Nicolas Sarkozy: Performing the French presidency

Abstract

A presidential election can be viewed as a national drama in which a candidate casts herself/himself as a courageous protagonist who seeks to become a collective symbol that embodies the best qualities of the nation. Drawing from the fields of performance studies, French studies, cultural studies and political rhetoric, this article provides a critical reading of a key moment in the 2007 presidential campaign: Nicolas Sarkozy's first official performance as presidential candidate on 14 January. Focusing on the staging of the nomination speech, the strategic use of repetition and expression of emotions, and the notion of personal change, this article explains how Sarkozy's speech represented a 'rupture' in terms of his image and personality, which in turn served to neutralise the threat posed by his main presidential rival, Ségolène Royal. This analysis can thus help to shed light on current political developments: the rise of populist newcomers in Europe.

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Nicolas Sarkozy: Performing the French Presidency

Drawing from the fields of performance studies, French studies, cultural studies and political rhetoric, this article provides a critical reading of a key moment in the 2007 presidential campaign: Nicolas Sarkozy's inaugural speech as presidential candidate. The presidential election is arguably the most important event in the French political calendar. Its significance can be judged by the media coverage, publications and the vast array of opinion polls devoted to the subject, as well as by the prevalence of the references to it in other elections. The presidential election can be viewed as a national drama. Candidates are characters in this drama, casting themselves as heroic protagonists and opponents. A candidate auditioning for presidential power strives to become a collective symbol that embodies the best qualities of citizens, and the nation. This idea of a collective symbol is reinforced in the French presidency by the legacy of General Charles de Gaulle's view of leadership. Milne describes how de Gaulle imbued the presidency with several characteristics such as the paradoxical pairing of transcendence and representativeness, which allows for the President to place himself above the everyday political fray and to speak for all French people (Milne: 1997). This description ties in with Drake's and Gaffney's account of de Gaulle's legacy for all subsequent leaders which, as they see it, sets the parameters of French leadership discourse. De Gaulle's romantic view of leadership was based on a perceived privileged relationship between a leader and the people, the leader or *l'homme providential* who could 'render the greatness of France (the vision [a "c*ertaine idée*" of France]) operational […] because of his *mystical* sense of the true relation between France, the Nation and the Republic' (Drake and Gaffney 1996 [emphasis in original]: 18). *L'homme providential* 'knows what to do, because he can "envision" the truth, realities, dangers, the way forward and "see" the future in a way that others cannot' (Garrigues cited in Gaffney 2014: 223). Nicolas Sarkozy harnessed effectively this mythical role in his presidential election. He won 53.06% of the vote on 6 May 2007, thus becoming the twenty-third President of the French Republic.

Despite being the leader of the centre-right governing party, then called the Union for a Popular Movement and holding senior ministerial posts during Jacques Chirac's presidency since 2002, Sarkozy was not tarnished by Chirac's and the government's unpopularity. The unemployment rate remained high during Chirac's presidency, oscillating between nine and twelve per cent. Chirac and his government suffered a series of political setbacks with the defeat of the UMP party in the 2004 regional elections, the French rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty in the 2005 referendum, rioting in the suburbs of France's major cities later that year, and student and union-led protests against the CPE reform of 2006.[1] Sarkozy's uneasy relationship with Chirac and Prime Minister Dominque de Villepin allowed Sarkozy to skilfully present himself as a rebel and an outsider within the government. He carefully cultivated a can-do, no-nonsense style of leadership which served to separate him from the pessimism and scepticism of the Chirac era.

However, this style of leadership was not without its disadvantages of belligerence and authoritarianism, and the presence of his Socialist rival, Ségolène Royal, in the presidential race risked reinforcing them in the eyes of the electorate. After explaining the theoretical framework underpinning this analysis, I will examine how Sarkozy used the performance of his inaugural speech to address what I am calling his public 'image deficit'. I will explore his strategic use of repetition and emotions as ways of presenting his candidacy in a personal and confessional way. We will then see how the notion of personal change permeated Sarkozy's conception of the French presidency.

