

SEMIOTICS OF THE “THIRD FORCE”: MOST AND THE PERFORMATIVE AND VISUAL DIMENSION OF POLITICAL LIFE IN THE POST-ELECTORAL PERIOD IN CROATIA, 2015.

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The present paper analyzes the media representation of the idea of the “third force” in politics. The research focuses on how the notion is being staged and visualized in order to create the impression of a new and fresh agent in the race for power. The case of MOST, a political coalition which gained importance in the 2015 Croatian parliamentary election, seems particularly important and adequate for the purpose. I do not discuss programs, political aims or visions of the main political parties. Rather, I propose a semiotic analysis of public communication. Attention will be paid to performative aspects of television broadcasts, organization of the space where negotiations were held, visual relations between political actors. The broadcasts, and the broadly taken space of public contact, will be treated as a stage, and actions taking place on such a stage as a political drama, with a screenplay which may be, but is not necessarily, conscious and planned. When seen from this perspective, the focus of interest does not lie on the purposeful layout of seating in a meeting or a public communique, but on unconscious cultural patterns which have a great impact on our decisions, choices, and perceptions. Ultimately, the electoral success of MOST was related not only to its program, but also—or maybe mostly – to its performative policy and its consistent positioning as a new actor in the political field.

Keywords: semiotics, performative analysis, public communication, MOST, Božo Petrov, political field

This paper is an attempt to analyze how the idea of the “third force” in politics is created in and by the media, and how the public reception of politicians as persons is based on specific cultural patterns. Therefore, I will not discuss programs, political aims and visions of the main political parties in Croatia, HDZ, SDP or MOST. I do not intend to enter into details of negotiations accompanying the long period of government construction in Croatia in November and December 2015. What I will analyze and present is the question of *staging* and *visualizing* the idea of the third force. What I mean by this is the way in which politicians of MOST with Božo Petrov at the head were presented. Attention will be paid to performative aspects of television broadcasts, the organization of the space where negotiations were held, and visual relations between political actors. The broadcasts, and the entire space of public contact seen more broadly, will be treated as a stage, and the actions taking place on such a stage as a kind of political drama, with a screenplay which can be, but is not necessarily, conscious and planned. What I find most interesting is not the purposeful layout of seating in a meeting or a public communique, but unconscious cultural patterns which have a great impact on our decisions, choices, and perceptions. This is precisely my aim in this paper: to reveal how the perception of the “third force” is created and perceived. MOST and its leader seems to be an ideal example of the semiotics of public communication. I will try to show that its activity may be analyzed to produce a model, allowing us to understand the mechanisms of performative aspects of the public space in similar cases. I find it useful to remember, when talking about political competition, that the choices and acts of participating actors would often be related not to any ideological attitudes, but to communicational schemas and scripts. That is my position in this paper, and this is a good place to stress that I do not intend to make an ethnography of organization, or “creative industry”, which should involve other kind of research; however, it might be an interesting step forward to reconstruct different contexts of the case.

In the Croatian 2015 parliamentary election two major forces – two coalitions – presented their candidates in the race for power: the central-left one and the right-Christian one, named respectively *Hrvatska raste* (Croatia is Growing!) and *Domoljubna koalicija* (The Patriotic Coalition).¹ Although these coalitions acted as collective bodies, in fact they were gathered around two dominant parties, leading on the Croatian political scene, SDP (Social Democratic Party)² and HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union).³ It is clear that they have not eliminated other parties from political life, but during the twenty-year period after the

¹ Details of the negotiations and political analysis can be found in Rešetar (2016).

² SDP covers the central left wing of the political field in Croatia. It is a successor party of the *Savez komunista Hrvatske* (League of Croatian communists), a part of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, the ruling (and single) party in former federation. Since 1990, SDP and HDZ are two major parties in Croatia.

³ HDZ was established in 1989 by Franjo Tuđman and other Croatian dissidents, with a strong support from the right-oriented Croatian emigration in the USA and Canada. It won the first parliamentary election in 1990 and was in power until 2000. Its ideological profile can be defined as central right, with a stronger nationalistic drive in the 1990s, and a close relation to the Catholic church.

end of the Croatian War of Independence, they have continuously imposed themselves on the public debate, polarizing positions in the political field and alternately gaining the most important centers of power in the country. The election held on 8 November 2015 revealed their almost equal standing, with 56 parliamentary seats for *Hrvatska raste*, and 59 seats for *Domoljubna koalicija*. Neither of them had the majority necessary to construct the government, and negotiations began with the third force, a coalition as well, named *MOST nezavisnih lista* (The Bridge of Independent Lists), which obtained 19 seats in the new parliament.

