# THE SYMBOLIC POLITICS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEMS OF THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY AND THE THATCHER PREMIERSHIP

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# ABSTRACT

## THE SYMBOLIC POLITICS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEMS OF THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY AND THE THATCHER PREMIERSHIP

### by Joachim Sander

This thesis highlights the value of symbolic politics research for a comparative study of the political leadership of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Most studies of symbolic politics neglect to explain their theoretical foundations. In contrast this analysis offers a detailed explanation of Murray Edelman's writings. It also spells out the overlaps between Edelman's thinking and the concepts of political culture, symbolic interactionism and systems theory, particularly as regards their view of the function of symbolisation in the political process. It is proposed that symbolic politics research needs to be more integrative, focusing on symbolisation both as a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders and as a device that assists the public in interpreting political reality.

Existing symbolic politics research has preferred to investigate the symbolic dimension of specific political events or particular policies. This study shows that symbolic politics can also be applied in an institutional context, that is to the Reagan Presidency and the Thatcher Premiership. Reagan's and Thatcher's symbolic politics are separated into different types and strategies ranging from symbolic problem solving to the culture of celebrity. Both case studies also demonstrate that political leaders' biographical backgrounds and administrations' media strategies are crucial for successfully implementing symbolic politics.

This thesis makes a contribution to a neglected area in political science, that is to the study of the symbolic meaning of the British prime minister. Conventionally the prime minister has been regarded merely as a symbol of the political process, however in recent years the symbolic meaning of the prime minister has become more elaborate. What is emerging is a symbolic premiership not unlike the symbolic presidency in the United States.

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Finally not enough appreciation can be expressed to my wife, Alison. Her help and support encouraged me to embark on this endeavour and, more importantly, to complete it. This thesis is dedicated to her and to our daughter Kellen.

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the nature of political reality for the general public. Only rarely do people experience the political process directly. Most of the time their perception of political reality is identical with the way in which it is symbolically staged.

There are three factors which have contributed to the increasing importance of symbolic politics. First of all, fixed party affiliation has decreased in the industrialised world resulting in the greater political mobility of citizens. Thus political parties and political leaders need to make a greater communicative effort to attract their formerly 'regular customers'. Secondly, political communication has become increasingly professional. Politicians have learned to accept that image makers are almost inevitably going to be amongst their advisers. They are aware that the marketing of their policies can contribute to them winning or losing an election. Thirdly, communicating political material through the mass media has fundamentally transformed the face of politics. The more the electronic media becomes the dominant source of information about political reality for the public, the more politicians will try to shape this information by symbolic means (Sarcinelli 1989: 297).

This prompts two questions: (i) How have political actors adjusted to these developments? (ii) How can the citizens of modern societies distinguish between political reality and the fictional political drama of mass democracies?

In the 1960s the American political scientist Murray Edelman suggested that an analytical scheme is required to separate "politics as a spectator sport and political activity as utilized by organized groups to get quite specific, tangible benefits for themselves" (Edelman 1964: 5). According to Edelman, the instrumentalist side of

political activity constitutes only one component of the political process. A similar viewpoint was adopted by Lasswell in his well-known book entitled 'Politics: Who gets what, when, and how' (Lasswell 1951). Lasswell challenged the established concept that people define their political interests rationally and Edelman built upon this concentrating on the interactive process by which politics influences what people "want, what they fear, what they regard as possible, and even who they are" (Edelman 1964: 20).

Despite the pioneering work by Lasswell, Edelman and others, the symbolic dimension of the political process remains a neglected area of political science. Burnier argues that the reasons for this underdevelopment "include the failure of earlier research either to differentiate among symbolic theories or to clarify concepts, and the failure to develop theories and methods appropriate for doing symbolic political research" (Burnier 1994: 239). British political scientists appear to have been particularly reluctant to explore the symbolic dimension of politics. The fact that "Britain is widely regarded as having a political system which scores high on political institutionalization and low on personal leadership" (Kavanagh 1990: 244) probably goes some way towards explaining this unwillingness to explore the more subjective elements in politics.

This thesis suggests that the study of symbolic politics can be divided into two separate areas of investigation. The first involves communicative theory. It looks at the control by political leaders of symbolic actions aimed at defining and manipulating the political environment; in other words how political communication is utilised to define the terms of debate. The second area of symbolic politics is more abstract and concerns the relationship between the presentation of politics (symbolic construction) and political reality. It looks at the consequences of the reduction of political complexity which result from symbolically transmitted reality.

In this thesis these two areas of investigation are operationalised in a study of comparative government. The examples used to illustrate the case in question are the political systems of the United States and Great Britain. Two separate case studies analyse the impact of symbolic politics on the offices of the American president and the British prime minister. Another way of describing this is as an investigation of the dramaturgy behind political leadership and its impact on the political process in both presidential and parliamentary systems of government. The combination of the comparative method with the case-study method should prove useful for the purposes of this thesis. Lijphart points out that productive research should closely connect these two methods and that "case studies can make an important contribution to the establishment of general propositions and thus to theory-building in political science" (Lijphart 1971: 691; see also Chilcote 1994: 373-375).

Two hypotheses are explored. These correspond, respectively, to the two areas of investigation mentioned above, namely communicative theory and the reduction of political complexity. The first hypothesis is that symbolic politics possesses a significant 'controlling potential'. This is defined as a measure of the effectiveness of using symbolic communication for the purpose of governmental control in the daily political power process of the political systems of the United States and Great Britain. The real 'controlling potential' of symbolic communication in politics can only be examined, if research focuses on two questions: (i) When is symbolic politics most successfully used by political leaders? and (ii) At what point does lack of substantive political achievement undermine symbolic success? The second hypothesis of this thesis is that symbolic politics can lead to a 'de-realisation' of political reality. This means that symbolic politics can promote a distorted picture of complex matters by giving the impression of certainty on the part of political actors, suggesting confidence about ambiguous causalities and offering the illusion of problem-solving competence.

The office of the American president has long been the subject of immense academic interest by political scientists and scholars from other disciplines. In contrast the office of the British prime minister has produced very little scholarly literature (King 1988: 52). As Rhodes notes "[t]he state of the art in British core executive studies leaves plenty of room for improvement" (Rhodes 1995: 36). Existing studies of the American president and the British prime minister have in common that for the purpose of academic scrutiny their respective offices are often divided into several distinct areas. For instance, scholars have analysed the economic management, the foreign, defence or education policies of presidents or prime ministers. This thesis takes a more integrative view. Hence the case studies differentiate between different types of symbolic communication instead of analysing symbolic elements in distinct policy areas. Moreover, many studies investigating political communication focus on one particular period of time in the political life of a leader, usually election campaigns. Undoubtedly election campaigns represent an accumulation of symbolic communication, however they should not be regarded as the only time when symbolic elements play an important role for an incumbent.

Ronald Reagan's Presidency and Margaret Thatcher's Premiership have been adopted as examples in this thesis for three main reasons. First of all, both incumbents are generally regarded as having had a large symbolic impact, although each in their own way. They are considered to be "politicians who paint in primary colours. There has been nothing neutral about them or the reactions they provoke. They are memorable personalities, who arouse feelings of enthusiastic admiration or of biting disapproval" (G. Smith 1990: 258). This makes them particularly suited to an analysis of symbolic politics. Secondly, both incumbents left office within the last decade. As symbolic politics is becoming increasingly more important, it is essential to study relatively contemporary events and developments. Thirdly, Ronald

Reagan and Margaret Thatcher occupied their offices by and large during the same time, although Thatcher of course remained in office longer. This is useful because it allows for a comparison of the symbolic communication within the two political systems during a Zeitgeist that was to some extent shared by them both.

Throughout this thesis a distinction is made between 'symbolic politics' (small 's') and 'political symbolism' on the one hand and 'Symbolic Politics' (capital 'S') on the other hand. 'Political symbolism' refers to the individual optical, acoustic, or verbal signals through which political information is transmitted. It forms part of the broader rubric of 'symbolic politics'. The meaning of 'symbolic politics' also includes the strategic use of symbolic communication by political actors (Sarcinelli 1989: 295). In other words 'political symbolism' refers to separate stimuli such as flags, verbal phrases, decorations, or gestures. If those stimuli are used over a specific period of time, such as throughout an election campaign or during the implementation process of a particular policy, then this is called 'symbolic politics'. The analytical model of 'Symbolic Politics' (capital 'S') is quite different from 'symbolic politics' as defined above. Whereas 'symbolic politics' covers the mere description of the strategic use of symbolic communication, the theory of 'Symbolic Politics' concerns itself with more far-reaching generalisations and principles than a purely descriptive approach. For example 'Symbolic Politics' hypothesises about abstract issues like the nature of political reality.

The overall structure of this thesis is as follows. The first chapter is concerned with the theoretical framework of Symbolic Politics. Unfortunately, most of the studies on Symbolic Politics are either too abstract or do not define their theoretical grounding at all. Therefore the first chapter concentrates on explaining the relationship between the theory of Symbolic Politics, as understood by Edelman, and the theories of political culture, symbolic interactionism and systems analysis.

Detailed attention is paid to particular aspects which become important later on in the thesis such as the relationship between symbolic politics and political leadership.

The rise of the modern media is often seen as the main reason for the increasing importance of symbolic politics and therefore the second chapter analyses points of contact between the development of the mass media and symbolic communication. Particular consideration is given to the relationship between the media and the offices of president and prime minister. In other words this chapter aims to review the institutional background for the employment of symbolic politics by the American president and British prime minister.

The third chapter contains an abstract examination of the symbolic functions of the American president and the British prime minister within their respective political systems. This symbolic dimension of the offices and their incumbents plays an important role in political leaders' power management as well as in their audiences' understanding of the workings of the political arena.

The fourth and fifth chapters constitute the most substantial part of this thesis. The first case study applies the theoretical framework of Symbolic Politics to the Reagan Presidency, the second case study applies the same framework to the Thatcher Premiership. In each case study different types and strategies of symbolic communication are analysed under the same five headings. This is followed by a conclusion which aims to present a coherent account of the results of this thesis.

# I. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF SYMBOLIC POLITICS

By way of outlining the theory of Symbolic Politics two avenues must be explored. First of all, cross-references to other influential theories and the function of symbolism in those approaches must be made. Secondly, key assumptions in Edelman's theory of Symbolic Politics need to be considered. To this end the chapter is divided into six sections.

The first section deals with the delimitation of the term 'symbol'. Terms such as 'symbol' or 'image' are often used in the vernacular without a clear understanding of their meaning. This can only be avoided by clearly defining the relevant terms at the outset of this thesis.

The second section explains the connection between symbolisation and political culture research. The concepts of political culture and Symbolic Politics share a basic concern for the subjective element of the political process. Both approaches developed as reactions to the narrow boundaries of the institutional understanding of politics. Both emphasise the interaction of individuals and not of institutional structures. In studies of political culture, political symbols constitute an important link between the individual and the political system. It is therefore important to discuss the function of symbols in the context of political culture before turning to the theory of Symbolic Politics itself.

The third section examines the concept of symbolic interactionism as developed by social psychologists such as George H. Mead. The interactionist perspective forms a background against which Symbolic Politics began to develop in the 1960s. Furthermore interactionist theory and its application in political science provide significant insights into the nature and development of meaning about political reality. Examples of these applications of interactionism will be discussed.

The fourth section considers the function of symbolisation in systems analysis. Systems theory, including its notion of the political system as an input-output model, is highly influential in political science. Like the previous two theoretical concepts, systems analysis also utilises symbolism as an important component in explaining the functioning of the political system. Three particular areas of this theory will be discussed because of their relevance, namely David Easton's idea of 'political support' and Niklas Luhmann's interwoven concepts of 'power' and 'reduction in the complexity of information'.

The fifth section outlines the main themes of Murray Edelman's theory of Symbolic Politics concentrating on those areas which are either fundamental to an understanding of his model, such as the concept of quiescence, or of particular importance for the fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis, such as the symbolic functioning of political leadership. Relevant commentaries on Edelman's theory by other scholars are also considered.

The final section of this chapter briefly summarises the discussion of the theoretical framework of Symbolic Politics. In doing so it outlines the author's basic theoretical propositions about the functioning of symbolisation in a political system.

## I.1 A Delimitation of the Term 'Symbol'

The literature is unfortunately inconsistent in its use of the term 'symbol'. Related expressions such as 'sign', 'image', 'myth', 'ritual' and 'symbol' are often used interchangeably and lack clear definition. It is therefore essential to begin this chapter by defining some of the basic terminological 'tools' of the thesis.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a symbol as "something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation)" (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). The English word 'symbol' derives from the Latin 'symbolus' meaning, either of two matching objects of which one was held by one party and the other presented by an agent of the other party as proof of identity in a contractual relationship.

Symbols are distinguished from signs in general by their representative dimension, by which it is meant that symbols are a subset of the group of signs. For the most part signs are merely instruments which if interpreted correctly convey information to an observer. In other words signs are referents. "X is a referent of Y if X points the attention of a cognitive being Z to the existence of Y" (Kowalewski 1980: 97). For example a road sign indicates to an observer that a particular action is legally required.

Langer observes that "man, unlike all other animals, uses 'signs' not only to *indicate* things, but also to *represent* them" (Langer 1951: 30). Certain signs do not merely point to any immediate matter but also evoke a transliteral meaning. "They serve ... to let us develop a characteristic attitude toward objects *in abstentia* which is called 'thinking of' or 'referring to' what is not here. 'Signs' used in this capacity are not symptoms of things, but symbols" (Langer 1951: 31). So symbols can be seen as a subgroup of signs with an additional meaning component attached to them.

The different meaning of 'signs' and 'symbols' is particularly apparent in the field of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of sign-systems and signification in communication (Saussure 1960, originally published 1916; Barthes 1967; Eco 1977). According to scholars a 'sign' is the smallest unit of meaning and is

composed of two distinct parts: a 'signifier' and a 'signified'. The 'signifier' is the material element of the sign. This can be anything used for communication, for example, words, gestures, musical sounds or writing. The 'signified' is the mental concept or reference which it represents (Seiter 1992: 33). For instance, a colouful cloth designed in a particular way is the physical element ('signifier') and the concept which it represents is that of a flag ('signified'). The relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary and has to be learned in accordance with the rules of a particular culture.

Semiotics also distinguishes between 'denotation' (the first-order of signification) and 'connotation' (the second-order of signification). This difference is illustrated by further reference to the example of the flag. Denotation relates to the most straightforward meaning of a sign. In other words the denotative meaning of a flag could be the 'Stars and Stripes' or the 'Union' flag. Connotation refers to any associated meaning attached to the first-order of signification. In this example feelings of pride or patriotism may be connotative meanings depending on personal and cultural interpretations. The connotative meaning makes a sign into a symbol. As stated above the additional meaning component is the distinguishing feature of the subgroup 'symbol'.

This analysis has a special interest in political symbols which prompts the question: what characterises a political symbol? Lasswell and Kaplan note that political symbols are those which "have a peculiar relevance to political science ... [and] function directly in the power process, serving to set up, alter, or maintain power practises" (Lasswell/Kaplan 1950: 103). With reference to Merriam's distinction between the "credenda and miranda of power" (Merriam 1950: 102), Lasswell and Kaplan define 'miranda' as consisting of those symbols whose function it is to "arouse admiration and enthusiasm, setting forth and strengthening faiths and loyalties" in the political process (Lasswell/Kaplan 1950: 119). In contrast the

'credenda' of power contain the rationale for the intellect to accept a given power structure.

It will be seen at a later stage of this thesis that this description of a political symbol, although of great importance, does not describe the entire function of political symbolism. Symbols have an influence on power structures through the emotions which they arouse, however this is only one side of the coin. The other side is that political symbols play a part in the creation of political and social reality for the general public. This feature is developed in more detail over the next sections.

The dictionary defines 'image' as a "picture or representation (not necessarily visual) in the imagination or memory of any object, especially of a person" (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). The Latin word 'imago' has a similar meaning and can be translated with 'imitation', 'copy', or 'mental picture'.

Daniel Boorstin defines an 'image', in his influential study on the same subject matter, as a "pseudo-ideal" (Boorstin 1961: 185). According to his analysis images replaced ideals after the Graphic Revolution: "An image is something we have a claim on. It must serve our purposes. ... The image is made to order, tailored to us. An ideal, on the other hand, has a claim on us. It does not serve us; we serve it. If we have trouble striving toward it, we assume the matter is with us, and not with the ideal" (Boorstin 1961: 198). Therefore whereas formerly people strove towards the achievement of certain ideals, Boorstin argues that they are now able, as a result of the Graphic Revolution, to choose the most appealing image.

In Dan Nimmo's work on political imagery an image has a slightly different meaning. Although both scholars see images as the interpreted mental representation of an individual's perception, Nimmo defines an 'image' as a "subjective

representation of something previously perceived" (Nimmo 1974: 5). In his definition he relies on Kenneth Boulding's characterisation of people's images as their 'subjective knowledge' of their surroundings. This 'subjective knowledge' or 'image' consists of those parts of a person's knowledge which they believe to be true and on the grounds of which they interpret the world (Boulding 1956: 5-6). Thus 'images' are similar to what social psychologists refer to as predispositions, although in this context may be seen as predispositions to a particular type of activity, namely perceiving and interpreting stimuli (Nimmo 1974: 8).

The image consists of different components, of particular importance are the cognitive and affective components. The cognitive component of an image involves the knowledge and information the individual possesses to interpret his/her surrounding. The affective component refers to the feelings about a particular sign which transforms it into a symbol (Nimmo 1974: 6-9). In other words the meaning of a symbol depends on the observer's knowledge of the sign and the kind and intensity of the feelings involved in interpreting such a referent. Furthermore individuals' images are not static but change under the influence of new information and sensations. Consequently the meaning of symbols may change - although radical change is rare, minor modifications and additions are more likely (Boulding 1956: 7-8).

The relationship between sign, symbol and image is best illustrated by referring back to the example of the flag. As noted above the meaning of a 'sign' combines both the physical device of the colourful cloth and the mental concept of the flag. Some signs possess an additional meaning component making them a 'symbol'. A flag, for example, can have associated meanings such as ambivalence, oppression or pride depending on individual interpretations. Interpretation of the additional meaning component depends on personal predispositions towards the symbol. These predispositions are also called 'image'.

Two additional terms worthy of consideration are 'myth' and 'ritual'. Unlike the terms described in the previous paragraphs which are integrally interrelated in a common contextual meaning, these additional terms are somewhat peripheral.

A 'myth' is commonly thought of either as an "ancient traditional story of gods or heroes, especially one offering an explanation of some fact or phenomenon ... [or as] a commonly-held belief that is untrue, or without foundation" (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). In a political context Lasswell and Kaplan hold that the term 'myth' does not necessarily imply a fictional, false, or irrational character, but that the political myth comprises the fundamental beliefs about the political system in a society. "It consists of the symbols invoked not only to explain but also to justify specific power practices" (Lasswell/Kaplan 1950: 117). However the authors point out that those beliefs about the functioning of the political system have to be regularly endorsed and demonstrated in order to maintain their strength.

Nimmo and Combs follow this basic understanding of myths and distinguish in a political context between four different types. First of all so-called 'master myths', that is those myths concerned with the nation's origin or destiny. Secondly, 'myths of us and them' which set certain social groups apart from others. Thirdly, 'heroic myths' which are myths about celebrated figures in politics. Finally, 'pseudo-myths' which are myths arising in contemporary politics and are usually of a short-term nature, for example, 'The New Nixon' (Nimmo/Combs 1980: 26-27).

Etymologically 'ritual' derives from a religious context and means a "prescribed order of performing religious or other devotional service" (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). However the term now applies to a much wider context. Lukes suggests two reasons why rituals need not be inherently religious. "First, not all cultures make a clear distinction between the natural or empirical and the

supernatural or non-empirical ... Second, there are practices which are, in all or most relevant respects, similar to religious rituals ... but in which reference to the supernatural or mystical is either not central or else absent: in such cases there seems no good reason to withhold the label of ritual" (Lukes 1975: 290). Lukes therefore defines 'ritual' as a "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance" (Lukes 1975: 291). Examples of rituals according to this definition are the British Coronation, the Fourth of July (and other ceremonies of American society). Parliamentary or presidential elections also involve ritual. These rituals constitute an important part of the political culture of a country.

Different opinions about the effect and meaning of rituals are considered in the next section. However it can be said here that political rituals bring the prominent myths of a society to mind as the examples above illustrate. Symbols are not only a constitutive element of such rituals but make them externally recognisable. The observer takes part in a ritual such as an election, through the use of signs like the ballot box. This sign acts as a symbol, in this case, for example, of democracy, depending on the individual's preconceptions.

To summarise briefly, a symbol in the context of this thesis is to be interpreted as consisting of two parts such that: SIGN + IMAGE = SYMBOL. Political rituals are to be understood as manifestations of the myths of society. They represent an accumulation of symbols, although symbols do of course also exist independently from rituals; not all political symbols are part of political rituals.

## I.2 Symbols and Political Culture

The study of political science is usually associated with the analysis of the working of parliaments, parties, governments, or international relations. It may therefore seem strange that the substance of symbols, signs, images, rituals, and myths are pivotal in this thesis. In order to explain this the following sections are concerned with the relationship between the functions of symbols/symbolisation in society and political science. As a first step this section will deal with symbols in the context of political culture research.

The term 'political culture' appeared for the first time about 40 years ago. At this time American scholars, in the front line of the behavioural revolution in political science, were trying to lead their field of study out of the traditional boundaries of an institutional understanding of politics. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba pioneered this area of research with their five-nation study 'The Civic Culture' (Almond/Verba 1965). They define 'political culture' as follows: "The term 'political culture' ... refers to the specifically political orientations - attitudes towards the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system. We speak of a political culture just as we speak of an economic culture or a religious culture. It is a set of orientations toward a special set of social objects and processes" (Almond/Verba 1965: 12). Separately Verba defines 'political culture' perhaps more clearly as consisting "of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place. It provides the subjective orientation to politics" (Verba 1965: 513).

The common denominator of these two definitions, namely the understanding of political culture as the population's *subjective orientation towards politics,* has since gained almost unanimous acceptance in the field as the core of political culture.

Almond and Verba believe that the research interest of political science has to shift its emphasis. It needs to bridge the gap between the study of macropolitical structures and processes, and microanalysis of individuals' political dispositions and behaviours. Borrowing from the Weber-Parsons school of thought, both scholars view the political system as a *system of action*. They hold the basic unit of this system to be the role: "[A] political system may be defined as a set of interacting roles, or as a structure of roles, if we understand by *structure* a patterning of interactions" (Almond 1956: 394). Thus they claim that the political system cannot be sufficiently understood simply by describing the political institutions and legal norms of a particular system. Rather all political institutions and persons have to be seen as interdependent and in interaction with each other; the system is determined by those interacting roles. In other words the term political culture is a collective term for all those "particular patterns of orientations to political action" (Almond 1956: 396) which influence this interactive process within the system and thus influence the output of the system.

Following Talcott Parsons' and Edward Shils' classification of predispositions towards political action (Parsons/Shils 1962: 58-60), Almond and Verba distinguish three types of political orientation: (1) 'cognitive orientation', that is, knowledge and awareness of the political system; (2) 'affective orientation' meaning emotional dispositions to the political system, its roles, and its outputs; and (3) 'evaluational orientation' referring to judgements and opinions about political action (Almond/Verba 1965: 14). Thus the political culture summates knowledge of and emotions and judgements about the political system of which an individual is a member.

It is argued that the political culture approach is fundamentally conservative in its policy implications (Reichel 1981: 418-419). The reason for this is that in most

cases of its application a normative bias exists in favour of systemic equilibrium. Political participation and political socialisation are merely defined in terms of social integration and stability under the conditions of liberal democracies (Reichel 1980: 393). Almond and Verba concluded that in 1965 a 'civic culture' existed in the United States and in Great Britain. This consisted of those attitudes which were particularly "supportive of a stable democratic process" (Almond/Verba 1965: x). This civic culture was seen to be of an exemplary nature for other countries.

Two comments must be made as regards the aforementioned criticism levied by Reichel. First of all, the political culture approach began to develop at a time when there was considerable general concern about socio-economic modernisation and political development in the newly independent countries (Kavanagh 1980: 126). Having to face the process of decolonisation and with the collapse of fascism fresh on everybody's minds, it is not surprising that political scientists developed a new approach towards comparative government with a strong normative bias. Secondly, political culture has to be understood as an evolutionary model of political dispositions and behaviour patterns. One example of this evolutionary process is that the original bias in favour of Anglo-American democracy has, in more recent years, been altered. Verba said in 1980: "In the United States and Britain ... there has been a steady erosion of confidence in the government. We had assumed that other nations might move in the 'civic' direction of the United States and Britain; in fact, the latter two nations moved away from that position" (Almond/Verba 1980: 339). Almond and Verba appreciated the constantly evolving character of political culture from the beginning as is clear, for example, when they describe their study as a "snapshot in a rapidly changing world" (Almond/Verba 1965: x). Other scholars such as Dittmer reinforce this argument by identifying political culture not as a "'given' ... set of identities that people inherit ... [but as] a process, such as modelling, shaming, or commemorating" (Dittmer 1982: 40).

Before turning to the role of symbolisation within a political culture, one related concept deserves a mention, 'political style'. Herbert Spiro suggests that political style should be one element in comparing the nature of the democratic process in different countries. He states: "Political style describes the types of arguments that are used in connection with the discussion of issues, mainly in the course of deliberation" (Spiro 1959: 178). Spiro distinguishes five types of political style "characterized by the predominance of arguments based on purposive interest, violence, ideology, law, and immediate goals" (Spiro 1959: 178).

Based on this understanding of political style, Verba suggests that much of the political activity directed towards the achievement of culturally defined goals is regulated by political style (Verba 1965: 544-545). In other words political style consists of those "informal norms of political interaction that regulate the way in which fundamental political beliefs are applied in politics" (Verba 1965: 545). For Verba political style is therefore no more than a subconcept of political culture. Along the same lines of argument Almond and Coleman have tried to introduce the model of political style as a link between the structure and the function of the political system. They identified "specified styles of performance of function by structure" (Almond/Coleman 1960: 59) in political systems in order to "make precise comparisons relating the elements of the three sets - functions, structures and styles - in the form of a series of probability statements" (Almond/Coleman 1960: 59).

However, the most interesting approach to describing the relationship between political culture and political style is presented by Bußhoff. He regards *the public behaviour of politicians or other people of public life under the conditions of a given political system* as political style ("das öffentliche Verhalten von Politikern oder Personen des öffentlichen Lebens im Rahmen eines gegebenen politischen Systems"; Bußhoff 1970: 8). In contrast he views political culture as consisting of *the public*

*behaviour of the 'political society' of a political system towards politics* ("das öffentliche Verhalten der 'politischen Gesllschaft' eines politischen Systems gegenüber der Politik"; Bußhoff 1970: 9). This means that political style, in comparison to political culture, represents a shift in focus from the subjective orientation of the population towards politics, to the nature of the actions of political protagonists (Sarcinelli 1987a: 37). However as both perception of the political process and the operating standards for the actions of political leaders are governed by the same subjective orientations towards politics, political culture can be regarded as the generic concept.

The question which now arises is what is the function of symbolisation in a political culture? Scholars have provided a variety of answers to this question. For current purposes it is sufficient to concentrate on the common themes of their explanations.

Donald Devine understands political culture as a subgroup of the culture of a society (Devine 1972: 14). He distinguishes between the four subsystems of a political culture: the symbol system, the identity system, the rule system and the belief system. Devine defines the symbol system as "the structure for support of the basic political artefacts deemed valuable in the culture" (Devine 1972: 16). According to his model symbolisation both enables and limits the scope of social interaction. In other words symbols are necessary in order to identify reality but they also restrict public understanding. Political symbols are of particular importance in creating individual emotional attachment to a social system. As such they represent values in a political system and assist the public's affective orientation towards political reality thus providing support for a regime (Devine 1972: 110-111). For example political officials and institutions which are identified as symbols of the state become very important in the individual's perception of politics (Rosenbaum 1975: 122-123). In Britain and the United States the monarchy and the presidency are highly influential as "they are the earliest political institutions of which the young

child becomes aware, and thus greatly influence the young child's affective and evaluative orientation towards the regime" (Kavanagh 1972: 33). Political symbols are therefore significant in developing the subjective orientations of the individual which add up to the political culture of the country.

In summary the empirical focus of this approach is the connection between regime maintenance and the values held by members of society. The symbol system is said to facilitate "emotional attachment to the nation, the community, the rules, and the beliefs" (Devine 1972: 133). Political symbols are part of the political culture and influence the processing of demands into inputs and support for the system.

Similarly Lowell Dittmer argues that political symbolism is the inherently cultural element in political culture (Dittmer 1977: 557). According to his analysis political symbols possess a 'metalinguistic' and a 'connotative' element (Dittmer 1977: 567). The 'metalinguistic' element of a symbol refers to its ability to integrate a wide range of meanings into a single political slogan, for example, while retaining the illusion of everyday reality. The 'connotative' element of a symbol is "its capability to represent and convey emotions" (Dittmer 1977: 568). These capabilities are of course highly significant in the context of political culture research as they influence the subjective orientation of individuals towards the political system.

Dittmer stresses the importance of so-called 'key symbols'. These symbols are capable of providing orientation and explanation about a political system and its functioning. Dittmer suggests that one way of pinpointing these symbols is first to identify the objects in a political culture which attract particular interest and then to analyse their precise meaning and the reasons why participants consider them particularly important (Dittmer 1977: 83). Dittmer regards political culture as consisting of "popular cognitive and behavioral orientations toward the central symbols" (Dittmer 1982: 20) of society. Therefore he suggests political symbols

should become the "basic unit of analysis in studies of political culture" (Dittmer 1977: 570).

An application of this approach can be seen in Elder and Cobb's empirical study on social aggregation in which they measure the affective orientation of the American population towards 27 national symbolic objects in the United States (Elder/Cobb 1976). They hypothesise that any political culture "is characterized by a variety of symbolic objects that serve as the basis of common identification ... Owing to the primacy of affective orientations toward the core symbols of a group ... it is these orientations that give definition to the group and provide its principal common denominator" (Elder/Cobb 1976: 309). Their empirical findings suggest that affective orientation towards political symbols varies significantly between the different groups in a society (Elder/Cobb 1976: 325). In other words each social group possesses a specific hierarchy in their affect for symbolic objects.

Elder and Cobb's study of symbolic affect usefully operationalises the political culture approach. Like Dittmer's 'key symbols', Elder and Cobb consider 'higher-order symbols' as the essential module of a political culture. 'Higher-order symbols' are defined as those symbols which have developed as cultural norms and values over a long period of time in a given political system (Elder/Cobb 1983: 82). In the political system of the United States the values of 'freedom' and 'equality' are for instance said to have taken on the role of 'higher-order symbols'. Although there is a basic level of agreement about the meaning of the terms 'freedom' and 'equality', a more detailed definition reveals considerable disagreement amongst the American public. Nevertheless the former basic agreement helps to stabilise the democratic system (Elder/Cobb 1983: 119). Likewise in Britain popular attitudes towards the monarchy have been seen as an important element of the political culture. It can be said that the monarch's role as a representative of the "organic unity of a nation" (Rose/Kavanagh 1976: 563) forms a 'higher-order symbol' in the aforementioned

sense. It is also suggested that the monarchy plays an important part in the enhancement of social aggregation and political authority (Shils/Young 1953: 77).

The relationship between political symbols and political culture can be summarised as follows. Most scholars hold the view that political symbols, particularly 'key symbols', are crucial in connecting the individual and the political system. Political symbols constitute an essential part of a political culture. They are studied within a normative framework as tools which bring about and maintain systemic stability.

This view of political symbols, which holds that they merely foster symbolic unification in a political culture, is too simplistic for two main reasons. First of all, the assumption of a relatively high degree of value consensus even in liberal democracies is empirically questionable (Lukes 1975: 297). Consequently political symbols and rituals representing the values of the existing social order only reflect a section of the entire value-system of society (Lukes 1975: 296-299). Putting it differently, it can be said that the ostensibly stabilising function of political symbols is the result of a normative pre-selection of those symbols which strengthen the current political culture, and a neglect of those representing an alternative system of attitudes and values. Secondly, it is suggested that the political culture of industrial societies has undergone some dramatic changes in recent years. For example (i) the decline of consensus politics; (ii) the increasing exposure of citizens to political information through the electronic mass media; (iii) the depoliticisation of many areas of life; or (iv) the importance of political imagery (Gibbins 1989: 1-2). These changes are seen as an integral part of a postmodernist culture which has emerged.

Without going into detail about the illimitable debate on postmodernism, it needs to be said that postmodernism in this context is seen to "signify a society exhibiting discontinuity between economy, society and polity" (Gibbins 1989: 15). Postmaterialist values, new types of economic organisation and a postmodern

culture with new forms of cultural expression are seen as the centrepiece of this development (Girvin 1989: 31).

Some scholars now argue that the conventional political culture approach needs to be broadened by merging it with the paradigm of postmodernism. In doing so the analytical focus of political culture research shifts from the conditions for systemic equilibrium to the process of meaning creation within the political system. It is held that if the political culture of industrial societies is going through a number of profound changes characterised by uncertainty and confusion, then research in this field needs to reassess its conventional framework and address the issues concerning such notions of postmodernity (Gibbins 1989: 23-24).

The significance of this reassessment in the context of this section is that inevitably with such a new approach towards political culture research, the function of political symbols is also seen in a new light. Whereas formerly political symbols were held up as the tools for achieving systemic integration, political symbols are now seen as a means for providing identification and orientation in the image contest of postmodern politics. The growing importance of political imagery in a political arena in which politics and politicians are 'consumed', turns politics into something very symbolic indeed (Pekonen 1989: 140-141). Yet these symbols do not represent the cultural norms and values which are the preconditions for stable and effective government, they are simply artificial imprints of the political sphere.

It must be stressed that this concept merely represents an attempt by some scholars to modify the conventional model of political culture and should therefore not be regarded as the consensus in this area of study. The notion of meaning creation raised in this context will be explored further in the following section.

## I.3 Politics as Symbolic Interaction

In his book 'Politics as Symbolic Action' Murray Edelman stresses the importance of the symbolic interactionist theory for Symbolic Politics: "The propositions upon which this book draws stem from the view of social psychologists that only through interaction with others do people create symbols with common and compelling meanings and thereby create either common conceptions and beliefs about the external world or socially supported self-conceptions" (Edelman 1971: 173-174).

The importance of symbolic interactionism for the elucidation of Symbolic Politics is not the only reason for focusing on politics as symbolic interaction in this section. It was stated at the outset that for this thesis the way in which symbolic reality is created is essential. Thus as symbolic interactionists purport to offer a perspective on the symbolic process of meaning construction in society, their theoretical framework must also be explored.

The relevant propositions of the theory of symbolic interactionism as developed by the 'Chicago School' in the 1920s are outlined next. This presentation will be conceptually analytic and will not focus on the process of socialisation of the individual as this is not relevant in the given context. The theoretical model will then be looked at from the standpoint of the study of politics. A few attempts by political scientists have already been made to apply symbolic interactionism to the analysis of politics (for example Brooks 1969; P. Hall 1972; Combs 1980; Denton 1982).

Symbolic interactionism is a distinctly American theory, usually associated with the work of George H. Mead. Unfortunately Mead himself never systematically unified his assumptions about a system of social psychology. The posthumously published volume 'Mind, Self, and Society' (Mead 1974, originally published 1934),

consisting of verbatim notes of his students, contains the most comprehensive elaboration of his work. It was in fact Herbert Blumer, probably Mead's most distinguished student, who coined the term 'symbolic interaction' in 1937 (Stryker 1980: 15). Charles Morris describes Mead as "philosophically, ... a pragmatist; scientifically, ... a social psychologist" (Morris 1974: ix) and summarises thereby the origin and nature of his work.

The most important groundwork for the development of symbolic interactionist theory was the formulation of pragmatist philosophy at the end of the last century (Manis/Meltzer 1978: 1-5). Charles S. Peirce, the founder of pragmatism, argued that "man is essentially a symbol-maker and a symbol-reader, and his life is to be read as a symbol" (Duncan 1969: 203). Pragmatism for Peirce is a philosophical method used to determine the meanings of objects and events. Its main principle can be defined as follows: "The practical consequences which might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of an intellectual conception constitutes its entire meaning" (Feibleman 1970: 318). In other words the meaning of objects and concepts lies in the behaviour of an individual which is directed towards them and not in the objects or beliefs themselves. Within such a model for the development of meaning, Peirce sees symbols not merely as signs of thought but as instruments of interaction between the individual and his/her environment (Fitzgerald 1966: 160-165). It can therefore be said that Peirce developed "a theory of action as symbolic action" (Duncan 1969: 206).

Against this background of pragmatism, Mead laid down the fundamental premises of his theory of symbolic interactionism. He extended the importance of symbolisation from an agency of perception and communication to a regulating pattern for social experience and meaning. In general terms symbolic interactionists view "the individual as a creature of voluntary action, who in the process of action

creates meaning in concert with others and through a symbolic system we call language" (Snow 1983: 237).

In analytical terms, Mead describes the relationship between the individual and the social group as one where "we are starting out with a given social whole of complex group activity, into which we analyse (as elements) the behavior of each of the separate individuals composing it. We attempt ... to explain the conduct of the individual in terms of the organized conduct of the social group, rather than to account for the organized conduct of the social group in terms of the conduct of the separate individuals belonging to it" (Mead 1974: 7). It is therefore advisable to begin by looking at the level of the social whole.

Society is viewed by symbolic interactionists as consisting of people in interaction. This view of society as a dynamic ongoing process contrasts with the more common understanding of society as a social system. Symbolic interactionists acknowledge that individuals interact within larger groups or compositions. However structural aspects of society, such as social roles or social class, are merely seen as a framework within which individuals act, not as determinants of action (Manis/Meltzer 1978: 6-7). Therefore the reality of society for the individual arises so to speak in interaction with his/her social environment. "As we interact we develop a perspective as to what is real and how we are to act toward that reality. This interaction that gives rise to our reality is symbolic ... It is through symbolic interaction with each other we give the world meaning and develop the reality toward which we act" (Charon 1979: 54).

What precisely is meant by 'symbolic reality' in this context? According to Mead symbols constitute the foundation of all social life. As reality arises through conduct, objects or concepts of reality need to be identified in accordance with a common symbol system by the individual using them. Human behaviour and

interaction is based upon the ability to function in such a symbol system. For Mead, language, seen as a process of symbolisation, thus "does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object" (Mead 1974: 78). For this process it is essential that the symbols used will arouse the same response in others as they arouse in the user.

Of particular importance are the so-called 'significant symbols'. Human beings respond to one another on the basis of learned gestural communication. This means that their behaviour involves reactions to interpreted stimuli. If each person in a social group possesses the ability to respond to a specific gesture in approximately the same manner, then this gesture becomes a 'significant symbol' with a shared, common meaning. For example, if speaker and listener designate in imagination the same pattern of action to the words 'Open the window!' then this vocal gesture becomes a 'significant symbol' (Meltzer 1978: 17). Mead distinguishes 'significant symbols' from 'natural signs' which "instinctively evoke the same body responses and feeling tones in the observer as in the original expresser" (Rose 1962: 7). However both signs and symbols constitute elements of communication.

As fundamental ingredients of communication 'significant symbols' function in the process of 'role-taking'. 'Role-taking' or 'taking the role of the other' in symbolic interactionist theory means that the expresser imagines how the recipient of his/her message understands his/her communication (Mead 1974: 254). According to Mead the interrelation between the interactions of individuals through 'significant symbols' and 'role-taking' leads to a 'universe of discourse' which consists of a "system of common or social meanings" (Mead 1974: 90) in human society.

One point of particular importance must be stressed. The individual does not only take the 'role of the other', but also of a "'generalized other' - in which he evokes

within himself simultaneously the diverse behavior of a number of persons acting in concert in a team, a group, a society" (Rose 1962: 9). This 'generalized other' reflects the attitudes of the individual's social whole. Therefore symbolic interactionists understand culture as society's sum of 'generalized others' - or a set of joint meanings and values - which enable the individual to predict other individual's behaviour (Rose 1962: 9-10).

One feature of symbolic interactionism is the claim that the human being has a self. Essentially the 'self' is held to consist of two distinguishable conditions: "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" (Mead 1974: 175). In other words the 'self' is the sum of culturally influenced self-conceptions (the 'I') and rather more personal self-conceptions (the 'me').

Mead, by referring to the human being as having a 'self', means to suggest that a person can see him/herself as an object of his/her own action. "The 'self' ... is a social object like all the other social objects we share with others in interaction ... One's self, like all else, is pointed out and defined socially ... The individual becomes an object to himself or herself because of others" (Charon 1979: 63). This characteristic of a 'self' enables the individual to interpret his/her own behaviour as s/he would that of others. It gives the human being the ability to guide his/her behaviour in a given social context. Society is essential for the development of a 'self' because the person "possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group; and the structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs" (Mead 1974: 164).

Herbert Blumer stresses the importance of symbolic interactionists' analytical appreciation that society is made up of individuals with selves, in contrast to other

sociological conceptions which see individuals merely as responding to different types of social or cultural forces. He notes that such sociological conceptions ignore the process by which human beings construct their reality through the course of interpretation (Blumer 1962: 184-185). It is said to be material to view people as 'acting units' which are only influenced by social organisation "to the extent to which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations" (Blumer 1962: 190).

By now the interwoven characteristics of the basic propositions of symbolic interactionism should have become clear. Four central premises of the 'Chicago School' and its successors have been elaborated: (i) "Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them" (Blumer 1969: 2). It has been outlined above how 'significant symbols' and a common system of meaning guide the individual in his/her perception of reality and in his/her actions. (ii) Meaning originates in social interaction with others. It has been explained how symbolic interactionists see reality arising as a social process between individuals themselves and their physical environment. (iii) Meaning is formulated and modified through an "interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blumer 1969: 2). In this context the characteristics of a human self developing through 'taking the role of others' and the ability to view oneself from the perspective of a 'generalized other' have been mentioned. (iv) In more general terms it can be said that in preference to propositions which stress the importance of social structures or social systems, symbolic interactionists highlight the "processual nature of human society" (Manis/Meltzer 1978: 6). A society understood as a framework within which social action takes place influences the ongoing development of the individual, but the individual also contributes to the steady process of modification of meaning in society. Charon describes this fundamental proposition as follows: "Society makes us, but we, in turn, make society. The key to this interdependence is our symbolic life" (Charon 1979: 36).

How can symbolic interactionism - in its origin a theory of social psychology - be applied to political science? Some illustrative examples of such an application will now be considered.

Richard Brooks, in his study of political ideology from an interactionist perspective, stresses that the individual's beliefs have to be seen as a product of symbolic interaction with others and not as determined by formal categories such as class, income, or education (Brooks 1969: 29-31). The individual's view of his/her place and status in various social systems depends on self identifications formed in interaction with his/her social and political environment.

Robert Denton, in his interactionist analysis of the American presidency, focuses on its significance for the public sphere. He investigates, first of all, the emergence of the 'presidential self', that is the office holder 'becoming' a president as a result of interaction with the public, his individual views of office, and historical expectations (Denton 1982: 37-90). Secondly, he analyses the interaction of presidency and society by looking at how the presidency influences people's perception of reality through defining and controlling themes and settings in the political domain (Denton 1982: 91-114). Denton concludes: "Symbolic interaction ... provides a rather clear framework for investigating the dynamic, symbolic, and even ephemeral nature of the office. Interaction involves acting, perceiving, interpreting, and acting again. Such interaction gives rise to 'reality' and in this case reveals how the office of President is 'created' in society through interaction. The Presidency must be defined in terms of public perceptions of the office. Presidential behaviour is based on public expectations permeated by interaction through perceptions of the institution. But the 'circle of influence' is indeed a 'two-way street'. For every President ... attempts to influence, modify, and control public perceptions" (Denton 1982: 116).

These two examples illustrate that two propositions of symbolic interactionism are of particular importance to political scientists. First of all, the individual's response to a particular situation does not depend on how this situation is objectively presented to him/her, but on how the individual perceives, defines, and acts towards the event (Lauer/Handel 1977: 85). In other words political analysis must take full account of the interpretative process used by the individual in assimilating and monitoring political reality. Secondly, the symbolic interactionist perspective of social reality enables political science to view the individual not as determined by his/her environment but as "maker, doer, actor, and as self-directing" (Charon 1979: 174). Thus like political culture research, in an interactionist analysis of politics the individual takes the centre stage in the analytical framework. However whereas in the former research focuses on the subjective attitudes and orientations of the individual, the latter centres on the individual as an 'acting unit' creating meaning in interaction.

Notions of symbolic interactionism have more frequently been incorporated into political science by applying the theory of the dramaturgical school of interaction as developed by Kenneth Burke and Erving Goffman. Burke and Goffman offer a variation of Mead's 'orthodox' concept of symbolic interaction. They share his perspective that reality is being constructed in interaction between human beings. Consequently "each orientation accepts, to some degree, the methodological necessity of 'getting inside' the reality of the actor in an effort to understand this reality as the actor does" (Meltzer/Petras/Reynolds 1975: 54-55).

In Burke's model of dramatism, which was originally intended as a theory of literature, the individual is characterised as a "symbol-using animal" (Burke 1968: 5). However, the individual does not always comprehend that "the whole overall 'picture' is but a construct of our symbol systems ... [and] clings to a kind of naive

verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality" (Burke 1968: 5). In other words, Burke suggests that attention be paid to the dangers of ignoring the fact that our reality is symbolic in nature.

Burke particularly emphasises the importance of the structure of the symbolic act. In his concept of dramatic action there are five key terms: 'act' (what took place), 'scene' (the situation), 'agent' (kind of person who performed the act), 'agency' (means or instruments the person used in performing the act), and 'purpose' (reason why the act was performed) (Burke 1945: xv). If one thinks of (i) the 'act' as action in social institutions such as government, science, or art; (ii) the 'scene' as a social stage; (iii) the 'agent' as the various social roles performed in these social institutions; (iv) the 'agency' as the medium in which communication takes place; and (v) the 'purpose' as the effort to achieve integration in social action; then one realises how Burke's pentad can be converted to a sociological model of action (Duncan 1968: 19). However, it is important to note that according to Burke this dramatistic model of the structure of symbolic action is not just a screen or metaphor for social, political, or economic reality, but is reality, as it is the framework of social order (Duncan 1968: 237). In other words, society is not just similar to drama, but is drama, and its purpose is the creation of social consensus.

The main premise of Erving Goffman's analysis of the meaning-constructing behaviour of individuals which is appropriate in the present context is "impression management" (Goffman 1969: 183). Goffman argues that in interaction each individual strives to 'manage' the impressions which others receive of him/her. "In effect, each puts on a 'show' for the others" (Meltzer/Petras/Reynolds 1975: 68). Or as Goffman himself puts it in his influential 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life': "Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind ... it will be in his interest to control the conduct of others, especially their

responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan" (Goffman 1969: 3).

It has been argued that the dramaturgical school of interactionism has advanced symbolic interactionist theory in a promising direction for two reasons. First, it stresses a 'team-of-players model' rather than the more individually oriented concept of symbolic interaction. Secondly, it underlines the motivational structure for behaviour in interaction. Both of these aspects have made interactionism more sociological (Kuhn 1964: 73).

The fact that the dramaturgical approach to symbolic interactionism has made the latter more sociological has encouraged a number of studies to investigate politics using a dramatic model of symbolic action. One example is Orrin Klapp's study of symbolic leaders (Klapp 1964). According to Klapp, a symbolic leader as opposed to an organisational leader functions "through his image, the kind of man he seems to be, the style of life or attitudes he symbolizes" (Klapp 1964: 23). An organisational leader on the other hand typically works within a certain social structure or group. S/he may also combine symbolic with his/her organisational leadership like Queen Elizabeth II or John F. Kennedy, but will by definition always remain fundamentally different from a pure symbolic leader as s/he needs the organisational structure to exercise symbolic leadership (Klapp 1964: 23). In line with the Burkeian dramatic concept Klapp distinguishes between three common types of symbolic leaders who act in the 'public drama' of mass societies: 'heroes', 'villains', and 'fools' (Klapp 1962). All types of symbolic leaders and the images they represent have a function in either maintaining or changing the social order.

To summarise, Klapp treats the social process as dramatic in nature and this "drama provides the scenes within which important changes are occurring ... that cannot be accounted for by ordinary organizational leadership" (Klapp 1964: 25). In other words the author holds that a sociodramatic analysis of leadership enables realisation of the operative influence of symbolic leadership figures in society.

Richard Merelman argues that politics cannot be compared precisely to drama but that politicians use dramatic devices to attain the support essential to political power (Merelman 1969: 216-217). He considers ideologies to be of particular importance for the dramaturgy of politics as they "cast the world in dramatic terms by employing such dramaturgical techniques as personification, identification appeals, symbolism, catharsis, and suspense" (Merelman 1969: 222). The employment of these dramatic mechanisms is said to be conditioned by certain variables such as the type of policy issues involved, or the settings of the political process. Whereas style issues, that is issues concerning moral or ethical questions, encourage the use of dramatic devices, a setting such as a bureaucracy which imposes inflexible rules on politicians, discourages the use of dramaturgy (Merelman 1969: 228-233). Merelman concludes that a dramatic "perspective on politics ... highlights formerly obscured aspects of the political process" (Merelman 1969: 239). His analysis neglects the perspective of joint meaning creation seen as a dramatic process in favour of ways of manipulating the political process by using dramatic devices.

In James Combs' 'Dimensions of Political Drama' (Combs 1980) the dramaturgical perspective is applied to such different areas of the political process as political ceremonials, campaigns, mass communication, and political leadership. Combs asserts at the outset of his study "that most politics occur at public distance in a reified zone of action separate from the lives of most people. As in theater, politics happen in a 'framed' arena, separated from the audience by a proscenium" (Combs 1980: 14). Political leadership, for instance, is seen as a highly dramatic

phenomenon in political life. Three concepts are said to be significant for the successful employment of dramatic devices on the political stage: 'public distance', that is physical and perceptual separation of the leader from intimacy with the audience, except on a controlled basis; 'public character', meaning to dramatise those character traits in the political leader which are valued by the political culture; and 'personage' which means that a consistent and well-known public character is more effective in using dramatic devices as he is elevated to a prominent role in the political play (Combs 1980: 78-85). Combs follows Klapp in his distinction between different types of symbolic leaders and describes a number of performance techniques used by them, such as personification, the controlled build-up of suspense, or unmasking, that is the managed exposure of some event or evidence (Combs 1980: 99-104).

In analysing the 'political drama' of contemporary politics, Combs tries to identify those areas of the political process which are either inherently dramatic, such as political ceremonials, or made dramatic through the use of staged communication, such as the drama of political leadership. Similarly to Merelman, Combs' analytical focus lies on elite management of the presentation of politics to a mass audience through so-called 'dramatic mechanisms'.

The dramaturgical approach adds a new dimension to the interactionist tradition describing the "manipulative penchant of humans" (Meltzer/Petras/Reynolds 1975: 81). Having considered briefly Klapp's, Merelman's, and Combs' analysis of politics from the perspective of a dramaturgical approach of symbolic interactionism it appears that each scholar simply highlights the controlling and management function of symbolic action in politics with a specific emphasis on the part played by political protagonists. In so doing their analysis almost completely disregards the two propositions of 'orthodox' symbolic interactionist theory described earlier as being of particular significance for political science: namely (i) contemplating the

interpretative process of individuals in defining political reality; (ii) focusing on the interactive discourse in society through which meaning is originated. This means Klapp, Merelman, and Combs apply the concept of dramatic interaction at a superficial level, that is for its apparent usefulness as an analytical frame of reference and its suitable terminology, such as for instance, 'political actor', 'political scene', or 'impression-management'. The main concern of interactionist theory is to explain meaning creation as a dialectic process. The failure of the dramaturgical approach in political science to pay sufficient attention to this dialectics is a serious deficiency.

The final part of this section will concentrate on a more theoretical perspective of politics as symbolic interaction. Peter Hall has so far presented the most comprehensive accounts in this area of political science (P. Hall 1972 and 1979). His article 'A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis of Politics' (P. Hall 1972) was the first major rejoinder to those scholars who argued that symbolic interactionism could not be applied at all to the study of the political system and the concept of power (Plummer 1991: xvi).

The starting point of Hall's analysis is that symbolic interactionism assumes the 'joint action' of individuals as the basic social fact, but lacks an explanation of the precise course of interaction in society. Hall suggests the use of the concept of 'society as a negotiated order', as developed by Strauss et al (Strauss 1956 and 1964), in order to provide answers to some of the questions raised, for example by Blumer, regarding society as a network of collective action. The concept of organisational life as a negotiated order focuses attention on the cultural and structural limits of the processes of interaction. By stressing the importance of factors such as self or group interests, values, goals, roles or resource constraints as elements of a theoretical concept of society this model offers a more realistic and sophisticated perspective of 'joint action'. In other words, Strauss' concept

elucidates some of the restrictions on complex forms of interaction which symbolic interactionists, in their understanding of society, do not sufficiently consider.

Furthermore, Hall correctly draws attention to the absence of the concept of power in the writings of symbolic interactionists (P. Hall 1972: 46). This criticism is rephrased in Denton's study as "ignoring the structures that channel the symbolic processes of individuals" (Denton 1982: 32) and assuming "that all individuals have equal influence in interaction" (Denton 1982: 32). Consequently it is suggested that for the purpose of political analysis, symbolic interactionism and the concept of power, which may be regarded as at the heart of the discipline of political science, must be brought together. In so doing the analytical interest of political research shifts from structural factors of power and its theoretical discussion to the processes of power which operate in negotiating the political order and reality of society (P. Hall 1972: 46-49). 'Defining the situation' or the 'symbolic mobilisation of support' are examples of exercising such power in the political arena (P. Hall 1972: 51-69). In line with Goffman's concept, Hall also refers to these examples of the processes of power as "political impression management" (P. Hall 1972: 51). The means of 'political impression management' form a substantial part of the analytical tools of Symbolic Politics and will be discussed in detail in section I.5 which deals with Edelman's theory.

At this point it is important to note that Hall's theoretical fusion of symbolic interactionism and political theory offers a useful perspective for political science. It stresses, on the one hand, the importance of social and cultural constraints on the process of symbolic interaction in society. On the other hand it also considers unequal power distribution in the course of meaning creation in the public arena without neglecting the mutual involvement of all members of a society in this process.

In summarising this section the following must be stressed: symbolic interactionism is a theory which describes the importance of the symbolic process in society. According to the interactionist model, reality is a social product. In other words individuals simultaneously gain meaning and orientation by interacting with others, and contribute to the formation of that meaning. Society is seen as individuals in a constant flow of interacting behaviour. Symbols are the tools for this process and function as the medium of interaction.

Due to its failure to recognise structural factors in society and its disregard for the concept of power, symbolic interactionism has rarely been utilised in political science. Where it has been applied, two analytical perspectives of the political arena emerge: first, an analysis of politics from an 'orthodox' interactionist point of view sensitises the onlooker to the importance of the individual in giving meaning and interpreting political reality in concert with others. Secondly, where the dramaturgical school of interaction has been applied, the analytical focus is also on the process of meaning creation of political reality, but here the particular emphasis lies on the manipulative efforts by political leaders to influence the meaning of politics through symbolic action. In other words, whereas in the former symbolism contributes to an interactive formulation of political reality, in the latter symbolism functions as a controlling device in the presentation of politics.

It has been demonstrated that both of these notions of meaning creation of political reality, which are of great significance for this thesis and will be further discussed in the next sections, originate from symbolic interactionist theory and its theoretical application in political science.

## I.4 Symbolism in Systems Analysis

Systems analysis is a version of functionalist theory in social science. It views politics as a complex 'system' of agencies involved in the process of decision-making. This perspective of politics, and in particular the function of symbolism within systems theory, forms the subject-matter of this section. Three important areas of systems theory will be discussed because of their relevance: (i) the function of 'political support', (ii) power, and (iii) reduction in the complexity of information.

Systems analysis in political science came into general usage in the late 1950s (Easton 1957) and was developed as a distinct way of interpreting the political process. Its central concern is the analysis of how "political systems come into being, survive, take certain forms, change and disappear" (Easton 1991: 602). It focuses on the development of a general theory which would be "equally applicable to any and all political systems" (Easton 1991: 602) and which explains how systems can remain stable under frequent pressures of stress or crises. This emphasis on systems persistence has led systems theory, like political culture research, to be criticised for being conservative. It is for example argued that the specific problem of order or stability should not set the overall agenda for the development of a general theory of the political system (Green 1985: 137-142).

The American scholar David Easton, who has been especially associated with systems analysis in political science, views the political system as a highly abstract mechanism by which inputs (demands and support) from a variety of environments are transformed, through political structures and processes, into outputs (decisions and actions of the authorities/policies). These outputs and their effects on the social environments of the system in turn influence inputs. In other words they create new demands and the support for the system. The latter process is called the "feedback

loop" (Easton 1965: 28-29). "This mode of analysis enables and indeed compels us to analyse a political system in dynamic terms. Not only do we see that it gets something done through its outputs but we are also sensitized to the fact that what it does may influence each successive stage of behavior" (Easton 1965: 29).

What function does symbolism have in such a model? In order to answer this question it is first of all necessary to consider the concept of 'political support'. Support is one of the two types of inputs of the political system, the other one being demands. It lies at the centre of systems analysis as its main function is to ensure the long-term survival of the system. Easton distinguishes between two types of political support, namely 'specific' and 'diffuse support' (Easton 1975: 437-438).

