

Bodily regimes and meaning production in Bolsonaro's visual discourse: a sociosemiotic perspective
Regímenes de corporeidad y producción de sentido en el discurso visual de Bolsonaro: exploraciones sociosemióticas
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In this paper, we analyze the semiotic strategies through which Jair Bolsonaro's body is represented in his Instagram profile. In order to do that, we build upon Landowski's elliptic semiotic square, through which we display Bolsonaro's different bodily postures and lifestyles. The diagram shows four bodily regimes through which the body of the current Brazilian president is portrayed: 1) the military body, 2) the buffoonish body, 3) the institutional body, 4) the popular body. The results show that the institutional body is the least present, while the other three reinforce Bolsonaro's non-political identity and anti-establishment discourse.

KEYWORDS: Bodily regimes, semiotics, digital populism, Bolsonaro, visual discourse.

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar, desde la perspectiva de la semiótica discursiva, las estrategias de figurativización del cuerpo de Jair Bolsonaro en su perfil de Instagram. Para este análisis hemos considerado, a modo de modelo metodológico, un cuadrado semiótico elíptico construido a partir de las propuestas de Landowski, que nos permitirá mostrar las diferentes posturas corporales y los estilos de vida del presidente de Brasil. El diagrama propone cuatro regímenes a través de los cuales el cuerpo de Bolsonaro es retratado: 1) cuerpo militar, 2) cuerpo bufonesco, 3) cuerpo institucional, y 4) cuerpo popular. Los resultados arrojan que el cuerpo institucional está menos presente, mientras que los otros tres refuerzan, en su conjunto, el discurso antisistema y la identidad no-política de Bolsonaro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Regímenes de corporeidad, semiótica, populismo digital, Bolsonaro, discurso visual.

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INTRODUCTION

The representation of the body is a central and recurring topic within the field of political discourse studies. The researchers who have tackled it are diverse and approached the multiple ways through which the body contributes to shape the image of politicians and their relationships with their followers (Belpoliti, 2009; Bloch, 1923/1988; Boni, 2008; Freud, 1921/1993; Le Bon, 1885/2005; Luzzatto, 1998; Mosse, 1996; Neto, 2012; Ramaldes & Prado, 2008; Weber, 1929; among others).

Within the realm of French Discursive Semiotics (Greimas & Courtés, 1979/1990), which is the theoretical-methodological approach adopted in this paper, the contributions on the relationship between corporality and politics are equally numerous and diverse (Demuru, 2020; Demuru & Sedda, 2020; Landowski, 1997/2007; Marrone, 2001; Piotto, 2012; Pozzato, 2018).

This article contributes to this scholarship by looking at how Jair Bolsonaro, the current president of Brazil, represents his body on his Instagram profile. Although to date the studies on the Brazilian president are extensive, it is somewhat uncanny that the role of his body in his communication still remains unexplored. Beyond the approach of Cesarino (2019) and Possenti (2019), there are still no records of studies that explicitly and deeply address the role of corporality in the visual-political discourse of the thirty-eighth president of the Brazilian republic.

Our purpose is to try to fill this gap. In order to do that, we have built a corpus that collects all the portraits posted by Bolsonaro on his Instagram account from June 2018 to June 2020. These images were analyzed on the basis of the theoretical-methodological framework of the French discursive semiotics. More specifically, we have combined the figurative semiotics and the plastic semiotics developed by Greimas (1984/1994) and his disciples (Floch, 1995; Oliveira, 2004), with Landowski's sociosemiotic approach (1997/2007; 2004/2015; 2005/2009).

Based on Landowski's model of regimes of interaction and meaning (1997/2007; 2005/2009), we have identified four "bodily regimes"

through which Bolsonaro's body is portrayed on Instagram: 1) the *military body*, characterized by an erect, firm and almost immobile posture, which refers to a tough, disciplined and uncompromising political personality; 2) the *buffoonish body*, a restless, sinuous and deformed body, which portrays a subject who breaks away from the ethical-aesthetic codes of politics and politicians as traditionally understood, i.e. the ones who always wear a suit and tie; 3) the *institutional body*, marked by a bodily configuration that refers to the image of the professional politician; 4) the *popular body*, defined by a relaxed posture, casual and everyday attire, which is close to the stereotype of the common Brazilian man.

The results of the analyses show that the institutional body is present to a lesser extent, while the other three reinforce the "non-politicality" and the "anti-politicality" of Bolsonaro, that is, his overall "anti-system" posture (Araujo & Prior, 2020; Demuru & Sedda, 2020; Fechine, 2020).

Starting from these premises, we will try to answer the following question: how does the figurativization of Bolsonaro's body on Instagram contribute to corroborate his non-politicality and anti-politicality? By way of response, we argue that the military body and the popular body manifest Bolsonaro's non-politicality, while the buffoonish body expresses an explicit "anti-political" attitude, which opposes more emphatically and clearly to the codes and institutional labels of the republic.