MOST was presented, and presented itself, as a “third force” on the political scene in Croatia. It was formed in 2012 in Metković, a small town on the Croatian-Bosnian border. It won the local election and became famous throughout the country as an example of a political force outside of the well-known set of parties, which are often seen as ineffective or compromised. MOST, with its president, young psychiatrist Božo Petrov (1979), launched a campaign to gain influence in the entire country and, ultimately, came third in the 2015 parliamentary election. It seems that the strategy of “the third way” proved successful, taking into consideration the electoral results of the coalition; as one of commentators noticed: “The success of MOST was based on attracting voters who abstain from voting, new (young) voters, on gathering votes of people looking for the ‘third option’ (whatever that means)” (Raos 2015: 10).

THE LEADER

In the media discourse of politics, “third force”, just like “the third way”, means something new, something that can be opposed to older ways of doing politics and to earlier ideas. When a previous alternative seems to be played-out, there appears a new solution presented as a completely independent factor from an older relation between two opposed, but related items. Not one of two, but totally new. This idea of “thirdness” can be found in the notion of the “third way.” After the Second World War it “indicated an alternative to both capitalism and communism” (Keman 2011). Kregar emphasizes that the notion of the “third way” was to overcome existing old divisions in order to form a new policy suitable to the new economic and social situation (Kregar 2000). In Anthony Giddens’s most influential work, the third way can be seen as a synthesis of an element of social democracy and liberalism, which could lead to reinforce the stability of democracy in postmodern societies (Giddens 1998, Šalaj 2006). “Thirdness” is thus a rhetorical construct, based on “emotion-evoking and metaphorical associations” (Hernandez 2013: 276). It is a way out of the Aristotelian logic of the alternative, and on the other hand it offers hope for those who are tired of oppositions presented as obvious (such as capitalism/socialism, Republicans/Democrats, HDZ/SDP, and so on).



Figure 1. Božo Petrov, Zoran Milanović, Tomislav Karamarko, in December 2015⁴

The illustration above is presented here for its typical character: I do not mean to suggest that it is special in itself, however it reveals a certain practice in the Croatian media of the post-electoral period. In December 2015 there were hundreds of similar pictures throughout newspapers and portals, showing these three men who played a crucial role in the process of forming the new Croatian government after the election. They are, from the left: Petrov, the leader of MOST, Milanović, the president of SDP, and Karamarko, the leader of HDZ. They were supposed to hold talks on a future coalition, because no single party could form the government by itself. The results showed almost equal support for HDZ and SDP, but neither of them could rule without a coalition partner. MOST turned out to be a necessary partner which is why Božo Petrov entered big politics on a national scale, and not on the local level as had been the case previously.

Figure 1 is interesting precisely because it is typical. Petrov, a *pars pro toto* for MOST, its media face, contrasted with the two other leaders. He is younger, with facial features contrasting with the other two in the most crucial and basic opposition in human culture, that of young/new vs. old. His appearance expresses what is new, while Karamarko and Milanović may both be seen as an incarnation of the old, of the well-known way of conducting political affairs and of the entire political, economic and social burden of the past. MOST, like new political parties in the neighboring Slovenia, “played with the recognizability of its leader” (Krašovec and Haughton 2014: 49). Karamarko, born in 1959, has been actively participating in Croatian politics since 1991, and has held many important functions, among them he was the Minister of the Interior (2008–2011), the President of HDZ (2012–2016); he collaborated closely with Ivo Sanader, his predecessor as president of HDZ and Prime Minister, subsequently accused of corruption and imprisoned. Thus, a large part of the Croatian

⁴ Source: <http://hr.n1info.com/a89101/Vijesti/Evo-sto-bi-Bozo-Petrov-u-ponedjeljak-mogao-ponuditi-Milanovicu-i-Karamarku.html> (accessed 10 September 2018).

electoral body may have seen him as an incarnation of HDZ and its policy, of corruption, and of crisis. As HDZ played a decisive role in ruling the country, winning the parliamentary majority in 2004, Karamarko's personal responsibility for the condition of the state in 2015 can be seen as central. The same remarks apply to Milanović. Born in 1966, he has been a member of SDP since 1999, and has had a more active role in the party since 2004, serving as its president for nearly ten years (2007–2016). After the social-democrat electoral victory, he became Prime Minister and held the position for an entire term (2011–2016). He too may be seen as responsible for Croatia's problems, first and foremost the economic crisis, demographic decline, and inefficacy of the national political scene.

