Chapter 1

ORIGINS OF AN IDEA

If we think of identity as a mark of a separate and unified subjectivity, identification is rejection of separateness; it denies the others difference by allowing the subject the excitement of trespass, the thrill of being the other. Art provides us repeated access to such psychic thrills.

—Elin Diamond, "Rethinking Identification: Kennedy, Freud, Brecht"

You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his.

—Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*

Identification can be given any one of many characterizations: common ground, inhabiting, projecting, becoming, associating, connecting, and so on. In cinematic terms, identification seems to create a momentary freeze frame: a temporary pause in a world unfolding at twenty-four frames a second. In that short space the brain seems to give us time to take in and absorb a place, a person, or a thought that we already "know." One could alternatively describe identification as the "replay" of a familiar "tape," or the match to a familiar form already in the memory. Whatever the metaphor, we strive to find the right words to account for the extension of identification from its literal Latin root *idem*—meaning "same"—to the much broader but elusive capacity for empathy.

In some ways tracing the intellectual history of so central a human impulse is arbitrary. No single source, faction, or culture can lay claims of exclusivity or discovery to the human tendency toward identification. We have, instead, a long series of complementary and sometimes contradictory systems of thought—ranging from Freud to film theory—which treat the subject as primary to

our understanding of how humans establish patterns of significance in their lives. In their finer details these systems agree on very little. But one thing is certain: experience in its many forms leaves its calling card behind, marking specific moments or events as obvious touchstones to our identity. And while we are only at the beginning of a long quest to map the neuroscience of "higher" cognitive processes,[1] we have a long history of interest in identification that spans from ancient rhetorical theory to modern cultural studies.

All of these fields start from the same premise: as individuals we possess a staggering range of symbolic resources that allow us to consider another person's experiences and recognize them as our own. These include the cues of our sensory world—sight, sound, smell, touch—as well as the linguistic tools for communicating these experiences to others. Just in the realm of language, an educated adult may have a vocabulary of forty thousand words, and an intensely verbal person's can reach over one hundred thousand.[2]

We also possess a brain that has an enormous predisposition for visiting and revisiting linkages. Events and feelings accumulated over time strike chords of recognition, providing a consciousness of similarity that is regularized in a kind of "library" of personal rituals. What neuroscience calls "associative learning"[3] builds structures of relationships that may exist as latent thoughts held by our long-term memory, or new thoughts that are a part of our immediate consciousness. Memory obviously gives the brain a significant amount of power to generate associations. Our love of replication, imitation, and ritual keeps many of them close at hand.

Even the impressionistic and abstract products of the arts can trigger a richer range of associations than might seem possible. In physical terms, the image conveyed on the canvas comes to us as light and color measured in angstrom units. Music can be reduced to the sound equivalent of cycles per second, or hertz. But the brain adds much more as associations begin to build up in the memory and are triggered in recall. The cliché that childhood comes with its own "soundtrack" is intuitively true. For nearly all of us memories of adolescence are easily recalled in the context of the popular music of the period. The same principle of association works in other forms of music that carry programmatic associations. For this writer the deliberate rhythmic inflexibility in the last movement of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony suggests the machine-age modernism

of the 20s: a style of rude dominance over the land also captured in the Cubist cityscapes of Joseph Stella and others.[4] I have no idea why I have these identifications, or if they create similar associations with others. But the links are real, and I love the music and images for them.

Music represents an especially tricky category of associations, but it seems strangely well suited to mining the depths of prior experience. At a purely physical or scientific level it may make little sense to attribute to a sequence of *sounds* a meaning that is translated into *visual* terms. But we make such connections all the time. Our senses are constantly feeding us impressions that prompt memories of our past: moments we consciously reconstruct to be better or worse than the original experiences. To be sure, these associations mix the personal and cultural in unpredictable ways. And with its framework of stimulus-response theory, associative learning models hardly seem up to the challenge. Yet it would be a serious underestimation to neglect contexts for identification because they violate narrow and deterministic systems.

