Presidential Rhetoric's Visual Turn: Performance Fragments and the Politics of Illusionism

Keith V. Erickson

This essay explores the aesthetic and rhetorical implications of prudent and imprudent presidential performance fragments embodied in photo-opportunities, thereby addressing presidential rhetoric's "visual turn." Assembled as a critical rhetoric text, this essay posits that presidential performance fragments privilege the dominant ideology and its power relationships. In addition, this project argues that prudent presidential performances signal a chief executive's consubstantiality with the mythic presidency, centralized authority, and active political leadership. Imprudent photo-opportunity performances, by contrast, impact negatively a president's image, agenda, credibility, and authority. The essay concludes with a discussion of how political images symbolically affect the citizenry and democratic processes, and advances foundational issues for the critic. **Key words:** Presidential, Critical Rhetoric, Illusionism, Performance Fragments

I'll go to Japan if that's what you want. But I won't kiss their asses. *Harry S. Truman* (terHorst & Albertazzie, 1979, p. 48)

A reporter flippantly asked President Reagan what it was like being an *actor* living in the White House, to which he candidly replied: "How could you be president and not be an actor?" (Roberts, 1993, p. 9). Indeed, as Schmuhl (1990) argues, one legacy of the Reagan administration is the lesson that acting, stragecraft, and mediated images can enhance statecraft. There is little doubt that mediated images of Reagan's dramatic appearances at such historically significant sites as Normandy Beach, South Korea's DMZ, and the Berlin Wall captivated American and international audiences as *coup de théâtre.* As Meyrowitz (1985) notes, the presidency is frequently articulated in spectacle form because citizens accept the fact that chief executives "*perform* the role of president rather than *be* president" (p. 303). So doing, "the presidential performer legitimates his claims, authenticates his role, and captivates his audience" (Raphael, 1999, p. 48). Citizens, though, may be ill-equipped to distinguish between political fact and well-chosen, felicitously performed stratagem. As a consequence, such apparently innocent presidential activities as George Bush pitching horse shoes or Bill Clinton reading *The Night Before Christmas* to minority children are rarely recognized as rhetorical illusions that visually define ideological and hegemonic relationships–the "micro-physics of power" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 98).

White House manipulated photo-opportunities have dramatically altered how presidents are portrayed visually (Hart, 1994). Kennedy, for example, charmed the nation with engaging photographs of touch football, quiet contemplation, elegant affairs, international diplomacy, and a youthful family (Schlesinger, 1965). A non-photogenic Johnson, hoping to emulate his predecessor's visual appeal, staged 222

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Communication Monographs, Vol. 67, No. 2, June 2000, pp. 138–157
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photo-opportunities and had 500,000 photographs of himself taken (Lammers, 1982, p. 155). Images of Nixon toasting Chairman Mao, Ford celebrating the nation's 200th birthday in New York Harbor, and Carter shuttling peace offerings between Israel and Egypt likewise captured the attention of witnesses worldwide. The Reagan administration, however, truly mastered the art of performing the presidency: "Every moment of every appearance was scheduled, every word was scripted, every place where Reagan was expected to stand was chalked with toe marks" (Regan, 1988, p. 248). Reagan's artful use of dramatized spectacle redefined the rhetorical presidency to the extent that the "moving synoptic moment has replaced the eloquent speech" (Jamieson, 1988, p. 117). Clearly, presidential rhetoric has taken a visual turn.

Presidents stage photo-opportunities to influence, manipulate, entreat, entice, amaze, or otherwise assume power over witnesses. The White House does so knowing that citizens are twice as likely to view rather than listen to a chief executive (Hart, 1987). Moreover, public relations experts recognize that witnesses tend to believe what they see rather than hear inasmuch as "words no longer hold people's attention or their interest" (Ellul, 1985, p. 131). Recognizing this, White House photo-opportunities are staged to stimulate political interest, create social awareness, reach mass audiences, and influence the public's "psychological readiness to acquiesce" (Erickson, 1998, p. 148). Rhetorically performed gestures, however, can "blind" unsuspecting witnesses to deceptive and/or manipulative visual appeals, thereby clouding the distinction between fiction and reality (Miroff, 1988). In addition, this project contends that performance imagery reaffirms power structures by suppressing all but the dominant ideology, minimizing rational discourse, dissipating the public sphere, and disguising politically motivated ends. As such, I demonstrate how mediated presidential performances are capable of hoodwinking the public, mystifying presidential behavior, lessening an administration's accountability, suppressing the public's participation in politics, and reifying ideological authority figures (Debord, 1994; Miroff, 1989). It is these forms of scripted, symbolic gestures that this essay seeks to describe, interpret, and evaluate.

The relative invisibility of presidential performance fragments demands of the critic an imaginative critical lens, one that captures the rhetorical, aesthetic, and ideological implications of mediated images. This essay, therefore, offers an analysis of rhetorically crafted performance images following Corbin (1998), Hariman (1995), McGee (1982, 1984, 1990), and McKerrow (1989). Here, presidential performance images are considered material, symbolic fragments that may be assembled and reconstructed to illuminate their political influence. Specifically, I examine performance fragments from the perspectives of prudential style (Hariman, 1995), McGee's fragmentation thesis (Corban, 1998), and McKerrow's (1989) critical rhetoric orientation of "*symbolism that addresses publics*" (p. 101). Critical rhetoric is text-based (as opposed to agent-centered) and oriented to unpacking nonapparent power practices in the dominant ideology's fragmented discourses. I hope, therefore, to unlock the power and ideological constraints imbedded in mediated presidential performance fragments. In addition, I link performance fragments to prudential behavior, thereby identifying "crucial elements of political decision-making typically unseen by other scholars" (Hariman, 1991, p. 5). Integrated throughout this analysis is an ideational critique of the phenomenon.

Overview: Presidential Performance Fragments

Clinton respectfully commemorated the fortieth anniversary of Central High's desegregation. He did so by symbolically escorting the Little Rock Nine through the school's front door. The gesture, hailed by the Black community, reminded witnesses of the government's historic action taken to redress institutional racism ("Clinton Opens," 1997, p. 4+). Rhetorically prudent, this gesture signaled Clinton's posture toward politically marginalized and disenfranchised publics. By contrast, an imprudent performance may reveal or question a president's intention, sincerity, competence, and/or character, especially when it functions to "promote gesture over accomplishment and appearance over fact" (Miroff, 1988, p. 289). Clinton, for example, joked and laughed with an aid at Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown's funeral. Upon spotting a film crew, however, he quickly dabbed his eyes as if stricken with grief. Rush Limbaugh, conservative talk show host, derided the president's "phony acting" and aired the incident repeatedly. The White House responded that Clinton was merely reacting to allergies ("Grief analysis," 1996). Thus, as these examples illustrate, the rhetorical implications and potential consequences of prudent and imprudent presidential performances are considerable.

