

The Style of Political Images

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"Highbrows. Intellectuals. You're always trying to find hidden meanings in things. Why? A cigarette is a cigarette. A piece of silk is a piece of silk. Why not leave it at that?"

"When they're represented they acquire additional meanings", said Robyn. "Signs are never innocent. Semiotics teaches us that".

"Semi-what?"

"Semiotics. The study of signs".

"It teaches us to have dirty minds, if you ask me".

David Lodge, *Nice Work*

The syntagm "dirty minds" associated to any semiotician by Vic Wilcox actually coincides with one definition provided by Umberto Eco (1979), namely "semiotics is the science that studies whatever can be used in order to lie" (our transl.). Taking into account that the empirical data analyzed are related to politics, one might imply that this rather shocking perspective on semiotics fits perfectly to any (non)verbal political discourse. How many times have we not heard that politicians are labelled as the best liars ever? It is not my aim to dig out and reveal the lies that underlie any political utterance, but one must not forget that, as Humpty Dumpty, the famous character of Lewis Carroll (1992: 159), would say, "the question is who is to be the master" and not necessarily "whether you can make words mean so many different things".

The discourse in general, and, especially, the political discourse raises the problem of the producer. If we think in terms of social status, then we might say that the politician-candidate becomes a master not only through the crafted "manipulation" of words, but as well through the function (s)he embodies, ending, through a process of social legitimization, into the position of a "master" upon some voters.

The paradox consists in the fact that this latter wish should be hidden under the mask of "faire peuple" (Le Bart 1989: 50). The words chosen for the positing of the political self on the stage should reveal a common man who is not concerned with his popularity. The weapon of a political man is "to talk in simple terms without giving the impression that (s)he talks a lot". According to Le Bart (1989: 55) the most efficient strategy is exactly this ability of self doubleness (producer and master) beyond simple and common words: "the best communication strategies are those that do not appear as such either in the eyes of the public, or in the eyes of the producer. [...] The craft (we might talk about a professional skill/ habit) is that which allows you to win without having the sensation of playing and to make good choices without having the feeling that you must make them" (our transl.).

This double-folded position (a producer of a text and a master through discourse) that should belong to any politician could be linked to the etymologies of two concepts, namely, *style* and *image*:

- The two meanings associated with *style* – from the Latin *stilus*¹ "stake, instrument of writing", on the one hand, and "manner or mode of expression", on the other hand – actually coincide with the concrete and abstract "how" to produce a text. Starting from the definition of style, offered by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Theo van Leeuwen (2005: 139) identifies a multimodal function of style, the word "expression" being related to writing, speaking and doing. We consider that exactly this last functional component of style, namely *doing/ acting (upon)* allows a textual producer to turn into a discursive master.
- Beyond the text produced, there will prevail "an artificial representation that looks like a person or thing" (from Latin *imaginem*, from stem of *imitari* "to copy, imitate") which will turn the politician into a master because the discourse gives the sender the power to win (persuade, manipulate) the receiver/ voter through his/ her own social weapons: needs, wishes, beliefs and ideologies.

But to be a master through discourse implies another aspect as well: the control upon the selection of some contextual elements that might persuade and their "packaging" into bright and convincing forms imposes some epistemic modalities of veridiction that belong to the action of a discourse creator who will obey to two rules (Maingueneau 2000: 21-22):

- on the one hand, the law of modality which will shape his/ her competence and performance,

1 <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=style&searchmode=none>

– on the other hand, the law of sincerity, focused on some responsibilities which will guarantee the (apparent) truth of his/ her actions embodied in semiotic resources (Van Leeuwen 2005: 93)². of physiological nature (voice, gestures, facial expressions) or of technical nature (objects of value: clothing, instruments). These semiotic resources or “signifiers, observable actions and objects” (van Leeuwen 2005: 4) help with constructing identities and values which are part of the representations of what is going on in the world.

I. Towards a definition of political discourses: the metaphor of a fortress

We consider that a definition is a matter of style, especially if we consider the two layers (having attribute and symbolizing) within the relational process (Halliday 1994) that any definition is based on.

The definition of political discourse will be shaped taking into account the terminology used in the theory of metaphors, which is, actually a subjective mode of expressing a reality: POLITICAL DISCOURSE = A FORTRESS. This apparently simple definition hides a paradox that could be explained through the argumentation theory of Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1993): a *definition* of the political discourse (a *quasi-logical argument* based on the process of identity) will be built, using actually an *argument that establishes the structure of reality* (the *metaphor*), based on a process of analogy.

I will start from the theory of metaphors drawn by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1981), where a metaphor is not a matter of language, but a problem of conceptual thinking. A conventional conceptual metaphor is a partial mapping of a

2 “The term *semiotic resources* originated in the work of Halliday who argued that the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a ‘resource for making meanings’ (1994:192). In his books, Theo van Leeuwen defines semiotic resources as the actions and artefacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically – with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc. – or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc.” (van Leeuwen 2005: 3). According to van Leeuwen (2005: 93), “any semiotic resource has a *theoretical* semiotic potential constituted by all their past uses and all their potential uses and an *actual* semiotic potential constituted by those past uses that are known to and considered relevant by the users of the resource, and by such potential uses as might be uncovered by the users on the basis of their specific needs and interests”.

conventional structure (SOURCE DOMAIN) onto another conceptual structure (TARGET DOMAIN).

