

**Televisual Images in Presidential Politics:  
A Baudrillardian Reading of Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential Campaign**

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(ABSTRACT)

Television's role in American presidential politics is significant; sixty percent of the American people identify television as their sole source of news. Thus, a presidential candidate must do his best to appear favorably in the media. Some scholars have suggested that this involves the creation of an "image" which appeals to the electorate, even to the extent of creating the appearance of a "reality" unsupported by known facts.

We continue to explore the creation of these televisual images with the assistance of some insights made by a controversial French social theorist, Jean Baudrillard. Applying his ideas of hyperreality, simulation, "will to spectacle," fate, and power to Bill Clinton's 1992 appearance on 60 Minutes (in which he denies allegations of an affair with Gennifer Flowers) and that year's Democratic National Convention film, The Man from Hope, we corroborate the "image making" aspects of theories purported by Tim Luke and Joanne Morreale. However, we also suggest that the televisual images generated by the presidential campaign satisfy more than the candidate's political aspirations, they also fulfill a social demand for reality's production. Furthermore, we find that difficulties determining an image's meaning suggest that its appeal to the electorate is based more on "sentiment" than its ability to construct a comprehensive, consistent representation of reality. These arguments are then summarily applied to Monica Lewinsky's introduction into political discourse in late January and early February 1998.

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## Introduction

Bill Clinton won the 1992 presidential election. While the citing specific reasons for this victory may be impossible, other than the fact that he got more popular and electoral votes than George Bush or Ross Perot, one may point out elements of his campaign which helped him to win. Toward this end two things are certain: 1) the Governor from Arkansas had to develop and maintain a positive relationship with the American electorate ; and 2) that the relationship would be filtered through the media.

The media's role in politics, as in many other areas, has been, and will continue to be, widely debated; however, questions concerning the media's ability to influence popular elections, choose what is "news", and force governmental candidates to play by their rules are not the concern of this analysis. Instead, it will explore the dynamics of the relationship among the media, the electorate, and Bill Clinton with respect to some insights made by Jean Baudrillard on the role of simulation in public affairs.

### Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard began his academic publishing career as a neo-Marxist, emphasizing the need for a semiological theory of the sign with regard to political economy. He argued that the era between the 1920's and 1960's saw an increase in the capitalist classes' desire to lower production costs and increase consumption. Kellner explains that "in this era economic concentration, new production techniques, and the like, accelerated capacity for mass production and consumer capitalism focused increased attention on managing consumption and creating needs for new prestigious goods, thus producing the regime of sign-value." ( Kellner, 1994, p. 3) Thus, the traditional Marxist emphasis on use-value and exchange-value was supplemented by the consumption of sign values in what Baudrillard calls the "consumer society".

The "consumer society" exists beyond the boundaries of production, emphasized by Marx. Labor no longer exists simply to produce a product as much as it begins to mark one's lifestyle, intelligence, and social status; and one's pay does not correspond to his or her work as much as it is determined by their place in the social system. For example, the proportion of money a lawyer makes compared with a garage mechanic is not necessarily indicative of their true use value to a society; further, while being a lawyer is more prestigious than being a mechanic, both workers now are dedicated to consume rather than produce. This shift demonstrates how people living in the "consumer society" are increasingly inscribed by and pursue meanings derived, not from production or use-value, but from a system of sign-values.

Later in his career, Baudrillard argued that the notion of *hyperreality* can define this consumer oriented world. In it, simulations of great deeds (the importance of Michael Jordan's basketball accomplishments) or the aesthetic difference between products such as cars, foods, and cloths, come to enthrall the consumer in rituals of spectacle and difference, insuperseding rational judgment from a primary place in purchasing decisions. Objects are no longer just objects; they are status symbols (BMW versus Volkswagen, Air Jordans versus Keds) as the sign becomes its own set of rewards (designer chocolate cake instead of plain old pieces of fruit for a hard days work). Furthermore, subjects can become objects: Michael Jordan becomes a superhuman, Richard

Nixon embodies corruption, Murphy Brown (a sit-com character treated as real) signals the decline of American values with an on-screen out-of-wedlock birth, and John F. Kennedy symbolizes unfulfilled potential. Together, subjects and objects become stylized commodities laden with meanings beyond their use or deeds. Whether we put stock in these meanings or not is not issue. Their accuracy is not the issue. The validity of the representations are not the point in the "consumer society"; it is that they demand to be made. Signs demand that they be played with and subsequently create a world less interested in what is real than in what kind of reality can be constructed, making them more than real, which fabricates the *hyperreal*. Further, Baudrillard points out that along with hyperreality comes an *implosion* of meaning. With the enormous play of signs, differences and distinctions between gender, race, class, and all other classifications collapse as arguments proliferate. Furthermore, Baudrillard claims that this play creates a spectacle "more intense and involving than scenes from everyday life" ( Kellner, 1994, p. 8).

However, Baudrillard's most radical claims come later as derivatives of this theory. In *Fatal Strategies* Baudrillard declares that objects have triumphed over subjects. Kellner summarizes that

...not only the acceleration and proliferation of the object world intensify the aleatory dimension of chance and non-determination, but the objects themselves take over in a 'cool' catastrophe for the exhausted subject whose fascination with the play of objects turns to apathy, stupification, and an entropic inertia. (Kellner, 1994, p. 15)

Later, Baudrillard expands this theory to include the disappearance of society as it becomes a statistically represented expression of the social, a *mass* that absorbs the televisually presented play of signs. Yet is incapable of responding, leaving its constituents essentially silent.

Given the radical nature of theories such as this it seems unlikely that Baudrillard could be used to inform less abstract political research. However, we will, in fact, find them useful in centering a discussion of the increasingly hyperreal nature of American presidential races. Authors such as Tim Luke and Joanne Morreale have noted the increasing need of presidential candidates to create a sense of presidential worthiness among constituents through televisual means, Baudrillard can help us add some more specific interpretations to this line of study. Baudrillard's concepts are particularly well suited to uncover the constructed nature of meaning found in a media intensive process such as an election, and put the effects of that construction into a context. His theories of hyperreality, models, simulation, fatality, the masses and power respond to some important questions: How are the media, the electorate and the candidate related? How do they manipulate each other? And in what way, if any, does the media distort reality? We will find that the media and campaign provide a context in which the candidate can be an issue, and the media constitute a genre within the parameters of which the other must conform, while the electorate views the show, participating only to the extent that the other two drop their *polls* into lake "popular opinion," fishing for motivation and justification.

## **Making a President**

Recent political analysis has found that televisual presentation plays a large role in presidential elections. Now that 60 percent of the American population rely upon television as their sole source of news, candidates are forced to create a televisualized, hyperreal version of themselves, or an "image," in the media ( Morreale, 1993, p. 1). Luke asserts that these images attempt to generate a charisma, or the classical "gift of grace," that might legitimate the candidate's claim to the presidency (Luke, 1989, pp. 129-53). Furthermore, he cites Reagan's ability to circumvent the unfavorable historical facts of his first administration, for example, by associating his image with claims of American "renewal" are one body of evidence showing that blatant misrepresentation can become reality in a society where the telereal and spectacle are reality.

Chapter 2 will continue this line of inquiry into hyperreal charisma by considering the Clinton campaign's planned production of televisual reality. It uses a Baudrillardian reading of Clinton's 60 Minutes interview with his attempt to mitigate the possible damages of Gennifer Flower's accusations of adultery. In this interview, Bill and Hillary Clinton exploited the televisual opportunity to demonstrate their mutual love and commitment, show that they can have problems like everyday people, and be more open and honest than any other presidential candidate in history. I will argue, however, using Baudrillardian theories, that the campaign used the hyperreal to circulate only simulations of a "real marriage" and a "sincere" candidate. This political system, such as it expresses Baudrillard's sense of evil and the social's "will to spectacle" as a system of relations, necessitated this strange hyperreal presentation.

Continuing with the image manipulation/creation theme, Chapter 3 will add to Morreale's reading of the campaign film. In A New Beginning, Morreale employs frame analysis to uncover the meaning of images and production devices used by the film's creators to sway public opinion. However, while arguably and maybe even obviously correct, her assertions do not go beyond personal opinion. Therefore, I will apply Baudrillard's concepts of recurrence and "will to spectacle" to the showing of The Man From Hope at the 1992 Democratic National Convention, to uncover a more deliberate aspect of meaning construction. In the film, Bill Clinton's life story is outlined as a televisual text. Moreover, the fateful aspect of Clinton's life leading up to becoming president is emphasized by repeated themes, enhanced by video clips and photos from his life. Baudrillard's sense of meaning established by fatalistic recurrence, and assertion that it is the social's "will to spectacle" that supplies the demand for this meaning, will add an understanding of the film's produced nature and the reasons for its appeal to its viewing audience beyond the interpretation found in Joanne Morreale's use of frame analysis. Together, these events will provide the theoretical context in which we can explore some of the ways the media, the electorate and a candidate's campaign produce a telereal candidate within a presidential campaign. They will demonstrate that the Clinton campaign, first, mitigated damage to Clinton's image and then made him seem highly charismatic, even destined to be president.

The final chapter will illustrate that the findings of the previous chapters were not confined to the 1992 election. As this analysis is being brought to a close in March 1998 the media has been dominated by allegations that President Clinton had a sexual relationship with a once White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. Since the story broke on January 21, 1998 the scandal has absorbed the media, especially television. Pontifications concerning impeachment, resignation, illegality, sex in the workplace, marriage, character, the public's opinion, etc. have bantered

about, played like sub-atomic particles on a spring picnic. The arguments are everywhere all at once, moving so fast that they seem to go nowhere, while being slightly modified to encompass daily events. However, this reactionary tendency has left behind its “first mover,” forgetting that the original allegations came from alleged tapes of a Lewinsky confession which after one and a half months have still not been heard. The media has moved beyond this slight nuisance to create a web of arguments that assumes the reality of the tapes and of the legal trouble that they might cause the president. Further, this web has been sustained by the undocumented, and questionably motivated, leaks of various “sources close to.” Sources close to the White House, the president, Ken Starr (independent counsel), Vernon Jordan (Clinton’s lawyer), etc. have shaped the media’s coverage while not revealing their identities ; truth is being grounded in phantoms. This setting, where images and arguments proliferate to create a media- scape detached from, and disinterested in, the reality that it claims to represent, will help us bring together the understandings and sensitivities that we unravel throughout this analysis; help us take into account the ever persistent hyperreal.

## Chapter 1: Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard's theory focuses on the "political economy of the sign" - dynamics of the value and exchange of signs. Like commodities that are bought and sold, Baudrillard claims that signs have value and are exchanged. However, Baudrillard claims that a sign's value is established by more than its use - a sign carries meaning. A car does not just get you from point A to point B. It is a statement; it is who you are, what you believe. More than transportation, an automobile is style. All of these meanings generate the real value of a car, recentring the car as a "sign."

Saussure provides the basic understanding of the sign. For him it is the combination of a signifier and a signified. The signifier is an "acoustic-image," a word that we recognize when spoken, and the signified is a concept. United, they become a sign which we would identify as an expression associated with an idea or a referent. A referent is an object like a car. The referent differs from the signified in that we do not picture a specific VW Bug when someone says that they took their car to the store. Instead, we associate the word car with a concept of a car, not an actual car. This understanding is important because it leads to the insight that concepts, while arguably linked to "real" objects, are defined with respect to other concepts. For example, our concept of a car would be different if we did not also have the concept of a truck. Without one the other would possibly include both. It is these conceptual structures, their relationship with each other and their referents, and their fluidity that is the focus of Baudrillard's theory. (See Silverman, 1983, especially 4-25, for more detailed account signs, signifiers, signifieds and referents.)

So we see that Baudrillard's theory is first and foremost concerned with the exchange of signs, which is affected primarily by the values attributed to them. Going further he claims that there are four stages of value through which the sign has evolved through history. He writes that

the first of these stages had a natural referent, and value developed on the basis of a natural use of the world. The second was founded on a general equivalence, and value developed by reference to a logic of the commodity. The third is governed by a code, and value develops here by reference to a set of models. At the fourth, the fractal (or viral, of radiant) stage of value, there is no point of reference at all, and value radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices, without reference to anything whatsoever, by virtue of pure contiguity. (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 5)

As the stages progress, one finds that signs essentially lose any close association with their referents.

The loss of the referent leads Baudrillard to claim that reality is no longer real - it is *hyperreal*. Reality is a produced *simulation* of what is considered real, a "substituting of signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all of its *vissitudes*" (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 2). In other words, the sign evolves into a map that creates and describes a territory without the baggage of a real territory, a symptom which testifies to an illness without the presence of a real illness, or a political campaign



television commercial that uses catch phrases like “tough on crime” to characterize a (Republican) candidate who may want to dismember the Brady bill, allowing for easier gun purchase.

However, this is more than just faking. It is indeterminacy. Pretending to have a symptom of a disease is a hollow simulation. True simulation is when you actually experience symptoms without having the disease. The danger here is the blurring of lines between the "real" and "imaginary." Doctors cannot consider a simulated disease as any less real, less natural. In fact, Baudrillard argues that psychoanalysis transfers the illness from "the organic order to the unconscious order" (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 3). Now a person who experiences tinnitus (a ringing of the ears usually caused by an ear infection) may have the disease for more than physical reasons - psychological reasons may apply. Here the unconscious has been made as "real" as the conscious. This is one example of simulation's undermining of reality and suggests a derivative Baudrillardian idea to be discussed below - reality's need to reassert itself.

At this point, however, we must confront *models*, the building blocks of simulation. They organize concepts and perceptions so that they seem "real". Baudrillard explains:

Simulation is characterized by a *precession of the model*, of all models around the merest fact - the models come first, and their orbital (like the bomb) circulation constitutes the genuine magnetic field of events. Facts no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of the models; a single fact may even be engendered by all the models at once. This anticipation, this precession, this short-circuit, this confusion of the fact with its model ... is what each time allows for all the possible interpretations, even the most contradictory - all are true, in the sense that their truth is exchangeable, in the image of the models from which they proceed, in a generalized cycle. ( Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulations*, 1981/1988, p. 175)

Baudrillard's models make truth possible by contextualizing concepts while they subvert truth through their exchangeability. For example, the fall of the Soviet Union has been used to prove capitalism's superiority over communism. Others would argue that the fall of the communist regime was an example of mismanagement, not theoretical inadequacy. Still, some claim that calling the Soviet Union communist was inaccurate to begin with; what the Soviets called communism did not proceed through the revolutionary stages envisioned by Marx and Engel. The *fact* of the fall of the Soviet Union finds different meanings when put into differing contexts or models. Truth is made possible; yet it is simultaneously subverted by its exchangeability in this system.

Despite our awareness of this dilemma, truth is ultimately the victor within the model system. The nature of this model system attempts to "revive a moribund principle[s] by simulated scandal, phantasm, murder..." ( Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulations*, 1981/1988, p. 176). As Baudrillard writes, " It is always a question of proving the real by the imaginary; proving truth by scandal; proving the law by transgression; proving work by strike; proving the system by crisis and capital by revolution..." (p. 177). Models avoid their fluidity by emphasizing the truth lent them by the existence of their inverse order.

While models support their truth, they do not support the reality of that truth. In fact, reality and simulation are left interchangeable. Therefore, they are mutually unverifiable, reversible in this system. One cannot admit that a holdup is a simulation because a bank gives away real money. Moreover, the legal order cannot allow people to be mere simulators of offenses. Still, a real hold up cannot be taken out of its hyperreal context either. Baudrillard writes that

hold ups, hijacks and the like are as it were simulation hold ups, in the sense that they are inscribed in advance in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their mode of presentation and possible consequences. In brief, where they function as a set of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs, and no longer to their "real" goal at all. (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation*, 1981/1988, p. 179)

Hence, one finds that while models provide a framework in which truth can be contextualized, the "realness" or "simulatedness" of a model is not determinable.

Realizations such as these pose serious questions for presidential politics. How, if at all, does the media contextualize and/or shape a candidate's message? How does the reality of the candidate compare to the image broadcast to the public? And, what is most important where elections are concerned, how do the simulations of presidential qualities by candidates relate to the electorate and effect their vote?

### **The Subject and Object in Baudrillard**

The battle between subjects and objects is one over *meaning*; each looks to be the disseminator of meaning, the controlling factor. People like to think that they know what love, honor, money, authority, age, youth, talent, intelligence, fairness, justice, etc. mean, and what their value is. Baudrillard would warn against this arrogance. For him, objects control meaning without effort or interest. Images, such as that of a vibrant, able Ronald Reagan, determine how people envision their subjective reality while they are insensitive to the fact that subjects, people, need to *know* that Ronald Reagan *is* vibrant and able.

In Fatal Strategies Baudrillard describes how subjects and objects (for us, the public and the images we watch on television) operate within, and according to, the confines of the symbolic order (the arrangement of objects in a model). The Transparency of Evil reaffirms and further explicates some of these themes. In Fatal Strategies Baudrillard denies that "the object is real, and the real is subject to laws, and that is that" (Baudrillard, *Les stratégies fatale*, 1983/1988, p. 198). Instead, he believes that objects follow a *fatal* strategy (in the sense of both fate and death) in which they dominate subjects. Baudrillard's main focus in Fatal Strategies is a juxtaposition of banal and fatal theory/strategy. The former asserts the primacy of the subject whereas the latter contends that the object is always one step ahead of the subject (p. 198). Furthermore, while the object is not Evil in and of itself, the fatal strategy of the object is Evil in the sense that it conceals the symbolic order. (p. 199)

The symbolic order, Baudrillard writes, is violated by the "ironic presence of the object, its indifference, and its indifferent interconnections, its challenge, its seduction...." This "presence of the object" carries the "principle of Evil we [and the symbolic order] cannot escape" ( Baudrillard, *Les stratégies fatale*, 1983/1988, p. 199). Moreover, Baudrillard writes that "the object is translucent to the principle of Evil: as opposed to the subject, it is a bad conductor of the symbolic order, yet a good conductor of the fatal, that is, of pure objectivity, sovereign and irreconcilable, immanent and enigmatic" (p. 199).

This description of Evil is made more clear in The Transparency of Evil where Baudrillard argues that "the principle of Evil is not a moral principle but rather a principle of instability and vertigo,...of complexity and foreignness,...of seduction,...of incompatibility and irreducibility. It is not a death principle - far from it. It is a vital principle of disjunction" ( Baudrillard, 1990/1993, p. 108). So we find that Baudrillard's Evil does not insinuate "badness". Instead it is all that opposes stability, inevitability, certainty, ineluctability, etc. Furthermore, Evil is located primarily in objects because of the current state of culture, in this case, all over the world. Baudrillard writes:

Going over to the side of the principle of Evil implies making a choice in every sphere that is not only critical but also criminal. In any society, even a liberal one (such as ours!), this kind of choice cannot be publicly expressed. A stated position in support of the non-human or of the principle of Evil will be rejected by any value system (by 'principle of Evil' here I mean nothing more than the simple stating of a few hard truths concerning values, law, power, reality, etc.)... The world is so full of positive energy and feelings, naive sentimentality, self-important rectitude and sycophancy that irony, mockery and the *subjective* energy of evil are always in a weaker position. (Baudrillard 1990/1993, p. 108)

Evil, therefore, is found to be a principle of disorder in a world that is constantly looking for order. "Fortunately," Baudrillard claims, "the evil genie has taken up residence in *things*: this is the *objective* energy of evil" (p. 108).

Related back to the symbolic order, objects are shown, by way of their Evil quality, to confuse categories because of their indifferent (compared to the subjective need to create or find good) consideration of the symbolic order. Objects affect subjects with their proliferation; they confuse categories: A bush can be called a tree, a good person can do bad things.

One consequence of the Evil object's dissolution of the symbolic order is that the subject responds to the situation with a "will to spectacle" (Baudrillard, *Les stratégies fatale*, 1983/1988, p. 201) where "messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolize the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolize any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence." As Baudrillard states, this is because "today, in order to survive... one must draw nearer to the nullity of the real." Experiencing that nullity is found in what Baudrillard terms a "fatal diversion" (p. 200). This diversion takes the form of an "ecstatic amplification of just about anything" - monotony, for example (p. 201). Baudrillard writes that "[subjects] make it their destiny: by intensifying the appearances of the contrary; by submerging themselves to the point of ecstasy;

and by fixating monotony in an even greater one" (p. 200). This intensification is considered fatal because "super-banality," in Baudrillard's opinion, is "equivalent to fatality" (p. 200). How this is the case, Baudrillard never really explains. However, the most reasonable link is that intensification calls for recurrence. I am bored this second, as I was a second ago, and will be in the second to come. This is intensification and recurrence. Moreover, it is meaning established by fate. Baudrillard writes that "it is the first event that occurs by chance, having no meaning in itself and losing itself in the banal night of experience" (p. 200).

Only by redoubling itself can it become an actual event...- like a sign that would only be valid redoubled by its ascendant. The sign itself is indifferent; redoubled it becomes ineluctable" (Baudrillard, *Les stratégies fatale*, 1983/1988, p. 202). Sporting events, economic indicators, and politics make the importance of such recurrence obvious. Mentioned once, an athlete's "stats," the GNP, or a political position mean little; but their repetition provides context over time as Ken Griffey Jr.'s lifetime .350 batting average proves he is a great player, a growing GNP shows that American workers, armed with the capitalist philosophy, can "kick the ass" of the "commie bastards," and that Ronald Reagan's repeated assertions that he caused the rejuvenation of America became true to a populace that was later to be buried in a Reagan enhanced budget deficit. This addictive consumption of information further demonstrates that models which contextualize meaning are dependent upon this "will to spectacle" and recurrence so that they may maintain their veracity.

Furthermore, in Baudrillard's opinion, the "will to spectacle" and fatality "protects us from the real..." (Baudrillard, *Les stratégies fatale*, 1983/1988, p. 201). The dispassionate real where meaning does not exist but for eccentricity - while nature merely inconveniences on a rainy day an earthquake or flood can indicate the end of the world. Moreover, while fatality stabilizes models it also allows people a distance from the real because, as Baudrillard states, "...things extinguish themselves in the spectacle, in a magical and artificial fetishization" (p. 201).

Political campaigns can demonstrate this process. Repeating campaign slogans shows recurrence. In 1992 Bill Clinton was going to make the U.S. citizenry "one country." In 1996 he promised to "build a bridge to the 21st century." The meaning of these phrases is obscure when dissected, but their continual expression on the campaign trail provides them a meaning that transcends their few words. Interestingly, four years later Bill Clinton is not asked where we stand as "one country" when he articulates his desire to "build a bridge." Once again: "...things extinguish themselves in the spectacle..."

At this point the hyperreal nature of representation and the battle between the indifferent object and spectacle dependent subject is devoid of the motivations for creating meaning. Why do subjects even look to hyperreal objects for meaning? Why is there a "will to spectacle"? Baudrillard's discussion of power addresses these questions.

### **The Strategy of Power**

Baudrillard asserts that power operates within and has become dependent upon the parameters of t(his) hyperreal system. He asserts that "power itself [like the hold up mentioned above] eventually break[s] apart in this space... becoming a simulation of power (disconnected from its

aims and objectives, and dedicated to *power effects* and mass simulation)" ( Baudrillard, Simulacra and simulations, 1981/1988, p. 179). Subsequently, "the only weapon of power, its only strategy against this defection, is to inject realness and referentiality everywhere, in order to convince us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy and the finalities of production" (p. 179). Hence, power must prove its existence through the discourse of crisis and desire. Crisis allows power to demonstrate its effectiveness by solution while desire signifies the reality of need and distracts one from the presence of hyperreality (p. 179).

Distraction is necessary for power to assert its reality because "hyperreality and simulation are deterrents of every principle and of every objective" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and simulations, 1981/1988, p. 179). However, power needs to do more than just distract subjects from the presence of hyperreality. It must use hyperreality and simulation to reproduce itself, or at least its signs, in order to prove its existence. It must create and resolve a crisis, such as Iraq, to show that it still exists in the form of the U.S. armed forces.

Furthermore, it need not do this for its own sake but for the sake of the social. Baudrillard asserts that "unlike 'true' power which is, or was, a structure, a strategy, a relation of force, a stake - this is nothing but the object of a social *demand*" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and simulations, 1981/1988, p. 179). Consequently, power is subject to the law of consumption, supply and demand. Hence, power can only produce (supply) itself, while it is the desire (demand) of the consuming social that it do so.

However, the aspects and motivations of the demand made by the social change throughout Baudrillard's theory. In Simulations and Simulacra the motivation is ambiguous but tied to the fear of the "collapse of the political" and/or an obsession with powers existence. (Baudrillard, Simulacra and simulations, 1981/1988, p. 180-1). In "The Masses" Baudrillard asserts that the mass' "deepest desire is perhaps to give the responsibility for one's desire to someone else" (Baudrillard, The masses: The implosion of the social in the media, 1985/1988, p. 215). In this case, the masses delegate their "power of desire, of choice, of responsibility,... to apparatuses either political or intellectual, either technical or operational, to whom has devolved the duty of taking care of all these things" (p. 215).

