

THE LEGACY OF [LIBERTY]:  
RHETORIC, IDEOLOGY, AND AESTHETICS  
IN THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

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The spectacle is ideology par excellence, because it exposes and manifests in its fullness the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, servitude, and negation of real life.

- Guy Debord  
Society of the Spectacle<sup>1</sup>

The argument has recently been made that we live in an era in which signs have increasingly less to do with life. This, it is claimed, is either a consequence of our modernity, or an index of our postmodernity. In either case, the assumption is that the rationalist assault on tradition and the technological capacity to produce images favor a system of sign production in which the epistemology of representation becomes an increasingly unnecessary alibi for the value of the sign. Such is the conclusion one might draw from Jean Baudrillard's *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*.<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard's diagnosis asserts the dark side of Walter Benjamin's prognosis made forty years earlier in "The Work of Art In The Age of Mechanical Reproduction," according to which the development of the reproducible and hence autonomous sign is treated, not as the dialectic of enlightenment, but as one of two historical alternatives: the emergence of a proletariat freed from the weight of dead generations through the politicization of art, or conversely, the massification of the social as spec-

tators who are participants in their own subjugation and destruction. According to Benjamin the advent of mechanical reproduction undermined the authority of tradition and the strength of historical remembrance. This loosening of signifiers from received signifieds, while potentially liberating, also led to the danger of "aestheticization," a mode of discourse in which politics collapses as the social becomes as a commodified object of contemplation, rather than a condition of *praxis*.<sup>3</sup> A further consequence of this process is the loss of the real, for once signification becomes arbitrary, the signscape itself can become a closed, self-referential field. It is the loss of such a fixed and representable social that Baudrillard, and later Kroker and Cook, have commented upon extensively.<sup>4</sup>

Our fate, at least according to these pessimists of postmodernity, is one in which the social, if it ever existed, has disappeared into its own simulation, so that aesthetic "shock effects" are all that remain to mobilize—or at least to motivate—the population. Rhetoric, in the classical sense of an active political speech, productive of knowledge and wisdom through an agonistic process, is absent.<sup>5</sup> As a result, speech becomes an empty productivity within the logic of a dead power that is based in the inertia of sedimented social structures; the only political discourse that remains short-circuits reasoned judgment, and displaces it with the pleasure of the consumption of signs.

This formulation is tempting, even though we are reluctant to admit all of its premises or claims. We agree, in particular, that there appears to be a trend in the discourses of mass national politics that operates through simulation and aesthetic effect to the exclusion of reasoned discourse. We wish neither to assert, however, that substantial social relations necessarily have disappeared, nor that there is a necessary contradiction between "good reasons" (or social reason) and aesthetic effects in public discourse.<sup>6</sup> The possible disappearance of social relations is not particularly germane to our analysis in so far as we are concerned with the critical assessment of public discourse, not the sociological analysis of the more private realm of everyday life. The relationship between public reason and aesthetic effect, is both central and immediate to our concerns. Nevertheless, we refuse to be scandalized by the post-structuralist discovery of the complicity between truth and power, or by the recognition that human knowledge and desire are ultimately without foundation.<sup>7</sup> These are not only Nietzsche's insights, but the insights of rhetorical theory, which, since the battle between Plato and the Sophists in the fifth century B. C., has taught that historical memory and ethical value are always configured in discursive acts, and that there is no simple untangling of the cognitive and affective bases for motivation, commitment, and judgment.<sup>8</sup> Political rhetoric has always simulated the social as the medium by which to call an order of power into being, and as such, the authentic, the rational, and the true have always been problematic.<sup>9</sup> What marks "postmodern" mass politics as distinct and troubling is not therefore the failure of the enlight-

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enment project to emancipate reason from prejudice, nor even the theoretical impossibility of a social guided by pure reason, but the very collapse of "good reasons" altogether.<sup>10</sup> Rhetoric's reason is the practical rationality that persuades a free community by giving voice to its experience in terms that permit collective life. Rhetoric is thus a creative and emancipatory force. Postmodern mass politics, as we shall see, replaces the collective imaginary of rhetoric with simulacra that remain specular and uninhabitable, being powered neither by reason nor intuition, but by aesthetic effects.

