Political Ritual

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Symbolic and Political Representation:
The Meeting as a *mise en scène*
of the Electoral Link[1]

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This paper is about the public expression of the political link in democracy. More particularly, it is about electoral meetings' ritual aspects which elaborate that link. We shall focus on three events conducted by the main political parties in Spain, in the municipality of Leganés. Leganés is one of the settlements which constitute the suburban belt of Madrid.[2] Its population is approximately 200,000. We carried out a three-year study there on social change and political attitudes. As part of it, we observed both local and general elections, in 1991 and 1993.

Using the analysis of these meetings, we will set the problem of election in the wider context of political representation. We will elaborate on two arguments, one of which is very general. Political representation, in the modern sense of the term as parliamentary delegation, presumes some kind of link between the electors and their representatives. Such a link is given form, visibility and credibility through the expressivity imparted by devices that

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[2] These municipalities are made up of population which came from rural areas during the 1960s and 70s. Most of the inhabitants are labourers with jobs in Madrid. Although previously these municipalities were known as "bedroom-towns", in the last decade the initially desegregated and dependent settlements have transformed into self-contained municipalities endowed with modern infrastructure and an urban life of their own.

are *representational*—though here, the sense intended is rather the symbolic and figurative one. Electoral campaigns undeniably play a major part in that expressivity.

Secondly, we will point out the paradoxes which arise from the modern autonomization of the political field in relation to social life. In cultural terms, autonomization means that the local forms of culture are subordinated, through the exercise of political power, to the universalist and rationalist logic imposed from institutions. But, in terms of its manifestations in public, the political link always maintains a parasitic relationship with the world of everyday life. From it, it borrows its expressive nourishment, its images of community, and its sources of legitimacy.

We are dealing with a modern form of communication that has been rationalized, and the purpose of which is strategic. From the point of view just advocated, having regard to this subordination, what stands out is not necessarily just its discontinuities with other expressive forms, ritual or traditional; it also exhibits family resemblances to, hybridizations and complicities with, and reappropriations from, those expressive forms.

Charging the Batteries

"Charging the batteries" is one of the metaphors which, for want of clearer expressions, our informants used to describe the effects of a meeting on an audience. So let us begin "charging the battery" with some of their comments about their personal experience at electoral meetings, which will give us some insight into the problem. It should be underlined that these people who live in Leganés are militants in leftist social movements. Since the time of transition to democracy, the "meeting culture" and, in general, the forms of public expression of political sensibility in the municipality have been intimately bound up with the Left. The comments express fairly well the informants' impressions of

what these kinds of event consist of and are for, and how they have changed in Spain during the last decade.[3]

> People who attend the meeting already know who they are going to vote for. So you don't convince anybody. A meeting isn't an occasion for explaining anything, not even for convincing people most of the time. Perhaps the meeting acts as a spur on the people to be more euphoric, more active,—well, to stand in the street defending particular ideas. In this respect, you come across first those good speakers (*mitineros*) who have a way with the audience without going too far in explaining their points, and second those bad speakers that take pains over explaining themselves clearly, but they have no rapport with the audience. To capture and touch people requires something more than explanations. Anguita's got a way with an audience, in that sense.
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> Did you attend Aznar's meeting and Garzón's? Did you see them? That's the difference between what makes for a good meeting and what doesn't. Garzón had things to say, but he said them so badly, as if he was saying nothing. And Aznar, even if he said nothing... well, he set about charging the battery. That is what you're looking for in a meeting, isn't it? Charging people's batteries. Because it's people who will later try to explain that same message in the street.

"Spurring on", "capturing", "touching" the audience: that is what makes for a stimulating meeting. Conversely, saying the things "badly", persisting in "explaining" or "convincing" in a cold and boring way, are what characterize those who put themselves over ineffectively. What are the traits on which a meeting depends if it is to succeed?

> You should combine two things. A faculty for holding a brief meeting which is interesting, which makes you prick up your ears, which you understand, grasp, and which is not boring! And at the same time you have to be uplifted, your morale is raised... and, you know, it does what we said before: it makes you work.
> It was a special meeting because it was actually crowded. It took place in one of the most beautiful squares in Leganés. I really consider Felipe González very good as a speaker, then he's got that...

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[3] Quotations come from a discussion group we arranged the day after the last general elections (1993), so that they might comment, from a local point of view, on the development of the campaign.

> He comes across very well to people. Then it amounted to a form of dialogue... that's what I remember. He had you pretty well hooked.

Raising the morale; a crowd at a suggestive stage; a sense of dialogue with the leader; that is what is going to uplift you, to get you hooked. And, first and foremost, the living presence of the leader, his physical proximity, his close contact, are what is emphasized.

> Moreover, there is the impression you get that the place where you live is being taken into account. That's an important factor. When you hear that "Garzón has been in Leganés", you say "Ooh! I live in Leganés! Garzón's been in Leganés!" "Has Anguita been in Leganés? I live in Leganés!" That has an effect too... The local factor.
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> Felipe González's meeting caught my attention, because he was separated from the crowd only by a low fence. As he spoke, there were people touching him. One lady kept saying: "How handsome you are!", all the time. After a time he was obliged to come down... He came down and kissed her twice. That's improvisation. It could happen because he was so close; it was a small stage, really...

Of course, not all the relevant aspects of the meetings are necessarily bound to the leader's presence, or to his attributes as an orator. In the experience of these people, there were other elements as well that were more vague, examples being the displaying by members of the audience of their own flags and badges, or the scenery and music.

> I missed the flags in this campaign too, for example the Left's flags. The flags at the meetings, the big flags. At Garzon's meeting, what came out were one effeminate flag. I call those little ones effeminate flags. That's not the appropriate flag for a meeting. In the last meeting of the IU [Izquierda Unida] campaign, it was interesting that there were big flags, red ones portraying Che Guevara. There were flags with the hammer and sickle ... That's the kind of flag a militant carries. I mean the kind of militant who goes to a meeting and carries his flag because he believes in it, isn't that right? Because he's brought his symbol to that event. This makes a lot of difference from the flag provided by the party just to do this [wave the hand].

