

ABSTRACT

The Bully's Pulpit: The Bodily Rhetoric of President Trump's Diplomatic Handshakes

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President Donald Trump's administration has revealed ideological fault lines and rapidly transforming power-balances underlying U.S. diplomacy. This thesis examines Trump's handshakes as rhetorical gestures that constitute discursive investments in populist and nationalist ideology. Before investigating Trump's handshakes with hostile foreign actors and allied diplomats, I establish a rhetorical framework for examining the metaphoric and tropic elements of gesture at play in Ronald Reagan's "Speech at the Brandenburg Gate." In doing so, I argue that the handshake as a metaphor contributes to a materialist understanding of Cold War metaphors and body rhetoric.

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DEDICATION

To Misty, good debate

CHAPTER ONE

Rhetorical Handshakes: Gesture, Body, and Metaphor

Introduction

Before anything else, Donald Trump is a businessman. The image he projects across every public appearance as president, presidential candidate, private citizen, and media personality is that of a wealthy and shrewd deal-maker. When Hillary Clinton confronted Trump about his tax returns in their first presidential debate, we saw a reassertion of the successful-businessman image as a justification for bending tax and bankruptcy laws for one's own personal gain. Refusing to release his tax returns, Trump broke from a forty-year tradition of presidential candidates disclosing their income to the public. In that first debate, Trump explained his publicly voiced desire for the housing market to crash in 2008 by stating "That's called business, by the way," and replying to the charge that he has avoided paying any income tax for years, he quipped "That makes me smart."¹ The responsibilities and strategic calculus required to lead people, either as a business executive or president of the United States, are discrete and identifiable areas of communicative expertise. Thus, Trump's ascent to the presidency signals a clash between two rhetorical domains of credibility, competency, and power. Bridging the worlds of business (economics) and politics (governance), Trump's businessman persona poses a challenging problem to the rhetorical criticism of American political economy – an executive actor whose policy is intrinsically motivated by no goal other than constantly 'winning.'²

Trump's rhetorical capacity for governing as president stems primarily from his corporeal presence and bodily maneuvers. The spectacle and abrasive style of Trump's handshakes reveal the president's unique reliance on his body for political discourse. Therefore, I posit bodily gesture as a critical node of symbolic-intersection between rhetorics of business and policy. Specifically, I argue that the handshake is a vital object of analysis for this moment in rhetorical criticism. Trump's uniquely strategic deployment of the handshake as a tool for visually displaying power and perceptively winning diplomatic engagements evinces the need for rhetoricians to situate the body as more than "a site of incoherence."³ Locating Trump's handshakes with world leaders as points of rhetorical cohesion across diplomatic contexts recuperates the possibility of materially analyzing the Trump administration's exceedingly fragmented (and often incoherently contradictory) articulations of foreign policy.⁴ Attending to the material-status of diplomatic handshakes will require recourse to Debra Hawhee's reading of Kenneth Burke's "attitude" as innately bound to bodily gesture, as well as an examination of the metaphorical significance of handshakes germane to the American Presidency as an internationally-recognized institution.

In Chapter Two, I analyze the handshake as a metaphor and tool for understanding presidential foreign policy through the example of President Ronald Reagan's "Speech at the Brandenburg Gate." With Reagan's address I situate and the primary object of this thesis, namely presidential foreign policy viewed through a lens that privileges the material significance of diplomatic handshakes. In the process of situating handshakes as a rhetorical artifact, I construct a paradigm for analyzing presidential diplomacy through a metaphoric frame of reference. My aim in looking to Reagan's Brandenburg Gate speech is to examine the president's rhetorical capacity for

articulating two discrete political bodies (East and West Berlin, the Soviet Union and Western democracies) as interlocutors, with the president acting as a node of contact that registers the differences and attitudes of disparate political actors. The notion of diplomatic contact achieved through the embodied and visualized metaphor of a handshake inflects the rhetorical significance of diplomatic norms in shaping the conduct and discursive constraints of political actors engaged in international relations. Reagan's speech at the Brandenburg Gate is an exemplary instance of a modern president employing metaphorical language to signal a complex and nuanced vision of recognition between actors whose interests are axiomatically divergent. The geopolitical stakes of the Cold War, and Reagan's unique rhetorical style, make this metaphorical handshake a necessary detour for examining the relationship between the American presidency and bodily rhetoric.

This first chapter of analysis establishes a model of presidential rhetoric that moves beyond symbolic gestures to examine the articulation of metaphorical political bodies. My goal is to show that the unparalleled international visibility of the American presidency presents unique opportunities for effectuating the material and metaphorical articulation of people, bodies, and places. I read Reagan's speech at the Brandenburg Gate as an exemplary diplomatic handshake that contends with its exigency while formalizing arrangements of geopolitical power in terms of negotiation and recognition. In addressing the city of West Berlin as a unified body, Reagan situates all of its citizens in relation to the rest of the democratic world. This first handshake extends the symbolic language of liberty and freedom to the people of West Berlin in order to convey the support and kinship that NATO allies and the United States feel with regard to the German city. Secondly, Reagan's speech addresses East and West Berlin as distinct

interlocutors that are historically destined for reunification and the resumption of coordinated civic activity. Relying on imagery of relatives and friends desperately hoping to be reunited with their loved ones, Reagan stages a moment of rhetorical tension that draws attention and affective energy to the wall as a physical barrier to sharply-desired contact between two political bodies. Finally, Reagan's direct appeals to the Chairman of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, gesture toward the possibility of cooperation, mutual respect, and potentially even trust between the two super powers if only the Chairman will reciprocate Reagan's gesture by making a material commitment to cooperation - tearing down the Berlin Wall.

In the remaining chapters, I will invert the model of presidential speech staging metaphorical handshakes to isolate instances of President Trump's handshakes (or the notable lack thereof) that function as metaphors for expressing relative position and negotiating power on the world stage. In chapter three, I center my analysis on Trump's body rhetoric when interacting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Supreme Leader of North Korea Kim Jong Un. I examine Trump's specific techniques for introducing and managing interactions with both leaders on their own terms, highlighting the congenial and intimate character of the president's engagements with authoritarian heads of state. Trump's direct negotiation with Kim Jong Un signaled an unprecedented shift away from the historical treatment of North Korea as a rogue state that was not party to official negotiations and whose primary interaction with the American presidency have been through asymmetrically imposed sanctions. Thus, I interrogate the rhetorical relationship between nuclear credibility and gestures of American governance vis-à-vis Ned O'Gorman and Kevin Hamilton's piece of criticism "At the Interface: The Loaded Rhetorical Gestures of Nuclear Legitimacy and Illegitimacy," which uncovers the

discursive framework that facilitates labeling countries such as Iran and North Korea as “rogue state” security threats.⁵

In chapter four, I examine “winning” as a peripheral perspective and imagined end goal of negotiation that impels Trump to employ gestural techniques and spontaneity in his handshakes with allied diplomats. The unfolding drama of Trump’s episodic handshakes with French President Emmanuel Macron provides an occasion for understanding and analyzing American alliances with reference to the attitudinal and positional effects of bodily rhetoric. Trump’s numerous handshakes with Macron provide material for an analysis of rapport-building through gestures, in the context of allied diplomacy. Trump’s failure to recognize German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s request for a handshake at their first meeting symbolizes the president’s hostile treatment of rival allies, in contrast to his deference and admiration for ostensibly hostile foreign powers such as Russia and North Korea. It is ambiguous whether Trump’s failure to shake German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s hand during their first press meeting indicates anything about their relationship or Trump was simply not paying attention to her gestures and recommendations from the press that the two leaders shake hands. The serious media attention given to this failed communicative gesture displays how, as one *New York Times* columnist put it, “With Trump, struts, scowls and pouts reveal every bit as much as what tumbles from his lips, which is a lot less trustworthy. His words can be counterfeit. His gestures are genuine.”⁶ Regardless of his intent, Trump’s body language with Merkel broadcasts a clear disinterest and inattentiveness to a powerful diplomatic guest and steadfast American ally.

In the fifth and final chapter, I conclude by gesturing toward Trump’s handshakes with subordinates and American officials as another opportunity for rhetorical critics to

analyze presidential body rhetoric. The immense volume of resignations and firings within the Trump administration is independently worthy of note for accelerating at an ‘unprecedented’ and rapid pace.⁷ A conversation and a handshake are norms of leave-taking with deep roots in American culture. A “golden handshake,” the presentation of a severance package that generously compensates a former employee in cases of termination at an executive level, is often expected or synonymous with leave-taking in the highest echelons of employment in the private sector.⁸ Former White House chief of staff, Reince Priebus, discovered he was fired from his position over Twitter on the tarmac after deplaning Air Force One. Similarly, former White House Counsel Don McGahn heard about his termination for the first time over twitter, and although the news “surprised” McGahn, he allegedly stated “Of course it happened this way.”⁹ Trump’s conduct in firing essential personnel signals more than a disdain for decorum. By shirking expectations for some conclusive point of understanding and contact for officials leaving his service, Trump affirms the virtual space of twitter as a legitimate site of Presidential decree and self-articulation.

Literature and Method

Central to my thesis is the question of how Trump aims to distinguish himself as a ‘tough’ and ‘smart’ negotiator. My primary line of inquiry, in centering my analysis on the presidential handshake, aims at the interrogation of *how* a normative bodily gesture can be put into play as an exertion of power that actively shores up the legitimacy and position of state actors. Looking to Trump’s preferred methods of self-description – “a very stable genius” “being, like, really smart” “Nobody knows more about taxes than I do – and income than I do” “I understand money better than anybody” “There’s nobody

bigger or better at the military than I am” the list goes on¹⁰ – my primary question will be how these variously self-proclaimed regions of expertise find expression in President Trump’s bodily rhetoric.

I suggest that a rhetorical reading of Trump’s corporeal style should begin from a discussion of gesture and metaphor. Debra Hawhee’s work with body rhetoric provides a primary opening for locating gesture, including the handshake, as a vital object of rhetorical criticism. In “Language as Sensuous Action: Sir Richard Paget, Kenneth Burke, and Gesture-Speech Theory” Hawhee reads Paget’s “theory of gesture-speech” through Kenneth Burke’s writing. She argues that this theory “reveals an early insistence on the body’s role in communicative practices and a resulting bodily poetics: the body both models and performs the physical movements to produce speech, and, in doing so, almost literally breathes life into words.”¹¹ This formulation of the body’s role in rhetoric inverts what is often considered common anthropological knowledge – that inherited linguistic structures and purposes “grounded primarily in cognition, reason, or epistemics” precipitated the use of bodily gestures in communicative acts.¹² Rather, for Hawhee,

Paget’s theory of gesture-speech also offers a way to trouble structural linguistics from a direction other than poststructuralism’s critique of social structures, offering instead material, mobile, and mutable bodily structures. Whereas Saussure argues that the signifier – a word – arbitrarily invokes a signified, an image of meaning, Paget holds that the word is frequently not arbitrary at all, but gestural, and it in turn evokes a gestural signified – i.e., an image or sense of the gesture (rather than a concept or idea).¹³

From a gesture-speech perspective, meaning is not premised on the attachment of phonetic sounds and signs to signified images, but on the articulation of speech actively signifying gestures and bodily motions. Put simply, rhetoric entails simultaneous visual and linguistic affective movements. Hawhee reads Burke’s references to mind-body

“correspondences” and his emphasis on “physical mimesis” as evidence that his theorization of ‘identification’ is premised on a “linguistic dance” whereby “attitude is conveyed through rhythms and movements that are thoroughly physical.”¹⁴ Thus, meaning-making through identification is not an abstract achievement of speech detached from the rhetors body, but a holistic process of physical motion and bodily incorporation.

The relationship between speech and gesture often preconditions the recognition of subjectivity. Louis Althusser depicts a model of recognition premised on habituated rhetorical gestures, including the handshake. He highlights the commonplace ritual of handshaking as a gesture of recognition and acquaintance analogous to calling another person by their name and other practices of “ideological- recognition.” Such ritualistic gestures reveal the fact that individuals are *always already* subjects of social and political habituation.¹⁵ Regardless of whether recognition provides individuals direct access to structural knowledge, an awareness of the bodily gestures and norms of every-day interpersonal recognition locates individual actors in broader schemas of subject formation via *ritualized* practices. The handshake is a ritual of primary importance to the rhetorical examination of subjectivity because the performance of a handshake simultaneously facilitates the recognition of one’s self and an interlocutor under normative identificatory constraints.

Given its ritualized role in the mutual recognition of subjectivity vis-à-vis interpellation, the handshake serves to reify and legitimate an individual’s position as actor and rhetor. Ronald Walter Greene’s notion of “communicative labor” provides insight into the work performed in normative rituals of recognition and the intersecting social, political, and economic value that such labor generates. For Greene, the concept of

communicative labor reveals that the structural maintenance of capitalism relies on the rhetorical management of individuals as value-laden subjects,

The cultivation of rhetorical capital is an investment in oneself and others as a communicative subject. If rhetoric has permeated human existence, it has partly done so because neo-liberalism encourages people to imagine themselves and others as value-producing subjects. A political economy of rhetoric provides the advantage of diagramming how different scales of governance – from the government of the self to the international trade in cultural commodities – rely on harnessing rhetoricality. Moreover, it allows for an exploration of neo-liberalism as asset of governing technologies that couple and uncouple different scales of governance.¹⁶

Greene develops a theory of political economy that attends to rhetoric as a strategic capacity for executing the communicative labor of subject formation. Thus, the terms of identification and recognition for subjects living under neoliberalism form along shifting scales of governance that harness rhetorical technique to habitually regulate individual practices of communicative labor. Extending Greene's analysis further into habituated political economy, Catherine Chaput notes that "neoliberalism governs our activities through an embodied habituation – a way of thinking and acting that stems from discrete but interconnected technologies all bound up within the same asymmetrical power dynamics of economic competition."¹⁷ The rituals undergirding interpellation and identification can thus be read as evidence of "an embodied habituation" that frames the recognition of subjectivity in terms of competition and value.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump consistently positioned his image and *ethos* as that of an outsider opposing the status quo of "establishment" politicians in Washington D.C. In doing so, Trump labored to distinguish himself from the image of Hillary Clinton as a dynastic insider-favorite for the office. In his article "The Rhetoric of 'the Body': Jesse Ventura and Bakhtin's Carnival," James A. Janack examines Jesse Ventura's appropriation of the "carnival fool" image in order "to claim the mantle of

otherness in relation to his political rivals and political culture in general.”¹⁸ Janack argues that Jesse “the Body” Ventura capitalized on public demand for the disruption of ‘politics as usual’ by staging “ritual spectacles” with an “[e]mphasis on the corporeal, often in excessive and exaggerated forms and functions, [that] symbolizes defiance of the dominant culture. Carnival celebrates those bodily activities that must remain hidden in official culture.”¹⁹ I examine Trump’s dramatic and unpredictable handshakes as an inversion of this formula, elevating the most public and ritually observed bodily performances to spectacles which do not defy dominant culture but actively embody relationships of neoliberal power and economic domination. Simultaneously, Trump’s political-outsider status is confirmed by refusing the safe politics-as-usual gesture of an uneventful handshake, opting instead for dramatic displays of economic *ethos* and political willpower.