The travails of Brexit and the rise of right-wing populism have been claiming the political limelight around Europe in recent years. Contemporary events, such as the European migrant crisis, terrorist acts in Paris and other cities, and the unfolding coronavirus outbreak, have contributed to a sense of widespread heightened anxiety. The rise in economic and social insecurity in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis has fuelled popular resentment of the

mainstream political parties. Emmanuel Macron's presidential election victory on 7 May 2017, a mere thirteen months after his launch of a new political movement *En Marche* ('On the Move'), could be viewed as a case in point, in that it marked the end of a party duopoly that had reigned since de Gaulle's establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. Sarkozy's performance can illuminate current political developments. This article traces genealogies of the current rise of populist newcomers in Europe back to the changing political performances of mainstream party candidates in the 2000s, using Sarkozy as a case study.

Presidency as Affective Performance

Sarkozy's election results were not a foregone conclusion in the pre-campaign period. Sarkozy had to overcome a particular image deficit and his nomination speech on 14 January 2007 provided a pivotal reset opportunity. According to Martin, 'speech is a dynamic medium for mobilizing ideas as a form of action' and exploring 'such action requires that we interpret how speech both responds to and acts upon a situation, utilizing ideas both as relatively structured resources and as "projectiles" that provoke reorientation among audiences' (2013: 106). This is particularly significant in Sarkozy's case as he sought to construct a more presidential persona in order to challenge the public's perception of his personality and thereby increase his electoral chances. It is useful therefore to view Sarkozy's speech through the lens of speech act theory which considers language as a type of action, in the sense that people not only use language to assert things but also to do things. Austin's concept of performative speech acts concerns cases in which 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' (1975: 6). McKenzie notes that Austin includes 'challenge' in his list and writes that '*performance challenges*, it provokes, contests, stakes a claim. And […] not only does performance challenge, challenges perform […] Challenges do something: they incite, demand, assert, accuse and oppose' (2001 [emphasis in original]: 32).

Derrida and Butler developed Austin's notion of the performative in showing 'the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes' (Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick 2007: 25). According to Butler: 'The power of discourse to produce what it names is linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts *as* discourse (1993 [emphasis in original]: 17).' Butler provides examples of performatives such as baptisms, inaugurations, declarations of ownership, legal sentences and statements 'that not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed' (1993: 17). Sarkozy's speech can be considered as a performative in the sense that it is producing what it is naming, which is the action of change. Sarkozy is performing his new status of the 'changed man', which in turn contributes to cementing his status as president-in-waiting.

Turner may well have had political elections in mind when he depicted liminality as 'a time of enchantment when anything might, even should, happen' and 'full of potency and potentiality' (1979: 465-466). This can be applied to that of presidential candidates. The concept of liminality represented the second part of Van-Gennep's triadic model of the Rite of Passage, a source of interest for Turner. Turner writes that '[l]iminal entities […] are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (1969: 95). Wels et al note the ambiguity of this middle phase given that 'the individuals involved are understood to be "no longer" and simultaneously also "not yet"' (2011: 1). In this liminal period, Turner observes that:

> [A] 'sacred' component is acquired by the incumbents of positions during […] *rites de passage*, through which they changed positions. Something of the sacredness of that transient humility and modelessness goes over, and tempers the pride of the incumbent of a higher position or office. (1969 [emphasis in original]: 96)

Something of this humility will be explored later in Sarkozy's performance of personal transformation in his rite of passage for political power.

A political figure is often performing what Schechner calls 'make belief". As opposed to the 'make believe' presented by an artistic performance in which the spectators know that what they are witnessing is not real, Schechner defines the 'make belief' performance, such as that of a political campaign, as an intentional blurring of the boundary between what is fictionalized, constructed, made to order and what might be actually real. He offers the example of an American President who wishes to convey his authority and knowledge, his 'commander-in-chief" aura in a speech at a time of national crisis, but who, at other times, may desire to show that he is an 'ordinary Joe' who relates to his 'fellow citizens' (2013: 43). Noting that everyone is aware of the meticulous staging of such activities, Schechner describes the American presidency as a performance, entirely scripted by professional speechwriters. Everything is planned for maximum impact: the backdrops and settings, the president's outfits and make-up, and how he uses his hands and makes eye contact with the camera and the audience (2013: 43). These techniques are certainly not limited to the American political context. A French president (and indeed an aspiring candidate) must also 'make belief' in order to 'build the public's confidence in the president, and […] to sustain the president's belief in himself', so that '[h]is performances convince himself even as he strives to convince others' (2013: 43).