As this last quotation indicates, flags act as a kind of bridge between the abstractions of politics and the person of the

militant, who carries and waves it. That bridge has changed over time. Thus we now have a contrast between throw-away emblems, which are characteristic of the party, and the purely personal and irreplaceable emblems which, some time ago, used to characterize the militants and was owned by them. There is also a difference between the gesture of shaking the pole of a big flag, convincing because of the physical energy needed to do it, and the ridiculous flicks of the wrist to which the "effeminate flags" are limited, these being associated with new styles of campaign with a certain U.S. flavour.

This kind of contrast suggests the direction in which changes have taken place in the "meeting culture" of the generation who made the Spanish political transition from Franco's régime. To these people, the expressive resources used to induce a sense of a link between the politician and the group he represents, have moved towards mediation which is more and more cold and spectacular.

I'd remove all the big boards behind them. I feel they create a sense of belittlement, not of the leader but of those who see him. You feel far smaller with those big boards. I'd remove those stages that are separated more than eight or ten metre from the audience. I think this makes people go there just to hear. Going to a meeting was more amusing some time ago. You used to sit in the middle of the people and hear what they were saying. But now they are silent. They just go to hear what is said, as if it were the voice of God. The meeting has been made sacred. But that's not a meeting. A meeting is an assembly...

All that grandiloquence, and that music as the speakers come in... it sounds like the arrival of the Archangel Gabriel, you know what I mean ... I think all that paraphernalia is in imitation of the big concerts. So the idea is to make political stars of them.

The scenery was so immense, the stage so white, so immaculate... with the leader usually dressed in some colour which stands out, and with a raised white lectern placed out in ... So he doesn't appear so alone in the middle. I think all that is very far from reality, isn't it? It's as if he was on a higher level. And I think people notice it. I've noticed the change... As if it were a Greek or a Roman drama.

It has to be festive, because you're going to celebrate a change in government or a continuation. Well, you have to put imagination into that kind of celebration. But there doesn't have to be such a lot

of money spent... just to show who's the richest, who has the means, who's better at deceiving, in a way.

Some elements of these commentaries come together. Firstly, right at the outset the meeting is something inherently ambiguous, since it is addressed at the same time to a body of militants (convinced adherents or members) and to a constituency of voters (citizens who have no such affiliation). The meeting is at the same time a ritual of the party and an exercise in propaganda to gain votes outside it.

Secondly, the crudely instrumental goals of obtaining votes and making followers "work" are mediated by expressive factors. Such goals depend on what experts call "efficient communication": the ability to "charge people's batteries", whether one has a way with an audience or otherwise, the appropriate blend of proximity and deification.

Thirdly, a large part of the burden of creating this expressivity falls on the speaker. However, we see as well that there are procedures, routines and conventions on the part of the audience which play a major part in the final result: the active presence of the crowd, the kind of flag, the way that the participants move about in the arena, the way that speeches are transformed into an interplay (or dialogue) with the audience, the multiple media made up of scenery, lighting and music. These conventionalized, patterned, ritualized features of the meeting are what attracts the anthropologist's interest. What they imprint on the meeting cause it to resemble other performances which are aimed at obtaining an effect mediated by symbols, through stereotyped, recurrent patterns of action. In much the same way, the improvisations by someone seeking to

arouse a meeting are variations on a theme which is known beforehand.[4]

Finally, let us draw attention to the frequency with which these informants rely on figures of speech to communicate meanings embedded in the implicit logic of such events. They are "touched", or are "charged" like a battery, "spurred on", "uplifted" or "hooked"; the message "come across". Precisely because they are obvious to the actors, it is hardly possible to formulate such statements in literal terms, since their meaning is essentially practical and is not amenable to being expressed in a less condensed and figurative vocabulary.

All this material illustrates the problem we are interested in, the expressive quality of electoral meetings and their capacity to establish the form of relation between a leader and the people who support him. It is in these circumstances that the abstractions of formal politics take shape. They imply a contact surface where the links between voters and their representatives - between rulers and ruled - can be felt and sensed, so "capturing", "spurring on", or "coming across to" each other.

Continuity, Charisma and Academicism
in the Electoral Campaign in Leganés

Socialists have led the local government of Leganés since the first democratic elections in 1979. Until three years ago, all the mayors came from Madrid. After a period of inner struggle and dissent within the local group of the party (PSOE), the mayor leaving office, a man from Madrid who

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[4] We will not deal here with the issue of the pertinence of the category "ritual" for the understanding of secularized contexts of modern politics. In recent times, such a perspective has been strongly advocated by a number of scholars (see Abéles 1990; Kertzer 1992; Ariño 1992).

had held office in the town for a long time and was quite popular, was replaced by another candidate.[5]

This was the context of the first meeting we attended. After resolving their internal differences, the party decided to give strong support to the new candidate. The socialist president of the Comunidad de Madrid, who is the highest representative of the Spanish State in the region, went there to sanction the new order by attending the electoral event. He shared the role of speaker both with the departing mayor and with the new candidate.

The event developed as follows. First there was a comedy show which lasted around thirty minutes. The artists performed some parodies and jokes in which professional politicians were made fun of, as were a number of other famous people: sportsmen, actors, radio announcers, society people. Indeed, what was striking was the clear lack of relation between this first part of the event and the second.

Afterwards came the speeches, the first from the candidate and the last from the president. Between them came that of the departing mayor. Each of the three followed a similar pattern. In ending the speech, whoever was on the stage introduced the next, and gave him a hug. All three began by reminding the audience of the many losses that the city had suffered before the socialists came to power. Next, each enumerated the achievements in improving urban facilities and social welfare. The speeches referred to the socialists' actions at national, regional and local government levels, over a wide period, going back to the restoration of democracy in the seventies, or even to the time of the Franco regime. Their frames of reference became even

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[5] Militants made some attempt to prevent the internal quarrels to be publicly known. To some extent, this affair overlapped with factionalist disputes at regional and national levels, but its causes were actually a local matter. For the first time in a long while, it was proposed that the new candidate should be a nature son of Leganés. The town's population grew from 20,000 to around 200,000 in only fifteen years between 1970 to 1985. The increase was due to the arrival of thousands people coming from impoverished rural areas in Spain.

wider when it came to criticizing their political opponents: the "eternal" Right, the Right "from centuries back", the "black periods in Spanish history". As each speaker neared the end, he spoke more vehemently, filling his speech with figurative images, slogans, earnest requests that people should vote and calls to action: "Have courage and forge ahead!", "For Leganés! For our town! I thank you all!", "Vote! For Victory!" The event was brought to an end with the signature-tune of the party, while flags were waved, and the politicians applauded and saluted from the stage.

