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What Can Semiotics Do for Political Communication?

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Abstract
The article attempts to summarize the way in which certain concepts from general semiotics and some of its applications (mainly visual semiotics and semantic analysis) can be of use to contemporary thinking around political communication. It focuses on two general tendencies within western political communication, that have been cutting across parties, leaders and nations over the last decades: a tendency to construct *binary oppositions* and the *storytelling fashion*. Indeed, semiotics can offer political communication studies something original, something which otherwise, without its contribution, would remain neglected, unconceptualized or unexpressed.

Key-words: marketing, political communication, semantic analysis, semiotics, storytelling.

What Can Semiotics Do for Political Communication?

Giovanna Cosenza

1. Semiotics and political communication

Semiotics has been studying political language and communication, or rather what it prefers to call «political discourse», since the 1980s. In its widest sense, political discourse is made up of:

(1) verbal texts – e.g. slogans, press releases, public speeches;
(2) non-verbal texts – e.g. logos, party and coalition symbols;
(3) syncretic texts[1] – e.g. posters, commercials, audio-visual products;
(4) practices, namely sequences of «organised somatic behaviours», which are endowed with meaning (Greimas and Courtés 1979, entry «semiotic practices») – e.g. the behaviour of individuals (facial expressions, gestures, postures) and groups (masses of people moving and acting together)[2].

As is generally known, over recent decades the social and political sciences have built up layers of intense theorization around political communication, also publishing several manuals and introductory works. By contrast, in the field of political communication semiotics has preferred to work on individual case studies, examining this or that electoral campaign, this or that public allocution, or this or that TV appearance by this or that leader. The results of the various semiotic analyses have been published in sector journals or essay collections (see, for example, Eco 1983; Landowski 1989; Livolsi and Volli, eds. 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003; Marrone 2001)[3].

In semiotics, therefore, the systematic treatment that has taken place in the political and social sciences has been absent. This has depended, first and foremost, on the discipline's analytical vocation, for which it tends to concentrate on exemplary cases and texts of limited

[1] According to Greimas and Courtés' dictionary (1986, entry «syncrétiques, sémiotiques») *syncretic texts* are those which bring together «a plurality of expression languages» into a coherent enunciation strategy (e.g. commercials, TV newscasts, political posters).

[2] In actual fact, the semiotic definition of *discourse* is more complex and problematic. On one hand, the concept frequently overlaps with the *text* concept. On the other, even those who distinguish between the two concepts, clarifying that a text requires both an expression and a content plane, while discourse is an «eminently semantic notion» (Marrone 2001: XXV), encounter problems such as how to define discourse's *genres*. See Pozzato (2007).

[3] The vast majority of semiotic writings are only in Italian and French, since the discipline is taught and practiced especially in Italy and France.

size. A second explanation comes from the fact that the basic concepts and methodologies of semiotics, which are required to analyze *any* type of text (not only those relevant for political discourse)[4], have been abundantly illustrated over recent decades in numerous introductory and accessible works, targeting not only students and academics but also the general public (see Volli 2003; Magli 2004; Gensini 2004; Pozzato 2001, 2013; Pisanty and Zijno 2009; Traini 2013; Marmo 2015). It is for these two main reasons that systematic works specifically devoted to political communication are missing within the field of semiotics.

Since this systematic void can be considered almost unavoidable, I myself have never attempted to fill it, despite working for years on political communication using semiotic concepts and methodologies. Instead, I have always attempted to clarify semiotics' usefulness not solely for political communication studies but also for all those who put political communication into practice every day: leaders, spin doctors, consultants, activists (see Cosenza, ed. 2007; Cosenza 2012, 2018). Moreover, I have always undertaken this task with the utmost interdisciplinary care and attention, measuring up not only to the most internationally recognized studies on political communication, but also to contributions from other disciplines, such as the philosophy of language, the cognitive sciences, linguistics, rhetoric, and psycholinguistics.

