, rhetoric and reality. However, this myth serves the interests of the Reagan Administration and conservative upper class Americans more so than other groups to which it is addressed. Yet it does appear, on the surface, to reconcile contradictions by providing a coherent framework within which dialectically opposed myths are simultaneously affirmed. This is accomplished, however, by excluding terms, events, and interpretations which cannot be accommodated and which do not suit the purposes of the mythmakers. Ronald Reagan's myth of a new beginning is thus both "true" and illusory; it functions as a unifying social glue which constructs a reality for those who subscribe to it; at the same time, from the more distanced perspective of the critic rather than the reader of myths, "a new beginning" is an illusory construction which perpetuates inequality and hierarchy for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many.

In light of this, I will examine A New Beginning as a rhetorical ritual through which fundamental American myths were evoked in order to orient the political majority to

Republican frames of mind. Following Hoban's analysis, I suggest that A New Beginning can usefully be considered to be a rhetorical ritual of rebirth which aimed both to establish and exploit a renewed sense of national self-identity. As such, it both exemplified and set the tone for the campaign to come, which was conducted on the premise that America was experiencing a material and spiritual revival. I argue that, as a mythic mode of communication, A New Beginning appeared to overcome the ambiguities and contradictions which mark American life. In so doing, the Republicans appealed to the personal as well as the political. Through communications such as A New Beginning, they offered Americans a positive self-image and identity. Ronald Reagan was offered as the symbolic resolution of the problems and dilemmas which had plagued America until the purported new beginning. Further, I suggest that the visual form and communicative techniques which differentiated A New Beginning from traditional political discourse increased its ability to communicate on a mythic level, and thus its efficacy as a transformative rhetorical ritual. Ultimately, however, it is problematic as a mode of political discourse because its mythic aspect supercedes the rhetorical; in consequence, the myth which is presented by Ronald Reagan is read as reality rather than a negotiable proposition. It is a framework for interpretation rather than an interpretation. This has important ramifications, since a myth can only be critically appraised from a position outside of the frame, yet the

nature of the myth is to deny the existence of such a position. It is thus that "rhetorical myth" may subvert the democratic principles upon which traditional "mythic rhetoric" is based. A "rhetorical myth" such as A New Beginning serves to further delimit the range of alternative definitions and interpretations allowed in political discourse.

A New Beginning as Rebirth Ritual

James Hoban, in "Rhetorical Rituals of Rebirth," notes that one of the most prevalent kinds of rhetorical rituals is that of rebirth.¹² Rebirth rhetoric often accompanies periods of transition such as changes of political or social status. Rebirth rituals are structured like rites of passage; they are what anthropologist Victor Turner describes as "liminal" phenonema:

. . .all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen) and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a "state"); during the intervening liminal period the state of the ritual subject (the passenger) is ambiguous, he passes through a realm which has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated.¹³

A New Beginning was indeed liminal. It represented the point where the primary campaign ended and the 1984 Presidential campaign began. Ronald Reagan was both President and candidate for President; through the film, he both recapitu-

lated the past and heralded the future. In a large sense, not only the film but the entire socio-political context was liminal. Ronald Reagan's first term in office had initiated a break with liberal democratic policies of the past, but he had not yet completed his task, the construction of a conservative Republican government.

In anthropological terms, rites of separation or disruption are followed by liminal rites of transition which attempt to re-unify, to re-integrate, and in the case of A New Beginning, to renew the culture. Events which occurred in the United States during the 1970's may well be regarded as rites of separation. Janice Hocker Rushing, for instance, notes that both Vietnam and Watergate marked a turning point in American consciousness; these, along with other social problems "marked a sort of spiritual death for America. . . perhaps a sign that the country had come of age, and could no longer look forward to unbounded growth and unlimited resources encompassed within the future."¹⁴ She then makes the point that rituals of death are followed by rituals of rebirth--a statement which is reminiscent of James Q. Wilson's observation that periods of crisis in American history have been followed by periods of "Great Awakening."¹⁵

It was this notion of rebirth, or renewal, which Reagan attempted to convey throughout the 1984 campaign, and which was exemplified by A New Beginning as a rhetorical ritual. This is even implied by the film's title, A New Beginning. As Hoban points out, it is in the liminal period (such as the

Republican National Convention, or more generally the transitional period between political ideologies) that rhetorical rebirth rituals are best able to achieve their aim, which is the transformation of identity.¹⁶ Their mythic aspects, in particular, are designed to transform identity by overcoming the contradictions and ambiguities which mark the liminal period. Turner writes that myths themselves are liminal phenomena, frequently told at a time that is "betwixt and between."¹⁷

As mentioned previously, society is made up of contradictory myths, or sets of values and assumptions, which rationalize behavior and provide models for action. Indeed, American history and politics can be construed as a struggle between dialectically opposing myths. Typically, one myth or aspect of the dialectic is stressed in order to explain social situations. It is during "liminal" periods of social crisis or change that prevailing myths are deemed to be inadequate. As a result, shifts in value orientation are achieved through enactments--or rituals--of transformation. Politics, in particular, is a dramatic stage upon which value changes are expressed through symbolic conflicts and overcoming, in a way which accounts for social and political change.

Beginning in the 1960's and throughout the 1970's, American myths, in all of their dialectically opposing manifestations, were felt by many observers to be inadequate. There was a crisis in the values which together make

up the American mythology. Thus, it was not enough simply to emphasize one myth or one set of values. Rather, as Reagan seemed to have intuitively realized, it was more efficacious to enact a dialectical synthesis of the contradictory myths which define and delimit American beliefs, values, and attitudes. This was accomplished through the transformative rhetoric and mythic imagery of rebirth. Rushing explains this process as follows:

In a dialectical synthesis the old is not merely replaced with the new, but rather an integration of the old with the new is formed in such a way that the relation among participants is reaffirmed. In other words, this pattern of change renews a sense of independence and community among those involved.¹⁸

Like most myths, the images and words which construct A New Beginning offer solace, certitude, and explanations of the world. However, instead of stressing one set of opposing myths over another, Reagan emphasizes both. A New Beginning celebrates the rebirth of myth itself. The myths which are invoked serve to provide unity, coherence, and integration through a dialectical synthesis of opposing myths, such as those which mark the tension between subjective and objective, private and public, individual and community. As a rhetorical ritual of rebirth, A New Beginning appears to overcome such contradictions by reaffirming both oppositions simultaneously. This helped the Republicans to effect personal and political transformation in accord with their conservative ideology.

Throughout the film, they pointed to economic revitalization and a reawakening of pride, optimism and patriotism across the land. This overriding vision of rebirth was related to basic, familiar myths which define American identity and beliefs. It was also related to the policies of the Reagan Administration.

The economy was, according to most official accounts, improving. However, the notion that America was experiencing a "new beginning" was carefully nurtured by the Reagan Administration, through the agency of the broadcast media. This is not to say that by evoking the myth of rebirth Reagan and the Republicans solved the problems which motivated the need for such a mythic revival. In one sense, myths may be conceived of as veils. They select, reflect, and deflect, but they do not, in reality, resolve the contradictions from which they emanate. The contradictions remain, although momentarily masked by myth.

Myth of Rebirth in A New Beginning

Rebirth, with all of its religious connotations, is related to what Nimmo and Combs, in Subliminal Politics, refer to as the American monomyth--the utopic myth of America as the Promised Land, the New World, and ultimately as Eden. They write:

From the time of their settlement, the American colonies of the New World became the New World became the New Eden. The Edenic myth--the belief that America was Paradise-- had a captivating appeal to generations ever since.¹⁹

Historically, this "root metaphor" or "conceptual archetype"²⁰ of America as Eden has provided Americans with a framework for understanding themselves and their place in the world. It is a secular version of the Biblical myth of Christianity, and as such, it provides the foundation for the entire corpus of American mythology. Both the Biblical myth and the American Edenic myth help people to deal with the contradictions between the real and the ideal world. There are two dichotomous versions which help to accomplish this task. The utopian side of the Edenic myth posits a past world of innocence, stability, and harmony. This world has, however, been lost as a result of the "Fall." This is the opposing vision of Paradise Lost, the tragic underside of the Edenic myth which accounts for sin, suffering, and strife. Nimmo and Combs explain:

Implicit in the notion of the Fall is a cycle of sin, suffering, sacrifice, and salvation that echoes again and again in the American political drama.²¹

Thus, what underlies the Edenic myth is the promise that Eden can be regained. Stated most generally, for Americans, this ideal world is one where there is freedom and democracy; where every individual has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (It is the very ambiguity of these terms which results in their varied interpretations.) It is, however, the basis of American mythology that when these goals are attained, America-as-Eden will be restored.

The Edenic myth entails two possible approaches for politicians, especially Presidential candidates. In mythic terms, they must present themselves as heroes or saviors who will lead Americans to the Promised Land. In order to do so, they may stress the suffering and sacrifice which is necessary to overcome the conflict-ridden past (as was the case with Walter Mondale). In contrast, they may concentrate upon the promise of redemption, as did Ronald Reagan in 1980 and again in 1984. In this way, Reagan's nostalgic evocation of the myths which have traditionally characterized America and Americans serves as a re-affirmation of America's Edenic past. It is the myth of this mythic state of harmony which is to be regained. Thus, Reagan's emphasis is upon the reconciliation of contradictions. Unity, consensus, and peace will enable America to be "reborn" as the new Eden.

Considered in this way, A New Beginning was a rhetorical ritual which enacted the rebirth of the myth of America as Eden. As such, it was structured like a rite of passage (or transformation). It evoked memories of America's past Fall, but principally as a means to portray its ultimate redemption --its rebirth--in the present and future. There was a "new beginning" in America because of the changes which Ronald Reagan had wrought. He was presented as a provider of redressive action which had overcome the strife-ridden past; thus, he would return America to its former glory.

In fact, events which had previously threatened to destroy the tenability of the Edenic myth were recast in

terms of the myth of the Fall. The crisis of beliefs and values experienced by many Americans prior to Reagan's Presidency had placed both sides of the Edenic myth in jeopardy. Vietnam, loss of American world power and prestige, growing awareness of limited resources, economic problems, Watergate, Iran, and increasingly prevalent poverty were just a few of the facts which could not be accounted for by this utopian myth of America. The ideals of democratic capitalism were themselves threatened; as a result, the suffering and sacrifice rationalized by the myth of the Fall no longer seemed to have any purpose.

Liberal democrats such as Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale, whose programs did not call for any radical changes, were forced to reiterate calls for austerity and sacrifice as the means to eventual growth and prosperity. By and large, they blamed difficulties on external events which were out of their control. Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, was better able to reaffirm faith in democratic capitalism and the Edenic myth. His policies and programs were put forth as the inverse of those of the liberal democrats. The liberal democrats were held to be responsible for America's dilemma. In consequence, Reagan enacted the myth that after the Fall, America was reborn anew.

Hoban writes that "metamorphosis, expressed specifically in spatial, temporal, and psychological changes, is the dominant image and formal principle in rhetorical rituals of

rebirth."²² This is the case in A New Beginning, where some of the images suggest conflict, separation, and sacrifice; these transform into positive images of unity, stability, and integration. Darkness, death, and the past are all associated with conflict, suffering and the Fall. However, because the film is a ritual of rebirth--positive transformation and integration--there are relatively few of these images. As a "legitimation rite" which was part of the overall ritual of the Republican National Convention, A New Beginning's emphasis was upon the new-found unity, harmony, and consensus rather than upon conflict which necessitated resolution.²³ A New Beginning does open in darkness, at Reagan's 1980 Inaugural Address which is itself a liminal, transitional event. The black screen, defined only by the date and the voice of Ronald Reagan taking his oath of office, marks both a separation from the past and the "new beginning" of the Reagan Administration. The movement from dark to light is indicated by the next image, where early morning sunlight fills the sky. Light and the sun predominate throughout the film. In Scene II, Reagan verbally reinforces this connection by referring back to Scene I: "Yes, it was quite a day," he says, "a new beginning."

Upward movements, according to Hoban, also imply positive metamorphosis.²⁴ Thus, in the first image of Ronald Reagan and George Bush together (Scene II), the camera moves from their feet up to their faces. By itself, this movement

would not necessarily carry great import. However, in the context of the many other upward movements repeated throughout the film, this manner of introducing the Reagan-Bush team links them to America's positive transformation which is indicated throughout A New Beginning. This metamorphosis is suggested both verbally and visually. In Scene III, for instance, George Bush attributes America's rebirth to Ronald Reagan:

It's just different. The mood is different. . . . It's not that everybody agrees with what you're doing, but there's a certain respect for the United States of America and it is loud, and it is clear, and I run into that all over the country. People say, "You know, we're pleased that the President is taking these strong positions," and they might argue with you on one or two things if you gave 'em a chance, but they're back. You get the feeling that the country's moving again, a certain pride level.

Bush's comment sets the tone for the scenes to come, which include interviews with ordinary Americans who marvel at the renewed feeling of pride and patriotism (Scene IV), and economic recovery (Scene IX); a patriotic song about America (Scene V); and Ronald Reagan celebrating the "reawakening" of military pride and patriotism in Scene VI. Further, Bush implies in this scene that some people may not agree with Reagan Administration policies. However, this suggestion is immediately followed by a set of interviews with five Americans who enthusiastically support Bush's claim that America is "back." This group consists of men, women, blacks, whites, Hispanics, workers, and middle class

representatives. They all agree that America has experienced a spiritual and/or economic revival, which is attributed to Ronald Reagan. There is no hint of dissent or disagreement. This minimizes the significance of Bush's comments that "it's not that everybody agrees with what you're doing" and "There are people who might argue with you on one or two things." Rather, the unity and consensus of this diverse group of Americans is meant to be indicative of widespread popular support for the Reagan Administration.

America's "rebirth" is conveyed both verbally and visually. The flag, which is the traditional symbol of "freedom," and thus, of the renewed feeling of pride and patriotism, is continually waved, raised, and saluted. It appears in a total of 28 shots during the film. The flag is most often associated with children, who mythically represent innocence and the future (as do Americans, according to Nimmo and Combs)²⁵ In Scene I, for instance, there is a long shot of a flag being hoisted, followed by a close-up of a child's face as she gazes up at it. Again, in Scene V, there are three images of children who appear with the flag when the song lyrics say "freedom" or "free." In one sequence, there is an extreme close-up of a billowing flag with the flag's edges extending beyond the film frame. It appears to be larger than life, rather than an object presented from the perspective of the human eye (as are "realist" or traditional documentary images). This is followed by an image of a young boy who is saluting what appears to be this same flag. Only

its corner appears in the lower right hand side of the frame, but its lines and dimensions are consistent with those of the first image. In this way, the flag is presented as the dominant, all encompassing symbol of America; its boundaries extend out to reach the American people. The young boy's salute is not only a military gesture (implicitly suggesting the need to defend the flag), but it is also a sign of welcome and well being. Symbolically, the child represents America's rebirth, its return to innocence, the Edenic state which is near at hand. This is followed by a shot of the Statue of Liberty encased in scaffolding. This is a reminder that America's ideal of freedom has been threatened in the past, just as it is a practical example of the urban and institutional decay which the Reagan Administration proposes to alleviate. These images are accompanied by the song lyrics, "The flag still stands for freedom, and they can't take that away." The Statue is, thus, being rebuilt; the flag is raised and respected anew. This section closes with a firmly centered image of the White House with the flag flying high in front. The White House is a metonymy for America, and as such, it connotes the stability, integration, and unity available to all Americans as they rally round the banner of "freedom."

Both the White House and the flag are presented as co-terminous with Ronald Reagan as well as America. Scene II opens with a backlit image of the White House (which, as a result, appears to stand in the early morning sun). Through

dissolves, images of the White House transform into that of Ronald Reagan, seated at his desk (also backlit). In contrast to the more disjunctive cuts which are typically used as visual transitions to communicate spatial change, dissolves used in such a fashion indicate unity and relatedness. Through this technique, Ronald Reagan (and his Administration) is the White House, just as the White House is both Ronald Reagan and America. Thus, in this scene and the sequence which it introduces, Reagan is presented as a leader who is in control (as is a "strong" America); at the same time, co-operation and camaraderie within the White House ranks are emphasized.

Even when conflict is acknowledged, it is quickly overshadowed. Reagan makes the point that, as President, he is exposed to opposition as well as agreement. As he speaks, a brief image of Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill, the liberal democratic Speaker of the House and Reagan's most vociferous political opponent, appears on screen. Yet, the impact of this acknowledgement of conflict is minimized. This shot is so brief that the image is barely recognizable. Far more memorable, because lengthier and more numerous, are the preceding and following shots which show Reagan surrounded by his co-operative political allies. Still photographs show him conversing with several members of his Cabinet, after which he is shown participating at a Cabinet meeting. All involved are alert and smiling; in one shot, two men whisper together. As these images pass by, Reagan lauds the men and

women who sacrifice their private lives for public service. All in all, the internal mechanisms of the White House appear to run smoothly. Like America itself, the White House is characterized by unity, harmony, and consensus.

Even when, in Scene V, the coffin of a dead soldier brought back from Lebanon is shown, an image of integration follows, as another soldier, also presumably returning home from Lebanon, is hugged by a woman. The song lyrics which underscore the first image are "I won't forget the men who died"; for the second, "Who gave that right (ie., freedom) to me." This latter image also contains a gun, a baby, and a flag. In this way, it links patriotism to a strong defense and the protection of America's future, which is represented by children. Not surprisingly, this image is followed by one of a flag being hoisted. There is a shift from separation to integration, achieved through the rebirth of American pride and patriotism. This is implicitly, but pragmatically (on Reagan's part) linked to military strength.

Images of positive metamorphosis are most apparent in Scene VIII, where Reagan celebrates economic renewal. Here, the transition from the liberal past, full of sacrifice, suffering, and despair, to the positive present is suggested through newspaper headlines which progress from bad news during the Carter Administration to good news after Reagan took office. These "factual" images are surrounded by those of people building, making, and buying (themselves images of

metamorphosis), as Reagan reasserts that his Administration overcame the reified "evil" of inflation and made it possible for people to prosper again.

Additionally, in Scene X, where Reagan appeals to the elderly, on two separate occasions an older couple walks hand-in-hand down the street, and their paths are crossed by children. The elderly represent the past, suffering, and separation; the children represent the future, innocence and rebirth. In one of the few dark images which appears in the film, two elderly people walk along a beach and are silhouetted in the sunset. In this scene, Reagan refers to them in the past tense--he will keep his promise to those who "kept" their promise to society. As with the "men who died," they are not to be forgotten. It is only through the hard work and sacrifices made in the past that America can be reborn; out of the old arises the new. This is further reinforced in the D-Day sequence (Scene XIII) which is basically a filmed rite of integration. The surviving war heroes from D-Day are commemorated. Reagan quotes General Marshall who referred to them as "the best damn kids in the world." As he speaks, the camera pans the now aged faces. One man wipes away a tear. A woman mourns the loss of her father; Ronald and Nancy Reagan stroll through the graveyard and lay a wreath at the grave of Theodore Roosevelt Jr.. This is the conflicted past, where men sacrificed their lives for peace and freedom. Its "reality" is reinforced by grainy, black and white archival footage (accompanied by

sounds of gunfire) of the troops landing in Normandy. It is this past which is remembered, but which has been transcended by the "new beginning" made possible by the Reagan Administration.

Finally, Reagan's trips to Japan, Korea, and China (Scene XII) and his final exhortation for peace (Scene XV) are important elements of this rhetorical ritual of rebirth. His trip symbolizes the meeting of the opposing cultures of East and West, and it suggests their integration in the new Eden. The prototype for this is the American frontier, which was the historical meeting point for the "civilized" East and the Western wilderness. Nimmo and Combs mention that the wilderness was originally conceived as Eden. However, the hardships endured by the early settlers were best explained by the myth of the Fall, which brought with it knowledge of good and evil, as well as hope of promise and fulfillment. In consequence, Americans believed that good, "civilized" ideals of freedom and democracy imposed upon the wilderness would ultimately restore America as Eden. Manifest destiny, for this reason, is an important part of the Edenic myth. It became the American responsibility to extend the frontiers of freedom not only to its Western borders, but throughout the world. It is in this context that, with the rebirth of the Edenic myth, Reagan posits a "new frontier" which is to share the fruits of the American Eden. Thus, he states, "Our trip to Japan, Korea, and later the People's Republic of China makes you realize that the old line "Go West, young man, go

West" still fits. There's a new frontier out there, there's a future, and the United States is going to be very much a part of that future."

In one sense, however, Reagan's statement seems almost alarming. Visually, his words are accompanied by an image of Japanese people waving Japanese and American flags together. This is followed by a shot where American flags predominate. He also refers to the Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese as "they" although Americans are "we." This highlights their otherness. "I cannot meet with those people," he says, "without realizing that they're a tremendously capable people, a talented, energetic people. And I found a great longing for peace among those people." Japan is already a capitalist country and an American ally, as is South Korea. Reagan's trip to Communist China was also a show of support for a country which had recently announced new policies of free enterprise and cultural exchange. Yet, the differences between Reagan and the Chinese Premier are emphasized by a still photograph which shows the two men visually separated by a pole which runs vertically down the center of the frame. Their handshake extends across this "barrier," so as to suggest reconciliation, the union of opposites. The scene was intended to demonstrate Reagan's ability to overcome differences and to attain world-wide peace. It was a non-threatening and non-explicit way to show that Reagan would talk to Communists and that he was committed to peace.

Peace is, indeed, an extremely important theme in A New

Beginning. In terms of the Edenic myths, it is only through attainment of peace that Eden will be regained. Thus, in Scene XV, Reagan directly addresses the American people with a final affirmation of his commitment to peace. Visually, the viewer is taken on a tour from the Oval Office to the Roosevelt Room, while verbally, Reagan takes the viewer on tour through American history. The camera lingers upon a series of Reagan's family photographs, but then moves forward (and back) onto images of American tradition and history. To further develop this nostalgic mood, Reagan asserts, "You can't help but choke up a little bit because you're surrounded by history that somehow has touched everything in this room . . . and it occurs to you that everyone who has ever sat here yearned in the depths of his soul to bring Americans together in peace." As he speaks, the screen is filled by an image of a set of miniature soldiers from the World War II battle of Bastogne, a gift which was given to the President during his trip to Normandy.

When the camera pans to the Roosevelt Room, Reagan reminds the viewers that this room is named for both Presidents named Roosevelt--"one a Democrat and one a Republican." He makes no other references to the Democrats by name throughout the film, but this reference at a moment when peace and conciliation are being stressed indicates the careful orchestration of the whole. Reagan makes only vague allusions to the Fall, to the way it was before his election in 1980. Throughout the film, real controversy is elided.

Reagan's comment that one room could be named for Presidents of different parties thus serves to minimize their differences. It implies that party differences can be reconciled, that both Democrats and Republicans share the same desire for peace. This also furthers the Republican aim of winning the traditionally Democratic vote. The parties are not that far apart, for both share the same ideals.

The camera then pans slowly to the five service flags, and to the streamers which represent every American war and battle fought since the Revolutionary War. Staring directly into the camera (and thus, into the viewers' living rooms), Reagan concludes, "My fondest hope for this presidency is that the people give us the continued opportunity to pursue a peace so lasting and so strong that we'd never have to add another streamer to those flags." He thus suggests that, if allowed to continue on, he will accomplish his goal. Mythically speaking, this goal is the rebirth of America as Eden, a rebirth which will not be marred by a Fall, i.e., a return to conflict, strife and war.

Overall, consensus and not conflict was the message conveyed by A New Beginning. For this reason, neither the Democrats (Reagan's internal adversaries), nor the Soviet Union was discussed or portrayed in any fashion, even though the Soviet Union has most often been presented as America's ideological opposite by the Republicans. Here, as in 1980, Reagan emerges as a man of peace by avoiding reference to the Soviet Union. It is only when Reagan visits the DMZ in Korea

and refers to his location "on the frontiers of freedom" that the threat of a foreign enemy is implied. Yet, the predominance of military images, and the remembrance of World War II serve as reminders of Reagan's commitment to peace through a strong defense. America may have been "reborn," but he does not rule out entirely the possibility of another Fall. This new Eden must remain protected--in a sense, an admission that mythic Eden remains an ideal which falls short of the real.

It is crucial that, in this "American reborn," with all of its religious underpinnings, Reagan himself personifies the reawakening of the positive national identity; he is, as he set out to be, America's "idealized image of itself."²⁶ This is important, for as Hoban notes, if rhetorical rituals are to be effective, subjective transformation must be enacted. Reagan himself had to embody America's new beginning. In mythic terms, as Nimmo and Combs suggest, it is through the hero's quest that he encounters evil, suffering, or death, and is himself purified and transformed.²⁷ In this way, mythic heroes can be redeemers, as was Reagan in A New Beginning. His own transformation and subsequent rebirth was enacted in Scene XI, which replayed footage from the assassination attempt which occurred on March 30, 1981. Not only did Presidential biographer Lou Cannon claim that this turned Reagan into a "mythic" figure,²⁸ but it was also written that this gave his Administration "a new life. . .it had new symbolic capital."²⁹ Afterward, it was as if Reagan's recovery

mirrored America's own process of renewal. Both had, in a sense, symbolically died and had been reborn in a more positive incarnation. Reagan's personal transformation is presented in the film as he sits with the (since deceased) Cardinal Cooke and discusses the event. By appearing with a religious figure, he is associated with divinity, and thus "goodness." He repeats and concurs with Cardinal Cooke's assertion that "God must have been sitting on your shoulder," at the time of the assassination attempt. "Whatever time I've got left, it now belongs to someone else," Reagan states solemnly as he stares directly into the camera. His words are further underscored by a finger pointing upward. In this way, Reagan is presented as a redeemer who will lead his people to the Promised Land. The viewer, identifying with this mythic presentation of Ronald Reagan and the America which he represents, undergoes a similar transformation and participates, if vicariously, in the myth of America reborn.