A president's stylized aesthetic (the ability to act with decorum to the "irrational novelty of the moment" [White, 1987, p. 20]) is managed by prudence. Kennedy, for example, left a black tie event in Los Angeles to drop in unexpectedly on a high school prom. Displaying masterful prudence, he gracefully greeted and moved among an otherwise thunderstruck crowd (Schlesinger, 1965). Clearly, a president's political style is a vital determinant of a performance fragment's visual appeal insofar as gestures do not prove, but rather aesthetically display, exhibit, and/or illuminate by miming natural performance (Stucky, 1993). To create among witnesses the impression of authenticity or naturalness, presidents stage performance fragments with attention to coherence, sensitivity, and care. Indeed, spectator receptiveness is dependent upon how well presidents articulate performance fragments. Reagan, for example, stood beneath a towering bust of Lenin and scolded Moscow intellectuals for disregarding human rights and religious freedoms. Back home, Reagan's passionate performance was widely applauded, and was subsequently deemed his finest hour (Schieffer & Gates, 1989).

A prudent political style mirrors aesthetic propriety, the rhetorical practice of image management that stimulates the spectator's aesthetic responses (emotions such as pleasure, joy, awe, wonderment). As such, prudent performance fragments appropriate and display mastery of those rhetorical and aesthetic materials that constitute the "standard[s] of rationality devised for a performative context" (Hariman, 1995, p. 27). Standards applicable to the presidency include charisma, taste, sensitivity, and responsiveness–qualities hopefully principled by *phronesis* (ethicality, practical wisdom, right action, rectitude). Performance fragments uninformed by *phronesis* may rhetorically manipulate, deceive, obfuscate, and/or dominate (McGee, cited in Corbin, 1998). Clearly, presidential imagery that misrepresents political reality not only misinforms but treats witnesses as objects of manipulation and control. Hence, a critical rhetoric critique informed by prudence can identify "how there is a relationship between [political] morality and gesture. . . ." (Hariman, 1991, p. 34).

Critically, deconstructing performance fragments requires an awareness of the aesthetic subtleties of ideology insofar as "power in the West is what displays itself

the most, and what hides itself the best" (Foucault, cited in Kritzman, 1990, p. 11). This is especially true of images that synoptically link a president to sites, rituals, and occasions that serve as markers of culture, power, and/or authority. By visually appropriating cultural and political symbols, a president is able to make "strategic choices about how to engage the popular imagination in any political situation" (Bennett, 1983, p. 42). Why? Because the "power of the State stems largely from citizen's emotional investment in its symbols" (Cos & Schatz, 1998, pp. 15–16). On the eve of Clinton's inaugural, for example, he appeared at Monticello, walked by candlelight to the Lincoln Memorial, rang a replica of the Liberty Bell, and with tear-filled eyes accepted the congratulations of Barbara Streisand and Michael Jackson at the Capitol Centre (Howard & Cerio, 1993). In addition, performance fragments influence and shape witness perceptions of political events, myths, and/or dramas. Nixon's dramatic trip to China, for example, encountered fierce press reaction regarding the Shanghai Communiqué, but the "public simply was not interested in the complex analyses of the document after having watched the spectacle of an American president welcomed in the capital of an erstwhile enemy" (Kissinger, 1979, pp. 1091–1092). High drama and exotic visuals simply minimized the "need for the inconvenient particularities of argument and inference" (Farrell, 1989, p. 161). Nor should the fact the trip coincided with the New Hampshire presidential primary go unnoticed.

Similarly, as narrative representations, performance fragments recount, retell, or reshape society's cultural and political realities. Ideologically, visual narratives intrude upon political reality insofar as they "save us the trouble of thinking and having to remember" (Ellul, 1985, pp. 127–128). In addition, presidential performance fragments silence witnesses and defuse the public sphere. Reagan's photo-opportunities, which forbid question asking, deprived the public "the genuine interplay of opinion, question, and argument that forms the basis of decisions" (Regan, 1988, p. 248). Performance fragments, therefore, practice exclusionary politics inasmuch as they relegate citizens to the status of spectator, and thereby blunt the dialectical process upon which democratic discourse depends. Monarch-like, the president seemingly governs high above the political fray (Minogue, 1985). Similarly, presidential rhetoric's visual turn suppresses alternative viewpoints as well as marginalized voices insofar as only the dominant orthodoxy is presented for viewing. Hence, performance fragments express "domination by ignoring, neglecting, and even obliterating the established sites of subordinated people" (Kuper, 1972, p. 422).

Crafted to impress, intrigue, beguile, or otherwise please witnesses, performance fragments "totally elide the distinction between the symbolic and real" (Villa, 1993, p. 227). As such, rhetorically crafted performance fragments constitute political illusions–aesthetically framed images that manipulate the public's emotions and perceptions of political reality. Reagan, for example, visited a Chicago public housing project. There, the fiscally tight-fisted president promised relief, inspected living quarters, reassured residents, and held children. This hegemonic performance fragment depicted Reagan as compassionate and humane even as it disguised his true motivation for visiting Chicago–to attend a sporting event (Regan, 1988)! Finally, performance fragments function as nominalist rhetoric. Ideologically, they name, define, or otherwise give meaning to symbolic gestures and actions. As a consequence, performance fragments enable many witnesses to "believe that they

inhabit not only an intelligible, but a satisfying political world" (Miroff, 1982, p. 224). Hence, performance fragments rhetorically manipulate an otherwise inchoate symbolic environment.

Prudent Presidential Performance Fragments

Although various exigencies, affairs of state, political ceremonies, and/or diplomatic strategies may prompt presidential performances, political need typically motivates presidents to signal visually: (1) consubstantiality with the mythic presidency; (2) ideological authority, power, and control; and (3) active leadership. Within the context of these rhetorical functions, therefore, this study assembles a text that unmasks performance fragments as powerful instruments in a contemporary president's rhetorical arsenal.

Consubstantiality with the Mythic Presidency

Performance fragments enable chief executives to *affirm visually mastery of the mythic presidency.* Citizen perceptions of the office demand that a president act presidential with such palpable authenticity as to display "true performance" (Hymes, 1975, p. 18). True performance constitutes a prudent adaptation to the standards and traditions of the mythic presidency. Presidents do not imitate their predecessors, however. Nixon correctly observed that what vitalizes the presidency is that "each man remains distinctive" (1978, p. 1078). [Pundits, for example, scoffed at Clinton's early gambit to mimic Kennedy (Alter, 1993, p. 33).] Accordingly, the electorate has witnessed a broad range of political styles and idiosyncratic takes on the mythic presidency, ranging from Johnson's roughshod élan ("a range boss on [a] cattle drive" [terHorst & Albertazzie, 1979, p. 248]) to Reagan's easy grace.