Hence, Baudrillard's later work suggests that the masses know that power does not really exist, but they find that its simulation keeps them from having to take responsibility for the workings of the system and from having to desire, period. There will always be people who get involved in charities, clubs, community service, and politics; however, the uninspired need not participate or defend their inactivity because the government fixes the roads, the church assures your place in heaven, and the schools raise the kids. As long as these institutions verify their responsibility in these areas, which they will as the prerequisite of their existence, the masses will have a scapegoat. Here the masses' active encouragement of power, their demand, takes the form of *silence*. They let the "powers that be" poke and prod them with opinion polls that assume an opinion while they simply sit and watch their TV analysts tell them what they think. All the while they are aware of the fluidity of the truth that is supposedly held within their mass consciousness.

Baudrillard's consideration of power privileges it as the single most important hyperreal object in the landscape of social subjective experience. Subjects demand that power continually reassert itself so that they may be released of political responsibility and alienation; they focus their "will to spectacle" on the repeat performance that allows the release of anxiety. This is not like the meaning found in Jr. Griffey's lifetime batting average or Reagan's image. Those objectifications can be placed in time and retrospectively and dispassionately adjusted. In contrast, concepts such as power, love, and justice must be continually reasserted; the government's ability to win the Gulf War, your spouse's declarations of love, and a civil conviction of O.J. Simpson in the past can not assure or convince us of national security, love's existence, or the untainable nature of justice. Power only becomes a privileged entity to the extent that the public demands its government or, say, presidential candidates to continually prove that they can live up to expectations. And, as we will see, television's ability to present a multitude of images within a short period of time, repetitively, and over great distances, makes it a powerful factor in demonstrating power and generating meaning among the American public.

These Baudrillardian insights provide the foundation for a reading of the 1992 presidential campaign. Bill Clinton won the election by creating hyperreal images of himself as a loving husband and sincere candidate. Furthermore, the media pandered to the demands of the electorate (social, mass) so that simulations of "power effects" would obviate a reality that was not necessarily there. Ultimately, it was the harmony of the media-electorate relationship that allowed for, and then demanded, Bill Clinton's hyperreal construction as a worthy presidential candidate, paving the way to his victory in 1992.

## **Chapter 2: Clinton's Televisual Image and the Gennifer Flowers Accusation**

Bill Clinton faced an accusation of adultery in the 1992 election. This claim was just one of the aspects of Clinton's life that the media brought to the attention of the electorate. Others included his impoverished upbringing, his intelligent wife, his political career, and so on. However, the salience of this particular aspect of Bill Clinton's life was seen by his campaign as undesirable because it was negative: bad press can ruin a candidate. Nevertheless, Bill Clinton and his staff turned the negative publicity into the foundation of his rise to the presidency by casting doubt upon the accusation and using the publicity to increase his name recognition. Further, as we will see, Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, the idea that images can take on a meaning less and less attached to the object to which they refer, will help us to understand how this could be possible. However, we will first discuss some theories explained by Timothy Luke to gain a preliminary understanding of the relevance and behavior of televisual images in our media oriented society.

### **Televisual Charisma**

Television has changed presidential politics and elections. For campaigners, traditional attempts to inform and motivate voters have evolved into the need to control media images: debates about issues and enthusiasm are now debates about the best forums for the candidate - podiums for the authoritative leader and town meetings for the down-home, sensitive man of the people; shaking hands plays a distant second fiddle to a good sound bite; television's insatiable daily demand for updated news means that you only have to be as committed to an issue as yesterday's poll says you need to be; and the twinkling eye, pleasant smile, and smooth tongue today (Clinton) can compete with war wounds of numerous yesterdays (Dole).

Society's reliance upon television and televisual reality has been observed and commented upon by many people. In particular, Timothy Luke asserts that televisual charisma is one of the most effective campaign devices to be used in a world attuned to televisual representation; "such charisma embodies promising, personal 'American images' of viewers and voters to idealize themselves within. Beginning with JFK's dubious but aesthetically enhanced image as war hero, serious author, and global statesman in 1960 - and extending to Reagan's equally questionable symbolically intensified aura as a chosen redeemer for an America adrift on the dark seas of fear, pessimism and limits to 1980 and 1984 - this new mode of charismatic authority is gaining more leverage in America's democratic decision making" (Luke, 1989, p. 151-2).

The reason for this televisual influence is the advent of the information age: "Partly accelerated by the internationalization of capital, by the state administration of science and technology as productive forces, and by the growing need to aesthetically and technologically intensify the process of production to remain competitive, informational modes of production, organization, and control are gradually displacing the old ones of industrial society" (Luke, 1989, p. 130). In this progressively informationalized setting, traditional customs or ritualized behavior of industrial society are gradually superseded by "complex cultural codes" created by advertising, entertainment, and the news media (p. 130). Thus Luke finds that the lives of the cultural consumer are increasingly engendered by televisual images, spectacles. Luke invokes Debord to

explain spectacle: “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an intense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation” (p. 130). Presidential candidates are no exception to this general rule; they must create and maintain a charismatic, telereal image that legitimates their claim to the presidency. Luke cites Ronald Reagan’s 1984 campaign to be indicative of this need.

Reagan was able to demonstrate leadership by constructing a charismatic image of himself and selling it to consumer-like voters, despite the unfavorable facts of his first administration. Luke writes that “despite the worst recession since 1932, a total washout on foreign policy, substantially high unemployment, and growing federal budget deficits coupled with unprecedented balance-of-trade problems, the economic upturn of 1983-84 enabled the Tuesday team [Reagan’s media advisors] to package the realities of Reagan’s first administration as a ‘telereal’ American renaissance in the making” (Luke, 1989, p.147). They did this by avoiding the facts of Reagan’s first administration and “manufactur[ing] a rich package of carefully chosen images to convey the president’s charismatic authority” (p. 146). Specifically, Reagan’s campaign film A New Beginning, shows a man on the street, “he looks totally staged yet completely ‘real’ as he remarks that ‘the U.S.A. is back’ with pride, newfound patriotism, and more jobs” (p. 148); referring to Reagan’s near assassination, “any man could do what Reagan has done so far...but only a truly extraordinary man with real gifts of God’s favor could do all this after a nearly fatal shooting” (p. 148); and “another cut assures the viewer that Reagan can ‘do it’” with images of horseback riding and cutting wood in the rugged mountain wilderness of his Santa Ynez ranch (p. 149). Together, these images presented Reagan as an already successful president with the natural and God given ability to continue leading what he supposedly started: America’s rejuvenation. Yet, Luke argues, this telereal construction was only successful because “the voter chose to coproduce Reagan’s products of prosperous hope in their imaginations rather than purchase Mondale’s package of crisis-ridden gloom in the spectacular political market” (p. 146); the telereal provided “...personal ‘American images’ for viewers and voters to idealize themselves within” (p. 151). In sum, Luke argues that telereal discourses of charisma are increasingly important in gubernatorial, congressional and presidential elections, those that extend beyond the confines of local, county or municipal districts and become subject to multi-media representation. In this mediated setting, candidates must provide voters with images with which they can identify and which compensate for alienated political aspirations.

With respect to Luke’s argument, a strong defense of the import of televisual charisma, we will now supplement this assertion by looking at Bill Clinton’s 1992 appearance on 60 Minutes, where he and Hillary tried to combat charges that Bill had had an affair with Gennifer Flowers. Specific instances such as this are important to image creation because failure to control a candidate’s televisual image in these cases can damage their appeal. As Luke testifies, “...in societies based upon spectacle, televisual appearance constitutes political reality. Unless image managers can control this sort of damage - as they did with Reagan’s comeback from his lackluster Louisville debate or with Mondale’s claim of victory in the 1984 Super Tuesday primary marathon after taking only two states to Gary Hart’s four - the negative imagery spoils the charismatic appearance of the candidate” (Luke, 1989, p. 141).



Clinton's attempt to avoid spoiled imagery, in this case, will allow us to explore the relationship between the image and the referent (Bill Clinton), and how the image is created. It will also deepen our understanding of the image's relationship with the public by using ideas developed by Jean Baudrillard. We will see that Bill Clinton, in 1992, was no exception to the relatively new televisual image creating political necessity when he faced claims that he and Gennifer Flowers had had an affair; that he and his campaign staff created a media strategy that would present Bill in the best light to the largest number of voters by agreeing to a *60 Minutes* interview; and that this strategy involved the construction of a *hyperreal* Clinton, sincere and forthright, a good man in a *real* marriage, that would mitigate the effects of a tarnished image, expanding upon a viable presidential image and satisfying the public's demand to witness *power's* construction of meaning.

### **The Clinton Image as a Media Event**

Star magazine reported on January 23, 1992 that Gennifer Flowers had had an affair with Governor Bill Clinton from 1977 to 1989. Furthermore, she had taped phone conversations to prove the allegations. Governor Clinton was quick to deny the charges; though he had willingly admitted to previous wrong-doing with respect to his marriage, he vehemently denied having an affair with Gennifer Flowers. Still, the extensive news media coverage of this accusation, the Governor's response, and various interpretations of this situation were seen by the Clinton campaign as potentially detrimental. James Carville, one of the chief political consultants of the Clinton campaign, claimed that fund-raisers in Washington were worried: "This thing is going to kill us. Look at what it did to Gary Hart. How can you ask us to continue raising money when we're going to be out of the race?" (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 107). A report on Monday (January 27) in the *Washington Post* confirmed the fears of the Clinton supporters. The Governor was running first in the New Hampshire primary on the previous Monday (January 20) with 39 percent of the vote. Senator Paul Tsongas was second with 14 percentage points. By the end of the week Governor Clinton and Senator Tsongas were tied with 27 percent of the vote - a 13 point gain for Tsongas and 12 point loss for Clinton (Baltz, 1992, January 27). Still, as of Friday and Saturday (January 24 and 25), the campaign was not as sure as to the effect of the allegations. Carville writes that "we didn't know what the effect of the Gennifer Flowers story was going to be; we didn't know if the polls were going to collapse; all we knew was that the whole thing hinged on the Clinton's appearance on *60 Minutes*" (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 107). All of a sudden, Bill Clinton's image had taken on a life of its own as it became the focus of a media event.

An appearance on *60 Minutes* was the available and chosen aggressive political maneuver planned to deal with the ramifications of Gennifer Flowers' allegations. It was a perfect set-up. Though ABC's *Nightline* had offered a spot the campaign decided not to do it because they wanted the Clintons on air together, touching each other - that is what married couples do; the simulation of a happily married couple would be otherwise incomplete. *Nightline* could not provide this - bad weather the night of the broadcast would force the show to have Bill in the New York studio being interviewed while Hillary got to chime in from a video link in Atlanta. There was no such problem for *60 Minutes*; both Clintons could get to the show. Moreover, CBS had the Super Bowl that Sunday; the residual audience would be enormous. However, the campaign needed more than air time and an audience, it needed a message.

Carville asserted that the message was that "Bill and Hillary Clinton had a *real* marriage." He deemed this necessary because "if this wasn't a marriage, this wasn't a man" ( Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 108; emphasis added). Carville figured that voters would not elect someone who "wasn't a man" to President of the United States. Consequently, the Clinton campaign decided how Bill and Hillary would dress and act the night of the interview so that Bill would seem honest and sincere and their marriage would seem "real."

Of course, strategy and application of that strategy are two different things. The Clinton campaign, as regretted by Carville, had no control over the editing of the 60 Minutes interview (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 110). However, their pre-interview goals had been met: The final edit contained Bill categorically denying the allegations of Gennifer Flowers, admitting wrongdoing, and pointing out that the Clinton's marriage was not an "understanding" or "arrangement" - it was love. Hillary reinforced this claim by stating that she was not "some little woman standing by her man like Tammy Wynette." Continuing, she said that "I'm sitting here because I love him, and I respect him, and I honor what he's been through and what we've been through together. And you know, if that's not good enough for people, then heck, don't vote for him." (Baltz, 1992, January 27) The interview showed Bill to be forthcoming, honest and sincere, and the Clintons to be real people who overcame hard times and now had a strong, loving relationship.

The campaign strategy seemed to work; Sunday night, after the interview, polls indicated that 80 percent of people thought Governor Clinton should remain in the race ( Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 111). Monday, 73 percent asserted that the question of whether he had an affair was between Bill and his wife, 66 percent said that they would vote for a Presidential candidate who had had an affair, and 80 percent claimed that the accusations should not be an issue in the campaign ( Ifill, 1992, January 28).