There are four aspects in this description which deserve a more detailed commentary: (a) the cohesive and integrated image of the party, representing the continuity of the project of socialist government; (b) the purely ancillary use of a humorous curtain-raiser; (c) the arrangements of the events in a sequence; (d) the pervasive image of a united mass of people in movement. Let us look at each one.

(a) Of course, the meeting does not reveal to the audience the conflicting personal relationships between the candidates, as would have eventually happened at a party conference. Instead, we get an idealized image of continuity and consensus. There is a clear homology between this ordering of the speeches, with the exchange of hugs between candidate and ex-mayor, and the peaceful handing over of local government leadership. The meeting is a useful means of formally closing the internal breaches suffered during the period before the election, serving as a rite to heal the schism.

This comes out both in what is said and in the drama. Ex-mayor and candidate each make references to the other, acknowledging and praising him. In addition, the President, by means of his concluding speech, provides hierarchical approval. Thus there is continuity in the passing on of political office, as there is also continuity between the different institutional levels within the State (local, regional, national). Socialist speeches intentionally adopt a broad perspective, a *longue durée*, placing problems in the context of the world system and Spanish history as a whole. They

emphasize underdevelopment and retardation in Spain for centuries, the long international seclusion, and the fight against "the long night of Francoism". Socialist ideals are able to span time and territories in this way because of certain readily assimilable and permanent emblems and symbolic resources—the name of the party, the fist and the rose, the colour red, the labour movement. "We've never ceased to be the fist-and-rose people", said one of the speakers. This claim of continuity reaches back to and invokes the imagery of the French Revolution, with the assertion that PSOE represents the call for Liberty, Fraternity and Equality.

(b) The comedy show acts to lure the public, much as do musical, folk and dance shows. But above all it is a useful means for preparing and warming up the "atmosphere".[6] However, these are complementary to the political event proper, and often poorly integrated with it—or rather merely tacked onto it. First the show is presented, then the meeting is "launched".

There is a paradox in the serious discourse of politics being parasitic in this way on other more popular modes of expression. For example, in our case, the jokes did not stop short at moral satire against the political adversary; they also touched on the socialists leaders themselves and the world of politics as a whole. Although in the context of a meeting it would be desirable that recourse to humour were subordinated to the more transcendental realm of State affairs, peoples' down-to-earth laughter entails a contrast with the serious world of politics, if not an open opposition to it. The laughter conveys a deeply anarchical, irreverent, even anti-political sense of politics, which links up with the spirit of carnival and buffoonery; it presents politics as

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[6] The "atmosphere" (*ambiente*) is an extensively used root metaphor in Spain. Spaniards use it to describe the social medium created during a public event: the greater or lesser warmth of the mood, the more-or-less intense interaction. On the necessity of this metaphor for the comprehension of public events see Díaz de Rada and Cruces (1994).

something to distrust, something alien to everyday life and only good as a pretext for making jokes. The artists took their leave with this rhyme, which was loudly applauded:

> For the love of a woman
> Boyer left his post yesterday
> and Solchaga is the boss today.
> That shows that power
> can depend thousands of times
> on the value of a slip.[7]

At other times, too we have observed the same kind of marriage of convenience or parasitic relationship between political expression and interaction and other genres of these. Meetings, when combined with a festival or with a banquet, are beset by similar contradictions. There are meetings at discos attended chiefly by old people, at which nobody drinks or dances; there are dinners with economic leaders where, as an informant said, "you do everything but eat".

(c) Third, we would like to remark on the implicit order within the sequence of speakers. It gives the event a kind of inner rhythm or progressive scheme. The local candidate, hierarchically lower, begins; the president of the Community, hierarchically higher, ends.

This hierarchical pattern, which was repeated at every meeting we attended, expresses the position of rank of each of the speakers according to the level of government structure at which they represent the electorate. But it also refers to an expected order in the way the ritual unfolds, to its inner tempo. Typically, the meeting proceeds from the least to the most inclusive, from the local and peripheral to the national and central, from lower to higher. In doing so it also proceeds from less "charisma" to a great deal of it, from what is commonplace to what is novel and eagerly expected, from "cold" to "heat".

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[7] Boyer and Solchaga were former Ministers for the Economy (socialists).

According to this model, which is implicit both in the actors' conduct and in their expectations, the way the occasion develops is through the overlapping of the two orders: on the one hand, the cognitive dimension of the hierarchy of representativity; on the other, the experiential dimension of the duration of the action. Victor Turner (1980: 31) distinguishes between the ideological and the sensorial poles of symbols, and the capacity of ritual to integrate both poles in a single movement of condensation. In this case, such a movement could be said to be "the more the representation, the more the heat"; hence the more intense the oratory, the greater the communion between the speaker and his audience, the more the flags are waved and the greater the enthusiasm of the partisans. The climax is placed at the end, where the prominent speakers, the "big names", are.

