

## Book review

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*The Public Debate Spectacle*. By Brîndușa-Mariana Amălăncei, Eikon, Bucharest, 2015, ISBN 978-606-711-386-3, 247 pp.

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Starting from the classification of debates, which takes into account multiple criteria and can be created by combining various criteria, the current study approaches the problematics of the public debate format, in a differentiated manner, as revealed by Constantin Sălăvăstru, in *Arta dezbaterilor publice (The Art of Public Debates)*, published by Tritonic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009. This is done by taking into consideration the organization norms of the debates, the technical rules guiding the activities carried out by the participants, the time allocated to each activity, as well as the order of performing the activities of each participant. The author insists on the particular characteristics of televised debates, which are individualized in terms of format, rules and strategies used, respectively on televised political debates, which involve, at the same time, a mediatized form of communication and a pluricodic one, resulting, as highlighted by Rosemarie Haineș (2000), from the combination of verbal strategies, paraverbal, kinetic and proxemic modalities, attire, make-up, elements of scenography and representation. However, besides the performance of the candidates, in the televised debates during electoral campaigns, importance is also given to the preparation of the participants by the campaign teams. This involves the identification of possible themes of attack targeting the adversaries and their weak points, the creation of defence, counteracting and attack strategies, the settling of the obligatory themes for the discussion, as well as of the themes which lie at the core the electoral message, and the determination of the attitude which will be adopted by the candidate during the confrontation.

What follows is a detailed presentation of debate strategies, based on the observations of Judith S. Trent, Robert V. Friedenberg and Robert E. Denton Jr. (2011), the debate as such being the suitable setting for shaping a candidate's particular image. At the same time,

the author expounds a few stereotypical roles identified by Roger-Gérard (Swartzenberg 1977/1995): the hero, the common person/commoner, the charismatic leader, the father (the parent of the nation), “the political non-woman”, which seem to have dominated the political scene over the years. The author argues that the filming manner, respectively the types of cinematic frames used, can contribute to the coherence of a candidate’s image. These frames can differ even in the case of the same televisual device and can contribute, each on its own, to *media logic*.

The author also stresses the importance of sustained efforts, made by both the candidate and his/her campaign team, and which should start right from the preceding stage of the debate proper, to prepare the candidate, the mass media and the voters and continuing these efforts even after the end of the campaign. However, the electorate form a certain impression all through the electoral campaign, using information received from various sources and in diverse manners, people’s perception of the candidate being hard to create only as a result of a debate. Although the final confrontation between the candidates is eagerly awaited by the TV viewers and has an impressive audience almost all the time, debates do not significantly change initial voting intentions, but only delay, occasionally, the taking of a final decision in this respect and constitute an occasion for the candidates to convince not only by means of words, but also by means of apparel, gestures, mimicry/facial expression, behaviour, and attitude.

The author then highlights, based on Alan Schroeder’s (2012) considerations, the similarities and differences between the French and the Americal presidential debates, which represent moments that are memorable and of major importance for the history of a nation and which remain as reference points owing to the live performance of the candidates. Trying to observe the manner in which the verbal and the gestural combine, the author first carries out an analysis of co-verbal gestures in which the raised pointing finger is involved, by relating

them to the functions with which they can be associated in order to support the verbal sequences with which the respective gestures are correlated, as identified during the presidential debate between Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy, which took place on the 2nd of May 2007. After that, the author's attention moves to the presidential debate between François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, which took place on the 2nd of May 2012, in order to observe the extent to which the categories of gestures from Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen's (1969) classification contribute to 'regulating' the discursive relations between the partners of the dialogue.

In the end, the author mentions that her research work can be situated at the convergence of approaches such as those of Mouchon (1983), Atkinson (1984), Blum (1988) and Calbris (1999, 2002), who favour the analysis of the content of politicians' visual image from a symbolical and psychological perspective, without being interested in the impact on the electorate's perception, and those of Sullivan and Masters (1988, 1993), Rosenberg and his collaborators (1986, 1987), Redlawsk and Lau (2003), who treated gesturality and mimicry in the context of the interaction with the other participants to the debate. Thus, the author takes into account both a series of gestures with an intentional character and those spontaneous gestures which occur during interactions between political actors.

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## Book review

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