"The practice of photojournalism operates as a political aesthetic that provides crucial social, emotional, and mnemonic resources for animating collective identity and action necessary to a liberal-democratic policy" (Lucaites and Hariman 2001: 38). The aesthetic aspect should be emphasized, given that the type of illustration mentioned above plays with the very fundamental aesthetic dimension with a strong anthropological context, by which I mean two axes: old–new and young–old. Moreover, the visual code leads directly to the semiotic aspects of the iconic signs. In the semiotic analysis it is apparent that the sign should be read in the following context: "by tying history to rhetoric, we hope to have demonstrated that things in ads mean what they do not because of some innate property but due to their particular past", as argued by Pracejus, Douglas Olsen and O'Guinn (Pracejus et al. 2006: 89). It is not only the history of use, but also its syntagmatic context which enabled them to show how the white space in ads has become significant. In our case, Petrov's image in context regains a new sense as the iconic representations of the new force, i.e. MOST, compared with old ideas and practices. The replication of this syntagmatic visual chain helped to spread this meaning in the public space.



Figure 2. Petrov makes a decision⁵

⁵ Source: [https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/sdp-nudi-the MOSTu-resore-pravosuda-i-uprave-hdz-za-vladu-strucnjaka-20151111](https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/sdp-nudi-the-MOSTu-resore-pravosuda-i-uprave-hdz-za-vladu-strucnjaka-20151111), 11. 11. 2015 (accessed 31 October 2018).

The second illustration can be analyzed using Barthesian notions of “myth” and “meaning” (Barthes 2000).⁶ At first glance, meaning seems clear. Petrov plays the role of a central figure, surrounded by the two other leaders as supplicants. The self-confident young man overtakes the two routineer politicians. The picture can be viewed as a condensed sign, which develops into an entire narrative, or a myth in Barthesian terms. Given that t-portal is one of the most consulted websites in Croatia, voters were provided with a photojournalistic mythologization of the political scene. The guidelines were more than obvious, with a strong emotional impact. The repetition of such images creates a stronger effect on the electoral body (Lucaites and Hariman 2001: 41); the process of naturalization (another Barthesian theme) of meaning could take place, transforming the third place of Božo Petrov’s MOST into a political triumph.

When we look at the illustration above, it might be compared to children’s games centering on “the odd one out”. A spectator is required to find out which picture does not belong together with the other ones, and why. In this case, the visual contrast obviously corresponds with a possible explanation of the place of the three men in the Croatian political field. Petrov is much younger than the two other politicians. But in this case the opposition does not allude to the oppositions such as experience/inexperience, ability/beginning, where the first, positive term would apply to the older politicians, and the second to the younger one, who has just entered the political arena. Indeed, Petrov, born 1979, has been active in politics since 2011, when he was associated with Hrast, a conservative nationalist party, and a year later, he co-founded MOST, a local movement at the time, which won the 2013 local election in the town of Metković. He became famous after reducing the debt of the city he governed, and for some bravado decisions like cutting his own and his councilors’ wages in order to balance the city budget. Meanwhile, MOST’s third place in the 2015 parliamentary election, with Petrov as the leader, was a big surprise.

In the game of “the odd one out” Petrov’s connotation seems strongly positive, because there is a difference between Petrov and the other two politicians: he was not part of the political establishment, he had not played any role at the national level before, he was never related to the main parties (HDZ or SDP), firmly opposing them. “We (i.e. MOST) are the only serious opposition force both to HDZ and SDP,” said Petrov in a TV broadcast during the 2015 electoral campaign,⁷ and this idea was the main motto of MOST’s pre-election media discourse. Providing the appearance of the leader, the idea of a “new force in politics” used to be performed every time all three party presidents were presented or appeared together.

It seems that a recognizable leader plays a crucial role when the third force intends to enter the political market. This was the case in the neighboring Slovenia in 2011 and 2014. In the parliamentary election in 2011, the first force was Lista Zorana Jankovića, which won with 28.5% of votes, overtaking established parties like SDS (democrats) and SLS (people’s party), two major ruling forces before. Three years later the election was won by the Party of

⁶ For comments on the Barthesian notion of “photogénie électorale” see Nachtergaele (2012).