Indeed, there is something very paradoxical about the local level being, in political terms, the coldest, least able to mobilize the audience. In theory, anyway, local speakers ought to be able to address their public in their own language, since they are more familiar with their problems and have shared in some of their struggles. In fact, though, local gatherings are used by the prominent national personalities as "landing places", the local leaders being expected merely to call for members of the public to attend, then to warm them up before such visitors address them. These, being closer to the centre of power, are infused with greater charisma.[8]

The action derives its inner rhythm from a series of progressions. There is a crescendo running through each performance, and another that runs through the succession of performances. As the performance thus gets "louder", it also moves forward faster, through an intensification of

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[8] Local elections are quite different from national and regional ones. The first are still to a great extent "street" campaigns in which the local leaders feature prominently. The meeting we are commenting opened the socialist campaign in Leganés in 1992.

expressive resources. The volume of the speaker's voice rises, and interruptions by the public are more frequent. As the speech comes to an end, utopian images abound, and the language becomes figurative: propositions become imperative and desiderative. A definite trait is the confusion between prediction and predication, so that what has already happened, what can happen, what is going to happen, what ought to happen, and what it is wished should happen, are all indiscriminately intertwined. For example, the President closed his speech in this way:

> The South... cannot want a Rightist government. A rule of the right would mean... not only to lose the elections, it would mean something far worse. To lose hope! The hope of true liberation for this country and its people. We have bets on the table, because Gallardón [a rightist leader] is right. Because it is here in the South where he can win. But he's not going to win! Comrades, friends in Leganés! —Hope we already have, but the future should belong to us as well. On May 26, vote for the Socialist Party, which is the party of the future, the party for equality and justice!

(d) This kind of expressive climax combines an aesthetic and effective way to "close" with a performative pretension in the way of "self-fulfilling prophecies". If somebody asserts with enough conviction that he is going to win, his chances increase in fact, to the extent that his assertion is believable.

Certainly this mechanism is in part an expression of the rationalist ethos of contemporary political persuasion. Such an ethos obliges the agents to represent what is nothing other than chance, or requested, or desired, in a language with an analytical flavour, as though it were a reality that is fulfilled and evident or (what is almost the same thing) a historical necessity. However, the symbolic device underlying this kind of self-fulfilling prophecy—"we have to win" ergo "we are going to win"—is more broad in nature. It has to do with the efficacy of all symbolic evocation, that is to say with the prophetic capacity of ritual actions—from magic to sacrament—to shape the beliefs underlying such actions by the very fact of their being carried out. In this

sense, the meeting makes an intensive and typically ritual use of multiple media and of raising the level of stimuli so as to produce what we might call celebratory images of an expected triumph.

Among such images, that of the "unitary mass in movement" stands out. This image is implemented in both actions and words. In the field of action, there is a tendency in the course of a meeting for the entire audience's gestures to come together in an orchestrated or choreographic way, while at the same time a single rhythm is imparted to the chanted slogans, to the applause and to the waving of flags.[9] In the field of discourse, the speakers resort again and again to orientational and directional metaphors such as "carry on marching", "marching ahead", "striding into the future", "going on to victory, no stepping back", "leaping into the future", "attaining our goals". The major virtue of this "Potemkin-image" of a headless but nevertheless resolved human crowd, the progress of which is unstoppable, is the semantic cross-flow it offers. In a sort of implicit Hegelianism, it confounds quantity, efficacy and legitimacy: the reason of the many and the many reasons; the electoral triumphs and the moral superiority; the achievements or the economic improvements and the respect for majority rule. Following this logic you do not know what comes first: to be many, to be efficient or to be reasonable. The departing mayor described his electoral support in this manner:

The people of Leganés answer the call of the socialist party ... A town which advances and works for the future. A town which does not feel shy about saying that we are in fashion and we are envied by many Spanish towns. Because things go well in this town... For

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[9] Of course, this ideal model is far from being realized in every instance. What stood out in most of our observations was a lack of sparkle, boredom and weariness. Spectators' reactions are usually confined to nodding their heads to indicate their approval of the most brilliant remarks of the speaker.

all of you, who are the best citizens in it, who have helped us to make progress in this our town, Leganés.

Let us now briefly compare the preceding meeting with two others held by the opposing political forces, the Partido Popular (the Popular Right-wing Party) and the Izquierda Unida (the United Left, an electoral coalition dominated by the Communist Party). The comparison underlines that they are similar in essentials though there are a few slight differences too.

The main meeting of the Partido Popular the last time legislative elections were held in Leganés, took place in an auditorium inside a modern shopping mall. The national leader of the party attended as the principal speaker, with part of his staff. Everything had been carefully prepared: TV cameras in the centre of the arena; a blue stage with the party's logo; special passes giving members of the press privileged access to an advantageous section of the auditorium; flowers by the proscenium; identity cards for guards keeping order; plenty of decibels for the party's signature-tunes for the campaign; small hand flags; stickers. And the public: half an hour before the meeting was scheduled to begin, buses arrived filled with militants from different districts of the capital. This, we were told, is the way that big meetings are brought up to strength. A leader has to be given a guarantee of a large turn-out, even if it is necessary to bring people from outside. Militants refer to this as "the general roll-call" (*toque a generala*).

The local leader at Leganés went completely unnoticed. He was not even on the stage. By contrast, the national leader entered the arena surrounded by a coterie in suits and ties. He walked the length of a cleared passage through the crowd, which screamed and cheered enthusiastically, waving little flags and touching him as he passed. Enthusiasm was amply in evidence, too, as the procession made its exit, since spirits had by now been inflamed after the speeches. The leader kissed the children, extended his hands, hugged people and let them jostle and embrace him.

While in the meeting described earlier we encountered a ritualization of institutional and historical continuity in the PSOE, in this case the PP distances itself from the universe of "the Spanish Authoritarian Right" through the adoption of replacements for its symbols and its forms of public presentation. They use no Spanish flags, no ceremonial formality, no paramilitary styles. Instead, the person of the leader is endowed with charisma by means of the media, this endowment giving him credibility as a potential prime minister. TV cameras captured him among the crowd, in the midst of a fervent mass of people, in his shirt-sleeves, perspiring, taking upon his person the identity of the whole country. He says:

González is behind me. Behind the country.

In this theatrically performed metaphor, the speaker uses his own body as a signifier of his position. He and the Nation merge into a single image, assigning the present prime minister a mere background role, a man of the past who has held the country back. The metaphor illustrates the way in which this model of meeting, exhibiting many facets of a show, is used to build up the identity of a collective "we", achieving this through the presence of the leader, and interplay between him and members of the crowd. There is a give-and-take that is reminiscent of rock concerts, when the vocalist lets the public break into his or her performance with spontaneous chanting. "Hit them!", a follower screamed, interrupting the leader's speech. "We have to hit, but hit just with reason!", replied the politician, earning himself an ovation. There is a kind of circularity in this bond that links leader and partisans. The leader appears increasingly as a sort of demiurge, who creates collective enthusiasm *ex nihilo*. But in fact it is he who, by means of that performance, becomes publicly sanctioned and derives reinforcement for his electoral aspirations.