Rebirth of Myth

A New Beginning may usefully be examined as a rhetorical ritual which replays the myth of rebirth. The film also attempts to revitalize the basic myths which define the American people. By so doing, it appears to overcome the conflicts and contradictions which had previously threatened to rend the social fabric. As a myth of rebirth, it provides a dialectical synthesis of the opposing values which make up the American mythology. Oliver Robertson, in American Myth,

American Reality, demarcates four areas, often in tension, which are the basis for American myths. These concern the purpose of America, the place of the individual, the nature of community, and the appropriate use of power. It is apparent upon viewing A New Beginning that the vision of rebirth touches upon all of these, and it reinforces contrasting versions of these myths, which are made to appear to coincide with Reagan's political programs (so too, Reagan's political programs, it may be argued, are based upon these myths).

Myth of National Purpose. One of America's most fundamental myths, according to Robertson, concerns its purpose. This is expressed in what has often been termed America's civil religion, the Edenic myth of the American Dream. Karl Ritter explicates this:

It is the collective memory, the national myth which unites Americans as a people. . . .For Americans, the past is captured in the wonderfully ambiguous phrase "the American Dream"--the belief that America was destined to become a mighty empire of liberty where individuals and society as a whole would prosper. In a mythic sense, American history is a record of this struggle to fulfill this national mission.³⁰

There are, however, two dichotomous versions of this myth. Throughout American history, political candidates have typically aligned themselves with one or the other versions of this myth in order to interpret the present, to relate their policies to American ideals and to forge a unified national identity. As Walter Fisher notes, the two different versions of the myth of the American Dream--the materialistic

and the moralistic--reflect the historical division between the Republican and Democratic parties. The materialistic myth emphasizes individual initiative as the means to happiness and prosperity, and is thus associated with the traditional Republican position, while the moralistic myth emphasizes community and society, and is thus characteristic of the Democratic view. Fisher writes:

Reagan's solution to America's plight was to stress the materialistic myth of the American Dream, which is concomitant with a laissez-faire interpretation of government. The salient features of this view of government are a belief in natural law, the Calvinist ethic, moral individualism, a "weak" state (the best government is the one which governs least) and the efficacy of competition.³¹

The moralistic myth, on the other hand:

. . . is well expressed in the basic tenets of the Declaration of Independence: that all men are created equal, men are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . these tenets naturally involve the values of tolerance, charity, and compassion and true regard for the dignity of each and every individual.³²

Fisher believes that Reagan emphasizes the materialistic version of this myth and not the moralistic one. However, as a result of the crisis in values which preceded Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, both versions of this myth were debilitated, and Ronald Reagan's "rebirth" revitalized both aspects of the American Dream. Robertson suggests that American history can be construed in terms of the struggle between Jeffersonian liberalism and Hamiltonian conservatism, and his descriptions coincide to a large extent with the

materialistic/moralistic dichotomy. Considered from this vantage, it is significant that Reagan's political program has been characterized as "Jeffersonian republicanism," itself a union of two opposites.³³ Further, Reagan has gained considerable political mileage by stressing that he was a former liberal Democrat turned Republican. It is not the case, as Rushing argues in "The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth," that Reagan offers only a pseudo-synthesis of contradictions because he "evidences little sense of the challenge of reconciling two inherent opposites."³⁴ From the perspective of the reader who is "inside" the myth, he offers and represents a genuine synthesis of contradictory myths, subsumed under the overriding myth of rebirth. The problem is that, from a more critical perspective, the resultant combination of myth and theory which forms the Republican ideology is inadequate as a means to cope with an increasingly complex reality.

By the late 1970's, neo-conservative critics such as Daniel Bell (themselves liberals turned Republican) were lamenting the erosion of traditional American values (or, in other words, myths). Bell argues in the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism that throughout the twentieth century, capitalism has become increasingly severed from any moral ethic. He suggests that the emphasis upon material prosperity unrelated to individual virtue or social values is responsible for this plight.³⁵ Will Wright agrees that the free market upon which early industrial era

capitalism was based fostered self-interested individualism at the expense of social needs and values (i.e., the materialistic myth dominated the moralistic one).³⁶ Rewards for work and one's social standing became, for the first time, determined by the self-regulating market and not by society. In consequence, the individual who sought prosperity was necessarily in competition with others who desired the same. Individual efforts to enjoy the benefits of society prevented others from doing so--this contradicted the social values upon which the moralistic myth was based.

The materialistic myth thus dominated the market society. The societal transformation to the planned economy and liberal democratic society begun by Roosevelt's New Deal was marked by the ascendance of the moralistic myth. But because this myth was also increasingly severed from the Protestant, agrarian, small town ethic which had preceded Industrialization, the cultural contradictions of capitalism deepened. Both of these versions of the American Dream became less and less credible. In his explanation of this process, Bell argues that with the twentieth century technological revolution, social goals and values became increasingly determined by technological goals, most notably economic growth and profits. Liberal capitalism, which had promised equality and prosperity for all, could not deliver on its promise. Bell points to a disjuncture between the social and economic structure, which emphasizes productivity, and the culture, which emphasizes consumption. In the

liberal, moralistic myth, values of equality, co-operation, and compassion are stressed, but only insofar as they facilitate productivity. Happiness is equated not with one's ability to produce, but to consume. As the autonomous individual is de-emphasized, the individual becomes increasingly dependent upon government, government services, and "experts"--the techno-structure--in order to achieve fulfillment.

This situation led to a questioning of the beliefs and values which provided the basis of the American Dream. While Reagan's policies have often been interpreted as a return to the self-regulating free market economy, in fact he retains the liberal goals of economic and technological growth as the means to produce the good life. His strategy is to point to the inherent morality of the American people because of their materialism--materialism characterized as the ability to produce and consume. He addresses this contradiction by stressing the shared values of equality, family, and community--the moralistic values of the public domain--through which individual virtues, such as independence, initiative, and enterprise, could be rewarded. In A New Beginning, while production remains a virtue in the public realm of work, consumption remains a virtue in the private sphere. Thus, images of growth and prosperity which reconcile production and consumption permeate the film. Scenes V and VIII repeatedly show houses and buildings being constructed. In fact, in Scene V a family is shown moving

out of a house, only to reappear in Scene VIII as they move into a larger home. Reagan claims that Americans are once again able to purchase homes and cars, and his words are illustrated by this same family, who also have a shiny new truck parked in the driveway. Both of these items symbolize the American Dream--to own a progressively larger single family home, to be socially mobile and thus to possess a larger and larger space. The boundaries of the home into which the family moves are demarcated by fences. The automobile is a further symbol of social and physical mobility. It is significant that Reagan chooses these two symbols with which to celebrate the economic recovery. They provide a clear expression of the materialistic myth, underpinning his appeal to the middle classes.

There are other images in the film which celebrate the fact that people are able to consume again. "People are spending more, traveling more, going on vacations," marvels one woman (Scene IX). This highlights the moralistic myth, with its emphasis upon equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Everyone is prosperous in Ronald Reagan's America. In Scene VIII there is an image of a man weighing a huge fish, and of a waitress taking an order at a diner. This prosperity, demonstrated by increased consumption, is also implied by all of the lush farm images scattered throughout the film. Produce is either growing or being harvested. There is production, and this necessitates consumption. Consumption is, however, identified with the

virtuous principles upon which the moralistic myth of the social order is founded; it is also associated with the principles of individual freedom, initiative, and enterprise which define the materialistic myth.

The Place of the Individual vs. the Nature of Community

Closely related to the myths of national purpose are the myths which deal with the contradiction between the individual and community. This contradiction is best articulated by the Western myth, which Rushing characterizes as America's most enduring myth, while Wright devotes an entire book to its analysis. He points out that in a market society, the rugged, autonomous, and independent individual is contrasted to the weak and dependent society (or community). In contrast, with the liberal planned economy, individualism is de-emphasized; the individual is dependent on the strong society.³⁷

If it was the case that, prior to the "new beginning," the values of both individualism and community had become weak, the filmed images serve to strengthen both of these myths. Both the independent individual and the strong, communal society are represented in A New Beginning. Family and neighborhood, rather than government or organizations, provide a homogenous set of values which guide and define social relations. The individual is part of these groups, but most importantly, is independent from the paternalistic government. The rugged individual is free to strive, to

attain, to become a producer rather than a consumer of the benefits of society.

In order to convey this conception of the individual/community dichotomy, A New Beginning harkens back to the myth of the West. As both Rushing and Wright point out, throughout American history, the peculiarly American character has been defined by this myth. In fact, Frederick Jackson Turner's famous "Frontier Thesis" attributes the American character, as symbolized by the frontiersman, to contact with the wilderness. He names several qualities of the quintessential "American" which resulted from this: cooperation, optimism, individualism, self-reliance, resiliency, steadfastness, neighborliness, confidence, wholesomeness, enthusiasm, calmness of purpose, spirit of adventure, and initiative.³⁸

Although this thesis could be, and was, used to support either the materialistic or moralistic version of the American Dream, or to support either individualism or the need for community, it has remained the rhetorical source of the national self-conception.³⁹ Historically, it was expressed through the pioneer, the yeoman farmer, and later, the cowboy. Thus, A New Beginning is populated with images of the cowboy. Many of the ordinary Americans who appear are dressed in Western style. Virtually all of the men (apart from those who are interviewed) and Reagan when he is not being "President," are dressed in checkered shirts. In Scenes I and V, men are even wearing cowboy hats. In Scene

I, a "cowboy" stands in a corral, with lasso in hand, as horses pass calmly in front of him. The "wild" horses have been tamed. This is followed by a shot of a construction worker pointing upward as he directs a crane. Like the cowboy who has tamed the horse, he has tamed the machine. It may even be argued that the various construction workers and laborers who appear in the film are the new "urban cowboys." Like their forebears, these men are all smiling, optimistic, and symbolically bathed in sunshine as they perform their day's work.

Rushing, in "Rhetoric of the American Western Myth," relates Reagan to the myth of the cowboy, as does Hankins in "Archetypal Alloy: Reagan's Rhetorical Image." However, neither analysis points out that what differentiates the cowboy from the pioneer or the yeoman farmer is that the cowboy is an employee. The cowboy, while a rugged individual, works for someone else. He is a professional, as Wright explains in his differentiation of the classical Western plot (which he associates with a market society) and the professional plot (which he associates with the liberal society and economy). This latter day cowboy, according to Wright, works for profit rather than for any particular set of values. He remains an individual, but is dependent upon someone else for his livelihood.⁴⁰

Reagan's cowboy, however, works not only for profit, but for the values defined by community. For instance, the song "God Bless the USA" begins: "If tomorrow all the things were

gone I'd worked for all my life" and the images which articulate this are of a young child hugging her father (presumably), a traditional wedding, and a house being built. This stresses the importance of family rather than economic success for its own sake. Throughout A New Beginning, the myth of community is reaffirmed through its characterization of a small town America which consists of unified groups of nuclear families and neighborhoods. It is in this monolithic vision of a society composed of shared values that the individual finds a place. Individuals in A New Beginning do not strive to become members of organizations, to get promotions in a corporation, or to become part of the technostucture as a measure of their success. In fact, there are few images of Industrial America. There is a token cityscape presented in Scene V, and many workers are interviewed against a metropolitan background. However, for the most part, the film consists of images of the small town. Yet, as Robertson states, the rural, small town community has always been a myth. It reflects Americans' self perceptions even though most people live in urban, or at best, suburban, environments. He writes that this myth has three important functions: it makes it possible to emphasize individualism because there is a simultaneous belief in social conformity; it demonstrates the democratic nature of American society, which, because there is unity and consensus of values, is the expression of the collective will of the

people; and it provides a secure sense of unchanging rootedness in a society which is increasingly changing and uprooted.⁴¹ He also notes that by the mid-1970's, many Americans felt that they had lost the values of shared community life, and that they had "chosen to live in a world for which they had no ethic."⁴² Thus, Reagan revitalizes this myth by presenting images of small town America in the context of present day realities, while simultaneously supporting the myth of individualism.

The myth of community is evoked early on in A New Beginning. In Scene I, a paper boy on his bicycle rides down a tree-lined avenue. A man wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase crosses the sidewalk toward a waiting car where a man and woman sit in the front seat. He says, "Good morning Jim," as he steps into the car. The exchange conveys a sense of community. The point is made that people here know each other's names; there is not the anonymity associated with the city. People smile and wave and work together.

In Scene V, a family which is moving leaves a house which is surrounded by a white picket fence. The young boy holds a baseball glove, while the young girl has a small doll. There is a mother and father; everyone is smiling in this stereotypical image of small town America. Throughout the film, people are together, whether at an outdoor picnic, a political rally, or as they stroll down the street eating ice cream. Further, rural America is disproportionately represented. The film opens with a single plow moving across

a field although the number of small farms still operating in America has been steadily diminishing. The next image, too, is of a farmhouse where a small truck is moving out of frame and a rooster crows to indicate morning. Again, this is an idyllic image of rural America which is familiar to the vast majority of Americans.

A New Beginning makes it clear that individualism and community are both vital forces in the America which Ronald Reagan represents. It is his particular blend of these two myths which aligns him with Populism. Like the traditional Populist movement in America, he is opposed to bureaucracy and the forces of organization; he favors individualism tempered by compassion. Although his policies have been consistently criticized because they favor corporate America rather than the individual or family, he elides this problem by keeping corporate America out of the film. Just as the film shuns any reference to the Soviet Union in describing Reagan's foreign policy, so the deleterious effects of urbanization and technology do not impinge on the film's representation of the myths of the individual and community. A New Beginning presents a myth which is undisturbed by reality.

Appropriate Use of Power. Most importantly, it is the myth of the President which Reagan so successfully revitalizes-- and redefines--in A New Beginning. Robertson writes that the myth of the President has always been the focal point for American myths concerning power and how it should be

wielded. As the symbolic representative of the American people, the President embodies, and thus mediates, the contradictory values expressed in the dichotomous myths of national purpose and the individual vs. the community. Walter Fisher, in considering the Presidency in such a fashion, refers to it as a "rhetorical fiction," a term which encompasses all of the contradictions inherent in the role of the President. He states in this regard:

It should be born in mind that the Presidency is an office and a role; an institution and a persona. At one and the same time, it is a symbol, a suatory force, a source of inducement to belief, attitude, values and action; it is a dramatic place, a stage for myth, ritual and legend, it is obviously a position of power and governance; it is a focal point for national reason and rationality, and it is a barometer of public morality and an instrument of humane and inhumane policies. It is, in short, an entity wherein rhetoric, poetics, dialectics, and ethics converge.⁴³

Further, Fisher also argues that, as a rhetorical fiction, the President "exerts a persuasive force in the making of persons, community, and the nation." He suggests that the President's ethos is the most salient feature of this rhetorical fiction, and defines this as "their conception of their relation to the people, for in this conception lies their images of themselves and the role of the Presidency."⁴⁴ In a later article, written early in Reagan's Presidency, Fisher claims that Reagan presents himself as a romantic hero who embodies the materialistic myth of the American Dream and the Western myth of the

individual. While he does do this, at the same time Fisher understates Reagan's ability to mediate contradictions as a means to transform values, and thus to forge a renewed sense of national identity through their dialectical synthesis. Reagan is presented as both a leader and a man of the people in A New Beginning. He emphasizes the moralistic myth of the American Dream and the values of community which Fisher associates with the Democratic vision. Like Kennedy, whom Fisher opposes to Reagan as the last "romantic hero," Reagan appeals to the "common people" and the values which have traditionally united them. For example, Fisher quotes Kennedy, who defines the Democratic cause in the following passage: "Our commitment has been, since the days of Thomas Jefferson, to all those he called the 'humble members' of society--the farmers, mechanics, and laborers. . . .On this foundation we have defined our values, refined our policies, and refreshed our faith."⁴⁵

Ronald Reagan could comfortably have made this same claim in A New Beginning. Part of Reagan's Populist appeal was aimed at gaining traditionally Democrat voting blocs, among them farmers, workers, the young and the elderly. Images of these groups populated A New Beginning, to the exclusion of great urban industrial centers, bureaucrats, technocrats, the indigenous or the elite. None of these were meant to be part of Ronald Reagan's America. Unlike Nixon, Reagan did not appear to be an elite leader divorced from the needs and interests of the majority; nor, like Presidents

Ford and Carter, was he so much a man of the people that his leadership abilities were questioned. Rather, he straddled both positions. By appealing to the independent individual in the name of the community, and by appearing to unite both the materialistic and moralistic versions of the American Dream, Reagan also reaffirmed the myth of the President as both hero and man of the people, a myth which is endemic to American Populism.⁴⁶ In so doing, he was able to revitalize the Edenic myth of America.

In accord with the myth of rebirth, the prototype for the populist myth of the president is Christ. Like Christ, and mythologized American heroes such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, Reagan is presented as a heroic savior who will redeem "the people." According to Nimmo and Combs, "In American political mythology, it is the recurring Hero's quest that provides an ever renewed hope of redemption from evil and a promise of a restored Eden."⁴⁷ Thus, as mythic figures, presidential "heroes" embody contradictions and provide the means to overcome them. In order to do so, Nimmo and Combs suggest that they must fulfill certain criteria: the hero must be of obscure and mysterious origins (exemplified by the log cabin myth in American political mythology); the hero hears the call to embark upon his quest; he is neither fool nor invincible; he has a goal; the quest is risky; the way is not always known to him and thus he is surrounded by helpers; and finally, it is essential that he delve into darkness (to confront evil,

death, suffering) and emerge transformed. In this way, he is able to make good his promise of redemption.⁴⁸

Even a cursory glance at A New Beginning reveals that Reagan located himself in this myth of the presidential hero. Throughout A New Beginning, he alluded to his common origins in order to unite himself with the American people whom he represented. These were, in turn, defined as the political center, the middle class majority. This served practically to allay criticisms that he was a rich man's President, whose policies favored corporate America and the elite. Thus, in Scenes VIII, X and XI, Reagan wears a checkered shirt as he addresses the film audience, linking him closely to many of the male "ordinary Americans" who also wear checkered shirts when they appear in the film.

When Reagan appeals to the elderly in Scene X, he begins by claiming that he is a senior citizen himself. Here, he stares directly into the camera, and it closes in upon his face, which is marked by lines and wrinkles. He dresses in casual attire--the checkered shirt--and his on-camera appeal follows two interviews with elderly people who are filmed in a similar fashion. He is presented here in a way which makes him almost indistinguishable from them; it is probably not incidental that this scene is followed by the depiction of the assassination attempt upon his life. It was this event which elevated him to divine status, after which he "heard the calling," confronted death, and thus became imbued with the power to lead. However, Reagan makes a joke about the

assassination attempt. In Nimmo and Combs' terms, he plays the fool and shows that he is not invincible. This also brings him "down to earth" before he associates himself with divinity. He is presented in a dialogue with the late Cardinal Cooke, and he recalls their conversation, during which he claims that he is now in the service of a higher authority. Like Christ, he is part man and part God. Yet he is not invincible, despite the fact that his leadership qualities set him apart from ordinary people.

Reagan is quick to point out that he is merely the instrument of the people's will. He has been called to serve them. As the film opens, in Scene II, he remarks that "You don't become President. The Presidency is an institution, and you have temporary custody of it." However, while he denies that he is an "elite" leader, removed from a community of peers, the images and symbols which surround him speak otherwise. He denies that he has a lonely job where he must make decisions as an individual. However, as he speaks the camera shows him working diligently--and alone--at his desk. A placard on his desk reads "It can be done" and a navigator's compass sits beside it. Even when he is later shown surrounded by his helpers (necessary for any "hero") he is assigned greater status by being allocated more space. He is not simply one of them.

Towards the end of the film (Scene XIV) Reagan is seen relaxing at home on his ranch. Here he embodies the typical American who enjoys the "simple things-- riding horses,

chopping wood, spending time with Nancy, being outdoors, and close to all of God's natural gifts." He wears a Tee-shirt and is shown working in the yard. He epitomizes the rugged individual of the American West in both words and imagery. As the scene opens, he is shown riding his horse in the distance. This is an echo of director John Ford's Western motifs. All of Ford's westerns deal with the contradiction between the individual and society, and in the end celebrate the rugged individual. Reagan differs from this myth only in that Nancy is always presented at his side. She serves, however, primarily to confirm his rugged individualism. She knows her place. She does not speak in A New Beginning, and for the most part, she smiles and looks up at her husband as he performs his "Presidential" activities. The facade of Reagan's individualism is, further, revealed in this scene by a conflict of words and images. Although he claims to enjoy chopping wood on his ranch, the image depicts him using an electric saw. He is thus not such a rugged individual after all.

Throughout A New Beginning, visual techniques are used to assist Reagan in mediating the contradictions implicit in the requirement that a Presidential hero be both a leader and a man of the people. In Scene I, the image of Ronald Reagan taking his oath of office is intercut with images of America and Americans. These dissolve into one another, but are separated from shots of Ronald Reagan by cuts. Dissolves, when used in this fashion, indicate unity and relatedness,

while cuts indicate separation. The direction of movement in each frame is always oriented toward Ronald Reagan with Nancy and the Chief Justice. This is a centered image of stasis, amidst the movement which is America. Additionally, these are constructed images, while those of Ronald Reagan are representations of an "actual" event.

During the scenes where Reagan directly addresses the audience, his mediation of the contradiction between being a leader and a man of the people, an individual and part of a community, is also expressed through visual means. Scene XV is a case in point. Like all mythic heroes, Reagan has a goal which he articulates here--most generally, to ensure a strong and lasting peace (i.e., to restore America as Eden). He is in center frame, and there are no distracting background objects to divert attention from him. The background here is much less cluttered than in the shots of many of the other "ordinary Americans" who are interviewed. This is one way of assigning more status to Ronald Reagan. The camera closes in on Reagan's face. Like the image of the American flag mentioned previously, these extreme close-ups make him appear to be larger than life. These techniques confer authority on him and elevate him in his role as leader. The use of still photographs throughout the film also serves this function. First used by Nixon media consultant Gene Wyoff in 1960, Wyoff later observed that this technique was "extraordinarily suitable for conveying an impression of an heroic image, perhaps because each still

photograph in itself is a slightly unreal impression, a moment frozen from life, that makes it easier for viewers to accept and be moved by an illusion of the candidate's heroic dimension."⁴⁹

At the same time that Reagan is presented as a hero, the very closeness and intimacy of the television images help to create the impression that he is one of the people. His soothing tones, his attire, and even the extreme close-ups which focus upon his twinkling blue eyes all create the appearance of accessibility. He speaks to the people, he is one of them and thus he is responsive to their needs and interests.

Supersedure of Rhetoric by Myth

It is because primarily visual techniques are used to communicate to the viewing audience that A New Beginning is problematic as a democratic mode of political discourse. Film, television, and traditional political oratory are inherently dramatic rhetorical forms; however, the mythic aspect, rather than the rhetorical and discursive, is predominant in A New Beginning. The televised film presents a mythic reality in the guise of a mythic discourse about reality. (Here I am using rhetoric in Kenneth Burke's sense of rhetoric as the use of words or visual devices and images to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents.)⁵⁰ In effect, the rhetorical devices which determine the conventions of mise-en-scene, framing, montage, and genre

serve only to mask the constructed nature of the presentation. The film's incorporation of news and documentary images amidst more fictional ones, as well as the use of all of these "realistic" images to re-affirm fundamental American myths, enables A New Beginning to appear to provide a plausible explanation and account of social reality. The myth which is presented provides a framework through which to interpret ongoing events, and in so doing, it appears to be indistinguishable from them. In his discussion of the relation between myth, ritual, and political control, W. Lance Bennett suggests some ways that myths become incorporated into the collective consciousness of a culture. He states:

Myths are assimilated through multiple inputs which blend fact with fantasy and confuse history with legend. They are transmitted as much through dramatic imagery and emotional arousal as through concrete words and ideas. Their core symbols are diffused throughout the environment where the individual encounters them in fragmentary form, in books, advertising, songs, religious ceremonies, youth organizations, business operations, school, family activities, workplace, sporting events, and numerous other everyday contexts.

As a result of their pervasive references to life experience, myths become embedded deeply in consciousness as associative mechanisms that link private experience, ongoing reality, and public history into public frameworks of understanding. This suggests that they are employed in communication and 'opinion formation' through 'primary process thinking.' In contrast to 'secondary process' or rational thought, primary process thinking is characterized by projection, fantasy, the incorporation of non-verbal imagery, a high emotional content, the easy connection of disparate ideas, the failure to make underlying

connections explicit, and the generation of multiple levels of meaning.⁵¹

Although Bennett's observation is in reference to traditional political oratory, and he does not go into detail about television's role, it is easy to see how television fits into this process. A New Beginning, for example, is a television program whose structure blends fact with fantasy, not only through its admixture of documentary and fictional images, but with its idealized images of "mythic" America placed in the historical context of Ronald Reagan's Presidency, and in the emphasis upon "spiritual" renewal in the context of empirical economic growth. History is confused with myth and legend throughout the film; historical events are related through mythic patterns such as that of the hero, the quest, and Eden. The film plays heavily on the viewers' emotions, and images are often connected only by the voice of Ronald Reagan, rather than by the discursive logic of order and sequence.