The subject of music is relevant in at least one other context. Researchers who study auditory perception note that the pleasure we derive from organized sound flows from more than just the recognition of a familiar tune. Music has, in the words of Robert Jourdain, a "deep structure" that involves an accumulation of expectations learned over time.[5] Certain associations and patterns are held as a kind of common property. Melodies are pleasing or not because they follow certain learned rules in the western twelve-tone scale. The conventions of popular music dictate that where key changes can happen and how a chord progression can be "resolved." Phrases of a song are broken into eight or sixteen bar segments such that a five-bar fragment inserted somewhere in the middle would seem alien. In the words of Aaron Copland, we expect certain rules of "continuity" and "thematic relationships" to be observed, and we are sometimes frustrated when they are not. Considering the works of a member of the German avant-garde, for example, Copland found continual violations of anticipated progressions that were frustrating:

> In this music, one waits to hear what will happen next without the slightest idea of what *will* happen, or why what

> happened did happen once it has happened. [Karlheinz] Stockhausen's only chance is to mesmerize the listener. Failing that, one gets bored.[6]

The same is no less true for other forms of discourse. In public rhetoric, the novel, the film, and virtually any representational medium, certain associations and pre-existing forms are held as property. In Kenneth Burke's words, "form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite."[7]

Form in general is a kind of common property when—as in the case of music—there are rules and conventions to be honored and audience expectations to be met. But form given substance in a particular piece of work is often valued as private property, as when we objectify reproductions of discourse and revisit them for the reliable pleasures they offer. As Evan Eisenberg has noted, there is an unmistakable attraction to the idea of possessing the performances of others.[8] Reproductions of music, films, books and paintings can be purchased and consumed at will. Works that we "own" that have been captured on paper or plastic are part of our world: tokens of specified meaning ready to sustain the routines of our lives.

This preliminary chapter takes a first look at identification by briefly tracing some of the important threads that make up the rhetorical fabric of the rest of the book. These include references to the seminal works of Aristotle, the Sophists, George Herbert Mead, Kenneth Burke, and others, all of whom have contributed related observations about identification and its centrality to the process of communication. The next chapter takes a closer look at the pivotal work of Burke and some of his interpreters.

Caveats and a Preliminary Definition

In exploring the nature of the relationship that momentarily links audience to source, I mean something more than Chaim Perelman's definition that emphasizes "connections and rejections of connections,"[9] but something less elastic than Kenneth Burke's assertion that it includes virtually the entire "function of sociality."[10] The emphasis here is more Western than non-Western, skewed in the direction of single messages or message segments, and more relevant to transactions where the communicator is conscious of an

audience beyond the self. Any simple definition of so broad a concept is a potential intellectual tripwire. And there are times in the pages that follow where it will serve the purposes of this study to step outside of the definition offered here. But it is a good starting point to consider identification as *the conscious alignment of oneself with the experiences, ideas, and expressions of others: a heightened awareness that a message or gesture is revisiting a feeling or state of mind we already "know."* Like so many aspects of communication, identification is both a process and an outcome. It includes message-acts offered up for their potential powers of association. And it plays out in audiences by creating predictable and sought-after effects. As such, *identification is experience.*[11] We are usually conscious of its arrival. At its strongest it creates spikes of decisive recognition that can bind us to specific sources, while affirming the boundaries of our own recognized world.

The Rhetorical Frame of Reference

The earliest discussions of rhetorical associations that bind sources and audiences together are usually credited to Aristotle (about 330 B.C.), not because he was literally the first observer of the process, but because, as Burke notes, Aristotle so convincingly places the roots of communication in the impulses of common ground and assimilation. Unlike Plato, Aristotle had a well-formed and remarkably modern sense of audiences: an essential asset in the analysis of identification. A recurring theme in *Rhetoric* is that audiences need to be intensively studied. Where Plato was notoriously suspicious of the arts for their imitative and emotional qualities,[12] Aristotle was far more accepting of the invitation art offers to audiences to step into the world of the "possible" or "probable."[13]