⁷ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWFsCMmx1To> (accessed 20 September 2018).

Miro Cerar (Stranka Mire Cerara) with a majority of 36% of votes. Krašovec and Haughton argue that “both parties played the card of their leaders who were largely recognizable”, Zoran Janković as the manager of the largest supermarket chain in Slovenia (Mercator), and Miro Cerar as a lawyer and constitutionalist (Krašovec and Haughton 2014: 49). Both parties were established directly before the electoral campaign, and their success was conditioned by the idea of “new faces in politics” (Krašovec and Haughton 2014: 51), incarnated by the leaders. The mechanism is precisely the same as in the case of MOST. The Croatian coalition proposed a new quality and literally “a new face” as an answer to the crisis.

THE STAGE

The world is a stage, we are players, says the well-worn image, codified by Shakespeare in his *As You Like It*. Still, the metaphor of the stage reappears in the social sciences with Erving Goffman, and has not lost its force so far. Goffman’s concept of the social sphere refers to the key idea that humans are not fully conscious agents, but often their moves are being directed: not by any supra-Director, as a religiously inspired philosophy might have it, but by “society”. This includes social customs, roles, position in the social field, all the factors that make us who we are from the sociological point of view. For lack of space, I cannot discuss the notion of agency (cf. Wnuk-Lipiński 2008: 84–90). I simply want to emphasize how the idea of the stage contributes to our reflection. On the one hand, we should assume that an individual acts according to the logic of the field, and not as a totally self-conscious agent (cf. Bourdieu and Waquant 1992: 94–115). On the other, it makes us think about communication in the public sphere as a form of ritual interaction, where our statements and actions are subject to a different degree of formalization, i.e. they become imminently mediatized by “culture” (Rothenbuhler 1998).

On 7 December 2015 a noteworthy event took place. Since negotiations came to a stall, and a new government was not expected to form quickly, successive sets of meetings were arranged. On the day in question, a discussion was organized, which was supposed to be decisive, between the three most important political actors: *Domoljubna koalicija* with HDZ at its head, *Hrvatska raste* led by SDP, and MOST. The debate was transmitted live on television and the internet. Neither of the two parties with the best results could form the government alone – MOST was needed as a coalition partner – and Petrov could not choose between *Hrvatska raste* and *Domoljubna koalicija*, trying to obtain more benefits for his party and himself. As the constitutionally defined deadline for government formation was approaching, pressure on the three leaders was increasing. The meeting on 7 December 2015 was seen as an attempt to resolve the situation, and a new government was expected to emerge from the negotiations.

I propose to look at the negotiations as a kind of drama. With the passage of time, the performative aspect of the meeting seems of more interest, since the content of the

discussions has generally lost its importance. The notion of social drama is taken from Victor Turner's approach to social conflicts. One of Turner's assumptions is that people, acting in the public sphere, often enter into already existing scenarios, they assume culturally formed roles, which is usually an unconscious process. An emblematic example of this idea is the conflict between King Henry II and Archbishop Thomas Becket. Opening the struggle, they – unconsciously – reached for ready-made cultural patterns of a priest martyr on the one hand, and legal sovereign, princeps, on the other, with other aspects influencing the relation between them, for instance the question of origin (low-born Becket in contrast with the king) (Turner 1975). Turner provided more examples, but they all revolve around this notion of scenario. What can be said, then, about the drama which took place in the elegant interior of the Esplanade Hotel in Zagreb on that December day?

First, the space where the politicians met may be regarded as a stage in two senses. It was the place where their social roles were to be exposed and antagonized. A confrontation between the three leaders was expected, incarnating their political supporters and options, one of them being a real winner despite his third place in the race for parliamentary power, and the two others limited to the level of supplicants. And from Turner's perspective, we should ask ourselves what kind of drama we witnessed. I assume that in the given situation we could expect the idea of the "third force" to be staged.

Figure 3 shows how the space where the negotiations took place was organized. Tables were arranged in the shape of a horseshoe. Božo Petrov and his colleagues from MOST were sitting in the middle, whereas SDP and its coalition partners on his left, and Karamarko with his Party on Petrov's right. It was a really interesting configuration of actors.



Figure 3. The meeting of three leaders on 7 December, 2015⁸

⁸ Source: *Sastanak Petrova, Milanovića i Karamarka*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pSHUObv-NxY> (accessed 14 May 2019).

