You probably are familiar with the stern message that introduces many videos. Warning you against unlicensed copying or display of the film you are about to see, the message demands to be taken seriously. True, few people really study it, but those who do hardly find it amusing. Yet, on one occasion, a graduate class I taught not only noticed the warning but also laughed heartily at it.

The video was a Bill Moyers interview with the philosopher John Searle. Prior to watching it, our class had been reading Searle’s notorious debate with Jacques Derrida about John Austin’s theory of speech acts. Derrida faults Austin for underestimating the instability of context, which for Derrida leaves the meaning and significance of speech acts open to perpetual drift. Searle affirms what he sees as Austin’s common sense and scorns Derrida for violating it. More specifically, he accuses Derrida of willfully ignoring how most speech acts can be anchored in certain contexts and analyzed in light of them. Derrida responds to Searle’s initial scolding of him by mischievously ruminating on copyright law. He argues that the very existence of warnings against copyright violation indicates the possibility of a text being reproduced, recirculated, and thereby refunctioned in any number of contexts. It was Derrida’s references to such warnings that made my students roar when the Searle interview began with the admonition against unlicensed use. Obviously this particular announcement would be yet more grist for Derrida’s mill. Besides, that this purportedly serious warning made us laugh reinforced Derrida’s point about a speech act’s capacity to vary in circumstance and effect.

Especially under the influence of Derrida and other poststructuralists,
rhetorical theory has grown ever-more attentive to seemingly marginal features of texts, as well as to possible shifts in the context of texts. Most prominently, Michael McGee has argued that rhetoricians should no longer assume that the texts they study are organically unified entities with a clear center. In his view, “changing cultural conditions have made it virtually impossible to construct a whole and harmonious text,” so that rhetorical critics should “explore the sense in which ‘texts’ have disappeared altogether, leaving us with nothing but discursive fragments of context” (76). Although the students who laughed at the videotape’s copyright warning were taking a course entitled “Literary Theory and Rhetorical Theory,” their experience shows that McGee’s rhetorical theory can apply to fragmented visual artifacts. Clearly, McGee doesn’t have videotapes or newer media objects in mind. Nevertheless, we can take his phrase “virtually impossible” as a reminder that the fragmentation he points to is, if anything, heightened by visually oriented virtual technologies, which are very much part of our “changing cultural conditions.” An echo of McGee’s argument can be found in Lev Manovich’s The Language of New Media, a book increasingly known for its incisive survey of its title subject. In effect, Manovich reinforces McGee’s emphasis on fragmentation when he points out a key characteristic of new media, modularity: “In short, a new media object consists of independent parts, each of which consists of smaller independent parts, and so on, down to the level of the smallest ‘atoms’—pixels, 3-D points, or text characters” (31). Although some Web pages and other computer displays may appear organically unified, they consist of components that can be altered, deleted, or recombined, and many other interfaces forthrightly revel in this fact.

Actually, it would be a mistake for us to see the history of information technology as a movement from relatively coherent audience experiences to far more schizoid ones. Moviegoers of my age and older will recall that it was common for many of us to enter the theater after the feature had started, so we spent quite a few minutes figuring out the plot. The medium of television is especially celebrated—or scorned—for encouraging fitful watching, especially with all those commercial breaks. Perhaps many viewers of film and television go so far as to relish parts rather than wholes, not exalting unity even when the movie or show they are watching flaunts it. Furthermore, as Manovich is careful to point out throughout his book, the supposedly revolutionary aspects of new media may have antecedents. He begins his survey by discussing Dziga Vertov’s 1927 film Man With a Movie Camera, whose fragmentation and self-
reflexivity anticipate much contemporary electronic design. Manovich
does acknowledge that Vertov's aesthetic was overshadowed by later
developments in film, especially the purported realism and seamlessness
of classical Hollywood cinema. Nevertheless, he argues, today's elec­
tronic culture can lead us to find similar elements in older media,
including features overlooked at birth or subsequently forgotten.

Over the last several years, studies under the rubric of visual rhetoric
have proliferated. Furthermore, much of this work has examined artifacts
heterogeneous in nature, hypertext creations being the most blatant
example. Even so, such analysis hasn't explored all the realms of
fragmentation it might. In particular, more can be done with applying a
rhetoric of visual fragments to fictional narratives, especially films that
circulate widely in DVD or videotape formats. Often enough, these
stories are accompanied by other visual segments that produce jumble
rather than unity.

A heterogeneous melange of elements has come to be a prime
marketing feature of DVD. Just about every recent film reproduced in this
new tape format lures buyers by offering them not only the original work
but also deleted scenes, raw location footage, a documentary on the
making of the film, different screen sizes, different languages for the
soundtrack, and various forms of commentary from the director and the
actors, often accompanying the film itself. The viewer can even skip from
scene to scene within the work. Needless to say, not everyone is en­
chanted with this state of affairs. Contending that "a movie, like a book,
is—or is meant to be—a coherent whole," columnist Jonathan Yardley
worries that many DVD connoisseurs "sample each scene as it begins,
and if it doesn't suit their taste or mood or whatever, they simply hit
NEXT on the remote" (C2). We rhetoricians may share Yardley's dismay
over the indulgence in fluctuation that DVDs permit. If we are interested
in new media at all, though, we need to study the potential incoherence
of DVDs and of related visual artifacts. As I have suggested in referring
to the warning that precedes the Searle interview, even a VHS tape can
be seen as a compilation of parts rather than a unified whole.