If we follow the lead of Burke in assessing *Rhetoric,* Aristotle emerges as a master psychologist of identification. The business of identification is nothing less than the central generative process in the design of messages. Burke's view arguably understates Aristotle's emphasis on rhetoric as a form of rational argumentation, and overstates his interest in adaptive appeals. Indeed, there is little in *Rhetoric* that could be directly translated into synonyms for "identification." But there can be no quarrel with the larger assumption imbedded in *Rhetoric*, *Topics*, *Poetics*, and *Prior Analytics* that

rhetorical appeals must be conceived in terms of how they are received by their audiences. Persuasion, notes Aristotle, "must take into account the nature of . . . [a] particular audience."[14] Audiences are the "judges" of messages.[15] *Their* understanding of the good, the virtuous, and the true are the fundamental starting points for a successful rhetor.

Aristotle offers three broad strategies of appeal that are especially relevant to the process of rhetorical courtship. They are worthy of a brief review for their own insights, and because Burke attaches so much importance to their implicit embrace of the processes of identification.

The first involves the persuader's search for signs of character *(ethos)* that are compelling and attractive. For Aristotle "character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion" an advocate possesses.[16] Although he criticized others for having neglected the role of the advocate, a concern for displaying the manifest signs of virtuous character is a constant that runs through most ancient rhetorics. In ways large and small a persuader must present himself and those he would praise as having virtues an audience would share. "If an audience esteems a given quality, we must say that our hero has that quality, no matter whether we are addressing Scythians or Spartans or philosophers."[17] There is simply no way to dismiss the powerful impulse of audiences to interpret messages through the filter of a source's *ethos*. Narrative and many other forms of public discourse continually draw us in by offering the details of private lives that identification makes us care about. We see it in Annie Dillard's affectionate memoir about her childhood in a leafy and comfortable Pittsburgh neighborhood. Her world is anchored by the details of her parents lives.[18] Over the course of her book we come to admire the habits and customs of a couple that managed to shun the conventionality of the Eisenhower years while successfully launching their children into adulthood.

A second implied form of identification comes from the use of *topoi* and "commonplaces," which were described by Aristotle as "notions possessed by everybody," hence self-evident. Sayings, maxims, and ideas widely adopted by a society were presented as the elemental materials of persuasion: a kind of ethnography of accepted attitudes.[19] And so we get a virtual catalogue of beliefs common to the audiences of his day, ranging from the young to the old.

At the extremes, for example, older men "guide their lives too much by considerations of what is useful and too little by what is noble." They "live by memory rather than by hope." And "they are continually talking of the past, because they enjoy remembering it."[20] For youth these ways of thinking tend to be reversed, but are just as clearly defined. In either case the rhetor's task is to duplicate the audience's attitude or preference in their own words.

To be sure, time often dates the common wisdom of another age. Yet the principle of locating beliefs shared by an audience is central to the process of identification. A primary feature of cultural studies ranging from ethnology to marketing research is the systematic cataloging of social beliefs and customs. They proceed from the solid assumption that what a society takes to be true or preferable functions as a crucial medium of exchange in public life.[21]

The third strategy is the construction of ideas using a reasoning sequence that begins from what is widely accepted and moves to new conclusions the advocate wants an audience to reach. Aristotle described this pathway of reasoning as an "enthymeme." Enthymemes function as the everyday equivalents of a logical syllogism. But where syllogisms are often admired for their rigor and the force of their conclusions, enthymemes exist in the more contingent nature of real-world settings. In their most basic form, they use reasoning patterns that start from a reservoir of common knowledge represented by signs or more group-specific commonplaces. These statements engage an audience by using beliefs or the imperfect knowledge they already have. Hence, "an enthymeme is a syllogism starting from probabilities or signs," such that one could argue "that a woman is with child because she is pale."[22] Like most enthymemes, the sign is inadequate and the conclusion is obviously far from certain.[23] But it is important to note that Aristotle was clearly captivated by what might be described as the logic of identification: reasoning that uses norms and accepted customs to win over adherents. Anyone who has assessed how we initiate a conversation with a stranger senses the many versions of this form as it exists in everyday life. We may break an awkward silence with a comment on the weather. A communication structure that moves from the recognizable to the new is a mechanism of daily survival. We reach for the familiar first: a subject that allows us to place the stranger in the context we already share.