The position of HDZ and SDP leaders suggests a struggle, opposite views, and a direct confrontation. We may say what the intention of the “director” was clearly to stage the opposition. In semiotic terms, signification is undisputable as well: Karamarko and Milanović were forced to play the role of “old” leaders. They could not agree with each other, and the SDP – HDZ opposition was seen as a key factor of the old politics. It is worth noticing a tendency to charge politicians with all the negative phenomena including the economic and demographic crisis, the lack of trust in politics, expressed by the large majority of citizens.⁹ In the scene above, MOST appeared as a conciliating factor, supposed to bring at least stability to the old political system of confrontation. Petrov was sitting at the perpendicular table, which formed a connection between the two opposed factions. As a synecdoche for his party, Petrov signified the possibility of communication, interrelation, or an element which could fill the gap between the old parties in order to form a new political system together. And this supposed “new” system could find its support in MOST, the only reliable factor of cohesion.

Watching the hour-and-a-half long debate, one can assume that the spatial disposition determined the comportment of the main agents. The primary position belonged to Petrov. He was the one who initiated discussion, he frequently addressed the other leaders and asked them questions. The negotiations began with his opening speech, and the meeting itself was organized on MOST’s initiative.¹⁰ Petrov said: “I’d like to ask you to make a statement” (00:19:07), which can be treated as a sign that he was controlling the scene and directing the drama. The other two leaders assumed the role of second-place players. Moreover, they treated each other as opponents, sometimes getting into violent arguments. Both Karamarko and Milanović addressed Petrov most often, as he was the master of the ceremony. At the end, Petrov said he wanted to hear proposals from both sides (1:14:00), thus confirming his major role in the negotiation process, or at least his desire to have a major role. What is more, as Rothenbuhler notices, the communication process in the media, primarily on television, embraces ritual patterns (Rothenbuhler 1998). Consequently, the ritualization of the meeting was reinforced, strengthening the scenario of the reconciling third force.

EQUIDISTANCE

“We are not burdened by the left, or the right wing. We clearly say what we want, and these are reforms and a government of professionals”, said Petrov in a broadcast after the election.¹¹ “In the last twenty years every time, after the election, negotiations would concern

⁹ According to the survey done in 2004 and 2013, institutional actors in the field of politics were given the worst positions in the hierarchy of the social trust. The last three positions were held by: the government, the parliament, and political parties. On the dimension of social distrust, as can be easily guessed, political parties came first (74.8 % of respondents did not trust them), followed by the Croatian parliament (with the same score), and the government (with 74 %). The distrust had increased alarmingly between the two surveys (Ilišin 2015: 25).

¹⁰ The broadcast can be viewed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6G1qmtMioM> (24sata youtube.com channel; accessed 10 October 2018); Petrov’s opening speech: 00:14:34 – 00:19:08.

¹¹ Al Jazeera Balkans news, 24 November 2015; broadcast is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xudb93GOvEs> (accessed 4 November 2018).

positions in the future government, but not things which were supposed to be done during the following four years”, added the leader of MOST in the same broadcast. I have selected this interview for its representative discourse. During the long period of negotiations, which took place for over a month and a half, Petrov used this argumentation trying to force a discourse of the third force. We can find distinctive elements of this in the quotations above. First, it is the idea of equal distance from both dominating forces, HDZ and SDP. Assuming the high rate of social distrust toward political parties, MOST tried not to be associated with any political option or ideology. We can accept that this is a typical position for these forces which try to win voters, opposing itself to the political past and playing the card of the new. It is interesting to find the drive to transcend the bipolar system in Barack Obama’s concept of presidential power. Some authors argue that a clear tendency was to perform presidency “standing apart from political parties and exercising the tools of the modern administrative office to promote the public interest” (Milkis et al. 2012: 68). There is an obvious difference of scale, but not of mechanisms. In both cases, Obama’s presidential speech, as the quoted scholars analyze it, and Petrov’s conduct in the public sphere, there is a clear effort to create distance towards the exiting polarization of the political field. If we assume that rhetorical figures are cultural forms, what we can detect here is the idea of (imaginary) unity, a source for the legitimation of power (cf. Holcomb 2007: 74). The difference is that Obama was given power already, while Petrov was trying to obtain it.