This article tackles the authorship of presidential speeches as part of its remit, drawing on Calvet and Véronis who evoke the impossibility for any presidential candidate to write his or her own speeches during a relentless election campaign (2008: 17, 19). They highlight repeatedly the pivotal role of the speechwriter Henri Guaino in Sarkozy's presidential campaign speeches (2008: 17-25, 169), revealing that Sarkozy did not generally write his texts.

However, the idea that Sarkozy was involved in the writing process during the presidential campaign is not a remote one if we take into account newspaper reviews of Yasmina Reza's bestselling biography of Sarkozy, *L'aube le soir ou la nuit*.[2] Whilst this article acknowledges the existence of collaborators or *plumes* in the production of a political text, it does not aim to determine their influence on Sarkozy's inaugural speech. I argue that once the presidential candidate or a politician unveils a text in the public sphere, it is essentially viewed by the media and the voters as his or hers. What is more, it is inconceivable that Sarkozy or any candidate vying for the most important political office in France would present or deliver a text if they were unhappy with its content and style.

Politics is not so much a coherent set of propositions but a performance that is primarily conducted by emotions. A political speech can be viewed as an avenue for the production of affects. Ahmed argues that '[h]ow we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective […] It is through how others impress upon us that the skin of the collective begins to take shape' (2004: 54). In her work on the productive nature of emotions, Ahmed focuses on what emotions do, how they move us, how they name objects and others, and how the social affects that they generate are repeated as a form of power. Drawing from Sartre's contingency of pain in her description of how emotion attaches us to the bodies of others, Ahmed states that 'while the experience of pain may be solitary, it is never private' (2004: 28-29). This experience will be noted later in parts of Sarkozy's speech where he alludes to his personal life and relates his encounters with victims of violence.

Politics is also conducted by an elusive element that Watson defines as the performance narrative, that is 'a correlation of sorts between presented appearance and the ability to assume political leadership', in which 'impression trumps reason and policy' (2006: 337). In his work on the performance narrative in voter choice, Watson views political debates as:

> [A] dramatization of the electoral process, a staging of national political performance in which every effort is made by the organisers to foreground policies, national vision, political instincts and rhetorical skill […] every effort is made by the parties to control the staging to favour their candidate. (2006: 341)

Later in this article, I will show how this effort can be seen in the staging of Sarkozy's inaugural speech. In the debates, 'the private citizen takes on the role of candidate, displaying a public "self" designed to convince viewers that he is a worthy president' (2006: 43). Watson goes on to cite Goffmann in his allusion to a character's 'front', which is an image displayed by the candidate 'consisting of rhetorical content and strategies, a mode of speech, manner, and costuming designed to offer an idealised view of himself as president' (2006: 43). Although Watson's observations concern debates between American presidential candidates, specifically the televised presidential debate between President George W. Bush and the Democratic candidate Senator John Kerry in 2004, they also resonate in the French political context. Sarkozy's nomination speech provides a novel opportunity not only to study the display of a French candidate's public 'self' or 'front', but also to explore how rupture is negotiated as a candidate performs the role of 'the changed man'.