Many theorists have written on television as a medium which is particularly effective means to communicate a society's myths in the guise of reality (or alternatively, to present reality in the guise of myth). Roger Silverstone bases his article, "The Right to Speak: On a Poetic for Television Documentary," on the premise that television, "Because it is an oral medium and because of its centrality in culture, presents contemporary myths more thoroughly than any other mass media, and of course not only its dramas."⁵²

Most importantly, Silverstone notes that television is itself a liminal phenomenon whose task is the transformation of an unfamiliar, even threatening reality into one that is familiar and reassuring. As a liminal phenomenon, television is thus the meeting point between two contradictory impulses, which Silverstone refers to as the mythic and the mimetic. News and documentary, in particular, are concerned to depict reality, and to do so in a manner which appears to be unmediated, but, as Silverstone points out, they do so only within the framework of myth. To turn on the television, he writes, is to enter a mythic, liminal world which is apart from the everyday, empirical world of experience. As evidenced by A New Beginning, the form of television presentations mythologize space and time as a means to depict reality. These are the frameworks within which a story is told or a reality is presented, yet both spatial relations and temporal progressions are far from realistic. Silverstone refers to this contradiction as follows:

The irony of television is that despite its constant preoccupation with history and its great attention to the details and facts of the past, television narrative, in its structure, insists on a divorce from real time and in its progress, regress and recurrence returns history to myth.⁵³

In this way, A New Beginning was doubly liminal, as both a rhetorical ritual and a televised version of a political event. Its mythic purchase on the viewer was thus doubly enforced, to the extent that the argumentative aspect of the film as a mode of political discourse was less important. As

a "documentary" film, and even as a fictional one, the rhetorical devices (in the Burkean sense) which structured the visual images were made to appear invisible, so that A New Beginning could be perceived to be a plausible representation of reality which simultaneously restored the myths of America.

The contradictions between myth and pragmatic, argumentative rhetoric, between the aesthetic, non-discursive, mythic dimensions of the televisual images and the pragmatic, discursive, logically argumentative dimensions (which are manifested as mimesis, or verisimilitude, so that the images are believed to conform to reality) become mediated as both are unified into one coherent framework for interpretation. Thus, in the case of A New Beginning, Reagan uses visual communication in order to present reality rather than to discourse about it; he uses television as a mythic vehicle, consisting of archetypal imagery presented at a liminal moment, in order to unify both poles of contradictory sets of values. Ronald Reagan's America is a closed and coherent world; it simply excludes terms which would conflict with the vision of rebirth which is presented. To view A New Beginning is thus to view the present in light of a familiar and reassuring myth, rather than as part of a less reassuring construction.

The problem is that the contradiction between the mythic ideal and the real world of experience remains. A New Beginning offers a self-confirming myth through which the

individual and the collective can understand themselves and place themselves in the tide of ongoing events. However, it leaves no place for those to whom the myth does not speak, those for whom this myth does not provide a satisfying and plausible explanation of their experience. This works well for the elite who would rather remain invisible in a society which espouses the myth of equality, but not so well for those on the bottom of the socio-economic scale who do not prosper with the "rebirth" of the myths which guide and define American society.

Unlike ceremonial political campaign discourse which is primarily argumentative and based upon myths (and thus is "mythic rhetoric"), A New Beginning is primarily mythic although it has an argumentative dimension. However, because its logically argumentative dimension is framed by myth, there are no obvious grounds for dissension or debate. Myth predominates, so that premises remain implicit and unquestioned. A New Beginning, unlike traditional campaign oratory, does not appear to be an argument about ends or the best means to attain them. The ends are already agreed upon. In consequence, the viewer who rejects A New Beginning is left without a positive alternative. Its mythic rhetoric does not allow dissension from within.

In summary, A New Beginning and similar political presentations based upon televisual imagery undermine the rhetorically argumentative and elevate the mythic dimensions of political discourse. The contradiction between the two is

mediated by television, which is a liminal, transformative medium where the logic of myth presides over discursive, argumentative logic. It would only be by making the "invisible" rhetorical nature of films such as A New Beginning apparent that the mythic ideology of mimesis would become less dominant, and political visual communication forms would be returned to the status of rhetorical argument. However, this would entail a major reframing and reorientation of people's perceptions of themselves and their relation to the world around them. This is not likely to occur in the near future, although the political use and manipulation of the media will surely continue. At best, we can hope that the divergent, but equally suasive uses to which political candidates put television will give people pause to re-evaluate their relationship to it.

ENDNOTES

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⁴⁰Wright, 167-8.

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CHAPTER IV

THE INNOVATIVE USE OF VISUAL CLICHE

Introduction

Chapter III considered A New Beginning as a rhetorical ritual of rebirth through which the Republicans aimed to transform the personal and political identity of the voting majority of Americans. Through largely symbolic appeals, myths and archetypes were linked to the accomplishments of the Reagan Administration in order to re-orient the political majority to conservative frames of mind. It was also suggested that the Republicans' use of visual media, television in particular, greatly enhanced their ability to accomplish this task, for television is itself a social ritual which is better suited to "mythic" communication than is traditional oratory.

The Republicans recognized the political mileage to be gained by presenting their positions through myths which television could render comprehensible and credible in a seemingly effortless manner. They were keenly aware of television's dominance in American life, and they operated from the assumption that televisual communication was more effective than the print media or traditional stump oratory in gaining political converts. More so than any previous Presidential contenders, and certainly more so than Democratic challenger Walter Mondale, the Republican

strategists understood that the aims and requirements of televisual communication differed from those of political oratory or print. To an unprecedented extent, deliberative oratory receded in importance during Reagan's 1984 re-election campaign. In the case of A New Beginning, a visual communication form was even substituted for a speech.

It is thus that A New Beginning, and the Reagan campaign in general, may have marked a turning point in American political discourse, one which is representative of a society which is more receptive to the visual than to the verbal. Unlike other forms of political discourse, including the ceremonial, A New Beginning was not designed to persuade its audience through discursive arguments implicitly grounded in myth. On the contrary, the Republicans relied heavily upon television's capacity to communicate myths through which implicit political discourse could be understood. They also understood that seemingly inconsistent, even opposing genres of television discourse, could themselves be purveyors of myth. As a result, the Republicans orchestrated the diverse styles of images which typically differentiate news, documentary, advertisements, political oratory, dramatic fiction and even music video in order to communicate a consistent message in A New Beginning. They made extensive use of the news and documentary genres, which can be potent conveyors of myth because they are most likely to be perceived to be "true." Thus, not only did they make a concerted effort to control the images which appeared on the

nightly news, but they referred to A New Beginning as a documentary, within which diverse discourses were interwoven to create and affirm one master myth of rebirth. Its potency came, no doubt, from the variety of different genres which worked in unison to present this myth. In consequence, a political, rhetorical ritual became indistinguishable from a social, mythic ritual, and the "rebirth" which the Republicans proclaimed was as much a rhetorical renewal of myth as a mythic representation of reality.

A New Beginning is in these respects an innovative form of political discourse and a rhetorical ritual at the same time. Myths are evoked in order to recreate a unified and cohesive American identity; yet unlike verbal rhetorical rituals, this mythic component is more readily apparent than is the argumentative dimension. In this way, A New Beginning highlights the modern day prominence of "rhetorical depiction"--the strategic use of verbal and non-verbal visualizations--which rhetorician Michael Osborn considers to be the master term of modern rhetoric. It is through rhetorical depiction that mythic images are used to place what might otherwise be abstract and unfamiliar in familiar terms; as was demonstrated by A New Beginning, these images are often little more than repetitive visual clichés which can be interpreted without thought or apparent effort. They appear to be self-evident visualizations through which reality is rendered intelligible, and because they are repeated across a variety of discourses they have a cumula-

tive impact which provides a common and comprehensive interpretive frame. To explain further, Osborn writes:

In our time great masses of people, often having political power and therefore increased recalcitrance, must be joined in mega-communities. Such communities can be sustained by simple but mythic pictures that embody common goals and values. To partake of these pictures through communication is to celebrate and to participate in a social communion. Communicants may be semi-literate or pre-occupied with daily problems of survival; they may have little patience for abstraction, and their short and unsophisticated attention spans may tolerate only a few broadly painted symbols that express their common history and purpose, creating a shared sense of time and cultural context. Accordingly, much of the most important communication of our times is conducted slightly above the level of the cave paintings of Altamira. We have developed a radically simplified hieroglyphics to serve our most vital rhetorical commerce.²

Osborn points to but does not elaborate upon some of the more discomfiting implications of political discourse, such as A New Beginning, which makes strategic use of mythic visual images. Indeed, many critics such as Osborn see a relationship between socio-cultural conditions, technology, and communication forms. Modern technology, particularly that of film and television, provides the media most suitable for non-verbal and verbal rhetorical depictions; yet, because the meaning of these depictions often appears to be self-evident, they circumvent the processes of reflection and analysis, faculties which are essential in a rationally-based democratic society. In some contexts, rhetorical depictions are functional, for it is their presentation, accumulation,

and elaboration which forms and sustains the social foundation; it is through political discourse, however, that this consensual social foundation should be negotiated and arbitrated, a process which requires these intellectual faculties. It is for this reason that A New Beginning, as a visual communication form which strategically uses mythic images in order to convey its message, is problematic as a mode of political discourse. It recycles familiar and reassuring mythic images, many of which have become visual clichés and commonplaces, in order to reaffirm the bonds which unite Americans as a people. Yet, it has little to say about controversial political issues.

In this chapter I will examine A New Beginning as an innovative form of political discourse that co-ordinates mythic images from different discursive genres. These images are united to convey one coherent myth of rebirth, a strategy which enhanced the perceived "reality" of the film despite its quite obvious excursions into fancy. In many ways, A New Beginning was an innovative assemblage of oft repeated myths, myths which are more aptly categorized as visual clichés. America's rebirth was celebrated by a re-presentation of many of the rhetorical depictions which once held Americans together as a people. This was effective, however, in that its message of rebirth placed the familiar in a new context, and in so doing, provided a positive means with which to interpret present day realities. This was not, however,

ultimately in the interests of the majority of American people.

In order to clarify this position, first I will briefly elaborate upon the differences between visual and verbal communication forms as they relate to sociocultural contexts. Next I will examine A New Beginning as an innovative political communication form which made extensive use of clichéd visual depictions. I will then more closely focus upon the use of visual clichés and stereotypes in A New Beginning, after which I will assess the consequences of political discourses such as A New Beginning which use rhetorical depictions in order to create a meaningful reality which can be effortlessly comprehended. Despite its reassuring surface appearance, A New Beginning serves to stifle discussion and debate, to eliminate reflection and critical analysis, and to subvert the very democratic principles which it professes to uphold.

Cultural Contexts: Verbal vs. Visual Communication

Much can be learned about a society by examining the interrelations and transformations of the various institutions and structures which together serve to define and articulate the experience of its members. It is in this spirit that many scholars have explored the relationship between modernization (a collective term for processes such as industrialization, urbanization, secularization, rise of capitalism and bureaucracy, etc.³) and Western society,

consciousness, and culture. The process of modernization is typically associated with the Industrial Revolution, the movement of large numbers of people to cities, the development of advanced systems of communication, i.e., the rise of the mass media, and the emergence of popular culture.

Indeed, many have expounded upon the relation between the modern communications media and popular culture (also called mass culture or consumer culture). As early as 1953, critic Dwight MacDonal'd offered the following definition and interpretation:

It is sometimes called popular culture, but I think mass culture is a more accurate term, since its distinctive mark is that it is solely an article for consumption, like chewing gum.

The historical reasons for the growth of mass culture since the early 1800's are well known. Political democracy and popular education broke down the old upper-class monopoly of culture. Business enterprise found a profitable market in the cultural demands of the newly awakened masses, and the advance of technology made possible the cheap production of books, periodicals, pictures, music, and furniture, and in sufficient quantities to satisfy this market. Modern technology also created new media such as film and television which are especially well adapted to mass manufacture and distribution.³

It is this "age of mechanical reproduction" to which critic Walter Benjamin attributes the decay of aura: the authenticity, or unique identity of objects.⁴ He suggests that this is a consequence of serial reproduction, where there is no qualitative or even physical distinction between an original and copies. Serial reproductions make objects

and experiences available to great numbers of people, and because none are more "authentic" than others, no one interpretation can be claimed to be intrinsically more valid than another. Benjamin believes that instead of being perceived to be timeless, remote from the observer, and rooted in history and tradition, objects have become disposable; they are to be possessed and consumed. He writes:

One might generalize by saying: The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions, it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence, and in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the film.⁵

The loss of aura, then, contributes to the "democratization" of objects in that it relativizes their meaning. Sociologist Alvin Gouldner also saw a relationship between modern society, the mass media, and the ideology of democracy and rationality. He wrote that these emerged as a consequence of the waning of traditional cultures and the givenness of their values.⁶ The mass media serve to decentralize knowledge and to democratize ideas; yet, because there are no a priori sources of authority (or, in Benjamin's terms, authenticity) plural meanings and definitions of reality may compete with each other. This is also associated with the Enlightenment and its veneration of rationality.

Jeffersonian democratic theory articulates the belief that both a free press and an educated, involved policy would produce the most rational--and thus best--decisions. Written public discourse (including formal oratory which, although oral, is structured according to the same principles) follows the standards of formal logic, linear sequence, grammar, and generic conventions. Print is widely regarded to be a medium which can convey nuanced arguments and complexities, and thus it can facilitate reflection, discussion and debate.

It has also been suggested that the technologies of film and television have contributed to a shift from a literate to a post-literate society. Benjamin sees film, even more than print, as an agent of the loss of aura; Gouldner claims that television is an historically new mass experience, where there has been a shift from conceptual to iconic symbolism, from a newspaper to a television centered system of communication. As a result, "the modern communication media have greatly intensified the non- linguistic, iconic, multi-modal character of public communication."⁷ This observation is shared by sociologist Daniel Bell, who suggests that a visual culture has supplanted a print culture. "Both," he writes, "have different weights for the formation of knowledge. . .the print media allow for self-pacing and dialogue in comprehending an argument or reflecting on an image. Print not only emphasizes the cognitive and the symbolic, but is the necessary mode for conceptual thought. . . .The visual media--I mean here film

and television--invite not conceptualization but dramatization."⁸ He also observes that:

. . .the very techniques of the new arts are efforts to intensify the immediacy of emotion, to pull the spectator in rather than allow him to contemplate the experience. Such is the underlying principle of cinema, which, in its use of montage, goes further than any other contemporary art in the direction of regulating emotion, by selecting the images, the angles of vision, the length of a single scene, and the "synapse" of composition. This central aspect of modernity--the organization of social and aesthetic responses in terms of novelty, sensation, simultaneity and impact, finds its major expression in the visual arts.⁹

The differences between print and visual media are often characterized as follows: print is a conceptual medium which fosters reflection, contemplation, and analysis; visual media are essentially formulaic, dramatic efforts to intensify the immediacy of emotion and experience. Visual media are widely considered to be "non-linguistic." Visual images require few of the discursive skills required to comprehend print media. Daniel Bell sees visual culture and communication as the epitome of modernity--the triumph of the irrational (in the realm of culture) which aims to heighten experience and extend sensibilities, but which at the same time limits reflection upon this experience. As pointed out by Boorstin in The Image, the broadcast media are increasingly used to produce or create rather than to simply re-present events. Images, montage, action, and sound are skillfully employed to hold the viewer's attention. At the same time, the more innovative these strategies, the less likely that the viewer

will be confronted with ideas or information which require concentration and effort to assimilate. The aim, thus, is to create a favorable impression rather than to inform or persuade through formal logic. In regard to political rhetoric in visual, post-literate culture, Paul E. Corcoran states:

At the same time that oral discourse becomes transformed into an archaic ritual and increasingly drained of its linguistic content by electronic media, oratory revives pre-literate modes of expression to articulate a rigidly defined and narrow ground of discourse. While this transformed rhetorical display appears to some as irrelevant, trite, and cliché-ridden grandiloquence, it is also clear that it is a form of oral communication which survives precisely because of its reliance upon simplicity, a familiar stock of received "wisdom," and the invocation of accepted commonplaces. . . rhetorical commonplace and stylization are the strengths rather than the flaws of political oratory. . . Persuasion, conflict or the disposition of specialized information play virtually no part in such an oratory.¹⁰

It is from a similar perspective that Osborn writes that rhetorical depiction has become the master term of modern rhetoric, and it is to a large extent this sophisticated rhetorical use of television as primarily a visual communication form which distinguishes the Reagan campaign from its predecessors. A New Beginning is a product of a visual culture, and it is an appropriate mode of communication for its medium, television. It is innovative as a form of political communication, yet in many other ways it is merely representative of a trend which began with the mass reproduction of moving pictures.

A New Beginning as Innovative Form of Political Communication

It is not surprising, given television's pervasiveness and its connection to the social and economic system and culture, that politicians have increasingly been using this medium and modes of communication specific to it to "sell" themselves. Since Franklin Roosevelt first made effective use of radio to address the American people en masse (a practice carried on by Ronald Reagan, despite radio's declining influence), politicians have become increasingly aware of the potential of the mass media to help gain the support of the voting public. It was not until the late 1950's that television and television advertising began to be used extensively in political campaigns; it was the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon television debates which focused public and political attention on the need for candidates to project a positive image on television. It was widely claimed that Nixon lost the debates because he did not convey a wholesome image. His subsequent campaign in 1968, documented in Joe McGinnis' The Selling of the President 1968, was almost exclusively a media campaign.

Since that landmark event, politicians have increasingly been making use of television to create a positive "image." (By this term I mean both the psychological sense of subjective impressions about inherent traits of character and personality,¹¹ and a visual image. Both work hand-in-hand). Books such as Jamieson's Packaging the President and Diamond and Bates' The Spot have documented these trends and candidates'

ever growing media sophistication. This has been demonstrated in one way by more and more reliance upon advertising techniques in order to communicate to the public. As advertisers make use of new technologies in order to develop new strategies, politicians have been quick to make use of them.

Ironically, it was through use of modern technology that Reagan was able to reaffirm tradition in 1984. Similarly, it was through use of highly technical marketing and production techniques that his emotional and simplistic mythic images were constructed. The Reagan campaign managers relied extensively upon population polls, surveys, demographic data, and market pre-testing strategies, as well as the already established visual symbolism of advertising. They even extended these techniques to orchestrate public appearances which were not paid advertisements. The resultant emphasis was upon formulas, clichés, and soft-sell emotional advertising to appeal to the public. Corcoran's less than laudatory description of the aims and effects of political discourse in the electronic age appears to describe the Republican approach:

Here the intention is not to stimulate thought but to prevent it; not to communicate information but to conceal or trivialize it; not to move but to enlarge acquiescence; ultimately, not to use language at all if cinematic artifice and a musical soundtrack can be used to conjure the desired image and elicit the favorable emotion. . . .Successful political discourse no longer requires the linguistic skills of reflection and analysis, but rather requires the ability to create an image which the viewers will identify with the resources and expertise required to dispose of information and policy.¹²

With A New Beginning, mythic images (or depictions) were used to create a positive psychological "image" of Ronald Reagan and the America which he represented. The result is summarized with great clarity by campaign chronicler William A. Henry in his account, titled Visions of America:

Conveniently for a candidate in the television age, Reagan's remembered America was also the country that is invoked in television advertising, not only his own but the 'reach out and touch' sentimentality of telephone companies, the rising sun and noble struggle tableau of corporate sponsors of the Olympics, the park-bench and cracker barrel wisdom treated with comic homage by IBM and other computer companies. It was fitting that this world be reflected in the mass media, because so many of the images that make it up were received by the public from schoolbooks and songs and magazines and calendars, from photographs and radio and television, above all from the richest source of Reagan's own story-telling, the movies. The unifying power of this kind of Americanism was that it had been experienced by the population in common, and had evoked, from the moment it was first perceived until the moment it was retrieved by recollection, an unanalytic, emotional response, based on the sensation that deep down, all true Americans shared the same values, sympathies, beliefs, creed.¹³

As Henry suggests, the Reagan campaign was organized around television and the mythic images which were so familiar to Americans, images which had become clichés. Yet, as Henry also notes, the predominance of these images which were echoes of those propagated by popular culture had a "unifying power." They thus served the Republican purpose extremely well. They served to articulate America's "rebirth," which at the same time helped Reagan to unify the

majority of middle and working class Americans under the Republican banner. One of their main objectives was, indeed, to secure the allegiance of the traditionalist "sunbelt" states, whose electoral college votes would secure Reagan a landslide victory. This entailed a shift in party alliances, and the Republicans recognized that any such shift in political alliances--whether simply in party preferences or in preferred structure of government--involved more than simply implementing short-term economic or political change. In order to create long-term conservative frames of mind, he needed to reach the people on a personal as well as political level. They also recognized a basic political fact--most voters, if not apathetic, have less than an in-depth relationship to politics. Roughly half (53.3%) of the eligible voters went to the polls in 1984; this did not differ significantly from 1980 (52.6%). But even this modest increase was the first in American presidential politics since 1960.¹⁴

Thus, in order to inspire a lethargic populace, the Republicans needed to appeal to the ethos of their audience--the underlying assumptions and dominant opinions which shape beliefs, values, and attitudes; these are themselves shaped by myths. They realized that the political center which they sought to consolidate was best reached through symbolic rather than pragmatic, overtly "political" appeals--and what better medium than television with which to do so. "Good" television is entertaining; it holds the attention of the

elusive viewer who always has the option to change the channel or to turn the television off entirely. A New Beginning was certainly good television. After the tumultuous 60's and 70's, viewers were constantly reminded "America is back." This was the mythic America of nostalgic memory. At the same time, it helped to re-define America's self-image, its people's conceptions of who they were and what they stood for. The combinations of familiar words, sounds, and images offered Americans positive images (both visual and psychological) of their President, their country, and themselves. The images were, in themselves, repetitive presentations which reinforced American mythologies. The film worked, though, because it was the rebirth of these mythologies which was proposed. Although these images were effortlessly recognizable, the film held the viewer's attention because it presented a virtual bombardment of them. The images and generic conventions which help the viewer to interpret them were constantly changing and challenging expectations. The film was structured as a non-narrative documentary which combined news, advertising, and documentary images and techniques; it was heavily underscored by music and incorporated a popular country song; it was thematic rather than sequential, and Ronald Reagan was both narrator and character. Its message was almost entirely positive, with barely the slightest hint of dissension, and it demonstrated the seamless co-ordination of free media and

paid advertising which had occurred throughout the Reagan primary campaign.

A New Beginning, then, was an admixture of visual genres and conventions which together served to convince the viewer that things were better in America since Ronald Reagan had become President; that there was both an economic and "spiritual" recovery. Although clearly not a traditional form of public address, A New Beginning was, like other discursive forms, a rhetorical argument. As noted by Chaim Perelman, a rhetorical argument is "any kind of discourse which is used to intensify the audience's adherence to certain theses."¹⁵ If anything, this was the aim of A New Beginning.

In contrast to traditional rhetorical argument, the tools used were preconstructed images, actions, and scenes rather than oratory alone. The pre-edited and pre-arranged sequences of events left far less to chance than any 'live' oratory could. Further, its structure facilitated a mode of communication which departed from the more typical expository form of argument which characterizes most "realistic" visual presentations. Theorist Bill Nichols observes that narrative (fiction), exposition (documentary and news) and poetic (experimental film) are the three structuring principles of film (and by extension, television). Although they often overlap (as in the case of A New Beginning), people have learned to interpret visual presentations as primarily one or the other. Expository visual forms, such as documentary and

news, are believed to reflect an external reality, or truth, unproblematically. Many advertisements, aiming to persuade primarily by extolling the virtues of a product, emulate this form. Nichols points out, however, that exposition is the domain of rhetoric, and as such:

Rhetoric is concerned with pragmatic questions, with how an argument can be made persuasively; it leaves questions about its ultimate truth to other disciplines. . . demonstrations of truth will depend on the demonstrator's rhetorical skill and our assumptions rather than procedures of a necessary and sufficient logic.

He adds:

The problems of particular or specific meanings are bypassed for the achievement of diverse effects upon the recipient of a message. . . .As anyone who has attended to recent political campaigns knows, the "message" has less to do with the literal meaning of statements--to which few politicians feel bound--than with the kind of attitude elicited in the audience towards the speaker--the ties that bind.¹⁶

Thus, as an expository form, A New Beginning worked to signify a particular version of reality. Its wholesome, upbeat and optimistic message had to be perceived as an accurate representation of Ronald Reagan and America. This was accomplished, in part, by using documentary techniques and conventions. Ronald Reagan was a narrator who directly addressed the viewing audience, "ordinary people" were witnesses who testified that America was better, and the film incorporated former news events such as Reagan's Inauguration, his trips to Korea, Normandy and China, and the attempt upon his life. There was also abundant use of still

photographs; one segment made use of archival footage from World War II, and in another, newspaper and magazine headlines were used to lend authenticity to the film.

