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Politicians on Campaign: Cristina Fernández's Visual and Discursive Strategies of Persuasion in the Parliamentary Elections of 2017

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Abstract

This work analyzes the visual representation that formed part of the electoral campaign of Argentina's former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner for the primary and parliamentary elections of 2017, in which she ran as senator for the Province of Buenos Aires. From a textual corpus made up of photographic and video images published during the primary campaign (July–August) and the parliamentary campaign (September 17 to October 22), it scrutinizes the iconographic and epistemological potential of the persuasive image at the threshold of a parliamentary election.

Keywords: Persuasion – Cristina Fernández – Argentina – visual strategies – discursive strategies-political campaigns

As Patrick Charaudeau has explained (2009b, 283), politics is a field in which symbolic relations of force conquer and manage a power that can only be exercised when it is based on an acquired and attributed legitimacy. Yet this is not enough, as the political actor striving for legitimacy must also appear credible and capable of persuading the largest number of individuals with whom they should share certain values. This means politics involves both constituting a political ideology that should represent an idealized value system and managing opinion in order to establish a consensus.

In a political campaign, the main objective is to secure the highest number of votes and therefore win the election. Political subjects endeavor to persuade potential voters through constructing discourse and visuals that represent them as authorized and credible speakers. The image thus created can be employed to defend a political position, maintain or increase symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1985), exercise power, convince audiences to adhere to the political subject's project, or a combination of all four, which means that an analysis of the overall image that political subjects construct is crucial.

With regard to the use and circulation of the words of politicians in the public space, three basic problems must be examined: the general conditions in which the political discourse is delivered, its possible strategies, and its manipulative practices in the face of public opinion (Charaudeau 2009a, 254–55). The invoking of certain visual stereotypes plays a central role in many of these interactions. Indeed, stereotypes are often used in visual narration to give political candidates a particular appearance in the electoral campaign. This has the dual purpose of creating a self-image by which candidates try to conform to their own profiles and developing criticism that seeks to harm the images of their opponents.

The idea of the “commonplace” as a means of persuasion seeks to guarantee the support of the electorate, taking into account clearly affective and value-specific attributes. Indeed, something

that is reiterated in many of the visual productions under scrutiny in this article is the attitude of a candidate who, more often than not, does not express or present any idea or concrete program. Instead, her campaign involves visual storytelling that shows her engaging in everyday activities. This strategy encourages the audience to identify and empathize with these human behaviors. It is about configuring a discourse in which what counts is not so much the truth of a word uttered in the public space, but its strength, its appearance of veracity, its dramatization conditions. Such words take shape in a dramatic script capable of moving the public in a positive or negative way, either to encourage individuals to support the project being defended, or to dissuade them from following an opposing project (Charaudeau 2009a, 263). This also implies the simplification of images in clear and repeatable symbols in order to create memorable photographic or visual moments and moving clichés, which produces a pathos that, at times, borders on quasi-religious feelings and extols nationalist values.

Grounded in the theoretical work done by Eliseo Verón (1984, 2002, 2004), Patrick Charaudeau (2000, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b) and Catherine Maingueneau (1997, 1999), this article explores the visual representation that formed part of the electoral campaign of former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (CFK from now on) for the primary and parliamentary elections of 2017 in Argentina, in which she was a candidate for senator to federal parliament for the Buenos Aires province. Our aim will be to analyze the discursive and rhetorical operations that helped shape the candidate's "self-image" in the enunciation scene.

We will see how these were configured, in addition to the political discourse itself, through photographs, gestures, music, tones, clothing, and colors that their campaign strategists displayed to be later picked up and disseminated through social media (Verón 1984, 3). The textual corpus is made up of photographic and video images broadcast by her own media strategists during the

campaigns of the primary elections of 2017 (July–August) and the parliamentary elections of the same year (September 17 to October 22).

The Addressees: Pro, Para, and Counter: Reinforcement, Persuasion, and Controversy

According to Verón (1984), political discourse has multiple recipients and functions. In the first place, there is a positive recipient or *pro-addressee* (in this case, the voter who shares beliefs with the candidate and who, in the campaign images, appears embracing her, photographing themselves with her, or applauding her). Here, discourse and images serve no other purpose than to reinforce the beliefs of the audience. Second, there is a *para-addressee*, the indecisive voter who still needs to be persuaded: “If you are part of the Argentine people and the people are with me, you cannot be left out,” would seem to be the implication. Finally, we have a *counter-addressee* or political adversary, who is intended to be discursively eliminated, suggesting that those who do not support the candidate are not part “of the people.” Three different functions correspond to each of these addressees: reinforcement, persuasion, and controversy. In this article, we pay special attention to the visual strategies aimed at conquering the para-addressee.

On June 24, 2017, CFK, twice president of Argentina, formalized her candidacy for national senator for the parliamentary elections of October of that year. On that same day she also announced the creation of the Unidad Ciudadana Alliance to the detriment of Frente para la Victoria, the coalition with which Kirchnerism, a movement founded by her now deceased husband Néstor Kirchner, had come to power in 2003 and had catapulted her to the presidency in two consecutive constitutional periods: 2007–2011 and 2011–2015.

