

Political Events through Image and Ritual

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Abstract: Governing people, the manifestation of the political power event creates *beliefs* and *ideas - power* which represent variables of belief systems or existing rules in any society. Some promote emancipation, freedom and justice, others propagate retaliation, revenge and oppression. All, however, serve the approaches to mobilize and unite people through images and speech. The image is a *global view* of the person. It comes from personal experience and from the information received from the media and it is the synthesis of all we know, true or false, on the subject which it represents. The citizens perceive the politician, the party, the political organization or institution according to the promoted image. The unique form of political discourse in the minds of the audience induces in the mind of the auditory the faith in the ability of the orator to provide optimal solutions to the problems manifested in the society. The charismatic leader acquires much of his power from the fact that it is perceived by many as being simultaneously *above others* and *as others*. The charismatic leader knows that the energy of the masses is extracted from the emotions, illusions, beliefs, expectations, ideals and dreams; thus energized, people believe they know who to follow and who to devote.

Keywords: image; ritual; politician; charisma; influence

1. Introduction

It is important for institutions to communicate, to arise and appear on the ritual stage. The will of state leaders to “publicize” their solemn and ritualistic meetings in order to make them visible to a larger number of individuals, confirms this situation, even if part of the sacred charge has evaporated. The success of the communicators, in any area, it is due most of the time to images or charisma. “*It would be futile to talk about the rise towards a society without gods or masters, as, at any moment, leaders reborn in our midst*”. (Moscovici, 1994, p. 99)

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2. Charisma and Ritual

In the contemporary society, television, advertising and surveys represent an important means of social influence, which were adopted by the political class to obtain adhesion to the members of civil society. In the volume *Violence, myth and revolution*, says Stephen Stănciugelu that in order to obtain legitimation, “power must seduce.” (Stănciugelu, 1998, p. 99) Gabriel Tarde argues that although it is said that freedom, emancipation, the absence of obligations are claimed and promoted as major values, “for most people there is an irresistible pleasure, the inherent in obedience, credulity, quasi-loved trust to an admired master.” (apud Moscovici, 1994, p 25). Here it is about charismatic authority, achieved by acknowledging and affirming the personal qualities of the leader.

2.1. The Charismatic Personality

The charismatic personality is the political issuer able to impose its will, interests and obtain the desirable behaviors and attitudes. The essential feature is the prestige, a kind of fascination that it exerts over our spirit an individual, a doctrine, the manipulator obtains adhesion by the fact that it proposes to the crowd, in simple and expressive terms, an answer to their questions and problems and it also gives them *an identity to their own anonymity*. The charismatic person is able to capitalize, in its own interest, a society marked by fear, being able to be liked and get sympathy, affection, trust, or even veneration from the audience.

In *Myths and political mythologies*, Raoul Girardet says that *regardless of the model, that it is about Cincinnatus, Alexander, Solon or Moses, even if embodies institutional, priestly power, the providential man always appears as a fighter, as a combatant*” . (Girardet, 1997, p. 61) Always being threatened, whether it reinstates or shatters an order, whether put things in order or announces the one who will come, his character is involved in a temporal reality that is marked by the rift. Due to him, what will be “after” will not be as before. “*To his legend there are always associated the same images, the same symbols of verticality, of the light.*” (Girardet, 1997, p. 62)

Through ritual, symbols, rhetoric, there was a new form of political religion, reconstructed around a relatively coherent system of collective values: the cult of law, justice, freedom and solidarity, celebrating motherland, belief in human progress, in the emergence of a new moral conscience certified by Reason. (Girardet, 1997, p 149)

The ritual structures the political imaginary in a coherent whole, and its finality is to unite the individual with the collectivity, with the organized life. The inauguration of a public building, for example, is an excellent opportunity for a

president or a prime minister to improve the image or to win public confidence. It consists of the following sequences (Frigioiu, 2009, p. 192):

- a) a symbolic marking of the space (dressing with flags, flowers, etc.)
- b) the presence of cameras, which indicates that a significant event will occur;
- c) the presence of local and central celebrities (minister, prefect, mayor);
- d) the presence of a big audience;
- e) welcome statement;
- f) cutting the inaugural ribbon;
- g) statement of the guest of honor.

Some of these sequences may be absent or may be reversed, the key is that the *“event organized by his emotional strength, becomes a “trap of thinking” for the audience by targeting the social perception.”* (Frigioiu, 2009, p. 192)

The political ritual is a power moment as performance, an authentic fulfillment of the institutional life. *“During these rites, the power is offering to the society, to be seen, and the fact of showing that thus it is acquired an active political dimension.”* (Lardellier, 2009, p. 247) To offer in order to be seen seems thus a consubstantial dimension of political order. The latter operates in the sphere of representation. (Lardellier, 2009, p 247) The political persuasion reveals less the arguments, being better to manifest spectacularly through the effect of visual arts. The initiating interrogations of any political persuasion approach are the following: Why would anyone vote for a particular political party, if the electoral programs are relatively alike? Why would anyone choose a politician and not another?

2.2. The Mass-Media and the Political Image

The institutions change their organization and strategies, giving priority to their presentations and also to their broadcasted messages, and the power discovers that its legitimacy depends on the governments’ ability to communicate, to influence the opinions of others. *“The media thus becomes the privileged tool to meet this need, to dynamite the private space boundaries, to produce beliefs, and to “tele”-command the behaviors.”* (Balandier, 2000, p. 146) To media act means, especially, to act using the word and the image and then use the means of spectacular, the construction of reality through dramatization.

In the governance process the image composed of elements predominantly physical, will dissipate. In the construction process of the image it appears the valuation relationship that involves the core of political personality. Kenneth R. Boulding in the study *“The Image”* shows that *“the image as subjective structure of any individual or organization does not consist of only the “facts” pictures, but*

in the ones of "value". There is a difference between the image that we have of physical objects in space and time and the value that we give to these objects and facts." (apud Frigiou, 2007, pp. 12-13) As a political poster, the image would produce confidence and determine the conviction and it would "*play on the idea of positive dramatization of the future.*" (Balandier, 2000, p. 152) Through picture, the message is personalized and it can become exemplary. The more active the motion pictures are, broadcasted through television and other high technical performance means, carrying with them an authority with immediate effect, it provides influence and power. The emotional pathos, manifested or hidden, present in the political discourses and images and in the reactions that it causes, establishes a semblance of reality of political confrontation, of the importance of the stakes, and also the overwhelming illusion of a dramatic representation of great proportions.

A fundamental condition for the successful imposition of a political image represents the consideration of the past political human, of the social context and actions of the opponents. An important aspect of the image is the positioning. It contains significant elements that appear when evoking that image. Also, for the sustainability of the public image, it is necessary for the politician to represent more than something of immediate interest. And for that, he has to communicate something other than political interest, especially desirable human qualities.

More and more scholars consider that today, politics is increasingly associated with an image, at the expense of the word. This is explained by the dominance of the techniques that they produce, directing "narrative" chaining and effectiveness. Through them, we model the event and the public opinion. In the view of the studied theorists, the political history, on long-term, marks the transition from the individual - subject to citizen, and from that to the person manipulated under the influence of the relationships established with professional opinion producers, especially the political opinion. The contemporary political drama differs less and less from the show that resorts to images. The power becomes a star. This is the decisive overthrow occurred during the 70s. The entire political world is a dramatic place where effects are produced.

The political picture proposed by the audio-visual techniques is at the confluence of the outlet seduction factors of personality and the attraction force of the bourgeois lifestyle. The intimate comfort, the joy of life in family gathered on Sunday, "the steak and fries, jokes etc. all require a picture of the candidate where the cognitive dimension disappears." (Frigioiu, 2007, p. 12) Thus the picture becomes a photo, a "social ineffable", a substitute for the political program of the candidate.

In participatory civic cultures in the West, under the influence of mass-media, the civic culture is transformed into a culture of performance. The latter is based on

simulation, artifice and the individual is considered a political actor, when there is only a spectator abused by the “political game” due to small screens and projection panels. In this play of images, the values of the participatory culture, individuals feel active participants in politics and they believe that by their vote they can influence the government decisions. *“This belief is derived from the symbolic identification with the role of leader. This unconscious projection, fueled by the mass-media, under the form of a show, gives a role of “representation”.* (Frigioiu, 2007, p. 30) Several anthropologists have emphasized the complementarity of the rite and myth in the process of updating the legitimacy of the political order. There is no ritual or political rituals without the symbolic mediation of reality. *“The fact that the symbols conceal and reveal at the same time, they are a bridge between the physical reality and the imaginary.”* (Frigioiu, 2009, p. 201) Politics is particularly spectacular, it is dramatic and dynamic. The political scene is recommended to the viewers, who become thus distance spectator of the drama set up for them, and most often in the form of a brief confrontation of political celebrities.

