

## Discourse, Argumentation and Scenography in “Iconotexts” / *Discurso, argumentação e cenografia em “iconotextos”*

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### ABSTRACT

This article, in line with the enunciative trend of discursive studies, makes use of the trichotomic notion of enunciation scenes, emphasizing scenography (MAINGUENEAU, 1998; 2006; 2008; 2013) in order to read a set of three “iconotexts,”<sup>1</sup> circulating on billboards in 2009 in the city of Cuiabá. Exhibited on the main avenues of Cuiabá, the “iconotexts” alluded to Dante de Oliveira’s political legacy. Performing a scenographic analysis, based on the examination of the verbal and iconic materiality of the texts, this study identifies an overlapping of enunciators – the Dante de Oliveira Institute, the politician Dante de Oliveira, and the PSDB, the latter being chromatically symbolized. Besides the enunciators, the scenographic analysis of the three iconotexts also indicates the topography and the chronography activated in the narrative of the discursive event Dante de Oliveira. The study shows the epistemological relevance of placing scenography at the center of the analysis of political communication.

KEYWORDS: Discursive studies; Political communication; Enunciation scenes; Scenography

### RESUMO

*Este artigo, alinhado com a tendência enunciativa dos estudos discursivos, recorre à noção tricotômica de cenas de enunciação, com ênfase na cenografia (MAINGUENEAU, 1998; 2006; 2008; 2013), para ler um conjunto de três “iconotextos”, dados a circular no suporte outdoors em 2009, na cidade de Cuiabá. Expostos nas principais avenidas cuiabanas, os “iconotextos” evocam o legado político de Dante de Oliveira. Realizando uma análise cenográfica, baseada no exame da materialidade verbal e icônica dos textos, o estudo identifica uma sobreposição de enunciadores – o Instituto Dante de Oliveira, o político Dante de Oliveira e o PSDB, esse último simbolizado cromaticamente. Além dos enunciadores, o exame cenográfico dos três iconotextos indicia também a topografia e a cronografia ativadas na narrativa do acontecimento discursivo Dante de Oliveira. O estudo mostra, ainda, a pertinência e a produtividade epistemológica de se colocar a cenografia como ferramenta discursiva que busca dar conta de aspectos importantes da análise da comunicação política.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Estudos discursivos; Comunicação política; Cenas de enunciação; Cenografia*

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<sup>1</sup> We have borrowed this expression from Maingueneau (2013a). In this text we do not make any theoretical reflection about this concept. We share with Maingueneau the idea that “iconotexts” associate text and image.

[The] "discursive materialism" relies on the so-called "linguistic turn" in philosophy which emphasizes how language is not a neutral medium of designation, but a practice embedded in a life world: We do things with it, accomplish specific acts... Is it not time to turn this cliché around: Who is it that, today, claims that language is a neutral medium of designation? So, perhaps, one should emphasize how language is not a mere moment of the life world, a practice within it: The time miracle of language is that it can *also* serve as a neutral medium which just designates a conceptual/ideal content. In other words, the true task is not to locate language as a neutral medium within a life-world practice, but to show how, within this life world, a neutral medium of designation can nonetheless emerge.

*Slavoj Zizek*

## **First Words**

In line with the enunciative trend of discursive studies, we mobilize the notion of enunciation scene, such as thought by Maingueneau (1998; 2006; 2008; 2013), to read a set of three “iconotexts” circulated on billboards in 2009, in the city of Cuiabá. In relation to the complex notion of scenes of enunciation (encompassing scene, generic scene and scenography), we have resorted particularly to scenography for our reading of the *corpus*. Displayed on the main avenues of Cuiabá, the “iconotexts” alluded to the political legacy of the former state and federal Congressman, former mayor of Cuiabá, former Minister of the Agrarian Reform and former governor of Mato Grosso, Dante Martins de Oliveira. The billboards were sponsored by the Dante de Oliveira Institute on the occasion of his third death anniversary, which occurred on July 6, 2006. We then present photographs of the three “iconotexts”:

The first text was displayed on Mato Grosso avenue and shows, in the foreground, a half body photograph, featuring Dante de Oliveira’s smiling face; in the background, on the upper part of the billboard, the slogan: “Brazil, a democratic country;” below, in the center, the logo of the “Diretas Já” Campaign (“Direct Elections Now”); on the left, the picture of the Brazilian flag draped over a crowd, an image probably alluding to one of the many demonstrations for the “Diretas Já” movement in 1984; below this photograph, another slogan, this time, featuring in uppercase “Dante made a difference” and, lastly, at the bottom, a stamp referring to the three years of Dante’s death, plus the slogan “DANTE forever.” In the left bottom corner, the name of the Dante de Oliveira Institute, as a type of signature text.