The centrality of the leader's arrival and exit stands out too in the media's role in producing this charisma. Waiting for his appearance generates a sense of suspense, and his

exit induces a sense of closing. This kind of meeting can be deemed to be an authentic ritual event that aims to invest the leader with charisma, or at least to achieve that image of charismatic investiture that can be then disseminated. A few minutes after the meeting ended, the masses of militants all climbed into their buses and were swept back home as swiftly as they had come.

The way in which the local left assessed this event was ambivalent. On the one hand, everybody recognized its success: an arena full of people; an euphoric "atmosphere" of adherence and impending victory; a credible image of leadership in the presence of the media. On the other hand, the event was objected too on the basis that it had been merely a "show", a "visit", a "promenade" around the periphery of Madrid; and there was criticism of the choice of a shopping mall as venue.

This dichotomy between the "show", the "farce", the "circus", the "selling", the "market" or the "theatre" on the one hand, and the legitimate political communication focused on "convincing", "reflecting", or "informing the public about programmes" on the other, is central to the current concerns of the Left. The campaign of Izquierda Unida at Leganés made explicit this criticism of the traditional meeting, redefining their own events by bestowing on them a fresh label: "informative events" (*actos informativos*).

The first and most important of these events took place in an auditorium of a neighbourhood centre. There was neither lighting, nor music, nor flags. Traditional party symbols, serving to convey and enforce shared meanings, were hardly present, communication being reduced to the party leaders' verbal explanatory discourse. Four "chairmen" sat behind a table; there was a banner with the logo and the slogan of the campaign; the audience consisted of about one hundred and fifty seated people, most of them over fifty. As at the meeting of PSOE, this event began with contributions from the local leaders, and ended with that of the visitor from Madrid, who had more political weight.

In the presence of an attentive audience, this politician explained tax policies and interest rates, providing arguments as to why it is necessary to increase taxes. By the end of his speech, the hall was half-empty. The chairman summarized and invited questions from the audience, but this was more symbolic than real. In spite of the exhortatory jargon that ran through the address by every speaker, with perpetual calls for active participation by citizens, the most noticeable feature of the proceedings was the passivity of the audience. This was not in any sense a dialogue, but a lecture—more particularly, a self-denying lecture, deliberately eschewing rhetoric and self-aggrandizement. At the end, the chairman from Madrid gave his telephone number to the audience as a gesture of accessibility.

These observations suggest drastic changes in the public culture of the Spanish Left. Giving up the militant ritualism which has been traditional in communist parties—with their secular cult based upon marks of identity relating to ideology and class—has not led to their wholly adopting the public culture of "catch-all" parties, with their strategies of political marketing and opportunist adaptations to demand. Rather, it has led to a striking retreat from such copious use of formal ritual and symbols. Today, the Left avoids charisma and the cult of personality, and instead there is a new stress on explanation of the programme and rational dialogue conducted on a face-to-face basis at local level. A redefinition of the meeting, as a political means, in terms much less spectacular than before, results in events that are cold, temperate, spare, cerebral, and conducted in a certain quasi-academic manner. They evoke, for several reasons, the routines of educational institutions and the equivalents among the self-taught. Those who participate are still referred to as "comrades" (the old-style label), but they are "chairmen" as well, and not by chance. In circumstances like this, the roles of "master" and "pupil" are even reversed, since the enlightened youngsters in the party may take the liberty of indoctrinating the old guard in the new ways of political expression.

True, there is also an effort to modernize and update the historical marks of identity of the working-class movement, in the direction both of the new social movements and of the urban middle classes. However, without the dramatic enaction of combative imagery of former times, the intimate link to class consciousness and revolutionary ideology, is lost, so that its capacity to evoke is diminished. We need do no more than consider the jingle of the IU campaign, a revised version of the glorious *No nos moverán* ("We shall not be moved") of the Spanish civil war. This collective hymn of combat and anti-fascist resistance is transformed into a pop-song with electric guitars and drums. For *No nos moverán* is substituted a lyric that is as assertive as it is vague:

Yes, yes, Izquierda Unida, yes. As the free wind, the thought. Izquierda Unida, yes.

The meetings held by Izquierda Unida in Leganés during this campaign reveals, beyond the recycling of an inherited symbolic repertoire, the difficulties of redefining and democratizing the link of representation without destroying it. The intention is clear: to authenticate the relation between elector and elected, to make it less alien, open, egalitarian and reciprocal—orientated towards debate. But how to give flesh and substance to a political rationale which is conceived as purely reflective and reasoning, extremely intellectualized and arid, not imbued with sensory qualities? In such a rationale what is not participation is "indifference" (*pasotismo*), what is not active is passive, what is not informative is deceptive, what is not communication is manipulation. The parliamentary Left thereby finds itself trapped in the horns of a dilemma between selling and convincing - between the ethical conviction that the attraction of votes should not be a market, and the pragmatic demand that it reaches a modus vivendi with the conditions pertaining in that market, so as to compete on equal terms with other contending parties.

Political and Symbolic Representation

In democracy, the paradigm of the political link is that which relates the elector to whoever he or she has elected. Rulers rule as representatives who reach power by means of delegation that takes place in the political process prior to their access to office. This "battery", periodically recharged during electoral times, is thus a part of a more general process, that which leads to the constitution of legitimate representation.[10]

If we go back to the origins of the idea of political representation, we find that our modern sense of "representing" is a specialized sense, historically derived from other more basic uses. The primordial meanings of "representation" were firstly the dramatic, secondly the symbolic, the evocative, or the figurative, and thirdly the legal. For example, in the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana*, written by Covarrubias in 1611, we read (1989: 905):

> [To represent is] to have a presentation made to us of something, in words or figures which fix themselves in our imagination; thus comedians were known as representatives because one of them represents the king, and figures as if he were present; another represents the lover, yet other the lady and so on.