Nonetheless, we also seek to reveal the contribution of semiotics to a deeper understanding of the discursive strategies that have fostered the recent rise of populism around the globe, whose discourse is explicitly marked by "anti-establishment" attitudes (Da Empoli, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2018; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Vines & Marsh, 2017). In fact, the semiotic approach could help other disciplines in the realm of political communication studies by revealing the mechanisms that govern the populist anti-system narrative, as well as its efficacy. As we shall see in this paper, the body is a central component of Bolsonaro's discursive machinery, through which his anti-system populism gains substance.

CORPUS AND THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The data for this study include images from Jair Bolsonaro's Instagram profile which, until July 2020, had approximately 17 million followers and 3 980 publications. According to Bites (2019), Bolsonaro is in fourth place among the twelve most influential world leaders in social media. Bites also shows that, since January 1st, 2019, Bolsonaro is the president who has published the most and, although he has fewer followers than Trump, he managed to achieve twice the interactions compared to the former president of the United States.

We selected a series of posts from July 22nd, 2018 to June 22nd, 2020. The start date was chosen for being the day of the officialization of Bolsonaro's candidacy for the presidency, while the end date marks the entrance to the third semester of his mandate. This choice allows us to look at how the Brazilian president represented his body in different moments of his political career, verifying the recurrence of particular semantic, figurative and plastic distinctive traits –i.e., *isotopies*, in discursive semiotic terms (Greimas & Courtés, 1979/1990, pp. 229-232)–.

During these two years, Bolsonaro posted 2 589 images. From this number, 1 095 make up full or partial portraits of Bolsonaro, thus constituting the final corpus of this research. For this paper, we have elaborated four emblematic photomontages, one for each bodily regime (the military body, the buffoonish body, the institutional body, the popular body). The criteria for the selection of the images responds to that of semiotic representativeness, since they are archetypal of all the photographs that refer to each of the identified bodily regimes.

As we previously argued, our analysis is based on the theoretical-methodological framework of Greimasian and Post-Greimasian discursive semiotics, in particular figurative semiotics and plastic semiotics (Floch, 1995; Greimas, 1984/1994; Oliveira, 2004), as well as on Landowski's sociosemiotics (2004/2015, 2005/2009). Following these guidelines, we begin our analytical journey by identifying the figurative and plastic isotopies in the corpus. According to Greimas (1984/1994), the elements of the natural world that have a valid name and meaning in a given sociocultural universe are understood as

figures. Examples of figures of the human body are, for instance, the feet, the hands, the belly, although so is a shirt, a tie, a sandal, and so on. Nevertheless, we understand as *plastic formants* the *topological* (peripheral/central, high/low, front/back, right/left, etc.); *chromatic* (black/white, light/dark, saturated/unsaturated, etc.); *eidetic* (straight/curved, round/square, thick/thin, etc.); and *material* (solid/liquid, rough/smooth, wet/dry, etc.) dimensions of images (Floch, 1995; Greimas, 1984/1994; Oliveira, 2004).

As proposed by Greimas (1984/1994; Greimas & Courtés, 1979/1990, pp. 229-232), a plastic isotopy (such as the recurrence of the “red” color) usually express and corroborates a specific thematic isotopy (the “romantic love”). In the case of Bolsonaro's bodily regimes, for example, the plastic isotopy of *rigidity*, typical of the military body, corroborates the value of discipline, while the *sinuosity* of the buffoonish body manifests the *irreverence* and *non-conformity* of the president.

In order to understand how Bolsonaro's portraits shape his political communicational style, we also build upon Landowski's model of *regimes of meaning and interaction* (Landowski, 2005/2009) which includes: 1) *programming*, characterized by the logic of regularity, routine, discipline and predictability; 2) *manipulation*, based on a strategic- intentionality; 3) *adjustment*, in which interaction occurs through “aesthesis”,⁴ that is, through the sensible and perceptive dimension of intersubjective interaction; 4) *accident*, characterized by the irruption of unpredictability, that is, by the rupture of all socially and culturally rooted codes, etiquette and meanings. As Landowski (2005/2009) suggests, such regimes constantly overlap each other, thus creating complex communicational dynamics, which combine the

⁴ The concept of *aesthesis*, which stands in ancient Greek for sensibility and perception, was introduced in the field of discursive semiotics by Greimas (1987) to tackle the role of the senses, as well as polisensoriality and synaesthesia, in the construction of meaning. A theory of aesthesis in social semiotics has been later developed by Landowski (2005/2009), who has also explored the implications of the aesthetic dimension in contemporary populist discourse (Landowski, 2020).

sensible and the intelligible, the programmed and the accidental, as occurs in the buffoonish body.