In CFK’s campaign discourse, communicative practices are emphasized in an exaggerated way through the symbology used: colors, music, tone of voice, and even clothing style. These

symbols function as a frame that anticipates the discursive lines that the candidate will follow in her speech, in an anaphoric game in which the sensory images contain, in embryonic form, the fundamental direction of her discourse (Verón 2004, 82). At the same time, a co-enunciator emerges in terms of age group, social class, nationalist vision, and so on. Likewise, it is possible that such correspondence between visual and linguistic discourse is associated with reception factors that exceed the *hic et nunc* of the actual communicative scene.

In order to become credible in front of an audience, the candidate must present herself as sharing common values (Charaudeau 2009b, 283). The images thus produced introduce a visual argumentative practice, built on shared background knowledge, aimed at persuading voters. They are presented in a familiar and natural staging: “Look at me: I am like you, I am one of you.” Consequently, the public may infer that she is the only person capable of defending their interests.

Interestingly, as we shall see, a fairly high proportion of voters had only fragmentary and superficial access to the candidate’s live speeches, since her appearances in the primary elections were limited to small groups for strategic reasons. With this (un)conscious operation of redundant frames, it is likely that the campaign advisers aimed to develop particular ideological aspects with which they hoped audience members who were not present (but would see pictures and read headlines the following day), would associate the candidate. Let us see then how, in practical terms, these dynamics took place in CFK’s electoral campaign in 2017, both in the period prior to the internal party elections (primary) and in the actual elections.

Strategy One: Commonplace, Zen Presentation

From the officialization of her candidature to the primary elections of August 13, CFK abandoned the frequent discursive tension that had characterized her during her two presidencies and, possibly

influenced by her campaign advisors, opted for an evasive tone and measured public appearances. Her practice consisted of tours through the streets of the Province of Buenos Aires, making the most of visual contact with the people, but offering vague speeches with few concrete proposals. And while she held some interviews with journalists, these were always her friends or supporters.

This was not new behavior. During her first presidential campaign (2007 elections), in which she was voted as president for the first time, CFK had followed the same strategy.¹ The campaign period for the primary elections took place between July 14 and August 11, 2017. During this time, CFK moved between messages on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc., with their chain-effect²), in which she criticised the government, to visits to the Instituto Patria in Buenos Aires, which she founded the year after she finished her term as president. The institute had been working as the headquarters of her political activity in the capital city since 2016. There, she was always seen in executive mode, dressed in solid colors, receiving politicians and former members of her cabinet, under the watchful eye of portraits of national heroes or photos of her husband, former president Dr. Néstor Kirchner (fig. 1).

Figure 1: Cristina Fernández de Kirchner welcomes Daniel Scioli, former governor of Buenos Aires province at Instituto Patria. Image published in La Nación, August 8, 2017; retrieved from <https://www.eldestapeweb.com/scioli-revelo-detalles-su-encuentro-cristina-kirchner-n19736>.

Many times, she appeared surrounded by her followers or greeting them from her balcony. She evoked an image that she had used in her last years as president, in which she was depicted with her supporters in the gardens of the government house. Other photos showed her with supposedly occasional supporters she met on the streets, or at informal gatherings with young students to whom she opened her own home and served typical Argentine drinks and snacks. Photographs of these meetings were then sent to the national press to be broadcast. When they became viral, they saturated the media, ensuring that both sympathizers and opposition media were talking about her (fig. 2).

Figure 2: Photos of CFK at her home meeting with students went viral on social media. Image published by Clarín, July 29, 2017, and reproduced on CFK's Facebook and Twitter pages, <https://twitter.com/CFKArgentina/status/891406668357128192/video/1>.

Unlike in earlier elections, the precandidate did not elaborate. She did not develop specific ideas. She was brief and vague. She only made reference to promises and simple slogans, expressing an image of serenity and striking goodness that presupposed a Manichaean scene, in which the villain was her political adversary, embodied in the figure of the current president. Her voice and gestures were youthful; she used informal expressions that sought (1) to break with “the formulas of institutional formalism” and (2) to adapt to her multiple receptors (by age, social stratum or gender) by means of less formal, simple and destructured forms of expression (Mouchon

1999, 107). In few words, there was a staging of marginal verbal registers and gestures and apparently careless and hasty tones (evident in her inattentive syntax) with which she sought to increase her contact with the young target audience.

The campaign videos reinforced the approach to the people, with insistent evocations of her recent presidency's achievements. A notable example of this is her first spot as a precandidate. In rapid succession, an anthology of archive images showed CFK hugging students and industrial workers young and old, or talking to businessmen who gave standing ovations during her (then) presidential speeches. Accompanied by epic background music, the precandidate appealed to the emotional memory of potential voters. Her presence was suffused with a plethora of signs that, through an association of ideas, underlined her essential connection with the people and her belonging to them. This phenomenon was emphasized with national colors (blue and white), ubiquitous on the screen or on her clothes.