Here, I want to pursue a rhetoric of visual fragments by considering
the disjunctive packaging of two particular fictional films. In each case,
the film is accompanied by documentary footage about its making, and in
each case this footage constitutes a narrative strikingly at odds with the
film's own. My first example, available on DVD and videotape, is the
restored version of Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 classic Vertigo, which in
both tape formats coexists uneasily with an account of the restoration
process. In fact, I turn to the *Vertigo* case precisely because the film and the accompanying documentary offer conflicting stories about the possibility of technologically resurrecting the past. My second example, originally broadcast on HBO and now available on video, is Christopher Reeve’s 1997 adaptation of Alice Elliott Dark’s short story, “In the Gloaming.” Granted, Reeve’s film is hardly as famous as Hitchcock’s, but one of the reasons I turn to it is to signal that lesser-known films may deserve study just as more celebrated ones do. The *Gloaming* videotape especially merits analysis because, as I will explain, contrasts between the film and its adjacent documentary segments point to tensions between current agendas for civil rights.

Although I focus on these two particular examples, I use my analysis of them to begin developing a more general methodology for studying visual artifacts that circulate fictional stories in fragmented ways. I want to stress this methodology’s rhetorical character. For Manovich, new media make audience conduct harder than ever to gauge or predict, and he sees this indeterminacy as having serious implications for rhetoric. In fact, he foresees “a continuing decline of the field of rhetoric in the modern era” because arguments made through new media, especially hypertext, are more unstable, chaotic, and multidimensional than those rhetorical theory has valued, granting the audience significant ability to choose its own paths of navigation” (77). For centuries, however, much rhetorical criticism has been relatively modest in aim, attempting to gauge a text’s impact without assuming it can be precisely calibrated. Just as rhetors can never be certain that their strategies will persuade, so rhetorical critics have had to question what the effect of these devices would be. In other words, probability has always been a guiding principle of rhetorical criticism as well as rhetorical production. Significantly, Manovich concedes that rhetoric remains a useful body of thought if it allows for the “spatial wandering” that hypertext enables (78). Similarly, rhetorical critics of DVDs and videotapes must acknowledge the temporal wandering possible with a flick of a button.

Cautions aside, the kind of analysis I seek to demonstrate is resolutely rhetorical insofar as it studies how the artifact makes various marketing appeals, solicits identification with particular selves and communities, and contributes in one way or another to arguments about civic issues. In keeping with this third aspect, such analysis ought to be more than formalist. If it sees the artifact as a collection of narratives in tension, it ties these dynamics to the larger “cultural conversation,” a concept elaborated by Steven Mailloux in his *Rhetorical Power*. Mailloux takes
pains to define this conversation as fragmented, too. For him, it consists of “multiple dialogues, overlapping voices, pregnant silences, unanswered accusations, suggestive whispers, overreactions, and misinterpretations” (93). To Mailloux’s list, I make a friendly amendment, adding “disjunctive narratives.” This term not only captures a notable feature of many visual artifacts, it also helps us link fragments within them to wider public debates.

**Restoration in/of Vertigo**

In case you don’t know the plot of *Vertigo*, I will offer a brief, prosaic summary, while recognizing that it can hardly do justice to the film’s rich details. During a rooftop pursuit, police detective Scottie Ferguson winds up hanging precariously from a ledge, where he discovers that he suffers from vertigo. Meanwhile, a police officer trying to rescue Scottie falls to his death. When we next see Scottie, he has retired from the force due to his continuing vertigo and, presumably, his guilt over the other man’s demise. Old college friend Gavin Elster then recruits Scottie to shadow his wife Madeleine, who Elster reports is morbidly preoccupied with an ancestor who killed herself. Eventually, Scottie falls in love with Madeleine, but he is unable to prevent her from committing suicide, too. She leaps from the top of a convent tower, while Scottie’s vertigo traps him below. Madeleine’s death leaves Scottie so distraught that he is institutionalized. Even after he is released, he remains enthralled by her memory, and he thinks he can resurrect her when he meets a woman who resembles her, Judy (played by the same actress, Kim Novak, who played Madeleine). At this point, we the audience are granted access to Judy’s point of view, from which we learn that she had all along been impersonating “Madeleine” and that Elster threw his real wife from the tower. Although she has collaborated in Elster’s scheme and still wants to keep it a secret, Judy has fallen in love with Scottie. Therefore, she hopes now that he will accept her as herself. Scottie, however, has other ideas: still haunted by his Madeleine, he insists that Judy change her clothes and hair coloring to look exactly like her. Judy resists his efforts to remold her, but eventually she succumbs, and Scottie believes that he has finally gotten Madeleine back. Yet, at this point he discovers “Madeleine” was Judy, a fact that he confronts Judy with by taking her back to the top of the tower. This feat enables Scottie to conquer his vertigo; moreover, he seems about to forgive Judy’s deceit. Tragically, though, Judy falls to her death, and the film ends with helpless Scottie looking down on her body.