'Specific support' is characterised by the following. First, it is 'object-specific', that is it is directly related to the perceived policies and actions of political authorities. Consequently it varies with the benefits or satisfaction obtained. Secondly, it supposes that members of the political system have sufficient knowledge and awareness to monitor and evaluate the outputs of the system (Easton 1975: 437-439). 'Diffuse support' on the other hand is a more fundamental form of support. It "consists of a reserve of support that enables a system to weather the many storms when outputs cannot be balanced off against inputs of demands. It is a kind of support that a system does not have to buy with more or less direct benefits for the obligations and responsibilities the member incurs. If we wish the outputs here may be considered psychic or symbolic and in this sense, they may offer the individual immediate benefits strong enough to stimulate a supportive response" (Easton 1965: 273). In other words Easton suggests that a combination of symbolic outputs and an existing underlying loyalty in individuals to a political system bring into being a level of basic or 'diffuse support' which is not 'object-specific' and makes a system resistant to stress.

Two related issues regarding the function of symbolism in Easton's highly abstract theory come into play at this point. The first is the proposition that symbolic outputs provide an essential part of the 'diffuse support' for a political system; and secondly the importance of the perception of members of the system in deciding whether outputs actually satisfy demands, or in other words the influence of evaluative elements in the feedback process (Easton 1965: 390-393).

The dualism of 'specific' and 'diffuse support' in Easton's theory can be seen as directly related to such concepts as Lipset's propositions regarding the 'effectiveness' and the 'legitimacy' of societies (Lipset 1969: 77-83), or Almond and Verba's concept of 'system affect' (Almond/Verba 1965: 354). Lipset, for example, suggests that a political system which can strike a balance between its 'effectiveness' (the actual performance regarding policy output) and its 'legitimacy' (which is based on value consensus and emotional attachment) is more stable than a system which has to rely purely on pragmatic considerations (Lipset 1969: 81). Similarly, Almond and Verba assert that for members of a society there is a need for a "balance between instrumental and affective orientations to politics" (Almond/Verba 1965: 354). In Easton's terminology this means that 'specific' and 'diffuse support' need to be kept in equilibrium to achieve maximum stability in a political system.

In his 'Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support' Easton identifies three specific properties of 'diffuse support'; namely (i) 'diffuse support' is more durable than 'specific support', in other words the level of 'diffuse support' is independent of outputs in the short-run; (ii) 'diffuse support' is the backbone of the support for the regime and the political community as a whole; and (iii) 'diffuse support' arises from socialisation and direct experience as is apparent, for example, in the development of ideological commitments (Easton 1975: 444-446).

The most important expressions of 'diffuse support' towards political authorities and the regime are trust and a belief in legitimacy (Easton 1975: 447). Based on Wahlke's formulation (Wahlke 1971: 288), trust is hereby seen as a "symbolic satisfaction with the processes by which the country is run" (Easton 1975: 447). Legitimacy on the other hand is understood as the conviction of the individual "that it is right and proper for him to accept and abide the authorities and to abide by the requirements of the regime" (Easton 1965: 278). To achieve this type of basic legitimacy it is necessary, inter alia, for the authority figures to gain 'personal legitimacy', in other words to be regarded as responsible and credible by the members of the political system (Easton 1965: 303).

There follows a summary of the function of symbolism in Easton's concept of political support. Symbolic gratification of demands is recognised as influencing the members' evaluation of the outputs of the political system. It is seen as a constitutive part in the development of the so-called 'diffuse support' for a political system which is analysed in terms of its causal contribution to systems persistence. 'Diffuse support', in general, enhances the individual's trust in the system and his/her general belief in legitimacy, but needs to be in balance with 'specific support' in order to achieve maximum systems stability. However Easton does not clearly distinguish between those types of outputs and circumstances capable of providing symbolic gratification and those which are not able to serve this function; nor does he discuss any other effects of symbolic outputs apart from their influence on 'diffuse support'.

Eulau and Karps' model of representation goes some way towards remedying the first of these two defects in Easton's concept. Eulau and Karps distinguish between four different types of outputs of a political system, one of which they designate as 'symbolic responsiveness'; the others being 'policy responsiveness', 'service responsiveness', and 'allocation responsiveness' (Eulau/Karps 1977: 242-246). The

'symbolic responsiveness' of a political system is said to involve "public gestures of a sort that create a sense of trust and support in the relationship between representative and represented" (Eulau/Karps 1977: 241), whereas the other types of outputs mainly include elements of formal structure or material benefit. In other words 'symbolic responsiveness' is analytically distinct from other types of systems outputs and consequently the symbolic components of such outputs can more clearly be identified as *the optical and rhetorical 'carrier' through which diffuse support is initiated* ("das optische und rhetorische 'Trägermaterial', über das diffuse Unterstützung initiiert wird"; Sarcinelli 1989: 305).

The concept of 'power' in the context of systems analysis and the function of symbolisation within such a model warrants consideration. Traditionally power has basically been interpreted as a causal relation. It is said that A has power over B if A's behaviour causes B's behaviour. Bertrand Russell, for example, defines power as the "production of intended effects" (Russell 1957: 35, originally published 1938). He classifies the manner of influence into three types: (i) 'direct physical power', (ii) power 'by rewards and punishments as inducements', (iii) power 'by influence on opinion' (Russell 1957: 35-36). Max Weber in his definition of 'power' also starts from a goal-attainment point of view and states "'power' (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber 1968: 53, originally published 1921).

The systemic view of 'power' does not reject this teleological concept of the classical perspective but repeats it at the level of the social system (Habermas 1986a: 76). Talcott Parsons, who pioneered utilisation of the notion of the system in a concept of society, defines power as a "generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective

goals and where in case of recalcitrance there is a presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions" (Parsons 1986: 103, originally published 1963).

In other words the systems-theoretic view understands power as the property of a system which enables the accomplishment of collective goals for which an agreement has been formed, if necessary by the use of coercion. Parsons therefore starts from the assumption that consensus, namely shared values and collective goals, forms the basis for all social order. For analytical purposes 'power' in his theory is frequently compared to money as a 'symbolic medium' which circulates through the political system and over its boundaries into the other subsystems of society (Parsons 1986: 138).[1]

One particular interpretation of 'power' as a system resource must be explained here as it is a prominent example of the combination of the systemic perspective with the symbolic model of communication. Niklas Luhmann, a representative of the so-called neofunctionalist school, developed a systematic general theory which has firm roots in Parsons' view of social systems. However in sharp contrast to Parsons' theory, Luhmann attempts to exclude any notion of 'action theory' from his model of social systems by drawing a clear analytical line between human action and the functioning of the social system (Turner 1991: 240).

Like Parsons, Luhmann sees 'power' as an essential element in a general framework for analysing the stability of social systems. Whilst sharing this common point of departure, Luhmann then goes on to redefine 'power' in communicative terms

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[1] Parsons' analysis of social systems is of course closely related to his early work on what came to be known as 'voluntaristic action theory' (Parsons 1937). This theory will not be discussed in this thesis. However it should be noted that symbolism is of great importance in Parsons' 'action theory', for example, in his understanding of how individuals symbolically communicate with each other and their environments. It has in fact been argued that this particular aspect of his analysis is very similar to Mead's symbolic interactionism (Turner 1974).

(Luhmann 1975: 4-18). This of course is particularly relevant when considering the wider theoretical context of symbolic politics as it brings together the notion of 'power' and communication in one and the same model. He argues that communication, understood as a process of passing on and selecting information, constitutes the basic foundation of all social systems. In this way a symbolic medium such as language facilitates the communicative process. Based on these assumptions he defines 'power' as an integral part of the communicative process of a social system or in his own terminology as so-called *code-controlled communication* ("codegesteuerte Kommunikation"; Luhmann 1975: 15).

To appreciate this definition of 'power' and the function of symbolisation within it, we must now turn to the third area of systems theory, the 'reduction of complexity of information'. Parsons, Luhmann and other system analysts share common propositions about changing processes in social systems. The most important force for system change is seen in the increasing amount and complexity of information in modern societies. In order to respond to this development the "enhancement of adaptive capacity" (Parsons 1969: 24) of social systems becomes a key feature in achieving stability. Thus flexible elements for adjustability must be built into the system to cope effectively with change. This means that social systems have to adapt to the growing complexity of information by, amongst other things, functional differentiation so that the tasks of subsystems become increasingly specialised or by more effective ways of transmitting and selecting information in their communicative processes. Overall it is crucial for the stability of a system that the structural components of the system correspond in their level of differentiation to the complexity of new demands (Luhmann 1982: 147).

Luhmann's definition of 'power' as 'code-controlled communication' has to be seen in the light of the assumption that a more complex social system has to develop more differentiated functions and processes of communication. In other words the

exercise of 'power' must be looked at in its functional context. 'Power' then is a process of selectivity of information which enables the system to cope with those growing complexities; it is no more than "the strengthened selectivity of the system" (Luhmann 1982: 151). Or as Luhmann puts it in one of his early articles on this subject, *the exercise of power can be described as a process of selection, namely as selection of premises for action for another person* ("Die Machtausübung läßt sich als Selektionsvorgang beschreiben, nämlich als Selektion von Verhaltensprämissen für einen anderen"; Luhmann 1969: 168). As communication in general is, according to this version of systems analysis, regarded as a symbolic medium, symbolisation becomes consequently an *imperative requisite of the formation of power* ("Symbolisierung ... ist unerläßliches Requisit der Machtbildung"; Luhmann 1975: 32). Thus one can say that Luhmann's redefinition of 'power' in communicative terms opens up the possibility of seeing symbols as a constitutive element in the exercise of power.

Finally, this understanding of 'power' overlaps with two other prominent variants of systems analysis, namely Karl Deutsch's cybernetic communication theory (Deutsch 1966) and Amitai Etzioni's concept of an 'Active Society' (Etzioni 1968). Deutsch's fundamental thought is that political integration at both a national and an international level progresses in direct relation to the frequency of communications. Like Luhmann, Deutsch also analyses 'power' in its communicative context but he particularly stresses that exercising 'power' is directly related to the ability of the social system to learn and to pass on new information. Improvements in the effectiveness of symbol systems are considered fundamental for progress in the communicative processes of the system as a whole (Deutsch 1966: 10). In the specific context of international relations Deutsch sees symbols as either "indicators of ... communication" (Deutsch 1955: 36) or as "'regulators' or instruments of political control" (Deutsch 1955: 36).

Amitai Etzioni highlights the function of symbolisation in the control of social systems. He suggests that particularly in modern industrialised societies there has been a "secular trend in which symbols have become increasingly significant, while the relative importance of objects has declined" (Etzioni 1968: 198). Examples of this trend are the growing importance of knowledge and information for social and economic development, the expansion of the service sector in modern economies, or the emphasis on education as the basis of social stratification (Etzioni 1968: 199-214). Etzioni concludes that as a consequence of this growth of the symbolic sector social systems become more controllable and malleable. He states that "an increased symbolization of societal processes in principle increases the societal capacity to actualize the potential inherent in the increased malleability of society" (Etzioni 1968: 198). All in all Deutsch and Etzioni underline Luhmann's argument that 'power' and control in modern social systems are communicative processes which are predominantly based on symbolisation.

Having summarised three substantial areas of systems analysis in which symbolism comes into play the following can be concluded. Easton focuses on how symbolism constitutes an important element in fostering 'diffuse support' for a political system. His concept of 'symbolic outputs' remains vague but seems to consist of those outputs which help to create the affective attachment of members to their political system. By contributing to the 'diffuse support', symbolic outputs assist in stabilising the political system as well as in making it more resilient to stress.

The notions of 'power' and 'reduction in the complexity of information' in systems analysis are interwoven. They offer a new perspective on the function of symbolisation in social systems. First, systems analysis in Luhmann's interpretation enables us to view 'power' not just as a causal relation but as a communicative process in which symbolism constitutes the medium. Selecting and dealing with information is seen as the main element in the exercise of such communicative

'power'. Secondly, it might also be argued that this understanding of the operation of symbolism in social systems opens up the view that symbolisation is responsible for what can be called the "nomic function of the symbolic universe" (Berger/Luckmann 1971: 116). This means that the reality of the social system comes into existence through a symbolic process of ordering and making sense of multifarious information. As in the previous two sections of this chapter, the function of symbols in a political system seems to depend on whether one starts from the assumption that symbolism has a more manipulative or a more systematising function. This twofold approach of either 'enabling order' or 'exercising control/power' through symbolisation will be further clarified in the next section with a look at the theory of Symbolic Politics itself.

## I.5 Edelman's Theory of Symbolic Politics

This section will outline some of the main themes of the theory of Symbolic Politics which have been developed by the American political scientist Murray Edelman since the early 1960s.[1] It must be noted that Edelman since his early writings has published a number of books and numerous articles on Symbolic Politics and related areas, such as the function of the mass media in the political process, however he has never outlined a coherent framework of analysis or central theory. His analysis is based on individual subject matters and his style of writing can be described as essayistic. This in fact may be an important reason why a summary or overview of Edelman's work on Symbolic Politics has not yet been attempted by other scholars.

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[1] Most of Edelman's work on Symbolic Politics was done at the Department of
Political Science and Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin -
Madison where he was the George Herbert Mead Professor. Since 1990 Murray
Edelman has been Professor Emeritus.

Despite this lack of coherence, his main hypotheses concerning Symbolic Politics have attracted considerable scholarly attention and have been frequently cited. In the two decades following the publication of 'The Symbolic Uses of Politics' (Edelman 1964) the book was cited almost 500 times, according to literature searches based on the Social Science Citation Index, and spread from the field of political science into, inter alia, journals of communication, law and history (Pouncy 1988: 785-787).

As a result of Edelman's analytic style and essayistic writings his theory needs to be crystallised into a number of key points of particular relevance to this thesis. Three fundamental corner stones abstracted from his various publications are: first of all, the political spectacle and mass quiescence; secondly, the functioning of political language; and thirdly, the symbolic uses of political leadership. These corner stones will be explained in this section which will conclude with a discussion of relevant commentaries on Edelman's theory in other research.

Two hypotheses can be seen to comprise the principal starting point of Edelman's Symbolic Politics theory. They are, first of all, his assumption of the doubling of political reality into symbolic acts of reassurance for the mass public on the one hand and strategic bargaining for tangible benefits by organised groups on the other. Secondly, Edelman claims that quiescence towards inequalities in wealth in industrialised societies is the result of the symbolic dimensions of politics. In other words political symbolism plays an important function in the so-called "caused inaction" (Lipsky 1977: xix) of the public, that is in the acceptance of those continuing inequalities.

Regarding the first hypothesis, it has been pointed out that the development of Edelman's theory in its early stages coincided with events such as the war in

Indochina, the 'Great Society' programme, the civil rights movement and Watergate which made American politics appear on the face of it as a *coexistence of a theatre of illusion and dirty secrets* ("Nebeneinander von Illusionstheater und schmutzigen Geheimnissen"; Offe 1976: viii). Thus the development of the analytic models of Edelman and others (for example Lipsky 1968; Merelman 1969), which critically questioned the public presentation of political reality, does not come as a surprise.

Edelman's theory clashed with three schools of thought in American political science. First of all, its emphasis on meaning creation through political language signalled a split with the tradition of institutional codification and legal analysis characteristic of political science during the early decades of this century (Edelman 1985a: 195).

Secondly, it clashed with the behaviourism of the 1950's and 1960's. Symbolic Politics rejects the qualitative approach in favour of the critical normative analysis of political science. Edelman points out that "behaviorism is positivist in orientation for the most part, while the study of the construction of meaning must focus upon the interpretations of subjects more than upon the observation of objects" (Edelman 1985a: 195).

Thirdly, and most importantly, Edelman's theory clashed with the pluralist research programme whose main hypothesis suggests that in the United States there exists a widespread and equally distributed capacity among various groups of society to influence the political process and prevail in at least some disputes (for example Dahl 1956). Edelman takes a radically different view and rejects the idea that all groups affected by specific policies are fairly represented in the democratic process. He concludes for example in his study of business regulation legislation that large protest groups with an interest in improving their economic resources through political activity most certainly fail to achieve tangible goals. On the other hand

small highly organised interest groups regularly succeed in protecting or enhancing their status quo (Edelman 1960: 695-704, reprinted in Edelman 1964: 22-43). Furthermore business regulation policies are said to function as a symbol that "threats in the economic environment are under control" (Edelman 1960: 702) with the effect of allowing even greater attainment of tangible resources by those organised groups than would be possible without symbolic legislation.

Pouncy and others argue that Edelman's observations have assisted in improving the pluralist research programme by addressing the problem of unequal distribution of power in the democratic process (Pouncy 1988: 792). Edelman, however, in his later writings opposes this interpretation of his research. He suggests that his theory would have benefited from a greater reliance upon Marxist writing as he then would have pointed to social class instead of the degree of organisation as the critical factor in group influence (Edelman 1985a: 199). In other words Edelman does not view his writings on Symbolic Politics as a contribution towards improving pluralist research but on the contrary as an approach which highlights the importance of social class and not group influence as the factor determining contemporary inequalities in democratic systems.

After these general remarks on Edelman's theory the focus now turns to the three key aspects of Symbolic Politics mentioned earlier.

I.5.1 The Political Spectacle and Quiescence

Popular acquiescence towards political or economic actions stands at the centre of Edelman's work. Or as Lipsky puts it in his introduction to 'Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail' (Edelman 1977): "How is it that people

accept poverty amid affluence, hopelessness in a land of opportunity, government by unresponsive institutions that are pledged to human service? Why do they not rebel or at least speak out more forcefully against the political and social order?" (Lipsky 1977: xvii). Throughout Edelman's writings such questions have always provided the starting point for his analysis. How then does Edelman view the political system?

Very often Edelman uses the term 'political spectacle' to describe his understanding of the political system. The 'spectacle' he defines as a "partly illusory parade of threats and reassurances, most of which have little bearing upon the successes and ordeals people encounter in their everyday lives and some of which create problems that would not otherwise occur. The political spectacle does not promote accurate expectations or understanding, but rather evokes a drama that objectifies hopes and fears" (Edelman 1988a: 96). In other words politics is as far as the mass public is concerned a constructed world of conflicting meanings that involves its audience by arousing emotional responses in them but generally has little influence on people's day to day action.

Of crucial importance here is Edelman's distinction between 'meaning' and 'information' (Edelman 1971: 31-32). He suggests that political beliefs are not based upon empirical observations or objective information but rather on individuals' cognitive structures which preselect the facts and the information they take on board or ignore. Because of the remoteness of the political process for the general public, and the indifference shown by most people towards political actions, symbols become critical in forming meaning. "The mass public does not study and analyse detailed data about secondary boycotts, provisions for stock ownership and control in a proposed space communications corporation, or missile installations in Cuba. It ignores these things until political actions and speeches make them symbolically threatening or reassuring, and it then responds to the cues furnished by

the actions and the speeches, not to direct knowledge of the facts" (Edelman 1964: 172). Thus 'facts' or 'information' become, so to speak, converted through political action into political symbols. These symbols, as meaningful units for the public, then shape people's knowledge about the political system, its functioning and its actions.

All the political symbols taken together form the political spectacle which can be seen as a "meaning machine" (Edelman 1988a: 10) creating for the public different meanings about the political process depending on such factors as social class or level of indifference towards politics.

Edelman however does not view the process of political meaning creation for the mass public as strictly moulding or manipulative, controlled by a powerful elite in society. Instead he combines his view of the nature of the political spectacle with basic assumptions from symbolic interactionism. Thus on the one hand public officials and leaders are held to take the roles of the general public and aim to convey the impression of 'representing' the public's interests. On the other hand people's perception and interpretation of politics are seen as part of an interactive process in which such elements as social conditions, the meaning of political action and individual's self-definition influence each other (Edelman 1985a: 197). The spectators of politics are torn between a "chameleon world" (Edelman 1985a: 197) of rapidly changing issues and actions which present threats, arousal or reassurances. Meaning in the political spectacle then arises dynamically between politicians' role-taking, spectators' interactive perceptions and a changing social and economic environment. Edelman concludes that "the role-taking of public officials and the psychic tensions and ambivalences of onlookers contribute to the symbolic potency of political acts, leadership styles, settings and language" (Edelman 1964: 191).

Over the years Edelman has increasingly recognised the importance of the mass media in stimulating the construction of the political spectacle and devoted more scholarly attention to it. He notes that "news accounts highlight the dimensions of the spectacle of politics that attract audiences: leaders, enemies, problems and crises. All of them are social constructions because they are created through gestures and discourse that evoke similar perceptions in people who are important to one another, and also because each of these aspects of the experienced political scene helps create the others" (Edelman 1985a: 202). Precisely because of their constructed nature he suggests that such news accounts should be studied as symbols rather than as facts.

Political news items are said to be ambiguous, that is interpreted by journalists involved in their production and principally open to the generation of potentially contradictory meanings by readers or viewers. Television in particular turns political news into a dramatic performance which concentrates on impressions and evocations instead of the transmission of information (Edelman 1964: 101). Edelman emphasises that the openness of political news towards the projections of the public, such as hopes or fears, represents the real political character of news items. News items which dramatise, simplify or personify their information are not objective accounts of events but are mere 'catalysts' for the projection of meaning taken from the everyday life experiences of the mass public (Edelman 1988a: 90-94). The amount of attention given to human interest stories or dramatic incidents in the media is typical of the interpretation of political news which is dependent on day to day experiences of its audience (Edelman 1988a: 99-102).

Another way in which the mass media stimulates the symbolic dimension of politics is in the development of political narratives. Narratives are understood as a structure for screening information for its news worthiness in the production process of news accounts. Bennett and Edelman argue that because of the prevalent narratives

dynamic changes in the social and political world are constantly channelled into repetitive and stereotyped news stories (Bennett/Edelman 1985: 158). Information that does not fit the accepted political narrative is completely ignored by the media.

It is submitted that selectivity is in principle an inevitable process in the production of political news. However "the issue with selectivity is whether a representation funnels emerging reality back into stereotypical terms, or whether it introduces new information ... of the sort that promote critical thought" (Bennett/Edelman 1985: 164). Moreover narrow political narratives are said to encourage both politicians and journalists to conform in accordance with the existing 'symbolic mould', that is to act in line with the pre-existing expectations of their audience. Bennett and Edelman conclude that present political narratives reinforce the most common views of social reality and support the current normative order. A political spectacle constructed by such narratives emphasises activity, conflict and change on the face of it, but disregards the fundamental inequalities and contradictions of society (Bennett/Edelman 1985: 169).

This last point illustrates how Edelman's assumptions about the construction of the political spectacle are tightly interwoven with his analytical concern for political acquiescence by the mass public. Despite an ongoing flow of news stories about a changing political spectacle the pattern of class, racial, gender, national, and other inequalities remains pretty well static (Edelman 1985a: 201). The political spectacle as the public presentation of the political system is thus no more than a mirror image behind which organised interest groups bargain for actual value allocation. Yet Edelman does not suggest that symbolic outward show of the political system possesses any "magical force as narcotics" (Edelman 1960: 703). He merely points out that stereotyped or personified accounts of complicated legislation programmes or foreign policies are "rather the only means by which groups not in a position to

analyse a complex situation rationally may adjust themselves to it" (Edelman 1960 703).

The symbolic functioning of political goals such as 'higher wages' or 'urban renewal' are seen in similar terms. Such goals are understood as "formal categories" (Edelman 1964: 160) for codifying the political process. They represent symbols for future developments which may never materialise. However they stimulate current sacrifices and thus contribute to quiescent behaviour (Edelman 1985a: 206).

Edelman's model also explains the existence and actions of political institutions with respect to their symbolic function towards acquiescence. One of his examples concerns the distribution of tangible resources by the federal government in the United States through highly lucrative defence contracts. He argues that high profits for the contractors are concealed by existing administrative structures. He notes that "there is no necessary implication here that the appropriations are not really needed for defence; only that the mode of structuring the benefit legitimises it and makes its continuation probable whether or not it serves its ostensible instrumental function" (Edelman 1964: 65). Other examples used by Edelman to illustrate similar processes are the enactment of business regulation policies (see above Edelman 1960) and the distribution of agricultural subsidies.

In general terms the administrative system is seen as facilitating the interplay of different groups in society through its symbolic function in which already privileged interest groups usually have the advantage over less privileged groups in society. Moreover Edelman generalises that the entire political system does not respond to value choices of the public but that its existence is symbolic in character and merely legitimises and perpetuates the present normative order in society. He summarises his view of the political system and quiescence probably best in stating: "It is therefore political actions that chiefly shape men's political wants and 'knowledge',

not the other way around. The common assumption that what democratic government does is somehow always a response to the moral codes, desires, and knowledge embedded inside people is as inverted as it is reassuring. This model, avidly taught and ritualistically repeated, cannot explain what happens; but it may persist in our folklore because it so effectively sanctifies prevailing policies and permits us to avoid worrying about them" (Edelman 1964: 172-173).

It should have become clear by now that Edelman's theory suggests that the mass public is not in touch with the political system as a mechanism for resource allocation, but only with a symbolic construction he calls the political spectacle. This doubling of political reality into publicised dramaturgy and unpublicised resource and power bargaining is held largely responsible for the existing inequalities in democratic societies.

## I.5.2 The Functioning of Political Language

Edelman states that there are currently two different approaches to studying political language and its functioning. The first approach investigates political language from a pragmatic rather than theoretical perspective. It studies the empirical influence of language and relies on psychological experiments and surveys in order to determine how political attitudes and behaviour can be changed. Such studies are used to increase support for public institutions or to plan political campaigns. Many of these studies are seen as providing "knowledge in the service of power" (Edelman 1988b: 1333). The second approach is more theoretical and critical in character. It takes a historical perspective and considers language in the broader context of investigating "the foundations of power" (Edelman 1988b: 1333) in society. From the previous

discussion of Edelman's view of political quiescence it should be clear that he studies the functioning of political language in the latter context.

All writings by Edelman on Symbolic Politics share the common assumption that language is of greatest importance in the construction of political reality. His understanding of the functioning of political language must be seen in the light of symbolic interactionism. As outlined in section I.3, Mead and other interactionists see language itself as a process of symbolisation which makes the existence of a concept or situation possible. In accordance with this perspective Edelman notes: "Language does not mirror an objective 'reality', but rather creates it by organising meaningful perceptions abstracted from a complex, bewildering world" (Edelman 1971: 66). Like Mead, Edelman recognises the importance of role-taking in communication and explains the development both of a self and of shared meanings as part of the same interactive process (Edelman 1977: 10-11). He further applies this broader theory of language in the context of political language. For most people language is the central element enabling them to make sense of political events. Political actions and developments only become part of the political spectacle through their verbal representation. In Edelman's words, "[i]t is language about political events rather than the events themselves that everyone experiences" (Edelman 1977: 142).

Furthermore political language as a symbolic tool for conveying information must be distinguished from the meanings it gives rise to. Such phrases as 'increase in the defence budget', 'gun control', or 'capital punishment' generate different meanings for different people. In other words the language which describes political intention or action is highly ambiguous in nature, that is open to the interpretation both of the speaker and audience in social interaction (Edelman 1985b : 10).

This ambiguity of political language reflects the wider ambiguity of the political spectacle for the general public as discussed in the previous section. Edelman therefore notes that "it is not 'reality' in any testable or observable sense that matters in shaping political consciousness and behaviour, but rather the beliefs that language helps evoke about the causes of discontents and satisfactions, about policies that will bring about a future closer to the heart's desire, and about other unobservables" (Edelman 1985b: 11).

This concept of political language must be seen as a component of Edelman's broader paradigm of quiescent behaviour. The construction of meaning about political action and development is of great importance for interest groups in society trying to bargain for resource allocation. Through political language such interest groups aim either to sanctify a certain course of action which they perceive to be advantageous or to attempt to further secure the present value and resource distribution.

Edelman suggests that this is achieved by different means. For example words such as 'democracy', 'poverty', or 'communism' are commonly used to describe political and social reality. However people engaged in everyday activities do not fully appreciate the way in which their social world is constructed through political language. Consequently "the connotations people project into such ambiguous verbal symbols become 'realities' that shape and inhibit the actions and thought of their creators while erasing recognition that they *are* constructions" (Edelman 1985a: 212). In other words the use of political language in this sense suppresses the symbolic character of the political spectacle and maximises the persuasiveness of the political world as an objective 'reality'.

Moreover words like 'national security', 'national crises' or 'public interest' can veil very different sets of material conditions behind ostensibly authoritative

terminology and thus legitimise political actions. Political language here emphasises rationality and choice whereas it is suggested that such labelling more often indicates demands for greater sacrifices from politically and economically weak groups in society (Edelman 1964: 116-117 and 1977: 43-55).

In general terms Edelman suggests that some political vocabulary may take on compelling connotations or value judgements and become "a sequence of Pavlovian cues rather than an instrument for reasoning and analysis" (Edelman 1964: 116). Systematic analysis of political action or developments is then prevented by a powerful set of self-interest considerations or emotional responses automatically evoked through political language.[1]

Furthermore Edelman distinguishes between four distinctive styles of political language. These he calls 'hortatory', 'legal', 'administrative' and 'bargaining' styles. They are said to promote social stability by evoking different meanings for different groups of society (Edelman 1964: 133). He suggests that in analysing the political process the use of a particular language style is a useful indication of the real function of political actions taken and thus assists in revealing the true nature of the resource allocations process in society.

Edelman defines 'hortatory language' as the style which is most clearly directed at mass audiences, for example, in appeals for specific policy support, election campaigns or legislative debates (Edelman 1964: 134-138). He notes that such a style is particularly effective if it conceals its emotional appeal behind apparently objective explanations. In the area of labour policies, for example, phrases such as 'to minimise the harmful effects of strikes' or 'to promote peaceful negotiations' are nothing but appeals to a mass public. However they are used and discussed as if

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[1] On this point see also Doris Graber's research on the function of condensation symbols in political language (Graber 1976: 289-321).

they represented objective definitions of reality (Edelman 1959: 96). The effect of 'hortatory language' is that each time it is used in the public sphere it brings about quiescence by reinforcing the belief that popular participation influences political decision making or indeed is imperative for the execution of public policies.

The 'legal' and 'administrative' styles of political language can largely be found in treaties, contracts, administrative regulations, bills, judicial decisions etc. These styles are said to function in two ways. They provide the mass audience with "a basis for assuming that there is a mechanical, precise, objective definition of law, and [they provide] a vocabulary in which organised groups justify their actions to accord with this lay assumption" (Edelman 1964: 139). The main difference between the 'legal' and 'administrative' styles lies in the response of organised groups and mass audiences respectively towards those styles. Interest groups show a more ambivalent response towards the 'legal style', while the mass audience is particularly ambivalent about administrative language (Edelman 1964: 144).

Finally, the language of 'bargaining' is similar to that of the 'hortatory' style in that its main aim is to gain support for specific political action. However the language of bargaining takes place exclusively in private settings and is thus characterised by a complete absence of public response. To illustrate this distinction Edelman states that for example a lobbyist using 'bargaining style' language "offers a deal not an appeal" (Edelman 1964: 146).

Edelman concludes that the analysis of language styles illustrates how the participation of the mass public progressively vanishes as political action moves from public declarations towards the allocation of tangible values in private negotiations. Recognition of this link between language styles and meaning creation therefore provides an important linguistic tool in studying mass quiescence.

In more general terms political language in Edelman's theory is seen as a symbolic medium which enables powerful groups in society to bargain effectively for resource allocation while at the same time the mass audience is reassured that it is the 'public will' which directs political decision making.

## I.5.3 The Symbolic Uses of Political Leadership

Political leadership constitutes another important corner stone of Edelman's theory of Symbolic Politics. In principle Edelman distinguishes between political leadership of volatile and unstructured crowds, as for example in riot situations, and leadership in highly structured environments, such as the performance of American presidents (Edelman 1971: 120). This thesis discusses the latter, the exercise of political leadership in a structured milieu.

The primary function of political leadership in a structured setting is to orientate the mass public. Edelman suggests that the development of the modern mass society has led to a widespread sense of alienation. This means that a large part of the population feels unable either to understand or to influence their everyday environment. Incumbents of high offices are considered to be 'signifiers' who make such a "complex and largely unknowable social world understandable" (Edelman 1988a: 38-39). Through political leaders the social reality of the mass audience becomes so to speak filtered and mapped out. Edelman states that "[b]ecause it is apparently intolerable for men to admit the key role of accident, of ignorance, and of unplanned processes in their affairs, the leader serves a vital function by personifying and reifying the processes. As an individual, he can be praised, blamed and given 'responsibility' in a way that processes cannot. Incumbents of high public office therefore become objects of acclaim for the satisfied, scapegoats for the

unsatisfied, and symbols of aspirations or of whatever is opposed" (Edelman 1964: 78).

This key assumption finds support in Edelman's research on the meaning and impact of presidential assassinations in American society (Edelman/Simon 1969: 199-221). In this text it is argued that presidential assassinations shock the public not only because a well-known public figure unexpectedly dies but because of the victim's symbolic function as head of state. As such the president offers symbolic orientation and protection in a confusing social environment. An assassination suddenly eradicates this symbol and thus from the public's point of view removes this shield of protection (Edelman/Simon 1969: 200-201).

Edelman distinguishes this basic understanding of leadership explicitly from Max Weber's classic definition of 'bureaucratic' and 'charismatic' leadership (see Weber 1968: 226-245). Relying again on symbolic interactionists' thinking he points out that it is not rationality nor charisma which is important in exercising leadership, but rather the interactive process between leaders and their actions on the one hand, and the responses of followers on the other. Thus leadership is not a personal property but can only be defined by those specific circumstances in which it arises (Edelman 1964:77).

In accordance with this interactive perspective of leadership Edelman suggests that the selection of political leaders is a twofold process. Its central feature is that the role and personality conceptions of individuals with leadership aspirations and the general public influence each other. First of all, potential leaders try to ascertain whether they are prepared to fulfill public role expectations or whether this would constitute an infringement of their personal life. In other words individuals with leadership ambition undertake continual self-selection. Secondly, the political system moves only those people upward who are flexible in taking on popular

positions and are prepared to adapt to styles and values which appeal to large groups in society (Edelman 1964: 85-86). Edelman then concludes that not only is the selection process determined by interactive conceptions but the leaders and followers also "provide essential psychological benefits for each other" (Edelman 1964: 91). The leader's actions provide orientation for the general public, whereas the incumbents of high offices get a sense of power and leadership through organisational structures and their followers.

In order to explain Edelman's analysis of political leaders' actions three interrelated assumptions must be kept in mind. First of all, political leadership is exercised in a highly complex environment in which decisions are based on the information supplied and screened by the administrative structures availabe. Secondly, the media confers an impression of political reality following strict narratives which explain political actions in stereotyped patterns. And thirdly, political leaders must take into account the psychological needs of their followers, that is they must try to reduce the general public's anxiety caused by a confounding everyday environment. All three aspects limit the capability of action of every political leader. Thus "[l]eaders rely increasingly on style differences to create and emphasize an impression of maneuverability, and the impression remains an important political fact even if the maneuverability is not" (Edelman 1964: 74). In other words success or failure as a political leader, according to this model, depends predominantly on well-conducted impression management rather than operative accomplishments. Style differences and the various symbols employed in creating such impressions are particularly apparent in presidential election campaigns, where style and personality have become the most important strategies in achieving approval (Edelman 1974: 158-164).

Outside election campaigns Edelman distinguishes between an 'active' and a 'passive' style of leadership (Edelman 1964: 80-81). He suggests that an 'active

style', that is a style which mainly consists of taking clear policy positions accompanied by material actions, can be more successfully adopted in emergency conditions such as a war. In emergency situations the public is particularly eager to believe in the practicability of the actions taken by its leaders and thus the general belief in the possibility of successful leadership is enhanced. A 'passive style' by contrast is said to consist of avoiding clear positions on controversial subjects and of "publicized action on noncontroversial policies or on trivia, and through a dramaturgical performance emphasizing the traits popularly associated with leadership: forcefulness, responsibility, courage, decency, and so on" (Edelman 1964: 81).

Regardless of whether a more 'active' or 'passive' style is adopted, it is said to be essential for political success that the leader is given the opportunity to demonstrate his/her ability to cope with enemies or adversary forces. Edelman notes that for example in a recession or depression incumbents most certainly suffer because "the enemy consists of economic forces much more difficult to personify or even to identify, so that a leader finds it hard to demonstrate his capacity for attacking them. There is a strong chance the incumbent will look impotent" (Edelman 1964: 82).

In accordance with his general research interest Edelman evaluates the ultimate effect of political leadership in terms of its contribution towards the quiescent behaviour of the general public. As political leaders and their actions are seen as one of the key features in the construction of the political spectacle, the leaders themselves are held up as "potent symbols for diverting public concern from well-being to constructed happenings" (Edelman 1988a: 42). In other words in focusing upon an individual as representing a complex and dynamic social world, political leaders help to displace attention from the structural conditions of the contemporary inequalities in society. Political leaders assist in constructing the impression of

political innovation where structural limitations objectively allow a minimum of new possibilities (Edelman 1988a: 53).

Another way in which leadership produces political acquiescence is seen in the "creation of difference and opposition" (Edelman 1988a: 49). Edelman argues that very often dramaturgy of opposition between political leaders compensates for an actual lack of difference in policy positions. However the effect of such a 'spectacle of conflict' is to rally support behind the main actors involved in such a personalised confrontation and thus to distract from considering the actual alternatives (Edelman 1988a: 51).

Edelman sums up his position on political leadership when he notes that "[l]eadership, then, is a remarkable sign, blurring history, contemporary social, economic, and psychological interactions, and personal guilt, while substituting an absorbing narrative in their place" (Edelman 1988a: 61). For him political leadership contributes to the symbolic construction of political reality and thus facilitates quiescence in modern mass societies.

I.5.4 Relevant Commentaries on Edelman's Theory

Edelman claims that political analysis, if it follows his model of political behaviour, should take the following three points into consideration. First of all, all social scientists ought to recognise that political realities are constructed and multiple. Different realities exist for different members of the public because people vary in their social backgrounds and their intentions. If political analysts refuse to acknowledge the existence of such different perspectives, then, according to Edelman, they neglect important modes of interpretation and disregard their moral

and intellectual obligations (Edelman 1988a: 6). Secondly, political analysis must focus on the social and psychological processes through which the political behaviour and opinions of the general public are determined (Edelman 1971: 178). Thirdly and most importantly, political science research, functioning within such a framework, ought to articulate "profound skepticism about the responsiveness of government to the will of the people and also about the likelihood that governmental actions will effectively and rationally attack serious social problems" (Edelman 1971: 178).

As stated at the beginning of section I.5 Edelman's model of political behaviour has been widely referred to and employed in a variety of scholarly publications. However not all applications of his model follow the above mentioned recommendations. In fact some scholars apply a model of political behaviour which appears only on the face of it to be based on Edelman's school of thought and on closer examination is often quite divergent on some of the most fundamental assumptions of Symbolic Politics. Let us consider in this section some examples of the wide spectrum of applications of Edelman's theory as well as a few criticisms thereof.

Gusfield in an early reflection on Edelman's writings agrees that political symbolism constitutes an important part of governmental action. However, looking at the politics of the American temperance movement, he stresses that symbolic actions particularly affect "the specific status order, as distinct from the constellation of classes" (Gusfield 1963: 182-183) in society. Unless economic issues are at stake, that is issues about the distribution of tangible benefits, symbolic acts are said to constitute a crucial factor in indicating "the kinds of persons, the tastes, the moralities, and the general life styles toward which government is sympathetic or censorious" (Gusfield 1963: 172).

The most common criticism of Edelman's model is probably best summarised by Dittmer. Dittmer notes that Edelman fails to distinguish clearly between symbolism and substantive political action by analysing all elements of the political process, such as campaign rhetoric, ballots, or reform legislation, merely in terms of their symbolic meaning. He states that "Edelman uses a one-way causal analysis to depict a circulation of symbols in which the elites pull the wires and the mass dances" (Dittmer 1977: 562). In other words Dittmer criticises Edelman's model for its exclusive focus on political symbolism as an instrument of manipulation used by well-organised groups in society.

An even more fundamental criticism is expressed by Goodin in 'Manipulatory Politics' (Goodin 1980). He not only questions the one-sidedness of Edelman's model but also denies its overall validity. Goodin describes Edelman as a political analyst who because of his analytical focus on quiescent behaviour naturally comes "to view symbolic rewards with contempt" (Goodin 1980: 123). He suggests a very different model of the functioning of political symbolism and distinguishes between those symbols which make an emotional appeal to a wide audience ('affective symbols') and those which promise substantive future improvements ('promissory symbols'). Regarding their respective manipulatory potential he concludes that 'affective symbols' do not qualify as means of manipulation but are "played upon just because people enjoy it" (Goodin 1980: 154). Manipulation through 'promissory symbols' is considered at best to be short term in nature as "[p]eople who value symbolic rewards only as promissory coupons will surely lose patience if they are asked to wait too long for the coupons to be redeemed" (Goodin 1980: 155).

After these explicit criticisms of Edelman's model, let us now look at three examples of the application of Symbolic Politics. First of all, Käsler analyses the symbolic dimension of political scandals such as the 'Profumo Affair' or

'Watergate' (Käsler 1989 and 1991). He introduces the terms *decision-making politics* and *show politics* ("Entscheidungspolitik" and "Schaupolitik"; Käsler 1989: 316) in order to distinguish Edelman's two levels of political analysis, namely politics as an activity by organised groups to obtain tangible benefits and politics as a spectacle for the mass audience (Edelman 1964: 5). Käsler suggests that both areas require a specific mode of political analysis. Whereas Symbolic Politics is thought to be suited to analysing 'show politics', a more traditional policy analysis is considered necessary for the study of 'decision-making politics'. He categorises political scandals as a particularly advanced area of contemporary 'show politics' which is dramatised through the mass media and primarily concerned with the social norms of society. After his empirical analysis of various political scandals Käsler concludes that such scandals, when seen in a symbolic context, function in two ways. They help to facilitate integration and stability by creating a common symbolic meaning in the political arena. At the same time the popular reporting of political scandals is in danger of over-simplifying political reality (Käsler 1989: 327-330).

In order to develop the theory of Symbolic Politics further, Kowalewski suggests a very different application. He echoes Dittmer's criticism that Edelman and others have focused too exclusively on political elites as "shrewd Machiavellian manipulators of symbols" (Kowalewski 1980: 96) to control the masses. Furthermore he proposes that research into the effects of political symbolism ought to study negatively privileged groups in society not merely as "passive spectator-recipients of these cues" (Kowalewski 1980: 96) but rather as "symbol-manipulators" as well (Kowalewski 1980: 96). Four factors are said to hinder in principle the mobilisation of communal protest action of disadvantaged groups: "low self-esteem, weak sense of community, fear of self-expression, and absence of communication networks" (Kowalewski 1980: 97). All of these elements can be greatly enhanced by communal symbolism. Comparing the protest action of 21

groups demanding national, religious, civil, economic and professional rights in the Soviet Union between 1965 and 1978, he finds that groups with a "richer symbolic life tended to participate in more protest actions than those for whom symbols were less salient" (Kowalewski 1980: 108). In sum, Kowalewski does not question the potential for symbolic manipulation by a political elite but argues that symbols also represent a powerful tool for the mobilisation of powerless groups, or in other words, that political symbolism must be studied as a "two-edged political sword" (Kowalewski 1980: 110).

Sarcinelli applies the model of Symbolic Politics to the political campaign communication of the general election for the West German Bundestag in 1980 (Sarcinelli 1983 and 1987a). In his research Sarcinelli expresses concern that Edelman in his model might *overrate the possibilities of centrally-controlled meaning creation* ("nicht die Möglichkeiten zentral gesteuerter Sinnerzeugung überschätzt"; Sarcinelli 1983: 34). In other words he questions the power of symbolic politics in influencing and manipulating the public's political opinions and behaviour. Therefore, like Käsler, Sarcinelli suggests a clearer analytical distinction between the two levels of political action. The first level is characterised by substantial decision-making processes. The second level contains those political actions of a presenting or promoting nature which are essential for the creation of mass approval (Sarcinelli 1983: 34). His analysis of political communication in election campaigns falls into the second category. Sarcinelli's subsequent quantitative study helps to illuminate the following points. First of all, symbolic politics is as a rule regressive, that is it reduces the events of the political process into easily assimilated units of information. Secondly, symbolic politics structures information in that it puts the information about political reality into an already existing frame of reference. Thirdly, symbolic politics is affective which means that it addresses and stimulates the emotions of the mass audience (Sarcinelli 1983: 37 and 1987a: 240-244). Sarcinelli concludes that political communication in election

campaigns is an extreme case of dramaturgy, in which the presentation of personalities and policies becomes the decisive factor for success or failure. During such times symbolic politics functions as a form of political communication which makes it extremely difficult for the general public to recognise political reality.

Having considered criticisms and interpretations of Edelman's model, one scholarly attempt to integrate these different positions on political symbolism deserves mention. Klatch suggests that most studies of political symbolism focus either on symbolism as a manipulative tool or as an instrument for integrating divergent views of society. As an alternative she proposes a 'multidimensional approach' to the analysis of symbolic politics. This approach "understands symbols in all of their complexity - as capable of legitimating political authority and of instigating independent action, as perpetuating domination and as inspiring collective rebellion, as forces of constraint and as forces of potentiality" (Klatch 1989: 154). Such an approach will be outlined in the following and final section of this chapter.

## I.6 Conclusion

This section will briefly summarise the previous discussion on the theoretical framework of Symbolic Politics and outline the author's basic propositions as regards the functioning of symbolisation in a political system.

Having considered the function of symbolisation in political culture research, in symbolic interactionism as applied in political science, in systems analysis, and in Edelman's model of Symbolic Politics itself, the following is suggested. This chapter's analysis has ascertained certain contextual parallels between prominent theories of the political system and the function of symbolisation in such theories. In

general the discernment of the functioning of symbolisation in theories of the political system is predetermined by the analytical focus of such models. In other words models which are predominantly concerned with the investigation of political 'power' and models which are mainly concerned with the accomplishment and preservation of 'order' in society each attribute specific qualities to political symbolism. For the purpose of this proposition, theories which investigate political 'power' comprise of models which centre either on a framework which broadly speaking defends the current 'power' distribution in society or else criticises it. Models of 'order' on the other hand focus on the process of meaning formulation in a complex system. Let us now consider this proposition in more detail.

As outlined above symbols in political culture research are generally studied within a normative framework of systemic stability. Thus political symbols are viewed as powerful devices in maintaining or bringing about such stability by linking the individual with the political system. However when the analytical focus of political culture research shifts from regime maintenance to questions of orientation in a confusing social world which integrates postmodernist ideas, then the function of political symbols moves from exercising control towards creating identification and orientation.

A very similar change in emphasis can also be seen in some applications of symbolic interactionism in political science. More 'orthodox' applications of symbolic interactionism highlight, in accordance with the fundamental propositions of the 'Chicago School', that political analysis must take full account of the interpretative process used by individuals in order to make sense of political and social reality. Consequently such an approach concentrates on matters of political meaning creation and problems of order. Symbols are the tools to fulfill these systematising functions. However if the analytical focus shifts from enabling order to investigating the manipulative potential of symbolic interaction, as can be seen in

applications of the dramaturgical school in political science, then symbolisation is seen as possessing far-reaching controlling and management functions in the political process.

The three areas of systems analysis, which were outlined in section I.4, illustrate a similar pattern. Easton stresses systems persistence as the overall focus of his model. Consequently he views symbolic outputs as contributing to the so-called 'diffuse support' and as such assisting in stabilising a political system. In contrast Luhmann's neofunctionalist interpretation of systems analysis offers a different perspective on the effects of symbolisation. Based on his redefinition of 'power' in communicative terms, he holds the symbolic process to be responsible for ordering information in complex social systems as opposed to achieving controlled stability.

Finally, Edelman's theory itself helps to further clarify the above mentioned proposition. At various points in his theory Edelman stresses the importance of analysing meaning creation in society as an interactive process between individuals. Without doubt Edelman breaks away from political science tradition which views symbols as functioning merely in the political power process. In some areas he makes specific suggestions as to how this might be achieved, for example in distinguishing meaning and information, or in his understanding of the functioning of language and the importance of role-taking, or in studying political leaders as 'signifiers' in a confusing social environment. However his overriding research interest, namely the creation of mass quiescence, impedes a consequential application of such an approach. By interpreting the political process exclusively with respect to creating quiescence, he shifts his analysis back into a more traditional direction and so to speak reintroduces the concept of symbolisation as a mere gadget in the power process.

It is suggested that the shifts in emphasis in the functioning of symbolisation in different models of the political system are an expression of the times and circumstances in which they have been developed. Older models (Devine 1972; Klapp 1964; Easton 1965; Edelman 1964) tend to stress the power component of symbolisation. More recent research however (Gibbins 1989; Denton 1982; Luhmann 1975 and 1982; Sarcinelli 1987a) additionally considers the 'meaning creation' aspect of symbols in politics. The increasing complexity of social systems or the growing influence of the electronic media in transmitting political and social reality may account for this reorientation in research.

As pointed out at the outset of this chapter, two hypotheses are explored in this thesis. The first proposes that symbolic politics possesses a significant 'controlling potential' in governmental action in the United States and in the United Kingdom. The second suggests that symbolic politics leads to a 'de-realisation' of political reality. By now it should have become apparent how these two hypotheses correspond to the theoretical background of symbolisation as elucidated in this chapter. The first hypothesis directs the analytical attention to the manipulative functions of symbolic politics, whereas the second hypothesis refers to the 'meaning creation' component of symbolic politics. In other words this thesis will analyse the functioning of symbolic politics in the political system from a more integrative view-point, as suggested above by Klatch (Klatch 1989).

Symbolic politics in this sense is seen as a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders to influence the perception of their actions. At the same time it is suggested that symbolisation possesses a systematising function, that is it orders the social process of perceiving and interpreting political reality. However this latter function, as suggested in the second hypothesis, may have dangerous consequences such as preventing a comprehensive and differentiated recognition of political reality by the general public.

## II. SYMBOLIC POLITICS AND THE MASS MEDIA

Having outlined the theoretical cornerstones of this thesis, the attention now turns to the messenger of symbolic politics in the political sphere, the mass media.

Essentially political communication in modern societies can best be understood as the "flow of messages and information that gives structure and meaning to the political process" (Pye 1991: 442). This involves three separate participants, namely political actors, the mass media and the audiences (Combs 1980: 136). The professional communicators working for mass media institutions have become the "symbol brokers or translators" (Blumler 1991: 357) of political information and their main function is to facilitate the communication process between political leaders and mass audiences. In such a context it is suggested that symbolic politics is the result of the mass media becoming the main institutions for political communication in modern societies (Schulz 1987: 139).

As the mass media occupy such an important position in the political communication of mass societies and hence significantly influence the employment of symbolic politics by political leaders, this chapter will outline the basic political context of mass communication. This will be done in three steps. To begin with it is necessary to look at some aspects of mass communication theory; this will provide a foundation for step two which examines the connection between the mass media and political communication. The third step involves discussing the development of the relationship between the media and both the American president and the British prime minister respectively.

## II.1 Mass Communication Theory

The term mass communication has been defined as referring to "abundant, openly available and relatively standardised messages, intended for more or less simultaneous consumption by large numbers of individuals in diverse social or geographical locations, which are 'professionally' produced and distributed by specialised institutions termed mass media, using advanced technologies" (Blumler 1991: 356).

Today these institutions mainly consist of the print media, the film industry, and broadcasting (radio and television). More recently new electronic technologies have led to the development of products such as video text or satellite television which promise high capacities combined with the possibility of interactive services between sender and receiver (see for example Arterton 1987; Negrine 1994: 179-201). The ultimate effects of such services particularly on broadcasting remain uncertain, however, increased competition between old and new providers combined with other factors is likely to create a "degree of fragmentation (if not segmentation) of the mass audience" (Blumler 1991: 359).

The following four selected aspects of mass communication theory will now be elaborated upon: (i) the differences between personal and mediated communication, (ii) the significance of 'attention' in understanding mass communication, (iii) the conflicting theoretical perspectives as to the functioning of the mass media in society, and (iv) media effects.

Mass mediated communication differs in some important respects from interpersonal communication. Even though mass communication frequently offers the illusion of face-to-face interaction it is usually aimed at large and heterogeneous audiences and is generally planned well ahead of transmission (Nimmo 1974: 43-44). Zijderveld

compares the interaction between the sender and receiver in broadcasting on the one hand and symbolic interaction on the other. He concludes that despite some similarities the former remains *indirect, abstract and non-committal* ("indirekt, abstrakt und unverbindlich"; Zijderveld 1975: 105). The process of identification, which is so central to symbolic interaction, does not constitute an essential component of electronic interaction. This means, according to Zijderveld's analysis, interaction through broadcasting does not demand the same level of engagement or commitment as symbolic interaction. This is reflected in the fact that electronic interaction is often characterised on the part of the audience by ambivalence or non-remembering. However while the factual content of programmes is often quickly forgotten, the formats and the style of interaction in the broadcasting media are more likely to remain in the memory of the audience (Zijderveld 1975: 104-107).

Closely related to this last point is the observation that with increasing habituation to the construction of social reality through systems of mass communication individuals fail to recognise the mass media as a symbolic medium (Pross 1974: 74 and 1975: 81). Instead they often accept mediated experience as if they had encountered the events personally. Mass media institutions are said to contribute to this distorting influence of symbolic reality by "depicting mediated events as though they were like nonmediated versions" (Altheide 1985: 21).

The second aspect of mass communication to be elaborated upon was the importance of 'attention'. For a considerable period of time, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, the following framework was seen as the best explanation of the processes of mass communication. Communication was understood as a "linear process from a sender, by way of a channel, in the form of a message, to a receiver, to achieve some kind of effect, whether intended or unintended" (McQuail 1987: 43). Sometimes the basic model was slightly modified, for example by including processes of feedback from receiver to sender, or by considering certain

characteristics of the media institutions in which the communicator acted, however the 'linear model' of communication always provided the common starting point.

An alternative view of the communication process was put forward by Carey (Carey 1975) who stressed the element of ritual in communication. His model suggests that the mutual gratification and shared beliefs of sender and receiver are more important in the communication process than the actual transmission of messages and information (McQuail 1987: 43-45).

McQuail argues that while both models of communication may well describe some areas of mediated communication, they do not embrace the substance of mass communication. Therefore he submits a third version of the communication process - the 'attention model' - which is held to remedy the defects of the former. "According to this view, the communicative activity of mass media is to attract attention rather than to transmit meaning or provide a platform, or increase expressive capacity or promote shared rituals. The business of the media and their primary purpose will be to interest an audience and the skills to be advanced and rewarded in mass communication are to be judged accordingly" (McQuail 1987: 44).

It is held that this attention model reflects the main interest of the media itself, namely attracting audiences. It is also supposed that it corresponds with the audience's predominant use of the mass media for entertainment or diversion purposes. Moreover the model explains the relationship between media and audiences in terms of an economic model of service provision and consumption. It is suggested that these two theories taken together (attention model plus media institutions as service industry) may, for example, explain the importance of personalities or celebrity to the media (McQuail 1987: 45-47).

With respect to the third aspect it is necessary to consider which the main theoretical perspectives in the social sciences concerned with the functioning of the mass media in modern societies are. Essentially one has to distinguish between the pluralist and the Marxist school of thought in studies concerning mass communication (Negrine 1994: 15-17).

Pluralists characterise the social and political order in society in terms of autonomous institutions and groups competing for power. The continuous competition between these groups leads to the gradual change of society. In keeping with this view of society "pluralists accord the media varying degrees of autonomy both with regard to their relations with other institutions and with regard to their work in the production of content and meaning" (Negrine 1994: 16). The mass media, in other words, is open to the whole spectrum of alternative opinions in society and acts as a 'cultural forum' for those opinions (Blumler 1991: 358).

In sharp contrast the common denominator of the various types of Marxist media studies is the general emphasis on a concentration of power in a dominant class or elite (Negrine 1994: 16-17). Mass media institutions are in the monopolistic ownership of that class (Chomsky 1991: 21) and their main function consists of structuring social and political reality so that it serves the interest of the power-holding elite. This is achieved either by disseminating values and beliefs which will integrate the individual into the present system or by suppressing information which would question the current distribution of wealth and power in society (Herman/Chomsky 1988: 1-35).

Whereas pluralists disagree on the degree of autonomy of media institutions, Marxists tend to diverge either over emphasis on the economic structure of the media or over the analysis of the ideological content of mass communication (McQuail 1987: 63-67). In recent years there seems to be an increasing willingness

to bridge the gap between these two conflicting approaches. On the one hand Marxist researchers (or 'determinists') "have pointed to a major weakness in the pluralist case: the model of a freely competitive market-place of ideas breaks down because some groups are unable to compete ... Yet the determinist explanation in terms of class manipulation and exploitation is too mechanistic, obscuring a series of complex relationships which have yet to be explained" (Curran/Seaton 1991: 275). As a result Marxists may now show greater interest in case studies or other empirical work, while pluralists may take into account the relationship between state institutions and the media (Negrine 1994: 18).

Also in recent years some writers have tried to go beyond these classical theoretical perspectives by taking into account that information has become the most valuable resource in modern societies and that new media technologies have revolutionised the efficiency of producing and distributing information (McQuail 1987: 75-78). Some of these attempts have tried to meld the concept of postmodernism with communication theory, for example the leading French philosopher of postmodernism Jean Baudrillard describes contemporary social developments as the "ecstasy of communication" (Baudrillard 1985: 126). He argues that individuals in today's most modern societies have lost their intimacy and private place as a result of an imperative of making everything visible by means of mass communication systems (Baudrillard 1985: 133; see also Baudrillard 1983).