The association expected through this strategy was evident: CFK was the incarnation of the Argentine people. Moreover, in the first campaign spot the leader showed herself along with her citizens. The images portrayed her in the middle of the crowd, as if she were its heart and soul. She recognized the people, interpellated them, and constructed her discursive space with them (see fig. 3):

Figure 3: CFK's first campaign spot in the primary elections showing her among "her people." Retrieved from Adelanto 24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpDaYPgjGqU>

Yo a veces me pregunto de dónde, de qué lugar de nuestros corazones sacamos fuerzas para renacer como país, para que pasen de decirnos lo que teníamos que hacer a que nos pregunten cómo lo hicimos. Para ser un país que en vez de perder la memoria de un golpe la recuperamos para siempre. ¿Qué hicimos para que los que se fueron hoy quieran volver? ¿De dónde sacamos tanta fuerza para que hoy los empresarios emprendan, los productores produzcan, los trabajadores tengan trabajo y los chicos futuro. Me gusta ver que los jóvenes se hagan respetar y que los mayores vuelvan a ser respetados. Me gusta ver a los científicos investigar, a los artistas actuando, y a las amas de casa dando y recibiendo amor. Quiero que sigamos cosechando lo que sembramos. Quiero leer “industria argentina” en muchos productos más. Cada vez que me pregunto de dónde sacamos tanta fuerza miro a un argentino o a una argentina a los ojos y lo entiendo todo. Es la fuerza del amor, es la fuerza de un país, de un pueblo. Es la fuerza de 40 millones de almas y corazones. Es toda esa fuerza junta.³

In short, it was suggested that such a successful plan had paid off because it had returned to its national origins. And CFK, as a leader, had embraced her people and brought them back to those lost roots. The identification of CFK with “the people,” with “the homeland,” and with certain symbologies was a frequent feature of this strategy (although strictly speaking, of all historical Peronism) (see Zanatta 1999; Annunziata 2006; Sigal and Verón 2008). Note, on the other hand, how this discourse builds a collective entity represented by that “we” (“we take out,” “we had,”

“we”). She was included as the guide, reason and cause of these changes (“I want us to continue reaping what we sow”).⁴

In this first stage of her campaign, there was an “indirect” type of a persuasion aimed at convincing those who were undecided, although, as we will see, this strategy did not last long. Indeed, urged by the need to perform better at the polls, the candidate moved towards a ghost campaign, with fewer public appearances, avoiding interviews in the national press. Dressed in extremely simple clothes and hairstyles, especially when compared to those donned during her presidency, the precandidate appeared calm, kind, and moderate, surrounded by an audience gathered in relatively small assemblies. Everything in her exuded modesty: her black leggings, her sweaters of solid colors that were not at all ostentatious, sometimes a sober poncho, and always a carefully disheveled hairstyle or a simple bun. And in an unusual twist for her, she confessed that she did not intend to develop “a dirty campaign.” Above all, she declared that she sought the union of the Argentines, looking to the future, always “tell[ing] the truth” and “talk[ing] about everyday life” (Fernández de Kirchner 2017). Such changes in strategy led some political analysts, not without irony, to say that the candidate seemed to have added Zen ingredients to her campaign (“Cristina buena” 2017). This uncharacteristic behavior in the candidate was interpreted as mirroring president Mauricio Macri’s behavior. Indeed, on several occasions the press had published commentaries about him and his special relationship with Buddhism, including his hiring of a Buddhist harmonizer to help him manage his stress (see Ise 2015 and Jacquelin 2016).

In the end, after a long and confusing episode in which the provisional figures of the ballot were delayed for a few days, the final results of the primary elections showed that CFK had overtaken the ruling party candidate by twenty thousand votes. The meager margin would mean, again, the need for a change of strategy for the upcoming parliamentary election campaign. Her

performance of calmness and moderation had not persuaded the elusive middle class she was trying to conquer. Therefore, as we shall see, she chose to change her strategy once again and concentrate entirely on maintaining her most faithful supporters (for more details, see Smink 2017).

Once the candidates of each party were elected in the primaries, the electoral campaign of the legislative elections was held from September 17 to October 20, 2017. The vote would take place on Sunday, October 22. After some indecision, CFK abandoned the facade of moderate discourse self-imposed during the previous weeks with her “Manifesto” and returned to harsh speech and accusations against the national government. The campaign team realized that the discrete strategy tested for the primaries had not convinced the para-addressees. “Zen Cristina” gave way to “Combative Cristina” once again, reminding the audience of the strategies used when she was in office. These two faces of the candidate had already been analyzed by the press when images of Evita Perón appeared on the walls of the Ministry of Social Development building, accompanying CFK when she made her speeches at the Salón de las Mujeres at the Casa Rosada during her presidency. According to Gutiérrez (2012), the good and sweet Evita was shown behind Cristina when she announced good news, while the combative Evita appeared when she attacked companies, announced a conflict with the established order or challenged the press (figs. 4a and 4b).

Figures 4a–b: CFK used background images of Evita to convey the mood of the news she was delivering. Left image retrieved from Télam, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JKIU7KkI74>; right image retrieved from La Capital, <https://www.lacapital.com.ar/economia/volvio-cristina-y-presento-progresar-un-programa-respaldo-jovenes-argentinos-18-24-anos-n452682.html>.

Strategy Two: Caso Maldonado and the Repression Approach

An accident that occurred in the last weeks of the primary campaign (August 1, 2017) would contribute to exacerbating the campaign's affective and emotional dimension, and would draw on attacks on the government and its candidate. This, known as the “Maldonado case,” would have an important effect and would contaminate the development of part of the pre-election campaign.