Sarkozy's 'rupture': Royal's contribution

The word rupture featured prominently in Sarkozy's vocabulary when he repeatedly called for a new French social model and an end to the French political habits and practices of the last thirty years. It was a powerful metaphor as it 'portrayed Sarkozy as a man of action, the embodiment of a personal dynamic style of leadership that would put an end to the rather discredited Chirac era' (Cautrès and Cole 2008: 23). In the years preceding the election, Sarkozy positioned himself, from the moment he became Minister of the Interior in 2002,

against the presidential style of Chirac: 'Nicolas Sarkozy chooses proximity over presidential distance, what is politically incorrect in language over apparent acumen, and engages in the news race with the media, in order to escape their punches' (Guibert 2007: 70). This carefully constructed image of a man of action who does not mince his words worked in his favour until the urban riots of October-November 2005. On 27 October 2005, two adolescents were electrocuted after entering a power station in order to avoid a police check in the Parisian suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis. This triggered a three-week period of violent clashes between local youths of North-African descent and the police. Sarkozy was criticized for his hard-line approach and was accused of fuelling the riots with his talk about the '*racaille*' (or 'scum') of the suburban estates. Immediately after the riots in the suburbs and throughout 2006, a sense of wariness tarnished Nicolas Sarkozy's image. He came to be viewed as an unpredictable, worrying figure, as one who added fuel to the fire rather than as one who was going to put it out (Guibert 2007: 71).[3]

Ségolène Royal became the official Socialist candidate on 16 November 2006 and her entry in the presidential race threatened to cement Sarkozy's disadvantages in the eyes of the electorate. The fact that Royal was a female candidate from a mainstream party who had a serious chance of winning the presidential election was a novelty in itself. Yet, Calvet and Véronis assert that it was her image and language which represented a real 'rupture' in a male-dominated political landscape, thus presenting a considerable challenge to Sarkozy's candidacy:

> From the beginning of her irresistible rise, Ségolène Royal had been nicknamed 'the Madonna' [...]. The image was beautiful: the political virgin dressed in white with maternal overtones ... And above all, it contrasted utterly with that of Nicolas Sarkozy: calm against agitation, tenderness against machismo, mildness against violence (at least

> verbal), love against hatred […]. / Ségolène Royal did not forego, out of inclination or design, playing on the language of the woman and the mother: tenderness, affection, love, happiness ... These are not words that one was accustomed to hearing frequently in politics. When de Gaulle spoke of love, it was exclusively that of the homeland. (2008: 69)[4]

Royal seemed to symbolise a more authentic 'rupture' than that of Sarkozy. The latter was positioning himself against his predecessors. With her clothing and language, Royal was setting herself apart from the entire political system.

It was now imperative for Sarkozy to overcome his image deficit accentuated by Royal's official entry in the presidential race. Calvet and Véronis observe that Sarkozy was obliged to modify his vocabulary, the word 'rupture' in particular:

> The Sarkozyian vocabulary, aggressive and authoritarian, is no longer tenable against a woman. [...] The communication of Nicolas Sarkozy and the UMP softens: one starts talking about debate, listening, respect, trust, protection ... all terms that were until now the prerogative of the Socialist candidate. Nicolas Sarkozy has an image of a 'scary candidate' [...]. 'Rupture', in particular, is considered 'anxiety-provoking': what was to be the key word of the campaign became in a few days its most cumbersome element. (2008: 13)

Thus, when he officially announced his candidacy for the presidential election on 30 November 2006, Sarkozy tempered this term of 'rupture' with the adjective '*tranquille*'. Calvet and Véronis also spot this nod to François Mitterrand's presidential campaign slogan in 1981, '*la force tranquille*' ('The quiet force'), and observe that the term 'rupture' faded into the

background until Sarkozy's election as President (2008: 14-15). As regards his inaugural speech as presidential candidate, there is no visible sign of Sarkozy's '*rupture tranquille*' and the term 'rupture' only appears once. However, a speech does not automatically have to feature a particular word in order to incarnate it. The tonality of his inauguration speech could be seen to be incarnating very effectively Sarkozy's '*rupture tranquille*', as shall be discussed later in this article.