A very similar argument is put forward by Denzin who states that the postmodern society is not only characterised by changes in economic organisation but it has also been transformed through film and television into a "dramaturgical society" (Denzin 1991: ix). This has had three main consequences: "First, reality is a staged, social production. Secondly, the real is now judged against its staged, cinematic-video counterpart. Third, the metaphor of the dramaturgical society ... has now become interactional reality" (Denzin 1991: ix).

Finally let us turn to the fourth aspect of mass communication theory, namely media effects. There is general academic uncertainty in mass communication studies regarding the kind and degree of effects of the media on the sub-systems of society. McQuail distinguishes between three phases in the development of media effect research (McQuail 1987: 252-256). During the first phase (until the late 1930s) it was generally accepted that the press and the newly developing media of film and radio were extremely influential in moulding public beliefs and opinions. However such a viewpoint was not based on serious scientific research but merely on observations of the great popularity of the mass media.

During the second phase (until the 1950s) a variety of social scientific studies were conducted, particularly in the United States, which led to a modified, much more moderate, assessment of mass media effects. "It was not that the media had been found to be without effects, but they were shown to operate within a pre-existing structure of social relationships and a particular social and cultural context. These social and cultural factors tended to have primacy in shaping the opinions, attitudes and behaviour under study and also in shaping choice, attention and response to media on the part of audiences" (McQuail 1987: 253).

This so-called 'limited effects' model was questioned as soon as it had been formulated. The advent of the television age in the 1950s and 1960s renewed the debate about the effect of the mass media and new theories threw doubt on the narrow definition of cause and effect in earlier studies. This third phase of media effect research continues today and the controversy between supporters of a 'minimal effect' model and others who subscribe to a 'powerful mass media' in society has not been resolved.

Moreover the following factors may also have contributed to the confusion in this area. 'Media effects' is of course only an umbrella term for a wide range of phenomena. It remains often uncertain whether the specific emphasis in research lies, for example, on long-term or short-term effects, on effects which change the response of an individual or a group, on effects which influence the socialisation process or merely the distribution of knowledge in society (McQuail 1987: 256-260). Last but not least the variety of scientific disciplines which have contributed to mass communication studies (for example sociology, political science, social psychology, economics) with their specific analytical interests and research techniques may account for added uncertainty in this field of investigation (Blumler 1991: 358).

## II.2 The Mass Media and Political Communication

Based on the general background of mass communication theory let us now turn more specifically to some points of contact between the mass media and political communication. It is said that "the mass media are the prime institutions for political communication in modern countries today" (Pye 1991: 443; see also Kaase 1986). As such they facilitate the symbolic participation of mass audiences in the day-to-day political process. This section will explore the implications of 'media politics' and how they have paved the way for the increasing significance of symbolic politics.

Watching television does not only consume a large proportion of the leisure time of the average individual in industrialised countries, it is also the most important source of his or her knowledge about political news. In the United States television has been for about thirty years the most important source of 'news about what's

going on in the world'. Since the 1960s between 55-65% of the American population have consistently considered television to be their primary source of political information (Bartels 1992: 260-261; Stipp 1991: 35). In Great Britain it is also empirically established that the mass media are the most important source of information about political affairs. Between 60-70% of the British population consider television to be their major source of political news, with newspapers ranking second place with 20-30% (Watts 1997: 73; Negrine 1994: 1). Moreover in both countries television is clearly regarded as a more credible medium than the radio or newspapers (Stipp 1991: 35; Negrine 1994: 3). It seems justified therefore to argue that the mass media and particularly television "provide the nation with shared political experiences" (Graber 1989: 3) or that "media activity gives shape to the ill-defined contours of the political system" (Negrine 1994: 6).

Despite the similarity in the importance of television as the dominant source of political news in the United States and Great Britain, there are significant differences in the institutional organisation of the mass media in these two countries. Although space does not allow for a detailed discussion of these differences, two features will be briefly mentioned.

First of all, the mass media in the United States, that is the print and electronic media, are almost exclusively privately owned and are run like commercial enterprises (Graber 1989: 68). As the income of these enterprises is entirely based on advertising, their products, that is newspapers, magazines and radio and television programmes, only succeed if they can secure a sufficient number of readers, listeners or viewers. In Great Britain only the print media is similarly organised. Television until 1954 was a public service broadcasting monopoly financed by licence fees and administered by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). With the advent of commercial television an independent body was set up whose main function was to regulate commercial television as rigorously as the BBC

is regulated in public broadcasting. This body was originally the ITA (Independent Television Authority), then after 1972 it became the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), finally it was replaced with the Independent Television Commission (ITC) in 1991. It has been suggested that the new duties of the ITC represent a 'lighter regulatory' approach as the ITC merely acts as a licensing body and not as a broadcaster. It is now up to the individual licence-holders to comply with the relevant guidelines (Watson/Hill 1993: 37; Negrine 1994: 94-96).

These organisational differences partly account for the following. First, the significance of advertising revenues in a commercial broadcasting system affects the content and style of television programmes. Entertainment programmes dominate the broadcasting market as particularly humour and tension have been found to create a favourable advertising climate (Kleinsteuber 1984: 47-48). Furthermore the commercial imperative is not only held responsible for an increase in entertainment programmes but is also deemed to have changed the format of presenting, for example, political information on television. Tony Schwartz stresses that in the United States the pressures of commercial television have resulted in TV news being increasingly packaged as entertainment (New York Times; 17 October 1982). Similarly Postman expresses concern in stating, "[t]he problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining" (Postman 1987: 89).

Secondly, unlike their American counterparts British politicians cannot buy broadcast air-time. In Great Britain Party Political Broadcasts (PPBs) and Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) guarantee a political party access to the broadcasting media on the basis of such factors as the number of candidates they are fielding or their strength at the previous general election. Each year the Committee on Party Political Broadcasts, consisting of representatives from the BBC, the ITC and political parties, allocates a limited amount of time to the major political parties

(Negrine 1994: 170-171). British parties were for many years unsure about the legality of spending money on political advertising in the print media and it was not until 1979 that large-scale press advertising campaigns were launched in the run up to the general election (Kavanagh 1992a: 74).

In the United States politicians seek access to the mass media through the medium of paid advertisements and in so doing they compete with other commercial purchasers of air-time. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), set up in 1934 by the federal government, provides only a very basic regulatory framework for broadcasting which, for example, does not permit TV stations to charge higher rates for political advertisements than for other advertisements (Kleinsteuber 1987: 607). A significant effect of the heavy use of the paid media has been a rapid escalation in the costs of campaigning and consequently an increase in the importance of fund-raising (Butler/Ranney 1992: 279).

This investigation now turns to three specific areas of 'media politics' which illustrates the important influence of the modern mass media on political communication in the United States and Great Britain respectively: (i) electioneering, (ii) the intrusion of the marketing concept into politics and (iii) the modern media logic in presenting everyday political events.

The mass media have since their beginnings played an important role in transmitting political information during election campaigns between parties and candidates on the one hand, and voters on the other. However more recently electioneering on a national level has almost exclusively been geared towards the mass media, and here in particular towards television. Patterson states in his study of the impact of the media on the American presidential election that "for the large majority of voters, the campaign has little reality apart from its media version" (Patterson 1980: 3). And with respect to the British general election Harrop concludes on a very similar

note that "the media do not cover the campaign; they *are* the campaign" (Harrop 1987: 46).

When looking at the impact of television on electioneering one has to be aware of the institutional framework within which those effects take place. One significant structural difference between the presidential election campaigns in the United States and British general election campaigns is the length of the campaigns. In America the campaign starts many months before the actual polling day whereas in Great Britain the general election campaign usually only lasts between three and four weeks, although it may be preceded by weeks of speculation. This is an important variable, for example, in studies which try to assess the influence of the mass media on electoral change (Negrine 1994: 152).

Furthermore as the electoral system of the United States is highly personalised and candidate-based it is held to have produced "a greater experimentation in campaigning" (Butler/Ranney 1992: 279) than other systems. It has been a forerunner not only in the use of television in political campaigning but also in other important developments of modern electioneering such as opinion polls, telephone canvassing, direct mail and campaign consultants. Other democracies have taken up almost all of these developments some years later (Butler/Ranney 1992: 8).

Recently this already personalised electoral process in the United States has become even more candidate-centred. Modern television campaigning, with its emphasis on personal qualities rather than substantive issues, has been considered largely responsible for this development, although other factors, such as a decline in party identification or changes in the law regarding campaign finance have also been held to contribute (Graber 1989: 227). Thus for a successful candidate in the nomination or election process, being 'good on television' is one of the most important requirements (Ranney 1983: 102).

Essentially a candidate in the United States has two possibilities of access to television: the 'paid media' or the 'free media'. Both types are thought to be essential for a successful campaign but the 'free media' usually attracts a higher priority in campaign strategies for two reasons. First, the costs involved in 'paid media' are very high, and secondly the 'free media' draws more attention and is regarded as more credible by audiences (Ranney 1983: 90-91). However in order to employ the 'free media' effectively, the campaign must be meticulously planned and co-ordinated to match the rapidly changing demands of the media schedule. The delivery of good 'soundbites' and 'photo-opportunities' becomes the over-riding requirement of effective 'free media' campaigning. The speed with which the demands of the media change is illustrated for example by the fact that the average 'soundbite' in American news broadcasting of election campaigns has shrunk from 43 seconds in 1968 to 9 seconds in the 1980s (Hallin 1992: 5).

For the detailed planning of such mediated campaigns special skills are required. This has resulted in the emergence of a whole new profession, namely that of political consultants. Sabato in his important book on electioneering in the United States suggests that: "No single medium has ever transformed American politics to the extent that television has, and the development of a group of political media experts was an inevitable consequence. Mixing style with substance and imagery with reality, media consultants have developed a wide range of formats, strategies, techniques, and gimmicks both to inform and to deceive a television-addicted electorate" (Sabato 1981: 111). This point will be returned to shortly in the context of the intrusion of the marketing concept in politics.

Changes in the selection process of presidential candidates have further increased the importance of television in American electioneering. Party reforms since 1968 have doubled the proportion of each party's convention delegates chosen in

primaries rather than by state parties. Consequently "[t]he greater use of primaries makes access to voters more crucial ... and television is the preferred means of communication (since it is the principal news medium used by the public, and is better at reaching the voters than the declining parties). As a result, campaigns and political observers have paid more attention to media campaign reporting" (Foster/Muste 1992: 24).

The media's reporting of the selection process has also changed. A disproportionate amount of news is devoted to events early on in the nomination process (the popular selection of candidates in Iowa and New Hampshire) and the media's interest in dramatising political affairs has caused a particular emphasis on 'horse-race' coverage (speculation about who is ahead, reporting campaign strategy, poll results) of the selection process (Foster/Muste 1992: 24-26). In line with these developments the character of the national party conventions has also changed dramatically from a forum of negotiating and bargaining to orchestrated television spectacles (Ranney 1983: 99-101). Finally it is shown that campaign coverage on network news has a significant impact on the content of both the local electronic and print media as well as the national print media. This additional effect of national television "has led campaigners to redouble their efforts to ensure that the symbols associated with their candidate are positive" (Foster/Muste 1992: 28).

Looking next at the influence of television on the style of electioneering in Great Britain, we have to keep in mind both the institutional differences outlined above and the fact that in a parliamentary system elections are generally more party-centred than candidate-based. Despite these differences it is suggested that since the introduction of television coverage of political events, general election campaigns in Great Britain have become increasingly similar in style to those in the United States (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 218). Kavanagh argues that the changes in contemporary electioneering have not gone quite as far as in the United States but agrees that the

main driving force behind changes in campaigning has been the development of the electronic media (Kavanagh 1992a: 84 and 1995: 218-227). He considers 1959 the turning point in the relationship between television and politicians in Great Britain as the BBC decided then to begin broadcast coverage of the general election campaign. Before that time newspapers effectively had the monopoly in election coverage (Kavanagh 1992a: 73).

With television today being the most important source of political news, the predominant task of campaign strategists in Britain and the United States consists of packaging candidates and devising telegenic events which create positive visual images (Negrine 1994: 166-167). In Britain limited access to the 'paid media' means that the presentation of parties and candidates in the 'free media' becomes even more crucial than in American campaigning. Consequently the strategists of the main parties increasingly rely on professional public relations advisers for the planning and execution of general election campaigns (Rosenbaum 1997: 262-263). In turn the media pays more attention to the party leaders. In recent general elections over 50% of election campaign coverage of the electronic media has been given to the party leaders (Kavanagh 1992a: 76). Furthermore the level of local activity in British campaigns has declined, both with respect to electors being called on by the parties, and in terms of the percentage of electors attending campaign meetings (Kavanagh 1992a: 82). This further enhances the importance of the mediated election campaign. Thus it may be surmised that British elections have also become "more leader-centred, increasingly stage-managed for the media, particularly television, and a greater role is played by public relations advisers, advertisers, and opinion pollsters" (Kavanagh 1992a: 84).

The next aspect of modern media-politics to be considered is the intrusion of the marketing concept in political communication. The electronic media has become the most important source of political news for the general public and as such has been

an essential precondition for the rapid spreading of commercial selling techniques in politics because "political marketing is largely a television activity" (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 46). It must be noted that this aspect of the present analysis overlaps considerably with the changes outlined above which were brought about by the electronic media in electioneering, as the employment of marketing techniques is particularly prominent during election campaigns. This is illustrated by many studies which concentrate on election campaigns as examples of political marketing (Luntz 1988; Harrop 1990; Butler/Collins 1993; Newman 1994).

Commercial marketing originated in the United States in the early part of this century. It was first applied in the area of consumer goods and characterised by the following four aspects. First of all, to survey the needs, opinions, and behaviour of consumers. Secondly, to direct development and production towards satisfying those demands. Thirdly, to use specific styles and formats of advertising depending on the requirement of the identified target markets and the products to be marketed. And fourthly, systematic planning and co-ordination of all marketing activities (Wangen 1983: 9-10). In later years, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, a broadening of the marketing concept took place. Marketing techniques were increasingly used by non-commercial organisations as well as by commercial enterprises. Academic writings suggested that marketing was not merely a business discipline but also a social activity. In other words marketing was not only applicable to the exchange of goods and services but also to the exchange of values in society (Wangen 1983: 11-17). Political marketing must be seen in this latter context.

The increasing professionalism in political communication is illustrated by the rising influence of political consultants such as campaign consultants, pollsters and advertising specialists. Political consultants are described as the 'product managers' or 'marketing packagers' (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 128) of the political world. In 1936 the title of 'public relations director' appeared for the first time in a presidential

campaign. However, even though political consultants first appeared on the political scene of the United States in the 1930s, it was not until the 1950s that they became firmly established in American election communication (Bloom 1973: 14). It was at this time that they first attracted scholarly interest. Even these early comments suggested that the growth of the electronic mass media was already mainly responsible for the sudden rise to prominence of political consultants (Kelley 1956: 202-205; Packard 1981, originally published 1957: 149-164).

It is argued that in Great Britain the campaign of the Conservative Party in 1970 was the first conscious attempt to employ commercial marketing techniques in election communication (Day 1982: 5). However scholars seem to agree that it was the 1979 election campaign which firmly placed the significance of a marketing approach towards political communication into the public consciousness. Harrop calls the 1980s the "pivotal years in the development of political marketing in Britain" (Harrop 1990: 227) and goes on to say, "[w]hen the Conservative Party hired Saatchi's in 1978, it was headline news. By the end of the 1980s it would have been just as big news if a major party had chosen not to use professional marketing expertise in an election" (Harrop 1990: 277). Indeed it is not only parties but also the British Government which has turned to marketing expertise when trying to stimulate support for particular policies or to reinforce existing laws (for example the 'Tell Sid' and other privatisation advertising or 'Don't Drink and Drive'-style campaigns) (Franklin 1994: 102-103; Bruce 1992: 124-125).

What are the most important contributions marketing professionals have made to political communication? Bruce, in the business of commercial and political marketing consultancy, distinguishes three key areas (Bruce 1992: 82-125): (i) sound market research has been adopted for political purposes. Pollsters have helped considerably to explain the electors' motivations and are often considered the most influential group of political consultants in designing successful communication

strategies and adjusting those strategies to suit individual target groups. (ii) Marketing consultants have convinced both politicians and parties that the process of persuasion demands strategic planning and co-ordination. The most important marketing concept here is 'positioning theory' which means that the strengths of the product have to matched as closely as possible to existing demands in the market. The better the product matches those demands, the higher the identification of the consumer/voter with the product (Wangen 1983: 173-174). An essential ingredient of this strategy is a clear positioning statement of "*what* the brand (or company, person, political party etc.) is for: *who* it is for, and *why* anyone should be interested in it" (Bruce 1992: 87). Other aspects, such as the image of a political leader, assist in forming the right positioning (Wangen 1983: 171-173). The successful implementation of such a technique demands great discipline from all communicators involved, as at all times strict adherence to the prearranged strategy is required. (iii) Marketing experts have also been responsible for the introduction of advanced executional techniques in political communication. Examples are 'negative advertising', 'picture research' (choosing photographs which have been tested as best achieving the desired effect) or using the 'people-meter' method (recording the reactions of a suitable cross-section of the population to a video of a speech and editing the speech in line with those reactions, in other words keeping those sections which are popular and changing or cutting out those which are not) (Bruce 1992: 82, 98 and 178-179).

In a wider context it is argued that the infiltration of marketing concepts into non-commercial areas, such as politics, has given rise to a 'promotional discourse' in modern societies. Habermas already argued in the 1960s that the mass media has extended the promotional imperative of the commercial sphere to non-commercial areas of society. One important consequence for the general public from that is the social psychological integration of politics into the area of consumption (Habermas 1986b: 256-257, originally published 1962). More recently Wernick, for example,

has suggested that "the range of cultural phenomena which, at least as one of their functions, serve to communicate a promotional message has become, today, virtually co-extensive with our produced symbolic world" (Wernick 1991: 182). He also regards the mass media as largely responsible for this development by mixing promotional with non-promotional discourse and applying similar styles and formats to both areas. One important consequence of this is the increasing personalisation of the political process with the individuals in the public eye becoming no more than 'promotional signifiers' (Wernick 1991: 139) for the issues involved.

Last but not least we will briefly examine how the rise of the modern mass media has transformed the logic of presenting everyday political issues and events. It is proposed that television in particular has turned the political process, at least at a national level, into a so-called 'permanent campaign' (Blumenthal 1980). This means that campaigning, understood as the employment of carefully pre-arranged media plans by politicians and their advisers, increasingly extends beyond the election periods to all times of the political calender. Maintaining their popularity and credibility is becoming the over-riding concern for political actors (Blumenthal 1980: 7). From a slightly different angle it is argued that politicians and their consultants have come to realise that "the electorate's overall impression is the accumulation of small impressions, of individual episodes that merge into a wholeness by election day, so constant public relations success should create a momentum that leads to the right verdict" (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 12).

In order to succeed in this perpetual campaign, governments and politicians frequently employ tactics of news management, that is they "wish to shape the news to their own advantage, or to control events in such a way as to win favourable publicity" (Watson/Hill 1993: 127). As with elections a variety of specialists may be involved in this process. There are the news managers who brief the media (press secretaries or spokespersons). There are others whose main task is to ensure that

when their principal meets the media he or she is shown in the best possible light (for example advance men). Then there are those specialists who provide their employers with speeches and articles (Bruce 1992: 128). Press secretaries, amongst other things, try to guarantee that the government speaks with one voice; advance men aim, for example, to devise photogenic scenes for summit meetings; and speechwriters try to formulate catchy phrases which will hopefully then be carried by the media.

If politicial actors are learning to adapt to the demands of the 'permanent campaign' and are beginning to manipulate the formats of the mass media to their own advantage, what are the new conditions and requirements put on media institutions when transmitting everyday political affairs? Surely a considerable part of the media's job is to select and structure potential news items, or to put it differently "to translate untidy reality into neat stories with beginnings, middles, and denouements" (Curran/Seaton 1991: 265). A number of factors come into play in this process.

The production of news takes place in the context of a fixed daily routine. Organisational and technical requirements demand that news organisations rely on firm expectations and their diaries in planning the core of their daily coverage. Specialist reporters are either placed in special institutions such as the White House or Parliament or they cover specific areas such as education or foreign affairs. This further enhances the capability of forseeing future issues and developments (Negrine 1994: 124-125). Thus "[m]ost news is really 'olds', in the sense that it is largely predictable" (Schlesinger 1987: 80). There is firm evidence that such news production practice is remarkably similar in the major broadcasting organisations of different countries (Schlesinger 1987: 79). Furthermore speed and actuality are other core features in the production process of political news as today's events constitute the media's predominant interest. Thus news coverage is not intended

primarily to be explanatory but rather it is specifically focused on observing and reporting the most recent events. Schlesinger argues that "[t]he corollary of this point is that there is an inherent tendency for the news to be framed in a discontinuous and ahistorical way, and this implies a truncation of 'context', and therefore a reduction of meaningfulness" (Schlesinger 1987: 105).

Moreover many news items are not 'events' at all but fabricated happenings produced primarily to be reported in the mass media. They are what Boorstin calls "pseudo-events" (Boorstin 1961: 9). Such 'events', like a photo-opportunity or a news leak, serve mainly to control media coverage or to create a particular impression. "The politician ... himself in a sense composes the story; the journalist ... himself generates the event" (Boorstin 1961: 30). Their popularity is based on a variety of reasons. 'Pseudo-events' are often more dramatic than spontaneous events, they can be planned and repeated and are normally more convenient to observe for journalists (Boorstin 1961: 39-40).

Some media also require particular formats for their information. Television for example is constituted around visuals. Consequently the essentiality of events and characters which are well suited to the visual imperative does influence the content and the style of presenting newsworthy material (Altheide 1985: 128-129). Another important convention of media reportage is 'personalisation'. The better a potential news item can be personalised the greater its chance of being included in the news (Watson/Hill 1993: 139). Clearly television is particularly people-centred, but it is held that, for example, photographs in newspapers also contribute significantly towards personifying political developments (S. Hall 1981: 236-237).

Galtung and Ruge describe the process by which the perception of media people selects events as newsworthy (Galtung/Ruge 1965). According to their highly influential model of 'selective gatekeeping', the choice of potential news items is

based on criteria such as 'unambiguity' (the more clear-cut the event, the more likely it is to be reported), 'frequency' (the frequency of the event needs to correspond to the frequency of the medium which means that a slow political development in a Third World country is not as newsworthy as for example a murder case), or 'familiarity' (cultural and geographical proximity are considered important requirements in the selection process) (Watson/Hill 1993: 128). Although Galtung and Ruge's study was based on the print media, Tunstall has applied the 'gatekeeping model' to the content of television news and points towards significant differences: (i) the visual is pre-eminent which means that with the availability of new film material the prominence given to an issue often increases; (ii) footage which includes the news organisation's own journalists is preferred; (iii) television generally uses much fewer and shorter stories than newspapers; (iv) actuality is essential in selecting newsworthy events (Tunstall 1971: 20-22). 'Actuality' describes the criterion for selecting those events which are closest in time to the production of the news programme.

On a systems level Luhmann regards two rules as crucial for the selection and construction of political issues in mass media dominated societies. First of all, 'attention rules' are said to regulate the principal selection of information in a political system. Such rules consist of, for example, value considerations, the status of the sender of the information, or the actuality of the news (Luhmann 1970: 11-13). Secondly, the public attention given to any issue is affected by the so-called 'life-story' of political themes. Luhmann distinguishes here three phases in the development of political issues. During the first phase the issue is only known to very few people who take some direct interest in the subject matter. During the second phase a topic becomes part of the public sphere and influences the communicative process of the political system. However many topics never reach the second phase either because they do not correlate with the attention rules of the system or because a specific event which would popularise the issue does not take

place. In any event the influential phase is usually very short and the topic soon begins to show signs of fatigue. This constitutes the third phase. Luhmann concludes that social attention governed by those rules often does not correspond with the decision-making requirements of a political system (Luhmann 1970: 14-15).

Now follows a brief summary of the relationship between the mass media and political communication. This section concludes by putting these results into the context of media effect research.

(i) Symbolic communication of reality through the mass media, as opposed to the immediate and direct experience of reality, constitutes an essential part of individuals' construction of actuality in modern mass societies. For most individuals the mass media construct every day a "retranslated, edited universe" (Ellul 1972: 113) by selecting and simplifying events which are outside of their immediate or proximal experience.

(ii) This applies in particular to the political sphere where the great majority of citizens rely almost exclusively on the mass media as their sole source of information. Moreover in this area the mass media do not just construct a common political reality, but they also alter the content and conduct of political discourse.

(iii) The dramatic rise of television-centred politics since the 1950s has resulted in some important changes in the nature of political communication. Political actors, the media, and their audiences have increasingly recognised that television is not purely informational but also an entertainment medium. "The overall message of television politics is not to think but to feel; the purpose is not to inform our minds but to form our perceptions ... The mass media, especially television, have made the political process a form of popular entertainment" (Moran 1984: 127). Consequently the formats of presenting both politics and politicians have changed. The dramatisation and personification of political developments and events

constitute the main changes. The rise of the mass media has imported the celebrity concept into the political sphere. As a result credibility and personality factors have developed into significant categories in the public evaluation of political leaders (Schwartzenberg 1980: 160; Nimmo/Combs 1983: 94-95). Finally the techniques employed in the context of political persuasion, particularly during election campaigns, have gravitated towards those employed in commercial marketing.

Broadly speaking the mass media affects political communication at two levels. At a macro level the mass media is responsible for the construction of a symbolic reality of the political system. At a micro level the mass media influence the styles and formats of political communication by accentuating the symbolic performances of political actors and by focusing public evaluations of political leadership on such performances.

However, both of these aspects have to be put into the context of research on mass media effects. Despite the scholarly confusion in this area, which was referred to in the previous section, a few findings ought to be considered at this point.

Early studies on the effects of the mass media on political communication focused on vote choices and reflected in their results the 'minimal effects' theory of the 1940s and 1950s. Accordingly the media's main effect was seen in the reinforcement of already existing political preferences (Lazarsfeld/Berelson/Gaudet 1944). Such findings were later challenged and it was held that the news media play a crucial role in setting the agenda and defining the limits of the political discourse at all times of the political process. McCombs and Shaw whose 'agenda-setting' model has gained great prominence in this area (McCombs/Shaw 1972) state that, "[a]udiences not only learn about public issues and other matters from the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media places upon it. What reaches the public is the result of decisions

made by political leaders, reporters, and editors. It is this power of the press - the ability to structure the unseen environment of symbols - which has been called the agenda-setting function" (McCombs/Shaw 1976: 18). This model seems to justify a far-reaching interpretation of the media's ability to construct and define the symbolic reality of the political system.

A fundamental criticism of the agenda-setting model is that it oversimplifies the process of media influence and that it does not take other criteria, such as real-world conditions, into account (Watson/Hill 1993: 111). American studies have shown convincingly that the public agenda is affected by media exposure (Bartels 1993), however they also suggest that real-world conditions such as inflation or unemployment "provide an independent impetus to the perceived importance of issues" (Behr/Iyengar 1985: 53). Similarly Erbring et al have found that real-world conditions affect the public's pre-existing sensitivity to news coverage and can thus limit the media's agenda-setting power (Erbring et al 1980). Therefore to avoid arriving at an inflated estimate of the media's impact on political communication, it is necessary to bear in mind the results of media effect research when considering the influence of the mass media on the symbolic construction of political reality.

## II.3 President, Prime Minister and the Mass Media

Having discussed some of the effects of the modern mass media on political communication in general, this section will now turn to the relationship between the media and the American president and British prime minister respectively. For the sake of brevity only a few important aspects of these relationships will be mentioned. However this overview aims to highlight the significance of the

institutional background for the employment of symbolic politics by political leaders.

The relationship between American presidents and the modern mass media will be dealt with first. The president depends on the media for two reasons in particular:

(i) The mass media constitute the most important channel of communication in presidential campaigns (see also section II.2.). Communication strategies of such campaigns have been transformed from relying primarily on face-to-face contact between candidates and the electorate to conveying positive images especially via television (Arterton 1984). Research findings have shown that the greatest impact on election outcomes is engendered by media impressions of presidential candidates rather than issues (Weaver et al 1981: 207).

(ii) Communication is one of the president's essential power resources (Cornwell 1965: 34; see also Seymour-Ure 1982: chapter 3). Richard Neustadt in his famous study argues that the American president despite his formal powers and his status "does not get action without argument. Presidential power is the power to persuade" (Neustadt 1990: 11, originally published 1960). Similarly it is put forward that presidents not only aspire to persuade congressmen and the political elite directly but also devote a lot of attention to so-called strategies of 'going public' (Kernell 1986). Kernell defines 'going public' as "a class of activities in which presidents engage as they promote themselves and their policies before the American public. Some examples of going public are a trip to China, a televised press conference, a special prime time address to the nation, a speech before a business convention on the West Coast, and a White House ceremony to decorate a local hero that is broadcast via satellite to the home town television station. What these various activities have in common is that they are intended principally to place the president and his message before the American people in a way that enhances his chances of

success in Washington" (Kernell 1986: vii). In other words the American president needs to run a "permanent national popularity campaign" (Rose 1980a: 323) in order to influence the government and succeed with his legislative programme. This proposition finds support in research which shows that the higher the public's approval of the president, the more support he receives from Representatives and Senators (Edwards 1980: 86-100).

The media on the other hand need to cover the president as he is the "focal point in the American political system" (Grossman/Kumar 1981: 4). Moreover as an individual the chief executive is well suited for the demands of television and his activities can be portrayed more dramatically than, for example, those of Congress (Barilleaux 1988: 130). It has been shown that about one fifth of a typical evening news broadcast in the United States concerns the president, his activities or his policies. The president is thus the "single biggest continuing news story that the network news presents" (Smoller 1986: 33) and television covers him more than all of the 535 members of Congress put together (Hess 1981: 98). However the format of television news, that is the constant need for new pictures, affects the coverage of the president in various ways. First of all, complicated stories or complex issues are neglected in favour of simple stories. Secondly, television biases news coverage toward those aspects which are visually attractive (action over processes). Finally, the visual imperative reinforces the journalists' interest in the unusual, for example scandals, conflicts or mistakes (Smoller 1986: 36-37; see also Edwards 1983: 146-148).

Thus there exists an overall relationship of interdependence between the president and the mass media, or as some scholars put it a 'symbiotic relationship' (Denton/Woodward: 1990: 55). Presidents need the media to present themselves to their electorate and maintain their popularity and the mass media need the president to satisfy their constant demand for news about the activities of the chief executive.

As a result both parties are engaged in a constant struggle of access to news on the one hand and attempts to control media coverage on the other (Wiedenkeller 1985: 22).

How has this relationship developed? The rapid growth of the newspaper industry in the second half of the nineteenth century led to an increased demand for more news. In their search for news newspapers began, amongst other things, to pay more attention to the capital Washington. The Washington press corps grew quickly and by the early 1900s journalists had begun to consider an assignment in Washington an attractive career move (Kernell 1986: 55-58).

Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) was the first American president to appreciate fully the growing importance of the press. He is consequently regarded as the "pioneer of modern press relations" (Cater 1959: 32). For the first time a president tried to establish close ties between the press and the White House. Some specifically selected journalists were treated by Roosevelt as 'insiders' in return for favourably written articles. If they did not co-operate they lost their insider status. He also offered journalists access to non-official situations such as time with his family who hence also became more prominent in the public eye (Wiedenkeller 1985: 27).

The years to follow saw some minor changes in the organisational structure of the White House such as President Hoover (1929-1933) giving one of his three assistants exclusive responsibility for handling media relations (Grossman/Kumar 1981: 82). However the next major leap forward in presidential press relations came with Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration (1933-1945). Some scholars in fact argue that "[m]ass-mediated and personalistic politics originated with Franklin Roosevelt" (Stuckey 1991: 29). First of all, earlier experiments with press conferences pioneered by President Wilson were transformed by FDR into a routine

event that was held in the Oval Office on average about twice a week throughout his tenure of office (Wiedenkeller 1985: 28-29). He introduced an element of spontaneity into these regular events by abolishing the previous practice of written questions (Cornwell 1965: 143). Secondly, and most importantly, FDR was the first President who was able to use a truly national electronic medium. He became the first great radio voice in the United States and adapted well to the intimacy of the new medium by making his speech patterns more informal and by relying on emotional phrases and vivid descriptions (Stuckey 1991: 30-39). In his casual 'fireside chats' for example he did not discuss specific legislative projects but concentrated instead on the wider context of his policies. This strategy was extremely well received by the American electorate (Wiedenkeller 1985: 29-30). Finally, FDR was the first American president to appear on television, when he addressed an audience at the 1939 New York World's Fair, but at this time only very few Americans owned a television set (Bruce 1992: 27).

Effectively the age of televised presidential politics began with Harry S. Truman (1945-1953). President Truman spoke to the nation in official television addresses for example at the outbreak of the war in Korea and after the decision to go ahead with the production of the hydrogen bomb. A newly appointed special adviser for electronic media assisted the president on these and other occasions (Wiedenkeller 1985: 31). Truman also permitted excerpts of press conferences to be broadcast by radio which meant that the president would from now on usually speak for the record. The number of press conferences was reduced and moved from the Oval Office into a larger room in the State Department. In general the intimacy of the FDR-style press conferences was increasingly destroyed by the electronic media (Kernell 1986: 68).

These trends continued under President Eisenhower (1953-1961). The number of press conferences was further reduced, from an average of 3.4 per month during the

Truman administration to 2.0 during Eisenhower's tenure (Kernell 1986: 69). President Eisenhower's staff no longer held press conferences at regular intervals but instead used them to distribute news at tactically favourable moments. His press secretary sometimes passed on questions to journalists before the press conference which the President was then of course well prepared to answer. In January 1955 television cameras were admitted for the first time into press conferences and edited excerpts were shown on the main news (Cater 1959: 41). On trips abroad the demands of television were also increasingly recognised and at an organisational level the communication activities of the press office were much more highly co-ordinated with those of other offices than ever before. Moreover assistants tried to ensure that visually attractive settings were arranged (Wiedenkeller 1985: 32-33).

Eisenhower's advisers also decided that with a penetration of 62% of homes in large urban areas the time had come to use television in political campaigning. With a series of television spots entitled 'Eisenhower Answers America' he became the first "tele-marketed Presidential candidate" (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 47). Stuckey notes another effect of television on presidential campaigns in those years namely a changed rhetoric. Whereas Truman's rhetoric "depended upon physical presence, a sense of localism, and the ability to use exceptionally forthright language. None of these traits are politically feasible over nationally viewed television" (Stuckey 1991: 44). Therefore by contrast Eisenhower's rhetoric was characterised by such techniques as personification or defining problems in dramatic terms and a prevailing intention to convey honesty, reliability and confidence via the new medium (Stuckey 1991: 58-59).

It is argued that the changes in presidential press relations introduced by Presidents Truman and Eisenhower were merely modifications of the FDR-system and that the real break with previous practices came with President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963). During JFK's Presidency the system fully adjusted to the imperative of

'direct communication', that is to the overriding importance of television (Kernell 1986: 69-70). It is possible that JFK would not even have become president had it not been for television. His much praised performance in the presidential debate against Richard Nixon, and Nixon's perceptible discomfort, may have been the decisive factors in his very narrow election victory (Wiedenkeller 1985: 34). In January 1961 President Kennedy introduced live coverage of press conferences which meant the final death blow for the Roosevelt style regular gatherings. "With the advent of live news conferences, whatever the president wished to keep from the public, he also kept secret from the press" (Stuckey 1991: 65). Soon after their introduction print journalists began to complain they were merely scenery for these conferences. They also accused the administration of 'news management' by means of pre-arranged simple questions or the purposeful timing of the press conferences. Moreover the new character of the press conference led to the introduction of other methods of access to the press. Examples were informal meetings with publishers and journalists from a particular region, or the frequent use of private interviews with journalists with whom Kennedy had a particularly close relationship (Kernell 1986: 72-73). His advisers also tried to find new avenues of media access which were exclusively aimed at projecting a positive impression of the presidency such as a 'Tour of the White House with Jacqueline Kennedy' (Wiedenkeller 1985: 35).

Despite some criticism about news manipulation from journalists, the relationship between the president and the media up until the Kennedy administration can be described as relatively sympathetic. The president was in a strong position to control the media's access to news and journalists rarely questioned substantially the president or his actions. Considerably more adversarial presidential-press relations became manifest during the subsequent period of the so-called 'imperial presidency' (Schlesinger 1974) that is the administrations of President Johnson (1963-1969) and President Nixon (1969-1974). Vietnam and Watergate are the outstanding events which illustrate the media's emerging distrust of official reports and

announcements. As regards Vietnam, the media from 1968 onwards were in clear conflict with the Johnson administration despite long-lasting positive coverage of the 'Great Society' programme at the beginning of his Presidency. Stuckey suggests that as a result "LBJ was the first modern president to be more controlled by the media than controlling it" (Stuckey 1991: 79).

Although President Nixon experienced intense confrontations with the media throughout his period in office, for example over the publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, he is best remembered for Watergate which illustrated the media's immense power to uncover abuses of power by the president. However the more the media appeared to be the enemy of the President, the greater were the administration's efforts to manage its public communication. Nixon preferred to communicate directly with the public through television addresses and he further reduced the number of press conferences from an average of 2.2 per month during the Johnson administration to 0.5 during his tenure (Kernell 1986: 69). Moreover, telegenic foreign travel became a standard feature of the President's public appearances. Particularly his visit to China in 1972 broke new ground with travel plans fine-tuned to coincide with prime time television (Wiedenkeller 1985: 40). The number of people in the White House who were solely occupied with public-relations work grew dramatically to about 80. Wherever possible all public communications of the President and members of his administration were planned and co-ordinated at length in frequent meetings (Wiedenkeller 1985: 40).

In sum, during the Johnson and Nixon years television coverage of the president, presidential elections, and the personal side of politics further increased. More adversarial relations between the president and the mass media developed and so the administrations tightened their control of public communication.

In the aftermath of the 'imperial presidency', President Ford (1974-1977) and President Carter (1977-1981) both cut down the size of the public relations apparatus in the White House and provided greater access to their administrations. Examples of this are President Ford's slim-lining of the Office of Communication, and the openness of President Carter's communication policy with easy access for staff-reporters in the White House (Kumar/Grossman 1989: 315-316). However it has been suggested that one of the consequences of less control and more transparency was to sacrifice the thematic control of the national agenda (Stuckey 1991: 112-113).

In sharp contrast to the Ford and Carter Administrations, President Reagan (1981-1989) is described as the man who instituted the so-called "primetime presidency" (Denton 1988). It is said that he achieved a perfect match between his messages, behaviour and persona and the format requirements of the electronic media (Denton 1988: xii). Even though details of President Reagan's media strategies will be analysed in chapter IV, it can be said at this point that his communication policy was tightly controlled, highly structured and co-ordinated with a particular emphasis on clear cut and visually attractive presentation (for example Schram 1987; Hertsgaard 1988). Thus Barilleaux suggests that with Reagan the "paradox of the more visible but less accessible president" (Barilleaux 1988: 131) was born.

Since the end of the Reagan Presidency the relationship between the president and the mass media has remained a dynamic public issue. During the 1988 presidential campaign George Bush's strategy of attacking his opponent's record on such issues as the environment and crime with hard-hitting television clips caused controversy (Jamieson 1992: 470-475). After his inauguration President Bush (1989-1993) declared that he wanted a more open and informal administration. He tried to illustrate this intention by, for example, inviting journalists into the private quarters of the White House (The Independent Magazine; 27 May 1989) and by giving more

news conferences in his first eighteen months than President Reagan gave in his entire term of office (Foley 1993: 101). After failing to get re-elected Bush regarded his personal shortcomings in using the media as an important factor in his defeat. He said: "I just was not a good enough communicator" (quoted in The Times; 29 January 1994).

The 1992 presidential election broke new ground with the arrival of the 'talk show campaign' (Bennett 1995: 103-108). The presidential candidate Ross Perot effectively launched his campaign on a CNN television talk show and the then Governor Bill Clinton made guest appearances on similar shows wearing dark sunglasses and playing the saxophone (Grant 1993: 242-243; The Times; 18 August 1992). Newman comments: "We all had to pinch ourselves to believe what we were seeing: Here was a candidate running for the highest office in the land appearing on late-night television, looking more like a pop star than a presidential candidate" (Newman 1994: 7). An important reason for this new style of communication was the candidates' aim to explore more direct routes to the electorate via the well suited medium of cable television. By the 1992 election cable television had reached into more than 60% of television households (Newman 1994: 7 and 13).

During his Presidency (1993 to today) Bill Clinton's media relations featured prominently in public debate. For example, for the first time the President denied the White House press corps access to the press secretary's office (The Times; 13 March 1993). He also replaced his head of public communication, after only five months in office, with a former Reagan White House communications director (Renshon 1995: 81; The Guardian; 2 July 1993). Controversially President Clinton also made his acting debut in a CBS television movie to highlight the importance of the 'Family Medical Leave Act' (The Daily Telegraph; 12 April 1996).

What are the main consequences of these developments? Most importantly it can be seen that advances in communications technology have fundamentally transformed the relationship between the media and the president. The wider changes in political communication brought about by the modern media, such as those outlined in section II.2., also affect presidential media relations. However some of those consequences are even more trenchant in the interaction between president and media.

On the one hand the mass media, and in particular television, have become increasingly focused on the president as the main provider of political news and depend on a steady flow of suitable news to report (Livingston 1986). On the other hand the president has to exercise leadership in a changed environment, namely under the imperative of the media's demands. Presidents rely on the mass media to convey their messages and programmes and employ a variety of techniques to control or influence the media's portrayal of their activities. Moreover the great majority of the public assesses presidential performances on the basis of the information and impressions conveyed through the media.

It is suggested that presidents have adjusted to these new demands in political communication in a number of ways. Miroff, for example, suggests that enacting "leadership as a spectacle" (Miroff 1988a: 271) has become a structural feature of the modern presidency. 'Spectacle' is understood as a succession of symbolic events which are "meaningful not for what they achieve but for what they signify" (Miroff 1988a: 272).

Moreover it is argued that the intense personalisation of the political process through television (Schmertz 1986) and also through the print media (Graber 1972) has caused presidents to pay detailed attention to their public appearance and image making. Presidents have become media celebrities with a loss of distinction between

their public and private life (Stuckey 1991: 139). Last but not least presidents have had to adapt their rhetoric to the new demands by concentrating on the use of memorable phrases and telling stories rather than developing arguments (Stuckey 1991: 136-138).

The two important features of the relationship between the president and the media mentioned at the beginning of this section apply mutatis mutandis to the relationship between the prime minister and the media. First of all, in general elections the mass media provide the main arena for prime ministerial election campaigning (and that of the leader of the opposition). As already pointed out in section II. 2, in recent elections the party leaders have been at the centre of the campaign with most of the media attention given to them. This has resulted in the increased importance of their packaging and impression management. The second important feature is that the prime minister's overall media performance constitutes an essential element of successful leadership. Even though public persuasion is nowhere near as important in order to obtain legislative support for the prime minister as it is for the American president, media performance is still an important way of strengthening his/her standing in Parliament, within his/her own party, and with the electorate at large. As Rose points out "[t]he more favorable the reputation, the greater the Prime Minister's ability to influence others" (Rose 1980b: 11).

The prime minister does not have to labour hard to gain access to the mass media. The media present him/her "as the champion and spokesman of the whole Cabinet in the battle against the Shadow enemy on the other side" (Crossman 1972: 67). And consequently "[a]s the biggest personality in politics the Prime Minister is ex officio the most newsworthy" (Rose 1980b: 19).

Earlier in this section a relationship of interdependence between the president and the media was described, the same exists between prime minister and the media.

"The Prime Minister and the media have a symbiotic relationship. Each feeds off the other. The Prime Minister is interested in being reported, and reporters live by the doctrine that names make news" (Rose 1980b: 18-19). Moreover it can be argued that this 'symbiotic relationship' has indeed been institutionalised in Britain in form of the Lobby. The Lobby system has two pillars: first of all, it grants a pool of newspaper, radio, and television journalists privileged access to politicians and press secretaries; secondly this privilege is part of a trade-off, namely that the journalists do not report the source of their information. The Lobby has existed for more than 100 years, however its membership increased sharply in the post-war period when provincial evening papers, Sunday papers and later broadcasting joined (Seymour-Ure 1991: 189). Twice daily the prime minister's press secretary briefs the Lobby about the activities and intentions of the government. The press secretary also conducts briefings at Number 10 with small groups of Lobby journalists or even more informal briefings over the phone or at lunches and dinners with individual journalists (Franklin 1994: 86-87). The Lobby has been criticised mainly for the secrecy with which it operates. Today it merely acts as a passive provider of news which the government distributes rather than a critical scrutiniser of such information. Cockerell et al point out that the rule of non-attribution combined with the credulity of many lobby journalists "has turned the Lobby into the Prime Minister's most useful tool for the political management of the news" (Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 33).

There follows a cursory view of the historical development of the relationship between prime minister and the mass media. Three important innovations in British society which took place between the middle of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century must be seen as the foundation for the modern relationship between prime minister and the mass media. The first was the various extensions of the franchise in the nineteenth century (and in 1918 and 1928) which changed the character of the electorate and required new techniques of political communication.

From then on politicians had to use new media of communication which would enable them to address a mass audience (Norton 1994: 349). Secondly, an increase in literacy and technological advances in printing, all in the latter part of the nineteenth century, made possible the launch of popular newspapers with a vastly enlarged readership (Koss 1981: 1-2). Later, of course, the advent of the electronic media in the forms of the first regular radio broadcasting in 1922 and the first television service in 1936 challenged the hegemony of the newspapers as the dominant medium of mass communication, although they were at first only broadcast to tiny audiences. Thirdly, a transformation from party press to mass commercial newspaper took place. The mid-Victorian press was characterised by the most intimate ties between newspapers and political parties and factions. However the time pressures of commercialisation and industrialisation affected the press so that "[b]y the middle of the twentieth century, newspapers ... usually continued to favour one party over another ... But they had abandoned and, in certain cases, repudiated the avowedly political objectives to which they had been dedicated" (Koss 1981: 3). As a result of the less formal relationship the press became less predictable for politicians and in order to obtain favourable media coverage alternative methods had to be explored.

This century saw D. Lloyd George (1916-1922) as the first Prime Minister to recognise the importance of the rise of the new press. Even though deeply entrenched in the old methods of gaining press support - for example in 1918 supporters of Lloyd George bought the 'Daily Chronicle' in order to secure favourable coverage for him (Negrine 1994: 47) - in his activities he also considered the new needs of popular newspapers such as attractive pictures and punchy headlines. He attempted to win the support of a large part of the press by various means, for example Lord Northcliffe was granted direct access to Lloyd George for the first year of his administration. Furthermore a large number of editors and publishers were put on the honours list to gain their favours, and Lloyd George

pioneered the modern Lobby system at Westminster. Carter suggests "that the use of these techniques enabled Lloyd George to maintain a hold upon public opinion, unique in British history until that moment" (Carter 1956: 103).

The next important development was the advent of radio in the 1920s which among other things enabled politicians for the first time to communicate effectively with the opposition's supporters. Stanley Baldwin (1923-24, 1924-1929, 1935-37) was the first British politician to exploit this new national medium. "[H]is cosy chats into the microphone carried his relaxed persuasive charm into the homes of millions of families" (Jones/Kavanagh 1991: 97). Neville Chamberlain (1937-1940) used the radio to report the outbreak of the war with Germany and Winston Churchill (1940-1945 and 1951-1955) frequently resorted to radio addresses as a direct and more intimate method of reporting on the military and diplomatic situation of the time. Cockerell summarises this point by saying that "[r]adio had a good war. It established itself as the most powerful of all agencies of information and the one most sought after by the politicians" (Cockerell 1989: 6).

Ramsay MacDonald (1924, 1929-1935) gave institutional recognition to the growing importance of the new media relations. In 1931 he set up the first press office at Number 10 and appointed the first press secretary. MacDonald wanted the office to deal with press questions about the economic crisis and hoped for general professional advice on how to deal with the Conservative dominated press (Franklin 1994: 83; Jones 1985: 84).

Since then the press office and the position of press secretary have undergone some significant changes. During the 1940s the press office became the key intermediary between the prime minister and the media. Harold Macmillan's press secretary Sir Harold Evans established a pattern of Lobby contacts which have become standard practice for subsequent press secretaries. In the following years the work of the

press office and the press secretary became more varied as prime ministers began to travel more internationally and television became increasingly accessible. From Edward Heath's tenure (1970-1974) the press office grew in size although even Margaret Thatcher's press secretary Bernard Ingham had only five assistants plus secretarial backup (Seymour-Ure 1991: 191). Ingham himself outlines three main tasks for today's chief press secretary at Number 10. "They are to: (i) serve as spokesman for the Prime Minister and, as the occasion requires it, the Government as a whole; (ii) act as adviser to the Prime Minister on his or her presentational programme and to the Government as a whole on the overall presentation of its policies and measures; and (iii) to co-ordinate, at official as distinct from Ministerial level, the Government's presentational programme - to conduct the Government's communication orchestra" (Ingham 1991: 177). The last task consists of synchronising the presentational work of the various Government departments through such activities as chairing the weekly Meeting of Information Officers (MIO).

Returning to the historical overview, Ramsay MacDonald was the first Prime Minister to decide that the world's first high definition television service should start (Cockerell 1989: 1). However television broadcasting was stopped during World War II and transmission did not resume until June 1946.

For the first decade after the war the new medium television was kept out of the realm of politics. Clement Attlee (1945-1951) and Winston Churchill agreed that television was an unsuitable forum for political debate. General election campaigns were not covered and the Fourteen Day Rule - an agreement between the BBC and the political parties that no subject which was certain or likely to be debated in the House of Commons in the next two weeks should be discussed on television - kept any topical political discussion off the screens. In those days "[t]he story of the 'Fourteen-Days' rule showed the broadcasters as subservient, in a strict sense:

deferring to a crudely literal notion of the sovereignty of Parliament" (Seymour-Ure 1991: 166). The Rule was finally dropped in the aftermath of the Suez crisis.

The early rules of engagement changed only gradually and when they changed they did not directly affect the relationship between the prime minister and television. In 1951, for example, the political parties agreed with the BBC that for the first time there would be party election broadcasts. In 1953 they agreed that their should be time for party political broadcasts and this was followed in 1954 by the first budget broadcasts (Seymour-Ure 1991: 166-167).

Most importantly it was the Coronation broadcast in 1953 which changed the image of television in the minds of both the public and the politicians. For the first time the TV audience exceeded the radio audience and even the highly sceptical Churchill conceded that "the televised Coronation had both played on the viewers' emotions and bestowed a popular aura on the nation's ruler" (Cockerell 1989: 20). This recognition caused Churchill in 1954 to agree to a live transmission of his eightieth birthday celebrations from Westminster. The same evening he also made his first television appearance especially for TV cameras (Cockerell 1989: 20).

By 1955 the percentage of the population with regular access to a television set had risen to 38% (Trenaman/McQuail 1961: 13). During the 1955 general election campaign Anthony Eden (1955-1957) responded by giving preference to television and radio appearanaces over public meetings the number of which were reduced. In the final campaign broadcast Eden spoke live to the television audience; it was the first time a Prime Minister had spoken on his own for a substantial period of time to the electorate (Cockerell 1989: 36).

It was Harold Macmillan (1957-1963) however who "emerged as the first Prime Minister with a strong television image" (Barber 1991: 37). After taking office he

underwent a complete 'makeover' (new hairstyle, new well-cut suits, new teeth) to satisfy the visual imperative of television. Moreover a former BBC producer was hired to produce his media appearances and a comedian was brought in to teach him acting (Bruce 1992: 30). His image of 'Supermac' was partly a result of televised pictures of the first jet-age Prime Minister's overseas trips (Cockerell 1989: 56-65). Furthermore Robin Day's questioning of Macmillan in 1958 is considered to be the first example of a new kind of media event namely the broadcast political interview. Politicians were now actively seeking access to television and television itself was concerned with finding new formats of presentation (Jones 1993: 67). In 1959 the percentage of the population with regular access to a TV set had rocketed to 75% (Trenaman/McQuail 1961: 13) and in a watershed development BBC and ITN for the first time reported on the campaign and election of that year. Overall during Macmillan's tenure of office television became available to most of the population and consequently developed into the key medium of political communication for the prime minister and political leaders in general.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home (1963-1964) was the last Prime Minister to attempt to ignore completely the imperative of the electronic media age. He was "totally unconcerned about how he appeared or what he said, so long as he remained himself" (Margach 1978: 129). In the 1964 general election campaign he exhausted himself in a series of tours across the country and began his speeches with such phrases as "I like to come and see you in person to show you that I'm not exactly what they make me look like on a TV screen" (quoted in Cockerell 1989: 106). When he later resigned as Leader of the Conservative Party he told the party conference: "what a total nonsense this business about an image is. Now I can even put on my spectacles without being told I am going to lose the next election on television" (quoted in Cockerell 1989: 118).

In sharp contrast Harold Wilson (1964-1970, 1974-1976) "was the first British political figure to realise the full potential of going public as a political strategy and to seize the opportunity of using the mass media in a coordinated manner to take his case to the people" (Foley 1993: 105; see also Pimlott 1993: 268-272). For example in preparation for the campaign in 1964 Wilson and his political secretary went to the United States to study President Kennedy's speeches in order to produce specific catchy phrases that would be ideally suited for television. Later during the campaign when the BBC or ITN carried live extracts from his speeches and he noticed the cameras coming on he would deviate from his speech and use one of his prepared 'sound bites' to achieve maximum effect (Cockerell 1989: 89 and 106; see also Williams 1975). During his first months in office he regularly announced new initiatives or plans on television. He also tried to find new formats of access to the public such as a television tour with David Frost entitled 'The Prime Minister and Mrs Wilson at Home', or walkabouts, that is pre-arranged opportunities for the press or television to film or photograph the leader 'spontaneously' talking to people (Cockerell 1989: 145-146 and 153-158). However Wilson was not only fascinated by the new possibilities of the media age but during the later years of his period in office he also became deeply suspicious of the media. He accused the BBC of bias against Labour and regularly monitored the press for possible leaks and critical reports. When damaging reports were discovered in the first editions of Fleet Street papers Wilson's aides or sometimes the Prime Minister himself would contact editors to see if paragraphs could be altered for the subsequent editions (Margach 1978: 150).

In 1970 Edward Heath (1970-1974) fought a highly sophisticated television campaign which relied heavily for its execution upon a small group of media advisers. However once in Number 10 he "shunned the press, avoided television and distanced himself in general from media attention. Heath's concern was for policy not public standing, which he regarded as a consideration confined largely to

the vulgarities of the electoral process" (Foley 1993: 107). When he attempted to use new media formats such as a so-called 'first world press conference by a British Prime Minister' to rally public opinion behind the application for EC membership it "made the Prime Minister appear an aloof figure, out of touch with the concerns of ordinary people" (Cockerell 1989: 176).

James Callaghan (1976-1979), although generally regarded as a skilful television performer, is not associated with any particular developments in the relationship between prime minister and the mass media (Seymour-Ure 1991: 186).

Margaret Thatcher's tenure (1979-1990) saw a further professionalisation and sophistication in the efforts of the prime minister to obtain favourable media coverage. These developments will of course form part of the analysis of symbolic politics in chapter V and will not therefore be preempted here. One feature of the Thatcher decade which warrants a brief mention was the growing public controversy about media relations. Although previous prime ministers had not enjoyed trouble-free relations with the media, particularly when things started to go wrong for the incumbent, none of them had as frequent rows with the media as Thatcher. They ranged from media criticism of the news management of the Number 10 press office, to criticism by the Prime Minister of the media coverage of controversial issues such as the Falklands war or the miners' strike, to disputes with the BBC for example about the appointment of Marmaduke Hussey (Seymour-Ure 1991: 187; Barber 1991: 42). Finally the decision to begin televising the proceedings of the House of Commons in November 1989 and the subsequent decision to make that televising permanent in July 1990 took place during the Thatcher years; both were strongly opposed by the Prime Minister herself (Franklin 1992: 3-26; Mathias 1992: 46-47). It gave the Prime Minister another media opportunity although research shows that it did not develop into the 'Maggie and Neil show' as some had feared (Tutt 1992: 133; see also Hetherington/Weaver/Ryle 1990).

John Major's (1990-1997) rapid decline in popularity after the general election of 1992 illustrated that for the incumbent the media are truly "two-edged swords. Prime Ministers sometimes seek positively to command the attention of the media; but sometimes they undoubtedly wish the media would go away" (King 1991: 37). Poor news management was evident, for example, during such episodes as the decision to leave the ERM in 1992, the 'bastards' episode in the summer of 1993 or the ill-fated 'Back to Basics' campaign in 1994 (Seymour-Ure 1994: 411-412). Months of highly critical media coverage also contributed to the resignation of Prime Minister Major's press secretary Gus O'Donnell in October 1993 (The Times; 14 October 1993).

Tony Blair (1997 to today) has not been in office long enough for firm views about his relationship with the media to be formed. However two themes which already emerged prior and during the 1997 general election campaign merit consideration. First of all, Prime Minister Blair considers media presentation an integral part of policy making. Government announcements are tightly controlled by a 'double lock' consisting of the Number 10 press office and the Minister without Portfolio, Peter Mandelson (The Sunday Times; 27 July 1997). Opposition parties and the press have already criticised the Blair administration for news management and overemphasis on presentation (The Independent; 16 July 1997; The Times; 9 August 1997). Secondly, Prime Minister Blair and his media advisers regard it as a top priority to obtain positive coverage in the mass circulation tabloid press. This constituted an important strategic decision when Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party (Jones 1995: 171-172) and his success in becoming "The Sun's new political pin-up" (The Times; 18 March 1997) presumably means that this strategy will continue.