### Constructing [Liberty]

Our particular concern in this study is with [liberty].<sup>11</sup> More specifically, we are concerned with the way in which the contemporary ideological *raison d'être* of the United States of America is located in [liberty] as an aesthetic object that is detached from the actual experience of public life. To that end, we will probe the 1986, nationally televised celebration of the Statue of Liberty's centennial as a means of identifying the way(s) in which aesthetic value is inserted into the terms of ideological, reason-giving discourse.<sup>12</sup>

Our theoretical starting point is Michael Calvin McGee's analysis of [liberty] in the Whig/liberal ideology.<sup>13</sup> According to McGee, [liberty] is not a thing, but an "ideograph," a term or sign that must be used by public officials as a warrant for the uses of state power within Whig/liberal societies.<sup>14</sup> More to the point, McGee claims that as a necessary commitment to community, [liberty] lacks any fixed meaning. Rather, he suggests that at particular historical moments, those seeking to exercise power in the name of the state deploy the community's generalized commitment to [liberty] as an argumentative warrant for their actions, and then justify their use of the term on the basis of a proffered interpretation of the community's collective tradition. Political practice is thus based in a public, rhetorical production of history and tradition that seeks to appropriate [liberty] to one's ends. In the language of postmodern theorists of culture, simulation (a rewriting of "history," of received simulations) provides [liberty] with significance.

What makes a particular reconstruction, or simulation, of [liberty] valid is problematic. For McGee, the historical memory of some particular audience, e.g., Congress, women, blue collar workers, the American "people," would permit it to make a judgment as to the propriety of the particular usage. Such an audience would compare the proffered structuration of power warranted by [liberty] with other similar structururations in its collective experience. In the process, this audience would consider whether or not this particular usage of [liberty] afforded a feeling of comfort "in the presence" of power consistent with what it had come to expect on the basis of past experiences.<sup>15</sup> The test of the propriety of [liberty] as a war-

rant to power would therefore not be based on a pure and abstract cognition, but on something akin to a Kantian aesthetic judgment—a judgment as to the universal validity of an experience of a feeling of appropriateness. However, this would not actually be a Kantian aesthetic judgment in that it would integrate knowledge, ethics, and art. Moreover, it would be one's encounter with the world, rather than with the formal interplay of the faculties, that would be the basis for pleasure, just as it would be historical remembrance, rather than the cultivation of sensibility, that would be the ground for a judgment. Thus, [liberty] would have no transcendental foundation, but only the grounding that is provided by the combination of collective experience and memory constructed in a community's history. Like all ideographs, [liberty] is ultimately a floating signifier, a product of rhetoric that functions in simulacra, anchored only by the experience of tension between an historically constituted historical memory and its attempted reconstruction in particular historical moments.

Benjamin linked the aestheticization of politics to the loss of aura or authenticity.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, such a loss marks both an unmooring of historical memory and its susceptibility to aesthetic effects. One must exercise care, however, in condemning outright the *weakening* of the power of tradition, for such a movement produced Anglo-American, Whig/liberal conceptions of [liberty] in the first place; nevertheless, it is equally important to recognize that the *destruction* of collective historical memory radically undermines a community's capacity to judge relations of power. It is from this perspective, then, that we consider the national, mass mediated celebration of [liberty]'s most cherished monument in 1986 as more or less symptomatic of the condition of contemporary public discourse in the United States. In particular, we will focus on how television simulates through spectacle the historical memory it claims to evoke, and how it therefore risks producing a configuration of [liberty], the substance of which is but the pleasure of a collective celebration of state power.

The week leading up to the unveiling of the restored Statue of Liberty was, in itself, a sort of national celebration. Most newspapers and weekly magazines devoted front page and cover spreads to the upcoming event, featuring stories describing the meaning and significance of [liberty], the history of the Statue as a gift to the United States from the people of France, and the regional preparations being made in New York City and throughout the nation for the Fourth of July weekend.<sup>17</sup> In addition, local and national television news programs marked the event with both news and feature stories. Typical of such programming were two stories shown back-to-back on the "NBC Nightly News" on July 1: Towards the end of the news program that evening, Tom Brokaw, the NBC news anchor, reported a very short news story entitled "Liberty Weekend" which was followed by a feature story narrated by correspondent Garrick Utley entitled "Patriotism." It is instructive to consider how these two stories were linked together as a frame in which the specific uses of the term [liberty] vanished in a

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simulation of historical memory that reduced the ideograph to a synonym for "military vigilance," "patriotism," and indeed, "America" itself.

Brokaw begins with "Liberty Weekend," which includes two brief segments. In the first segment he describes a festival of "tall ships" in Newport, Rhode Island, and the preparations being made for their trip south to New York Harbor. The film footage that accompanies this segment is of the tall ships sailing about in a harbor, and the closing shot, filmed from above, is a full screen portrait of a Yankee Clipper, one of the most majestic and powerful of tall ships invented and used in the United States prior to the discovery of the steam engine.