**Fig. 1:** Billboard displayed on Mato Grosso Avenue

The second, displayed on Fernando Correa Avenue, differs from the first in relation to the slogan – “Mato Grosso, a champion in human development” – and also in relation to the photographs, which show the former mayor, born in Cuiabá, with a group of Indigenous people in the Indigenous Tertiary Education from Mato Grosso State University – UNEMAT, in an inauguration ceremony of the regional hospital in the interior of the state, and in an event, talking to professionals from the technical training project Arara Azul (Blue Macaw).



**Fig. 2:** Billboard displayed on Fernando Correa Avenue

The third one, displayed on the CPA avenue, next to Bandeiras Square, differs from the first ones in relation to the slogan – “Mato Grosso, bi-champion of economic development” – and also in relation to the photographs, which refer to a set of

infrastructure buildings launched during his eight years as the governor of Mato Grosso: Terminal da Ferronorte in Alto Araguaia; Sérgio Motta Bridge connecting Cuiabá to Várzea Grande in the neighboring region of Praieiro; the asphalt of the state roads and the construction of bridges in country roads. The background in all texts is blue, white, and orange.



**Fig. 3:** Billboard displayed on CPA Avenue

The texts that we analyzed belong to what the communicologists define as political communication and as such are typically argumentative, since they aim at leading the readers/voters to vote for candidates or for one of the political parties. Referring to political communication, Fernandes says:

Traditionally, political communication is understood as the system composed of three elements: In the center the media and, in a two-way relationship with them, the citizens and the political organizations (McNair, 2003, p.6). In a logic of informative marketing (Enríquez, 2001) all the parties seek to send and receive informative messages through which they position themselves before the external element. In the political arena, these informative exchanges are full of intentionality, their content and purpose are about politics (Denton and Woodward, 1990 *apud* McNair, 2003, p.4) and aim to persuade the interlocutor. Thus, what characterizes communication is precisely this intentionality, including the communication of the political agents to voters, and vice-versa, and all the communication about both by the media. The nerve center of this model is in the media, as we said, and all the activities of communication developed are geared to result in the generation of positive effects there. This model is also characterized by an imbalance in so far as it suggests that persuasion occurs essentially from the political agents and for the remaining two elements, in a logic of asymmetric information diffusion. This model considers even the media as a political actor since as an actor “not only do the media report politics, they are a crucial part of the

environment in which politics is pursued (...) the media are active in defining political 'reality' (McNair, 2003, p.74)" (2010, p.123).

We believe, however, that, besides its persuasive character, through which a speaker tries to convince his addressees of the pertinence and relevance of its proposition and, mainly, given the enunciative specificities of the political communication, this language practice should be thought of as a discursive genre which participates in a particular scene of enunciation.

## 1 A Little Theory

The discourse genre is, on the one hand, a fruitful analytical category in the field of discourse analysis and, on the other, a pedagogical instrument which is fundamental in language teaching, since it relates words to the ideological places which they make possible and which make them possible, showing that language is an inoculated product of historicity.

However, genre alone, disconnected from a reflection that seeks to grasp the aspects of meaning which differentiate one text from the other, is not enough to give access to the meaning of the enunciative activity. Thus, based on Maingueneau (1998), we considered the possibility of combining genre to the scene of enunciation, avoiding notions such as that of the "situation of enunciation," which is of a strictly linguistic order, or of a "situation of communication," which can be used in a purely sociological approach, in which the discursive activity is described, somehow, from the outside. Besides, according to Maingueneau, the term "scene" has the advantage of being able to refer, at the same time, to a *frame* ("the scene represents...") and to a *process* ("across the scene," "a circus scene," as done by Tiririca in his campaign to become a federal Congressman for the state of São Paulo in 2010 elections...). Anyway, it allows highlighting the importance of the work in which some participants of a discourse genre are permanently engaged: *Putting themselves in the scene*. The analysis of the scene of enunciation, proposed by Maingueneau, distinguishes three components: The *encompassing scene*, the *generic scene* and the *scenography*.