At the same time, the overall structure of the film was not conventionally organized as a narrative, with a chronological beginning, middle, and end, but rather, it was organized poetically, as an "image mosaic." Nichols describes this as follows:

The whole is organized not as a narrative but poetically, as a mosaic. Only the parts have a diegetic unity. Between sequences editing seldom establishes a chronological relationship; sequences follow each other consecutively but without a clearly marked temporal relationship. The whole thus tends towards poetry (metaphor, synchronicity, paradigmatic relations)--an all at once slice through an institutional matrix re-presented in time--rather than narrative.¹⁷

Like the documentary film which Nichols describes here, many of the images and segments which compose A New Beginning are not arranged in a linear, sequential order. Individual images and some sections may be narratives which "tell a story," but the overall structure of the exposition is poetic. Meaning is arrived at through metaphors, associations, juxtapositions, paradigmatic relations. This is not unusual for experimental or "art" films; it is more uncommon for expository political discourse. However, this structure characterizes the "new advertising"¹⁷ which first emerged in the 1960's and which has been termed the "soft-sell" approach because it attempts to evoke feelings rather than to use "hard-sell" rational persuasion. This soft-sell approach can

be considered to be a shift from narrative exposition to poetic organization of advertisements. It was this soft-sell approach which the Reagan campaign managers used in A New Beginning and throughout the 1984 campaign. Hal Riney, member of the Tuesday Team, succinctly described this strategy as one in which: "The product is associated with wholesome, yet otherwise unrelated images."¹⁸ If A New Beginning is considered to be an advertisement, Ronald Reagan was, indeed, the "product" being sold to a nation of consumers. The film's editor, Tom Maniaci, suggested that such was the case, "You have to say this is a product (referring to Ronald Reagan), and the market is the USA. . . .You're selling an ideal, a way of life."¹⁹ Even Ronald Reagan was reported to have quipped upon meeting the illustrious group of advertising experts who were to run his campaign. "I heard that you were selling soap, and I thought that you might like to see the bar."²⁰

This is not to say that no 'formal' logic or argumentation occurs within A New Beginning. On the contrary, Ronald Reagan as narrator often performs this function. As an expository form, A New Beginning argues that it represents a social reality. It does so, however, by creating a favorable psychological image, by fostering an impression or attitude and not by persuading with "irrefutable" logic or "facts." To accomplish this task, it is structured as a poetic image mosaic rather than as a more literal narrative exposition. Stated another way, it is organized more by the

"oral logic" of televisual communication than by the literate, formal logic of print media. Fiske and Hartley explain in Reading Television:

. . .television's meanings are arrived at through the devices of spoken discourse fused with visual images, rather than through the structures of formal logic. This means that apparent inconsistencies or lapses of logic are not necessarily faults in television discourse. They must be seen as aspects of a different kind of logic: as part of a process whose aim is to produce fully satisfactory and plausible meaning. . .²¹

Scene I of A New Beginning provides an excellent example of this process. It does begin conventionally with the date of Reagan's Inauguration in 1980 on a black screen while he begins his oath of office. While the Inauguration itself is obviously linear and sequential, the images which are interspersed are atemporal and have no overtly logical relationship to the words which are being spoken. The internal structure of this opening scene indicates the way that meaning is arrived at in A New Beginning through metaphor, association and juxtaposition rather than through formal argument. The aim of this scene is to create a mood, tone, or feeling which, as part of the image mosaic which comprises the film, will contribute to the overall impression, or image, which the viewer takes away from it.

According to Judith Williamson in Decoding Advertisements, the meaning of visual advertisements is established by correlating image and product. Although she refers to still photographs, her insights can be extrapolated

to film. Visual images stand for certain qualities, or values, which, by their correlation or juxtaposition, become transferred to the "product"--i.e., Ronald Reagan in the case of A New Beginning. Her explications appear consistent with Nichols' description of poetic structure, and Fiske and Hartley's oral logic:

. . .the correlation is non-sequential; the two things are linked not by their line in an argument but by their place in a picture, by its formal structure. . . .This transfer of significance does not exist as completed in the ad, but requires us to make the connection. . . .this transfer is based on the fact that the first object has a significance to be transferred. . . .a system of meaning must already exist, and this system is external to the ad which simply refers to it.²²

In Scene I of A New Beginning, the product, Ronald Reagan, contains the other images. His image--a re-presentation of past actuality--surrounds those of ordinary America and Americans; his voice conjures these images and ultimately, he explains their significance, "Yes it was quite a day, a new beginning." This refers to both the Inauguration and the images of Americans beginning a new day which are cross-cut within it. Further, it is the qualities and values which these images of a new day connote which are transferred to Ronald Reagan. The initial image of a plow furrowing the earth in the early morning sun suggests growth, fertility, fecundity. It is a simple image, yet one which is evocative of America's agrarian roots; this is especially the case when this image is joined to that of a farmhouse. This too represents a simple America untarnished

by industry and technology. The cock crows, the flowers bloom, and there is work to be done, indicated by the dump-truck with an empty bed which is moving out of frame. A cowboy and his horse (traditional, rural) dissolve into a city laborer at work. Both country and city are unified, both are peopled by men at work. The laborer's upward pointing gesture is, like the sun-lit images which have come before, an indication of optimism. Through the juxtaposition of these images and their connotations (and their unification through the implication of a beginning, a new day), Reagan is imbued with the positive qualities of traditional America-- its fecundity, beauty, optimism, hope.

Reagan's America also encompasses the grassy suburbs, where an enterprising young boy with a paper route learns early the value of work; the friendly businessman who carools is part of a neighborhood, a community where people are on a first name basis. In this community, people learn traditional sex roles. Men are active--there is a paper boy, not girl, a man bustles off to work, he says hello to Jim, and the car which he climbs into is driven by a man. There is, to be sure, a woman in the scene. She sits in the passenger seat of the car and does nothing. She may be a part of the work world, but she is still in a passive position in relation to the active males who dominate this scene. But it is the more obvious, positive connotations which are most likely conveyed here, and through them the

values of work, neighborhood, and community. It is these values which are associated with Ronald Reagan.

In addition to work, protection and defense, which are important themes throughout A New Beginning, are also suggested early in the film. There is an image of a traffic policeman, prominently wearing his badge, who guides a group of construction workers across the street. This invites associations with law and order, and consequently, protection and defense. This is particularly the case because the word "defend" accompanies this image. Then, some would say incongruently, Reagan promises to "preserve and protect" and the image which appears is that of a wooded camp area where a group of children watch as a flag is being hoisted. The intention may have been to create associations with Reagan as an environmentalist in order to mitigate criticism of him in this area. A more dominant association here, however, is that of the flag being raised amidst a group of children. The flag is going up--as is the sun in the previous images. The flag connotes freedom and patriotism, and in conjunction with the sun, productivity, hope, and a new day. The children gaze upward, children implying innocence and the future. A close-up of one child's face is coupled with the word defend, suggesting the need to defend the nation's children, rather than "the Constitution of the United States" which is the continuation of this dialogue in the next shot. These words are paired with an image of the White House, the unifying center of political stability and authority. It

links the images which have come before with Ronald Reagan and his presidency. Two images of the White House follow the completion of the Inauguration, both of which are linked to a third, which positions Ronald Reagan securely within its confines, seated at his desk in the Oval Office.

Thus, this initial scene, composed of simple, even commonplace images, constructs a highly complex "image" of Ronald Reagan and what he represents: Tradition, hope, productivity, defense, patriotism, innocence, the future, authority. These connections are not made verbally or through logical argument, but rather through the "oral logic" of poetic visual communication. Overall, the film aimed to create an impression of spiritual rebirth, of optimism, patriotism, and productivity across the land; most importantly, this renewal was inextricably related to Ronald Reagan by juxtaposing images with conventional, generally positive associations and the voice/image of Ronald Reagan.

Like the initial scene, none of the images which comprise the various segments of the film create this impression through formal argument. None of the scenes following the Inauguration are arranged in chronological or sequential order to build a persuasive argument. The attempt upon Reagan's life, for instance, which occurred in March of 1981, is presented well after later events such as his trip to Korea. Scene IV, which is entirely structured to follow Lee Greenwood's son "God Bless the USA," makes little attempt to establish internal temporal or linear logical relations,

and itself has no temporal relation to the rest of the film. Together the scenes, differentiated by their themes, make up the fragments of the image mosaic.

A New Beginning as Visual Cliché

Clichés

Although A New Beginning was structurally innovative as a poetic expository form, this formal departure from tradition was accompanied by images which were familiar, effortlessly recognizable, and perhaps even banal. As Murray Edelman writes, "Not only is security probably the primal political symbol, but whatever is ceremonial and banal strengthens reassuring beliefs."²³ Thus, Reagan communicated to the public with familiar, reassuring images--not simply metaphors, but visual clichés and stereotypes whose implications and associations have become commonplace, given, beyond question. Just as with language, highly conventionalized visual images become clichés:

Any sensuously apprehended detail is an image; hence what one sees or hears in a film is an image. . . . But an image can also function as an implied or stated comparison, in a context broader than the representational, that is, metaphorically. Finally, like poetry and painting, cinema uses concrete details so that they function as symbols, thought-bearing images which stand for a complex of associations. Symbols, arising when an image or metaphor is surrounded by a complex of thought, are a high point in cinematic art. On the other hand, as in language, there are in cinema concrete details so overused that they are merely clichés, overused metaphors that no longer convey the beauty that they are intended to convey.²⁴

The clichéd images which constructed much of A New Beginning already had an emotional (if vague) meaning associated with them. They invoked conventional associations: They were tied to a meaning which did not require reflection and analysis in order to be discerned. For instance, patriotic clichés abound, the most prominent being the American flag which stands for freedom, as the song lyrics point out (the word freedom is itself a verbal cliché). The flag is hoisted, it is combined with images of children (themselves clichés of innocence, the future), it is waved and saluted. It appears 10 times in Scene V alone--it billows in front of the White House, behind a young man, a young child waves it back and forth, it drapes the coffin of a dead soldier (presumably a casualty from Lebanon), it appears between a woman hugging a soldier (again, he is presumably returning from Lebanon, much later), a policeman hoists the flag, a crowd of smiling Americans in a still photograph wave flags broadly, and the final shot of this scene depicts Ronald Reagan wrapped in the American flag as the song ends. In these contexts, the flag stirs up "patriotic" emotion and sentiment which is ultimately transferred to Ronald Reagan.

Anton Zijderveld, in On Clichés, gives further insight into their use and function:

A cliché is a traditional form of human expression (words, thoughts, emotions, gestures, acts) which--due to repetitive use in social life--has lost its original, often ingenuous, heuristic power. Although it thus fails

positively to contribute meaning to social interactions and communication, it does function socially, since it manages to stimulate behavior (cognition, emotion, volition, action) while it avoids reflections on meaning.²⁵

Thus, visual clichés such as the flag, the Statue of Liberty and Air Force One were used in A New Beginning to provoke an "emotional reflex"; these positive reflexes were, in turn, associated with Ronald Reagan. A less obvious case in point was the usage of dark and light, which are visual metaphors which have become clichés. In filmic "language," light implies knowledge, goodness, life, hope, and beginning. It is inseparable from the orientational metaphors which, according to Lakeoff and Johnson, provide the conceptual structure by which people understand and interpret the world.²⁶ Light can be associated with all of the concepts which they relate to the spatial metaphor "up": happiness, consciousness, control, goodness, rationality, high status. It is one of the primary symbols of the Western tradition; it opens the Bible:

In the beginning, God said let there be light and the light began. God saw the light and found it good, and He divided the spheres of light and darkness. The light He called day and the darkness night.²⁷

Such imagery is pervasive throughout Western art and literature, so much so that it has become cliché. Yet, this was a central motif in A New Beginning, one which was also compatible with the many religious associations in the film. It began in darkness, with only a date (the "beginning" on the screen) and the sound of Ronald Reagan taking his oath of

office in 1980. The first image is--light. The bright sun blazes in the sky, in front of which a plow moves forward to till the earth. Throughout, the images in the film are bathed in sunlight. Reagan's America is bright and sunny--i.e., good, happy, healthy, optimistic. Sunset only appears once, as two silhouetted elderly people walk along the beach. This is the other side of the cliché--they are at the end of their days. The sunset is, however, the only "dark" image in the film. For the most part, the film is packed with familiar, positive clichés: babies, smiling children, flowers, a wedding, people hugging, touching, smiling, looking up, gesturing up, building, working. All of these images have appeared time and again on greeting cards, on television, in movies. They invoke "knee-jerk" associations with the way people "remember" it to be, or, more likely, with the way that they would like it to have been.

The images of an American family which appear in Scenes V and VIII, for instance, are primarily clichés. In Scene V, the family appears as singer Lee Greenwood pays homage to America; "I thank my lucky stars to be living here today." There are two parents and two children, predictably a boy and a girl. The girl clutches a teddy bear while the boy helps his father carry a rug out of the house; the boy manages to hold a baseball glove in his hand at the same time. The house is surrounded by a white picket fence; the yard has rose bushes. Later in the film, as Reagan discusses

improvements in the economy, this same family reappears although they are wearing different clothes. This time, the wife steps out of a house with red brick stairs and a walkway. She tousles her son's hair and smiles at her husband, who this time is singlehandedly carrying a rug into a house with a "sold" sign in front of it. There is a fence around this new home too, but this house is bigger than the first one. As Reagan discusses the increase in the consumer's ability to purchase cars, the husband walks toward a shiny red truck parked in the now spacious yard. A man wearing a suit and tie greets him as the daughter, still clutching her doll from the first scene, jumps into the truck. Both men shake hands, pat each other on the back, and walk amiably toward the truck. A business deal has presumably been struck.

This is the traditional family from 1950's television shows which, even then, bore little resemblance to the actual state of affairs. It is an idyllic vision, but one which is a familiar model to many middle class Americans. There are two parents, two children, one of each sex (the norm supposedly being 2.5) and traditional sex roles. The males do the work; they carry the rug. The young boy carries a baseball mitt while his sister has a doll. The wife does no physical labor, but she offers encouragement. The white picket fence, the shrubbery in the yard, the new, bigger house and the new truck are familiar images which imply the American Dream; the image is easy to consume. Everything is

harmonious here. There is no tension apparent and the viewer need not think much about it in order to understand it. It brings feeling rather than thought to the fore; it predisposes the viewer to a favorable attitude. The family is happy, they are prosperous, they are upwardly mobile--all in the context of Ronald Reagan's improvements, of which he reminds the viewer as this scene plays. Through association, this cliché favorably orients the viewer to Ronald Reagan; it is functional precisely because it lacks substantive, heuristic meaning other than that provided by its positioning within the film.

What is most important is that this cliché, and all of the simple, mythic images which permeate A New Beginning, have no meaning in and of themselves. (The film's title, A New Beginning, is also a verbal cliché which exemplifies this). There is no information, particularly no insight, which is provided. There is merely a repetition of traditional cultural images which echo and reproduce the status quo. These images are, however, reassuring. They are pleasurable because they are so effortlessly recognizable. They reinforce conventional images of social reality and one's place in it. These clichés serve as points of orientation; their connotations, implications, and associations appear to be self-evident and need not be questioned. They are effective, moreover, because they illustrate the more pragmatic, "actual" claims made throughout the film. Claims that the economy is better, for

instance, made by Ronald Reagan and persons interviewed throughout the film, are supported with these visual clichés.

As Zijdenveld argues, not only is modern society "clichogenic," but clichés function as "mini-institutions" because they represent "traditional and collective forms of thinking, feeling, and acting which provide the individual with stability and society with a durability which transcends individual beings."²⁸ In this way, the very banality of these clichés--their simplicity and repetitiveness--eliminates the need for reflection and the inescapable relativization of meaning which accompanies reflection. In an uncertain and ambiguous world, clichés help to maintain the appearance of stability and certainty.

Stereotypes

Another type of visual cliché which was used to great effect in A New Beginning was the stereotype. Both of these terms have a common origin, and according to Zijdenveld, both are inextricably linked to mechanical reproduction. Thus:

The word cliché referred originally to a cast or dab by which pictures could be massively reproduced in a relatively easy, fast, and thus economical procedure. As such the cliché stood, together with the invention of typography, at the cradle of modern technology, and contributed to the rise of modernity. . .in the world of printing the synonym stereotype is for obvious reasons often used.²⁹

Both clichés and stereotypes have come to have a more metaphorical meaning, although they still retain traces of their origins as "techniques to quickly and massively reproduce cultural material."³⁰ Michael Osborn, in

"Rhetorical Depiction," refers to stereotypes as "repetitive presentations." One of the most important functions of rhetorical depiction, he argues, is presentation, whereby experience becomes mediated and pre-disposed. Stereotypes thus provide a "prearranged ethos"; they serve to acknowledge personal and institutional roles within a society.³¹

According to Osborn, then, stereotypes are the means by which social roles and positions are delimited and defined.

Taking a more negative position on stereotypes, Paul E. Corcoran writes that clichés eliminate the critical distance which is required for reflection. Their aim is to encourage identification, rather than to inform or persuade logically. Corcoran states in reference to political discourse:

Replacing persuasion as a rhetorical aim is the process of identification. Here the speaker invokes symbolic commonplaces, by which he endeavors to associate himself (especially) and his proposals (if any) with images, ideas, and values which are far from new or specialized in character-uncontroversial within the dominant culture. These conventional items, as might be expected, are little more than platitudes such as order, brotherhood, peaceableness, the new and the good (progress), the old and the familiar (tradition) and synonyms for the common will of the people.³²

Through use of visual cliché, Reagan invoked symbolic commonplaces with which he associated himself; further, through use of stereotypes, A New Beginning provided figures with which the viewer could identify. It was important for Ronald Reagan, in order to gain a consensus and to unify the political "center," to provide stereotypical images of "we"

Americans. The persons interviewed in A New Beginning were echoes of ordinary "people on the street" who appear in advertisements or on the evening news. These people are conventionally assumed to have no vested interest, and supposedly they represent the climate of opinion surrounding an issue. In this way, they function rhetorically as demonstrative proofs which support, or authenticate, the claims being made throughout the film.

These persons represented a cross-section of Americans whose support Reagan wanted in the coming election. They were, in a sense, spokespersons for particular social groups and interests. They testified that America was experiencing an economic and spiritual recovery, and implied or directly attributed this state of affairs to Ronald Reagan. Their statements in A New Beginning served not only to demonstrate that things were better, but as social stereotypes, these people served as points of identification for the home viewing audience. While the concept of identification remains ill-defined, Kenneth Burke offers the following explication:

By identification I have in mind this sort of thing: one's material and mental ways of placing oneself as a person in groups or movements; one's way of sharing vicariously in the role of leader or spokesperson. . .³³

More psychoanalytically oriented film theories also stress that it is through identification that visual images are made both pleasurable and comprehensible; it is identification which makes social life possible.³⁴ In A New Beginning, these stereotypes represented a recognizable world

with familiar situations and positions. Through identification with these representatives of social groups, the viewer vicariously shared in their experience. Their opinions and interests, which reflected favorably upon the Reagan Administration, could be accepted as relevant definitions of the situation.

It was apparent from the social and occupational groups which were delineated that Reagan aimed to reach the middle and working classes. Lower and upper class stereotypes were conspicuous by their absence. Interviews were conducted with laborers, professional persons, women, blacks, a Hispanic, and the elderly. All of the constituencies were important targets of the Republican party. Laborers, in particular, have traditionally been aligned with the Democratic party, and Reagan's attempt to woo the blue-collar workers was obvious in A New Beginning.

Laborers predominate in Scene IV, which is the first sequence of interviews with "the people," all of which coalesce around the theme that there is a new feeling of pride and patriotism in America. There are three blue-collar workers, one black man in a business suit, a young woman with a faintly Hispanic accent, and one noticeably nondescript middle-aged white male representative. The workers, in particular, are located by both clothing and background. The first is in a factory or warehouse; he wears a solid blue uniform, and people are busily engaged in work in the background. He asserts that the President has brought

respect back to the White House. Similarly, a young black worker, dressed in a tee-shirt and located at a building construction site, announces that he now feels more patriotic. A third worker, also located at a noisy construction site and wearing a hard hat, forcefully declares, "The man put me to work and he's gonna keep me there. The man did a good job and I hope he's gonna go another four years. God Bless America."

The man insists the "Ronald Reagan" put him to work, while he blesses "America." Patriotism is explicitly related here to economic advantage, while both are linked to support for Ronald Reagan, who is rendered indistinguishable from the country which he represents. All of the people interviewed here celebrate the general attitude in the country, the "new" spirit of pride proclaimed by George Bush. As stereotypes, they imply that both blue-collar workers and minorities share a positive attitude towards America and, by implication, Ronald Reagan. Both verbal statements and visual cues, too, suggest that this attitude is warranted because of economic gains. The laborers are not only employed, but they are interviewed at bustling workplaces. Their activity suggests growth, production, and development; the predominance of images of workers building, making, and doing throughout A New Beginning serves as a metaphor for America's "new" beginning, and as a concrete effort to obtain the allegiance of this bloc of voting Americans.

All in all, this scene appears to be directed to working rather than middle-class Americans, with an unspoken promise of upward mobility. The voices of a foreign woman and a black man sporting a suit and tie echo the sentiments of the laborers. Their expressed satisfaction and pride suggest that minorities, like blue-collar workers, can prosper in Ronald Reagan's America. Their interests are, moreover, made to coincide with those of the "average" American, as this scene concludes with the remarks of a stereotypical "everyman" who cannot easily be located in terms of occupation, social or ethnic group. Even the green grass background suggests neutrality. He represents the political middle, and his presence provides assurance that Reagan supporters are mainstream Americans whose ranks include the members of specific interest groups. It is his remark, "I even hear songs on the radio. . .television now. . ." that serves as a transition to Scene V, which consists of a patriotic song, accompanied by images, about America.

It is not until Scene VII that the next group of interviewees appears. These men and women are middle class representatives whose concerns mirror those of the majority of Americans. Their comments vaguely address issues such as defense and the economy; for the most part, they offer testimonials to the theme that the economy is better. They laud the economic improvements made by the Reagan Administration which they assert have made their lives better.

Consumerism is the focus here; they are pleased because they are able to buy more with Ronald Reagan as president. One woman mentions that "people are travelling more, business is better, people going on vacations, and they are spending more money." These people celebrate the transformation in social status indicated by leisure time activities and monetary gain. The possibility of upward mobility convinces them that the economy must be better; one man even mentions the "facts" that unemployment and interest rates are down. (He neglected to add, however, that they remained higher than they had been when Reagan first took office.)

This scene appeals to those who identify with the more affluent middle classes. While Scene IV implies that people are gainfully employed because Ronald Reagan is in office, those who appear in Scene VII seem to be more preoccupied with advancement. A golfer (another indication of the leisure time available to prosperous Americans) notes that "the people" are getting back to work. Both he, and the others who appear in this scene, are thus separated from the legions of the unemployed. They praise Ronald Reagan because they are able to have and to do more.

The representation of Black Americans also merits consideration. They appear in the army, but none are present in the rural and suburban scenes of traditional America. Two out of the three black men who are interviewed are wearing suits, although two appear in the first "blue-collar" scene, and only one in the predominantly upper-middle class Scene

VII. It is apparent that Reagan wanted to appeal to Black Americans, but primarily upwardly mobile ones who were likely to vote. (Even so, Mondale won the majority of the Black vote in 1984.) In Scene VII, a black man wearing a suit, who is positioned against an urban background, says, "We're going to be better off in the long run." It was left unclear whether he was referring to Black Americans, all Americans, or both.

No Black women at all appeared in the film, perhaps because Reagan's weakest constituencies were women and Blacks. It was also suggestive of the Reagan Administration's less than liberated attitude toward women that only one could be identified by occupational group, and none in terms of social class. One businesswoman was photographed against an urban street background, and she was wearing a foulard tie which is stereotypical attire for businesswomen (Scene IX). This woman accused those uncertain of Reagan's position on the issues of not having a television--implying that people could (and should) be informed merely by watching television, an assertion which is contestable. All other women were photographed against a blurred, or a floral background and were dressed anonymously. One woman (Scene IV) was even standing in front of a stream of rippling water. These settings were certainly picturesque, but they contrasted markedly with building sites, golf courses, and noisy city streets which located the men in the world of work.

The elderly also received their own special section of the film, tied to Ronald Reagan's commitment to Social Security. An elderly man commended Reagan for getting inflation down (as if Reagan did this personally), and a woman asserted that he was a "caring man." Again, these were stereotypical notions of what were male and female (and elderly) concerns. These easily recognizable and identifiable figures presented what was, for Republican purposes, a well-rounded picture of America. Like visual clichés, they provided points of orientation for many voting Americans who identified with these groups. Most importantly, not much reflection was required. These people espoused values which were representative of social groups and their interests. Women, Blacks, workers, and the elderly appeared disproportionately in comparison to other sections of the population. The people who did appear functioned to create the illusion of consensus; they represented the Republicans' image of the political center which they wanted to gather into their fold. Just like visual clichés, these simplistic stereotypes served to mask conflict and diversity of opinion and interests. These spokespersons provided "evidence" that America was experiencing a patriotic awakening and an economic resurgence, and that Ronald Reagan was personally responsible for these events. This was the self-image of America, and Americans, which was reflected by Ronald Reagan and A New Beginning.