Subsequently, less weight was given Ms. Flowers' accusations after the tapes were played on Monday, January 27, at a press conference. Tuesday, the New York Times reported that "the tone of the conversation was friendly, but there was nothing in what Mr. Clinton said that proved a past or present sexual relationship. The few words of risqué banter were uttered by Ms. Flowers. Mr. Clinton, whose voice sounded faint on tapes, did not appear to respond. He has not denied that he knew or talked to her on the phone" (Ifill, 1992, January 28). Furthermore, Carville writes that a tape expert, Anthony Pellicano, examined the tapes and claimed that they had been "selectively edited" and were "suspect at best" (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 113).

Despite the holes in Gennifer Flowers' allegations, the press continued to cover the story in two ways. First, the emphasis of coverage shifted from the importance of an affair to the "real" issue: credibility. People, when polled, were still not sure who was telling the truth. Subsequently, if the Governor was lying then people were less likely to vote for him. They could understand and forgive an affair as long as he and his wife had worked it out. At least this was a theory suggested in Wednesday's Washington Post.

Second, as Carville points out, the media covered the media covering the story. This view is supported by a Howard Kurtz article, in Thursday's edition of The Washington Post, called "Reports on Clinton Pose Quandary for Journalists" (1992, January 30). In the article editors

were quoted as being "ashamed for their profession," not wanting to take "news tips from the likes of the Star," and of being guilty of a circular phenomenon - "because other people treat it as a story, you don't have any choice but to." Regardless of this devaluation of the story, the end of the article then claims that the "real" issue, as mentioned above, "is not infidelity, it is lying."

Of course, Friday bought about the resolution of the theories proposed the two preceding days. A poll released on Friday January 31 announced that 33 percent said that Clinton should withdraw from the race if Ms. Flowers' accusations were confirmed - 85 percent believing this because he lied, 5 percent because he had had an affair (Baltz, 1992, January 31). As was indicated by the previous analysis, massive news coverage accompanied the accusations. Carville notes that 350 reporters showed up at the Star/Gennifer Flower's news conference (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 113). He also jokes that "350 reporters wouldn't show up if there was a cancer cure" (p. 144). This coverage had two noticeable effects.

First, Senators Tom Harkin and Bob Kerry complained that they were getting no news coverage. Tom Harkin said "we're getting the biggest crowds of the campaign... and no one [is] there to cover it" (Baltz, 1992, January 31). Furthermore, as a result of this relative blackout, Bob Kerry's campaign resolved to "engage" Bill Clinton directly with the hope of entering into some of his media space (Kolbert, 1992, January 30). The competition was not being heard while as Carville recalls, "our name recognition skyrocketed. We were the only game in town" (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 113).

In the span of two weeks Bill Clinton went from one among many possible democratic presidential nominees to the virtually single focus of American national politics as the media engaged in a self-help therapy of sorts - musing over its own nature, the necessary qualities of a potential president, the "real" issues, and the "true" desires of the American people. In this setting, the intensive scrutiny, fast pace and unpredictable conclusions of the media became a defining moment in Bill Clinton's campaign for the Presidency; his image would either be judged compatible (for the moment) or incompatible with the public's impression of a president in a matter of days. Furthermore, the intense focus of the media provided an opportunity to lay the foundation for the televisual representation of who Bill Clinton "really" was; the public could see the sincere, honest, down-to-earth family man first hand. They took advantage of the opportunity; it was the ability of the Clinton campaign to manage his image, as best as possible, when it became a media event that helped lead to his eventual presidential victory.

### **Baudrillard and the Media Event**

The above section demonstrates that the Bill Clinton's image became a media event; now we turn to how his image was constructed by the campaign within the parameters of the media. Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, the principle of evil, and "will to spectacle" will focus our discussion.

The week of January 22 to January 31, 1992 found the Clinton campaign, the news media, and the American electorate engaged in a socially demanded attempt to prove the real in the face of the principle of Evil's insidious undermining of hyperreal concepts. Two concepts, "President" and "character," to name a few, were forced to the forefront of social awareness by the

accusations of Gennifer Flowers as the media pondered the essential qualities of a president. Can an adulterer be president? If so, would he be a president with character? Subsequently, hyperreal concepts were tossed around and put into various perspectives in a media and campaign driven attempt to fix their meaning, supplying the demand of the social/masses by appeasing their "will to spectacle" and "protect[ing them] from the real."

Hyperreality's operations are the foundation of this situation. As Baudrillard argues, concepts (or signs) have become detached from what they refer to - their referent. Athletes, politicians, musicians - cars, toys, and cleaning supplies - all become predominantly known by their televisual representation, not their actual personality or use; they are dependent upon the contextualization forces of television. Thus, people demand that mass contextualization forces, such as television, to continue to situate the meaning of objects whether they be tangible cars or intangible attributes, such a honesty or sincerity. Two ungrounded concepts in this situation are "President" and "character."

To begin, what is a "president?" Yes, one can propose a definition: the elected leader, chief (political) executive, of a republic in which he or she executes the duties of said office for a preset term. However, the presidency is more than an office. It is a position held by a person. Moreover, it is a position that defines a person, and a position which comes to be defined by a person. Hence, the American electorate, in its mission to elect a "president," must consider the personality of one that is campaigning to be "President" ; does this person possess "presidential" qualities? Despite this need, nailing down the essential characteristics of a President are difficult for one obvious reason: very few people have ever met, observed first hand, and/or become intimately familiar with a President. The concept of "president" is not real - its hyperreal.

Furthermore, essential concepts associated with a "president" can also be hyperreal. One such concept is "character." An elected official is, as hoped by the electorate, in possession of "character." But what is "character?" For example, one might suggest that a person with "character" is loyal and caring. However, these need not be positive attributes if taken too far. One can be so loyal that when made President they appoint their friends, not the most qualified people. Furthermore, one can care so much about the plight of people around the world that they might put the needs of those people above the needs of their nation. Hence, "character" seems to be less about the possession of specific characteristics than it is about the proper balance of many traits: one should be caring and loyal but only in the "right" way and to the "right" extent. However, how can one ever prove that someone holds the key to that balance?

Because mediated political discourse uses hyperreal concepts like president and character, the concepts must be contextualized, organized in what Baudrillard calls models, so that they may hold meaning. Models can create meaning by stringing hyperreal concepts together: a good president is someone who has character. Now we know what a good president is while we still need to determine what exactly defines character. Though this simple construction seems transparent, a barrage of numerous hyperreal signs contextualized by models can present a simulation of reality. Bill Clinton's 60 Minutes interview is indicative of this simulation as it used appearance (a sweater and casual pants), proximity (wife by his side) and tone of voice (quiet repentance versus loud assertiveness), and invoked trigger concepts like love and honor, to

portray Bill as a good person in a loving marriage and, most important, a worthy presidential candidate. The true nature of the Clinton's "real" relationship was never shown on television, only a hyperreal, telereal representation.

Of course, the media, the campaign and the public contributed to Clinton's image construction in differing ways. The Clinton campaign's job was to prove that Bill Clinton was a "real" and acceptable candidate by situating his past actions in the context of models, most importantly the one that they perceive to define the proper attributes of a president. The news media tried to report Governor Clinton's denial, place that denial in a context, and raise questions about both the denial and its context. And the electorate, as a mass, provided opinions of the candidate, the media and the issue, and, simultaneously, drew security from the examination's reification of perceived truths while avoiding the responsibility for maintaining those truths.

Still, these separate camps did not work independently. They were constantly influencing each other. The media brought the issue to the forefront, the campaign and masses responded, the media contextualized the response, the campaign and masses responded to the contextualization, etc. However, despite the importance of this web of influence, these actors must be separated for the purpose of analysis.

### **Five Minutes to Curtain**

Bill Clinton was put in the media spotlight by Gennifer Flowers' accusation. Though early in the campaign the Clintons had admitted to marital problems and said that they had worked them out, the media's ability to put a name and face to the difficulties caused renewed interest and focused attention on this aspect of the Clinton's lives. So now the Clinton campaign needed to decide *how* to dispel concerns that the Clintons had a rocky marriage.

Thus, they came up with a strategy by which they would diffuse concern over the qualifications of their candidate with respect to his marriage. Task number one was to access high profile media coverage. This was not a problem considering that this accusation drew massive amounts of media attention. As Carville recalls, in response to his attempts to avoid being crushed by the media masses he was berated by a Boston radio reporter, "Shut up. This is a story" (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 108). *Nightline* and 60 Minutes offered time on their programs.

Only 60 Minutes allowed for the possibility of fulfilling task number two: Bill and Hillary had to be together for the interview so that love and sincerity could be simulated. A satellite connection between New York and Atlanta was not good enough. The hyperreal concepts that the campaign wished to invoke - such as love, honor, forgiveness - would lose credibility if their possessors were not even within 500 mile of each other. It would be as believable as a traveling salesman's declarations of love spoken over a phoneline from San Francisco to New York. While the assertion might be true, it more readily believed when spoken from at least within the same state! Thus, Mr. and Mrs. Clinton had to be shown together so that the hyperreal concepts, and their contextualization (within models), would be believable as real. As Baudrillard explains: "...pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 3). In this case, the Clinton campaign

wanted the televisual representation of the Clintons to pass for, simulate, reality, not suggest that there was an undisclosed reality underneath the what was seen on television.

Ubiquitous in the campaign's thinking was the necessity of presenting Bill Clinton as a "real" man with a "real" wife with a "real" marriage. As Carville states, "In my view, if people thought that union was a sham then they wouldn't believe in the candidate's sincerity on any other issue that really mattered. I thought people would accept the idea that marriages go through hard times; they would know it from personal experience, they could relate. But if this wasn't a marriage this wasn't a man" (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 108). Proving this "realness," for the sake of Bill Clinton's *sincerity*, demanded an insight into the inner working of hyperreality, models, and simulation which, first of all, demanded that two married people be seen together, touching, "living in love." These (hyperreal) signs, put into the context of a discussion about marriage, would indicate that the couple had a "real" relationship regardless of what their relationship was in reality. Of course, this attempt had to be made through a medium over which they did not have complete control and would be only partially responsible for constructing and contextualizing their message.

Toward the end of proving Governor Clinton's "manhood," the campaign contrived an interview strategy. Bill was to deny that he ever slept with Gennifer Flowers. He was not to "bitch about the press," and realize "you are not the victim." He needed to wear a sweater (no one wears a blue suit and tie on Super Bowl Sunday), admit that the marriage went through hard times but that they were "stronger at the broken places," let Hillary jump to his defense emphasizing that she is not a slave to a cheating husband, and allow her to appear as a well educated, independent woman that has forgiven and loves a man who has made mistakes (Carville & Matalin, 1994, p. 111).

The program, though edited by CBS, fulfilled these attempts by demonstrating the use of the campaign's desired hyperreal concepts and their contextualization within organizing models in relation to Steve Kroft's (the interviewer's) recontextualization. Other than the out-right denial of an affair with Gennifer Flowers, the interview was a hyperreal game played with respect to various contextualizing models.

### **Show Time!**

The move to hyperreality was instigated and obviated by Steve Kroft's first move away from the more tangible Gennifer Flowers accusations. He accomplished this feat when his line of questioning moved to the definition of problems. He asked:

You've said that your marriage has had problems. That you've had difficulties. What do you mean by that? What does that mean? Is that some kind of--help us break the code. I mean, does that mean you were separated? Does that mean you had communication problems? Does that mean you contemplated divorce? Does it mean adultery? (Baltz, 1992, January 27)

Here one finds a deliberate attempt by Steve Kroft to move beyond the ungrounded "problems." However, Bill Clinton counters with more hyperreality. He states: "I think the American people,

at least people that have been married for a long time, know what it means and know the whole range of things that it can mean." He continues later stating that "most Americans who are watching this tonight, they'll know what we're saying; they'll get it, and they'll *feel* that we've been more candid." (Baltz, 1992, January 27; emphasis added) Essentially, Bill Clinton leaves the definition of problems concerning his marriage undefined.

Yet, though ungrounded, this hyperreality is the foundation of a model that becomes constructed throughout the interview. I would call this the "worthy candidate" model. Based off of the now established fact that "they'll get it," Bill asserts that "I think [the American people are] saying, 'Here's a guy who is leveling with us.'" Furthermore, he continues his offensive by claiming that "I've told the American people more than any other presidential candidate." This second statement is then lent weight by Hillary's contextualization with respect to "detailing everything that ever went on in their marriage or their life." She claims that "it's real dangerous in this country if we don't have some zone of privacy for everybody" (Baltz, 1992, January 27). In essence, the Clinton's argument is that because "they get it" he has "leveled" with the public, going further outside a "zone of privacy" than "any other candidate for president."

Of course, none of the later concepts are any more grounded than the original "they'll get it." While one understands what it is to "level" with someone (be honest and forthright) there are no criteria to judge whether or not, in this case, Bill Clinton is leveling. Instead, Americans are expected to "feel" that Bill Clinton is "leveling" based on the fact that "they get it." Bill is being *sincere*.

Furthermore, a zone of privacy, while inferring that one need not put forth information they deem inconsequential to others, refers to no particular object. There is no criteria by which one may claim something private. In fact, the ability to declare something private demands that it be made public and consequently judged "private." Otherwise, anybody may claim anything as private. Hence, while a zone of privacy may be understood as a body of information that each individual would not choose to share with others, the "zone" in question refers to no particular information. Bill Clinton completes the model by contextualizing this hyperreal argument with respect toward other presidential candidates. He has been more honest, more forthright than any other candidate. He has infringed upon the later argued "zone of privacy" more than any other candidate. He, Bill Clinton, is a "worthy candidate." Furthermore, sincerity and concern become hyperreal aspects of Bill Clinton and love becomes the hyperreal aspect of his marriage. Because first-hand observation is not possible, the television viewing audience must depend on these simulation of concern, sincerity, love and understanding put-on in a structured environment.

Yet, the "worthy candidate" model is not the only model created. A contextualization of a hyperreal "real marriage" is also constructed. In response to Steve Kroft's statement that it is "admirable" that the Clinton's have reached "some sort of understanding and arrangement," Bill responds:

Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. You're looking at two people who love each other. This is not an arrangement or an understanding. This is a marriage. That's a very different thing.

Hillary then continues:

You know, I'm not sitting here - some little woman standing by her man like Tammy Wynette. I'm sitting here because I love him, and I respect him, and I honor what he's been through and what we've been through together. And you know, if that's not enough for people, then heck, don't vote for him. ( Baltz, 1992, January 27)

These two statements claim, first, that a marriage is not just an understanding or an arrangement; it is something more. Second, within the context of this "more," Hillary asserts that she chooses freely to stay with him because of "love," "respect," and "honor." In fact, Hillary's love is stronger than Tammy Wynette's merely undying, unquestioning love. Hillary's love is even more "real". It becomes hyperreal, one could say, as love becomes contextualized with respect to a country song.

However, in line with the arguments above, these terms are devoid of tangible referents. They are signs pointing to signs, hyperreal concepts standing in for an intangible reality which must ultimately be taken at face value when someone such as Hillary Clinton claims to be in possession of them. Needless to say, the "real marriage" model also supports what I have deemed the "worthy candidate" model, however, I have separated these models because they present two different arguments at two different points in the interview.

Nevertheless, no matter how models are specified and distributed within the context of the 60 Minutes interview, their existence and identification demonstrates the role hyperreality and simulation, as theorized by Jean Baudrillard, play in the construction and reification of reality. Both the "worthy candidate" and "marriage" models, and the elements which ground them, demonstrate that the reality appealed to in the interview is self-referential. Their weight is not held in their ties to observable, identifiable referents. Their import is derived from the relationships among their hyperreal elements and the context created by these relations.

Moreover, the fact that the campaign's presentation was made on a reputable TV news magazine further lends to the truth of the Clinton's story. Like Disneyland, which Baudrillard believes "is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the 'real' world and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere," (1981/1994, p. 25) the presence of manufactured reality in situation comedies, science-fiction movies, and innumerable action dramas on television force us to believe that news magazines are the site of a reality without fabrication - concealing the manufactured nature of the fact making process. The ability of the Clinton campaign to recognize and utilize hyperreality in contemporary American culture changed the outcome of the 1992 presidential election. However, we are yet to discuss the system of relations that exist between the image produced and the public, and the effect of the image on the voting behavior.

### **The System of Relations and the Vote**



Luke claims that charismatic images help a presidential candidate assume the presidency to the extent that the image compensates for alienated political desires. This assertion demands that we locate the desires and reasons for alienation. Positive identification of desires to exert political influence and representative democracy induced alienation are familiar explanations. A system of relations among Baudrillard's Evil, the public's will to spectacle, the creation of meaning and realness, and power provide a contrasting perspective.

First, we must distance ourselves from the more apparent causal relationship between image and its effect upon an electorate as Luke presents it. Yes, Ronald Reagan was made into an icon of American rejuvenation in 1984 that, as Luke puts it, created "personal 'American images' for viewers and voters to idealized themselves within," which most likely relieved alienation anxiety by providing a 'place' within which people could couple a favorable personal and public image, positively disposing them towards Ronald Reagan. But one might also argue that the stars lined up pro-Reagan on election day. The point, locating specific reasons for electoral victory is a suspect business in the first place; though less apparent, we must consider any possibilities that locate voter motivation. A system of relation's among Baudrillard's ideas of power and its relationship with the public provide this sort of exploration.

The focus of these relationships is the media, especially television; its presence allows for, and arguably necessitates, the sustainable banter between the public, its demand for power's repetitious revelation, and reality's production. In the case of the 60 Minutes interview, the media was both a creator and disseminator of information. In cutting an hour interview into a fifteen minute segment the media aided in the construction of the Clinton message it then disseminated. Another example of the balance between creation/dissemination could be found in Star magazine's running of the Gennifer Flowers accusations. They were disseminating an assertion made by Gennifer Flowers while they arguably created the story by offering her one hundred thousand dollars to tell the story.

Yet, despite the media's propensity for being more than a transparent medium, it would be unfair to claim that it is a conscious, self-aware, deliberate animal. Yes, one may assert that the media is driven by a profit motive which, in turn, necessitates the manipulation of newspaper and television stories into "popular" commodities. However, this analysis only scratches the surface of the media's motivation. Here we reveal Baudrillard's "strategy of power" and how it uncovers the role and importance of the media in contemporary culture as exemplified by this case.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, power becomes a mere simulation of itself in a hyperreal world and consequently tries to prove its existence by "injecting realness and referentiality everywhere" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulations*, 1981/1988: 179). Realness allows for power, and our reality is power. Television magazine programs like 60 Minutes, Nightline, and Dateline make power possible by representing real people in the context of real stories while warning against real problems in an attempt of balance the public's televisual perception of reality in the face of ubiquitous "bad" news and commercial advertising. Power demands this because its exertion only becomes possible when there is a reality that can be effected by its assertion: the United States cannot go to war over oil fields and Kuwaiti borders if the public is not convinced of, or at least deems feasible, the "reality" of potential power struggles, increased gas prices and threats to the

state system encouraged by inactivity. Further, the causal, consequential nature of this reality which we consider immutable, and integrate wholly into our being, is power. Our reality is power's breath. Baudrillard writes that power "...reinject[s] realness and referentiality everywhere, in order to convince us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy and the finalities of production" (p. 179). Without our belief in the necessities of these systems of social, state and economic relations power disperses. That is why it must show itself, "live" on television, day after day. But, of course, power does not think, it cannot act, be taunted or motivated; it can only be 'produced' like the latest TV mini-series - and the public demands that it be.

Why does the public demand to see power continually reassert itself? Because Newt Gingrich went from being the leader of a rejuvenated Republicanism to the poster-boy for "Whiners International" when he complained that President Clinton gave him a bad seat and ignored him on Air Force One. What is real is not a constant. Newt's situation is but one example of the way daily events can alter our perception of reality. In a moment, Republicans went from confident future policy makers and moral trend setters to exposed game players and cry-babies (at least until the news of another Clinton affair was divulged). Here we see that the objects of our reality, like the image of Newt Gingrich, care little for our desire to *know* where we stand; they are, in Baudrillard's terms, evil. This evil presence within our contextualizing media leaves people who rely upon these media without assurance. This fluid reality, though we seldom speak or think of it as such, generates a need among spectators to continually observe and silently demand the unraveling of the real through the media, especially television. Baudrillard calls this a "will to spectacle".

The spectacle provided is Bill Clinton's 60 Minutes interview. The Clinton's performance was important not because it allowed the alienated masses to identify themselves with a person and his version of reality, at a deeper level they had to construct an image that was not only favorable to them but that satisfied the viewers expectations of a 'real' sincere, honest, good man and husband. They had to simulate and reassert reality and the expected relations of power within that reality: sin in marriage, forgiveness, respect, vulnerability, and love. It is to the extent that he succeed in this, the extent that Bill Clinton satisfied the demands of the public to provide a televisual appearance of systems of power and its reality, that Bill Clinton created a viable presidential image in the minds of American viewers.

Thus we find that Baudrillard's system of relations among evil, power, the will to spectacle, and the media provide a deeper understanding of the possible motivations and effects of televisual image creation in presidential campaigning when compared to more obvious causal hypotheses such as Luke's. However, we also lend to their import when we consider that Ronald Reagan's 1984 image of a rejuvenated America not only met the public's expectations of televisual reality, it used this ability to construct what became accepted as reality in the face of contrary evidence.

### Chapter 3: The Search for Meaning and The Man From Hope

We have now identified the increasingly influential nature of television in contemporary American politics and explored ways in which it subverts reality with hyperreality and generates meaning with models. But the construction of meaning has another *fatal* dimension, explicated by Baudrillard. The social's "will to spectacle" discussed above has a side effect: meaning is found in repetition; if something is observed once it is mere chance, observed twice it's ineluctable. This understanding adds depth to Joanne Morreale's textual frame analysis of the political campaign film and demonstrates how Clinton's campaign film used fatality, repeated hyperreal signs and the sense that it was fate that Clinton become president, to help him to win the 1992 presidential election.

Joanne Morreale, in her book A New Beginning: a Textual Frame Analysis of the Political Campaign Film, considers the way Ronald Reagan's 1984 political campaign film A New Beginning created a televisual reality with which the American public could identify, making them more likely to vote for him. Her method of analysis, textual frame analysis, "...moves from an examination of framing, to ideology, to myths that express ideologies, to the particular ways that myths are communicated" (Morreale, 1991, p. 6-7). The use of frames and myths are the primary concern of this work, but I should point out that her consideration of ideology provides contrast between a Carter/Mondale liberalism and Reagan conservatism.

Citing Erving Goffman as the elaborator of frames, she explains that "frames are the organizational principles that govern interpretations of events; they are always determined by social convention. Frames, which may be implicit or explicit, facilitate communication by providing it with an order or structure within which events make sense. For example, both nonfiction and fiction are frames that govern viewers' expectations and help them to make sense of their experiences" (Morreale, 1991, p. 20).

The Republicans, with respect to these frames, "initially framed the film as a nonfiction news event" (Morreale, 1991, p. 21). Documentary techniques like news footage and black and white photos achieved this end by lending authenticity to assertions associated with these images. For example, Reagan's claim that his administration is not a threat to Social Security is immediately followed by footage of John Hinckley's 1981 assassination attempt; the reality of Reagan's near death experience is linked to his political promise. The most serious, finite truth of human matters contextualizes one of the most fleeting political ones. This is how the Republican nonfiction, documentary-esque framing masked the nature of the film as advertisement or propaganda, asserting an American economic and spiritual rebirth that could not be substantiated (Morreale, 1991, p. 22-3).

Beyond the framing devices of the film, Morreale argues that common cultural myths caused the message of the film to resonate with the American public; specifically, myths of the American Dream, the individual versus the community, and the president. She defines myth as "a socially constructed representation of reality that articulates the central beliefs, values, and preoccupations of a culture" (Morreale, 1991, p. 46). The American Dream addresses the opportunities of

America and, for immigrants, a place to get a fresh start (p. 58). The idea of the individual versus the community considers the balancing act between capitalistic, individualistic competition and the values of a strong traditional community (p. 61). And the myth of the president identifies a president's power as his ability to aggregate these American myths into a cohesive whole (p. 64).

Morreale argues that Reagan's convention film constructed an image of him that satisfied the expectations of all of these myths, thereby making him an obvious choice for president. Specific devices the film used were phrases like "new beginning" and "reawakening", scenes of the American flag, the reconstructing of a scaffolded Statue of Liberty, references to promises kept by the older generation and the younger generations subsequent obligation to take care of them, and acknowledgment of the sacrifice made by soldiers who gave their lives to protect the ideals of America.

However, Morreale points out a potential short-coming of the use of these images and her analysis: "...though we experience the world through symbols that condition our knowledge, these symbols do not have one univocal meaning. Rather, meanings in mass-mediated texts are multidimensional. Readers bring many experiences to bear on them, though the producers of cultural texts may attempt to delimit and control the variety of possible interpretations" (Morreale, 1991, p. 94). The multiplicity of meaning associated with any single image or series of images seriously questions any, even admittedly rhetorical, interpretive reading. While this can by no means be completely overcome, Baudrillard provides some insight into what we might look for to ground our interpretations.