Irrespective of a distinctive style, performing the presidency prudently constitutes a rhetorical balancing act between political necessity and the public's romantic expectation of *phronesis.* [Regrettably, a president as illusionist will likely give every appearance of being a *phronimos* (McGee, in Corbin, 1998).] For example, candidate-Carter both astonished and delighted a post-Nixon electorate by declaring: "If I ever tell a lie, if I ever mislead you, if I ever betray a trust or a confidence I want you to come and take me out of the White House" (Turner, 1976, p. 30). Although inflated for dramatic effect, Carter's promise nevertheless prudently signaled his principled character and respect for the presidency. Similarly, Johnson threatened to federally enforce civil rights laws in the deep South. Johnson's bold gesture asserted "I intend to do what is right," an unexpected and courageous performative that thereby impelled nineteen hundred conservative New Orleanians to burst into applause. This authentic performance signaled Johnson's political strength and will to embrace the mythic presidency–the chief executive as a nonpartisan leader and protector of the commonweal (Goldman, 1969, p. 246).

Prudent performances also *facilitate the inventional management of presidential personae.* Even though the media expect chief executives to perform photo-ops with subtle decorum, the White House routinely craft malleable self-inventions that act out hyperbolic presidential compliments in an "uninterrupted monologue of self-praise" (Debord, 1994, p. 19). Presidents enact a variety of fictive personae (personal and public) in order to heighten their authority and to avoid imposed characterizations. For example, labeled a pro-gun control advocate, Clinton prudently staged a photo-op in a Maryland duck blind where he appeared brandishing a shotgun–an

image that deemed him "male bonding with hunters" (Clift & Hosenball, 1994, p. 25). Rhetorically crafted to read as a totality, the underlying stratagem of such image portrayals generally escapes intellectual capture. Typically, presidents enhance their political attributes by posing as bigger-than-life, simultaneously casting themselves as strong, active, decisive, and compassionate. Moreover, if artfully practiced, such prudential performances can "become *realistic,* a straightforward mimesis of dramatic reality" (Lanham, 1976, pp. 147–148). Indeed, prudent performance fragments facilitate a president's ability to realistically enact such roles as world leader, peacemaker, protector of the commonweal, guardian of cultural and political values, commander-in-chief, and chief executive. Clearly, such image fragments function contingently as nominalist rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989). In Bonn, for example, Reagan altered Europe's impression that he was a "nuclear cowboy" (Kondrack, 1982, p. 21). His subsequent remade image, buoyed by visual representations and aphoristic eloquence, depicted him as a humanitarian, diplomat, peacemaker, and world leader. Reagan's prudent performances both calmed Europe's fears and distanced him from previous positions. From the White House's perspective, Reagan's reenactment of the presidential persona through performance fragments allowed the European audience to identify with him. The mimesis form of the performance fragments provided the medium by which the audience actively, personally, and practically identified "with the verbal and nonverbal symbols of a hero cast as a vision of ideal community" (Chesebro, 1989, p. 14). In this case, the ideal accepted by the European community was the mythic presidency persona. By contrast, chief executives who offer exceedingly intimate images of themselves may appear nonpresidential, as illustrated by Johnson whose imprudent display of an abdominal scar stunned journalists (Culbert, 1983).

Closely related, staged performance fragments *reify and assert a president's popular support.* A grass-roots presidential appearance, for example, may signal presidential popularity as it seduces those easily intoxicated by hoopla, symbolism, and political power. Such performances have the impact of sublimity, a sudden aesthetic shock that transports the spectator to states of pleasure, appreciation, and acceptance. Perhaps Bush's simple reflection expresses it best: "You know, after all the politics, I'm the president. And they [the citizenry] get this sense of, you know, excitement" (Keen, 1992, p. A11). For example, immediately following his 1998 State of the Union Address, Clinton delivered speeches at Urbana, Illinois and La Crosse, Wisconsin. Vice President Gore, with cheerleader effusion and stentorian bombast implored the college audiences to "Stand up! Stand up and show support for your president" ("The Clinton Rally," 1998, p. 22). The subsequent enthusiastic response signaled the public's approval of the president and indifference to media claims of sexual misconduct. [Gore's dramatic posturing affirms McGee's notion of a materialist rhetoric ("rhetoric as object")–its "pragmatic *presence* [being] our inability safely to ignore it at the moment of its impact" (McGee, 1982, p. 45).] To an unsuspecting spectator, accolades dispensed at rallies, graduation exercises, and other celebratory occasions authenticate a president's visually projected popularity. Few performance settings, however, rival parades and motorcades for signaling popularity, commanding attention, usurping public space, and imposing deference to the chief executive. Nixon's travel party in Rome and Belgrade recognized this phenomenon when they intentionally stalled cars to create traffic jams, thereby creating the allusion of a massive presidential welcome (Kissinger, 1979). Similarly, parade imagery suggests

a president's populace support, as did Carter's emboldened walk to his inauguration: "A shock went through the crowd. They heard gasps of astonishment . . . [and] some wept openly" (Carter, 1982, p. 17). Carter's spontaneous walk reflected prudent decision-making as he enacted the "right gesture in a public space . . . for political action" (Hariman, 1991, p. 28). In like manner, state orchestrated parades (depending on levels of formality or informality) can visually signal diplomatic respect/disrespect or popularity/unpopularity.

Ideological Power, Dominance, and Control

Presidents use prudent performance imagery to *honor the dominant ideology's wisdom and assert political realities.* The White House, as a signifier of political meanings, attempts to manage and control the citizenry's views of reality by visually imposing interpretive frames that felicitously engage the public's perceptions. As such, a rhetorically staged performance fragment "achieves its effect because it simultaneously blends practical utility with aesthetic pleasure" (Leff, 1984, p. 124). Such performance fragments are complex, occasionally quixotic, and typically suspended between perceptions of accommodation and rejection of the uneven distribution of power. Indeed, administrations create or rhetorically mystify world views to influence the public's definition and perception of reality. Moreover, political reality frequently emerges from the strategic use of visuals that cue spectators' emotive impulses, unspoken agreements, and cultural recollections. Although occasionally disdained by critics, fetching images nonetheless rhetorically influence the public's acceptance of political fantasies insofar as they suppress reliance upon logic and collaborative evidence, and visually stress dominant and underlying ideological themes. Thus, Clinton's inspired releasing of a bald eagle named "Freedom" at a wilderness site on July 4, 1996, earned him the sobriquet: "Clinton the Environmentalist" (Turque & Rosenstiel, 1996, p. 26).