Implications

Overall, A New Beginning may be considered in the context of twentieth century capitalist ideology. As Daniel Bell points out, the twentieth century may be viewed as a struggle between traditionalists and modernists who adopt the political philosophy of liberal capitalism. Traditionalists, or Populists, remain tied to the ideas and values which characterize the capitalist ethic: work, family, neighborhood, individualism, equality of opportunity, freedom. Most importantly, this ethic equates work, or productivity, with virtue and self-fulfillment; as such, it directly contradicts the modern liberal ideology. Liberal capitalism, with its assumptions of the desirability of progress, economic growth, and innovation, must constantly create demands and attempt to satisfy them. It emphasizes material gain rather than work as the means to self-fulfillment; the resultant emphasis is upon what a person has and not what a person is. It is tied, thus, to consumer culture. It fosters dependencies upon goods, objects, and services as the means to happiness; its focus is upon novelty, immediate gratification, sensation, and impact.

It is not accidental that, while Reagan associates himself with traditional values, his conservative position retains the liberal assumptions about the benefits of economic growth and progress. In many ways, he gathers the forces of modernity--technology, innovation, and even visual communication, and constructs a framework within which he

places traditionalism. In so doing, he sells "new" wine in "old" bottles. A New Beginning promulgates Reagan's conservative ideology not by informing and persuading, but through mythic symbolizations which appeal to his audiences' beliefs, values, and attitudes. As a technologically and politically innovative form, it reinforces the liberal values of growth, change, and progress at the same time that its familiar, clichéd images, drawn from cultural tradition, serve to maintain the status quo. Its complex structure and high production values present a simplistic portrait of America, a reassuring image which can be effortlessly consumed.

In consequence, A New Beginning is a subversion rather than an extension of the democratic process based upon equal participation and informed and reasoned dialogue. It uses a means of communication which is only partly linguistic. Its techniques reproduce and mimic the idiom of "the people," but the people cannot themselves use these techniques in everyday discourse. They are available only to those in control of resources, capital, specialized knowledge, and skills. As a result, there is no common ground of discourse on which the electorate can discuss and debate. Information is placed in the hands of the few who dispose of it as they will. In the case of Ronald Reagan, his use of modern communication forms masks the contradictions which permeate the social, economic, and cultural milieu: those between the capitalist ethic and reality, between tradition and modernity, between producers and consumers in society. He offers A New Beginning as

another object for consumption. It promises happiness and fulfillment in exchange for complicity in the acceptance of prefabricated meaning.

ENDNOTES

¹Michael Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," unpublished manuscript: 1.

²Osborn, 3-4.

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⁴Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Film Theory and Criticism, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 852.

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⁷Gouldner, 168.

⁸Daniel Bell, The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1976) 108.

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¹⁰Paul E. Corcoran, Political Language and Rhetoric (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1979) 197-8.

¹¹Corcoran, 170.

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¹⁷Nichols, 211.

- ¹⁸Rinker Buck, David Friend, and Christopher Wipple, "The Soft Sell," Life (June 1984) 82.
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- ²³Murray Edelman, Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail (NY:: Academic Press, 1977) 3,4.
- ²⁴Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein, The Film Experience: Elements of Motion Picture Art (NY: Harper and Row, 1968) 82.
- ²⁵Anton C. Zijderveld, On Clichés: the Supersedure of Meaning by Function in Modernity (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) 10.
- ²⁶George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago press, 1980) 14.
- ²⁷Bible. Gen. 1:1. trans. from Latin Vulgate (NY: Sheed and Ward: 1954).
- ²⁸zidjerveld, 47.
- ²⁹zidjerveld, 7.
- ³⁰zidjerveld, 8.
- ³¹Osborn, 5-7.
- ³²Corcoran, 169.
- ³³Kennedy Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form (New York: Vintage Books, 1957) 195.
- ³⁴Christian Metz, The Imaginary Signifier (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982) 46.

CHAPTER V
DEF(R)AMING FRAME

Introduction

It is apparent that A New Beginning was an effective political tool because the Republicans knew how to manipulate its form and structure to their advantage. By re-presenting familiar myths and clichés through a variety of modes and genres of televisual discourse (all of which were combined in A New Beginning), and by tying these to Ronald Reagan's conservative positions, the Republicans were able to both represent and constitute a coherent ideological stance, one which was perceived to be a credible truth rather than a slanted Republican version of it. Although Ronald Reagan's conservative positions make up his articulatable ideology (using the term in a narrow sense), this was presented to the American people through appeals which were ideological in another, larger sense:

Ideology, in much recent cultural analysis, is understood in Althusser's terms as 'a system with its own logic and rigour' of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical significance and role within a given society. In other words, the work of masking, unifying, or displacing contradictions goes on at one level in the circulation of pre-formed ideas, common sense understandings, the conventional wisdom of a given social group or society. On another level, according to Althusser, this conventional wisdom is materialized in the way we live our daily lives.¹

This suggests that it is not the case that these representations, such as myths, clichés, and commonplaces, can be opposed to everyday reality. On the contrary, these are presentational strategies which mediate and make experience meaningful. They reinforce a particular way of interpreting experience, and because they are ideological, this interpretative frame is posited as non-problematic, transparent, and "natural."

Nor is it the case that symbolic, or "fictional" mediations of experience are necessarily less "true" than those which are interpreted to be less mediated representations, such as news or technical accounts. The frames, or boundaries, which differentiate these discursive forms and genres are themselves socially constructed means whereby meaning and sense are made communicable. In this way, attending to the framing of the film can provide insight into the way in which a non-contradictory ideological position was both represented by the film and created in the process of viewing it; in other words, the way in which a rhetorical reality was constituted rather than merely reflected in A New Beginning.

A New Beginning aimed to create the impression of a hegemonic reality, populated by the prosperous majority of Americans who were supporters of Ronald Reagan. Its rhetorical message of rebirth was made credible, in part, because of the framing of the film. Through manipulation of frame, the boundaries which conventionally differentiate

genres, levels, and even spaces of televisual discourse were rendered indistinguishable. As a result, the viewer was provided with no position from which to differentiate "fact" from "fiction," "performance" from "reality," or "story" from "discourse." Only the voice and figure of Ronald Reagan provided a point of orientation which unified all of the diverse sounds and images comprising the film, and in so doing, positioned the viewer in relation to it. His dual role as both narrator and character, both inside and outside of the film, helped to create a "fiction of discourse" with the viewing audience, one in which a one-way transmission of "reality" was disguised as a two-way dialogic exchange about it.

In order to explain my thesis, first I will elaborate upon the notion of "framing" as it applies to A New Beginning. I will discuss how the different genres of televisual discourse were rendered indistinguishable by the film, thus enabling the Republicans to make an essentially fantastic claim which was interpreted to be credible. Next I will consider how different levels of representation were occluded. The film became indistinguishable from the 'live' convention of which it was a part, and even the frame which separated the televised event and the viewer was occluded. After a discussion of the effect which this had on the relation between voice, character, and viewing audience, I will elaborate upon how the consequent fiction

of discourse served as an instrument of social integration and control.

Framing

Erving Goffman, in Frame Analysis, provides an extensive account of frames and how they are used to define and demarcate experience. Goffman writes:

I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events, at least social ones, and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify.²

Frames, or the organizational principles which govern events, are not inherent in events; they are always imposed as a means with which to interpret them. Frames facilitate communication by providing it with an order or structure within which events can be imbued with sense. It is also the case, as pointed out by Gregory Bateson in his essay, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," that the frames imposed are often implicit and even unconscious. He states:

(d). . . a frame is metacommunicative. Any message which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, ipso facto gives the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included in this frame.

(e) The converse of (d) is also true. Every metacommunicative or metalinguistic message defines, either explicitly or implicitly, the set of messages about which it communicates, i.e., every metacommunicative message is or defines a psychological frame.³

Bateson explains that metacommunicative frames provide means for representing and distinguishing different logical types, levels of abstraction, or in other words, different orders of reality. All communication consists of different, though overlapping, levels of abstraction--the linguistic or visual (denotative) level, the metalinguistic or connotative (rhetorical) level, which is about the relationship between communicants, and the metacommunicative (ideological) level, which is about how the message is to be interpreted. These third level metacommunicative constructs support one interpretive version of reality and necessarily exclude others; as ideological constructs, they invisibly, implicitly order and organize perceptions. Thus, "reality" is constituted by interpretive frames which provide a delimited ground within which messages and events can be discerned at the same time that the frames are made to represent "reality."

It is also the case that the frames which distinguish different logical types and levels of abstraction may be arbitrary and even paradoxical. According to Bateson, it is by manipulating these metacommunicative frames that the ordering principles which govern an event, and thus the event itself, can be re-framed. With the Reagan Administration, this re-framing was accomplished through its use of visual communication. In both a literal and a metaphorical sense, it is the television frame which separates events from the viewers' living rooms. The viewer is aware that the words,

symbols, and images which comprise its messages are mediations, or simulations of events at a different level of abstraction than the viewer's immediate experience. However, this frame is itself paradoxical. These words, symbols, and images both are and are not perceived to be what they represent. Framing these messages as "fact" avoids paradox by equating the representation with what is represented; framing these as fiction, in contrast, also avoids paradox (although conversely). Fictional, explicitly mediated images are often equated with the ideas or attitudes which they connote. It is also in this way that the metacommunicative messages which distinguish "live" events, or news, at one extreme, and artificial constructs such as advertisements, at the other, imply different interpretive frames for these genres of televisual discourse.

The Republicans, however, rendered the boundaries which distinguish these frames indistinguishable. By communicating through television, they pointed to the constructed nature of the discourse. By not framing forms and genres of televisual discourse as distinct, their messages of different logical types and levels of abstraction which were conventionally interpreted to be real or true (such as news or the Republican National Convention), along with more explicitly symbolic representations, together became interpreted to be authentic simulations of reality.

In order to understand this more clearly, it is important to recognize that, as with all processes of

communication, meaning can only be made with the participation of the receiver, or audience, or in this case, the viewer. As David Chaney writes:

. . .each social process of communication invites agreement on the order to be followed. Of course this order is only rarely explicitly addressed, rather it is inferred from cues such as context and memories of other similar expressions and performances. We cannot get inside an author's head, but we can infer the grounds through which his use of imagery is potentially meaningful by situating his work within features of a tradition or genre. The performance is the occasion of our inference of meaning, but we accumulate sense through reference to shared grounds so that performances make sense through each other.⁴

It is in a similar fashion that Osborn suggests that rhetorical depictions have a cumulative impact in the construction of reality. It is these "shared grounds," or interpretive frameworks, which are represented by "simple mythic images."⁵ These "shared grounds," in the forms of myths, clichés, and commonplaces, are perceived to represent truths rather than propositional constructs. It is for this reason, too, that Zijderveld writes that at the core of frames are clichés, which he refers to as "the social knots of communication."⁶ They unify and provide a common interpretive frame for large numbers of social groups, and through their repetition in a variety of cultural forms, they become imprinted in the collective consciousness.

Neither Osborn nor Zijderveld, however, focus upon framing as a means to explain how these shared grounds are

created and maintained. It was, for instance, because of the similar imagery which pervaded both the videotaped film and the "live" convention that the "frame" of the videotape became virtually indistinguishable from the larger event of which it was a part, and both contributed to the message which the Republicans wanted to convey. Later, these boundaries were further confounded when the Republicans combined A New Beginning, parts of a film about Nancy Reagan, and footage from the convention, and re-broadcast the entire melange as a thirty minute paid commercial. Even more cleverly, by framing the film as a documentary to be substituted for the Introductory Speech, the Republicans were able to generate the news event which they claimed it to be in the first place. Simons refers to such a strategy as "persuasion in the guise of objectivity."⁷ Although the film obviously took a partisan stance, the Republicans' classification of it as documentary and as news was an attempt to have it interpreted to be grounded in objective "reality" rather than rhetoric.

A New Beginning also drew upon many cultural images and televisual genres which were familiar to the viewer, although they were typically perceived to be incompatible means of communicating a single message: news, documentary, music video, fiction, advertisement, historical biography, and even elements of a home movie. The interpretive frames both within the film, between the film and the convention, and

thus between the televised event and the viewer became occluded on a number of levels. It is framing which distinguishes different forms, genres, and responses to televisual discourse. As Bateson asserts, the boundaries which separate event from background, or background from larger context, are paradoxical. It is in this sense, too, that Roger Silverstone writes that television is itself a liminal phenomenon, betwixt and between, whose frame both includes and excludes.⁸ The television frame both separates the viewer from an event and allows access to it. In the following section, I will discuss the different ways in which frames were obscured, or in my terms, def(r)amed, in A New Beginning.

Def(r)aming: The Occlusion of Boundaries

One of the most apparent ways in which the Republicans aimed to obscure boundaries was in terms of the internal structure of the film. The Republicans initially framed A New Beginning as a "non-fiction" news event at the Republican National Convention. They hoped that the television audience tuned into the event would perceive it to be a documentary, and they disavowed its nature as an advertisement which could be perceived to be a propagandistic attempt to influence. Framing the film in this manner was an attempt to control the interpretive context in which it was to be viewed by determining the genre in which it was to be placed. Although

A New Beginning shared many characteristics with other political campaign films, the Republicans hoped to create a set of viewer expectations which differed from those associated with fiction, advertisements, or other political films. They hoped that it would elicit responses associated with less overtly mediated representations.

The admixture of visual forms and genres which constituted A New Beginning ranged from those which are typically considered to be highly mediated, and obviously marked by a rhetorical presence, to those which are regarded to be unmediated reflections of reality. It must be remembered, too, that it is rare to find a pure genre; most overlap and borrow from one another, but all aim to be perceived, in one way or another, as credible. The two ends of this continuum are characterized by Goffman's distinction of primary frameworks as either "natural" or "social," and Sol Worth's parallel distinctions between "natural" and "symbolic" sign events. In this way, advertisements and fiction films may be considered to be signs of social frameworks, while news and documentary genres are signs of natural frameworks. Natural signs are believed to be unmediated and to be "caused" by reality rather than vested interests. Worth explains:

Sign events may be natural or symbolic but always have the property of being used in the interpretation of meaning. . . If we assess them as symbolic, we consciously assume implicative intent, and call into play those interpretive strategies by which we infer meaning from communicative events.⁹

On the other hand, Worth continues;

Sign events which are recognized as natural events are taken as informative rather than communicative, and the interpretations are made of them in terms of what we know, think, or feel about the person, objects, or events they represent or refer to. That is, we attribute characteristics to the recognized sign elements on the basis of our knowledge of a world in which we 'know' they are found.¹⁰

It is not that natural and symbolic frameworks are inherently different; both are orderings which are imposed on experience. However, the Republicans took advantage of the fact that the two frameworks are conventionally interpreted as different logical types. It was by occluding the boundaries which demarcate these frames, and the various televisual genres which aspire to one or the other of these frames, that A New Beginning so adeptly provided an interpretive frame for its version of social reality. Symbolic signs such as myths, clichés, and formulaic commonplaces, for instance, were important as suatory devices which repeated, underscored, and dramatized the version of reality put forth by the "natural" signs. Images of the sun shining, the flag being raised, and building construction were provided with a pragmatic context by being juxtaposed with "people on the street" who applauded rising patriotism and declining unemployment. These statements were also supported in Scene VIII by a "fictional" image of a family moving into a new home. Overall, the Republicans attempted

to assure viewers that the primary framework constructed by television was credible, right, and true. This perceived capacity is suggested by Tony Bennett:

Much of television's power lay in its visual and documentary character--it's inscription of itself as merely a 'window on the world,' showing things as they really are. Its propositions and explanations were underpinned by the grounding of this discourse in the real--in the evidence of one's own eyes. Its discourse, that is, appeared peculiarly a naturalistic discourse of fact, statement, and description."

Although television is obviously a mediation, it is believed to reflect reality transparently. These two interpretive frames, the natural and the symbolic, overlap, and while different genres within the television frame are perceived to conform more readily to one or the other, it was by obscuring the boundaries which differentiate them that A New Beginning was so effective as a mode of political discourse. This resulted in a confusion of what was typically interpreted to be fact and fiction, performance and reality, and even history and legend. Images which are interpreted to be highly symbolic--even those which were trite, clichéd, and sentimental--were used to suggest renewal and rebirth; at the same time, they were anchored in reality because they were merged with images which are typically regarded to be unmediated. It was in this way, most importantly, that Ronald Reagan was able to make an essentially "fantastic" claim--that America was undergoing

an economic and spiritual "rebirth"--and was able to make such a claim appear credible.

The assassination (Scene XI) exemplifies this point extremely well. It demonstrates the confusion of the filmic conventions through which viewers interpret different genres of televisual discourse. In Scene X, the elderly voice their support for Ronald Reagan. At the end of this scene, Reagan faces the camera and comments in regard to retirement insurance, "There is no threat, from anyone, certainly not from this Administration, to Social Security." This was a sensitive issue throughout his first term in office, as his efforts to change the system had met with alarmed protests from the elderly. This first sense of Social Security is quickly replaced, however, by another sense of social security--the safety of society and its members, particularly the President. The film's editor, Tom Maniaci, affirmed in an interview that this deflection was intentional.¹² This footage is also recognizable as a genuine news event, one which was totally uncontrolled at that. The camera is hand-held, the shots are poorly composed, and there is background noise and pandemonium. Including this in the film draws upon and recycles the popular memory of this event, for those who saw this replay of the event on television and for those who remember the event but did not "see" it. Significantly, it is the voice of Ronald Reagan, President and narrator, which explains what happened.

Then this "news" event is immediately transformed into a movie; it is narrativized as newspaper headlines and photographs roll across the screen to explain what happened. This is a case where different genres overlap. Newspaper headlines are transitional devices which appear in fiction films of the 1930's as well as in non-fiction newsreels and documentaries. In both cases, they are used both to show the passage of significant, eventful moments in time, and as illustrative "proof" of an event. Steven Neale writes:

However, in genres such as war films or gangster films, a number (by no means all) of the discourses and codes deployed overlap with discourses involved in genres socially defined, perhaps not quite as scientific or documentary, but at least as non-fictional, e.g. newspaper reporting, sociology, the adoption of the 'press release' or of the front page headline style characteristic of, for instance, the work of Sam Fuller. In this way, connotations of non-fiction spill over into or become attached to certain genres because some of their component discourses are also produced, classified and circulated by institutions whose business is supposed to be 'facts' and 'truth' rather than 'fiction' and 'phantasy.'¹³

Thus, this use of headlines is a way to fictionalize, or narrativize, A New Beginning in a way which retains its perceived truth. The attempt to be perceived as plausible is further reinforced by other images in the documentary tradition. Ronald Reagan, the narrator, directly addresses his audience as he faces the camera and narrates his feelings about the event. Here pictures are also used as corroborative testimony which illustrates his words, again reminding the viewer of the "actuality" of the event. This

is the case even to the extent that the words and images do not match. Reagan says, "They shot me right here," although the picture which is shown gives no clue as to where "here" is. The editor said that still photographs were used primarily because there were no filmic visuals to make their point; here, however, the photograph seems to be out of place. Yet, this disjuncture may have functional value for the Republicans. The picture is a testimony to the event, while Reagan's voice-over narration is a testimony that he has overcome it.

There is another disjuncture here. Reagan then directly faces the camera. He is relaxed, wearing casual clothing and he is seated against a serene background. Here he tells a joke which was often repeated at the time of the assassination attempt: "When I saw all those doctors around me I said I hoped they were all Republicans." This humanizes him and makes him one of the people, immediately after which he is elevated above them. He is associated with divinity as he is next presented in another still photograph with the late Cardinal Cooke. In this case, the film's editor said that although they had film footage of Reagan meeting with the Pope in Alaska, they chose to use the photograph with the Cardinal because "he said nicer things." Also, although the Republicans may have wanted to associate Reagan with divinity, the Pope may have been too strong a symbol of Catholicism, which they did not necessarily want. The Cardinal served their purpose, which was to suggest that

Ronald Reagan, like America, had been reborn. Reagan is presented as both one of the people and above them; like Christ, he is part man and part God. Reagan echoes Cooke's words to drive this point home: "God must have been sitting on your shoulder," and he ends by saying, "He must've been. . . .Whatever time I've got left, it now belongs to someone else." Sentimental music plays in the background. Again, this musical device would never occur in news events, and would be very unusual in documentaries. It lends the scene an emotional quality which is more characteristic of fiction or even commercials.

Throughout this scene, the viewers are taken seamlessly from footage which they take to be "real" to a scene which is fantastic. Reagan is presented as virtually a Christ figure--but because the boundaries between these different genres of representation are unclear, this message appears to be credible, and its fictional qualities may not even be noticed.

In A New Beginning, rendering the frames which delimit different televisual genres indistinguishable allowed the Republicans to make a fantastic claim which was interpreted to be "reality." This version of reality was conveyed, moreover, by merging the frames which differentiate levels of representation as well as the representational genres themselves. Television, like Bateson's description of play, is doubly abstract and thus doubly paradoxical. Bateson writes that acts which are framed as play are simulations of

first order 'mood' signs, or denotative signs. In play, these are 'bracketed' and given an "as if" status. Television events, too, have an "as if" status. Events portrayed on television re-present but do not denote an actual, immediately experienced event; they are fictional in that they communicate about something that is not present and thus does not "exist"; television events are always mythic in that they transform ordinary reality, which may be unfamiliar or even threatening, into a framework which is coherent and thus reassuring. Television events are provided with meaning by their generic frames; these frames are, however, themselves framed by the television medium which implicitly works to establish the authenticity of its messages--whether the "objective" referential reality of its natural signs, or the "subjective" symbolic reality which particular organizations of signs connote. In this sense, television's messages are framed as dis-play. They are simulations which purport to be presentations. It is their "as if" status which becomes bracketed. Televisual dis-plays become spectacles; they are performances which are framed by the real. In consequence, "the 'real' is a replayed image, a scene, a simulation--the hyperreal."¹⁴

Thus, as was so well demonstrated by the presentation of A New Beginning, the television medium is itself a metacom-
municative frame within which the validity, or authenticity, of its messages is asserted. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz make the following point which is also pertinent to this

discussion of A New Beginning:

Television, in our time, has become the dominant mode of publicness, and we are witnessing the replacement of what could be called a "theatrical" mode of publicness, an actual meeting of performers and public in places such as parliament houses, churches, convention floors, by a new mode of publicness, based on the potential separation of performers and audiences, and on the rhetoric of narration rather than the virtue of contact.

This mode is justifiably mistrusted since its dynamics lead to substitute simulation for representation, and since simulation, when endowed with authority, may turn into what Austin called "performative," and thus constitute a social reality. Our era, as Baudrillard pointed out, after Benjamin, might be that of simulacra; of images without originals, of images whose effectiveness is not in the least impoverished by such a lack.¹⁵

Considered in this way, television's messages are simulations which define and are defined by a frame which affirms their "authenticity." In so doing, television denies its own status as a frame which orders and organizes, and thus constitutes, perceptions. Its simulations of reality become the reality which they purport to represent. It was because of this perceived capacity of television that the Republicans were able to use it to constitute a reality. In contrast to political speechmaking, which Dayan and Katz would characterize as a "theatrical" mode of publicness, Reagan used television to simulate discourse which was perceived to be authentic and authoritative. One way in which the television frame achieves this effect is through modes of address which create the impression of "liveness"

and immediacy, thus simulating the "presence" of discourse which refers to, rather than constitutes, a reality. This avoids the paradox of television--its liminal, mythic, "as if" status within which its messages are accepted as authoritative and true. The metacommunicative frame within which television discourse is delimited is naturalized; it is made to be invisible and transparent so that the boundaries which differentiate levels of representation--past and present, mythic and discursive, fiction and history, even fantasy and reality--become doubly unified. Reality is framed by its simulation and in this way it becomes intelligible. John Ellis writes:

The broadcast media has the effect of immediacy. It is as though the television image is a 'live' image, transmitted and received in the same moment that it is produced. . .the notion that broadcast television is live still haunts the medium; even more so does the sense of immediacy of the image. The immediacy of the broadcast image does not just lie in the presumption that it is live; it lies more in the relations that the image sets up for itself. Immediacy is the effect of the directness of the television image, the way in which it constitutes itself and its viewers as held in a relationship of co-present intimacy.¹⁶

It is this effect of liveness and immediacy which simulates the "presence" of discourse and enables Ronald Reagan, as the narrator of A New Beginning, to emerge as the unifying point of reference, himself a simulation whose projection of the present is a re-presentation, or recreation, of the past. It is also these characteristics which distinguish A New Beginning from cinema. Narrative

cinema, in particular, is more clearly a spectacle whose frame demarcates its "as if" status and separates performance and audience. A New Beginning, however, was an "electronic ceremony"¹⁷ which was both spectacle, requiring no audience participation, and discursive event (i.e., it was a rhetorical ritual) which depended upon the interaction of participants-- i.e., performers and audience. Dayan and Katz suggest that electronic ceremonies contain elements of both spectacle and festival. However, as a specifically political event, A New Beginning was a rhetorical ceremony rather than a festival; it was a form of public address. Despite this difference, Dayan and Katz's observations apply to A New Beginning:

By turning into a spectacle, an interactive ceremony undergoes an obvious impoverishment. The surprise is that while television represents an occasion, and therefore flattens it into a spectacle, it gives itself a new mission: that of offering an equivalent to the lost participatory dimension. Thus while destroying interaction by its very similarity to cinema, television performs (or simulates) it anew.¹⁸

To a large extent, television simulates interactive discourse by creating the impression of liveness and immediacy. The Republican National Convention was itself a televised event which people conventionally believe to be a live and immediate "actual" event; a television film such as A New Beginning, similarly, consists of levels of representation within the film which range from the spectacular to the discursive. By creating the impression of liveness and

immediacy, the Republicans were able to simulate discourse and thus to deny any discontinuity between the film, the convention, and even the viewing audience. They relied upon the metacommunicative frame of television and its presentation of itself as "mere mediator." Dayan and Katz explain:

If the event itself is speech, then television as "mere mediator" is supposed to connect this speech to its audience without superimposing its own speech upon it. Television is thus entrusted with, and appears to restrict itself to, the 'phatic' function of communication: insuring that there is a contact between partners, that the channel for communication is free.¹⁹

By using television as mediator of their electronic ceremony (or rhetorical ritual), the Republicans were able to convey their version of reality through a fictional discourse in which the public could participate. By abolishing the distance, or frame, which separated A New Beginning and the convention from their audience, the Republicans created the impression of discursive co-presence and intimacy. The convention itself had been wired for television; as a televisual event, it was organized and arranged in much the same manner as A New Beginning. Positions were pre-arranged so that network television cameras would transmit good visuals. This projected the image of an exuberant celebration which was transmitted to the home audience "as it occurred." The Republicans wanted to establish a communality of celebration. This was accomplished, in one way, by the proliferation of crowd shots at the convention, in addition to those which were included in A New Beginning. Just as a

cross-section of Americans were presented in A New Beginning, the network cameras at times provided close-up shots of the cheering conventioners, who were waving symbols such as flags, banners, and red, white and blue balloons. In one sense, the convention was a frame within which A New Beginning was to be interpreted--the actual, "live" celebratory event which provided the backdrop for the videotaped film. The visual sounds and images which constituted both events were remarkably similar, so much so that the convention supported the film's message of rebirth, as evidenced by the cheering and patriotic crowds.

