To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by A. Ann Norris entitled "A Fantasy Theme Analysis of 'Washington Week in Review' for the First 100 Days of the Reagan Administration." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communications.

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A FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS OF "WASHINGTON WEEK IN REVIEW" FOR THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

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A. Ann Norris

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DEDICATION

To Don

Without Whom This

Would Not Have Been

Possible

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To Dan Nimmo for teaching me how to find something called reality in an unreal world.

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ABSTRACT

Most Americans receive most of their news from television, and the actual number of persons using television as their primary source of news and information grows every year. It is not surprising, therefore, that communications scholars have conducted content analyses of television news and public affairs programming at an increasing rate.

An especially fruitful form of content analysis called fantasy theme analysis was developed by speech communications scholar Ernest Bormann in the 1970s and has since been applied to the study of television by Bormann, Dan Nimmo and others. The thesis of this study is that fantasy themes develop in group discussions on public affairs television programs, and that content analysis can uncover those fantasy themes.

As opposed to other forms of content analysis, fantasy theme analysis does not depend upon the counting and quantification of content. Rather, fantasy theme analysis uses rhetorical criticism to look at the deep, underlying meanings in the manifest content of group discussions.

This study is a fantasy theme analysis of the public affairs television program "Washington Week in Review" for the first 100 days of the Reagan administration. "Washington Week in Review" is a one-half hour long show that appears weekly on the Public Broadcasting System. Four "major" print journalists make up the panel, and discussion revolves around the "major" news events of the week just passed.

The first 100 days of the Reagan administration were chosen because of the attention given to this particular period of time in a new presidential administration by scholars and journalists since the days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Fantasy themes that developed on these 15 "Washington Week in Review" programs included themes about the Reagan persona, or public mask of the individual, and about Reagan's domestic and foreign policies.

Themes of the persona showed that the panelists viewed Ronald Reagan as: the "Great Communicator" who could hold the nation spellbound during televised speeches and who could persuade almost anyone to his point of view if allowed to speak; the "Great Politician" who knew exactly when to twist arms and when to offer tickets to Kennedy Center; the "Tough Guy" who looked for a war he could win so he could declare it; and "Superpatient," the man whose body was 20 years younger than its chronological age and who walked away from a close brush with death smiling.

The themes of the two political parties were Biblical in nature. The "Disorganized Democrats" were lost and leaderless, like the ancient Israelites, and would wander in the political wilderness until they found a modern Moses to lead them. The "Republican Invincibles" were modern Christian Soldiers, marching to victory after moral victory.

The foreign policy themes that developed were "Just Like Vietnam," which cast El Salvador in the role of today's Tar Baby; "Hardball," which was the name of the foreign policy game Reagan was playing against the Soviets for control of the world; and "Disarray," which took place

when Reagan's White House and Secretary of State Alexander Haig squabbled over control of foreign policy.

Domestic policy had four predominant themes. "It'll Never Fly" reflected the panelists' belief the proposed 30 percent tax cut would never get through Congress; the "Battle of the Budget" had Democrats and Republicans engaged in trench warfare over the development of the national budget; "Tough Medicine" was what the country would have to swallow to cure its economic ills; and "Social Armageddon" was what would ensue if Reagan got all his requested budget cuts to social programs.

Two shorter themes were also identified. These were "Moonraker," the portrayal of the Space Shuttle as right out of James Bond; and "The System Worked," which was the perception of government's actions after the attempted assassination of Reagan by John Hinkley.

This study showed that fantasy themes develop in group discussions on public affairs television programs, and that those themes can be detected using the method of fantasy theme analysis as modified and applied here. This study also shows the underlying messages received by viewers of that particular television program during the time period studied.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every day Americans turn to their television sets for programs that will entertain, inform, provoke and amuse. Their viewing habits are perhaps the most closely monitored in the world, and in the area of news in particular, research has shown that with each year the numbers of Americans who rely primarily or solely upon television as a source of news has increased (Roper Organization, 1972, p. 3).

For example, the Roper/Television Information Office poll of 1981 found that 64 percent of adult Americans received most of their news from television, and that the believability of television news was higher than that of all other news media combined. What is more, Roper found that for 40 percent of the American people, television was the only source of news (Broadcasting, 1981, p. 84).

Purpose of the Study

In recent years communications scientists have focused upon analysis of the content of television news. They have hypothesized that continuing news stories strive for thematic closure, use melodramatic representation, create symbolic realities, and build rhetorical visions (Nimmo & Combs, 1980, p. 174). To test this particular hypothesis some communications scientists have used a kind of rhetorical criticism involving content analysis for fantasy themes to detect the underlying meanings in television news stories.

Nimmo and Combs (1983) define fantasy as:

> . . . a credible picture of the world that is created when one interprets mediated experiences as the way things are and takes for granted the authenticity of the mediated reality without checking against alternative, perhaps contradictory, realities so long as the fantasy offers dramatic proof for one's expectations. (p. 8)

Fantasy themes have been successfully detected in print news stories and in television network news stories. But the nightly newscast does not make up the universe of television news. This study applies the content analysis method for fantasy themes to one public affairs television program to determine whether fantasy themes also develop on this type of television program.

Utility

To date, fantasy theme analysis has been applied to television network news and to print media. It has not been applied to discussion of recent news events by groups of journalists on public affairs television programs. Therefore, a content analysis of one such public affairs program will add to the body of knowledge being compiled on the development of fantasy themes in the news media.

Such a content analysis will also help communications scientists to understand better the development of fantasy themes by journalists in group discussions. By uncovering the fantasy themes in a particular television public affairs program, this study will help communications scientists to begin the development of a more complete understanding of one of the ways in which news events are portrayed to television audiences.

Statement of the Problem

The problem which is studied in this thesis is: "What fantasy themes were developed by the journalists participating as panelists on 'Washington Week in Review' during the first 100 days of the Reagan administration?"

Hypothesis and Assumption

The hypothesis for this study is that fantasy themes in fact develop during group discussions on television programs. The assumption is that the fantasy themes that develop can be uncovered through content analysis of a television program.

Limitations

"Washington Week in Review" is the only regularly scheduled television news program which involves discussion of a week's predominant news events by groups of journalists. For the purpose of this study "Washington Week in Review" constitutes a total population of such programs on television. Each "Washington Week in Review" program that was aired from January 20, 1981, through April 29, 1981, (the first 100 days of the Reagan Administration) was videotaped and kept for analysis. Therefore, a total sample of the programs has been used in this study.

This content analysis for fantasy themes includes a total population of such programs on television, and a total sample of the programs that appeared during the selected time period. This study provides a comprehensive picture of fantasy themes that developed on "Washington Week in Review" during the first 100 days of the Reagan administration.

Conclusions drawn in this study will not necessarily apply to any other television program aired during the same period of time, or to network newscasts aired during the same period of time. The same themes may have appeared elsewhere in the media, but it is beyond the purview of this study to determine if this is the case.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the importance of television as an information source for a large segment of the United States' population, it is not surprising that communications scholars have investigated such topics as news bias, political campaign coverage, TV news logic, and the differences among network news presentations, among a host of other topics.

News Analysis

One example is Edith Efron's study of television news bias in the 1968 presidential election. Efron and her associates reviewed each newscast for the three commercial networks for a seven-week period immediately prior to the 1968 election and found that news bias existed at several levels. They found bias in the choice of words used to describe persons and events, the placement of news stories within broadcasts, and the length of time devoted to individual news stories (Efron, 1971, pp. 32-47).

Four years later Richard Hofstetter conducted a similar investigation into bias on the three commercial television networks. Hofstetter's study covered the four months immediately prior to the 1972 election and included both major political conventions. His study concluded that the news coverage of that campaign was not politically biased (Hofstetter, 1976, pp. 47-144). Rather, Hofstetter found what he called structural bias on all three networks. Structural bias, he said, consisted of television's choices of visuals and commentary which would

"dramatize politics and make politics exciting and interesting to the general public" (Hofstetter, 1976, p. 34).

Another scholarly investigation of news bias in the 1968 and 1972 presidential elections was undertaken by Doris Graber. Graber examined the content of television network news programs and compared that content with 20 daily newspapers during the last four weeks of the two campaigns. She found that both television and newspapers heavily emphasized the personal qualities of the candidates, the excitement of the campaign, and the concept of a "horserace" between the contenders. In addition, 77 percent of the coverage focused upon personal attributes, style and image, rather than issues in the two campaigns (Graber, 1976, pp. 288-301).

What Hofstetter called structural bias was examined by David Altheide in his study of television station operations in the western United States. Altheide found that in writing stories for the nightly news, reporters told a story about a story. In so doing, they transformed the everyday world for news purposes (Altheide, 1976, pp. 24-25). The effect, Altheide said, was "to take an event out of its familiar circumstances and surroundings and meanings, and then embed it in a foreign situation--the news report" (Altheide, 1976, p. 25). Rather than calling it bias, Altheide said his findings indicated television news reports "created reality" for the viewer by transforming the event into a short report with visual impact.

In a later work, Altheide and Robert Snow examined the formats of print and broadcast media and concluded that television news had become another kind of TV entertainment programming, "committed to pulling in the viewers at the expense of doing deeper, more complete

and accurate reports" (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 75). According to Altheide and Snow, delivery of the television news story was more important than the information contained within the story: "The form of the presentation becomes the significant content" (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 10).

In a more recent work, Dan Nimmo and James Combs analyzed network news reporting of the accident at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant to determine differences among the three commercial networks' reporting styles. Nimmo and Combs found that there were

> . . . sufficient stylistic differences among the networks to suggest that viewers may have received markedly different impressions of the accident depending upon which of the three TV networks they relied upon for news. (Journal of Broadcasting, Summer 1981, p. 289)

They concluded that such stylistic differences might occur on other types of stories, but further investigation would be necessary to make that determination (Journal of Broadcasting, Summer 1981, p. 289).

Content Analysis

While each of the research examples cited employed a different methodology, all had in common the use of some type of content analysis. Prior to World War II content analysis was primarily quantitative, that is, the counting of volumes of material in newspapers (Krippendorff, 1980, pp. 13-14). The work of the World War II propaganda analysts under Harold Lasswell for the Library of Congress, and Hans Speier at the New School of Social Research, brought content analysis into the area of explaining as well as quantifying communications content. The Lasswell and Speier groups collected volumes of information and then coded it. Then, they went one step further and interpreted the

information for its hidden meanings, using qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980, pp. 16-17).

According to Krippendorff, "qualitative content analysis could be characterized as a method of inquiry into the symbolic meaning of messages" (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 22). He cautions that messages do not have a single meaning, and that the meanings of messages need not be the same for all analysts. He also says:

> The most distinctive feature of messages is that they inform someone vicariously, providing the receiver with knowledge about events that take place at a distant location, about objects that may have existed in the past, or about ideas in other people's minds. Messages and symbolic communications generally are about phenomena other than those directly observed. (Krippendorff, 1980, pp. 22-23) [Emphasis added.]