Prudent performance fragments can *signal a president's ideological dominance* over state ceremonies and rituals, sites of political practice and spaces of discourse. Not surprisingly, sites surrounding the ritualistic practice of asserting or affirming ideology and/or authority are selected for their ability to inspire wonderment and command respect. Ceremonies and rituals enacted at state-erected structures, monuments, and memorials, for example, articulate cherished principles, cultural recollections, and ideological values that define, soothe, and unify witnesses in a form of primitive mystification. They succeed because such prudent performances echo prior events, occasions, and actions. Hence, such ritual performatives privilege the president and symbolically create community, parry dialogue and criticism, all the while imposing political deference and conformity. Indeed, nearly all public events presided over by the president "push" witnesses into and "are operators of, and on, social order" (Handelman, 1990, p. 15). Crafted to beguile the spectator, prudent presidential performance fragments reinvigorate the values, beliefs, and traditions public events intend to evince. They effectively suspend political debate and divisiveness because, as ideological conceits, presidential performance rituals typically express "yearnings for togetherness, for fusion" (Dayan & Katz, 1991, p. viii).

Mediated as rhetorical images, performance fragments can "reassert–even magically reinvigorate–the symbols we believe in but rarely think about" (Combs, 1980, p. 23). For example, by having isolated pan-human virtues, Clinton's prudent oratory at Normandy's D-Day anniversary signaled respect for patriotism, heroic

sacrifice, and the price of freedom. So doing, the President eased tension between himself–an alleged draft dodger–and veterans (Walsh, 1994). Presidents can likewise performatively appropriate the public sphere's rules (Foucault's "orders of discourse" [Therborn, 1980, p. 82]) of who may speak, who may assert or participate, and what may or may not be uttered. Kennedy recognized this principle when he declaimed "*Ich bin ein Berliner*" at the Berlin Wall. Chaos nearly erupted, prompting him to observe that "Had I said, 'March to the wall–tear it down!" that they would have" (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 884). This lore-making gesture convincingly established Kennedy's ability to prudently perform a script capable of eliciting emotional responses for political advantage. So powerful was this gesture that years afterward Nixon, in contemplating a visit to Berlin, feared the inevitable comparisons his and Kennedy's appearance would draw (Kissinger, 1979).

Presidential performance fragments frequently *target politically influential and marginalized audiences.* Rhetorically, presidents address such groups to garner political support, and/or to create hegemonic impressions of shared power, cultural accommodation, and political inclusiveness. Thus, administrations routinely attend the conventions of (among others) minorities, educators, physicians, and lawyers. As Laclau observes, "classes cannot assert their hegemony without articulating the people in their discourse" (cited in McKerrow, 1989, p. 95). Thus, Reagan unabashedly portrayed himself as a diversity candidate by busing minorities to, and speaking at, the Statue of Liberty–a political fantasy visually constructed as reality (Nimmo & Combs, 1983). Politically inspired images that target disenfranchised or politically marginalized spectators (women, minorities, gays, children) typically signal compassion, concern, sympathy, or celebrate or reward accomplishment. Eileen Collins, the first female shuttle commander, illustrates this point as she accepted the Clinton's congratulations at a Rose Garden ceremony–her male counterparts went unacknowledged (Walsh, 1994). Similarly, presidents recognize America's diversity by being photographed at minority churches and temples, housing projects, inner-city schools, and by symbolically offering homage to current and past minority leaders. Seldom do such performance fragments positively benefit the disenfranchised even though a prudential performance should "engage the particular with the general good in mind" (Kuypers, 1996, p. 457).

Rhetorical performance fragments can likewise *privilege a president as head-of-state, diplomat, and titular representative of the American people.* As Kennedy put it, making an appearance in a foreign nation is "one of the most powerful weapons we have . . . ." (cited in Schlesinger, 1965, p. 884). In 1969, for example, Nixon's widely broadcast trip to Romania had as its contrapuntal motive the piquing of Soviet sensibilities. Nixon gloated that, "By the time we get through with this trip they are going to be out of their minds" (Kissinger, 1979, p. 156). Similarly, photo-op appearances can help repair diplomatic ill-will. Reagan's sharply symbolic visit to Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Honduras, for example, offset damage inflicted by US support of Great Britain in its war with Argentina. His adroit performances visually signaled to South and Central American nation's sensitivity, non-imperialist intentions, and a desire to mend diplomatic wounds ("Reagan Heads," 1982). Presidential gestures can also warn or threaten nations. Bush's high dudgeon televised address to the Ukranian legislature (prior to meeting Gorbachev) pointedly warned them as to the risks of suicidal nationalism and America's unwillingness to intervene in republic disputes. So doing, Bush aligned himself with Gorbachev, signaled indifference

toward internal republic squabbles, visually reinforced his image as peacemaker and world leader, and effectively squelched recklessly shrill political cant (Serrill, 1991, p. 24). Thus, deftly crafted images of a president can signal "who are the powerful and who are the weak . . . [and] reinforce authority" (Kertzer, 1988, p. 5).

In addition, presidents use visual drama to signal diplomatic policy, as did Nixon's initial tour of Europe that established the principle that the United States would consult its allies "before negotiating with . . . potential adversaries" (Nixon, 1978, p. 370). Presidents likewise enact leadership scenes to upstage political opponents. Gorbachev, for example, performed with enigmatic aplomb jack-in-the-box diplomacy. His highly visible performances won the praise and raised the hopes of the world's citizenry, and kept both Reagan and Bush off-guard in one-upmanship contests (Javetski & Fly, 1989, p. 60). Among world leaders, though, performative restraint can ease tensions and help cement relations. Bush and Gorbachev, for example, sustained each other's confidence through mutual applause and flattery. Bush vowed not to be filmed "danc[ing] on the Berlin Wall" (Talbot, 1991, p. 24)–an act that would have diminished Gorbachev's credibility at home. By contrast, Reagan dangled one foot over Berlin's demarcation line "as if to tempt the totalitarian demons on the other side" (Morganthau & DeFrank, 1982, p. 36). [A splenetic Chancellor Schmidt groused that the penchant of presidents to perform for the cameras from the *safe* side of the wall was "feckless and uselessly provocative" (Osborne, 1978, p. 10).] Too, a presidential state visit can rhetorically inspire a heartened sense of goodwill, create suspense, calm political animosities, and clarify political *agon*–"dramatic conflict between leading characters" (Combs, 1980, p. 55).

Signal Active Leadership

Presidents rhetorically craft images to *alert the populace to presidential initiatives, political agendas, and legislative accomplishments.* Johnson, for example, went to Appalachia to inaugurate the War on Poverty program as "through my eyes . . . all America saw the [impoverished]" (Johnson, 1967, pp. 78–79). Symbolically, such witnessed performances are interpretative frames that visually warrant and synoptically link the public with presidential agendas. As such, Johnson's prudently calculated appeal constituted "an aesthetic sensibility that . . . regulat[ed] the political process" (Hariman, 1991, p. 29). Similarly, symbolism generated by Bush's gestural flummery at the Iwo Jima Memorial, arguing for a constitutional amendment banning flag desecration, was for many citizens an appropriate and rhetorically compelling performance fragment. Bush's action visually signaled patriotism, reverence, and a facile evocation of one of the nation's foremost totems ("How," 1988). In this case, chirping the dominant mantra proved to be powerful politically. As such, his dramatic staging was "*artful as a performance,* not as an artifact" (McGee, 1990, p. 276). Similarly, with breast-heaving pride Johnson signed the 1965 Education Bill at his boyhood school house, a performance that pitched equal opportunity but just as surely positioned him as lawmaker. Axiomatically, it expressed earnestness, concern for minority affairs, and interest in education (Goldman, 1969). However, the significance of Johnson's theatrical appearance was that it affirmed Washington's newly imposed role in public education. Thus, the importance of such performance fragments is that they attach themselves "to a structure of signification" (Greene, 1998, p. 35).

Similarly, chief executives routinely rely on performance fragments to *heighten the*

public's awareness of salient events, political issues, policy developments, and emergencies. Clinton clearly appreciates this function: "I need to [travel more to] get the public focused back on the big issues" ("President," 1993, p. A1). Typically, presidents heighten public awareness in spectacle form at sites that visually elicit a "concentration of suggestions: of connotations, of emotions, and of authority" (Edelman, 1985, p. 96). Bush's contrived *rededication* of Mt. Rushmore during the 1992 campaign, for example, visually framed him with the American presidency's foremost icons and the mythic architecture of public memory. Visually arresting, such public event performances rupture the spectator's political structures, instantiate ideological abstractions, and impose on the public's cognition new "versions of social order . . . mediate[d] into collective abstractions" (Handelman, 1990, p. 15). Clinton, for example, effectively alerted the public to the terrorist potential of militia groups. He visited the Oklahoma City bomb site, planted a tree memorializing victims, and orchestrated a high security town-hall meeting in Montana–home to paramilitary groups and the infamous unabomber. Witnesses applauded Clinton's emblematic appearances for being on-the-job, personally tackling an issue of grave national import in seemingly a timely, concerned, sympathetic, and an authoritative manner. No critic faulted his aesthetically prudent performances as they eased public fears and sparked the nation's collective consciousness. Shortly, previously unknown weekend militia groups came under public scrutiny as they were labeled dangerous radicals (Carney, 1995).

Typically, legislative appeals taken directly to the people fail (Denton & Hahn, 1986). Knowing this, when presidents do go public they stage events and speaking engagements that maximize visual appeal. Typically, going public appearances are short-lived displays that signal presidential activity rather than demands for legislative compliance. However, for spectators absorbed by spectacle illusionism, such performance fragments "are visual forms of rhetorical support, dramatized proofs [authenticating] political reality" (Erickson, 1998, p. 148). As rhetoric, such gestural performances may signal an administration's official stance. For example, a Cassandra-like Clinton ominously warned of dire consequences should his anti-crime package not pass congress. Lacking sufficient support, he posed in Milwaukee with police officers and, in Maryland, dramatically joined a Black congregation who *prayed* for the bill's passage. Politically hardened critics and Washington insiders smirked at this jejune performance even though it gave articulate expression to the bill's salient and revelatory significance (Barnes, 1995).

Likewise, dramatic gestures can *divert the public's attention* by commanding headlines and air time that overshadow competing agents, agendas, exigencies, and/or sensitive operations. Diversionary performances are rhetorically powerful and help to explain why "a person cannot escape from the influence of dominant actors" (McKerrow, p. 94). In one week, Bush was filmed hiking through the Sequoia National Forest, announcing an end to weapons grade plutonium production, attending a baseball game, fishing in Wyoming, and meeting with the president of Mexico in an attempt to divert the public's attention from the Democratic National Convention ("Going," 1992). Similarly, Clinton proposed an education plan and visited Detroit the day the United States Senate initiated impeachment proceedings against him. Essentially, a diversionary performance in spectacle context "blocks, ignores, shuts out, other forms of cognition . . . ." (Polan, 1986, p. 63). Sidestepped or shunted to background status, real issues and problems take backstage. Reagan's

administration, for example, recognized that performance fragments offered an opportunity to capture on film rhetorically stirring images symbolizing prosperity and military might. "The idea was to divert people's attention away from substantive issues by creating a world of myths and symbols that made people feel good about themselves and their country" (Maltese, 1992, pp. 198–199). Reagan, for example, only days following the bombing of a US military barracks in Lebanon, ordered the liberation of Grenada. Exhibiting graceful comportment, he later visited the island and acceded to the clamor of a conquering hero welcome. The spectacle's appropriateness, timeliness, grandeur, and commander-in-chief imagery shifted attention from tragedy to triumph while simultaneously giving resonance and meaning to the president's anti-Communist resolve (Stengel, 1986). Thus, Reagan's presence served largely as a soothing response to an otherwise horrific disaster and a lopsided intervention.

Imprudent Presidential Performance Fragments

Presidential performance fragments are subject to uneven media coverage, dotty misinterpretation, and niggling attention that occasionally spike surges of public doubt or mistrust. A dull or embarrassing presidential performance, for example, can signal confusion, incompetence, or insensitivity. Bush's blather at Auschwitz, for example, ("Boy, they were big on crematoriums, weren't they?" [Jacoby, 1997, p. A14]) signaled a shallow appreciation of holocaust horrors. Worse, an infelicitous performance fragment may reveal itself as a rhetorical stratagem. For example, Clinton's forced images of physical vigor soured an outspoken gonzo journalist, which prompted the scatological complaint: "How many miles of this shit-eating jogging are we going to have to watch?" (Thompson, 1994, p. 188). Similarly, silly tableaux and temporary flirtations with the melodramatic ring hollow, and are likely to elicit spectator bemusement. At a New Hampshire truck stop, Bush commandeered an eighteen wheeler, blew its horns, assaulted its gears, and took it for a brief spin. Journalists greeted his return by donning trucker caps inscribed "Shit Happens"—the performance fragment never aired (Shiefer & Gaytes, 1989, p. 354). In addition, imprudent performance fragments can generate negative press and "morph" into unintended meanings. Bush's center-stage excursion to Japan generated images of a game-playing, albeit a suppliant president in search of jobs, jobs, jobs. The negative chaining fantasies depicting the performance fragment motivated one reporter to lament that "we used to know how to stage photo-opportunities and make handsome and well-engineered lies" (Lapham, 1992, p. 23). Illness aside, Bush's excursion failed to exhibit a "performative sensibility" (Hariman, 1991, p. 27). Thus, it gave critics license to question the president's rationality, grasp of issues, and ability to anticipate the contingent.

Unforeseen circumstances, poor aesthetic judgment, nongraceful demeanor, or an impromptu social blunder may diminish the rhetorical impact of even the most artfully conceived performance fragment. For example, gun shots and tear gas cut short a Bush victory speech in Panama, an incident that failed to "remind Americans at home of an administration success story" (Wines, 1992, p. A1). Austin's categories of infelicitous performatives (abuses and misfires) inform the following analyses (1975). Here, abuses are performance violations while misfires represent performances unsuccessfully enacted.

Performance Fragment Abuses

Blatantly staged or contrived performance fragments lack prudence and will likely signal disregard for truth, hint at deceitful behavior, and heighten questions regarding political manipulation. A particularly brazen, if not racist, photo-op had Clinton playing basketball with a Black teenager during the South Central Los Angeles rioting. Critics jeered: "It's inherently unpresidential, and it's locked in simplistic assumptions" (Krammer, 1993, p. 23). As Burke notes, dramatistic elements must cohere: "It is a principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene" (1931/1969, p. 3). The tactical need of the moment, for example, cannot justify modifying performances to fit diverse audiences, because they are typically unconvincing. A D-Day photo of Clinton on Normandy Beach, for example, depicted him on bended knee piously forming a cross with loose stones, with an accompanying cut-line that read "Clinton Wishes He had Served." This performance fragment exhibited appalling taste, violated standards of prudence, smacked of hypocrisy, and represented "a canonical example . . . of visual subterfuge" (Messaris, 1994, p. 186).

In addition, critics may question the political and/or ethical elements of *inappropriate, unsuitable, or frenetic performance fragments.* Carter, who showed barely a hint of aesthetic intensity, uncharacteristically displayed leanings toward ceremonial kitsch by insisting that Israeli and Egyptian delegates sign a peace accord on top of Mt. Sinai–aghast, both nations adamantly refused to surrender to such dizziness (Lasky, 1979). Similarly, Ford was eager to give an anti-crime speech at Yale University though it offered no course work in criminal justice, and would have invited a public and media pillory. One political maven argued that an appearance by Ford would lack sufficient ground-figure realism, and acidly concluded: "A crime speech at Yale is a form of insanity" (Casserly, 1977, p. 78). Performance fragments must also transcend the commonplace lest their salience and ability to inspire awe diminish. Thus, according to a former Clinton aid, the contrived necessity to dart back and forth across the nation trivializes image-making, wearies witnesses, and ultimately loses the "ability of the country to focus on what is really important" (Panetta, cited in Kiefer, 1998, p. A4). Too, frenzied photo-op performances may signal news manipulation, campaigning, showboating, or worse, inattention to matters of state in deference to "hearing the sweet music of compliments and cheers" (Hartmann, 1980, p. 385). Moreover, prudence frequently dictates deference to political reality as opposed to spun-sugar, visual fantasies. For example, even though it signaled the end of the cold war, as a lame duck president Bush declined to engage in elevated drama at the START II arms control pact signing. Bush correctly reasoned that his political status negated the need to festoon the event with self-serving political gestures (Gerstenzang & Goldberg, 1992).

Likewise, *rhetorically insensitive presidential performance fragments* may cast doubt on a chief executive's cultural awareness, reflect chauvinism, and/or spawn ugly American comparisons. When one million gay men and women marched on Washington in 1993, for example, Clinton left town–a hastily called business trip that conveniently denied activists access to the White House and forestalled guilt by association visuals. Within the gay community, however, the president's actions branded him a traitor (Shapiro, 1993). Similarly, Carter jested about catching Montezuma's revenge at a state banquet in Mexico, a remark that "made him look like a country bumpkin," and signaled cultural superiority (Lasky, 1979, p. 387).

Likewise, staging inappropriate ceremonies at emotionally supercharged sites may suggest rhetorical insensitivity. Until 1998, for example, no serving president had visited the holy sites of Jerusalem. [Clinton's canceled visit to the Western Wall in 1994 was considered a "moral victory for Arabs" (Holmes, 1994, p. A12.).] Similarly, no amount of rhetorical bleating could "vanish on command" Jewish "cultural and historical wounds" that surfaced with images of Reagan at Bitburg, a German cemetery containing remains of Nazi SS troops (Farrell, 1993, p. 292). Moreover, a president's camera hungry antics may anger or upset nations. Nixon's visit to Romania, for example, recklessly antagonized the Soviets and signaled support for a Communist dictatorship–a drama-laden trip likened to diplomatic brinkmanship (Rosenfield, 1969). Similarly, Bush shocked Israel and elicited grave criticism from Democrats by meeting and being photographed with the Syrian President, al-Assad, prior to the Desert Storm conflict with Iraq. As Israel's Arens charged: "In the Middle East, the meeting is the message" (Bierman, 1990, p. 25). Finally, images designed to disguise leisure-time activities as official business or working vacations may signal inattention to duty or portray the president as a wastrel. For example, journalists speculated "Who is in charge?" regarding Reagan's frequent (345 days in eight years) trips to, and pictorial horse-back rides at, the Western White House ("A New Round," 1985).

Performance Fragment Misfires

Ineffectual or failed visual dramas may suggest a chief executive's inability to exercise political acumen or display prudent leadership. Carter recounts that his shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Egypt, had it been unsuccessful, "would have greatly dramatized failure" inasmuch as the world awaited the mission's outcome (Carter, 1982, p. 416). Kissinger recognized that diplomacy, as political theater, requires high-profile activities that climax with dramatic yet refrained decorum. Consequently, his legendary grasp of dramatic flair included "agreements that he had prearranged but portrayed as major breakthroughs" (Destler, Gelb, & Lake, 1984, pp. 268–269). Thus, attention-holding summits generally claim substantive accomplishments as opposed to imprudent acts that question the participants' diplomatic skills, political motives, or worse, knowledge. Reagan, for example, exhibited shocking indifference toward diplomatic negotiations by being underprepared at the Reykjavik nuclear arms' reduction summit. Moreover, he engaged Gorbachev in a series of acrimonious leader-of-the-world scenes that quickly became hostile skirmishes marked by mutually exchanged barbs and a climate of disquietude (Schieffer & Gates, 1989).

Likewise, ill-timed and no-win presidential performance fragments may communicate poor judgment or frivolousness. Critics charged Bush with callous indifference following his decision to golf in Maine the day he called up military reservists bound for Iraq (Broder, 1990). Not surprisingly, such rhetorical situations are best left to surrogates or avoided altogether. Clinton, for example, debated visiting the World Trade Center bomb site, but an adviser warned: "There isn't much [you can] do except tie up traffic" (Birnbaum, 1993, p. A6). Moreover, presidents are not always welcome. Clinton was painfully aware of this fact during the 1994 congressional races (Walsh, 1994). Similarly, Bush's conservative posturing met strident rebuff and charges of perfidy at the hostile Rio Earth Summit ("Bush," 1992). Intriguingly, presidents sometimes attempt to avoid photo-opportunities. At other

times they simply miss photo-opportunities. In either case, they do so at considerable risk. For example, a prudent presidential performance at a photo-opportunity can visually legitimize, spotlight, or give prominence to individuals, groups, or organizations–especially marginalized communities. Thus, when Reagan elected not to attend an NAACP convention it was considered a snub, a rejection that symbolically characterized African-Americans as politically unimportant to a Republican president. An annoyed Benjamin Hooks snapped: "It is sufficient just to note that he found a week of play and recreation of higher priority" (West, 1983, p. 517). Similarly, should a president not participate in a host nation's rituals and ceremonies–perfect synoptic moments–it would likely signal cultural chauvinism, disinterest, disrespect, or even a foreign policy change. Carter's decision not to attend Marshall Tito's funeral, for example, inadvertently signaled an implied foreign policy decision to withdraw support for Yugoslavia (Richardson, 1980). Consequently, in a bullet-proof vest and to deafening chants of "Get Out," Reagan dutifully attended a rain soaked wreath laying ceremony at Bogota's statue of Símon Bólivar (Kittle, 1982). Similarly, a good-spirited Ford kept his appointment with Japan's Emperor Herohito even though his trousers were hopelessly too short. Journalists were "scandalized" by this sartorial gaffe (Fairchild, 1989, p. 192). Finally, student rioters forced Eisenhower to cancel a trip to Tokyo, an episode he called "the greatest triumph of the communists" during his presidency (Lisagor, 1969, p. 20).

Implications and Conclusion

McGee's fragmentation thesis and McKerrow's critical rhetoric perspective proved to be viable platforms from which to expose presidential photo-ops as rhetorically crafted ideological texts. In the spirit of these orientations, presidential images were positioned as discourse fragments symbolizing ideological power. As a critical rhetoric text, this project revealed that performance fragments frequently substitute visual stratagems for leadership, shape hegemonic and ideological power claims, and affix the chief executive to the so-called mythic presidency. Specifically, presidential images were exposed as mystifying political reality, bypassing the public forum, serving partisan interests, and misdirecting the citizenry's attention. I conclude, therefore, that presidents who routinely engage in illusionism govern "on the basis of representation and substitution" (Ellul, 1985, p. 127), a rhetorical practice that numbs the citizenry, dramatizes decision-making, masks authentic voices, exerts political dominance, and usurps the public sphere. As such, performance fragments misdirect, mislead, and/or marginalize citizens as observers of, rather than participants in, the political process (Miroff, 1982). Clearly, such political activity is contrary to the ethical practices of democratic governance (viz., Debord, 1994; Miroff, 1989; Mitchell, 1994; Wise, 1973). This is particularly sobering in light of McGee (cited in Corbin, 1998) who bluntly asserts: "Politics simply isn't informed by ethics any longer" (p. 49).

In addition, this project established that political image-making is tied to the prudential mastery of rhetorical and aesthetic materials. Typically, prudent presidential performance fragments appear natural, improvisational, propitious, and appropriately responsive to mutating rhetorical situations. In time, prudent gestures come to represent a normative "master code for successful performance" (Hariman, 1991, p. 28). Moreover, prudent performances cohere to rhetorical events, instantiate ideological abstractions, legitimate ritual expectations, harmoniously represent the

mythic presidency, construct political realities, and reflect the dominant ideology's power structures. Thus, prudence significantly impacts the visual manifestation of ideology, with power emerging as a "byproduct of successful performance" (Hariman, 1991, p. 34).

Solutions? It may be unproductive to speculate about correctives given the media's ferocious appetite for visually arresting images. Moreover, "actions oriented toward change will tend to be conducive to power maintenance rather than to its removal" (McKerrow, p. 94). Indeed, it is unlikely future administrations will refrain from utilizing rhetorical performance fragments as a means of commanding authority and exercising power. However, it is not inconceivable that a media-educated citizenry could deconstruct the physics of performance driven imagery by critically inquiring: "What does this event which we are witnessing really tell us about the president's purpose, his grasp of public affairs, his political skills?" (Miroff, 1989, p. 162). In any event, citizens should hope for that day when responsible journalists will tire of broadcasting shallow, self-serving, and/or deceptive performance fragments. Overdue, such reporters would dramatically assert themselves as neither coddlers of, nor "megaphones for, the man in the Oval Office" (George Reedy, cited in Thompson, 1983, p. 98).

Several observations regarding a critical rhetoric analysis of visual fragments emerged as a result of this project. Hariman (1995) correctly observes that "standards for appropriate performance [are] always negotiated through performance" (p. 74). That is, prudent performatives are neither rule bound nor subject to systematization. Methodologically, therefore, the critic should avoid analyzing performance fragments utilizing a template or formulaic mind-set. Performance fragments must be assembled and contextualized to appreciate fully their ideological underpinnings. Likewise, presidential performance fragments have multiple and sometimes nonapparent rhetorical objectives. Thus, a critic may misread or fail to unpack an image's ideological implications. Prudent stratagems if perceived as politically authentic may escape critical observation. Johnson's tearful address to Congress upon the assassination of Kennedy, for example, described the fallen president as a visionary whose dreams for America would be made manifest under his administration (Johnson, 1971). Critically, the President also articulated the nation's core values, beliefs, and strengths, an ideological move that disguised his true feelings toward Kennedy, comforted a grieving nation, and maintained ideological continuity. Too, a president's motives are inevitably complex (fiscally, psychologically, politically, militarily) and infrequently self-revealing. At times, therefore, imputing subtly disguised motives to a chief executive's performances may border on noetic criticism, especially attempts to tease out discrete rhetorical motives where none is intended. In addition, citizens respond polysemously–uniquely–to aesthetic performance fragments. For example, when Carter taught Sunday school, media critics both scoffed at his phoniness and praised his sincerity (Shogon, 1977). Therefore, interpreting spectator responses offers "no *certainties,*" only critical "*possibilities*" (Gray, 1989, p. 344).