The source-concept that political discourse is associated with is a building from which we borrow terms such as “content, foundation, force, and structure” (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 99). Lakoff and Johnson consider that any source-concept of a metaphor has two surfaces: a content-defining surface and a depth-defining surface. In the case of a building, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 100) mention the fact that the content is not to be found in the interior, as it is the case of a container, instead “the foundation and outer shell constitute the content”. The depth-defining surface associated to a construction starts from the ground level in order to reach the interior of any building.

From the semantic field of the source-concept, we will choose the metaphorical paradigm “fortress” (Cmeci 2005 a: 58-61). So we will build up the syntagm of this place, mentioning its *foundation*, *exterior walls (outer shell)* and *the territory between the walls*.

The concept of a fortress should not be reduced only to its military purpose: “a military construction designed for defense in warfare”³. Any building of such a type has a very precise architecture of its constitutive elements: the inclusion of a town within its walls. We will interpret the political discourse in terms of this military architecture. Just like a fortress, a political discourse should be seen as a necessary and permanent combination of different types of bricks/ discourses. The “fortified city” hidden behind the walls is the *foundation* (the spine) of any political discourse. We will associate this powerful element to any *doctrinal discourse*, the real identity of a political party, “built” in time and belonging to a historical tradition. For this coherent set of ideas⁴ (through which a social reality is represented) to exist, it should be put on stage (to be uttered and shown in persuasive words and images). Any *doctrine* is exhibited on the *exterior walls* from where the narrative

3 <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/fortress>

4 For this part of the political fortress, we will associate the doctrine of a party with the term *ideology* as defined by Ball T. and Dagger R. ([1995] 2000: 22) in their book *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, namely a political ideology is a coherent and comprehensive set of ideas which explains and evaluates the social conditions, it helps people to understand their place in society and it offers a programme for social and political actions. Ball and Dagger describe four important functions of (political) ideologies: *explanatory function* (an ideology explains political phenomena that would remain mysterious or puzzling), *evaluative function* (an ideology provides criteria and standards of evaluation for deciding right and wrong, good and bad), *orientative function* (an ideology orients, allowing one to have a sense of who they are and where they belong to), *programmatic function* (an ideology supplies a political program).

and symbolic images can be perceived. We will translate these two processes of producing and sending a message into a *discourse of "the convenient truth"* associated to a *mass-media discourse* that will constitute the compulsory ingredients of a *discourse of advertising*. G. Thoveron ([1990] 1996: 142-143) and H. Quéré (1989: 4-5) state that through its "geography", the (election) poster, as an embodiment of a discourse of advertising, is spatially omnipresent, on the walls of any (modern) agora and through its material life, it is temporally persistent. Its external location, in the street, turns the election poster into a modern theatre where the spectators, even if they seldom stop, know the casting and the actors' lines by heart, the involuntary memorizing of a political message being the aim of any builder of election posters.

During an election campaign, we witness a sort of sight violation through the excessive invasion of one's territory with these means of communication. For a period of time, the walls or the poles of a city seem to lose their negative connotation (the walls of disgrace) and to get a positive significance (the walls of celebrity).

In other words, the election campaign may focus on this process of legitimisation through sight. The type of voters who prefer to ignore the ideology of a party are metaphorically called by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2002: 118) "the owners of a pub" who have the wine of Cotnari⁵ on the shelves (memory on a short term) behind them, as well in the cellar (memory on long term), this latter category being preserved through years (perceived information, but having no permanent effect). The situation described by the Romanian author is as follows: in the pub there enters a person who asks for a bottle of Cotnari wine. What would the owner do? Would he either simply grab the bottle on the shelf or would he go down into the cellar and pick the best wine he has? Alina Pippidi-Mungiu considers that the respective owner would prefer to turn round and take the nearest bottle, for the simple reason to avoid the effort of going down into the cellar. In fact, this hypothetical situation was meant as a warning for the builders of political messages: the majority of voters is governed by this principle of idleness, based on a memory on short term. The candidates should be aware of the fact that only a persuasive message uttered by a trustworthy (possible) politician, such as "there is gold on the bottom

5 *Grasa de Cotnari* originates from the area of Cotnari in Romania on the lower slopes of the Carpathian mountains. With a green-yellow colour when it is young and then golden like the leaves in autumn, with the taste of nut kernel and a shade of raisin and almond kernel at which it adds the flavour of noble rot, the wine remains unique in the assortment scale of the Romanian and foreign sweet wines, an authentic treasure of this region.

(http://www.romvinimport.com/en/wine_list.php).

of those bottles", would convince the man to climb downstairs to the cellar, so as to be able to reconstruct some other pieces of information stocked in the memory on long term.

The building of persuasive messages takes place between the interior and the exterior walls of the fortress where there is a certain *ground* that will be related to the *discourse of power*. This is, in fact, the 'lab' of discursive changes where the creator (the politician/ PR specialist) decides what should be 'displayed' or, on the contrary, hidden.