On August 1, 2017, about twelve days before the primary election, a young man named Santiago Maldonado disappeared from a Mapuche roadblock of a highway in the province of Chubut. The National Gendarmerie, a security force dependent on the Ministry of National Security, had unsuccessfully tried to clear the road. Some protesters said they saw a gendarmerie vehicle taking young Maldonado from the protest. For weeks, different human rights organizations deemed the federal government responsible, accusing it of forced disappearances, yet there was no evidence to support those claims. CFK and her followers took advantage of the moment and the government's inability to solve the case. When the body of the young man failed to appear, they began to draw similarities between the actions of the national government and the repressive practices of the dictatorship of the 1970s.

In the Argentine historical context, this was a grave accusation. Expressions such as “Macri, basura, vos sos la dictadura”⁵—an accusation that different sectors of Kirchnerism had been rehearsing since the very inauguration of Macri's presidency—increased as never before across social networks. With the help of journalists and sympathetic spokespersons, Kirchnerism took advantage of the case's lack of resolution. The irresolution of the case continued for weeks

and occupied an important space of the CFK campaign. A shadow of doubt hovered over the government's performance and seemed likely to have some effect on the election results.

However, three days before the 2017 elections, the body of Maldonado was found by divers from the Naval Prefecture in a sector of the Chubut River where the Mapuche community had not previously allowed people to enter because it was sacred. The body did not show any signs of violent death and suspicions of accidental drowning began to circulate. In effect, the autopsy of the young man, which took place after the election results, concluded that he had drowned while trying to cross the river and that his body had remained in that place from the moment of his disappearance. On the body of the young man no marks were found of the alleged violence of the gendarmerie, according to the fifty-five experts who participated in his autopsy (an outstanding number of specialists for a study of this type). The experts also determined that the body had remained in the water for seventy days (Gaffoglio 2017). Moreover, the investigations that continued *a posteriori* showed that the witnesses who had claimed to have seen the kidnapping of the young man had falsified their statements. Several weeks later, it was confirmed that lawyers from the Assembly for Human Rights, a body co-opted in part by Kirchner, had falsely denounced the government to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH), deceiving the international tribunal and Argentine society.⁶

Figure 5: CFK's campaign had an opportunistic response to the case of a missing man. Image published in La Nación; retrieved from [https:// www.lanacion.com.ar/2058868-cristina-kirchner-participo-de-una -misa-por-la-aparicion-con-vida-de-santiago-maldonado](https://www.lanacion.com.ar/2058868-cristina-kirchner-participo-de-una-misa-por-la-aparicion-con-vida-de-santiago-maldonado).

We bring up this case because CFK's response was opportunistic. Although the event began even before the campaign was launched (September 17), the candidate used it for photo opportunities, appearing in a church holding an image of the disappeared youth (fig. 5). The case, after all, had all the right ingredients for an electoral staging and was perhaps chosen as a last resort to convince the elusive para-addressee. However, this manipulation did not attract many new voters. In fact, it was immediately turned against her: the candidate received criticism and boos in the same church from some assistants. As expected, the incident was later reproduced and exploited by the entire opposition press ("La madre de una víctima").

Strategy Three: The Prophet Approach

Some photos portrayed CFK from the front, with arms extended towards the crowd, evoking the paintings of Christ or of saints—cloak included (fig. 6). These constructions seemed to evoke a sacred figure who mediated between an afterlife (also symbolized by the evocation of her deceased husband) and her people. On the other hand, the aerial images showed her at the very heart of these massive meetings, where the blue and white of the national colors reinforced their identification with the public (fig. 7).

Figure 6: CFK in Mar del Plata, October 13. Image posted by her Twitter account, @CFKArgentina. Retrieved from <https://provincianoticias.com.ar/2017/10/13/cfk-convoco-a-la-ciudadania-a-que-ponga-un-freno-a-tantas-tropelias/>

Figure 7: Aerial images of the candidate showed her in the heart of the public. Retrieved from Política Argentina, <http://www.politicargentina.com/notas/201710/23135-las-mejores-fotos-del-acto-de-cristina-kirchner-en-racing.htm>.

Through this highly dramatized staging on grandiose podiums, framed by symbolic sets and surrounded by a crowd, the candidate developed a discursive strategy torn between proximity and fascination. With a careful proxemical composition, it sought to establish at all times a mimetic

meeting between candidate and audience. The images always showed her surrounded by an exalted crowd. She would appear dancing with women in a gym, eating empanadas that people from the poorest neighborhoods brought her, or wearing muddy jeans and tennis shoes (figs. 8 and 9). Meanwhile, she discredited her opponents, whom she positioned in a situation of distance and indifference in regards to the concerns of the people. The identification with her audience was always emphasized, reinforced, exploited, and exaggerated in a continuous game of emotional feedback that seemed to want to block rational thinking.

Figure 8: Shoes had been given to the candidate on September 27 in the town of Esteban Echeverría by Adidas workers in conflict. The stripes on the shoes were light blue and white, simulating the Argentine flag. Image from Twitter, <https://twitter.com/CFKArgentina/status/913144504345088000>

Figure 9: CFK eating empanadas made by someone from the neighborhood in La Matanza, aboard the “Cristimóvil,” September 30, 2017. Retrieved from CFK’s Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/CFKArgentina/photos/a.1666921516705710.1073742301.115689108495633/1667697546628107/?type=1&theater>.