In order to distinguish in the multitude of government representatives, a politician must build a self-image, which reveals a different political identity from that of political opponents, an image with which a potential voter would be able to identify easily. *“A politician can play the advantage of his youth or his professionalism, honesty or the new ideas which he promotes.”* (Stoiciu, 2000, p. 17) The clear presentation of this image to the electorate is very important, even if it is challenged by the political opponents. The image of a politician is not judged and evaluated in terms of true and false, but in terms of popularity, clarity, contradiction or confusion.

Multiplication and dissemination of modern media has changed the way of producing the political images. Politics is achieved by disseminating daily images. They can be made in very large numbers at events or circumstances that shall not be exceptional; therefore they get into becoming everyday mundane acts. Therefore, they must be renewed or acquire the appearance of novelty. Thus power has a true technology of appearances.

Across cultures and eras, the power exists and it is achieved under the eyes of its witnesses; in front of them, the image of the politician must look to his advantage at any cost. Power ceases to be absent, abstract and it is *alive*. According to RG Schwarzenberg ideas substitute the characters that capture the attention and flourish the imagination. They justify their usefulness through a repertoire which includes membership heroes, common people (identified with ordinary rulers), the charismatic leader, the father, the mother (called the “political non-woman”). Circumstances build and de-build characters, causing succession of roles, conditioning the different images of the authority. (apud Balandier, 2000, p. 116)

Better equipped to produce images, the governor is still in the paradoxical situation of seeing this ability reducing due to its use. *“The audiovisual techniques available to power, allow a permanent or near-permanent dramatization and therefore less dependent on the annual cycle of the political ceremonial.”* (Balandier, 2000, p. 116) Reality seems less powerful than the image.

Screen games require a new type of political actor, the “tv-politician”. The political universe seems more open to the governed. Communication between government and the governed has never been so instrumental as nowadays. Media and communication services, using various media, evident role play in various meetings, circumstantial statements, staged debates are all associated means to accommodate the political language to the target audience. The objective is the impact production, so this language would be understood and accepted.

2.3. Politics as Theatrical Media

Once power is set, the politician begins to exist, largely through these ceremonial appearances, it puts him in contact with people, transforming the image into the divine, thus his speech “becomes history”. Due to the acquisition of the most advanced techniques, communication captures the imaginary, producing reality and simulations, building and imposing characters that hold the power or including them in the area of addiction.

Without television, radio, mass circulation press, this theatrical democracy loses its national meaning; it will be played in particular, on many local scenes. The possibilities for increasing the political images introduce the habit and the detachment of the people - spectators, the decrease of the demonstrations’ impact.

To limit these vulnerabilities, power and his opponents have to resort to all current resources of political drama and ensure renewal (and also the images inflation). *“In media society, the political influence is fueled by the event, being “the engine” of dramatization that generates the influence and maintains it”* (Balandier, 2000, p. 118) Modernity is characterized not only by the irruption of the event and the ephemeral, but also by taking into consideration the future, challenging the forces of big changes.

By televised debates, surveys and polls, the modern communication techniques contribute to the establishment of a direct democracy as an instant tantamount, as the citizen-viewer can form an opinion regarding the moment events pressing regularly on the button of his remote-control. The televised events that turn into ceremony the democratic process itself are called by Daniel Dayan events-confrontation or “arranged confrontation.” (Dayan, 2010, p. 251) A significant example is the presidential election debates. “They require as perfectly legitimate the possible conflicting dimension of all political debates, which start from the way

political parties relate to the idea of the “common good”. (Dayan, 2010, p. 251) The confrontation events are oriented towards the argumentative register; they demonstrate that there may be solemn ceremonies related to authority based on reason.

The election campaigns analyzed in terms of political communication appear as symbolic overload moments, which face the definitions of the situation, each aiming at becoming dominant. They can have various forms, depending on the arguments and stories which they mobilize. Highlighting the argumentative dimension of the political discourse it determines the examination of the logic and discursive procedures through which there are drawn the schemes, that is the simplified representations of political situations. Conversely, emphasizing the narrative dimension directs towards understanding the mechanisms of implementing the story, the electoral discourse containing both a retrospective, as a review of government action, and a program of action that needs to be taken.

3. Conclusions

The stake of electoral communication is the control over the construction of a reality and modeling the representations, as the behaviors are oriented based on these representations. When politicians get to present the situations as being real, they become real in their consequences. The subjective representations arise as objective consequences of the discursive interaction of the political candidates. If a political speaker fails to establish its own representation on the political situation in a dominant position, then it will increase the potential of the capacity and ability to influence the voters' conduct and to cause intentional effects on the social-political order.

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