Let me turn now to *Obsessed With Vertigo*, the documentary that
accompanies *Vertigo* on DVD and videotape. As I have already indicated, one methodological move we can make with such a behind-the-scenes account is to view it not as a window onto the Real but rather as a particular narrative. In this respect, there is no ontological difference between the fictional film and the documentary about it; both can be seen as stories, and these stories can be compared. Actually, the documentary about *Vertigo* consists of two narratives. One is about the creation of the original film; the other, which I will be more concerned with here, is about its restoration after decades of decaying prints.

At times, *Obsessed With Vertigo* suggests that restoration isn’t tantamount to preservation. It points to the distinction mainly during its interviews with the restoration’s chief architects, Robert Harris and James Katz. According to Harris, “Once a picture has not been preserved properly or it hasn’t been preserved at all, then you need restoration.” The film’s original negative, he reports, had deteriorated so much that merely saving it would have been useless. Restoration then entered in as an arduous process of technological adjustment and enhancement. Harris remarks that restoring a film takes “a year to two years of work and major commitment”—the same requirement, I might add, that Scottie faces after “Madeleine” dies. As Harris and Katz proceed to explain, they transferred *Vertigo*’s frames to another film stock and format, and then replaced various sound effects with new versions. The result, Katz admits, is that they created “something that Alfred Hitchcock never saw and never was able to see when he made the film in 1958.”

At other moments, though, the documentary suggests that to restore *Vertigo* is to resurrect an original version. This definition of restoration accords with the documentary’s role as a marketing device. *Obsessed With Vertigo* seeks to justify and even exalt the latest rendering of Hitchcock’s classic so that consumers will respond favorably to the new text. This aim is typical: many a behind-the-scenes feature has an epideictic function. And such a role deserves rhetoricians’ attention, especially because it may contradict more complex developments in the main film’s plot.

One instance of this documentary’s stronger claim about restoration is a remark by Katz. After explaining how his team converted *Vertigo* to seventy millimeter stock, Katz declares that this is “the way it was intended to be seen, in large format.” But he thereby glosses over something he had mentioned earlier: that Hitchcock intended *Vertigo* to be seen in a 1950s Paramount format called VistaVision, which is not the same format as the restoration’s. Moreover, though the restored *Vertigo*
briefly played in select theaters, most of its audiences will see it in letterbox on their home TV screen.

Later, at the climax of Obsessed, the documentary very much defines restoration as utter resurrection. This climax is tied to the climax of Vertigo itself, when Judy takes on Madeleine’s appearance completely and thereby restores her to life for Scottie. To demonstrate the efficacy of the film’s restoration, the documentary uses a before-and-after strategy. First, it shows Scottie in a unrevised, washed-out shot, as he anxiously waits for Judy to put the finishing touches on her Madeleine look. Then comes a newly enhanced shot, this time of Judy walking toward Scotty as the seeming reincarnation of his lost beloved. The latter shot is captioned “After Restoration,” words that can apply both to the new print quality and to Judy’s resurrection of Madeleine. This connection is reinforced by the documentary’s narrator, Roddy McDowall, who announces that “Vertigo has been given new life. The haunting vision of a master filmmaker will astonish and obsess movie audiences for generations to come.”

Nevertheless, the overlap of the two climaxes isn’t as smooth as it seems. On the one hand, the documentary is telling a story of triumph, ultimately defining the restoration of Vertigo as the past regained. On the other hand, the plot of Vertigo suggests the futility of hoping for restoration in this sense. After all, Scottie hasn’t gotten Madeleine back. Furthermore, he never met the real Madeleine in the first place, but only Judy, who was impersonating her. And later, the film ends with Scottie discovering Elster’s scheme and Judy plunging to her death. In general, then, Vertigo explores the depths and costs of Scottie’s fantasy of restoration. The documentary, however, nurtures a similar fantasy about the film itself.

At the two climaxes, the documentary does this partly by encouraging us to share Scottie’s gaze. Showing us the character’s face as he rapturously looks toward the transformed Judy, Obsessed With Vertigo makes an analogy: just as Scottie beholds “Madeleine” returned to him, so we should behold Vertigo returned to us. As I have noted, the analogy is undermined by the subsequent destruction of Scottie’s bliss. Nevertheless, the documentary’s attempt to get us to align ourselves with him is a noteworthy rhetorical move. In the wake of Kenneth Burke, rhetorical critics have increasingly studied appeals to identification; ripe for such analysis is how Obsessed entices its audience into Scottie’s subject position.

His isn’t the only subjectivity, though, that the documentary privi-
leges. It presents other people for us to admire, if not necessarily to imitate. Harris and Katz come across as authoritative analysts and reconstructors of Hitchcock's classic. Also, Hitchcock himself plays a key role, as befits a director who marketed his films by charming the public with his distinctive persona. Although Hitchcock figures in various ways throughout Obsessed, especially interesting is its use of him to validate the reconstruction. The documentary ends by suggesting that the new version of Vertigo, as well as the original film, are direct emanations of Hitchcock's psyche. More specifically, Kim Novak and Martin Scorsese emphasize how personal a film it was for him, and the documentary's final shot before the credits is of Hitchcock's own face, presented in a manner that iconographically resembles the woman's face in Vertigo's opening credits. By intimating that the old and new versions of Vertigo convey the essence of Hitchcock's soul, the documentary encourages us to forget devices and stratagems that the restoration required. Again, by contrast, Vertigo depicts restoration as at best a technologically contrived simulacrum.