Presentation, Repetition and Electoral Appeal

Sarkozy's candidacy was confirmed during the party's special convention in the Palais de congrès convention centre in Paris on 14 January 2007. Sarkozy delivered his 80-minute speech to around 80,000 cheering party faithful from a vast stage bearing the colours of the national tricolour flag. Television footage shows Sarkozy leaving his seat in the front row and walking the front steps up to the stage. This action could be seen to underline the link between himself and the party faithful who have elected him as their presidential candidate. Sarkozy does not appear overly triumphant here; he comes across as rather modest, acknowledging the audience with a nod, a wave and the word '*merci*'. There is violin instrumental music playing in the background, which comes to an end when Sarkozy begins to address the audience. Once he utters '*Mes chers amis*' ('My dear friends'), we see the unveiling of his campaign poster on the screen behind him: '*Ensemble tout devient possible*' ('Together everything becomes possible'). The slogan runs over a rural backdrop, projecting a soft, unifying presidential image. The slogan is also already displayed against a blue backdrop on the front of the lectern. While his party supporters represent Sarkozy's immediate audience, the staging of the event is designed to appeal to all French voters. There is no reference to his party or party paraphernalia on the screen, or anywhere on or near the stage. We only see sarkozy.fr on the side screens. Sarkozy is standing in front of the white part of the tricolour, which seems significant because white is

usually associated with innocence, purity, completeness or neutrality. It is worth noting though that the white flag also symbolises the French monarchy, the House of Bourbon, who ruled in France from the late 16th Century until the French Revolution.

As for the speech itself, it suggests right from the very beginning, a candidate who is not content with relaying a point once but three times: 'Each of you understands the importance of this moment for France, for the future of your families, and for me. […] I could try to name this feeling, try to express it in a word, try to say thank you' (Sarkozy 2007: 1). Sarkozy's speech is peppered here and there with such trinities. This ternary rhythm imbues his speech with a certain lyricism. It suggests that Sarkozy is keenly aware of his audience and potential voters (via live television coverage and other media forms) and of the need to hold their attention. Watson writes that owing to 'information overload and/or the nature of television, it is generally agreed among speechwriters and media advisors that audiences rarely retain more than two or three ideas from a broadcast political speech' (2006: 349). Sarkozy's use of repetition would also seem to indicate a natural inclination towards simplicity and emphasis over mystery and restraint; the latter qualities were more in keeping with the conventional French presidential style. His habit of underlining or repeating ideas or words three times is particularly recurrent in the first part of his speech where he strives to portray himself as a changed man.

It is worth looking at particular passages in the speech in order to show how Sarkozy uses repetition to enhance his electoral appeal. With the aid of anaphora – a rhetorical device which gives a certain momentum to his speech – Sarkozy refers to great figures of French history and politics: 'France, she is 17 years old and has the face of Guy Môquet […]. France, she is 19 years old and has the radiant face of a girl from Lorraine […]' (2007: 4). Sarkozy presents a list based on the age of the personality at a defining moment, and often the last moment, in his/her life. The ages of these figures appear in an ascending order: figures such as Guy Môquet,

17, Joan of Arc, 19, Charles de Gaulle, 50, Emile Zola, 58, Victor Hugo, 60. Sarkozy's effective use of repetition here is certainly designed to maintain the audience's attention but I propose that these lines are meant to portray a France in action rather than as an abstract ideal. Sarkozy's range of personages aims to illustrate his knowledge of France's history. More importantly though, each of the abovementioned figures in his or her distinctive way symbolises rupture: each one resisted conformity and strove to change things. Sarkozy's range of personalities addresses the French electorate as a whole rather than his immediate audience which is comprised of party supporters. Furthermore, one or more of these personalities will definitely have some appeal for any French voter. For instance, Abbé Pierre, who was voted France's most popular person for many years, founded the Emmaüs organisation in 1949 with the aim of helping poor and homeless people as well as refugees; Simone Veil advanced Frenchwomen's legal rights relating to incarceration, family legal matters, sexual and reproductive health in the Ministry of Justice (1956-1974) and as Minister of Health (1974-1979); Joan of Arc has much appeal for the far right and Guy Môquet is an important figure for French Communists.