Rhetorical Criticism

In the examination of symbolic communications, rhetorical criticism has become a valuable tool for content analysis. Scott and Brock, for example, point out that it is the function of rhetorical criticism to describe, to interpret and to evaluate (Scott & Brock, 1980, p. 9). The rhetorical critic may examine a speech or group of speeches, interpret the words for underlying meanings, and then evaluate the possible effects of those meanings on the listener. The critic also may examine theatrical plays or television programs from a rhetorical point of view. For Scott and Brock, the rhetorical critic has become an interpreter of events and of the "interaction of speaker, audience and context" (Scott & Brock, 1980, p. 124).

Content analysis from a rhetorical point of view differs from other types of content analysis in its focus upon the subjective

elements of objective content. That is, the rhetorical critic typically analyzes what Krippendorff defines as thematic units of content.

> These [thematic units] are identified by their correspondence to a particular structural definition of the content of narratives, explanations, or interpretations. They are distinguished from each other on conceptual grounds. . . . Thematic units require a deep understanding of the source language with all of its shades and nuances of meaning and content. (Krippendorff, 1980, pp. 62-63)

Krippendorff adds that analysis of thematic units is common in folklore and in the detection of stereotypes, racism and distortion (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 63). Thus, the rhetorical analysis of thematic units is also a form of content analysis, albeit of a different sort than the types used by some of those authors whose works were cited above.

CHAPTER III

SURVEY OF RECENT RESEARCH

Of the methods of rhetorical criticism that might be applied to television news, the analytical method used by Ernest Bormann has proved especially useful. Bormann's rhetorical method for fantasy theme analysis is based upon a discovery by Robert Bales in investigations of small group interaction. Bales found that often during a small group discussion one member would dramatize a situation or event or tell a story about it. Other group members would join in telling the story, causing the dramatization to "chain through" the group, or be passed from one group member to the other (Bales, 1950, p. 138). Bales labeled these group dramatizations "fantasy events" or "fantasy chains."

Fantasy Theme Analysis

According to Bales, a fantasy chain is created when one group member's dramatization of events and objects in another time and place is accepted and added to by other group members (Bales, 1950, p. 138). The group members do not develop fantasies at a conscious level. That is, they do not set out to create fantasies in their discussions. Rather, the fantasies develop in the group, among the participants, as one shorthand way of understanding a complex set of events. One group's understanding of a set of events, therefore, may be quite different than another group's understanding because the fantasy themes and fantasy chains develop differently from group to group, and from discussion to discussion.

Central to the method for fantasy theme analysis is the idea that over time people develop a shared social system through their group communications. They also develop a shared system of symbols that unite them into a "group culture."

> The culture of the interacting group stimulates in each of its members a feeling that he has entered a new realm of reality--a world of heroes, villians, saints, and enemies--a drama, a work of art. The culture of a group is a fantasy established from the past, which is acted upon in the present. In such moments, which occur not only in groups, but also in individual responses to works of art, one is "transported" to a world which seems somehow even more real than the everyday world. One may feel exalted, fascinated, perhaps horrified or threatened, or powerfully impelled to action, but in any case involved. One's feelings fuse with the symbols and images which carry the feelings in communication and sustain it over time. (Bales, 1950, p. 138)

Bormann applied Bales' method for studying small group interaction to the study of speech communication. Specifically, Bormann extended the idea of fantasy chaining to larger social settings, reasoning that what might hold true for small groups also might be extended to the larger world in which mass media play a major role in the dramatizing of events and spreading of fantasy chains across physical boundaries. In Bormann's words:

> The composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality, I call a "rhetorical vision." Just as fantasy themes chain out in the group to create a unique group culture, so do the fantasy dramas of a successful persuasive campaign chain out in public audiences to form a rhetorical vision.
>
> A rhetorical vision is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a given society. (Bormann, 1972, p. 398)

The speaker's audience, the television viewer, the radio listener, and any other participant in fantasy chaining is no more aware that

he is a part of a fantasy chain than was a member of Bales' small group. The symbols and images they have received from communication are absorbed and become a part of their subconscious. Many times people will recognize a symbol, but have no idea why they recognize it or where they first saw or heard it used. The fantasy theme is a part of their culture, and as such is a part of them.

Since each group develops its own fantasy themes and fantasy chains, Bales found that fantasy chains had special meanings in all cases for one or more of the discussion participants. The mention of one of the elements of a fantasy by one group member was often enough to provoke a sympatheic response in other group members. They had all developed a common understanding of the event or events mentioned through sharing a fantasy that had chained out among them. Bales called this a "chain reaction of associations for the participants" (Bales, 1950, p. 138).

Fantasy themes and fantasy chains need not be either "true" or "false" representations of the event about which a fantasy has developed. In other words, a fantasy may be absolutely accurate in its representation of an event, or it may be absolutely inaccurate, or it may be anywhere between the two extremes. A fantasy theme is a fantasy theme, without regard to truth or falsehood relative to actual fact. Rather, fantasies are consensual validation of the picture of an event as the group has come to understand it. This consensual validation is more important to the group members in small group discussion than fact or fiction (Bales, 1950, p. 138).

Groups may develop contradictory and even clashing fantasy themes without apparent dissonance. Since the themes are not a conscious part

of the group discussion or even part of the awareness of individuals within the group, a clashing or contradictory nature of themes appears to present no difficulty for group members in fantasy theme development. Bales found that the group simply incorporates fantasies into its discussions without regard to their seemingly exclusive nature. The fantasies, regardless of their nature, are a natural and logical product of small group interaction, and take place without regard to pre-existing fantasies or even clashing ones (Bales, 1950, p. 138).

Bormann provided an example of fantasy theme analysis by examining the literature of the Massachusetts Bay colonists during the early years of settlement. Real life there was extremely demanding, dull, drab and grim. However, Bormann found that those people in fact "led an internal fantasy life of mighty grandeur and complexity" (Bormannn, 1972, p. 402). Rather than plodding through life, the colonists saw themselves as reenacting the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. According to Bormann's analysis, they believed themselves to be God's modern chosen people who had come to the promised land after two years of wandering (Bormann, 1972, p. 402).

The two predominant fantasy themes detected in the materials were

> . . . (1) the pilgrim making his slow, painful and holy way, beset by many troubles and temptations and (2) the Christian soldier fighting God's battles and overcoming all adversaries in order to establish the true church. (Bormann, 1972, p. 404)

One type of the literature Bormann examined was sermons by Bay Colony ministers. He found that in

> . . . creating fantasy themes for specific sermons the minister would use all his art of assertion, imperatives and descriptive language to search out the hiding places

> and bring each member of the congregation center stage to play out the drama of salvation or damnation. (Bormann, 1972, p. 402)

By bringing members of his flock to believe that each moment spent on earth doing God's work was of the highest importance, the minister gave dramatic meaning to even the worst drudgery of daily existence for the colonists (Bormann, 1972, p. 402).

Less than a year later Bormann published a fantasy theme analysis of a contemporary American political event, that of mass media coverage of the Tom Eagleton Affair. He found that the conflicting fantasy themes of the news media and the adherents of the "New Politics" set the stage for the drama which was then played out (Bormann, 1973, p. 148).

The adherents of the New Politics, represented by presidential candidate George McGovern, operated under the fantasy theme that people running for political office under their banner were "not really politicians." Instead, they were "honest, sincere, decent people who just happened to be in politics" (Bormann, 1973, p. 148). The news media, on the other hand, operated under the fantasy theme that "all politicians are essentially ambitious people out to get elected, scrambling about for political advantage, generally hypocritical" (Bormann, 1973, p. 148).

News media coverage of Eagleton's medical history, e.g., electoshock therapy for depression, focused upon when, not if, Eagleton would be dumped from the Democratic ticket. When McGovern finally asked Eagleton to leave the ticket, Eagleton has become a figure of public sympathy. According to Bormann, McGovern's action in removing Eagleton only served to confirm the news media fantasy theme about politicians. McGovern was cast as "wishy-washy, behaving exactly as any other

politician would behave by putting political considerations ahead of ideals" (Bormann, 1973, p. 155).

Eagleton emerged as the sympathetic victor. Instead of McGovern's being able to portray himself as the white Knight St. George doing honorable battle against the black forces of evil personified by Richard Nixon, McGovern was cast in the media as "an inconsistent, inept, untrustworthy and politically expedient politician" (Bormann, 1973, p. 159).

Television Public Affairs Programming

Bormann's analysis of the Eagleton Affair, as well as the works of the other communications researchers discussed earlier, have in common that they dealt with one segment of television public affairs programming--the nightly newscast on the three commercial networks. Certainly the nightly newscasts are important sources of news and information for the American public. They do not, however, represent the universe of television public affairs programming.

Programs such as "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation," "Issues and Answers," "This Week with David Brinkley," and "Washington Week in Review" also present political news and information to television viewers. However, these and other public affairs programs have not been subjected thus far to critical analysis by communications scientists.

One of the more important programs of this genre is "Washington Week in Review," which is broadcast over the Public Broadcasting System. An article in Newsweek magazine stated that "Washington Week in Review" is so important, it is "mandatory viewing for much of official Washington" (Newsweek, May 25, 1981, p. 92). The article also said that a single appearance on the program "can do wonders for a reporter's

reputation--and make his job considerably easier" (Newsweek, May 25, 1981, p. 92). Those print journalists making appearances on the program have reported that their phone calls to government officials are returned quickly, and entree to the highest sources of news is made much easier after one week's program (Newsweek, May 25, 1981, p. 92).

Because this program is so important to official Washington, and inasmuch as it reaches a nationwide viewing audience, a study of "Washington Week in Review," especially during an important political event in American life, can be a valuable contribution to the growing body of knowledge of television news analysis.

One such important political event for Americans is the first 100 days in office for a newly elected president. This importance of the first 100 days first received scholarly attention with the inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt took office during one of the most critical periods in American history and immediately began to propose actions intended to solve the nation's problems. As Arthur Schlesinger put it, "In the three months after Roosevelt's inauguration, Congress and the country were subjected to a presidential barrage of ideas and programs unlike anything known to American history" (Schlesinger, 1959, p. 20). Presidential scholar Wilfred Binkley said much the same thing, calling the time, "a hundred days certainly without precedence in the history of the presidency" (Binkley, 1962, p. 294). According to Roosevelt "Brain Trust" member Rexford Tugwell, "The accomplishments during this time were so astonishing that the allusion to Napoleon's hundred days, his return to Paris from Elba, caught on" (Tugwell, 1967, p. 95).