This territory of political discursive creation corresponds to the depth-defining surface mentioned by Lakoff and Johnson. The movement direction of the political meaning creator is performed on two axes:

– *a vertical axis*: the action is one of "digging" into the *deep structure* of the people's abstract mental systems. This metaphorical digging implies a micro and macro analysis of the society. We consider that this location within the fortress brings forth another perspective on ideologies, namely van Dijk's (1995: 21) conceptual triangle that connects society, discourse and social cognition. The Dutch author avoids the syntagm *system of ideas* and he interprets an ideology as "specific basic frameworks of social cognition, with specific internal structures, and specific cognitive and social functions". The process of controlling/ knowing the "personal mental representations of people's experiences of social practices", which van Dijk (1995: 19) calls *models*, constitutes the starting point in any construction of a political promise, built on illusions, that stand as one of the significances of the myth (Girardet [1986] 1997: 4).

The mixture of narrative techniques, mystification, and mobilization implied by myth and archetype – the cultural premise of persuasion – as Ch. Larson (2003: 254) considers, has a twofold function: on the one hand, it can control the shared representations of different social groups, on the other hand, it is the right ingredient in the moulding of a (non)verbal political self-portrait.

– *a horizontal axis*: the action is one of "levelling down" those convenient elements (that include arguments based on the groups' values, opinions, properties) that stand for a decisive persuasive force.

Bringing to surface what voters would like to hear, political messages also have a controlling power upon the citizens' identity, because they seem to undergo a metamorphosis: from citizens who vote for a President, they become consumers of political styles/ representations. This new identity coincides with Norman Fairclough's (1989: 62) *synthetic personalization*: to create a personalized relation between the consumers/ voters and the producer+product/ candidate.

But finally the aim of any political identity construction is to constitute itself into a powerful weapon in any type of political debate. The so-called “siege” during an election campaign can be interpreted as a confrontation which becomes compulsory in democracy: the discourse of a party refers explicitly (negative campaigning) or implicitly (positive campaigning) to the discourse of another party. This condition, essential to any political discursive existence, can be associated to a *polemical discourse*.

The architecture of the political discourse that we have designed so far displays two types of exterior forces that could “attack” a political fortress:

- on the one hand, there is the audience (voters) who performs a silent attack through a visual sense and a “violent” one through the act of voting;
- on the other hand, there are the other political parties whose self-positioning on the battlefield implies either a defensive or an offensive tactics.

We might add another type of force that keeps haunting any politician, namely his/ her past.

The use of the term *battlefield* implies a more profound understanding of the same *ground* within the source-concept (fortress). Although the target-concept (political discourse) takes over this word, the discursive structure will not limit the *ground* only to the territory where the construction is located, but, on the contrary, it will extend towards the exterior surface. The ground outside the political fortress can stand for three different distances which, only coexisting, will give meaning to any political discourse:

- the inclusion in the making of a political discourse of a distance/ surface between four concentric circles represented by the situational, institutional, social, and cultural contexts/ embeddings (Chruszczewski 2002: 17);
- the distance within the scene (walls) where the political identities “display” themselves;
- the distance, on the same scene of the political show, between several political discourses.

II. Election posters – semiotic inventions⁶

The discursive reconstruction (*Mirror, mirror on the wall, tell me who is the most ... powerful in the country?*) of the famous line from the fairy-tale *The Snow White*

⁶ We will interpret the term *invention* taking into account the semiotic theory of Umberto Eco (1979: 266), namely *invention* is a production of sign-functions.

and the Seven Dwarfs, places us into the interior of the election discursive fortress, in the lab where there takes place the metamorphosis of any candidate ("cat") into the image of power, rendered through the signifier *lion*. Everything becomes a game of imagination, not only on the part of the builder of political images, but also on the part of the receivers who are supposed not to perceive the weak part (the cat), but the strong part (the lion). On the outer shell/ exterior wall, in front of the voters, through a mere operation of mirror rotation, there will be projected, from the inside, only the fixed visual image of a "lion"⁷. We, the spectators, are in front of a magic mirror of political advertising with a twofold function

- a function of metamorphosis: the *mimesis* role, a known feature of any mirror, is cancelled in favour of *metamorphosis* – the reality changes;
- a temporal function: the mirror of political advertising will preserve the newly created figure through time even if the real character/ candidate moves through space and time. It is a problem of manipulating actantial roles (Greimas 1983) or different prototypical representations of various types (Biocca 1991).

Umberto Eco's semiotic theory actually constitutes the perfect method of (de)coding this discursive reconstruction of political candidates who seem to re-invent themselves through words and fixed images.

In order to understand this semiotic representation which glides from an example (human being) through invention in order to reach a stylization (President), one should be aware of the following question: *what does a candidate want a voter to perceive when looking at an election poster, a normal human being or a President?* If we were a voter, then the answer would be a President, because that person in the poster is placed in the situational context of an election campaign. But if we were to place ourselves in the role of Pygmalion (the person in charge with the production of the poster), then we might notice that the solution would be not the mere choice of one element or the other, but a conjunction of these two elements. That is why we have chosen this representation in order to show the production of the circular identity transformation which puts together (conjunction) a *human being* and a *President*.

7 The art of governing, according to Niccolo Machiavelli (1999: 63), means the combination of the ability of a *lion* to defend itself from *wolves* (the image of the opponent candidates) and the ability of a *fox* to defend itself from the traps laid. It is interesting to observe that the politician is associated just with a defensive role, but, mostly, during a negative campaign, they activate the offensive role as well.