Along with this, we rely on the four political regimes of presence proposed by Landowski in *Présences de l'autre* (1997/2007): 1) the *man of action*, a politician marked by a supposed capacity of practical resolution; 2) the *mediating hero*, who leaves the heights of politics behind to approach the public, thus constructing, cognitively and affectively, the idea of a collective subject; 3) the *vedette*, characterized by a glamorous and cosmological style; 4) the *buffoon*, a true “anti-star” of politics, who –like a clown– mocks the “system” and the “institutional establishment” with his eccentric gestures.

On the basis of such theoretical-methodological framework, we identify, as we anticipated in the introduction, four bodily regimes that characterizes Bolsonaro’s Instagram portraits: 1) the military body, 2) the buffoonish body, 3) the institutional body and 4) the popular body. Each regime corresponds to a specific body posture, or rather a *hexis*, Bourdieu’s concept taken up by Landowski in *Passions sans nom* (2004). Bourdieu (1972/2000, pp. 285-286) describes the hexis as a disposition of the body that embodies socially and culturally consolidated values and habits. Instead, Landowski (2004, p. 192) defines it as “a way of being” and “being in the world”, through which a certain system of values is manifested via body and physical presence.

Through the methodological apparatus of figurative semiotics and plastic semiotics, we tackle the distinctive features of each of the four aforementioned bodily regimes: 1) the military body, characterized by plastic formants such as linearity, rigidity and inflexibility, refers to a type of firm, severe and authoritarian political personality; 2) the buffoonish body, marked by curves, oscillations and deformations, breaks the gestural and moral codes of traditional politics; 3) the institutional body, with its imposed gestures and formal attitudes, corroborates the ethical and aesthetic imagination of traditional power representatives; 4) the popular body, defined by relaxed postures or, on other occasions, by pain, portrays Bolsonaro as a true “common man” who, just like everyone else in Brazil, goes to the beach, relaxes on the sofa, drinks coffee, suffers from migraines and the ailments of age or constantly deals with the mundane tasks of everyday life.

Our analysis shows that each bodily regime corresponds to a specific regime of interaction and meaning: the military body corresponds to the *programming regime*; the buffoonish body to the *accident regime*, the institutional body to the *manipulation regime*, and the popular body to the *adjustment regime*. However, the popular body also presents features of the *manipulation regime*, given that sensibility is used, here, as a manipulative strategy through which Bolsonaro reinforces his populist narrative (Landowski, 2020).

The following table shows the incidents related to each bodily regime framed in our study period. It should be noted that there are 115 images that do not respond to any of the indicated regimes and seem to point towards other possible categorizations, among which the *mystical-religious body* stands out, whose features seem to have an affinity with a certain Catholic-evangelist iconography and refer to the figure of the Messiah. However, its statistical impact is low. In the period considered in this study, less than ten images correspond to this typology. Thus –and in accordance with our methodological option, based on the elaboration of a semiotic-elliptical square that takes into account the most relevant quantitative and qualitative occurrences of Bolsonaro's body– we preferred, for now, not to consider it. In any case, the topic could be approached in future research, also considering that in 2020 and 2021 the religious dimension of Bolsonaro's speech gained momentum both on Instagram and on other digital platforms (Demuru, 2021).

TABLE 1
BODILY REGIMES

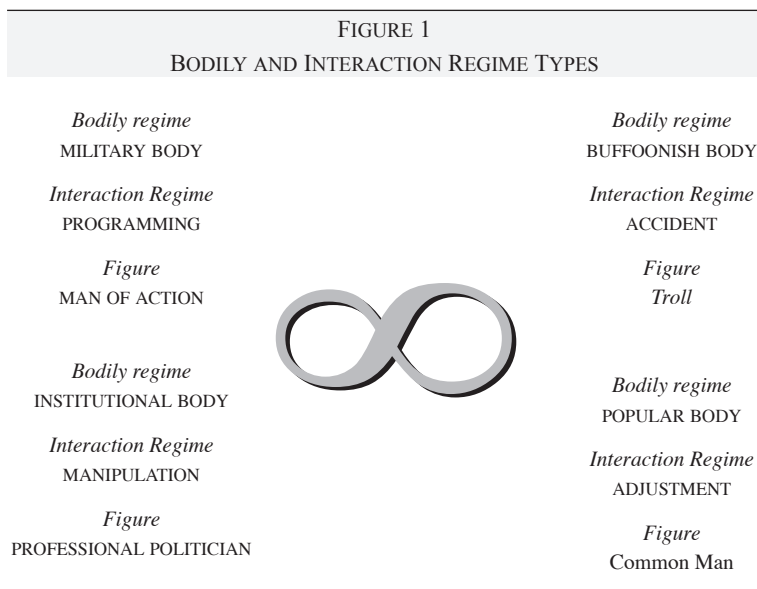
Bodily Regime	Number of Posts
Military Body	292
Buffoonish Body	212
Institutional Body	291
Popular Body	185
Others	115
Total	1 095

Source: The authors.

However, we could not draw an exact correspondence between the four bodily regimes through which Bolsonaro's body is represented on Instagram and the regimes of presences proposed by Landowski (1997/2007). In fact, only in the case of the military body there is an explicit link between such a specific bodily regime and the regime of presence of the man of action. Despite the fact that Landowski uses this expression to refer to the so-called technocrats, Bolsonaro's military hexis clearly refers to the values of *firmness*, *impassivity* and *performativeness*, typical of men of action and their programmed politics.

Therefore, given the impossibility of an exact match, we set about proposing new categories that could be systematized and associated with Landowski's typologies. Thus, we assign to the buffoonish body, founded on the accident regime, the figure of the *troll*, the one who starts flame wars on social media, seeking to provoke emotional responses (Leone, 2020). Conversely, we associate the institutional body to the figure of the *professional politician*, and to the popular body to the figure of the *common man*. Once the categories are outlined, they can be arranged along the axes of the semiotic square of the Greimasian theory (Greimas & Courtés, 1979/1990, pp. 96-99).

FIGURE 1
BODILY AND INTERACTION REGIME TYPES



Source: The authors.

FIGURE 2
MILITARY BODY PHOTOMONTAGE



Source: The authors based on Bolsonaro's official Instagram account.

According to the logic of this model, we will have a first opposition between the military body and the buffoonish body, defined as contrary terms, and a second opposition between the institutional body and the popular body (subcontrary terms), which respectively represent the negation of the buffoonish body and the military body (Figure 1).

That being said, we will show in the next pages the overlapping between Bolsonaro's bodily regimes, Landowski's regimes of interaction and meaning and the political figures presented above. Our purpose is to reveal the semiotic mechanisms through which the visual representation of his body and gestures builds and reinforces Bolsonaro's non-political and anti-political discourse.

THE MILITARY BODY

The military body occupies a prominent place among the images posted on Bolsonaro's Instagram profile, being defined by the reiteration of plastic-figurative isotopies (Floch, 1995; Greimas, 1984/1994) that evidence his military background.

The rites, clothing, settings and stereotyped gestures of the military environment emerge as central elements of each of the images shown in Figure 2. In some cases, the reference to military figurativeness is explicit, as in image i, in which a soldier with an unfocused silhouette, in the foreground, seems to greet Bolsonaro, who appears in the background. In the same image, to the side, three soldiers in profile, wearing kepi trace a straight path between the president and the military authority. The chromaticism (Greimas, 1984/1994; Oliveira, 2004), marked by the presence of whites and blues, confers solidity and solemnity to the occasion. In parallel, the topological arrangement of the images is characterized by the symmetry between the front and bottom, and between the left side and the right side (Floch, 1995; Oliveira, 2004). Such a disposition is corroborated by the plastic qualities of Bolsonaro's hexis. With his erect posture, arms extended parallel to the hips, and legs in a similar position, Bolsonaro's body is marked by tension, linearity and rigidity, in the neck as well as in the shoulders, arms and legs. Along with this, the closed mouth and slightly furrowed eyebrows give the silhouette a serious face. The outfit is a tight-fitting black suit that highlights his height and a certain thinness. Additionally, the blue tie gives a slight chromatic counterpoint, corroborating the president's apparent seriousness and sobriety. The military attitude became explicit also thanks to the fulfillment of three military positions known as *salute* (see images f, l, u), *attention* (see images i, r, q, v) and *parade rest* (see image j).

In another photograph (image p), the perspective that frames Bolsonaro changes. This time the president's position, who ranked as captain, occupies the center of a corridor made up of four soldiers on each side. In the background, and exactly behind him, over his head, waves the Brazilian national flag.

In this regard, it should be noted that the chromatic formants that make up the spectrum of the flag of the Federative Republic of Brazil (green, yellow, white and blue) stand out in all the images analyzed: in Bolsonaro's ties, in military uniforms, and so on. However, the correspondence between the emblem and the plastic arrangement of the images highlighted above does not only refer to the chromatic but

also to the eidetic dimension. In fact, the same lines that characterized the rectangle of the national symbol also appear in Bolsonaro's bodily hexis. The restrained body of the president, with his arms outstretched, creates the image of a single solid block, while the hand raised on the head as a sign of command, forms a diagonal line. In other words, the geometry of straight lines is printed both on the flag and on his body (see image f, l, u). Likewise in the previous images, a plastic-figurative correspondence is observed between Bolsonaro's body and the background against which he stands out: the former reinforces the latter and vice versa.