An enthymeme that includes "common knowledge" tames our fear of difference and separation. It uses a reasoning sequence that starts from what is already "known" before moving to ideas or conclusions that might be contentious. The commonplace is a "foot in the door," the first step in a sequence of statements that ask for agreement and (often) acceptance of the source.

An additional feature of enthymemes speaks to Aristotle's sensitivity to the way actual appeals often work. He notes that acceptance of a statement is sometimes so assured that "there is no need to mention it. The hearer adds it himself."[24] The context of the topic is enough to trigger one's memory of the recent past or a relevant commonplace. For example, the spoken dialogue of a David Mamet screenplay often captures the shared experiences communicated in simple stares and unfinished sentences. In films like *Heist, A Life in the Theater,* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* characters talk in fragments. And yet we understand that they are bound to the same world of understandings. Similarly, an advocate for stricter gun laws may start a persuasive attempt with a chain of statements that begin with the observation that too many children die each year from gunshot wounds; or a prochoice speaker might state that too many children are born to couples who lack the means to be effective parents. In each case the first statement starts from common knowledge or widely accepted beliefs, and only then moves to related but more controversial conclusions.

In their totality these three components of revealed character, shared attitudes, and reasoning from common assumptions exist as core elements in the central canon of rhetoric. "As ideas," notes Burke, "they all seem no less compelling now than they ever were."[25] But it is important to note that identification is more than calculated similarity. Burke understood the mechanics of recognition and empathy used by Aristotle and other ancient rhetoricians to be only part of a larger process he labeled consubstantiality. In important ways that we will revisit again in the next chapter, identification is not simply a condition where *A* is identical with *B*, but where individuals come to believe they share "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes."[26] Identification thus moves beyond the "externals" of similarity to deeper levels of unity. We are, at various times, "joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another."[27] Thus, a grandchild may iden-

tify with a grandparent, a man with a woman, a Muslim with a Jew, and so on. All presume the capacity to assume the place of others who are outwardly very different from ourselves.

The surprising emergence of singer Johnny Cash as a lesbian icon carries the same feature of being more about "resonance" than similarity. He connects to this audience, notes one writer, through songs that chronicle "masculinity gone strange with grief, remorse, and loneliness."[28] It is an unlikely pairing of source and audience, but less so if we give full credit to the restless human capacity to find resonance in unlikely places. At a very different level the tendency of Japanese workers to identify with their employers speaks to the same process. Although a weakened economy has sometimes strained old loyalties, employers and workers often act on the assumption of consubstantiality. As Edwin Reischauer has noted, "A job in Japan is not merely a contractual arrangement for pay, but a means of identification with a larger entity—in other words, a satisfying sense of being part of something big and significant."[29]

Roots in the Pre-Socratic Sophists

One can go even further back in time to find earlier recognition of the centrality of identification to the persuasive process. Aristotle's teacher, Plato, reviled his own competitors and predecessors partly for their alleged indifference to truth in the process of winning over audiences. Plato's *Gorgias* takes as its central character a Sophist born about 490 B.C. who wrote manuals of rhetorical instruction and performed speeches to admiring audiences of his day. What we know about Gorgias is from incomplete fragments of his own work, and partly from the hostile dialogues of Plato.

For the great philosopher, Gorgias was a figure who lacked sufficient appreciation for the difficulties of teaching *arete'*, or the "qualities of human excellence" that produce natural leaders. *The Gorgias* wants us to worry about sophistic liberalism that gives legitimacy to the variability of public attitudes and to a persuader's efforts to deal with them. In Plato's view, catering to audience attitudes is not a virtue but a vice. He writes the heroic part of the dialogue for Socrates, who describes rhetoric as "a knack" for "ornamentation and sophistry," an art with more regard for "flattery" than truth. "Flattery" is represented as virtually coextensive with

rhetoric: a form of pandering that gives pleasure to an audience and power to the persuader, but shuns allegiance to a higher morality.[30]