The circular 'journey' undertaken by any election creator of political signification starts with an *ostention*⁸ ('example' – human being), then it goes through the process of *invention* based on a game of codes⁹, in order to reach the final result, a 'stylization' (President), which is an invented image and which can be associated with Greimas's actantial roles or with Biocca's classificatory links¹⁰. As it can be seen from our representation, the semiotic circle that stands for the candidate's image will never close, thus, establishing a gap between the starting and ending point because any election stylization must be perceived as an appearance of reality, even if the candidates want us to perceive the election stylizations as obligatory and sincere qualities of the respective examples.

III. Traian Băsescu – a new style in Romanian politics

Being the discourse of 'the best', any discourse of election advertising must have a verbal face ('x President' and a promise) and an iconic one (the bust). Any relation of legitimacy between voters and a candidate is built on the verb *to promise*. Being a commissive verb (Austin [1962] 1975: 157), *to promise* has a compulsory control over its subject, imposing at least the condition (Searle [1969] 1972: 105) of sincerity on the part of the agent¹¹:

To promise	(x)	(y)	w)
	Agent	Target	Theme
	Candidate	Electorate	Promise

We will associate the constitutive rule of sincerity with the implicit rule of an election ritual game, namely a candidate is supposed not to lie. This sends us to two

8 Eco (2003: 235-266) considers that *ostension*, as a mode of sign-production, involves a choice of existing or potentially existing sign-expressions as 'tokens' of 'expression-types', while *invention* involves the production of completely new sign-expressions.

9 Chandler (2002: 149) identifies three types of codes: *social codes* (verbal language, bodily codes, commodity codes, behavioural codes), *textual codes* (scientific codes, aesthetic codes, stylistic codes, mass media codes) and *interpretative codes* (perceptual codes, ideological codes).

10 Biocca (1991: 67) is of the opinion that "individuals continuously make classificatory judgments or judgments of similarity. To identify is to classify".

11 J. Grimshaw (*apud* Cornilescu, Alexandra, 1995: *Concept of Modern Grammar*, București, Ed. Universității din București, pp. 155-156) establishes two conceptual dimensions represented in a predicate's Lexical Conceptual Structure: the thematic hierarchy and the aspectual properties of the predicate.

conditions considered by E.W. Rothenbuhler (1998: 30-32) as inadequate for any ritual: *insincere public performance* and *empty convention*. These two features actually hide a paradox in the analysis of a political promise. Taking into account the electoral procedure, a promise, as a way of the candidates' involvement into the election ritual game, cannot be absent and it becomes an accomplished condition that will be performed in public in a sincere way: a candidate is confident in his solutions to stop the crises installed by the previous party/ President. But taking into account the propositional content, any explicit or implicit promise becomes empty talk without having the possibility of being accomplished if the politician-candidate is not elected.

In the last seven years, the Romanian election stage has been the perfect place where promises have been uttered in simple words, but these promises started being catchy to the public in 2000. For example, the 2000 Romanian election campaign was built around three archetypes:

- the Parent: two center-left wing parties (The Alliance for Romania and The Romanian Social Democratic Party). Whereas Teodor Meleşcanu (the leader of the former party) built his discourse on the signified of *concern* (*Your future is my concern!*), Ion Iliescu (the leader of the latter party) built his discourse on the signified of *solidarity* (*Property Justice Solidarity Responsibility – Together we will come out of poverty!*). *Property Justice Solidarity Responsibility* is actually the English equivalent of the Romanian syntagm *Proprietate Dreptate Solidaritate Responsabilitate*. The rhetoric figure obtained is an *acrostic* (each letter spells out another message than the initial word which begins with the respective letter) for the name of the party (Partidul Democrației Sociale din România).
- the Youth: two center-right parties (The Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party). Whereas Petre Roman (DP) reinterpreted the concept of *force* (*Roman for Romania* – an implied synecdoche centered on a lexical derivation), Th. Stolojan (NLP) decided for the concept *work* (*Economy before politics, work before empty talk!* – two relations of contrariety in the Greimasian semiotic square).
- the Redeemer: the Great Romania Party (right-wing) and the 2000 Romanian Democratic Convention (right-wing). The settings into the two parties' discourses focused on the metaphor of a war: a social war based on violence (The "Great Romania" Party and C.V. Tudor - *We shall uproot the misery in the villages and cities. We shall make the thieves as flat as a pancake. [...]*) and an ideological war based on justice (2000 RDC – *We forced the change. We will defeat any form of resistance. 2000 RDC The Key – against left-wing parties; Never vote the*

other way round! TOV—. The key was the symbol used by this convention during the election campaign. The rhetorical device used in the second message is an anagram, obtained through the reordering of the Romanian word *vot* – to vote. The final result is *TOV*, the short form of the Romanian *tovarăş* – comrade, a fellow member of the Communist Party).

And yet, most of these verbal election promises seemed to be contradicted by their nonverbal counterparts. For example, the verbal solidarity – *Close to the people, together with them!* –, promised by Ion Iliescu, enters an oppositional link with an iconic emptiness, the poster displaying only a human being, namely the candidate Iliescu. Denotatively, the left field should have been populated with those people who were mentioned linguistically. Even at the linguistic level, the 3rd personal pronoun, plural is an index of political detachment from the people, and not a marker of a social relation of inclusion as the personal pronoun, 1st person, plural (*we*) would have shown.