Overall we can conclude that the relationship between prime minister and the media has fundamentally changed over the course of this century. Today's mass media demand a constant supply of information about and pictures of the prime minister and his/her activities in order to satisfy their need for news. The personalisation of such information plays a crucial part in the subsequent production process of news by the media. Consequently the prime minister is represented as the public focal point of government and has evolved into a highly familiar media celebrity. This is illustrated in polls, for example, by the high level of public recognition of the prime minister (and the leader of the opposition) in contrast to the considerably lower level of recognition of other leading politicians (Foley 1993: 130-132).

The prime minister for his/her part must "make every effort to provide leadership that is supported by the public and is evocative of public confidence, and even occasionally, of popular acclaim" (Foley 1993: 88). In order to achieve this the prime minister must use the mass media to present him/herself, his/her policies, and his/her achievements in the best possible light. This demand on the incumbent is particularly apparent during election campaigns and has dramatically increased the importance of the 'packaging' of the prime minister and political leaders in general. To put it differently publicity achieved through the mass media is a fundamental requirement of effective leadership for today's prime minister and has made media work an important part of the prime minister's job description.

Some observers suggest that a 'presidentialisation' of the British premiership is taking place (Seymour-Ure 1991: 183; Foley 1993). Foley, for example, states that the British premiership is in many respects moving in the same direction as the American presidency and one reason for this is "the rise of a public dimension of leadership exposure and approval through media coverage, sustained opinion polling and the continual deployment of leaders by their parties into public settings of symbolism and spectacle" (Foley 1993: 265). Thus the importance of the modern

mass media is seen here as partly responsible for the prime minister having to adopt an increasingly similar style of public leadership to that of the American president. We will return to this notion in the conclusion.

## III. THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY AND THE BRITISH PREMIERSHIP

This chapter will discuss the symbolic functions of the American presidency and the British premiership within their respective political systems. In conjunction with chapter II it reviews the institutional framework surrounding the use of symbolic politics by political leaders.

The reader will recall two points made earlier which form the background for this analysis. First of all, Edelman's premise that the primary function of political leadership lies in the symbolic construction of political reality for the mass public, or in other words the fact that political leaders act as 'signifiers' who make a "complex and largely unknowable social world understandable" (Edelman 1988a: 38-39; see also section I.5.3). Secondly, the argument developed in more detail in chapter II that changes in political communication brought about mainly by the electronic mass media have led to an intense personalisation of the political process.

Let us begin by looking at the American presidency. The American president has, inter alia, been described as the "chief symbol-maker of the land" (Novak 1974: 28), "our temporary monarch" (Neustadt 1990: 280), "the one-man distillation of the American people" (Rossiter 1957: 5), "the great national explainer" (Grossman/Kumar 1981: 314-315), or as "interpreter-in-chief" (Stuckey 1991). The common denominator of these various titles seems to be best described by Cronin: "Whether he likes it or not a president becomes a kind of high priest of a nation. He is not merely an executive officer but a carrier of meaning, a symbol" (Cronin 1980: 158).

How did the presidency become a political symbol? After all since the beginning of the American Republic the political system of the United States has been

characterised by a poverty of common symbols (Lösche 1989: 107). Gabriel lists six reasons for this poverty: (i) the nation was the offspring of a rebellion which presumably voided prior common political events; (ii) no established or even mutually shared religion could provide the basis for common sacred symbols; (iii) the Puritan attitude to singing and elaborate religious symbolism hindered conventional symbol development; (iv) the rebellion was especially directed against monarchy and therefore the characteristically monarchical forms of pomp and ceremony were ignored; (v) the founders were stopped from using military symbols because of a deep-seated liberal fear of standing armies; and (vi) distance in time effectively made the country larger than it is today inasmuch as communication between isolated settlements was at best infrequent and consequently common symbol attachment was hampered (Gabriel 1956: 93-94; see also Devine 1972: 111-112).

Gabriel argues that the most important early symbol representing common aspirations and ideas was the charismatic appeal of George Washington himself. This was manifested in the fact that his generation gave him the title 'Father of His Country' (Gabriel 1956: 94). Later the flag became the chief representation of the nation and following the Civil War the Constitution became an important symbol of regime stability (Devine 1972: 117). Today the presidency, the flag and the Constitution are jointly seen as the most important political symbols of the United States (Wasser 1980: 96). Rituals taking place around the flag such as the Pledge of Allegiance or the singing of the national anthem underline its central position as a powerful political symbol (Lösche 1989: 272). Icons, such as portraits of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, the Roosevelts and Kennedy, can be found in many classrooms or public places and enhance the symbolic role of the presidency (Cronin 1980: 87; Miller/Schwartz 1985: 536-537). Moreover the omnipresence of today's president, as a result of the electronic mass media, has further strengthened his position as a national symbol (Lösche 1989: 108).

In order to understand this symbolic task more fully the various roles assumed by the president will now be described. Rossiter distinguishes between five presidential functions required by the Constitution: chief of state, chief executive, chief diplomat, commander-in-chief, and chief legislator (Rossiter 1957: 4-16). Furthermore the president has to perform five additional roles which are not required by the relevant Articles of the Constitution: chief of party, voice of the people, protector of the peace, manager of prosperity and leader of a coalition of free nations (Rossiter 1957: 16-24). These additional responsibilities are said to have developed over time as a result of the growing activities of presidents and the increasing expectations of the public. Rossiter is at pains to point out that the president "is all these things all the time, and any of his functions feeds upon and into all the others" (Rossiter 1957: 25).

These presidential roles lie at the heart at what the public expects of the president. Presidential roles can be seen as "the medium of performing specific duties" (Denton 1982: 83). The various roles are not static as individual presidents can choose to elect a particular variety of behaviours. However these roles set the boundaries of acceptable presidential behaviour, in other words a role set "provides a means for anticipating a range of behaviour but also confines the range of behaviour possible" (Denton/Woodward 1990: 205).

Boulding points out that the image in the public mind of the institution which is the presidency consists of a complexity of roles and expectations which has been perpetuated, with some changes, from generation to generation since the early days of the American Republic. The image of the presidency "is present in the minds of millions of Americans in greater or lesser degree of clarity. It is not only present, it is accepted, that is, it is placed high on the value scale" (Boulding 1956: 104). Hinckley defines this image as the 'symbolic presidency' that is "a particular set of

expectations about the office that are held by the public, described by journalists and teachers, and encouraged by the presidents themselves" (Hinckley 1990: 130).

Such a set of expectations is usually formed early on in the life of American citizens with lasting effects. Studies have shown that by the age of nine almost all American children can identify the incumbent president and view individual presidents as exceptionally important or benign (Greenstein 1974: 129-130). They also attribute many personal characteristics such as honesty, goodness, powerfulness and helpfulness to the president (Easton/Hess 1962: 241-242). As adults, personal aspects of presidential image such as sincerity, warmth, or impulsiveness remain important elements in assessing presidents (Greenstein 1974: 141). As a result of political socialisation the American public also keeps investing exaggerated hopes and performance expectations in each new president despite previous disappointments (Edwards 1983: 188-198; Berman 1986: 10). Moreover the position of being president remains, irrespective of swings in individual popularity, highly regarded amongst American citizens. Each president has at some time been at the top or near the top of the list of most admired men since World War II. President Reagan, for example, topped the Gallup list of 'Most Admired Men' for the eighth consecutive year in 1988 (Denton/Woodward 1990: 209).

The president may be said to serve six symbolic functions for the public. To begin with he functions as (i) a cognitive aid and (ii) an outlet for feelings. Both of these help the public simplify its perceptions of politics and government. (iii) The president also acts as a means of vicarious participation, in other words he becomes a potential object of identification. (iv) The president is a symbol of national unity and also (v) a symbol of stability and predictability. Finally (vi) he acts as a 'lightening rod' or object of displacement, which means he potentially becomes the scapegoat or focal point of protest in political communication (Greenstein 1974: 144-147).

Hutcheson points towards another important symbolic function of the presidency. As head of state in a multifaith society he has an important religious function namely that of symbolising the common faith and the operative values that bind all Americans together (Hutcheson 1988: 3). In other words the president can be seen as the main representative of the American civil religion which has produced a consensus between a unified national life and a religiously pluralistic society. That said, Hutcheson however argues that with Presidents Carter and Reagan this cultural integration was threatened as more organised religious groups found access to the political arena (Hutcheson 1988: 34). This increased access challenged the institutional separation of church and state which is essential to the maintenance of the American civil religion.

Two points raised in this discussion of the symbolic dimension of the American presidency must be emphasised. First of all, the symbolic dimension of the presidency is an essential ingredient in the process of interaction between the public and the incumbent president. It is through this interaction process that political reality is created. A president performing his various roles must always consider the symbolic expectations of the American public in terms of what they want and do not want him to do. In other words a president has to find ways of satisfying the public's image of an 'ideal' president. This process is a 'two-way street' as presidents in turn attempt to influence and shape the public's perception of them and their actions (Denton 1982: 116). It is said that to pay attention to this process and thus to the presidency as a "symbolic institution is not to lessen the significance and importance of the office. Rather, it emphasizes the subtle impact of the institution upon every citizen" (Denton/Woodward 1990: 215).

The second point which warrants further emphasis is the importance of distinguishing between the manipulative forms of symbolic communication used by

incumbent presidents to maintain their popularity or achieve short-term goals and the wider symbolic dimension of the institution of the presidency. Whereas the former is part of what was earlier described as the president's 'power to persuade' or leadership through 'going public', the latter is crucial in creating meaning about the political process for the citizens of the United States. This distinction is also reflected in the earlier discussion of the theoretical framework of Symbolic Politics (see section I.6) where a distinction was made between symbolisation as a powerful tool to influence public perceptions and symbolisation as an aid to order and systematise political reality.

Turning now to Britain it is worth noting that the symbolic dimension of the premiership has not yet been explored. Unlike in the United States where the president is generally regarded as performing a symbolic function as part of his wider political powers - indeed scholarly writings sometimes deal exclusively with this symbolic dimension (for example Denton 1982 or Hinckley 1990) - political scientists in Britain have not yet considered such a function.

Three reasons may explain this gap in scholarly attention. First of all, there is a general paucity of academic literature concerned with the office of the prime minister. As King points out the British prime ministership "is not studied because it is simply 'there', taken for granted, almost never, as an office, argued about" (King 1991: 25). Secondly, the British system of cabinet government results in a more collective performance of executive responsibilities than in the United States and this is generally apparent thus deflecting attention from the symbolic function of the individual occupying the office of prime minister. Thirdly, and most importantly, in contrast to the American president the British prime minister does not serve the dual functions of head of state and head of government. Hence academic writings tend to attribute symbolic functions such as representing the unity of the nation exclusively to the monarch.

The following analysis will explore some of the interconnections between the established political symbol of the monarchy and the symbolic dimension of the premiership. As a result of the lack of an established analytical framework we will proceed by comparing the British situation with the aforementioned symbolic aspects of the American presidency.

What are the main duties commonly considered part of the job description of the prime minister? According to James the prime minister's tasks comprise a political and a governmental dimension. In his political role the prime minister is the leader of the dominant party in Parliament and as such "the party's chief debater, propagandist and champion, in overall charge of its organization, manifesto and tactics" (James 1992: 89). The prime minister's head of government role can be divided into four categories: (i) running the key functions of government, such as appointing and dismissing ministers, chairing the Cabinet, and ordering the distribution of functions between ministers and departments; (ii) fostering collective responsibility, that is the prime minister must ensure that ministers abide by all government decisions and publicly defend them; (iii) giving strategic leadership by taking an overall view of government policies and ensuring that government initiatives merge into a common whole, and (iv) involving him/herself in individual policy issues, that is intervening in any area which s/he feels requires it (James 1992: 89-91). Hence broadly speaking the prime minister has to fulfil two sets of public expectations: (i) the expectations placed upon him/her as party leader; and (ii) the expectations directed towards him/her as head of the British government.

For our purpose, however, it may be more productive to reflect briefly on those roles which in contrast to the American president are not part of the prime minister's job description. As already mentioned the British prime minister does not personify the state. Instead the Queen fulfils this function and in that capacity has

been described as the "symbol of the institutions of government" (Rose 1985: 74) or by Bagehot in his late Victorian analysis as "a visible symbol of unity" (Bagehot 1993: 92, originally published 1867). Indeed in the introduction to 'The English Constitution' Crossman notes that Bagehot described "the importance of the Monarchy as a bulwark against violent change, a symbol of national unity that will preserve the deferential attitude of the masses" (Crossman 1993: 24, originally published 1963). Borthwick makes a similar point when he notes that "[w]hatever political disagreements may divide the society, virtually all can accept the monarchy as one of the symbols of what is held in common. It is an important part of the collective image that the British have of themselves as a people and as a state" (Borthwick 1990: 6). In other words the monarch is seen as acting as the symbolic head of the nation and its institutions. In so doing s/he plays an important part in creating 'regime loyalty' to the political system, to use the terminology of political culture research.

Ample support can be found for the importance of the monarchy in the public consciousness. More than 80% of respondents in a 1988 Gallup poll found the uniting, or figurehead, functions of the Queen, and her immediate family, to be very or quite important (quoted in Norton 1994: 311). A study by Greenstein et al found support for two assertions: (i) children in the United Kingdom typically first think of the Queen as the effective ruler and the prime minister as a mere helper and only later assign the monarch figurehead status; (ii) the Queen receives an automatically positive evaluation whereas the prime minister does not (Greenstein et al 1974: 285). They conclude that "[t]he child who belatedly learns that the Prime Minister is a leader rather than a lackey is not likely at that point to drape the Prime Minister with the idealized qualities young British children assign to the Queen and young American children to the President" (Greenstein et al 1974: 286).

In addition to a unifying function the monarch also has other symbolic functions. Once more Bagehot points out that the monarchy supports the government of the day with the strength of religion, and acts as the head of society and the head of the nation's morality (Bagehot 1993: 88-99). From a historical viewpoint it is suggested that the symbolism of the monarchy was crucial in the formation of the British nation after the union with Scotland. It provided stability for Britain in the face of both the American and French Revolutions (Colley 1992). Furthermore the Queen is commander-in-chief and soldiers fight symbolically for 'Queen and Country' (Norton 1994: 309) and on an international level she has symbolic status as head of the Commonwealth (Adam 1955). Overall it can be seen that many symbolic arenas which in the United States are under the sole control of the president are in the United Kingdom occupied by the monarch and not by the prime minister.

This has obvious communication implications for the office of the prime minister. As the pomp and pageantry of the head of state function are attached to the monarch the prime minister has less scope for symbolic communication than the American president (Seaton 1985: 15). This is illustrated, for example, by the fact that presidents use travel more often than prime ministers to convey messages. In Britain the Queen uses travel in a similar manner, that is for symbolic expression rather than merely for the purpose of going from one place to another (Seymour-Ure 1980: 260). Although in one sense the role of the prime minister is curtailed, a prime minister who is not burdened with ceremonial obligations finds more time for the business of running the government (Rose 1985: 75; Norton 1994: 310).

Moreover in the United Kingdom a royal *family* occupies the throne. It is said that "[a] family on the throne is an interesting idea also. It brings down the pride of sovereignty to the level of petty life" (Bagehot 1993: 87). Over the last thirty years public attention given to the Windsors has significantly increased due to growing media coverage of the private life of royalty (The Sunday Times Magazine; 2

February 1992: 21; Bruce 1992: 35-37). Likewise in the United States a lot of media attention is now focused on the president's private life and family. Gould argues that today voters in the United States elect a couple and that the First Lady has a very important ceremonial role in American society. From a comparative perspective he suggests that in Britain the royal family fulfils many of the ceremonial and charity roles which an American First Lady undertakes. Gould sums up that "there is no real role for a British prime minister's wife the way there is for an American First Lady" (quoted in The Times; 31 January 1992; see also Gould 1990). However it is worth noting the interest which was given to the candidates' wives in the 1990 leadership contest of the Conservative Party. The three spouses featured in the national press and were made subject to individual scrutiny on ITN. Yet the emphasis did not lie on the selection of the future British 'First Lady' but rather on reaffirming "the suggestion that each candidate's political credentials for high office were being actively based upon his character and personal background" (Foley 1993: 196). Most recently the press has described Cherie Blair as "Britain's glamorous first lady" (The Sunday Times; 6 July 1997) containing claims of expensive haircuts, designer clothes and 'makeover teams' advising the Prime Minister's wife (The Times; 7 July 1997).

Barnett suggests that the monarchy in the early nineties symbolised "the British disease of economic disappointment, lack of direction and a felt loss of the future" (Barnett 1994: 1). Kennedy states: "There is disenchantment with almost every pillar of British life: Parliament, the House of Lords, the City, Lloyds, the Law, the police, the Church. ... [The Crown's] position at the political and social apex makes it a ready symbol of an unfair and ineffective system" (Kennedy 1994: viii). Wilson questions the unifying effect of the monarchy and states that "[t]here are two British nations, the haves and the have-nots. By persuading people that there is only one, the Monarchy is an instrument of mystification and delusion of the nation's have nots" (Wilson 1989: 122). It seems that even though the prime minister as a partisan

figure often attracts spontaneous negative reactions and short term criticism, the monarchy, not unlike the American president, may become a symbol of wider dissatisfaction with the general direction in which the country is moving.

Comparing the average approval ratings of American presidents and British prime minister proffers further valuable insights. Post-war presidents have had an average approval figure of 53 percent compared with an average approval rating of 46 percent for British post-war prime ministers (Rose 1988: 269). Moreover although the prime ministers cannot match the peaks of popularity of presidents, their approval ratings remain overall more stable, both in terms of the differential between the highest and the lowest rating and with regard to the monthly variation (Rose 1988: 270-271). Rose offers three reasons for these differences. First of all, the prime minister is a clearer symbol of his/her party than the president and this partisanship limits his/her popularity. Secondly, before entering Downing Street the prime minister has usually been in the public eye for a longer period of time which tends to stabilise ratings. Thirdly, a president by 'going public' tries harder to be popular than a prime minister which consequently increases his potential for popularity (Rose 1988: 271-272).

Another way of explaining the average discrepancies in presidential and prime ministerial popularity may be the symbolic dimensions inherent in both offices. On the one hand the president is a symbol of his nation and can therefore attract a higher percentage of approval, when the moment is right, than a prime minister who is always impaired by his/her partisanship. On the other hand a president who is a more distinct symbol of the hopes and aspirations of the population than a prime minister can also quickly lose his positive ratings when those hopes are frustrated.

The incumbent prime minister "has an invisible but discernible aura" (King 1991: 35) being the successor of such great figures as Gladstone, Disraeli, Lloyd George,

and Winston Churchill and today this aura is "reinforced by security considerations: The PM has to be kept some distance from ordinary public contact" (Norton 1994: 180). However the effect of the aura of the prime minister's office on the outside world is easily surpassed by both the powerful public mystique and glamour of the monarchy (Nairn 1994: 34-36) and by the dignity of the head of state function of the American president.

Overall it may therefore be postulated that in the United Kingdom the prime minister's main symbolic function is as the chief public exponent of the government whereas the monarch symbolises the nation. Foley succinctly states that "[a]ccording to the British political tradition, prime ministers are expected to be the main representatives of the national government, not to be the personification of the nation itself" (Foley 1993: 158). Thus in comparison to the American president who has to celebrate conventional American values and aspirations as part of his political functions, the prime minister "is a much more subdued advocate for social values" (Woodward 1979: 48).

Finally the symbolic role of the prime minister as representing the activities of the government of the day is crucial in creating meaning for the public about the political process. The office of the prime minister and the acts of the incumbent function in Edelman's words as important 'signifiers' for the public in observing and interpreting political reality. However the office of the British prime minister is a less symbolic institution than the American presidency as many symbolic arenas carried by the latter are occupied by the monarch. This limits the spectrum of communication opportunities for the office holder in the United Kingdom.

# IV. THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY: A CASE STUDY IN SYMBOLIC POLITICS

This chapter will apply the theoretical model of Symbolic Politics as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis to the Presidency of Ronald Reagan. Both the manipulative function of symbolic politics and its role as a facilitator in the social process of meaning creation will be explored.

On the 20th January 1981 the Republican Ronald W. Reagan was inaugurated as the 40th President of the United States. Two months earlier he had won a resounding victory over the incumbent President Jimmy Carter and the independent candidate John Anderson. Reagan gained 51% (489 electoral votes), Carter 41% (49 electoral votes), and Anderson 7% of the popular vote. For the first time for 26 years the Republicans also had a majority in the Senate which they maintained until the assembly of the 100th Congress in January 1987 (Steffani 1988: 75-83).

At the time of the 1980 presidential election the public agenda was dominated by two issues. The first was the Iran hostage crisis. The second was the deep economic recession reflected in a rate of inflation of 12%, interest rates of over 15%, and an unemployment figure of over 7%. There was widespread disillusionment with both the institutions of government and the general direction the country was moving in (Thompson 1981: 14-15) and in the election year of 1980 over 70% of the American population felt 'dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S. at this time' (Gallup Poll quoted in Lipset/Schneider 1987: 4). In 1979 this percentage had risen temporarily to over 80% and President Carter spoke publicly about "a crisis of confidence ... that strikes at the heart and soul and spirit of our national will" (quoted in New York Times; 16 July 1979). Not surprisingly Reagan capitalised on this problem and commented in his autobiography some ten years later: "If I could be elected president, I wanted to do what I could to bring about a

spiritual revival in America. I believed - and intended to make it a theme of my campaign - that America's greatest years were ahead of it" (Reagan 1990: 219).

Different circumstances prevailed in the election year of 1984. The economy was growing at a spectacular rate of over 6%, inflation stood at only 3.5% and the level of unemployment, which had risen at the beginning of the Reagan Presidency, had returned to the 1980 level. A majority of voters were of the opinion that the economy had improved since 1980 and gave President Reagan credit for this development (Keeter 1985: 93-94). In 1984, in sharp contrast to 1980, more than 50% of the population were generally satisfied with the way things were going in the United States (Gallup Poll quoted in Lipset/Schneider 1987: 4). Thus overall it is suggested that macroeconomic development favoured Ronald Reagan twice; first of all in 1980 when the effects of the recession significantly dampened President Carter's hope of a second term in the White House and then again in 1984 when the economy picked up just in time for Reagan's re-election campaign (Behrmann 1988: 30).

President Reagan's job approval ratings (see below Figure 1) constitute an important backdrop to an exploration of symbolic politics. Ceaser distinguishes six phases in the approval rating variations of the Reagan Presidency:

(i) 'Takeoff'. This ran from inauguration day until the winter of 1981/82 when the ratings fell below the point at which they had begun. Apart from the well established honeymoon effect three major events contributed to a positive evaluation of the President by the public during this period: the enactment of Reagan's radical economic programme, the assassination attempt in March 1981, and the President's decision to dismiss 11,500 striking air traffic controllers in August 1981.

(ii) 'Decline'. From winter 1981/82 until the summer of 1983 this phase paralleled the recession. Despite various defensive responses to the economic difficulties of those months, such as predicting an imminent economic turnaround or blaming the recession on the misguided policies of the past, President Reagan's public support remained at a very low level.

(iii) 'Restoration'. This phase ran from the summer of 1983 until after Reagan's re-election. Reagan's approval ratings recovered sharply in the improved economic climate during the second half of 1983 and throughout 1984. Moreover the invasion of Grenada in October 1983 and Reagan's re-election campaign also boosted support for the President.

(iv) 'Anointment'. This phase continued until the Iran-Contra scandal broke in the autumn of 1986. It is characterised by the extension of the high approval ratings of the 'restoration' period largely due to the continuing growth of the economy. The dip at the beginning of 1985 is generally associated with the controversial visit to a war cemetery in Bitburg where some members of the Nazi SS had been buried. In foreign affairs the first Reagan-Gorbachev summit near the end of 1985 and the attack on Libya in April 1986 both received positive responses by the American public.

(v) 'Debacle'. Following the revelations of the Iran-Contra scandal in November 1986 President Reagan's approval ratings fell dramatically until the congressional hearings had been concluded in August 1987.

(vi) 'Equilibrium'. This phase ran from the end of the Iran-Contra affair (Ceaser 1988: 174-205). Although Ceaser's observations end in December 1987 it seems justified to extend this phase until October 1988. As at the end of the last phase the approval ratings continued to hover around the 50% mark throughout this phase,

however it is distinguished from the previous phase by a change in public agenda. The new agenda involved, for example, the stock market crash in October 1987 and the signing of the INF treaty in Washington in December 1987 and the subsequent ratification process. Clearly though President Reagan was unable to recover from the loss of public approval that the Iran-Contra affair had inflicted upon him.

(vii) In extending Ceaser's model a seventh and final phase in President Reagan's approval fluctuations is suggested: 'ascension'. The last three months of the Presidency signal a significant upward trend in Ronald Reagan's public approval. The reason for this may be a more retrospective evaluation of the Presidency particularly after George Bush had been elected to succeed President Reagan.
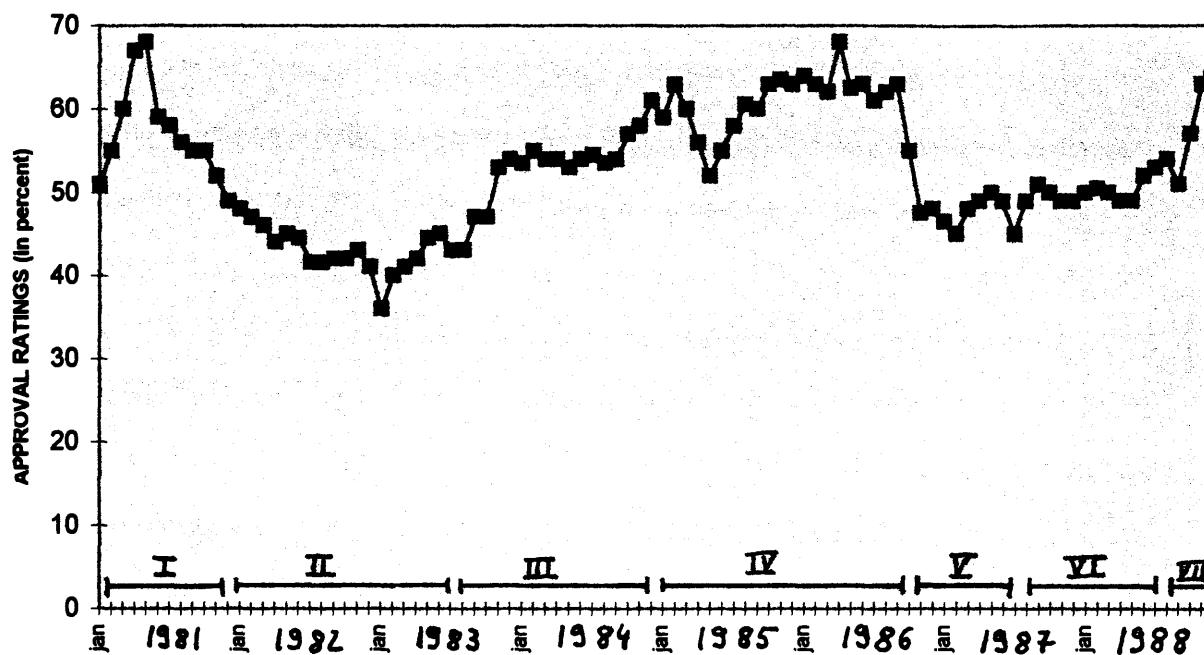


FIGURE 1

President Reagan's approval ratings (in percent)

Question: *Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling his job as president?*

(based on Gallup Poll results, in Edwards/Gallup 1990 and Gallup Report No. 280)

Throughout this chapter the reader is reminded of these seven phases in President Reagan's public support. Symbolic politics is discussed in the light of the fluctuations in presidential approval ratings, in other words are certain types of symbolic communication characteristic of particular levels of approval ratings? For example, the distinct types of symbolic communication that were used during a time of very low approval ratings, such as the depth of the recession in the early 1980s, are contrasted with those utilised during a period of high approval ratings, such as the 1984 re-election campaign.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. It begins with a look at the biography of Ronald Reagan as his personal background is of particular relevance to a case study of symbolic politics. There follows an analysis of different forms of symbolic communication of the Reagan Presidency namely (i) election campaigns, (ii) symbolic problem solving, (iii) symbolic rhetoric, (iv) the so-called fictionalisation of politics, and (v) the connection between symbolic politics and the culture of celebrity. The precise meaning of these headings will become clear during the course of this chapter. Unfortunately it is not always possible to avoid somewhat artificial divisions between these separate areas of investigation, for example, symbolic rhetoric during election campaigns will be dealt with in the rhetoric rather than the election section. For the purposes of analytic clarity the different types of symbolic politics will be distinguished before the picture as a whole is explored. Finally the media strategies of the Reagan administration which are of particular relevance to a study of symbolic politics are discussed.

## IV.1 Ronald Reagan: His Life as a Professional Communicator

The purpose of this section is to illustrate that Ronald Reagan's biographical background made him extremely well suited to successfully employ symbolic politics as a political leader. As Barber points out "[b]y the time Reagan reached the stage of the White House, he had more experience pleasing audiences than any American politician since William Jennings Bryan ... The obvious combination of public personality and media talent made it surprising that it had taken so long for the Reagan type to appear in the age of media politics" (Barber 1985: 490).

From early on in Ronald Reagan's life communication skills were prominent in his education. In his teens he was a leader in Easter prayer services and served as a toastmaster in the local church (Vaughn 1994: 17). He discovered acting during those years and was deeply fascinated by his work with drama groups at his High School and at College. "I was so addicted to student theatrical productions that you couldn't keep me out of them" (Reagan 1990: 41). During his last year at College he received a prestigious award at a play contest at Northwestern University which provided great encouragement to him to further pursue his interest in drama (Vaughn 1994: 20; Reagan 1990: 58). Another early example of his ability to communicate was a student strike at his College during which Reagan was selected to deliver an important speech. The choice fell upon him because "he was, they all agreed, the best and most enthusiastic speaker they had" (Edwards 1987: 90).

The next chapter in Reagan's life as a communicator was dominated by the medium of radio. For him in those days "radio was magic. It was theater of the mind" (Reagan 1990: 59). FDR's fireside chats, for example, left a lasting impression on the future president (Reagan 1990: 66). In 1933 Reagan became broadcaster with WOC in Davenport, Iowa, then with WHO in Des Moines. Although he did all

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kinds of broadcasts he became best known for his sports casting. His speciality were 'live' recreations of baseball games which were played to him by a telegraph operator. In fact some of his recreations, it is said, sounded more exciting than the real games (Denton 1988: 74). His visualising skills turned Reagan into a local celebrity and as one local newspaper put it: "To millions of sports fans in at least seven or eight middlewestern states, the voice of Dutch Reagan is a daily source of baseball dope" (quoted in Wills 1988: 130). Denton states that Reagan's reconstruction of baseball games "encouraged the notion that drama mattered more than accuracy" (Denton 1988: 74). He also observes that "Reagan's years in radio greatly aided in the development of his language and vocal skills. These skills allow Reagan to establish an emotional link with audiences" (Denton 1988: 73).

On a trip to California in 1937 Reagan was offered a screen test and subsequently signed a contract with Warner Brothers. Over the next twenty seven years Reagan made fifty three feature films, most of them (forty six) between 1937 and 1952 (Vaughn 1994: xi). During his career as an actor he achieved only modest stardom and it was his later career on the small screen which made him become an American household name. However during his Hollywood years he received a fine training in acting which contributed to the perfection of his communication skills. After Reagan had retired from film-making he wrote about himself: "Now I had become a semi-automaton 'creating' a character another had written, doing what still another person told me to do on the set. ... So much of our profession is taken up with pretending ... that an actor must spend at least half his waking hours in fantasy, in rehearsal or shooting" (Reagan 1981: 6, originally published 1965). Apart from perfecting his acting skills Reagan also became deeply familiar with the myths and the symbolic repertoire of American society as frequently put to use in Hollywood films (Henningsen 1988: 234).

For our purpose it is also worth noting that the future First Lady, Nancy Reagan, was also trained in the skills of the acting profession and featured herself in eleven motion pictures between 1949 and 1958 (Kelley 1991: 472-473). Since her childhood she was, like her husband, interested in the theatre and drama (N. Reagan 1989: 82) which later turned into a general fascination with her appearance and presentation in public (Kelley 1991: 196-198).

During the 1950s a television career followed Reagan's time in Hollywood. He served among other things for eight years as the host of the popular weekly 'General Electric Theater' which presented a variety of dramatic material. As part of his contract he would, for about three months each year, visit GE's plants around the country and speak about life in Hollywood to improve the morale of the company's employees. He would also speak to local organisations such as Rotary Clubs or Chambers of Commerce and more and more often he was invited to speak in front of larger groups such as Executives Clubs and the National Association of Manufacturers. He decided to cut down on the portion in his talks about the film industry and turned his speeches into a general "warning ... about the threat of government" (Reagan 1990: 129). Technically he learned how to adapt his Hollywood speech-making techniques to his new environment by using cue cards and shorthand (Reagan 1990: 130). In the late 1950s a GE executive told Reagan that "he was more in demand as a public speaker than anyone in the country except President Eisenhower" (Cannon 1982: 96).

Reagan's political breakthrough came with a speech on nation-wide television in support of Barry Goldwater's bid for the presidency in 1964. The speech (see R. Reagan 1989: 22-36) was not too different from Reagan's GE talks and became a huge success by raising probably $600,000 in contributions for the Goldwater campaign. Overnight Reagan became a political star (Hess/Broder 1967: 253-254). His charisma and communication skills in conjunction with the direct accessibility

of a mass audience by means of the modern media facilitated Reagan's first success in the political arena.

Within two months of the Goldwater speech a group of wealthy Californian businessmen decided that Reagan would be their ideal candidate for governor in 1966. They chose him because of his staunch conservative credentials and his by then renowned ability to communicate successfully. A.C. Rubel, chairman of the Union Oil Company and one of the members of the well-financed committee of 'Friends of Ronald Reagan' praised his candidate's skills: "Reagan is the man who can enunciate our principles to the people" (quoted in Cannon 1982: 103). Despite his earlier political engagement as President of the Screen Actors Guild, Reagan expressed reservations about the offer: "I hadn't the slightest interest in public office. Indeed, in my mind, it was completely unexciting and unattractive compared to show business. ... I felt sure that the people would accept me as a campaigner for someone else, but not as a candidate myself. After all, I was 'just an actor'" (R. Reagan 1989: 37-38). Incidentally this was not the first time that friends wanted Reagan to run as their political candidate because of his charisma and ability to communicate. In 1941 a group of supporters suggested that they would finance his campaign if Reagan would run for a seat in Congress (Edwards 1987: 246).

This time, however, Reagan was encouraged by the success of his fellow actor and friend George Murphy who had become Senator of California in 1964 and whose campaign Reagan had supported (Schwartzenberg 1980: 155; Wills 1988: 342). Reagan finally agreed to run and announced his intention to seek the Republican nomination for governor in January 1966. During Reagan's campaign his total inexperience was sold as an asset. Reagan was packaged as the 'citizen politician' running against Pat Brown, the 'professional politician' (Nimmo/Combs 1980: 113-114). Brown himself later observed of Reagan "that he really never has become involved sufficiently in the process of government to become an authentic political

figure" (Brown/Brown 1976: 5; see also Brown 1970). Reagan defeated Brown by a huge margin in November 1966 and was re-elected in 1970 retaining popular approval through both terms (Wills 1988: 406).

Newspaper articles from these early days of Reagan's political career illustrate the new quality that his candidacy represented. The 'New York Times' commented under the headline 'And May the Best-Looking Man Win' that the announcement of Reagan's candidacy for governorship "is perhaps the most dramatic example of the star-in-politics" (New York Times; 9 January 1966). A few months later it wrote that Reagan "personifies ... [the] intrusion of television and show business values into serious politics. ... [He] smiles handsomely and speaks well. His standard speech is a skilful script combining moral platitudes, pseudo-indignation, homely examples, and harmless jokes ... On [election day], Californians will, we trust, understand where reality ends and fantasy begins" (New York Times; 6 October 1966). Academic writers were also sceptical about the new situation that Reagan had created. Wyckoff, for example, warned: "Who can be so sure today that tomorrow's homely Jeffersons and Lincolns and Roosevelts and the substance of tomorrow's debates on public policies will not be obscured at the polls by tomorrow's Ronald Reagans?" (Wyckoff 1968: 247).

The state of California was well suited to the Reagan-style rise in politics. As a result of particularly weak political parties - a legacy of the Hiram Johnson's anti-party drive at the beginning of this century (Hess/Broder 1967: 256-257) - a highly personalised selection process of political candidates had been in place even before the arrival of television. "At a time when most other states favored candidates who had advanced through the ranks, California selected potential office-holders on the basis of real or supposed charismatic appeal, a condition ideal for Reagan" (Cannon 1982: 105). Resulting from this personality system, California also had the reputation of being the promised land of political consultancy and private campaign

management. From the start of his campaign Reagan was heavily packaged by the then most renowned consultancy in California 'Spencer Roberts & Associates' using the most advanced techniques of political marketing available at the time (Schwartzenberg 1980: 220-221).

Once in office Governor Reagan recognised the importance of symbolic communication. His inauguration ceremonies were the biggest and most sumptuous California had ever seen (Leamer 1983: 206). His decision to send in the National Guard to combat the student unrests in Berkeley or his sanctioning in 1973 of the first execution in California for ten years were powerful images publicly associated with his style of leadership (Dallek 1984: 46-48). Moreover as far as his charismatic influence on the media is concerned one journalist explained that many Californian journalists deliberately did not attend Reagan's press conferences as "[t]hey preferred the objectivity that came with reading his prepared comments without having his personality affect how they heard what he said" (The Journal of Commerce; 19 May 1986).

Between 1974 and announcing his candidacy for the presidency in November 1979 Reagan maintained a high public profile again through his role as an accomplished communicator. Syndicated commentaries for radio stations and regular appearances on television shows were Reagan's main methods of keeping his name in the public mind and pronouncing his political philosophy (R. Reagan 1989: 51). His narrowly failed bid for the Republican nomination in 1976 of course also contributed to his public standing.

After his residence in the White House Reagan turned to his old role as a professional communicator more quickly than had been anticipated. He was in high demand on the lecture circuit at $50,000 per speech (U.S. News & World Report; 8 January 1990: 10). Moreover for a reported fee of $2 million he accepted an

invitation by the media conglomerate 'Fujisankei Communications' for a nine-day promotional trip across Japan in 1989. Reagan gave talks to Japanese businessmen, attended concerts, and congratulated the winners of the Japanese equivalent of the Nobel Prizes (Time; 30 October 1989: 41). Newsweek commented days before the Reagan trip: "Ronald Reagan launched his political career in the 1950s as a hired mouthpiece for the General Electric Co. Now the highest bidder merely happens to be a Japanese firm. When all is said and done, the former president is merely resuming his previous occupation" (Newsweek; 23 October 1989: 23). In 1990 a video was released entitled 'Stand-Up Reagan' which contained short clips of President Reagan telling jokes, performing after dinner speeches and imparting anecdotes (Stand-Up Reagan: Parkfield Entertainment; 1990). Even Reagan's disclosure that he is suffering from Alzheimer's disease in November 1994 was designed as a high-profile media event. Reagan announced his illness in a two-page handwritten letter addressed to his 'fellow Americans' the day before the midterm elections of that year (The Times; 7 November 1994 and 11 January 1995).

We can conclude that Reagan was not a 'born' politician who was interested in communication to further his cause but somebody who found his way into politics relatively late after spending a long period of his life in various fields as a professional communicator. In other words before entering politics Reagan was "a supplier of entertainment, comfort, distraction, and healing symbols; entirely a creation of the media" (Wills 1988: 120).

During his years in radio, film, and television Reagan had learned that the media was the messenger and communication was the key. "These lessons ... proved of inestimable benefit to his political career. He mastered performing before microphones, cameras, and audiences, as well as how to dramatize events. He gained training in propaganda and public relations" (Vaughn 1994: 233). Reagan himself states: "Some of my critics over the years have said that I became president

because I was an actor who knew how to give a good speech. I suppose that's not too far wrong" (R. Reagan 1989: 14). Reagan's personal background may also have been responsible for the media acknowledging his skills to communicate from the very beginning of his Presidency and describing him routinely as the 'Great Communicator' (King/Schudson 1987: 37; Nimmo/Combs 1983: 154-155).

Another consequence flowing from Reagan's background was that he came to office with many prepacked images already attached to him. Amongst other things he was a small-town boy, a former movie star, an all-American cowboy, a former governor, he was sports minded and athletic, and a celebrity surrounded by famous friends (Orman 1987: 18-19). Moreover before becoming president he had created a more visible legacy than any other president and, for example, had been seen in uniform by more people than any twentieth-century president, with the exception of Dwight D. Eisenhower (Vaughn 1994: 118). It will be shown in the subsequent sections that both his communicative skills and the symbolism of many features of his biography were important in his employment of symbolic politics.

## IV.2 Types and Strategies of Symbolic Politics

### IV.2.1 Election Campaigns

From the viewpoint of Symbolic Politics election campaigns are part of the wider social process of creating meaning about political reality through communication. It is suggested that especially during election campaigns the political spectacle becomes a manufactured reality which exists almost independently from the reality which it is supposed to represent (Sarcinelli 1986: 42). This section will consider some examples of the development and employment of symbolic politics by Ronald

Reagan as candidate and President respectively during the presidential elections of 1980 and 1984[1].

The planning and strategy of Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential bid indicated a new development in American politics. His campaign marked the real beginning of the extensive use of marketing techniques in the political arena (Newman 1994: 18) and was "the most sophisticated and well-funded research program in the history of U.S. politics" (Denton/Woodward 1990: 90). In particular the work of Reagan's pollster Richard Wirthlin and his firm 'Decision Making Information' (DMI) deserves mention. Although Wirthlin had conducted polls for Reagan since 1971 he had never conducted the far-reaching exercise he was about to prepare for his presidential campaign.

First of all, DMI tested six scenarios for the future in a nation-wide survey during the pre-primary period of 1979. The scenarios ranged from 'America can do' types to 'less is better for America'. The 'can do' choices emerged as the most popular with the American public and were particularly successful when combined with an emphasis on the importance of good leaders (Nimmo/Combs 1983: 65). Secondly, the firm conducted a so-called psychographic study in order to understand people's existing attitudes towards a variety of suspected candidates for the forthcoming presidential election. Overall Reagan scored well on headings such as 'individualism' and 'authoritarianism' but badly on such aspects as 'compassion'. Furthermore many people particularly outside California had a clear second level of perception of Reagan as 'actor' which inevitably raised the issue of the candidate's

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1) This is in contrast to symbolic politics during the midterm election campaigns of 1982 and 1986 which will not be considered here. There were however many instances of symbolic communication by President Reagan during those campaigns. Examples are his strategy of appealing for more patience regarding the economic recovery in 1982 (Denton/Hahn 1986: 287), or the President's sudden public attention on drug abuse during the 1986 campaign (Mayer/McManus 1988: 279-280).

credibility (Devlin 1981: 5). McDowell states that "for many voters assessing Reagan in 1980 ... the test was whether he seemed safe enough to justify voting the incumbent out" (McDowell 1988: 203).

At the conclusion of the DMI study Wirthlin wrote a 176-page strategy statement which subsequently became the script of Reagan's campaign (Denton/Woodward 1990: 90). During the later stages of the campaign so-called focus group testing, that is the market testing of ads on small group of voters, was also conducted. Sometimes Reagan's ads were tested against Carter ads in order to establish how to increase the effectiveness of the former (Devlin 1981: 6-7). Moreover focus group testing was also used for the fine tuning of the overall strategy, that is to determine which particular region or section of the population to target during a critical period of the campaign (Luntz 1988: 15).

Wirthlin's results were comprehensively applied in the production of advertisements for the Reagan camp. In line with the successful 'can do' theme Reagan ads stressed that "[w]e did it in California. And we can do it for America" (quoted in Jamieson 1992: 429). Another TV ad pointed out that inflation *can* be controlled and that a President Reagan would make the tough decisions which are required to do so (Jamieson 1992: 429).

The problem area of credibility which was identified by the surveys took centre stage in candidate Reagan's campaign plan. According to Peter H. Dailey, the media director of Reagan's 1980 campaign, a five minute documentary film called the 'Reagan Record' was the main device used to tackle the credibility gap. The documentary concentrated exclusively on Reagan's upbringing, his professional career and his California record. In the words of Dailey it was "shown so much that you can almost turn the sound off and run it and remember it" (quoted in Devlin

1981: 5). The idea behind the clip was to reassure the public about Ronald Reagan's past and to raise his profile as a national political figure.

Other techniques were applied too to raise his credibility and to promote the overall 'leader perception' of candidate Reagan. The so-called talking head format was used in more ads than by any presidential candidate since 1960 defying conventional wisdom that talking heads are dull (Jamieson 1992: 430). Michael Deaver, who acted as a strategist during parts of the 1980 campaign and subsequently became Deputy Chief of Staff, states that the talking head format suits Reagan extremely well because of his communicative talent (Deaver 1987: 76). Lou Cannon observes that Reagan "was the Great Communicator because he was believable" (Cannon 1982: 371) and this believability appears to be the talent that was put to use in the talking head format.

His credibility was also symbolically underlined by the Reagan camp strategy of attacking President Carter's record but not the person. It was believed that attacking President Carter as a person would have undermined Ronald Reagan's attempts to appear positive and presidential. 'Attack spots' which amongst other things focused on the personal qualities of the incumbent were however produced late in Reagan's campaign. These were exclusively produced and placed in the media market carrying the name of 'political action committees' in order to distance the candidate Reagan from such attacks (Bruce 1992: 106).

One of President Carter's main attacks on his opponent was the claim that Reagan would be 'dangerous' and in Carter's own words that the election would decide "whether we have war or peace" (quoted in Jamieson 1992: 409). Apart from the fact that these attacks backfired on Carter as he lost one of his greatest assets namely the public perception that he was a decent, honourable, and religious man, Reagan had also tried to anticipate Carter's claims. For example he included a long

paragraph on world peace in his acceptance address at the Republican Convention and fittingly closed his speech with a moment of silent prayer (Jamieson 1992: 396). In another television spot it was Nancy Reagan who rebutted Carter's claims that Reagan was a menace to peace and a war-monger. Jamieson comments that the "use of Reagan's wife is a radical departure from the tradition of presidential advertising. In the past, wives have been featured in ads with their husbands ... or speaking about what they had learned in the campaign and what their husbands would do for America. But here Nancy Reagan assumes the role of her husband's champion" (Jamieson 1992: 437).

Reagan's professional approach in campaign planning also extended to the 1980 debates between himself and President Carter. Two months prior to the debates Reagan set up a 'Debate Task Force' whose job it was to prepare strategies and tactics for the debates and to provide professional advice on presentational aspects of the debates (Denton/Woodward 1990: 102). David Stockman describes how a mock TV studio was set up where the format of the debates and potential questions were rehearsed before 'panellists' (Stockman 1986: 48). During the real debates 50 researchers in a 'Debate Operations Centre' carefully monitored the statements of President Carter in order to draw potential errors immediately to the attention of the media (Martel 1983: 27).

Stockman also describes how during the debate preparations when specific policy commitments were discussed Reagan's advisers were "searching for the wooliest generalizations possible" (Stockman 1986: 49). The avoidance of clear policy stands was however not only a feature of the debates but a characteristic of the whole Reagan campaign. Two main reasons may be put forward for such avoidance. First of all, "policy stands can create enemies as well as supporters, whereas few voters would disagree with the need for honesty or competence" (Arterton 1984: 113). In other words with clearer conservative policy positions Reagan might have alienated

voters he was eager to attract and would have distracted attention from his emphasis on leadership and competence. Secondly, specific commitments offer the media the opportunity to search for inconsistencies or ask for further clarifications. Indeed Reagan's original plan for the 1980 campaign to highlight one particular policy issue each week was dropped after it had given journalists too many opportunities to seek explanations for statements of previous days (Arterton 1984: 127).

In sum Reagan, in the 1980 presidential contest, fine tuned his campaign communication to match the attitudes and opinions of the electorate which had previously been elicited through surveys. He provided a simple policy agenda namely that domestically there was too much government and in foreign policy the United States had to act more decisively. He emphasised that the problems facing the country were manageable and that a brighter future would lie ahead under his leadership. Reagan tried to present himself publicly as a more credible and presidential candidate than both the incumbent and his own previous reputation might have led the public to believe. In other words by turning the campaign into a character appeal he attempted to demonstrate symbolically that he was qualified for the job.

The crucial importance of such an image centred approach in campaign communication has been highlighted in various research. Abelson et al demonstrate, for example, based incidentally on a study conducted early in the 1980 presidential election, that affective responses - that is how does this person make you feel; angry, happy, proud etc. - strongly predict the voter's overall evaluation of the respective candidate (Abelson et al 1982: 626). On a similar note Sanders states that "[w]ith limited education and interest, it may, in fact, be easier to make decisions based upon whether or not you feel people act properly ... rather than try to evaluate the propriety of a particular policy before it is implemented. This, in turn, may indicate that political candidates are correctly reading the electorate when they

spend what seems like an inordinate amount of time trying to create the 'proper image'" (Sanders 1989: 250-251). Glass indeed shows that the strong emphasis on style and personal attributes in the assessment of presidential candidates are not only restricted to the less well educated sections of the electorate but "are every bit as central to the evaluations of the highly educated" (Glass 1985: 532).

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter the 1984 elections took place against the background of dramatic improvements in the performance of the economy in comparison to the early period of the Reagan Presidency. Keeter taking note of these improvements points out that "Mr. Reagan could hardly have dreamed of better circumstances in which to seek reelection" (Keeter 1985: 93). President Reagan's approval ratings had recovered almost parallel to the betterment of the economic indicators and reached marks in the high fifties and low sixties during the final phases of the 1984 campaign.

President Reagan's reelection campaign was characterised by the same "demand-led and research-defined view of political communication" (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 51) as his 1980 campaign. Comprehensive polling by DMI long before the election identified the themes President Reagan would need to highlight during his reelection bid. Polling intensified as election day approached. During the last two months DMI conducted approximately 4000 telephone interviews every evening to assess the impact of the most recent events and developments of the campaign (Der Spiegel; 36/1984: 131).

As in 1980 results from the polls were used for various purposes such as devising slogans, planning the campaign route for the President, or deciding on the purchase of TV advertising times. Detailed market testing was also used for the production and airing of individual ads. An example of this form of testing is the famous 'bear spot' of the Reagan campaign. In this spot a narrator comments on pictures of a

bear roaming in the woods and being confronted by an armed man: "Some people say the bear is tame. Others say it's vicious and dangerous. Since we can never really be sure who's right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the bear?" (quoted in Diamond/Bates 1985: 51). It is put forward that this highly successful ad is "probably the most heavily tested political spot in American history" (Diamond/Bates 1985: 51). It had first been tested on no fewer than 100 focus groups. It was then aired in a few selected markets in order to survey the viewers recall rates, that is how many voters could remember seeing it, which proved to be exceptionally high.

President Reagan rather than recruiting traditional Republican political consultants for his campaign created an ad hoc team of high profile public relations experts, the so-called 'Tuesday Team'. The team was in overall charge of producing the advertisements for the Reagan campaign. This unusual step may have been a reason why the work of consultants and strategists itself became a prominent topic during the months of the campaign. Newspapers, for example the 'New York Times' or 'USA Today', regularly featured articles on the work and strategies of the two camps' advisers (Burstein 1988: 190).

Reagan's team had already decided that the election should be framed as a choice between what Stuart Spencer, the campaign's chief strategist called "the Carter-Mondale past" (quoted in Mayer/McManus 1988: 7) and the overwhelmingly confident national mood as personified by President Reagan of the year 1984. Surveys had shown that many of Reagan's original themes such as increased defence spending or cuts in social security did not find the same amount of support as in the early 1980s (Mayer/McManus 1988: 5-6). However wider themes such as optimism and patriotism scored very well in polling data. Thus it was decided that the campaign agenda should be dominated by a celebration of the current national mood rather than by any specific policy commitments for a second term. As Smith states

the campaign was "strong on symbolism and slick at sliding off hard-policy choices" (Smith 1988: 701-702).

This campaign agenda is reflected in the highly emotional advertisements of the Reagan camp. Philip Dusenbery, one of the members of the 'Tuesday Team' and best known as the creator of the Pepsi campaign with Michael Jackson, commented on the team's concept: "Good emotional advertising isn't designed so much to think about, to understand, so much as to feel. It's the most powerful part of advertising. It stays with people longer and better" (quoted in The New Republic; 19 November 1984: 12). Kleinsteuber claims that the Reagan spots during the 1984 campaign are noticeable examples of *modern spots [which] do not argue anymore, but codify their message in the form of symbols and suggestions* ("Moderne Spots argumentieren nicht mehr, sie verschlüsseln ihre Botschaft in Symbolen und Suggestionen", Kleinsteuber 1987: 608-609).

The result of the 'Tuesday Team's' approach was a series of spots which later came to be known as the 'feel-good' ads. The first wave of those spots were called 'Spring '84 in America' and showed scenes, for example, of beautiful countryside, people at work, or little children playing. The narrator says: "This is America ... And this is America ... And this, too is America. Just four years ago, people were saying its problems were too big to be handled by any one President. Yet what do we see now? Jobs are coming back. Housing is coming back. And for the first time in a long time, hope for the future is coming back" (quoted in Germond/Witcover 1985: 339-340). A similar theme was repeated during the autumn campaign when a series of ads entitled 'Morning in America' were aired. This time the narrator said at the end of the spots: "Life is better. America is back. And people have a sense of pride they never felt they'd feel again. And so, it's not surprising that just about everyone in town is thinking the same thing. Now that our country is turning around, why would we ever turn back" (quoted in Jamieson 1992: 451).

The Republican convention was another example of the campaign's effort to highlight the themes of optimism and patriotism and to link them to the President. The inspired choice fell on Dallas as the venue for the convention. It was a place symbolising the economic revival of the United States but 'Dallas', the hugely successful soap opera, was also a popular fantasy for millions of Americans (Blumenthal 1988a: 108). The most potent patriotic motif used during the convention but also during the campaign as a whole were the Olympic Games which had taken place in Los Angeles in the summer of 1984. The convention began, for example, with the presentation of Olympic gold medalists, the chant 'U.S.A.! U.S.A.!' that was so much part of the Los Angeles games would echo from the convention hall all week, and even the slogan 'Higher, Faster, Stronger' was adopted by the Republicans. As Pomper points out "[t]he Olympic image of the athlete's lonely struggle to master the physical world was matched by the campaign image of the President's solitary battle to master the political world" (Pomper 1985: 87).

An emotional film documentary about the President entitled 'A New Beginning' and produced by the 'Tuesday Team' was shown before Reagan's acceptance speech. Amongst the events described the film shows the President representing his country during state visits, surviving the assassination attempt, or during holidays on his ranch in California. It does not however deal with policies or programmes (Pomper 1985: 79; see also Morreale 1991). An extended 30 minute version of the film was later simultaneously shown in an unprecedented thirty-minute purchase of all three major television networks and the major cable outlets, a so-called 'roadblock' device (Germond/Witcover 1985: 429 and 477). How important such visual images are in influencing voters' preferences has been shown by Rosenberg and McCafferty. They conclude, in a study conducted during the 1984 campaign, that the nonverbal aspects of candidate's appearances, such as their depiction on

photographs, "can significantly affect the vote that a candidate receives" (Rosenberg/McCafferty 1987: 45).

An indirect effect of President Reagan's overall strategy was that the more he succeeded in making 'feel-good' his campaign theme, the more his Democratic challenger Walter Mondale was reduced to trying to introduce discomfort into the celebration of a renewed America (Jamieson 1992: 449). Mondale's call for a 'new realism', 'hard work' and 'new taxes' appeared almost as if "we must punish ourselves for our binge of self-indulgence under Reagan" (Blumenthal 1988a: 111). In other words Reagan's tactic helped make his opponent appear like the mythical Cassandra and thus made it difficult for Mondale to find a receptive audience for his criticisms.

An issue which had already caused problems for Ronald Reagan during the 1980 campaign was his age. He was going to become the oldest President in the history of the United States. In an attempt to tackle the problem head on his advisers decided to defy the critics by putting on lavish parties to celebrate their candidate's 69th birthday during the primary season. When the issue raised its head again during the 1984 campaign, President Reagan's close association with the images of the Olympic Games, and photo opportunities which pictured the President arm wrestling or iron pumping helped to silence his critics (Smith 1988: 416; Jamieson 1992: 455-456). The issue was finally defused by a one-liner during the second debate of the campaign when Reagan said: "I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience" (quoted in Jamieson 1992: 456).

Finally President Reagan tried to use the incumbent's power of 'going public' during the whole election year of 1984. High profile overseas trips took him to China at the end of April 1984, followed in June by a trip to Europe. Even though

some parts of the media criticised Reagan for trying to distract from domestic problems by taking his campaign abroad, the White House considered appealing pictures far more important than the occasional criticism (Wiedenkeller 1985: 172). Moreover photo opportunities were particularly frequent in the months leading up to the election. One example of this occurred at the beginning of May 1984 when in only a few days President Reagan met the Pope for a 20 minute encounter in Alaska, welcomed the Olympic flame in the White House and presented a certificate to Michael Jackson in the Rose Garden for his involvement in the campaign against youth alcoholism (Wiedenkeller 1985: 172).

Overall President Reagan's 1984 campaign can best be described as "a feel-good campaign, wrapped around the glow of economic recovery ... The voters got to choose a man and a mood, but no specific policies" (Smith 1988: 364-365). The Reagan team succeeded in framing the election as a choice between two symbolic scenarios. President Reagan's America in which confidence and prosperity had returned and his opponent's which was characterised by pessimism and negativity.