In this essay, I will attempt to summarize the way in which certain concepts from general semiotics and some of its applications (especially visual semiotics and componential semantic analysis) can be of use to contemporary thinking around political communication. Furthermore, I will not do this because concepts already well expressed by other disciplines can *also* be translated into semiotic terms and *also* be seen from a semiotic angle (which happens in all interdisciplinary relationships), but rather because I believe that semiotics can offer something more, something original, something which otherwise, without its contribution, would remain neglected, unconceptualized or unexpressed.

To this end, I will focus on two general tendencies within western political communication that have been cutting across parties, leaders and nations over the last decades, since I believe semiotics has something to say about these, while other disciplines have thrown little or no light on them: a tendency to construct *binary oppositions* and the *storytelling fashion*.

2. Binary oppositions[5]

In contemporary political communication, it frequently occurs that national and international facts, events and situations, which in fact are complex and composite, are reduced to binary oppositions, as if there were a simple contrast between a compact «us», a unit free from differences and divergences, and a «them», which is represented as equally homogeneous. In the face of this contrast, voters, citizens or, in a frequently used term, «the people»[6], are invited to choose unambiguously to which camp they belong.

One of the first to highlight the contemporary propensity for binary formulas was US sociologist Jeffrey Alexander (1992), who observed that all democracies tend to organize their political discourses systematically around a rigid binary framework, corresponding to the division between an *us* and *them*, *friends* and *adversaries*, from which political struggle is born. On one side of this binary framework – and judged positively – are the leaders who speak (and the parties, coalitions and organizations they represent); on this side are also the values which those speaking take for granted – absolutely and in any situation – as positive, good, and to be

[4] See note 2.

[5] A first formulation of what appears in this section can be found in Gelsumini (2007) and Cosenza (2018, chap. 1).

[6] The first in Italy to prefer the expression «the people» to refer to their electorate were Umberto Bossi, in the 1980s (specifically, he used to say «my people»), and Silvio Berlusconi from 1994 onward.

pursued, such as *democracy*, *liberty*, *justice.* On the opposite side are the adversary's meanings and values, labelled as *anti-democratic*, *anti-libertarian*, *repressive*, *unjust*, which are therefore almost certainly going to be considered negative, in any circumstances and from any perspective.

A rigid dividing line around which political debate takes shape is thus taken for granted as if it were self-evident and natural. Doubts are never cast on such binary frameworks, nor are they relativized with questions such as «Liberty for whom, and to do what?», «Justice for whom, with what limits and criteria?» or «Democracy of what sort, and with what electoral system?» Neither is the legitimacy of placing oneself on one side or the other seen as problematic. Questions such as «Are we certain that the political side preaching liberty, democracy and justice will really put these into practice?» are never asked. These are questions which the political factions do not ask themselves, nor do the media commenting on politics.

The tendency to create or further entrench binary oppositions is indeed both political and mediatic, and plays a crucial role in wider contemporary phenomena, already well studied by the political and social sciences, such as the *mediatization*, *personalization* and *spectacularization* of politics (see Mazzoleni 1998; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Mazzoleni and Sfardini 2009; Mazzoni and Ciaglia 2015).

The first to bring this tendency to Italy was Silvio Berlusconi in 1994. The very name «Pole of Freedoms» («Polo delle Libertà»), chosen by the center-right coalition, expressed an absolute divide: presenting itself in this way effectively meant communicating both a binary vision of the political scene and a radical attribution of meanings and values, in which the Pole of Freedoms – not one but *many* freedoms, ideally *all* of them – was viewed as positive, while the adversary became a negative pole representing anti-democratic and anti-libertarian repression.

The binary framework on which Berlusconi founded his communication over the following twenty years was all present in his famous speech marking his «entering the field» on January 26th, 1994. This speech placed on one side «the old Italian political class», which was portrayed negatively, the «old rulers», who «no longer believe in anything» and «the shouting, ranting, criticizing masses». On the other, and presented positively, were the «liberties group», «people with their heads screwed on», those who wanted a «clean, reasonable, modern nation» and who were «forces based on the fundamental principles of western democracy» (see Cosenza 2018: 6-8).

It was against the *old* political class – categorised as negative – that Berlusconi presented himself as *new*, since he did *not*, as a businessman, belong to that political world which had been thoroughly discredited by the bribery scandals of «Tangentopoli» and «Mani Pulite» («Clean Hands»). Over the years, Berlusconi tinged this dividing line with bright, ardent colours, which he even took as far as expressing in terms of an opposition between *love* (his, for Italy and Italians) and *hate* (that of his enemies, against him and any optimistic and constructivist vision)[7].

There are many similarities with more recent Italian cases. Consider the rhetoric of *scrapping* launched by Matteo Renzi in 2010 and which he toned down only after becoming Prime Minister. Think of Renzi's own tendency – during the whole of his government from February to December 2014 – to label all those who did not agree with him as «owls»: on one side, he himself was a bearer of *hope*, *optimism* and *pragmatism*, and on the other were the politicians, journalists and pundits who exclusively emphasised, for Renzi, everything that was not working. Consider, finally, the way in which the Five Star Movement has always played on rigid oppositions between what it portrays as the *old* political world, an indiscriminately negative whole, and the *new* one apparently embodied by the Movement and presented

[7] In fact, in 2010 Berlusconi published a book entitled *L'amore vince sempre sull'invidia e sull'odio* (*Love Always Wins Out Against Envy and Hate*) (see Berlusconi 2010).

positively. On this basis, the Five Star Movement has always rejected the title «party», stating up until December 2017 that it would never become one, and today still defines itself, by statute, as an «association» not a party[8].

This binary system is not only an Italian trend. The American presidential communication on international terrorism from 2001 through to today can also be read in this way, independently of whether it has been George W. Bush, Barack Obama or Donald Trump speaking, three presidents with very different personal and political characteristics – not simply different but pitted against one another.

In George W. Bush's first televised speech on the evening of September 11th 2001, the communication strategy, which was designed to reassure not only Americans but the whole world, was framed in terms of a global war between one side, led by the United States and symbolizing *freedom*, *justice*, *peace* and, ultimately, *good,* against the other side, that of the terrorists and their supporters, seen as symbols of *death*, *violence* and, in the last analysis, *evil.*

These radical dichotomies can repeatedly be found in the ways in which the western media have been presenting international terrorism, from the Twin Towers attack to the more recent actions of self-professed Islamic State (IS). This radicalization is in both *verbal* (leaders' speeches, newspaper articles, TV commentaries) and *visual* texts (photos on newspaper front pages, magazine covers and TV clips).

For example, after September 11th, the media juxtaposed images of George W. Bush with those of Osama Bin Laden in a visual (i.e. not solely verbal) attempt to represent the men respectively as symbols of Good and Evil, as if the ultra-complex international situation could be reduced to a struggle between two people. Later, Bin Laden was juxtaposed with President Obama, who signed the latter's death warrant in May 2011.

In a similarly way, more recently, both in the USA and Europe, on the front pages of many newspapers, on the covers of a great many international magazines, in many TV broadcasts and even in internet memes, images of Trump have frequently been juxta-posed with those of the black profiles of nameless Islamic State fighters. It is relevant to remember, in addition to this, that the struggle against IS was a key factor in Trump's campaign against Hillary Clinton in 2016.

The contrast presented has always been the same: on one side Good, symbolized by Trump, on the other Evil, symbolized by terrorists. Fig. 1, taken from an article dating May 9th, 2017, on the website of British *Daily Express*, is emblematic of this[9].

[8] Article 4 of what was, until December 2017, called «Non-statute» reads: «The Five Star Movement is not a political party and has no future intention of becoming one». In the current statute, published on 30th December 2017, the Five Star Movement is defined as an «association», not a party. See https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2017/12/e_ora_di_pensar.html (last consulted: October 15th, 2017).

[9] Source: http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/776870/Donald-Trump-ISIS-Barack-Obama-US-troops-Kuwait-Syria-Iraq-middle-east-White-House (last consulted: January 15th, 2020).

Fig. 1. Image from the website of British *Daily Express*, May 9th 2017.

In semiotics, this visual contrast is called *semi-symbolism*[10]. It involves – on the expression plane (which includes what we perceive materially with our eyes) – both the *plastic level* of what we see, relating to the image's spaces, lines and/or colors, and the *figurative level*, relating to figures which we recognize and thus are able to *name* with at least a *common* or *personal name* in some language, plus some *adjectives* and *descriptions* whose meanings we understand. In Figure 1, at the plastic level, we notice the red on the left and the black on the right. At the figurative level, we recognize Trump and the American flag on one side and the IS fighters on the other. As for their meanings – the semiotic «content plane» – since in western culture the color black symbolizes, among other things, *death*, *bereavement* and *tragedy*, the red stripes signify not only America but also can be thought of being in contrast with death, bereavement and tragedy, e.g. symbolizing *life*, *energy*, *vitality*.

In recent years, the polarization between *Good* and *Evil*, which links up in an even more hackneyed way, with the familiar *goodies* vs. *baddies* polarity, has also contaminated European political and mediatic communication concerning African immigration.

Among innumerable examples, here is a renowned cover page from the Italian weekly news magazine *L'Espresso* (see Fig. 2). On June 13th 2018, *L'Espresso* juxtaposed, on the left, the face of Aboubakar Soumahoro, an Italian-Ivory Coast trade union leader who has been fighting for the rights of migrants for years, and on the right the face of then-minister Matteo Salvini. The headline was «Uomini e no», which means «Men and Non-men»:

[10] For accessible introductions to visual semiotics, in which the concept of semi-symbolism is explained, see Polidoro (2008), Pozzato (2013, chap. 7-8-9), and Agnello (2013).

Fig. 2. Italian weekly magazine *L'Espresso*, cover page, June 13th 2018.

The headline echoes Elio Vittorini's 1945 novel, which narrated the struggle of the partisans («men») against the Fascists and German invaders («non-men»). The text below throws light on the meanings and values to be associated with the two faces, and splits the world in two, inviting readers to take sides: «Cynicism, indifference, the hunt for consent based on fear. Or moral rebellion, empathy, the appeal for unity from the more vulnerable. Whose side are you on?»[11].

Space limitations make it impossible here to attempt any complete semiotic analysis of any specific case study. Here I will simply note that, in general, for a full understanding of the binary oppositions, both visual and verbal, which the global political media have been increasingly constructing and disseminating around the world, semiotics makes available various tools, in addition to the semi-symbolism concept, coming from *componential semantic analysis* (see Murphy 2010; Marmo 2015, chap. 4).

Indeed, componential semantic analysis helps distinguish various types and nuances of opposition, breaking down the meanings of the two polarities into *semantic components*. Among such different oppositional pairs, it is possible, for example, to distinguish those which are *contraries*, *complementaries*, *reversives* and *contradictories* (see Marmo 2015, § 4.4). One can also organize these oppositions into hierarchic relationships of *hyperonymy* and *hyponymy* (see Marmo 2015, § 4.2), which help us understand the relevance criteria and value hierarchies which the opposites implicitly presuppose and take for granted.

Lastly, it must not be forgotten that each oppositional pair can be fully understood only if it is contextualized within the wider *semantic relationship system*, i.e. into the overall *semantic field* (see Marmo 2015, § 4.1) to which the pair – and the text proposing it (a cover, a poster, a TV appearance, a leader's speech) – belong. When necessary, moreover, further communication examples – by the same leader, newspaper, etc. – that are relevant for the text under examination need to be considered.

[11] In actual fact, Elio Vittorini's novel problematized the dichotomy to which the title alludes, since the partisan central character's humanity and suffering encourage a reflection on the fact that opposing labels such as *men* and *non-men*, *good* and *bad*, *positive* and *negative* all belong to each and every one of us.

3. The storytelling fashion

A focus on the «art of telling stories» has been a feature of US culture for decades. For example, courses on narrative writing were already present at American universities as far back as the 1960s. This presupposes the idea that the ability to narrate (also) derives from the learning of certain specific techniques, and that these can be codified to the extent of being teachable at university. Furthermore, the National Storytelling Festival, the world's first of its kind, was set up in 1972, and since then it has been organized every year in October in Jonesborough, Tennessee[12].

An awareness of the importance for leaders to be able to tell personal life stories in order to maintain consensus, and to continue to do so after they have been elected, has been a feature of American political communication since at least the late 1950s or the first half of the 1960s, i.e. since the dissemination of mass TV and the first *mediatization* and *personalization* of politics (see Mazzoleni 1998; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999).

However, the emergence of a fully-fledged *fashion* for storytelling dates back to the mid-1990s, when it began to take root in a great many academic and professional contexts: educational science, economics, journalism, business communication, advertising, politics, marketing, international diplomacy, cognitive science, and management. It was such a pervasive phenomenon at the time that the expression *narrative turn* was born to describe the sense of novelty perceived in this communicative change. Alternatively, a *storytelling revival* was referred to when focus was placed on a sense of returning to something – a narrative art form or oral history perhaps – that had already existed previously. This involved not only academics and professionals but also the mainstream media, from the most important newspapers to the most popular TV entertainment programs.

The fashion reached Italy more than ten years after the American narrative turn, i.e. from 2007 to 2010, when books, articles and training courses with the word «storytelling» in their titles began to proliferate, and when business consultants, journalists and professional trainers began talking about it in the most disparate situations[13].

In political communication too, an awareness of the importance of storytelling came much later to Italy than to the United States, since in Italy the personalization of politics can only fully be spoken of from 1994 onwards, when Berlusconi «entered the field», although some early warning signs had been there since the early 1980s[14].

From 1994 onward, a 20-year fracture appeared in Italian politics. For years, storytelling was Berlusconi's monopoly and labeled as «Berlusconism» by the center-left (and anyone else who disliked Berlusconi). The label implied powerfully negative connotations: telling stories like Berlusconi was paralleled with «telling fairy tales» with no basis in reality; or worse, with lying. Despite these accusations, in actual fact the leaders of the Democratic Party, Walter Veltroni and Pier Luigi Bersani – who took turns as center-left candidates for the 2008 and 2013 elections respectively – attempted to use techniques from marketing and advertising,

[12] See the site of the International Storytelling Festival http://www.storytellingcenter.net/festival/ and that of the International Storytelling Center, founded in 1975, three years after the first festival was held.
[13] Over the last ten years, there have been many dozens of Italian publications on storytelling. I will simply note here that the translation of Christian Salmon's first book (2007) played an important role in bringing the fashion to Italy, as did his second with its focus on political communication (Salmon 2013).
[14] Consider, for example, the powerful personal stamp which President of the Republic Sandro Pertini left on his mandate. Think of Enrico Berlinguer's popularity in the last years of his life, and finally think of Bettino Craxi, who anticipated certain of Berlusconi's communication techniques, by spectacularizing party conferences and public meetings in view of their effectiveness on television.

including storytelling, in their electoral campaigns. However, they did so badly and with poor results[15].

In Italian political communication, then, one can speak of a full awareness of the importance of storytelling – cutting across the whole political spectrum – only with Renzi's appointment as Democratic Party secretary in December 2013 and as Prime Minister in February 2014. This led, however, to a great deal of heavy-handed use and errors (see Cosenza 2018, §§ 8.2-8.3), which contributed to discrediting the practice of storytelling in Italy.

Excessive media attention to storytelling – here called «fashion» – prompted two significant negative consequences, not only in Italy but across western political communication and even studies relating to it.

The first of these is that the word «storytelling» is frequently used in a hollow way, involving little or no awareness of its true meaning. This especially takes place in journalistic jargon, where the words «storytelling» and «storyteller» have become buzzwords (they «sound good», they are «fashionable») or even a linguistic reflex, a filler of sorts. For example: *politician X / manager Y is a good storyteller.* But what does this mean? In what way? What stories are they telling? How are these constructed? What makes them effective?

Unfortunately, in marketing and business communication as well, many people speak of storytelling but very few explain what concretely marks out a good story from a bad one, one which captures our attention from one which bores us, a story which makes an advertising campaign memorable from one that is immediately forgettable. Frequently, in this field, it is simply a question of putting forward examples of successful stories and narrating anecdotes, whilst very infrequently breaking them down to identify resemblances and distinctions and illustrate their narrative structures, commenting on them in ways which are not simply vague and/or based solely on first impression.

In some cases, this lack of analysis depends on insufficient expertise from those speaking (at a conference, meeting or training course) to explain how the (effective or ineffective) stories they have used as examples have been constructed. In other cases, by contrast, even if the expertise of those speaking is proven, because they work for a company which has produced various successful stories (for advertising or political campaigns, for television or other media), the will to reveal the tricks of the trade is lacking, since constructing a good story has a certain market value.

The second consequence of this fashion for storytelling is that the concept frequently ends up with negative associations: storytelling as the ability to manipulate people, in a fascinating but undeniably deceptive, mendacious way. In the worst cases, *telling stories* is paralleled with *telling lies,* with *storytellers* being put on a par with *liars*.

It should be said that this pejorative use began precisely with marketing, that same marketing which, on the other hand, offers up storytelling as a magic wand with which to construct successful communication campaigns for the purposes of renewing a firm's image, recovering a brand's lost or reduced reputation (and frequently without explaining how or why this is possible). Two examples. In the famous book by American businessman Seth Godin, one of the founders of viral marketing (Godin 2005), the lying stigma appears in the very title *All Marketers Are Liars*. In the two books by French writer Christian Salmon (2007, 2013), especially in his second, narration is frequently associated with deceptive and illusory manipulation.

In brief, marketing itself, which has contributed so decisively to generating the storytelling fashion, has frequently done so in an ambivalent way, exalting it on the one hand while stigmatizing it on the other.

[15] On the clumsy and botched use of certain marketing and advertising techniques by the Italian center-left until the end of 2011, see Cosenza (2012, chap. 3).

However, the worst stigmatization is taking place in political communication, where the tendency is to accuse adversaries of «being storytellers», implying that they are being unrealistic or generally incapable of taking action, or simply liars, depending on the situation. We hear for example: *telling stories is one thing, real life is another*. This implies that storytelling is fiction, something which has nothing to do with recounting real facts. Another example: *so far, X has shown that he/she is a good storyteller. Let's see now what he/she is capable of.* This is like saying that storytelling is, by definition, opposed to practical, concrete action: talking rather than acting. We also hear: *Y's stories have got us dreaming, but actually things aren't going well.* This is as if to say: storytelling is the process of telling fairy tales to conceal a much harsher truth.

All this takes us back to the role played by semiotics in analyzing political communication. Semiotics has always emphasized the importance of constructing and listening to stories in organizing human thought and experience, since its beginnings in the 1960s (see Barthes 1966). For semiotics, storytelling is an indispensable and foundational way of organizing our experience, our perception of reality, of understanding what we and other people do. It is a fundamentally important way of ascribing meaning to life and the world, and to attributing meaning to words, phrases and discourses.

Certainly, stories can *also* be told with the intention of lying. Stories can absolutely take us to a world made up of dreams and fantasies, an illusory universe detached from reality. *Also*, but not solely. Attractive, interesting and well-constructed stories can also be told as a way of affirming, confirming, reinforcing and defending magnificent truths and making them invincible, of recounting harsh realities and making them easier to understand and accept. These are stories which, luckily, have always been told all around the world: in books, theater, poetry and films, as well as in cartoons, comic strips, videogames, on the internet and even in marketing, journalism and politics.

An appeal is inevitable at this point. Let us not allow the concept of storytelling to be hollowing out, on one hand, while its use is disparaged on the other, muddying the reputation of the art of narration. Let us not allow media chatter to obscure the beauty and power of storytelling. It is a beauty and power about which semiotics has always had much to say, thanks to the work of Roland Barthes (1966) and Algirdas J. Greimas (1970, 1973), but above all thanks to Umberto Eco, a great international storyteller as well as semiotician (see Eco 1979, 1994). Only a discipline which has been studying how stories work for over fifty years can analytically answer questions such as «What differentiates an effective story from an ineffective one?», «Why is a story capable of surviving over time?», «What distinguishes an authentic story from a false one?», but also, simply, «What differentiates a story from another one?». And so on.

The semiotic discipline can answer the aforementioned (and other) questions, as well as the key distinction between telling a story, on one hand, and simply describing (presenting, explaining) something, on the other, by conducting at least three types of analyses[16].

(1) A *narrative analysis*, which essentially involves the following: (a) identifying the *semiotic narrative structures* underlying a political text (e.g. a leader's speech, a TV appearance, a street demonstration, a leader's social media account) in terms of *actantial roles*, which can be arranged in pairs: *subject/object*, *sender/receiver*, and *helper/opponent*; (b) identifying the four phases of the *canonical narrative schema*, which phases are not chronological but logical-semantic steps: the *contract/manipulation* stage (i.e. the moment in which a subject is induced, by him/herself and/or by others, to act following either his/her will or some duty); the *competence* stage (i.e. the moment in which a subject acquires the knowledge and the power which are necessary to act); the *performance* stage (i.e. the moment in which a

[16] For a concrete application of the three types of analyses, see Cosenza (2018, chap. 5).

subject concretely acts); the *sanction* phase (i.e. the point at which the performance of a subject is evaluated, by him/herself and/or by others, as either accomplished or failed) (see Greimas 1970, 1973; Eco 1979, 1994).

(2) An *enunciational analysis*, which essentially means identifying the linguistic and semiotic relationship that any political text (e.g. a leader's speech, a TV appearance, a street demonstration, a leader's social media account) establishes between its *enunciator*, on one hand, i.e. its author or set of authors (a politician, a leader's consultants, a party, a political coalition), and its *enunciatees*, on the other, i.e. those who read/hear/watch or, more generically, receive the political text. The various linguistic-semiotic relationships between *enunciators* and *enunciatees*, that emerge from political texts, can be organized in different types of *enunciation strategies*, from the most distant ones to the most engaging ones (see Fisher and Veron 1986; Marmo 2003).

(3) An *emotional analysis*, which nowadays can be conducted, at its best, by combining, on one hand, some concepts and distinctions coming from the so-called *semiotics of passions*[17] and, on the other, the attention to the central role of emotions in political communication paid by several contemporary political psychologists and scientists (see Marcus 2002, 2012; Westen 2007; Demertzis ed. 2013; Cepernich and Novelli eds. 2018). This means taking into consideration not only the emotions that are *explicitly* named in verbal texts (fear, anger, hope, relief, and so on), but also those which are *implicitly* expressed and/or aroused by both verbal texts and non-verbal signs (facial expressions, gestures, body postures, and so on).

The three types of analyses, which have just been presented concisely, together compose the slightest semiotic (and also interdisciplinary) equipment which is necessary to explain political storytelling, whenever either stories are explicitly told by someone or they underlie a political text only implicitly. It is, in other words, the smallest theoretical and methodological apparatus, through which both the vacuous and the misleading uses of the word «storytelling» can be escaped, not only in marketing but also in political communication.

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[17] Semiotics labels *passions* what both contemporary psychology and cognitive sciences, as well as everyday language call *emotions*. For introductory works on the semiotics of passions, see Fabbri and Pezzini (eds.) (1987), Greimas and Fontanille (1991), Pezzini (ed.) (1991), Pezzini (1998), Bertrand (2000, chap. 11).

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