CHAPTER IV

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The function of this study is to begin to fill that gap in the research. Specifically, this study is a fantasy theme analysis of "Washington Week in Review" during the first 100 days of the Reagan administration. The themes that developed during group discussions on the television program in that period will be described and analyzed using the method developed by Ernest Bormann. Since virtually all the discussions involved Ronald Reagan or actions by the Reagan administration, the content of all the programs which went on the air during the first 100 days of the Reagan administration has been analyzed.

Bormann's concise description of the method for fantasy theme analysis is as follows:

> The critic begins by collecting evidence related to the manifest content of the communication, using video or audio tapes, manuscripts, recollections of the participants, or his own direct observations. He discovers and describes the narrative and dramatic materials that have chained out for those who participate in the rhetorical vision.
>
> Once the critic has constructed the manifest content of the rhetorical vision he can ask more specific questions relating to elements of the dramas. Who are the dramatis personae? Who are the heroes and villians? How concrete and detailed are the characterizations? What are the typical scenarios? What meanings are inherent in the dramas? . . . How artistic is the development of the fantasy theme? How skillful the characterization? (Bormann, 1972, pp. 401-402)

Data Collection

For this research all 15 "Washington Week in Review" programs aired during the first 100 days were videotaped and kept in chronological

order. Since "Washington Week in Review" is the only public affairs program on television involving discussion of the week's predominant news events by groups of journalists, a total sample of a total population of such programs was available for analysis.

Data collection consisted of following Bormann's method for the specific identification of fantasy themes. Bormann said:

> When a critic has gathered a number of dramatic incidents he can look for patterns of characterization (do the same people keep cropping up as villians?) or dramatic situations and actions (are the same stories repeated?) and of setting (where is the sacred ground and where the profane?). The critic then must creatively reconstruct the rhetorical vision from the representative fantasy chains much as a scholar would delineate a school of drama on the basis of a number of plays. (Bormann, 1972, p. 402)

The analysis of a transcription of dialogue on "Washington Week in Review," rather than the viewing of videotapes of the actual broadcasts, would have eliminated a dimension from this research that was necessary in the analysis of small group discussion. Viewing videotapes allowed the researcher to see the body language of the participants, and to detect strong feelings and excitement through facial and bodily expressions. It also allowed the researcher to hear the excitement in the voices of the group members, and to hear their interruptions of each other as group fantasies developed. Clearly, the visual and auditory elements were necessary ingredients in this analysis for fantasy themes.

An initial viewing of the videotapes allowed the researcher to detect key words, phrases, metaphors and opinions that served as initial indicators of the existence of fantasy themes. The researcher noted the excitement of group members as certain words, phrases,

metaphors and opinions were repeated from week to week. A fantasy theme could be hypothesized at the first viewing of the videotapes by noting the indicators stated above and by noting the chaining of the fantasies through the group, and from week to week.

Further viewings of the videotapes included the repetition of certain sections of each tape several times to be certain all indications of fantasy themes had been noted. The researcher then could explicate the themes in their totality. This consisted of making certain the panelists' characterizations of events and persons, and the concreteness and detail of those characterizations, had been recorded.

The researcher then creatively reconstructed the fantasy themes from the evidence noted on the videotapes. The themes were reconstructed chronologically, since this was how they developed. The words, phrases, metaphors and opinions that showed the fantasies of the "Washington Week in Review" panelists were drawn into a consistent delineation of each theme. In addition, the themes were given names, which was the researcher's attempt to convey the predominant message of the theme in a shorthand way. At times the names given the themes were one phrase used repeatedly by the panelists. At other times the names were the researcher's shortened version of the thrust of the theme.

Bormann said of fantasy theme analysis: "The critic's purpose is to provide a personal idiosyncratic interpretation of the object of criticism" (Bormann, 1982, p. 301). The interpretations in this study are, of course, those of a single researcher. However, other scholars have used the same method fruitfully in conducting other, similar, studies. The results of this analysis show that Bormann's

method for fantasy theme analysis can be applied effectively to television public affairs programming.

"Washington Week in Review"

"Washington Week in Review" is a weekly, one-half hour public affairs program broadcast nationwide on the Public Broadcasting System each Friday evening. Its format features a discussion of four of the top news stories of the week by four print journalists. The criteria for choosing panelists for participation in the discussions were not explained during the 15 weeks under study, although it was apparent that panelists were from major metropolitan newspapers and were considered "important" journalists.

Discussions on the program involved, first, the presentation of a few facts about one of the top news events by the panelist who was that week's expert on the subject; second, a short discussion of the implications of the story by all four panelists. This procedure was followed for each of the four topics chosen each week. Moderator Paul Duke kept time on the discussions, dividing the program into four fairly equal segments.

A few behavior patterns became evident over the 15 weeks studied. For instance, on many of the programs a panelist would pose a "Big Question." One would ask something like: "The question this week was: Can Haig be controlled?" or "Can Reagan pull it off?" The group then would discuss a range of possible answers.

The panelists and the moderator appeared to be conscious that they were taking part in a television "show." At times they would turn to the camera and say something to "The folks out there," meaning

their audience. All the panelists were competent and experienced communicators. They also were trying to please as large an audience as possible by being as colorful in their expressions as possible. Since they were print journalists they might write something such as, "In order to redirect the national economy toward greater stability in an upward direction, President Reagan's remedial philosophies will be difficult for the typical citizen to endure." On the television program, they said, "President Reagan has tough medicine for the country to swallow to get the economy well again."

This tendency to state opinions and make predictions in a way that would be understandable to "the folks out there" sometimes led panelists to hyperbole. Some examples of this are: "Reagan has perfect instinctive timing." "The poor are rumbling in the ghettoes and when these budget cuts are felt, they will riot." "Nobody else could have held the nation's attention for 27 minutes as Reagan did. His performance was riveting."

During the 15 weeks analyzed the six most frequent participants were: Hedrick Smith of The New York Times (nine appearances); Jack Nelson of The Los Angeles Times and Haynes Johnson of The Washington Post (seven appearances each); Charles Corddry of The Baltimore Sun and Albert Hunt of The Wall Street Journal (six appearances each); and Charles McDowell of The Richmond Times-Dispatch (five appearances). These men were the continuing cast of characters for the program. They obviously knew each other well and were comfortable with one another. Their familiarity with the program and its format seemed to relax some of the less frequent participants. Moreover, not a single program

went on the air during the 15 weeks analyzed without at least one of the men listed above on the set.

Eleven other journalists appeared on "Washington Week in Review" during the 15 weeks. Three persons made three appearances each: Christine Russell and Georgie Anne Geyer of The Washington Star, and Harry Ellis of The Christian Science Monitor. Three persons made two appearances: Henry Trewhitt of The Baltimore Sun, Eileen Shanahan of The Washington Star, and Hobart Rowen of The Washington Post. Single appearances were made by five persons: Linda Greenhouse of The New York Times, Don Oberdoerfer and Peter Osnos of The Washington Post, Roger Wilkins of The Washington Star, and William Hines of The Chicago Sun Times. Although these journalists appeared less often, they seemed to be acquainted with the other panelists and sometimes quoted the others' stories that had appeared in print.

The program participants had a number of news events to discuss during the 15 weeks surveyed. All of the programs dealt almost solely with Ronald Reagan and actions or predicted actions by his administration. The one exception to this was the situation in Poland. That subject was discussed several times, but it does not appear in this research because it was not discussed with relationship to Reagan or his administration. This study is limited to those news events that related specifically to Reagan and his administration.

The stories included in this study involve the president's inauguration, predictions of his actions once in office, Reagan's proposal for a 30 percent income tax cut, the relationship of the tax cut to the federal budget, proposed budget cuts to social programs, predictions of the consequences of those cuts to social programs, and budget

increases in defense spending. The list above includes news events relating to domestic policy. In the area of foreign policy, Reagan made several addresses and public statements in which he "talked tough" to the Russians and to the Cubans, and the consequences of those statements were discussed several times. Reagan also announced that America would intervene militarily in El Salvador to save the hemisphere from communism; accordingly, U.S. intervention in Central America was discussed at length. In other matters, the first flight of the space shuttle took place, Secretary of State Alexander Haig made public a dispute over foreign policy turf with the White House staff, and John Hinkley attempted to assassinate Reagan.

In discussions of the events listed above, the Big Questions, predictions for the future, and hyperbole would set the stage for the dramas to be played out in group discussions. As the discussions took place the group arrived at a consensus of understanding on the events being discussed, and the group fantasies developed. On succeeding pages the fantasy themes of "Washington Week in Review" that developed during the first 100 days of the Reagan administration will be discussed.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS: THE FANTASY THEMES

A. INTRODUCTION

The fantasy themes that developed on "Washington Week in Review" during the 15 weeks of this study fell into several categories. Some concerned Ronald Reagan and can be labeled the Good Communicator, the Good Politician, the Tough Guy and Superpatient. Two more concerned the major political parties--the Disorganized Democrats and the Republican Invincibles. Three additional categories involved foreign policy--Hardball, Disarray and Just Like Vietnam. And finally, several fell into the area of domestic policy, including the Battle of the Budget, It'll Never Fly, Tough Medicine, Social Armageddon, The System Worked and Moonraker.

This researcher chose these theme names in order to present concisely the predominant image conveyed by each theme. Some theme names came from phrases repeated often by the panelists. Others were derived from the overall image contained in the theme as the researcher came to see it. Most of the themes were developed by the journalists over several programs. A few, however, existed only briefly in one or two programs. An Appendix presents a table showing the dates of the programs on which each of the themes identified in this research occurred.

B. PERSONA THEMES

The themes that revolved around Reagan himself involved aspects of what Bormann called the persona. Bormann said that because fantasy theme analysis "emphasizes the dramatizing aspects of rhetoric, a critic needs a term to distinguish the public mask or personality of individuals from other aspects of their personality" (Bormann, 1973, p. 143).

Bormann argued that the common term "image" had been so overused and applied to so many different concepts, it would not suffice to explain his meaning. Instead, he used the term persona, which is "restricted to the character a public person plays in a given dramatization" (Bormann, 1973, p. 143). In his fantasy theme analysis of the Eagleton Affair, for instance, Richard Nixon was the black knight and George McGovern was St. George. As stated above, the fantasy themes of the Reagan persona were the Good Communicator, the Good Politician, the Tough Guy and the Superpatient.

Good Communicator

Reagan's performance at his inauguration provided a perfect example of the Good Communicator. The panelists discussed his "perfect instinctive timing," said he was "brimming with confidence," and his voice was "just right." One quote by Haynes Johnson seemed to sum up their comments with: "He comes over very well, and he symbolizes old-fashioned Americanism" (January 23).