As we have mentioned, the figure of a “good Cristina” in the primary elections turned into a “combative Cristina” in the parliamentary electoral campaign. This paradox between the good and the angry Cristina is understandable. Her anger was justified because at its root was her so called “concern for the wellbeing of her flock,” which was—it is worth remembering—the entire nation. This phenomenon became more evident on August 30, in the act of relaunching her electoral campaign in a stadium in the city of La Plata. On that occasion she asked her audience, in a measured tone:

Mientras estaba haciendo antesala, escuché algunas cositas [referring to insults against the current president]. Por favor, todo lo que sea alegría y respeto, bienvenido. Todo lo demás lo dejamos en casa, por favor. [. . .] El objetivo de la campaña es convocar al amor, a la construcción positiva. El odio es muy feo, enferma a la gente. No queremos un gobierno de clase que desprecie a los peronistas, a los “negros”, a los obreros.⁷

Ten days after the result of the primary ballot, CFK still continued with that posture of kindness and humility shown during the campaign. For example, in the closing act of the primary elections, she tried out some dance steps to the rhythm of “Nunca me faltes,” a classic cumbia by Antonio Ríos, an image that immediately went viral in all social networks frequented by a young electorate (“Nunca me faltes”). The song was a paragon of commonplaces where a masculine voice (with which a young and festive audience identified) praised the feminine object—here

represented by the candidate herself—whom he begged not to abandon him, since his existence depended on hers.⁸

Another unexpected strategic turn during the legislative campaign occurred in regards to her relationship with the opposition press, especially given the unusual disdain that the candidate had for some media and political analysts during her presidency. If elusive voters would not come to her, she had to speak to them in their own territory. This situation which led her to appear on several radio and television programs that were not CFK supporters, even when her own campaign strategists were not confident that this would increase her votes (de León 2017).

A couple of days before the launching of the legislative campaign (September 14, 2017), the journalist Luis Novaresio, not aligned with Kirchnerism, interviewed her on the América TV channel. Novaresio's questions sought to investigate her wealth increase and her relations with state contractors accused of corruption. Faced with the impossibility of correctly answering some uncomfortable questions, she became emotional and tearful when the journalist exhibited inconvenient images of a former secretary of public infrastructure dragging bags loaded with bribery dollars to hide in a convent during her government. This was not the first time she used emotional displays to seek empathy from her audience in difficult times. Moreover, Rafael Flores, candidate for national deputy for the province of Santa Cruz in the 1993 elections, told journalist Ceferino Reato (2017):

En un acto en la ciudad de Comandante Luis Piedrabuena [. . .] a Cristina se le quebró la voz. Me emocioné, pensé que tenía un lado humano después de todo, y empecé a tratarla con más afecto. Pero de ahí nos fuimos a Gobernador Gregores y a Cristina se le quebró la voz en el mismo párrafo. Al otro día, fuimos a Puerto San

Julián. ¡Y se le volvió a quebrar la voz en el mismo momento! Me di cuenta de que era una gran actriz y una farsante. Recuerdo que en esa campaña, me dijo: “¿Sabés, Rafa? Yo hubiera querido ser cantante.”⁹

It was evident that, with this attitude, her purpose was twofold. On the one hand, she was still trying to attract different sectors of that undecided electorate, the para-addressees. On the other, she was challenging criticism about her reluctance to give interviews to the media and her alleged lack of tolerance to questions. As Charaudeau notes, while manipulative speech takes different forms, each of these forms involves concealment (2008b, 247). Indeed, her strategy of media appearances, using an extremely informal, sometimes even vulgar language, and recounting personal or inconsequential anecdotes (adopting a sarcastic tone at times, more serious at others) was not only a construction aimed at her para-addressees, but also an approach to persuade extremely heterogeneous and complex sectors without alienating them. How to convince such a diverse group with a coherent speech was one of the major difficulties that she had to face with this modality and could explain, in part, her failure to persuade undecided voters.

Back to Basics

While ten days after the primary ballot CFK continued with her position of kindness and humility, a month later, in an interview with Rozín, her speech was filled with outbursts. She called the president an “idiot”; accused the minister of security, Patricia Bullrich, of being “an alcoholic,” and referred rudely to a member of parliament of the ruling party, ironically suggesting questions to the interviewer to ask María Eugenia Vidal, governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, the next day.

Resigned to the fact that her incursions through TV channels and radios did not bring better results among her para-addressees, she decided to concentrate on her pro-addressees once more, a practice that, as Annunziata (2016, 113) points out, she had already tried on other occasions. Her speech filled with vulgar idioms because these expressions helped her to position herself as “woman of the people,” who watched her with fascination. This was, as Maingueneau says (1997, 46), citing H. Meschonnic, the integration of the discourse to the body and the voice, as well as the body and the voice to the discourse. She sourced arguments that always stirred emotion and appealed mainly to the memory of “the good times” in which she and her husband had been in power. In this way, she stopped worrying about persuading the undecided and did her best to strengthen her ties with those already convinced. Her speech in Lanús on October 4, 2017, in full electoral campaign, is a perfect synthesis of the devices of proliferation that CFK incorporated in the enunciation scene, characterized fundamentally by accumulation and excess (for example, the insistence on the conjunction “and” in her speech). As we said above, these were the operations *par excellence* of their discursive operations. In these final words of the candidate, her construction was clearly reinforced.¹⁰

