

MEDIA FANTASIES  
of  
CAMPAIGN 1988

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## Media Fantasies of Campaign 1988

One of the claims of fantasy theme analysis is that utilizing the technical terms of the symbolic convergence theory to describe rhetoric and link it to public consciousness allows for the summary and synthesis of a body of research findings. While there is virtue in idiosyncratic viewpoints in rhetorical criticism it is the case that attempts to draw generalizations from a series of such studies are difficult if not impossible. So it has been my argument that there ought to be room for a coherent and integrated large scale research program in rhetorical criticism which does yield general conclusions about public discourse.

We now have a large number of studies written from the perspective of fantasy theme analysis. Some of these are studies of interpersonal, small group, and organizational discourse, some of religious discourse, some of revolutionary movements, some of reform movements, and some of political campaigns.

My own work has been heavily involved in political campaigns. Beginning with the presidential campaign of 1972, my associates and I at Minnesota have made fantasy theme analyses of the presidential campaigns of 1972, 1976, 1980, and the senatorial campaign in Minnesota in 1984.

Our technique to establish the connection between available rhetoric and resulting consciousnesses was the small sample, Q-sort study. These studies demonstrated that a number of communities of voters shared differing configurations of dramatizations and thus shared statistically different visions of the campaign. We checked our findings against the voting behavior of the subjects.

In 1980 and 1984 we took the studies a step further and using the small sample Q-sorts as the basis we developed a large scale survey technique which allowed us to generalize our small sample findings to larger audiences.

We thus have a substantial body of longitudinal research data about the rhetorical visions of partisans for political candidates and for the media professionals coupled with audience analysis of the way which voters shared or failed to share elements of the public rhetoric and how communities of voters came to symbolic convergence around different rhetorical visions.

We are now in the midst of another political campaign for the presidency. The campaign fantasy generators are going full blast and we can view the breaking news from the perspective of sixteen years of studies.

There are a number of fascinating aspects to the campaign fantasies of 1988 that are

worthy of examination in light of the previous studies but the one that I find most important and interesting at the moment is the rhetorical vision of the political scene in the United States that has been embodied in the public rhetoric of the mass media since 1972. One of the more interesting of our findings has been that the media, all of the media, radio, television, and film share a very similar rhetorical vision.

When I speak of the media in this context I refer to news and public affairs programs - especially those bits of rhetoric presented by the wire services and local news services as factual reporting. Sometimes the vision is also present in stories and reports labeled analysis. Editorialists and columnists may or may not reflect this vision of the campaign. But even editorialists and columnists often do and I would like to suggest that there is a saga which is embodied in the great majority of media rhetoric. That saga has at its core the rhetorical vision of the reported news and analysis and includes the visions of individual columnists and editorialists that overlap in substantial ways with the media rhetorical vision.

My purpose today is to describe the core rhetorical vision of the media and then link that vision to the rhetorical visions of voters in the campaigns of 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984 and conjecture about 1988. Finally I shall make some remarks of a rhetorical critical nature about the rhetoric of the media, the responses to that rhetoric, and what it means in 1988 and beyond.

In the years since 1972 our research has begun with a thorough survey of the media rhetoric and the construction of the rhetorical visions in that rhetoric. Although the rhetorical visions of the candidates have changed over the years, as I have noted that of the media has remained essentially the same.

The media rhetorical vision has an ideal type of candidate against which to evaluate the campaigners. The good candidate should deal with the vital issues of the day. The good candidate is clean as a "hound's tooth" and has no unfortunate skeletons in the closet. The candidate is not a former alcoholic, user of marijuana, adulterer, influence peddler, unfair campaigner, poor father, liar about educational background, and so forth. The candidate is able to take the tough treatment of the campaign, particularly the probing questions of media reporters in stride without making a major mistake. The candidates should develop their positions on the issues with originality, and an eye to the best interests of the electorate. The candidates should then present those issues with excellent communication skills, in an interesting manner, clearly, and openly. Unfortunately, according to most news reports, the candidate in the featured fantasy fails to have a well developed position, fails to deal with the issues that are important to the electorate, fails to be forthcoming, and fails to be presidential.