By inviting us to adopt Scottie's viewpoint and to accept the authority of Harris, Katz, and Hitchcock, Obsessed With Vertigo in effect endorses the power of men. This, too, however, is something that Vertigo puts in question. True, the film leaves Gavin Elster getting away with his scheme, but it exposes its protagonist, Scottie, as a zealous and naive manipulator of female appearance. Scottie even resembles Elster in that both men seek to control Judy by turning her into "Madeleine," the difference being that Scottie pursues an illusion bound to fail. It is not surprising, then, that Vertigo has been much discussed by feminist film critics. To be sure, their interpretations of it diverge. While all look askance at Scottie's attempt to dominate Judy, they vary in their specific diagnoses of him, and they take different stands on whether Vertigo amounts to a feminist work. Still, given that the documentary's embrace of male authority contrasts with the film's emphasis on male arrogance and insecurity, a rhetorical critic would do well to put these disjunctive narratives in a larger social framework. They serve as an impetus for tracing how their conflicting attitudes toward gender show up repeatedly in more widespread discourses about the male psyche and about men's relation to women. The context of analysis thus expands to Mailloux's "cultural conversation."

Besides issues of gender, much of this conversation revolves around the possibilities and limits of new media. Consider the conflicting messages that Obsessed With Vertigo and Vertigo convey about
technology's mimetic potential. Ultimately, the documentary claims that restoration has brought *Vertigo*'s original glory back. Meanwhile, the film's narrative exposes the dubious allure of simulacra. In this respect, Hitchcock seems prescient; though his earlier *Rear Window* is famous for probing photographic voyeurism, *Vertigo* anticipates new media's creation of convincing fakes. To what extent should new media indeed aim for mimesis? To what extent should they emphasize artifice? These questions have become common in the wake of technological advance. In *The Language of New Media*, for example, Manovich notes that work on developing better images of three-dimensional space coexists with work devoted to non-mimetic animation. Similarly, in their book *Remediation*, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin observe that new media enable audiences to sense both immediacy and hypermediacy. As they point out, older media also offered these prospects, albeit in their own ways. Nevertheless, present technology is more able to simulate reality and revel in artifice, so that comparing these alternatives becomes a more pressing task. Of course, these goals aren't mutually exclusive, and surely both will somehow remain in force. But at present, the tension between *Vertigo* and the documentary signifies that in public discourse, these aims remain split.

**Disjunctive Narratives: In the Gloaming**

The narratives that I have been discussing are disjunctive in presenting opposite messages about the same topic. Clearly, though, stories may conflict in other ways. We encounter differences in subject as well as tone when we compare the fictional film *In the Gloaming* with the documentary material accompanying it on videotape. More specifically, a fictional story about a young man dying of AIDS is juxtaposed to a tale of triumph about the film's quadriplegic director. The task of the rhetorical critic, then, is to probe the dynamics that emerge as two markedly different narratives bid for attention.

In many respects, the film *In The Gloaming* is faithful to its source, Alice Elliott Dark's short story. Certainly, it retains Dark's basic plot, in which the AIDS-stricken man returns home to die and finds in his mother the only emotional support that his dysfunctional family can give. Presented alone, this narrative would strike many viewers as well structured. The man steadily declines over a period of months, with the name of each month displayed on the screen. Moreover, the story is told largely from the viewpoint of a single character: the mother. In other words, we have here a case of classic Hollywood style.
What injects discontinuity into the videotape is its second story. This is introduced in a brief feature preceding the film and is then developed in a longer segment afterward. Again, this second narrative is about the shooting of the film. It depicts the production as a personal triumph for actor Christopher Reeve, who was making his directorial debut after a much-publicized spinal cord injury left him a quadriplegic. The story of Reeve’s triumph originally appeared on HBO as publicity for the film, and its appearance on the tape is surely yet another attempt to engage audiences who might otherwise find the film’s plot too depressing. The result is a pair of narratives that seem quite discordant: the first chronicling a man’s death from AIDS; the second depicting a man’s victory over physical disability.

Conceivably, the accompanying features about Reeve could have dwelled on the misery of his disability, thus being more in sync with the AIDS narrative. Yet even if Reeve had wanted to wallow publicly in self-pity, HBO would hardly have linked In the Gloaming to a spectacle of that sort. No doubt, the company wanted a supplementary documentary inspiring enough to attract audiences that would otherwise shrink from a story about death from AIDS. In this situation, too, rhetorical analysis seems relevant, for it can illuminate how the segments about Reeve serve as a marketing strategy. In particular, these segments try to engage audiences by de-emphasizing the rest of the film’s production team and focusing almost exclusively on its director. To appropriate Michel Foucault’s well-known term, the two documentary features establish an “author-function” and assign it to Reeve. Then, by depicting Reeve wonderfully surmounting his disability, the narrative about the film’s “author” counterbalances the sad deterioration of the film’s chief male character. The contrast between decline and glory on the Gloaming tape is underscored by the parallel roles the two narratives assign actress Glenn Close. In the film, she plays the dying man’s mother, grieving over her son and nurturing him through his final months. Before and after the film, however, viewers encounter her expressing joy over Reeve’s accomplishments as director. Although the son’s life ends, observing Reeve’s work moves Close to declare a “whole lifetime of possibilities” opening up for him.