Baudrillard, as shown in Chapter One, claims that within today's hyperreal world an "objective energy of evil" exists whereby "instability and vertigo" and "complexity and foreignness" undermine the signs of reality. This is our problem with Morreale's interpretations. However, it goes beyond the scope of one political campaign film that mixes documentary and advertisement "frames" - the signs of reality are questioned everywhere, especially in a purely representational medium such as television. Thus, people respond with a "will to spectacle" that draws them "nearer to the nullity of the real" so that they may "survive". The "will to spectacle" harbors itself in "fatal diversion" - "an ecstatic amplification of just about anything." Meaning is derived from this amplification when it incorporates recurrence - "like a sign that would only be valid redoubled by its ascendant...redoubled it becomes ineluctable." Moreover, this "protects us from the real" as "...things extinguish themselves in the spectacle, in a magical and artificial fetishization." In essence, Baudrillard argues that people, to overcome hyperreality's instability, find meaning and comfort in the repetition of signs. Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign film is built on this fatalistic premise. Hyperreal signs - the phrase "one country", African American identifications, family, - are all repeated in the space of the ten minute film. This contextualized recurrence explicates the meaning and its import.

### **The Film**

The Man From Hope film (Democratic National Committee, 1992) opens with a black and white scene of downtown Hope Arkansas accompanied by Bill Clinton's recounting of his birth. Most notable was that he was born three months after his father died.

The film continues from there in interview form. Each person in a different place, various rooms in various houses, sitting by themselves giving question inspired monologues. (We never hear the questions. They are inherent to the answers being given to a person whom you do not see.) Bill sits in a dining room arm chair wearing a buttoned down shirt (no tie) and jacket; Hillary is on the porch with pink blouse; Chelsea sits on an enclosed porch in a back-lit wicker chair; Roger (Bill's brother) is outside on a bench near a tree; Bill's mother is inside on a couch, and Hillary's mother joins Roger outside (though they are not obviously together since you only see a piece of his blue button-down shirt when she is shown.) All are casually dressed and convey an off-the-top-of-the-head, conversational style as they piece together the life of Bill Clinton.

Bill begins this film speaking of his grandparents, their store, and the town they lived in. Back then Hope, Arkansas was a segregated town. However, he says that his grandparents, with little formal education, drew wisdom from the depths of their experience and supported the integration of schools. Hillary then mentions that Bill's grandmother had always valued education and had put up playing cards around his high-chair when he was a baby so that he would learn numbers. She also attempts to dispel the thought that Bill was born with a "silver spoon" in his mouth. Instead, she claims that he was born in a house with an out-house in the back. Furthermore, 'Mother Clinton' says that she felt Bill's birth was prophesied by a film she saw its preceding day: Tomorrow is Forever.

The discussion then considers Bill's step father. Bill says that he had a few problems with his father while a piece of his mother's interview interjects that the man was an alcoholic, yet a good man that loved Bill if anything in the world. Still, Bill remembers a specific ninth-grade incident when his step-father was being violent with his mother. The picture goes back to His mother where she recounts that Bill asked his father to stand, but he could not. So, Bill's mother continued, Bill said, "Stand up! I have something to say to you. Daddy, if you're not able to stand up I'll help you. But you must stand to hear what I have to say." Once the father had risen Bill said, "Don't you ever lay a hand on my mother." Recalling this situation, Bill regretfully wished that he had known human psychology better back then. Hindsight now showed him that his step-father was not a bad man, nor that he did not love his kids or wife, but that he did not think enough of himself.

Roger Clinton, Bill's brother, then talks of Bill taking a leadership role in the family at a young age. He also remembered every picture of their youth having Bill with his arm around him and his first day of school when Bill went to have his name changed to match his brother's. Roger says that he has to smile whenever Bill insists that "we have to be one country" because that's the way Bill always thought of his family. And Roger noted the prominence of religion, "church- goin'", and hymn singing in their life as children and as adults.

Bill's mother moved the film along when she called to mind Bill's interest in current events. She said that at seven years old he read that Arkansas was at the bottom in education. She continued that he remarked, "You know, if Arkansas would let me, one of these days I'm gonna get us off the bottom."

The film then returned to Bill for his account of one of the most important days of his life - the day he met John F. Kennedy in July 1963. Bill recalled that President Kennedy had made a few comments and that he then proceeded to greet the youth individually. Bill said that the kids were lined up in alphabetical order by state, so he was one of the first in line, and, being one of the biggest kids, he made sure that he got to shake hands with the president. Reminiscing, Bill thought that moment showed how great the United States was. A country where a young boy from a small town could meet his president (and let it be archived forever for tomorrow). Bill's mother recalled his return home, the picture of he and President Kennedy, and Bill's pride. She said that from that moment on she knew that his goal would be government in some capacity.

Interest in government led to what it could accomplish. Bill follows his mother's words by saying that when he grew up children wanted to become president and believed that their vote counted. Roger then expound upon these sentiments as he recalled Bill reciting Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech from memory. Bill further emphasized this account as he says that it was the greatest political speech ever. Furthermore, Bill was heart broken when Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated. Bill thought that the last twenty years would have been better if those deaths had not occurred.

The film then moves to the first meeting of Hillary and Bill. Hillary remembers first seeing Bill across the Yale law library. He was at the entrance with some friends trying to convince him to join the law journal. Bill says, while staring at Hillary from across the room, that he was only interested in going back to Arkansas to be a country lawyer. Meanwhile, Hillary, equally interested, gets up and introduces herself. She says that if they are going to look at each other they might as well know each other's name. Bill says, "I couldn't remember my name." From there Hillary comments that Bill is great looking, fun, challenging and always makes her happy. Bill then tells that after a visit to Arkansas in which they had passed a house that Hillary liked he went out and bought it. He said that she would have to marry him because he could not live in that big house by himself. Bill's mother-in-law briefly interjects stating that Bill and Hillary love each other, are deeply committed to each other and have a kind of "synergy" together.

This synergetic component then comes to life in their daughter Chelsea. Hillary recounts the birth of Chelsea, noting the appreciation of Bill since it was something his own father did not experience. Bill says these same things in his own words. And then Hillary recalls a time when Bill called her into their living room to show that Chelsea understood gravity because she rolled to the edge of their bed and back again. Hillary laughingly remembers a half-hour later when Chelsea hit the floor, unlearning gravity.

Chelsea's own words describe her Dad as a goof who makes noises when she pushes his nose or dances around while pitching her softballs. But she more seriously wishes that people know that her parents are great people. Bill rounds out this assertion by giving an account of the night the 60 Minutes interview aired. Supposedly, Chelsea had wanted to see the program so they all went up stairs and watched the confession of marital problems. When it was over Bill asked Chelsea what she thought. Her response was, "I'm glad you're my parents." "After that," Bill said, "I knew whatever happened I'd be all right."

The next scene shows Bill Clinton on the podium delivering a speech to an exuberant audience. He exclaims that he may have taken hit in the campaign but that they were nothing compared to the hits the American people were taking from the Republican administration. He also calls for citizens to come together as one country.

Pictures of Hope, home movies, campaign rally video, and his encounter with President Kennedy accompany Bill Clinton's final words:

Sometimes, late at night on the campaign plane I'll look out the window and think how far I am from that little town in Arkansas. And yet in many ways I know that all I am or ever will be came from there. A place in a time when nobody locked their doors at night, everybody showed up for a parade on main street, and kids like me could dream of being a part of something bigger than themselves. I guess there'll always be a sadness in me that I never heard the sound of my fathers voice or felt his hand around mine. But all of us have sadness and disappointment in our lives and hopefully we grow stronger for it. I know that every day I'm alive I hope I'm a better person than the day before. I hope that every day from this day forward we can be a nation coming together instead of coming apart. And I hope that we as a people acknowledge that each child in our country is as important as our own. I still believe these things are possible, I still believe in the promise of America, and I still believe in a place called "hope". (Democratic National Committee, 1992)

Various images - still photos, professional and home video - accompanied the words spoken in this film. Examples would be pictures of Bill and Roger with Bill's arm around Roger, as suggested; interspersed photos of Bill at various ages; scenes of downtown Hope in the 1940's and 50's; video of the current campaign with Bill and Hillary, and home movies of Bill and Chelsea.

### **Fate, Frames, Myth, Meaning and Sentiment**

At first glance, this film seems casual - like people who told their stories and then had pictures and music added. However, closer study reveals structural tendencies that added to the believable "reality" of the "truth" revealed about Bill Clinton. The film creates a reality that makes the facts of Bill Clinton's life more than true, it makes them, and him, important - value laden. The real becomes hyperreal and the hyperreal real.

Frames, as explicated by Morreale, aid this process. For example, when Roger claims that "it seems like he always had his arm around me" in old pictures, four pictures of Bill with his arm around Roger and put on screen. We must recall that when taking photographs it is common for the photographer to ask subjects to pose in some fashion; the older brother putting his arm around the younger is a common request. Thus the message that Bill is a loving brother is a hyperreality made real by being framed as a photographically defended statement.

The speech at the end of the film also demonstrates the ability of framing to make real the hyperreal. While Bill is speaking in front of a sizable crowd (maybe 200 people) the video

switches between a view of only him and only the audience. Spliced together, these clips may have been filmed at different places and different times for all we know. The cue card generated, uproarious, approval from a studio crowd can easily be made to support a rehearsed, practiced, and studio performed speech. However, the televisual “reality” is of a presidential candidate making a speech while on-the-spot, in front of an audience. This speech helps to frame the Clinton film as an unadulterated view of a presidential candidate where further scrutinization presents the possibility that the speech was more of a hyperreal simulation meant to show Bill Clinton as a popular figure.

Further along these lines of simulation, we get to the heart of framing: though a political advertisement, the use of “live” speeches and old film and photos let the film simulate a documentary. When compared with talk shows, situation comedies and dramas within the televisual medium, the documentary gives the feeling of untainted authenticity. The Discovery Channel’s Year in the Life of the Coyote, stocked with anthropomorphic commentary, shows the civilized human the nitty-gritty life of the savage coyote - “no holds barred!” A&E’s Biography does a “this is your life” appraisal of all the “important” people from Colin Powell to Larry Flint. The Man From Hope film puts Bill Clinton in this company as it interviews family and friends, and portrays a successful future president with one catch: Bill Clinton was yet to be elected. The documentary was created to honor a president who had never been elected: it gave grace to him, generating charisma. His obituary was written before he was dead. However, the film was believable because it was framed, simulated a documentary.

Myth can also be found. Norman Solomon considers the links made between a mythical John F. Kennedy and a fated future president, Bill Clinton.

Six months before Bill Clinton became president, I stood in the press gallery of Madison Square Garden, above the colorful pastiche of the Democratic National Convention. As thousands of delegates - and millions of TV viewers across the country - watched a carefully crafted movie about Bill Clinton's life. Suddenly, on the screen, a teenage Bill appeared in the Rose Garden of the White House, shaking hands with President Kennedy. The blurry footage lasted only a few seconds, yet it was electrifying: A thunderclap struck; in an instant the delegates went wild, their delirium shaking the huge convention hall. Like some pre-planned spontaneous combustion, both orchestrated and authentic, the explosive response seemed to be insisting on making history. Political manifest destiny was in the air. A torch was being passed, over our heads. (Solomon, 1994, ch. 3)

Norman Solomon opens chapter 3 of his book, False Hope, with this poignant memory involving the film described above. Furthermore, he presents the premise of his chapter: the Clinton Campaign encouraged a comparison with John F. Kennedy.

Solomon writes that President Kennedy used "speech as seduction, carried to new heights," with a politics "largely about the riches of symbology" (Solomon, 1994, p. 40). Furthermore, the aggregation of his ability to stir the American imagination and his untimely death left him the "archetype for the great Democratic leader taken from us, leaving an empty space yet to be filled"



(p. 42). Completing this cycle, Solomon presents the logic: "If a great leader was taken from us, triggering the country's downward trend, then another great man might just be the ticket to set things right. Enter: Bill Clinton" (p. 43).

Despite differences, such as Kennedy's fortune and Clinton's poverty, Solomon claims that "likening a politician to the martyred president [was] an ultimate compliment, and it was a comparison that Clinton aides worked hard to encourage in the media long before he became president" (Solomon, 1994, p. 44). Thus, we find that Bill Clinton was set up to be the concluding chapter to a book first penned long ago.

Solomon then notes the desire of the media to feed on this imagery. Newsweek published an article: "The Torch Passes". Later, Time presented: "The Torch is Passed." Burning in the hearts of these articles were Kennedy comparisons ("youthful, centrist Democrat") and ideals of a bygone America ("a distinctive American endowment of youth and energy and ideals and luck: the sacred American stuff") (Solomon, 1994, p. 44-5). Together, Solomon claims, the person and the dreams presented a winning combination for the American electorate.