In the second segment, Brokaw reports on the anchoring of the USS *John Fitzgerald Kennedy*, one of the U.S. Navy's largest aircraft carriers, in New York Harbor. Brokaw describes the ship as a "floating city." The film footage that accompanies this segment is also shot from above at approximately the same angle as was the Yankee Clipper, and indeed, this segment is physically connected with the previous one via an editorial "wipe" of the screen that invokes a visual continuity between the two scenes. In the first segment the camera seems to remain stationary. In the second segment the visual presentation begins by showing the USS *JFK* in the foreground and the outline of Manhattan in the background. As the narrative quickly unfolds, however, the camera, apparently attached to a helicopter, moves so as to bring the ship into a tight close-up, emphasizing its size and presence, and gradually locates the Statue of Liberty in the background. As the story ends the camera returns the television viewers to the studio, where they see Brokaw gazing at the monitor on his left—presumably seeing what his viewers had just seen—with a warm and friendly grin on his face. He then reflects upon the diversity of both New York City and America, noting that it is "impossible to find a place that perfectly reflects all of our ideals," as he introduces Garrick Utley's report on "Patriotism."

Let us first consider Brokaw's short nautical piece. These two brief segments demonstrate, of course, that news anchors do not always speak in the neutral "institutional voice."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the occasion of a national celebration, perhaps even more than that of a national crisis, invites the news anchor to adopt the persona of homespun philosopher, and so also to identify with the audience he claims both to speak to and for. Ironically, the news anchor becomes an anchor for the chain of significations connected by the news-text. Standing both as witness and ideal spectator, Brokaw's smile reveals the experience of an aesthetic judgment that suggests not only pleasure, but its universal validity for his American viewers. And what chain of signification does Brokaw anchor? The play of metaphor and synecdoche is hardly occulted. Tall ships find their counterpart in warships. The USS *JFK* (a "floating city") is America in the diversity of its crew, just as New York City is the vessel for the simultaneous privileging and transcendence of difference and variety that "make it impossible to find

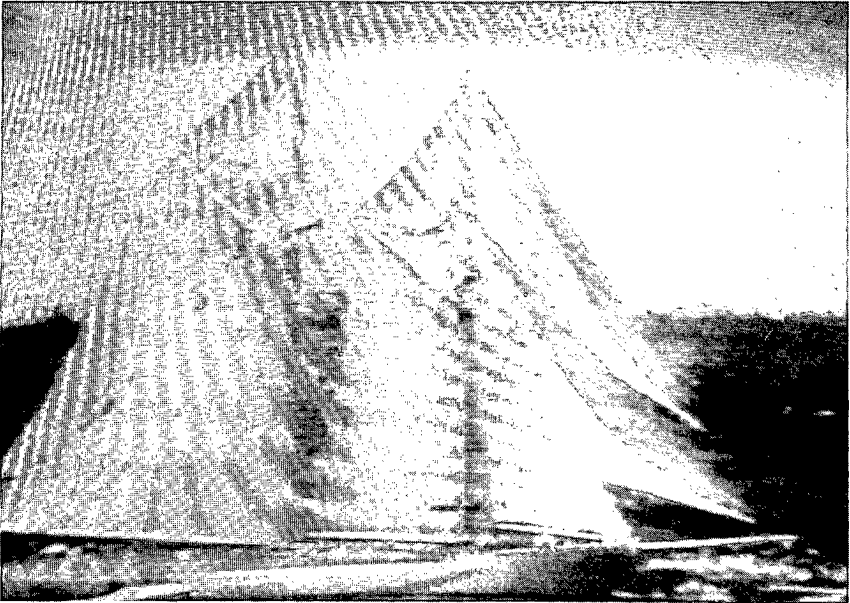
a place that perfectly reflects all of our ideals." Finally, both the Statue and the USS *JFK* keep watch over the nation and its shores.

The sequence of stories does more than merely shift topics through formal equivalencies. It also operates to elicit a simulated historical remembrance. For the America depicted here, [liberty] is a legacy bequeathed by the revolution celebrated on the Fourth of July. The tall ships evoke a sense of remembrance: the romance of freedom on the open sea, and of men and women allied with nature in a wind-driven ship, becomes the substance of a [liberty] situated in a simulacrum of the past immediately condensed onto the present. As the the camera "wipes" the presence of the Yankee Clipper from the screen, the USS *JFK* is revealed as the contemporary carrier of the spirit of [liberty] in history.

The significance of "history" as the topos that organizes these two segments of the evening news becomes manifest as Brokaw's story on "Liberty Weekend" is immediately succeeded by correspondent Garrick Utley's story on "Patriotism," a quality, we learn, that serves as the anchor for "all of (America's) ideals." Utley begins his narration as the television screen displays an American flag flapping in the wind, the bright sun shining though the flag and into the line-of-sight of the viewer. "Patriotism," he notes, "is an elusive quality, something to be felt, to take pride in, to believe in." As the story unfolds Utley proceeds to give sense to this sentiment, not by defining it, but by affirming its place within America's historical memory, identifying it with the "feeling" of a lived present that the segment itself evokes.