Later, Reagan made a televised speech outlining his economic plan, which the panelists called "riveting." Haynes Johnson said, "Nobody else could have stood there for 27 minutes and held the nation's attention as Reagan did that night." Then Johnson, Eileen Shanahan,

Jack Nelson and Albert Hunt contributed their own anecdotes about Reagan's "relaxed and confident" manner in the presidency. They said he laughed and "cracked one-liners" frequently with members of the news media both on and off camera, and seemed comfortable enough to be able to "communicate freely" with them (February 6).

On the February 20 program Charles McDowell likened Reagan to baseball great Babe Ruth in his "amiable audacity" and "down home manner" of addressing people. Charles Corddry said Reagan was not like the "dazzling John Kennedy," but, rather, was "relaxed and comfortable" in the presidency and in dealing with people. McDowell then predicted Reagan would "win the battle of the budget because he can communicate better than his opponents."

Reagan traveled to Canada to visit Premier Trudeau, and the panelists discussed the visit almost entirely in terms of the Good Communicator (March 13). Jack Nelson said, "What was most important was that Reagan and Trudeau got together to talk about things, and they liked each other. As long as they keep talking and liking each other they can solve the problems later and keep operating for now on the good feelings they have about each other." Similar comments were made by Henry Trewhitt and Harry Ellis.

By the March 20 program Reagan had begun to make a strong pitch for his proposed budget cuts and was actively wooing Congressmen. Haynes Johnson described Reagan's activities as "more dramatic than any president since Roosevelt." Hedrick Smith offered the suggestion that Reagan would "use his skills of communication" to "forge a mandate for change."

Reagan's mandate forging was temporarily set back by the assassination attempt, and a portion of the program discussing Reagan's injuries dealt with the Good Communicator. In Albert Hunt's view, it was Reagan's "communication skills" that were the key to "selling the (budget) programs to Congress." Charles Corddry then offered the opinion that Reagan would have to recover soon "to do the things only he can do" to push his budget program forward (April 3).

Reagan had returned to the White House by the April 17 program and the panelists discussed the possibility of his going on television "soon" to address the country in favor of his budget cuts. This was in spite of his just having left the hospital. Haynes Johnson said Reagan would "have to make the speech for the personal pitch which only he can make and must be made to save the budget from Congress."

Reagan made his televised speech--raspy voice and all--and, to put it succinctly, he wowed 'em. In Charles Corddry's words: "Not since LBJ and the civil rights legislation of 1965 has the country seen such a great communicator or a great politician." Jack Nelson added, "Reagan put on a star performance which brought down the house. This just might win the battle of the budget." In Hobart Rowen's assessment, Reagan had "political magic, reminiscent of Eisenhower and Kennedy." Several other panelist comments included: "he has charisma," he makes great political theatre," and "he has a grin like the boy next door" (April 24).

Throughout the 15 programs analyzed there were frequent references to Reagan's skills as a Good Communicator. Ronald Reagan had campaigned for the presidency off and on between 1975 and 1980, and had been ridiculed for believing an actor could become President of

the United States. Those same acting skills, which in years past had seemed to disqualify him for the highest elective office in the land, were brought to bear once Reagan was in office, and the result was the Good Communicator facet of the Reagan persona.

Good Politician

The second facet of the Reagan persona was the Good Politician, which was characterized by Reagan's ability to court individual members of Congress and to achieve his legislative goals in spite of what the panelists believed were almost insurmountable odds.

Reagan's nationally televised address on the budget, which had been one of the Good Communicator's finest half-hours, also showed the Good Politician. Haynes Johnson related the story of Reagan going "to Capitol Hill to court Congress" immediately after the speech. According to Johnson, Reagan was also "even bringing Democrats to the White House who were not invited there when Jimmy Carter was there." In admiring tones, Johnson then told the panelists Reagan had "come out fighting for his program" rather than "just putting it out there and letting Congress take over as usual" (February 6).

The Good Politician also made the trip to Canada. He had "Trudeau's respect for his grasp of the problems faced" by the two countries, Jack Nelson said. At one point in the Canadian trip Reagan had been heckled by demonstrators. He had let Trudeau handle the situation rather than himself responding, and Albert Hunt said this was "definitely good politics" (March 13).

The panelists almost elevated Reagan to the Great Politician status on the March 20 program. In Charles Corddry's words:

> A revealing signal was flashed at the end of the budget cutting session this week. It is a truly remarkable occurrence when liberal Democrats like Pat Moynihan vote for cuts in social programs.

Hedrick Smith's assessment of the situation was: "Reagan undid 30 years of social legislation in three days." The consensus of panel opinion was that Reagan had accomplished "a miracle" and that "no one else" could have done what Reagan had done with his budget cuts. Corddry said, "He is truly a great politician."

The May 1 program was devoted to an analysis of Reagan's first 100 days in office. The panelists characterized him as both "wooing and strongarming" members of Congress to push his budget cuts. Hedrick Smith offered the opinion that, "He has done a better job than any president in recent history."

The Good Politician had picked up where the Good Communicator left off. In the fantasy themes developed on "Washington Week in Review" Reagan used his communications skills and his political skills to get his legislation through Congress. The Good Communicator and the Good Politician were different facets of the Reagan persona--both showing up at different times to accomplish the same purposes. He brought Congressmen to the White House for a personal touch of lobbying, and he let the head of state of another country deal with a situation that could have been touchy internationally. To the panelists, Ronald Reagan was the Good Politician.

Tough Guy

The third facet of the Reagan person was the Tough Guy. This was characterized by Reagan's "tough streak" and shown through his "no compromise" stances. As stated earlier, competing and clashing

fantasy themes may and do exist concerning the same person or thing. The Tough Guy fantasy theme of the Reagan persona is an example of clashing themes, in that it clashes with the "amiable audacity" of the Good Communicator and some of the benevolent aspects of the Good Politician. With the Tough Guy the reader might perceive this particular theme akin to the Mr. Hyde of the Good Communicator's Dr. Jekyll. The correct understanding, however, is that the Tough Guy is but one more of the fantasy themes developed by the panelists about the Reagan persona, even though it clashed with the others.

The example the panelists gave to illustrate Reagan's Tough Guy was an incident the previous week concerning Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. Past presidents had given Soviet ambassadors the privilege of entering the State Department Building through an underground elevator, allowing them to avoid the hordes of reporters stationed outside the front door of the building.

With chuckles around the table and amused expressions, Charles Corddy told of how Dobrynin had been turned away from the private elevator. Charles McDowell then said, "He has to come around to the front door just like everybody else now." In Hedrick Smith's opinion, "This shows the Russians Reagan is in charge." It was Corddry's observation that the incident was a clear way to "show the Russians he is getting tough with them" (January 30). He also said, "Reagan has talked tough for years and he's talking tough now that he is President--especially to the Russians."

A portion of the February 6 program involved the panelists' giving background to the development of Reagan's economic address to the nation the previous week. Haynes Johnson related the tale of

discussions on cutting the federal budget in which Reagan had been informed some cuts would put people out of work. Reagan was alleged to have said, "I hate to put people out of work, but let's do it and get it over with if that's what it takes to get the budget balanced." Johnson offered the opinion that this was "not being hardhearted." Rather, Reagan was being "tough when he needed to be tough to get the economy going again."

Another characteristic of the Tough Guy was his consistency. On the February 13 program the panelists expressed surprise that Reagan had "really meant" all those things he said during the campaign. He was actually cutting the budget, for instance. It was evident from the discussion that budget cutting was being done "deeply and severely" and that Reagan intended to "stick to his guns" on the subject.

Albert Hunt gave a scenario of past budget battles, in which he claimed that presidents were "supposed to back down when controversy erupts--especially on the national budget." Reagan was not doing that, but was, instead, making strong public statements to the effect that he "wants every single cut he has proposed--no exceptions" (February 13). This broke with tradition in the view of the panelists.

Charles Corddry took a portion of the February 20 program to talk about the Tough Guy in military terms. Corddry told the story of Reagan speaking to his staff on the fate of the budget cuts in Congress and saying, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead." The Tough Guy, in Corddry's terms, intended to ram his program through Congress.

Quoting Hedrick Smith on the February 27 program: "Reagan talks tough and acts tough, and it's working in the game of hardball he's playing with the Soviets over El Salvador." Smith then related a story

he said had been told to him about Reagan's first few days in office. Reagan had allegedly told his foreign policy advisors, "Just find a war we can win and declare it." This was Smith's way of illustrating that Reagan was determined to "stand tough" against the Russians, and that the best way to do that was to "stand up and fight."

In the week before the February 27 program several European heads of state had come to Washington to meet Reagan. The panelists reported that the world leaders had been "pleased" in their discussions with Reagan, because they "feel they can count on consistent American foreign policy and strong action" from Reagan. Harry Ellis said, "Reagan told them he plans to stand tough against the Russians everywhere in the world." So, although Reagan had not gotten tough with the Europeans, he had indicated he would get tough with their mutual enemies.

The discussion on the March 13 program was primarily about the Good Communicator and his trip to Canada. However, the Tough Guy also appeared. Jack Nelson told the other panelists: "As long as the Soviets are in Afghanistan and near Poland, there will be no negotiations at all on anything, much less arms control." Henry Trewitt told the others Reagan had told the Canadians, "We must stand tough against the Russians." (The Tough Guy facet of the persona played a major role in another fantasy theme of Hardball, which will be discussed later with the foreign policy themes.)

Reagan was standing tough on both foreign policy and his budget cuts. Jack Nelson characterized it as a "no compromise" stand on the budget. Nelson and Harry Ellis seemed particularly perplexed that Reagan "really meant it" when he made those kinds of "no compromise"

statements. Ellis said Reagan was even "stepping on toes" in Congress and pressure groups to get his way on the budget. They obviously did not like Reagan's pressure tactics--or his budget cuts--but they expressed grudging admiration for his willingness to sacrifice good feelings for goals.

Throughout the programs analyzed the panelists were of two minds on the Tough Guy. On the one hand, they were surprised and confused about his "really meaning it" and his unwillingness to compromise on budget cuts. On the other hand, they expressed admiration for the same unwillingness to compromise on foreign policy. Reagan was behaving consistently in both instances, and the panelists had difficulty swallowing the whole thing.

Superpatient

The fourth fantasy theme of the persona was named Superpatient for the way the panelists portrayed Reagan's "phenomenal" recovery after being shot in an assassination attempt. Superpatient contains elements of the three previous fantasy themes, but it is a separate theme because it was the way the whole man was portrayed during the recovery period. It was as if the three previous themes merged into this one theme for a time during the 15 weeks analyzed.

The program immediately after the assassination attempt showed the fully developed Superpatient theme. Hedrick Smith characterized Reagan as "just like John Wayne in the movies. He got shot and walked away from it smiling." Charles McDowell extolled Reagan's behavior with the statement he had "lifted the nation's spirits by the way he handled himself since being shot--cracking jokes, showing optimism, his youthful recovery, his sense of can do" (April 3).