To be sure, as the case of Hitchcock spectacularly indicates, Hollywood has often promoted a film by spotlighting its director. As Barbara Klinger reminds us in “Digressions at the Cinema: Commodification and Reception in Mass Culture,” life stories of the film’s production team and cast are usually part of a whole publicity campaign. Furthermore, Klinger
points out, this touting of the film as a commodity directs viewers to particular elements of the text rather than encouraging them to experience it holistically. "The spectator, motivated by the activity of these referential frames, fragments the text," Klinger notes, by focusing on what the advertising apparatus has designated as the film's "capitalizable" features (130, 126). Hence, it isn't surprising that near the beginning of his New York Times review of In the Gloaming, John J. O'Connor makes the following observation: "A man in his late 20's must use a wheelchair and is dying of AIDS. The director is Christopher Reeve, who, as is widely known, must use a wheelchair after a horse-jumping accident" (11). Since 1989, however, the publicity narratives that Klinger discusses are often physically closer to the film they frame, in the sense of abutting it on the same tape. Therefore, the potential is even greater for viewers to experience fragmentation, especially when they encounter stories that significantly clash.

The videotape's commercially attractive exultation of Reeve is abetted by references to visuality, both within the film and within the documentary segments. Indeed, when analyzing an artifact of visual culture, rhetorical critics should attend to any ways in which it discursively privileges visual media and the very act of seeing; after all, this privileging may be simultaneously performing another epideictic function: exalting those who consume and produce visual culture in the first place. Stephen Heath has observed that, in many respects, television is blatantly self-referential, the medium often being the subject of its own shows (281). Though Heath made this observation back in the late 1980s, subsequent TV broadcasts have exemplified it, to the point where there now exists an entire channel called TVLand. In In the Gloaming, a self-reflexive moment comes when the mother watches a videotape. Although the film was originally shown on HBO, most likely its makers envisioned it as a videotape, and the mother's watching can be taken to ratify both viewers and artists of this medium. Similar privileging of the visual also seems to operate at other moments when the film departs from its literary source. Whereas in the original short story the mother and son discuss their favorite works of literature, in the film adaptation they discuss their favorite movies, and the mother is also shown reading a book on Italian film directors. Again, the implication is that consumers and creators of cinema are engaged in natural, worthwhile acts.

Two other episodes in the film itself work together to underscore director Reeve's own stature. The specific videotape that the mother watches is the 1930s musical Forty-Second Street, and one of the scenes
from it that we see along with her is the musical number, "Young and Healthy." At one moment during her viewing, she imagines her son, rather than Dick Powell, performing the song. And later, she has a nightmare in which her son coughs up blood as he sings the song. The film's entire use of *Forty-Second Street* would remind many viewers of Reeve, another performer who was "young and healthy" until disaster struck. This evocation of Reeve in effect stresses his own significance as a visual artist, albeit in a mode of pathos. The two documentary segments about him, though, emphasize his remaining creative potential, thus continuing to affirm him as an artist while shifting the tone from despair to elation.

This affirmation is evident, too, when an unidentified member of the production team speaks in the segments. Crowing over Reeve's ability to direct the film whatever his physical constraints, this interviewee compares him to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who, he notes, managed to lead the country while keeping his wheelchair out of public view. In Reeve's case, too, the interviewee declares, "You don't see the wheelchair!" What he means, apparently, is that Reeve might not be able to continue acting in a wheelchair but can still achieve much as a director, for the latter job—like Roosevelt's presidency—doesn't require him to maneuver his wheelchair in front of a camera.

But more than words alone convey the tale of Reeve's achievement-in-adversity. Indeed, the interviewee's "You don't see the wheelchair!" comment is at odds with moments of the tape that do show us Reeve's wheelchair, reminding us of the physical conditions he has had to overcome. By repeatedly drawing attention within the *Gloaming* film itself to the wheelchair of the AIDS-stricken protagonist, director Reeve gives the audience numerous opportunities to think of his own wheelchair-bound existence, as the comment by *Times* critic O'Connor indicates. Similarly, even as the interviewee suggests that Reeve's wheelchair, like FDR's, remains invisible to the public, the documentary segments repeatedly display Reeve in it. Thus, while Reeve's connection to wheelchairs is verbally denied, visually it is made obvious. Yet the interviewee's enthusiasm over Reeve isn't thereby undermined. Rather, the narrative of triumph is still promulgated.

Today, just four years later, the interviewee's euphoric comment "You don't see the wheelchair!" seems out of date. Since the remark, many advocates for the physically disabled have objected to the original design of the FDR memorial because it *didn't* show him in a wheelchair. Moreover, this omission has now been rectified. For rhetorical critics of
visual culture, including visually depicted fictional narratives, the debate over the memorial underscores the importance of situating their objects of study within larger histories of social movements. Again, the context of analysis expands to include the "cultural conversation."