This analysis has sought to show that Ronald Reagan in his 1980 presidential campaign tried to demonstrate symbolically that he possessed the status and character required for the office holder. Four years later he employed symbolic communication to turn the themes of pride and optimism into his campaign agenda and to link himself closely to these motifs. Intensive research and detailed planning during every stage of the campaign were essential in making the candidate's messages most effective. However the receivers of those messages are also actively involved in the process of campaign communication. As Gronbeck argues presidential campaigns "get leaders elected, yes, but ultimately, they also tell us who we as people are, where we have been, and where we are going" (Gronbeck 1984: 496). In other words campaign communication is successful because it invokes aspirations and satisfies needs in the receivers. Reagan read those needs

well in symbolically addressing the issues of self-doubt and lack of direction in 1980 and a 'feel-good' mood in 1984.

## IV.2.2 Symbolic Problem Solving

Despite a number of serious abuses of presidential power the American public still continues to have high hopes of each new president and high expectations of his capacity to solve problems (Wayne 1982: 185-199). Consequently success in solving political and economic problems and mastery of sudden crises situations are vitally important for an incumbent who naturally strives for a positive public assessment of his overall job performance. Moreover, as Sarcinelli stresses, successful problem solving plays a vital role in the *legitimacy by achievement* ("Legitimation durch Leistung", Sarcinelli 1989: 300) of any office holder. This means that the American president perpetually confirms the power and authority inherent in his office by attaining tangible results.

It is not suggested here that presidential problem solving is purely symbolic or that its material impact can be disregarded. Rather an attempt is made to shift the emphasis in political analysis from its usual focus on material consequences to the symbolic impact of presidential actions, whilst not discounting the former.

President Reagan used symbolic problem solving extensively throughout his Presidency and some examples of this will be discussed in this section. In order to illustrate various forms of symbolic problem solving the examples have been subdivided into three groups namely (a) symbolic acts, (b) symbolic programmes, and (c) symbolic gestalt.

(a) Symbolic acts can be defined as presidential gestures which are not aimed at materially solving the particular problem but are merely intended to show the president's concern for the problem and/or to shift the focus of public attention towards a different problem agenda.

Let us consider a few examples to illustrate this definition. When unemployment peaked at over 10% in the winter of 1982/83 President Reagan appeared for photos at events for unemployed dock workers and with people retraining for new jobs (Smith 1988: 416). The President also personally found a job for an unemployed man who had come into the news as a lifesaver. Sometime later, with the famine in Africa making the headlines, President Reagan could be seen on television busily phoning representatives of private companies in order to raise donations for a soup kitchen in Ghana threatened by closure (Wiedenkeller 1985: 183). Both examples illustrate that by solving the individual problem of one unemployed man or one soup kitchen in Africa the President tried to appear concerned about and committed to the problems of unemployment and hunger. The material effect of both actions was of course limited to the individual cases.

Similarly President Reagan visited an inner-city school in Chicago to demonstrate his concern for the black population and lit a candle in the White House in order to protest against the imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981 (Drew 1982: 97; Krauthammer 1982: 22). At the time of the former, media attention was paid to cutbacks in social programmes partially designed to help blacks in inner-cities. During the latter, political debate concentrated on the rather harmless catalogue of sanctions President Reagan had imposed, such as cancelling twice-weekly Polish airline flights to the United States. The 'New Republic' commented critically on President Reagan's reactions by saying that "in politics the symbolic act corrupts when it substitutes for action, or worse, when it conceals contradictory action" (Krauthammer 1982: 22).

A series of symbolic acts can also be found in President Reagan's frequent public relations campaigns on set themes. For instance, as the economy was showing signs of recovery in 1983 President Reagan spent a period of six weeks visiting auto plants, high-tech plants and other places across the country commonly associated with a revitalised economy (Hertsgaard 1988: 48). The idea behind the campaign was not only to highlight the improvements in the economic outlook but also to divert attention from other more damaging areas such as the continued high level of unemployment.

During the same year criticism was repeatedly raised about the administration's cutbacks in federal aid to education. Reagan's advisers decided that the President should use every opportunity for two months to travel to different states, visit local schools, and hold speeches on education stressing issues such as merit pay for teachers and greater classroom discipline. As part of the campaign President Reagan also 'adopted' one local school in Washington D.C., visited the school with his wife, invited its pupils into the White House, and sent books and materials to the school. President Reagan chose one seven year old boy at the school as his personal pen friend in order to get to know the 'real problems' facing young pupils (Wiedenkeller 1985: 183). Although the President did not promise any material changes in his agenda for education public approval of his education policy increased during those two months by nearly ten percent. "The shift had occurred merely by his seizing the stage and shrewdly marketing his story line" (Smith 1988: 418). Michael Deaver, who was responsible for the operation, was challenged by reporters who pointed out that the President's actions were in contrast to the concern he voiced about the administration's cuts in the education budget. Michael Deaver responded: "You can say whatever you want ... but the viewer sees Ronald Reagan out there in a classroom talking to teachers and kids, and what he takes

from that is the impression that Ronald Reagan is concerned about education" (quoted in Smith 1988: 418-419).

(b) Symbolic programmes, in contrast to the symbolic acts, involve strong material effects, that is they are intended to offer a real remedy to a particular political, economic, or social problem. Their true impact on the process of meaning creation in society, however, can only be recognised if their symbolic significance is taken into account too.

One such programme of the Reagan Presidency was what came to be known as 'Reaganomics'. President Reagan's radical economic package, which was passed during his first year in office, consisted of large cuts in federal programmes, large multi-year tax cuts and a three year 27% increase in defence spending (Time; 6 July 1981: 6-7 and 10 August 1981: 12-13). The magic formula for his programme was the premise of the supply-side theorists that reducing federal spending and cutting taxes would stimulate the economy. Tax savings by upper income people, who benefited most under the programme, would be invested and trigger productivity, increase employment, lead to an increased income base for taxation and eventually to a balanced budget (Berman 1986: 324). The economic programme substantially affected the distribution of material resources in American society and its feasibility as well as its strong fiscal advantages for affluent citizens were hotly debated.

In what way can 'Reaganomics' be called a symbolic programme? President Reagan's economic agenda was part of his wider anti-government stand or as he himself put it "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem" (R. Reagan 1989: 61). In the context of this programmatic statement Elder and Cobb suggest that 'culturally significant symbols' were crucial for the successful promotion of 'Reaganomics' (Elder/Cobb 1983: 111). Starting from the premise that government had become too powerful Reagan intended, for example,

to restore a safety net only for the 'truly needy' and only for those people 'who through no fault of their own must depend on the rest of us'. Moreover he wanted to make use again of 'the genius of our economic system' and begin 'to reward hard work and risk-taking' (Elder/Cobb 1983: 111). In other words President Reagan presented some of the principles of his economic programme in such a way as to make them fit into a widely held symbolic consensus about the functioning of American society. Moreover as Ackerman points out "[i]n rhetoric, Reaganomics ... did an outstanding job of addressing the frustrations of the late 1970s. It offered to restore economic growth, to stop inflation without recession, to make everyone better off" (Ackerman 1982: 16). Thus 'Reaganomics' was also well suited to the particular time in which it was put forward and symbolised a new approach after the disappointments with Keynesian economic models.

Dallek sees a clearly manipulative function in 'Reaganomics'. He states that supply-side "was nothing more than a cover for the old idea of reducing taxes for the wealthiest individuals and largest enterprises in the belief that benefits would 'trickle down' through the economy to less affluent Americans" (Dallek 1984: 98). Moreover he suggests that 'Reaganomics' "was a way to assure that government would now defer to the wishes of the white middle class, which would once again stand symbolically at the center of American life" (Dallek 1984: 68). In other words President Reagan's economic programme is interpreted as a symbol of deception for the less well off in society and as symbol of reassurance for higher income earners.

In line with President Reagan's general intention to reduce the influence of the federal government he made clear his view that the political and administrative system of the United States had become too top heavy at the cost of the individual states: "The Constitution [the framers] ... wrote established sovereign states, not administrative districts of the federal government. They believed in keeping government as close as possible to the people" (Reagan 1990: 198). Thus Reagan's

much proclaimed 'New Federalism' programme was supposedly designed to give many of the rights and powers (in areas such as health and education) which had become centralised in the federal government back to the states. Lösche, however, assigns the programme a very different meaning from the one intended. He suggests that 'New Federalism' merely functioned as a symbolic justification for the deep financial cuts in federal programmes which became necessary as part of 'Reaganomics' (Lösche 1989: 104). In other words 'New Federalism' served as a positive programmatic label for the inevitable hardship caused by Reagan's economic policies.

President Reagan's domestic aim to reassert the United States' economic power was complemented by his intention to increase the country's military strength and to act with renewed confidence in areas of foreign policy. A dramatic rise in defence expenditure, reaching heights unprecedented since the Vietnam war, and the sometimes alarmist style of the President, caused commentators to announce a 'new cold war' during the first years of the Reagan Presidency (Ionescu 1991: 231). It is suggested that this approach provided favourable propaganda for President Reagan's domestic agenda. To re-establish America's military might and to take a clearly confrontational stand against communist regimes was "a step toward a symbolic triumph over the forces in this country promoting government power" (Dallek 1984: 162).

The invasion of Grenada in October 1983 was a prime example of the more commanding approach to foreign policy put into practice by President Reagan. The operation became associated with a much wider meaning than seems justified by its relatively limited material effect. It developed over time into "a metaphor for nothing less than the country's willingness to overcome the paralysis regarding the use of force that had followed the Vietnam War" (Mayer/McManus 1988: 13). Grenada also fitted neatly into Reagan's theme of a more potent America for his

1984 re-election campaign. Pointing to the then recent success the President could claim that since his inauguration "not one inch of soil has fallen to the Communists" (R. Reagan 1989: 204). Because of its strong effect on patriotic feelings amongst the American public Hertsgaard states that the "primary target of the operation was not in Grenada or Nicaragua, or even in Cuba or the Soviet Union, for that matter; it was among the electorate of the United States" (Hertsgaard 1988: 213).

The Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) also possessed a strong symbolic make-up for both advocates and opponents of the programme (Linenthal 1989: 113-119). Advocates often portrayed SDI as a symbol of conquest of a new and final frontier or as a symbol of a new technological breakthrough in a long line of innovative steps such as the building of the first atomic bomb or the moon landing. It was seen as an invigorating fantasy about American can-do optimism and superiority. Opponents frequently resorted to popular science fiction images such as 'Star Wars' in order to deride the project. It was seen as the final step in the irrationality of the nuclear arms race or as "intended to create the illusion of a conservative alternative to nuclear disarmament" (Mead 1987: 185). In any case SDI was symbolically significant in that it fired the public imagination about the future of the arms race and polarised the debate about how to take the issue forward.

The artificial creation of a crisis situation can also constitute a deliberate political manoeuvre rather than a materially justified action. For instance, "[w]hen a President announces a 'war' on anything, the news consumer should begin looking immediately for signs of a well-planned political drama with a clear political purpose" (Bennett 1983: 149). During the winter of 1982/83 President Reagan announced a 'War on Crime' and supported a package of anti-crime measures in Congress. The social problem of crime had featured prominently in the public agenda for some time and there had been no unusual increase in crime rates during the months prior to the announcement. However towards the end of 1982 and early

1983 economic news were at their worst and President Reagan's approval ratings had hit rock bottom. Thus Bennett concludes that the "entire performance was designed to rally the support of a fearful economically troubled citizenry around a strong leader" (Bennett 1983: 149). In any case President Reagan's programme on crime at least achieved a momentary shift of focus in the public agenda from the economic problems to crime.

Earlier in 1982 the First Lady had announced a 'War on Drugs'. She subsequently visited drug clinics, rehabilitation centres and launched the 'Just Say No' campaign aimed at preventing drug abuse by appealing to children aged 7 to 14. During the 1986 midterm election campaign the President joined his wife in her highly publicised crusade and both delivered their first joint television address in September of that year. Despite all official publicity, government spending on anti-drug education and other prevention programmes had actually fallen in real terms between 1982 and 1986 (New York Times; 14 and 15 September 1986). Hence Reagan's 'War on Drugs' created an impression of investment which conflicted with the actual financial commitments of the administration. Furthermore, the First Lady's original announcement in 1982 was at least partially designed to improve her own image after her unpopularity early in her husband's administration (Benze 1990: 782). Incidentally Nancy Reagan was widely criticised for withdrawing her support from a rehabilitation centre after her husband's retirement from office (Newsweek; 23 October 1989).

(c) Symbolic gestalt refers to the wider cultural meaning of the Reagan Presidency. The President as the "temporary monarch" (Neustadt 1990: 280) of the United States is, so to speak, capable of putting a symbolic stamp on his age.

President Reagan was acutely aware of the importance of the symbolic gestalt of his Presidency. Particularly as a successor to four troubled presidencies and with public

turmoil throughout the 1960s and 1970s he saw himself involved in the "spiritual rebirth" (Reagan 1990: 326) of the nation and in the process of making Americans feel "proud and patriotic again" (Reagan 1990: 265).

Commentators have used an endless variety of expressions to describe the symbolic gestalt of the Reagan Presidency. What follows are merely representative examples of such descriptions. Miroff states that the "evocation of American fantasy" (Miroff 1988b: 539) was the most potent quality of the Reagan Presidency. Hamby describes Reagan as an "outstanding national cheerleader ... [who] has successfully lifted the morale of a nation that in 1980 was wallowing in pessimism and uncertainty" (Hamby 1988: 32). Meyerson sees the oldest president in the history of the United States as the "Great Rejuvenator" (Meyerson 1988: 38). And finally Blumenthal comments that "[w]hen Ronald Reagan was president all things seemed possible, as they do in daydreams. ... Reagan's mission ... was therapeutic: to make us feel good again" (Blumenthal 1988a: xiii-xiv). In essence commentators seem to see a spirit of contentment and optimism embodied in the Reagan Presidency.

The symbolic gestalt of the Reagan Presidency is discussed in this section on symbolic problem solving for two reasons. In chapter III of this thesis it was argued that it is a part of the symbolic meaning of the presidency to assist the mass public in the process of translating a complex and largely remote social world into ascertainable reality. In the introduction to this chapter it was stated that the feelings towards the nation, that is whether people were generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things were going in the United States, improved considerably during the course of the Reagan Presidency in comparison with the late 1970s (Lipset/Schneider 1987). Bringing these two notions together it is suggested here that the symbolic significance of the Reagan Presidency may be seen in his having contributed to a more optimistic and positive outlook on the part of a large section of the American public during a great part of the 1980s. President Reagan

represented and reinforced the popular mood of his years in office and became, to borrow from Ward's famous title, a "symbol for an age" (Ward 1955). We will come back to this theme in section IV.2.5 which deals with the culture of celebrity and the Reagan Presidency. It should also be noted that Reagan's difficulties during the recession and the Iran-Contra scandal show how fragile the symbolic gestalt of a presidency can be or, in other words, that in the long run a particular mood cannot be created independently of the material context in which it arises.

The second way in which the wider symbolic meaning of the Reagan Presidency can be described as having contributed to symbolic problem solving becomes apparent if we turn to the main paradigm of the so-called 'school of decline'. This school of thought caught public attention during the last two years of the Reagan Presidency and inspired a widespread public debate on the future of the United States (see for example The New York Times Magazine; 5 December 1987). Decline theorists argued that the international system was developing into a multi-polar world order and that the United States, like other world powers before, was losing its dominant position within the new emerging system. The relative decline of the United States is mainly due to a shift in global productive balances, that is the United States' share of the gross world product is decreasing and the share of economic rivals increasing (Kennedy 1987; Modelski 1987). Representatives of this school of thought now suggest that President Reagan was the electoral expression of a "culture of defeat" (Krieger 1986: 131) as he managed at least temporarily to convey the impression that the loss of power of the United States was not taking place. Mead argues "that the symbolic functions of the American presidency have become more important in these years of decline. ... Reagan has mastered the art of the Glorious Retreat so that defeat can be presented as an affirmation of national values and purpose" (Mead 1987: 208). In other words the symbolic gestalt of the Reagan Presidency is here seen as providing a temporary camouflage for the long-term political and economic problems of American society.

Let us now briefly sum up the results of this section. Symbolic problem solving takes place at various levels of presidential action. A distinction is made between symbolic problem solving as a calculated political manoeuvre and symbolic problem solving as an abstract social process.

When the problem solving attempt is a calculated political manoeuvre it can be symbolic in that it is a mere substitute for being unwilling or unable to tackle the actual cause of the problem. By the same token it can be symbolic in that the presidential action creates the illusion that a certain problem can quickly and easily be solved. Furthermore such problem solving can also be symbolic in that presidential action increases the public profile of one problem over another. In other words presidential action can influence the public agenda of what is perceived to be an important current problem.

When discussing the more abstract symbolic gestalt of the Reagan Presidency we saw that the sum of impressions conveyed by an incumbent can also be regarded as problem solving, however, the effect of the overall impression was outside the control of the President. This effect arose in the interaction between presidential actions, material circumstances, and changing public moods. Nevertheless the symbolic gestalt of a presidency must be regarded as an important ingredient of meaning creation in society.

## IV.2.3 Symbolic Rhetoric

In the first chapter of this thesis it was shown how by taking the theory of symbolic interactionism Edelman views language as a process of symbolisation which enables

the individual in concert with others to construct political reality. This section will be looking at what Edelman calls the 'hortatory style' of political language (see section I.5.2), that is language used by political leaders and directed at mass audiences to obtain their support and reassure them that it is the 'public will' which directs political decision making.

The fact that the rise of the modern mass media has had a significant impact on the development of presidential rhetoric was mentioned briefly in section II.3. According to Tulis the modern media has caused a shift "from written message to verbal dramatic performance" (Tulis 1987: 186) so that presidential oratory today largely consists of the search for memorable phrases or carefully planned 'soundbites'. Hence the function of much of the president's public rhetoric must be regarded as either part of his persuasive powers to influence public opinion in order to succeed with specific policy proposals or as an integral part of his wider efforts to have his actions presented in the most favourable way (Ceaser 1985).

Ronald Reagan's personal background meant that he brought with him vast experience in crowd-pleasing speechmaking (Jamieson 1988: 243). He became the 'Great Communicator' largely because of his rhetorical talents and so it has been said that in President Reagan "America found the rhetorical president" (Tulis 1987: 189). Ronald Reagan himself stresses the importance of oratory for his career when he states that "[s]peechmaking has played a major role in my life" (R. Reagan 1989: 14). In his autobiography he talks at length about rhetoric: how to structure a successful speech, about the importance of jokes and stories in speeches, problems of using teleprompters, or his technique of taking out one contact lens in order to read the text on the teleprompter and see everything else as well (Reagan 1990: 246-248). Let us now consider some of the symbolic elements of President Reagan's rhetoric.

A great part of Ronald Reagan's rhetoric emphasised themes which have already featured in this analysis such as optimism, a new beginning and economic restoration. His broad motifs adjusted to the changing material circumstances of his Presidency. During the 1980 campaign, for example, Reagan promised to 'recapture', 'give rebirth', 'renew', 'restore', or 'reaffirm' the United States (Procter 1991: 60). With the economy booming and a rise in public confidence President Reagan proclaimed in his State of the Union Address in 1984 that "America is back, standing tall, looking to the eighties with courage, confidence, and hope" (Public Papers of the Presidents 1984 I: 87). The acceptance speech at the Dallas Convention later in the same year repeated a similar message: "Every promise, every opportunity is still golden in this land. ... [America's] heart is full; her door is still golden, her future bright. ... She will carry on in the eighties unafraid, unashamed, and unsurpassed" (R. Reagan 1989: 216).

A very important device in President Reagan's rhetoric is his use of heroes. He comments in an annotation to one of his speeches that "I've always felt that heroes were very important to our nation. They bind us together; they give us strength that we can do great things" (R. Reagan 1989: 181). In the inaugural address in 1981 the newly elected President made the point that "[w]e have every right to dream heroic dreams. Those who say that we're in a time when there are no heroes, they just don't know where to look" (R. Reagan 1989: 63). At the end of his address Reagan mentioned the example of the soldier Martin Treptow who was killed in the First World War. Before he died Treptow had written an emotional pledge to America in his diary which the President read out (R. Reagan 1989: 66). President Reagan's eulogy for the unknown soldier from the Vietnam war in Arlington was another example of the rhetorical importance of heroes. On this occasion the President began by admitting his ignorance of the man's true identity but then provided him with a new symbolic identity. "We may not know of this man's life, but we know of his character. We may not know his name, but we know his

courage. He is the heart, the spirit, the soul of America" (quoted in Erickson 1985: 57).

In his State of the Union Address in 1982 the President mentioned Lenny Skutnik as a hero who had rescued the victim of an air crash out of the icy Potomac river in January of that year (Public Papers of the Presidents 1982 I: 78). In Reagan's State of the Union Address in 1985 the Mother of Harlem, a 79 year old woman who cares for infants born of mothers who are heroin addicts, and Jean Nguyen, a Vietnamese refugee who had just graduated from the Military Academy at West Point, were celebrated (Public Papers of the Presidents 1985 I: 135). These people were actually present at the speech and received standing ovations when mentioned (Video recording: Amerika-Haus, Hamburg; 1985).

Smith in analysing the President's 22 first-term televised addresses to the nation distinguishes five kinds of hero listed here in order of the frequency of their being mentioned in Reagan's speeches. First former presidents, secondly service people, thirdly Founding Fathers, fourthly 'extraordinary ordinary Americans' and fifthly celebrities of several decades ago (Smith 1987: 435-436). Stuckey suggests that the frequent use of such heroes emphasises the upbeat optimism which the President was eager to promote and also makes the speeches easy to listen to (Stuckey 1990: 36). Erickson argues that the President's heroes are in fact so-called "stock symbolic characters" (Erickson 1985: 51). He states that "[b]y personifying his beliefs about good and evil in simply drawn men and women, the President provides points of reference and points of view for his audience" (Erickson 1985: 51).

Weiler and Pearce argue that another core element of the President's discourse was its populism or the identification "*with* the people *against* the elites" (Weiler/Pearce 1992: 18). Hence it can be said that Ronald Reagan's rhetoric was in tune with his

programmatic anti-establishment and anti-government stance. Let us consider a few examples of this position.

President Reagan's speeches were written in a conversational style. This is illustrated, for example, by the use of many informal transitions in his speeches such as 'now', 'well', 'but', and 'so' (Jamieson 1988: 166). Moreover Denton and Hahn point to the use of ordinary metaphors in President Reagan's rhetoric. Two examples of such constructions are path metaphors and disease/health metaphors. Here are a few examples: "The question is, are we simply going to go down the same path we've gone down before ..." and "[w]e live now at a turning point" or "[t]he great nation is moving forward again and we're not turning back" (quoted in Denton/Hahn 1986: 68-69). The disease/health motive was, for instance, used like this: "Our federal government is overgrown and overweight. Indeed, it is time for our government to go on a diet" and "[t]his Administration's objective will be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy" or "[t]he pounding economic hangover America's suffering didn't come about overnight and there's no single, instant cure" (quoted in Denton/Hahn 1986: 69-70). The metaphors are of an everyday ordinary type and thus sound reasonable. Besides, path metaphors are held to imply movement and action whereas the theme of disease/health is said to evoke strong reactions in an American public for whom health and exercise are fashionable. In general terms metaphorical language "taps into fads and feelings and beliefs of the average person on the subconscious level" (Denton/Hahn 1986: 68).

Reagan's style of delivery was also characterised by informality. It is described as a "talk-to-the-person-not-the-people technique" or as "conscious anti-oratory" (Safire 1984: 22). Jamieson emphasises that in this respect it is reminiscent of FDR's fireside chats (Jamieson 1988: 167). Reagan explains his thoughts whilst speaking to a crowd or on television: "I try to remember that audiences are made up of individuals and I try to speak as if I am talking to a group of friends ... not to

millions, but to a handful of people in a living room ... or a barbershop" (Reagan 1990: 247).

The frequent use of anecdotes in Reagan's speeches accentuated the casualness. One of the President's most frequent phrases 'There's a story ... ' introduced "bits of history, instances of pseudohistory, excerpts from letters, folktales, and other exempla designed to give life to Reagan's principles" (Erickson 1985: 32; see also Wills 1988: 147). In some instances 'There's a story ... ' was also followed by a conventional joke of which some were used "so often that they should be interred" (Reagan 1990: 247).

Some speeches did more than just use anecdotes. Their whole theme was borrowed from American popular culture in which Ronald Reagan had of course participated professionally for a substantial part of his career. One of the best examples of such a speech was President Reagan's commencement address at Notre Dame University in 1981. The speech was the most widely covered event on his first trip away from Washington D.C. after being shot. Reagan had played the role of the legendary Notre Dame football player George Gipp in the Warner Brothers film 'Knute Rockne - All American'. George Gipp had died before graduation and asked his coach Knute Rockne to pass his last request on to the team, namely 'to win one for the Gipper'. Incidentally this one-liner was repeatedly used in the President's speeches (for example R. Reagan 1989: 402 or Erickson 1985: 106). The coach only revealed Gipp's last request some eight years later to a losing team who were so inspired by it that they went on to win.

At Notre Dame the President said: "As a coach, [Rockne] did more than teach young men how to play a game. He believed truly that the noblest work of man was building the character of man. And maybe that's why he was a living legend" (quoted in Erickson 1985: 41). Then nearly halfway through his speech Reagan

turned from football to the nation. "Reagan sounded like Coach Rockne at halftime, rallying the lackluster team that had forgotten how to pull together" (Erickson 1985: 46). He said that "[f]or the West, for America, the time has come to dare to show to the world that our civilized ideas, our traditions, our values, are not - like the ideology and war machine of totalitarian societies - just a facade of strength. ... My hope today is that in the years to come it shall - when it's your time to explain to another generation the meaning of the past and thereby hold out to them the promise of the future, that you'll recall the truths and traditions of which we've spoken" (quoted in Erickson 1985: 48-49). Reagan had transformed the story of Rockne and Gipp which had already undergone Hollywood treatment and an adaptation by Reagan's speechwriters into a metaphor for his role as President and a patriotic vision for America. In Erickson's interpretation "America will win ... because Coach Great Communicator will keep us to the right team spirit" (Erickson 1985: 48).


Another example of a popular theme heavily utilised in President Reagan's rhetoric and already mentioned in section IV.2.1 is the Olympic motif in the election year of 1984. Reagan gave three speeches specifically concerned with the summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles of that year (Erickson 1985: 105). However many other speeches contained references to the Olympic motif. Reagan, for instance, concluded his acceptance speech at the Republican convention by metaphorically linking the journey of the Olympic torch to his themes of patriotism and optimism. He described how the torch was passed on from one person to the next and "[i]n West Virginia the runner came across a line of deaf children and let each one pass the torch for a few feet ... Crowds spontaneously began singing 'America the Beautiful' or 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic'. And then, in San Francisco a Vietnamese immigrant, his little son held on his shoulders, dodged photographers and policemen to cheer a nineteen-year-old black man pushing an eighty-eight-year-old white woman in a wheelchair as she carried the torch. My friends, that's

America" (R. Reagan 1989: 215). In other speeches the President made reference at a High School to "our Olympians of the classroom" (quoted in Erickson 1985: 108) or told audiences during the campaign "[w]e were never meant to be a second best nation. And so, like our Olympic athletes, we're going to go for gold" (quoted in Erickson 1985: 108).

The term 'American civil religion' describes a common faith which provides a sense of unity to society and symbolises the American way of life (Bellah 1967). The terms 'liberty' and 'freedom' are important in the American civil religion and featured repeatedly in the President's oratory. These terms illustrate Reagan's rhetorical reliance on familiar themes and concepts. Domestically tax reform was interpreted as a sign that "we have rededicated ourselves to liberty in ... important ways" (quoted in Procter 1991: 67). Taxation, Reagan argued, had historically been a method of depriving the individual "of some of his most basic civil rights" (quoted in Procter 1991: 68). Abroad the invasion of Grenada was part of a "freedom offensive" with the result that "freedom was returned to the people of Grenada" (quoted in Procter 1991: 67). And when the President obtained congressional approval for funds for the 'freedom fighters' of Nicaragua he said: "Just as the French came to the aid of our revolution, we're extending a helping hand to those who fight against tyranny and for democracy" (quoted in Procter 1991: 67).

However not only the themes of America's civil religion but also explicitly religious references often appeared in presidential addresses. Reagan saw, for example, a "spiritual awakening" and "moral renewal" (R. Reagan 1989: 175) taking place in America during his Presidency. When the President proclaimed a 'National Day of Prayer' in March 1981 he expressed the wish that "more of our citizens would, through prayer, come into a closer relationship with their Maker" (quoted in Erickson 1985: 73-74). In two speeches in 1982 he said that "[i]t's time to realize, I think, that we need God more than he needs us" and preached "[t]ogether, let us

take up the challenge to reawaken America's religious and moral heart, recognizing that a deep and abiding faith in God is the rock upon which this great nation was founded" (quoted in Erickson 1985: 74). Moreover Safire comments that "[n]o politician has incorporated God into his speech endings more than Ronald Reagan" (Safire 1984: 108). Overall President Reagan's explicitely religious discourse enabled him amongst other things to align with the new christian right movement of his years (Weiler/Pearce 1992: 27) and led to an era of "president-as-pastor" (New York Times; 27 May 1987) in which he became an outspoken advocate of right-wing religion in the political arena.

Fittingly for a rhetoric influenced by religious themes President Reagan often appealed for faith and enthusiasm rather than rational and intellectual scrutiny of his proposals. In his first inaugural address the President stated that the crisis America was facing could only be solved with a "willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds, to believe that together with God's help we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. And after all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans" (R. Reagan 1989: 66). Two months later President Reagan promised that "[w]e can restore our economic strength and build opportunities like none we've ever had before ... All we need to have is faith, and that dream will come true" (quoted in Smith 1987: 437).

Finally President Reagan's oratory also illustrates that "today's political rhetoric is visual" (Åsard 1990) in other words that it is especially designed to be seen rather than heard or read. So-called 'visuals' were a feature of many of his speeches. The heroes whom he talked about in his State of the Union Addresses and who were actually present during the speech have already been mentioned. Another 'visual' took place at the first inauguration address when Reagan's aides alerted television crews that the national memorials and Arlington National Cemetry would be mentioned in the speech, thus all three networks positioned their cameras so that

they could show shots of these places at the appropriate moments during the address (Ritter/Henry 1991: 103-104). At the Dallas convention signs were prepared with key phrases out of the President's address and passed out to delegates, again the television crews had been alerted so that they could zoom in on the appropriate sign during the speech (Germond/Witcover 1985: 430). At the end of the First Lady's speech during the convention President Reagan appeared on a huge TV screen behind the podium waving to his wife from his hotel room (Germond/Witcover 1985: 429-430). Furthermore for his television address on the economy in February 1981 Reagan used some coins to illustrate the effect of inflation and two charts to show the alleged positive effect of his economic programme on the government deficit (R. Reagan 1989: 74-83).

Hart identifies three core characteristics in President Reagan's verbal symbolism. First of all, it is said to have provided a sense of momentum, an emotional, take-charge, can-do spirit of optimism that deals with broad statements of philosophy rather than of policy. Secondly, Reagan's rhetoric identified a clear 'sense of place' which described who Americans are and what they should do. Thirdly, Reagan provided a strong sense of tradition in his speeches (Hart 1984: 215-228). On a similar note Smith states that the President's rhetoric characterised the American community as a "special place with a proud heritage, a sense of moral purpose, and good people who can accomplish anything" (Smith 1987: 440). All these themes are said to interweave "into a seamless tapestry" (Smith 1987: 440).

What is the significance of the use of verbal symbolism in the context of our analysis? Perhaps the best description of the function of President Reagan's symbolic rhetoric is of helping to provide a frame of reference for the American public to construct and interpret social reality. In other words the President's oratory offers an important interpretative framework for the social process of meaning creation. The content of Reagan's speeches, for example his populist

themes and his plain speaking style, made it easy for the public to integrate symbolically the events and actions their President was talking about into familiar themes and motives of their culture. Moreover, Reagan's focus on a limited number of issues and his inclination to apply a categorical interpretative model to materially unlike situations created an easily understandable, simplified, and familiar political reality for his audiences. In this sense President Reagan's rhetoric offered predictability and simplicity for the American public.

Finally it should be noted that the rhetoric of a president has a directly measurable effect on both the public's policy agenda and their evaluation of his performance. Cohen, for example, demonstrates that the more attention a president's rhetoric gives to a certain policy area, the more concerned and aware the public become about that area (Cohen 1995: 102). Ragsdale shows that a president's popularity increases by roughly three percent on average with the delivery of a major address (Ragsdale 1984: 980). Gilboa demonstrates that for President Reagan his televised addresses to the nation after both the bombing of the Marines' headquarters in Beirut and the invasion of Grenada in October 1983 and after the hijacking of a TWA passenger plane to Beirut in June 1985, led to an immediate and substantial increase in his approval ratings (Gilboa 1990).

However presidential rhetoric should not be seen as a magic tool that can be applied in any context in order to make all problems disappear and to convert presidential approval ratings from negative to positive. Rowland and Payne, for instance, show that despite all efforts President Reagan was rhetorically unable to banish the issue of unemployment from the agenda during the 1982 midterm election campaign (Rowland/Payne 1984). Moreover Simon and Ostrom demonstrate that not all televised speeches by presidents are approval-enhancing but that their effect depends on the material context in which they are being used and that speeches are likely to

be ineffective to regain already lost support in a particular policy area (Simon/Ostrom 1989).

## IV.2.4 The Fictionalisation of the Presidency

In this section we will look at some examples of what can be called the fictionalisation of the Reagan Presidency. Fictionalisation refers to the final outcome of a process that was described in section II.2 of this thesis namely that because of the importance today of television as a transmitter of political information the format of presenting political news has changed. Television is mainly used for entertainment purposes and thus political news items become like the content of other programmes dramatised and personalised in order to fit the requirements of the medium. Nimmo and Combs, for example, suggest that the dramatic logic of television turns news about political events into 'real-fictions' that is "compositions of sound and sight that select and organize facts in ways that yield a sense of purpose that might not otherwise exist without the thematic unity imposed by the TV story" (Nimmo/Combs 1983: 28).

With regard to the American presidency Smith expresses a similar idea in less abstract terms: "The presidency becomes a TV serial; the president, his family, his aides and cohorts become recognizable characters in the play - known and familiar, heroes and villains. Special episodes draw attention: 'Ronald Reagan Goes to Peking', 'Nancy Reagan Says No to Drugs', 'Ollie North Sells Arms to Khomeini'" (Smith 1988: 399-400). It was also noted earlier in this thesis that presidents have learned to adjust to these new media formats by running a "permanent national popularity campaign" (Rose 1980a: 323) or by enacting "leadership as a spectacle"

(Miroff 1988a: 271) in other words, by investing an increasing amount of time and effort into the presentational aspects of their job.

Several special episodes were prominent during the first months of the Reagan Presidency. For example, President Reagan's inauguration coincided with the final act to one of the longest running dramas in contemporary American politics, the hostage taking of U.S. staff and personnel stationed at the American embassy in Teheran which had lasted 444 days. It had received more news coverage than any single event on television up to that date (Nimmo/Combs 1983: 33). Plots and subplots developed over time, suspense, expectations, and emotions were constantly at the centre of media reports. ABC had even devised a logo of a blindfolded hostage which clearly identified all accounts of the hostage crisis (Nimmo/Combs 1983: 36). When the announcement of the imminent release of the hostages came the "optimism and good cheer that permeated every presidential inaugural was magnified a hundrefold in Reagan's case by the news that the human symbols of American's apparently declining global power were at last coming home" (Hertsgaard 1988: 102). The happy climax to this most dramatic episode boosted the launch of the new President.

President Reagan was also able to learn from the dramatic episode of the Iranian hostage saga. Four years later a TWA passenger flight was hijacked and it was decided that Reagan, in sharp contrast to President Carter during the Iranian hostage crisis, should stay "politically and emotionally apart from the hostage drama" (Mayer/McManus 1988: 95). The President tried to maintain an appearance of normalcy in the White House and he did not attend the burial of one of the passengers who had been shot by the terrorists on the first day of the hijacking. However when the remaining hostages were released two weeks later Reagan's advisers decided to do a 'good news' hostage event with the President. At short notice their arrival was shifted from New York to Andrews Air Force Base for a

welcome spectacle and President Reagan even attended a specially organised belated ceremony at the still fresh grave of the shot hostage (Mayer/McManus 1988: 104-105).

Let us return to the first months of the Reagan Presidency. In August 1981 the President decided to make 11,500 air traffic controllers redundant on the ground that strikes by federal employees were illegal. The episode was presented as a highly personalised confrontation between union leaders and the President and it possessed considerable spectacle value. In the end the President was said to have acted decisively and in doing so to have established an image of toughness (Ceaser 1988: 184).

The highly controversial 'AWACS deal' in September/October 1981 is an even better illustration of an equally personalised episode which was presented as a dramatic confrontation. The Reagan administration intended to sell the airborne warning and control aircraft 'AWACS' plus other weapon systems to Saudi Arabia and was seeking the Senate's approval for the sale. Strong opposition was raised by Jewish lobby groups in the United States because of the negative security implication for Israel. Concerns were also aired that military secrets and technology might be passed on to the Soviet Union. These questions however hardly featured in the media reporting of the AWACS story, instead the story dominated the headlines as the first battle with Congress which the new President might lose. When President Reagan finally got his approval almost all news reports followed the same line namely 'President Wins AWACS' (Bennett 1983: 12). On the cover of 'Time' magazine the President was pictured with "a triumphant look holding the final role-call voting card, much like a golf scoreboard or a winning lottery ticket" (Snow 1983: 24). Bennett concludes that as a result of such dramatic presentations "the political world becomes a mystical realm populated by actors who either have the political 'force' on their side or do not. ... Like any fantasy world of play, sport, or

fiction, it can involve people intensely on the basis of catharsis, escape, hope, or sheer entertainment" (Bennett 1983: 13).

Another intensely dramatic moment during the first few months of the Reagan Presidency was of course the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan's life on 30th March 1981. Media reports raised highly emotional memories of the assassination of President Kennedy. They also focused on both personal and trivial aspects of the situation such as the content of well-wishers letters and telegrams, the amount of jelly beans awaiting the President on his return from hospital and on Ronald Reagan seeking rest in the White House solarium (Time; 20 April 1981: 21). The President's humorous remarks were also widely reported, for example he said to his wife on her arrival at the hospital "Honey, I forgot to duck", and to a doctor who was preparing him for the operation "I hope you're a Republican" (Reagan 1990: 260-261). Other episodes, such as his quick return to the White House only twelve days after the shooting or his determination not to dwell on his situation but, for example, to deliver a speech to a joint session of Congress on his economic package in person rather than to broadcast his talk from the Oval Offices only a week after he had left hospital (Leamer 1983: 328), are said to have "destroyed any lingering doubts that the President was a cardboard man whose aspirations and emotions were as synthetic as a celluloid screen" (Cannon 1982: 405). In fact Richard Beal, a survey expert who worked for the President, suggests that the assassination attempt "focused uniquely on the President. It did a lot to endear the President to the people. ... His personal attributes might never have come across without the assassination attempt" (quoted in Blumenthal 1981: 113).

A stream of such dramatic episodes flowed throughout the first few months of the Presidency and contributed to the development of President Reagan's image as a strong, decisive, competitive, and powerful leader. Orman argues that by becoming associated with these attributes President Reagan reinstituted in his first year in

office the "macho presidential style" (Orman 1987: 111). This illustrates how single dramatic impressions may be converted over time into something more than the meaning of the individual actions. Together they helped to establish the persona of the incumbent.

In the area of foreign policy we have already explored the invasion of Grenada as a symbol of President Reagan's outspoken determination to contain communism and as a "successful presidential spectacle" (Miroff 1988a: 286). Another episode later in his Presidency with an equally high spectacle value was the confrontation with Libya. Mayer and McManus argue that "[t]aking Qadhafi on was the counterterrorism equivalent of invading Grenada - popular, relatively safe, and theatrically satisfying" (Mayer/McManus 1988: 221). Months before the bombing raids on Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986 the American public was prepared for the final showdown. Secret polls were conducted how people would feel about an attack on Libya and under what circumstances they would support it. Approximately four weeks before the bombing raid the polls indicated that a majority was in favour of a military strike as long as it was quick and on the face of it a reluctant rather than provocative response. The main villain in this play was also a perfect target: Qadhafi "reportedly liked to use makeup, wear women's clothing, and travel with a teddy bear" (Mayer/McManus 1988: 221). President Reagan characterised him in increasingly aggressive rhetoric which culminated shortly before the raid with the graphic title "the Mad Dog of the Middle East" (quoted in Mayer/McManus 1988: 222). Yet after the bombing raids, once the climax to this plot had passed, the Qadhafi topic quickly showed the signs of fatigue typical of a news story and vanished from the public agenda. The long term material impact of President Reagan's policy decision was of no interest to the American media and its audiences (Chomsky 1991: 113).

Ceremonial performances by the President, such as trips abroad, often conveyed drama too and such presidential performances became high profile media stories. Moreover in Ronald Reagan the American public had elected somebody who "enjoyed the ceremonial aspects that go with being president" (Reagan 1990: 387). Smith calls the Reagan era a "storybook presidency ... which, like James Michener's immensely popular novels about Hawaii, Poland, Spain, or Texas, plunged a nation of viewers into new worlds and took them on glossy adventures that outdid National Geographic. Often the policy purpose seemed secondary to the travelogue" (Smith 1988: 419).

A series of presidential visits took place during the period from the end 1983 into the election year of 1984. In November 1983 President Reagan visited South Korea and memorable pictures of the commander-in-chief in the demilitarised zone reached the American public. The President appeared behind sandbags, surrounded by armoured vehicles and looked through his binoculars towards North Korea. Michael Deaver, who was responsible for the image of the President at that time, states that the trip to the "border between North and South Korea was a symbolic high point of the Reagan years. Standing there, staring across the buffer zone, drawing the contrast between freedom and oppression, this was what Ronald Reagan did best" (Deaver 1987: 175). Chris Wallace from NBC reported from the event: "[I]t was clear that Mr. Reagan was genuinely moved by what he saw here today - the choir of orphans, young American soldiers ready to fight far from home. It's safe to assume Mr. Reagan will be speaking of this place for a long time" (quoted in Hallin 1986: 31). Influenced by the drama of the moment Wallace separated Mr. Reagan the person from President Reagan the politician and in so doing he projected an image of sincerity and understanding on to Reagan (Hallin 1986: 31).

In May 1984 'U.S. News & World' reported 'It's Show Time for President in China' and told of Reagan's next major trip abroad. The pictures on television

screens at home were described as "dramatic ones of an American President visiting the Great Wall and the tomb of Emperor Qin Shi Huang or chatting with both peasants and China's leaders" (U.S. News & World Report; 7 May 1984). A planned trip down the Yangtze River was cancelled because the television tapes would not have reached the networks in time for the news. The China trip was followed by a tour of Europe which included such events as a visit to the Irish village of Ballyporeen where Reagan's ancestors lived before they emigrated to America. There followed celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the D-day landing in Normandy. Commentators agreed that these episodes were invaluable in turning the whole trip into a sentimental and emotional spectacle (Der Spiegel; 21/1984: 102).

Not only did presidential travel created theatrical moments for President Reagan, other staged events fulfilled a similar function. One 'pseudo-event' par excellence was the Liberty Weekend extravaganza in New York in July 1986. This four-day celebration simultaneously marked the restoration of the Statue of Liberty, the 100th anniversary of its installation and the 210th anniversary of the United States. At a time when Ronald Reagan's approval ratings were consistently (over months) above 60% "the biggest patriotic celebration of his presidency [was converted] into a symbol of his political vision" (Procter 1991: 60). Procter argues that Reagan accomplished this "through a drama of restoration. By transforming Liberty Weekend [in his public appearances, speeches, radio messages and interviews] into undergirding political structures and then casting his political vision through those structures, President Reagan's political agenda seems a logical step in the renewal of the United States" (Procter 1991: 68). Furthermore Reagan himself was celebrated in the course of the weekend: "As the seventy-five-year-old Reagan presided over the relighting of Liberty's lamp and a grand, patriotic gala, it was hard to be sure which national symbol was being celebrated more" (Mayer/McManus 1988: 247). The CBS journalist Lesley Stahl gushed in her report: "Like this leading lady, the

Statue of Liberty, the President, after six years in office, has himself become a symbol of pride in America; he has devoted himself to reviving the spirit of patriotism across the country" (quoted in Hertsgaard 1988: 301).

These examples illustrate how the episodic presentation of the political process worked to the advantage of President Reagan. In some episodes the presentational advantage arose as a circumstantial coincidence, in other situations the President was able to utilise the episodic presentation for his personal 'impression management' by enacting particularly spectacular events or by reinforcing the intense personalisation of news stories. For the successful implementation of such 'impression management' during the first few months of the Presidency, Reagan's advisers even had a specifically devised communication plan called 'The First 100 Days' (Spragens 1989: 333). In this plan the behaviour of several previous presidents during their first 100 days in office had been compared in order to establish which actions President Reagan should take in order to establish a lasting positive image for his administration (Blumenthal 1981: 43). Obviously the President's media strategies were important for the successful construction of such episodes and will be looked at in section IV.3.

However not only events which worked to the President's advantage turned into so-called 'real-fictions'. The Iran-Contra crisis illustrates how particular scandals can also turn into highly dramatic and personalised political theatre. The significant influence of personalisation became clear when the supposed villain of the affair Lt. Col. Oliver North turned almost over night into a "sacrificed knight" (U.S. News & World Report; 8 December 1986: 20). During the congressional hearings "the boyish-looking colonel, wearing a marine uniform decorated with six rows of ribbons topped by parachute wings, looked like an all-American hero, a man of character and vigor whose words could be trusted" (Graber 1989: 2). Immediately after the hearings polls showed that only 14% of the American population had

negative feelings towards North and 73% called him 'a real patriot'. Other polls showed after his appearance a sizeable decline in the number of people who considered the Iran-Contra scandal as serious as Watergate (quoted in Graber 1989: 2).

The dramatised and personalised quality of the episode brought the credibility of the President into question or in his own words "[f]or the first time in my life, people didn't believe me. I had told the truth, but they still didn't believe me" (Reagan 1990: 532). The public debate focused on questions such as when did Reagan know, what did he know, and most importantly had he told the truth? For Silverstein it was critical that the issue of credibility stood at the centre of the presentation of the affair rather than a debate about a constitutional arrangement which allows scandals such as Iran-Contra to happen (Silverstein 1989).

Another important aspect of this episode was the sudden collapse of Reagan's carefully nurtured image as a successful, sincere, and consistent President. 'U.S. News & World' commented that if the impression that the United States had a Presidency that worked "has been badly damaged, it may count as the greatest tragedy in the entire affair. For the first time in a generation, the Presidency under Reagan was viewed at home and abroad as strong and vital, and Reagan himself was seen as kind of healing figure who restored luster and dignity to the office. ... [T]he current crisis seems to have stripped Reagan of his near magical charm and credibility" (U.S. News & World Report; 8 December: 17). In Smith's words President Reagan "had violated the cardinal rule of the image game: acting contrary to the image he had developed for himself" (Smith 1988: 449).

To sum up the results of this section, fictionalisation is regarded as the episodic presentation, particularly on television, of political actions and events concerning President Reagan with a strong emphasis on drama and persons. As already noted

such fictionalisation allowed the President at times to use techniques of impression management to manipulate the media's format of news stories effectively to his own advantage. At other times, however, such presentational advantage was merely coincidental or even, as the Iran-Contra example shows, worked to the President's disadvantage by placing particular emphasis on the personal element of the scandal.

More importantly during President Reagan's tenure of office fictionalisation provided an important social framework for the general public's construction of political reality. In other words fictionalisation assisted in simplifying the political world by structuring political news around common cultural patterns and by using everyday concepts familiar to the audience from their own life experiences. Hence the analogy of a television serial or soap opera referred to at the beginning of this section seems suitable. Presidential politics became an everyday drama with widely known characters, well-versed storylines, and common incidents.

## IV.2.5 The Culture of Celebrity

In this final section of chapter IV.2 we shall reflect briefly on the connection between the culture of celebrity and the Reagan Presidency. However before turning to President Reagan directly let us consider two preliminary thoughts. First of all, it is suggested that members of modern societies have shifted their collective attention from tradition and local events to a so-called 'public drama'. The public drama mainly consists of the news and entertainment presented in the mass media and it is communicated to a constantly changing and almost limitless audience (Klapp 1964: 252). Celebrities fulfil a crucial function in this drama namely the role of protagonists: "[o]n them rests the burden of carrying on the show for a public that has come to depend on them" (Klapp 1964: 252). Secondly, even though film stars

were the prototype of modern celebrities, politicians have gradually attained a similar status (Goldsmith 1983: 76). The intense personalisation of the political process is responsible for the rise of the celebrity politician. It is argued that JFK was the first American president fully to earn the description 'celebrity' which he achieved by creating intimacy or at least the illusion of intimacy between himself and his audience (Schickel 1985: 169).

Today celebrity politicians are regarded as "fantasy figures as much as are other celebrities. As symbolic leaders they represent not only politics per se, but also values, lifestyle, and glamour" (Nimmo/Combs 1983: 95). In other words celebrities in the political arena are more than what is contained in the dictionary definition of 'celebrity' namely "a widely known person" (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). A political celebrity influences current popular culture or, as Novak points out with regard to the American president, the "way he lives affects our image of ourselves. His style and his tastes weigh upon our spirits" (Novak 1974: 3).

Let us now return to the Reagan Presidency. As a former movie actor President Reagan was able to back up his political celebrity status with the status of a show business celebrity. President Reagan imported elements of the world of show business into the political capital, so that "[d]uring the Reagan era, Washington began calling itself 'Hollywood East', exulting in celebrity politics ... For millions, the Reagan years became a political home movie" (Smith 1988: 397). Schmuhl points out that "[d]uring the Reagan years, the White House seemed like a theater stage or movie set, complete with a star who combined statecraft and stagecraft in a deliberate, politically purposeful way" (Schmuhl 1990: 45).

The President referred in many speeches to his life in the entertainment industry (see R. Reagan 1989: 89, 128, 402; see also section IV.2.3). Furthermore he often

appeared publicly with stars such as Frank Sinatra, Jimmy Stewart and Gregory Peck. For his election campaigns a 'celebrity coordinator' was appointed to ensure that the President was always supported by a sufficient number of Hollywood stars. His first inauguration in particular brought the splendour and glamour often associated with show business to Washington and has been described as an *unrestrained celebration of luxury and wealth* ("hemmungslose Zelebrierung von Luxus und Reichtum"; Silverman 1987: 54). Costs of $ 16 million made it the by far most expensive inauguration in the history of the United States (Leamer 1983: 2-3) and many commentators were reminded of a coronation ceremony. Blumenthal states that the "line between fantasy and reality was constantly blurred, and the glitz of new money was presented as the heart of tradition. Style was substance, fashion was power: with sequins on parade, the strength that waned during the plebeian Carter years would be restored" (Blumenthal 1988b: 251). President Reagan later justified the outlandish and expensive inauguration in the midst of a deep recession as necessary in order to demonstrate the rewards and wealth which American society holds for those who are talented and work hard (Silverman 1987: 57).

Soon after the inauguration 'Demonstrations of Dignity' in the White House were reported in the press (Time; 9 March 1981: 14). Journalists noticed how the new President always dressed immaculately and to no one's surprise the White House issued an order that photographers and cameramen working around the Oval Office would have to smarten up their appearance. Later on in the Presidency 'U.S. News & World' reported under the headline 'Reagan White House Steps Up Social Pace' (U.S. News & World Report; 23 January 1984: 52-54) that not only were the Reagans entertaining considerably more guests at teas, concerts and gala dinners than their predecessors but the events were also particularly sumptuous in comparison with previous administrations. Moreover, the Reagans' close friendship with other celebrities such as New York designer Adolfo, representatives of the art world and wealthy Californians, often featured in the media.

Benze argues that the presidents' wives have also "achieved celebrity status in American culture. ... As a result all of their actions become familiar to all Americans" (Benze 1990: 779). Cannon suggests that during the Reagan Presidency Nancy Reagan became the "national symbol of the New Luxury" (Cannon 1982: 340). A popular postcard in Washington D.C. 1981, for instance, featured Nancy Reagan as 'Queen Nancy' in ermine cap and jewelled crown. Soon after Ronald Reagan had taken office, however, the media began to criticise the First Lady for various financial excesses, for example, raising $800,000 of private funds for the refurbishment of the White House, getting more than $200,000 worth of donated china, the acquisition of expensive designer dresses, or for having three hairdressers ceaselessly coming to the White House (Benze 1990: 781; see also N. Reagan 1989: 23-29). The criticism was a stark reminder that part of the public's expectations are that a First Lady shows some concern for the common person and a certain sensitivity for the economic climate in the country. Although her life style did not change materially in subsequent years her image problem was addressed. The 'War on Drugs' and successful appearances on TV programmes such as 'Different Strokes' and 'Good Morning America' improved Nancy Reagan's public image considerably (Barnes 1985: 16; Benze 1990: 782). The significant improvement in the economy may also have made the First Lady less vulnerable to criticism.

Similarities between the Reagans' style in the White House and American popular culture during the 1980s are striking. Silverman, for example, emphasises that aristocratic self presentation and luxury were celebrated in many ways throughout the Reagan Presidency. Exhibitions such as 'Costumes from Royal India', 'Treasures from British Stately Homes', or 'Garments from China of the Ts'ing Dynasty, 1644-1912' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York were immensely popular. Big department stores incorporated the themes from aristocratic lifestyles into their marketing strategy and some, like Bloomingdale in New York,

even had some items from these exhibitions on display before they were shown at the museum (Silverman 1987: 40). Moreover the hugely successful television series 'Dallas' and 'Dynasty' with their veneration of wealth and creation of wishful-thinking fantasies became representative of the 1980s (Ang 1985). Thus Silverman suggests that the connection between the Reagan Presidency and the popular culture of the time lies in the reliance on artificially created illusions and a discrepancy between symbolic self-presentation and social reality (Silverman 1987: 22).

The purpose of this section has been to illustrate how as celebrities in the public arena President Reagan and his wife came to represent something wider than the political sphere. Through their own life style they came to symbolise the Zeitgeist of the United States during the 1980s. As Blumenthal points out Reagan is more a "hero of consumption than production [and] ... represents consumption without guilt" (Blumenthal 1988a: 107). This fitted well the social climate of his Presidency and to use Edelman's terminology the Reagans became not only successful political 'signifiers' but also cultural 'signifiers' of their country.

## IV.3 Media Strategies and Symbolic Communication

At the outset of the second chapter of this thesis it was noted that the mass media function as the messenger of symbolic politics and are thus essential in its analysis. More specifically, Edelman's understanding of the media's significance was discussed in chapter I.5 and such terms as 'visuals' or 'news management' were explained in chapter II.2. Against this background and in the context of the case study of the Reagan Presidency we will now turn to an examination of the Reagan administration's media strategies.

The transition period, that is the time which starts the day after the election and ends with the new president's inauguration, already illustrates the importance of media and communication strategies for the Reagan Presidency. In contrast to President Carter, for example, who appointed Gerald Rafshoon as a communication adviser only towards the end of his Presidency, Michael Deaver (Deputy Chief of Staff and most closely involved with communication) and David Gergen (Special Assistant to the President for Communication) were amongst the early appointments of the newly-elected President Reagan (Kumar/Grossman 1989: 313-314). In conjunction with other senior advisers they developed 'The First 100 Days', the communication plan referred to in section IV.2.4, for mapping out the public relations work of the new administration during its first weeks.

It was also decided that the internal organisation of the White House would have to be changed in some important respects. Most importantly the press secretary's influence was reduced and an independent Office of Communication created. During the Carter Presidency all of the communication duties had been under the press secretary's control. In the Reagan White House the Director of Communication came to supersede the press secretary in the hierarchy of influence which meant the former was freed from time consuming press briefings and could deal exclusively with the planning and organisation of the President's image strategy (Barilleaux 1988: 135; Smith 1988: 404). Furthermore the Office for Television Consulting grew into an independent office with new state of the art equipment and the Photo Office of the White House was granted greater access to the President. Wiedenkeller states that all of these institutional changes indicated that the projection of picture would take up a crucial place in the Reagan administration (Wiedenkeller 1985: 168).

Many of President Reagan's important communication advisers were exceptionally well qualified for their jobs because their professional background was in

marketing. William Henkel, Head of the Media Advance Bureau, had worked for the marketing department of the banking group Merrill Lynch. The pollster Richard Wirthlin and the campaign adviser Stuart Spencer had both been involved in public relations for big corporate clients. David Gergen was a former editor of 'Public Opinion' magazine, and finally Michael Deaver had his own public relations firm (Smith 1988: 404).

Their main task was seen as "the staging of a media event: blending the gifts of Ronald Reagan with the proper pageantry" (Deaver 1987: 179). Donald Regan who served President Reagan as Secretary of the Treasury and as Chief of Staff describes in his memoirs Michael Deaver's approach. "He saw - designed - each Presidential action as a one-minute or two-minute spot on the evening network news, or a picture on page one of the Washington Post or the New York Times, and conceived every Presidential appearance in terms of camera angles" (Regan 1988: 248). Similarly Larry Speakes, the Reagan administration's longest serving press secretary, writes that "[w]e learned very quickly that when we were presenting a story or trying to get our viewpoint across, we had to think like a television producer. And that is a minute and thirty seconds of pictures to tell the story, and a good solid soundbite with some news" (Speakes 1988: 220).