Utley begins his story by reporting on an event in the near present, the recent Memorial Day celebration held in the small New England town of Noank, Connecticut. Utley, displaying the dual personae of journalist and populist pedagogue, reminds his listeners that Noank has had a Memorial Day parade since 1876, and then proceeds to lecture on the presence and role of patriotism in American history. He speaks, in particular, of the historical necessity of patriotism in America as the civil religion of a nation "settled by people from many countries," a nation of immigrants who lack any other basis for social cohesion. The visuals that accompany this history lesson display the U.S. Constitution, portraits of America's Founding Fathers, and then black and white newsreel footage of the "flood of immigrants" coming to America. In this scenario patriotism belongs to American history, even as the residents of Noank rekindle its flame in their annual ritual. Indeed, as the narrative unfolds the viewers are introduced to a wide range of Noank's citizens, including Howard Davis, a veteran of World War II who emphasizes that patriotism is knowing that the "flag is a symbol worth fighting for"; Rick Anderson, a child of the 1960s who believes that "protesting against the American government's policy (in Vietnam) could be as patriotic as fighting a war"; and Mary Virginia Goodman, an eighty-eight year old woman who has taken part in the parade since 1908, and who delivers a short speech to the townspeople of Noank at the closing

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ceremonies of the Memorial Day celebration:

This is your country. This is your land. This was fought for you, and kept for you, and for many yet unborn, because men dared to go out and fight for it. Tell your children about them. This is America. God Bless America!

As Utley concludes the story he echoes his introduction in a reverential tone:

In the end, patriotism is in the heart of the beholder. Most people are stirred by it, some at times are skeptical about it, but no one can be indifferent to it.

And as he finishes, the viewer hears the gentle playing of "Taps," and sees the image of the American flag placed over the graves of the brave, fighting men of this small New England town, both the headstones *and* the flags bathed in the warm glow of the glinting and setting sun. The sense of history, the setting sun, and the allusions to bravery and the ultimate sacrifice, all move the heart as touching reminders of those who gave their lives for their country out of a "feeling" of patriotism. But Utley's final remarks are revealing, for if patriotism is indeed "in the heart of the beholder," what is beheld is the television screen as it breathes life into both history and the present. The sequence affects a synecdochic operation whereby the screen's Noank *is* past and present America. This narrativized and specularized Noank would exist within tradition, and thus retains its collective memory. Furthermore, as the sequence depicts these Americans and leads us to mourn the dead with them, we, as viewers, are included as residents of Noank-as-nation.

Up to now, little mention has been made of the military articulation of [liberty] made evident through its association with patriotism. We recognize (although we do not condone) the fact that most national states associate patriotism with a commitment to military readiness and strength. Furthermore, we do not wish to contest the propriety of honoring the men whose lives were taken away by a war machine they were induced or trapped into joining. But we consider particularly pernicious the historical revisionism or amnesia within the public discourse on [liberty] with regard to America as a military force precisely because [liberty] has historically provided a ground from which to critique power. Thus, for example, in the story on "Patriotism," Vietnam War protestors are placed on equal footing with World War II veterans as representatives of patriotism. But notice the repression of memory at work: Vietnam, a recent historical event and tragedy, is reduced to and remembered as a point of patriotic dispute between generations. Whether one went to Vietnam and fought (and lived or died), or stayed behind and refused to fight, one was patriotic and enacted [liberty's] legacy by fighting for it. What is lost to memory

is profound, including any experience of the devastation, destruction, and immorality of that war, or of the national crisis that it produced at home. The pain of Kent State and The University of Wisconsin is comfortably forgotten, and the pleasure of identification with the screen is offered to fill the resultant void. Life itself is elided.