Little rhetorical scholarship takes up the handshake as a symbolic or bodily gesture with material significance. R. Allen Harris makes some oblique gestures toward “secret handshakes” as gestures of inclusion, often used to fabricate a persona tailored to particular audiences, but says very little about how such a gesture operates rhetorically to effect material distributions of power or ideological subject-formation.²⁰ Jeremy Engels provides a unique account of Sarah Palin’s rhetoric in response to the Tucson shooting where she “calls on citizens to shake hands and get down to business once they have had their say.” Engels argues that Palin’s discourse, which appears on surface to be appeal for the resumption of normal deliberative practice, is better understood as a call to “shake hands in rage” in the articulation of a “politics of resentment” that obscures the underlying violence at play in the language of neoliberal governance.²¹ Most rhetorical analyses that mention handshakes fall in line with Harris and Engels in treating the

gesture as a ritual of inclusion or as an obliquely symbolic appeal to a shared democratic ethos.

To situate the handshake within rhetorical practices of identification, interpellation, and recognition, I employ the concept of articulation. In Nathan Stormer's account of rhetorical articulation, the concept's usefulness lies not in "collapsing the distinction between materiality and meaning to advance a specific critical project; it is about historicizing different configurations of materiality and meaning (collapsed, segregated, overlapping) as conditions for the coming into being of a given form of rhetoric."²² These configurations of meaning and materiality are notably bound to the arrangement of the body in rhetoric:

[T]o articulate is to spatialize culture and nature by arranging diverse material-semiotic elements into recognizable bodies and languages. Bodies necessarily are composed of material-semiotic elements, as are languages. Within different performative regimes, bodies and languages are configured into orders of things and of discourse.²³

Stormer's contribution to a rhetorical theory of articulation is vital because he spurns the notion of a rigid divide between body and language (material and semiotic) in favor of a performative articulation that could simultaneously be a body and language that is semiotic and material. Thus, articulation is best understood as the arrangement or ordering of conceptual and physical linkages that "delineate form and establish the boundaries and substance of a body, whether textual, corporeal, institutional, social, or natural, by arranging its elements."²⁴ Bodies and spaces do not simply exist before rhetoric articulates them, they are contingently ordered and brought into being through practices of articulation.

I develop a method of close-textual and corporeal analysis in my thesis, making use of Stormer's notion of articulation as a particular arrangement and formalization of

bodies in space and discourse. In achieving a close reading of presidential handshakes, my methodological work gives priority to the motions and concomitant rhetorical arrangements that emanate from presidential articulations of politicized embodiment. Rather than elevating any singular theory of rhetoric or interpretation of materialism, a consistent emphasis on articulation as a *starting point* rather than a totalizing explanation or system of thought will preserve my objects of analysis as uniquely situated and emergent phenomena. No doubt theoretical extrapolations and detours will be welcome in my treatment of particular cases of presidential handshaking. Still, by refraining to give priority to a single all-encompassing explanation that unifies or universalizes my explanations, I aim to achieve a more careful and attentive reading of the handshake's contingent rhetorical effects.

CHAPTER TWO

Reagan and Cold War Metaphors

President Ronald Reagan's "Speech at the Brandenburg Gate" marked a turning point in U.S.-Soviet diplomatic relations. Geopolitical turmoil defined the international scene that Reagan would speak from at the Brandenburg Gate. With the arrival of his second term, President Reagan found himself more deeply embroiled than ever in a heated "war of ideas" that would place monumental demands on his rhetorical approach to strategy, negotiation, and victory in confronting the Soviet Union.¹ The intricate ideological systems and political realities that Reagan would address during his two terms in office carried with them the gravity of potential nuclear conflict and global devastation.

Reagan's speech at the Brandenburg Gate drew sharp criticism and praise from dissonant voices in Western Europe, the United States, and the administration itself. In its contemporary moment, many liberals saw the address as overly provocative and aggressive in its posturing toward the Soviet Union. Conservatives and hawks decried Reagan's suggestions of negotiation and cooperation as a diluted form of "accommodation," an approach that the Reagan administration consistently and vocally opposed. Yet, rhetorical critics Rowland and Jones identify in Reagan's rhetoric "a sophisticated symbolic perspective that recognized both the power of moral clarity and the risks associated with consistently sticking to principle regardless of the costs."² Rather than seeking to satisfy all of his audiences with the presentation of a singular and comprehensive stance at the Brandenburg Gate, Reagan sought to define the terms by

which the world might evaluate the potential for peace or conflict stemming from the innate volatility of the Soviet system.³

In elaborating a framework and vision for the reunification of Berlin (and by extension all of Europe), Reagan displayed mastery over the practical demands of metaphoric rhetoric at the nexus of the Cold War and in its decline. Reagan's speech at the Brandenburg Gate, along with several other moments during his oratorical tour through Europe in 1987, would shape public understandings of freedom, democracy, and market-place economics on a global scale. Engaging citizens from vastly disparate economic, social, and political circumstances in an international conversation about governing practices and ideologies. I argue that Reagan's speech effectively brokered a form of ideological negotiation between communism and democracy that can be understood as three simultaneously overlapping handshakes between the United States and West Berlin, East and West Berlin, and the Soviet Union and the United States. I elaborate the notion of the handshake as a rhetorical metaphor for understanding Reagan's sophisticated diplomatic approach at the Brandenburg Gate. Namely, he morally condemned what he saw as the "evil" of the Soviet Union while insisting on a coordinated negotiation of peaceful arms reduction and nuclear de-escalation. I maintain that recourse to the positional and identificatory dimensions of the handshake metaphor might aid critics in attending to the complexities of Reagan's "pragmatic and principled" rhetoric at the Brandenburg Gate.

The handshake as metaphor calls on critics to attend to the body's role in crafting meaningful political gestures and situations. Centering rhetorical analysis on bodily metaphor means investigating the embedded and sedimented figures of speech that govern attitudes and orientations toward politics while appearing ideologically neutral or

non-metaphorical. Diplomatic negotiations involve sprawling national interests, alliances, political attitudes, and ideological tenants embodied in the discourse of representative officials. The handshake is a moment where these diffuse concerns crystallize in the gestural exchange between two embodied figures identifying themselves and negotiating for relative position or stature. Any rhetorical critic's analysis of body rhetoric and diplomacy remains incomplete if it does not approach the handshake as a gesture that mutually delineates the style, identity, and embodied difference of political actors.

Metaphor and Gesture in Reagan's Cold War Rhetoric

Rhetorical confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States adopted exceedingly unfamiliar and diverse forms during the Cold War. Often times, rhetoric on both sides of the political spectrum in the United States manifested with vitriolic and divisive characteristics. Robert Ivie identifies the dehumanizing effects of metaphors that Reagan and his contemporaries (conservative and liberal alike) regularly employed to advance their own interpretations of the conflict and its strategic imperatives. He engages in a Burkean reading of Cold War tropes. Ultimately, Ivie reads such tropes as “[t]erms [that] compete with one another to dominate the hierarchy of meaning by which our interpretations of political experience, and ultimately our political acts, are guided. There is no natural hierarchy of meaning, but our eventual choice of a master metaphor determines what we regard at any moment as the literal over the figurative.”⁴ In doing so, Ivie carves out space for rhetorical criticism that examines the explicit and implicit work of metaphor in structuring the political frameworks that would determine individual's perspectives on the ideological combat of Cold War leaders. For Ivie, the force of metaphor lay in its cyclical potential for literalizing and “deliteralizing” the terms of identification against opposing political systems as an animalistic or “savage” threats.⁵

Such threats were unpredictable, irrational, and morally irredeemable.⁶ In effect, rhetorical appeals to dehumanizing metaphors articulated *actual* violence as inevitable or ethically sanctioned.

Leaders used metaphor in the Cold War to legitimate as well as condemn political figures and their actions. Jennifer L. Milliken argues that Lyndon B. Johnson metaphorically personified the United States as a person engaged in world politics with other personified nations where the war in Vietnam and other engagements “are treated as occasions for demonstrations of excellence and opportunities for winning and losing personal honor.”⁷ Constructing the United States as a “physical entity” embeds a concern for status, honor, and prestige in the conduct of American diplomacy among “a community of states.”⁸ The handshake is a vital and implicit metaphor in the context of personified international affairs where stature and prestige often determine the power relations between actors who are constantly engaged in gestures of identification and negotiation.

Extending Ivie’s use of metaphors, I argue that the handshake as a metaphor helps to explain the ways Reagan negotiated competing ideological tensions. I locate the handshake as a metaphorical gesture occupying territory in-between the competition of “containment and liberation” for narrative authority and political legitimacy, more akin to what Ivie calls “a realistic rhetoric of coexistence.”⁹ I take my cue from Ivie when he writes:

The value of locating underlying metaphors is in revealing their limits or untapped potential as sources of invention, something that is far more difficult to accomplish when a generating term is allowed to operate without being explicitly acknowledged as such. Speakers lose sight of alternatives when they become accustomed to routine extensions of images no longer serving their original purposes. Stripping away the outer layers of literalized metaphors exposes them to closer scrutiny and possible reconstruction.¹⁰

The stakes for parsing out the unstated metaphorical material of political rhetoric are clear. Identifying and interrogating the conceptual framework and embedded figurative elements of Cold War rhetoric opens up the possibilities of invention and reconstitution to critics wishing to analyze the processes of recognition (and misrecognition) that attend normative political discourse and the moral judgments it spawns. Ivie contends that George Kennan's denunciations were actually projections of his own personal struggle with chronic illness into a political scene that he interpreted through the lens of his own bodily suffering. The repressive metaphorical frame that Kennan spawned, from his own bodily experience, foreclosed Soviet figures access to the terms of diplomatic recognition and legitimization by crafting an intrinsically negative and decivilizing image – viral disease.¹¹ Such recognition is the foundation for audience identification and, I argue, bound to the ritualized experience of the body and the gestures which it makes. U.S. Cold War discourse about the Soviet Union relied heavily on metaphors that portrayed Russian state actors as inhuman vehicles for evil and violence, if left unchecked.

Many rhetorical critics have paid the most attention to decivilizing Cold War metaphors that justified or reified the rationale behind war. Following the end of World War II, American "containment" rhetoric would rapidly escalate the stakes of ideological confrontation between democracy and communism. Ivie identifies the inextricable and early ties between the rhetoric of Soviet containment and the metaphor of a healthy body combatting disease,

As early as February 22, 1946, George Kennan's influential "long telegram" from Moscow had warned that world communism was like a "malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue." The Soviets themselves were characterized in the telegram as "neurotic," requiring the United States to treat its adversary in the manner of a "doctor" examining any "unruly and unreasonable individual."¹²

Kennan's urgent language and the vitriolic denunciations of president Truman set the stage for decades of posturing through metaphors of containment, paternity, vulnerability, and heroism. By advancing and maintaining this matrix of metaphoric terms and contexts, Truman "elevated difficulties with a former, albeit wary, ally into the realm of ideological conflict that was mythical in its essence... that economic sickness abroad might spread communism and war to the United States led to alarmist visions of the nation's adversary."¹³ Such metaphors warrant careful rhetorical analysis, not only because they remain some of the most effective discursive tools for demonizing an enemy and motivating warfare, but also because their longevity and consistent use risks embedding them in political discourse while shielding their symbolic effects from critical investigation. Repetition and institutionalization of decivilizing metaphors during the Cold War meant the entrenchment and reification of diametrical opposition between U.S. and Soviet leaders.

Commonly used metaphors often risk escaping critical analysis when they lose their abstract valence and take on a more literal presentation and reception. As their use becomes more regular and normalized, metaphors are accepted as the primary vehicle for articulating sentiments that permeate discourse without explicitly surfacing in one's language. Beer and Landtsheer observe that,

. . . world politics may be the implicit metaphors embedded in current phrases such as "balance of power" or "Cold War," which are easy to swallow without chewing. Such old metaphors are well-worn pathways in our neural networks: they may be so accepted that they are no longer considered to be metaphors. Older metaphors are so sedimented through time and use that we employ them unawares, draw on their accumulated cultural capital for persuasive power. They are like enthymemes, relying on the audience's knowledge of the missing term of the argument. They blindly and effortlessly move on an ocean of convention, conformity, majority usage, habit, and opinion until they are called out.¹⁴

The effects of metaphor are constitutive and not always transparently available for analysis. They shape reality insofar as language provides access to the world of sense, perception, and action. Dick Gregg understands the bodily effects of metaphor in relation to individual understandings of self and context, it is “a cognitive process that shapes the scheme by which we come to structure and know ourselves and the environments in which we live. It provides us with the schema and orderings that make sense of our experiences.”¹⁵

Sedimented metaphorical pathways for rendering experience intelligible can exert force on how we grasp the world. Thus, “as constitutive metaphors increasingly become fixed in meaning and tragic in orientation, a play of similarities and differences gives way to the reification of categories and identities, as if metaphorical vehicle and tenor were no longer commenting on and interacting with each other but instead one had become a proper name and the other its clear, correct, and stable referent.”¹⁶ At stake in the metaphors that frame our experience and express our perceptions is our very identity and the possibility of meaningful exchange.