Thereupon, we can say that the military body refers, on the one hand, to the programming regime (Landowski, 2005/2009) and, on the other, to the regime of presence of the man of action (Landowski, 1997/2007); this means a figure who embodies, in his own pose, the values of discipline, firmness, intransigence, pragmatism, doing and order. The continuous reference to the Brazilian flag has a specific meaning in this particular context. The motto inscribed on the flag (*Ordem e Progresso* [Order and Progress]) finds an immediate translation in Bolsonaro's hexis. The position –or rather the (com)position– of the president produces a double meaning effect. His orderly, disciplined and alert body, ready to act, shows that military programming is not only, as Landowski indicates (2005/2009), an existential style of Bolsonaro as a person, but also a non-political way of doing politics. A specific way –among others that we highlight here– of denying traditional politics.

THE BUFFOONISH BODY

Although the military body is governed by the logic of regularity, the buffoonish body is characterized by a radical breach of the traditional politics protocols. By assuming this corporeal-existential stance, Bolsonaro shows himself –according to the typology proposed by Landowski– as a true buffoon of politics, that is, as someone who does not even recognize “the label of politics, nor the public debate conventions if it is not to violate them in a calculated way” (1997/2007, p. 229).

FIGURE 3
 BUFFONISH BODY PHOTOMONTAGE



Source: The authors based on Bolsonaro's official Instagram account.

More specifically, a buffoon is someone who:

... applies his ingenuity to downplaying the political game as a whole, caricaturing it according to an *aesthetic* of bad taste, and on the level of *aesthesia*, influencing their own disgust, as far as possible, with the systematic adoption of a voluntarily shocking bodily *hexis*... [the buffoon] relies, very indiscreetly and sometimes even obscenely, on the strategy of authenticity, as opposed to the alleged factuality of "political politics" (Landowski, 1997/2007, pp. 230-231).

This is what happens in the images of Figure 3. The erect posture and disciplined countenance of the military body regime now give rise to a sinuous body, characterized by curves, diagonals, untimely movements, irreverent, mocking and provocative poses and gestures, such as the *Iberian slap* (image s), the *gun* (image k), the *yawn* (image t) or the explicitly ironic heart (image m).

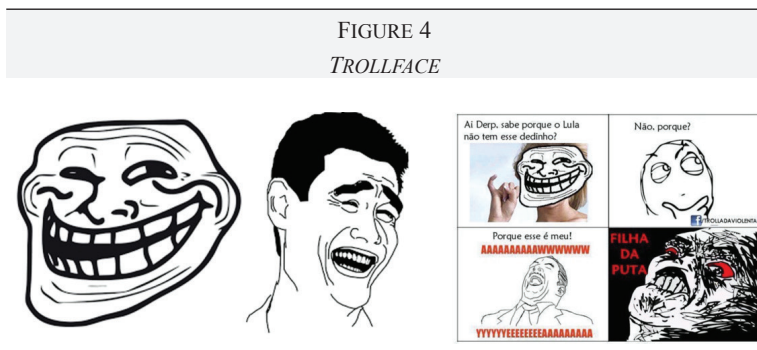
The full and medium full shots, which highlight the totality and verticality of his figure, are left behind for medium shots and close-ups, which highlight the president's torso and face. The straight lines and angles that marked his clothing, his gestures, and the hexis of the military body give way to flexible and sinuous lines. Here, the meanings of stability, rigidity and predictability distinguished in the man of action are lost. The Bolsonaro-buffoon is, like his body, unpredictable, hasty, chaotic, untimely, profaning, i.e., a man who, far from acting or doing, "undoes", "irrupts", and "corrupts". A true "anti-subject", in Greimas' terms (Greimas & Courtés, 1979/1990, p. 395), whose main strategy is summarized in hindering the plans of the other.

For this reason, it could be said that the buffoonish body is founded on the *accident regime*, characterized, according to Landowski (2005/2009), by the unpredictability and the sudden dissolution of any pre-established program and order. Indeed, this peculiar hexis confers on Bolsonaro the status of an "actant-joker", marked by a "catastrophic role par excellence" (Landowski, 2005/2009, p. 80). Nonetheless, it should be noted that many times we are faced with *calculated* accidents (Landowski, 2005/2009), actions designed to produce a sense of spontaneity and untimeliness effect. The recurrence of such events, not only in the visual discourse, but also in the entirety of his political communication (Sedda & Demuru, 2018), is a reliable proof that, for Bolsonaro, the accident is truly an action plan. From this perspective, the Brazilian president can be considered –paraphrasing da Empoli (2019)– a true "chaos engineer", an anti-system digital populist for whom confusion and disorder constitute a real program, a project and a strategic design.