The media vision portrays the practice of journalism as, unfortunately, requiring that the media professionals must fight the attempts of candidates to hide their shortcomings; must dig out the facts relating to character flaws, must ask the difficult questions, must keep boring in with courage and persistence to try to pin down the candidate and find out what really is the case.

In terms of fantasy theme analysis, my study of the Reagan Inaugural and the hostage release goes into detail to illustrate how fantasy types serve to provide a frame for the depiction of the breaking news. In the same fashion the rhetorical vision of the media contain a number of fantasy types which provide stock scenarios that can be used to make sense out of the often confusing experiences related to campaigning. They serve as *topoi* used to serve the classical rhetoricians trying to analyze a speaking occasion and develop a speech.

Bantz's study of ABC news and its coverage of the campaign of 1972 found several of the basic fantasy types that served as integrating frames for covering large portions of campaigns and our subsequent rhetorical analysis has found several more.

The basic fantasy types to cover the overall campaign consist of analogies to races of various sorts although horse races predominate. The first fantasy type is that of the front runner. When the race has a clear front runner as legitimized by polling data then the stories focus on that candidate. Stories relate to how far ahead is the front runner? Does the front runner give evidence of stumbling? Can the front runner win? Or are they just stalking horses for other candidates? Or have front runners stumbled so often in the past that front runners cannot win? In the campaign of 1988 the main front runner stories to this point have dealt with the candidacy Gary Hart and George Bush but the front runner fantasy type came into play with the campaigns of Edmund Muskie, Ronald Reagan, Walter Mondale, Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson.

As the campaign proceeds the front runner may be portrayed as so thoroughly ensconced and ahead that nothing can stop the victory. The media professionals then move to another fantasy type, the landslide drama. Lyndon Johnson's first campaign and Richard Nixon's second were portrayed in terms of this fantasy type. The landslide fantasy type portrays a dull and ineffective campaign. Neither Johnson nor Nixon debated the issues. Indeed, neither participated in presidential debates. Johnson campaign team stayed serenely above the battle. Nixon's team relied heavily on surrogates and when the media focused their attention on the Eagleton affair the Nixon team made no comment pro or con.

Should the front runner stumble, however, and if the polls legitimize a candidate gaining on the leader, then the media professionals move from the front runner fantasy type to another which is a version of the old tortoise and hare drama. Can the front runner come back. Has the

momentum shifted? (another good sports analogy) will the Iowa bounce carry over to New Hampshire? Dan Rather reported that after the Iowa primary George Bush hit the ground standing still. A few days later a press release noted, "This weeks third-place finish in Iowa humiliated Bush. Now he's fighting for his political life. Recent polls show that his 20-point lead here has evaporated -- and that he and Dole are in a nearly dead heat. If Bush loses the primary Tuesday, his campaign could be over." This fantasy type is much more interesting than the landslide drama. The Humphrey-Nixon campaign of 1968 and the Carter-Ford campaign of 1976 illustrate this fantasy type.

One of the media dramas we found in the 1976 rhetoric was that September was the month the campaign took a turn for the gutter. But a negative campaign is a poor campaign for both candidates are desperate and desperation leads to poor elections.

Some campaigns are not characterized by front runners. One fantasy type useful for media covering primaries with a number of entrants is the drama of a faceless pack of candidates with no claim to the office except their desire for it. The news questions that stem from this fantasy type include the question of who cannot win. On radio I heard the announcer at the anchor desk ask the reporter in Iowa, about who in the Iowa primary cannot be elected. The reporter then ticked off such names of Jackson, DuPont, and Robertson. But in any case the result is public confusion, a faceless pack, public apathy and generally a bad campaign.