In other words television became the "organizing framework" (Smith 1988: 401) for the Presidency. The press, in particular the New York Times, was also regarded as important because its choice of subjects influences the networks in their programme planning (Speakes 1988: 228). The key element in the Reagan administration's media strategy was 'control'. In the words of David Gergen, "[w]e wanted to control what people saw, to the extent that we could ... We wanted to shape it and not let television shape it" (quoted in Smith 1988: 403-404). With regard to the press, Speakes puts it in even stronger terms and describes the invention of a new game "[i]t was called 'Beat the Press' and definitely not 'Meet the Press'" (Speakes

1988: 218). At the centre of the game was the strict domination of the flow of information so that even under intense pressure the press secretary would only disclose that information allowed by the President and his top aides.

Examples of the exercise of this control are numerous, for instance, reporters who covered the President had less daily access to Reagan than to his predecessor (Smith 1988: 434-435) and so-called impromptu question-and-answer sessions were reduced (Smith 1988: 429). From early 1982 what came to be known as the 'Deaver rule' laid down that journalists were not allowed to ask questions in photo-opportunities (Smith 1988: 434). In addition numerous lie-detector tests were conducted on members of the administration to stop 'leaks' (Wiedenkeller 1985: 179). The atmosphere at press conferences changed, apart from drastically reducing their number compared with his predecessors, the President did not respond to shouts and only called on journalists who raised their hands. Journalists in attendance were also required to remain seated unless called upon to speak (Barilleaux 1988: 136). It is argued that such changes created a visible distance between President Reagan and the journalists and Smith notes that "[b]y demonstrating he could control the rambunctious press corps, he also demonstrated his presidential mettle" (C. Smith 1990: 139).

The most controversial restrictions upon media access came when the White House and the Pentagon barred all U.S. reporters from Grenada for the first two days of the invasion. Even after the two days only a small pool of journalists were allowed to report from the island and then only under the strict supervision of military officials. On this occasion a barrage of criticism followed the reporting restrictions (see for example Washington Post; 28 October 1983 and Newsweek; 7 November 1983: 83). However this was not usually the case and on the whole the Reagan administration's "dual track of cordiality and control" (Smith 1988: 437) did not alienate the White House press corps. The UPI reporter Helen Thomas, for

example, states that "[w]e are pretty tightly controlled, but they do it in a nice way. Even when Reagan flays the press, it doesn't have the same atmospheric. There is a certain amount of civilized feeling on both sides" (quoted in Wiedenkeller 1985: 167).

The Reagan team's intention to avoid the media's editing of their messages was also apparent from the frequent choice of so-called *one-way communication* ("Einbahn-Kommunikation"; Wiedenkeller 1985: 167). One-way communication is contrasted with interactive forms of communication like interviews or discussions and is exemplified by the President's frequent sending of greetings on video tapes to events he was unable to attend in person (Wiedenkeller 1985: 171). Another example is President Reagan's radio addresses which started in April 1982 and continued with short interruptions during the summer of 1982 and after his re-election in 1984 until the end of his period of office. Larry Speakes describes them as "one of our most effective public relations instruments" (Speakes 1988: 239). The addresses were approximately five minutes long and broadcast on Saturdays (Israel 1987: ix). They often made front-page news over the weekends because Saturdays and Sundays are typically slow news days. The President's television addresses must, of course, also be regarded as a type of one-way communication. Although Reagan did not use televised speeches and statements more frequently than his predecessors, he did become "the quintessential prime-time president" (Simon/Ostrom 1989: 71) with 92% of those speeches and statements shown in the evening hours.

Another highly successful element of the Reagan administration's media strategies was news management. Early on during each day Michael Deaver and a few other senior advisers decided on the so-called 'story line of the day'. The story line would consist of a particular message plus an appropriate supportive visual. The press secretary would subsequently brief top reporters on the content of the story line and

such things as where to deploy their camera crews at a 'guidance session' at 9.15 a.m. (Smith 1988: 405-408). Periodically the White House press corps were circumvented in order to minimise press editing of the line of the day, instead regional broadcasters and journalists were approached directly as it was believed that they were more likely to be impressed by simply being present in the White House and thus more likely to produce favourable coverage (Smith 1988: 409). Other news management strategies included spreading good news out over a number of successive days and bundling together several items of bad news and disclosing them all on one day as the media would usually only highlight one particular piece. Releasing items late on Friday afternoons was another way of minimising media interest in items of bad news (Wiedenkeller 1985: 177). The overall co-ordination of the news management took place when Reagan's top communication advisers, the so-called 'Blair House Group', gathered once a week in order to discuss their experiences and plan the week ahead (Hertsgaard 1988: 34).

The Reagan administration also made use of what was earlier described as the symbiotic relationship between presidents and the mass media. Susan Zirinsky, a CBS producer assigned to the White House, says that "[i]n a funny way the [White House] advance men and I have the same thing at heart - we want the piece to look as good as it possibly can ... That's their job and that's my job" (quoted in Schram 1987: 55). Michael Deaver describes this relationship as "[y]ou need them and they need you" (Deaver 1987: 147).

One example of how the symbiosis between media and President worked in practice was the preparations for the 4th July celebrations in 1984. A memo from Henkel (who was responsible for presidential advance work) to Deaver reads: "Subject: Trip of the President to the Pepsi Firecracker 400 Race at Daytona International Speedway ... The President will start the race with a call to 'start your engines' via radio-telephone from Air Force One. Upon arrival, the President will proceed to a

suite located above the grandstands from which he will watch the last half hour of the race. While in the 'sky suite' the President will take part in five minutes of live broadcast going out to 300 radio stations across the United States ... After the race is complete ... the President will make brief informal remarks and present the trophy. ABC will then conduct a brief, light, sports-oriented interview with the President in the Winner's circle. [Note: Deaver checked his approval on a list of options and across the top of the memo ... he wrote: 'Excellent'" (quoted in Schram 1987: 41-42). On the evening of the 4th of July all three networks used the event as the framework for their evening news and focused on the compelling pictures of the President's day (Schram 1987: 42).

Sam Donaldson's (from ABC) comparison of the respective visits to Normandy of Presidents Carter and Reagan in commemoration of the D-day landing is another illustration of the mutually beneficial partnership between president and media. "I'll never forget ... Jimmy Carter with his tan gabardine ... There he is. Oh, come on, give me a break, folks. I'm here to make you an historic figure and here you are walking along with something that you've bought in Americus [the little Georgia town near Plains]. I mean it's all those things. And who made the most memorable speech that day? It wasn't Carter, it was Giscard" (quoted in Schram 1987: 62-63). In contrast Donaldson's comments on President Reagan's emotional speech at the same place six years later: "And yet, when Reagan said it and Reagan's tears came and [he read], 'Dad, I'll never let them forget' - oh, I mean, we put three pounds of that in [the ABC news story that night] ... it was a compelling, dramatic moment. I mean, that was D-day ... I got back to London [to put the nightly news piece together] ... and I sat there thinking, ... [t]ey got me. That's it. You win, Deaver. Here, take it" (quoted in Schram 1987: 63-64). Incidentally the pictures of the ABC evening news clip on the Normandy visit were later used in the President's spots during his re-election campaign (Schram 1987: 64).

The media strategies of Ronald Reagan's election campaigns also proved to be highly sophisticated and innovative. Journalists agreed, for instance, that in 1980 "the Reagan people were by far the most talented in controlling the day's lead" (Swerdlow 1988: 183). One device in achieving this was the 'Issue of the Day' (IOD) strategy. This meant aiming for positive media coverage by reducing the frequency and increasing the formality of Reagan's contact with the media whilst highlighting the same issue over a particular period of time. It has been reported that Ronald Reagan was almost completely shut off from the outside world for the duration of the campaign so that reporters were forced to rely exclusively on the staged events organised by his camp (Thomas 1983: 35). As with the 'story line of the day' approach an appearance or statement by the candidate was always complemented by a carefully chosen visual (Griscom 1989: 338). Covington et al show that the IOD strategy was particularly successful at gaining a high proportion of positive television coverage (Covington et al 1993: 797). During the 1984 campaign a similar technique was applied and although reporters had excellent logistical support all real access to the President was denied (McWilliams 1985: 161).

Meticulous advance work also ensured good pictures on television. At every rally a well placed camera platform was provided near to the stage with the area behind the platform carefully roped off. This granted not only good angles for television teams but also made the crowds appear larger than they actually were as everyone had to pack tightly into the area in front of the platform (Swerdlow 1988: 181). The pollster Richard Wirthlin pioneered the so-called 'speech-pulse system' during the 1984 campaign to increase the effectiveness of the soundbites used in news reports. Catchy phrases which were used by the President in his campaign speeches had previously been market-tested on small groups of people. During these tests each participant held a dial mechanism and had to respond instantly while listening to a recording of selected phrases (Mayer/McManus 1988: 44). Other innovations of the

Reagan team included the remarkable 30 minute 'roadblock' device mentioned in section IV.2.1 and the purchase of advertising time on the music video channel MTV (Blumenthal 1988a: 174).

Dan Rather (of CBS) comments that "[t]he Reagan people saw the whole campaign as a movie ...[T]hey thought as movie directors do, of shooting sequences - we have our star, this is our sequence, now how ... do we want the shot framed? The Mondale people - at best - saw it as a series of quick sound bites" (quoted in Schram 1987: 59). Michael Deaver confirms Rather's analysis: "We absolutely thought of ourselves when we got into the national campaigns as producers. We tried to create the most entertaining, visually attractive scene to fill that box ... We became Hollywood producers" (quoted in Ritter/Henry 1992: 103).

As a person Ronald Reagan was well suited to the highly formalised and planned media strategies of his administration. For press conferences the President underwent elaborate preparations; his briefing material was presented in a Q-and-A format and advisers conducted at least two 'dry runs' prior to the event (Speakes 1988: 236-237). These mock press conferences were held in the family theatre of the White House which amongst other things included a presidential podium, television-type lighting, and a proper address system to make the situation appear as realistic as possible (Speakes 1988: 237; see also Newsweek; 24 May 1982: 23). Michael Deaver's planning of Reagan's public appearances included such details as chalked toe marks to guide his movements around the stage and exact directions for his facial expressions. Donald Regan says that "[t]he President accepted these arrangements with what seemed to me to be practically superhuman good nature. *Second nature* might be the better term: he had been doing this kind of thing - learning his lines, composing his facial expression, hitting his toe marks - for half a century" (Regan 1988: 248). In other words Ronald Reagan's personal background

enabled him to cope with the demands of the "scripted spontaneity" (Smith 1988: 405) resulting from his media strategies.

Weisman suggests that "[t]o an unprecedented extent, Mr. Reagan and his staff have made television a major organizing principle of his Presidency. His day is planned around opportunities for TV coverage. Every effort is made to assure a constant flow of positive visual images and symbols from the White House" (Weisman 1984: 39). This appears to be the sum and substance of what other commentators have called "the era of the television presidency" (Denton 1988), "[t]he Ronald Reagan Show" (The New Republic; 7 April 1982), or a "choreographed presidency" (Berman 1990: 17).

In the context of our analysis two points warrant particular emphasis. First of all, many elements of the symbolic politics of President Reagan such as the execution of his election campaigns, the theatrical representation of symbolic acts, or the deliberate creation of dramatic episodes required sophisticated media strategies for their successful implementation. In other words when analysing symbolic communication as an instrument of presidential impression management the mass media must be regarded as an essential tool for its execution.

Secondly, when focusing on the more abstract 'meaning creation' component of symbolic politics the mass media's function must be regarded as that of the vital intermediary between the president on the one hand and the American public on the other. Consequently the media institutions' criteria for the selection and framing of political news are highly influential for the construction of the political spectacle and hence for the creation of political reality in society.

## IV.4 Summary

This chapter has applied the theory of Symbolic Politics to the Reagan Presidency. This final section aims to bring together the separate areas of investigation into a more coherent picture. We shall proceed by first looking at symbolic politics as a power resource for President Reagan and then by considering the systematising function of symbolic communication.

Symbolic politics was a powerful tool by which Ronald Reagan achieved a positive image for himself and his policies. In other words symbolic politics assisted the President in communicating successfully with the American public. Many examples of this approach have been mentioned including President Reagan's market-tested election campaigns as well as his carefully staged symbolic acts and his effective rhetoric. It has also been argued that the President and his staff's ways of dealing with the media were of great importance for the implementation of symbolic politics. Elaborate planning of presidential communication combined with a high level of control over all elements of public relations work were essential for the success of the Great Communicator in the political arena.

President Reagan used symbolic politics in his public style of political leadership. Kernell argues that "Ronald Reagan has relied on going public for his influence in Washington more heavily and more profitably than did his predecessors" (Kernell 1986: 212). For President Reagan 'going public' was crucial in rallying support for his policies and thus for implementing his political agenda. Symbolic politics became a vital piece of President Reagan's 'power to persuade'. It was important because the American president is, at least in domestic matters, a relatively weak chief executive who functions in a system of fragmented political power and communication is therefore essential to advance his agenda.

In addition Ronald Reagan as a person "was content to exercise the symbolic powers of his office" (Regan 1988: 143) and "[h]is preoccupation was with what might be called 'the outer Presidency'" (Regan 1988: 267). Cannon states that "Reagan's idea of a President was of a leader who could rally the country to a cause with the power of his voice and use public opinion as a catalyst for change" (Cannon 1982: 371). Hence Ronald Reagan's background in the entertainment industry provided him not only with the right skills but also with an approach towards leadership well suited to the requirements of today's public presidency.

Two consequences arise from this. First of all, the question may be posed whether politicians who are not trained in acting or the other performing arts have the expertise to succeed in the age of mediated politics with its emphasis on personal presentation and symbolic communication (Neustadt 1990: 275-276). Even if one does not foresee a succession of Hollywood actors in the White House, Reagan's tenure of office at least suggests that the ability to communicate via television and an awareness of its importance has taken up a crucial position in the job description of the American president. Secondly, throughout his Presidency Ronald Reagan was criticised for instituting the "staff presidency" (Smith 1988: 300) that is for giving too much authority and latitude to his staff. Smith argues that there is a connection between the emphasis on symbolic politics during the Reagan years and the delegating style of his leadership: "The more any president is preoccupied with public relations and ceremony, the more power over the substance of policy he must turn over to subordinates. ... Reagan is famous for leaning on staff; future presidents excessively preoccupied with P.R. will be the same" (Smith 1988: 705).

When discussing symbolic politics as a presidential power resource we must also take a fresh look at Ronald Reagan's approval ratings mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It is generally acknowledged that approval ratings change in "response to impressions of presidential success and failure formed from indications of policy

outcomes reported in the news" (Brody 1991: 165). Thus impression management and media presentation become crucially important for the office holder's aim to maintain a high level of public approval. The performance of the macroeconomy provides, however, an independent impetus for the level of job approval with ratings often on the increase during times of economic growth and decreasing during economic downturns. It is therefore argued that both symbolic communication and economic performance are linked to presidential popularity (MacKuen 1983: 191; see also Brody 1991: 103). A variety of other factors also influence presidential popularity as exemplified by higher approval ratings (on average) during the honeymoon period of a new incumbent or sudden gains or losses caused by international crises or scandals (Brody 1991; Edwards 1983).

President Reagan's approval ratings plummeted at two points during his Presidency. First during the recession of 1982 - 1983 and secondly after the revelation of the Iran-Contra affair. With regard to the former Pomper argues that "[h]is vaunted communication skills would have done him little good if unemployment had remained at the painful levels of 1982" (Pomper 1985: 80). Schneider makes a similar point when he states that "for all his skill as a communicator, the polls make clear that if Reagan had run for re-election under the conditions that prevailed in 1982, when it was definitely not 'morning in America', just about any Democrat would have beaten him" (Schneider 1987: 41). The Iran-Contra affair illustrates how non-economic factors severely tarnished the President's approval ratings. Smith argues that the drop in approval "was so swift and sharp precisely because so much of his popular appeal had ridden on image" (Smith 1988: 449).

Both situations, that is the recession and Iran-Contra, demonstrate that President Reagan's proclaimed ability to employ symbolic politics could not guard him against sharp drops in his approval ratings. In these instances symbolic politics failed to compensate for unpopularity caused by macroeconomic factors or a

corruption scandal respectively and these instances are examples of the relative limits of symbolic politics as a presidential power resource. One can, of course, speculate that the decline in approval ratings in both circumstances might have been even sharper had it not been for President Reagan's symbolic communication which may well have been the case, yet it is difficult to conceive how research could verify such a damage limitation effect of symbolic politics.

As we have seen President Reagan also enjoyed periods of high approval ratings and from early 1984 these lasted for a period of almost three years. It has been argued that President Reagan would not have achieved this level of popularity without successful symbolic communication (Combs 1993: 13). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, studies have shown that symbolic communication does in principle influence approval ratings, for example they have been shown to change as a result of televised presidential addresses or after presidential travel abroad even when those trips do not result in tangible outcomes. Research has not, however, determined the exact size of the approval enhancing effect of symbolic politics at particular points in time. Thus it would merit detailed investigation in future research to compare changes in approval ratings at times of well-packaged presidential actions with badly communicated examples of the same class in similar circumstances (for example announcements of domestic initiatives, presidential travel, or crises in foreign affairs).

Let us now turn to the systematising function of symbolic politics. Three points developed earlier in this thesis must be regarded as the foundation for the argument which follows. First of all, political reality is symbolically constructed, that is its meaning depends on the communication and interpretation of participants involved in social interaction. Secondly, the mass media occupies a key position in translating political actions and events into a repertoire of familiar stories with well known characters. Thirdly, the American presidency is a highly symbolic institution which

greatly influences the public's expectations of an 'ideal' president and the president's ability to interpret reality.

Against this theoretical background President Reagan must be regarded as a portentous 'signifier' of political and social reality in the United States during the 1980s. Symbolic politics was an important ingredient in the wider process of creating meaning about such reality during the period of his Presidency. Meaning was multiple and depended for its interpretation on social interaction. For some the invasion of Grenada came to represent an end to the United States' humiliation in foreign affairs, for others it proved their concerns, that a trigger happy President had entered the White House, right. For some Reaganomics meant laying the foundation for the economic recovery of the mid-1980s, for others it symbolised an irresponsible fiscal policy which created social hardship for millions of Americans. For many in the United States, or abroad, President Reagan prompted some reaction and it was often a strong reaction.

Symbolic politics enabled people to make sense of both politics and the wider social reality with the President at the centre of the political process. Edelman's interpretation of symbolic politics as a powerful tool in the hands of an elite, which obscures social power and displaces attention deliberately from the structural inequalities in American society, is only one possible perspective on symbolic communication. It is true that symbolic politics during the Reagan Presidency often highlighted drama and people, rather than structural or historical features, but Edelman overestimates the manipulative potential of such an approach. In our example the recession and Iran-Contra affair clearly illustrated the limits of presidential power to successfully define reality.

By contrast a more systemic interpretation of symbolic politics of the Reagan Presidency is offered. President Reagan's symbolic politics not only assisted in

ordering social and political reality but also oversimplified it. Many examples of oversimplification have been shown. During election campaigns only one or two personalised themes, for example credibility or patriotism, dominated the contests. President Reagan's rhetoric repeatedly relied on the same emotional or heroic motives to explain materially very different situations and symbolic problem solving provided the impression of real solutions. Such communication turns politics into easily digestable units but it also oversimplifies politics by pretending predictability and by assuming the presidential ability to understand cause and effect and to remedy whatever the problem. This effect is reinforced by the media's presentation of news in dramatic and simplified patterns which, as research shows, leads to both emotional arousal and to a reduction of cognitive complexity by the viewer. In other words it reduces the viewers recall of information and the complexity with which individuals think about the events reported in the news (Milburn/McGrail 1992: 626).

Finally this chapter has shown that symbolic politics is not just restricted to image making during election campaigns or other generally acknowledged moments of high symbolic drama, rather the whole interaction of president, media, and general public is imbued with it. Whether presentation of policies by the president, construction of news by the media or the public's interpretation of events, all depend heavily on the symbolic content of the matters involved. Hence Symbolic Politics as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis has proven a useful analytical framework for the study of presidential leadership and its interaction with the American public.

# V. THE THATCHER PREMIERSHIP: A FURTHER CASE STUDY IN SYMBOLIC POLITICS

This chapter will follow the same analytical steps as the previous one, this time in the context of the Thatcher Premiership. We will again consider both the manipulative function of symbolic politics as well as its role as a facilitator in the process of creating meaning about social reality. Although some cross-references to the Reagan analysis will be made here, a more comprehensive comparison and evaluation will follow in the conclusion.

At the general election on 3rd May 1979 the Conservatives won a convincing victory with an advance of 7% in their share of the vote, the biggest gain of either of the two main parties up to that point since 1945 (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 339). They won 43.9% of the popular vote and 339 seats to Labour's 36.9% and 269 seats (Norton 1994: 83). Their leader Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first woman Prime Minister and would repeat her electoral success at two subsequent general elections.

The 1979 general election was fought against the backdrop of economic crisis. Inflation stood at 10%, unemployment had reached 1.2 million and the 'winter of discontent', a series of public sector strikes in 1978-79, had just provided the minority Labour Government with a huge political liability. More generally speaking there was a "growing sense of national self-doubt" (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 1). Descriptions of Britain as the 'Sick Man of Europe' or talk about the 'British Disease' reflected a wider disenchantment with relative decline and slow economic growth. Margaret Thatcher picked up on this mood when she described Britain during the 1979 general election as "a great country which seems to have lost its way" (quoted in Little 1988: 48) and not surprisingly economic revival featured top of the Conservatives' election promises.

By the time the next general election was called in 1983 the rate of inflation had fallen sharply to around 4%. Unemployment, however, had more than doubled to over 3 million. This mixed picture was complemented by brighter economic news during the last few months before the election. Industrial output grew, the exchange rate fell boosting exports and house and car sales were up. In addition the sense of general self-doubt had been transposed in the aftermath of the Falklands war of 1982-83 into nationalistic pride. The outcome of the general election gave the Conservatives the biggest majority of any party since 1945. The Conservatives with 42.4% of the popular vote won 397 seats to Labour's 27.6% and 209 seats. The Alliance's share stood at 25.4% of the popular vote but only won 23 seats (Norton 1994: 83).

In 1987 the economy had been improving for the sixth consecutive year at an average growth rate of 3%. Unemployment was still high but inflation appeared under permanent control with an average rate of 3.4% for 1986. This time the Conservatives won 42.3% of the popular vote and 376 seats to Labour's 30.8% and 292 seats. The Liberal Alliance secured 22.6% of the vote and 22 seats (Norton 1994: 83).

As in the previous chapter symbolic politics will be analysed by reference to fluctuations in approval ratings. Our hypothesis remains that symbolic communication takes different forms and has different functions during different phases of approval ratings. We can distinguish between six phases in the approval ratings of Prime Minister Thatcher (see Figure 2):

(i) 'Initial Decline'. This phase ran from taking office in 1979 until December 1981 when only 25% of the British public were still satisfied with how Thatcher was doing her job as Prime Minister. This 20% decline in job approval rating during her

first two and a half years as Prime Minister paralleled the dramatic deepening of the recession in that time. Industrial production fell by 15% between 1979 and 1981, the year 1980 saw the largest increase in unemployment in a single year since 1930 and inner-city riots in Liverpool, Brixton and other places in the summer of 1981 heightened fears of social breakdown.

(ii) 'Takeoff'. The Prime Minister's approval ratings started to recover in January 1982 and reached a peak (59%) in June of that year. This sudden rise in the popularity of the Prime Minister and the Thatcher Government during the first half of 1982 has been the subject of intense academic scrutiny. Some commentators emphasise the importance of improving macroeconomic indicators as mainly responsible for the takeoff (Sanders/Ward/Marsh 1987). Others stress the significance of the Falklands war in reviving the public's approval of the Prime Minister and the Government (Clarke/Mishler/Whiteley 1990). Looking closely at Thatcher's approval ratings for those months we can see that they began to recover by 5 or 6% for the three months from February until April followed by a jump of 15% from April to May 1982, the first poll taken after the outbreak of the Falklands conflict.

(iii) 'Erosion'. This title is given to the phase from the Prime Minister's highest approval score in June 1982 until the summer of 1986 when her ratings had slowly eroded down to a level of 30%. Some of the major events during those years included the miners' strike from March 1984 until March 1985, the Brighton bombing in October 1984 and the first big privatisation with the transfer of British Telecom to the private sector in November 1984. Despite continued economic growth and low inflation the Prime Minister's approval decline maybe explicable as a mixture of cyclical factors such as midterm unpopularity and a succession of embarrassing political events particularly in 1986 such as the Westland crisis, the

Spycatcher affair, the bombing of Libya, and the issue of sanctions against South Africa.

(iv) 'Restoration'. This phase lasted from the summer of 1986 until the summer of 1987 with the Prime Minister's approval ratings recovering sharply in the run-up to the general election in June 1987. During this phase the privatisations of British Gas and British Airways took place as well as the Prime Minister's triumphant visit to Moscow. The political difficulties of the previous months faded into the background and the economic record of the Government became increasingly the public focus of attention as the election drew closer.

(v) 'Iconoclasm'. This phase shows a decline in Thatcher's approval ratings ending with her lowest figure for any month of her tenure (20%) in March 1990. Macroeconomic difficulties began to emerge soon after the general election of 1987 with inflation accelerating from 3.5% during the election year to 8% by March 1989 climbing to 15% by the end of that year. In addition a majority of the British public considered the privatisations of the electricity and water industries a step too far. Internal divisions within the Cabinet over exchange rate policy led to the resignation of Nigel Lawson in October 1989 and the implementation of the poll tax culminated in riots in Trafalgar Square in March 1990.

(vi) 'Death throes'. This title is used to characterise the Prime Minister's approval ratings over the last nine months of her period of office. A brief recovery in public approval in the aftermath of the poll tax confrontations was soon to be followed by a final decline in the wake of Geoffrey Howe's resignation and the leadership contest leading to her resignation in November 1990.
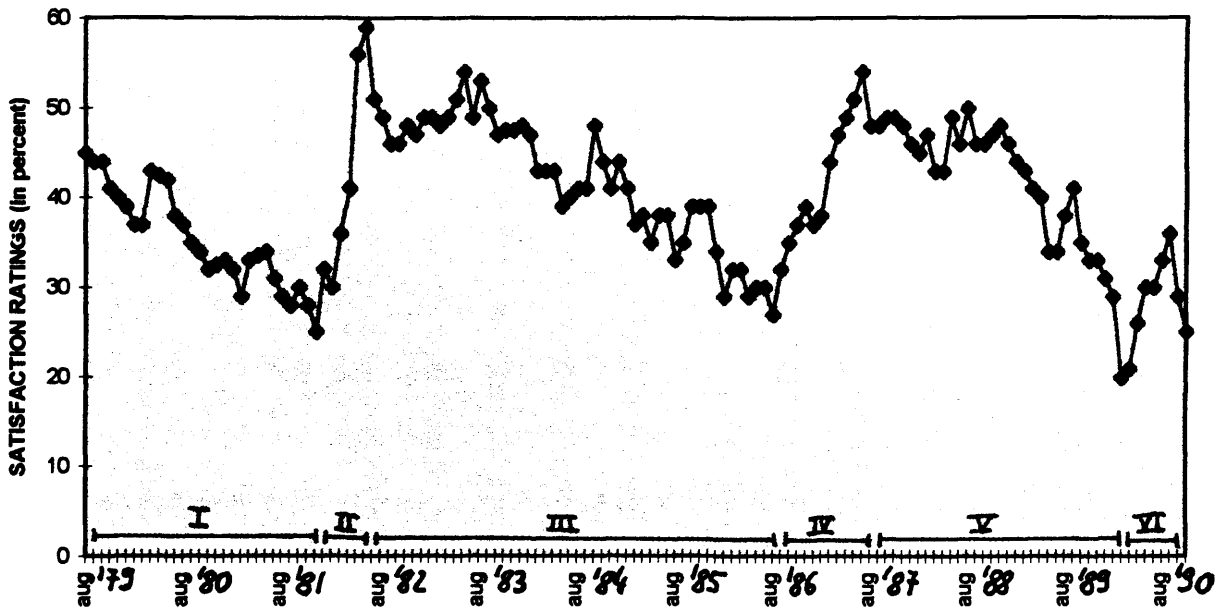
FIGURE 2

Prime Minister Thatcher's satisfaction ratings (in percent)

Question: *Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with*

*the way Mrs Thatcher is doing her job as Prime Minister?*

(based on MORI Satisfaction Trends 1979 - 1990)

The structure of this chapter follows the same outline as the analysis of the Reagan Presidency. After a cursory view over Margaret Thatcher's biographical background, we will analyse the symbolic politics of the Thatcher Premiership under the same five headings as in chapter IV. Also as before an analysis of media strategies and a summary will conclude the case study.

## V.1 Margaret Thatcher: Her Life as a Career Politician

The analysis of the symbolic politics of the Reagan Presidency began by looking at Ronald Reagan's life as a professional communicator before taking up office in the

White House. Applying the same analytical structure to the Thatcher Premiership it is useful to look at Margaret Thatcher's background prior to entering Downing Street.

The opening paragraph to Hugo Young's biography of Thatcher reads as follows: "Margaret Thatcher was born to be a politician. Her lineage and formation allowed of few other possibilities. Politics infused the atmosphere in which she was reared. The political life, with its parallel attractions of service and of power, was the only life set before her as a model superior to that of shopkeeping" (Young 1991: 3). Let us take a closer look at the reasons for this assertion.

Margaret Roberts grew up in Grantham, Lincolnshire in a home that was in her own words "practical, serious and intensely religious" (Thatcher 1995: 5). Her parents owned a grocery shop over which they lived and later expanded by taking in adjoining buildings and by opening a second shop. Both parents were devoted Methodists and her father a popular local preacher. The day-to-day routine of Margaret Roberts' childhood was largely dictated by Methodism and her life in general was subject to firm principles such as thrift and diligence (Thatcher 1995: 6-7). When asked in 1975 what first came into her mind when she looked back on her father she answered: "His simple conviction that some things are right, and some are wrong. His belief that life is ultimately about character, that character comes from what you make of yourself. You must work hard to earn money to support yourself, but hard work was even more important in the formation of character. You must learn to stand on your own feet" (Harris 1988: 42).

Alfred Roberts took a keen interest in public affairs. Small businessmen from the area came to his shop to discuss the problems of the day, he was an active member of Rotary and his work as a local councillor took up an important part in his life. For the period 1945-1946 he was elected Mayor of Grantham. When Alfred Roberts

bought the family's first radio Magaret Thatcher remembers: "I knew what he was planning and ran much of the way home from school in excitement. I was not disappointed. It changed our lives. From then on it was not just Rotary, church and shop which provided the rhythm of our day: it was the radio news" (Thatcher 1995: 22). In the previous chapter we took notice of Ronald Reagan recalling his early experience of the radio as 'magic' and 'theater of the mind'. One might speculate that Margaret Thatcher's statement, by contrast with Ronald Reagan's, is a demonstration of her interest in the factual material made available to her by the radio rather than the entertainment value.

From a very early age Margaret Roberts was involved in the activities of her "highly political family" (Thatcher 1995: 25). For example, at the age of ten she carried lists of the names of voters who had not yet voted from the polling stations back to the Conservative committee rooms so that they could be persuaded to turn out (Harris 1988: 44). In 1939 the Roberts family helped to organise the accommodation of Jewish refugees. They themselves also accommodated a Jewish refugee who had been a pen friend of Muriel Roberts, Margaret's sister (Thatcher 1995: 26-27). Young Margaret also shone in the school's debating club and "debated with more self-confidence than any of her contemporaries" (Young 1991: 12).

Webster points out that today "Mrs Thatcher's biography, and especially her Grantham upbringing, floats somewhere in the popular understanding of Thatcherism. The story has been told on many occasions, beginning somewhere around 1935 when she was ten, though she occasionally talks about her 'little' primary school. The focus is almost always on the 1930s and her life in Grantham - 'my early years', she tends to call it. It would be difficult to find people who now remember, or ever knew, much about Harold Wilson's or Edward Heath's parents or birthplace, but the broad outlines of Mrs Thatcher's origins are widely known -

and particularly the fact that she is a Grantham grocer's daughter" (Webster 1990: 5). Young makes a similar point when he states that "Grantham was the place she had worked to get away from. Only when she became party leader was it restored to favour as the town that had made her, the equivalent of the log cabin from which every mythic American president has stumbled triumphantly into the White House" (Young 1991: 28).

When Margaret Roberts went to Oxford to study chemistry in 1943 her political socialisation continued. She immediately joined the Conservative Association, (OUCA) and remembers that its "activities quickly became a focus for my life" (Thatcher 1995: 42). In the general election of 1945 Margaret Roberts canvassed for Quintin Hogg who fought the city seat in Oxford. Back in Grantham she was also involved in the campaign by being a warm-up speaker for the Conservative candidate at village meetings. She comments on her experience fifty years after the event: "In those days, many more people turned out to public meetings than today, and they expected their money's worth. I would frequently be speaking at half a dozen meetings an evening" (Thatcher 1995: 45). The 'Grantham Journal' noted about Margaret Roberts campaigning that she had "her father's gift for oratory" and that she was a young woman with "decided convictions" (quoted in Young 1991: 21).

Margaret Roberts also received her first lessons in public speaking from Conservative Central Office in those early days of her political career. She notes that the teacher's "emphasis was on simplicity and clarity of expression and as little jargon as possible. In fact, at election meetings, when you never knew how long you would have to speak before the candidate arrived, a touch more long-windedness would have been very useful" (Thatcher 1995: 45). In 1946 she became president of OUCA and as such attended her first Conservative Party conference, held that year in Blackpool (Thatcher 1995: 47-48). At the end of her four years in

Oxford she had set her eyes firmly on a political career and decided to become an MP (Thatcher 1995: 60).

The next period in Magaret Roberts' political life lasted until 1959 when she became Member of Parliament for Finchley. She worked for three years after her degree as a research chemist in Essex and in London. "And, as always with me, there was politics. I immediately joined the Conservative Association and threw myself into the usual round of Party activities" (Thatcher 1995: 62). At twenty-four she became the youngest woman to contest the 1950 general election. She lost the safe Labour seat of Dartford and lost again contesting the same seat the following year but gained "more publicity than a hundred middle-aged male candidates in other hopeless seats" (Young 1991: 32).

Having gained financial security through marriage she then studied for the Bar and in 1953 passed her Bar exams. Her new profession provided her not only with a more respectable vocation but also with the freedom of a self-employed practitioner necessary for her political ambitions. Socially, the Bar enabled her to meet many other aspiring Conservative politicians and when she joined the Society of Conservative Lawyers she soon became the first woman elected to its executive committee (Young 1991: 33). After four unsuccessful interviews by constituency selection committees between 1954 to 1958, Margaret Thatcher was finally adopted by the safe Conservative seat of Finchley and elected with a majority of 16,200 in 1959.

Beginning with her maiden speech Thatcher impressed other MPs with her confident and competent performance in the House of Commons (Harris 1988: 53). In 1961 she was offered her first post of Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance and after the Conservatives had lost the 1964 general election she moved to Housing and Land as shadow spokesperson. After the

1966 general election she became number two spokesperson on Treasury matters under the Shadow Chancellor. In October 1967 she was promoted to the shadow cabinet in charge of the Fuel and Power portfolio and subsequently to Shadow Minister for Transport and Shadow Minister of Education. This meant that by the time of the 1970 general election she had shadowed five Government departments (Harris 1988: 54).

After the 1970 general election Edward Heath appointed Margaret Thatcher Secretary of State for Education. In that position for the first time she became a "truly famous national politician" (Young 1991: 73) albeit by being the guilty party in a highly damaging episode. The decision to cut free school milk to older primary school children, from eight to eleven years old, had been preceded by similar cuts implemented by previous Labour governments, for example, from all secondary schools. This time, however, the decision of the Secretary of State for Education led to a storm of protest with the tabloid press taunting her as 'Thatcher the Milk Snatcher'. Young points out that the incident struck a deeper chord. "It was a piece of seemingly gratuitous deprivation that conformed with the image of severity and adamant righteousness which was beginning to become Mrs Thatcher's stock-in-trade" (Young 1991: 73). Shortly after the 'milk snatcher' episode and further adverse publicity in relation to her withdrawing the instructions of the previous Labour Government to local authorities to submit plans for the conversion of their State secondary schools into comprehensives, 'The Sun' newspaper printed an article about her entitled 'The Most Unpopular Woman in Britain' (The Sun; 25 November 1971).

After the Conservatives lost the October 1974 general election, Edward Heath gave Thatcher the Shadow Environment portfolio. As a result of this move she became the protagonist in a number of highly publicised policy announcements, for example, a comprehensive reform of the rating system and the announcement that a

Conservative government would hold mortgage rates down to 9½%. In the House of Commons she impressed colleagues with a number of combative exchanges. Although a staunch Heath supporter James Prior observed that during that time "Margaret's stature in the Party had been enhanced by her performance at the dispatch box" (Prior 1986: 99). Thatcher herself acknowledges that during the last year before the leadership election "[a]ll this publicity was good for me personally as well. Although I was not to know it at the time, this period up to and during the October 1974 election campaign allowed me to make a favourable impact on Conservatives in the country and in Parliament without which my future career would doubtless have been very different" (Thatcher 1995: 250). She makes the same point repeatedly in her autobiography (see also Thatcher 1995: 245 and 258).

During this period Thatcher became more familiar with Gordon Reece who would go on to play a crucial role in the development of her career. At the time he was Conservative Party adviser on television appearances. She describes him as somebody with "an almost uncanny insight into that medium" (Thatcher 1995: 255) and praises him as "a Godsend" (Thatcher 1995: 294). Harris describes the relationship between Reece and Thatcher as "[h]e was able, and she was willing" (Harris 1988: 83). Gordon Reece had been a television producer of religious broadcasts and light entertainment programmes such as 'Emergency Ward 10'. He became involved in political broadcasting through the election coverage of Independent Television News in 1964 and by making party political broadcasts for the Conservative Party in the early 1970s (Ranelagh 1992: 146). He assisted Thatcher for the first time during the leadership contest in 1975. Webster regards Reece as responsible for creating the 'housewife' image during the 1975 leadership contest to counter concerns that Thatcher was aggressive, shrill and distant (Webster 1990: 54). Many pictures in the tabloid newspapers during her campaign showed her peeling potatoes, sweeping garden paths, washing up or putting out empty milk bottles. She told 'The Daily Mirror' in February 1975: "What people don't realise

about me is that I am a very ordinary person who leads a very normal life. I enjoy it
- seeing that the family have a good breakfast. And shopping keeps me in touch"
(quoted in Webster 1990: 54).

Gordon Reece joined Thatcher's staff at the House of Commons after her election as opposition leader. His role, although never defined, was to be her image maker (Hollingsworth 1997: 51). He suggested a number of changes to her media strategy and her appearance in public. He advised her to reduce the number of interviews she gave on current-affairs programmes and suggested that she target instead less politically committed audiences by making appearances on light entertainment programmes such as 'Jim'll Fix It'. In addition he proposed that she pay more attention to the mid-market populars, rather than concentrating solely on the quality broadsheets. With the proviso that the material was interesting he believed that the mid-market populars would treat the new party leader fairly. "So, whatever the other demands on my diary, when Gordon said that we must have lunch with such-and-such an editor, that was the priority" (Thatcher 1995: 294).

Reece also conducted detailed private opinion polls after Thatcher's first television appearances as party leader. As a result he advocated a number of personal changes, for example, to her hair style and clothes. He would show her video tapes of her television appearances and discuss them with her. He also found an expert to teach her how to lower the pitch of her voice (Hollingsworth 1997: 52-54). Commentators noticed her make over: "Instead of looking and seeming like a hoity-toity Tory lady of the flowered hat variety ..., she now appears, if not quite the mum next door, at least a fairly approachable sort of woman" (The Observer; 22 April 1979). Thatcher herself viewed these changes pragmatically considering them necessary to her pursuit of power. "Every politician has to decide how much he or she is prepared to change manner and appearance for the sake of the media. It may sound grittily honourable to refuse to make any concessions, but such an attitude in

a public figure is most likely to betray a lack of seriousness about winning power or even, paradoxically, the pride that apes humility" (Thatcher 1995: 294-295).

Margaret Thatcher's life prior to entering Downing Street was dominated by a desire to enter and to succeed in politics. Advancing her political ambitions seems to have been her single most important consideration. For this reason Kavanagh calls Thatcher a "self-made professional politician" (Kavanagh 1986: 7). Here he is referring to a modern career politician who represents the more meritocratic element of the Conservative Party, a person who has progressed through the ranks by determination and commitment.

Thatcher brought with her to Downing Street firm ideas about the substance of her political aims. However she was also open-minded about the necessities of image making and media management in modern political life. In particular she has always attributed a significant role to oratory skills in her career. Many of the symbolic impressions of her as Prime Minister were derived from her biographical background. For example, her experiences growing up in a small town and 'life over the shop' as well as from the values of her childhood environment such as self-reliance, thrift and hard-work.

## V.2 Types and Strategies of Symbolic Politics

### V.2.1 Election Campaigns

This section will focus on important examples of symbolic politics which occurred during the Conservative Party's general election campaigns of 1979, 1983 and

1987[1] with particular emphasis on the role of Margaret Thatcher as party leader. In principle general elections in Britain are fought nationally between the two main parties, however, the party leaders' campaigns and their personal images increasingly determine the public face of election campaigns.

Responsibility for campaign arrangements in the Conservative Party is divided between the party Chairman, who heads Central Office, and the communications director, who is likely to have experience in marketing or media relations (Kavanagh 1995: 15). Gordon Reece became director of publicity, a job title to be changed to communications director, in late 1977. Franklin suggests that there are three elements to this post: (i) conducting survey research to identify public perceptions of policy strengths and weaknesses, (ii) planning the campaign schedule in great detail, well in advance of the general election, and (iii) overseeing the design and implementation of the party's advertising campaign (Franklin 1994: 135). It can be argued that the Conservatives' campaign in 1979 and the two subsequent general elections brought about radical innovations in all three areas.

One of Reece's first tasks in his new job was to gather support for the appointment of an advertising agency for the forthcoming election campaign. Having agreed the idea with Thatcher, Reece had two criteria for selecting an agency. First of all, it had to have a rising reputation and secondly, it had to be British. When Saatchi & Saatchi were selected in early 1978, Managing Director Tim Bell was the person assigned to lead the advertising team for the Conservatives' campaign (Hollingsworth 1997: 54-62). Although agencies had previously been involved in advising the Conservative Party on their campaign strategy, the 1979 general

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[1] The symbolic politics employed by President Reagan in midterm election campaigns was not discussed in chapter IV.2.1. Likewise this section will not consider any symbolic communication of local elections and European elections. Margaret Thatcher never took part in by-election campaigns in order to avoid any political risk for the Government (Thatcher 1993: 266-267).

election was the first in which advertising experts were involved in a major way. Thatcher reflects in her memoirs that the appointment "was a significant departure in our political communications. But I needed no persuading that it was right to obtain the best professionals in their field to put across our message ... [and] politicians should resist the temptation to consider themselves experts in fields where they have no experience" (Thatcher 1995: 410).

The 1979 general election, like the 1980 US presidential election, "proved a watershed in the use of market research to gain power" (Bruce 1992: 83). Soon after commencing work for his new client Tim Bell found that the polling conducted by Conservative Central Office was mainly quantitative research which he considered statistically too rigid. Instead he wanted to emphasise qualitative research and commissioned in-depth interviews with small groups of people. His main aim was to identify basic emotional responses and attitudes of potential Conservative voters. The interviews were filmed in order to read the faces of the interviewees as well as the words. Bell notes that "the importance of these discussions is that they simulate what happens in society" (Bell 1982: 13).

The main results drawn from these interviews were as follows. Many voters were disillusioned with the Labour Party and regarded it as 'extreme'. However they only supported the Conservatives in terms of abstract individualistic themes such as choice, freedom and getting the government 'off our backs'. The majority of interviewees were pessimistic about Britain's economic prospects (Kavanagh 1982: 274; Hollingsworth 1997: 62-63). This research helped to identify the most promising target market for potential Conservative votes outside the group of faithful supporters. These target voters were first-time voters, women and skilled workers (Bell 1982: 13-14). It also suggested that it was the harshness of Thatcher's public image which was mainly responsible for her trailing Prime Minister

Callaghan in personal popularity (Livingstone 1981: 141). These core findings were incorporated into the Saatchi team's campaign strategy.

As pointed out in chapter II.2 general election campaigns in Britain normally extend over a period of just three to four weeks. However this is often preceded by months of de facto pre-election campaigning involving speculations about the election date. In 1978/79 this pre-election period was particularly long. Political commentators and the opposition expected Prime Minister Callaghan to call an election in the autumn of 1978 and in anticipation of such an announcement Saatchi launched a highly publicised poster campaign in the summer. The most famous poster of that campaign showed a long dole queue with the caption 'Labour Isn't Working'. Similar attack posters followed. For example a poster entitled 'Britain Isn't Getting Any Better' depicted a queue of patients trying to get into hospital (Kleinman 1987: 29-30). These posters broke the mould in several ways. First of all, they conflicted with the previous notions that the political opponent should not be mentioned directly. Secondly, they challenged the widely held view that traditionally weak issues for the Conservative Party, such as unemployment, should not be emphasised.

The strategy of attacking the Labour Government's record continued into the main election campaign capitalising on events which had taken place during the 'winter of discontent'. There were pictures on television and in the newspapers of small children going without emergency operations and of mourners being turned away from cemeteries because of the strike of Liverpool grave diggers. Cockerell comments on such pictures saying that if "Reece and Saatchi & Saatchi had been writing the script, they would not have been able to do better. The images of the 'winter of discontent' were to feature in virtually every Conservative party political broadcast for the following eight years and the next three general elections" (Cockerell 1989: 243). One of Saatchi's 1979 PEB showed pictures of Britain

virtually going backwards, people walking backwards and planes landing in reverse. Another broadcast presented images of the 'winter of discontent' with a Callaghan-like voice-over repeating 'Crisis, what crisis?'. The positive messages of the Conservatives were vague. Messages such as advocating lower taxes and more home ownership were deliberately based on those themes of choice, opportunity and small government which had received a favourable response in the agency's research. Bell explains the strategy: "Everything we did was directed towards increasing the salience of this dissatisfaction; towards transforming a vague dislike of the circumstances in which people were living into a burning issue for them" (Bell 1982: 12).

Saatchi & Saatchi focused their communication strategy on the target voters identified by their private polling. Thatcher's photo-opportunities in factories were chosen with the target audience of skilled workers in mind. For the same reason newspaper advertising was heavily concentrated on the tabloids such as the 'Daily Mail' and 'The Sun' (Hollingsworth 1997: 70-72). To reach the female audience Thatcher appeared on mid-morning radio shows and magazine advertisements concentrated on women's magazines (Webster 1990: 56). In order to reach first-time voters Bell and his team experimented with political advertising in cinemas for the first time in Britain (Bell 1982: 14).

In view of Thatcher's harsh image Reece is reported to have said privately in the run up to the 1979 election that "he would be happy if he could arrange for the leader to be seen but never heard on television news each night" (Young 1991: 128). Thatcher's campaign in that year illustrates how her image maker attempted to conceal her image problem.

Harold Wilson experimented with walkabouts and other new formats of access to the public. However it was Margaret Thatcher who first introduced in 1979 a whole

sequence of meticulously pre-arranged and planned photo-opportunities into a political campaign in Britain. She visited a tea factory in Newcastle, cut her own dress pattern in a factory in Leicester, coated chocolates at Cadbury's and had her lungs and heart electronically tested beside her husband in Milton Keynes (Cockerell 1989: 246). Probably the most famous of those photo-opportunities occurred when she was filmed holding a new-born calf during a visit to a farm near Ipswich. The BBC political correspondent John Sergeant comments: "We were in John Gummer's constituency in East Anglia and we went to this field and suddenly this calf was produced. ... And it did seem that was the moment when British politics changed quite significantly. It had the advantage of being a very good picture and also a very good symbol and a very good message" (Dispatches: Channel 4; 18 March 1992). While holding the calf Thatcher's said: "It's not for me, it's for the photographers. They're the most important people on this campaign" (quoted in Young 1991: 130).

Thatcher's image makers made other efforts to emphasise pictures and emotions over the spoken word. Harvey Thomas, who had organised rallies for the American evangelist Billy Graham, helped Reece arrange "the United Kingdom's first showbiz-style election rally" (Thomas 1989: 69). Thatcher appeared at the Wembley Conference Centre surrounded by celebrities from the world of sports and show business. A member of the Saatchi team comments that "[w]hat we brought was the concept of imagery, as opposed to words. Politicians live off words and they don't think about imagery" (quoted in Hollingsworth 1997: 74). Reece also advised Thatcher to turn down an invitation from LWT to debate with Prime Minister Callaghan on national television. Thatcher wrote in her reply to LWT that "[p]ersonally, I believe that issues and policies, not personalities, decide an election. We are not electing a president, we are choosing a government" (Thatcher 1995: 445; see also Coleman 1997: 15). Reece even suggested dispensing completely with the morning press conferences, probably in an attempt to avoid a more traditional and uncontrolled verbal exchange between the party leader and

journalists. However Thatcher objected and said that the morning press conference "provides an opportunity for politicians to show what they are made of" (Thatcher 1995: 445).

The symbolic communication of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives in the 1983 general election was in many ways a fine-tuned version of the campaign four years earlier. At an early stage in planning the campaign Tim Bell once again conducted extensive qualitative research with focus groups of between twelve and fifteen voters. Bell presented edited versions of the video-taped interviews at a strategy meeting at Chequers in January 1983 (Parkinson 1992: 218). He drew four main conclusions. First of all, that the majority of the electorate did not blame the Thatcher Government for the sharp rise in unemployment to over 3 million. Many voters accepted the Government's arguments that changes in industry and the world recession were the real causes. Secondly, he concluded that strong feelings of patriotism were widespread in the aftermath of the Falklands war. Thirdly, he surmised that although Thatcher was still regarded as harsh, attitudinal surveys showed that 'toughness' was regarded as more useful to Britain than 'softness'. Finally, the Prime Minister was seen as by far the most effective leader. Her firm sense of leadership and direction was regarded as a particular strength (Burch 1986: 69; Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 197-201).

Private polling helped the Prime Minister determine the most favourable time to 'go to the country' (Kavanagh 1992b: 525). These results confirmed the evidence of the public polls that the Conservatives were comfortably in the lead. Thatcher decided on 9 June as later dates in that month would have clashed with Royal Ascot. "I did not like the idea of television screens during the final or penultimate week of the campaign filled with pictures of toffs and ladies in exotic hats while we stumped the country urging people to turn out and vote Conservative" (Thatcher 1993: 289).

During the campaign itself three types of private polls supported the Conservatives' communication efforts. First of all, four large-scale weekly 'State of the Battle' surveys were completed which underlined the strong level of support for the Conservative Party. Secondly, these were supplemented by 'quickie' polls based on smaller samples the results of which were instantly available. Thirdly, 'Operation Fast Feedback' was mounted. One hundred and fifty individuals were telephoned every evening and asked a series of questions such as what they saw as the most effective Conservative theme of the day or how they regarded the impact of statements made by leading figures. This polling encouraged the Conservatives not only to stick to their selected themes but also to adhere to their pre-arranged battle plan (Butler/Kavanagh 1984: 138-140; The Listener; 16 June 1983).

The battle plan, developed months in advance of the campaign, was designed to achieve two aims. First of all, it sought to pace the campaign properly. Issues on which the Conservatives were weak were dealt with early in the campaign and strong issues, such as defence, presented at the end. Secondly, the battle plan aimed to communicate a distinct tightly co-ordinated message each day of the campaign. The rationale was that this would maximise the likelihood of the intended message being delivered by the media with minimal filtration. Furthermore it provided more scope for setting the theme of the day (Burch 1986: 70-71). At that time Cecil Parkinson was party Chairman. As he put it later, "I had mapped out a draft programme for our press conferences, which would enable us to cover the areas of policy which we wanted to cover, in the order in which we would ideally like to discuss them. ... [W]e were able to stick to our chosen programme without change during the entire campaign" (Parkinson 1992: 227).

As in 1979 the results of the qualitative research were converted into campaign themes. Strong leadership and what Tim Bell summarised as 'keep on with the change' would constitute the focus of the Conservatives' campaign (Thatcher 1993:

287). The slogans 'The Resolute Approach' and 'Britain Is On The Right Track - Don't Turn Back' were intended to convey those themes. The Prime Minister's style added emphasis to the theme of strong leadership. She dominated the morning press conference and the Fast Feedback System confirmed that most voters now regarded this style positively as a 'commanding dominance' (Butler/Kavanagh 1984: 88). It was also decided to utilise the continuing disenchantment with the Labour Party by repeating the attack strategy of 1979 (Hollingsworth 1997: 94). One example of this strategy was an advertisement which compared eleven Labour and Communist policies line-by-line. It ran with the caption: 'Like Your Manifesto, Comrade'. Another example was a sharply edited PEB which portrayed images of the 'winter of discontent' with the voice-over repeatedly saying 'Do you remember ... ?' (Hollingsworth 1997: 95-96).

Photo-opportunities were also intended to emphasise the themes of the campaign. Thatcher was seen cutting a birthday cake for an old-age pensioner who had fought in the Falklands during the First World War and visiting factories representing developing parts of British industry such as micro-chip or other 'new technology' factories. The most memorable of the Prime Minister's photo-opportunities occurred in the final stage of the campaign when she visited the British Hovercraft Corporation. She was filmed against a backdrop of the country's biggest Union Jack which was emblazoned on the hangar doors. Thatcher made a telegenic landing on board a military hovercraft (Cockerell 1989: 284). The Prime Minister's mid-campaign visit to the G7 World Economic Summit in Williamsburg, Virginia was also turned into a photo-opportunity. It emphasised her role as an international leader. The Conservatives subsequently used the news film in one of their PEBs. In the clip the voice said that Britain had once again become a world leader "because of one woman who believed that our country, our people could do more than we dreamed possible for many, many years" (quoted in Cockerell 1989: 280).

Thatcher reduced the number of set-piece speeches from thirteen in the 1979 campaign to eight during the three-week period of the 1983 campaign. Media coverage of such platform events declined as a result of competition with more visually interesting events (Burch 1986: 72; Atkinson 1986: 38-41). Those speeches she did make were skilfully managed by Harvey Thomas and "resembled American presidential conventions" (Cockerell 1989: 280). The rallies were ticket-only affairs which aimed to avoid hecklers. Miniature Union flags were provided for each member of the audience to wave. The speeches were drafted to include statements which could easily be replayed on television. Furthermore Thatcher even had her own campaign song (The Listener; 16 June 1983).

When planning for the 1987 general election began the results of private polling were not encouraging for the Prime Minister. According to Saatchi & Saatchi's qualitative research the majority of voters felt that the Government had lost its way and was running out of steam. In contrast with 1983 Thatcher was seen as stubborn, single-minded, too extreme and inflexible. The only positive finding for the Conservatives was that Labour was still regarded as too left-wing and dominated by militants and the trade unions (Sharkey 1989: 63-64; Tyler 1987: 35-36).

A long pre-election campaign was devised to revive the Conservatives' chances of winning a third term. Michael Dobbs, chief of staff at Conservative Central Office, and Saatchi & Saatchi prepared a so-called 'Blue Book' containing a detailed plan for the pre-election campaign (Tyler 1987: 49-51). The Prime Minister set up a strategy group which came to be known as the 'A team'. Thatcher, the Chairman of the party, Norman Tebbit, and a small group of senior ministers met once a week to plan the election campaign and to ensure a better presentation of government policy in the run-up to the election (Thatcher 1993: 565; Tyler 1987: 17-18). In retrospect some members of the 'A team' express criticism about the effectiveness of the

strategy group and believe that very little was achieved (Lawson 1993: 681; Howe 1995: 519).

Two events stand out in the Conservatives' pre-election efforts to revitalise their fortune. The first was the Conservative Party conference in October 1986. Saatchi & Saatchi was involved in planning and staging the conference to an unprecedented degree. The marketing agency not only co-ordinated the publicity and designed the publicity material, they also drafted outlines for the minister's speeches to ensure that they contained a positive package of new policy announcements. Saatchis was also involved in choosing the slogan of the conference: 'The Next Move Forward'. This was designed to counter the impression of a governing party which had run out of ideas (Davies 1995: 212; Sharkey 1989: 64). The conference was regarded a great success and a "turning-point" (Lawson 1993: 659) for the Thatcher Government. The second event was the Prime Minister's triumphant visit to the Soviet Union two months before she called the election. Even before Thatcher arrived an official at the British Embassy in Moscow admitted that the visit was all about pictures (Cockerell 1989: 317). For example she was filmed visiting a monastery and lighting a 'candle of freedom'. On several occasions she was pictured being applauded by enthusiastic crowds. She was also filmed as women kissed her hand and she gave a well received combative interview on Soviet television (Riddell 1991: 185; Young 1991: 514). Cockerell comments that sometimes "it almost appeared as if the Prime Minister were fighting a by-election in Moscow North" (Cockerell 1989: 318). Her role as an international leader was further promoted by her visit to the G7 Economic Summit in Venice during the final week of the election campaign.