At a simplistic level it is hard to quarrel with Plato. Who could deny that identification has its uses as a tool of deception? With regard to the public discourse of politics and advertising, we pride ourselves on our cynicism. We know the wolf is in sheep's clothing, and that there are deeper and contradictory motivations behind the universal appeals we want to expose. Virtually all human action—and especially human expression—is subject to doubts about the potential gaps between stated and deeper intentions. So every act has its manifest meaning and alternative narratives. One can even deconstruct Plato's dialogue with its own ironic backstory. His unflattering portraits of his own contemporaries gives them words they may have never said, and at the same time, returns power and prestige to himself.

W. K. C. Guthrie's convincing analysis of the Sophist's career is more generous. He notes that Gorgias was among the first to place communication at the center of institutions that are primarily about verbal action, and at the same time recognizing the principle of adaptation as the bond that links an audience to an advocate.

> [Gorgias] saw the power of persuasion as paramount in every field, in the study of nature and philosophical subjects no less than in the law-courts or the political arena. One essential to the art was the sense of occasion, *kairos*, the right time or opportunity.[31]

Guthrie notes that there was a remarkably modern conception of culture behind some of the thinking of many of the Sophists, including Gorgias, Isocrates, Critias, Protagoras and others. It involves drawing a distinction between opposing worldviews in the organization of knowledge: two very different ways of thinking about the place of humans in the evolution of ideas. A view accepted by many of the Sophists held that "laws, customs and conventions were not part of the immutable order of things," but the products of the culture and its attitudes.[32] This realm of socially created law (*nomos*) was in sharp contrast to philosophies and assumptions that presented certain moral codes and truths of the natural world (*physis*) as *prior* to human understanding and awareness. The first gives priority to socially derived values and knowledge. The sec-

ond suggests larger forces—the Gods and natural law—as the ultimate arbiters of truth and value. Was religion a matter of social convention, or did the gods really exist? Did states evolve through the variable efforts and ideas of political organizations, or were they conceived according to some divine plan? And is the division between slaves and masters solely the product of the values and economies of particular culture, or the result of some higher natural law?[33]

The Platonic quest for immutable truths often assumed the existence of "unwritten laws" of moral conduct that were to be discovered more than constructed. These starting points made it easy for Plato to retain suspicions about democratic institutions. There was simply no reason to consider collective public opinion as reliably useful.[34] In modern life the fundamentalist's observation that homosexuality is "unnatural" and not part of "God's plan" draws from the same assumptions of unwritten law. Humans are not the agents of their own societies. Larger forces and larger immutable values are at work.

But for Sophists who upheld the centrality of *nomos*, civil life and social norms were seen as governed by the flow of human events. Laws are the work of humans, not the gods. Moral precepts are a matter of public opinion and custom rather than absolutes. "Man is the measure of all things," declared Protagoras. The statement is a fitting epigram for the modernist assumption that civil life is socially constructed. Burke's seminal "definition of man" (see chapter 2) is a similar declaration of the dominance of the symbolic world in our lives. It gives the same priority to culture as a construction of "symbol using (and mis-using) animals" who are thus separated from their natural condition by instruments of their own making.[35] Both views implicitly emphasize the importance of discourse as generative of culture. And both give greater weight to identification as a process that binds a collectivity to the same common experiences. We are civilized into the same culture, securing our place within it by finding ways to negotiate our differences and demonstrate our similarities.

Much more could be said about the centrality of identification in the history of rhetoric.[36] Even so, this sketch is at least suggestive of its roots in early figures who understood our psychological impulse for consensus. In a nonrhetorical world individuals would

measure themselves against standards derived from outside the context of social conventions. But in a rhetorical world we are heavily invested in the values and language of our communities. We rarely escape their influence, though we are often active agents in interpreting their meaning.

Identification, Role-Taking and the Search for Self

Folding identification into the larger notion of adaptation takes us beyond any single intellectual thread. If the Hellenic world three hundred years before Christ generated an understanding of audiences as the owners of opinions which must be addressed, we will find no similar timelines that allow us to track the awareness of collective or individual identities. One thread leads us into the biochemical processes of pattern recognition in humans and related species: a topic best left to neuroscience. Another begs for a general scheme that accounts for how identity is shaped, and how it is maintained through consciousness of culture and community.