Once the field has narrowed down to two or three there is the possibility of the fantasy type of a horse-race, nose to nose, battling for the wire. This campaign is more newsworthy and generally more interesting to the reporters than the landslide fantasy type but less interesting than the come-from-behind underdog drama. In close races the campaign oftens get nasty. Shortly before the Iowa Caucuses a news service report read:

*Kansas Sen. Robert Dole heatedly confronted Vice President George Bush in the Senate chamber twice Thursday, demanding an apology for a campaign aide's statement and later accusing Bush of reducing the GOP presidential race to "groveling in the mud".*

The report continued that "Bush's state campaign chief, accused Dole of 'Cronyism and mean-spiritedness". The report went on to note that aides described Dole as "steaming mad" and saying later that the press release was "one of the nastiest things I've seen in politics."

In general when the media reported on political personae and events they portrayed a shoddy and disappointing state of affairs. When the media reporters portrayed political candidates they placed them in less than laudable scenes enacting scenarios that range from the uninteresting to despicable. A media fantasy of 1980 was typical. The media dramatized the campaign as one in which none of the three major candidates, Anderson, Carter, or Reagan, were presidential. Like the student in an essay examination the voters were picking "None of the above."

In the campaign of 1972, for example, the incumbent Richard Nixon was suspect for his background in using unfair campaign practices from unethical attacks on his opponent Helen Gahagan Douglas, to his behavior on the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, to his Checker's Speech. The other major candidate George McGovern was a politician pretending to be something else but when he actually received the nomination the candidate of the dispossessed, the women, the poor, and the ethnic minorities he showed his true colors when his campaign machine turned pragmatic in order to broaden their base of support. When the crunch came he turned his back on his vice president Thomas Eagleton and waffled on all important decisions.

In 1976, the incumbent Gerald Ford was well meaning but essentially a lightweight. He had played too much football without a helmet. He bumped his head when leaving aircraft, he stumbled going down the steps. He did not understand the relationship between the government of Poland and that of the Soviet Union.

The challenger Jimmy Carter was a born again Christian who pretended to be peanut farmer and wore informal shirts without tie. He was much more sophisticated and well trained than he pretended. Although he campaigned as a Washington outsider he was really a tough politician and no better than most. His pious posing was revealed when he allowed an interview with a reporter from Playboy magazine to be published. In the magazine he admitted to lusting in his heart after other women. While publishing an interview in the magazine was not per se an undesirable thing for a politician to do it did reveal a serious character flaw in a born again candidate wanting to be President.

By 1980 the incumbent Carter had demonstrated his ineffectiveness. He was handcuffed by runaway inflation, high unemployment, and high interests rates. Iranian terrorists had kidnapped American citizens at the Embassy and the ineffective Carter administration could not deal with the situation. One network broadcast each evening the number of days the hostages had been in captivity.

The Republican candidate was an extremist, a conservative actor who made his way with a dogeared bunch of note cards giving speeches which played fast and loose with the facts. He was an old man with 19th century ideas who was trying to win office with the wiles of an actor. He could read a speech and did well with a script but without his script he was a lightweight.

By 1984 the incumbent, Ronald Reagan had demonstrated a baffling ability to keep up in the polls despite a series of unfortunate goofs. He fell asleep at awkward moments, was not up on things, was essentially lazy and did not work as hard as a President should. Nancy Reagan had to prompt him when he was caught without a script. He failed to answer difficult questions at press conferences and, indeed, his media managers were careful to keep away from the probing questions of the media reporters.

Walter Mondale the democratic challenger had the charisma of a Norway Pine. He was essentially a decent but dull human being. He was a captive of the old politics. His support was based on the old New Deal coalition of the unions, the poor, and the minorities. He had no vision and when he tried to break out from his background and select a woman to be his vice presidential candidate he picked someone whose husband had a devious financial background and whose own financial record was highly suspicious. When he tried to shake-up his campaign with the announcement of the need to raise taxes he made a major political blunder.