Traian Băsescu has tried to break the monotony of words glued next to a mere collection of manly busts through creative (non)verbal rhetorical devices which should be decoded by voters. Without actually clearly asserting, Traian Băsescu moulded as well the image of his voters. Only smart people/ voters can enter into his three-levelled game:

- The level of *reality* stirs some visual stimuli.
- The level of *perception* is what our senses allow us to understand.
- The level of *imagination* which implies one's mental representation based on some cognitive operations or semantic links, such as contextual links, classificatory links, oppositional links, causal and narrative links, metaphoric and hierarchical links (Biocca 1991: 67).

Traian Băsescu's image of authority and reputation has been manipulated during two election campaigns:

- in 2000, he embodied the authority image of a political mentor (the mayor of Bucharest) who introduces his eight disciples/ unknown candidates (the poster of the political Romanian 8+1 team or the postmodern election *Little Red Riding Hood*);
- in 2004, he was the candidate running for the President of Romania, thus, he himself being the doer of any social action through which he will stand out from the crowd of dull candidates.

Both the negative and the positive election campaigns whose main protagonist was Traian Băsescu were memorable and this memorability was achieved through the fact that the fixed images/ posters were undercoded and this lack of closure is,

actually, a subtle invitation for the Romanian reader to interpret every semiotic resources of technical nature (objects of value: a stake and a lollipop – III.1.a., III.1.b.) or of physiological nature (hand gestures – III.2.) through experiential abduction that will bring to surface associate connections stored in the memory of Romanian voters.

III.1. Metaphorical political promise

As if having understood the pragmatic implications behind a political promise, in 2004, Traian Băsescu, the J(ustice) T(ruth) Alliance (Alianța DA) and his public relations team launched an implicit (non)verbal polemic discourse rendered by the verbal utterance – *Would you believe in eye candy? – Vrei să fii dus cu zăhărelul?*¹² and the fixed image of a *lollipop*. These two elements make the isotopy of a transactional act where a seller *intends* to swindle a *gullible* buyer. Within this context, there is a third seller who holds the truth and who, through his rational action, seems to downplay the opponent's plans. This is obtained by the discursive procedures of two Romanian idiomatic expressions.

III.1.a. Idiomatic expressions

Having as theoretical background two theories on idioms (G.L. Permyakov¹³ and George Lakoff¹⁴), our analysis will focus on the meaning of the Romanian idioma-

12 We are of the opinion that the idiomatic expression *eye candy* (something that is intended to be pleasant to look at but has no real meaning) is the best translation for the Romanian idiomatic expression “a fi dus cu zăhărelul” whose meaning is *to be swindled by nice talk*.

13 Being against the grammatical rule of composition, where the whole is formed of its parts, G.L. Permyakov (1979: 32-51) mentions three distinctive planes that interact in the process of decoding an idiom: 1. The grammatical/ linguistic plane: idioms cannot be reduced to separable semantic units. They have only one meaning.; 2. The logico-semiotic plane: idioms are signs of objects that send certain concepts.; 3. The object-image plane: the realia plane where the ethnic, geographical, historical and other unique features of idioms are manifest. It has an emotional character.

14 Rejecting the classical theory on idioms, where anything that is not predicted from the context is arbitrary, George Lakoff (1987: 448), starting from the theory of cognitive models, offers the following *motivational alternative*: The relation between A and B is *motivated* just in case there is an independently existing link, L, such that A-L-B “fit together.” L *makes sense* of the relationship between A and B.

Thus the meaning (B) of an idiom (A) is based on a conventional image (the motivational link L). Adding to these conventional images, which exist in our conceptual system, some encyclopedic knowledge and conceptual metaphors, Lakoff (1987: 451) associates these three links with *folk etymologies*, because the etymology of a word does not imply a mere historical placement in time

tic expression *a fi dus cu zăhărelul* (to believe in eye candy). But the visual metaphor (the stick of the lollipop = a stake) sends us towards two implicit Romanian idioms *a da țeapă* (to give the shaft/ to chisel: to use unethical methods) and *a tra-ge în țeapă* (to impale).

– *the linguistic plane*. The *Mic dicționar academic* (*The Abridged Academic Dictionary*) offers the following etymologies of the words *zăhărel* (the diminutive of *zahăr* - sugar) and *țeapă* (stake)

a. *zăhărel*: [At: CARAGIALE. O. II. 96/ V: (re) *zâh* ~ / Pl: ~e / E: *zahăr* + -el] (Reg.; la pl.). It can be used in the plural, with a meaning of sweets, candies.

b. *țeapă*: [At: COD. VOR². 39^r/4/ V: *țep* (Pl: *țepi* sm. reg. *țepuri* sn). (reg) *țep* (Pl: *țepi* sm, *țepuri* sn) sm./ Pl: *țepi*, (reg.) *țepe* / E: ns cf. alb. *thep* „a sharp end of a cliff”] a piece of wood or metal pointed at one end, used in buildings, for haystacks, or as a battle weapon, or as an instrument of torture.