This sequence of stories illustrates well the manner in which a mass-mediated, televisual culture risks displacing both life and the possibility of a culture of argumentation that exists when public discourse manifests a dialectic between historically material human experience and collective life. For such a culture to be possible, there must be a clear relationship between the language of public discourse and the lived experience of social relations, or what Carlos Castoriadis calls the relationship between the "imaginary," the "perceptual," and the "rational."<sup>19</sup> The televised news sequences we have described do not evidence such a relationship, but are instead illustrative of a process by which public discourse is colonized as a series of mass-mediated, aesthetic effects. In neither "Liberty Weekend" nor "Patriotism" does the screen's proto-imaginary evidence any use of the community's perceptions or rationality; rather than to locate the experience of [liberty] in the lived social relations of the citizenry, it is placed in the condensation of grand historical narratives reproduced by the mass media in complicity with the state. In this sense, the two segments that we have just analyzed offer a constitutive rhetoric in the assertion that patriotism is a "feeling," and simultaneously deliver a narrative that elicits that very feeling.<sup>20</sup> Put otherwise, the news textually produces "Patriotism" (and patriots) in the context of television's "Liberty Weekend." *Note, however, that this rhetoric requires no other ground but itself.* Whether or not those living in America "feel" free as they experience the sedimented structures of economy, bureaucracy, and their socially-determined life chances, becomes irrelevant. The experience of [liberty] of which public discourse admits resides elsewhere, such as in the televised version of Noank, Connecticut, that simulacrum of small-town harmony in nineteenth-century America. Noank thus becomes the romanticized community of which John Dewey despaired the loss.<sup>21</sup>

And there is more. For even if the spectator, interpellated by this discourse, might have an unmediated investment in [liberty] on to which this sequence of news segments could connect, the media text excludes it from public discourse. Brokaw suffices as the voice within which historical connotations and latent narratives of the romantic sea, of collectivity, and of state power are combined. Within the audio-visual grammar of television, this integration of metaphoric and synecdochic chains specularizes [liberty]. [Liberty] becomes the point of both the articulation of a feeling and of a set of condensations. As such, it becomes situated outside political argumentation. The culture of argumentation here collapses, for [liberty] is no longer an ideograph that must be deployed through a discourse of "good reasons" that admits to the possibility of a counter-argument. The

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proto-judgment of the rightness of the “feeling” of [liberty] in the face of a simulated historical remembrance is extra-cognitive. Aesthetic effects have almost entirely displaced any discussion of whether, in daily life, Americans encounter the “thing itself.” [Liberty] comes to belong more to the mass-mediated, televisual moment than to lived practice.

In the above analysis we might seem to be making much of a small matter. After all, the last few minutes of one network newscast are relatively insignificant to the overall field of public discourse in the United States. Nevertheless, we consider these few minutes of television to be representative of the aestheticization of America’s public imaginary, and of the evacuation of politics from its political discourse. Indeed, we would claim that America’s imaginary is a mass-mediated, televisual, cinemythic culture. Consider, for example, that even the President of the United States renders [liberty] as a spectacle.

Writing in *Parade* on Sunday, 29 June 1986, then President Ronald Reagan previewed the national celebration of the renovated Statue of Liberty in an article entitled “Now More Than Ever... The Meaning of Liberty.” He began as follows:

*The fireworks, the entertainers, the tall ships sailing through New York harbor should create fine and lasting memories for our children. Although they may not fully grasp the significance of the speeches, they will hear words like liberty and freedom and will understand that these are things that we, as Americans, hold dear and proclaim proudly. And, of course, at the center of attention will be Lady Liberty herself.*<sup>22</sup>

What followed these words was the heavily anecdotal discourse that was symptomatic of the public discourse of the Reagan Presidency, in which the President remembered his own past as symbolic of America’s ruggedly individualistic, privatized, frontier spirit. Frequently, it seemed, this past—and by extension America’s past was intimately, and often subtly grounded in his cinematic experiences.<sup>23</sup> So, for example, in this article we hear him talk of his own spiritual awakening upon seeing the Statue of Liberty at 4:00 in the morning on a return trip from Europe where he was filming *The Hasty Heart*, an experience reminiscent of that reported by hundreds-of-thousands of immigrants first seeing the shores of the United States, and of equal numbers of soldiers returning from World Wars I and II; he later discusses how his role in *Sante Fe Trail* opened “new vistas” for him, as well as “a love for the West, and its open spaces and the freedom it promised.” Later still, after recalling his role as the Notre Dame running back George Gipp in *Knute Rockne: All American*, he tells of his own triumphant battle with racism while playing football at Eureka College—a triumph in which he proudly “saves” two black football players on his team from the knowledge that they have been discriminated against by a local hotel manager by concocting a story of limited space at the hotel and tak-

ing them to stay at his mother's house.