Jack Nelson went into a detailed decription of Reagan's physical state. He said the 70-year-old president was "not really 70 years old." His heart, lungs, muscle tone, and so on, were those of "a much younger man." Nelson then told the rest of the panelists, "He is physically much closer to 50 than to 70." Moreover, Reagan's wisecracking and joking with the hospital staff led Nelson to characterize him as "behaving as a much younger man."

All of this was especially amazing to the panelists after Nelson gave his account of Reagan's "brush with death." Nelson made such statements as: "Had he been a few minutes later in reaching the hospital he might have gone into shock from the tremendous loss of blood he was suffering;" "That bullet was much closer to his heart than the doctors led the public to believe;" and "Reagan was bleeding tremendously inside his body. If he had lost much more blood he might have gone into shock or cardiac arrest from lack of blood." While this was not an encouraging or reassuring picture of the state of Reagan's health, it was calculated to make certain that the audience and the other panelists knew that Nelson had the "real facts" on the assassination attempt, as was obvious from other statements not connected with this particular fantasy theme.

Much to the surprise of the panelists on the April 10 program Reagan had gone "home" to the White House that week. (The panelists had predicted the previous week that Reagan would remain in the hospital for "at least two weeks, maybe more.") Charles McDowell told the audience, "his recovery period at home will probably be just like that of real people." Albert Hunt voiced the fear that there was a danger Reagan would "try to be too active" now that he was out of the

constraining atmosphere of the hospital. Charles McDowell then returned to the thread of the theme from the previous week with statements that Reagan was recovering "just like a man in his 50's" and that he was "just like John Wayne. There's a job to be done and only he can do it, so he's back at work" (April 10).

The April 17 program had the panelists discussing Reagan's "miraculous" recovery. Haynes Johnson told the others, "Reagan looks good in spite of his surgery." Jack Nelson offered a cautious word with: "He's putting a good face on it, but he's still weak from being shot." (This was the man who recounted Reagan's "brush with death.") The president was said to be back to only a few hours a day in the Oval Office, but that in itself was "a miracle."

Reagan's "remarkable recovery powers" and the fact that he was "recovering like a young, tough man" were commented upon in the April 24 program also. This was amazing, in the panelists' view, since he had such a "close brush with death." Moreover, he was said to be "almost back to normal in a short space of time."

Superpatient became the theme of the Reagan <u>persona's</u> recovery from a bullet wound inflicted by a would-be assassin. As Superpatient Reagan was a much younger man who, like John Wayne, got shot and walked away from it smiling. He came home from the hospital sooner than anyone had expected, and was back on the job in spite of his close brush with death. Reagan was not an average 70-year-old man. He was the wounded President, who became the Superpatient.

Persona Conclusion

The four fantasy themes of the Reagan persona during the first 100 days showed that the panelists on "Washington Week in Review" saw Ronald Reagan as bigger than life. He was portrayed as a better communicator, better politician, and tougher guy than presidents who preceded him. There were frequent references to FDR and John Kennedy, and Reagan was compared favorably with both men. When he was wounded by a would-be assassin, Reagan became Superpatient. He was shot but not killed, and his recovery was just short of miraculous. He was given a second chance to lead the country to greatness, and he gave every indication of his determination to do so.

Any man who becomes President of the United States becomes a figure of awe, at least for a time. Reagan was no exception. The four fantasy themes of the persona show how that awe translated into a set of thematic understandings through which the "Washington Week in Review" panelists attempted to explain the new President to their viewers and to each other.

The fantasy themes of the persona were positive and favorable to Reagan, but not all the themes of the first 100 days were positive or favorable to their subjects. The following two themes concern the panelists' fantasies of the Democrats and Republicans. One is highly negative and the other grudgingly positive.

The rhetorical visions of the "Washington Week in Review" panelists concerning the two major political parties in Congress became those of the Republican Invincibles and Disorganized Democrats. The Republican Invincibles theme gained in detail and became a more concrete characterization over time. At first, it was as if the panelists

did not want to believe that the Republicans were in fact strong and organized. However, the Republicans in this drama had become unstoppable for the present and for the immediate future. They were organized in both numbers and attitude, and they marched with military precision to victory after victory in Congress.

The Democrats, on the other hand, were disorganized, and were referred to as such on all but one of the 15 programs analyzed. They could not agree on alternatives to Reagan's policies, and continually lost legislative battles as a result of their lack of organization. The panelists on the final program reviewed gave up on the party in disgust, and predicted that it would remain lost and leaderless for the foreseeable future.

C. POLITICAL PARTIES THEMES

Eileen Shanahan set the stage for the Republican Invincibles drama with the statement that the historic party roles had become reversed on economic matters. In Shanahan's words,

> It's the Republicans who are saying let 'er rip on the tax cut and the Democrats who are saying let's be careful and go slowly on this thing. This reverses history. Things are upside down and backward with the political parties these days. (February 6)

With this statement Shanahan compared the relative condition of the two parties with the fantasy theme that had been in place prior to Reagan's taking office. That theme had the Democrats as invincible and the Republicans as disorganized. Clearly, the panelists were unaccustomed to the different roles about to be played by the two parties.

Albert Hunt gave an example of what he called the "bankruptcy of the Democratic party and its leadership" (February 20). Hunt told

the story of the Democrats drawing the line that week on budget cuts, but, as he put it, "not with widows and orphans." Instead, the line had been drawn at "synfuels, of all things," Hunt said it was as if the Democrats had said, "Now, Mr. President. Don't you dare cut this synfuels project." The Democrats in Hunt's recounting of the incident played the role of little children trying to defy the authority of a much more powerful figure. They were, in other words, not only disorganized, but almost without power in Congress.

In a later discussion Jack Nelson claimed the Democrats were "troubled and confused by Reagan's successes." Nelson also felt the Democrats recognized that the consensus in the country favored cutting federal spending, but the party dared not "lend its support to taking the country down that gloomy economic road" (March 13). This statement recalled the role reversal of the parties. After all, the powerful party of Franklin Roosevelt and social spending could hardly change the fantasy theme under which it had so long operated and became an economic Scrooge.

While telling the other panelists that the Democrats were troubled and confused, Nelson also reported the Republicans were showing "surprising organization and strength" by sticking together on votes in Congress. He and the other panelists gave grudging accolades to the Republicans for sticking together and getting the right and left wings of the party to vote together (March 20).

Time after time the panelists referred to the Democrats as disorganized and to the Republicans as organized and strong. But during one week analyzed the panelists thought they saw the long-awaited reorganization of the Democrats.

The week after Reagan was shot the Democrats succeeded in pushing through several bills not to the President's liking. Peter Osnos attributed this unusual set of events to a legislative miracle accomplished with the aid of Renegade Republicans. Osnos and his fellow panelists then arrived at the conclusion that cooperation between Democrats and Renegade Republicans would be the pattern for the future. The Democrats had finally gotten organized and the Republicans had broken ranks. The tide had turned in favor of the traditional heroes (April 10). The villians had gotten their comeuppance. This situation lasted less than one week, however, and for the panelists it was back to the earlier fantasy themes on the parties.

On the final program of May 1 the Democrats had moved from being merely disorganized to being almost hopeless. During the discussion the panelists cast the party in the role of the ancient Israelites. Like the Israelites the Democrats were wandering lost and leaderless in the political wilderness without a Moses to lead them. Haynes Johnson characterized the Democrats in this way: "Nobody could lead the Democrats these days. They are lost and leaderless. They have no purpose. They have lost the Senate and the Presidency and they may lose the House next." All this, the panelists believed, was the result of Democratic laziness and disorganization.

The Republicans, on the other hand, took on the mantle of Protestant Christian soldiers marching to war. As Johnson characterized them: "The Republicans are far ahead in every way in campaigning. They are efficient and they will win because they work hard. Where the Democrats are stagnant, the Republicans generate ideas and then carry them out." The Republican Invincibles become the very embodiment

of the Christian work ethic, and they would be rewarded for their hard work by legislative victories.

Throughout the 15 weeks studied the Democrats were cast as heroes and the Republicans as the villains in the drama. The poor Democrates were struggling with political losses in Congress, while the Republicans were glorying in repeated victories. The panelists gave every appearance of pulling for the Democrats to get organized, even when disgusted with them. On the other side of the coin, the panelists grudgingly admired the Republicans. When the Biblical roles were finally cast for the parties, sympathy on the panel remained with the Democrats and arm's length awe for the Republicans. With the Democrats and Republicans as two more of the dramatis personae in place, the stage was set for the fantasy themes of domestic and foreign policy.

D. FOREIGN POLICY THEMES

The foreign policy fantasy themes of Hardball, Disarray and Just Like Vietnam will be discussed first. Hardball was the fantasy theme of the Reagan administration's conduct of foreign policy. The theme was replete with athletics terms and the panelists repeatedly managed to lump a number of games into one foreign policy game called Hardball. Disarray was another word used repetitiously by the panelists to describe the status of foreign policy when Alexander Haig began open warfare with the White House Staff. Just Like Vietnam was the drama of El Salvador and was the most detailed of the foreign policy themes. It drew the parallel between El Salvador and Vietnam so closely none of the panelists or the viewers could have missed the theme.

Hardball

In the "Washington Week in Review" programs studied, Hedrick Smith introduced the game of Hardball with:

> The Reagan administration is engaged in a game of hardball with the Soviets over El Salvador and the Cubans. But they got a curve from Brezhnev when he proposed a summit to get the Soviets better play on the fields of foreign policy. (February 27)

Don Oberdoerfer then added: "The Reagan administration is doing well with one play at a time, but they have yet to formulate a long term, full court foreign policy." Although curve balls and full courts do not belong in the same athletic event, this was a new game, that of Hardball--the drama of America's foreign policy.

The contest was global, and Reagan began recruiting players for "our team," in the panelists' view, with his reception of right wing military dictators in Washington. The panelists expressed their personal distaste for America's aligning itself with nations whose human rights records were less than good, but acknowledged, "It's probably necessary" in order to carry out the global confrontation with the Soviets (March 13). Hardball players might be what they wished at home, as long as they were willing to play ball on the Reagan administration's foreign policy team.

Even though the dictators appeared to be quite eager to join Reagan's team, European leaders were less than enthusiastic about the prospect. In Jack Nelson's view:

> While the Europeans like the idea of a stronger America, they are reluctant to accept a reasserted American leadership in the world. The allies are getting more leadership than they want right now with Haig and Reagan pushing anti-Soviet postures everywhere. (March 13).

Reagan was playing out his foreign policy drama, but the Europeans had their own drama to enact. They were not certain they wanted to trade theirs for Hardball.