The handshake is a thoroughly sedimented metaphor of transaction and negotiation. It persists as a trope that frames almost every modern discourse ranging from business exchanges, political debates, informal or formal greetings, and uncountable other domains of human interaction. I will elaborate a model of handshake-as-metaphor to pull this gesture from its obscured and embedded seat in political discourse and acknowledge its vital role in structuring and framing diplomatic rhetoric. The handshake cuts to the core of metaphorical meaning-making. For Leslie A. Hahner, metaphorical tropes “serve an ontological and epistemological function – a mode representation that is repeated across culture such that it becomes a way of organizing and constituting human

expression and knowledge.”¹⁷ Whatever the context, the handshake is a gesture between multiple parties “predicated on twisting and turning meaning and signification” that sits at the nexus of exchange across the differences of culture, tradition, experience, language, and bodies.¹⁸ Analyzing presidential discourse through the metaphor of the handshake exposes the “schematic” value of metaphoric rhetoric as the incorporation of bodies into the “twisting and turning” motions of signification.

The handshake is a vital metaphor for grasping the complex networks of identification that Reagan consistently weaved into his political rhetoric. As a metaphor, the handshake negotiates the complexities of Soviet foreign policy flexibly – allowing Reagan to decry the “Evil Empire” while accomplishing broader diplomatic objectives. Travis Cram locates Reagan’s national security policies as a both/and framework for identification with and against the Soviets. The “both/and” structure depicts Reagan’s pragmatic foreign policy approach to achieving principled objectives as a unique dualism couched in Reagan’s perception of his own role as that of a ‘truth-teller.’¹⁹ For Cram, the consequence of this truth-telling mentality is a grand strategy that refuses the forced choice of the “security dilemma” under a realist interpretation of international politics.²⁰ This sentiment regarding interstate contestation directly echoes the structure of Reagan’s language in Berlin, “East and West do not mistrust each other because we are armed; we are armed because we mistrust each other.”²¹ Reagan’s formulation here functions as a chiasmus – grasping the presumed security relationship of realism (mistrust/anarchy premised on military capability) and inverting it to display the structural logic underpinning the entire nuclear arms race. Such a reformulation constitutes a rhetorical intervention in the normatively realist terms of identification and recognition practiced by both the United States and Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. In performing this

intervention, Reagan stages his speech at the Brandenburg Gate as a metaphorical gesture that invites a multiplicity of fragmented audiences to participate in a fundamental reconstitution of the Cold War and its state-based actors' identities.

The First Handshake: Berlin and the World

Reagan opens his address at the Brandenburg Gate by thanking his hosts and touching on the motivation for American presidents to speak in Berlin. Beginning from a consideration of duty and emotions bound to Berlin as a place, Reagan situates his rhetoric in the legacy of President John F. Kennedy's historic "Ich Bin Ein Berliner" speech. In a similar vein to President Kennedy's declaration, Reagan invokes the composer Paul Lincke and states "wherever I go whatever I do: Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin. [I still have a suitcase in Berlin]." ²² This statement echoes Kennedy's own German statement and establishes a structure of recognition that binds a key element of Reagan's position (as president) to the citizens of Berlin via a shared history of "courage and determination."

By articulating the U.S. president and the people of Berlin as bound the same historical course, Reagan offers his recognition of the sacrifice and willpower the Germans have displayed in serving as the literal and figurative vanguard against the encroachment of communism. Reagan identifies Berlin's struggle against political and territorial division with his own struggle against the global immorality of the Soviet Union. Reagan and Berlin share this inheritance and hold this ideological battle in common. For Reagan, democracy is an incorporative and participatory historical force embodied by the people of Berlin and the Americans who join them in the struggle against Soviet communism.

The president proceeds to expand the scope of this identificatory structure to encompass the entire world. He pivots to discuss the imposing Berlin Wall and says

Standing before the Brandenburg Gate, every man is a German, separated from his fellow men. Every man is a Berliner, forced to look upon a scar. President von Weizsacker has said, "The German question is open as long as the Brandenburg Gate is closed." Today I say: As long as the gate is closed, as long as this scar of a wall is permitted to stand, it is not the German question alone that remains open, but the question of freedom for all mankind. Yet I do not come here to lament. For I find in Berlin a message of hope, even in the shadow of this wall, a message of triumph."²³

Reagan's statements function as a handshake insofar as he embodies the commensurability and commonness of Berlin's struggle with all people's struggle for recognition as a valid and legitimate political agent. Reagan's identification with the people of Berlin is an initial point of contact for the German audience listening to the speech. His message of "hope" and "triumph" cement's the president's warmth and good will for the city of Berlin and its citizens. That optimistic message, in the face of uncertainty and fear, constitutes Reagan's first metaphorical handshake.

By approaching the question of German self-determination and "freedom" simultaneously, Reagan stages a transactional moment of mutual recognition and identification. He displays a grasp of the immense struggle that the people of Berlin faced as a result of externally and arbitrarily imposed separation. This understanding plainly displays the president's geopolitical priorities and diplomatic perspective for the German people to grasp in return. Reagan's handshake is narrative. He articulates the fate of global democracy and the fate of Berlin's reunification as inextricably linked realities which the president and the Germans embody. Their very persistence in the face of adversity is a gesture toward the resilience and strength of democratic principles – namely, the virtue of "freedom."

Freedom is the primary theme underlying Reagan's metaphorical handshake between Berlin and the world. This freedom symbolized not only the Germans' right to reunify as one Berlin, but more crucially symbolized the potentially uninhibited capacity to participate in democracy and deliberate on their own political identity. For Reagan, the people of Berlin embodied proof, "before the entire world," that "[f]reedom leads to prosperity. Freedom replaces the ancient hatreds among nations with comity and peace. Freedom is the victor."²⁴ In Reagan's address, the citizens of Berlin greet the world as free people – shaking hands with a global community of democratic nations.

The Second Handshake: East and West Berlin

The thematic of reunification of East and West Berlin is vital to Reagan's address as a coherent expression of moral and political sentiment. His insistence on the inevitability and centrality of a singular and united Berlin to the sustainability of the European security arrangement grounds the speech's historical magnitude and moral poignancy. He addresses his words not just to the people of West Berlin but states also, "To those listening throughout Eastern Europe, a special word: Although I cannot be with you, I address my remark to you just as surely as to those standing here before me. For I join you, as I join your fellow countrymen in the West, in this firm, this unalterable belief: Es gibt nur ein Berlin. [There is only one Berlin.]"²⁵ Citing Paul Ricoeur, Leslie A. Hahner contends that the rhetorical function of metaphor "works by crafting relations of similarity based on difference. Holding similarity and difference in tension allows for new meanings and significations."²⁶ Reagan effectively sustains the tension of similarity and difference manifested by the wall's division of the city and its people by drawing

attention to the physical/territorial difference of a singular people who share a cultural and historical inheritance.

Reagan simultaneously elevates the physical dimension of the Berlin Wall as a “cut” in the landscape, while downplaying its capacity for separating a spiritually united population. Reagan’s articulation of solidarity with a united Berlin hinges on the language of “join[ing].” The visual metaphor employed to convey the struggle for reunification is the wall itself as a mental and physical barrier to a Europe that can fully join itself in access to freedom and democracy. For Reagan, the wall transcends the purposes of territorial demarcation and regulation to “have imprinted this brutal division of a continent upon the mind of the world.”²⁷ In this way, Reagan’s reference to a “joined” Berlin in spite and “triumph” over the “totalitarian presence that refuses to release human energies or aspirations” to establish hope for a literal and figurative return to a whole Berlin.²⁸

Within the metaphorical framework of this second handshake the Soviet Union is figured as a decidedly immoral and “backwar[d]” violence. The Soviets are represented, not as an entity, but as a barrier and “scar” that imposes itself on Berlin and the European continent.²⁹ Such a division serves a crucial rhetorical function for Reagan as it allows him to position the ideological conflict between “freedom” and “totalitarianism” in a historical narrative -- “ultimate victory over the Soviets and other totalitarians was inevitable because totalitarian systems deny the fundamental nature of what it means to be human.”³⁰ Under the framework of Berlin-reunification, freedom signifies the capacity for the citizens of Berlin to engage in a mutual recognition of their similarities and differences outside of the forced territorial division that the Soviets have imposed on the European landscape and psyche. Reagan’s gesture to a unified Berlin and a unified

Europe is a call for the divided people to shake hands, to meet each other at the site of their physical separation and overcome their scars in recognition of their common humanity.

The Third Handshake: Reagan and Gorbachev

Reagan and his speechwriters organized the speech at the Brandenburg Gate so that it would address several audiences simultaneously, and engage vastly different groups of people in a shared reflection on the democratic virtues of civic life. This organization entailed mobilizing a precise set of rhetorical embodiments and metaphors to achieve a singular objective – shedding light on Soviet injustices and abuses of power. Rowland and Jones divide Reagan’s address at the Brandenburg Gate into two discrete sections dealing primarily with “means and ends” respectively. On my read, the first two handshakes occupy the portion of the speech dealing with means. The president’s insistence on continental reunification and global identification with Berlin’s struggle against totalitarian division locates the overarching objective of freedom’s spread in the facilitation properly recognizing the innate humanity of arbitrarily separated people. The feasibility of such recognition and freedom pivoted entirely on Reagan’s famous demand to the Soviet Chairman Mikhail Gorbachev – “tear down this wall.” The third handshake consists in Reagan extending a set of tangible political actions as conditions for the de-escalation of moral criticism and nuclear brinksmanship.

Without Reagan’s direct appeal to the Soviet leader, the prior discussion of Berlin’s separation and misrecognition would be inert symbolic material – a simple articulation of static conditions without hope for an alternative situation. By shifting the focus of his metaphorical and literal contestation of the Berlin Wall to Gorbachev,

Reagan articulates a dynamic vision for actively bringing the freedom of movement and political decision to the disenfranchised people languishing under Soviet totalitarianism.

Reagan's former advisor, Edwin Meese III, claims that the president saw something unique in Gorbachev and from the early stages of his administration sought to establish a special relationship with the Soviet leader. From Meese's perspective,

Reagan himself became a friend of Gorbachev. He knew Gorbachev remained a dedicated Communist, but he thought that the Soviet leader was different from his predecessors in sincerely wanting a better relationship with the Free World and in understanding many of the fallacies of Marxism-Leninism. Reagan frequently observed that Gorbachev was the first Soviet leader he had known who did not seek the establishment of a one-world Communist state. Reagan also felt that, although Gorbachev was not necessarily a believer, deep down the Soviet leader was influenced by his Christian upbringing.³¹

For Reagan, and others in his administration, Gorbachev represented the promise of a security relationship with the Soviet Union that might transcend antagonism and aspire to open cooperation. In the second half of the Brandenburg Gate speech, Reagan organized his moral denouncement of the Soviet Union and hopes for the negotiation of a more peaceful and secure world around the symbolic gesture of inviting Gorbachev to remove the Berlin Wall.

Peter Robinson's account of the drafting process for Reagan's address at the Brandenburg Gate attests to the immense power and authenticity of Reagan's speech. Robinson adapted Reagan's most memorable call from the words of a family in West Berlin that hosted him for dinner and voiced their frustration with living next to a barrier that separated them from their loved ones. Confronted with the physical scope of the wall and its exhausting toll on the people of Berlin, Robinson was determined to craft an exhortation that was authentic to Reagan's voice and concern for the "truth." Over several weeks of drafting and revision, Robinson would face severe objections from national security agencies and advisors on the language in his speech. The State

Department and National Security Council specifically disapproved of the “tear down this wall” line as overly direct and confrontational. Robinson felt that these recommendations to change the speech “ignored the question of human agency altogether” and “were saying . . . that the President could go right ahead and issue a call for the destruction of the wall—but only if he employed language so vague and euphemistic that everybody could see right away he didn’t mean it.” Robinson isolates the most distinct and determinative quality of Reagan’s rhetorical style as “his insistence on telling the truth.” In the language of metaphor, the organizing principle of Reagan’s address is the advancement of truth as a final authority on the historical shifts Berlin was undergoing. The truth is almost always contested in diplomatic contexts. Leaders establish ideologically motivated political perspectives that vie for popular support and public recognition. In Reagan’s Cold War context, telling the truth would mean rhetorically gesturing toward the preeminence and authority of his own perspective in the ideological clash between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In calling for Gorbachev to tear down the wall, Reagan fused his insistence on mutual arms reduction negotiations and the implementation of domestic social reforms in the Soviet Union to the physical gesture of reunification. To urge Soviet action, Reagan made international recognition of Soviet reformism contingent on the removal of the wall as “one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace.”³² At Brandenburg, Reagan regularly employed the metaphor of the “negotiating table” to stress the imperativeness of maintaining U.S. security commitments. The metaphor encouraged Soviet cooperation from a “position of strength.” In fact, Reagan and Gorbachev had met at the negotiating table before, in Reykjavik during a summit in 1986. Their meeting was a public spectacle

and featured a collaborative discussion on arms control that famously unraveled when Gorbachev made Soviet cooperation contingent on the Americans discontinuing the Strategic Defense Initiative. Still, the summit in Reykjavik evidenced the emergence of radical new possibilities for the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Fundamentally, Reagan's urgent call for Gorbachev to act and tear down the Berlin Wall was a gesture toward the recognition of a common concern for freedom. Rowland and Jones depict the president's mentality as demanding material change, "While others treated glasnost and perestroika as indicating fundamental change was occurring in the Soviet system, in the Brandenburg Gate address Reagan treated those policies as mere window dressing until and unless the Soviets provided tangible evidence of reform, such as removing the Berlin Wall."³³ Hollow reforms that could be reversed or engineered to hide imperialist schemes on the part of the Soviets were insufficient from Reagan's perspective. For the rhetorical and symbolic dimension of the Cold War to shift into a domain of negotiation or cooperation, actual signs of progress needed to occur.