Also:

> To represent is to incorporate within oneself the person of another, as if it was one's own, and thus to succeed to all his activities and rights, as a son comes to represent the person of his father. (ibid)

These uses are virtually repeated in the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, but now we find specialized legal senses, with

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[10] It might be argued that what is brought into play in the course of meetings is not properly the exercise of representation, but rather a bid for election. Both dimensions are intertwined, however, as is indicated by the proliferation of 'institutional acts' surrounding the campaign, and the presence during these of persons in positions of authority whose duty is to endorse the candidates' claims.

their prototype in the rights of succession. Variants refer to the public dignity of the person and the way it relates to authority:

> It also means authority, dignity, character, or recommendation of the person... It is also taken to be the supplication or motivated plea which is made to the princes and superiors. (1984: 584)

According to Williams (1976: 223), when representation was first used in English to convey a clear political sense of delegation to elected spokesmen, of "standing for others", it embodied in addition and indissolubly an implication of "symbolization of a whole", of "making something present to the eyes"—that is to say, the symbolic or evocative element. Thus these spokesmen were not confined to the modern meaning of execution of a programme in the name of a mass of electors. With respect to the English Parliament, for example, Charles I said that it was "the Representative Body of the Kingdom". What is relevant in the modern political use is therefore the progressive loss of this evocative, mimetic or figurative component which is implicit in the more ancient uses (Ginzburg 1991: 1220).

Notwithstanding this, Williams observes that the contemporary uses of the term have preserved a certain polysemic complexity as well. Somebody may be considered a representative if he fulfils determinate formal conditions of democratic election according to the rule of majority. But he can also be eventually impugned as "scarcely representative", or can be accused of having ceased to represent the interests of those who elected him, hence the political pertinence of semantic disputes with the aim of appropriating the legitimate meanings of "representation" and "representative", words which designate among us the acceptable means of intervention in politics.

So, in "representation", not everything is so neat as the crystal-clear definitions of liberal political theory and constitutional codifications of modern states would suggest. This can be seen in the historical drift of the concept of representation, as well as in the social struggles surrounding

it. In the practice of social interaction, the link of representation is ethereal, abstract, ephemeral, paradoxical, even mysterious.

(1) It is *ethereal* because it lacks an evident social soil which encloses the link of representation. Unlike the running of a society organized in estates or castes, the groups to which such a link is addressed are vaguely defined. In most cases, they are not even groups, but constituencies, potential bodies of individual voters. Between the elector and the elected, there does not necessarily exist a common affiliation, not even in terms of gender or class.

(2) It is *abstract* because it is founded in programmes, ideas and interests. By addressing itself to the field of reason and reasons, it aims to attach a certain reasonableness to the exercise of authority. Hence the imagery of the political arena as a permanent rhetorical war of figures and arguments, in the middle of which the elector finds himself periodically disorientated and hesitant.

(3) It is *ephemeral* not only because of the periodic nature of its mandatory renewal, but above all because of those phenomena termed by political scientists "volatility" and "erosion"—the relative ease with which sympathies or antipathies towards characters in the public eye can shift.

(4) It is *paradoxical* because, as has been eloquently pointed out by Bourdieu (1988: 158),

> if it is true that delegating is entrusting somebody with a function, with a mission, we still have to question how it is possible that the trustee can have power over those who gives him the power.

This paradox becomes especially striking on occasions such as civic celebrations, where the representatives publicly authorize the feast for those who have elected them - and do it in the name of those same individuals.

(5) The nature of this incarnation, by means of which the representative stands for his or her electors, is unavoidably *mysterious*, since such an incarnation is always covered with an aura of naturalness; there is nothing more natural for a

leader than appearing as leader in the presence of his followers. It is not in vain that Bourdieu refers to this fact as a form of social magic: the "mystery of the ministry" or the "fetichism of delegation" (Bourdieu 1988).[11]

The hypothesis of this paper is that this link between electors and elected is far from transparent or self-evident; there is a need to impart to it an elaborate expressive dimension. It is through such symbolic processes that the delegation of power by many to a few, with the political subordination which it entails, becomes possible, and thus perceivable, believable, thinkable, acceptable and natural to the people represented. Its viability derives from its being effectively believed, thought, viewed, felt, accepted—that is to say, represented in subjective terms by the voters. "To represent", in its political sense ("to stand for somebody"), implies to a certain extent "to represent" in its semiotic sense ("to mean") and in its cognitive one ("to make present to the mind"). These several senses continually intertwine today in any of a number of ways in the political field.

Let us look in more detail at each aspect of the expressivity that is addressed to the political link, which we have mentioned just now.

(1) Making the representation believable means that, as a background to the existence of the institutions of the state and their executive decisions, we have something more than the brute strength of coercion. We also have beliefs and expectations: a certain degree of faith in the system, to which politicians refer in terms of "trust". Paraphrasing Durkheim, we might say that states, like religions, are a kind of "well-founded illusion", as is made strikingly

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[11] As Abélès (1990) has pointed out, this kind of label degrades the notion of representation, inasmuch as the Marxist criticism of ideology, as "false consciousness" or "alienate consciousness", is applied to it. The problem with this approach is that viewing the electoral link as a legitimate imposture suggest the existence of some kind of ultimate truth—the class struggle—which always underlies the process of constitution of political relations, and which is endowed with a higher degree of reality than the process of representation itself.

evident by recent events in Eastern Europe. True, there is always a backcloth of physical violence to political enactions, so that it cannot be reduced to a mere play with symbols. According to the Weber's definition (1992: 83), the State has the monopoly of legitimate violence. A theory of power needs a theory of representation as well, however, because the second is what closes the distance between legitimized violence and unrightful violence.

(2) Secondly, political representation has to become thinkable, to take its place in the conceptual system of citizens. The distinction between Left and Right has served to locate parties within the political spectrum in Europe since the time of the French Revolution; it is still perhaps the main axis in the conceptual scheme that assigns a representative his place in relation to others. Such a scheme is the result of an overlap between, on the one hand, relevant ideological or programmatic contrasts and oppositions (tradition and progress, order and revolution, stability and change, and so on) and, on the other hand, differences rooted in the immediate social world (rich and poor, women and men, entrepreneurs and workers, conservatives and the forward-looking, the military and civilians, technocrats and ideologists).