That said, it should be observed that Bolsonaro's accidental and desecrated nature is manifested not only through his body, but also through his facial expressions and, in particular, his smile and laugh. It is, at times, a disjointed, caricatured, histrionic, picaresque laugh, as in images a, b and c, one that openly denies the formality required by traditional politics. At other times, we perceive a more delicate, restrained smile; however, this does not keep Bolsonaro's face from presenting shades of derision and sarcasm (images d, f, h, i, k).

Such modulations refer, by a process of intertextual stylization, to a figure of great popularity in social media: *the troll* and, more

specifically, the *trollface*, whose open, disjointed and mocking smile recalls, plastic and figuratively, that of Bolsonaro (Figure 4).



Source: Museu de Memes (2015).

The trollface was created in 2008 and quickly became one of the most popular memes on the Internet. Over the years, several versions that explored other physiognomies emerged, among which is the *Asian trollface* (middle image in Figure 4). As Leone (2020) points out, the role of the troll in social media is essentially provocative. It is inserted into the conversation of its victims with the aim of destabilizing and irritating them. From this point of view, we can argue that the focus of his actions is passionate by nature. His provocations seek to “increase the emotional tone of the interlocutor’s response, in terms of indignation, anger and even fury” (Leone, 2020, p. 148).

By breaking into the traditional politics spaces, Bolsonaro’s laughter, smile and gestures produce among his followers and adversaries an effect of meaning similar to that of the troll and the trollface: they provoke, outrage, enrage, emptying the meaning of the public debate. Issues and values lose relevance. Pure feeling is imposed. We are faced here with the *aesthetic* dimension of political communication (Fontanille, 2011; Landowski, 2005/2009), typical of contemporary digital populism (Landowski, 2019; Sedda & Demuru, 2018) and also fundamental –as we shall see– in the popular body, whose intensity is, however, less elevated than that of the buffoonish body. The smile accompanying the gesture of the gun, in images k and o, and even in

the Iberian slap of image r, are significative examples of this bodily hexis. All of them can be considered true epitomes of the irreverent and politically incorrect attitude of the troll. Through these gestures and this posture, Bolsonaro shows himself as an allegedly authentic individual, alien to the system that he constantly criticizes, an open and truly anti-political man.

Therefore, we find in the figure of the troll –more than in that of the buffoon– the thematic role (Greimas & Courtés, 1979/1990, p. 404) best suited to summarize the regime of buffoonish corporality. It is not by chance that Bolsonaro's mocking laugh became another version of the trollface, as shown in Bolsonaro's videos found on YouTube with the hashtag *risada opressora* [oppressive laugh].⁵

THE INSTITUTIONAL BODY

The explicit rigidity of the military body and the abrupt movements of the buffoonish body give rise, more sporadically, to a more formal, placid and accommodating hexis: one that we will call the institutional body, which can be traced back to the figure of the professional politician. The images highlighted in Figure 5 significantly condense this third regime.

Let us take, for example, Bolsonaro's pose in image d, where he appears next to Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, during an official visit to the Asian country. Although showing a certain linearity and rigidity, his hexis cannot be reduced to that of the military body. The meaning effect of such a bodily regime is different due to the position of the president within the plastic-figurative background of the photograph. Between the symmetry of the gardens, the geometric floors and the hexis of the soldiers, the figure of a head of state who fulfills his international meeting agenda also stands out. Here, Bolsonaro has a diplomatic mediator and a State representative posture –as shown in the image e– which portrays him next to Prince Charles of England. The handshake between the two of them symbolizes etiquette, courtesy and formal staging for a meeting of this kind. In the description of the image, we see how this isotopy echoes and confirms:

⁵ See Sr. Mito Bolsonaro (2018).

FIGURE 5
INSTITUTIONAL BODY PHOTOMONTAGE



Source: The authors based on Bolsonaro's official Instagram account.

Muito educado e respeitador, conversamos sobre vários assuntos [Very polite and respectful, we talked about various topics].

In image f, Bolsonaro and Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, talk while seated. Bolsonaro leans his body forward and watches Netanyahu attentively. His formal and, at the same time, relaxed pose builds a meaning effect of dialogue and agreement between the two nations. The translucent vase with white lilies and roses, the flags of Brazil and Israel placed between both leaders, corroborate figuratively and symbolically this semantic value. Unlike the position of the troll, which harasses the interlocutors, we have, now, a restrained body marked by the economy of gestures and expressions. In image j, the glasses, which are rarely used in public, show serenity and sobriety, also reiterated by the chromatic arrangement of the image, dominated by a gray background. Finally, Bolsonaro's silhouette occupies the foreground of the shot. His body now appears to have composure and decorum.