Metaphorical Transformations and Problems of Recognition

Reagan often influenced the public reception of his diplomatic meetings with Gorbachev by framing and contextualizing their negotiations. This became a particularly effective tactic with Gorbachev's exceeding concern for international opinion, driving him to set reforms in motion to recuperate the Soviet Union's "image" following Reagan's denunciations around the Reykjavik summit.³⁴ By explicating a prosperous Soviet-U.S. relationship as contingent on reforms and visible progress, Reagan effectively pointed to the history of Soviet humanitarian abuse as the justification for

mistrust and stalled negotiations over nuclear disarmament. At the Brandenburg Gate, Reagan carried the logic of this justification to the global context of embattled communist and democratic forces. He presented the wall as an opportunity for Gorbachev and the Soviets to display concrete signs of improvement and begin to re-shape their global image. The handshake as metaphor signifies an opportunity to display difference and reconfigure relationships through the visual schematization of diplomatic exchange where two political figures meet each other. In Berlin and Reykjavik, Reagan predicated the opportunity for Soviets to improve their human rights image on their willingness to meet the America in a gesture of good will – humanitarian reform.³⁵

In his interview with Martin J. Medhurst, Anthony R. Dolan refers to the Soviet Union as a criminal enterprise and insists that Reagan’s dualistic approach to arms reduction was rooted in Reagan using the same assessment. Dolan sized up liberal critics as detractors without a grasp on the Soviet mentality who thought that “if you said the Soviet Union was an Evil Empire, you couldn’t negotiate with them. And Reagan made the point, in any number of speeches, that far from hindering negotiations, that sort of candor assisted them, in part, because he was dealing with a criminal psyche. The Soviet regime was a criminal one, and when you are dealing with criminals, and people who are involved in an evil enterprise, the one thing that really does frighten them is the ability of others to see them as they see themselves.”³⁶ The notion of the rhetorical handshake indicates that there might be more at play in Reagan’s approach to negotiating with the Soviets than a diagnosis of criminal mentality. Indeed, Reagan recognized a complex and diffuse rhetorical situation in Berlin that called for some truly heavy discursive lifting. Rather than supplying the world with an upfront refusal of communism and the Soviet Union, yet again, as an “Evil Empire” destined for the “ash heap,” Reagan insisted on the

powerful potential for cooperation and recognition that dwelled in that historic moment before the Brandenburg Gate.

In calling on Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall, Reagan enacted a process of recognition that may have threatened the Soviets with the possibility of exposing their true face to the world. Rowland and Jones note that the hostility of Soviet media outlets' response to the Brandenburg Gate speech indicates that the president "hit a nerve" of sorts.³⁷ Yet, the rhetorical handshake as metaphor would seem to indicate that Reagan's appeals to the people of East and West Berlin, East and West Europe, and the leadership of the Soviet Union began much more humbly, as genuine gestures toward the promise of a future with more security, fewer nuclear weapons, and more freedom on a global scale. Rather than enacting a foreign policy of skepticism and doubt concerning the Soviet commitment to broad social, economic, and military reform, Reagan's speech in Berlin provided space in the discourse of freedom and democracy for the Soviets to meet the Americans (literally and figuratively) at the wall. The historical consequences of such a meeting were monumental. Rather than accommodating expansionist Soviet desires, Reagan's adamant insistence on negotiating a coordinated effort to preserve peace despite foundational and principled disagreement with the morality of the Soviet Union would produce a geopolitical context where the recognition of freedom, as a commonly human desire, could undermine the theoretical and economic foundations of the Soviet world.

In his speech at Moscow State University in 1988, Reagan would clarify the stakes of identification between Americans and the citizens of the Soviet Union. Rowland and Jones contend that Reagan emphasized a Russian literary and artistic tradition of "ideological first principles" that located a shared desire for freedom and liberty in common amongst the people of the Soviet Union and United States.³⁸ Following the

argument of Roland and Jones, we might understand Reagan's overt identification with the spirit of liberty and democracy he perceived in the people of the Soviet Union as the president making good on the promise of recognition that he articulated at the Brandenburg Gate and in so many other venues throughout the tumultuous final years of the Cold War.

CHAPTER THREE

Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin, and Tropes

Tropes are the name given to the interconnected logic of identity and difference. They help integrate new phenomena into pre-existing systems of knowledge and categorization via the discursive identification of difference. Aristotle's formulation of metaphor reveals a productive tension driving the identificatory work of tropes. Having elsewhere established the role of gesture and metaphor in the communicative labor of the president, I turn to tropes to examine the *transposition* of discursive value achieved via the handshake as a 'figure' of exchange and recognition under the rhetorical constraints of economics and politics. In this paper, I seek to locate the tropological function of the handshake, as a metaphorical and figurative gesture at the symbolic core of President Trump's foreign policy and diplomatic conduct with world leaders who are hostile toward the United States and its interests.

I isolate the rhetorical function of tropes given that figural speech and the rhetor's body are inextricably bound. For Ricoeur, "The very expression 'figure of speech' implies that in metaphor, as in the other tropes or turns, discourse assumes the nature of a body by displaying forms and traits which usually characterize the human face, man's 'figure'; it is as though the tropes gave to discourse a quasi-bodily externalization. By providing a kind of figurability to the message, the tropes make discourse appear."¹ I argue that the handshake embodies and concretizes the discourse circulating around Trump's meetings with Kim Jong Un, supreme leader of North Korea, and Russian President Vladimir Putin. In the scene of international politics, the handshake figures

political actors as subject to an overtly symbolic negotiation of relative position and legitimacy along the lines of bodily metaphor. While it may be the case, with Trump, that “he views handshakes as a struggle for dominance” my concern in this paper lies in extracting a tropological framework of gesture and signification from the *appearance* of Trump’s embodied acts of symbolic exchange with historically combative foreign officials.²

The importance of interrogating the tropological functions of Trump’s handshake is accentuated by the stakes of his recent acts of international relations. Trump’s summit with Kim Jong Un, on June 11th 2018, was framed by uncertainty and simmering tensions in the geopolitical circumstances of the United States and North Korea. The diplomatic tumult surrounding North Korea’s nuclear program is familiar, dating back to Soviet efforts to buttress Kim Il Sung’s military capabilities and the construction of North Korea’s first nuclear reactor (“a small one designed for industrial research”) in 1965.³ Wrapped up in the negotiation of material possibilities and geopolitical directions for a nuclear-capable North Korean state are a myriad of intricately interwoven security commitments, international legal regimes, ideological contestations, and existential uncertainties. Taken as a whole, competing security interests and ideologically-fueled claims to nuclear legitimacy constitute a “fragile diplomatic dance” between two diametrically opposed political entities.⁴ Trump himself denounced North Korea and Kim Jong Un with vitriolic fervor before the United Nations in 2017, famously referring to Kim as “Rocket Man” and threatening to “totally destroy” North Korea in the event that they posed a military threat to standing US security commitments.⁵ I approach the Trump-Kim handshake as a metaphorical negotiation of power relations during “the most dramatic – and dangerous – moment of Trump’s presidency so far.”⁶ Comparing Trump’s

discursive approach to Kim Jong Un with established practices of nuclear legitimization reveals the structural importance of gesture in the negotiation of relative geopolitical position and stature.

Similarly, President Trump's conduct *vis-à-vis* Russian President Vladimir Putin warrants a rhetorical analysis of the handshake as trope so that we might interrogate the figural gestures at the core of Trump's diplomatic calculus. Domestically, Trump's highly-visible sympathies for Putin generated an official response from congress "that would not only codify executive branch sanctions into law, but would force President Donald Trump – and any other president in the future – to consult Congress before suspending or terminating economic sanctions on Moscow. The bill passed 419-3 in the House and 98-2 in the Senate..."⁷ Russian hackers exploited the American "free-market disposition not to regulate forms of expression and channels of political communication" to wage a "cyber war" that exposed millions of Americans to misinformation and exaggerations that directly favored President Trump's candidacy.⁸ Amid exceedingly certain allegations that Russia meddled in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Trump's displays of support for Vladimir Putin have appeared with consistency and commitment from the U.S. administration – regularly expressing optimism for "a very good relationship with President Putin" and defending Putin with the belief that he "really feels, and he feels strongly, that he did not meddle in our election."⁹

Given the consistency of Trump's discourse on Putin and his intentions, staging highly visible handshakes between himself and the Russian president may appear as an obvious effort to publicly coordinate a gesture that would evince "a very good relationship." My analysis challenges the apparent character of this assessment and identifies a structural logic of exchange and governance at play in the tête-à-tête between

two of the most powerful heads-of-state in the world. Recourse to a notion of tropes that privileges the structuring importance of bodily movement in the transposition of discursive value under political economy is vital to my taking up Trump and Putin as *figures* of ideological condensation. In other words, by analyzing the commonplace gestures that President Trump uses to physically comport himself to Vladimir Putin, one can examine the motions of identification which characterize the bodily rhetoric of both presidents.

Epiphora: Transposition and Exchange in Rhetoric

A rhetorical focus on tropes can carry an economic and/or political valence. Lundberg reads Lacan's work with rhetoric to elaborate a "generative" understanding of tropes as the genus of "all signs and representations."¹⁰ For Lundberg, the tropological character of signification and representation is confirmed in their "metonymically connecting a signifier or representation with the thing that the signifier or representation stands in for (a word with a thing) and with other signs or representations (a word or concept with another word or concept) that sit together in a field of discourse."¹¹ This metonymic function is not a matter of mere identification or even recognition, but constitutes the maintenance of an "affective econom[y]" through a particular mode of discursive *investment* (on the part of rhetor and audience alike).¹² Following Lundberg's reasoning one might extract an understanding of tropes efficaciousness derived from their contingently deduced regulatory function: "the link between public affinity and public affects is not so much a question of a theory of *the* public as a sphere, set of structures, or normative procedures, as it is a question of the tropes organizing the *practices* and *investments* that underwrite identitarian relations between strangers in *specific* publics."¹³

Tropes function as sites of affective investment and practice that organize subjectivity in a relational field of publicly constituted identities.

Applying this notion of tropologically regulated relations to Trump's handshake, I arrive at a worthwhile conclusion regarding intentionality. Materialist interest in the role that gesture and bodily rhetoric play in Trump's diplomatic technique or style would be best served by avoiding the cumbersome problematic of the President's *intentional* investment in particular tropes or metaphors that express a particular identity. Rather, rhetorical critics should approach a tropological analysis of Trump's gestures by identifying the instances of 'communicative labor' that are publicly imbued with value where:

The critical question is not *how* did that identity become *internalized*? as if internalization were a process or a mechanism that might be descriptively reconstructed. Rather, the question is: From what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? In what language is "inner space" figured? What kind of figuration is it, and through what figure of the body is it signified? How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depths?¹⁴

Butler's problematization of critique premised on the interiority/exteriority split prompts an understanding of the regulatory/managerial force of tropes which privileges the identificatory push/pull of *figure* and *position*. In the articulation of a publicly recognizable identity, rhetoric *figures* discourse as "a quasi-bodily externalization."¹⁵

For Ricoeur, tropes work via the figuration of discourse. In Aristotle's taxonomy of rhetoric, Ricoeur attributes the specificity and refinement of Aristotle's classification of metaphor as incorporative of tropes:

[M]etaphor is something that happens to the noun. . . Aristotle's definition contains *in nuce* the theory of tropes, or figures of speech that focus on the word. Certainly, confining metaphor among *word-focused figures of speech* will give rise to an extreme refinement in taxonomy. It will, however, carry a high price: it becomes impossible to recognize a certain homogeneous functioning that (as Roman Jakobson will show) ignores the difference between word and discourse

and operates at all the strategic levels of language – words, sentences, discourse, texts, styles.¹⁶

Here, the strategic element of figural discourse appears in the definition of metaphor and its effects—in Ricoeur's case these effects are confined to influencing "*the noun*." He tracks the consequences of metaphor on the noun with his reading of Aristotle's second characteristic of metaphor. Ricoeur invokes the Greek notion of *epiphora* to depict the paradoxical kernel of metaphorical "*movement*."¹⁷ Thus, *epiphora* is a movement in the meaning of discourse "from...to...."¹⁸ In other words, metaphor involves the *transposition* of terms. Such a transposition "designates change of meaning as such" for "all linguistic entities."¹⁹ *Epiphora* is the movement and transformation of discourse's meaning through figural exchanges that transact and negotiate the signs and representations that articulate *position* through the *figure* of metaphor.

In rhetoric, *epiphora* is taken from Aristotle in two ways. The more literal interpretation of *epiphora* as a rhetorical device involves the repetition of a clause or sentence with the substitution of a different noun across repetitions. In contrast, Ricoeur reads *epiphora* as a figurative transfer of discursive value and meaning. In any case, *epiphora* is pivotal to the definition and function of metaphor. In Aristotle's *Poetics* metaphor is the "movement [*epiphora*] of an alien [*allotrios*] name from either genus to species or from species to genus or from species to species or by analogy."²⁰ Because *epiphora* designates *movement* in a physical or kinetic sense, Aristotle effectively deploys the metaphor of physical movement to define and depict the movement of language, meaning "the very word 'metaphor' is metaphoric because it is borrowed from another order than that of language."²¹ Concomitant with the transference of meaning that inheres in *epiphora*, is the unique *position* from which metaphors unfold:

Another reason why epiphora is a “metaphor of metaphoricity” (i.e., appropriately inappropriate) is because it gives the impression that in using a metaphor such as “*the light of reason*” I am “conferring in addition” light upon reason rather than its having been there all along, both of which are necessarily true. Like the illicit union of an adulterous couple, the tryst is assumed not to have occurred because it has not yet been discovered.²²

Epiphora is a movement *between* terms that is enunciated from *within* this movement of resemblance and difference. The effects of *epiphora* are contingently reliant on the invention and discovery of new meanings that can only appear within the tropological comparison of terms, identities, and differences.