The one exception to unsatisfactory candidates was portrayed by the media in 1980 when the persona of John Anderson emerged in one of the Iowa debates as a politician who told the truth and played fair and square with the voters. The statement that was picked up and became a shared media fantasy took place after a number of candidates had answered the question about how they would cut taxes and raise spending for national defense and social programs and still balance the budget. The answers were attempts to suggest that tax cuts would result in larger revenues and thus it would all come together. Anderson responded that it could only be done with mirrors. The media continued to portray Anderson as a decent and honorable man with a refreshing approach to the basic issues. When it became apparent that he could not win the nomination they dramatized scenarios in which he might choose to run on a third party ticket. They continually questioned him about the possibilities. Finally, he announced his decision to run as a candidate. The media drama then switched to the he cannot win fantasy type.

In 1988, the Democratic Party fielded a large group scrambling to be president. They were a lackluster bunch. When it appeared that a woman might join them, some wag characterized the field as "Snow White and the seven dwarfs." The fantasy was widely shared in the media and the inside cue of "dwarfism" began to crop up in media reports. When Pat Schroeder decided not to run she broke down and cried. Thus, triggering an old fantasy type developed during the

Muskie primary campaign that people who cried were probably too weak to be president.

Recently, the media has portrayed weakness in a wimp fantasy type. The wimp fantasy type was a scenario in which the persona of the candidate was revealed as weak, pampered, and hypocritical. In a political campaign in Illinois Stephenson was portrayed as a wimp. The wimp issue became impossible for him to deal with and he was defeated. In the campaign of 1988, George Bush was portrayed as a possible wimp. The media reported the wimp factor as a problem and depicted the candidate's attempts to assume a more macho persona. The media recalled the Bush comment after the vice-presidential debates of 1984 when he said that he had "kicked a little ass". They also interpreted a confrontation between Bush and Dan Rather as an attempt on the part of the candidate to overcome the wimp factor.

Perhaps, the most important fantasy type for the media in the years since 1972 is the drama of the "gaffe" in which a candidate makes a blunder in something she or he does or, and more usually, in something he or she says. Gaffe's vary from relatively minor ones like Carter making a comment that was viewed as accusing his opponent of racism and Ford bumping his head as he leaves his helicopter to "smoking guns". A smoking gun gaffe is one that is fatal. The source of the smoking gun version is the archetypal fantasy of Watergate.

The archetypal Watergate fantasy has served to structure the more serious scandals in the years following. The inside cue for the application of the Watergate fantasy type to explain the breaking news is the suffix "gate". Thus, the media reported on Billy Carter's possible peddling of influence to Libyans as Billygate. The involvement of Ronald Reagan in the sale of arms to Iran and attempts to release the hostages were reported as Irangate. The Billygate fantasy did not result in widespread sharing by the general public but Irangate did which caused the media to focus on the smoking gun. Did Ronald Reagan know enough to result in impeachment and resignation from the presidency? If not did George Bush know enough to result in his resignation from the campaign?

The time and detail relating to news stories reporting in the form of the gaffe fantasy type over the years is remarkable. Every campaign has seen major gaffe fantasy types preoccupy the news.

In 1988 the gaffs fantasy type has organized fantasy themes about Hart's error in challenging the media on his womanizing. The resulting stonewalling about his relationship to Ms. Rice. His unrepentant withdrawal and blaming of the media for it. His return to the campaign. After the return the media gave both Mr. and Mrs. Hart an amazing amount of coverage, including an

interview of Mrs. Hart on sixty minutes about how she felt standing by her husband when he was an adulterer, very tight face shots of a puzzled looking interviewer and of resolute Mrs. Hart.

A second gaffe was candidate Biden's plagiarism of a British candidate's speech as excerpted in a political message. Both of these were smoking gun kinds of gaffes. In both instances the media fantasies did not make moral judgments on adultery or plagiarism.

A third gaffe was candidate Robertson having his first child too short a time after his marriage. A fourth was the crying of Pat Schroeder.