Throughout this whole rendering of the "meaning" of [liberty] is the echoing resonance of those opening lines of the article that subtly substitute *the feeling in the presence* of the spectacle of "the fireworks, the entertainers, the tall ships sailing through New York harbor" for the "meaning" of [liberty] itself as a term with which to discuss relations of power. What seems so problematic here is that the memory of [liberty] becomes a direct and immediate function of the reminiscence of a cinemythic past, and indeed, a past that is celebrated for the pleasure of private virtue and public displays of power, more than for (or perhaps even to the exclusion of) the public moral values embedded in the historically material commitment to [liberty] as a condition of political life. Furthermore, this essay by Reagan, like the segments on the "NBC Nightly News," set the stage for the national, televised celebration of the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty which began on July 3, and in which entertainers and politicians sang and danced their praises to [liberty] as the Statue was unveiled amid fireworks reminiscent of the "rocket's red glare" so prominent in "The Star Spangled Banner."<sup>24</sup>

#### Reconstructing [Liberty] in a Culture of Argumentation

At the outset we indicated our concern for the fate of [liberty]. While we acknowledge the complicity of this ideograph with the rise of bourgeois capitalism, and recognize that in certain discourses of the conservative right it pertains more to the disposition of private capital than to political expression or the experience of the social order, we would be loathe to dismiss its historical significance for the humanization of power. Indeed, this essay is, at least in part, prompted by our concern that the "sweetness" of [liberty]—the feeling of comfort "in the presence of power"—is being displaced within the contemporary public discourse that promotes a simulated America. [Liberty] hence corresponds to a self-congratulatory, romantic aesthetic. Thus, and fundamentally, this essay is about more than [liberty], it is about the death of a kind of politics and a kind of speech. It is about dead rhetoric.

We believe that we can elaborate this point more fully if we treat the case that we described above as a "representative anecdote" for the character of public discourse in the United States.<sup>25</sup> In doing so, we will travel along a well worn path, for a number of authors have already written about the displacement of ideology or argumentation by the consciousness industry, television, or the logic of postmodernity.<sup>26</sup> We hope, however, to offer a different inflection in our analysis, grounded not simply in the need to recover a culture of argumentation, but to promote and reconstruct such a culture so as to accommodate the public problems of twentieth-century mass society.

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Judging from the effort and expense involved in the 1986 Statue of Liberty celebrations, it seems reasonable to conclude that ideology still matters in the United States.<sup>27</sup> Power is still legitimated in arguments and, at least occasionally, some members of the population must be motivated sufficiently through such rhetorics to tolerate or support state power. Following McGee however, we would hasten to point out that arguments of legitimation in no way resemble those of the Aristotelian dialectician or even those of the cost-benefit analyst.<sup>28</sup> These arguments are neither analytically nor technically rational. Rather, the warrants in legitimation arguments are ideographs such as [liberty] that refer to vaguely articulated principles that elicit affective responses.<sup>29</sup> At best, the warranting of power through ideographs is socially rational when there is a space in public discourse for those subject to the power to judge the appropriateness of *particular* warrants to *particular* claims within *particular* exigencies. As we noted at the outset of this essay, this requires a form of public historical memory that would be the vehicle for a "common sense." The common sense that permits the constitution of a creative and collective power that would breathe life into the social would not be the one derided by Stuart Hall as "ideological."<sup>30</sup> Rather, it would correspond to the *sensus communis* discussed by Hans Georg Gadamer as the contingent knowledge, akin to *phronesis* (practical wisdom), that is necessary to the formation and sustenance of human community.<sup>31</sup>

We leave as a matter of debate whether or not the subjects of America's multiple cultural formations have unique and distinct forms of common sense, but we do maintain that the process of aestheticization that we have described banishes that common sense from the public discourse of the national political community. In its place, we argue, the discourse of the public sphere proffers a Kantian common sense of aesthetic preunderstanding as the ground for the ideographs that provide motive force to claims of power.<sup>32</sup> The common sense that the Statue of Liberty celebrations appealed to (and were aimed to construct) was Kantian in that it was predicated upon an aesthetic sense that admitted of neither cognitive nor argumentative understandings. The truth of [liberty] was thus rendered as the beauty of [liberty], a phenomenon which one could not debate, and, indeed, which one was expected to experience as a condition of community. For Kant, judgments of beauty were capable of being universalized in that all those who had cultivated their aesthetic sensibilities would agree on what was beautiful. The rhetoric of [liberty] displayed in the preparations for the nation's celebration of The Statue of Liberty implies the same presumption or validity claim, the only difference being that the claim here is made with regard to patriotic sensibility rather than to aesthetic sensibility.

[Liberty] is thus subordinated in contemporary public discourse in two ways. First, it is located outside of the sphere of the *sensus communis* and outside of the practical knowledge that would found political judgments

in a world of contingency. Instead, it is located precisely in the sphere of an aesthetic sensibility that is demanded of all those who would lay claim to membership in the community. The mass media's celebration of [liberty] produces a politico-aesthetic sensibility as state culture. This is the aestheticization of politics and power.