The *encompassing scene* corresponds to what is commonly meant by "type of discourse." The political encompassing scene, for example, implies a relationship

between a “citizen,” a candidate and/or a political office-holder, addressing other “citizens” about how he intends to tackle the issues of collective interest: Health, education, security, housing, infrastructure, public transport, social security, etc., conditions which define the statute of the partners who are in a certain pragmatic space – historically defined. The encompassing scene is not enough to specify the verbal activities, since the speaking subjects are not directly confronted with the discursive fields, such as politics, religion, publicity, literature, etc., but with discourse genres that circulate in these spaces, more specifically, with *generic scenes*.

The *generic scenes* determine, particularly, the purposes, the roles of their participants, a suitable place, some form of inscription in temporality (frequency, duration, continuity, valid time of the text), the support (linked to a mode of transport and storage and, thus, of memorization), occasionally a text plan, a certain use of the language, which, in the case of politics, can materialize in a pamphlet, a flyer, a letter of intent, a government program, etc., in sum, more or less stable forms of political communication in our socio-historical and ideological formation.

However, the genre, although viewed from its purposes, the roles of its participants, a suitable place, some form of inscription in temporality, cannot capture the uniqueness of a text, the trace of meaning that differentiates it from other texts. A novel can be enunciated, for example, through the scenography of an intimate diary, of an account, of a chat next to a fireplace, of an exchange of love letters, of a farmer that is reading a novel in which supposedly he will be the very victim of one of the characters of the plot, as Cortázar does in *Continuidade dos Parques* (Continuity of Parks), or even, a character that during the narrative spends all the time asking himself if the woman he loves has betrayed him or not with his best friend, as Machado de Assis does so well in *Dom Casmurro*. To approach this specificity that goes beyond the generic scene, Maingueneau proposed the term *scenography*.

*Scenography* is based on the idea that the enunciator should develop, through his enunciation, the situation from which he intends to enunciate. Every discourse, by its own constitution, claims adherence to its universe by establishing the scenography which legitimates it. Evidently, this scenography is imposed from the beginning, but it is through enunciation that this imposed scenography can be legitimated. The scenography is, in this way, at the same time, what produces the discourse and what is

produced by it; it legitimates an enunciation that, in turn, should legitimate it; it should establish that the scenography from where the discourse comes is precisely the *scenography* necessary to enunciate whatever suits this or that kind of discourse genre.

Scenographies are usually based on speaking scenes already validated in culture: Situations of communication characterized by genres, but also by unique utterances. For instance, the slogan of Barack Obama's campaign: "Yes, we can," in the presidential elections of 2008, was based on the slogan of the *United Farm Workers*: "Si, se puede," already validated in North American society. Recently, in the semi-finals and finals of the Libertadores da América Cup of 2013, this scene of validated speech, (re)written as "Yes, we CAM," was incorporated to the cheering from supporters of the Clube Atlético Mineiro – CAM. In this case, the polyphonic resonance between "can" and "CAM" is produced by the change of an <n> by an <M> and of the lowercase by the uppercase, which are formally minimal changes, but capable of transforming what is the same into Other.<sup>2</sup> *Validated scene* does not mean valued, but "already installed in the universe of knowledge and of values of the public," thus recognizable. In other words, this slogan, since its emergence, was validated in our society as a kind of *word-monument* that can be (re)utilized in situations in which a great difficulty must be overcome.

## **2 Identities and the Spatialization of Language**

### **2.1 Topography and Addressees**

According to Maingueneau, a scenography defines the identity and the relationship between the partners, the place (topography), and the moment of enunciation (chronography). According to the author, "topography is a space from which the enunciator intends to keep the discourse. This space, constructed through its enunciation, allows you to define your place, as well as that occupied by your addressees and competitors in the field" (2013, p.192).

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<sup>2</sup> This Other here does not correspond to the Lacanian theory but to a second discourse which is constituted from the first discourse.

In the case of the “iconotexts” analyzed in this study, the place of enunciation is the political field, a space where multiple positions are reciprocally delimited and generally polemicize one another. Thus, in the “iconotexts,” we can observe that the Dante de Oliveira Institute polemically dialogues with the party coalition that was in power at that time, especially in the State Government: PR, PMDB, PT, PPS, PP. We refer to the dialogue with the parties that headed the State Government, since Wilson Santos, affiliated to the PSDB as Dante de Oliveira was, held the office of Mayor of Cuiabá in 2009.

By evoking the political legacy of Dante de Oliveira, the “iconotexts” construct interdiscursively a dysphoric representation of the parties that headed the State Government. This negative representation can be seen in the slogan: “Dante made the difference.” We observe that this difference is also marked semiotically, because the slogan is placed in relation to the photographs which make up the “iconotext” in a downward position. Thus, the assumption of this slogan suggests that the rulers at the time did nothing to equal the feats of Dante de Oliveira, since Dante’s actions exceeded those of the traditional governor. They go from the fight for redemocratization of the country, with the presentation of the constitutional amendment by the “Diretas Já” in 1984, to the completion of projects that were not restricted to the economic sphere, but were especially aimed to invest in the human development of the state population. Accordingly, if at the time the billboards displayed that there was some mediatic consensus that the rulers were so prodigal in the investment in infrastructure needed to boost agribusiness, especially in the first term of the Blairo Maggi Government, they left something to be desired in relation to human development. Neither were they worried about the redemocratization of Brazil. The three slogans at the top of the “iconotexts” - “Brazil, a democratic country;” “Mato Grosso, a champion in human development” and “Mato Grosso, bi-champion of economic development” – substantiate Dante’s being placed somewhere out of the ordinary among the rulers or the parties that were in government.

It is also worth highlighting that the blue, white and orange background intersemiotically evokes the colors of the PSDB, the party Dante was affiliated with at the time of his death. The semiotic resource to the colors of the PSDB extends, to this party, the out-of-the-ordinary place occupied by Dante. Thus, the colors that



predominate in the “iconotexts” create, for the PSDB, in the interior of Mato Grosso political field, a paratopic place (MAINGUENEAU, 1993), that is, a place which is inscribed in the political field – investment in infrastructure, rewritten in the slogan “Mato Grosso bi-champion of economic development” –, just like the parties that were in power at that time, and, at the same time, out of that field – investment in human development, rewritten in the slogan “Mato Grosso champion in human development.” This paratopic place is reinforced by the slogan: “Brazil, a democratic country.” In other words, the colors produce an identification between Dante de Oliveira and the PSDB in such a way that the political legacy of the first symbolically extends to the second, that is, the colors place the PSDB on scene and project the Mato Grosso politician into the national scenario, as someone fundamental in the process of redemocratization of Brazil.

Although we cannot identify any linguistic explicit sign of their addressees in the “iconotexts,” we can assume that they would be “primarily” the individuals that migrated to Mato Grosso after the end of Dante de Oliveira’s second term, in 2002. It is important to remember that since the 1970s Mato Grosso has been the Brazilian state with the highest migration flow. We believe, therefore, that such billboards also speak to these people, because they undoubtedly work as a vector of social, cultural and political memory – as it will be shown below – which is independent of the migratory flow.

## **2.2 The Properties of the Enunciator: Chromatic?**

The “iconotexts” in question are constructed from a triple enunciative perspective. In the first, we have an interlocutor, the Dante de Oliveira Institute, the discursive subject that is responsible for the enunciation. The responsibility for the enunciation is attributed to it. In the second, memory is evoked, Dante de Oliveira’s political legacy as an enunciator, who, after three years of his death is recollected enunciatively. Although there are no quotes of Dante de Oliveira’s speech on the billboards, half-body photographs of the politician and those in which he appears inaugurating works, in a kind of certificate of attendance, giving authenticity to this enunciative perspective. And, in the last one, an enunciative perspective is created, for it

identifies, through the blue, white and orange colors, the speaker Dante de Oliveira Institute and the enunciator Dante de Oliveira with the enunciator PSDB. This is a chromatic enunciator that, despite its not textually taking responsibility for a single word, is presented as the protagonist of the enunciation, putting itself at the scene. One cannot ignore that in 2009 the first political articulations started, aiming the elections in 2010.