Sure evidence of the sharing of these gaffe fantasies is provided by a Bloom County comic strip by Berke Breathed in which it begins with Opus asking the caucus boss "Could you give our candidate some guidelines as to what sort of behavior is political suicide for a public figure." The caucus boss responds, "Adultery. . . like Hart's. Plagiarism . . . like Bidens. Racial insults . . . like Jimmy the Greek's. Mixing in religion . . . like Robertson. Crying . . . like Pat Schroeder.

I turn now to an overall description of the media rhetorical vision. The first thing that is surprising to me is that the rhetorical vision of the media in this country has been relatively unchanging in the last sixteen years. Indeed, I think there is evidence to suggest it has been relatively unchanged for longer than that.

In the case of the media professionals a core fantasy type of their rhetorical vision is the service-to-the-community drama in which the participants have a mission to provide the political system of the nation with the social knowledge the citizens need to make wise political choices.

In order to fulfill this mission the dramatic line of the core fantasy type features the heroic persona of the objective news gatherer, vigilant, tough, and hard working who takes no political claims at face value but digs beneath the surface to find out what is really going on. The news reporter then presents these findings for the American electorate. The scene of this drama is characterized by the wisdom of the founders who provided constitutional safeguards for freedom of the press to assure the vital mission of having an objective group to monitor the political processes.

The core fantasy type is largely assumed and only dramatized in media stories when there is an apparent challenge to the fantasy type. In 1988, for example, a school paper brought censorship charges against the school authorities for banning their paper. Court decisions brought forth news stories about the chilling effect of prior censorship on the fundamental mission of the media.

When some charged the media with being overzealous in the way reporters hounded presidential candidate Gary Hart about his sexual liaison with Ms. Rice. The media defenders again came forward with redramatization of the public's right to know and the importance of the media fulfilling its basic function in a democracy as protected by the first amendment.

Around the core fantasy type there several additional key fantasy types in the rhetorical vision of the media. One is the fantasy of the protection of sources. The drama sees the courageous reporter seeking out sources willing to reveal the true situation and protecting those sources to assure that they will not dry up. Indeed, the heroic persona will go to jail if need be to defend the sacred right of source confidentiality.

Perhaps, the most celebrated insider media fantasy theme of recent times illustrates the basic values embedded in the rhetorical vision. The Washington Post Reporters, Woodward and Bernstein, dug into the Watergate scandal and with great tenacity and resourcefulness tore off the masks of the political figures involved, revealed the most dastardly coverup of what at first seemed to be an attempt at espionage but soon turned to an even more unsavory effort at sabotage of a political opponent. Their skills as investigative reporters, their courage in pursuing the facts despite the power of the most powerful office in the land, resulted in the ultimate coup, the toppling of a president. For their sterling work the two reporters received the most important honors available to their peers, wrote a book of their experiences that became a best seller and was turned into a movie.

Another important fantasy type is that of objective reliance upon facts. The ideal reporter cannot inform the American people of political happenings unless there is solid evidence to support the claims. The reporter may attribute rumors, beliefs, and convictions to others but without sufficient documentation for claims of a political persona doing good or bad the story cannot be distributed to the electorate. The standards of the media rhetorical community, thus, provide a basis for deciding whether to go with a story or not. That honest and honorable media professionals might differ on the tough decisions nonetheless the integrity of the system requires monitoring by peers. Peer monitoring is not only essential for the integrity of the profession but vital to fend off outside efforts to provide control or censorship of media political rhetoric.