One way of relating the Gloaming tape to this conversation is by considering the tape's representations of bodily impairment. In her article "Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness," disability activist Eli Clare associates Reeve with "the supercrip model," which "frames disability as a challenge to overcome and disabled people as superheroes just for living our daily lives." Though she isn't referring to how the Gloaming tape depicts him, the documentaries on the tape are part of a general discourse in which he "insists on his ability to overcome quadriplegia." At the same time, Clare observes, he has also enacted a "medical model," which "insists on disability as a disease or condition that is curable and/or treatable" (360). Consistent with this second model is the only organized movement referred to by the Gloaming tape: the American Paralysis Association, which one of the documentary segments identifies as a cause that Reeve has advocated. In the Gloaming film itself, however, neither the "supercrip" model nor the medical model seems to fit the young man dying of AIDS. To endure his last months, he relies on wit and storytelling rather than significant physical prowess, and, though he takes abundant medication, he is clearly perishing. Nothing can prolong his life, let alone cure him, and reference to AIDS-related organizations is absent.

Another culturally-resonant discrepancy involves the sexual orientations of Gloaming's protagonist and director. Like many people with AIDS—though of course not all—the son who returns home is gay. Although he doesn't engage in sexual behavior on screen, we learn about his sexual history, which included a long-term relationship with another man. By contrast, the documentary features on the tape remind us that Reeve is straight. Besides meeting his wife Dana, we see a People magazine cover that shows them cuddling. The tape's use of People exemplifies what Bolter and Grusin call remediation, their term for the ways in which newer media (here, videotape) technologically incorporate older media (here, print). Bolter and Grusin's concept is obviously important for any rhetorical critic analyzing contemporary visual artifacts. Yet, it is equally important to note that the technological remediation they refer to may involve ideological remediation as well. Consider that the Gloaming tape uses the People magazine cover to produce a spectacle
of heteronormativity: Mr. and Mrs. Reeve snuggling together. While the film’s story is about a gay man, Reeve’s story is blatantly associated with the sexual majority. For many viewers, this difference may make the tape’s narrative of quadriplegia more salient and appealing than the tape’s narrative of AIDS.

In effect, the *Gloaming* tape asks its audience to consider the relative importance of the two narratives it spins. Pertinent to this case, as well as to *Vertigo*’s, is the propensity of contemporary rhetorical criticism to study how narratives validate certain identities and communities that have developed around particular public issues. In this regard, the two stories’ relative textual status is also a matter of relative political status, for the two narratives are tied nowadays to movements that don’t exactly coincide. Indeed, even activists committed to the rights of both people with physical disabilities and people with AIDS can have trouble devising a discourse that smoothly accommodates the two constituencies. I imagine that most readers of this article sympathize, as I do, with both these groups. Perhaps, some of you are members of one or both. The discordance of the *Gloaming* tape’s two narratives, however, points to the difficulty of conceptually and materially linking the social movements they reflect.

This difficulty was well demonstrated in Bragdon v. Abbott, a 1998 U.S. Supreme Court case in which the justices had to decide whether HIV infection was a “disability” covered by the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act. Bragdon was a dentist, and Abbott an HIV-infected woman whom he had refused to treat in his office. Abbott sued Bragdon under Maine state law, successfully arguing that her condition fell under the rubric of the ADA. When Bragdon’s appeal reached the Supreme Court, much public debate ensued over an issue of definition: do HIV-related illnesses fit the ADA’s notion of “disability”? Ultimately, the Court decided to remand the case back to a lower court. But on the definitional issue, the justices expressed conflicting views. Delivering the majority opinion, Justice Kennedy argued that Abbott’s condition does fit the ADA’s rubric because it is, in the statute’s terms, “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities.” In this case, the majority found, the “major life activity” is reproduction—a claim, needless to say, that would be disputed. Kennedy conceded as much: “It may seem legalistic to circumscribe our discussion to the activity of reproduction. We have little doubt that had different parties brought the suit they would have maintained that an HIV infection imposes substantial limitations on other
major life activities." In a separate concurring opinion, Justice Ginsburg argued that HIV does threaten additional "major life activities" such as "the affected individual's family relations, employment potential, and ability to care for herself." Meanwhile, in another opinion, Justices Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas declared that "the Court is simply wrong in concluding that as a general matter that reproduction is a 'major' life activity." Going further, they contended that "Reproduction is not an activity at all, but a process." Dissensus reigned as well in the public's reaction to the Court's decision. Even as many AIDS activists welcomed inclusion under the ADA, several of them objected to the centrality of reproduction in the Court's rationale.

Contrary, perhaps, to expectations, I myself won't take a position here on the Supreme Court case. I am more concerned to show how a fragmented artifact such as the *Gloaming* tape can be related to major civic disputes. In addition, I wish to acknowledge that the issues faced by the Court remain thorny, and thus deserve continued debate. Returning to the *Gloaming* tape, I must admit, too, that I can't gauge exactly its political effects on viewers. Speculation about their responses to this juxtaposition of two stories must be tentative at best. In part, my tentativeness stems from uncertainty about who will see the tape in the first place. The niche marketing that has come to define our post-Fordist economy is evident on our television screens. Both the film *In the Gloaming* and the documentaries about it appeared first on HBO, merely one channel in a increasingly segmented broadcast universe. HBO's sheer existence signifies fragmentation of a televisual world once ruled by three other networks. And, though the tape with the film and the documentaries is now available in video stores, it has to compete with myriad attractions, including a growing number of DVDs.