– *the logico-semiotic plane*. The notion/ concept/ signified (B – to swindle) is semiotically represented by the idioms/ signifiers (A_1 - A_2) built on the explicit objects *stake* (*țeapă*) and *candy* (*zăhărel*).

A_1 = *to believe in eye candy* (*a duce cu zăhărelul*). It is the first signifier used by the JT Alliance and it has the following signified: to abuse of someone's good faith, using deceiving words and promises.

A_2 = *to give the shaft/ to chisel* (*a da țeapă*). This second signifier is a colloquial expression, and it has the same signified, but conceptually it implies the syntagm *unethical methods*.

– *the object-image plane*. The fact that the JT Alliance uses two different idioms for the same meaning (B) makes us think of a conceptual synonymy, although a certain conceptual antinomy can be perceived at the level of the structure of the two objects mentioned. The motivational links (L_{1-2}) are based on the functional values of a candy and a stake.

	Semantic features	Functional values
Sugar (Candy)	[+ sweet]	Ingredient used to sweeten (lollipop)
Stake	[+ painful]	Instrument of torture

The two idiomatic expressions presuppose two human actions that, actually, constitute the conventional images on which the motivational links are based. Two aspects should be as well considered: on the one hand, the passing from a function-

and space, but, also a certain psychological scheme of the respective community.

nal value of the objects towards socio-cultural values, and, on the other hand, the relation of dependence between the two links.

L₁ – The first motivational link, which associates *to believe in eye candy / a duce cu zăhărelul* (A₁) with *to give the shaft/ to swindle* (B), is centered, in the situational context of elections, on the candidates' speech act of *to promise*.

The negative connotation of this expression, which hides the candidate's intentionality to abuse the voters' good faith using deceiving promises, can be related to the etymology of the word *sincerity* (L. *sinceritatem, sinceritas*)¹⁵ that comes from the Latin *sincerus* whose denotative meaning is "without wax". Charles Larson (2003: 261) mentions two ancient meanings of this word. The former is used for "wax layers in order to preserve" and *to be without wax* would mean "to be pure, fresh". The latter sends to the unorthodox habit of the carvers in stone that, in order to hide their imperfections, would cover them with a thick layer of wax that finally will fall down, but unfortunately this will happen when the respective carver is dead so that he might not give account for his deed. During the long periods of history, this lasting camouflage instrument has taken the form of a *mask*, often associated with negative significances (... a disguise, a pretence). Since the 20th century, the word *image* has been used, the postmodern ages turning into that period where everyone strives after showing a self's image that should be the most *convincing, interesting and seductive*.

Taking the form of a rhetorical interrogation, this idiomatic expression reveals an implicit dialogue between the JT Alliance candidate and voters, where the latter ones have an apparent freedom of choice.

L₂ – The second motivational link – A₂ (*to give the shaft/ to chisel/ a da țeapă*)-L₂-B (*to swindle*) – is based on a disastrous extralinguistic reality which the political opponent party (The Social Democrat Party) is to be blamed for.

Unlike the idiomatic expression *to believe in eye candy* which implies a sort of approval on the part of the voter (the patient), the implicit idiom *to give the shaft/ to chisel/ a da țeapă* is focused on the rational agent's action upon the patient, the latter being actually the victim, without having any possibility of choice.

For a better understanding of the Romanian idiomatic expression *a da țeapă*, one should associate it with a third motivational link, based on a particular Romanian cultural context, namely the expression *a trage în țeapă* - *to impale*. The histo-

15 Larson, Charles ([2001] 2003): *Persuasiunea – receptare și responsabilitate* (Persuasion – Reception and Responsibility), p. 261.

rical intertextuality is obtained through the implicit image of Vlad Țepeș/ Vlad Dracul/ Vlad the Impaler¹⁶.

Based on the rule of transfer, intertextuality functions on the basis of symbolical cultural significances built by the society, that will come to surface, activating the Romanian voters' memory. This rule of transfer is characteristic feature of persuasion, by operating an already existing conceptual sublayer (prejudices, stereotypes, or mythologies etc.). Known for his brutal means of punishing boyars, thieves and criminals, Turks, Saxons and those who conspired against him, Vlad Țepeș/ Vlad the Impaler becomes the sign of justice within the Romanian cultural context.

The two idiomatic signifiers *to impale* (*a trage țeapă*) and *to chisel* (*a da țeapă*) have different conceptual signifieds, and this fact is rendered at the level of the rational agent: whereas *to chisel* is usually associated with a political opponent in a negative campaign, *to impale* could be interpreted as a social verbal means of asking not to vote a respective candidate. The object-image plane of a *stake* has the function of bridging the two idiomatic expressions which implicitly mould a part of the colloquial language style that Traian Băsescu is famous for. We might say that this choice of informal address fits Băsescu as a glove since he is known for his unpolished charisma and for his sense of humor. It was exactly these two inborn qualities of Băsescu's which made us consider that the long shape of the signifier "stake" can also stand for a sexual meaning.

III.2. The political bodily codes: Băsescu's hand as a symbolic gesture¹⁷

Traian Băsescu's election campaign was memorable not only through the use of technical semiotic resources (a lollipop and a stake) which brought about the mental image of an aggressive but justified punisher and that of a political swindler, but also through the use of a physiological semiotic resource, namely the hand gesture.