When the campaign started it was not the Prime Minister whose effective symbolic communication attracted attention but rather the Labour Party which launched its campaign with an impressive 'Kinnock' PEB. The film was an evocative portrayal

of Neil Kinnock's personal background, his character and his political hopes and beliefs. Whereas Prime Minister Callaghan had expressed distaste for photo-opportunities (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 172) and Michael Foot had shown little interest in advanced publicity techniques (Kavanagh 1995: 90) the Labour Party's campaign in 1987 caught up with the modern age of political electioneering. Labour's campaign manager Peter Mandelson emphasises how "key symbolic policies" (Mandelson 1988: 12) were identified to illustrate a fresh approach. Unexpectedly the Prime Minister was confronted with an opposition leader "as adept as the Conservatives in disseminating imagery, symbolism and personality as the food for electoral choice" (Foley 1993: 111). Thatcher and the Conservatives were not only surprised but even judged their own PEB "old-fashioned and amateurish" (Lawson 1993: 695; see also Young 1990: 207-210).

The Conservatives' campaign was also affected by considerable tension between Conservative Central Office and Downing Street. Although Saatchi & Saatchi remained the official party agency, Thatcher was unimpressed with their work and obtained separate advice from the American agency Young & Rubicam. Tim Bell, who had left Saatchis, and Gordon Reece also advised the Prime Minister independently (Hollingsworth 1997: 161-185; see also Tebbit 1988: 258-266). Thatcher had always taken a keen interest in planning and executing the Conservatives' election campaigns. In previous years she had, for example, vetoed posters she considered too negative and a PEB because of its presidential style (Hollingsworth 1997: 73 and 96-97). However during the 1987 campaign she became even more involved in the detailed planning of the campaign as a result of the disagreements between her and the campaign management team in Central Office.

As a result of these difficulties the Prime Minister was only able to focus on her main themes of economic regeneration and optimism during the second half of the

election campaign. 'Thatchertours 1987' was the roving campaign drive. This drive aimed to illustrate the themes of economic regeneration and optimism through photo-opportunities. For example she visited the Gateshead Metro shopping centre, Alton Towers theme park and the Docklands development in London (Thatcher 1993: 576-588). Another aim of 'Thatchertours 1987' was to humanise the Prime Minister. On one occasion Thatcher visited a training school for guide dogs for the blind where she had her face licked by an Alsatian (Cockerell 1989: 326).

Thatcher also insisted on mixing attack posters with positive messages about the accomplishments of the Conservative Government. For example, one attack poster showed a picture of a surrendering soldier with his arms held aloft above the caption 'Labour's defence policy'. Other posters celebrated achievements with slogans such as 'Today Britain has the lowest inflation for twenty years' or 'Income tax is down to its lowest level for twenty years'. At the bottom of the posters it read 'Life's better with the Conservatives. Don't let Labour ruin it' (Hollingsworth 1997: 177-179).

This section has described how the Conservative Party, under Margaret Thatcher's leadership, developed modern campaigning techniques during the general elections of 1979, 1983 and 1987. Under the guidance of marketing experts campaigning was seen as an integrated process of identifying public opinion and target audiences, converting polling results into campaign themes and conveying those themes by way of a carefully structured communication strategy.

The core aims of this integrated electioneering were to demonstrate symbolically (i) the widespread dissatisfaction with the Labour Government in 1979, (ii) the success of strong leadership in 1983 and (iii) the positive effects of economic prosperity in 1987. The symbolic communication of these messages was not just restricted to the

three or four week-period of the election campaigns but started many months prior to the actual campaigns.

Research has repeatedly shown that images of party leaders constitute an important factor in electoral choice (Stewart/Clarke 1992; Bean/Mughan 1989). This is not surprising considering Thatcher's crucial role in communicating the themes of the election campaigns to the British electorate. As leader of the Conservatives and/or Prime Minister she came to represent, amongst other things, the Conservatives' programme and the Government's record.

## V.2.2 Symbolic Problem Solving

This section follows the same outline as section IV.2.2. Examples of symbolic problem solving will be subdivided into three groups: (a) symbolic acts, (b) symbolic programmes and (c) symbolic gestalt. The intention here is not to deny that political actions can have significant material effects but to centre political analysis on the symbolic impact of prime ministerial problem solving.

(a) Symbolic acts are gestures which are not aimed at materially solving the particular problem but are merely intended to show the political leader's concern for the problem and/or to shift the focus of public attention towards a different problem agenda.

Examples of symbolic acts can be found in Thatcher's responses to terrorist attacks. Only four months into the Prime Minister's first term the Provisional IRA murdered Lord Mountbatten. The assassination of this popular member of the Royal Family in conjunction with the killing of eighteen soldiers at Warrenpoint on the same day

induced a profound state of national shock. Thatcher comments: "I decided immediately that I must go to Northern Ireland ... to demonstrate our determination to resist terrorism" (Thatcher 1993: 56). The Prime Minister flew to Ulster two days after the attacks and visited the Parachute Regiment at Crossmaglen, a dangerous border area of the Province. She was filmed wearing a camouflage jacket and red beret and according to Cockerell "was using the visual power of television to demonstrate the Government's response to the murder" (Cockerell 1989: 255).

When the IRA bombed the Grand Hotel in Brighton in October 1984 the Prime Minister was determined that the Conservative Party conference should go ahead only a few hours later. When it did the Prime Minister stressed that "the fact that we are gathered here now, ... is a sign ... that all attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail" (Thatcher 1993: 382). Similarly the Prime Minister's husband intentionally went to Harrods after a car bomb had killed shoppers the previous day in December 1983 (Thatcher 1993: 397; Thatcher 1997: 221).

During 1988/89 symbolic acts were used in relation to a very different policy area. The latter part of the 1980s saw a significant rise in the British public's concern for environmental protection (O'Riordan 1991: 180-181). The Prime Minister, however, was regarded as someone with no particular interest in environmental issues. Hence Thatcher's speech to the Royal Society in September 1988 came as a surprise. In her address she praised the achievements of British scientists and, in particular, those researchers in the British Antarctic Survey who had discovered the ozone hole. The Prime Minister's speech was followed by very few material innovations in Government policy but nevertheless symbolised a significant shift in emphasis (O'Riordan 1991: 180). At the Conservative Party conference a few weeks later Thatcher reiterated her new theme stating that "no generation has a freehold on this earth, all we have is a life tenancy - with a full repairing lease - and this Government intends to meet the terms of that lease in full" (quoted in Thomson

1989: 147). In March 1989 Thatcher co-hosted an international conference in London at which 123 countries discussed the threat to the ozone layer. The combination of these symbolic acts led 'The Economist' to depict the Prime Minister as a caterpillar under the headline of 'The greening of Margaret Thatcher' (The Economist; 11 March 1989; see also Murie 1989: 222).

After the 1983 election victory the Prime Minister initiated a debate on the reintroduction of capital punishment. This can be interpreted as a symbolic act aimed at partially resolving the 'law and order' issue for the Government. The proposed restoration was defeated on a free-vote in Parliament but Thatcher's prominent support for the return of hanging was a constant reminder of her reputation for being 'tough on crime' (New Statesman; 22 July 1988). Noetzel argues that Thatcher's 'capital punishment as a deterrent' initiative was a symbolic reminder of her support for strong military deterrence and linked the latter to the issue of 'law and order' (Noetzel 1987: 78).

Other symbolic acts were less personal. For example, in the period immediately following the 1987 general election the National Health Service dominated the headlines. A public outcry was triggered by dramatic images of the death of a baby who had been kept waiting six weeks for open-heart surgery. The Government reacted with a series of measures including top-up grants for the NHS to finance new pay awards. In addition the Government "symbolized its concern for medical care by carving a separate Department of Health out of the DHSS under a Secretary of State for Health" (Letwin 1992: 215-216).

(b) In contrast to symbolic acts, symbolic programmes have strong material effects. They are intended to offer a real remedy to a particular political, economic, or social problem. However in order to evaluate the programme's real impact on the process of meaning creation in society its symbolic importance must be recognised.

Veljanovski defines privatisation in general terms as "the withdrawal of the state from the production of goods and services" (Veljanovski 1987: 2). He distinguishes between two distinct phases in the privatisation programme of the Thatcher Government. The first phase lasted from 1979 to 1984 and was immediately followed by the second phase. During the first phase firms were sold which had no real characteristics to justify their continued retention in the public sector, for example British Freight. After 1984 the Thatcher Government started to sell so-called public utilities. Here the prospect of real competition was limited if not entirely absent, for example British Telecom or the Regional Water Companies (Veljanovski 1987: 6-7). One of the broader aims of the Thatcher Government was to reduce state interference and to put more reliance on the free market. Accordingly by the end of 1990 the state-owned sector of industry had been reduced by 60%.

One "spill-over benefit" (Lawson 1993: 206) of privatisation was the opportunities it provided for widening share ownership. Other measures were introduced to reinforce this trend, for example employee share schemes, employee share option schemes (ESOPs) or personal equity plans (PEPs). An integral part of the same philosophy was the 'Right to Buy' policy introduced by the Housing Act 1980 which enabled council tenants to buy their homes at a discount price. The sale of over a million houses over the next ten years contributed to the sharp growth of home ownership between 1980 and 1989 (Murie 1989: 214-221). In 1948 Anthony Eden created the phrase: a 'property-owning democracy' (Riddell 1991: 114). These various aspects of the privatisation programme were symbolically linked under a unifying slogan which broadened Eden's phrase to 'popular capitalism'. Nigel Lawson claims that the original slogan 'people's capitalism' was his idea. It was amended by the Prime Minister to 'popular capitalism' as the original reminded her of Communist expressions such as 'people's republic' (Lawson 1993: 224).

Riddell notes that although the number of individual shareholders increased, the proportion of UK shares held by individuals continued to decline with financial institutions increasing their holdings (Riddell 1991: 233-234). The obstacles for small investors to participate in the stock market remain great and some big companies are still reluctant to have a large number of shareholders. Riddell concludes that the "real beneficiaries from popular capitalism have been the minority of the existing well-off, while the majority have been given the illusion of participation, and some of the icing off the cake from privatization" (Riddell 1991: 122). In other words the symbolic meaning of privatisation helped to popularise the programme with the public at large but created a false impression of its real material effects.

A Mori survey conducted in March 1986 of first-time shareholders showed that as a result of owning shares 21% of the sample were now more in favour of companies making it their top priority to increase profits (quoted in Riddell 1991: 123). Letwin points out that the effect of popular capitalism was to provide ordinary people with "an incentive to think differently about the world" (Letwin 1992: 104-105). She also argues that an important symbolic consequence of the Thatcher Government's privatisation lay in its representing a paradigm shift away from holding governments responsible for solving all social problems. Instead the privatisation policy represented "a vivid act of disengagement" (Letwin 1992: 110) and curtailed expectations of what a government can and should do.

Hennessy argues that "Margaret Thatcher has had more impact on the Civil Service than any peacetime prime minister since Mr Gladstone" (Hennessy 1989: 114). Within days of her election victory in 1979 she not only imposed a freeze on Civil Service recruitment but also appointed Sir Derek Rayner, joint managing director of Marks & Spencer, as her first adviser on government streamlining (Stephenson

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1980: 53). Sir Derek's Efficiency Unit developed a strategy for cost savings and improving the Civil Service by introducing a managerial culture. By 1987 Thatcher's initiative had produced a cumulative saving of £1 billion and the Civil Service had shrunk by some 20% to its smallest since 1945 (Hennessy 1989: 116).

There were also some institutional changes. In 1981 the Prime Minister abolished the Civil Service Department and distributed its functions to the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. After the election in 1983 Thatcher wound up the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) which was a 'think-tank' for the Cabinet set up by Prime Minister Heath (Jones 1985: 88-95). Not all changes were made in view of cost or efficiency considerations, however, overall Thatcher's radical reform of the Civil Service reflected the Government's broader aims of small government, less state intervention and greater reliance on market forces. Hence these reforms were an important symbol for political credibility when free-market reforms were implemented in other areas of British society.

The step-by-step reform of industrial relations was one of the most significant changes brought about by the Thatcher Premiership. Having come to power in the aftermath of the 'winter of discontent', Thatcher was committed to curbing trade union power in order to improve the performance of the British economy. A series of legislative measures were primarily aimed at (i) making trade unions more responsible and (ii) limiting their power. The Employment Acts of 1980, 1982 and 1988 and the Trade Union Act 1984 included changes such as restricting lawful picketing, making trade unions liable for damages arising from unlawful industrial actions and removing various closed shop immunities (Kavanagh 1990: 235-236). Other factors which weakened trade union power included the dramatic fall in union membership, the sudden rise in unemployment in the early 1980s and the arrival of new concepts of human resource management in the UK (Roberts 1989: 69-74).

Some high-profile symbolic confrontations accompanied the legislative reform of industrial relations. The unions' attempt to reassert their power was exemplified in the Steel Strike in 1980, the print union strike at 'Fortress Wapping' in 1986 and the Dock Strike in 1989. However the most dramatic confrontation was the miners' strike of 1984/85. The strike was mainly targeted against a closure programme for uneconomic pits, however the "specific issue ... mattered much less than the symbolism of the dispute" (G. Smith 1990: 139). From its outset the strike was regarded as "the long-delayed battle on the issue of 'Who governs Britain?'" (Cole 1996: 273). After twelve-months the union leaders called off the strike which ended not only in failure for the miners but also in the splitting of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). It is said that the "old relationship [between the government and trade unions] was symbolized by late-night crisis meetings at 10 Downing Street over beer and sandwiches" (Clarke 1991: 310). In sharp contrast the Thatcher Government's victory against the NUM represented a dramatic loss of power and status for trade unions in general. The victory was a vivid symbol of a British government's ability to govern against the will of the trade unions. Thatcher had effectively "taken one major constitutional issue - the government versus the unions - entirely out of politics" (Bogdanor 1989: 134).

Maintaining a strong military defence capability was a policy very closely associated with Margaret Thatcher. She vigorously supported NATO's decision to deploy US Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe, despite large-scale protests. The decision was taken to maintain a strong nuclear deterrence by replacing the Polaris missile system with Trident. Furthermore the defence budget in 1985/86 was 28% higher in inflation adjusted terms than in 1978/79 even excluding the additional spending for the Falklands war (Freedman 1989: 143-153; Riddell 1991: 199-203). The Prime Minister's combative anti-Soviet rhetoric, particularly in the period between 1979 and 1984, further emphasised the Thatcher Government's defence policy. In 1976

the Soviet news agency Tass attached the tag 'Iron Lady' to the then Leader of the Opposition based on rhetoric alone.

The recapture of the Falkland Islands in the spring of 1982 can be interpreted as symbolically legitimising the concrete actions and the general approach towards defence policy of the Thatcher Government. However like the invasion of Grenada for President Reagan, the victory in the Falklands war also conveyed a much broader symbolic message. The so-called 'Falklands Factor' revived the fortunes of the Thatcher Government with a wave of nationalistic pride pushing aside an array of difficulties in domestic politics. The 'Falklands Factor' also "became the Thatcher Factor" (Jenkins 1987: 165) and was "converted into a Leadership Factor" (Cole 1996: 262). The Prime Minister was seen as "the central driving force ... in absolute command" (The Times; 31 March 1983) of the campaign. This style of leadership turned the Falklands war into a personal victory for Margaret Thatcher and transformed her "status from that of struggling politician to national leader" (Cole 1996: 262). After the task force had returned, the military success was further personalised by the Prime Minister herself taking the salute at the victory parade in the City of London and by her surprise visit to the Falkland Islands in January 1983 (Young 1991: 282 and 313).

The Falklands war was also seen as having laid to rest the humiliating experience of the Suez expedition of 1956 (Harris 1988: 135). In an even broader context the victory was not only interpreted as having stopped the "long retreat" (Thatcher 1993: 173) of British foreign policy but also as "a striking symbol of the attempt by Mrs Thatcher and the Conservatives to arrest the decline of Britain" (Riddell 1991: 215).

(c) In section IV.2.2 the symbolic gestalt of the Reagan Presidency was defined as the wider cultural meaning of its time. Correspondingly we will concentrate here on

how the Thatcher Premiership came to represent more than merely the sum of its actions and in doing so can be regarded as having solved problems symbolically.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher frequently referred to the 'relative decline' of Britain. For example she said that "[u]nless we change our ways and our direction, our greatness as a nation will soon be a footnote in the history books, a distant memory of an off-shore island lost in the mists of time - like Camelot, remembered kindly for its noble past" (quoted in Clarke 1986: 32). Referring to the 'decline' of Britain was by no means a new notion (Barnett 1972; Wiener 1981) but the arrival of IMF officials in Whitehall in 1976 and the 'winter of discontent' had added to the growing feeling of a nation in crisis. There was a climate of "deep anger and despair about the state of Britain" (Ranelagh 1992: 171). Shortly after the Conservatives' election victory in 1979 Prime Minister Thatcher set out the new Government's objectives: "The mission of this Government is much more than the promotion of economic progress. It is to renew the spirit and solidarity of the nation. ... [W]e need to inspire a new national mood, as much as to carry through legislation. At the heart of a new mood in the nation must be a recovery of our self-confidence and our self respect. Nothing is beyond us. Decline is not inevitable" (quoted in Riddell 1991: 7).

Jenkins observes that during the early years of the Thatcher era "the psychological need was for a success, a success of some kind, an end to failure and humiliation, to do something well" (Jenkins 1987: 163). This social craving for a tangible accomplishment is the reason why during the Falklands war Thatcher was able to employ "the symbols of an imperial nostalgia in a patriotic mobilization" (Hall/Jacques 1983: 10). Only a few weeks after the Argentine surrender, the Prime Minister claimed: "We have ceased to be a nation in retreat. We have instead a newfound confidence - born in the economic battles at home and tested and found true 8000 miles away ... we rejoice that Britain has rekindled that spirit which has

fired her for generations past and which today has begun to burn as brightly as before. Britain found herself again in the South Atlantic" (Thatcher 1993: 235). It was a fortuitous coincidence that while the victorious task force was returning home to Portsmouth harbour, archaeologists were at the same place preparing to raise Henry VIII's flagship the 'Mary Rose'. Media reports created a close association between the return of the task force and the raising of past glory (The Attic: BBC 2; 13 June 1995).

However it was not just the Falklands war and the economic revival of the 1980s which contributed to the Thatcher Premiership's symbolic defiance of 'decline'. Patrick Cosgrave, a political adviser to Margaret Thatcher, describes the character of the Thatcher Premiership as "essentially a matter of recapturing the past. ... At the heart of the whole enterprise was this romantic idea of what Britain should be" (The Attic: BBC 2; 13 June 1995). We will return to this notion throughout the remainder of this chapter. Thatcher often referred to the importance of 'Victorian virtues' such as hard work, self-reliance, thrift and patriotism. She considered Victorian England and its values not only "a symbol of vanished stability" (New Statesman; 27 May 1983) but also pivotal in re-asserting successful British traditions (Marquand 1988: 164).

'Thatcherism' is the other core element of the symbolic gestalt of Thatcher's Premiership. For the first time an 'ism' became attached to the name of a British prime minister. There was, and still is, no agreement about the meaning of 'Thatcherism' or 'Thatcherite'. Such terms "meant very different things to different people and were used as terms of praise and as terms of opprobrium" (Butler/Kavanagh 1984: 1-2). Kavanagh, for example, sees in 'Thatcherism' "[a]bove all ... a political style, associated with her no-nonsense leadership and rejection of a consensus politics" (Kavanagh 1987: 48). In contrast Hall regards 'Thatcherism' as "the subtle capacity to identify the positive aspirations of people

with the market and the restoration of the capitalist ethic, and to present this as a natural alliance" (S. Hall 1984: 22). Some academics even created new concepts to explain 'Thatcherism' such as Hall's "authoritarian populism" (S. Hall 1979). Others denied 'Thatcherism' the status of a theory but nevertheless recognised the importance of the promotion of "the vigorous virtues in individuals" (Letwin 1992: 40). In fact the literature on this topic is so large that some writings exclusively deal with categorising the numerous explanations of 'Thatcherism' (Marsh 1995).

From the point of view of symbolic gestalt 'Thatcherism' came to represent something sufficiently distinct from established styles, practices and policies for it to merit attention in its own right. It became a widely debated 'ism' because it was judged to be unlike previous governments. A prominent distinguishing feature of 'Thatcherism' was its challenge to the consensus of British post-war politics. Consensus in this context refers to a set of policies or values which the Labour and the Conservative parties had to a large extent shared. For example the commitment to a high level of employment and to sustaining a mixed economy in which there was a large role for state intervention (Clarke 1991: 292). Thatcher openly challenged consensus politics. To her consensus was "the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies ... What great cause would have been fought and won under the banner 'I stand for consensus'?" (Thatcher 1993: 167).

The symbolic gestalt of the Thatcher Premiership was therefore comprised of two elements: (i) the Prime Minister's self-proclaimed assault on the 'decline' of Britain, in conjunction with (ii) 'Thatcherism' representing a distinct political phenomenon. Both elements were important in changing the national mood and the self-image of Britain in the 1980s. This is the reason why Noetzel argues that *the symbols of Thatcher politics are ... more important than their actual content* ("Die Symbole der Thatcher-Politik sind ... wichtiger als ihre eigentlichen Inhalte", Noetzel 1987: 24).

As suggested in the previous chapter, symbolic problem solving can be seen either as a calculated political manoeuvre or as part of an abstract social process of meaning creation. Both types of problem solving occurred during the Thatcher Premiership. Thatcher deliberately employed symbolic acts to illustrate certain points such as an uncompromising attitude towards terrorism or to display concern for the environment. The Prime Minister's reactions during certain formative events such as the miners' strike or the Falklands war had a lasting impact on the public assessment of industrial relations and defence policy. Moreover we have seen that the symbolism of such programmes is crucial to how society interprets the effects of policies. The symbolic gestalt is heavily influenced by the interaction between political action, material circumstances and national mood. The symbolic gestalt of the Thatcher Premiership was important for the general public in deciding whether its policies were an appropriate response to the state of Britain.

## V.2.3 Symbolic Rhetoric

Margaret Thatcher has always regarded oratory as an important component of her political life. She had gained considerable experience in public speaking early in her political career and had impressed colleagues in the House of Commons by her well-informed and combative performances[1] .

Intensive preparations were a key feature of the Prime Minister's speech-making. When asked by her daughter in 1983 about her speech-making philosophy Thatcher replied: "[I]t's got to be my ideas. Not every bit of the draft is mine but, as you

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[1] Selected examples of speeches given by Mrs Thatcher before she became Prime Minister are contained in Thatcher 1977.

know, I go through it all. First we do the ideas, then they [my speech writers] go away and draft, then that draft's usually torn up, then we do another one, and then I literally spend hours and hours going through that. We change it and change it, and some speeches we'd still be changing now, if we hadn't delivered them already" (quoted in Thatcher 1983: 135). Charles Powell, the Prime Minister's private secretary from 1984-1991, describes the technique for those involved behind the scenes with Margaret Thatcher's speeches: "Never put anything worthwhile in the first draft, for it will be rejected. Keep the structure for the second draft, for the first will inevitably be condemned as not having one. Have the collected works of Rudyard Kipling to hand. Don't even try to draft a peroration until you are right up against a time limit, because they are always revised right down to the line. Be ready to stay up until six in the morning on the day of delivery if necessary" (quoted in The Times; 29 October 1992).

The former playwright Ronald Millar acted as the Prime Minister's chief speech writer. Millar was responsible for (i) providing his own material for Thatcher's speeches and (ii) for polishing drafts. Thatcher describes the latter of his two functions as sending the text of a speech "to Ronnie to be (what I would always later describe as) 'Ronni-fied'. It came back transformed. More precisely, it came back a speech" (Thatcher 1995: 307). Millar explains 'Ronnifying' as "I think what I had to do was make it natural. A combination of natural expression and theatrical impact. It sounds a contradiction in terms but all good plays have it" (quoted in The Times; 7 May 1993).

Painstaking preparations also featured in rehearsal of the delivery of an important speech or a major TV interview. Thatcher describes, for example, how she practised her address to the joint meeting of Congress in the British Embassy where she was staying all night "until I had got every intonation and emphasis right" (Thatcher 1993: 468). Before a major TV interview Tim Bell and others would visit

the Prime Minister to help her practise her performance. She would require Bell to be a 'nasty interviewer' and to throw questions at her (Hollingsworth 1997: 67). It was not just major speeches and interviews which were carefully prepared but also Questions to the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. Prior to every session Thatcher spent at least two hours with her advisers trying to anticipate those issues likely to be raised and rehearsing mock questions (Thatcher 1993: 41; Jones 1993: 81).

When President Reagan addressed both Houses of Parliament in the summer of 1982 the Prime Minister admired his use of the teleprompter, a device which projects the text of the speech from two hidden cameras onto transparent lecterns on either side of the speaker. Thatcher comments that it seemed as if the President had delivered the speech without a single note (Thatcher 1993: 258). She was so impressed that she pioneered the use of the device at the Conservative Party conference in Brighton of the same year (Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 202-203). Another innovation used by her for the first time at the Brighton conference was an electronic adjustable height-lectern (Thomas 1989: 115).

Let us now turn to some of the symbolic elements in the Prime Minister's rhetoric. An important theme of many of Prime Minister Thatcher's speeches was Britain's international position in the 1980s. She said, for example, in 1988: "I believe that Britain's role and standing in the world have increased immeasurably as we have succeeded in overcoming our problems at home, getting our economy right, and proving ourselves a staunch ally. We are now able once again to exercise the leadership and influence which we have historically shown" (quoted in Riddell 1991: 184). This quote is comparable to those dealing with the 'end to decline' theme in the preceding section.

Symbolic rhetoric assisted the Prime Minister in presenting the Government's policies for turning Britain's fortunes around into a crusade-like venture. In 1986 Thatcher declared that "millions have already become shareholders. And soon there will be opportunities for millions more, in British Gas, British Airways, British Airports and Rolls Royce" (quoted in Gaffney 1991: 172). She reflected triumphantly, perhaps even grandiosely, on her perception of the impact of the privatisation programme: "The great political reform of the last century was to enable more and more people to have a vote. Now the great Tory reform of this century is to enable more and more people to own property. Popular capitalism is nothing less than a crusade to enfranchise the many in the economic life of the nation. We Conservatives are returning power to the people. That is the way to one nation, one people" (quoted in Gaffney 1991: 172). Thatcher's intention expressed in 1987 "to go on and on and on" (quoted in Cole 1996: 293) and statements such as "[d]o not say it is time for something else! Thatcherism is not for a decade. It is for centuries!" (quoted in Gilmour 1993: 327) enhanced the impression of a long-term project constructed around the person of the Prime Minister.

The impression of a crusade was also apparent in Thatcher's depiction of the role of government. In 1986 she said: "This government has rolled back the frontiers of the state and will roll them back still further" (quoted in Gaffney 1991: 171). In her Bruges speech in the summer of 1988 she made the same point this time with an anti-European emphasis: "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels" (Thatcher 1993: 744-745). The Prime Minister's rhetoric implies that the Thatcher Premiership is simply a form of popular self-government which, to use one of her favourite phrases, simply allows people to "go about their daily lives" (quoted in Gaffney 1991: 162). Gaffney argues that Thatcher's rhetoric implies that she is not really "in government, but is simply the spokesperson for ordinary people" (Gaffney 1991:

181). The following statements illustrate this point: "I believe it [Labour policy] totally misjudges the character of the British people", "we want to see a Britain where ..." or "I believe the interests of Britain ..." (quoted in Gaffney 1991: 181 and 183). The same point is evident when the Prime Minister distances herself from her own cabinet colleagues and refers to them as 'they' in comments which suggest that 'they' are making life difficult for her, 'they' have to be persuaded, or 'they' are too concerned with defending the interests of their own departments (King 1985: 118).

The Prime Minister's anti-government rhetoric is reinforced by her presentation of government in the hands of the opposition as an oppressive force. "Labour may say they put people first, but their conference voted to put *government* first and that means putting people last" (quoted in Gaffney 1991: 169). A Labour government is depicted as bringing ideology into every part of society. "What the Labour Party of today wants is: housing *municipalised,* industry *nationalised,* the police service *politicised,* the judiciary *radicalised,* union membership *tyrannised,* and above all - and most serious of all - our defences *neutralised.* Never!" (quoted in Gaffney 1991: 169). Gaffney finds that throughout Thatcher's Conservative Party conference speech in 1986, the Labour Party is presented as an entity "which the people have to be warned against and protected from" (Gaffney 1991: 176).

The rhetorical theme of a political crusade was suitably accompanied by the "warrior image" (Kavanagh 1990: 247) of Margaret Thatcher. The Prime Minister did not stand out as a particularly inspiring or visionary orator. Indeed relatively few of her speeches "cast forward into the future with grand prophetic utterance" (Young 1991: 603). However "[s]he was a fighting speaker who always liked to win, preferably leaving a corpse rather than taking prisoners" (Young 1991: 242). Young cites one example which occurred during Questions to the Prime Minister. Michael Foot, the Labour leader, asked if she could confirm "that a married man on

average earnings with two children, who becomes unemployed, will be £ 13 a week worse off than he would have been had the Government not cut the value of benefits?" (quoted in Young 1991: 243). The Prime Minister responded by demonstrating her command of detail: "Would the right honourable gentleman, in giving me that figure, tell me how he has dealt with earnings-related supplement?" (quoted in Young 1991: 243). Foot was visibly unprepared and lost the point.

Some notorious phrases and soundbites further underline Thatcher's fighting image. The acronym 'TINA' ('there is no alternative') was used to make the case for the Thatcher Government's economic policy and became closely identified with the Prime Minister. Of colleagues and journalists she asked 'Is he one of us?' to identify their support. The expression 'wets' was employed for those in Thatcher's first Cabinet who disagreed with her economic and social policy. Having fought the "enemy without in the Falklands" (quoted in Gilmour 1993: 93), in 1984 she warned of the "enemy within" (quoted in Gilmour 1993: 93) referring to the striking miners. Millar provided Thatcher with probably her most famous soundbite at the Conservative Party conference in Brighton in 1980: "To those waiting with bated breath for that favourite media catchphrase, the 'U-turn', I have only one thing to say. 'You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning'" (Thatcher 1993: 122). Millar believes that the soundbite caught on because "[i]t *was* Thatcher and was instantly seen to be her by the public" (Millar 1993: 288). At the following year's party conference she repeated a similar message. "If ever a Conservative government starts to do what they know to be wrong because they are afraid to do what is right, then is the time for the Tories to cry 'stop'. But you will never need to do that while I am Prime Minister" (quoted in Rose 1984: xv).

The Prime Minister was also renowned for using very direct language. When asked in 1980 why she did not sack James Prior for leaked remarks about the Chairman of British Steel she said: "Good heavens, if you're going to kick up a terrible fuss over

one mistake it doesn't really seem to be fair does it? ... [Y]ou don't just sack a chap for one mistake" (quoted in Webster 1990: 151). Other examples are calling those who drew attention to unemployment as "moaning minnies" (quoted in Webster 1990: 153) or exclaiming that criticism of her economic policies in 1990 was "[p]oppycock. Codswallop, bunkum and balderdash. It took someone with real spine to do it" (quoted in Gilmour 1993: 54).

At times Thatcher deliberately cultivated her image of an 'Iron Lady' or 'Headmistress'. During the 1983 election she said: "The Russians said that I was an Iron Lady. They were right. Britain needs an Iron Lady" (quoted in Atkinson 1984: 118). During the same election campaign she said in an interview: "Well I've known some very very good headmistresses who've launched their pupils on wonderful careers. ... Yes, my style is of vigorous leadership. ... Yes, I do believe in trying to persuade people that the things I believe in are the things they should follow" (quoted in Atkinson 1984: 118). The Prime Minister's style in political interviews was also unusual. She frequently voiced objections to being interrupted and used phrases such as 'no, please let me go on ... may I just finish? ... no don't stop me'. Nevertheless, contrary to the impression that she created, namely that she was regularly interrupted, comparing the number of interruptions during interviews of the Prime Minister with interruptions of Neil Kinnock, Bull and Mayer found that interviewers did not interrupt Thatcher more often than the opposition leader. However Margaret Thatcher's style did make interviewers more frequently justify or apologise for their role (Bull/Mayer 1988: 44-45).

Only rarely did the Prime Minister deviate from her fighting-style rhetoric. When she did, for example to describe an emotional ordeal, she used images of the English landscape or the rural past (Webster 1990: 99-100). The morning after the Brighton bomb, Margaret Thatcher said: "It was a lovely morning. We've not had many lovely days. The sun was coming through the stained glass windows and

falling on some flowers right across the church. And it just occurred to me that this was the day I was not meant to see" (quoted in Webster 1990: 100). After the Falklands war she used similar imagery to describe her feelings during the conflict: "The flowers grow. The garden looks the same. ... The sun shines ... someone has had terrible news that day. Yet life goes on. They still have to cut the hay ... You think of what's happened to someone who will go out in the same morning ... and it won't still their sad hearts" (quoted in Webster 1990: 100).

In a BBC radio interview in 1985 Thatcher described her kind of Conservatism as "populist ... I would say many of the things I've said strike a chord in the hearts of ordinary people. Why? Because they're British, because their character is independent, because they don't like to be shoved around, because they are prepared to take responsibility" (quoted in Kavanagh 1990: 249). Populism can be regarded as the core element of Prime Minister Thatcher's symbolic rhetoric. It took a number of different forms. For example, Tim Bell observes how good Thatcher was at adapting her use of language in photo-opportunities during election campaigns: "She talked about holidays, cars, schools, houses and owning your own home and not spending more than you've got in your purse. ... She expressed herself in very ordinary language in a way they saw things. It was unusual political language and a departure from the way the Tory Party leaders had approached the electorate in the past" (quoted in Hollingsworth 1997: 73). For example, when she was filmed talking to women workers in a tea factory in Newcastle she said "I find teabags are so much more convenient" (quoted in Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 194). In her rhetoric the idea of a 'federated Europe' becomes "an airy-fairy concept" (quoted in Raban 1989: 29), and 'society' is "you and me and our next-door neighbour and everyone we know in our town" (quoted in Raban 1989: 29). On a different occasion she said "[t]here is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" (quoted in Webster 1990: 57). Thatcher does not like to waste time with complex ideas but instead wants to deal with what

she calls the "nitty gritty" (quoted in Raban 1989: 30). "This is the language that a lot of people like to hear. It answers intimately to a general impatience with difficult abstractions and with the rhetoric of patrician mystification in which government has so often been conducted. People warm to its fierceness, to its air of cutting the cackle and getting to the marrow of things" (Raban 1989: 68).

Her political opponents acknowledge the Prime Minister's populist skills. Labour MP Peter Shore says that Margaret Thatcher "has the ability to take hold of complex issues and, if you like, simplify them, moralise them, according to her own bourgeois values, and to get them across" (quoted in Young/Sloman 1986: 63-64). Labour MP Michael Meacher comments that "[s]he carves out a single phrase, a sentence, two sentences which convey a very powerful message that more often than not strikes a chord, even though I think it is sometimes quite wrong" (quoted in Young/Sloman 1986: 68).

Another element of Thatcher's rhetorical populism is what Clarke calls "preaching the simple economic maxims of the cornershop" (Clarke 1991: 299). Responding to some of her economic critics she said that "having myself been brought up over the shop, I sometimes wonder whether they [her critics] back their forecasts with their own money" (quoted in Young 1991: 217). She said in 1981 that her "policies are based not on some economic theory but on things I and millions like me were brought up with: an honest day's work for an honest day's pay; live within your means; put by a nest egg for a rainy day; pay your bills on time" (quoted in Ranelagh 1992: 33-34). The Prime Minister often compared the management of the British economy with the budgeting of a housewife. Phrases such as 'think of politics at your own household level' or 'every housewife knows that you have to live within your means' were used in many of her speeches and interviews. Thatcher defends using the rhetorical symbol of a housewife's budget to illustrate how the national economy should be run: "I knew that every housewife would

understand what I was doing. After all she has her own budget. She knows that if she spends more on one thing she's got to spend less on another. And if she has something to buy that costs more, and she borrows, she mustn't let herself get into too much debt. Otherwise she'll never be able to repay. That's exactly what I was doing with the nation's budget" (The Downing Street Years, Part 1: BBC 1; 20 October 1993)

Margaret Thatcher often linked the 'housewife analogy' with phrases emphasising the motif of common sense when explaining her economic thinking. Her statements contain phrases such as 'ordinary decent people to whom both thrift and hard work are virtues', 'lack of discipline', 'economic policies that make sense' (quoted in Little 1988: 58-59), 'restoring honest money', 'sound money' (Thatcher 1993: 36) or getting unemployment down by 'simply the old fashioned way' (quoted in Harris 1988: 106). The populist theme of the family also featured frequently in her rhetoric. She sees the family as "the whole basis of our life" (quoted in Webster 1990: 57). On her tenth anniversary as Prime Minister she had the message that the "family and its maintenance really is the most important thing not only in your personal life but in the life of any community, because that is the unit on which the whole of the nation is built" (quoted in Webster 1990: 59). Webster argues that the motif of the family in Thatcher's rhetoric has two important functions. First of all, it serves as a "symbol of stability, the one resting place that Thatcherism offers" (Webster 1990: 58). Secondly, the family motif serves to counter any charges that Thatcherism is simply greed. Pursuing wealth and promoting profit is rhetorically linked with the aim of giving ones family a better life. In other words the family motif "serves as a justification for competitive individualism" (Webster 1990: 57).

Last but not least the notion of 'Britishness' constituted a core element in the Prime Minister's rhetorical repertoire. Thatcher said in 1983: "What I think we have discovered and expressed, both in our four years of Government and in the

programme which grew out of those four years, was where the heart of the British people lies" (quoted in Thomson 1989: 151). She also proclaimed that "[s]tate socialism is not in the character of the British people. It has no place in our traditions. It has no place in our hearts" (quoted in Thomson 1989: 152). In a television interview shortly after the Falklands war, the Prime Minister showed the journalist a porcelain statute of three British soldiers raising the Union Jack on the islands and remarked: "Look above all at the expression on the faces of the marines. It is the spirit of Britain and it is everything that makes us great" (The Attic: BBC 2; 13 June 1995). She often used expressions such as 'my country', 'we British', 'our nation', 'we in Britain are rightly proud' (quoted in Letwin 1992: 304) or talked about defending 'our boys' and 'our money' (quoted in Riddell 1991: 186). The Prime Minister claimed to possess an almost instinctive knowledge of the real 'British character'. She said: "Deep in their instincts people find what I am saying and doing right. And I know it is, because that is the way I was brought up. I am eternally grateful for the way I was brought up in a small town. We knew everyone, we knew what people thought. I sort of regard myself as a very normal, ordinary person, with all the right, instinctive antennae" (quoted in Young 1991: 208).

References to 'Victorian values' in the Prime Minister's rhetoric served as a symbol of the achievements of past 'Britishness'. Britain's economic problems were presented as having "a moral dimension, or had their roots in a morality that took socialist and welfarist assumptions for granted" (Gould/Anderson 1987: 42). She said: "Look at the enormous increase in industry and commerce in this country during Victorian times, which brought with it a consciousness of duty to others. They built the hospitals. They built the schools. They built the prisons. They built the industries. They built the town halls" (quoted in Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 198). Thatcher made her most famous statement on 'Victorian values' in April 1983: "I was brought up by a Victorian grandmother. We were taught to work jolly hard. We were taught to prove yourself; we were taught self reliance; we were

taught to live within our income. You were taught that cleanliness is next to godliness. You were taught self-respect. You were taught always to give a hand to your neighbour. You were taught tremendous pride in your country. All of theses things are Victorian values. They are also perennial values. ... [t]hey were good values and they led to tremendous improvements in the standard of living" (quoted in Crewe 1989: 239).

Thatcher appreciates that speaking publicly as Prime Minister in her own words is "a theatrical as well as a political event" (Thatcher 1993: 569). Her elaborate preparations for speeches and interviews illustrate her acute awareness of impression management by oratory. The emphasis of the Prime Minister's symbolic rhetoric lay on populist combative performances. Rose comments that Thatcher possesses "rhetorical zeal" (Rose 1984: xv). The eagerness in her oratory may be seen as symbolising her forceful style of political leadership. Moreover her symbolic rhetoric provides a frame of reference for the British public to interpret the Thatcher Government's policies as part of a wider scheme. Prime Minister Thatcher rhetorically simplified complex social reality by interpreting events around such motifs as the 'British character' and 'making Britain great again'.

## V.2.4 The Fictionalisation of the Premiership

In the previous case study we described the fictionalisation of the Reagan Presidency as the process of dramatising and personalising events so that political information becomes transformed into a steady stream of episodes with well-known characters and familiar storylines. The communication requirements of the modern media combined with skilful impression management by President Reagan were

held responsible for this development. In this section we will show that the Thatcher Premiership also had a distinct narrative, with principal friends and foes.

Throughout Thatcher's period in office the British press liked stories such as 'Maggie Goes To War', 'Maggie's Fury Over Minister's Blunder', 'Quick Win For Maggie' or 'Maggie's Aid for Afghan Children'. The style of these headlines not only personalised the messages but the use of 'Maggie' instead of 'Mrs Thatcher' or 'The Prime Minister' added informality and a certain familiarity to their content. On one occasion the 'Daily Mail' wrote: "'Food: Now Maggie Steps In'. Mrs Thatcher last night dramatically intensified Government action on food safety" (quoted in The Spectator; 25 February 1989: 8). A food scare had broken out more than two months before the Prime Minister's announcement and 'Maggie's' dramatic action amounted to nothing more than the setting up of a committee to monitor conflicting advice to the government on food safety. On other occasions the popular press credited her with, for example, 'moving' to outlaw the sale of human kidneys or 'ordering' senior ministers to cooperate with Toyota in its search for a suitable factory site (The Spectator; 25 February 1989: 9). The impression given was one of personal governing, that "[n]othing is too difficult for her, whether it be sorting out food safety, taking action on kidneys or saving Afghan babies" (The Spectator; 25 February 1989: 10).

Smith writes that the "Reagan-Thatcher relationship in some ways resembled a collection of long-running soap operas, with the same main actors but different plots and varied settings. Just as we are wondering what will be the sequel to last night's drama, we get the next instalment of another one. But the performances of the two principal actors do not seem to be affected by what is happening to them in the other series. Like the good professionals they are, they are able just to keep on relating to each other" (G. Smith 1990: 95). Let us take a closer look at this special transatlantic relationship.

It is true to say that at first sight Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan "are a most improbable couple, he waffling, windy and uninterested in detailed policy: she sharp, direct and a master of every paper that crosses her desk" (Young/Sloman 1986: 108). Yet their mutual admiration dated back years before taking office in Britain and the United States respectively (Thatcher 1995: 372; Reagan 1990: 204). When Ronald Reagan won the presidential election in 1980, Margaret Thatcher was amongst the first who sent "an exceptionally warm message of congratulation" (The Times; 6 November 1980). The Prime Minister was also the first foreign leader to visit President Reagan in Washington. All of their encounters were described as particularly warm and close, for instance, "[t]he weather which greeted Mrs Thatcher's arrival at the White House was as bright as the atmosphere that prevailed inside" (The Times; 21 February 1985).

President Reagan was the only political leader the Prime Minister always greeted with a kiss. After the assassination attempt on Reagan in March 1981, Thatcher's telegram to the President and her statement of how "very distressed" (quoted in The Times; 31 March 1981) she felt was the headline story. Young remarks that "[w]hatever their differences, and whenever they found themselves separately in crisis, they presented each other with irreplaceable draughts of personal reassurance" (Young 1991: 257). These personal compliments and tributes to each others leadership qualities always took up a prominent place in newspaper reports. For example, Reagan said that Thatcher "is a strong and principled leader in the international arena" (quoted in The Times; 18 July 1987). Thatcher described herself to the press as "a great fan" (quoted in The Times; 21 February 1985) of the President and added: "I feel no inhibitions in describing our relations as very, very special" (quoted in The Times; 21 February 1985). During the British general election in 1987, Reagan said to foreign newspaper journalists: "I admire the Prime Minister and the progress that has been made in many fields there" (quoted in The

Times; 27 May 1987). The President also criticised the Labour Party's stand on defence as "grievous errors" (quoted in The Times; 28 May 1987). 'The Times' commented that Reagan's remarks "came closer than any US official has yet done to open intervention in the election in support of Mrs Thatcher" (The Times; 28 May 1987). When the President and the Prime Minister held talks in Washington in July 1987, Thatcher made an unprecedented appeal to the American public to leave the Iran-Contra scandal behind in order to end undermining President Reagan's successful leadership of the Western world (The Times; 18 July 1987).

Prime Minister Thatcher was also criticised for her soap opera relationship with President Reagan. The main charge against her was one of sycophancy towards the President. Such criticism was made particularly at a time when both leaders were unpopular with their electorates. 'The Sunday Times' reported, for example, that Thatcher did not want to hear any criticism of Reagan amongst her inner circle of friends and advisers. Under the headline 'The Iron Lady and the Lone Ranger' the newspaper commented: "It is an error enough for one national leader to become wholly dedicated to the service of another. But when the latter is a man so ignorant and single-minded as President Reagan, fealty becomes alarming ... Are we independent sceptic or dependent pawn?" (The Sunday Times; 14 March 1982).

Reports of how well the two leaders got along also resulted in a "widespread public perception that the Thatcher-Reagan relationship led to a rebirth of Anglo-American friendship" (S. Smith 1990: 126). British commentators in particular praised a revival of the generally ill-defined 'special relationship' between the United States and Britain. In view of the Thatcher-Reagan friendship Hill appropriately labelled the 'special relationship' a "sentimental alliance" (Hill 1986: 2).

Confrontation rather than co-operation characterised Margaret Thatcher's attitude towards Europe throughout her period in office. Nigel Lawson comments

poignantly that the Prime Minister "regarded the continental Europeans with distrust and, in private, with undisguised distaste and hostility" (Lawson 1993: 900). During the first phase of her Premiership, Thatcher pressed for a significant reduction in the British contribution to the EC budget. Clarke notes that "her policy seemed to be ... to rampage from summit to summit as a sort of fishwife Britannia demanding her money back" (Clarke 1991: 317). It was not uncommon for other European leaders to criticise her for taking a 'housewifely' attitude to EC finances (The Times; 1 July 1987). In June 1984 the Community finally agreed permanent arrangements for calculating contributions of member states which reduced the contribution of Britain by almost half. Thatcher's 'tough stand' found praise in headlines such as 'Europe United, Maggie Wins a New Deal for Britain' or 'Maggie Home with a Bargain' (quoted in Letwin 1992: 281).

Many of the Prime Minister's policy stands found their expression in high profile clashes with individual 'enemies'. In the case of Europe the Prime Minister's main target was Jacques Delors who became president of the European Commission in 1985. For example, in December 1987 'The Times' headline 'Thatcher-Delors Clash Looming' summed up Thatcher's demands for strict curbs on farm spending which the president dismissed (Letwin 1992: 286). In July 1988 Jacques Delors said that within 10 years 80% of economic and perhaps fiscal and social legislation would be enacted by an embryo European government. The following day Thatcher denounced Delors as a 'fantasist' (Howe 1995: 536). In the summer of 1990 President Delors spoke at the TUC conference and said: "You have totally failed to defeat the Prime Minister in this country, but you have an opportunity through Brussels and Strasbourg to bring social legislation which would be helpful to your cause" (quoted in Letwin 1992: 287). Thatcher responded by accusing the TUC and the Labour Party of "seeking socialism by the back door" or more frivolously "by the back Delors" (quoted in Letwin 1992: 287). Reporting on the Rome European Council in the House of Commons on 30 October 1990, Thatcher uttered the

following infamous outburst: "The President of the Commission, Mr Delors, said at a press conference the other day that he wanted the European Parliament to be the democratic body of the Community. He wanted the Commission to be the Executive and he wanted the Council of Ministers to be the Senate. No. No. No" (quoted in Watkins 1992: 146). Watkins observes that Jacques Delors was the "villain of the week" (Watkins 1992: 140) during the Conservative Party conference at Bournemouth which had taken place only days earlier. Ian Gilmour makes a similar point when he describes the Prime Minister's personal attacks of those months: "Jacques Delors was denounced as though he was the socialist successor to Ken Livingstone as leader of the Greater London Council" (Gilmour 1993: 323).

Ken Livingstone was, of course, another of Thatcher's prime targets. He not only symbolised, in the Prime Minister's opinion, a highly wasteful and redundant institution but also hindered her proposed reforms for local government. The Conservatives' manifesto for the 1983 general election contained, amongst other things, a pledge to abolish the GLC and the Metropolitan County Councils. The subsequent campaign of the GLC against abolition was, in the words of Livingstone, often depicted by the press "as a personal conflict between Mrs Thatcher and me" (Livingstone 1987: 246). Newspapers presented the conflict as 'Thatcher's onslaught on Livingstone's GLC' (The Guardian; 13 June 1984) and as a 'vendetta' of the Prime Minister ensuing from her dislike of Livingstone (The Times; 15 June 1984). The sophisticated campaign by the GLC against abolition in conjunction with Livingstone's astute media skills further highlighted the confrontational nature of the dispute. Although Derek Hatton's Liverpudlian Militant Tendency never succeeded in producing comparable public impact, confrontation between the two protagonists was another example of personalised controversy about local government reforms.

We noted in section V.2.2 how the successful outcome of the Falklands war became a personal triumph for the Prime Minister and symbolically transformed a climate of 'decline' into a mood of national pride. Moreover in Simon Jenkins' words the conflict "was not just a primitive clash of ships and men. It was an almost medieval clash of wills between its two main protagonists" (The Times; 31 March 1983). In this comment Jenkins refers to the confrontation between General Galtieri on the Argentine side and Prime Minister Thatcher on the British side. As the conflict progressed the status of this personalised confrontation rose. The British press increasingly distinguished between the junta led by Galtieri on the one hand and the Argentine population on the other hand. The latter were presented as having been deceived by their leaders and therefore they were not the 'enemy' but rather victims of the Galtieri regime (Ossendorff 1987). It is arguable that without this personalisation, the Prime Minister's conduct during the crisis would not have been interpreted as "the most dramatic confirmation possible of [her] steely resolve" (Bruce-Gardyne 1984: 113) and Thatcher would not have been perceived as "Bodicea with a handbag" (Riddell 1991: 185). The Prime Minister's surprise visit to the Falklands in January 1983 refocused public attention on the personal and dramatic nature of 'her' military victory (Wapshott/Brock 1983: 255).

The confrontation between the Prime Minister and Arthur Scargill, President of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), during the miners' strike in 1984/85 was another dramatic episode. Thatcher saw in Scargill everything she held responsible for Britain's economic decline. Smith notes that Scargill's "domestic style of speaking, combined with a desire to shock, qualified him well for the role of a public threat" (G. Smith 1990: 139). "Thatcherism and Scargillism were made for each other: one fortified the other; each seemed to justify the actions of the other" (Goodman 1985: 18). Dürr shows that the media spent much more time reporting events involving the protagonists of the strike, particularly Margaret Thatcher, Arthur Scargill and Ian MacGregor (Chairman of the Coal Board), than analysing

the underlying issues of pit closures and economic regeneration (Dürr 1985: 413). During the last months of the strike "it seemed that all the main actors were on stage together as if waiting for the final curtain call, if not the applause" (Goodman 1985: 170). Young provides a good description of the potent mixture of personalisation and drama when summarising the main outcome of the strike: "[For the Prime Minister] Scargill's scalp was a permanent trophy" (Young 1991: 378).

The reporting of disagreements within the Thatcher Cabinet was also highly personalised. As mentioned earlier Margaret Thatcher used the term 'wets' for those Ministers, such as Sir Ian Gilmour, Peter Walker, Francis Pym and James Prior who disagreed with her social and economic policies. During the Prime Minister's first years in office the media often carried stories about concessions to the 'wets', alleged rebellions by the 'wets' or the imminent removal of the 'wets'. Cabinet decisions were frequently presented as victories either for Thatcher or the 'wets' and headlines such as 'Battling Maggie Under Attack from Wets' or 'Cabinet Wets Foiled' were common (Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 135; Prior 1986: 134-135). This dramatic fashion of presenting political in-fighting within her Cabinet along with the labelling of her opponents as 'wets' (suggestive of people who lack courage and vigour) helped Thatcher symbolically establish the public persona of a combative and determined Prime Minister.

Commentators often use the terms 'dramatic' or 'drama' when describing certain events of the Thatcher Premiership. One such event was the Westland affair in 1985/86. The fundamental argument behind this crisis was the question of whether Britain's only helicopter manufacturer should be allowed to be sold to an American buyer or whether the company should remain, at least, European owned. However this issue hardly featured in the public perception of the affair. Instead such issues as personal rivalry and the sources of leaks dominated media debate. Dunleavy points out that the symbolic politics model is particularly suited to highlighting the

distinction between the popular perception of the Westland crisis and the underlying substantive arguments (Dunleavy 1995: 217). For instance, from the public's viewpoint one prominent dimension of the affair was the dramatic manner in which Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for Defence, resigned. Cole notes "[h]ere was a powerful minister who had, literally walked out of Cabinet" (Cole 1996: 282). The subsequent news conference Cole remembers as "one of the most dramatic any of us could remember" (Cole 1996: 282). Another dimension of the drama focused on who had authorised the leaking of a letter written by the Solicitor-General which was extremely damaging to Heseltine's case for a European solution. The leak became the central issue of the affair. Particular emphasis was placed on whether the Prime Minister had personally authorised the leak, bringing her integrity into question. Further side-shows dealt with the fury of the Solicitor-General, Sir Patrick Mayhew, over the leaking of his letter, and with the question of whether the resignation of Leon Brittan, who had accepted responsibility for the actions of officials at his Department for Trade and Industry, was decisive in enabling the Prime Minister to survive the affair.

During the final months of her Premiership "Margaret Thatcher's own unfolding drama" (Young 1991: 566) took centre stage. After her resignation in November 1990 analogies from the realm of theatre were used to describe the end of the Thatcher Premiership. "Like an audience leaving a fine performance of a Greek tragedy, the watchers were blessed with the relief that dramatic resolution brings. But high drama also leaves regrets, a sense of loss for a heroine in the grand style, the aftertaste of tragedy" (The Independent; 11 May 1991). It was said that "Margaret Thatcher, an entertainer of unusual - one might say eccentric - mien, was removed in mid-performance" (New Statesman; 29 November 1991: 21). 'Granada' produced a television drama-documentary entitled 'The Final Days' which recaptured the events of her resignation. The aim of the programme was "to satisfy that urge for replaying dramatic events" (The Sunday Times; 8 September 1991).

A succession of tense episodes preceded the events of November 1990. When Nigel Lawson resigned in October 1989 public debate focused on the friction between the Chancellor and the Prime Minister's economic adviser Professor Alan Walters. Only a few weeks later a leadership challenge by the 'stalking horse' candidate Sir Anthony Meyer brought the survival issue of Prime Minister Thatcher to the forefront of public attention. Sir Anthony's challenge raised the prospect of a more serious challenge at any time. The introduction of the poll tax was the other "remarkable political drama" (Cole 1996: 314) of those months and became "intimately bound up with increasingly bitter assaults on Mrs Thatcher's leadership style" (Butler/Adonis/Travers 1994: 155). Thatcher herself observes that "[t]he [community] charge became a rallying point for those who opposed me" (Thatcher 1993: 642). Last but not least Michael Heseltine's leadership challenge was triggered by another moment of high drama namely Geoffrey Howe's resignation speech in the House of Commons on 13 November 1990 (Howe 1995: 655-669).

Fictionalisation of the Thatcher Premiership often simplified complex issues by providing a narrative framework for the British public to interpret political reality. It occurred frequently particularly in the form of dramatic episodes and the personalisation of conflicts. At times it assisted Thatcher in establishing the image of a determined and decisive political leader. Fictionalisation also added a dimension of intimacy and familiarity to the presentation of the Prime Minister as, for instance, the numerous 'Maggie' headlines or reports of the Thatcher-Reagan relationship have shown. Kavanagh observes that identifying unpopular targets polarises public opinion and that "[b]y being clearly against an unpopular figure, Mrs Thatcher has usually rallied public opinion to her side" (Kavanagh 1990: 275). We have seen examples of this in Margaret Thatcher's confrontations with Jacques Delors, Ken Livingstone, General Galtieri or Arthur Scargill. Fictionalisation also

had negative effects for the Prime Minister, for example, during the Westland crisis or when fighting for her political survival in 1989/90. At these times fictionalisation heightened the sense of an acute crisis.

## V.2.5 The Culture of Celebrity

This final section of chapter V.2 explores some points of contact between the Thatcher Premiership and the culture of celebrity. It was explained earlier that the rise of the modern mass media is responsible for importing the celebrity concept from the world of entertainment into other areas of society including the political domain. In recent times celebrity politicians have become protagonists in a continuously evolving 'public drama' of news. They have come to create intimacy, or the illusion of intimacy, not only between themselves and their audience but they also impact on popular culture by representing something more than their actual political role.

As Britain's first woman Prime Minister part of Margaret Thatcher's celebrity status was that she "took her place in a man's world" (Young/Sloman 1986: 36). She literally stood out on every picture taken at summit meetings or state visits. Appropriately the female accessory of a handbag became, in the words of Kenneth Baker, "the symbol of her authority. It was her sceptre" (quoted in The Times; 25 June 1997). Riddell writes that "Mrs Thatcher is a star. She attracts interest partly because she has become so well-known" (Riddell 1991: 185). The longer the Prime Minister remained in office the more her celebrity status increased. This was true abroad as well on the domestic front. Elles states that "radio and television has enabled political personalities to make an impression far beyond national frontiers. Mrs Thatcher must have become one of the best known (if not *the* best known) of

political leaders in the world since 1979" (Elles 1987: 109-110). She "in effect became the face of Britain" (Foley 1993: 2).