The perspective of the PSDB chromatic enunciator overdetermines previous enunciative perspectives. This happens largely because the colors are also constituted as a modality that expresses truth as well as the reading path which the reader should follow to interpret it. According to Van Leuwen,

[...] modality is a term-concept that refers to semiotic resources used to express the way in which the truths are represented and also how they should be taken. Resources of modality allow that a range of different degrees and types of modalities can be expressed as truths. Language has resources of modality to express the truth of the enunciations in terms of probability, frequency, knowledge, whose valuation of truth in the enunciation can and/or should be subjective or objective (2005, p.199).

This identification brings along the sense that all of Dante de Oliveira's actions, as head of the government of Mato Grosso or in the Parliament in Brasília, were, on the one hand, actions of the PSDB and, on the other, actions that could only be fulfilled because Dante belonged to the PSDB. In other terms, this chromatic enunciator asserts that Dante made the difference, especially because he belonged to the PSDB. We cannot forget to emphasize that for these senses to materialize, it is necessary to silence the fact that when Dante de Oliveira proposed the amendment of the "Diretas Já," in 1984, he was a militant in the Brazilian Democratic Movement – MDB and, when he was elected governor for the first time in 1994, he belonged to the Democratic Labor Party - PDT.

Another aspect that deserves our attention is the physical space in which these "iconotexts" were displayed. As we have mentioned before, these texts were displayed on billboards located on main avenues of the capital of Mato Grosso (Av. do CPA; Av. Mato Grosso; Av. Fernando Correa), arteries on which thousands of people circulate by car, bus or on foot on a daily basis. The "iconotexts," when displayed on the main arteries of Cuiabá, produce a kind of spatialization of language, constituting a territorialized fixed window of sense production, in which subject and sense are

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exposed to the public. As passersby pass these avenues (whether they like it or not), they perform a ritual look, transforming these billboards in a place of memory (NORA, 1993), a look which, although expected to be all-seeing, is a fixed gaze, a circumscribed and bounding territory.

The enunciation “always DANTE,” which incorporates slogans of Dante’s political campaigns and the half-body photograph, emphasizing Dante’s face, attest linguistically and semiotically to this space of celebration: A kind of cult of the political hero Dante de Oliveira. Both the slogan “always DANTE” and the emphasis on the face, supporting each other, identify the locutor with the person’s face, giving a body to the utterance and producing an effect of veracity to what is said. Moreover, the photograph depicts a gentle physiognomy of the locutor Dante: Smiling, eyes wide open and slightly arched eyebrows, happily gazing at his viewers/interlocutors. These “semiotic resources” (VAN LEEUWEN, 2005) seek, one the one hand, to impute a mild tone to the locutor and, on the other, to create a relationship of interaction with viewers/interlocutors. This trajectory of the gaze, even in an imaginary plane, requires viewers/interlocutors to establish an affectionate contact with the locutor. Added to this is the fact that the photograph, showing a person smiling to his viewers/interlocutors, shows that this is in essence the locutor, addressing his viewers/interlocutors in an affable manner, but sincere and honest to them.

### **3 Chronography: the Discursive Memory**

#### **3.1 Scenography and Narrative of the Event**

The three aphorizations<sup>3</sup> present at the top of the “iconotexts” discursively summarize the political trajectory of Dante de Oliveira from three scenographies that

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<sup>3</sup> Maingueneau (2006; 2008) distinguishes *featured assertion* from *aphorization*, since each one operates according to its own logic. While a featured assertion occurs in the text, the accentuation of a sequence against a textual background, an aphorization extracts the statements of a text and put them to circulate outside it in other scenes of enunciation. Thus, an aphorization reframes the quote, since it is no longer to represent the voice of the Other, but to present the Truth or the Law, produced elsewhere from contact with a Transcendent Source, as if they presented themselves. According to Maingueneau (2008), the source enunciation and the featured enunciation differ in their pragmatic status. Featured enunciations are subject to a regime of enunciation called “aphorizing enunciation”. The differences between an

can be understood in the “iconotexts” analyzed as “narratives of the event” (GUILHAUMOU, 2009). These narratives seek, on the one hand, to describe the “political legacy of Dante de Oliveira” and, on the other, to show that, thanks to this legacy, he still lives in the discursive memory of Brazilians residing in Mato Grosso. In the first aphorization, “Brazil, a democratic country,” the responsibility for the redemocratization of the country is attributed to Dante. The authorship for achieving this important feat on behalf of Brazilian society that had lived two decades of an authoritarian regime, more explicitly, of military dictatorship is attributed to him. In the second, “Mato Grosso, a champion in human development,” the responsibility for carrying out important actions that led to the placement of Mato Grosso in a prominent place in the Brazilian scenario is also attributed to Dante. In the third and last one, “Mato Grosso, bi-champion of economic development,” Dante is again responsible for making Mato Grosso a champion of economic development twice.