Another fantasy type is the drama of the fair media reporter. No matter what the individual's personal political preferences the heroic protagonist of this fantasy type will carefully monitor the messages to assure there is no personal bias reflected in the rhetoric. Periodically outsiders attack insiders with charges of a liberal bias often by conservative critics or a conservative bias often by socialist or Marxist critics and such works may even present "evidence" gathered from content analysis of media messages. These are typically followed by counter arguments by the

defenders of the vision reestablish the essential fairness of the news and public affairs rhetoric. For example, an article in the most recent issue of the Southern Speech Communication Journal by Stepehn A. Smith and Cherri Roden entitled "CBS, the New York Times, and Reconstructed Political Reality" notes that the editorial positions of the CBS Evening News and the New York Times are frequently attacked by the Radical Right as having a consistently liberal bias in the presentation of public affairs information. This study examined the coverage of the 1984 national election in local newscasts of a CBS affiliate and discovered that there was a bias in both time of coverage and direction of favorability toward the Reagan-Bush campaign.

The bias fantasy type is particularly important for that subculture of the professionals concentrating their efforts in radio and television reporting. The rationale has been standardized into the "fairness doctrine" and assures that news is portrayed in neutral rhetoric that is objective and factual. If biased rhetoric is used in the media it should be labeled as editorial opinion representing an institution or as the personal opinion of a political columnist.

What I have sketched in above are the important fantasy types that compose the rhetorical vision of the electronic media. These dramas establish the mission and portray the insiders as heroic personae making a vital contribution to a democratic society.

The vision also contains a panoramic depiction of the political scene in general and of the breaking news relating to a given campaign in particular. This portion of the vision as I have suggested above is more cynical and motivates practices which often bring criticism from those outside the vision.

One of the ways in which Bush tried to deal with the Rather interview found the media reporters employed another archetypal fantasy type, that of the media-basher. The media-basher fantasy type is an old one and is a mechanism that helps explain the inflexibility of the media vision. The archetype of the media basher fantasy is the old classical scenario of the messenger bring back news to the leader and being executed because the news was bad. Often the media insiders will defend their practices when attacked as an example of the media-basher fantasy. The media reporters are simply telling it the way it is. People are upset with the media because the news is bad, the truth hurts, and they would be much happier if the media were not as effective and courageous as they are. The resentment that builds up from this mistaken response to bad news (i. e. blame the messenger) makes it popular to bash the media. But despite the momentary popularity of media-bashing in the long run it does not stand up. In the media reports that I monitored the rhetoric often contained the fantasy theme about an unsavory vice president named Spiro Agnew who went on a media-bashing offensive as a surrogate for Tricky Dick Nixon and ended up in disgrace because of criminal activity is a case in point.

During the primary campaign the educational channel, for example, broadcast a background program on television news. The program included clips of anti-war demonstrators during the Democratic Convention of 1968. The graphic pictures showed police beating up demonstrators while the demonstrators shouted in unison "The Whole world's watching". The narrator commented over the pictures that they had caused violent responses in the viewing audience. In my terms some had shared the fantasy as portrayed on the media of rioting police beating up on heroic demonstrators while other viewers had strongly rejected that drama. Cut to a former president of a television network. The executive recalls that then president Lyndon Johnson called him and cursed at him and accused him of harming the country. But the network executive says with a smile, these people who blamed the network did not understand that the network only reported the bad news they did not create it. Cut to Spiro Agnew giving a speech against the network.

The media-basher fantasy type is a mechanism, perhaps, the most important mechanism for protecting the integrity of the rhetorical vision and accounts for its inflexibility. Any criticism from external sources can be portrayed as media-bashers and any success they may have will have a chilling effect on the crucial mission of the insiders.

Of course the rhetoric of the media may be dominant in terms of amount and, perhaps, in terms of believability but it is only one of a number of sources of campaign persuasion. Citizens also hear the candidates and read their written messages. They talk to one another and start up their own interpretative dramas about what is going on.

An important question, therefore, is to what extent are the rhetorical visions of voters the result of fantasy chains started by media fantasies.