Players were also recruited from the Middle East. Israel had been a member of the American foreign policy team for years. But Hardball required Arab players also (April 24). Just as some athletic coaches make offers of automobiles and clothing to outstanding football or basketball players, the Reagan administration agreed to sell AWACS airplanes to the Saudi Arabians. In the fantasy theme of the panelists, the offer of military hardware was necessary to "recruit" the Saudis to "our team" (April 24).

Disarray

Reagan received the leaders of the world in Washington and Secretary of State Alexander Haig circled the globe recruiting more Hardball players, and the second foreign policy fantasy theme began. Disarray seems to contradict the images of the Republican Invincibles and Hardball. But then, as seen earlier in this research, fantasy themes may conflict with each other and not apparently cause any cognitive dissonance in the panelists from whom the theme was derived.

During the week before the March 20 program the White House and State Department had broken out in a rash of contradictory statements on foreign policy. This led Hedrick Smith to the statement: "The Reagan administration is in disarray on foreign policy. Who speaks for the president?" He explained the situation this way:

> The Reagan administration feels the Soviets are on the march around the world and something has to be done to stop them. Here is, however, a great deal of disagreement

> over a central policy on just how to do this. Individuals differ on how to get it all accomplished. (March 20)

The disagreement had become Disarray by March 27. Haig had declared publicly that he should be the "vicar of foreign policy" and made his stand clear to the media and to the administration. What was worse, he made it clear to the president. When Reagan firmly and politely declined to implement Haig's plan, Haig made a well-publicized threat to resign. Hedrick Smith told the story this way: "The administration is in disarray. They are not communicating well with each other or with the country. The result could be a severely damaged foreign policy by the end of the year" (March 27).

For all the panelists' visible agonizing over the Disarray drama, it lasted only two weeks. Instead of evolving into another fantasy theme on foreign policy, the panelists went back to Hardball and to the third theme of Just Like Vietnam.

Just Like Vietnam

The small Central American nation of El Salvador was portrayed as being Just Like Vietnam. A number of the catch phrases used by the Johnson administration and military leaders of the 1960's and 1970's to justify American intervention in Vietman were used by the Reagan administration to justify intervention in El Salvador. These evidently led the panelists to the conclusion the situation in that country was Just Like Vietnam.

On the February 27 program the panelists quoted Reagan administration statements of the previous week. One quote was: "The dominoes are falling all across South America, and they will not stop until they reach America's southern border." One administration spokesman

was reported to have used the terms "communists behind the indigenous guerillas" and "secret Soviet supplies." And Don Oberdoerfer, in terms clearly invoking those used by critics of Americals Vietnam policies, put forth the theory that the Reagan administration was only "throwing guns at what is at its heart a political problem" (February 27).

On a subsequent program Haynes Johnson, Charles Corddry, Georgie Anne Geyer and Hedrick Smith engaged in a particularly eloquent Just Like Vietnam discussion. They repeated several quotes from administration statements to bring out the drama. Some of those quotes were: "El Salvador does not stand alone. The U.S. stands behind them. . . . Rescue is at hand. . . . The Latin American dominoes will fall if El Salvador falls, and they will not stop falling until they reach North America" (March 6). Each quote was chosen by the panelist to demonstrate his or her version of the drama in El Salvador.

Three weeks later Christine Russell used public opinion surveys to show that the American people were against what the administration was doing in El Salvador. "It's just like Vietnam," was Russell's opinion. She also said the administration was "propping up" the government of El Salvador and again said, "This is just like Vietnam." Russell made the claim that demonstrations that week in European cities against American foreign policy showed clearly that the Europeans were against the American intervention in El Salvador. In her words, "The demonstrations are just like the ones against Vietnam. The Europeans think we're making a big mistake again" (March 27).

In the drama of El Salvador the "Washington Week in Review" panelists believed American was again becoming embroiled in the internal affairs of a small country far away, creating a war nobody in the U.S.

wanted. The visions of Vietnam and El Salvador had many of the same elements; those of communist-inspired guerillas living in jungles, secret Soviet supplies, and dominoes falling all across the Western Hemisphere if one country fell.

El Salvador was but the first playing field in the game of Hardball Reagan and his administration were playing with the Soviets. The Tough Guy had taken his stand, drawn the line at El Salvador, and dared the Soviets to step across. That the "Washington Week in Review" panelists played the El Salvador drama as Just Like Vietnam must have been disconcerting to the President. Hardball was much more his style.

The format for "Washington Week in Review" involves the discussion of only four "major" news events each week. So, with the sole exception of the sale of AWACS airplanes to the Saudis, none of the foreign policy fantasy themes appeared on the program after the end of March. What caused the dropping of the themes was the intervention of more pressing domestic concerns, such as Reagan's proposed budget and tax cuts, and the probable effect of both. Since those events were the "major" news stories, they were the ones discussed by the panelists.

E. DOMESTIC POLICY THEMES

Fantasy themes developed about three areas of domestic policy during the first 100 days of the Reagan administration. The Battle of the Budget was the drama of Congressional debate over proposed budget cuts, It'll Never Fly was the theme of the proposed 30 percent tax cut, and Tough Medicine and Social Armageddon were the two fantasy themes of Reagan's proposed budget cuts to social programs. The last

two themes developed in sequence, that is, Tough Medicine was the first portrayal of the budget cuts, and Social Armageddon became the later drama of the effects of the cuts.

Battle of the Budget

Whenever the Disorganized Democrats and Republican Invincibles clashed it was the Battle of the Budget, replete with military allusions and mighty battles. As Jack Nelson told the story: "There is a titanic legislative struggle shaping up over budget cuts. It will be one of the great struggles of all time" (February 13). On the same program Albert Hunt reported "a counterattack gathering force on the budget cuts even now. And it has people from businessmen to welfare groups in it." Hunt then explained that presidents were supposed to back down when meeting strong Congressional opposition on the budget, but Reagan was, instead, "sticking to his guns."

Moderator Paul Duke introduced the February 20 program with the statement that Reagan had aimed "a public relations fusillade" at the media that week to bolster support for his budget cuts. Charles Corddry predicted, later in the program, "The great economic battle will rage long and furious in the trenches and on Capitol Hill."

Harry Ellis introduced military hardware into the continuing drama with the statement, "Social Security and Medicare are time bombs set for the Democrats to catch the fallout" (March 13). Jack Nelson told the other panelists that leaving those two programs intact while cutting other portions of the social welfare budget would "explode the Reagan administration's budget theories" (March 13).

The drama reached a high (or low, depending on your point of

view) on the April 10 program when Peter Osnos said, with a perfectly straight face, "It's a lot easier to throw a grenade than it is to catch one." Osnos used the statement to illustrate the point that the Reagan administration had proposed cuts to so many areas of the budget (the grenades) the Democrats were unable to deal with (catch) all of them, and might just miss one that would explode at the next election.

On the final program analyzed, Haynes Johnson Stated categorically, "The consensus of the country is with Reagan, and he will win the battle of the budget because of it" (May 1). Reagan could rely upon the rest of the country and the Republican Invincibles as his troops. The Disorganized Democrats might as well fold their tents and go home in the Battle of the Budget. Home certainly would have been a more comfortable place than the trenches of Capitol Hill with grenades going off all over and time bombs sitting there waiting, ticking away.

It'll Never Fly

The Battle of the Budget was a concrete and consistent fantasy theme. The characterizations used to describe its parts were invariably military in nature and often quite humorous to the viewer, such as catching grenades. The second domestic policy fantasy theme, It'll Never Fly, was also a concrete and consistent theme, but lacked the melodrama of the Battle of the Budget. It'll Never Fly was the "Washington Week in Review" fantasy of Kemp-Roth, or the proposed three-year, 30 percent tax cut. The panelists believed it would never get through Congress.

Albert Hunt made the prediction on the February 6 program that,

"The tax cut will be a supply side cut, but it will not be anything like Kemp-Roth. The Democrats just won't ever vote for a Kemp-Roth type cut." In other words, Hunt believed some type of tax cut was possible, but he would not accept the idea that one as drastic as Kemp-Roth would be passed.

On the February 20 program Hunt made the unequivocal statement:

> The president is in trouble now with his tax cut proposals and he has been from the beginning. The tax cuts will be sharply reshaped on the Hill. There is no enthusiasm for Kemp-Roth. There will be no three-year tax cut. I am convinced there will be no 30 percent across-the-board-tax cut ever.

Charles Corddry added to this with: "The Democrats will reshape the tax cut and alter it to reduce cuts and to make them benefit the poor and middle income people. They will definitely get it together for this one" (February 20).

On March 13 Jack Nelson said, "Reagan will get his spending cuts, but tax cuts will be worked over heavily by Congress." Meanwhile, the Battle of the Budget had heated up. Cuts to social programs would cause Social Armageddon. None of this stopped Hunt from predicting, "The fight will not come with budget cuts, but with the tax cut. There will be much smaller tax cuts than the 30 percent over three years that Reagan wants" (April 10).

Eileen Shanahan had her own reasons for believing the tax cut would not pass Congress. She said,

> Congress will not legislate any three-year tax proposal because it would lost clout to taxes for three years. No Congress will do that. Whatever Congress does on taxes, it will be for one year at a time. (April 17)

Albert Hunt clung to It'll Never Fly even on the final program analyzed, with: "Kemp-Roth has little support in the country. It's

not like the budget. It will have much more trouble in getting passed than the budget cuts" (May 1).

The drama of It'll Never Fly played in the beginning as it played in the end. The panelists' fantasy was that no such tax cut would be passed by Congress, and in this they were consistent. They were consistent but, as it turned out, completely wrong. That the predictions in this fantasy theme turned out to be inaccurate does not make it any less a fantasy theme. Other examples of themes that were predictively inaccurate included Social Armageddon and a portion of the Disorganized Democrats in which the panelists predicted the party's imminent organization. In all three cases the definition of fantasy holds true as,

> . . . a credible picture of the world that is created when one interprets mediated experiences as the way things are and takes for granted the authenticity of the mediated reality without checking against alternative, perhaps contradictory, realities so long as the fantasy offers dramatic proof for one's expectations. (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 8)

Tough Medicine and Social Armageddon

Congressional debate over budget cuts and tax cuts were played as a single drama on "Washington Week in Review." However, Reagan's proposed budget cuts and the possible effects of those cuts on the country developed two distinctly different themes--Tough Medicine and Social Armageddon. At the beginning of the programs surveyed, the panelists believed the cuts were Tough Medicine the country would have to swallow to cure its economic ills. Later, the effects of the cuts became the drama of Social Armageddon with riots in the streets and the poor rumbling in the ghettoes. Ronald Reagan became the villain

in the story for his willingness to cut the heart out of programs that aided the poor and the helpless.