It should be noted that many of the images that refer to the regime of the institutional body are photographs of public statements and interviews, which highlight the president's apparent openness to

dialogue (see images l, j, k m). The voice here acquires relevance, helping to link Bolsonaro's figure to that of the professional politician, i.e. a man whose physical and moral posture seems to be appropriate for the position he occupies: President of the Federative Republic of Brazil.

That said, we can affirm that the regime of interaction and meaning on which the institutional body relies is that of manipulation. What is at stake here is a predominantly cognitive attempt at persuasion. Whereas in the buffoonish body –and as we shall see below in the popular body– aesthesia occupies a preponderant place, a persuasive intention of a markedly intelligible character dominates in the institutional body. Building a bridge between Landowski's model and Geninasca's research on the typologies of "meaning grasp" (Geninasca, 1997), it could be stated that the images of the institutional body provide a "molar grasp" of Bolsonaro's body, i.e., a logical-inferential reading of his hexis that redirects the current president of Brazil to socially settled schemes and figurative types (p. 75), as, in this case, the "professional politician type".

In short, through these images, Bolsonaro tries to convince his followers that he is capable of fulfilling the institutional role of President of the Brazilian Republic. Of course, only when it is necessary and required. Actually, this is the only regime that explicitly references the traditional political figurativeness, since the other three are framed in non-politics (military body and popular body) and anti-politics (buffoonish body). A fact that reinforces the impression that, by assuming the position of a professional politician, Bolsonaro is acting to some extent. His main strategy is to show his apparent non-belonging to the political class, as it more explicitly occurs in the case of the popular body.

THE POPULAR BODY

The fourth and last bodily regime identified in our research is the popular body, which manifests the figure of the common man. As the military body, this bodily regime also shows Bolsonaro's "non politicality", i.e. his distance from professional politics.

FIGURE 6
POPULAR BODY PHOTOMONTAGE



Source: The authors based on Bolsonaro's official Instagram account.

In many of the images that make up this typology (see Figure 6), Bolsonaro opens the doors of his residence and reveals his private life. It is a recurring strategy in the field of contemporary political communication (Bracciale & Martella, 2017). Bolsonaro seems to be one of the main examples of it (Fisher & Vaz, 2020).

Bolsonaro's position is relaxed. The president appears reclined on the sofa with a smartphone in his hand (image a) or sitting near a table while watching television (image b). In some of the images he is wearing soccer jerseys, shorts and sandals, and in other images he shows some bare skin.

In image d, Bolsonaro is portrayed while talking to his ministers at an official government meeting. The president is wearing the uniform of the *Sociedade Esportiva Palmeiras*, a soccer club in the city of São Paulo of which he is a fan. The distended shoulders accompany the movement of the arms, resting delicately on the table. In image f, posted in February 2019, Bolsonaro talks with Major Vitor Hugo, the former leader of the official government bench in the Chamber of Deputies.

He is wearing sweatpants, a polo shirt, and sandals. His look explicitly contrasts with that of his guest. One more in line with the dress code of politics, while the other wearing casual clothes. Thus, a figurative and semantic confusion is consolidated between the *private house* and the *presidential palace*. Through these images, Bolsonaro seems to remind his followers that there is no difference or distance between the two spaces. In both pictures, he continues to be the same person: someone supposedly simple, authentic, and spontaneous, an ordinary person.

It is enough to see the image posted on October 19th, 2019 (Figure 7), to realize that the popular body uses simplicity and authenticity to inscribe, imitate and reinforce the stereotypical imaginary of the Brazilian common man.

FIGURE 7
BOLSONARO'S BREAKFAST



Source: Official Instagram profile.

Sitting near a table with the remains of what was his breakfast, Bolsonaro is portrayed again wearing the Palmeiras shirt and a pair of shorts. His posture is relaxed and at the same time attentive. Like

his clothes, the objects and food are emblematic expressions of popular culture and Brazilian daily life: coffee, the *copo americano* [the glass cup] (Vila Nova, 2020), Minas Gerais cheese, French rolls, condensed milk (Fisher & Vaz, 2020). Thus, a thematic-figurative isotopy between the body and the setting is built, corroborating the image of the common man. Nonetheless, there is a counterpoint, which refers to the rigidity of the man of action: the knife stuck vertically in the cheese, which reminds, at the same time, that the president of Brazil is still a pragmatic, vigorous and rigorous “non-politician”.

As a common Brazilian man, Bolsonaro not only relaxes and rests, but also falls ill, suffers, and struggles with life’s adversities. This is what the photographs of his hospital admissions show. On several occasions the images show him partially naked, exhibiting marks of wounds and bruises. In image k, Bolsonaro is framed vertically. His bare chest displaying a nasogastric tube, an oxygen catheter, and electrodes that monitor his heart rate. His expression is one of anguish and discomfort. In another picture (see image l), the president is walking down the hospital corridor leaning on the shoulders of his son Carlos. They both look down at the ground, thus emphasizing the effort that he requires to walk with the medical implements.