All these narratives, supported by the PSDB chromatic enunciator, converge on the fact that Dante did not become glorious on account of his death, which occurred prematurely at the age of 54, on July 6, 2006, or for his political career in favor of Brazilians and Mato Grosso, but especially for belonging to the PSDB. Such narratives aim to show that Dante still lives in the imagination not only of Mato Grosso, but of all Brazilians. The enunciation “Dante de Oliveira, a 5-year unfilled gap in Mato Grosso: State lost one of its most important politicians in recent decades,” a headline news story published on the website *Página Única*, on July 6, 2011, on the occasion of the inauguration of the headquarters of the Dante de Oliveira Institute in Cuiabá and the fifth anniversary of the death of the former Congressman of Mato Grosso, attests to that place of memory assigned elsewhere to Dante de Oliveira, turning him into a mythical figure.

### **3.2 Heroization of Dante**

The image of Dante as a hero, gestated with the creation of the Dante de Oliveira Institute and recollected in the “iconotexts,” since they can be read as a metonymic representation of Dante’s biography with the aim of highlighting the achievements of

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“aphorization” and a text are not just in size, shape and linguistic systematicity, but of an enunciative order.

this social actor in Brazil and Mato Grosso politics, seeks to show that he remains, above all, active today by their heroic representation. This meaning can be attested in the speech by the interim governor Chico Dalto, in 2011, in the week dedicated to the memory of Dante de Oliveira in that year in Cuiabá<sup>4</sup>:

Dante de Oliveira was one of the most important politicians of Mato Grosso in the last decades. His political life was marked especially by the amendment of the Diretas Já!, in 1984, which marked the beginning of a major popular reaction that would end the military regime in 1985. Dante was a statesman and a reformer. His memory inspires us to think that, even after his death, a public man can touch generations with the legacy of his work.

The speech of the interim governor Chico Dalto is presented, on the one hand, as a synthesis of the heroic journey of Dante in the Brazilian and Mato Grosso politics and, on the other, as something that should serve as inspiration. It is a kind of endorsement, of an echo of what Dante meant and still means, through the legacy of his work, a memory-producing element for people from Mato Grosso and Brazil.

## **Final Words**

The brief analyses carried out in this article aimed to highlight the epistemological relevance and productivity of putting the scenography as a discursive tool able to deal with important aspects of the analysis of political communication. This approach allowed us to show that this kind of practice occurs argumentatively not only through the persuasive intentionality of a locutor, aiming to convince the addressees of the relevance and pertinence of his propositions, but also presents itself as a set of strong indications that political communication, as a unique enunciative activity, in addition to materializing a way to update the persuasive intentionality of the locutor, engenders his argumentative character, mobilizing various scenographic resources.

In this sense, the “iconotexts” in question, the chromatic enunciator PSDB, when activating a set of scenographies, narratives of the event of which Dante de Oliveira was

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<sup>4</sup> This news report from Cuiabá's *Página Única* is available at <http://www.paginaunica.com.br/TNX/conteudo.php?cid=1340&sid=179>.

the protagonist, largely responsible for the process of redemocratization in Brazil by placing Mato Grosso as a champion in human and economic development, raising him, because of these memorable trajectories, to the condition of a mythical hero, intended to stand as the big beneficiary of this symbolic capital, aiming at the approaching 2010 statewide elections. In short, returning to the epigraph presented at the beginning of this text and relocating it in order to think of our analyses, it seems to us that the chromatic enunciator PSDB, seeking to sustain the historical journey of Dante de Oliveira by making it memorable, tries, within that life world of political communication, to present itself as a neutral medium for the designation of a content that would be both beneath and beyond institutionally constituted interests.

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