

An operational approach of communicational propaganda

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to prove that propaganda involves four elementary operations of persuasion into the productive process: lie, fiction, seduction and myth. The main operation appears to be in propaganda: the seduction and myth. The lie and fiction appear as secondary operations. Propaganda operates as a poly-operator system. The operation of seduction presides therein (the principle of contagion, the principle of repletion, the principle of frontal non-contradiction). The operation of mythical induction have an important role (the principle of thematic valorisation of myths), the lie (the principle of distortion) and fiction (a corollary of the principle of denaturation).

Keywords: lie; fiction; myth; seduction; persuasion; propaganda

1. INTRODUCTION

According to J. Ellul (Ellul, 1962, pp. 40-44) propaganda is based on the conditioned reflex and myth, understood as "global matrix-image, some kind of vision of the desired objects, but which lost their material features in order to become a very colourful, global image, including all that is desired and rejecting the rest". The global matrix-image (the myth) forces the individual to action, for therein is all the good, all the justice, all the truth for this man. Thus, the individual is able to act in any direction they want, without being mandatory for this direction to be consistent with one aspect or another of the matrix-image (Borowski, 2013; Powell, 2014). In other words, the myth renders the individual permeable to a message which is not necessarily a thematic derivative of the myth itself. That it opens the target-audience to a propagandistic influence that can even come out of its assembly of significances, we find that J. Ellul illustrates what we have called the principle of thematic exploitation of myths. The myth is exploited thematically, persuasively, and not logically, convectively. According to J.-M. Domenach, we recall that the sources of propaganda are publicity and ideology, and the foundations are: the lie and myth. J. Cazeneuve considers that propaganda is shaped by values and deeds of the topicality and myths. While Domenach sees in ideology a source of propaganda, Cazeneuve (Cazeneuve, 1976, p. 371) finds that the general path of history "has gone from a propaganda in the service of ideology, to ideology in the service of propaganda, passing through a moment of developing the ideology of propaganda". Cazeneuve observes that propaganda uses the myths and values as material to develop the message; the operation

of internal generation or propaganda is “the affective syllogism” (Cazeneuve, 1976, p. 363). On the one hand, the affective syllogism is a form of sophism and, on the other hand, a form of seduction. In fact, propaganda would therefore be managed and operationally generated by a seductive sophism, meaning by ultimate seduction.

2. OPERATIONS INSIDE PROPAGANDA

In our opinion, propaganda involves all four elementary operations of persuasion into the productive process. The operations of mythical interconnection have an important role (the principle of thematic valorisation of myths), the lie (the principle of distortion) and fiction (a corollary of the principle of denaturation). Propaganda operates as a poly-operator system. The operations of seduction preside therein (the principle of contagion, the principle of repletion, the principle of frontal non-contradiction). The main operations appear to be in propaganda: the seduction and myth. The lie and fiction appear as secondary operations (Vlăduțescu, 2013; Vlăduțescu, 2014).

J. Cazeneuve (Cazeneuve, 1976, p. 371) says that the social practice of propaganda and the social fact of the ideology appear along with the empires and great religions of salvation. The political and religious ideologies are subject to a symbolic propaganda through art and image, on the one hand, and through customs, on the other hand. Since the beginning, ideological propaganda is symbolic and normative. As J. Cazeneuve (Cazeneuve, 1976, p. 371) shows, “the decline of the ideology in favour of propaganda occurs in the 20th Century”, which is due to the sensorial effect of the new media and fragmentation of time which they favour it.

The objective of propaganda is to get effects concerning the propagation of some ideas, conceptions, doctrines. The transmission of the ideas occurs by means of the message. The purpose of the propagandistic message, as well as the publicist one, emphasises V. Volkoff (Volkoff V., 1997, p. 20), “is not that to inform, but to influence”. Propaganda seeks to influence. The operations by means of which it seeks to influence are: seduction and myth, lie and fiction. Seduction is the major operation.

According to V. Volkoff (Volkoff V., 1997, p. 20), “a major feature of propaganda is that it stimulates the attempt to convince the intelligence to ourselves, but in reality, when it reaches its maximum efficiency, it addresses “our most irrational faculties”. The opinion of Ch. U. Larson (Larson, 2003, p. 55) is that propaganda “represents the intentional use of suggestion, irrelevant emotional stimuli and false evidence in order to prevent the specific human process of taking well thought-out decisions.” It “addresses the soul of the audience, and not its reasoning” (Larson, 2003, p. 384).

The major feature of propaganda, which it puts in opposition to “conviction of intelligence” (confidence) is the seduction addressed to the most irrational mental faculties. Propagandistic seduction occurs irrationally, subconsciously, emotionally. “Aim at the viscera!” Hitler used to say. The flags, torches, parades, distinctive salutes and rhythmic chants “*Sieg! Heil! Sieg! Seil!*” of the Nazism were intended to deprive the individual of their critical spirit and bring them not from the doctrine to behaviour, but from behaviour to the doctrine. One may observe that contagion is sovereign in seduction.