As we have seen, CFK’s scene always consists of a standard schematic organization. This consists of a limited number of fixed categories—excess, redundancy, and connection—that effectively organize the representations to legitimize the candidate in the political arena. The discursive scene expands and expands like a loop, in a helical shape, turning over itself again and again. In the October 4 speech, this was based on the image of the “red leather jacket,” which she said she wore when her husband Néstor won the elections in 2003. In this case, she built her speech on the image of that red leather jacket, as reminiscence, orbiting around it so as to remind the audience she made decisions in conjunction with her husband: “right to work,” “creation of work,”

“extension of rights,” “increase of retirement rights,” “increase of health insurance and social programs.” She also carefully chose her words so as to ironically use forms derived from the term “change,” which allude to the name of the ruling coalition “Cambiemos.” The words anchor these meanings of the imaginary framework and duplicate their intentions like mirrors that feed each other, from which the discourse is intended to be uttered so as to be able to ensure its right to speak from a certain perspective of action over another (Charaudeau and Maingueneau 2002, 223).

“That’s why those who have to return are not us, you are. It is you who have to return to the state. The people have to return,” the candidate says in her final part, reaffirming, in case there were any doubts remaining, her identification with the audience, diluting herself in it, while denying her political adversary democratic capacity, tolerance, efficiency, and intelligence (remember her abovementioned outburst of “idiot” in reference to the president). Finally, the distinction, differentiation, and polarization between groups that points to this strategy is evident in the pronominal use in which a set of blurring (–) and antithesis (/) is established (we–you, he–I–you, I–you, we/them, etc.), but also by deictic, that in the passage in question is marked by the “then” that introduces the evocation that opens “the read leather jacket” and the “now” of the supposed change negative instituted by the government of Macri.

Conclusion

At the beginning of our work we proposed to analyze the visual representation that accompanied part of the election campaign of ex-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner for the mid-term elections of 2017. In them, the candidate was running as a national senator for the Province of Buenos Aires, after having been in charge of the executive power for two periods (2007–2011 and 2011–2015). In essence, our objective was to study the discursive and rhetorical resources that

helped CFK shape the “image of herself” and the construction of a commonplace order to reconstruct and reorganize her political base. As we have seen, she attempted to carry this out through a double electoral strategy oriented towards the production of identification groups that were approached more emotionally than rationally and both visually and linguistically.

Starting from a textual corpus conformed by the staging of CFK (photographic and video images that were disseminated from the acts of her campaign), we analyzed the iconographic and epistemological potential of that staging and its ability to promote thinking about politics in terms of images. We saw how the profile of the candidate was forged through the tone of her speech, her body dynamics, the use of certain colors in the communicative scene, camera angles, symbols, and the music that accompanied her, all elements that surrounded her words and that served as keys to assist in the decoding of them. In addition to the image that the candidate wanted to make of herself, she was composing, in parallel, the coenunciator that she had in mind, at times elusive, at times loyal adherent.

We observed that two differentiated types of co-enunciators were outlined in the fabric of this montage throughout this period. During the primary elections campaign, CFK not only portrayed herself as good, humble and one of the people (that “Cristina Zen” the media spoke about at the time), but also, paradoxically, presented herself onstage as the personification of the values that represented the nation itself. The symbols and representations that surrounded her speeches pointed towards that connection or association. This overactive and excessive discursive rhetoric flooded the interstices of the scene, with two purposes: (1) to facilitate its internalization by a para-addressee that she needed imperatively to expand her political map and (2) to cancel out the voice of her opponents, excluding them from the collective Argentine people. However, depending on the type of audience to which this discourse is directed, it can produce the opposite

effect and end up irritating at the same time. In short, this could lead to derailments of strategic maneuvers and, therefore, to particular fallacies that could be easily detected (Snoeck Henkemans 2013, 7).

During the election campaign itself, after her attempts to reach this elusive para-addressee in the primaries failed, her focus turned onto the pro-addressee, that is, her faithful and historical voter who shared her beliefs. In other words, her argument did not propose much change, but rather reinforced what her pro-addressee already shared with her so as to maintain that political link. Her discourse and self-representation suggested association with a providential figure, a kind of “mortal divinity,” who even stepped down from her “sacred place” to be seen doing the same as her people (her muddy jeans and shoes sunken in the dust of the unasphalted streets of the province, eating some humble empanadas prepared by a neighbour, for example). At other times, she used evocative and markedly nationalist language and reminded the public of her acts as former president. In short, her self-image varied according to the profile configuration of the coenunciator she addressed, creating dynamics of mutual feedback.

In this way, the image that the candidate built of herself was articulated in a crossroads with the emotions of her audience in two ways. On the one hand, it projected an empathic and almost maternal image that was anticipated in that paratextual space that surrounded her (posters, icons, colors, clothes, music, dance). These images were saying: “I am one of you. I have worked for you, the people, and I feel what you feel (and therefore I am the ideal person to represent and defend you).” Through the sense of belonging that she forged with her audience, she presented herself as a person who shared the same world of hopes, desires, beliefs and love they had for the homeland. That sense of familiar space of beliefs and affections that she and her audience shared favoured communication and reinforced their bond. On the other hand, they were also united by

hostility towards an enemy defined as intruders who had appropriated the state illegitimately and who stood between her and her people.