George Herbert Mead has noted that consciousness of the self is possible only with a concurrent consciousness of others. We are not simply "ourselves," but constructions shaped through our interactions with others. We use the materials of our relations with others to round out our sense of who we are. In Mead's words, "This requires the appearance of the other in the self, the identification of the other with the self, the reaching of self-consciousness through the other."[37] Language induces an awareness of "I," "we," and "they," even while it reflects features of the community back into the self.

This perspective represents a common theme running through much of our understanding of the nature of identity. *Who* we are to ourselves and to others is a collection of attributes assembled and discarded over a lifetime, a mosaic of impressions given off to others and held inside. At times we may appear to others pretty much as we see ourselves. John Kennedy once described Daniel Webster as the embodiment of a great man: "He looked like one, talked like one, was treated like one and insisted that he was one."[38] As we might say about someone today, he seemed to be "comfortable in his skin." But it is more likely that our internal and external "selves" are never fully integrated or consistent. They are always under reconstruction in ways that seek to negotiate the differences be-

tween who we are and who we want to be. When film star Cary Grant was reminded by fans that he personified the kind of person that many of them wanted to be, he noted wryly that "Everybody wants to be Cary Grant . . . *I* want to be Cary Grant."[39] His point, of course, was that his sophisticated on-screen character was the artful abstraction of a much more complex Archie Leach, who would go through four painful divorces and never live so perfect an off-screen life.

Mead notes what has since become a basic paradigm of communication: that a communicator and audience are involved in one large and imperfect feedback loop. The communicator "is influenced by the attitudes of those about him, which are reflected back into the different members of the audience so that they come to respond as a whole."[40] In this process "He himself is in the role of the other person whom he is . . . influencing."[41] In short, the public self is a unique construction that has been negotiated between the private self and what we believe audiences expect of us.

This role-taking model is not without its problems, particularly when placed in a psychological framework. Several concerns are relevant. Some social theorists have questioned the value of placing communication at the center of the construction of the self.[42] Language may be a reflection of who we are, but is not necessarily synonymous with it. There is a certain elasticity of labeling and identity such that a person may accept a characterization of themselves, say, as "gifted" or "hard working," even if they doubt the accuracy of the description. Others, like Anselm Strauss, also note that we need a more subtle way to talk about identities, particularly the interactions between "personal histories" and "social histories." A person "must be viewed as embedded in a temporal matrix not simply of his own making, but . . . his conception of the past as it impinges on himself."[43]

Strauss's concerns are especially relevant to the legacy of Sigmund Freud, who—as Burke notes—almost inadvertently enriched the language for the rhetorical analysis of identification while looking at meaning derived from personal experience. Even though his theories of emotional development have been discredited by many, Freud's conception of identification as "an emotional tie with another person" remains central to any understanding of the term.[44] And his *Interpretation of Dreams* was important in establishing a

rationale for seriously considering the verbal and symbolic baggage of everyday life, including popular stories, legends, and evocative symbols.[45] One does not have to accept all aspects of the Freudian canon to appreciate his explorations of how consciousness is modulated by a subject's life history. But his primary emphasis on developmental processes associated with identity formation is too reductive and deterministic to fully account for the construction of meaning and significance in the temporal environments of public discourse and popular culture. This newer "cultural meanings" context is not irrelevant to older Freudian ideas of identity formation. But—at least for this writer—one does not easily telescope into the other.