The second rhetorical element is typical as well. It is the idea of a “government of professionals”, which means that the ministerial positions would be held not by politicians, members of any political party, but by professionals in a given field. This position has the same significance as the policy of equidistance. In a society with a high level of social distrust, one can expect to gain support by proposing to oust politicians in order to make room for “professionals”. It should be noticed that such a position brings uncertainty and is an obstacle to the functioning of the public sphere, precisely because of exploiting those deep layers of distrust (Šalaj 2006).

MOST adopted the role of the “third option” during the electoral campaign and after the election.¹² During the negotiations, Petrov and his colleagues were constantly highlighting the most important requirement in their eyes, i.e. that the future prime minister must not belong to any political party. Such a “non-partisan” line would eliminate both Zoran Milanović and Tomislav Karamarko from the competition, two professional politicians who had both held the prime minister post before.¹³ “MOST is the only true winner of the election, because there won’t be government without them”, said one of the commentators after the results were

¹² One example shows why MOST might constitute an interesting political partner: in 2015, a local political group in Osijek (Građanska opcija grada Osijeka) choose MOST as the “third option”, as a chance to overcome the SDP – HDZ polarization. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4S7mMPF7VE> (accessed 10 October 2018).

¹³ Sources are abundant, showing the position of MOST. See e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ipqRVizWAE> (accessed 4 November 2018). Indeed, following the negotiations and a coalitional agreement between HDZ and MOST, the prime minister post was offered to Tihomir Orešković, a non-partisan professional who had been working for the pharmaceutical industry before, and held dual citizenship, Croatian and Canadian.

announced, and “both coalitions are at equal distance from MOST”¹⁴ Božo Petrov carefully reinforced this distance towards the established parties, emphasizing the new dimension of the movement he presided over. He, together with other MOST leaders, put on an interesting spectacle in Zagreb two days before the election (on 5 November 2015). The president of MOST had a political statement he made notarized, and then read it publicly on the main square in the Croatian capital (Ban Josip Jelačić square). The statement said that “the representatives of MOST will not individually enter into negotiations or unilaterally accept any coalition or any party, helping it to form a government, without a clear prerequisite of reforms [...]”, but even more interesting was the next paragraph: “If MOST unilaterally accepts any coalition or enters into a coalition with any party which had governed Croatia within the last ten years, and in this way helps to secure the majority in the Croatian parliament, I hereby swear that I will resign from the post of the president of MOST [...]”¹⁵



Figure 4. Božo Petrov on the Ban Josip Jelačić square, 5 November 2015

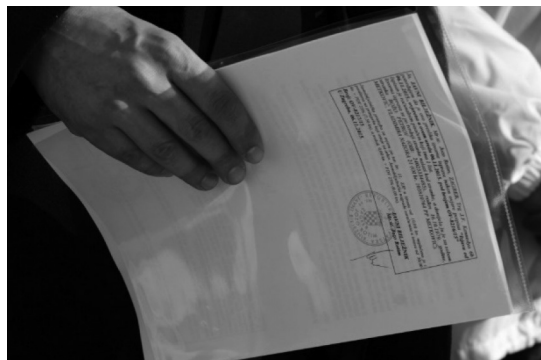


Figure 5. Petrov's statement validated by a notary public¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plCO8LrL1iw> (accessed 4 November 2018).

¹⁵ Petrov quotes after the news: *Petrov kod javnog bilježnika ovjerio izjavu da neće u koaliciju* (Petrov notarized a statement that he will not enter a coalition) (<https://direktno.hr/domovina/petrov-kod-javnog-biljeznika-ovjerio-izjavu-da-the-MOST-nece-u-koaliciju-29913/>, accessed 6 November 2018).

¹⁶ Both pictures are taken from the news source quoted above.

Two aspects fit clearly into the semiotics of the third way. First, we cannot overlook the intention to remain at equal distance from HDZ and SDP. However, this is not the only obvious thing. One can also notice reservations towards the entire field of politics. "Any party which had governed Croatia" meant not only the two major parties, but also their allies and, I believe, the political system as a whole. Politicians were distrusted, the parliament did not have a good reputation, and all other institutions achieved a better public opinion rating in a public survey than political parties. MOST joined political life on the national level, trying to maintain a position of an outsider, of an agent who does not belong to the field, or at least does not accept the old, inefficient and hypocritical rule. In Petrov's statements and in the statements of MOST politicians in the public sphere this attempt is clear: how to produce the image of non-belonging to the "old" system. A validated "document" was meant to be a sign of truthfulness; MOST was to be treated as a trustworthy movement, a movement that does not change its mind every time it might be profitable. In a world where politicians are known by their inconsistency and flexibility, when one could not trust them anymore, a document with a notarial stamp seems to guarantee truth and stability.