"Quand dire, c'est faire" says J.L. Austin ([1962] 1975: 5) in order to show that some utterances can be interpreted as performatives, which coincides with the *do-*

16 Vlad was called Tepes (the Impaler) only after his death (1476). He ruled in Wallachia between 1456-1462 and in 1476. In 1462, having been defeated by the Turks, Vlad took refuge in Hungary. In 1476, with the help of the Hungarian king Matia Corvin and the Moldavian prince Stephen the Great, Vlad took over the Wallachian throne again for a month. A battle followed, during which Vlad was killed.

17 A part of this subchapter was published in the Romanian version (Cmeciu, C.M. (2005 b): *Implicarea gestuală a lui Traian Băsescu în campania electorală*, in *Signa in rebus. Studia semiologica et linguistica in honorem M. Carpov. Supliment al „Analelor științifice ale Universității Al.I.Cuza”, Iași*, pp. 47-55).

ing, one of the multimodal functions of style, mentioned by Theo van Leeuwen (2005: 139).

In the discourse of election advertising, it is necessary for the political locutor to involve himself in his "dire". As Geneviève Calbris (2003: 61) mentions "in order for a politician to be believed and followed, his conviction should seem visible, his personal involvement and his frankness evident. [...] The communication goes from the orator to his audience while his voice and body become themselves actors". Traian Băsescu, the JT Alliance candidate, seems to have broken the iconic norm of a mere bust, and his discourse of positive election advertising turns the hand¹⁸ into a visible body subunit, manipulating it as a polysign gesture. Even if mimic gestures, specific to (political) print advertisement opposes movement, the gesture becomes the dynamic representation of a state (Calbris 1990: 114). Thus, we might add that this new way of designating the figurative component of a politician's involvement stops, in a way, the monotony of the inexpressiveness rendered by the vizualization of the political bust.

The configuration/ signifier (subordinate categories) that our analysis is based on is the palm of Traian Băsescu's hand. He used this physiological semiotic resource in 2000 election campaign as well and at that time the oblique palm was directed right-upward in order to point and to introduce some unknown democrat members. Băsescu's open oblique palm and the democrat candidates' palms manoeuvring the paddles could be explained through the difference between the words *gesta* versus *gestus* (Schmitt [1990] 1998: 163-165). If the latter term is associated with the individual responsibility of gestural acts, the former implies the person's total dependence on the group. While Băsescu's palm, oriented towards the background can be qualified as the mentor's *gestus*, the hands grabbing the paddles express the *gesta*. Thus, the act of miming, which evokes the concrete act of rowing designated by active body parts (upper limbs), implies a symbolization, a dynamic representa-

18 Geneviève Calbris imposes an interpretation of one's hand as conventional and motivated gestural signs formed of two components:

- *physical components* of the gestural signs (Calbris 1990: 124-125): direction, with or without repetition, vehicle – arm, hand(s), digit(s), head, part(s) of the face), plane (horizontal or vertical (sagittal or vertical), position –. These variants show the concrete movement implied in any gesture, and the comparison of variants shapes the relationship between the signifier and the signified, leading us towards the second component, namely the semantic field.
- *semantic components* of the gestural signs: each of the above-mentioned physical elements may carry a symbolic function that is actually embedded deep down in our conscience (Calbris 2003: 17). Interpreting the respective gesture, we activate several codes which represent a social and cultural dimension in semiotics.

tion of a state of cohesion. This figurative unity is rendered not only through an act of holding the same object, but also through the direction of the movement on a time axis: any race is won if all the members of a team push in the same direction, namely towards the future.

Within the composition of the 2004 election posters, the direction of the hand changes into a left-upward one. In four years' time, the mentor became the possible President and thus, he has to unveil his own identity which, besides a name, also implies a social position. Traian Băsescu chose the physical components of his right hand as a means of showing his former profession, that of a captain of merchant ships. Besides the nonverbal component of the act of saluting (oblique right hand, fingertips oriented upward), there is also the uttering of the sentence 'May you live long and be wealthy' – *Să trăiți bine!*, both of them implying a future axis that could become the scheme of a 'journey' (mandate) in time (five years) and space (in Romania) towards a desired objective.

The verbalized physical description of this hand gesture becomes an idiom of a certain attitude that points both to the physical domain of saluting and, at the same time, to the psychological domain of discipline and respect. The newly-created situation where a captain seems to be saluting the troops turns the whole context presented in the poster into a performative one (Austin [1962] 1975: 5) where the verbal and nonverbal utterances are the doing of the saluting action. For a situation to function as a performative one, some felicitous conditions (Austin [1962] 1975: 14-15) should be satisfied:

The norm of 'happy' performatives	The implied performative context	The politically adapted performative context
(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances.	The conventional procedure of saluting the troops. There is a standard way of saluting: the captain's right hand should be oblique, almost touching his cap, while the left one, next to his body.	– The conventional procedure: the potential President saluting his citizens. – The change of orientation: Băsescu is facing every passerby and not only those on the right side, who answer his salute.
(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate to the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.	The presence of the captain – Traian Băsescu The soldiers who answer his salute. The formula used is "Yes, Sir". Its Romanian equivalent is "Să trăiți!".	Both a captain and a President rule over somebody: troops and people. The former captain, Traian Băsescu, uses actually the salute given by the troops: "Să trăiți!"