With its core themes of the reciprocity of ideas and attitudes, the importance of the role-taking model is undeniable. We are audiences to each other, constructing and defining ourselves to meet the expectations of others. In various ways role taking is fundamental to understanding the daily give and take of social relations.[46] It clearly represents an irreplaceable metaphor for the rhetorical process of identification. To a substantial extent we are nurtured, maintained, and sometimes undermined by the sum of our interactions with others. Our individual biographies can be read as maps that allow us to retrace our influences. We acquire our values from culture and opinions from our immediate contacts. And we learn from our responses to life's exigencies. To be sure, these acquisitions of insights based on real-world experiences are never reflexive. To define someone as the "product" of Catholic schools, the Upper West Side of Manhattan, or a small town in eastern Wyoming is not enough to claim an understanding of them. And no one would want to be known simply by these identifiers. But even these incomplete facts have their own power to establish and sometimes undermine expectations.

It would be difficult to overestimate the potency of expectations as they are affirmed and violated. Expectations affirmed are often identifications. Expectations denied are potentially sources of alienation. Consider, for example, the case of the iconic John Wayne. A roadhouse a few miles from my home has framed pictures of the actor bedecked in cowboy garb hanging on the walls at each end of the bar. One assumes that Wayne has pride of place in this largely male refuge because of what he represents to the owner and his

patrons. Wayne grew up in California and came to symbolize the West as both a place and a state of mind. In the settled East a person had to adapt to existing laws and customs. But a Westerner once had to be more resourceful and independent to survive in a region where the land and its inhabitants had not yet been tamed. Or so went the myth. And so we have romanticized Wayne's film persona through these familiar impressions and attitudes. The hero of *Stagecoach* and *The Alamo* used and enhanced fantasies Americans still cling to about the men and women who would not easily submit to the harsh western landscape. The figure of Wayne on horseback moving through an unbroken sea of sagebrush and rimrocks easily fits into this world.

But, as Garry Wills notes, Wayne was also another person who was significantly at odds with this image. That he was born in Iowa with the less mellifluous name of Marion Morrison—and actually hated horses—is a reminder of how some identifications are nourished and others are not.[47] He also went out of his way to avoid interrupting his Hollywood career for military service during World War II, a somewhat surprising fact given his love of the military roles. But such is the nature of all role-taking. It selectively constructs a presence that can feed our interest in prospecting for its paradoxical opposites. Old film stars are especially fertile ground for these explorations. In Burke's phrase, a rhetoric of identification also implicitly invites us "to confront the implications of division."[48]

Identification and the Dramatic Imperative

In his classic study, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman used overt dramatic terminology to extend the idea of roles acquired through audience-mediated communication. In the presence of others, he notes, we typically "project" a "definition of the situation" as we see it. That definition usually carries a number of expectations we believe others hold about what the totality of our behavior (language, gesture, appearance, and attitude) should be. In Goffman's dramatistic scheme, situations carry a performance imperative: we know how we should act. We have a sense of how to manage our identity, our "front," and how others are supposed to perceive it. We play off of that identity to "manage"

the "impressions" we give to others. In short, we are performers in search of receptive audiences. "Thus, when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact than does his behavior as a whole."[49]

Implicit is the image of the self as a collection of multiple roles. These features of our identity are on display as each occasion demands it. We fashion elements of our performance to meet the exigencies of social life as they occur. One enters a new social setting with a natural interest to succeed in it. In colloquial terms, "screwing up," "laying an egg," "making a scene," or "pulling it off," are suggestive of a range of possible outcomes. In life as in the theater, the actor's first responsibility is to seem to inhabit fully the role he or she is performing. We do not want to see someone struggling to meet the expectations of their role. We are more comfortable if we feel that they have completely taken ownership of it. This was ostensibly President Reagan's special gift. He certainly knew the script of the presidency, and his relaxed affability suggested that he was at home there. But over time these images of confidence could be undermined as it was when observers noticed Reagan's periodic glances to staff-written answers to questions concealed in a partly opened desk drawer.[50] Was the President the product of his "handlers," as the national press largely assumed? Or was his appeal in his apparent authenticity?