The second subordination of [liberty] in contemporary mass mediated culture is tied to the broader subordination of living rhetorics and politics. According to Kroker and Cook, aestheticized politics set the act of judgment against the life of the social, the body, the will, and the imagination.<sup>33</sup> The measure of the quality of an aesthetic object, including an aestheticized social formation, is neither in terms of its ethical character nor its practical wisdom. It fails the test of the former because, as for Kant, the beautiful and the good are split, retaining at best an analogous character with one another. It fails the test of the latter because the faculty of aesthetic judgment consists of a universal, transcendental foundation, existing outside of time and space, and hence outside of the realm of lived human experiences. We thus maintain that the subordination of a vital rhetoric and politics occurs whenever human speech, with its presence, contingency, and dialogic character vanish.

We cannot demonstrate fully here that a mass mediated or televisual culture silences human speech or agency and petrifies life. Indeed, we are not even certain that such a claim is fully demonstrable, for it rests ultimately upon an interpretation of what would occur in a politics of human agency suffused with life. However, we do suspect (and hope) that at rare moments a glint of life may shine through the mass-mediated and aestheticized ideology, and through the "promotional culture" of which it is a part.<sup>34</sup> Life, for us, includes the "surplus" and Brownian motion that eludes the grids of power and determination of Foucault's "formations." That surplus exists in difference, play, ambivalence, and, most importantly, human agency. It enters the public realm, the realm of politics and of collective human endeavors, through speech.<sup>35</sup>

The speech we have in mind is akin to the classical conception of rhetoric in that it distinguishes itself from "just talk," from spectacle, and from the Foucauldian *énoncé* operating under the Will to Truth, by its affirmation of presence and its dependence on a culture of argumentation that presumes the existence of a listening other. This speech or rhetoric is a performance that creates a sense and a spirit of collective life. The speech or rhetoric that is excluded in a culture of generalized sign exchange would be animated with the spirit of the "true discourse" of sixth-century B.C. Greece. As Foucault painstakingly reminds us, this discourse was a discourse of presence and power:

(it inspired) respect and terror, to which all were obliged to submit, because it held sway over all and was pronounced by men who spoke as of right, according to ritual, meted out justice and attributed

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to each his rightful share; it prophesied the future, not merely announcing what was going to occur, but contributing to its actual event, carrying men along with it and thus weaving itself onto the fabric of fate.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, our life is not that of the ancients. Indeed, our [liberty] consists, in part, of being freed of the thrall of a single voice, of a solitary Logos constitutive of justice and right. Life today is animated by many Logoi; there are many voices that must speak their justice and their truth. Collective life requires that they encounter each other, not in the dead rhetorics of the mass media's hyperreality and simulation, but in a public culture of argumentation in which each utterance entails a risk.<sup>37</sup> The aestheticized [liberty] of "Liberty Weekend" is a node in a public discourse of a promotional culture that moves constantly to transform politics into a commodity, to silence speech and rhetoric, and to erect its social knowledge through a range of procedures of exclusion.<sup>38</sup> Excluded finally, is the possibility of ambivalence, dissent, and the risk of encountering the Other. What is excluded ultimately is the voice of life.

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### Notes

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1. Guy Debord, *Society of The Spectacle* (Detroit: Red and Black, 1983), 215.
2. Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).
3. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 241-2.
4. See Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*, and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities... Or the End of the Social*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and John Johnstone (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); and Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 267-79.
5. See, for example, Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese, in *Aristotle*, Loeb Classic Library, vol. 12 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926); Isocrates, "Antidosis," in *Isocrates*, trans. George Norlin, Loeb Classic Library, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 185-365; and Cicero, *De Oratore*, in *Cicero*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classic Library, vols. 3 and 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942).