The movement of *epiphora* appears with greater clarity through the spatial metaphor of distance. For Ricoeur, “It is as though a change of distance between meanings occurred within a logical space. The *new* pertinence or congruence proper to a meaningful metaphoric utterance proceeds from the kind of semantic proximity which suddenly obtains between terms in spite of their distance.”²³ Metaphors express the transfer of meaning and value between disparate positions *within a field* of relational identities. The closing movement of epiphora is asymptotic: two discrete linguistic trajectories approach a hypothetical meeting point - a total exchange of content, an inversion of terms, and the resolution of difference - while sustaining their inherent spatial identity. For Philip Wheelwright, metaphor is split into the motions *epiphora* and *diaphora*, where *epiphora* is “standing for the outreach and extension of meaning through comparison and *diaphora* is “the creation of new meaning by juxtaposition and synthesis.”²⁴ Reading Aristotle, Ricoeur resolves his understanding of metaphorical movement through the lens of distance, “What Aristotle called the *epiphora* of the metaphor, that is, the transfer of meaning, is nothing else than this move or shift in the logical distance, from the far to the near.”²⁵ The handshake is an embodied trope of meeting that signifies a communicative exchange between two actors whose positions are

closing in distance. Handshakes are a commonplace gesture premised on the repetition of movements that symbolize the attitudes and dispositions that circulate between two entities. Implicit in the structural logic of the handshake is a mutual recognition of status, by shaking the other person's hand we acknowledge that each of us is party to a symbolic relationship that is being physically negotiated. International politics is the turbulent global scene where national identities are figured in the diplomatic relationships of representational actors who embody and express the interests of their respective countries and communities. Thus, we might understand international diplomacy as the discursive field in which Trump, Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin, and all national leaders seek a distinctly recognized and honored identity.

An "Unprecedented" Handshake: Trump and Kim Jong Un

The June 2018 summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un was hailed by many as an historic and unprecedented act of diplomacy. The meeting between the two leaders constituted the first official diplomatic contact between Pyongyang and Washington since the 2009 failure of the Six-Party Talks agreement to denuclearize and re-enter the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), after which the North Korean government "stated that it would never return to the talks and is no longer bound by their agreements."²⁶ In the interim between the Six-Party Talks and Trump's meeting in 2018, North and South Korea both escalated threatening rhetoric and ratcheted up the frequency of military exercises and operations aimed at deterring or threatening each other.²⁷ Trump ostensibly broke from this volatile history of denunciations and disavowals to broach the ambiguous conditions of continued peace on the Korean Peninsula and the possibility of large-scale denuclearization in North Korea.

The meetings, which involved “hours of face-to-face contact” resulted in both leaders agreeing to sign a “joint statement” which is “the first ever between a sitting American president and a North Korean leader.”²⁸ Still, the summit and President Trump drew criticism for failing to solidify any terms for verifying or facilitating denuclearization. Joseph Y. Yun, a former U.S. ambassador and Special Representative for North Korea, claimed “This is what North Korea has wanted from the beginning, and I cannot believe that our side allowed it.”²⁹ Recently, the Trump administration has revealed plans for a second summit with the North Korean leader as Pyongyang consistently cancels or refuses “lower-level diplomatic meetings that are necessary to draft a more complex agreement, pushing instead for a second Trump-Kim summit.”³⁰

The build-up to the meeting between Trump and Kim featured spectacular displays and photo-ops inflecting the relative positions of the two leaders and accentuating their embodied differences as heads of state. A rhetorical understanding of gesture is vital to mapping out the economy of tropes at play in staging the first Trump-Kim summit as a spectacle of negotiation and discursive exchange between a legitimated and delegitimated nuclear state. The singular objective of U.S. diplomatic engagement with North Korea, since the Communist nation’s nuclear ambitions became clear in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, has been the total denuclearization and securitization of the Korean Peninsula.³¹ While publicly claiming alignment with the over-arching U.S. commitment to denuclearization, in 2017 Trump consistently fueled the escalation of tensions with Pyongyang and broke from normative rhetorical practices of reproaching and rendering illegitimate the threat posed by hostile or emergent nuclear powers. While Trump’s volatile behavior signals a shift in the formal characteristics of “nuclear legitimation,” I contend that the content of Trump’s diplomatic rhetoric with Kim Jong

Un continues to perform value-laden gestures of legitimation from a distinct institutional position.

The logic of “Nuclear Legitimation” is pivotal to the diminishing rhetoric Trump employed to threaten against North Korean hostility, as well as the president’s ostensible about-face in facilitating direct diplomatic contact with Kim Jong Un. For O’Gorman and Hamilton, “nuclear legitimation” is a complex process that articulates “belief in the integrity of the systems and actors that constitute the nuclear-weapons organization.”³² In other words, the process of confirming the moral and value-based superiority of U.S. governance over nuclear weapons, their production, their deployment, and their use relies on the legitimating performance of “pivotal actors in these systems.” Such “pivotal actors” “have been national rulers, their agents and officials, technocratic and technological elites, and all those responsible for the *public* discursive processes that ‘manage’ public perceptions of nuclear weapons.”³³ O’Gorman and Hamilton posit the technocratic and externally-incomprehensible toil of American nuclear-interface operators as a series of legitimating gestures contrasting with “nuclear illegitimacy [that] is presented as a less-than-whole appropriation of modernity, a fractioning of modernity. Nuclear terrorists and rogue states are framed as marginal modems.”³⁴ The differentiation of legitimate and illegitimate nuclear capability is articulated as a “fractional” difference of “degrees” in operational competency, technological superiority, and deliberative rationality where “Nuclear danger...lay not in the massive proliferation of state-produced nuclear weapons in the Cold War, but in the refusal of certain state and all non-state actors to progress along the disciplinary path constructed by the West with regard to these dangerous technologies.”³⁵ From this gestural frame, an unwillingness to openly negotiate and abide by the technocratic discipline of Western standards for nuclear

conduct are grounds for the relative legitimization/delegitimization of nuclear actors. In dealing with North Korea, Trump's capacity for rhetorically legitimating his institutional position as the ultimate arbitrator of American nuclear force brushes up against his image and status as an 'outsider' to the traditionally technical, technological, and rationalizing discourse of institutional legitimation in Washington.

In 2017 and early-2018, President Trump initially responded to the complex and often confounding demands of nuclear diplomacy posed by North Korea with mocking insults and inflammatory provocations. Immersing himself in the turbulent waters of nuclear legitimacy discourse, Trump replied to Kim Jong Un's threatening claims that a nuclear launch button is "always on my table" by ratcheting up tensions over twitter, posting: "North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the 'Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.' Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!"³⁶ While it should be noted that Trump is factually inaccurate in suggesting he possesses a "Nuclear Button" (the actual "football" is a drastically more intricate and involved interface than the image of a "Button" involving several layers of secrecy, verification, personnel and strategy),³⁷ it is most significant to my analysis that Trump legitimates the U.S. nuclear deterrent on the grounds of apparent size and relative socio-economic stature, rather than the technical competency and fail-safe responsibility involved in the Executive process for committing to the use of nuclear weapons. Elsewhere Trump would dismiss North Korea's nuclear program as a failure and publicly refer to Kim Jong Un as "Little Rocket Man."³⁸ Repeatedly and across almost every diplomatic context, Trump chooses to articulate and consolidate his positional authority

by lambasting his opponents (and the nations they represent) with insults and praising himself (and the United States) with hyperbolic affirmations.³⁹

Trump's proposal of a summit with Kim Jong Un, and the subsequent meeting between the two leaders reveals the vital role of gesture in the President's approach to foreign policy. Trump himself overtly privileged appearance and position over the substance of negotiations that would take place during the summit: "'It's about attitude,' Trump said Thursday. 'It's about willingness to get things done.' In Trump's mind, tone and posture are so important that he predicted he would be able to determine Kim's level of seriousness about abandoning North Korea's nuclear weapons "within the first minute" of their meeting. 'My touch, my feel — that's what I do,' Trump said Saturday."⁴⁰ One can gather that Trump's approach to negotiation is tactile and embodied. The President relies on snap judgements about attitude, body language, and disposition to find an efficient path to claiming a 'win.' In this sense, Trump's diplomacy hedges on figurative rhetoric. His capacity for exerting pressure and presence in deliberative proceedings stems from his ability to *figure* perceived positional differences into ostensibly triumphant outcomes or 'deals.' Citing Cicero, Hawhee indicates that figural language speaks from the body via mutually informed practices of reading and performing "habituated action": "If, as Cicero says, the body talks through action – habituated action – then body reading, or the encounter with these actions, emerges as an important (and necessary) effect of such repetition. Such repetition, always in relation to the particular temporal and spatial situation, is therefore productive, insofar as it shapes reading practices and the imitative, repetitive practices that emerge as reading provoke desire for *sunousia*, for transformation by association."⁴¹ Pedagogical links between rhetoric and athletics tether to the body as a site of legitimate and authoritative

performance. The terms, standards, and expectations of bodily performance are habitually deduced according to the specific circumstances of the community that calls for performances of legitimation. Such performances are unthinkable without a consideration of the body and the expression of gestures that designate one's inclusion in the structural hierarchy of actors and powers at play in the community. The hierarchical order of a community finds expression in the disparately legitimated performances of its participants – such performances are the products of the habituated repetition of gestures and tropes. *Epiphora* is the transference of meaning and value achieved, to some extent, with each repetition of habituated gesture.

Epiphora is useful in attempting to trace the transpositional work the handshake trope achieves within the framework of Trump's tactile diplomacy. Rather than dismissing the tumultuous insult-trading that precipitated the 2018 summit as the immature posturing of two "Thin-skinned alphas,"⁴² one might approach Trump's initial handshake with Kim as a figurative displacement of heightened geopolitical tension into the positional requisites (two discrete entities meeting each other in discourse) of diplomatic negotiation. Trump himself is among the first to confirm the figural importance of his handshake with the North Korean leader. Almost a month later, on July 9th, Trump would tweet "I have confidence that Kim Jong Un will honor the contract we signed &, even more importantly, our handshake. We agreed to the denuclearization of North Korea. China, on the other hand, may be exerting negative pressure on a deal because of our posture on Chinese Trade-Hope Not!" Pyongyang would report "gangster-like" posturing on denuclearization and "extremely worrisome" outcomes from the Trump-summit.⁴³ Chaïm Perelman's insight on 'symbolic relation' illuminates the significance of Trump's appeal to the "honor" binding Kim Jong Un to their handshake:

Recourse, in argumentation, to the concept of honor is always bound up with the idea that the individual is the symbol of a group. Honor varies from group to group and, moreover, assumes a certain superiority of the group. If one speaks of the honor of the person, it is as a symbolic representative of mankind. Giving one's word of honor is not a reference to the value of the individual, but to his symbolic relation to the group.⁴⁴

The handshake, as a form of *epiphora*, is a trope of binding and transparent recognition.

Trump's explicit grasp on the rhetorical mechanics of symbolic reference and positionality remains beside the point. It is the privileged character of Trump's gesture and the statements he provides to frame that gesture, as a figure of negotiation and status-recognition, that warrants critical attention. What matters, rhetorically, is that the image of Trump and Kim Jong Un meeting each other's grip is figured as a moment of positional exchange. In the case of the June, 2018 summit the transposition of symbolic value occurs as an exchange of Kim's improved "attitude" and "willingness" toward negotiation for Trump's willingness to deal with the North Korean leader directly and personally in an internationally hyper-visible spectacle.

The material effects of the summit on the matters of denuclearization and the normalization of American relations with North and South Korea have yet to be settled, and admittedly appear bleak.⁴⁵ However, any materialist analysis of the diplomatic conditions that precipitated the outcome of the joint statements or the security arrangement on the Korean peninsula warrants attending to the structuring significance of the gestures and metaphors that positioned Trump and Kim Jong Un as international political figures possessing nuclear weapons capabilities of disparate 'legitimation.' The handshake does more than mark the meeting of two individuals, it is a pivotal gesture which indicates the structure and relative stature of political actors. In shaking hands officials vie for position and express their identity in an explicitly rhetorical and gestural sense.