In our studies of voters response to media rhetoric in 1976, 1980, and 1984 we have found a typical division of voters into 5, 6, or 7 statistical diverse rhetorical communities. Typically two of the communities will share rhetorical visions that are mirror images of one another. These rhetorical visions are those most committed to the two major candidates and can be characterized as those of the traditional democratic and republican parties. These rhetorical visions share some fantasies drawn from the media but they tend to be negative dramas about the opposing candidate. Thus, the Republicans shared the media vision about candidate Carter's major gaffe in giving an interview to Playboy magazine. In a sense such sharing is to be expected. What is more to the point is that these visions typically actively reject unsavory media portrayals of their candidate or of the campaign.

The remaining three or four rhetorical communities of voters tend to share visions which are amalgams of the media rhetoric and some of the candidates rhetoric.

In the 1980 large sample study of committed voters we found five rhetorical communities of voters. Four were amalgams of candidate rhetoric and media rhetoric and only one community actively rejected the media dramatizations.

Our 1984 study of the Growe-Boschwitz campaign in Minnesota largely supported the findings of the 1980 study in regard to the way voters share or reject media fantasies. Three of the six communities were participants in the traditional party rhetorical visions and did not share as many media fantasies nor share them in the same way as did those in the remaining three rhetorical communities. Those groups of voters who shared a goodly proportion of the media fantasies tended to be less committed to party and candidate and more likely to switch votes.

Although I have not time to make a thorough rhetorical criticism of these materials I can indicate some lines that I might take.

First we find no evidence of a bias in the media vision for a particular candidate or political party nor for a political position such as liberalism or conservatism. What we do find is an overall cynicism about the political process and the candidates. As far as the two major parties are concerned, the media slogan might well have been a "plague on both your houses". The media rhetorical vision turns out in practice to emphasize debunking fantasy types.

Generally, the media fantasies present the candidates as second rate, the people as having no choice or a poor choice, and the political process as bankrupt. The media vision is one that encourages interpretative fantasies that portray the voters as either angry and upset if they are involved and interested or as apathetic.

Conceivably, the growing disenchantment with party membership that is revealed by the studies in the post World War II period comes to some extent from the success of the media journalists in getting larger and larger proportions of the general public to share their fantasies about the campaigns.]

Participants in rhetorical visions that dramatize the election as exciting and vital and celebrate the personae of their candidates need to insulate themselves from the barrage of cynical media fantasies in order to continue commitment to their vision. Richard Dougherty, McGovern's press secretary during the 1972 campaign, bitterly castigated the press because they gave McGovern "a hell of a beating." He was referring to the Eagleton Affair. He concluded,

*The man they offered up for the people to judge was a caricature of the real man, and most reporters knew it. I would guess that 90 percent of the news people who covered McGovern voted for him. Why, if that was their ultimate personal judgement of him, could they not pass that judgment on to the public? Hard news wouldn't let them. It wouldn't have been objective reporting. You can write about a candidate who is being sneaky and bumbling: That's objective reporting. But you can't write about a candidate who is being kind and forgiving: that's editorializing." ("The Sneaky Bumbler," Newsweek, 8 Jan. 1973. p. 7).*

One way for partisans to insulate themselves from the barrage of cynical media fantasies is to share fantasy types that makes the media itself a personification of evil. Members could then discount the media fantasies as biased and malicious. Such sharing would provide an alternative explanation of the events portrayed by the media-bashing drama of the journalists.

The basic question of the rhetorical strengths and weaknesses of the media vision remain to be analyzed. The first thing that is surprising to me is that the rhetorical vision of the media in this country has been relatively unchanging in the last sixteen years. Indeed, I think there is evidence to suggest it has been relatively unchanged since the second world war. In the early 1950s Riesman, Glazer, and Denney did a study of political style which they entitled, the Lonely Crowd: A study of the Changing American Character. In that book they explain in detail a group they refer to as inside-dopesters. They note, "There are political newsmen and broadcasters who, after long training, have succeeded in eliminating all emotional responses to politics and who pride themselves on achieving the inside-dopesters' goal: never to be taken in by any person, cause, or event."