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6. See Walter R. Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 64 (1978): 376-84; and "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," *Communication Monographs*, 51 (1984): 1-22; John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit, "Re-constructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective," *Journal of Communication*, 35 (1985): 90-108; and Michael Calvin McGee and John Nelson, "Narrative Reason in Public Argument," *Journal of Communication*, 35 (1985): 139-55.
7. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109-33; and Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207-72.
8. See Samuel Ijsseling, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict: An Historical Survey* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976); and Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 3-182.
9. Michael Calvin McGee, "In Search of 'the People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 61 (1975): 235-49.
10. Karl Wallace, "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 49 (1963): 239-43.
11. We employ the use of open and close bars "[ ]" to designate the specific ideographic usage of particular terms that possess both ordinary language meanings and ideological meanings as public commitments of community, as well as to accentuate the material presence of the signifier. So, for example, the word "equality" can refer to the phenomena of "sameness" or "identity" as in the sentence: "The two armies are of equal strength," or it can refer to one of the fundamental commitments of community of Whig/liberal societies, as in the American creed "All men are created equal." In the latter sense "equal" is ideographic, its use in American public discourse carries material force, and we would thus render it in single quotation marks. See Michael Calvin McGee, "The Ideograph: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 61 (1980): 235-49; John Louis Lucaites, "Flexibility and Consistency in Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Whiggism: A Case Study of the Rhetorical Dimensions of Legitimacy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1-48; and Celeste Michelle Condit, "Democracy and Civil Rights: The Universalizing Influence of Public Argumentation," *Communication Monographs*, 54 (1987): 1-18.
12. The argument has been made by some, such as Kroker and Cook, and Postman, that television constitutes the primary problem confronting a culture of reason and rationality in the postmodern condition. Our studies lead us to the conclusion that television is, at worst, symptomatic of these problems, but that it does not necessarily pose unique problems in this regard. In this particular study we focus on the ways in which television aestheticizes the universe of public social and political discourse, but the same arguments could be made about other mass media as well, including the cinema, popular music, print journalism, and so on. Kroker and Cook, *The Postmodern Scene*, 267-79; and Neal Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).
13. Michael Calvin McGee, "The Origins of [Liberty]: A Feminization of Power," *Communication Monographs*, 47 (1980): 23-45.
14. McGee, "The Ideograph."
15. McGee, "The Origins of [Liberty]" 45.



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16. Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 221-4.
17. See, for example, *The New York Times Magazine*, 6 July 1968, Section 6:1, and 12-3; *National Geographic*, July 1986, 2-43; *Newsweek*, Collectors Edition, Summer 1986; *Parade*, 29 June 1986, 1, 4-5; *Time*, 128 (1), 7 July 1986, 18-25; *Time* 128 (2), 14 July 1986, 10-20; *U.S. News and World Report*, 101 (1), 7 July 1986, 6-7, 25-35; and any daily edition of *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or virtually any other national or regional newspaper between 29 June and 7 July 1986.
18. John Hartley, *Understanding News* (London: Methuen, 1982), 109-11.
19. Carlos Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Bliemen (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1987), esp. 340-73.
20. Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Quebecois*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73 (1987): 133-50.
21. See John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (New York: Swallow Press, 1927), 110-84.
22. Ronald Reagan, "Now More Than Ever... The Meaning of [Liberty]" *Parade*, 29 June 1986, 4-5.
23. See Gary Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (Garden City: NY: Doubleday, 1987).
24. The opening ceremonies for "Liberty Weekend" were broadcast by *ABC* on the evening of July 3. In these two hours the audience was presented with a running narrative of the history and meaning of [liberty] in speeches by President Reagan, President Mitterand of France, Gregory Peck, Chief Justice Warren Berger, Lee Iaccoca, Ted Koppel, Henry Winkler, and Elizabeth Taylor, as well as through performances by Kenny Rogers, Mikhail Baryshnikov, John Williams and The Boston Pops, Neil Diamond, Jose Feliciano, Debbie Allen, and Frank Sinatra. The evening was completed with the unveiling of the restored Statue of Liberty. *ABC's* "Liberty Weekend" celebration had actually begun on the evening of July 2nd, when it ran a one hour prime time preview of the televised events to take place on the subsequent four days, and extended through the closing ceremonies broadcast during prime time on July 6.
25. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), 59-61, 323-5.
26. The literature here is quite large and diverse, but see in particular Hans G. Enzenberger, *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974); Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*; Kroker and Cook, *The Postmodern Scene*; and Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
27. This is a point that was accentuated by then Vice President George Bush in the 1988 presidential campaign. When Governor Michael Dukakis, Bush's opponent in the campaign, maintained that the election was about competence, not ideology, Bush responded that "competence is important, but ideology is very important!" This became a theme of the Bush campaign that was apparently authorized by the American people in the election results. Vice President George Bush, "Acceptance Speech," New Orleans, LA, 17 August 1988. A transcript of the speech can be found in the *The New York Times*, 18 August 1988.
28. See McGee, "In Search of 'the People'" Cf., Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 68-74.

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29. See Lucaites, "Flexibility and Consistency," 223-4.
30. Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed., James Curran, et al. (London: Methuen, 1976), 56-89.
31. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975), 19-33.
32. Immanuel Kant, "The Critique of Judgment," in *Kant: Selections*, ed. Theodore M. Greene (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1929), 411-15.
33. Kroker and Cook, *The Postmodern Scene*, 167.
34. Andrew Wernick, "Promotional Culture," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 12 (1988). 180-201.
35. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 175-81.
36. Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," trans. Rupert Sawyer, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 218.
37. See Douglas Ehninger, "Argument As Method: Its Nature, Its Limitations and Its Uses," *Speech Monographs*, 37 (1970): 104.
38. See Murray Edelman, *Constructing The Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).