Even among people who do see the tape, responses may diverge. As I noted earlier, audiences have always been able to focus on various aspects of whatever they are watching, going so far as to resist or ignore elements that unify the work. Moreover, idiosyncratic viewing can serve a variety of political causes. Although a major school of thought in cultural studies welcomes such waywardness as subversive populism, it isn't necessarily progressive. As Klinger points out, selective attention to a film's elements may result from the studio's advertising campaign, which pushes the viewer to focus on certain things.

Remember that Mailloux's "cultural conversation" is by no means perfectly linear or unified, either. It consists of "multiple dialogues, overlapping voices, pregnant silences, unanswered accusations, sugges-
tive whispers, overreactions, and misinterpretations." Along with my term "disjunctive narratives," this wording invites consideration of what in the late 1990s cultural context encourages the Gloaming tape to offer a potentially riveting narrative about Reeve's disability rather than present the AIDS narrative alone. I have already suggested that Reeve's story is included, in part, because it counterbalances the gloom of the AIDS story. In addition, the film and television industries have always hesitated to tell stories about the circumstances of gay men. But also relevant, I suspect, is this particular moment in history. The tape suggests that the AIDS story may not be as timely as it once was, and that the disability story may be a timelier one to tell. Hence, rhetorical critics analyzing such artifacts might turn to a classic rhetorical concept, kairos.

Of course, in this instance they would be applying the term not to a discursive verbal argument, but rather to a videotape yoking two visual narratives that make certain appeals.

When Dark's story "In the Gloaming" was published in The New Yorker (May 3, 1993), the AIDS crisis was still less than a decade old, and the story was quickly seen as contributing significantly to an evolving body of fiction about the epidemic. By 1997, however, when the film adaptation premiered on HBO, an increasing number of Americans had begun to believe—or, more precisely, were preferring to believe—in the salvational power of protease inhibitors.7 Deserving the rhetorical critic's notice are particular texts that encouraged this optimism. It was conspicuously nurtured, for example, by HIV-positive writer Andrew Sullivan in his 1996 New York Times Magazine article "When Plagues End." "[A] diagnosis of HIV infection," Sullivan declared, "is not just different in degree than, say, five years ago. It is different in kind. It no longer signifies death. It merely signifies illness" (52). Sullivan's article was controversial; many AIDS activists and other readers criticized it. Furthermore, Sullivan himself admitted in his piece that "The vast majority of HIV-positive people in the world, and a significant minority in America, will not have access to the expensive and effective new drug treatments now available. And many Americans—especially blacks and Latinos—will still die" (52). Still, the overall tenor of Sullivan's article was sanguine, and his writing became part of an emerging discourse that no longer saw AIDS as a mortal threat for white Americans of the middle class or above. Unfortunately, besides overlooking the increasing danger that the AIDS virus posed to other groups in America, this discourse ignored the steadily climbing rates of infection in other parts of world, including predominantly nonwhite societies in Africa and Asia. Nevertheless, given the
then-current stage of the cultural conversation, a film of Dark's story might seem old news. All the more reason, then, for framing it with a real-life story about another condition, in which a white, heterosexual, upper-class hero even triumphs.

If left to itself, would the film *In The Gloaming* make viewers aware that AIDS is an ongoing social problem? Again, surely their reactions would vary. Basically, though, the film stays within a domestic context, focusing on relationships within one particular family and confining events to their particular house. As Paula Treichler, Eva Cherniavsky, and others have noted, the usual genre of film and television narratives about gay men with AIDS is the family melodrama, which Treichler sees as aiming "to restore stability to the nuclear family and reinforce the traditions of a patriarchal order" (199). *In The Gloaming* follows the same plot, and its resemblance to its predecessors is quite close in respects. Like his counterpart in *An Early Frost*, the AIDS-stricken young man in *Gloaming* comes home to an empathetic mother, a fearful sister, and a father blatantly insensitive to his plight. As in *Our Sons*, the benevolent mother must confess a lingering element of homophobia, revealed in her reluctance to invite her son's lover home. Significantly, in Dark's original story the parallels aren't as strong. It mentions a sister just briefly, without specifying her attitudes; it does not refer at all to a lover; and the mother appears quite tolerant of her son's orientation. Consciously or not, therefore, the film adaptation seems crafted to fit the more specific guidelines established by Hollywood for its AIDS family melodramas. Once more, the concept of kairos applies. By the time that *Gloaming* was filmed, the medium in which it would appear had already developed conventions for this kind of work.

"By staging social and political conflicts in personal and familial terms," Cherniavsky observes, "melodrama displaces the operations of political economy and institutionalized social power into the register of intergenerational strife and private affect" (376). Although she is thinking of AIDS narratives in general, and she doesn't mention the film of *Gloaming*, her words fit it. If anything, the film reinforces its displacement of politics through an omission I noted earlier: it fails to acknowledge AIDS-related activism. Relevant here is Treichler's indictment of *An Early Frost* and *Our Sons*. For her, their domestic focus amounts to a "failure to exploit the enormous resources of narrativity demonstrated in activist and independent work, to represent the courage and dedication of the AIDS activist community, to mention the words condom or safe sex or gay community, to show gay men and lesbians being gay, to make
manifest the shabby politics surrounding the epidemic, and to challenge the systemic inequities of the health-care system” (204).