As we see, this image ended up becoming a persuasive argument that, with a dramatic attitude and hyperbolic mode, was weak at heart. Such discourse required that the practice be diluted and not be excessive so as not to be ineffective. By provoking a caricature effect with her baroque speech and intense staging, she ended up exposing her manipulation and ultimately failed to persuade the undecided para-addressee.

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Notes

¹ To avoid requests for interviews, she went on tour abroad in order to obtain photographic opportunities that would be exhibited alongside international political figures such as the then French Socialist presidential candidate Ségolène Royal; French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin; German Premier Angela Merkel; or Austrian President Heinz Fischer, among others. Such staging had allowed her to occupy the local news space without too many obstacles or resistances. Avoiding the national press and their uncomfortable questions would become one of her usual practices repeated in her two administrations. At the same time, the aim was to control the agenda, preventing the media from setting priorities. By shaping her image in parallel with other popular and well-known candidates, a transposition of attributes such as competence, experience, and honesty was established, *mutatis mutandis*. If those politicians with whom CFK was shown were reliable and worthy of admiration, then so were the Argentine candidate and her political project.

² By "chain-effect" we refer to a practice in which the adherents to a party are forwarded links or photos from one social network to another, thus reduplicating the messages quickly and economically. For more details of this practice, see Sarlo 82.

³ “I sometimes wonder where, from where in our hearts we draw strength to be reborn as a country, so that they go from telling us what we have to do to asking us how we did it. To be a country that, instead of forgetting a coup, recovers that memory forever. What did we do to make those who left want to return today? Where do we get the strength to have it that, today, entrepreneurs start enterprises, producers produce, workers have jobs and kids have a future? I like to see that young people win respect and that older people are respected again. I like to see scientists researching, artists performing, and housewives giving and receiving love. I want us to continue reaping what we sow. I want to read ‘Made in Argentina’ on many more products. Every time I ask myself where we got so much strength, I look at an Argentinian in the eyes and I understand everything. It is the force of love, it is the strength of a country, of a people. It is the strength of 40 million souls and hearts. It’s all that strength together” (our translation).

⁴ The Kirchners’ arrival to power happened in special circumstances. In the 2003 elections, two Peronist figures were confronted in the first electoral round: Carlos Menem, who had been president between 1989 and 1999, and an unknown Néstor Kirchner, an obscure governor from a distant southern province, by Frente para la Victoria. Neither Kirchner’s name nor his figure resonated in the rest of the country. Menem had won with 24 percent of the valid votes and with only 2 percent ahead of Kirchner. This very tight victory raised doubts among the candidates, since the polls predicted a massive victory for Kirchner with a difference of between 30 percent and 40 percent if a second round took place. Facing the prospect of a significant defeat, Menem decided to withdraw, speculating that the small base with which Kirchner came to power would make his government unsustainable. Thus, by default, and with the lowest percentage ever, Kirchner came to power in 2003. This forced the winning candidate in his first years, to try to broaden his base of legitimacy, first under the argument of “transversality.” This was aimed at the incorporation of different political sectors that were willing to support the construction of a new identity, based on common convictions and with the support of the middle class, but always under his direction. For a detailed concept of “Kirchner’s transversality,” see Gomez and Recio (2005). For a brief account of the events that led to the Argentine crisis of 2001 and the resignation of its president Dr. Fernando de la Rúa, see Hortiguera and Rocha (2007).

⁵ “Macri, trash, you are the dictatorship” (our translation).

⁶ More details in Gaffoglio (2018) and Novaro (2017).

⁷ “While I was waiting, I heard a few things [referring to insults against the current president]. Please, any happy and respectful words are welcome. Everything else, let’s leave it at home, please. [. . .] The aim of this campaign is to summon love, to be positive. Hate is ugly, it makes people sick. We don’t want a government of the kind that

disparages Peronists, or ‘bogans,’ or workers” (our translation). To view the full speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUQzuufug8s>. Retrieved from Cristina en La Plata, accessed April 4, 2018.

⁸ “Quiero decirte al oído / tantas cosas preciosas que estoy sintiendo por ti:/ Que te quiero, que te adoro, tú eres la mujer / que he soñado, que me haces muy feliz/ Que cuando no estás me falta el aire./ Eres la razón de mi existir. /Amor por favor, nunca me faltes/ porque tú eres todo para mí./Nunca me faltes, nunca me engañes/ Que sin tu amor yo no soy nadie.” (“I want to whisper in your ear / so many beautiful things I feel about you/ that when you are not around I cannot breathe./ You are the reason for my existence./ Love, please, be always here, because you are everything for me.”). This was definitely not the first time the Kirchners used music for political purposes. For a study of the topic, see Favoretto and Hortiguera (2016).