As mentioned in chapter V.1 parts of Thatcher's life are far better known by the general public than are the biographical details of some of her predecessors. However it was not just the 'grocer's shop to Downing Street' story that was widely publicised during her Premiership. The Prime Minister was also "uniquely able to introduce the *personal* into politics" (Campbell 1987: 238). In a BBC programme in 1986 she *displayed her wardrobe to the nation and enthused over one suit:* "This black one came through the Falklands war all right" (quoted in Young 1991: 307). During the same television programme she also announced that her underwear came from Marks & Spencer. Young comments that "it would be hard to imagine any of her predecessors in Downing Street publicising the name of his tailor, still less the supplier of his hosiery" (Young 1991: 307). The Prime Minister would also show tears in public, for example, when asked about her father in a television interview in 1985, or when leaving Downing Street after her resignation. She willingly talked about her collection of 'Derby' and 'Worcester' porcelain, her old 'Kipling' volumes and about plans to bookbind at home when she has time (The Observer; 12 June 1983). When the Prime Minister's son went missing during the Paris-Dakar Rally in 1982 newspaper reports focused on Thatcher's anxiety about her son's safety and her husband's search trip to Africa (The Daily Telegraph; 12 January 1982; The Times 13 January 1982). Webster argues that like celebrities from the world of entertainment, with Thatcher there was also a general tension between private reality and her public face. Webster believes that personal stories about the Prime Minister helped to overcome this tension and "drew their readers into the intimate private world of the star" (Webster 1990: 78).

Margaret Thatcher also became a prominent figure in popular culture. One example was the puppet of the Prime Minister in Central Television's 'Spitting Image'

programme. She was presented as a dictatorial masculine figure, smoking cigars who would deal with opponents by 'handbagging' them out of her way. Coinciding with the publication of Thatcher's account of 'The Downing Street Years' (Thatcher 1993), 'Spitting Image' published 'Margaret Thatcha: The Real Memoirs' (1993), a satirical account of her life. The Prime Minister was a prime target for cartoonists who often presented her as an aggressive boxer or a brutal monster (The Times; 8 September 1992). Picture postcards appeared depicting Thatcher either as barbaric or with a regal persona. Parris remarks that "we satirists, cartoonists and jokers become part of the image-making we thought we had come to explode. ... For 12 years cartoonists threw everything they had at the previous prime minister [Thatcher] yet ended up only by bolstering her ego and reputation" (The Times; 8 September 1992). As Britain's first male prime ministerial spouse Denis Thatcher, the Prime Minister's husband, also featured in popular culture. For instance, John Wells's 'Dear Bill' column in 'Private Eye' developed Denis Thatcher's 'character' as a "boozing, smoking, sports-loving male chauvinist who was married to a domineering wife and deserved the sympathy of every man" (Thatcher 1997: 140). The idea behind Wells's letters later developed into a stage play called 'Anyone for Denis' which opened in London in May 1981 (Thatcher 1997: 145).

Prime Minister Thatcher's celebrity status was also evident from the personalised dislike she seemed to induce in her opponents. In 1986 it was reported that "from the latest poll of visitors to Madame Tussaud's waxworks, Margaret Thatcher had emerged as the ... runner-up to Hitler under the category 'Hate and Fear'" (Biddiss 1987: 1). Few politicians have been given more derogatory nicknames than Thatcher. Amongst many other things she was called 'Attila the Hen from Number Ten', 'Parrot on Ronald Reagan's Shoulder', 'Ramobona' or 'Thatchertollah' (Dale 1997: 95-96). In 1988 the 'Sunday Telegraph' published interviews with leading figures in the intellectual and cultural establishment (Sunday Telegraph; 10 January 1988). The interviewees' vitriolic responses included, for example, a description of

her as "loathsome, repulsive in almost every way" (Sunday Telegraph; 10 January 1988). This surprised many and caused others like Kingsley Amis to compare the hostility of Thatcher's critics with the venom of anti-Semitism (Letwin 1992: 319).

In recent times the royal family has become the prime exponent of celebrity culture in British society. Yet it has been suggested that at least in their own country "the British Royals are never *just* 'celebrities' ... [but] they remain something more as well" (Nairn 1994: 35). Nairn describes the feature which distinguishes the royal family from other celebrities as "some underlying Thing which - however vaguely apprehended through the daily parade - is felt as great, and inexhaustible" (Nairn 1994: 36). This distinguishing accessory of the royal family was described in chapter III in terms of them symbolically having to personify the nation itself. Despite their alleged special status, many commentators put the royal family on an equal footing with 'ordinary' celebrities. "In the Thatcher era, they [the royal family] came to symbolise a wholesale retreat into fantasy and illusion. Royal non-stories swamped the popular press, an ever-reliable substitute for genuine news, comment or inquiry. Royal coverage reflected the general resurgence of snobbery, glutinous sentimentality, sycophancy and humourlessness. The doings of the Palace young generation, especially, became soap opera as empty and interminable as 'Dallas' or 'Dynasty'" (The Sunday Times Magazine; 2 February 1992).

Whatever the discussion about the royal family, it remains a remarkable fact of the 1980s that a celebrity politician, the Prime Minister, could rival the pre-eminence of the royal family's celebrity status. Newspapers detected signs of a "dual monarchy" (The Observer; 5 June 1983) or a "parallel sovereign" (The Sunday Times Magazine; 2 February 1992). What were the reasons for such statements? The Prime Minister was seen as adopting an increasingly regal persona which caused confusion about the respective roles of the royal family and the Prime Minister. For instance Thatcher visited the scenes of disasters like the Clapham rail crash or the

Pan Am jumbo jet wreckage at Lockerbie (Kieser 1989: 394). She also conveyed her sympathy to the survivors of the Hillsborough tragedy in a high profile visit to Sheffield's hospitals (The Times; 17 April 1989). The Prime Minister's visits abroad were often seen as 'royal tours' (The Spectator; 20 April 1985). Simon Heffer claimed in the 'Daily Telegraph' that "[a]fter more than fifty foreign trips ... Mrs Thatcher rather than the Queen was increasingly being seen abroad as the symbol of Britain" (quoted in Cockerell 1989: 351). Some observers also noted that a member of the royal family and not the Prime Minister should have taken the salute at the victory parade after the Falklands war (Harris 1988: 142). Thatcher's frequent use of language regarded as more appropriate for the Queen, for instance 'my ministers' or the royal 'We', added further impetus to the claim that the Prime Minister was showing monarchical tendencies (The Observer; 5 June 1983). It can therefore come as no surprise that the newspapers on numerous occasions reported tensions between the Queen and Prime Minister Thatcher on such issues as the conduct of the miners' strike or the reluctance of the Prime Minister to support Commonwealth pressure on South Africa (Harris 1990: 164-165; The Economist; 26 July 1986).

Thatcher's theme of patriotism and her rhetoric of 'Victorian virtues', particularly manifest in the aftermath of the Falklands war, overlapped with a general mood of nostalgia in Britain during significant parts of her Premiership. Museums, for example, opened which were designated to replicate Victorian lifestyle. There was a resurgence of popular fairs celebrating traditional crafts and customs and English Heritage started to organise re-enactments of great battles in English history (The Attic: BBC 2; 13 June 1995). Even television commercials employed the theme of nostalgia as illustrated for example by the well-known 'Hovis brown bread' clip which evoked the image of pre-first-world-war family life in a cobble-streeted small town (Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 197). In line with this mood the Prime Minister decided that the renovation of 10 Downing Street should place particular

importance on restoring the house's original character (The Attic: BBC 2; 13 June 1995).

Although not strictly part of an analysis of the Thatcher Premiership, Thatcher's continued status as a celebrity after leaving office merits a few remarks. Soon after her departure from Downing Street speculation began to mount which was akin to that which might be expected when a sports or entertainment star is about to make an imminent comeback (The Independent; 11 May 1991). Thatcher was rumoured to be about to take on the role of a mediator in international conflicts or become the next Secretary-General of the United Nations. "[N]one of these tasks even began to materialise. But their mention was a measure, all the same, of the fame that survived the fall" (Young 1991: 596). In June 1991 Thatcher went on a lecture tour across the United States. 'The Observer' commented on the publicity the former Prime Minister attracted: "She was news. She was wanted" (The Observer; 23 June 1991). A report of a later lecture tour of Japan described her as "a glittering celebrity" (The Sunday Times; 28 May 1995). The first part of Thatcher's memoirs were published in 1993. Just before the publication date extracts from her book, including comments on her successor John Major, were leaked coinciding with the Conservative Party conference in Blackpool. The 'Daily Mirror' reported on its front page: "What she said about him: 'Intellectually he drifted with the tide'" (Daily Mirror; 6 October 1993). Commentators described the publicity of the book launch as "the hype of the decade" (The Times; 16 October 1993) and saw in the former Prime Minister a "marketing phenomenon" (The Times; 21 October 1993). Well over six years after Thatcher's resignation, her photo-opportunities during the general election campaign still guaranteed front page coverage (The Times; 19 April 1997). Thatcher's endorsement of William Hague in the 1997 Conservative Party leadership contest was described as "Handbag swings in to bless the Young Pretender: ... She stood at the St. Stephen's entrance to the Commons, the only

non-royal woman in Britain whom it is unnecessary to name: it is sufficient to mention the blue suit, the coiffure and the handbag" (The Times; 19 June 1997).

During her Premiership, Thatcher became a leading celebrity of the public arena, a status that has become permanently attached to her. A number of factors contributed to the development of this status. As Britain's first female Prime Minister she accrued significant novelty value. The length of her tenure combined with memorable political events and some popular policy innovations made a lasting impression both domestically and abroad. Thatcher's combative and sometimes regal style was well-suited to absorption into popular culture which, in turn, influenced the public perception of the Prime Minister. Finally some of her emotive themes, for example patriotism, came to represent an important part of the Zeitgeist of Britain in the 1980s.

## V.3 Media Strategies and Symbolic Communication

Having analysed five separate areas of symbolic politics in this case study we will now turn to some particular elements of the Thatcher Government's media strategies and their impact on symbolic communication.

Margaret Thatcher was very aware of the mass media's importance for personal impression management. In her memoirs she writes that "[o]nce a politician is given a public image by the media, it is almost impossible for him to shed it" (Thatcher 1995: 470). Cockerell notes that "Thatcher became Prime Minister with a keener appreciation of the political power of television than any of her predecessors" (Cockerell 1989: 253). During the 1983 general election campaign Thatcher said "[t]elevision, I think, is the most powerful form of communication that there is"

(quoted in Thatcher 1983: 135-136). Three years later she remarked that "selective seeing is believing and in today's world, television comes over as truth" (quoted in Cockerell 1989: 307).

Anecdotal evidence illustrates that when being filmed Thatcher always paid particular attention to the impression she created. Pilsworth describes how she often asked television crews questions such as 'Are you running sound?' or 'Would you like to do another take' (Pilsworth 1980: 206). Jones describes a particular incident on the day of the Clapham rail crash in December 1988. Television crews assembled in a room containing the Number 10 Christmas tree waiting for the Prime Minister's statement on the disaster. Thatcher was still posing for an unrelated presentation with officers of the Grantham Rotary Club in front of the tree. "Once the ceremony had finished she turned towards the television cameras and microphones, and as she did so she began walking away from the tree towards the fireplace on the other side of the room, saying it would be inappropriate at a time of grief to be filmed in a seasonal setting. She seemed to know instinctively that a neutral backing would be more in keeping with the sombre statement she was about to make. We [the television crews] had been caught by surprise at her sudden change of position; she had begun moving across the room before a press officer could possibly have intervened or prompted her to get away from the tree" (Jones 1995: 82).

Although the Prime Minister had opposed the introduction of television cameras into the House of Commons, she prepared herself thoroughly when the moment arrived. Thatcher was one of over 100 MPs who attended briefings and rehearsals with the supervisor of parliamentary broadcasting, John Grist (Jones 1995: 14). She had also watched videos of the experimental coverage and in watching them she realised the need for greater bodily movement into her delivery as the television viewer would only see the top part of her body (Ingham 1991: 170-171). Thatcher describes

another consequence of having to appear in front of television cameras in the House of Commons: "People watching television would also notice whether I had worn the same suit on successive occasions and even wrote in about it. So from now on Crawfie [the Prime Minister's personal assistant Cynthia Crawford] always kept a note of what I wore each week for Prime Minister's Questions" (Thatcher 1993: 576).

Section V.2.1 provided an analysis of symbolic communication during the Conservative Party's general election campaigns of 1979, 1983 and 1987. Some of the elements referred to then, such as the existence of detailed communication plans or making use of photo-opportunities, have naturally not only a symbolic dimension but also form part of the media strategy of the campaign. Yet there were more examples of a television dominated style of campaigning. Television journalists often received preferential treatment over other journalists both in terms of catering for their specific demands and in respect of time and access to Margaret Thatcher. Covering the 1979 campaign for the 'Financial Times' Elinor Goodman says: "As the campaign progressed we realised that we, the written journalists, were really the costumed extras in this drama of Mrs Thatcher goes to Downing Street" (Dispatches: Channel 4; 18 March 1992). In 1983 newspaper journalists composed their own song, which they sang on their coaches, complaining about the lack of attention by the Prime Minister: "Maggie, Maggie, give us an interview, your not speaking's making us all feel blue. You talk to the guys from the telly, but to us, not on your nelly" (The Listener; 16 June 1983).

Central Office assisted television crews wherever possible. It provided advanced communication equipment and, for example, in 1979 drew up detailed maps showing how long it would take for news film to reach the nearest process laboratories and television studios (Pilsworth 1980: 204). Moreover the Conservatives completely refurbished their conference hall prior to the 1983

campaign in order to stage their daily press conferences in a modern, visually attractive surrounding (Linton 1986: 152; Parkinson 1992: 225). For her 1987 'road show' Thatcher used an articulated truck which could park anywhere and reveal a stage complete with a PA system, lectern and lights (Thomas 1989: 164). This provided sophisticated equipment for the Prime Minister's open-air meetings and an attractive backdrop for television. Also in 1987 the Conservatives introduced American-style 'Gofer' teams. Gofers are highly qualified professional people who work voluntarily and take leave of absence from their companies for the duration of the campaign. They benefit by feeding back their experiences of the campaign to their companies. The Gofers' main task is to ensure a consistent standard of presentation as regards backdrop, sound, lighting and camera position (Thomas 1989: 172).

Outside general election campaigns, media interviews with the Prime Minister were strictly rationed to avoid overexposure (Jones 1993: 75). When Thatcher agreed to give a television or newspaper interview she carefully prepared and rehearsed the event. The Prime Minister knew of the potential damage that could be inflicted by just one inappropriate word or line even if given off-the-record. She restricted small talk before an interview to trivialities. For example on several occasions she limited her comments to her preference for British rather than French bottled water (Jones 1995: 109). The Prime Minister's media advisers often surprised journalists with their attention to detail. It is noted that prior to an interview they often wanted to negotiate the colour of the set or clarify whether there would be flowers or reconsider the kind of chairs to be used. On one occasion a chair had to be flown in from Sweden because Thatcher's team had approved the design but not the colour. Gordon Reece also insisted that for major interviews the television cameras had to come to Downing Street in order to effectively project the prime-ministerial image (Jones 1993: 79). Advisors had also drawn up an 'enemies list' of interviewers who

were regarded as hostile and who would potentially bring out Thatcher's bad features (Franklin 1994: 147).

Atkinson shows that the Prime Minister's style of speaking was well-suited to the modern media age. Her speeches and interviews often contained statements which could easily be replayed on television. He highlights the importance of so-called 'three-part lists' (Atkinson 1986: 48-50). One example of such a 'three-part list' is a response Thatcher gave in an BBC interview in 1983: "... I am what I am. [1] Yes, my style is of vigorous leadership. [2] Yes, I do believe certain things very strongly. [3] Yes, I do believe in trying to persuade people that the things I believe in are the things they should follow. And, Mr Cole, I'm far too old to change now" (quoted in Atkinson 1986: 50). The success of deliberately created soundbites is illustrated by the use by five of the national newspapers of 'The Lady's Not For Turning' as their splash headline after Thatcher's speech at the Conservative Party conference in 1980 (Jones 1995: 28).

It is said that in media terms Thatcher "straightforwardly pitched her appeal down-market" (Clarke 1991: 314). One example referred to in chapter V.2.1 was the concentration of the Conservative Party's newspaper advertising in specific tabloids. A further example of this approach was originally suggested by Tim Bell. In July 1984 Thatcher became the first Prime Minister to appear on a television chat show. LWT announced two special guests for that night's 'Aspel and Company', the singer Barry Manilow and Margaret Thatcher. The Prime Minister talked freely about such things as the birth of her twins and laughed at an impression of herself by the impersonator Janet Brown. Appearances on other light entertainment programmes followed, for instance, the 'Jimmy Young Show' and 'Wogan' (Cockerell 1989: xii; Webster 1990: 85).

Bell also proposed that the Prime Minister hold presidential-style news conferences during the parliamentary recess. He thought this would help to get the Conservative Party's message across during a generally quiet time of the year (Hollingsworth 1997: 80). Bernard Ingham thought such an event "would appear transplanted and artificial" (Ingham 1991: 352) and persuaded the Prime Minister to drop the idea. Ingham notes that "there was inevitably a latent tension between Messrs Bell and Reece and myself because they are much deeper into show biz than I will ever be" (Ingham 1991: 352). This tension resurfaced when in the spring of 1990 Reece suggested allocating a 'special communications adviser' to each minister affected by the unpopular introduction of the poll tax. Ingham and senior departmental press officers strongly opposed the idea as they regarded it as an insult to their competence. The plan was finally dropped when the national press published details of the proposal (Hollingsworth 1997: 206-208).

Thatcher's press secretary Bernard Ingham was seen as personally dominating the Prime Minister's media relations. Each day he wrote a digest of the morning's national newspapers for her as she did not read the papers (Ingham 1991: 180). The press secretary's associates "speak of his strong desire, amounting almost to a sense of personal mission, to 'sort out' public relations in Whitehall" (Harris 1990: 118). Ingham completely dominated the weekly MIO which he chaired for most of Thatcher's tenure. As explained before the MIO is the meeting of the heads of information officers from all the Whitehall departments. It co-ordinates the presentational work of the government. Issues discussed at the MIO included the time tabling of announcements and events over the next week or the latest bids by the media for in-depth interviews (Jones 1995: 93-94). Ingham got himself more involved in detailed presentational issues of every government department than any of his predecessors. He regarded criticism by information officers as hostile and did not tolerate dissent. Whereas it had previously been the case that most members of the MIO considered their loyalty belonged first and foremost to a particular minister

or department, Ingham insisted that effective government promotion would only be possible if Number 10 were to become their focal point (Franklin 1994: 94). Towards the end of Prime Minister Thatcher's tenure Ingham also became Head of the Government Information Service (GIS) which further increased his personal influence over the Government's communication (Franklin 1994: 7).

Ingham's chief concern was "bringing the work of the Government together in one presentational whole" (Ingham 1991: 179) and ensuring that "the Government's message was getting through" (Ingham 1991: 237). Charges against the Thatcher Government of 'news management' often centred on his role. He was, for example, criticised for exploiting the Lobby system by flying kites, putting his spin on the agenda or for tactically leaking stories which were detrimental to the 'wet' cabinet colleagues of the Prime Minister (Seymour-Ure 1991: 192; The Economist; 4 July 1981). Ultimately this criticism led 'The Guardian', 'The Independent' and 'The Scotsman' to withdraw from the Lobby. Their correspondents only returned when a new press secretary took up his post in Number 10 (Franklin 1994: 90; The Guardian; 12 October 1991). Ingham vigorously defends his style: "I plead utterly, completely and wholeheartedly guilty. Of course, I tried to manage the news. I tried - God knows, I tried - to ensure that Ministers spoke with one voice, if necessary by circulating a standard speaking note which I wrote myself. ... I tried to ensure that Ministers were aware of what each other was doing and whenever they were likely to cut across each other. Dammit, that was what I was supposed to do" (Ingham 1991: 187). However he also points towards the limitations of news management: "The real news managers today are the media themselves. It is television which predominantly dictates news value for the masses: either there are pictures or there are not, and if there are no pictures there is no news" (Ingham 1991: 188).

Ingham promoted the idea that everyone in the Whitehall publicity machine should deal with the media in a determined but consistent manner. He advised Whitehall

press officers to deviate from the previously popular strategy of 'no comment' and ensure that Ministers were always available for questions or interviews. However he also urged officials to work out a clear line on any given subject with their Ministers and to adhere strictly to the agreed position. Press deadlines had to be rigidly observed (Jones 1995: 94). Ingham did not hesitate to use coercion. On one occasion he threatened to exclude ITN from all future events with the Prime Minister when an ITN cameraman questioned Thatcher during a photo-opportunity at Number 10 (Franklin 1994: 85). During the Prime Minister's visit to the Falklands in January 1983 Ingham insisted that the BBC had to pool its material, that is they had to make the film freely available to ITN and across the world. He only succeeded after threatening that no pictures at all would be going out unless the Corporation accepted his condition (Harris 1990: 101-102; Ingham 1991: 301-302).

The Falklands war was a time during which the Thatcher Government's news management was particularly criticised. Adams writes that "[t]he military and the Ministry of Defence were able to exercise almost complete control over the limited number of journalists with the task force, whilst the government had a monopoly in the dissemination of authoritative news about events in the South Atlantic" (Adams 1986: 4). Throughout the campaign bad news was often delayed or suppressed while good news was emphasised, at times personally, by the Prime Minister. For example, Thatcher waited until the main television news to announce the recapture of South Georgia live on the doorsteps of Number 10 (Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 149).

An episode of news management also associated with the Falklands was the publication of the 'Franks Report' into the origins of the Falklands conflict. Prior to its publication Ingham had brought to an end the practice of issuing embargoed copies of government documents to Lobby correspondents up to 24 hours in advance. Instead correspondents were issued with copies at the same time as the

Prime Minister unveiled the report in the House of Commons. Ingham had merely identified important paragraphs of the report to Lobby journalists 45 minutes earlier. As correspondents did not have time to read the whole document, newspaper headlines the following day focused on the overall conclusion of the report namely 'Franks Find Thatcher Is Not To Blame'. It was only after journalists had the opportunity to digest the whole report that headlines appeared such as 'A Verdict That Is At Odds With Its Evidence'. Although the report's conclusion had vindicated the Prime Minister, the bulk of the findings were highly critical of the Thatcher Government (Cockerell/Hennessy/Walker 1984: 181-186).

Media strategy played an important role during the Thatcher Premiership. The Prime Minister considered television in particular to be an important medium for her to present herself and her policies in a favourable light. Her press secretary occupied a key position in the execution of a media strategy aimed at achieving positive coverage by restricting and synchronising the flow of information originating from Number 10 and Government departments. Franklin notes that the Thatcher Government, like previous governments, complemented news management by means of (i) reproaching investigative journalism, (ii) appointing political supporters, for example, on to the Board of the BBC, (iii) censorship and (iv) enacting financial or organisational pressure, for instance, via the licence fee (Franklin 1994: 76-82). The frequent conflicts about media relations during the Thatcher Premiership illustrate that at least parts of the media were unwilling to accept a sometimes flagrantly restrictive approach by the Prime Minister's strategists. Finally, the mass media was important in constructing the political spectacle of the Thatcher Premiership for the British public. Institutional arrangements like the Lobby system and the media's predictable criteria for deciding newsworthiness were the background of successful political news management.

## V.4 Summary

This case study has applied the theory of Symbolic Politics to the Thatcher Premiership. As at the end of chapter IV, this summary brings together the separate branches of the analysis to provide an integrated account. First of all, consideration is given to symbolic politics as a prime ministerial power resource. This is followed by an overview of the systematising function of the Thatcher Premiership's symbolic politics.

Margaret Thatcher employed a wide range of symbolic politics in public discourse. This chapter has provided examples of her symbolic communication including her use of carefully structured communication plans during general election campaigns, her symbolic acts designed to illustrate her concern for particular problems and her oratorical impression management. Innovative media handling combined with a strategy of restricting and synchronising the flow of information emanating from the Government was the organisational setting for successful symbolic politics.

Foley argues that despite his/her constitutional rooting in the collective entities of the Cabinet and the parliamentary party, the modern prime minister is increasingly drawn away from those immediate allies and pushed into the wider public environment (Foley 1993: 88-89). Today "a prime minister must continually cultivate his or her links with the public" (Foley 1993: 88) in order to provide effective leadership. Symbolic politics must be regarded as a key component in Prime Minister Thatcher's efforts to provide public leadership. It was the Prime Minister's success or failure in public leadership which determined her standing amid backbenchers, among her own party and with the electorate at large.

This chapter has shown that combined with Thatcher's firm views about the substance of her political aims she was also very aware of "just how much she is a

'product' that needs to be marketed and sold" (Thomson 1989: 219). Kavanagh argues that she was "more attentive to the requirements of the arts of self-presentation and the requirements of the mass media and public relations than other leaders like Heath, Callaghan, and Foot" (Kavanagh 1990: 271). This personal quality made her well-suited to employing symbolic politics. In the British political system, which in terms of importance tends to rank personal leadership below political institutions, Thatcher's attitude was a vital factor in utilising symbolic politics as a power resource.

Let us now turn to some points of contact between the symbolic politics of the Thatcher Premiership and the six phases in the approval ratings of the Prime Minister outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Symbolic politics did not make Margaret Thatcher a popular Prime Minister. Based on Gallup polls from 1945 to 1990 only Edward Heath, on average, scored lower approval ratings than Margaret Thatcher (quoted in The Daily Telegraph; 23 November 1990). However Gallup data confirms that Thatcher was a controversial figure who strongly polarised public opinion. Roughly one quarter of the electorate admired the Prime Minister throughout her period in office. Another third indicated hostility towards her (quoted in The Daily Telegraph; 23 November 1990). However even with this polarisation of public opinion there is no denying that Margaret Thatcher was a highly successful electoral politician winning, after all, three consecutive general elections.

Symbolic politics may not have made Margaret Thatcher popular with everyone all the time, however it did, on occasion, appear to have a profound effect on her approval ratings. The second phase ('Takeoff') of the six phases in her approval ratings shows a sudden surge in support for the Prime Minister during the first six months of 1982. As mentioned earlier symbolic politics was responsible for turning the military success of the Falklands into a personal victory for the Prime Minister.

It is arguable that without symbolic politics Thatcher's approval ratings during this period would not have improved as dramatically as they did. The Prime Minister's popularity also recovered sharply during phase four ('Restoration') which included the long run-up to the 1987 general election campaign. This chapter has outlined a number of well-orchestrated communication efforts undertaken by Thatcher during these pre-election months the first of which was the highly successful Conservative Party conference in the autumn of 1986. It is questionable whether the Prime Minister's approval ratings would have recovered as much without purposeful symbolic communication.

Quantitative research in the United States shows that symbolic communication influences presidential approval ratings. Comparable research is not available in respect of the British prime minister. Such studies as do exist focus either on the importance of party leader images for electoral choice (Jones/Hudson 1996; Stewart/Clarke 1992; Bean/Mughan 1989; Graetz/McAllister 1987) or on the correlation between the personal popularity of the prime minister and government popularity (Hudson 1984). Studies which concentrate on government rather than prime ministerial approval fluctuations tend to emphasise the link between government popularity or voting intentions on the one hand and the state of the economy on the other (Price/Sanders 1995; Sanders 1991; Pissarides 1980). In any event there appears to be significant scope for further quantitative analysis of the relationship between prime ministers' approval ratings and symbolic communication. This could take the form, for example, of studying the impact of high profile speeches, attendances at summit meetings or visits abroad on fluctuations in prime ministerial popularity. It might be hypothesised that well-presented actions of prime ministers might enhance their approval ratings.

It was noted in the summary of the case study of President Reagan that his much admired skills as a communicator did not protect him from sharply declining

approval ratings during the economic downturn of the early 1980s or the Iran-Contra affair. Prime Minister Thatcher suffered a similar fate when her approval ratings plummeted over her first two and a half years in office. This decline in popularity paralleled the dramatic deepening of the recession in that time. An even deeper downturn in her approval ratings occurred in the fifth phase ('Iconoclasm') with inflation sharply edging upwards and controversy about the introduction of the poll tax. Confronted with difficult macroeconomic problems or the implementation of a widely unpopular policy, symbolic politics was unable to protect the Prime Minister from sharply declining approval ratings. As with President Reagan it can be speculated that the decline in popularity would have been even greater had it not been for symbolic communication. However, as pointed out before, it is difficult to see how research could verify such a damage limitation effect of symbolic politics.

Moving on to the systematising function of symbolic politics the following three points were discussed earlier in this thesis and form the background for this aspect of the summary. First of all, political reality is symbolically constructed, that is its meaning depends on the communication and interpretation of the participants involved in social interaction. Secondly, the mass media occupies a key position in translating political actions and events into a repertoire of familiar stories with well known characters. Thirdly, the British prime minister's main symbolic function is as chief public exponent of the government. The office of the prime minister and the actions of the incumbent are the focal point for the public in observing and interpreting political reality.

Margaret Thatcher was an outstanding 'signifier' of political and social reality in Britain during the 1980s. Symbolic politics was central in creating meaning about the Thatcher Premiership. For some 'Thatcherism' was the radical cure that Britain needed to arrest economic decline. For others it represented an irresponsible social experiment which created mass unemployment and widespread poverty. Some

people considered the privatisation programme essential in order to transform state-owned industries into efficient businesses. Other people regarded it as the state's ultimate sell-out to free-market capitalism. The Falklands war was regarded as an example of Thatcher's resoluteness and willingness to lead. However the same military conflict was also interpreted as a jingoistic act resulting in deplorable and avoidable loss of life. These few examples illustrate that meaning about the Prime Minister and her actions was manifold and often strongly polarised.

Aughey argues that in the 1970s and earlier it had often been said that trade unions were too powerful, that British industry was inefficient and uncompetitive and that government was too big. When Thatcher arrived in Downing Street she pinpointed the problem as "a failure of confidence. It was an inability to translate what was perceived to be necessary into a determined political will to achieve it" (Aughey 1983: 392). Thatcher's forceful style of personal leadership has frequently been referred to in this chapter. From the viewpoint of Symbolic Politics the Prime Minister's character and her actions were important in representing this shift towards political confidence and determination. Thatcher personally became the symbol for a new direction in British politics.

A consequence of such a personalised presentation of the political process was that the verdict over success and failure also came to be closely associated with the person in charge. At a time when the Prime Minister's political fortunes reached a low point Ronald Butt observed in 'The Times': "Mrs Thatcher rightly received the plaudits when the Government was at its peak. Now it is she who is blamed for the return of inflation, strikes and wage claims justified by reference to higher living costs, the unpopular poll tax, water and electricity privatization, and disliked NHS policies. The common cry now is that she has ridden free-market dogma too hard" (The Times; 27 July 1989). This point overlaps, of course, with the discussion of fluctuations in prime ministerial approval ratings. If the representation of the

political process becomes more centred on the prime minister then the public's appraisal of the government's record, or particular policies, depends more on his/her symbolic presentation.

This chapter has also shown a number of ways in which Thatcher "sought to project herself and her office as an embodiment of national principles and values. ... It was a concerted policy to identify the Thatcher programme with the essence of Britain itself" (Foley 1993: 158). This stronger bond between the office of the prime minister and the theme of the nation has two significant consequences. From the prime minister's point of view it opens up opportunities for symbolic communication previously regarded as exclusive to the monarch. From the point of view of the public it increasingly mixes themes of nationhood and patriotism into the highly partisan atmosphere of party politics.

It is said that Margaret Thatcher created a public discourse consisting of simple truths. For instance Minette Marrin comments: "It may be that ... Lady Thatcher, in a curious way tends to corrupt democratic sensibilities. By expressing great and glorious certainties, she gave people too much of a taste for the simple-minded excitement of rhetoric, after the time for it has passed" (The Daily Telegraph; 9 May 1996). In other words symbolic politics of the Thatcher Premiership oversimplified political and social reality. Examples of this (referred to above) include the personalisation of political conflicts, such as during the miners' strike, the frequent 'Maggie' headlines in newspapers or the populism in Thatcher's symbolic rhetoric. However it also merits a mention that at least part of this (over)simplification can be seen as an expression of a time during which many of the certainties of consensus politics were gone (Arnold 1984: 12).

This case study has confirmed that symbolic politics is a core element in the interaction between prime minister, media and general public. The analytical

framework of Symbolic Politics has proved a useful tool when applied to a study of the Thatcher Premiership.

# CONCLUSION

This conclusion considers the results of this thesis from three perspectives: (i) their significance for political science research, (ii) their implications for the two hypotheses set out in the introduction and (iii) their implications for the study of the offices of the American president and the British prime minister.

It was pointed out at the beginning of the thesis that the symbolic dimension of the political process remains a neglected area within political science. In particular Burnier emphasises that little attention has been given to the study of political institutions from the viewpoint of Symbolic Politics (Burnier 1994: 247). Although some studies have looked at the American president as a symbolic institution (for example Denton 1982; Hinckley 1990) very few attempts have been made to operationalise symbolic research in the context of individual incumbents of presidential offices. Those studies which have sought to do the latter (for example Dallek 1984 in respect of President Reagan and Northcutt 1991 in respect of President Mitterrand) have only applied Symbolic Politics very loosely, that is without an exploration of its theoretical foundations.

Rather than looking at political institutions, symbolic research has preferred to focus on specific events such as political scandals, election campaigns or presidential assassinations (for example Dunleavy 1995; Käsler 1991; Sarcinelli 1987a; Edelman/Simon 1969). Scholars have also considered the symbolic dimension of particular policies such as SDI or government regulation of business (for example Linenthal 1989; Edelman 1960). It was mentioned earlier in this thesis that British political science has not only disregarded the symbolic dimension of the office of the prime minister but it has also appeared indifferent to symbolic politics research as a whole. Edelman's writings are rarely cited and have received very little scholarly attention in Britain.

This thesis has tried to address some of these deficits. First of all, the analysis of both the Reagan Presidency and the Thatcher Premiership was based on a detailed examination of the theoretical foundations of Symbolic Politics. For that purpose Edelman's key assumptions and cross-references to other influential theories were outlined in the first chapter. It emerged that writings which investigate the distribution or maintenance of political 'power' in society generally emphasise the manipulative or controlling function of symbolisation. In contrast models which focus on the importance of 'order' in political systems stress how symbolisation assists in the process of creating meaning in society. This thesis has proceeded on the basis that these two functions of symbolisation are not mutually exclusive and need to be joined together in a more integrated method of analysing symbolic politics. Hence chapters IV and V looked at what has been referred to as both the controlling *and* the systematising functions of symbolic politics.

Secondly, both case studies have shown that the symbolic politics of an American president and a British prime minister respectively can be explored in a systematic manner without concentrating the analysis too much on specific events or distinct policy areas. The Reagan Presidency and the Thatcher Premiership have been studied under five headings: (i) election campaigns; (ii) symbolic problem solving; (iii) symbolic rhetoric; (iv) the fictionalisation of the presidency/premiership; (v) the culture of celebrity. These headings may not, of course, always be applicable when categorising types and strategies of symbolic politics used by other political leaders. For example, when studying the symbolic politics of more historical political leaders the culture of celebrity may be less important, or when studying political leaders in non-democratic governments election campaigns may have a different significance. Overall the case studies have shown that Symbolic Politics can be operationalised in a study of office holders of the American presidency and

the British premiership. Symbolic Politics can be applied successfully to a comparative and systematic study of the dramaturgy behind political leadership.

The analysis of the types and strategies of symbolic politics was complemented in each case study by an overview of the political leader's biographical background. This has proved to be important for two reasons. First of all, the leader's biographical background gives some indication as to how much importance he/she attaches to the packaging of himself/herself and his/her policies when becoming president or prime minister. Secondly, the case studies have shown that important features of the symbolic politics employed by both leaders had strong links with the respective biographies of the individuals concerned. For example, Reagan referred to his Hollywood career in a variety of contexts and Thatcher used the analogy of shop-keeping when commenting on the management of the economy.

The analysis of the types and strategies of symbolic politics was also complemented by a review of the respective administration's media strategies. Media strategy is crucial in communicating symbolically with a mass electorate. It appears that the more pre-planned symbolic politics is, for example during election campaigns, the more crucial a sophisticated and co-ordinated communication plan for dealing with the mass media becomes. The case studies have shown that contemporary symbolic politics by a political leader should not be seen in isolation either from the leader's media strategies or from the production process of media institutions.

It seems to be particularly important to provide this analytical framework for the study of symbolic politics at a time when the styles and methods of communication which take place between political leaders, the mass media and the general public are a widely debated issue. In the United States the 'selling of the president' (McGinniss 1969) has for some time been an issue of public and academic interest. Episodically this topic appears to gain particular prominence, for example with the

frequent use of symbolic acts by President Carter, with the arrival of Ronald Reagan in the White House or with the unprecedented "electronic intimacy" (Bennett 1995: 110) which was seen to be at the heart of Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign.

In Britain public interest in the 'selling of the prime minister' (Tyler 1987) is a more recent phenomenon which started in earnest with the Thatcher Premiership. Since Thatcher left office, political communication has continued to feature prominently as a public issue. Some examples include: (i) the 'packaging' of Prime Minister Major as 'Citizen John Major' or 'Honest John' (Jones 1995: 196; Foley 1993: 204); (ii) the leaking of the 'Maples memo' in 1994 (a document which was privately prepared by the former minister John Maples containing a devastating assessment of Conservative publicity during the Major Premiership) (Jones 1995: 198-199); (iii) the leaking of the Labour Party's 'War Book', that is their election strategy document (The Financial Times; 24 April 1997); (iv) the makeover of the new leader of the Conservative Party, William Hague, and tension between his advisers on how to 'package' him and his proposed party reforms (The Sunday Times; 13 July 1997; The Sunday Times; 20 September 1997); or (v) the ongoing public debate about the influence of 'spin doctors' in political communication (Panorama: BBC 1; 30 September 1996). The parties' spin doctors have not only achieved a high public profile (for example The Sunday Times Magazine; 1 October 1995; The Times; 1 March 1995) but leading politicians like Clare Short and Paddy Ashdown have also publicly criticised their influence (New Statesman; 9 August 1996; The Times; 9 November 1996). Even popular culture has commented on the issue of spin doctoring both in the form of satire (Private Eye; 4 October 1996) and in fiction writing (Shea 1996).

There are also many examples from other countries of political communication becoming a more prominent issue in recent years. The involvement of Bill Clinton's

spin doctor James Carville on behalf of Constantine Mitsotakis in the Greek national election in 1993 produced public controversy (The Sunday Times; 26 September 1993). The work of Tim Bell and others for Boris Yeltsin in the Russian presidential election of 1996 indicated that professional political consulting is spreading to former communist countries (Financial Times; 14 March 1997; Hollingsworth 1997: 262). Last but not least the temporary electoral success of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy in 1994 illustrated the potent mixture of political ambition and ownership of mass media institutions (The Sunday Times; 3 April 1994).

So far this conclusion has concentrated on how this thesis has tried to address deficits in symbolic politics research and why paying attention to these deficits is particularly important today. Attention will now shift more specifically to the two hypotheses set out at the beginning of the thesis. The first hypothesis was that symbolic politics possesses a significant 'controlling potential'. This means symbolic communication is used effectively for the purposes of governmental control in the political systems of the United States and Great Britain. The second hypothesis was that symbolic politics can lead to a 'de-realisation' of political reality. This means symbolic politics can promote a distorted picture of complex matters by giving the impression of certainty on the part of political actors, suggesting confidence about ambiguous causalities and offering the illusion of problem-solving competence.

We will first deal with the notion that symbolic politics possesses a significant 'controlling potential'. In the introduction to this thesis it was pointed out that the real 'controlling potential' of symbolic communication can only be examined if research focuses on two questions: (i) when is symbolic politics most successfully used by political leaders? and (ii) at what point does lack of substantive political achievement undermine symbolic success?

Both case studies showed that symbolic politics is effective for an incumbent when it is backed up by material success. For President Reagan the examples of the presidential election campaign of 1984, the invasion of Grenada or the AWACS story illustrated this point. For Prime Minister Thatcher the general election campaigns of 1983 and 1987, the Falklands war and the EC budget negotiations demonstrated the same point. Moreover for both leaders economic recovery followed a time of deep recession early on in their respective periods of office. Reagan and Thatcher were able to claim the credit for the dramatically improved economic climate of the mid 1980s. The examples illustrate that symbolic politics can lead to a personalisation of achievements so that tangible success becomes the success of the incumbent. Themes such as optimism, patriotism and a need for change appear to be particularly common in personalising political success. President Reagan's drive to 'rediscover the American dream' and Prime Minister Thatcher's constant reminder of 'the virtues of the Victorian past' not only had a similar message but also successfully combined all three themes of optimism, patriotism and need for change in one overriding motif. Symbolic politics which backs up substantive achievements is also effective because it allows the polarisation of political reality giving rise to a simple choice. The incumbent can claim that his/her way works and that he/she will continue to deliver tangible accomplishment. Furthermore the incumbent can warn that the electorate would be foolhardy to experiment with an alternative the outcome of which is unknown.

It is important to consider those situations when a lack of material achievement can undermine symbolic politics. The economic downturn of the early 1980s meant that Reagan and Thatcher soon after coming to office were losing their electoral support. Occasionally a recession may offer a political leader the opportunity to symbolically redefine the problem and to disassociate himself/herself from personal responsibility. For example, research with focus groups by the Conservative Party for the 1983 British general election campaign showed that (i) the majority of the

electorate did not blame the Thatcher Government for the sharp rise in unemployment, and (ii) many voters accepted the argument that changes in industry and the world recession were the real causes for the economic problems (see section V.2.1). Political scandals such as the Iran-Contra and the Westland affairs were also damaging despite both leaders' skilful damage limitation exercises. From the viewpoint of Symbolic Politics political scandals are particularly dangerous because they are readily personalised and frequently framed around the issue of credibility. A widely unpopular policy, for instance the poll tax, can also prove to be more harmful to an incumbent than the actual criticism of the policy suggests especially if its symbolic meaning becomes a focal point for wider dissatisfaction.

Generally speaking it seems that at times of material achievement political leaders use symbolic politics in order to create an intimate association between the good news on the one hand and their own actions on the other. In such an environment political leaders want to emphasise a sense of personal success. However when they are unable to back up their actions with real achievements, symbolic politics serves to divert attention away from areas of material failure. At these times symbolic politics is also important in creating a scapegoat, with an identity distinct from the political leader, for why success has not been forthcoming. For example, an economic downturn is often blamed on the mistakes of a previous administration or on the effects of a world-wide recession. In other words political leaders try symbolically to distract from failure or to depersonalise non-success.

It was also hypothesised that symbolic politics can lead to a 'de-realisation' of political reality. This postulate is concerned with the impact of symbolic politics on the process of constructing meaning in society. The first chapter explained that the reality of a political system arises in the interaction between political actors, the mass media and the general public. By interacting with each other all members of society are actively involved in the construction of meaning. This interactive process

"is ongoing and embedded in the very dailiness of politics" (Burnier 1994: 252). Symbolic Politics draws particular attention to the fact that reality is not uniform but multiple, that is many different realities exist in society. Substantive politics cannot be separated from symbolic politics as all material decisions are interpreted on the basis of their symbolic meanings. As Mount stresses the theatrical or symbolic element in politics "is not something which is so to speak, tacked on afterwards, but something which is both central and ubiquitous" (Mount 1972: 8).

Some scholars who accept that reality is interactively constructed in society view symbolic politics as helping to create meaningful democracy. For example, Elder and Cobb state that "[t]he myth of the 'responsible citizen' who is directly and continually involved in the political process is perhaps ill-suited to the realities of a large-scale society. It may obscure the fact that for most, politics is necessarily a mediated affair often remote from their daily lives and touching them only indirectly. Symbols provide the vehicle through which people relate and respond to such a politics. They are both the imperatives of psychic economy and make popular political involvement possible" (Elder/Cobb 1983: 148). Portis agrees that symbolic politics enables popular involvement in a democracy in which most people only vicariously participate. He develops this idea and points out that for most people symbolic participation also constitutes their most important personal reward of the political process (Portis 1987).

The hypothesis that symbolic politics leads to a 'de-realisation' of political reality does not deny the validity of the argument that symbolisation helps people to make sense of politics or to participate in the political process. However the analysis of the Reagan Presidency and the Thatcher Premiership draws attention to a different interpretation of the function of symbolic politics in the construction of meaning. Many aspects of the case studies have shown that symbolic politics promotes a distorted picture of complex matters. For example, Reagan's and Thatcher's

symbolic acts focused public attention on small public gestures which had no material impact. Both leaders' election campaigns created the impression of clear-cut choices limited to only a handful of issues. Symbolic rhetoric offered stock explanations for very diverse problems. The fictionalisation of political news often caused public attention to focus on highly personalised accounts of events instead of concentrating on the underlying structural issues.

This 'de-realisation' of political reality has serious consequences for a political system. First of all, issues which are difficult to present in symbolic terms receive less public attention than those issues which can easily be personalised or explained within an existing frame of reference. Long term developments or complex structural problems fall outside the prevailing symbolic mould and are therefore neglected. The interactive process between political leaders, the mass media and the general public constantly reinforces the existing symbolic mould as all participants learn to describe and to interpret events in a manner that conforms with previous experiences. It must be asked whether the 'de-realisation' of political reality may cause a political system to become unstable if it does not contain a mechanism which ensures that those issues which fall outside the symbolic mould receive attention.

Secondly, the argument has often been put forward that in modern political systems the substantive differences between opposing parties or candidates are becoming smaller. A related point is that governments operating in such systems possess only very limited substantive choice between different policies because of economic, political or international restraints. Sarcinelli argues that as a result of these similarities and restraints politicians increasingly turn to symbolic politics in order to create an illusion of real choices and material differences (Sarcinelli 1987a: 242). In other words the less it matters who is president or prime minister the more political leaders will turn to the symbolic stage to highlight artificial or irrelevant

distinctions. This process leads to further 'de-realisation' as issues are merely given public attention because they are either one of the few remaining issues where there are substantive differences between parties or candidates, or because they are particularly suitable to illustrate disagreement, albeit insignificant in material terms, by symbolic means.

Thirdly, Butler makes the point that "[d]emocratic politics relies on electors' ability to perceive relations of causality between their experiences of social life and governments' actions. Constructing and contesting such relations is a central task of politicians, and of the interest groups, media, and information brokers which straddle the unstable boundaries between state and society" (Butler 1995: 56). He goes on to say "that some intelligible relating of government activity to experienced social outcomes is a precondition for electoral accountability, and that such relations are difficult to establish in modern capitalist states" (Butler 1995: 64-65). It is arguable that 'de-realisation' caused by symbolic politics is at least partly responsible for the electorate's difficulty in perceiving a causal link between political action and its effect on their daily lives. If this trend continues and, for example, voter apathy increases further in some modern democracies, then this would raise serious questions about such issues as electoral accountability and the legitimacy of political systems.

Let us now turn more specifically to the impact of symbolic politics on the offices of the American president and, in particular, the British prime minister. The emphasis of the following discussion on the British prime minister results from the lack of an established academic framework.

Chapters IV and V have shown that symbolic politics is a central ingredient in the president's and prime minister's efforts to exercise public leadership. President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher both used symbolic politics in order to present

themselves and their policies in the best possible light. Political leaders also function as 'signifiers' and help the public to make the political world meaningful. It was outlined in chapter III that wide ranging symbolic functions are attached to the office of the American president. Moreover the American public has a relatively clear set of expectations of an 'ideal' president and any incumbent has to fulfil his duties in a manner which bears in mind those symbolic expectations of acceptable presidential behaviour. The British prime minister's symbolic function is generally regarded as more limited. It was explained in chapter III that his/her main symbolic function is that of chief public exponent of the government. In other words the prime minister is conventionally only regarded as a symbol of the political process.

This difference between the offices of the American president and the British prime minister has to be called into question. Chapter V has shown how Margaret Thatcher came to represent an important part of the British Zeitgeist in the 1980s. She came to represent more than her actual political role by symbolising a determined effort to 'turn the country around'. The Prime Minister tried to represent the virtues she regarded as necessary for making her political reforms work. Thatcher also developed a strong bond between her office and the theme of the nation. The analysis of her symbolic rhetoric illustrated the importance of such topics as patriotism or 'Britishness'. Some of her policy stands, for example, advocating the importance of a strong defence or resisting further European integration did, of course, materially underline her symbolic enthusiasm for national motifs. Foley observes that "Mrs Thatcher immersed herself in national stories and symbols in an effort to project her programme and her office, above party politics and doctrinaire divisions, into the transcendent realm of the national spirit" (Foley 1993: 160).

Little points out that today "political leaders (a) symbolize and (b) try to give effect to deeply held convictions, individual and shared, about how individuals should live

in society" (Little 1984: 554). He also argues that prime ministers *and* presidents "have become symbols of who we are, personification of our way of life and our deepest beliefs" (Little 1988: 2). The Thatcher Premiership illustrates how the British prime minister has developed a more comprehensive symbolic function than that of simply a political symbol. Thatcher took on additional symbolic meaning by representing an important part of the national mood that prevailed during her tenure and by exercising leadership with a strong emphasis on national and patriotic themes. These more comprehensive symbolic meanings are also evident from the way in which her successor, John Major, was initially perceived. In the early days of the Major Premiership some important policy changes were made, probably none more important than dropping the poll tax and its replacement with the council tax. However to a significant extent change was symbolised by emphasising a new national mood and Major's call for a nation 'at ease with itself' was the most important sign of this.

In the United States scholars have long warned about the symbolic impact of the American president. Novak states that "[o]ur danger is that one man ... is not a sufficient guide to the politics of daily reality" (Novak 1974: 257). Barber makes a similar point. He acknowledges that the president assists people in making sense of politics but warns that the dramatic presentation of his actions is dangerous: "The dark side is the power of drama to overwhelm reason: the lure of illusion, the fracturing of logic, the collapse of political conversation. The dark side is the drift into the swamp of fantasy and on over the brink of disaster. Drama offers interest but it risks political insanity" (Barber 1985: 493). More recently Langston has advocated a reform of the relationship between the president and the American public. Amongst other things he recommends "diffusing the symbolism of national stewardship" (Langston 1995: 8). "A good reform would strengthen the *political* bond between a president and his supporters. If the symbolic load upon each president's back were made lighter, the people could more readily appraise the

president's qualities as a politician" (Langston 1995: 138). He argues the American political system as a whole needs to be less personalised and more partisan in order to overcome the problem of political apathy which is best illustrated by a declining turnout of voters in presidential and other elections (Langston 1995: 135-144).

In Britain many observers have commented, most of them critically, on a 'presidentialisation' of the prime minister's office. Such comments generally refer to two separate developments. First of all, 'presidentialisation' is used to describe a trend in which the public presentation of the political process is increasingly focused on the prime minister and the leader of the opposition. For instance, as pointed out in chapter II, in recent general elections the activities of the party leaders have been given more coverage than those of any other politician. In turn party leaders have adapted their style of campaigning to suit the media's focus on their activities and their personality. For example, the general election campaign of 1997 was described as 'presidential' because the Labour Party emphasised the issue of trust in its leader as an important campaign theme (Financial Times; 19/20 April 1997; The Sun; 4 April 1997). Secondly, the term 'presidentialisation' is used to capture the notion that the prime minister has come to dominate the rest of the executive. It is thereby linked to the dispute in British political science between cabinet government and prime ministerial government. The observation that the prime minister's power is increasing is the main proposition of the advocates of the prime ministerial government thesis which advocates of the cabinet government thesis counter by pointing to the constraints on the power of the prime minister (Rhodes 1995: 13).

There are three reasons why the notion of 'presidentialisation' is not helpful when applied to the British prime minister: (i) The concept of 'presidentialisation' is ill-suited to describing the increasing public focus on the prime minister because it uses institutional terminology to explore an essentially non-institutional development. Parliamentary and presidential governments differ in respect of certain definitional

criteria outlined for example by Verney (Verney 1959) or Steffani (Steffani 1979). The fact that the British political process is often presented as centred on the activities of the prime minister does not affect the institutional distinctions between these two forms of government. (ii) The expression 'presidentialisation' is less precise than the term prime ministerial government when describing that the prime minister has become more powerful within the cabinet. It ignores the fundamental difference between Britain and a presidential system of government in which the president is the only member of the executive and as such is individually responsible for final decisions. (iii) Stating that the British prime minister is becoming more presidential also contains an implication, albeit generally speaking unintentional, that presidential systems are not themselves constantly evolving. However it is factually wrong to create the impression of presidential systems as static and constituting the end point of a developing parliamentary system.

For these reasons it is suggested here that the British prime minister has not truly become more presidential but instead his/her office has become more symbolic. In other words what has emerged in Britain is a *symbolic premiership*. This means that the prime minister has taken on far wider symbolic functions than those associated with him/her as a mere political symbol. In chapter III it was explained that according to Greenstein the American president serves six symbolic functions for the public: he acts as (i) a cognitive aid and (ii) an outlet for feelings, both of which help the public to simplify its perceptions of politics and government. He acts as (iii) a means of vicarious participation, in other words he becomes a potential object of identification. (iv) The president is a symbol of national unity and also (v) a symbol of stability and predictability. Finally (vi) he acts as a 'lightning rod' or object of displacement, which means he potentially becomes the scapegoat or focal point of protest in political communication (Greenstein 1974: 144-147). The analysis of the Thatcher Premiership has shown that most of these symbolic functions also apply to the modern prime minister. Points (i) to (iii) were often

referred to in the Thatcher case study in terms of the 'meaning creation' or 'systematising' function of symbolic politics. As regards function (iv), Thatcher strengthened the bond between the office of the prime minister and the theme of the nation. Symbolising stability and predictability is probably the least likely function to be taken on by a prime minister acting in a political system where the head of state is a hereditary monarch. Controversy surrounding the issues of Europe and the poll tax during the final phase of the Thatcher Premiership show that function (vi) can be very relevant for a prime minister.

The British prime minister's symbolic functions are not as established as the expectations surrounding the symbolic presidency in the United States. Each incumbent of 10 Downing Street has considerable flexibility in defining the precise limits of his/her symbolic premiership. In fact it is arguable that only those prime ministers who appear to be attentive to self-presentation and impression management will push the limits of the symbolic premiership onwards. As indicated in the summary of chapter V, a more symbolic premiership may also have important consequences for the way in which the British public evaluates a prime minister's performance. In other words if the office becomes more symbolic then his/her symbolic performance will become more crucial in exercising successful public leadership.

It seems no coincidence that at a time when a symbolic premiership has emerged, the symbolic meaning of the monarchy has been widely debated. Borthwick points out that "[t]he symbolism and social exclusiveness of the British monarchy has become more widely questioned" (Borthwick 1994: 8). This trend seems to be continuing. A recent poll indicated the lowest level of support for the royal family ever recorded (ICM/Guardian survey quoted in The Guardian; 12 August 1997) and headlines such as 'In search for the common touch' (The Times; 8 September 1997) were widespread in the aftermath of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. With a

developing symbolic premiership and the questioning of the symbolic meaning of the monarch, it almost seems as if the two may enter into a public contest about who best personifies the nation's virtues and its Zeitgeist. This contest could become more intense over time particularly if at some point the monarch and the prime minister are no longer separated by a generation gap.

The symbolic premiership will always differ significantly from the symbolic presidency for a number of reasons. Institutional differences between a prime minister in a parliamentary system and a president in a presidential system will remain. As a result of the contrasting institutional makeup a British head of government will always be a more partisan figure than the American chief executive. Differences between political cultures are also important. For example, it is said that American culture is more of a "'sell' culture" (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 207) than the British which emphasises the value of self-promotion. Similarly Gaffney makes the point that "the cult of the heroic individual" (Gaffney 1991: ix) is far more important in the United States. Furthermore Peele stresses that "[r]eligion occupies a much more significant place in American than in British social and political life" (Peele 1994: 73). Chapter III and the Reagan case study referred to the importance of religion in every day American politics and to the prominent role of the president. As a result the American president will always be more active in moral and religious domains than the British prime minister. In fact it is suggested in respect of the Thatcher Premiership that the position of 'the moral right' was not taken on board in a sustained manner (Durham 1989 and 1991). Foley rightly sums up: "It is almost impossible to imagine that the prime minister's office could reach a position which would rival the American presidency's centrality both in the country's view of itself and in the metaphysics of its cultural destiny and national vocation" (Foley 1993: 270).

This discussion concludes with two practical comments. The first concerns the need for more research on the "public presidency" (Barilleaux 1988: 156) and, in particular, the public premiership. Research should pay more attention to those aspects of political leadership in the United States and Great Britain concerned with symbolic communication and the construction of meaning. The summaries at the end of chapters IV and V have already mentioned the need for more detailed quantitative analyses of the impact of symbolic politics on fluctuations in presidents' and prime ministers' approval ratings. In Britain in particular qualitative research should also focus on the public's symbolic expectations of an 'ideal' prime minister. It would be interesting to contrast those expectations with the public's expectations of the monarch. In addition there is scope for exploring various aspects of modern prime ministers' communication strategies, for example their rhetoric or their skills and impact as media performer. Finally, public debate of many policy areas in the United States and Britain, for example education, health or the management of the economy is greatly influenced by symbolic politics. An investigation of the influence of symbolic politics in such areas would contribute to a better understanding of how political meaning is constructed in society.

The final comment concerns everyone who with more or less interest follows the political process. It seems very unlikely that the developments described by the terms symbolic presidency and symbolic premiership will be halted or reversed. If anything the increasing importance of spectacle in modern societies seems to suggest the opposite, namely that political leaders and their actions will become more similar in style to the contributions of other celebrities. The question is how can citizens of these societies protect themselves against this trend? Nimmo and Combs seem to provide the only plausible answer when they suggest that all citizens have to become "drama critics" (Nimmo/Combs 1983: 68) in order to make sense of their political systems.

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