Sarkozy cites a few lines from Môquet's last letter to his family before he was shot by the Nazis on 22 October 1941: '17-and-a-half-year-old … My life has been short! I have no regrets except for leaving you all' (2007: 4). Sarkozy also quotes Victor Hugo in his preface to Les Misérables:

> She [France] is 60, and has the face of an outcast called Victor Hugo when at the start of *Les Misérables* he wrote: 'As long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, books like this cannot be useless'. (2007: 5)

While Hugo and Zola ('She is 58 and has Emile Zola's face when he pens *J'accuse* to defend Dreyfus and Justice' 2007: 5) have broad national appeal, they are regarded primarily as symbols of the Left. Both fought against injustice, a theme which seems to enrage Sarkozy in the speech, as we shall observe later in this article. They are both recognised as major literary figures who shaped the French political landscape. These figures have been perhaps added to the list in order to dispel Sarkozy's *enfant de la télé* (child of the television age) image, to show that he is au fait with France's literary past.[5] Sarkozy does not seek to demonstrate any preference for one age over another, for one face/voice over another. He is not privileging his own electorate over another. He is keen to show that France is not symbolised by one person alone but by many great people who had not only had a certain idea of France but who took risks in upholding it, thus contributing to France's greatness.

Sarkozy adds himself subtly to the list:

> France, she has the face, age and voice of all those who have believed in her, who have fought for her, her ideals, her values, her freedom. She has the face, age and voice of all the French people who, from the depths of their hearts, have the conviction that France is not finished. Because in my heart as in my mind, France does not want, must not, cannot die (2007: 5).

Here, Sarkozy unveils his personal feelings ('my heart') about France as if the latter was a living person. Sarkozy's vision for France is as personal as it is patriotic. This is already evident earlier in the speech when he evokes the heroes of the French Resistance:

> At this moment, when everything will change for me, I cannot help but think about those who made me dream of another destiny, a better life, a more exciting future. They were

> for me a source of reflection, hope and confidence. / They are the heroes of the Resistance and the liberation of France, men with whom I took my first political steps, people who came from an era when politics were indistinguishable from patriotism and epic events. (2007: 1)

Sarkozy's view of that era carries a hint of nostalgia and even regret: politics back then equated patriotism and heroism. The implication is that Sarkozy is following their example, that he is not the type of person who engages in politics for personal ambition but for a nobler one, a love for France. It is significant that these heroes of the French Resistance make their appearance early in the speech. By aligning himself with these heroes, Sarkozy can be seen as seeking to reassure those voters who feel that he is perhaps a 'rupture' too far:

> They taught me, because they knew better than anyone, what Gaullism meant. It is not a doctrine. That was never General de Gaulle's intention. But it is a moral demand, the exercise of power as self-sacrifice, the conviction that France is only strong when it is united, the certainty that nothing is hopeless when the flame of resistance continues to burn in the heart of one man, it is the refusal to give up, a rupture with the status quo when it is leading France into decline. (2007: 2)

The theme of unity always crops up in French presidential elections. Sarkozy's 'flame of resistance' line echoes a line from de Gaulle's famous speech on 18 June 1940 (*L'Appel du 18 juin*): 'Whatever happens, the flame of the French Resistance must not go out and will not go out' (1970: 4). Sarkozy does not wish to portray Gaullism as belonging to the realm of the abstract 'doctrine'. In his description of Gaullism, Sarkozy employs strong active nouns: 'demand', 'certainty', 'refusal' and finally, the list reaches a crescendo with 'rupture'. It is

perhaps no coincidence that the first (and only) mention of this word in this speech is used in reference to de Gaulle. Sarkozy had already used de Gaulle to advocate 'rupture' in his speech in Saint-Étienne on 9 November 2006, the anniversary of his death: 'De Gaulle was the man of all ruptures. He always refused continuity, conformism, habit and the status quo' (Gurrey and Ridet: 2006). In associating 'rupture' with Gaullism, Sarkozy wishes to reassure French voters that his political aims and actions are inspired by the same noble intentions as those of de Gaulle, and that his resistance to the predominant conventions mirrors that of de Gaulle.