(3) Visibility, in representation, emerges when a face and a past is attached to what is initially merely a name. This is what in political circles is called the "trajectory" of a candidate. As the processes of government become increasingly technocratic, the focus has shifted to plans and programmes, but in addition to closed lists of candidates for election is a development which places the main burden of the political process upon the party machinery, thus entailing a considerable depersonalization of democratic authority. Notwithstanding this, parliamentary democracy has from its birth been very tightly bound up with the famous faces of professional politics, as Weber (1992: 130) pointed out at the beginning of the century in connection with the figure of the Anglo-Saxon "political boss". Thus our political systems have the curious trait of being, at one and the same time,

bureaucratic and personalist, hence the importance of a leader's image, carefully groomed by experts so as to build up a suitably eloquent image that can readily be projected visually.

(4) Besides being made visible, representation needs to be felt by the elector in two ways, namely sensation and feeling. We are sensorial beings. The experiential deprivation of modern life, and the absolute remoteness of the institutional processes from the everyday world, make it imperative to provide massive substitutes for this "contact" between the two worlds, and such a contact between the formal institution and everyday life constitutes the sap of the representational link. Touching the leaders, speaking to them, seeing that they are "flesh and blood", all have an undeniable affective value which is not to be attained through the media. Legitimacy's emotional "batteries" seem to require some kind of periodical recharging. A cold legitimacy, completely detached from the sources of everyday life, and without an ear for the drift of opinions and feelings noised abroad in "the street", would not stand up for long.[12]

From this perspective, the electoral campaigns can be taken to be authentic pilgrimages to the sanctuaries of the everyday: walks around the market-places, exhausting electioneering tours from town to town in company with an entourage, leaders immersing themselves in the throng. Likewise, such a point of view leads us to understand the growing relevance of live debates in Spanish electoral campaigns. The tedious explanation of ideas is fitted out, through the confrontation between leaders, with something

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[12] The metaphor of "the street" as the ultimate source of popular sanction is crucial in the context of our research. The experience of "getting out into the street" was the prototypical image of sovereignty in the first years of the restoration of democracy in Spain. In a similar way, those thought to have an advanced social consciousness are said to be "in the street" while the phrase to be "in touch with the street" implies political awareness. Thus people expect politicians to "come out onto the street", from time to time at least.

akin to a plot. This imparts to the media fiction a sense both of tension and reality.

(5) Representation stands in need of devices that will make it acceptable. We need do no more than refer to the permanent struggle of the political system against the "ghost of abstention" from participation. Local variants of political culture may eventually reject, disdain, or step outside the representative process, hence the institutional emphasize on legitimate channels for communicating demands and on sanctioned modes for resolving conflicts. The crisis of legitimacy of the State has to do with a civilian sidetracking the process of representation, when this is measured against the alternatives of other logics and legitimacies like assemblage, particularism, communitarianism, fundamentalism, scepticism and mercantilism. Apropos of this, let us underline a phenomenon which has been called "political cynicism" and has been considered by some scholars to be typically Spanish. As is indicated by research carried out in countries with more firmly established democratic institutions, this phenomenon is exemplified by the recent electoral volatility, the rising of social movements that question the legitimacy of the capitalist welfare state, or the post-modern trend called "neo-communitarianism" (Gibbins 1989; Offe 1992; Marramao 1993).

(6) Finally, all the preceding factors combine to lend to representation a semblance of naturalness. This coating of naturalness means that the devices and procedures of political delegation come to be incorporated into the set of cultural tenets, so that their origin as artifacts is lost to sight, and they seem immediate, self-evident and unproblematic.

This process of imparting expressivity to the link between the elected and his electors is therefore aimed at making graspable what would otherwise, by reason of being intangible and abstract, seem obscure. Political commentators usually gauge the success of this venture by reference to what is termed the "juncture" of the electoral

marketing—that is to say, the relative strength of the parties and institutional groups, stratagems in the use of media, and how effective, in terms of securing votes and promoting the required image, their expenditure of effort have proved to be. As Abélès (1990: 127-128) has pointed out, it has been the dominant trend, in the social sciences too, to chart a dichotomy between these modes of explicit political communication and those characteristic of political ritual in premodern societies. In such a distinction, modern forms would be characterized as secularized, relatively stripped of tradition, individualized, and less specific territorially.

However, the political veneer and the instrumental tricks of the candidates would not be possible without a preexisting background of shared conventions which have as their nucleus the idea of representation.

> To take seriously the symbolic contents of political representation, deemed as a mise en scène of sovereignty, demands the analysis of the imagery which is associated to the relations between governors and the governed. (Abélès 1990: 173)

True, politicians resort to such conventions above all in order to manipulate them, to take some advantage of them; but, paradoxically, in so doing they are themselves manipulated by them as well. This paradox—that resorting, for electoral ends, to a set of conventions for imparting expressivity to political representation, implies subjecting oneself to these very conventions—will be the focus of our conclusions. The rationalization implicit in these modern modes of presenting political links in public has not necessarily entailed the absolution of former modes. Rather, it looks as if Machiavelli's stratagems had to be built either upon ways of action and expressive modes borrowed from other fields of social life, or upon ritualized images and conduct whose *longue durée* is transferred to the public space.

The Parasitism of Political Order—
Three Conclusions and one Paradox

Let us revert to the meetings analyzed earlier. In which ways do they shape the electoral link? Which relationships do they trace between the political link and social life?

Firstly, what we observed suggests that modern political expression in one of its dimensions is discursive and rational in nature. Meetings consist of an ordered series of speeches. Undoubtedly, this discursiveness, dissociating word from action, reflects a generic feature of modernity. Modern rituals have been taken to be mainly rituals of words, rituals of the spoken word (Velasco 1989).