Putin, Trump, and Their Gestures

Nearly every fragment of publicly available text from President Trump or Russian President Vladimir Putin concerning their relationship feels weighted with the unsettling presence of unspoken history. Beyond the strangely accommodating language that Trump used to describe his optimism for U.S.-Russia relations (in response to a barrage of urgent press questions about election meddling) the body language that Trump employed in Helsinki was confounding to many.⁴⁶ Trump consistently refuses to publicly address the question of Russian interference in the 2016 federal election to Putin, despite “holding the strongest hand we’ve had with a Russian president in a long time.”⁴⁷ Additionally, Trump’s direct and informal lines of communication with Putin flow freely, “Former officials acknowledge that Mr. Trump’s aides have given up trying to manage what he says to Mr. Putin in phone calls or meetings. Mr. Putin proposed the idea of a meeting in March during a call in which Mr. Trump ignored advice not to congratulate the Russian leader on his lopsided re-election victory and did not bring up Russia’s meddling in the American election.”⁴⁸ Trump cast doubt on the information provided to him about the 2016 election by the American intelligence community during the summit press conference when he was asked “if he believed his own intelligence agencies or the Russian president,” Trump displayed immense and accommodating deference “President Putin says it’s not Russia, I don’t see any reason why it would be.”⁴⁹ While the consensus amongst America’s allies grows that the ‘Trump Doctrine’ is premised on aggressive, selfish, and impulsive decision-making, and some officials inside the White House believe the President’s entire diplomatic outlook is best distilled to the phrase “We’re America, Bitch,” Trump has remained uncharacteristically accommodating to Russia and Putin.⁵⁰

Trump's motivations in so readily submitting to Putin's improbable or downright false⁵¹ defense against election interference remain a mystery. However, the summit in Helsinki was roundly criticized in *The Atlantic* as "The Worst Russia Blunder in 70 Years," as well as the words of former CIA Director John Brennan, who called Helsinki "nothing short of treasonous."⁵² Trump's many gestures during the Helsinki summit, including two drawn-out handshakes for the press, attest to the utterly bizarre aura surrounding the press conference held "after a roughly two-hour-long unrecorded one-on-one meeting with Trump and working lunch."⁵³ When it came time to brief the press on what had transpired during their face-to-face meeting, Trump "gave Putin a quick wink as the sounds of camera shutters filled the room. He deferred to Putin to speak first, extending his hand, and then nodded as he listened to the translation of Putin's remarks."⁵⁴ Trump displays a rare amount of deference and accommodation by giving up the floor to Putin—allowing him to speak the first word on their meeting.

As somewhat expected, analysis from "body-language experts" populated the news cycle. Many pundits and contributors attempted to reconstruct what might have transpired between the two powerful men, "no one knows what was said in the meeting between Trump and Putin. All we are left with is their little gestures and handshakes when they came out."⁵⁵ In a journalistic account of policy consequences and speculation over meeting content, gesture and posture provide some clues as to the substance of a partially disclosed relationship between individuals, institutions, and (figuratively) nations as well. The distinction to be made in directing rhetorical criticism toward the metaphorical value of gestures and symbolic tropes is primarily material. In rhetoric, at least for Kenneth Burke, gesture matters in so far as it is an expression and affectation of a perceived or desired attitude.⁵⁶ Following Hawhee and Burke's sense of identification

and attitude as bound to “bodily movement,”⁵⁷ we might read rhetorical gestures as disclosing the transpositional possibilities of metaphorical movement through practices that figure the bodies of interlocutors within fields of symbolic relation.

Trump’s playful gestures and generally accommodating behavior achieve heightened significance in the context of subsequent press coverage. Flaws and omissions in the official White House transcript of the press conference tell a strange story. Trump would later claim that his statement “President Putin says it’s not Russia, I don’t see any reason why it would be” was an error and he actually meant to say “wouldn’t.”⁵⁸ Even more bizarre the official White House transcript and video record of the press conference excluded the first half of Reuters journalist Jeff Mason’s question to Vladimir Putin: “President Putin, did you want President Trump to win the election and did you direct any of your officials to help him do that?” to which Putin replied “Yes, I did. Yes I did. Because he talked about bringing the US/Russia relationship back to normal.”⁵⁹ In its incomplete form this exchange would indicate Putin admitting to directing officials to help Trump without any reference to whether or not he wanted Trump to win. After more than a week the White House would correct the transcript and release a statement that the omission was “not malicious” and stemmed from audio-recording issues.⁶⁰ Regardless of the intentions and mistakes made in presenting the Helsinki summit to the press, the Trump administration’s actions cast the summit and its record in uncertain terms – muddling the domestic narrative of diplomatic reality.

While the press conference featured a formal handshake between Putin and Trump, their first shake occurred in an informal setting at the G20 summit in 2017. While world leaders circle about in what appears to be a large lobby area, Trump approaches Putin and grasps his right hand while playfully tapping Putin’s elbow with his left hand

finishing with a few friendly pats on Putin's back.⁶¹ Trump broadcasts a certain intimacy with the informal shake and several points of abnormally standard greeting, leading some journalists to comment on how uniquely "normal" the handshake appeared.⁶² Gestures verging on intimate and friendly make sense in the context of Trump's abnormally close relationship with Putin. It's known that Trump spoke with Putin over the phone from Camp David after G20, and during the summit itself insisted on an hour-long conversation behind closed doors with no one other than a Russian translator present – meaning there is still not an accessible record of what might have transpired for American consumption.⁶³

Returning to the consideration of *epiphora*, Trump's interactions with Putin display a unique approach to the positioning gestures of diplomatic engagement. Trump repeatedly deploys handshakes to unsettle, intimidate, and dominate other officials – deploying the handshake as "a weapon."⁶⁴ Yet, Putin receives preferential treatment and friendly demeanor. The difference across these gestural repetitions is a matter of disposition. Trump's attitude toward Putin is distinctly friendly and collegial, while his treatment of allies and employees is notoriously brutal. Trumps bodily engagement with Putin articulate a desire for a particular arrangement of position, respect, and recognition. Materialist rhetoric demands that critics equip themselves with the capacity for *reading* such gestures as expressions of possibility and stature in political relationships

Gesture, Judgement, Repetition

Handshakes, winks, and elbow tapping taken out of context are meaningless fragments of guttural bodily movement. Yet, placed in their appropriate context these gestures can be read as the products and performances of a relational encounter. For the

ancient Greeks, rhetoric and athletics were public practices that were linked by a pedagogical insistence on training the body for “*bodily production* a mutually constitutive struggle among bodies and surrounding forces.”⁶⁵ For Aristotle, the possibility of reading an individual’s performance as an ethical actor depends on the “habituated practice of reading the body” where “[w]e judge men’s characters, like their bodies, by their movements.”⁶⁶ When importing the ancient emphasis on bodily rhetoric into modern politics, it is vital that critics recognize the material status of gesture for the processes of diplomacy and international negotiation.

Gesture can be subtle or grand, diminishing or affirming, trusting or suspicious, and so many other things. In any and all cases gestures are habituated. We learn them over time as we perform them and see others perform them. This means that the value and purpose we attribute to gestures is a product of repetition and observation – we act and we read the actions of others. Practices of meaning-making and interpretation are thus bound to gesture as a mode of repetition and articulation. *Epiphora* reveals the transfer of meaning achieved through bodily actions. Gestures are metaphorical insofar as they articulate the differences and resemblances that inhere in symbolic relationships between actors. Handshakes are the negotiation of identity and stature within this metaphorical frame because they are a coordinated and mutual sign of recognition. In shaking another person’s hand, we produce and read our physical and metaphorical relationship with each other.

CHAPTER FOUR

Allies

President Trump's brash and abrasive behavior toward allied leaders is sharply juxtaposed with his friendly and often trusting tone toward authoritarian leaders such as Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin. In this chapter I read Donald Trump's handshakes with key allied diplomats as metaphoric and gestural articulations of isolationist foreign policy values and nationalist ideology. I turn to theories of rhetorical articulation under the constraints of neoliberal ideology and communicative capitalism to approach Trump's metaphoric gestures as rhetorical investments in populism and nationalism. I argue these rhetorical investments are geared toward the production of images that his base will interpret as America "winning." In the last chapter I analyzed some normative gestures of international goodwill from President Trump, this chapter centers on Trump disrupting the routine body rhetoric of allied diplomacy. Handshakes with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Theresa May, and many other allied heads of state provide a gesture-based framework for understanding the rhetorical fluctuations in Trump's foreign policy.

A global digital media context that privileges the immediacy and spectacle of political images is critical to the gestures Trump performs and their wide presence in journalistic sources and internet forums. Diplomatic relationships are constantly and rapidly evolving—images of international diplomacy which filter the world's perception of global affairs by offering a snapshot of officials and their orientations toward each other. Erickson criticizes "presidential travel images" as visual spectacles meant to

privilege “gesture over accomplishment and appearance over fact.”¹ Erickson assumes a public that is shown images in television news broadcasts or newspaper publications while generally remaining aloof to the symbolic and figurative meaning of the president’s engagement. Still, the spectacle of these presidential images retains the capacity to “render ever more plastic citizen perceptions of political reality.”² For Guy Debord, spectacle is “the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption,” an all-permeating force of hegemonic reification and self-justification that composes and mediates social relationships through images that articulate dominant visions of reality.³ Debord’s assessment was prescient. Today, every social media user is empowered to select and circulate images that reinforce their political perspective. Diplomatic images adopt heightened significance when they are embedded in other media or digital contexts that immediately disseminate and frame the consumption of images as identification with or against a political perspective. The decision to share political images suggests endorsement, with the spectator as an involved participant in ordering the world of representations.

Handshakes are foundational visual components of international diplomacy that usually transcend the terms of ideological conflict or argument. Photos and videos of officials meeting each other frame political discourse everywhere. Pictures of presidents and officials shaking hands dissolve into the backdrops of online content as users scroll. Such images pop-up and preface video-lists and news round ups. Handshake images are ephemeral and ambient assurances to viewers that a news article refers to an actual event. Photo opportunities, where leaders meet under heavily produced and staged circumstances to be pictured together, confirm the handshake as a ubiquitous gesture in diplomatic imagery. Such photo opportunities are so routine that it is much more notable

for journalists when these staged “pseudo-event(s)” don’t regularly occur under a president and his administration.⁴ Public images of presidential diplomacy are traditionally constructed to be unremarkable and ordinary signs of stable relationships. Handshakes are a customary and expected greeting when leaders meet in almost any diplomatic context, redundantly incorporated into the beginning and ending of public events.

Articulation: Gestures and Symbols at Work

Handshakes call on individuals to use their hands symbolically. While the performance of hand gestures is essential to some modes of communication, such as sign language, their omnipresence in speech and oratory is often taken for granted or subordinated to the symbolic value of speech. In his 1644 philosophical volume on gesture, English physician John Bulwer pressed Francis Bacon’s conceptualization of gesture as “personal and internal.”⁵ For Bulwer,

The hand, which Bulwer called the “ingenuity of the outer man, and the better genius of the microcosm,” fashions the little universe of the body against and by way of the larger one. The gesture casts one’s thinking—conceptualizing as it forms. As Robert Burton (1577–1640) suggested in his cure for melancholy, to change the patterns of the hand is to adjust fixtures of thought. Bulwer extended this premise to his rhetorical model, insisting that appeal formation is a material process, inextricable from movement and, like the gesture itself, deeply ingrained in the dynamic world, including other bodies.⁶

Hands provide the gestural capacity to aim discourse at the world, grasp at meaning, visibly affect emotional states, and persuade others. Hand movements are critical for persuasive communication because they are sites for articulating the material arrangement of bodies, entities, things, and relationships.

Through articulation, human beings performatively organize and express their experience as “material-semiotic” compositions. Rhetorical materialism calls on critics to

analyze the political and economic forces underpinning “communicative labor” as matters of deliberation and articulation. Communicative labor is not limited to generic discourse about work, rather “it describes how social wealth increasingly relies on the political, economic, and cultural values produced by communication.”⁷ Trump’s use of gestures to translate economic values from the business world into an embodied political rhetoric is a fusion of communicative practices that tracks with Greene’s conceptualization of “Money/Speech,” whereby the symbolic economy of “finance capital” regulates and governs political communication, such that a citizen with capital “partakes in long and short positions in ideas and people as investments.”⁸ Citizens circulating Money/Speech signify their investments in beneficial arrangements of social, political, and economic life by articulating their alignment with or against individuals as the embodiment of cultural values.

Trump’s political ethos hinges on his experience as an executive qualifying him to perform the presidential communicative labor of investing in the people and ideas that his base of voters and financiers support. This president’s campaign identity is built on projecting frightening images of an anti-American and anti-conservative world where immigrants, elitist institutions, and government itself are the enemies of white working-class people, who only Trump is willing to “protect.”⁹ For these Americans, supporting Trump constitutes a rhetorical investment in his promise to protect populist ideals against a liberal international order premised on globalization and ownership over mainstream media.

Via processes of articulation, communicative decisions constitute rhetorical actions – body and mind, material and semiotic, image and speech are affected in the same movement. For Nathan Stormer, “ordonnance,” “a set of acts that produce specific

orders of discourse, things, and the spaces of their relative, historical disposition,” means that rhetoric exceeds the categories and classifications scholars use to organize information.¹⁰ Rather, rhetoric is an immanent process of spatially ordering the world and its inhabitants “through the mutual production of bodies and languages and their configuration into complex orders.”¹¹ Put simply, language does not just convey messages that correspond to a given reality, rather, articulation brings reality into existence. Rhetorical decisions affect the material organization and constitution of politics and society as communally realized sites of human experience.

Trump and his supporters often articulate “winning” as the engine driving their movement. During the 2016 campaign, to “Make America Great Again” and place “America First” Trump promised to make America *win*. In a speech close to the end of the GOP primary race, Trump would deliver the following lines while frantically pointing to the sky, waving both hands in the air while making the “ok” finger-circle gesture, and karate chopping the space around him:

You’re going to be so proud of your president and I don’t care about that but you are going to be so proud of your country because we’re going to turn it around and we’re going to start winning again. We’re going to win so much. We’re going to win at every level. We’re going to win economically, and we’re going to win with the economy. We’re going to win with military. We’re going to win with healthcare and for our veterans. We’re going to win with every single facet. We’re going to win so much you may even get tired of winning. And you’ll say ‘please, please it’s too much winning. We can’t take it anymore. Mr. President, it’s too much!’ And I’ll say ‘no, it isn’t, we have to keep winning! We have to win more! We’re going to win more!’¹²

Trump’s populist rhetoric is grounded in a promised return to a world defined by American success. His wild flailing gestures are a massive departure from the standard body rhetoric employed during campaign speeches or rallies. For his supporters, Trump embodies winning by articulating an unconstrained and visceral will to shape American politics through success “at every level” of politics.