The personal and the political

Citing Goleman, Ahmed writes that emotions can be 're-presented as a form of intelligence, as "tools" that can be used by subjects in the project of life and career enhancement' (2004: 9). This can illuminate our understanding of how Sarkozy deftly employed emotions in his political actions. The following lines on the heroes of the French Resistance in Sarkozy's speech reemphasise again the idea that his political actions are motivated by patriotism, but they also add something new to the mix − his 'personal emotions':

> They taught me, a young Frenchman of mixed heritage, to love France and to be proud of being French. This love has never weakened, and this pride has never abated. For a long time, I kept it within me, like a hidden treasure in the depths of my heart that I never felt the need to share with anyone. I used to think that politics had nothing to do with my personal emotions. I used to imagine that a strong man was duty bound to hide his emotions. I have since realised that he who is strong can still appear human. I understand that humanity is a strength, not a weakness. / I have changed. (2007: 2)

These lines represent a powerful moment of revelation in Sarkozy's first official performance as presidential candidate. In order to be of service to France, Sarkozy must not only unveil his love and pride for his country but also his more private feelings. Sarkozy is no longer alluding to individuals who have helped him along the way. The focus now is on him. This is his moment to unveil himself. Sarkozy's lines could be viewed as a *mea culpa* for his 'hard man' image. Calvet and Véronis remark upon the verbal and physical transformation of Sarkozy in this speech:

> Previously known for his aggressive gestures […], and for his nervosity which was apparent in the numerous shoulder shruggings and head jerkings during his speeches, his character "smoothes" out suddenly, softens […]. His tics/twitches disappear as if by magic, and his hands are no longer aggressive towards the public but are turned towards him, symmetrical, in a unifying gesture à la de Gaulle. (2008: 12-13)

The process of revelation and metamorphosis within Sarkozy can also be seen in his use of verbs: 'I kept it within me', 'I never felt', 'I used to think', 'I used to imagine', 'I have since realised', 'I understand'. This process culminates in the following: 'I have changed'. This phrase becomes a refrain for the next few paragraphs. Sarkozy attributes this change to his new status: 'I have changed because the moment you designated me, I stopped being the representative of only one party' (2007: 2). In his consideration of belief in one's own performance, Goffman writes that an individual who plays a part is implicitly asking his observers to take seriously the impression that he is fostering and the attributes that he appears to possess (2007: 61). Sarkozy is implicitly asking his observers to believe that he is already adhering to de Gaulle's conception of the French presidency.

More importantly, Sarkozy ascribes his change to the notions of truth and empathy, which he views as key components of the presidential election: 'I have changed because the presidential election is an acid test that no one can avoid. Because I owe you this truth. Because I owe this truth to the French people' (2007: 2). Sarkozy unveils himself in this speech; he shares his 'truth' with the French:

> I have changed because the ordeals of my life have changed me. I want to say it modestly, but I want to say it because it is the truth and because we cannot fully understand another person's pain unless we have experienced it ourselves. (2007: 2)

His own experience of hardships, of pain seemingly allows him to understand those of others, that is, the voters. However, in citing Melzack and Wall, Ahmed points out the impossibility of fellow feeling when it comes to pain: 'Because pain is a private, personal experience, it is impossible for us to know precisely what someone else's pain feels like' (2004: 29). Sarkozy seems to acknowledge this impossibility of bridging the gap between fellow feeling and pain and yet attempts to overcome it when he repeats the phrase 'we cannot' and draws parallels between himself and others:

> We cannot empathize with one who experiences professional failure or personal heartbreak if we have not endured them ourselves. […] We cannot extend a helping hand to one who has lost all hope if we have never experienced doubt. (2007: 3)

Sarkozy's repetition reinforces the impossibility of connecting with the people if a candidate does not relate to them. He wishes to show that the inability to relate with the people goes hand in hand with the inability to unite the people. Sarkozy's allusions to his own hardships ('I have

known failure and I had to overcome it' (2007: 3) portray a candidate who wishes to establish a more personal and compassionate relationship with the voters. He does not go into detail regarding his own setbacks in life, but one could imagine that he has in mind his period in the political wilderness in the mid to late nineties as a result of his decision to support the presidential bid of Chirac's rival Édouard Balladur. His allusion to 'personal heartbreak' could be linked to his publicised marital problems in 2005-2006.

