

# CARTE SEMIOTICHE ANNALI 5 - CALL FOR PAPERS

## POLITICS AS A FORM OF EXPRESSION

Edited by Juan Alonso Aldama and Denis Bertrand

Political theory, as well as semiotic studies, address politics mainly from the point of view of its contents, by analyzing the significant articulations responsible for certain sense effects and focusing on values, ideas and themes on which it deals with, on its axiologies or still on the passions that inhabit it.

If we consider that politics, as *politiké*, is a form of action, we could assume, from the logical point of view, a *being* implicated by such *doing*, and therefore focus on these *ways of acting*. For example, we should draw attention to aspectuality, by studying how interruptions, accelerations, jolts could shape the *forms of action*, that is could structure the *life forms* defined among other by such *ways of doing*.

Politics, therefore, is not only about contents, semiotics must also consider its "Plan of Expression" as a level which might make sense independently of its contents.

The assumption is confirmed by the fact that several political differences are based on the level of expression, on the expressive differences in strategies, practices or objects, much more than on ideas, projects or actions. As several opinion studies show, an important part of the population believes that there are no great differences between the different political orientations, and that ultimately, from the point of view of the very content of actions, politics will be increasingly less the same, regardless of the government's orientation. How is it possible to judge two political orientations equivalent, and nevertheless continue to distinguish them and consequently to vote for one or the other?

Another phenomenon reinforces the hypothesis that perhaps political differences do not lie in the contents and ideas that define them. How to explain the fact that we use the same political notion, "populism", to designate opposing positions, and that we can speak of a right- and a left-oriented populism? Some scholars speak of populism as a style rather than a regime or an ideology. In this case, populism would rather be a way of doing politics, which is a policy defined by the form of expression.

Richard Hofstadter, in his classic *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*<sup>1</sup>, defines populism as a paranoid style of thought, claiming to use the notion of *style* in the same sense in which an art historian speaks of Mannerist or Baroque style, a sense that refers to a certain form of expression. There would therefore be forms of politics defined exclusively by their *manner of doing* (ie by their expression), forms whose content would be secondary if not irrelevant in the definition and therefore apprehension of their meaning.

Naturally, it is not a matter of thinking of a politics without a Plan of Content, which from a semiotic point of view would not make sense, but to shift a perspective centered mainly on contents (passions, values, narrative programs, etc.) on the expressive dimension, analyzing it a bit like anthropologists learn a cultural system starting from the study of material culture.

If the shape of a spoon or the way of using it at the table inform us on a culture as its myths do, we should adopt the same approach with respect to politics, and study, as Bruno Latour did in the field of law<sup>2</sup>, its objects (logos, flags ...), practices (meetings, transcripts, surveys ...), rituals, routines and procedures, rhythms (slowing down and acceleration of political decisions, ...), the intensity and extent of debates, forms of organization and regulation, techniques, tactics, strategies, new media formats, etc.

The aim of this issue is therefore to explore those political forms that seem to be reduced to practices: gestures, movements, tactics, rituals, rhythms, times, strategies, devices, techniques, which seem to have a semiotic existence independently of any political content.

If we can consider views of the world, social goals and ideologies as the plan of the content of politics, the plan of expression will consist of procedures, devices, rituals, tactics, strategies, styles and ways of realizing political ideas or objectives.

This perspective solicits a series of questions:

1. How does politics as a content turn into politics as an expression?
2. Through which semiotic operations and with what consequences?

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hofstadter (1964), *The Paranoid Style in America*, Harper's Magazine, November 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Bruno Latour (2004), *La fabrique du droit*, Paris, La Découverte.

3. How can a politics be reduced to a simple practice regardless of ideologies, or how it can give up its ideological origins and to be reduced to a "governmental" technique of power?
4. Could we speak of a generalization of expressive devices, for example prescribed by media? Which is their impact on political differences and creativity?

Michel de Certeau, in *L'invention du quotidien*<sup>3</sup>, retracing the history of the theories of practice, clearly shows the dichotomy between a politics of content and a politics of expression, highlighted by Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et punir*<sup>4</sup> with the distinction between "ideology" and "procedure".

If, as already highlighted by Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message"<sup>5</sup>, It is also legitimate to ask whether the proliferation of new media supports does not lead today to a reorganization of relations between political expressions and contents. The relationship between media and politics is in some way responsible for this elevation of the *significant to content* - and to *empty of content*? The exponential power of the "mass significant" deprives the politics of its own "aura", as mechanical reproduction removes it from the works of art according to the famous thesis by W. Benjamin<sup>6</sup>?

Finally, it is opportune to question how the digital supports and formats applied to politics, conditioning the processing of data, conform and to a certain extent prescribe in advance its contents.

This issue intends therefore to investigate the role of semiotic practices and technological procedures in building and transforming politics, bringing attention to forms of expression that seem to generate their own contents, which express effective "forces" and produce meaning effects, making the project of a real "politics of expression" implicit to the Machiavellian idea come true.

This call invites interested scholars to submit contributions related to the practices and forms of political expression. Below is a non-binding list of issues raised by the main focus on "politics as a plan of expression":

1. Conditions of policy transformation as content in politics as an expression;
2. Spatial and plastic expression: images, signs, monuments and gestures;
3. Temporal expression: times and rhythms of the politics;
4. Objects and devices: spaces, techniques and technologies of politics;
5. Practices and strategies;
6. Rites, liturgies and ceremonials in politics;
7. Style in politics;
8. Thematic roles and forms of life (the resistant, the eternal candidate, the loser, among others);
9. New media forms, new political contents;
10. Digital format and ideology.

The Editorial Board invites interested scholars to send an abstract with a proposal of contribution of 2000 characters (500 words) in English, French, Italian, Spanish (please a short bibliography attached) by the **15th of OCTOBER 2018** to the following address: [cartesemiotiche@gmail.com](mailto:cartesemiotiche@gmail.com).

## Summary

Papers in English, French, Italian and Spanish  
 Length: max. 40.000 characters (8000 words)  
 Images: b/w embodied and color (two, 300 DPI)

Deadline for abstracts: 15 OCTOBER 2018  
 Communication of acceptance of proposal: 30 OCTOBER 2018  
 Deadline for contribution: 30 APRIL 2019  
 End of reviewing process: 30 JUNE 2019  
 Expected date of release: OCTOBER 2019

<sup>3</sup> Michel de Certeau (1990), *L'invention du quotidien. 1. L'art de faire*, Paris, Gallimard, pp. 75-81.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault (1975), *Surveiller et punir*, Paris, Gallimard.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall McLuhan (1964), *Understanding Media : The Extensions of Man*, New York : McGraw-Hill.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin (1939), *L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproductibilité*