Balcony Scenes

The Balustrade as a Dispositif of Political Power

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> Después, el discurso de rigor, pronunciado desde el balcón de Palacio.[1]
> *Alejo Carpentier, El recurso del método*

Introduction

Considering the title of this article, an initial quotation of the Ecuadorian ex-president José María Velasco Ibarra seems quite expectable. "Give me a balcony and I will become president," this politician is supposed to have said on one or several occasions (Knight). Velasco, who was ultimately removed from office in 1971, represents a late example of an authoritarian leader. He exercised his power within a framework of traditional political propaganda or, to be more precise, within the framework of "classical representation" (Schneider 544, 547). This included elements such as monuments, portraits in governmental offices, (military) parades, speeches, etc. Within this overall framework, the balcony plays a fundamental role in political staging with its elements of "static representation"—the kind we find in images, rituals, architecture, and media. However, it is difficult to state exactly, when the balcony began to function as a political dispositif of power, as this architectural element had already been an integral part of the premodern royal or aristocratic architecture: "[a]loof yet highly visible, the balcony has enduring associations with royal prerogative" (Avermaete 1075).

Furthermore, it is also questionable whether it is still an effective domination or indoctrination technique today. What we do know, though, is that the

1 In English: "Afterwards, the usual speech, delivered from the balcony of the Palace." (Translation J-H. W.).

balustrade has functioned as a communication platform for and with crowds even in times of crises since the premodern age. The Spanish King Charles III, for example, appeared on the balcony of the Royal Palace during the Madrilenian Esquilache Riots in 1766 in order to calm down the masses (Sarrailh 583). In modern times, balconies were used to proclaim republics, as in the case of the Weimar Republic in Germany (1918). However, the balcony had already been included in the canon of bourgeois urban architecture by the 19th century, "once reserved for aristocratic and regal architecture, [it] becomes part of the world of the rising bourgeoisie and the buildings associated with it" (Avermaete 1121). Since then, this architectural element has no longer had an exclusively representational function but has formed a transitional space between the public and private spheres. As we will see, it is precisely this transitional character of the balcony as an interface between the private and the public that has an effect on the political-representative space of (symbolic) action and leads to the imprinting of further registers of expression. In the political context, the palace opens its doors via the balcony and reveals its interior as if through a crack, and the same may be said for the personality of the leader: The political performance on the balcony offers the opportunity to simulate closeness to the people, although this does not actually correspond physically with the architectural element as the balcony itself is distant and high. Nevertheless, the simulacrum succeeds through a leeway below the purely representative level, in which the mostly calculated disclosure of feelings or their exchange becomes possible.

Within the history of political communication, the capture of the city Fiume—today Rijeka in Croatia—in 1920 by Gabriele D'Annunzio and his warriors can be considered the beginning of a new paradigm (Simonelli). His regime marks a starting point of a series of new balcony scenes, arranged as an interaction between the political leader and his audience in order to represent or rather simulate social hegemonies. Here—to a nearly grotesque extent—D'Annunzio displays a set of theatrical rituals which contain, among other elements, certain definite gestures, patterns of gathering people, choirs, symbols, uniforms, etc.

> In Fiume, extending the arm became a celebratory moment binding together the leader with the people in a new political model: the *Arengo*—the national council. This was the magical and symbolic space where the mystical union of leader and masses occurred, outdating parliamentary representation in favour of an authority that worked through assemblies

> in which decisions were made by acclamation. (Serventi Longhi 38, cf. Simonelli 258)

These practices of political stage-management had an enormous impact on the representations of leadership during Italian and German fascism. These forms of communication with the crowds could certainly be discussed in more detail, calling to mind Walter Benjamin's expression of the "*aestheticizing of politics*" (Benjamin 42, italics in the original) or the term "ornament of the masses" as conceived by Siegfried Kracauer (cf. the end of his well-known essay, Kracauer 86, and Witte 345). Here, I follow some of Elias Canetti's theories about crowds.

According to Elias Canetti, a gathering of people is a catalyst for affects that goes beyond the emotional world of individuals, which civil society had kept separate and dispersed.

> Soon as a man has surrendered himself to the crowd, he ceases to fear its touch. Ideally, all are equal there; no distinctions count, not even that of sex. The man pressed against him is the same as himself. He feels him as he feels himself. Suddenly it is as though everything were happening in one and the same body. (Canetti 15–16)

The experience of the crowd can be shaped through the collective performance of dances, movements, gestures, shouts, or songs. "Every part of a man which can move gains a life of its own and acts as if independent, but the movements are all parallel, the limbs appearing superimposed on each other" (Canetti 32). The eye-catcher of a political meeting is the gallery or balcony, through which the views are directed towards a political leader. The latter then has the opportunity to guide and encourage the movements of the people and weld them together through synchronous rituals. As far as can be reconstructed, D'Annunzio opened up this new field of political performance, which Canetti describes eloquently as follows: "In the end, there appears to be a single creature dancing, a creature with fifty heads and a hundred legs and arms, all performing in exactly the same way and with the same purpose" (Canetti 32). The crowd expresses violent affects; it is interpellated as choir, performs specific kinds of choreographies or the joint shouting of slogans. This, together, can lead to a climax of the mass experience (Canetti 38).

Mussolini was not the first to convert the balcony into a political stage which had the function of stimulating emotional eruptions in the crowds

since D'Annunzio, as in so many other respects, had done decisive preparatory work here. However, it was Mussolini who revived a medieval tradition by turning the balconies of sacred buildings—*arengario*—, from which sermons could be delivered, into communication platforms for the fascist movement (Avermaete 1144). "Throughout Italy, from the appropriation of the balcony of Palazzo Venezia to the erection of temporary platforms for speeches, [the *arengario*] was used to stage the Duce–popolo (people) relationship in its most dramatic, imaginative and enduring manner" (Pooley 218). Precisely these "temporary platforms" not only contributed to a ubiquity of ruling power, they also brought about a mobility of the balcony as a political stage. Movable and height-adjustable platforms, furthermore, had already been devised for Lenin, making them adaptable to various locations and occasions (Avermaete 1141).

The fascist modelling of the interplay between an authoritarian leader and his masses was translated into the Spanish context of the 1930s, when the Spanish party Falange adopted it to strengthen its identity politics and to stabilize the unity of its members by initiating the political fight against the Republicans. Still, the later performances of Francisco Franco on the balcony of the abovementioned Royal Palace at the Plaza de Oriente in the 1970s were also influenced by the symbolic language of Italian fascism. The dictatorship of Franco, in turn, doubtlessly served as a sinister model for Latin American authoritarian regimes, including the one of Juan Perón in Argentina.

In the following paragraphs, a few conceptual considerations will be presented. Afterwards, a series of examples will be commented on, first from the reelection campaign of Juan and Eva Perón in Argentina and secondly from the Venezuelan election campaign of 2012. The intention is to highlight the transformation of the forms of political communication in the changing contexts of mass media development. One guiding question will be how the political stage-management changes when the images of the rulers are transmitted by electronic visual media. A further point of focus will be the question of how self-affection and display of emotions in the realm of civil sentimentalism become part of the political staging in this context.

Conceptual Considerations

The balcony combines various forms of communication that serve different emotional registers and can mix and mingle. It can become a theater in which

the emotional worlds of the middle classes' social strata and their traditional forms of identification dominate. In the theater the "equality of the spectators really consists only in the fact that they are all exposed to the same performance" (Canetti 36). As an example, in the Latin American context, reference can be made here to the aesthetic forms of melodrama, which have been transferred to other media forms such as soap operas on the radio or later television (Michael 96–100).

Unlike the proscenium stage and its auditorium, the structure of a balcony and a square is more open and the interaction between politicians and the crowd more spontaneous. The passive reception of watching and listening to the political leader can change at any time into participative forms of applause or contradiction as well as into the sharing of common rituals or forms of expression. However:

> Rehearsed and regularly repeated shouts are no proof that the crowd has achieved a life of its own. They may lead to it, but they may also be only external, like the drill of a military unit. Contrasted with them, the spontaneous and never quite predictable outcry of a crowd is unmistakable, and its effect enormous. (Canetti 35)

Therefore, the interaction of political leaders and the crowds implicates numerous factors of contingency. In this light, the balcony provides an arrangement which serves the reduction of complexity. Most importantly, it is a manifestation of what Canetti described as the ruler's fear of being touched. Thus, the position of the political leader is the counterpart of the crowd, in which, as we have seen, the fear of being touched is dispelled.

> Access to him is made difficult, palaces with more and more rooms being built round him. Each gate and each door is heavily guarded so that it is impossible to intrude on him against his will. He, from his remote security, can have anyone seized wherever he may be. But how is anyone to seize him, protected as he is by his hundredfold separation? (Canetti 207)

This panic of being reached out to is not limited to the fear of assassination attempts or of viruses, as could be concluded from the long conference table Vladimir Putin used to receive European politicians in the run-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Certainly, every ruler who accesses a public stage always runs the risk of being assassinated, and indeed, leaders have been assas-

sinated on balconies—it is a quite exposed position. Keeping the bigger picture in mind, this aspect eclipses what fear of being touched really means. In a broader sense, this type of anxiety corresponds to the limitation of public access and interaction. The fear of being touched is a fear of being in touch. The affect mentioned above indicates the desire for control and distance to assure the functioning of the "impression management" (Goffman 132). The ruler needs the balcony as an arrangement for staging and at the same time to regulate and control reactions and emotions in the best possible way.

In this sense, the balcony not only creates distance and hierarchy, it makes it more difficult to access the "backstage," as Ervin Goffman (69, 70) would call it. Despite this, though, this distance between the ruler and the audience somehow has to be overcome. Therefore, the political speech, as well as other forms of communication and rituals, often serves to create an emotional bond which can evoke a spectrum of well-known feelings such as joy, sadness, or fear on the subjective, individual level. However, violent emotions and collective affects can also be aroused and can possibly lead to ecstatic states through ready-made forms of gestures, expression, and political shibboleths. The architectural position of the balcony may be helpful, but it can by no means be considered a guarantee for retaining control over what is happening. The objective in this case is to reduce the distance between the crowd and the political leader while also eliminating the fear of physical contact as well as the ruler's panic of being assassinated. In other words: Regarding security and sensibility, an economy of proximity and distance must be balanced.

The reflections up to this point lead to the conclusion that the balcony can be described as a dispositif of power which regulates representations, interactions, feelings, and affects. Here, I am alluding to the Deleuzian adaption of a concept that was first conceived by Michel Foucault:

> Apparatuses are therefore composed of lines of visibility, utterance, lines of force, lines of subjectivation, lines of cracking, breaking and ruptures that all intertwine and mix together and where some augment the others or elicit others through variations and even mutations of the assemblage. (Deleuze n.p.)

The balcony enables certain forms of political visibility, allows for emotions, identifications, affects and their control, and is connected to discourses that are based not only on linguistic codes but also include other communicative forms. Thus, it implies an emotional interaction with the audience. The rela-

tionality of all these elements creates political agencies or, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, "lines of subjectivation," as well as the dissolution of subjectivities.

Besides, the balcony is not a stable or fixed form that repeats itself in always the same way. As an "apparatus," it is like a set of relationships between elements that can have a wide range of possible variations: "[…] mutations of the assemblage" (Deleuze), as it were. The balustrade, for instance, is not necessarily an architectural element; it can also be a rostrum or stage. As mentioned earlier, movable stages have been used since the 1920s. However, any suitable object could and can be used. For instance, it can be a tank as in the case of Boris Jelzin who climbed it to mobilize the resistance against the military coup d'état in 1991, creating a sort of stand-up act which certainly changed the whole apparatus considerably. Nevertheless, a balcony, in order to operate as part of an early form of mass media, needs a square and a space where crowds are able to gather.

Yet, one might wonder if the terms "political theater," "staging," and "stage-management" really are suitable descriptions. Consulting the works of media scholar Vilém Flusser (19–95), we find some reflections concerning different forms of discourses. In this context, the "theater discourse" presupposes the existence of one source of information with a protected background. Messages are sent to a semicircle of present listeners and spectators who theoretically have the opportunity to respond (Flusser 21–22). Bearing in mind this definition, one might wonder whether the messages are really sent to a present audience in the case of the balcony dispositif. What substantial messages are truly transmitted? And finally: Does not the audience itself form an essential part of the stage-management as it conveys support for the speaker in relation to other spectators who, today, are connected to it via electronic or digital mass media? Hence, the entire balustrade image—ruler and crowd—is a form of political representation that is broadcasted in every direction to a wider public. This wider public may not be able to respond but they are meant to be touched by an impressive media spectacle. Thus, this "assemblage" rather corresponds to what Flusser describes as the "amphitheater discourse" (26–28), and, maybe, this constellation leads to an adaption of the dispositif: The wider audience, which is only reached via television sets, is not able to participate directly in the political event and to share the experiences of the crowd. In the mind of the ruler on the balcony, however, this wider audience must always also be considered and addressed. In addition to arousing strong emotions and mobilizing the masses, it becomes elementary to reach the people who are isolated in the television experience through identification and empathy. The more the bal-

cony dispositif moves towards an amphitheatrical constellation, the more we leave the paradigm of classical or static political representation and communication.

First Example: Eva Perón[2]

As Ursula Prutsch (2015, 2016) has vividly shown, Juan Perón's wife, Eva María Duarte de Perón, was a central player in the power structure of a political movement that has been called Peronism both inside and outside of Argentina. A discussion about the political classification of Peronism brings to light different views, e.g. also with regard to the question of whether it reactivated and adapted the politics or aesthetics of European fascism (Payne 340–49; Prutsch 2015, 28–33; Schembs). This cannot and should not be decided here, although this question is highly relevant with regard to the tradition of "the political balcony" as a dispositif of power.

Still, Peronism is undoubtedly one of the first populist regimes in mid-century Latin America (Werz), and it was precisely at the interface between the leading figure (Juan Perón) and his lines of connection to broad segments of the population (working class, the women, etc.) that Eva Perón held a key strategic function, based on the historical circumstances and the individual conditions of all the actors involved (Sarlo 91). This may have to do with the fact that her social gender—a woman in Argentina in the 1940s and 1950s—enabled her to enact a wider range of emotional expressions in her role as leader and with that, as a former actress (especially as a radio play voice), she ideally complemented and completed the communicative registers of Perón.

It is indisputable that in this context the balcony underwent a renaissance as a dispositif of propaganda and was also used by Juan and Eva Perón as a stage in the sense mentioned above (Prutsch 2016, 239). The most relevant example refers to the appearance of Juan Perón on the balcony of the presidential palace Casa Rosada—on October 17, 1945 (Prutsch 2015, 50–51), a place which has become one of the best-known memory spaces for Peronism. After Perón's arrest, carried out by his political rivals, a vast multitude of workers and farm workers (the so called "cabecitas negras," "black heads," a term related to their mostly mestizo or indigenous origin) entered the bourgeois urban space of Buenos Aires and occupied the Plaza de Mayo, the square in front of the palace. This

2 The following comments refer to videos 1 and 2 as listed in the references.

social pressure led to Peron's release, after which he showed himself on the balcony and calmed down the people by engaging in dialogue with them.

This political event can be considered as a touchstone for Eva Perón's famous political intervention on August 22, 1952, in which her possible candidacy for the vice presidency in the context of the upcoming election campaign figured as the background. The General Confederation of Labor had called for a rally on that day, in the course of which the Perón-Perón duo was to be proclaimed. The expression "*Cabildo abierto*," which had been circulated for the occasion, referred to another place of memory that commemorated the proclamation of an Argentinian nation and the deposition of the Viceroy in 1810. A large stage had been set up at the front of the Ministry of Labor where representatives of the Confederation, ministers, Juan Perón, and Eva Perón appeared and spoke. In the course of her appearance, Eva Perón, who by this time was already seriously ill, suffering from cancer, raised doubts about her candidacy, engaging in a direct interaction with the assembled crowds. She kept everyone present in suspense and asked for a postponement of the decision until she finally declared the renunciation of her candidacy via a historic radio address on August 31, 1952 (Prutsch 2016, 249–50, cf. video 2: 11:24).

In her speech contributions, Eva Perón emphasizes her willingness to continue the struggle for Peronism wholeheartedly and sacrificially. As is characteristic of populist movements, political opponents who had already stirred up opposition to her possible candidacy in advance were defamed by Eva Perón as representatives of the political establishment: "mediocre figures," or "traitors to the fatherland" (video 2: 03:45, 08:20). Simultaneously, there is the exaltation of the political leader Perón and the evocation of all those gathered as a community. This did not only include the shirtless (*descamisados*)—workers and poor people—but in a broader framework all citizens. In the foreground, however, the first and foremost happening was the conveyance of emotion as a common bond to all those present, regardless of the communicative content, of course.

Certainly, what was happening on the balcony was not mere acting, even if "self-affection" (Kremer) may clearly have played a role in the performance. Rather, emotions were part of the political publicity and, thus, part of the political business. Despite the poignant circumstances, the fact that Eva had previously practiced and internalized her political stage presence as an actress and speaker in radio plays cannot be completely ignored here. This becomes clear in the moment when the president's wife, bearing the marks of her illness, overwhelmed by her feelings, throws herself into her husband's arms (cf. video 2, initial image), presenting herself and President Perón as being in a familial or

intimate relationship. Here, the podium is turned into a stage on which the mutual feelings of the leaders are communicated. Later on, she distances herself from the office of vice president, which would be associated with honor and dignity (cf. video 2: 05:00). In this way, she makes it easier for a wider audience to identify with her, and she enables them to sympathize with her personal situation. This observation also applies in a broader sense. In the words of the political leaders, Perón, his wife, and their followers are united by love and affection ("*cariño*", video 2: 05:12, 07:14, 08:36), almost like a family.

In addition, she describes herself at the outset as a "bridge" between the president and the citizens (Vassallo 2; Sarlo 91). She thus places herself at the service of the Peronist cause. In fact, however, due to her gendered role of the wife, she functions as an "emotional bridge"—i.e., as what has been attributed in the rhetorical tradition to the arousal of affect—not least through the techniques of self-affection. These enable the speaker, qua emotional attunement, to transmit emotional states to an auditorium. One could say: Eva mediates and transports the self-affection of Peronism. The First Lady, as a sort of "natural" and simultaneously "political" body (Kantorowicz 7; Sarlo 92),[3] adds the affective and passionate components, framed and reterritorialized by a civic-bourgeois imaging, to its communicative registers and, in her gestures of sacrifice and self-consumption, she herself becomes a cipher of passion (Sarlo 25–28). She thus forms a counterweight to the mainstream of Peronism, a movement with revolutionary potential that deliberately instrumentalized a mobilization of the masses, undermining the self-image of the bourgeois classes. Conversely, the latter began to redefine themselves against the backdrop of Peronism (Adamovsky).

It is important to emphasize that the assembled audience is part of the performance, creating a political event that is disseminated to a wider public via visual and audio media. The registers of empathic emotions were amplified in a sort of transmission that reached out to a greater audience via mass media. The whole campaign event was recorded and documented on film. The message that is transported is that of a political community that constitutes itself through a dialogue between the speaker on the podium and the crowd standing below. Vertical differences in height, behavior, language, and the play with emotions thus become an open arrangement in which distance and closeness must be balanced.

3 Beatriz Sarlo (92) points out that "the material body of Eva produces her body politic."

The dialogue between Eva Perón and the crowd is provided for and stimulated by the pauses that structure the speeches. In this way, an almost intimate emotionality is transmitted even when the crowd implores Eva Perón to confirm her candidacy instantaneously, although she had called it into doubt by statements like the following one: "Colleagues, do you think that if the post of vice-president were a burden and I were a solution, I would not have already said yes?" (quoted after Vassallo 6).[4]
Later on, the following dialogue takes place (quoted after Vassallo 6):[5]

> Evita: "No, no, comrades. I accept the word of comrade Espejo [i.e., José Espejo, General Secretary of the General Confederation of Labour] and tomorrow, at 12 noon…"
>
> Audience: "No! No! No! No!"
>
> Evita: "I ask for a few hours. If tomorrow…"
>
> Audience: "No! No! No! No!"
>
> Evita: "Comrades, comrades: I ask you only one thing: When has Evita let you down? [Cf. video 2: 09:00] When has Evita not done what you want? But don't you realize that this moment for a woman, as for any citizen, is very transcendental? And that the least she needs is a few hours of time. Nothing more."
>
> Audience: "Now! Now! Now! Now!"

The observation that melodrama informs the political communication here and is acted out within the framework of bourgeois emotional repertoires does not contradict the findings that this situation may have gotten out of

4 Translation J.-H. W., in the original: "compañeros: ¿ustedes creen que si el puesto de vicepresidenta fuera una carga y yo fuera una solución, no hubiera ya contestado que sí?"

5 Translation J.-H. W., in the original: Evita: "No, no, compañeros. Yo acepto la palabra del compañero Espejo y mañana, a las 12 del día…" / Público: "¡No! ¡no! ¡no!" / Evita: "Yo pido unas horas. Si mañana…" / Público: "¡No! ¡no! ¡no!". / Evita: "Compañeros, compañeros: yo les pido una sola cosa. ¿Cuándo Evita los ha defraudado? ¿Cuándo Evita no ha hecho lo que ustedes quieren? Pero, ¿no se dan cuenta de que este momento para una mujer, como para cualquier ciudadano es muy trascendental? Y que lo que menos que necesita son unas horas de tiempo. Nada más." / Público: "¡Ahora! ¡ahora! ¡ahora!"

hand and that the president's wife temporarily lost her discursive sovereignty. With her persona, which is publicly declared to be private, Eva Perón embodies care and self-sacrifice to the crowd present, a crowd, guided by her husband President Juan Perón. However, according to the film sources available,[6] the identification with her seems to have been momentarily derailed by an emotionally charged disagreement strongly articulated by the people as feeling and sympathy turn into collectively shared affect.

In view of the cinematic testimonies available today, however, one will state that this loss of control is reterritorialized through montages and commentaries, turning the *Cabildo abierto* as a media event into a myth and place of memory in the realm of the Peronist imaginary. Going back to the year of 1952, one may hypothesize that the First Lady returns to the ultimate medium of the amphitheater structure—the radio—and monopolizes the discourse. This, however, does not change the overall design of the message as seen from today, which is intended to convey familiarity and emotional unity still in dissent.

Second Example: Hugo Chávez[7]

In order to supplement the previous remarks, comments on a few examples of videos taken from the presidential election campaign in Venezuela in 2012 are in order. This campaign was won by Hugo Chávez, who then took over the presidency for the fourth time. As we will see, the balcony is still a highly relevant dispositif of propaganda, even in the political world of our time.

Chávez's regime can be considered an example of Latin American leftwing neo-populism (Werz). In my opinion, the evaluation of his government should also take into consideration a larger perspective on Venezuelan history, including the former epochs going back to the middle of the 20th century, which saw massive social and economic inequalities and rioting.

Even though Chávez came to power through general elections in 1998, it is noteworthy that he intended to introduce fundamental changes in the political system of Venezuela; changes that he apostrophized as the Bolivarian Revolution (Peters 2020). It is true that, particularly in the first phase of his government, some remarkable successes in the field of social policy (so called

6 Cf. as an historical source video 1.

7 The following comments refer to videos 3, 4 and 5 as listed in the references.

Social Missions) can be identified and some developments in the creation of direct democratic institutions (introduction of Communal Councils) took place. At the same time, it is also necessary to point to his disdain for representative democracy. This is evident in incidences such as his former attempts at military coups, substantial modifications of the constitution, the polarization of the political landscape, governance per decree, and the centralization of the executive power. However, it was the attempted coup of 2002 against Chávez that contributed to the radicalization of his regime and certain political measures that included repression of the opposition or freedom of speech (Kitzberger 2010, 16). Last but not least, accusations of nepotism and a political self-fashioning as the typical Latin American caudillo should be mentioned. Chávez denoted his own political role frequently as messianic and described his mandate as having directly emanated from the Venezuelan people (Welsch). As the head of a so-called rentier state (Peters 2017) that deals mainly with petroleum, he did not succeed in reducing the social inequality significantly. This stands in contrast to other Latin American countries that followed these strategies during the epoch of neo-extractivism in the first decade of the 21st century. His promise to diversify the oil-centered economy remained unfulfilled, which led to extreme economic and social crises after the fall of the oil price and, later on, after his death (Peters 2020).

The presidential election campaign of 2012 was burdened by the office-holding regime's intimidation and hindrance of the opposition. Furthermore, crimes of violence were committed. At the same time, the president's illness also cast a shadow over his campaign. Chávez had fallen ill with cancer already in 2010. In July 2012, the president declared his complete recovery, which helped his approval ratings immediately. After his reelection in October, he suffered a relapse in December and, in March of 2013, his death was announced by Vice President Nicolás Maduro.

The following analysis is based on scenes of videos taken at political rallies during the presidential election campaign of 2012 (see references). However, they should also be regarded in the broader context of Hugo Chávez's media policy. Already in 1999, he introduced a weekly television show (*Aló presidente*) to address the Venezuelan people; but also, to make occasional political decisions during the broadcasting of this television live format. In this context, it is necessary to emphasize his crucial role in the development of what the French journalist Christian Salmon has analyzed as "political storytelling." This form of storytelling moves away from classic forms of instilling adoration in the audience in order to create the charismatic authority of the ruler. Instead,

it tends to be nourished by softer emotions such as sympathy or empathy. Indeed, populist rulers often undermine the separation of public-political and private spheres in their self-representation. They belabor the paradox of having to substantiate their singular claim to power on the one hand, while on the other being not so singular but merely one among many others without unique qualities to begin with (primus inter pares, cf. Freud 102; Laclau 59). *Aló Presidente* corresponds quite precisely to such a model of self-dramatization (and its contradictions). It was just the right format "to bring the leader into his followers' households, to promote his iconography, to inform the public about his achievements, and generally to solidify emotional ties with his supporters" (Frajman 525). Furthermore, Chávez initiated the foundation of the national TV station TeleSur, a project realized to counterbalance the hegemony of traditional media groups or the dominance of U.S.TV stations such as CNN, for instance. Besides, the Chávez regime urgently needed new platforms to present its programs and protagonists. As Kitzberger (2012, 125) indicates, the traditional media groups in some Latin American countries as in Venezuela "structure a public sphere in which the interests and experiences of subaltern classes and groups are less visible and legitimate." What was initially conceptualized as an attempt to diversify political reporting in Venezuela turned out to be a valuable propaganda instrument of the Chávez regime, which, after 2002, increasingly attempted to monopolize the public sphere. Although the following examples were also broadcasted by TeleSur, I will mainly refer to videos broadcasted live by Cadena Nacional or Venezolana Televisión due to reasons of accessibility.[8]

The Announcement of the Election Victory of 2012[9]

I would like to begin with the announcement of Chávez's election victory, on October 7, 2012, where Chávez appeared with his entourage on the balcony of the Presidential Palace Miraflores in Caracas. At this point, it is highly relevant to comment on the historical significance of the monument the balcony is part of, for Miraflores does not only represent a historical building. Chávez's political movement interprets this location as a place of memory that reminds the

8 The source is YouTube. The excerpts from TeleSur that the author of this article had consulted are no longer accessible on YouTube. The other videos provide more material and give a more complete impression of the campaign rallies.

9 Cf. video 3 as listed in the references.

Venezuelan people of the failed coup d'état of 1992, in which the renegade military squads tried in vain to occupy the Presidential Palace. Chávez was one of the commanders who had orchestrated the conspiracy. This defeat was also the beginning of his political career, as Chávez—in a public statement and wearing a uniform and a red beret—took all responsibility and, to avoid greater damages, ordered his troops to stand down and to hand over their weapons.[10] Again, in certain political contexts, a balcony is not only a neutral architectural element.[11]

After his victory is confirmed, Hugo Chávez enters the balcony and appears in his typical outfit, a red tracksuit. Doubtlessly the red color refers to the socialist movement, which Chávez baptized as the Socialism of the 21st century. In the beginning, Chavez's use of a tracksuit was a kind of homage to Fidel Castro who preferred and cultivated this sportive dressing style after his retreat from politics. However, the Venezuelan ruler introduced a new design with the colors of the national flag. Later on, Nicolás Maduro wore this garment on the occasion of the funeral procession of the deceased president (Williams). This was certainly an homage to Chávez on Maduro's side, but it could also be understood as an unorthodox investiture of the successor.

The speech from the balcony of the Presidential Palace should be perceived as the visual and acoustic affirmation of political power: its representation after he won the election. This is a rather common ritual that corresponds with the political customs in other countries, even though there are other procedures of inauguration in Germany or in the U.S. In addition to that, Chávez uses his appearance on the balcony to stage his reunion with the Venezuelan people. In this sense, the sportive jacket indicates a casual style that suits a president well who intends to present himself as a man of the people. It is noteworthy here that the political staging should not only be described as a theater but, in analogy to the case of Juan and Eva Perón as analyzed above, as

10 Therefore, the broadcasting of TeleSur inserts the live pictures of the Mountain Barracks 4F. The letter and the digit are fixed on the roof of this building, they refer to February 4, 1992, the date on which the rebellion took place and which was the starting point of the "commandant Chávez" myth that, on his part, alludes of course to another legend: the commandant Ché Guevara.

11 That is to say that the balcony participates in historical representations that are connected to one or more buildings and places as a whole. For instance, when, in 2019, Matteo Salvini used the balcony of the Communal Palace in Forlì for a political speech, it was a clear reference to Benito Mussolini who in the same place sentenced four captured partisans to death in 1944 (La Repubblica 2019).

an amphitheater—a dispositif which is formed by several elements such as architecture, memory space, clothing, the elected president himself, the crowds, etc. However, within the framework of an amphitheater structure, it is crucial that the whole event is broadcasted by TeleSur or other television stations. Having in mind this organizational form, two kinds of separateness have to be overcome simultaneously: the distance between the elected president and his people but also the distance between the entire meeting and the television spectators.

In order to cross the emotional thresholds, the president does not concretize any political content or plans. He prefers to address the people by naming and embracing their heterogeneity: women and men, workers, the old and young, indigenous people, etc. He expresses his gratitude to them—even invites the opposition to participate in his political project. Finally, Chávez takes out the sword of Bolívar—it is difficult to verify whether it is a replica or the original—and so unites the masses under the central symbol of the Bolivarian Revolution (cf. video 3: 35:11). The aim of placing the event in the context of a political tradition is to give both those present and those watching via television the feeling that they are witnessing something important, that they themselves are part of history in the making. With regard to its traditional meaning within the code of political symbolism, the sword stands for the possession of the state authority and the monopolization of power. So, calling into mind the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the meeting of the ruler and his people communicates the message that the Venezuelan people and their head Chávez have once again conquered the sphere of political power.

The central role of the "assemblage" (Deleuze) is incorporated by Chávez. He is the center of attention and merely lends his voice to pronounce the victory of the people. In the emotional interplay between the ruler and his audience, the self-affection of the former—as an emotional "bridge" to the auditorium—appears to be crucial. This affection expresses itself through language and voice. From this point of view, the medium seems to be the message. The reunion of the populist politician and the crowd as a metonymy of the people or the nation is sustained by the presence of the political voice as the most important medium of interaction between leader and auditorium. Populist regimes weaken and destabilize the actually democratically secured procedures by taking (over) power through such balcony appearances. Therefore—quoting Mladen Dolar—the voice represents

> […] the source of authority against the letter, or the voice not supplementing but supplanting the letter. Most tellingly, all phenomena of totalitarianism tend to overbearingly hinge on the voice, the voice which in a quid pro quo tends to replace the authority of the letter, or seriously put into question its validity. The voice which appears limitless and unbound, i.e., not bound by the letter. (Dolar)

Thus, Chavez' appearance, as he celebrates his election victory on the balcony, can be considered a lesson in the art of an affectively-charged self-dramatization of populist rulers. In this context, the election and its legitimacy themselves are called into question—a paradoxical tendency that can also be noted in context of the right-wing populism we are currently witnessing.

With respect to political speech, Chávez developed his very own form of declamation, which was almost more relevant for the rhetorical effect of his speeches than the political agenda conveyed. On a linguistic level, we can observe a language that, apart from apostrophes and several figures of speech for repetition, manifests the master trope of climax: He combines simple or paratactic sequences that lead to a culminating point in which the audience takes over to cheer, to applaud, or to answer with chants. Here, Chávez as an orator demonstrates a real intuitive capacity of creating a call-and-response rhythm in which the pauses of the ruler's speech are a highly relevant part of the exchange. However, even though the whole scene does not adopt the character of a dialogue between political leader and audience, as in the cases of the classical Peronism discussed above, the crowd undoubtedly plays its part. Within the amphitheater-structure, it has the role of the claqueurs in the common sense of an affirmative audience but possibly also in the sense of Goffman (91): "A shill is someone who acts as though he were an ordinary member of the audience but is in fact in league with the performers." This way, the auditorium invites the greater public of television spectators to join the party by social imitation, sympathy, and approval.

The Campaign and the Mobile Balcony[12]

Finally, I would like to offer a few comments on several rallies held during Chavez's election campaign. The center of this "assemblage" is the rostrum, which can be characterized as a sort of mobile balcony. It is a stand-up stage

12 See videos 4 and 5 as listed in the references.

that the candidate takes with him or her on his campaign tour, during which he tries to bond with the crowds he encounters by making specific references to their regional or communal particularities. At the occasion of the *Cabildo abierto*, relating to the vice-presidency of Eva Perón, the rostrum was added to the front of the Ministry of Labor. In any case, the mobile balcony usually is the stage of the candidates, whereas the balcony belongs to the representation of leaders that are already in possession of political power.

In this context, a few comments need to be made on Chavez's campaign rally in Barcelona, on July 12, 2012. Barcelona is the capital of the Venezuelan state Anzoátegui. Here, the president appears on stage wearing clothes in the national colors: a blue tracksuit, a red beret, and a yellow scarf. The red beret refers to the moment in above-mentioned attempt of rebellion in 1992 when the commandant presented himself in a television broadcast to declare the failure of the coup and to take all responsibility. At the beginning of the meeting, the candidate starts singing the national anthem and alternates verses with the audience present (cf. video 4: 03:34). So, the speaker faces a crowd which is entirely ready to contribute to the emotional setting of the situation. He then takes his time to greet the assembly, addressing himself especially to the workers, the women, and the young people, and dedicating particular attention to the host city and its different parts (cf. video 4: 05:39). Afterwards, he recounts personal episodes from his life that are related to Barcelona and the region. As in the television program *Aló Presidente*, the political observer is able to notice "Chavez's facility with the spotlight, his 'gift of the gab,' his extensive knowledge of Venezuelan folk culture, songs and food" (Frajman 504) in the election campaign.

What he delivers is not just a speech, it is a civil religious sermon. On a performative level, it is Chávez's typical intonation, as commented on above, and the prayer-like chanting of paratactic sequences that already convey this impression. With regard to the contents of his discourse, he conveys the central points of his political program. Moreover, he talks about love as the main principle that connects all individuals and that also has the power to animate and move forward the national project. The campaign runs under the slogan "Corazón de mi Patria"—"Heart of my Fatherland"—which expresses not only patriotism but also a strategy to highlight the candidate's willingness to take care of the emotional well-being of the Venezuelan nation. "Love" and "heart" are the signifiers that reunite bourgeois emotions and patriotic feelings (cf. video 4: 09:20). The so-called Bolivarian Revolution can certainly be understood as an attempt to bring together the groups worst off in society. The represen-

tatives of these groups are addressed metonymically at the beginning of the speech in order to unite them in the sense of an emotional civic community. However, the Chavismo of 2012 also struck conciliatory tones and, especially after the election victory of October of that year, signals a willingness to cooperate with the opposition.

This speech nevertheless culminates in an uncanny declaration of "l'État, c'est moi," now expressed in its neopopulist version: "Chávez, ya tú no eres Chávez. Tú eres un pueblo. Chávez se hizo pueblo" (video 4: 10:06). That is to say, as if speaking to himself he states: "You are not Chávez, you are the people. Chávez has become one with his people." By using these words, the candidate quotes the Columbian leftwing politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who lived in the first half of the 20th century and whose assassination in 1948 led to the "Bogotazo." This popular expression was applied to the riots, massive street fights, and civil war in the aftermath of the murder. Chávez borrows Gaitan's words to reactivate the populist phantasm of the union between leader and people. He then turns and addresses himself once again to the Venezuelan people in a generic second-person singular: the woman, the man, the worker, the girl, the boy. They all are Chávez, so the president says, each one is Chávez. Once again, the political observer is reminded of the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, in which the sovereign is represented as the composition of many small individuals.

The second rally I would like to mention took place on September 16, 2012, in San Fernando, the capital of the State of Apure. Here, we can observe the same aspects of political stage-management. However, in the course of this reunion, one cannot help but notice the even stronger presence of emotions, conceived as a political communication strategy. Chavez reveals that he is not yet in full possession of his strength due to his illness and physical limitations. Then he begs God to grant him his last dream (cf. video 5: 04:29); that is to say, a complete recovery and to win the upcoming election. In fact, the president seems to allude to his illness that has recently been cured (or so it seemed), and he shows himself highly emotionalized, using a silken red handkerchief to dry his tears, which provides a good contrast to his white and blue tracksuit (cf. video 5: 08:18), before he starts performing regional songs with the popular singer Cristóbal Jiménez (cf. video 5: 09:09). As in the case of the election campaign of Juan and Eva Perón, the personal illness and the attached emotions of the candidate become part of political communication. The political and natural bodies of the president remain indistinguishable (Kantorowicz).

Conclusion

In the context of populism and neopopulism, the balcony is part of an "assemblage" which permits the ruler to stage his union with the people. Since terms such as "the people" are deceptive universals, they lend themselves well for political instrumentalization. The balcony dispositif fulfills exactly this purpose of staging political power, by showing the unity of the political leader on a balustrade and the crowds gathered below.

According to Canetti's theory, the individual's fear of contact is eliminated in the mass experience.[13] The distance between the leader, who is not part of the crowd, and 'his people' has to be overcome by the excitement of emotions and affects which are expressed by speeches, rhetorical techniques, rhythms, rituals, and music. Such spectacles can trigger ecstatic states in groups of people that go beyond the realm of distinct individual emotions. In this sense, I would distinguish between individual emotions on the one hand and collective affects that are generated as part of a mass experience. The site of emotional expression is the theater. In the age of electronic mass media, it is the amphitheater (Flusser). In order to amplify the effect, electronic visual media devices and networks are crucial.

The balcony scenes in question, which took place in the context of left-wing populist movements, but which have also emerged on the opposite extreme side of the political spectrum, show very clearly that mobilizing the masses was no longer sufficient in the age of television. There are two heuristic aspects to both Eva Perón's and Hugo Chávez's appearances: First, the crowd and its interaction with the political leader become part of the spectacle. Second, affects evoked in a mass experience cannot be transmitted electronically. Therefore, the historically older form of displaying emotions is used to reach a wide audience consisting of individuals and to appeal to them through sentimental emotions such as empathy and sympathy.

In an attempt at theoretical localization, I would like to conclude by proposing the thesis that the success of populism is neither plausible exclusively through theories which are ultimately based on psychoanalytic theorems (Laclau 69–71, 133), nor through theories that assume power and domination beyond political representation and describe it exclusively as "an affective

13 Canetti's theory has an anthropological foundation and claims almost universal validity. In contrast, I see the need to historicize his thesis and locate it in the context of bourgeois modernity.

relation, or as habit" (Beasley-Murray 27). Rather, the exercise of political power as well as the populist impression and stage-management should be addressed as an intertwining of the aforementioned aspects on the basis of "assemblages," as a multitude and structural relationship of representations, architectures, media, registers, codes, agencies, affects, and (!) emotions.

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