Some time ago I wrote a paper on the relative flexibility and inflexibility of rhetorical visions. We had assembled enough studies at that point so that I could see a continuum on one end of which some rhetorical vision were in continual states of flux, changing, and shifting with changing circumstances. Their boundaries were permeable and if their members shared what I called corroborated fantasies which went counter to the furniture of their rhetorical vision they had to rearrange the furniture. If a heroic persona was portrayed as a villain and this portrayal was corroborated and shared then that persona was withdrawn from the pantheon of heroes. The New Deal rhetorical vision personified by Franklin D. Roosevelt was a flexible one. The participants in the vision were pragmatic. They tried things and if they did not work they dropped them. Thus their vision spawned a host of alphabet agencies some of which were quickly dropped like the National Recovery Act, the NRA. So flexible was the vision that before

the end of Roosevelt's first term there was talk of a second New Deal because the shape of the vision was changing so rapidly.

On the other end of the continuum were rhetorical visions that were relatively inflexible. These visions retained their essential features despite what seemed to others to be changing circumstances. The boundaries of such visions were less permeable and contained fantasy types which allowed the members to assimilate apparent contradictions into their vision without rearranging its features. My favorite example emerged from the study of the Puritan rhetoric. From the time of its importation in this country in the early 1600s until it collapsed after Civil War the Puritan rhetorical vision remained very much the same. A Puritan sermon preached in 1850 was identifiably of the same kind as one preached in 1650.

An inflexible rhetorical vision has certain rhetorical strengths. Since it has retained its essential integrity over a number of years it provides a solid symbolic anchor for the participants. There is a continuity to the community, a sense of certainty, and a solid symbolic foundation for action. Because it has withstood outside critiques the insiders have rehearsed many defenses and erected an elaborate system of argumentation to defend the faith.

Inflexible rhetorical visions also pay a rhetorical price. A vision which came to maturity in a historical period to meet historical needs may continue unchanged and move into new historical periods and have to deal with changing circumstances. The inflexible vision at the time of its creation may have been productively adapted to its times and provided its participants with the rhetorical means to deal successfully with the pressing problems they faced. With the passage of time, however, the inflexible vision is likely to become conservative and finally reactionary. It becomes more and more difficult for the defenders of the faith, the rhetoricians of the movement to provide communication that enables the participants to deal with pressing problems and provide a sense of purpose, mission, and identity. Sustaining the consciousness becomes an important rhetorical problem.

In the case of the media professionals a core fantasy type of their rhetorical vision is the service-to-the-community drama in which the participants have a mission to provide the political system of the nation with the social knowledge the citizens need to make wise political choices. The rhetorical question of relative flexibility or inflexibility of the vision becomes important in this instance because of the key position of the fantasy type.

As an inflexible vision grows older cracks appear. Consciousness sustaining becomes more difficult. Insiders tend to strive to create novelty and innovation within the framework and boredom is a great danger. Many media professionals have reported on how boring they find the

coverage of campaigns in recent elections. Striving for newness means either breaking the vision or dramatizing the same fantasies in more extreme fashion. One of the major changes that the rhetorical vision of the media professionals have had to deal with is the rapid and ubiquitous growth of television as a force in political campaigning. Screaming mobs of reporters sticking microphones in faces. Reporters lying in wait to see if candidates are keeping assignations with models. Diagrams of the prostate gland and the male genitals to aid reporters in explaining presidential health problems are probably all efforts to make the old stories new, theatrical, interesting, and effective in the changed circumstances.

Finally, the basic rhetorical question that needs to be examined is central to the vision itself. How well does the media rhetoric about political campaigns provide the potential voters with the social knowledge they need to make wise decisions about how to participate in the political process? What does the continual reporting of a dull, ineffective, or bitter, conflicted campaign do to those who watch the television news and read the morning paper? Does the American citizen derive the information needed to make wise political choices? Far too often the people in our Q-Studies and large sample surveys who share the media fantasies are cynical, alienated, apathetic, discouraged about politicians and politics. They often vote against a candidate pilloried in the media rather than for the candidate.