The compatibility of both film and convention was further dramatized when, following the convention, the Republicans combined scenes from the convention, parts of a film about Nancy Reagan, and A New Beginning, and re-broadcast the entirety as a paid half hour commercial which appeared simultaneously on all three networks across the United States. Here the "live" conventioners from the original event more obviously became echoes of the Americans interviewed in the film. All were presented to the viewing audience in intimate close-up shots, so that viewer and image appeared to be face to face. The closing shot of A New Beginning even dissolved into an image of the convention (underscoring their unity), and then the "live" Ronald Reagan began his Acceptance Speech.

Even prior to this re-playing of the electronic event, the television networks had a role to play in the merging of

the film and the convention which both framed, and was framed by, A New Beginning. Although no network footage appeared in the reconstructed political advertisement which the event became, the coverage during the convention unintentionally suited the Republican purposes. This was partly because the images which they transmitted had been pre-ordained by the Republicans, and partly because their means of attending to A New Beginning pointed to it as an event to which it was worth attending.

The three major networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, took different approaches to televising the film, which all considered to be a commercial as opposed to a documentary or "news." This insistence upon discrete categorizations was itself questionable, both because of the structure of the film and because so many of the "news" events telecast by the networks throughout Reagan's first term in office had been similarly constructed. Reagan's trip to the Demilitarized Zone in Korea, for example, which appeared in Scene VI, had earlier appeared on the evening news. Network camera positions for this event had been prearranged; Reagan had toe marks telling him exactly where to stand in order to convey the best visuals, and he even dressed in military uniform for dramatic effect.²⁰ This, at the time, was advertising for Ronald Reagan, but it met with no resistance.

During the Republican National Convention, however, the networks objected to the substitution of the film for the traditional Nominating Speech. This may have been, in part,

because their objection to A New Beginning would not hurt their ratings; if anything, the attention given to the film would improve them. It is possible, too, that they protested the presentation of A New Beginning because they felt that the Republicans had flaunted the implicit rules of television and the convention. Not only was a speech not being given, but the frames which distinguish different genres of televisual discourse, such as advertisements, fiction, documentary, and news, were intentionally and blatantly being obscured. The networks could not, however, see that the frames which differentiate levels of representation had also been occluded. They could not prevent the Republicans from using the very medium of television to dissolve the boundaries between reality, representation, discourse, and performance. Thus, the networks all responded to what they perceived to be the Republican attempt to break the rules by doing so themselves, but in a manner which only reinforced the pseudo-discursive reality of A New Beginning.

As a result, the CBS announcers broke the rule, stated by Dayan and Katz, that at an electronic event, the event takes precedence. The outside narrator's voice should be inobtrusive. Ideally, this voice, "grafts itself onto the continuity of the event, and its presence must not prevent viewers from 'flowing' with the event."²¹ First of all, CBS showed only the conclusion of the film, thus keeping the viewers from the event, and the announcers Dan Rather and Bill Plante did point to its rhetorical and constructed

nature, which was a way of editorializing about it. But A New Beginning had already been heralded in the print media, and much suspense had been generated as to what this film was and whether it would be shown. For this reason, the announcers' intrusions merely kept the viewer from 'flowing' with the event, and perhaps made the viewer more eager to see it.

Even when CBS did show the film, the videoscreen on which it appeared was (literally) framed by the "live" convention in the foreground, filled with cheering conventioners. Similarly, NBC announcers Tom Brokaw and Roger Mudd discussed the film against the background of the convention floor. Their remarks, overlaid upon the "live" event and interspersed between the "live" event and the film (itself intercut with images of the "live" convention) served only to prevent the viewers from immersing themselves in it, and consequently produced a "desire for contact"--that is, for the pseudo-discourse and images of A New Beginning. Their words were easily displaced by the immediacy and presence of the combinations of words, sounds, and images which constituted A New Beginning and the "live" celebration which was the convention.

NBC was the only network to announce that it would show the film in its entirety, and their criticisms were the most scathing. Roger Mudd called attention to what was excluded and what was included in the film, presumably to highlight the bias in the film. However, this merely provided the

negative background against which the positive figure of A New Beginning could be comprehended. The NBC showing was also interrupted with several unannounced cutaways. These were presumably devices meant to distance the viewer and to call attention to the film as a televisual event. Yet, this may have had the opposite effect. The "live" convention became virtually indistinguishable from the film itself, and the different levels of mediation became merged. This was further compounded by shots of Ronald Reagan arriving at the convention hall in time to watch himself on television.

The NBC cameras even managed, in one instance, to provide a transition from the penultimate to the concluding scene of the film. They cut away from the film, where the American service flags and banners were on screen, to the convention floor. There, conventioners were watching the videoscreen in the background; in the foreground, a large American flag was waved in response to the film. When the cameras returned to the film, the image showed a policeman hoisting a flag--the repetition thus stressing the continuity between the film and the convention. The convention became part of the film which was part of the convention, and the convention's perceived qualities of liveness, immediacy, and authenticity became unified with the perceived authority of the film.

ABC took yet another approach to A New Beginning. Announcer Jeff Greenfield contrasted the Reagan and Mondale films, both of which were shown only in excerpted form. He

referred to these as a political debate, though "fought out not in face-to-face argument, but with the weapons of the mass media, especially with images and symbols aimed at our hearts more than our heads."²² Freeze-frames were taken from both films, and were placed in juxtaposition on a split video screen. Greenfield then analyzed the similarities and differences which marked the "debate." Yet, even if these image displays could be called a debate, it was essentially no contest. Reagan had the advantage from the outset. Both the live convention and A New Beginning were celebrations of Ronald Reagan, and the strategic placement of A New Beginning as a substitute for the Nominating Speech generated excitement about it before it was ever shown. Mondale's film received no such acclaim.

Greenfield's comparison of the verbal images which appeared in both films, while hardly constituting a non-verbal repartee, did highlight the candidates' differences in a manner which favored Ronald Reagan. Like most political campaign films, both were comprised of many clichés and symbols of America. The Statue of Liberty, for instance, appeared in both films; yet in the Reagan film the Statue was being reconstructed, as was America. The White House appeared in both films, although in A New Beginning, it dissolved into an image of Ronald Reagan at his desk in the Oval Office. He had the advantage of incumbency to make him appear to be at home there. Both men were shown greeting soldiers (another convention of political campaign films),

but Reagan was also dressed in the military uniform. The Mondale film was far more explanatory, laborious, and less cheerful, optimistic, and visually exciting than was A New Beginning. This attempt to disrupt the event, like that of CBS and NBC, only served to make the Republicans more appealing. It concretized the Republican position by showing what it was not.

Voice and Framing in A New Beginning

Within A New Beginning itself, it is the voice and figure of Ronald Reagan which provides the unifying point of reference for all of the different levels of representation. As both narrator and character (both within and outside of A New Beginning), he creates a sense of "presence" and intimacy with the viewer. He is the subject of both the film and the convention; he is also narrator and character within the film. As such, he is an image, or simulation, which conveys an impression of authority. Colin McArthur describes this function of the narrator as follows:

. . .the central ideological function of the narration is to confer authority on, and to elide contradictions in, the discourse. In a patriarchal society the narrator must therefore be a man and in a bourgeois society his voice must be one which signifies authority.²³

It is the narrator, in both film and television, who is perceived to be the "Voice of Truth" and who organizes all of the discourses which make up the visual text. By directly or indirectly addressing an audience, both the narrator and

characters in a film convey the impression of discourse, although it is the narrator who is guarantor of its truth. It is in this way, too, that Ronald Reagan as narrator unifies all of the different levels of representation, which can be characterized according to their different modes of address. The perceived liveness and immediacy of television, for instance, is a function of its modes of address. Another way to conceptualize this is in terms of "discourse" and "histoire." Margaret Morse distinguishes these two modes of representation as follows:

Perhaps because TV talk is fashioned from the stuff of everyday life, television itself seems more 'real' and everyday than other media. But if television is a 'reality' factory, its means of production are not the 'realism' of the novel or the cinema, based on 'pure and simple' narration of the facts, a story without a narrator, but rather discourse and the self-referential reality of human dialogue. Discourse is 'every utterance assuming a speaker and hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way; its persons are 'I' and 'you,' its basic tense is the present or 'the time at which one is speaking,' 'the coincidence of the event described with the discourse that describes it.' Story and discourse, then, are two planes of language, the former suppressing subjectivity in order to refer to an objective and separate realm of space and time inhabited by others (he, she and it), the latter a plane of subjectivity in which a person, 'I,' adopts responsibility for an utterance and calls for intersubjective relations with a 'you' in the here and now.²⁴

Considered in this way, A New Beginning occluded the boundaries which distinguish histoire and discourse (as does all television discourse). Morse refers to these as two

planes, or spaces, rather than levels or even frames. She writes that narrative cinema is the realm of story space, where discursive space, marked by the presence of a narrator, is only implied; with television, however, discourse and story space overlap, so that television gives an impression, or "fiction" of discourse. Television establishes pseudo-social relations, what John Caughie describes as "imaginary social relations":

People characterize unmet media figures as if they were intimately involved with them, and in a sense they are--they engage in pseudo-social relations with them. . . a major form of artificial social involvement is through media consumption.²⁵

Through A New Beginning, the Republicans took advantage of television's admixture of story and discourse, and the consequent role of the narrator as voice of authority, as well as the imaginary social relations which are established. What occurs, through televisual discourse, is that the frame which separates the viewing audience from an event becomes dissolved. As Morse continues, "it (discursive space) spreads itself like another plane over the story space of television and it encompasses our living rooms as well."²⁶

Morse also asserts that television narration is the primary constituent of discursive space. The televisual narrator and characters create the impression of discourse, of communication which defines an "I" and implies a "you." That this "I" is a simulation, an image, is of little consequence, for as in the case of Ronald Reagan, the image

is the reality. Most importantly, this is possible because the frame which separates televisual reality from immediate reality is dissolved. Referring back to Bateson can help to explain this process:

In what should be triadic constellations of messages, the frame setting message (e.g. the phrase "as if") is omitted, and the metaphor or fantasy is narrated and acted upon in a manner which would be more appropriate if the fantasy were a message of the more direct kind. . . .With the loss of the ability to set metacommunicative frames, there is also a loss of the ability to achieve the more primary or primitive message. The metaphor is treated directly as a message of the more primary type.²⁷

Bateson suggests that if frames are omitted, people act on myths or fantasies as if they were direct messages. Although Bateson is not referring to television, television does fall into the realm of myths, fantasies, play, and other simulations which become substitutes for experience. Myths, fantasies, images, or simulations, without a frame, cannot demarcate and delimit experience. The viewer has no position outside of the television frame from which to evaluate experience. Television presents a myth, a story, even a spectacle of discourse in a way which defines reality for its viewers. There is no frame which separates simulation from representation of an event; the space of television is not contained by its frame (both literally and figuratively) and the imaginary social relations which it constructs are the reality. In the following section, I will explain the way that, through their use of voice and modes of address in A

New Beginning, the Republicans merged the boundaries which separated discourse from *histoire* and the viewer from the plane, or space, of televisual discourse.

Modes of Address

As mentioned above, television foregrounds "discursive space" while in narrative cinema, "story space" or *histoire* predominates. *Histoire*, the fictional space within which a story is told, is separated from the viewing audience by the cinematic "frame." The presence of the audience is not acknowledged in the self-contained world of the film; the presence of narration, of someone telling the story from a position outside, is at best only implied. A seamless, fictional world is created which is undisturbed by the presence of a narrator who takes responsibility for this fiction.

In contrast, expository forms such as documentary and political films, as well as the entire realm of television, occupy discursive space, so that *histoire* is subordinated to discourse. John Ellis names three characteristics of television which place it in this realm: its segmental narrative structure (distinguished by genres), its perceived qualities of liveness and immediacy, and its dominant mode of direct address.²⁸ It is the interplay of both visual images and the verbal structures of address that constitutes the discursive space of television; it is also through this interplay that the frames which separate discourse and

histoire become occluded, so that both spaces intersect with and support one another, and in this way they position the viewer in relation to the visual text.

Andrew Tolson, in "Anecdotal Television," disagrees with Ellis to some extent and suggests that television is not always perceived to be "live." He asserts that the discursive space of television is structured by a hierarchical arrangement of three spatial conventions: place, time, and mode of address.²⁹ "Live" studio events, where a narrator, synchronized with his/her image, directly "speaks to" an audience, are perceived to be most authentic and authoritative. At the other end of the spectrum, "actual" and recorded events, where characters are involved in indirect address (and thus are oblivious to the viewing audience) construct a story space which serves mainly as a support for the authority of the discursive narrator. (Considered in an odd manner, this may also account for the effectiveness of advertisements which intervene in the story space of television shows.) It is the narrator, inserted into the story, who organizes and frames this space. The ensuing "fiction of discourse" enables the narrator to appear to be addressing the audience from a position of knowledge, "outside" of the combinations of words, sounds, and images which construct the film. In this way, histoire is used to support the truth of the narrator's position.

Tolson also suggests that the anecdote is the mode of argument best suited to televisual communication. He defines

the anecdote and its structure as follows:

Anecdotes can be defined as incidental narratives which perform an illustrative or exemplary function. They are incidental in two senses: firstly, they are incidentally produced--i.e., more or less spontaneous, casual, habitual. . .secondly, they are focused around a specific incident or event which defines the extent of the story. Rhetorically, in many kinds of speech, the tactic is to use such incidental narratives to exemplify some kind of general point--usually a moral, which may take the form of a maxim, aphorism, or proverb: 'And it all goes to show. . .' etc.

Firstly, as befits the moral tale, anecdotes have a retrospective focus. That is, the anecdotal incident is strictly framed in the past--there is no present or future in these stories, and no sense of an unexpected outcome. . . .At the most. . .a kind of suspense is created by the delay of a predictable outcome--but there is no real uncertainty. . . .The position of the listener then, is highly secure in this type of narrative.³⁰

Tolson believes that the anecdotal effect of television is a consequence of the hierarchical structure of televisual space and the interplay of place, time, and modes of address. In A New Beginning, anecdotes--brief, segmental, retrospective narratives, framed in the past, serve as supports for the "live," authoritative presence of Ronald Reagan, who directly addresses the audience and thus simulates discourse. In this way, the interplay of spatial conventions and the modes of address with which they co-occur can be means of communicating about "reality." Bill Nichols, in Ideology and the Image, defines modes of address as "patterns of sound/image which specify a 'place' or

attitudes for the viewer."³¹ Their interrelations, which constitute the discursive space of a televisual presentation, also construct the overall "voice" of the film--"that which conveys a sense to us of the text's point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the material which it is presenting to us."³²

It was the voice (and figure) of Ronald Reagan which unified the spaces of discourse and *histoire* in A New Beginning in order to create a "fiction of discourse," and the film's use of anecdotal logic was such that this discourse was familiar and reassuring to the viewer. Ronald Reagan was both narrator and character in A New Beginning; the image of "Ronald Reagan" both constituted and was constituted by various anecdotal structures throughout the film. Similarly, the resultant fiction of discourse both constituted and was constituted by the viewing audience outside of the film.

Thus, A New Beginning may be analyzed in terms of Tolson's three hierarchical categories of place, time, and mode of address. On television, discursive place, time, and mode of address take precedence (that is, are able to interpret or comment upon less "discursive" arrangements). Discursive place is that of a studio. In A New Beginning, the White House is like the television studio--it is a controlled, quiet, and serene environment; it is the site from which the world of "actuality" can be interpreted. Actuality, on the other hand, does not take precedence on

television. It is in the realm of story space. Television time is either recorded or "live" and, needless to say, "live" presentations construct discursive space and take precedence over recorded ones. Modes of address are either direct or indirect, and direct address takes precedence over indirect address.

Considered in terms of this hierarchical structure and its various permutations, it is easy to see that A New Beginning begins by merging two televisual genres in the space/time of televisual discourse. The film begins in story space which is framed in the past. Both Ronald Reagan's 1980 Inaugural Address and images of America and Americans are located in different places, but both are "actual" in the sense that the term is being used here. They are not studio events, and all images are recorded and characterized by indirect address. The priority of the Inauguration is asserted, however, for its indirect address becomes the voice-over narration for the other images in the scene. The Inauguration occupies the discursive space of the entire scene. It is also associated with a prior reality, for it recalls the past where it "really" happened. These images are also marked by music, but this is clearly subordinated to the replaying of Reagan's Inaugural oath. In this way, A New Beginning begins with an anecdote, one which recalls a previous event and places Ronald Reagan within it in order to make a point.

It is in Scene II, however, that Ronald Reagan moves from character to narrator, from indirect story space to the direct address which constitutes discursive space. It is in this scene that he retrospectively "frames" the opening anecdote, both defining and becoming defined by it. As the images of both the Inauguration and America merge into the White House, marking the end of the anecdote, Reagan's "live" off-camera voice directly addresses the audience and explains the significance of the first scene, "Yes, it was quite a day. . . a new beginning."

Throughout Scene II, Reagan's voice remains off-camera. Discursive and story space overlap here, as the visual images remain in the space of *histoire*. In his function as narrator, Reagan describes his presidential duties; at the same time, he is a character who acts on screen. As narrator, he establishes a discursive relation with his audience, although as character he is not aware of their existence. He takes on dual roles here, although the hierarchical space of television assures that his role as narrator is perceived to be more authoritative. For instance, when Reagan the narrator asserts that his job is not lonely, the images show Reagan the character working alone at his desk. Here the picture belies the words, but it only serves to support the image of "Ronald Reagan." This only reinforces his modest stoicism. His role as narrator "authenticates" and renders coherent the fictional story space, but the story space, too, supports his position as

narrator. It is the interrelation of character and narrator which constitutes the resultant "image" of Ronald Reagan. This image draws upon and reflects other already constituted images of "Ronald Reagan" outside of the film.

It is in Scene II, also, that the voice of Ronald Reagan is established as the "institutional" voice of A New Beginning. His is the voice of authority which is distinguished from the other, subordinate voices throughout the film. (In fact, Nancy Reagan's position is so subordinate that although she appears in many scenes throughout the film, she has no voice. She does not speak.) John Hartley distinguishes between "institutional" and "accessed" voices. Institutionalized voices are those which are fully 'naturalized,' so that:

These voices deny their constructed, provisional status--the things they say are said as if they were completely transparent. 'Reality' simply appears through them.

However:

. . .the accessed voices which take the form of interviews or on the spot comments are separated from the reporter's own account. There is a code of 'being interviewed': the individual is filmed in close up, but never addresses his/her remarks directly to camera; instead, s/he appears to be talking to an unseen reporter, who is stationed discreetly off-camera.³³

Accessed voices are less authoritative than are institutionalized voices, which are those of narrators who directly address the camera (with the most authority when they are perceived to be in live, studio situations). Thus, when

George Bush speaks in Scene III, he does not directly address the camera. He is presented as if in a conversation with Ronald Reagan. He indirectly addresses the viewing audience. His authority is also subordinated by visual means--as he speaks, the backside of a horse points in his face. The film's editor, Tom Maniaci, said that this was not intentional.³⁴ It may not have been, but it is an example of the excess meaning which visual images and texts contain. Bush is located in the White House, which serves as the "studio" space throughout the film. Yet, if this space is authoritative, it is not the province of George Bush. His main purpose is to provide support for the claim that America is experiencing a "new beginning," and to link the series of anecdotal images which follow to Ronald Reagan.

Bush is followed by a series of interviews with six "ordinary Americans" who attest to American spiritual and economic renewal. None of these people directly face the camera; their voices are accessed. Bill Nichols discussed this function of the interview in expository forms:

Interviews then provide elaboration. They contribute emotional and moral proofs--we align ourselves for or against characters according to their apparent credibility. By giving us access to 'ordinary people' the narrator's own status rises; their testimony almost invariably bears out the narrator's thesis; the viability of our access to knowledge through the locus of He-who-knows is reconfirmed.³⁵

Thus, the people interviewed provide support for Ronald Reagan; they function as anecdotal dramatizations who testify

to the themes already introduced by Ronald Reagan. Their positions are less authoritative than those of George Bush. They are interviewed "on-the-street," in "actuality" rather than in the White House. They are easily identified "types" who are interviewed against backgrounds which help to locate them socially. They are presented as real life "ordinary Americans" although it is easy to see from an analysis of the spatial relations constructed by the film that they are fictional. They are placed in actuality, in recorded time, and their mode of address is indirect. They are thus securely within the realm of story space which is framed and rendered coherent by the film's narrator, Ronald Reagan. In fact, they were not "ordinary Americans," with all that this term implies. They were friends of Republican campaign workers--not exactly a random sample.³⁶

The last person interviewed serves as a transition to Scene V--his voice is entirely functional. Scene V is the most clearly articulated story space of the entire film. It is pure spectacle--it is a song where the voice of Lee Greenwood sings "God Bless the USA." This song was later nominated for a Grammy Award and it became a music video whose images mimicked this scene of the film. This is just an example of how the genres within the film echoed, recalled, and collapsed into other cultural forms. The boundaries which were dissolved were not just within the film. Considered in the context of A New Beginning, however, the song serves primarily to construct the fantasy of the

film. All of its themes and images appear in this sequence of images: rebirth, renewal, pride, patriotism, optimism, work, faith, family, and peace (to name a few). Throughout the film, these images are recalled and repeated; they are reiterated by both characters and by the narrator, Ronald Reagan. They become integrated with the discursive space of the film, as the fantasy becomes framed by "reality."

It is the voice of Ronald Reagan, predictably, which bridges this sequence to Scene VI, where he relates America's reawakening of pride and patriotism to the military. Here again, he is both narrator and character as his off-screen voice describes the images within the frame. This scene, too, serves as anecdotal support, as illustrative proof of the humanity tempered by authority of "Ronald Reagan"--Ronald Reagan as both character and narrator, as one of the people and a leader who is above them, as he appears inside and outside of the film. His character even breaks into the discourse of the narrator here, as character Reagan remarks that the food on his cafeteria tray "looks good." He does not directly address the audience, but the combination of both voices indicates the unity of character and narrator, and the fiction of discourse which is A New Beginning.

It is not until Scene VIII, after more people have been interviewed and devices such as newspaper headlines and images of building have appeared as yet other forms of testimony, that Ronald Reagan actually appears on camera as a talking head who directly addresses his audience. His

function as framer of the story space is quite apparent here, for as he speaks corroborative images flash on screen. He orders and organizes all of the images which surround him; in a sense, he makes them "exist." His voice and figure authenticate them; at the same time, these images (some of which, such as newspaper headlines, have a prior "authenticity," support his discourse.

In Scene X, when Reagan appeals to the elderly, he attempts to present himself as one of them. He begins by claiming that he is an elderly citizen himself; he dresses in casual clothing. However, the hierarchical structure of discourse space is preserved. Two elderly interviewees and Ronald Reagan are framed in close-up. Their heads are face-to-face with the viewer, as they simulate the presence and intimacy of discourse. However, only Ronald Reagan stares directly into the camera; the interviewees look off to the side. This preserves his authoritative status.