When talking about propaganda, H.-P. Cathala (Cathala, 1991, p. 51) takes into account that “the process of making an opinion” has a “strong irrational character”. Referring to the irrational, states Cathala, may be done by “rules of propaganda and of disinformation, when needed: summary and striking phrases, aggressive slogans, production of collective myths, endless repetition of topics and involvement of individuals in collective manifestations

accompanies by a spectacular ceremony". And as "propaganda addresses opinions", it must do so in an irrational way, the way of shadows, of places suitable for deviations, trends, passions and prejudices.

The lie is also an operation of propaganda, but a minor one. It may be missing. Propaganda without lying exists, but without seduction it does not. To this effect, V. Volkoff (Volkoff, 1997, p. 19) shows: "the fact that certain propagandas are false, it does not mean that all would be as such," Even when lying, which happens often, the main difference between this and disinformation is that "propagandas are presented with an unveiled face", and disinformation is not. In other words, even when lying, propaganda "does not have hidden intentions" (Volkoff, 1997, p. 19). On the other hand, as a form of lying, simulation particularly intervenes in propaganda. Propaganda "simulates the intention of convincing" (Volkoff, 1997, p. 22), in return, its real orientation is to seduce. In its turn, publicity does not simulate the conviction, it "only seeks to seduce" (Volkoff, 1997, p. 22).

Specific functions of the two discursive devices (language device and cogitative device) and of the overall discursive construct are made visible in propagandistic production.

To inductively establish propagandistic effects, the language device shall cause:

- ambiguity, amphibolies and brachylogies, using them by appealing to generalities and abstractions, so that the target-audience could interpret them according to its processing possibilities: whatever words would say ambiguously, they shall say to everyone what they want to understand (Siminică & Traistaru, 2013; Traistaru & Avram, 2014);

- a style full of repetitions, formulae and slogans;

- predominant use of the affirmative manner; analysing the Nazi myth, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (1998) have stressed that the two guide-works of the regime ("*Mein Kampf*" by Hitler and the "The Myth of the Twentieth Century" by Alfred Rosenberg) "use the affirmative accumulation and never or almost never the argumentation. It is an often mixed agglomeration of evidence (or at least of elements which it is affirmed about that they would be as such) and of endlessly repeated certainties. An idea is always pronounced, it is supported by all that appears to be able to suit it, without running any analysis, without raising objections into discussion, without giving references. There is no science to establish nor any mind to conquer. An already gained fully available truth must only be declared. Implicitly, a kind of mythical proliferation is used, which is not poetic, but which seeks all resources in the empty and imperious power of its own affirmation";

- involving allegations (groundless affirmations);

- putting the convictive communication into the shade, by style, for the profit of persuasive communication;

- attracting the rhetoric in organising the speech;

- propagandistic stylistics shall be directed towards distorting the content;

- stylistic engineering shall consist in advancing persuasively repetitive formulas;

- stylistic involvement of conviction as ornament: the propagandistic style makes a goal of not letting the target-audience become aware of the defalcation from convictive to persuasive;

- the propagandistic style shall not strictly have obligations to the literary register, it shall remain the tool adapted to the tastes of various social environments and to the historical moment; style shall have topicality and "customisation"; a propagandistic style sensitive to the

situation has developed as reference model in the media; propaganda has acquired in the 20th Century a recognisability and by style: therefore, a propagandistic style with a character of universality would be established;

- the propagandistic style shall make an ideal of the clarity and concision of simplistic slogans and formulas;

- the propagandistic style shall impose a clear phrase for non-propagandistic ideas and an ambiguous phrase for the propagandistic ideational: it shall persuade by the clear and obscure mixture;

- the abundance of astounding generalities shall be managed by words with a substantial emotional load;

- the propagandistic vocabulary shall be predominant in terms of the affective and phatic, avoiding to be referential;

- the propagandistic vocabulary shall strip the concepts from abstractions, the gaps being filled with seductive meanings: the concept shall seduce by sonority, and not by content;

- vague words shall enjoy priority, relying on the selection, which the target-audience confidently makes between the simple and the complex;

- unfavourable ideas shall be labelled with words of spiritual vibration, so that the target-audience would reject those ideas without requesting any evidence of their debility or falseness;

- testimonials, declarations, quips of some personalities, quoted from works that shall make the speech interesting in terms of language: the aimed gain shall not be of cogitative nature (authority's argument), but of seductive-language nature;

- presenting the information juxtaposition ally, their agglomeration allowing the omission of the inconvenient ones, censoring the opposing ones and favourable return of the meaning of others;

- the language principle acting in propaganda is the principle of allegation: of the declaration without evidence:

- the assertions shall rely on the affirmative way;

- positive phrases shall be presented as facts, valorising the assumption that what is not disapproved does not require evidence in order to be proved;

- to seduce the audience, so that it identifies itself with the source, the testimonies, declarations and ideas of the opponent shall be taken out of the context and distorted in what they have essential: plausibility, credibility and legitimacy of what the opponent advances shall be attacked;

- vague phrases shall be used in the so-called process of rationalisation (the target-audience shall extract the generalities from the vague phrases, and with those generalities, it shall render rational those acts or facts that are questionable);

- the familial style, common language, decent garment, delicate and common sense manners shall induce the idea that the source "is one of ours", which shall facilitate captatio benevolentiae;

- appeal to stereotypes for making simple affirmations, but decisive regarding the seductive effects on less specialised individuals, who lack the possibility to verify what has been sustained;

- making some phenomena of trans-phrasal rhetoric, such as insinuation, irony and collusion; their effect shall be suggestion (component of seduction) of the target-audience to making certain inferences, drawing certain conclusions; insinuation may be achieved by: guiding questions that admit one single answer, use of caricatures and jokes with the enemy, use of the so-called pure reasons (those reasons by means of which the audience is suggested that if it did not have them, it would not be on the side of justice), inducing the guilt by association (obtained by juxtaposition of people or ideas, to other ideas or people, having a connotation or a negative “renown”);

- appeal to the photographic and pictorial language;

- use of paralanguage; significant intonations and breaks full of propagandistic meaning.

The cogitative device shall be driven into infra-operations such as:

- opponent’s arguments shall be combated simply, presented as being especially complicated and without respect for the audience (Nowicka-Skowron, Dima & Vlăduțescu, 2012; Nowicka-Skowron & Radu, 2014);

- own arguments shall be complex and confusing, avoiding to be false, because the ratiocinations would become vulnerable, raising suspicions that may affect the performance of the operation of language seduction;

- simplification shall be stimulated; the easy possibility to give simple answers to complex questions shall be created for the target-audience;

- transfer shall be used: a person’s qualities shall be positively or negatively projected on another person to make the latter more acceptable;

- by using certain topoi (common places), the target-audience shall be persuaded that taking the position of the source reflects the opinion generally accepted by the majority;

- using the incredible truths, when the source is confident that an event that is crucial, catastrophic or unfavourable to the enemy shall occur (Craig, 2014; Ţenescu, 2014);

- to explain the need for sacrifices, it shall be appealed to the argument "of the smallest possible wrong," showing that what is undertaken is wrong, but it is the smallest possible wrong, for any other action has broader unfavourable effects: by this, one thing which in itself is pure propaganda is rendered acceptable;

- use of "*argumentum ad verecundiam*" (invoking one's authority to establish or reject a thesis); invoking the names of some personalities, the human tendency of legitimate trust in an authority shall be valorised; the sophism introduced by such an argument shall be mitigated by the mention that we rely on the affirmations and allegations of the personality, only because we cannot investigate absolutely everything that is brought into discussion, as this would take too long;

- because the institutions and individuals positively aimed at must be perceived to be prestigious, the propagandist shall exploit only the contexts favourable to their prestige, thus artificially boosting the prestige of the institution or of the individual (Kot, Grabara & Kolcun, 2014; Bajdor & Grabara, 2014);

- use of the strategy to change the pace: from a belligerent (artificially created) attitude, it shall be passed to a peaceful one, of good omen for creating the impression of openness;

- the advancement of lies shall have as topic just the enemy;
- the myths involved shall be in connection with the topic of the propagandistic message, and not with the seduction and the lie, so that propagandistic argumentation could be attacked just laterally (Cerban, 2010; Gîfu & Teodorescu, 2014);
- staging the enemy in order to obtain the disapproval of public opinion to their conduct and to the ideas and actions opposed to those of the propagandist, as in the purpose of generating public hostility; the procedure of hostility and disapproval is to first indicate a multitude of negative consequences of an option (affecting the interests, threatening the individual position, preventing the achievement of some important objectives), aiming to trigger the negative emotional reaction to it and then presenting a different alternative, which would have only positive effects; if you know that X is a fool, because this is induced to you, you shall disapprove X and you detach from X and their ideas (Neacșu, 2005; Colhon, 2013);
- focusing not on logical reasoning or on presentation of relevant facts, but specifically on that information that provides a profound affective resonance;
- the appeal to the tactics of dawdling: deliberately delaying the disclosure of some information, so that its effect would be diffused even by the time passing by;
- use of the tactics "wagon platform" consisting in communicating to people (target-audience) that all others have already joined the idea in course of propagation and that it would be preferable to join at the last minute ("jump on the platform") than to be left behind; thus the natural will of individuals to be winners permanently or, in any event, on the winner's side is exploited;
- presenting the opponent, in the good/bad model, with their good parts, but good parts which in themselves do not mean something good in relation to their (opponent's) instincts;
- use of tactics of changing the scene, consisting in changing the battlefield when the hostilities are not as good as designed.

3. CONCLUSION

The major feature of propaganda, which it puts in opposition to "conviction of intelligence" (confidence) is the seduction addressed to the most irrational mental faculties. Propagandistic seduction occurs irrationally, subconsciously, emotionally.

"Aim at the viscera!" The lie is also an operation of propaganda, but a minor one. It may be missing. Propaganda without lying exists, but without seduction it does not.

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