Here, Bolsonaro’s body loses the vigor of the military hexis, showing his fragility, finitude and resilience. The wrinkles, spots and blemishes on his skin (image n) reinforce this particular meaning effect. However, it should be noted that the image is only one of the many examples of Bolsonaro’s intimate and daily life, figurativized, in this case, by the use of a razor. Shaving becomes, in this context, an emblematic gesture through which the president expresses his apparent normality, as well as when he receives his guests in homely clothes.

The prevalence of curves and arches, as well as the absence of straight and vertical lines, typical of the military body and, to a lesser extent, the institutional body are perceived in regard to the plastic-figurative arrangement of those “popular” portraits. Even the deformed movements and the reactivity of the buffoonish body now give rise to wavy postures and more delicate gestures. As in the buffoonish body, in the popular body regime, sensibility plays a fundamental role. Nonetheless, we are not looking for the “aesthetic shock” that

characterized the troll's performance, but rather the exploration of a more intimate, immediate and lasting emotional bond with the common people in social media. The effectiveness of of Bolsonaro's popular body lies exactly in the manifestation of this *shared feeling*, in the public exhibition of his skin and flesh (Anzieu, 1985; Fontanille, 2011). A reciprocal mirrored reflection process, of a sensible nature, emerges between Bolsonaro and his followers. Following Geninasca (1997), it could be said that the "meaning grasp" fostered by the popular body is impressive and analogical: its understanding is, above all, epidermal and mimetic. Thus, a visual parallel is consolidated between Bolsonaro's hexis and the hexis of the average Brazilian man, as one of the comments from a follower that appears in image i seems to show: *Presidente povão, há quanto tempo eu não via isso, só orgulho* [A President of the people, I haven't seen that in a long time, I'm proud].

Building upon Landowski's model, it could be argued that the popular body is founded on the adjustment regime, that is, on an interactive dynamic whose essence lies in the ability *to know how to feel* the other, or rather, in its populist-demagogic use. In this case, as Landowski (2020, pp. 25-26) warns, "the exploration of sensibility can be put at the service of manipulation" (p. 19). What emerges, here, is a manipulation marked by a process of "aesthetic contagion", in which the intelligible and the sensibility overlap each other. It is an hybrid regime of interaction and meaning, through which the leader builds an affective bond that becomes the basis of belief and political consensus, in which "sensed reasons prevail rather than those thought or weighted... based on feelings of immediate affinity that refer to a level of relevance other than the purely cognitive level" (Landowski, 2020, p. 19).

CONCLUSIONS

Recent studies in sociology, communication and political science have pointed out the anti-political and anti-establishment character of current digital populism (Da Empoli, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2018; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Vines & Marsh, 2017, among others). Over the last decade, leaders such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Matteo Salvini have consolidated themselves as supposedly simple, authentic and

spontaneous individuals, distant from the stereotype of the “traditional politician”. Some authors have pointed out that such a meaning effect is built through verbal language (Viennot, 2019), while others outlined the role of visual language in corroborating the alleged authenticity of populist leaders (Fisher & Vaz, 2020; Possenti, 2019).

In this article, we have sought to show how body language is another relevant aspect of this particular discursive strategy. The results indicate that, a year and a half after his election, Bolsonaro continues to stress, through his bodily hexis, a markedly non-political and/or anti-political profile. In fact, the portraits corresponding to the institutional body, which refers to the figure of the professional politician, barely involve a quarter of the analyzed images (291 photographs out of 1 095, equivalent to 26% of the total). The remaining three-quarters are all regimes through which Bolsonaro reaffirms his non-politicality (as explained in the military body and the popular body) and/or anti-politicality (the buffoonish body).

That said, we should point out that the construction of non-politicality and anti-politicality relies on an impressive-aesthetic logic, as we observed in the analysis of the buffoonish body and the popular body (Geninasca, 1997; Landowski, 2005/2009). The adherence to the leader’s discourse is based, in this case, on a principle of affective order, which constitutes the ground for the growth of non-political and anti-political beliefs.

Finally, this work represents an effort to demonstrate the contribution of semiotics in the field of communication sciences, and in particular of the political communication research. Indeed, the discursive semiotic approach reveals how political values such as the ones analyzed in this paper emerge and consolidate, as well how they are perceived by the people. Furthermore, we believe that the model constructed here can be applied not only in the analysis of the visual discourse of a leader like Bolsonaro, but also in comparative research on the bodily hexis and communication styles of other contemporary populists, such as Matteo Salvini, Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán, who also seem to go back and forth between the regimes of the common man, the man of military action and the buffoon (Demuru & Sedda, 2020).

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