Here we see more of the mythic considerations of the campaign film, as Morreale argued. Clinton's potential is directly related to that of a once beloved president who never got his rightful chance to live up to his own potential. However, despite a frame's ability to make something more believable and a myth's ability to contextualize concepts like potential, we need to take more care to identify *what* needs to be more believable and contextualized: how do viewers *know* that a flag means freedom so that they may identify it with an American Dream myth and believe it because it was shown in black and white film? Baudrillard fills this gap with his notion of *fatalism* - meaning established by recurrence.

At a large scale, Baudrillard's logic suggests that the electorate wanted Bill Clinton to be just like President Kennedy. As the "objective energy of evil" undermines a sense of reality, people search, with a "will to spectacle," for reassurance that their perceived reality is "real" - that Kennedy was a hope inspiring president that would have used his youth to invigorate America and lead her to prosperity. Reassurance of this comes through repetition of signs. Kennedy, the sign, was a good looking young democrat who brought hope to his people and lost his life in the service of his country. Clinton, from handshake to party age, served as a reminder and fulfillment of the Kennedy promise: the signs connected the present with a bygone era. Furthermore, Bill Clinton was established as a "real" presidential candidate because he reminded people of a past president - he *simulated* the characteristics of a past president thereby showing himself capable of being a "real," future president.

However, recurrence does not limit itself to this level of analysis. The deliberate nature of The Man From Hope film and its subsequent effectiveness allows us to explore the use of recurrence and observe the creation of meaning. The Clinton campaign called on The Man From Hope film to articulate, concisely, historical information about Bill Clinton and its relationship to his vision of, and viability for, the presidency of the United States. Hence various elements of Bill Clinton's life, personality and purpose were emphasized by using different techniques - all forms of

recurrence. Furthermore, we can locate their potential for popular appeal in the sentiments of the electorate, without reference to the ubiquitous myths privileged by Morreale.

Keeping in line with Baudrillard's assertion that signs become ineluctable when redoubled, the film repeats themes and specific signs. Lessons of fatherhood, race, destined government involvement, poverty, small town boy, "hope", and the notion of "one country" are all redoubled within this ten minute film.

Most noticeable, Bill begins the film speaking of his birth: "I was born in the little town of Hope, Arkansas; three months after my father died." The visual image presented on screen is a still photo of a wood building, my guess is a general store, with a sign nailed to the front reading "HOPE". This scene is then repeated as the photo appears as the last shot of the film with Bill saying, "...and I still believe in a place called 'hope'." Thus an optimistic, visionary, and somewhat escapist notion bookends the more tangible information given in the film's body.

Chelsea's birth provides another, obvious, moment of recurrence. A matter of seconds after Hillary says, "Bill's becoming a father and having Chelsea was one of the really great experiences of his life because it was something his own father never got to do, you know, never got to see his own child," Bill follows with, "...I still remember how profoundly grateful I was that, you know, Hillary was O.K. and that I had lived to see it. I mean, I was very aware at that moment that that was something that my father hadn't done" (Democratic National Committee, 1992). These near verbatim portrayals send a message to the American public. What the message says would be speculation. However, the repetition fatalistically imposes the presence of meaning.

Roger Clinton lays the foundation for more recurrence. He says: "You know, I have to smile when I hear my brother say in the campaign that we have to be one country because that's the way he's always felt about our family." The Clinton speech at the end of the film brings this point back explicitly: "...We can no longer have a country where I worry about me, you worry about you, and they worry about them...We have to be one country again, goin' up or down together again." Though the focus of Chapter Two was the slippery nature of hyperreal signs that have no particular referent, we see this theme repeated in "one country". Bill never really defines "one country", he only mentions what it is not ("I worry about me, you worry about you, and they worry about them"), yet it still makes the crowd roar approval. Why this is the case is not the focus of this chapter. Instead, we must note that this "one country" phrase is repeated in this ten minute film. Hence, even if this phrase holds no weight for the film viewer its presence demands recognition.

Themes, though repeated, do not demand this same level of recognition. However, their repetition conveys what I will call a fatalistic "sense". Specific words or phrases are not duplicated, but a "sense" of Bill Clinton is reinforced. Race is one such theme. Bill describes Hope as a segregated town during his youth. However, he was proud that, despite their limited education, his grandparents "oppos[ed] the closing of Central High School to keep black students out. They were for integrating the schools." Later in the film, Roger recalls: "One of my earliest memories is of my brother reciting Martin Luther King's 'I Have A Dream' speech, by heart, from beginning to end." Bill reasserts this profound influence by recalling: "It's the greatest political

speech of my lifetime. It was so powerful, it was so moving, it was such a wake-up call for the country. I was heart broken when Martin Luther King died..." Furthermore, adding his remorse over the death of Robert Kennedy two months later, Bill says, "...if both of them had lived I think the last twenty years would have been a lot different for America; and much better." Thus we *sense* that Bill Clinton, seemingly from birth, was not only for the equal rights of minorities, but was personally touched and influenced by some of the ideals of the black community. Weight is added to this understanding by the use of thematic repetition.

Destiny, the focus of Solomon's discussion, provides the other recurring theme. Bill Clinton was destined to be a leader in government; of this there can be no doubt. Four scenes reinforce this point. First, Roger claims that Bill took over the leadership of their family when he was young. Second, Bill's mother describes his early interest in current events: "One morning, he couldn't have been more than 7 years old, he read where Arkansas was on the bottom in education. He remarked to me at the time, 'Do you know, if Arkansas would let me, one of these days I'm gonna get us off the bottom.'" Third, Bill tells of his Boy's Nation experience of meeting President Kennedy, which his mother then contextualizes, "When he came home from Boy's Nation with this picture of John Kennedy and himself, shaking hands, I've never seen such an expression on a man's face in my life...I knew then that government, in some form, would be his goal." Last, during the closing remarks of the film, the video of Bill shaking hands with President Kennedy, first shown when Bill told of his Boy's Nation experience, is replayed as the accompanying music forges to a climactic single pitch before it releases into a fully orchestrated cadence with the final picture of the Hope "General Store" displayed. All tolled, the repetition of events that made Bill Clinton seem destined for President of the United States made viewers believe, as Solomon attested, that Bill Clinton *was* destined to be president. Furthermore, this belief may have made Bill Clinton president.

Together, the repeated signs of "hope," "one country," caring brother, loving father and husband, racially aware, and destined president reify an image of Bill Clinton. However, we also notice that the problematic nature of locating meaning when searching for recurrence, made obvious by our need to include repeated themes along with more explicit statements. This hints that Morreale's jump from a film's "truth" being made explicit in myth is a larger leap than originally envisioned.

Instead, the modest meaning created by the film seems like it would appeal to a less articulated, more personal *sentiment*. By sentiment I refer to a general view or opinion based less on reason than on feeling. In this case, voters are moved by the reiterated appeal to "family values," togetherness as "one country," and racial sympathies. Because they are less defined than Morreale's myths, sentiments are more easily appealed to, accessed, by the more tangential meaning generated by the campaign film. And taking the fluidity of meaning into account, it seems prudent to avoid deterministic leaps from basic televisual images to grand mythological abstractions. Yet, despite our hesitance to impose these connections, we must in some way account for the effect (the uproarious, immediate applause and the largest ever subsequent post-convention public opinion improvement - 16 points) of the film.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that the political campaign film appeals to the viewing audience by using hyperreal signs framed by various documentary and advertising

techniques. Further, Baudrillard's notion of recurrence helps us to locate in a more specific manner the meaning of the images conveyed. Morreale's idea that these images appeal to the public to the extent that they fit into a complex matrix of overlapping myths is supported in general, but it is found suspect when faced with the problematic nature of locating ultimate meanings. As a result, I have suggested that access to viewer sentiment is more likely to affect public opinion.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

### **Monica-gate and the Hyperreal**

The preceding chapters have attempted to reveal relationships that exist between the media, the electorate and a presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, with respect to some ideas put forth by Jean Baudrillard. Recent events concerning President Clinton's alleged sexual relationship with a once White House intern, Monica Lewinski, can help us summarize these revelations. Extensive media coverage of this story and its cursory manifestations has led to a sensationalized televisual discourse that is derived not from facts but from undefended insinuations. Here televisual images and arguments have proliferated with little concern for facts or truth, less interested in their reality than with their symbolic exchange as hyperreal images. In this Baudrillardian universe the media has been seemingly infiltrated by the desire to reconcile image (honorable president) with reality (sinful president). This is an attempt to "prove the real," in Baudrillard's terms, so that the public's "will to spectacle," the comfort derived from their release into the system of relations among televisual images and information, is appeased. However, the affect on public opinion caused by this (dis)play has been negligible as the president continues to enjoy high job approval ratings, the public seemingly more interested in facts than investing in a scandal of a merely telereal persuasion.

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality has provided the foundation upon which our analysis has been based. The idea that an image, or sign, can be dissociated from its referent has informed our reading of the Clinton's appearance on 60 Minutes and in The Man From Hope film. We have revealed deliberate attempts on the part of the 1992 Clinton campaign to construct images of honesty, love, and sincerity, simulate popularly received speeches, and create an aura of destiny, all with more concern for televisual and campaign efficacy than reality. The Monica Lewinsky scandal only obviates this point.

On Wednesday January 21, 1998 a story broke that a once White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, admitted to an affair with President Bill Clinton in secretly recorded phone conversations. A "friend", Linda Tripp, had supposedly recorded these conversations at the behest of independent counsel, Kenneth Starr. If true, this added one more conquest to Bill Clinton's list of extramarital sexploits.

Truth, however, is not the concern of the hyperreal. Why? Because the truth is always less interesting, less seductive, than the possible. Truth never changes. It's boring. You may be able to create a story out of truth, but never a media event. Truth can only be reported once. Your vital stats (age, income, marital status, home town, college, gpa, etc.) are of little importance. The story, as in the case of Bob Dole's 1996 presidential campaign, is when you start to embody them. The truth of Bob Dole's age was nowhere near as important as his overused World War II stories intermingled with the image of him falling off a stage in Chino, California. His image made him old, not his age. Age, by itself, is meaningless and uninteresting. The story lay in the possible meanings. Thus the media draws viewers with the lure of the possible. It is the possible that fascinates: Is Clinton another Nixon? Will he resign? Is this about sex, honesty, the law? What are Ken Starr's motivations? What are Linda Tripp's motivations? How will Monica's California lawyer, William Ginsburg, deal with Washington's "inside the beltway" legal elite? (Can he

measure up?) What can Monica's 37 visits to the White House after she stopped working there have been for? Why is the president being evasive? Is he being evasive? What is the public thinking? Are they withholding judgment or are they so cynical that they see this scandal as just one more drop in an already large and full bucket? We may say these are valid questions and that some of them have answers, some are mute, some merely speculative. However, we must realize two things about these questions. First, they presuppose an underlying truth, answers. Second, finding these answers is not the goal of the discourse. Instead, the questions are more concerned with listening to themselves be asked. The answers may come, but only to introduce new questions: "This just in ... blah blah blah. What does this mean for the administration? Will this hurt Clinton? What will Hillary say? Who else is involved?" In this media-scape questions compete for hyperreal stature. What is the question of the day? Here, answers become a tag along sibling. The questions can go out and play but they have to let the answers be part of the game. Still, the game is run by the questions and the answers know their place. This was evident in the Monica Lewinsky case from the very beginning.

The introduction of the Monica Lewinsky story started a hyperreal rollercoaster ride in the media. The day after the story broke Ann Curry of the Today show spoke of reports of Clinton's recent deposition in the Paula Jones trial where he supposedly admitted to one affair, with Gennifer Flowers, and no others (National Broadcasting Company, 1998, January 22). With aghast, Curry insinuated that the Lewinsky accusations confirmed a presidential pattern of lying - Clinton said in 1992 that he did not have an affair with Gennifer Flowers which he had recently admitted to, and his denial of any other inappropriate relations was being questioned by the taped phone conversations of Monica Lewinsky. However, lost in the hype was the fact that no one had actually heard the Monica Lewinsky tapes or knew for sure what was said in Clinton's deposition in the Paula Jones case. The true and the "reportedly" true became exchangeable for the sake of providing some early morning information.

It was only fitting that Hillary Clinton came on the Today show a week later, the day of the President's State of the Union Address, to defend her president-husband by claiming that this turmoil was the result of a "right-wing conspiracy" to destroy her husband's career (National Broadcasting Company, 1998, January 26). A brilliant ploy, the media has subsequently spent hours of television time debating the existence of the right-wing conspiracy. Republicans look at each other wondering, are you the mastermind?, and democrat sympathizers skirt the subject, admitting that the notion of a "conspiracy" (with all of its underhanded and illegal overtones) is a problematic characterization, while claiming that there are people who have spent a lot of money trying to de-rail Clinton's presidency. With the slight of hand only a master magician could be (aware and) proud of, Hillary established hyperreal equilibrium with the (hyperreal) currency afforded "a right wing conspiracy," with one (economical) assertion.