⁹ “In an act in the city of Comandante Luis Piedrabuena [. . .] Cristina’s voice broke. I got excited, I thought she had a human side after all, and I started to treat her more kindly. But from there we went to Gobernador Gregores and Cristina’s voice broke in the same paragraph. The next day, we went to Puerto San Julián. And her voice broke again at the same moment! I realized that she was a great actress and a fake. I remember that in that campaign, she said: ‘You know, Rafa? I would have liked to be a singer’” (our translation).

¹⁰ “El trabajo ha vuelto a ser un problema. Miren, hoy cuando venía para acá. . . . Les voy a contar un secreto. ¿Ven esta camperita? ¿Les gusta? ¿No se acuerdan de esta camperita? ¡Aaaah! ¡Mala memoria! Esta camperita yo la tenía el 27 de abril de 2003, cuando Néstor sacó el 22 por ciento de los votos. Esta camperita es de esa noche. Me acuerdo . . . [la gente interrumpe con cánticos: ‘Néstor no se murió. Néstor vive en el pueblo, la puta madre que lo parió’]. Y me acuerdo que aquella noche en aquel 2003 tan difícil, tan terrible, donde Néstor tenía menos votos que los desocupados que había en el país. Su gran preocupación era esa y laburó, laburó y yo también laburé y laburé y nos rompimos el alma porque nuestra gran ilusión era que ese derecho que es el trabajo —porque ahora te dicen, ¿viste?: “Antes te regalaban las cosas”— es que alguien debería decirle a este presidente-empresario que los derechos no se regalan. Los derechos se ejercen y se reconocen por parte del estado. Se ejercen por la ciudadanía y el estado los debe reconocer. Y el trabajo no es un regalo. Nunca le regalamos trabajo a nadie. Al contrario, les reconocimos el derecho a todos y a todas a tener un trabajo digno, a tener buenos salarios. Y el trabajo hoy cambió, sí que cambió y mucho. Algunos lo perdieron, otros no lo consiguen, a otros el salario tampoco [les] llega a fin de mes y otros están con la incertidumbre y el temor de perderlo. De que lo ‘precaten’ [*sic*, por ‘precaricen’], de que no alcanza. . . . ¡Mirá vos si cambiaron! Y también cuando tenía esta camperita esa noche los jubilados . . . en esa noche . . . hacía años que

nadie les aumentaba un peso de salario. ‘*Longi tempore*’, decía un amigo y acá llegamos. . . . A devolverles los derechos a los jubilados con aumentos, con inclusión jubilatoria y finalmente con la movilidad cada dos años. ¡Fíjense! Y como además sabíamos que teníamos que dar cobertura sanitaria. . . . El PAMI también ahí estaba con los remedios, con las vacaciones programadas. ¡Miren si cambiaron las cosas! Ahora les sacaron los remedios, pero no solamente a los jubilados, también a los enfermos de HIV, también a los oncológicos. ¡Miren como han cambiado las cosas! ¡Claro que han cambiado! ¡Y siguen cambiando! Sí hay estado, pero lo que pasa que unos pocos se apropiaron de este estado para hacer negocios de las empresas privadas de ellos, de su familia, de sus amigos o de sus socios. Por eso los que tienen que volver no somos nosotros son ustedes. Son ustedes los que tienen que volver al estado. El pueblo tiene que volver.” “Jobs have become a problem again. Look, today when I was coming towards here. . . . I’ll tell you a secret... Do you see this jacket? Do you like it? Do you *remember* this jacket? Aaaah! Bad memory! I wore this jacket on April 27, 2003, when Nestor won with 22 percent of the votes. This jacket is from that same night. I remember . . . [people interrupt her by chanting: ‘Nestor did not die. Nestor lives in the people, *motherfuckers*! And I remember that night in 2003, which was so difficult, so terrible, when Néstor had fewer votes than the unemployed people we had in this country. That was his greatest concern so he worked and worked and I also worked and worked, and we put our hearts and souls into it, because our great hope was that one... having a job is a human right -because now they tell you (have you noticed?): “In the past you used to get stuff for free”-. Someone should tell this businessman president that rights are not just given away. Rights are exercised and recognized by the state. They are exercised by the citizens and the state must recognize them. And a job is not a gift. We never gave away jobs to anybody. On the contrary, we recognized everyone’s right to have a decent job, to earn good wages. And nowadays work has changed, it has changed a lot indeed. Some people lost their job. Others cannot get one. For many it’s not easy to make ends meet and others are subject to uncertainty and fear of losing it. They fear getting more precarious jobs, not enough money... Look how things have changed! And also when I was wearing this jacket that night the retirees. . . until that night . . . no one had increased their pensions for years. ‘*Longi tempore*’, said a friend of mine and here we are . . . We gave the pensioners their rights back with pay increases, extending pension benefits, and finally we set pension adjustments every two years. Think of that! And as we also knew that we had to provide health coverage, PAMI (Comprehensive Medical Attention Program) was also there with medicines, with the holiday programs for seniors. Look how things have changed! Now pensioners are left with no medicine. But not only them, also people with HIV, and cancer patients. Look how things have changed! Of course they have changed! And they will keep changing! There is a state indeed,

but what happens is that a few have appropriated this state to do business with their private companies, their families, their friends or their business partners. It's not us who have to return, but you people! It is you all who have to return to the state. The people have to come back. ”

Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2D3_TugftA. Act in Lanús, October 4, 2017, accessed April 4, 2018.