During the 2016 presidential campaign Trump regularly took up “excessive gestural space,” for instance “lurking”¹³ in the background of almost every frame in the second presidential debate with Hillary Clinton, “to convey that he is a new kind of politician, unconstrained by petty rules and competent at accomplishing daunting tasks.”¹⁴ Now in a state of permanent campaign, President Trump “governs by disruption” and continues to fuel his base of supporters by stoking controversy and unsettling American political conventions.¹⁵ The elasticity of Trump’s persona as a celebrity entertainer and business executive opens a range of gestural possibility that are normally unviable political figures. During his presidential campaign, Trump frequently used “pistol hands” (thumb raised and cocked back with a pointing index finger coming out of a fist) to point at competitors or the audience he sought to address.¹⁶ In a few speeches, he mimed the pose of a rifleman lined up in a firing squad to allude to a time when the punishment for a soldier accused of desertion or treason would have been execution.¹⁷ Trump has embraced established elements of republican political rhetoric (national security, tax reform, anti-immigration) while gesturing and maneuvering his body in ways that are inaccessible for the vast majority of officials who cannot claim “outsider” or “disruptor” status. For his base, any move Trump makes to assert conservative values while disturbing political discourse based on liberal sensibilities, decorum, or “political correctness” counts as a win.¹⁸

After the election Trump would continue to utilize visual rhetoric to rally his populist base around his embodied challenge to the normative expectations that traditionally govern public officials’ behavior. Trump’s bodily rhetoric pivots around regular clashes with institutional forces in the media and government bureaucracy that seek to contain, choreograph, and fabricate the appearance of stability. Rather than dilute

his image for public reception, Trump articulates policies seemingly without inhibition or even consideration for the contradictions and inaccuracies that he might espouse. The appearance of winning, not stability, is Trump's primary political concern.¹⁹ His foreign policy revolves around the bodily performance of negative affect and confrontation abroad to consolidate populist support at home.

Macron and NATO: The Symbolism of Shaking Hands

President Trump's foreign policy doctrine is an impulsive, informal, and often contradictory web of gut-decisions and tentatively held opinions organized around the primacy of U.S. interests. Internationally, Trump and his administration have significantly eroded confidence in the stability and credibility of U.S. diplomacy. The "postwar liberal order" that has determined the shape of international relations and global geopolitics since the end of the Second World War faces an uncertain future, not only because Trump actively disdains the organizations that comprise it, but primarily because of the shift in U.S. foreign policy rhetoric that Trump signifies.²⁰ U.S. security commitments and diplomatic leadership have been the bedrock of those multilateral institutions responsible for brokering most peace-treaty negotiations, solidifying global economic interdependence, and promoting democratic governance internationally. As the consensus on both ends of the political spectrum in Washington about America's prescribed role in international politics shifts away from presumed unipolarity, America and her allies are starting to re-evaluate the distribution of economic and defense burden sharing. Nations have already begun searching for regional leadership outside the scope of American politics. In Europe, figures such as French President Emmanuel Macron and

German Chancellor Angela Merkel continue to champion the liberal international order in the vacuum of American diplomatic leadership.

President Trump and President Macron have enjoyed a uniquely competitive relationship since the dawn of the Trump administration. Early in 2017 Trump and Macron engaged in several meetings and highly visible displays of diplomatic goodwill, even friendship. Despite glaring ideological differences, Trump being an outspoken nationalist and Macron a moderate progressive, their steady rapport is largely attributed to their shared political-outsider status and their own compatibly stylized flavors of masculine “tough-guy” persona.²¹ Many have been surprised by Macron successfully remaining close to Trump in light of the rift separating their perspectives on policy issues such as the Paris Climate Agreement, Iran sanctions, the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and America’s role as a global leader and great power. Macron and Trump kept steady lines of communication in 2018, making numerous diplomatic visits and holding at least 19 conversations over the telephone.²² As both men touted their strong rapport and mutual admiration, journalists and analysts interpreted images of dramatic handshake episodes between the two presidents as signs of an underlying struggle over power.

Trump and Macron met each other’s grasp for the second time in Brussels with a meeting held after the NATO summit in May 2017. Their meeting stirred headlines, not because of its outcomes or content, but because of their handshake. In their first public moments Trump and Macron squeezed each other’s hands with excessive force which “caused each man’s knuckles to turn white and jaw to clench. When this became too much for Trump, he tried to break free. Macron wouldn’t allow it.”²³ Macron would comment that the forceful gesture was “not innocent,” stating that “It’s not the alpha and

the omega of politics, but a moment of truth."²⁴ Trump's reputation for establishing power dynamics with bizarre handshakes and gestures spurred France's ambassador, Gerard Araud, to warn Macron who then prepared for the handshake in Brussels by studying footage of Trump's gestures.²⁵

In their first official meeting, Macron had won a stunning symbolic victory. He caused Trump to wince away from their handshake prematurely, displaying weakness and signifying a tremendous tactical failure for the U.S. president. Earlier in the day, Macron avoided Trump's reach for a first handshake in front of cameras and other leaders attending the NATO summit. In a video posted on the French president's Twitter account, Macron approaches a moving crowd of diplomats headed by President Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Macron appears to aim for Trump, who sees him and stretches both hands out to greet the French president. Macron quickly swerves out of Trump's path, heading toward Merkel whom he kissed on the cheek before shaking the hands of two other officials and finally turning toward Trump. Clearly affected by the display, Trump aggressively pulled Macron towards his gut then Trump angled his elbow up and continued to forcefully manipulate Macron's arm.

Trump's first handshakes with Macron display a gestural framework for interpreting Trump's rhetoric about NATO. In Brussels, Trump would lambast America's European allies for failing to meet a two-percent GDP goal for defense spending and failed to verbally commit to NATO's "Article 5," the mutual-aid clause stipulating that allies were bound to defend and assist each other when under attack.²⁶ Trump's verbal commitment to Article 5 was expected after then-Defense Secretary Mattis and Vice President Pence publicly endorsed the clause and affirmed the administration's commitment to American allies. The crux of Trump's criticism was that American allies

are failing to adequately invest in their own defense and security, leaving America with the bill and the danger involved in acting as a global police force. Trump shirks the presumption that he will commit to NATO's defense by jarringly asserting the primacy of America's economic and national interests. Yet, Trump's gestures toward upending the liberal international order to strike new deals that are more favorable for America carry no guarantee of success. The May 2017 encounter with Macron evidences his failures to symbolically, let alone materially, move such ambitions. Deprioritizing U.S. commitments to allies and global security creates opportunities for new arrangements and images of international leadership and governing authority that correspondingly de-emphasize America's role in global diplomacy.

Merkel and May: Gesturing Toward Nationalism

The current decline in the credibility of U.S. diplomacy under President Trump has left a leadership vacuum in the system of European alliances and international governing bodies that America helped found. In many cases, other nations are turning to Germany and Chancellor Angela Merkel for guidance. In November 2016 President Obama made the last diplomatic visit of his presidency to speak with Merkel. Over dinner, Chancellor Merkel admitted that her decision to run for office after her third term was motivated by the rise of a populist tide in Europe and the need to guide the E.U. through an expectedly volatile Trump administration.²⁷ The German Chancellor thoroughly prepared for her first meeting with Trump: studying episodes of "The Apprentice," his *Playboy* interview from 1990, and his book *The Art of the Deal*.²⁸ Despite her rigorous efforts, the meeting would produce a disastrous image of the

relationship between the two most powerful politicians in the United States and Western Europe.

Trump's rejection of the liberal international order, in favor of a distinctly American brand of nationalism, has defined his foreign policy and orientation toward allied diplomats. Jason A. Edwards notes that Trump used Clinton and her vocal support for the liberal order as a "scapegoat" to rally voters and "symbolically transfer and subsequently expunge guilt" from public perceptions of his own foreign policy.²⁹ Similarly, as president, Trump has insistently referred to Merkel and the E.U. as "foes" constituting a global system of alliances that disadvantage American interests.³⁰ Trump's diplomatic actions reflect nationalist campaign promises to reinforce American sovereignty, regardless of the price—withdrawing from trade partnerships and international conventions such as the Paris Climate Agreement, railing against NATO and American allies for not spending enough on defense, and decrying immigrant workers as criminals and job-stealers.³¹ As a case in point, Trump's first Oval Office meeting with Merkel, one of the earliest diplomatic receptions of his presidency, constitutes an embodied confrontation between nationalist and liberal values.

Angela Merkel has held her position as German chancellor since 2007, cementing her role as a fixture of European governance and diplomacy. During her tenure as chancellor she developed close-knit and personal relationships with two American presidents. Despite some major policy disagreements and tenuous disputes over economic affairs, Merkel proved to be a significant ally and friend of Barack Obama and George W. Bush alike.³² Chancellor Merkel visited the White House in March 2017 to mark the beginning of her diplomatic relationship with the newly elected President Trump. The meeting started innocuously with Trump shaking Merkel's hand as she

arrived and exited her vehicle, patting her on the elbow while he greeted her. Yet, when the leaders moved to the Oval Office Trump appeared to “snub” Merkel’s offer to shake hands for press photographers. As they sat together Trump held his fingertips together in a triangle pattern, a gesture referenced globally as the “Merkel-raute” or “Merkel diamond.”³³ When a photographer calls out to Trump and asks him to shake hands with Merkel, Trump seems to do a slight neck roll and look around the room around him while avoiding bringing his gaze to the German chancellor. Merkel then turns to Trump and explicitly asks to shake hands while he continues to look around the room and refuses to acknowledge her request. In November, Trump would clarify that “someone started shouting: ‘shake her hand, shake her hand’ but I did not hear that” “I’m getting along really well with Angela.”³⁴ Still, Trump did not address Merkel’s request and only referenced the reporter’s calls.

Trump’s statements during the press conference that followed the Oval Office meeting clarified the political investments of his administration. These statements underscored the palpable bodily tension exhibited before press photographers. During their press conference Trump dismissed allegations of isolationist foreign policy as “fake news” and expressed general support for NATO conditioned by the statement that the nations composing the organization “must pay what they owe.”³⁵ Trump had directly criticized Merkel on the campaign trail, accusing her of “ruining” Germany with open immigration policies that welcomed Syrian refugees, and chastised Time magazine for naming her “Person of the Year” for 2015.³⁶ Trump’s consistent ideological references to Merkel suggest recognition that she is a pivotal figure in European politics with a liberal political perspective that sharply clashes with his own sensibilities. Refusing to meet Merkel’s grasp in front of the press and directing his gaze almost everywhere but toward

her both constitute gestures that diminish her position and authority relative to the president. The failure to recognize Merkel's physical presence establishes a perceptual distance between the two leaders and constructs an image of indifference that casts serious doubt on vague statements from both U.S. and German officials alleging that they maintain a positive relationship.

During Trump's reception for British Prime Minister Theresa May, he displays an entirely different bodily disposition and rhetoric from his actions with Merkel. When May visited the White House in January, the press snapped candid photos of her holding the president's hand as they walked outside the building. May would later state that she saw Trump's gesture as him "being a gentleman" to smooth their descent down some steps.³⁷ Regardless of the intent, the hand holding suggests an intimate and welcoming concern for the Prime Minister's comfort and image as they traversed the stairs. Later, on a diplomatic visit to England, Trump and May held hands while walking on two additional occasion—stirring some controversy and criticism for May.³⁸ Trump's amicable tone toward May during both visits overshadowed sharp criticism for May's "soft-Brexit" proposal for leaving the European Union while maintaining pivotal trade relations and economic ties. Before the visit to England Trump said he counseled May against leaving economic ties to the E.U. intact while suggesting that doing so would jeopardize bilateral trade talks between the U.S. and United Kingdom. Trump went on to criticize London's mayor Sadiq Khan for his response to terrorism and refugee's seeking asylum in the city stating, "Allowing the immigration to take place in Europe is a shame" and "I think you are losing your culture."³⁹ Edwards claims that Trump's withdrawal from the exceptionalism of American foreign policy and unipolar dominance is a return to pre-World War II presidential rhetoric that privileged American leadership through

example rather than alliances or interventions in other nation's governing practices.⁴⁰

President Trump's diplomatic body rhetoric displays a clear willingness to act as an exemplar for nationalist and nativist policies in the United Kingdom, constituting a discursive investment in Britain's own turn away from globalism and the European Union.

Winning Diplomacy: A Zero-Sum Game

It is more vital than ever that citizens evaluate their investments in the symbolic practices of neoliberal governance, because a digital communicative context empowers individuals to engage others in critical reflection and reflexive political discourse.

Trump's hostility toward established institutions dedicated to defending and promoting liberal order means that citizens and individuals are increasingly tasked with defending democratic practices that have been previously enshrined as virtues. I have illuminated Trump's unwillingness to respect the conventions and standards of allied diplomacy to highlight symbols of American disengagement from global conversations on governance, leadership, and the future of democratic political life. Trump's foreign policy doctrine, to the extent that his diplomatic activity could be said to reflect a doctrine, is premised on a peculiar disengagement from the normative contours of diplomatic conduct wedded to a "post-truth" refusal to abide by factual assessments of geopolitical reality.⁴¹ While burying one's head in the sand is a sure fire way to make signs of imminent danger vanish before their eyes, an unwillingness to face reality leaves the rest of the body vulnerable to a volatile world of unforeseen threats.

Understanding Trump's bodily rhetoric necessitates an awareness of winning's primacy in the president's political calculus. If Trump is not seen winning, then he is

losing. Trump's populist base is carefully attuned to the image-politics of triumphant nationalism that Trump embodies. Yet, Trump's own ego and gut-decision-making mean that winning images translate into more momentum and more wins down the road.⁴² Even in the realm of global diplomacy, Trump never stops speaking to his base. He is constantly campaigning. For a base that prioritizes American success and liberal disruption above all other objectives, Trump's bodily rhetoric of allied confrontation and zero-sum negotiation means that the president is constantly winning.