Let us take stock of the performative aspect of Petrov's unusual act. We could qualify it as a performance, i.e. a planned sequence of acts with additional meaning. He first wrote the statement, then went to the notary public office and had it notarized, and after that, together with his colleagues, he went to the main square of the capital city to give a speech in public, naturally registered by TV cameras. The connotation of the performance seems clear. It should not have been viewed only as a verbal declaration: if seen as such it could have been treated as another announcement of distrust. In this day and age, if we cannot trust what the others are saying, the fetish of our times is a written and notarized document. Petrov, presenting the notarized document (notice the large stamp visible in figure 5) in the heart of Zagreb, performed his, and his party's, trustworthiness. A performed meaning should be more influential, especially when transmitted and broadly commented on in the media; we can interpret it as an example of what Giovanni Sartori calls *videopolitics*, or an attempt to form the public sphere through the use of television and its communicational schemas (Sartori 2007: 87–91).

DISCUSSION

Roland Barthes, inventorying fashion in an attempt to recreate the "system of fashion", tried to determine which elements of the system are not only pieces of clothing, but have additional significance. A short black dress does not only have practical use (a piece of clothing actually worn), but can also mean "elegance", or "a nice evening with friends in a fancy restaurant" (cf. Barthes 1967). Similarly, the rhetoric of the visual can be reconstructed behind ordinary and at first glance purely denotative pictures, arrangements, or public statements. This paper did not deal with the political program of MOST. I was interested in the semiotic mechanism which allowed its leader, Božo Petrov, to create desirable meaning and consequently to gain influence over the public sphere. Moreover, "the increasing use of new communication techniques made it possible to address messages to citizens

that could be adapted by the media on the left and right wings like a commercial product” (Lanzone 2014: 58). It seems that it is not the content of the message, but its formal organization, connotational meanings and the syntagmatic context which prevail in the process of communication. The “third force” is a result of historical connotative dimension of “thirdness” and rhetorical organization of space and discourse. The third element, like in the Hegelian syllogism, suggests a new quality, unifying the opposite terms in the expectance of unity. As could be seen, it is based on relatively simple mechanisms, which refer to the fundamental axis of perception (old–new, young–old, opposite–adjacent). In the case of MOST in 2015, such a strategy might be successful, giving it real political influence. How long this can be fruitful, when the signifié – that third option – is in fact empty, is another question entirely.

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SEMIOTIKA "TREĆE SNAGE": MOST I PERFORMATIVNA I VIZUALNA DIMENZIJA POLITIČKOG ŽIVOTA U POSTIZBORNOM RAZDOBLJU U HRVATSKOJ 2015. GODINE

U ovom se članku analizira medijski prikaz pojma "treće snage" u području politike. Rad se bavi načinom na koji se pojam "treće snage" uprizoruje i vizualizira s ciljem stvaranja dojma o novosti i svježini agensa u utrci za moći. Slučaj Mosta, političke koalicije koja je dobila na važnosti na parlamentarnim izborima u Hrvatskoj 2015. godine, čini se posebno važnim i adekvatnim za navedenu analizu. U radu ne raspravljam o programima, političkim ciljevima ili vizijama glavnih političkih stranaka, nego dajem semiotičku analizu javne komunikacije. Posebno se bavim performativnim aspektima televizijskih emisija, organizacijom prostora gdje su se održavali pregovori i vizualnim odnosima među političkim dionicima. Televizijske emisije i čitav širi prostor javnog kontakta sagledat ću kao pozornicu, a djelovanja na tako shvaćenoj pozornici kao političku predstavu utemeljenu na scenariju koji može biti, ali nije nužno, svjestan i planiran. Iz navedene perspektive najzanimljivijim se ne čine planirani rasporedi prostora na sastanku ili u javnom obraćanju, nego nesvjesni kulturni obrasci koji imaju velik utjecaj na naše odluke, izbore i percepciju. Zaključno tvrdim da izborni uspjeh Mosta nije bio vezan isključivo uz njegov program nego i uz – ili ponajviše uz – njegovu performativnu politiku i konzistentno pozicioniranje kao novog igrača u političkom prostoru.

Ključne riječi: semiotika, performativna analiza, javna komunikacija, MOST, Božo Petroj, politički prostor