I share Treichler’s dismay over the film and the television industry’s neglect of these narrative elements. And, however variable the film’s effects on audiences, it seems yet one more example of the tradition that Treichler deplores. By listing the “resources of narrativity” that she wants AIDS stories to tap, she indicates that analysis of a visual artifact needn’t just settle for “reading” it. Instead, such analysis can be activist, using rhetorical strategies of its own to promote new directions for whatever genre it studies. Moreover, Treichler suggests, such analysis can go beyond the lone artifact to examine biases of the media industries that produce and circulate it.

In the case of the videotape, *In the Gloaming*, rhetorical critics shouldn’t forget that it is the product of a network. By *network*, I don’t mean just a particular television channel, HBO. Rather, I use the term in a broader sense, which Heath articulates when he points to “a new imagination of network” expressed by the global capitalist system to which television belongs. In this meaning of *network*, the word serves to remind us that television “is part of . . . [an] electronic information/communication media conglomerate, within which it represents a specific area of investment and development” (194). Obviously, the film’s migration from cable television to videocassette shows these two media may interconnect under the same corporate rubric, HBO. Yet HBO itself is part of a larger media empire, now called AOL Time Warner. This connection helps explain what otherwise seems a gratuitous moment in the presentation of Reeve’s story: the *People* cover showing Reeve and his wife. Prior to displaying the cover, the *Gloaming* tape has already indicated that the Reeves are a happily married heterosexual couple. Thus, the cover comes across as excessively verifying this claim. But *People* isn’t being invoked here simply as a touchstone for the Real; by visually referring to this particular magazine, the tape points to a Time Warner publication. In the classic lexicon of rhetoric, this gesture is an example of *meta Ie psis*, reversibility of figure and ground. For, just as the *People* cover legitimizes the HBO tape’s emphasis on Reeve’s marriage, so the HBO’s tape use of *People* legitimizes the magazine. Just as important for rhetoricians to note is that this moment of apparent fragmentation is actually postmodern corporate synergy, an homage to *network* in Heath’s sense of the term.

With its very title, *People* exalts individualism, suggesting that the stories most worth presenting are those focused on particular lives: for
example, Christopher Reeve. In contrast, the "new imagination of network" cited by Heath opposes individualism, focusing instead on the interplay of corporate enterprises while assigning people to consumer categories. The excluded middle in this binary opposition of people and network is citizens' advocacy and protest groups, such as those that Treichler finds absent from television dramas about AIDS. True, the Gloaming tape identifies Reeve with the American Paralysis Association, but otherwise it ignores how individuals have joined together to pursue goals at odds with corporate agendas.

Although authoritative political judgments of such visual artifacts as the Gloaming tape may not always be possible, rhetorical critics of them ought to blend formal analysis with civic consciousness, exploring how tensions within the work relate to our often discordant "cultural conversation." Furthermore, while fragmentation is unlikely to disappear from the visual artifacts we study or from our own social scene, we can still critique particular examples of it we encounter. If, behind the Gloaming tape, is a media establishment that simply opposes individualism to corporate life, the result may be forms of social fragmentation that we need to resist.

Conclusion
Throughout this article, I have pursued McGee's observation that "changing cultural conditions have made it virtually impossible to construct a whole and harmonious text." Some rhetoricians, I realize, may take his pronouncement as bad news. Indeed, just as I began by recalling a copyright warning that fragments a videotape, so I seem to be ending with a warning about capitalism's disintegrative effects. But I would like to end on a more positive note. Overall, I have tried to detail several ways in which disjunctions related to cinematic fiction are open to rhetorical analysis. Such criticism may have much to say about these disjunctions if, in particular, it still attends to persuasive appeals, to subject positions, and to the "cultural conversation," while now acknowledging visual discord, too. Rather than agonize over cases like those of Vertigo and In The Gloaming, our field should see them as a fruitful and exciting realm of inquiry, even as we note the fragments that compose (or discompose) them.

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Notes

1. See Williams for an explanation of how Hitchcock got moviegoers to change this habit of late arrival when, in 1959, he required them to see Psycho from the beginning.

2. The most influential analyst of television's fragmentation is Raymond Williams, for whom the medium's key feature is its "flow" of disparate images.

3. The most discussed analysis of classical Hollywood cinema is the book of the same name by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson. Although they have been much criticized for neglecting chaotic elements in the films they study, they are right to point out how particular narrative conventions made these films seem largely coherent.

4. Kapsis provides a detailed account of how Hitchcock personally gained publicity for his films.

5. For a good overview of feminist critics on Vertigo, see White.

6. Although an image of Roosevelt in a wheelchair has now been added to the memorial, whether and how his disability should be represented is likely to remain an issue. For example, several critics accused the recent film Pearl Harbor of distorting history when it showed Roosevelt (played by Jon Voight) publicly rising out of his wheelchair to proclaim American resolve.


8. More precisely, while the father in Frost is downright hostile to his son (turning soft only at the end), the father in Gloaming quietly, nervously avoids his (though, after his son dies, he asks his wife what the son enjoyed).

9. For a more extended discussion of this sense of network, see Castells.

Works Cited


*In the Gloaming*. Dir. Christopher Reeve. HBO, 1997.