Similarly, aesthetic displays are difficult to capture as performance standards are neither fixed nor universal, but temporally contingent. In short, a presidential performance witnessed *now* as a prudent gesture may be critiqued, after-the-fact, as deceitful, shallow, or rhetorically puzzling. Clinton, for example, dramatically pointed his index finger at the American public and tersely snapped: "I did not have

sexual relations with that woman. . . ." (Lacazo, 1998, p. 38). Perceived by many as an authentic performance, accusations of sexual infidelity temporarily subsided. Not until the veil of illusionism was lifted, did the public grasp the deceptiveness of the President's performance. Thus, Clinton's confession regarding Monica Lewinski collided head-on with values associated with the mythic presidency. Indeed, citizens accustomed to a self-assured Clinton were unsettled when he "dropped the mask" to reveal "the real Bill" (Noonan, 1998, p. 36). Similarly, a performance fragment dismissed as mere performance may fail to recognize the cultural force of ideology. Reagan, for example, announced a tax reform proposal in Williamsburg as its visual images suggested a "new American Revolution" (Kernell, 1986, p. 3). Newscasts redounded with images of horse drawn carriages, period costumes, militia men, and colonial flags. Why? Because such imagery triggers cultural memories and values that reify ideology. In short, witnesses are aesthetically moved by the clangor and symbols of nationalism.

Additionally, a critic must be alert to the power implications of performance fragments that seemingly aid, comfort, assist, or otherwise benefit the spectator. It is, after all "equally the case that power is not only repressive but potentially productive [helpful]. . . ." (McKerrow, 1989, 101). Note Noonan's (1990) affectionate description of how, at a memorial service, Reagan embraced the relatives of 248 soldiers who had lost their lives in a transport aircraft mishap: "Reagan embodied; he became the nation holding you, he was the nation hugging you back, and there was nothing phony about it, nothing [imprudent]" (p. 262). His Commander-In-Chief performance helped ease the pain of the Christmas tragedy. By contrast, presidents routinely take advantage of horrific events to establish dominance and authority. Chief executives visit "disaster sites to dramatize, in *deus ex machina* fashion, empathy and the healing resources of government" (Erickson, 1998, p. 148). Reagan, for example, passed sand bags at a Louisiana flood site for only 11 minutes before retreating to high ground–time enough, though, to make the evening news (Spear, 1984, p. 17). Moreover, a president's decision *not* to create a performance fragment may have ideological or power implications. Bush, for example, elected not to visit Valdez, Alaska, an oil spill site. Although Bush cited a busy schedule, one pundit allowed that "planting trees makes a better picture than holding up dead otters" (Dowd, 1989, p. A16).

In addition, critics are cautioned against rendering unidimensional or bipolar critical judgments (e.g., power/powerless; freedom/dominance; hegemonic/concordant) as politics is almost never black or white. Clearly, ideology interpenetrates society by exerting its force variously and by degree through gender, race, economic status, affiliation, and a multitude of social issues and policies (Minogue, 1985). Moreover, it cannot be argued that spectators are consistently mesmerized by, or surrender their critical judgment to performance fragments. Nor should we forget that citizens *expect* a president to perform the rituals and routines of centralized authority and governance. For example, Johnson's somber and physically demanding walk behind the horse drawn caisson holding Kennedy's casket (from the Capitol to Arlington National Cemetery) reassured mourners by giving resonance to the continuity of political order (Goldman, 1969). [Deeply touched, the former First Lady thanked him for his bravery and thoughtfulness (Kennedy, 1963).] Finally, performance fragments lend themselves to polysemous critical interpretations. For example, Johnson's aforementioned center-stage walk can be read alternatively as a

strategic ploy, simply a display of newly assumed authority. Critically speaking, therefore, mapping the intentions of ideological representations requires keen judgment and discernment.

Finally, as demonstrated by this project, performance fragments may be judged ethical or unethical. A critic essentially judges whether a performance fragment takes authenticity or verisimilitude as an end. That is, does the imaged representation reflect reality or simply the appearance of truth? Is it an authentic representation or a rhetorically crafted fiction? Nixon, for example, helped stem a public outcry by personally inspecting a Santa Barbara oil spill. Although audiences witnessed footage of a sparkling clean beach, it had been "cleaned especially for the event, while miles of beach to the north and south remained hopelessly blackened" (Bennett, 1983, p. 47). Similarly, performance fragments often suppress a president's authentic voice or persona. This is significant insofar as the self-portrait of dominant authorities is "designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule" (Scott, 1990, p. 18). Critical analyses may reveal a president's moral choices and political judgments regarding the arts of domination.

Social critics may wish to explore additional means of reading performance fragments. For example, Cloud (1994) would have social critics "seek out counter-ideological information and perspectives whose contradictions with the prevailing constructions of 'reality' expose those constructions as mystifications" (p. 157). Similarly, Greene (1998) argues for a new materialist rhetoric that abandons "a logic of representation for a logic of articulation" (p. 21). Too, drawing parallels between visual imagery and language may sponsor an Althusserian (1971) interpellation critique. Finally, a critique of concordance may judge multi-vocal accommodation accomplished through presidential dramas by "maximiz[ing] the different categories located in the discourse and then . . . recontextualiz[ing] them" (Condit, 1994, pp. 212–213). Regardless of one's critical stance, however, presidential rhetoric's visual turn offers the social critic ample ideological fragments to critique.

Future projects scholars may wish to pursue include: (1) citizen sensitivity to the rhetorical implications of political illusionism; (2) authentic and nonauthentic performative voices; (3) performatives and the privileging of power and ideology; (4) aesthetic implications of prudence and decorum; (5) critical correctives that warn or educate the citizenry to the dangers of mediated illusionism. Scholarship exploring these issues should advance significantly our appreciation and understanding of presidential rhetoric's visual turn. As Butler (1997) notes, the politics of performatives "offers an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking" (p. 118).

In conclusion, numerous scholars caution against the political dangers of deriving reality from visual representations, the consequences of which may be the creation of a "culture of images, a society of the spectacle, a world of semblances and simulacra" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 157; Debord, 1994; Miroff, 1989; Polan, 1986). Such an eventuality is possible, they contend, because the public is largely "unaware of [the president's] ontological status as *image*" (Goethals, 1978, p. 26). Unfortunately, few citizens critically discern the symbolic from the real, nor do they willingly surrender visually acquired perceptions of political reality. Indeed, presidential rhetoric's visual turn provides many spectators political satisfaction and reassurance. Citizens, it seems, are as likely as not to applaud felicitous visual stratagems. Interestingly, the polity do not want their president to perform the presidency

poorly, seemingly even if such actions adversely affect democratic processes. Critics quick to label performance fragments illusionist rhetoric, therefore, may encounter public resistance insofar as "discrediting an image may actually strengthen its acceptance" (Bennett, 1983, p. 56). Thus, critics of presidential rhetoric's visual turn should construct prudent texts mindful of this irony of the postmodern condition.

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Received: October 7, 1990
Accepted: March 14, 2000

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