Trump's handshakes with the leaders of Europe frame diplomatic meetings as zero-sum affairs where a decisive winner and loser feel the impact of a perceptual loss or victory on their political image. A win in the interpersonal context of two diplomats meeting each other signifies victory for the ideological values, investments, and allegiances that political actors embody and express. Ben O'Loughlin situates Trump's politicized gestural exchanges as zero-sum "standoffs," between the president and diplomats representing oppositional perspectives on governance. These gestural exchanges present opportunities for Trump to accumulate wins for a nationalist voting-base.⁴³ A "digital media ecology" that privileges the individualized and accelerated circulation of images and "user-led remediation" of content enables Trump to "exploit and evade containment" by media organizations and political establishment forces.⁴⁴ Trump's support stems from his ability to differentiate himself from the ordinarily reserved and conventional politicians in American government and at the helm of America's strongest allied partners.

The president's use of gesture to distinguish himself and achieve political victory signals a major and irreversible shift in the character of U.S. foreign policy. Trump "doesn't believe in alliances, treaty commitments, loyalty, or the value of European

partners. For the Trump administration, U.S. “leadership” means the United States doing what it wants, and transatlantic “unity” means Europeans doing what the United States tells them to do.”⁴⁵ Diplomatic handshakes are vital tools for communicating Trump’s foreign policy objectives because his gestures produce images of disruptive political action that upsets and disturbs the status quo liberal order and global governing institutions. In the digital media context, access to these images is almost instantaneous and uninhibited. Such images are politically crucial for the president “because Trump understands that much of his base considers very little to be as important as his promise to defeat their cultural enemies.”⁴⁶ Fomenting forces of nationalism and populism in the United States, combined with an exceedingly visual emphasis in news and digital media contexts, means that the challenges Trump poses for normative diplomatic rhetoric are not temporary or unique to his presidency. Trump’s handshakes have effectively shifted ideological and political discourse to a visual domain where bodily rhetoric and diplomatic gestures are the material of public opinion capable of affecting tangible political action.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion – Employees, Subordinates, and Appointees

Trump's handshakes provide a snapshot of his gestures and bodily rhetoric, which I have read as political texts open to materialist criticism. Trump's relationships with foreign diplomats have been the primary study of this thesis. To conclude, I will introduce another significant set of handshakes that rhetorical critics should target for further analysis -- Trump's handshakes with employees, subordinates, and American officials. I argue that rhetorical handshakes supply a bodily-inflected framework for understanding ideological tensions and positional dynamics. In this way, handshakes are forms of communicative labor that can embody or contest pillars of neoliberal governance. This chapter details the importance of Trump's bodily rhetoric to his success as a political outsider disrupting the status quo and normative democratic discourse in Washington. Trump's aggressive and dominating handshakes with officials, such as Supreme Court Appointee Neil Gorsuch and Trump's own Vice President Mike Pence, indicate that Trump effectively wields his physical presence and gestures to articulate his political agenda. Trump's firing of former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, James Comey, and the numerous cabinet members whom Trump has fired without a face-to-face meeting (and thus, without a handshake) signifies the priority that he gives to personal loyalty and appeasement from his subordinates and appointees.

Trump's self-proclaimed fear of germs lends credence to claims that his handshakes are gestural means put to political ends. In his book, *Art of the Comeback*, Trump states that he washes his hands compulsively, viewing "the simple act of shaking

hands” as “One of the curses of American society” and a gesture that becomes more necessary and customary as one’s celebrity and fame expands.¹ Trump vocally despises social demands for physical contact between interlocutors – cultural requirements that uniquely apply to American presidents, who are estimated to shake 65,000 hands per year.² For President Trump, the handshake is an inevitable and required aspect of diplomacy, a reality that is magnified by the “glandular”³ and persona-based character of his foreign policy. When speaking about persisting vacancies in the State Department, Trump described his foreign policy plainly “I’m the only one that matters, because when it comes to it, that’s what the policy is going to be. You’ve seen that, you’ve seen it strongly.”⁴ Similar to the majority of modern American presidents, Trump is the locus of his administration’s foreign policy articulations. Trump’s departure from most recent presidents comes with his apparent hostility for the agencies, officials, and other federal entities that constitute, inform, and serve his own administration.

Trump projects a populist image of personalized strength and sovereignty – one that often banks on renegade norms of bodily and discursive rhetoric. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Doron Taussig consider the “lines of argument, patterns of inference, and stylistic idiosyncrasies that not only distinguish one president from another but affect governance” to be markers of a president’s distinct “rhetorical signature.”⁵ Trump’s rhetorical signature is innately disruptive and adversarial with the norms of presidential discourse – he “rejects conventional standards of accountability, denies discernible reality, including some of his own past statements, and, when caught, distracts.”⁶ Governance, for Trump, is characterized by eliding and unsettling institutional norms and practices. During his Republican candidacy, Trump positioned himself as a Washington “outsider” who would “drain the swamp” and assert populist values in a political

environment that he criticized for serving the interests of elites and political dynasties, rather than average American citizens.⁷

Populist support for “outsider” politicians often manifests as widespread opposition to the status quo. James A. Janack reads Jesse Ventura’s bodily rhetoric during his candidacy for governor alongside Bakhtin’s conceptualization of “carnival” as “the symbolic destruction of authority and official culture.”⁸ Ventura utilized seemingly spontaneous, unscripted, and guttural rhetorical performances, which accentuated a publicly perceived disconnect between Minnesota’s political officials and the citizens they represent, to craft a populist image of uninhibited bodily expression.⁹ Similarly, Trump’s exaggerated handshake performances as president can be read as mass appeals to discontent with the reserved and choreographed character of Washington “insiders.” Through normatively “grotesque”¹⁰ bodily performances and images, Trump marks himself as distinct from the established political figures and institutions that he criticizes. Widespread media coverage labelling Trump’s handshakes “super-awkward,”¹¹ “bizarre,”¹² “intense,”¹³ and “legendary”¹⁴ seems to confirm that the president’s gestures upset normative expectations for presidential body rhetoric and deliver a populist spectacle of political disruption.

Trump maintains a combative stance toward subordinates and appointees who refuse to submit to his personal agenda and political preferences. An analysis of Trump’s handshakes with American officials might elucidate the political significance of the president’s disruptive gestures, and the often-surreal images which they produce. Examining the political affects attached to images of Trump violently shaking hands with Vice President Pence or Supreme Court Justice Gorsuch would likely clarify how the president wields visual rhetoric to engage populist discourse through spectacle.

Specifically, Trump's highly visible handshakes with American officials tap into a populist desire "for a strong leader who could solve problems based on force of will,"¹⁵ reinforcing the type of "strongman" image that Trump frequently articulated during his presidential campaign and publicly admired Vladimir Putin for promoting.¹⁶ A future analysis of Trump's gestures in domestic politics might observe trends in his bodily rhetoric that exceed populist or nationalist messaging, manifesting instead as tactics of authoritarian power consolidation.

Trump's interactions with James Comey exhibit clear signs of authoritarian rhetoric and governance. Investigating Trump's bodily rhetoric further clarifies Trump's disdain for democratic institutions and the intelligence agencies of the federal government. Benjamin Wittes, editor in chief at *Lawfare* and a personal friend of the former FBI director, recounted conversations with Comey explaining that Trump's efforts to demand personal loyalty and his unwelcome gestures toward intimacy "disgusted" Comey.¹⁷ Comey expressed discomfort with Trump's invitations to the White House because he believed "the FBI director should always be at arm's length from the President" and that Democrats were placing blame on him for influencing the election in Trump's favor.¹⁸ At a gathering of intelligence officials in the White House Blue Room, Trump eventually noticed Comey's large 6'8" frame (despite the FBI director's efforts to blend into a backdrop of dark blue curtains). After Trump called out for "Jim" and joked that he had "become more famous than me," Comey reluctantly approached the president to shake hands, intent on not displaying any other signs of warmth or friendship. Then Trump grabbed his hand and wrapped him in a unreciprocated and uncomfortable embrace, whispering "I really look forward to working with you."¹⁹ Comey's discomfort was magnified when Trump invited him to a private

dinner at the White House and, according to Comey, repeatedly asked for the former FBI director to declare his personal loyalty and inquired about whether the administration was a target of the FBI's investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election.²⁰ Sarah Huckabee Sanders, then deputy press secretary, denied that Trump would ask for loyalty from law enforcement officials and President Trump denied that he summoned Comey at all, telling NBC that the dinner was at Comey's request to avoid his eventual firing.²¹ Based on Comey's account, Trump used bodily rhetoric to make an American law enforcement official uncomfortable before requesting personal loyalty, ostensibly effecting oversight or accountability that the FBI would traditionally impose on the Trump administration independently.

Trump's short fuse for firing employees and subordinates is an established and well-known aspect of his public persona. He has fired an "unprecedented" number of key White House advisors and staff.²² Similar to the disruptive impact of Trump's diplomatic body rhetoric, the excessive number of firings within the administration signals a chaotic and uncontained challenge to the organizational norms of the American presidency. There are a myriad of news organizations and media outlets maintaining infographics,²³ interactive charts,²⁴ interactive timelines,²⁵ and regularly updated lists²⁶ tracking firings and resignations under President Trump. The sheer volume of firings, resignations, and replacements at this point in the Trump administration signals the chaotic and volatile atmosphere surrounding daily operations in the White House. Analyzing Trump's behavior when firing and hiring replacements, specifically his bodily rhetoric when shaking hands (or not shaking hands) with employees and appointed advisors, would provide a stable rhetorical point of reference for "organizing"²⁷ Trump's relatively unpredictable actions as an employer and statesman. Given that the cultivation of doubt

and uncertainty is a regularly utilized rhetorical strategy that Trump uses to dismiss criticism from media outlets as “fake news,”²⁸ future rhetorical analysis of Trump’s handshakes or the absence of final meetings and handshakes with officials would provide materialist insight into the actual situations where the president and his advisors part ways.

Materialist rhetoric offers critics a detached and relatively distant perspective for rendering judgements about the president’s deliberate uses and deprivations of gesture to convey political messages via traditionally mundane organizational tasks such as firing and replacing employees. There are already dozens of instances of resignation and firing for rhetorical critics to examine and compare to the employment and advisory practices of previous administrations. Each departure and replacement provides a window into Trump’s political calculus and messaging techniques that would otherwise remain unclear and obfuscated by the seemingly constant waves of scandalous accusations, political blunders, unfiltered tweets, and unpopular decisions circulating around and emanating from the Trump administration.

One possible application for the metaphorical and transactional understanding of handshakes that I elaborated in chapter two is a rhetorical reading of former Secretary of Defense James Mattis’ resignation letter. Historical comparisons to clashes between high ranking military officers and President George W. Bush’s Defense Secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, mean that a rhetorical perspective on the institutional dynamics at play between civilian and military officials would lend important insight into the evolving and exceedingly transactional internal organization of federal war powers authority.²⁹ In his resignation letter, Mattis criticized Trump’s exchange-based approach to “alliances and partnerships” as well as the president’s failure to resist authoritarian challenges to

“international order.”³⁰ Trump, reportedly displeased with the visibility and attention Mattis garnered with the letter, quickly retaliated by firing the defense secretary on January 1st 2019, well before Mattis’ announced preference to depart on February 28th.³¹ In this way, a handshake framework facilitates analysis about complex institutional situations that rely on metaphors of contestation and confrontation to legitimate grievances and dismiss dissent within a president’s administration. Trump accelerated Mattis’ resignation with a post on the social media platform Twitter, Trump’s favored outlet for making official announcements and publicly disseminating his perspective on politics.³² Trump’s use of Twitter to fire important advisors has become an ordinary occurrence under his administration.

More generally, Twitter provides Trump a highly visible platform for publicizing administrative and organizational decisions with spontaneity and immediacy. How Trump has rendered Twitter a legitimate site of presidential decree, is an ambiguous and complex question with a potentially rhetorical answer. It’s possible that articulating official announcements and policy declarations over Twitter adjusts public expectations for executive branch discourse and normalizes President Trump’s unique social media presence. Using social media to broadcast official proclamations is not just a departure from the standard operating procedures of the Bully Pulpit, it signifies rapid and already advanced evolutions in the organization of political discourse and neoliberal citizenship. Analyzing the ways in which Trump’s Twitter firings unsettle normative expectations for privately exchanged and respectful symbols of good will and closure, would illuminate massive rhetorical shifts in the quotidian organization of U.S. governance and ideological confrontation. White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus initially resigned with the expectation of a week-long transition before Trump announced that John Kelly would

replace him over Twitter from an Airforce One flight that all three men were aboard, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson found out about his firing over twitter,³³ and White House counsel Donald F. McGhan II read that Trump was asking him to leave on Twitter as well.³⁴ A critical lens that resolves around the metaphor of rhetorical handshakes is equipped to identify ruptures and slippages in Trump's strategies for managing subordinates and governing through untraditional rhetorical channels.

Handshakes are a consequential gesture for rhetorical materialists, not only because they are a standard articulation of greeting and leaving in American politics and business, but also because they have served a distinctly rhetorical purpose since Greek antiquity. Archaeological records of Greek "stelai," ornate stone slabs featuring chiseled scenes and ornamentation which were frequently used to commemorate burials and funerals, show that handshakes were a common and meaningful gesture for Greeks in the "Classical period" from the late fifth century B.C. to 317 B.C..³⁵ Still, the exact meaning of these depictions is ambiguous and varied. It seems most likely that artists utilized the wide range of cultural meanings and connotations associated with handshakes or "*dexiosis*" to articulate various transformative affects including "Parting, reunion, and communion between living and dead" as "aspects of the same concept of family unity."³⁶ In the ancient Greek context, handshakes were signs of dwelling together, familial unity, and existential transformation. These meanings and significations have persisted through time and history to inhabit our own cultural milieu. The handshake's material and rhetorical significance remains, waiting for critics to observe the political, cultural, social, and ideological differences that it affects.

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