The norm of 'happy' performatives	The implied performative context	The politically adapted performative context
		and he adds the Romanian adverb <i>bine</i> (be wealthy). The people are represented metonymically through five different categories: workers, pupils, business men, doctors, and farmers.
(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and (B.2) completely.	In order for the procedure to be carried out, the soldiers should answer the captain's salute.	If the potential President seems to reproduce the captain's standard salute, the people answer with an ordinary one.

This election recontextualization of the military salute turns the utterance "May you live long and be wealthy!" into an implied combination between the exercitive verb (Austin [1962] 1975: 155-156) 'to order' and the commissive one 'to promise', the latter being the necessary ingredient in any election slogan. Reinterpreting the verb of saluting 'to live' as a speech act of promising and placing it into the syntagm 'to live long and be wealthy', Bănescu seems to commit himself to a future action which brings wealth to the four members, belonging to the macro structure of the Romanian society. Actually this is the only poster in the 2004 election campaign in Romania which represents four social groups (non)verbally:

- The rhetorical structure of a nonverbal metonymy provides the social status through the commodity code of their "uniforms": overalls for workers, school uniforms for pupils, suits for business men, doctor's outfits for doctors, shabby clothes for peasants.

- Lexicalization (Van Dijk 1995: 25), adapted to each social context, is the strategy on which Bănescu builds his election promise: "decent wages", "good education", "profitable business affairs", "proper health", "profitable agriculture".

IV. Conclusion

Within four years, Traian Bănescu has achieved a political image that every Romanian can easily identify in the great number of election stylizations. This memorability has a twofold explanation:

- On the one hand, it is a matter of creativity. The semiotic resources used, being either technical (stake and lollipop) or physiological (hand) in nature, were so perfectly adapted to the Romanian social and cultural contexts that they stirred within

the memory and imagination of the citizens certain behavioural patterns that were transferred upon the main protagonist of the election posters. Thus Traian Băsescu could be perceived as an aggressive punisher, ready to make justice, as a great mentor who is proud of his pupils or as a leader of his people.

– On the other hand, it is a pragmatic matter of the consequences of bridging the gap between reality (Traian Băsescu – human being) and stylization (Traian Băsescu – the President). He seems to be one of the fewest candidates who knew how not to make this gap even larger. Turning his former social positions, and consequently his past, into strong arguments of authority, Traian Băsescu actually manipulated his own image to highlight his own style which seems to be innate, rather than moulded. This is the reason for which the above mentioned semiotic resources perfectly fit with his colloquial style of speaking, his unpolished charisma and his popular sense of humor.

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The Style of Political Images

Election campaigns become the most suitable spatio-temporal contexts where and when any (possible) President/ MP will implicitly or explicitly connect to some powerful mental images, adapted to the social and cultural embeddings.

My paper focuses on the study of three election posters (fixed images) during the 2000 and 2004 election campaigns in Romania, having as their main protagonist Traian Băsescu, the actual president of Romania. The reason for my choice lies in Băsescu's attempt to break the monotony of empty words glued next to a mere collection of manly busts,

through the use of some creative (non)verbal rhetorical devices which should be decoded by voters. My paper is based on two semiotic theories:

– Theo van Leeuwen's social semiotics is the general framework against which the semiotic resources in the three election posters will be analysed. It also provides a "multi-modal function of style" which includes a threefold process: writing, speaking and doing. I am of the opinion that the last functional component of style, namely, *doing/* acting upon allows a text producer to turn into a discursive master.

– Umberto Eco's semiotic theory constitutes the theoretical background of my representing the discursive reinvention of political candidates as a semiotic circle (beginning point – example/ human being; ending point – stylization/ President) which will not be closed. The gap created between these two points suggests that any election stylization should be perceived as an appearance of reality.

It was exactly this subtle game between reality and appearance which has driven me to place (conceptual) metaphors as the theoretical basis for the definition of a political discourse (political discourse = fortress).

Traian Băsescu¹⁹ (and his team) created memorable election posters within these four years because they knew how to manipulate his social position in order to turn any slight hint of fake appearance into an ingredient of some real facts (Băsescu – the mayor of Bucharest, embodying the image of the mentor in 2000; Băsescu – the possible president and a former merchant ship captain, embodying the image of the aggressive but justified punisher or the image of the social commander in 2004). The process of decoding the election posters was a subtle invitation for the Romanian reader to interpret every semiotic resources of technical nature (objects of value: a stake and a lollipop) or of physiological nature (hand gestures) through experiential abduction that will bring to surface associate connections stored in the memory of Romanian voters.

Băsescu's new (non)verbal ways of designating a politician's involvement stops, in a way, the monotony of the inexpressiveness rendered by the visualization of the political bust. The idiomatic expressions (*a fi dus cu zăhărelul* = to believe in eye candy, *a da țepă* = to give the shaft; to impale) coincide with the colloquial language style, the unpolished charisma and the sense of humor Traian Băsescu is famous for.

Keywords: *style, image, political fortress, election posters, semiotic invention, technical and physiological semiotic resources, hand gestures as signs.*

19 In the 2004 election campaign, Traian Băsescu entered the Presidential race, on behalf of Justice and Truth Alliance (Alianța D.A.), formed of the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Party, whose leader was, at that time, Traian Băsescu.