As the film progresses, Ronald Reagan takes on a more prominent role as narrator, firmly established in a position of authority. He directly addresses his audience from the White House, and "the people" who speak for themselves (even if indirectly) gradually disappear. Ronald Reagan, both character and narrator, speaks for himself--he supports himself. This coincides to a great extent with Scene XI, which is the re-presentation of his attempted assassination. Here Reagan takes on a variety of roles, as he shifts in and out of direct and indirect address, and in and out of

discourse and story space. It is in this way that his image is constituted throughout the film, as Ronald Reagan as character and narrator frame one another and unify the space of discourse and histoire. In this assassination scene, for example, Reagan is first presented as a character, located in actuality, who is not aware of the viewing audience outside of the film. There are newspaper headlines and photographs, as well as still photographs which are accompanied by Reagan's voice-over narration; finally, he appears as a "live" character/narrator who directly addresses his audience from the White House. This scene begins in story space but ends in discursive space.

It is as if this scene transformed the character into the narrator in the same way that the "human" Ronald Reagan became transformed to the "divine". "Ronald Reagan," after this, represents the unified realms of story and discourse. This is evidenced during the following scenes, when he travels to Japan and China. He becomes a man of peace, empowered to unify opposites such as East and West. He no longer needs the anecdotal support of the American people. It is not his character which requires illustrative proof anymore; rather, anecdotes testify to his authoritative position as President, as "narrator" who represents the American people. This is illustrated in Scene XIII, when he presides over the D-Day commemoration in Normandy. Character and narrator become merged here, as Reagan shifts back and forth, virtually imperceptibly, from Presidential character

who delivers a speech at Normandy to narrator outside of the event who comments upon it. His voice also has evocative power--as he recalls D-Day, the visual image which appears is from "actual" archival footage of the American troops landing on the Beach of Normandy, and as he recalls the sounds of gunfire, the viewer, too, hears sound effects of the boats landing. It is this power of the narrator, to re-call, re-order, and re-organize events, which conveys the "truth" of the fiction of discourse.

Finally, the film ends with the voice of the narrator, having already established its authority and authenticity, providing Ronald Reagan's own biography--that is, establishing the "character" of the character. This is where Ronald Reagan the narrator states:

Before I reached my decision to run for re-election, some people thought that maybe I'd be happy to retire to that beautiful ranch outside Santa Barbara, and spend the rest of my life enjoying the simple things, riding horses, chopping wood and spending time with Nancy, being outdoors and close to all of God's natural gifts. (Scene XIV)

This scene, along with many others in the film, and along with many other examples of his discourse outside of the film, highlights Reagan's mode of presentation which is not theatrical but is expertly "discursive." Reagan is not only an actor, but he is a professional narrator who knows how to address television audiences. His voice is warm, conversational, subtle and artfully nuanced. His tones bespeak sincerity; his voice enables him to appear to be

"just a regular guy." It was just this sort of "hokey" character which he cultivated in his film roles, and it is this character which he cultivates as President of the United States. In this way, television's anecdotal effect is ideally suited to him (and he to it). It is often claimed that he speaks and understands most things anecdotally.³⁷ In this way, he is his own anecdotal image; he is what the television constructs. Part of his appeal may be, then, that he is able to use the discursive space of television to his advantage.

It is also the case that anecdotes have a moral at the end. They end with homilies, commonplaces, even clichés with a reassuring moral point. A New Beginning, too, ends on this note. As the film nears its close, Ronald Reagan as narrator directly faces the camera and makes a final exhortation to the audience. This establishes not only the impression of discourse, but the impression of discourse which accesses the real. It is here, in Scene XV, that Reagan most directly appeals to the American voters. He is most explicit about what he believes are the positive accomplishments of his Administration, and about what he hopes to accomplish in the future. He appeals to the voter's belief in his "reality," in the new beginning which he claims to have brought about.

The film then closes with a reminder of this fantasy/reality, as there is a replay of the song and a reiteration of many of the images which appeared earlier in the film. There are new images, too. A rocket ascends into space;

Reagan appears with the American Olympic athletes, including Mary Lou Retton, who had become an American heroine in the summer of 1984. American athletes dominated the 1984 games primarily because the Soviet Union and many of its allies refused to participate; their success, like that of A New Beginning, was predicated upon disavowing the existence of the Soviet Union. It was thus a fitting image upon which to close the film. As was the case with the other images which appeared in the film, American myths and realities became the same.

Following the conclusion of the film, then, the viewers became firmly located in the "real" of the Republican National Convention and the "real" to which Ronald Reagan of A New Beginning both referred and defined. The image of "Ronald Reagan" constituted by A New Beginning and the various other Ronald Reagan "stories" which it recalled became a new story space in the context of the convention. Ronald Reagan became framed by the discursive space of the "live" convention, which it simultaneously framed. The new interplay of story and discourse securely located Ronald Reagan in the present, in the ground between hope and memory. In so doing, it also secured the viewer's position in relation to that of Ronald Reagan. His position was that of knowledge, of authority, and in creating a fiction of discourse, he also created the fiction of participation. The viewer positioned by A New Beginning was a consumer, a receiver of pre-constructed images. The viewer became

subjected to an imaginary social relationship, to images layered upon images which were, in many ways, pure feedback. Ronald Reagan gave the American people the image they wanted to "hear."

A New Beginning as Instrument of Social Intergration and Control

By dissolving, or def(r)aming the boundaries through which people demarcate different genres, levels, and spaces of discourse, "Ronald Reagan" was able to blur the distinctions with which people differentiate immediate and mediated experience, reality and fantasy. A New Beginning constructed a community of "ordinary Americans," mediated by Ronald Reagan who was both character, one of the people, and narrator, their authoritative leader. It proposed the rebirth of this community; it proposed that America had experienced a "new beginning." This claim was supported by a fiction of the real and a fiction of discourse about the real. A New Beginning offered its viewers a secure position. Its interpretive frame posited a reality which was familiar, intelligible, and reassuring, so long as the viewer subjected his/herself to the authority of Ronald Reagan. That he offered a pseudo-discourse, that A New Beginning allowed no space for interaction, that Ronald Reagan was presented as pure image, did not seem to matter to the majority of voting Americans. They responded to the image of the audience which Ronald Reagan reflected; by identifying

with this image, they accepted their assigned positions within which they had an identity. A New Beginning offered a portrait of Ronald Reagan's America, an America which was unified and marked by a conservative consensus.

This portrait was, further, filled out by anecdotal evidence: interviews, short narratives, photographic testimony, newspaper headlines--televisual evidence which, on the surface, appeared to be a cogent replication of a plausible reality. However, the danger which remains is that the viewer who accepts this simulacrum, who recognizes his/her own image in this image, becomes defamed as well as deframed. The viewer becomes framed by, but cannot frame, the televisual messages. The viewer becomes positioned, and thus loses discursive control in the production of this position. Reality is no longer created and negotiated through discourse, but it becomes the province of the few, of those with the position and authority to define what is and is not. It is in this sense that Ronald Reagan, as exemplified by A New Beginning, offered Americans an image which was simultaneously a mirror and a screen.

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CHAPTER VI

FINALE: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

Through A New Beginning, the Republicans presented an upbeat and optimistic portrait of America, one which was reiterated throughout the 1984 campaign. The world depicted in the film defined a community of prospering, proud, and patriotic Americans, all of whom firmly supported their country. This support was expressed verbally, visually, and in the case of the military, physically. Members of different social groups and strata who appeared in the film constituted a unified American community. All were easily recognizable types who expressed common beliefs, values, attitudes and interests which congealed into a national "identity." These were representatives of the American people, and as such, they both defined and reflected the Republicans' conception of the political center which they wished to concretize and consolidate. This conception and representation of the political majority as Republican, rather than Democratic, was a feat in itself. Prior to 1980, the Democratic Party had been the party of the lower and middle classes who made up the majority of voting Americans, and these groups defined the political "center" which the Republicans wished to appropriate.

Both the elections of 1980 and 1984 suggested that the Republicans had successfully attained a re-alignment of party

preferences. In both cases, Reagan received a majority of votes from middle class Americans who had historically been Democrats. These were the people who formed the dominant "we" of A New Beginning: laborers, office workers, rural and suburban Americans, upwardly mobile Blacks, the elderly and "ordinary" women. This representative cross-section of Americans served, in effect, to redefine, and thus to reconstitute "the people," the political center who were Republicans rather than Democrats. This redefinition, further, enabled the Republicans to shift the political center to the right of the political spectrum. Those of the people who were given voices extolled American economic and spiritual renewal, brought about by Ronald Reagan; others who were merely depicted served as demonstrative visual "proofs" of narrator Ronald Reagan's claims for the reality of America's "new beginning." This enabled the Republicans to address--and thus, to define and constitute--an audience outside of the film who, like the people presented on screen, considered themselves to be "ordinary Americans." And ordinary Americans were, by implication, conservative Republicans.

In consequence, the value-laden, one-sided, even fictional propositions which structured A New Beginning were put forth as plausible, uncontroversial representations of reality. It was in this way, too, that A New Beginning served an ideological rather than merely a political purpose.

As Bill Nichols writes:

Ideology is itself an effect of communication and exchange carried out through the material practices of existing institutions. Its purpose is to inculcate an acceptance of existing relations of production as a given beneficial to both the working class and the ruling class. This acceptance is only sometimes won by conscious acquiescence to reasoned argument. More often it derives from the psychic investments we learn to make, perhaps above all from the desire for recognition mediated by those very signs (commodities) that are themselves mediated by the general equivalent of exchange (money).¹

Considered in this way, A New Beginning's message was ideologically compelling because it offered Americans a positive personal and political identity in exchange for their recognition of Ronald Reagan's conservative version of reality. The Republicans also hoped that this recognition would materialize in votes. A New Beginning's rhetorical vision was that of rebirth--of a "new beginning," the dawn of a new day, a new social order which would bring about the moral and prosperous good life promised by democratic capitalism. The implicit interpretive frame for this message was the historical context of the Reagan Presidency, within which consumer culture, Populism, and Reagan's conservative version of the American credo were inextricably entwined.

In this way, the Republican message that America was experiencing a "new beginning" was rendered intelligible by its backdrop. American history and politics may be viewed as a struggle between competing myths and theories, all of which

attempt to define the nature and purpose of America and its people. Thus, from the very beginning of his career in national politics, Reagan presented his program as the antithesis of the liberal democratic welfare state which had dominated American politics for the past fifty years. Reagan's identity and ideology was forged in opposition to the liberal democrats; in so doing, he offered Americans a new brand of Populism within which the myths, traditions and ideals of an earlier time were reinvoked and reinterpreted in light of the present.

Considered historically, Ronald Reagan and his conservative "movement" was a timely response to the perceived crisis of liberalism which marked the late 1960's and 1970's. As capitalism entered a post-industrial stage, and the technological boom which followed World War II gradually went bust, the resultant complex of economic, social, nationalistic, and even personal identity crises were easily attributed to liberal policies by the newly revitalized conservative right. In particular, they railed against the welfare state which, with its preponderance of social programs, attempted to create equality of conditions within American society. This was held, however, to be responsible for the nation's plight. It destroyed incentive to work, to produce in order to consume which is the dynamic underlying capitalism; it debilitated the nuclear family and the authority of the wage-earning male by undermining his position as provider; further, concentrating upon domestic

concerns weakened America militarily and threatened its dominance as a world power (which, even worse, made the "free world" vulnerable to Communism).

Although this crisis of liberalism may have been more accurately identified as a crisis of post-industrialization (particularly as these problems were not unique to the United States),² a space was thus opened for Ronald Reagan. His conservative "revolution" posited an alternative, albeit an alternative that was just an inversion of the liberal program. He appealed to traditional Populist myths and ideals, as he advocated a return to pre-welfare state free market capitalism, based upon equality of opportunity (rather than conditions), individual initiative, and a weak central government which interfered as little as possible in the market. These "free market" conditions characteristic of early capitalism were supposed to provide the incentive for individuals to succeed in the marketplace.

Reagan appealed to ideals espoused by Populists throughout American history. His appeals were, however, mainly nostalgic evocations of an earlier, mythic America which was not dominated by institutions such as banks and corporations. But lessening government regulations and restraints on businesses, cutting back taxes and programs to help the indigent, and lowering the priority of Civil Rights issues and Affirmative Action programs could not possibly create equality of opportunity in modern American society. Rather, these initiatives only created greater inequality and

benefitted the already affluent. This point has been acknowledged by David Stockman, who was the architect of Reagan's economic and governmental reforms.³

Stockman has also attested to the fact that Reagan's position was largely untheorized; that the Reagan "revolution" was, from its very inception, illusory (unbeknownst to Reagan himself).⁴ The cuts in taxes, the increases in military spending, and the social "safety net" of programs which could not be cut could not help but produce an enormous Federal deficit, one which Stockman prophesied will eventually produce an economic crisis worse than that which Reagan's policies allegedly allayed.

However, Reagan did manage to gain adherence to his causes. During his first term in office, he initiated social and economic changes which effectively altered the terms of political discourse. Much governmental bureaucracy and many welfare state programs were dismantled as military spending gained in priority. Programs and proposals which attempted to create and maintain an equitable society were virtually dropped from the political agenda; these became, in Reagan's terms, the concerns of "special interest" groups, rather than the Populist political majority whom he represented.

That the economy had apparently taken a turn for the better provided a large part of Reagan's symbolic currency in 1984. This enabled him to ground his own conservative ideology, coupled with his Populist appeals, in "reality," as he celebrated Americans' renewed ability to consume. This

was the contemporary twist which he gave to traditional Populism, for, as initially articulated by Jacksonian democracy, the moral and "prosperous" individual was self-sufficient; he or she was a "producer" who owned and worked upon a piece of land and thus was in control of his or her labor. In other words, production rather than consumption was a virtue. Populism adapted to industrialization and America's shift away from being an agrarian society by mythologizing rural America and the small town, where a moral and prosperous individual was a member of a community. Production tempered by consumption was the ideal which maintained the community. However, in Reagan's rendition of Populism, it is consumption alone which is the gauge of an individual's "value," as is fitting in a society where fewer and fewer people have control over their own labor. In A New Beginning, the myths of rural America and the small town are both reiterated and transformed; both urban and suburban America are incorporated. The "people" who celebrate their new-found prosperity perceive it only in terms of their ability to consume. They work--but for someone else; they buy more--but they cannot replace what they have lost, the value of their labor.

Through A New Beginning, then, the "people" are re-defined as a political majority of virtuous consumers. They are proud to be Americans; they rejoice in their freedom to be what they are able to buy. This definition entails, however, a disenfranchisement of those who are unable or

unwilling to exchange their labor for the privilege of consumption. If one is what one has, and one can become more by accumulating more, then all must play by the same rules. This conception of America and Americans displayed by A New Beginning allowed the Republicans to disavow another reality--that not everyone had benefitted from the purported economic recovery, nor was everyone awash with a new spirit of pride and patriotism. Reagan centered his audience to the right of the political spectrum; in consequence, those at the bottom and to the left were not addressed; they were not defined and, in the terms of A New Beginning, they did not exist. Thus, one elderly woman who appeared on camera was able to say, "I know that President Reagan is a caring man; he cares about old people and children and ill people." (Scene X). She spoke in spite of the fact that, as a result of Republican efforts to curb Federal spending, thousands of people were inappropriately cut from Social Security disability rolls (There is no threat to Social Security, as Reagan also says at the end of Scene X). Even Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret Heckler later admitted, "The process has been insensitive. . . .The Administration has long recognized the need to make this program more compassionate and humane."⁵

Neither the Reagan Administration's cuts in social programs, reductions in government bureaucracy, increases in military spending, or his "new Federalism" were mentioned in A New Beginning, even though these were concrete aims and

accomplishments of the Reagan Presidency. Most likely, this was because the effects of these policies were disproportionately detrimental to women and Blacks, who were his least supportive constituencies. However, in keeping with the emphasis upon the positive and America's spiritual and economic "rebirth," there was little reference to adversity and opposition, and there were almost no controversial issues raised at all. As a result, none of these policies were mentioned, although women and Blacks were generously splashed across the face of the film. Their support and enthusiasm masked the fact that, in the world outside of A New Beginning, their status had not improved along with the economic recovery, even if America's patriotic rebirth did make them feel "proud to be Americans." (See Scene IV in particular). These groups were most directly hurt by the reductions in social programs, not only as recipients, but as providers of social services. In 1976, the government employed 21% of all women, 25% of all blacks, 15% of all Hispanics, and 16% of all men.⁶ However, after the Reagan Administration implemented governmental cutbacks, minority employees were laid off at a rate 50% greater than non-minority employees, women administrators were laid off at a rate 150% higher than male administrators, and minorities in administrative positions were laid off at a rate about 220% higher than non-minorities in similar positions.⁷ This would suggest that a "new beginning" was not for everyone, despite the Republicans' attempts to make it appear to be so.

In terms of the economy, the unemployment rate was still 9% in the summer of 1984 when the film was first shown; employment remained a major problem, although everyone pictured in A New Beginning appeared to be working or to believe that other people were. (Scenes IV, VII and X, for example). Blue collar workers were repeatedly shown at work; businesspersons, however, simply expressed satisfaction that things were better in general. A New Beginning promised employment primarily to those who were least likely to benefit from Reagan's pro-business economic policies, while the repeatedly emphasized point that inflation and interest rates were down was addressed to the upwardly mobile middle classes. Scene VIII, in particular, lured them with the promise of being able to purchase expensive symbols of affluence such as homes and cars. America's new found prosperity could only be recognized as an increased ability to consume; it could not be recognized as an increased ability to provide for all of the members of society.

Further, even though lush farm images, farmers, and cowboys who typified American myths were heavily represented in A New Beginning, their presence belied the fact that farmers and rural sections of America are fast becoming destitute, largely in consequence of Federal farm policies. According to a study by Larry Swanson, an economist and former director of the Great Plains Office of Policy Studies at the University of Nebraska, all rural Nebraska communities with a current population of under 1000 will be barely

surviving by the 1990's if Federal policy stays on its present course.⁸ Small farming communities that can no longer sustain themselves are fast becoming pockets of poverty across the United States; they are the new rural "ghettos" which fly in the face of the American Dream. Indeed, there is an America which is far removed from the myths and ideals which have traditionally characterized the American people. This place is noticeably absent from A New Beginning.

Significantly, corporate America and technology were hardly alluded to in A New Beginning, even though the Reagan Administration fostered the growth of the highly technological military-industrial complex, and it allocated billions of dollars to military and defense spending. However, simplicity rather than progress and technology seemed to be the preferred topic. "He's getting us back to basics," said one woman. "Back to things that keep us surviving and strong, like a good defense and a good economy." (Scene VII).

This emphasis upon simplicity and the exclusion of technology can also be related to the low priority which education received in the Reagan Administration. Not surprisingly, education is not mentioned in A New Beginning. Although the literacy rate has been steadily declining for the past twenty years, and the drop-out rates, particularly in urban areas, have been consistently increasing, the Reagan Administration focused little attention on this issue.

Indeed, Federal loans and higher education grants were diminished, and one of the effects of de-centralization was to return responsibility for educational funding to states or individual families. This had the adverse effect of making more and more jobs requiring specialized skills--such as those in defense, which was one of the few growth industries--unavailable to the uneducated or unskilled. It also made many colleges unaffordable for those who were not wealthy. The overall consequence was a greater, rather than smaller, division between rich and poor, producers and users, the functionally productive and the functionally superfluous.

Thus, Reagan did not emphasize technology, education, or the gains made by corporate America in A New Beginning. This would have been contrary to his Populist aim of winning "the people" over to his side. Technology was invisible in A New Beginning--both the technology which dominated the American society which was supposedly "reborn," and the technology with which A New Beginning was able to construct and present a portrait of the "real" which could be so flatly contradicted (and yet was not). The Republican campaign managers used sophisticated means of information gathering, such as statistics, population polls, market surveys, and audience pre-testing strategies, in order to construct the "simplistic" messages of the film. Nor was it made apparent to an uncritical audience that the Republicans were using visual technology to manipulate televisual conventions in order to

insure the public's acceptance and recognition of their messages.

A New Beginning's message of rebirth was ideologically compelling because it addressed and constituted its audience in a manner which was gratifying and confirming. Its effectiveness cannot, however, be considered independently of its manipulation of conventional modes of visual communication. A New Beginning provided a mythic framework of rebirth, within which specifically American myths could be revitalized; its innovative mosaic structure provided a form within which reassuring clichés and stereotypes could be recognized; and its occlusion of the frames which differentiate genres, levels, and spaces of televisual discourse allowed the Republicans to constitute the reality which they were ostensibly allowing to appear. The effect, intended as such, was to blur the distinctions between fact and fancy, reality and performance, history and myth. Although Reagan's policies benefitted the few rather than the many, through media manipulations such as A New Beginning the Republicans managed to create the illusion of unity and consensus; this illusion became the reality which defined and was defined by "the people."

The Republicans were successful, then, in part due to their televised re-presentation of familiar myths. These myths offered Americans interpretive frames which enabled the Republicans to construct and reinforce their version of reality. It is through myths that reality can be typified

and reflected upon, and it is through myths that reality can be constituted as coherent and non-contradictory. The Republicans' central myth of rebirth is a familiar story which has appeared throughout Western art, literature, and history. Its vision of America as Eden, and Ronald Reagan as humble yet heroic savior who rescues America from the Fall (represented by liberal democracy) has parallels throughout American history. The Republicans also used the myth of rebirth, however, to propose the rebirth of American myths, myths which concerned national purpose, the individual and the community, and the role of the President. It was this re-definition which enabled them to construct a new identity for "the people," and it was in this way that opposing versions of American myths could be reconciled to accord with the demands of modernity while reaffirming tradition.

Television was a particularly apt medium for such a task. Not only is television a technological medium which is itself "mythic,"⁹ but--perhaps more so than other forms of discourse--its myths are believed to be credible representations of reality. Television operates according to what Fiske and Hartley term an "oral logic."¹⁰ This is exemplified by the mosaic, segmental narrative structure of A New Beginning, the predominance of discursive space (defined by perceived qualities of liveness, immediacy, and direct address), and by its "anecdotal effect." Within this mode of presentation, familiar myths are re-presented to the audience, and an attempt is made to convince the audience

that these are appropriate to their context (i.e., in the case of A New Beginning, the actual, historical "frame" which these myths serve to articulate). In A New Beginning, myths clichés and anecdotes served to articulate "reality." They offered reassuring interpretations of what people already "knew" to be the case, and in this way, unified them around this central position of knowledge. In this way, too, what people "knew" to have been the case in the past was re-presented in the present, in order to direct them toward the future.

Most importantly, A New Beginning demonstrates the way that myths, clichés, and anecdotes functioned ideologically to present a unified conception of the American people, a conception which simultaneously reaffirmed and reinterpreted conventional ways of seeing and knowing within American culture. Anton C. Zijderveld, who studies the function of clichés in modern society, associates their rise with the decline of "aura"--qualities which convey a sense of authority, authenticity, and unique identity, and thus render experience meaningful. As Zidjerveld suggests, in modern, fragmented society, marked by the decay of aura, there is no stable, unquestioned social foundation within which individual positions are secure. Clichés, then, serve as mini-institutions, as the social knots of communication which preserve conventional ways of seeing and knowing. Many meanings, rival frames or alternate definitions of a situation are possible in modern society. Clichés, like

myths and anecdotes, provide interpretive frames; they define situations and construct a community for whom they function as anchors of the social order. Zidjerveld writes:

In short, in the cognitive vagueness, emotional instability and moral uncertainty, brought about by modernization, clichés provide the individual with clarity, stability and certainty. They are, of course, very artificial, if seen in the light of traditional institutions, but that is still better than having no clarity, stability, or certainty at all.¹¹

It is in this way that television's cliché-ridden, mythic, anecdotal structure takes on an "aura" of its own; it provides a secure social foundation and a framework of unquestioned beliefs, values, and attitudes. It is television which constitutes what Michael Osborn refers to as "simple mythic pictures which embody common values and goals," and what Andrew Tolson refers to as "anecdotal dramatizations." These pictures both imply and constitute shared evaluative outlooks; they are recognized, they are comprehended, and thus they are corroborated.

These televisual word/sound/image combinations, further, sanction certain roles and behaviors and repudiate others. They constitute, again in Osborn's terms, a "prearranged ethos." They define a conception of the moral community which is "the people."

It was in this way that A New Beginning, particularly as it was inter-played with other political discourses of the Reagan Administration and other cultural discourses, effectively masked the indeterminacy and relativization of

meaning, and accordingly, the role of the audience in the production of this meaning. Myths, clichés, and anecdotes became anchors of the social order because they were unquestioningly recognized and accepted. The positions of the viewers were thus secure--they were spoken to, they were addressed, and they could recognize themselves through this call. The viewers who consumed these images were able to participate in "social communion," yet it was a communion which denied difference, distance, alternative frames in the representation of a unified and all encompassing "we." This "we," spoken by both Ronald Reagan and the ordinary Americans in A New Beginning, defined an American community which did not exist other than through its representation, its simulation. These representations provided points of orientation, points which simultaneously positioned individuals by providing them with a coherent identity and oriented them toward a particular point of view. Moreover, this orientation was not cognitively or analytically arrived at; it was implicitly, invisibly, even unconsciously structured.