Paul Duke introduced the program February 6 this way: "Reagan has tough medicine for the country to swallow to cure the economic ills we have." Later in the discussion Haynes Johnson said that Reagan had proposed cuts to so many different federal programs at the same time, Congress would "have to swallow much more than they want to to save a few pet projects." And Charles Corddry put in: "Reagan has proposed a revolutionary program to cure the nation's economic ills" (February 20).

The February 27 program had elements of both Tough Medicine and Social Armageddon. Rather than a benevolent physician prescribing bitter medicine, Reagan had become the mad surgeon ready to slash away with his scalpel. Don Oberdoerfer made a statement that spoke most directly to this fantasy theme with: "The knife goes deeper, and it will cut the heart out of low income people and farmers. . . . The danger is that with inflation what it is, it could cause a recession."

The first program in March brought the beginning of Social Armageddon. Georgie Ann Geyer said,

> There is a tremendous reservoir of crime, poverty and joblessness in this country. Since Reagan is cutting programs which alleviate all this, he is dealing with social dynamite. There may be riots in the streets when these cuts are finally felt.

Geyer said the biggest problem would occur with the urban poor. "They may cause a revolution some time down the road."

Hedrick Smith got into the swing of things with:

> The Reagan administration's response to the problems these budget cuts will cause is to ask people to trust him because it will be better in the long run. But the

> poor, especially the young, can't look toward the future and might just hit the streets rioting if things begin to hurt them.

In the panelists' view, the knife of Tough Medicine would cut more deeply and the response very well might be Social Armageddon.

On the March 13 program Jack Nelson posed the question: "Could those most hurt by budget cuts mobilize behind a leader or a demogogue?" Roger Wilkins replied that he did not see "any Hitlers" on America's horizon, but not seeing Hitlers did not mean Wilkins thought things would be fine. His scenario went as follows:

> It is clear that there is a tendency to respond less responsibly than before Reagan. There is a strain on the social fabric of the country right now. If there is less money given to poverty, riots in the streets will happen. (March 13)

Haynes Johnson played the drama even closer to the edge of Social Armageddon. On the April 17 program he said,

> The poor are rumbling in the ghettoes. There may be a revolt soon when they begin to be hurt by the cuts. This shows just how little we really know about the exact effects of the cuts in social programs.

During the time Social Armageddon played on "Washington Week in Review" only one non-white person appeared on the program. Roger Wilkins was present for the March 13 discussion. That did not stop the white, mostly male, and obviously affluent panelists from predicting what would happen when budget cuts were felt. Social Armageddon was one of the more artistic dramatizations during the first 100 days. With poor rumbling in the ghettoes and strains on the social fabric, who could doubt that riots in the streets would follow? Certainly not the "Washington Week in Review" panelists.

The major fantasy themes of domestic policy consisted of The

Battle of the Budget, It'll Never Fly and Social Armageddon and Tough Medicine. There were two other short-lived fantasy themes during the 15 weeks surveyed that are listed under domestic policy because of their subject matter. The first was The System Worked, which was the theme of the assassintion attempt. The second was Moonraker, which was the theme of the flight of the Space Shuttle Columbia. In The System Worked the viewers would have found that the country remained calm and functioned efficiently even with its leader gravely wounded and on an operating table. In Moonraker, Columbia was portrayed as the James Bond-like space ship. This fell into domestic policy because, even though he cut budgets to other things, Reagan actually increased the budget of the space program.

The System Worked

The April 3 program was devoted entirely to a discussion of John Hinkley's attempted assassination of the president. Moreover, that was the only program on which the assassination attempt was discussed. The fantasy theme of the assassination attempt was The System Worked. This was not to say that the system of shooting presidents worked, even though it had. Rather, the drama on "Washington Week in Review" was that the American people were safe because the government continued to function smoothly while its leader lay wounded.

Panelists on the program were Haynes Johnson, Jack Nelson, Hedrick Smith and Charles McDowell, who opened the discussion with relating their feelings and thoughts upon hearing the president had been shot. "Oh, no. Not again," was Johnson's first reaction. The question, "Are we as Americans off the rails?" was posed by Jack Nelson. After

much head shaking the others agreed with Hedrick Smith that, "It was just a case of one more crazy gunman out there with a handgun." The four agreed that the country should not be held accountable for the actions of one crazed gunman.

Then the drama of The System Worked began. Haynes Johnson said, "After Reagan was shot, the right people took over on that black Monday, and the system worked. Aides and the Cabinet got together and held down the fort while the president was on the operating table."

White House aides Baker, Deaver and Meese were three of the heroes in the drama for the way they took charge at the White House and reassured the country. While Hedrick Smith thought the reassurances the three gave via television might have been a bit overdone, "It was done to keep the country relieved." The panelists gave several examples of upbeat performances by each of the aides and expressed approval for the way they "kept the country calm" the day Reagan was shot.

The System Worked depended upon the impression being given by the major actors that all the wheels of government were running smoothly. Anything that might upset the smooth functioning of the government or the performance by the heroes threatened the drama.

Enter the Secretary of State Alexander Haig, who earned the role of villain in the panelists' perception by throwing "a monkey wrench into things." Mid-afternoon on the day of the shooting Haig was at a Cabinet meeting downstairs at the White House when he "suddenly decided" to go on television and declare "I'm in charge."

The description of events in the White House press room by Charles McDowell went:

> There was a gentle, milling confusion there in the White House where I was right after the president was shot. Then Haig appeared. He was sweaty, drawn and rattled. His words were insensitive, and the mood in the White House took on his mood--unsettled. He really damaged himself that day.

Haynes Johnson gave the reason for Haig's television appearance with: "Haig popped unceremoneously onto television to reassure foreign capitols that there was someone they could trust with his finger on the button. It had the opposite effect than he intended." Smith said Haig's performance, "took people back to the Nixon era again. It was definitely bad communication on Haig's part."

The panelists then took pains to show that in the Constitutional line of seccession Vice President George Bush--not Haig--was in charge while Reagan was injured and unable to govern. They also related the story of Bush's rushing to return to Washington immediately upon receiving word of the assassination attempt, and they had nothing but praise for the way Bush had conducted himself in the role of "acting president."

Haynes Johnson characterized Bush as: "Bush has not pushed himself into the limelight. He's made it clear to all of us that he is only sitting in Reagan's chair in the Oval Office to keep it warm until his boss returns." Smith and Nelson added their anecdotes concerning Bush's conduct, which showed their admiration for the way he had behaved in a "tough situation."

The panelists' praise of Bush and the White House staff constituted the principal elements of The System Worked fantasy theme. These were the heroes of the story. The "right people" had taken over when the president fell to an assassin, the country remained calm, and with one minor deviation, the government functioned smoothly. The villain

in the drama was Alexander Haig, who was the only major actor to "throw a monkey wrench" into the works on that Black Monday.

Moonraker

The second short-lived fantasy theme developed during Reagan's first 100 days concerned the Space Shuttle Columbia. Discussions of the flight of Columbia took place on the April 10 and April 17 programs, and the panelists portrayed the shuttle as nothing less than James Bond's Moonraker. In the movie, Moonraker was a vehicle which could be launched into space, grab satellites or weapons in orbit, and return to Earth. That was exactly what the panelists said of Columbia.

Charles McDowell began the Moonraker discussion with:

> This shuttle can go up into the outer atmosphere and grab satellites and fix them. It can go up and grab their (the Russians') satellites and keep them. It can fix weapons shot into space, or build weapons up there. Astronauts could pick off rising missiles from the shuttle in orbit, before they were even spotted on American radar. It's just like Buck Rogers. (April 10)

McDowell finished his portion of the fantasy theme with: "The Russian killer satellites don't seem so scarey any more to us. We've got the shuttle and it could take 'em out." Peter Osnos said the Columbia had "tremendous military implications." And in Osnos' view, "the shuttle has put America ten years ahead of the Soviets in space."

The discussion of Columbia on April 10 took place before its first flight. By the April 17 program the shuttle had been launched and returned safely to Earth. That week the panelists fairly bubbled about the effect of the successful flight. Jack Nelson began the discussion with praise, "The shuttle is a tremendous boost for the country's morale. There are implications for defense here which are almost unheard

of. New frontiers made this country great. The great frontier is now space." It was Haynes Johnson's estimate that, "The budget is tough and tight, but this country needs space. We need it for our sense of national pride and the sense of success it gives. After all, we're ten years ahead of the Russians here."

Chicago Sun Times reporter William Hines had been brought to "Washington Week in Review" specifically for his expertise in space. Hines tried several times to counter Johnson's and the other panelists' contention that the shuttle put us "ten years ahead of the Russians." Hines said the shuttle put us "maybe three or four years ahead, but nothing like a decade." They paid no attention to him, and Nelson and Johnson repeated the "ten years ahead" statement several more times. Hines finally gave up trying to correct the misconception.

Hines did say the shuttle would go up into space and fix satellites when necessary, launch satellites, and had the capability to "pick off killer satellites with lasers." His characterizations were not as strongly science fiction as McDowell's of the previous week, however, they contained the same Moonraker elements. Hines predicted, "The shuttle will be increasingly military. Of course, space has never been anything but military."

The two discussions of the Space Shuttle demonstrate that a fantasy theme such as Moonraker can be developed in one or two programs. McDowell called it "just like Buck Rogers," and said "we" had nothing to fear from Russian adventurism in space because "we" had a superior weapon with which to beat "them." Peaceful functions of the Shuttle, such as scientific research, were not mentioned on "Washington Week in Review." Instead, the panelists chose to use the military potential

as a rationale for continuing the flights. The shuttle was Moonraker, and it gave America an awesome edge in the space race in the fantasy theme of "Washington Week in Review."

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reviewing ten years of fantasy theme analysis conducted by himself and others, Ernest Bormann said that this particular form of rhetorical criticism has earned its place in the examination of social reality. Bormann said,

> The fantasy theme drama when shared is a key to the social reality. It is not by itself the social reality. My position is that during the process of sharing a fantasy theme drama the participants come to share the interpretation of the drama, the emotions, meanings and attitudes of the drama towards the personae and the action. They come to share a common view of an aspect of their common experience. To my mind this is a good definition for social reality. (Bormann, 1982, p. 304)

Bormann's definition for social reality was used in this research to identify and describe the various interpretations of social reality as they developed during discussions on "Washington Week in Review."

In group discussions on that program, one participant would provide a brief description of one of the week's top news stories. The elements of a fantasy theme would be contained in the description. As other group members joined in the discussion, they would elaborate on the fantasy theme, expand upon and embellish it. In these discussions, the journalists were drawn into the fantasy world of their own making--the world of the group, created by the group. The full development of a fantasy was a chain reaction of associations for the participants, and it continued from program to program. The group thus entered a new world--one filled with heroes, villains, saints and enemies. They found a world of drama. Even though the participants sometimes

changed from week to week, the fantasy themes remained consistent, for the themes were a part of the group history.