The significance of the role as a model for examining the possibilities of identification is suggested in Hugh Duncan's observation, building on Mead, that drama is the "means by which we become objects to ourselves."[51] This statement is a wonderful evocation of the power for identification inherent in drama. The attraction of theater, film, or the novel lies partly in their abilities to give audiences potent commentaries on their own values and choices. In Duncan's words, "The novel presents a situation which lies outside the immediate experience of the reader in a form which makes it possible for him to enter into the attitudes of the groups in the situation."[52]

For example, as I note in more detail in chapter 3, dramatists talk of the "emotional center" of a work to suggest that point at which an audience is meant to become "one" with a character and the situation he or she inhabits. Narratives usually include a char-

acter that acts as a vessel for transporting us into a different world. Jonathan Harr's novelistic account of an actual case of litigation against polluters in *A Civil Action* provides such a port of entry.[53] Years of legal maneuvering over the suspicious deaths of children in Woburn, Massachusetts are distilled in the book. Lawyers are reluctant to accept the case of the families, until it is discovered that the polluters are owned by two corporations with deep pockets for a potential settlement.

That is the basic story, but its emotional center resides in characters like the stubborn Boston lawyer who took the case on a contingency fee basis, only to end up in bankruptcy after covering his investigation expenses. Readers are meant to identify with him and the victims of the pollution. The corporations are the unsympathetic enemies in a continuing high-stakes chess game. Harr's novel holds a mirror to the idea of financial compensation for victims, finding that objective a hopelessly inadequate basis for delivering true justice. But we are essentially coaxed into considering the problem because of the drama of the characters who, not unlike ourselves, must make choices with significant consequences. The appeal of the narrative comes from its characters, rather than the political and legal processes to which they are tied.

Narratives of national life also make us objects to ourselves. Impressions of national events usually come to us through the polarizing or unifying presence of specific agents. The 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon created a thin but obvious sense of national unity. The human loss at a fourteen-acre site in lower Manhattan was enough by itself to conclude that the nation as a whole had been attacked. Deep national differences were largely set aside in favor of expressions of communal unity and grief. By contrast, in the corrosive national environment of 1998, very different forces were at work. Americans confronted portrayals of the actions of President Bill Clinton, Independent Prosecutor Kenneth Starr, and other players in concurrent sex and impeachment dramas. Denials of various improprieties by the president where met by aggressive and sometimes small-minded investigation techniques that sharpened differences in Congress and the nation. Did this national nightmare feed a growing sense of alienation from our national life? How do these events fit into what we want to believe about our collective past? As Robert Bellah and his colleagues note,

"If we face a crisis of civic identity, it is not just a social crisis, it is a personal crisis as well."[54] The death and national trauma of September 11 momentarily reversed the nation's withered sense itself. But the whole extended impeachment episode weakened rather than enhanced American confidence in its civic institutions.

The inevitable cycles of civic engagement and disengagement have been productively explored by others, and is the subject of chapter 6.[55] Their relevance here lies in the fact that issues like these are—in their simplest form—at the center of what the rest if this book is about: a sense of connectedness or the lack of it; of fragmented pieces of identity affirmed or denied.

The task that remains, then, is to flesh out the idea of identification as a pivot point in communication, taking on the same mission of discovery that energized Kenneth Burke. Burke quoted the words of St. Augustine, who noted that a person is persuaded if

> he likes what you promise, fears what you say is imminent, hates what you censure, embraces what you commend, regrets whatever you built up as regrettable, rejoices at what you say is cause for rejoicing, sympathizes with those whose wretchedness your words bring before his very eyes . . . and in whatever ways your high eloquence can affect the minds of your hearers.[56]

Augustine's premise of building common ground illustrates the central theme of this chapter as well. At its core, identification is a moment of recognition that links a person to someone else. It usually represents a heightened awareness of the relevance of one's own life to a parallel setting inhabited by others: a natural outgrowth of our tendency to find our way in life by reflecting the actions of others back on to ourselves. In its highest form identification offers the potent sensation of sharing another's consciousness. In the process, it diminishes the distance between the alien and the known, providing a sense of "place" for ourselves in the external world.

Freud, Mead, and Burke extended identification into new ways of thinking about the construction and reconstruction of the self. The goal of this study is to build on their work, while placing identification in more contemporary contexts. The deeper struc-

tures of identification are the central concerns of the next two chapters. The last three apply elements of these structures to cases from the worlds of politics, art, and social action.