At first sight, this trait fits fairly well with the self-conception of the political field as an autonomous domain, which is defined by the exercise of rational choice and by the search for strategic advantages within the limits of constitutionally regulated competition. From this point of view, what transpires is not the imparting of symbolism, but on the contrary, it is a process of expurgation of all spontaneous expressivity, so that primordial links which formerly bound the politician to his family, his place of origin, tongue and social class are dissolved and ousted by that kind of universal *lingua franca* of administrative rationality, aimed at goals determined by reference to organizational effectiveness. The autonomy of the political field implies a trend towards linguistic standardization; a neutralization of the connotations of common language; a predominance of technical jargon; a conceptual rationalization; an effacement of the idiomatic components of speech. Hence there is a tendency to speak a private language, to "speak as politicians"—a trait shared by all the politicians participating in our meetings.

Secondly, in contrast to this, we can also see a pervasive presence of expressive modes borrowed from other fields of social action, among them show business, religious ritual, festivals, popular humour, singing and music, business, schooling and competitive sport. That politics has a "para-

sitic" nature is not confined to participants in meetings trying to incarnate and appropriate evocative gestures taken from the world of life. Frequently, indeed, these performances are constituted of elements which themselves serve to simulate, even reproduce, elements drawn from such worlds. There are meetings that smack of a military parade, others with the flavour of a rock concert, yet others with the quality of an erudite conference or a religious consecration. There are meetings like festivals over dinner, meetings on the march and meetings for colloquy.

Such expressive modes do have a symbolic efficacy far more immediate than mere words. They speak to the sensibility and collective identity of social agents who are locally and culturally rooted, rather than to the strategic rationality of individual voters. Political representation is a bridge between two worlds: the world of institutions, and the immediate social world where electors live. To that extent, it forces the politician to subscribe to the rules of a different game, which prove to be resistant to all kind of rationalization. Political representation obliges him to use a twofold language, then negotiating or "bargaining" its meanings. That metaphors are indispensable for discussing politics illustrates the extent to which the autonomy of the political field is incomplete. While it is not unusual to hear that parliaments are "asylums", or "temples", or "gatherings at the parish pump", the converse use of politics as metaphor for other things is rare. The State can be seen as a "home", the party as an "army", the electoral debate as a "battle", a conference of leaders as a "summit", but seldom the reverse. As a cognitive device for comprehending the less known through the better known, the metaphor serves both the electors and the elected in giving body, sensoriality, everyday nature and direction to the abstract and socially ethereal field of formal politics.

In a similar way, that plenty of metaphorical meanings are used during meetings compensates for the neutralization and impoverishment of the content of professional politicians' messages. It allows them, with varying success, to

"charge the battery", to bridge the gap between the arid semantics of their own domain and those in which meanings are far denser, symbolically, and thus able to reach a wider audience.

Thirdly, the meeting is also a ritualized form of action differentiated within itself. We have underlined the inner rhythm resulting from the overlapping of oratory sequences; the use, typically ritual, of multiple media, of ways of building up stimuli, and patterned forms of conduct aimed at producing shared images. Finally, we have drawn attention to the *mise en scène* both of the hierarchy of representation and the strategies employed to rouse and mobilize an audience as a collectivity of people.

Such device has an inherent ambiguity. It oscillates between its evident effect on inner intensification—for instance, its use as an expression of the party's unity—and its external purpose as a message projected externally to others. It shares this double face with other categories of contemporary public events, and suggests a curious combination of the traditional functions of communal ritual - as understood in the best style of Durkheimian analysis - and the media-orientated nature of these acts as public messages. In them, the actors are perfectly aware of the outer effects of their unitary expression (Baumann 1992). As an informant explained to us, people in meetings and demonstrations notice the arrival of cameras since there will then be a sudden intensification of chanting and waving of flags—"TV must be here", they guess.

Anyway, in order to produce images of continuity, charisma or rationality, political agents resort to this symbolic device of *mise en scène*, which is able to project historical continuity over the representational link. Going further than the candidate's reasons, this *durée* sets them at the heart of social life, and in particular at the heart of the driving ideals of modernity. Only think of the song *No nos moverán*, the images of a crowd which sways in unison, the invocation to Liberty, Fraternity and Equality.

Finally, we might conjecture about the extent to which this parasitism of politics limits the way in which bureaucratic authority conceives its role. On the one hand, the institutional order is radically distinct from the local cultures which are subordinate to it, but on the other hand it needs to present itself as the legitimate incarnation of such local cultures.

The fact that universal institutions must have local roots constitutes what we may label, following Marramao (1993: 7-20), as the "paradox of modern universalism". The link of parliamentary delegation is a cultural tenet born of the Enlightenment, as are the notions of social contract and legitimate authority. Although this tenet has spread itself over the net of local cultures, it cannot get rid of them entirely. Universalism continues, and will continue, to be less than universal, even though the different modes of parliamentary democracy have become, during our century, the basic network of political structures and international law worldwide (Rengger 1989).

We do not mean that local cultures are, by definition, completely alien to the ideas of contract and representative legitimacy. Quite simply, local cultures contrast, and intermingle, with other forms of logic which derive directly from the everyday, and from a social practice which is locally rooted. They come from particularistic feelings which have little to do with the kind of rationality that the political theory of social contract lays down as the foundation of modern institutions, and which addresses itself to finalistic and individualistic values. Thus our paradox concerns an institutional order that, albeit dominant over local orders of reality, is nevertheless tributary to, parasitic on and dependent on them in the expressive field. Political legitimacy would hanker after being purely formal, but it needs to keep drinking from those life-giving springs that are nowhere to be found in its own "universalist" world.

Irony and paradox are not merely quibbles, or intellectual stunts; rather, they are a method of unveiling aspects of reality, and one to which anthropology itself seems to be

condemned (Fernandez 1993). This paradox of universalist politics with local electorates is not so very different from that which pervades the whole history of anthropology—which, devoted as it has been to constructing bridges between the local and the universal, has never ceased to have its feet on the ground at one end of the bridge. Like any paradox, this one is not amenable to solution, and we must learn to live with it. Perhaps, then, the paradox which besets the enlightened project in which we anthropologists engage, our "science of cultural diversity", is no more capable of solution than is the "mystery of ministry" which has been our topic here.

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