As the titles chosen for the fantasy themes indicate, the panelists had a reality filled with men who were bigger than life, of actions that would forever change the world as we know it, and of events cataclysmic in nature. The picture of the first 100 days of the Reagan administration that emerged on "Washington Week in Review" was nothing if not dramatic.

The men who were bigger than life were Ronald Reagan, certain members of his staff and cabinet, the Disorganized Democrats and the Republican Invincibles. Almost any person who becomes President of the United States will be held in some awe by ordinary citizens and professional observers. During his so-called "honeymoon" period, he will also be treated with exceptional respect and deference by his political opponents and the media. It is little wonder, then, that Ronald Reagan was portrayed by the "Washington Week in Review" journalists as more and better than other men.

In this case, however, they saw Reagan as not just bigger and better. He was among the greatest of modern presidents. In their reality, Reagan was riveting and charismatic, and just like other American heroes such as John Wayne and Babe Ruth. He was a better politician than anyone else in modern America, able to push legislation through Congress on the force of his personality alone. He was willing to strongarm members of Congress who appeared to be "against him," but he was also willing to woo others with trips to the White House and tickets to Kennedy Center if the situation called for it. To the

panelists of "Washington Week in Review," Reagan was a better politician and a better communicator than any president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, even though he had been in office less than three months.

He was also the Tough Guy. He looked for a war he could declare to prove his toughness against the communists. He stuck to his guns on legislative programs and did not budge, even when the public and Congressional outcry arose against him. He was tougher than any other modern president.

He was bigger than life. When he was wounded by a would-be assasin, he walked away from the incident smiling. He raised the country's spirits by his own light treatment of his brush with death. To the panelists Reagan was a giant among men. His actions were more, they were bigger, and they were better than those of any president in modern America. He was a Great Man in everything he did.

Reagan's Congressional allies were the Republican Invincibles, who became modern Christian Soldiers marching to victory after victory. The Republican Invincibles were organized, hard working and not about to slip into the old ways that now characterized the Democrats. They were more than just a party that had won a major election. They were invincible because they had organization and hard work on their side, and they would remain that way for the foreseeable future. The Republican Invincibles personified the Christian Work Ethic for the "Washington Week in Review" panelists.

The Democrats facing the Republican Invincibles across the trenches of Capitol Hill were Disorganized. They were the modern day Israelites, condemned to wander the political wilderness for years for the sins of

sloth and disorganization. They lost votes in Congress again and again because they could not get organized, nor could they find a new Moses to lead them. The reality of the panelists of "Washington Week in Review" was that the Disorganized Democrats would continue to wander the political wilderness until, at some time in the future, they would become able to reorganize under a new leader.

Reagan and the two political parties took part in the fantasy themes of events that would change American life. The first was It'll Never Fly, the fantasy theme of the 30 percent tax cut. The panelists approached the tax cut as if they were walking around it, shaking their heads, and solemnly declaring that thing would never fly through Congress. It was something no Congress would ever make law, because to make it law would be to give up taxing power for three years. It was something the country did not support, so it would never get most of the votes of the electorate. To the panelists, the reality of the 30 percent tax cut was that It'll Never Fly.

Hardball cast foreign affairs as an athletic contest between "our side" and "their side." It drew athletics parallels so closely viewers could not help but recognize that Reagan was playing a foreign policy game. The countries of the world had to join one team or the other, and the Europeans were poor sports when they chose to sit on the sidelines and watch the contest. It was "us" against "them" and if they chose to play dirty, we would just get tougher. Foreign policy on "Washington Week in Review" pitted the good guys against the bad guys in a classic game to be won by physical prowess on the fields of the world.

In the foreign policy Hardball game there could be only one head coach. When Alexander Haig attempted to take control of the Hardball team the fantasy theme became Disarray. Conflicting statements by White House and State Department spokespersons during a two-week period led the panelists to conclude that squabbling among members of the coaching staff of the Hardball team could lead to a disabled American foreign policy.

The Hardball and Disarray themes relied upon allusions to athletics contests, but the drama of Tough Medicine drew its message from the world of medicine. Tough Medicine was the first theme of the proposed budgetary cuts to social programs. The message from the early "Washington Week in Review" discussions of the budget cuts was that if the country would be willing to swallow the bitter taste of the cuts, the medicine would make the ailing economy better again. In later programs, the medical message was that the budget cuts would cut the heart out of programs designed to help the nation's poor.

Where medical terms abounded in discussing results of some budget cuts, military terms were the order of the day in discussions of the Battle of the Budget. The Disorganized Democrats and Republican Invincibles occupied opposing trenches on Capitol Hill. From these positions they lobbed grenades at each other and constructed time bombs from Medicare and Social Security. The annual budget review process by Congress was portrayed as a military exercise. Capitol Hill had two armed camps, with the president aiming public relations fusillades at the media and a titanic legislative struggle taking place.

The Battle of the Budget was in full swing when John Hinkley shot President Reagan, and the fantasy theme of the assassination attempt

was The System Worked. Presidents had been shot before. We were lucky that Reagan survived. The Right People took over on that Black Monday, the country remained calm, no one panicked, and the machinery of government ran smoothly while our elected leader lay wounded in the hospital. The System, set in motion by our Founding Fathers, worked again and kept the country safe and calm.

The fantasy themes of Just Like Vietnam and Social Armageddon were portrayed as events of a cataclysmic nature. Moreover, both tapped events in recent American history that made them even more powerful. Any event linked to Vietnam would have the potential to become another national nightmare. The panelists of "Washington Week in Review" invariably discussed El Salvador in terms of Vietnam. It was not just another country in Central America with domestic problems of its own. <u>It was another Vietnam</u>. The analogies were too clear to be missed. The reality of the discussion was that we could not let another Vietnam occur. If the president and the military were not stopped, we would have another national nightmare. That could not happen, for we had not yet fully recovered from the horror of Vietnam. The reality for "Washington Week in Review" was that El Salvador was Just Like Vietnam.

Those Americans old enough to remember the race riots of the 1960's would easily have recognized elements of the fantasy theme of Social Armageddon. The "Washington Week in Review" panelists used the parallel between the '60's and what they believed America would become if budget cuts to social programs passed Congress. The poor were rumbling in the ghettoes. The young in the ghettoes would be most hurt by social budget cuts, and they would hit the streets rioting.

The picture of black anger and rage was clear. The threat of black riots reminiscent of 15 years earlier was the drama of Social Armageddon--the reality of "Washington Week in Review."

Moonraker was one of the most entertaining dramas on the 15 weeks analyzed. The space shuttle was a weapon worthy of James Bond or Buck Rogers. Americans could rest easy in their beds, safe in the knowledge that no matter what military hardware the Russians had, the shuttle could handle the situation. It put "us" ahead of "them" by at least ten years, and gave cause for celebration with our reassertion of superiority in space. Other publicity on the shuttle might emphasize the scientific and peaceful nature of the program, but the reality of Moonraker on "Washington Week in Review" was that the shuttle put "us" in the driver's seat in space for a long time with a weapon worthy of science fiction heroes.

These were the fantasy themes that formed the reality of discussions on "Washington Week in Review." Through these dramas the journalists on the program portrayed the characters and events of the first 100 days of the Reagan administration. The overall picture of the first 100 days was one of people bigger than life and of events dramatic and cataclysmic in nature. Political life in America was one successive drama after the other.

Rhetorical criticism has been shown to be an effective method for political communication research. This has been demonstrated in the works of Bormann and Nimmo and Combs, and also in this analysis. Fantasy theme analysis is an aspect of rhetorical criticism. In this research, fantasy theme analysis has uncovered and explained the deeply

embedded meanings that develop in group discussions on television public affairs programs. It also has identified the political realities that were mediated on one particular public affairs program.

"Reality" is a relative term. That is, what a person experiences directly is filtered through his own, special understanding system. When an event is not directly experienced, but is reported by a third party, the event and the reality of the event can be said to have been "mediated." That means an intermediate source provides a description and interpretation of the reality of an event.

In the case of the television public affairs program "Washington Week in Review," the audience has no direct experience of the events being described and interpreted by the panelists. The only reality the audience has is the version presented on that program, or that program in addition to others audience members might choose to view. The reality of the events discussed on "Washington Week in Review," then, becomes one of the mediated realities of the viewing audience. It is mediated by passing through the journalists and their medium of television before reaching the audience.

The fantasy themes developed on "Washington Week in Review" during the first 100 days of the Reagan administration were the particular mediated realities presented by a group of journalists. This research has not only identified the fantasy themes that developed during this period, but has demonstrated the validity of using fantasy theme analysis on public affairs television programming.

It is the task of communications scholars to seek out the underlying meanings in order television programs, as the meanings on this

program have been uncovered. This research proves the meanings are there to be found. By examining the depth of political communication, scholars will better to able to explain how several versions of the same reality can exist, and explore the implications of those coexisting realities for American politics.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

THEMES AND DATES OF PROGRAMS ON "WASHINGTON WEEK IN REVIEW"

	Jan. 23	Jan. 30	Feb. 6	Feb. 13	Feb. 20	Feb. 27	Mar. 6	Mar. 13	Mar. 20	Mar. 27	Apr. 3	Apr. 10	Apr. 17	Apr 24	May 1
Good Communicator	x		x		x			x	x		x		x	x	
Good Politician			x					x	x						x
Tough Guy		x	x	x	x	x		x							
Superpatient											x	x	x		
Disorganized Democrats and Republican Invincibles			x		x			x	x			x			x
Hardball						x		x						x	
Disarray									x	x					
Just Like Vietnam						x	x			x					
Battle of the Budget				x	x			x				x			x
It'll Never Fly			x		x			x				x	x		x
Tough Medicine and Social Armageddon			x		x	x		x					x		
The System Worked											x				
Moonraker													x	x	

VITA

Alice Ann Wall was born in 1944 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. She married Donald F. Norris in September of 1965 and received her B.S. degree from Memphis State University in January of 1966, with a major in speech and drama and minors in English and education.

She has worked as a biophysics research technician at The University of Tennessee Medical School in Memphis, the University of Virginia Medical School in Charlottesville, and Blodgett Memorial Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Ann has been a newspaper reporter, producer and moderator for cable television public affairs programming, freelance magazine writer and contributing editor, television news writer and producer's assistant, assistant news director and assignment editor for all news radio, and radio and television producer for The University of Tennessee's Information Services. She has also written scripts and recorded voice tracks for audio visual presentations and films.

She has received an M.S. degree in broadcasting with a minor in political science from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and teaches broadcasting at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Ann is a member of Alpha Lambda Delta and Phi Kappa Phi honor socieites.

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