As discussed in chapter one, Baudrillard indicates that the proliferation of these hyperreal images jeopardizes the salience of truth and reality causing the public to take comfort in the mere progression of bombarding signs, in a "will to spectacle," accented by blips of ineluctable, fatalistic, recurring signs and power effects. Chapter two showed that Bill Clinton serviced the power effect aspect of this "will to spectacle" with his 60 Minutes appearance, offering not displays of grand military power over another country but the proper balance of interpersonal

power relations, first, between a man and wife - love and forgiveness - and, second, between a political candidate and his nation - honesty and sincerity. These televisual power manifestations, we argued, preceded any charismatic persona associated with a political vision or agenda as discussed by Luke with respect to Reagan. In essence, the issue is less the issues and more an insatiable, insidious need on the part of the media to supply the public with what they demand, the display of power effects in an attempt to “prove the real,” insist that their are answers to the questions. The media’s obsession with the discrepancy between the image of “president” and the person, Bill Clinton, in the Monica Lewinsky situation reiterates this point.

President Clinton, despite the media’s obsessive coverage of these charges, has enjoyed high approval ratings - from 59 to 70 percent depending on the poll and the day. Subsequently, the “news” in the Monica Lewinsky situation shifted from facts, or at least information, about the progression of a story to how the story was playing with the public. For example, Katherine Crier, host of the Fox News’ The Crier Report, spent an evening (February 9) asking Ed Rollins (conservative strategist), Susan Estrich (former democratic campaign manager), Randy Tate (executive director of the Christian Coalition) and Gary Nordlinger (democratic political consultant) what the polls were really saying. Posing hyperreal questions as discussed above. The ones that exist for their own sake. Questions truly disinterested in their answers: Do the people accept this behavior? Are they holding off judgment until the facts come in? Is the high job approval rating a response to the media’s over coverage of events? An hour was taken up not reporting events but trying to put them in perspective, creating a televisual therapy focused on reconciling the image of a president as honorable and respectable with the reality of a sinful man who can still do the job.

Why does the media do this? Some might say that “they just don’t get it.” DeeDee Myers, former Hillary Clinton press secretary, summing-up her appraisal of the public’s mindset and the media’s reaction to it, said that the media is failing to recognize the presence of a possible bifurcation of morality into public and private. She says that people may expect the a certain kind of “presidential” behavior in public but feel that his private life is his own business. She argues that “his [the president’s] behavior may be wrong and abominable but that doesn’t mean he’s a bad president. The press is having a really hard time understanding that” (C-SPAN, 1998, February 12).

However, descriptive as this may be, the motivation is missing. Why is the media “having a really hard time understanding?” Our Baudrillardian analysis leads us to believe that it necessary for their existence. Their seemingly obsessive desire to reconcile the image of president as a symbol of integrity, authority, and character with the person of a scandal ridden Bill Clinton demonstrates their willingness to satisfy the responsibility that the public places in them. As Baudrillard would suggest, in our televisually enhanced information society where facts, possibilities, suspicions, innuendoes, and actualities bombard us in minute-to-minute updates, people demand reassurance that there is an underlying real, that questions have answers. Whether we know what that “real” is or not is irrelevant as long as we can believe that it is there. Thus, the media’s display of penetrating inquiry into the Monica Lewinsky situation presents “power effects” which allow the public’s release from the responsibility of locating truth (what they think) and investing in their desires (what they should do). Instead, the media explores the public will,

as if one existed, and tries to “prove the real,” prove that we know how a president should behave, and prove that those standards can be met. They ask question upon question, never facing or posing the possibility that there is no answer. The headline will and can never read: “After Years of Exploration the Public Will Has Not Been Found, the Search Has Been Called Off.” No, the media must explore and we must watch; make sure that our world is what we think it is.

The frenzied exploration of the issue of leaks in this situation emphasizes this point. Ken Starr has been accused by the White House of leaking, or allowing leaks of, grand jury testimony. In turn, he has claimed that the White House leaks to help the president. In this environment, reporters have been asked to reveal their sources (which they refuse to do) while the veracity of sources has been questioned. No one seems to know who told who what, when, or why. With respect to “power effect,” this display ‘proves’ that other sources for other stories are worthy of trust. Just as a Disneyland ‘proves’ that reality exists beyond its gates and the Gulf War ‘proves’ that peace exists elsewhere, the coverage of the obvious misuse of the media to wage a legal-political battle through legal and illegal leaks of information and disinformation ‘proves’ that sources are usually trustworthy, legal, and apolitical when the truth is in question. The public is consequently reassured of the stability and veracity of the news media in which they place so much trust to be accurate; we watch to be appeased.

But how does the *president* respond? In the Gennifer Flowers case he and Hillary went on television showing that they had a “real” marriage, as discussed in Chapter 2. It was that post-Super Bowl interview on 60 Minutes that established Clinton’s hyperreal persona - less a politician than a sincere, honest, human, family man. But that persona has changed; a president is not a candidate, and 1998 is not 1992. The 1996 campaign, and Dick Morris, created a new Clinton and it is that Clinton who responded to the Monica Lewinsky accusations.

The Clinton that has concerned this analysis was the Clinton elected in 1992. However, the down-to-earth, sincere, caring guy of that campaign turned into a “weak” president. So some changes had to be made. Dick Morris lead the charge to create a new Clinton. In trying to get his 1996 balanced budget proposal passed, Dick Morris recalls that the proposal made Clinton seem less “liberal,” but that he was still perceived to be “weak” (Morris, 1997, p. 176); people knew that he meant well but thought that he could not get anything done. By October 1995, Clinton’s attempts to get his budget proposal passed made this perspective even more apparent as he went around like a congressional whip drumming-up support. However, now that the political foundation had been laid, Morris could turn to constructing Clinton’s image as “presidential.” He suggested a strategy of “‘lift and loft’. ‘Stay above that battle,’ [he] said. ‘Be president while others squabble’” (p. 180). Morris recounts his thinking:

In the 1992 campaign, Clinton was America’s buddy. Down-to-earth, riding buses to campaign events, conducting town meetings, eating at McDonald’s, going one-on-one with people, appearing on MTV, and playing the saxophone - he was a regular guy. ‘But now,’ I told the president, ‘it’s time to be almost the nation’s father, to speak as the father of the country, not as a peer and certainly not as its child. (Morris, 1997, p. 181)



However, strategy alone would not change Clinton's image. Practical measures had to be taken.

Clinton's behavior and the issues he focused on were addressed. Behaviorally, Morris and other advisors went so far as to critique Clinton with video clips of good and bad aspects of his speeches, locating specific problems and recommending different behavior.

You explain yourself too much. Father's don't. You seem to care too much about what others think of you; that's not a father's way. Don't have conversations with your audiences; speak *to* them. Don't complain in public about not getting recognition for your achievements. Don't be self deprecating. Don't ask questions in speeches; give answers. (Morris, 1997, p. 181)

However, this "presidential" behavior had one short-coming: it did not let people know what Clinton had done. People were already unaware of Clinton's success in office, that is why he complained in public. Not complaining would only let the unknown facts stay unknown. So Bob Squier devised a method for getting the message across: mention what you have done only when you speak of what you want to do. For example, "The seven million jobs we've created won't be of much use if we can't find educated people to fill them. That's why I want tax deductions for college tuition to help kids go on to college to take those jobs" (Morris, 1997, p. 182). These minor changes in behavior, caused by seeing through a policy position (the balanced budget), helped to create the new image of Bill Clinton as presidential, a father figure. It is this Clinton that responded to the Monica Lewinsky allegations.

On Monday, January 26, 1998 Clinton held a press conference in which he claimed, in no uncertain terms, that he had had "no sexual relations with that woman - Miss Lewinsky" and that he had to get back to the business of running the country. He said what he had to say in one decisive statement and left. He was not there to explain himself. He was not there to comfort anybody. He was there to be a falsely accused president taken away from other, more important concerns.

These hyperreal images of power and the president, however, do create a real atmosphere that gets lost in this delirium. Not only are the hyperreal images present, they occur quickly and for their own sake. This has practical implications for the public.

The speed of shifting truth associated with the media barrage was most evident when CNN reported at 11 p.m. on Sunday January 31, 1998 that the Dallas Morning News was going to report the following day that a secret service agent had witnessed Monica and Bill together. However, the news story the next morning was not this incriminating tale; instead it was a retraction of the story put out the night before. People who went to bed before 10 p.m. EST. woke to hear that a secret service agent did not witness Monica and Bill together. The story for east-coast Americans was the retraction of a story. This exemplifies a joke told by Jerry Nachman (former editor of the New York Post) on C-SPAN about the state of news today: "A rumor can go around the world once in the time it takes the truth to get its boots on" (C-SPAN, 1998, February 12).

And what else are we to expect from a televisual media- scape that cares more for how events play out on the hyperreal stage than what they are for “real.” Ken Starr’s (independent) investigation is a prime example. First created to investigate Clinton’s “Whitewater” dealings, Starr has spent approximately twenty-five million dollars in three and a half years trying to convict Bill Clinton of a crime. In the process he has subpoenaed everyone who has ever had been seen with the president, been accused of trying to get people to change their stories to implicate Clinton in wrong-doing, allowed the leakage of legal and illegal information, used the media to play legal games, used illegally recorded tapes to incriminate Monica Lewinsky in a crime, and the list goes on. However, three years and twenty-five million dollars has produced no tangible results. Like a terrorist airplane hijack or a war in Iraq, the independent counsel cannot be taken out of its hyperreal context, how it will play in the media. But with the litigation results it has created, we cannot be sure it exists anywhere else - to the point we cannot be sure of the original intent of the independent counsel. Responding to accusations that he allowed leaks of grand jury testimony, Starr accused the White House of leaking the information damaging to the president. He said that “they would have a clear and manifest motivation to release harmful information with carefully crafted defenses in order to lessen the painful impact of such evidence when it is revealed through official proceedings” (Wiener, 1998, February, 2). Well, if the White House can be devious enough to leak information harmful to the president we may take it a bit further and suppose that the White House encouraged the creation of the independent counsel to prove Clinton’s innocence of all crime. Only an innocent man could come through an investigation of every aspect of his life, which spent thirty million dollars plus over four plus years, and emerge without charges. A brilliant political maneuver, Clinton’s place in history as the most honest and upstanding president would be assured. Unlikely as this may be, it fits into the logic of the telereal where layers of questions, probabilities, and possibilities hide their assumption of a truth, of a real, which is no longer necessary for its existence or its act of being.

This idea of fluid images, and the speed at which they bombard us, moves us beyond Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality and toward some of its consequences, namely, the public’s relationship with televisual images. Our analysis in chapter 3 tried to unravel some of the issues associated with this relationship, such as the political campaign film’s attempt to create meaning through frames and myths as theorized by Joanne Morreale. Our analysis of Clinton’s film, The Man From Hope, supported the idea that the film, though a political advertisement of sorts, could “frame” itself as a documentary, seeming more factual than it necessarily was. Also, there was evidence to suggest that the film pandered to a sense of Bill Clinton’s presidential destiny of potentially mythic proportions. However, as emphasized in this chapter, our awareness of the speed and fluidity of televisual images complicated Morreale’s idea that the public fit the film’s images into a mythic context through which they could identify with the candidate. Instead, meaning was generated by the recurrence of signs, phrases like “one country” and themes like racial sensitivity. It was the “truth” provided by these insistent images that stood out in the televisual landscape to resonate with viewers. Of course, the move away from Morreale’s assertion that the public related to the images through their identification with common cultural myths like the “American Dream” left a less ambitious idea that the film can influence opinion at the level of sentiment. Based on feeling more than reason, people can identify with images without investing in them. Thus a casual tie is

formed, ready to be revised or broken by the next set of images presented; in this case, the network news debriefing we get after every political event.

Thus we find that the Monica Lewinsky media explosion has provided the perfect telereal display upon which to base a summarization of our analysis. Baudrillard's contention that our media oriented society generates hyperreal images and arguments dissociated from their referents is made explicit by the proliferation of probing questions that have no real answer and assertions of a "right-wing conspiracy." The media's attempts to reconcile the idea that a president should be respectable with the sinful reality demonstrates their inertial movement toward "proving the real," that there are answers to the questions, that we can know how a president should behave and that the standard can be met. And that the mixture of the hyperreal images and the speed at which they bombard us suggests that we form ties to images presented on the screen based on sentiment, more feeling than thought, a sympathetic resonance subconsciously aware of the potential pitfalls of investment.

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