The Republicans were also able to exploit this unifying and centralizing capacity of television by blurring the boundaries which differentiate ways of knowing or comprehending televisual discourse. In particular, the admixture of documentary and fictional film forms and styles, as well as the distinctions between the film and the "live" convention of which it was a part, directed the viewer to interpret it in terms of "reality" which existed outside of

the film. The intersection of story and discourse, and the creation of pseudo-discourse, where Ronald Reagan appeared to directly address the viewer, also pointed to a reality which was not bounded by the television frame.

The role of Ronald Reagan, the "Great Communicator," in conveying this impression of reality cannot be overlooked. As an ex-actor and professional narrator, Reagan knew how to make use of the medium of television. More so than any other Presidential candidate before him, Reagan was able to master the relaxed and nuanced conversational style so effective on television. Unlike a platform speaker, Reagan the television orator aimed to reach people in the privacy of their living rooms. A subtle lifting of the eyebrow, a nod of the head, a wink or a smile were artful rhetorical devices. Even when reading from a teletape, Reagan was able to appear to be engaged in a sincere and spontaneous talk with the viewer.

A New Beginning did, indeed, play to all of his strengths as a President and a persona. In the film, he presided over political ceremonies and he spoke to the American people; footage of the assassination attempt was included as a reminder of the event which had made him a figure of mythic stature. Camera angles, lighting, and the juxtaposition of shots all worked together to make him appear to be a heroic, larger than life figure, yet these devices probably could not have succeeded had they been used with any candidate other than Ronald Reagan. It is his ability to project a persona which is both "Presidential" and ordinary;

his peculiar combination of movie star qualities with those of the cowboy; and his ability to be perceived to be a leader and a man of the people which are all part of his political appeal.

Yet, it is primarily through television that Reagan is able to convey these attributes. Throughout the 1984 election, his political campaign advisers took daily polls to ascertain the moods and attitudes of the voters. Reagan, the consummate political performer, was able to play to the voters' preferences. As illustrated by A New Beginning, he became inextricably associated with America's renewed patriotic attitude. He was able to restore the illusion of unity and consensus, thus providing momentum for this attitude. Most importantly, with his persona, he was able to appear to mediate the conflicts and contradictions in the American psyche. He mediated polarities such as moralism and materialism, liberalism and conservatism, the individual and the community. He was able to create the illusion of American omnipotence and prosperity, and to create the impression of Presidential strength and leadership which coincided with a resurgent Populism. Ronald Reagan, as conveyed through television, established a rapport with the American people which transcended his particular policies. As evidenced by the oft repeated observation, many people liked him while disagreeing with his political positions, thus earning him the title of the "Teflon-President." It is for this reason, too, that the future of the Republican party

after Reagan seems especially unclear. They have money, organization, and sophisticated media techniques. They do not, however, have a replacement for the inimitable Ronald Reagan.

Although it may be the case that A New Beginning, without Ronald Reagan, would have had less impact, the film remains important as a new mode of political communication. It marked the first time that a visual presentation was substituted for a speech. A New Beginning simulated not only the presence of "reality," but the presence of discourse about reality. While political speeches are often mediated to the public through television, and while political speeches also are characterized by myths, clichés, and anecdotes, I have contended throughout this study that A New Beginning is a qualitatively different mode of address than is a political speech. A New Beginning was an unprecedented, specifically televisual presentation, one which used the conventions, perceived capacities, and audience expectations of the medium to fullest advantage. It effectively communicated its "reality" to the viewing audience, rather than its political discourse about reality. It merged the personal and the political; it provoked positive associations and implications which were only secondarily related to the specifics of the Reagan Presidency; most important of all, it provided positive, secure, coherent identities and interpretive frames for the American "people." This unified group embodied a set of beliefs, values, attitudes and interests

which coincided with those of the Reagan Administration. The film's mode of presentation was thus able to mask class differences, contradictory realities, and the social positions of the viewers as consumers who were exploited by producers (including the invisible "producers" of Ronald Reagan and A New Beginning; the affluent who supported his election bid with their campaign contributions, and who benefitted from his policies.

It is thus the case, as I have maintained throughout this study, that the media manipulations exercised by Ronald Reagan and his strategists present a danger to the democratic principles which they purport to maintain. They make capitalism more rather than less exploitative, for they constitute an illusory unity while perpetuating class divisions. It is instructive that A New Beginning was so widely hailed as an innovative political film although its images were trite and repetitive; nor was its internal structure vastly different than previous campaign films. A New Beginning exemplified the extent to which the Republicans made use of television and its technology in order to construct simple, easily recognized messages. In order to appeal to "the people," all of the forces of technology were harnessed: political consultants, advertising experts, and studio technicians. The result was a highly produced and politically persuasive visual communication form.

Implications for Future Research

Throughout this study, I have attempted to provide insight into the ways that the Republicans made use of televisual communication in order to serve their ideological ends; my larger objective was to demonstrate the persuasive power of a film such as A New Beginning in a culture which is increasingly oriented toward visual communication forms.

This rhetorical analysis of televisual political communication has provided a method for future work in this area. This method was arrived at in the course of repeated viewings of the film, a process which enabled me to formulate, test, and sometimes discard ideas and approaches to the material.

Overall, I examined the interrelations of the context, content, form, and framing of the film; in each chapter, I moved from theory to concrete analysis. My starting point was to locate A New Beginning within an historical context. I then analyzed its content with regard to myths and clichés. Not only were these predominant in the film, but they provided a means through which to explain the historical exigencies addressed by the film. This then led me to a consideration of the formal structure of A New Beginning, and finally to an analysis of its framing. All of these concepts indicated the underlying rhetorical strategies which made A New Beginning a persuasive communication form; together, they underscored the extent to which the Republicans were able to make use of the visual media to serve their ideological ends.

Chapter V, where I discuss framing, makes the greatest theoretical contribution to the analysis of televisual political communication. This section also demonstrates the utility of combining rhetorical criticism and communication theory. I rely upon the work of communication theorists such as Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman to examine the concept of framing in relation to A New Beginning. Both suggest that it is through "frames" that all experience is organized and rendered coherent; thus, the way that A New Beginning was framed contributed to the viewers' interpretations of it, and I became convinced that framing, in addition to historical context, form, and content, needed to be considered in order to understand the film.

In the case of a visual communication form, framing is particularly important given that the experience is mediated through a television or film frame. As Bateson notes, frames are metacommunicative; they implicitly define messages as real or imaginary, fact or fantasy, natural or symbolic. The relationship between frame and message may, however, be quite complex. Bateson cites play as an example of an event where a denotatively "real" message becomes bracketed, or reframed as fantasy. "Playful" behaviors are simulations of denotative messages; in other words, messages which are framed as "play" take on an "as if" status. I suggest that television, like play, simulates a primary message. However, television is dis-play. Messages which are inherently fictional become reframed as real or true. The television

medium works to establish the authority and authenticity of its messages--whether the "objective" referential reality of genres such as news and documentary, or the "subjective" symbolic reality of genres such as dramas and advertisements.

Visual events, then, are provided with meaning through the metacommunicative frame of television; within this frame different genres of televisual discourse are believed to primarily denote or connote a reality. A New Beginning, however, a videotaped film first presented on television as a substitute for a speech, is indicative of the Republicans' attempts to merge the frames which typically differentiate different genres, levels, and spaces of televisual discourse. "Documentary" and "fictional" genres, "live" and pre-recorded events, and even the spaces which separated the viewer from the event were made to appear to be indistinguishable.

Most importantly, it was the voice and figure of Ronald Reagan which provided the unifying point of reference for all of the different forms and levels of representation. As narrator and character, both within and outside of the film, Reagan became imbued with a special authority to which all of the other voices and images became subordinated. This strategy enabled him, through A New Beginning, to create a "fiction of discourse," a fiction which enabled him to appear to be addressing the audience from a position of knowledge. It is important, then, to probe more deeply into televisual framing, and to examine the ways it can be used as a political tool to convey authority and authenticity.

Overall, the Republicans did their best to ensure that A New Beginning would be favorably received. It offered no controversy, it offended no one who was included in its representations, and it conveyed virtually no information about the Reagan Presidency. If A New Beginning indicates the wave of the future of political discourse, it is to be hoped that this study has provided some means with which to approach and counter this wave. I have attempted to describe the making of ideology through visual modes of presentation, for A New Beginning--perhaps more so than any other visual presentations to date--provides a vivid example of this process. It was through the artifice which was A New Beginning that the Republicans enabled the "real" to be seen; yet, it was by no means made apparent that this reality was itself an artifice designed to support their conservative ideology.

A New Beginning, as Reagan's most comprehensive rhetorical display, exemplifies the strategies and techniques which enabled the Republicans to communicate their version of reality to the American public, and in so doing, to achieve Reagan's enormous popularity and his landslide re-election victory in 1984. This study of their strategies has indicated many areas which require further investigation and analysis. One other concerns the nature of myth and its role with regard to visual political communication. I have suggested that myths are often implicit and unarticulated; they are often re-presented in the forms of clichés and

anecdotes which define a moral community. Visual presentations of myths could be more deeply examined in order to determine their role in sustaining or reinterpreting ideology. I have also closely considered the usage of visual clichés, and I have suggested some ways in which their "artful" presentation can serve an ideological function. I have, finally, considered the ways in which a film such as A New Beginning engaged the boundaries between fiction and reality in order to constitute an intelligible reality.

Moreover, in this study I have analyzed and produced a reading of A New Beginning as a mode of political discourse. My aim, in the end, is to point to the necessity of discourse about discourse. A New Beginning is a product of a consumer culture, a culture which consumes, most of all, images of itself, about itself, which represent itself. Ronald Reagan is the consummate image which is able to unify and mask the contradictions that mark modern American society. He is a symbol which constitutes and is constituted by his "audience," the American people who accept his fiction of discourse and his narrative authority. Fortunately, a space still exists for criticism and analysis; such meta-discourses can subvert the hegemonic, undemocratic impulses of this political usage of the media. It is in this way that rhetorical criticism, in this case verbal discourse about visual discourse, can re-frame and reconstitute a film such as A New Beginning as part of an on-going dialogue. Criticism is important as a tool to prevent subjection to the

discourse of A New Beginning, to disrupt acceptance of this pseudo-speech on its own terms. A New Beginning does not reveal so much as it conceals; it does not facilitate, but prevents questioning of reality; it appropriates the means by which reality is conventionally constituted in order to re-present a familiar and reassuring version which accords with conservative principles.

Political communication such as A New Beginning aims to cut off discourse. It is not speech, it is pseudo-speech which compellingly frames, and is framed by, "reality." Given television's centrality in American culture, those with control of the media, ie., those with resources to employ those with skills, produce the images which are consumed by the television public, audience, viewers. Those without resources, skills, or access remain unheard. As evidenced by Reagan's exclusion of undesirable members of society, they cease to exist.

Further, both the Reagan Administration policies and their appropriation of televisual technology exemplify the widening gaps between producers and consumers of social reality. It thus becomes crucial for the viewing public, the "people" who are constructed by A New Beginning and other televisual discourses, to assume a different relation to the televisual images and sounds which address them. Education is one means of constructing this relationship, although social policies which de-prioritize education also serve to prevent critical viewer positions. Schools without funds can

hardly afford personnel, materials, or equipment in order to de-mystify visual communication forms; making higher education the province of the few also will help to keep the viewer in place, and will assure that television will not become an interactive and democratic medium. As it stands, television's transmission remains one sided. Television, the modern cultural centerpiece, remains communicative source and the viewers remain consumers and receivers of messages; as such, they are supports for an exploitative ideology which feeds upon such a relationship in order to perpetuate itself.

ENDNOTES

¹Bill Nichols, Ideology and the Image (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981) 289.

²See Vicente Navarro, "the Industrialization of Fetishism or the Fetishism of Industrialization: A Critique of Ivan Illich," Social Science and Medicine 9 (1975).

³John Kenneth Galbraith, "The Stockman Episode," New York Review of Books 26 June 1986: 4.

⁴See David Stockman, The Triumph of Politics (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

⁵Robert Pear, "US Will Resume Reviews of Rolls for Disability Aid," New York times 6 Dec. 1985: A33.

⁶Zillah Eisenstein, "The Patriarchal Relations of the Reagan State," Signs 10.2 (1984): 334. Eisenstein quotes Lester Thurow, The Zero Sum Society (New York: Penguin Books, 1980).

⁷Eisenstein, 334. Eisenstein quotes Augustus F. Hawkins, "Minorities and Unemployment," in What Reagan Is Doing To Us eds. A. Gartner, C. Greer, and F. Reissman (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

⁸Osha Davidson, "The Rise of the Rural Ghetto," Nation 14 June 1986: 822.

⁹This point has been elaborated upon in Chapter III.

¹⁰John Fiske and John Hartley, Reading Television (London: Methuen, 1978) 112.

¹¹Anton C. Zijderveld, On Clichés: The Supersedure of Meaning By Function in Modernity (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979: 46-7.

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APPENDIX 1
NARRATION SCRIPT FOR A NEW BEGINNING

SCENE 1

JUSTICE: (APPLAUSE)
Governor, are you prepared to take the
Constitutional oath?

REAGAN: I am.

JUSTICE: Place your left hand on the Bible and
raise your right hand and repeat after
me. I, Ronald Reagan, do

(MUSIC)
(ROOSTER CROWS)

REAGAN: I, Ronald Reagan, do solemnly swear

(MUSIC)

JUSTICE: That I will faithfully execute the
office of President of the United
States

(MUSIC)

REAGAN: That I will faithfully execute the
office of President of the United
States

(MUSIC)

MAN: Good morning, Jim.

(MUSIC)

JUSTICE: And will, to the best of my ability,
preserve, protect, and defend

(MUSIC)

REAGAN: And will, to the best of my ability,
preserve, protect, and defend

(MUSIC)

JUSTICE: The Constitution of the United States

(MUSIC)

REAGAN: The Constitution of the United States

(MUSIC)

JUSTICE: So help you God.

(MUSIC)

REAGAN: So help me God.

(MUSIC)

JUSTICE: May I congratulate you, Sir.

(APPLAUSE)

SCENE II

REAGAN (VOICE OVER): Yes, it was quite a day. . .a new beginning. You know, you don't really become President. The Presidency is an Institution, and you have temporary custody of it. I know that the image is that it's a lonely job, and uh, you're out there all on your own for everything that has to be decided or done. But that's not quite true. I've always believed that the other people around here are meant to be here and to contribute. And you know that the best council and the opinions and many times the varied opinions, opposition as well as approval of what is being discussed. But, uh, you're hearing these honest views from these very capable men and women who've given up so much, so many of them in their private lives to come here and serve, uh, you don't feel alone. I believe that the Vice-President, George Bush, is more involved in policy matters of this Administration, government in general, here in the Executive Branch than any Vice-President we've probably ever had.

SCENE III

GEORGE BUSH:

It's just different. The mood is different. The, the. . .it's not that everybody agrees with what you're doing, but there's a, there's a certain respect for the United States of America and it is loud, and it is clear, and I, I run into that all over the country. People say, y'know, we're pleased that the President is taking these strong positions, and they might, they might argue with you on one or two things if you give em a chance, but they're, back, you get the feeling that the country's moving again, a certain pride level.

SCENE IV

INTERVIEWS

Man 1:

The bottom line with President Reagan is that he has brought back respect to the White House. Period, that's it.

Man 2:

There's a whole new attitude in America today. And I think that that needs to be continued.

- Woman 1: It used to be the Americans took it for granted they were American. Now it seems like they're really proud.
- Man 3: I feel more patriotic towards my country and I feel more proud to be an American.
- Man 4: He put me to work, he's gonna keep me there, the man did a good job, and I hope he's gonna go for another four years. God Bless America.
- Man 5: I even hear songs on the radio-tv now that says I'm proud to be an American.

SCENE V

SONG (MUSIC)

If tomorrow all the things were gone
I'd worked for all my life
And I had to start again
With just my children and my wife
I'd thank my lucky stars
To be living here today
Cause the flag still stands for freedom
And they can't take that away
And I'm proud to be an American
Where at least I know I'm free
And I won't forget the men who died
Who gave that right to me
And I gladly stand up next to you
And defend her still today

Cause there ain't no doubt
I love this land
God Bless the USA

SCENE VI

REAGAN (V.O.): Yes, there's been a lot of talk about a reawakened of patriotism in our country. And in our military, there's now a renewed sense of pride and patriotism there too. We recently were on a trip to Asia. On Sunday, in South Korea, I went up to the Demilitarized Zone, went to the outdoor church service with our troops there.

(Singing: hymn)

CHAPLAIN: May we bow our heads together for the invocation.

(Cafeteria Noise)

REAGAN (V.O.): I met with a great many of the men. I had the chance to talk with them individually, and I was so proud to hear not grumbling or I want to go home, but to hear the pride with which they carry out their duties there.

REAGAN: It looks good.

REAGAN (V.O.) And I have never seen such morale, such esprit de corps, such pride in their work. All of us here at home

should remember all those young men
and women on the frontiers of freedom.

SOLDIER: Steve (inaudible) from (inaudible)

REAGAN (V.O.) I hope that people out there recognize
what a wonderful bunch of young people
we've got in the military now. When
they see someone on the street in
uniform, I hope they'll go up and say
hello and maybe tell them they're a
little proud.

REAGAN: Proud to know you.

SOLDIER 2: Proud to know you too, Sir.

SCENE VII

INTERVIEWS

WOMAN: The President's policies I'm 100%
behind because he's strong and he's
strong defense.

WOMAN 2: I think President Reagan is getting us
back to basics, back to things that
keep our nation surviving and strong,
like a good defense and a good economy.

MAN 1: The economy has never been as great as
it has been now, uh, in twenty years,
uh, unemployment is down, interest
rates are down, uh, more people are
buying homes than ever before.

MAN 2: I really feel that we're gonna be better off in the long run.

MAN 3: We're on the upward swing. And the factories are working much stronger than before. The people are getting back to work.

WOMAN 4: People are traveling more, business is better, people on business trips, people on vacations--they're spending more money.

MAN 5: We're back on top.

(MUSIC)

SCENE VIII

REAGAN (V.O.) You know it's hard to believe that it was less than four short years ago that interest rates were going through the roof. Inflation was, of course, the single biggest culprit and was responsible for those high interest rates. You can understand why tackling inflation head-on was one of our first priorities and we went at it tooth and nail and brought it down and we've kept it down.

REAGAN (ON CAMERA) That wasn't wishful thinking. And it did become reality. Since January of '81 the prime rate has been pared by 40%. Mortgage interest rates have

OFF CAMERA (V.O.)

come down 4 percentage points since their peak. Now that makes home ownership possible for seven million American households that couldn't afford it just 2 1/2 years ago. And the same goes for automobiles too. Lower loan rates have made cars a lot more affordable for a lot more people. Still it is good to see people buying homes and cars again, to see America's automobile industry regaining its strength and taking a back seat to no one. So

REAGAN (ON CAMERA):

we're going to keep on with what we're doing. We're going to bring those interest rates down further by keeping inflation down once and for all.

SCENE IX

INTERVIEW

WOMAN 1:

I think he's just doggone honest. It's remarkable. He's been on television, what have I heard, 26 times? Talking to us about what he's doing? Now that's. . .he's not doing that for any other reason than to make it real clear. And if anybody has any question about where he's headed, it's their fault. Maybe they don't have a television.

(MUSIC)

SCENE X

REAGAN (V.O.): I've made a commitment, not just as President, but as a senior citizen myself that we must have a Social Security system that keeps its promise to the people who've kept their promise to America.

INTERVIEWS

MAN 1: The President has done a lot of things, but bringing inflation down I think is probably the best thing he's done for older people, for everybody.

REAGAN: I feel strongly about keeping inflation down, interest rates down, but also making sure that no one pulls the rug out from under those people who are dependent on Social Security.

WOMAN 2: I know that President Reagan is a caring man, that he cares about old people, and children, and ill people.

REAGAN (ON CAMERA): There is no threat, from anyone, certainly not from this Administration, to Social Security.

SCENE XI

(Crowd noise-voices calling President Reagan)

REAGAN (V.O.) I didn't know I was shot. The--in fact I was still asking what was that

noise. I thought it was firecrackers. And the next thing I knew Jerry, secret service, had simply grabbed me here and threw me into the car, and then he dived in on top of me. And it was only then that I felt a paralyzing pain and I learned that the bullet had hit me up here. When I walked in they were just concluding a meeting in the hospital of all the doctors associated with the hospital. Sure when I saw all those doctors around me too, I said I hoped they were all Republicans.

(LAUGHTER)

I've been asked about a visitor that I had while I was recuperating back in March of 1981, Cardinal Cooke. He was a wonderful man, a most dedicated man, and just one of the most kindly men that I have ever met. And we were talking about some of the, call them coincidences that had happened at the time of the shooting and that I had heard after I'd started to recover. And he said that in view of them, God must have been sitting on my shoulder. Well, he must have been. I told him that whatever time I've got left, it now belongs to someone else.

(MUSIC)

SCENE XII

REAGAN (V.O.)

Our trip to Japan, Korea, and later the People's Republic of China makes you realize that the old line "Go West young man, go West" still fits. There's a new frontier out there, there's a future, and the United States is going to be very much a part of that future. One cannot meet with those people without realizing that they are a tremendously capable people, a talented and energetic people, and I found that there was a great longing for peace among those people. And I think that we can have a fine relationship, we do already. But we can keep that and build on that relationship, whether it's with trade, cultural exchange, we can be mutually beneficial to each other.

SCENE XIII

REAGAN (ON CAMERA):

We stand on a lonely, windswept point on the northern shore of France. But forty years ago at this moment, the air was dense with smoke and the cries of men and the air was filled with the crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon. Here in Normandy the rescue began. At dawn on the morning of the sixth of June, 1944

REAGAN (V.O.): Sixty two of the rangers who scaled the cliffs there at Pointe du Hoc, now back 40 years later to the scene of their heroic action.

REAGAN (ON CAMERA): These are the boys of Pointe du Hoc. These are the men who took the cliffs.

REAGAN (V.O.) It was a very moving experience. They were what General Marshall called, "Our secret weapon--the best damn kids in the world." Where do we find them? Where do we find such men? And the answer came almost as quickly as I'd asked the question. Where we've always found them in this country--on the farms, in the shops, the stores and the offices. They just are the product of the freest society the world has ever known.

REAGAN (ON CAMERA): "Some day Liz, I'll go back," said Private First Class Peter Robert Zenatta, of the 37th Engineer Combat Battalion and first assault wave to hit Omaha Beach. Liza Zenatta Henn began her story by quoting her father who promised that he would return to Normandy. She ended with a promise to her father who died eight years ago of cancer, "I'm going there, Dad. And I'll see the graves and I'll put flowers there just like you wanted to do. I'll feel all the things you made me feel through your stories and your eyes. I'll never forget what you went

through Dad. Nor will I let anyone else forget. And Dad, I'll always be proud." Through the words of his loving daughter who is here with us today, a D-Day veteran has shown us the meaning of this day far better than any President can. It is enough for us to say about Private Zenatta and all the men of honor and courage who fought beside him four decades ago, we will always be prepared so we may be always free. Thank you.

(MUSIC)

SCENE XIV

REAGAN (V.O.)

I believe in the line "I look to the hills from whence cometh my strength." Before I reached my decision to run for re-election, some people thought that maybe I'd be happy to retire to that beautiful ranch outside Santa Barbara and spend the rest of my life enjoying the simple things, riding horses, chopping wood and spending time with Nancy, being outdoors and close to all of God's natural gifts. But they forget, there are so many things that remain to be done, so many challenges that must be met. I'd have felt like a quitter if I'd just walked away from getting Federal spending under control once and for all, or from reforming

and simplifying our tax system,
creating enterprise zones, a set of
incentives that would encourage
business to help rebuild the troubled
areas of our country, provide hope for
those who yearn for true opportunity.
And something else

SCENE XV

REAGAN (ON CAMERA)

Sitting in the Oval Office, you look
around and sometimes you can't help
but choke up a little bit because
you're surrounded by history that
somehow has touched everything in this
room. And it occurs to you that every
person who ever sat here yearned in
the depths of his soul to bring people
and nations together in peace. Four
times in my life America's been at
war. That's a tragic waste of lives,
and it makes you realize how
desperately the world needs a lasting
peace. Just across the hall here in
the White House is the Roosevelt Room,
named after the two Roosevelts who
served here, one a Republican, one a
Democrat. Many decisions are made in
that room, and often as I meet with my
staff I gaze up at the five service
flags, each representing one of the
five military services. And draped
from each flag are battle streamers,
signifying every battle campaign
fought since the Revolutionary War.

Each ribbon a remembrance of a time
when American men and women spilled
their blood into the soil of distant
lands. My fondest hope for this
Presidency is that the people of
America give us the continued
opportunity to pursue a peace so
strong and so lasting that we'd never
again have to add another streamer to
those flags.

SCENE XVI

SONG

And I'm proud to be an American
Where at least I know I'm free
And I won't forget the men who died
Who gave that right to me
And I gladly stand up
Next to you and defend her still today
Cause there ain't no doubt
I love this land
God Bless the USA