Politics is often the art of deftly negotiating weakness. Sarkozy has long seemed keen to portray himself as a man of action, who is always very sure of himself, to the point of being arrogant. In this speech, Sarkozy admits to moments of doubt (2007: 3). He does not dwell too long, however, on this weakness; he feels the need to defend it by depicting it in more positive terms: 'One cannot be courageous if one has never been scared. For courage is obtained by surmounting one's fears' (2007: 3). In the following lines, he associates weakness with characteristics befitting a French President such as strength and ambition:

> This part of humanity was buried in me because for a long time, I thought that to be strong was to never show weakness. Today, I understand that weakness, pain and failure make you stronger. They are companions for those who strive for more. (2007: 3)

These lines illustrate Sarkozy's desire in this speech to appear more human and understanding, less the hard, ambitious politician and more the everyman who is not immune to the trials of life. Sarkozy's attempts to relate to the French take the presidential role of representativeness to a new level. His unveiling of his emotions in this speech could be seen as the initiation of a campaign strategy which aims to underscore Sarkozy's proximity to the people and soften his hard-line personality. Bertrand, Dézé and Missika observe that Sarkozy seeks to show that he

understands France and the French by reciting and glorifying emotions in his campaign speeches (2007: 129).

Sarkozy's next use of 'I've changed' signals that he is moving from his personal experiences to his political ones: 'I've changed because power has changed me. Because it has made me feel the heavy moral responsibility of politics' (2007: 3). Sarkozy is conscious of the fact that his presidential rivals will continue to remind voters that he is still part of the current government. Thus, he avoids bringing up his political experience or ministerial record in the incumbent government here. He says that power has changed him, but he does not dip into policy detail. He prefers instead to focus on a more abstract aspect of politics such as moral responsibility. He does not define the term but states that '[t]he word 'moral' does not frighten me' (2007: 3).

Sarkozy goes on to illustrate his encounters with the moral responsibility of politics: his encounters with the victims of murder, violence and unemployment. Sarkozy was Minister of the Interior for much of the 2002-07 period during which he cultivated a tough law and order image (and was still the Minister of the Interior at the time of this speech). Instead of outlining his record in countering murder and violence in French society, he chooses to dwell on a domain that escaped his ministerial grasp: justice. Sarkozy singles out two individual victims of injustice, both of whom are female:

> I've changed because nobody can stay the same in front of the stricken faces of the parents of a young girl burned alive. Because no one can remain the same in the presence of the pain experienced by the husband of a young woman killed […]. (2007: 3).

This focus on female injustice could have the intent of softening Sarkozy's hard man reputation in the eyes of the electorate, in particular the female electorate. Perhaps Sarkozy also had in

mind Royal's observation that there is 'a very close correlation between the status of women and the state of justice and injustice in a society' (*Le Monde*: 2006).

The impact of these encounters on Sarkozy could fit in with what Ahmed describes as the ethics of pain:

> The impossibility of feeling the pain of others does not mean that the pain is simply theirs, or that their pain has nothing to do with me. […] an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel. Such an ethics is, in this sense, bound up with the sociality or the "contingent attachment" of pain itself. […] I am moved by what does not belong to me. (2004: 30-31)

While Sarkozy wishes to show that he is moved and thus transformed by the pain of others, his focus on individual victims could also be regarded as a result of what Prochasson describes as the 'psychologization' of political life, a life that is as much about the personal space as the collective space:

> We live in a period of low ideological or doctrinal intensity. The triumph of the "I" over the "we" involves an unprecedented psychologization of political life, the effects of which are increased tenfold by the media. We no longer speak of social class, but of the suffering of victims. Suffering has become the major category of social and political perception. We saw this in a new genre of TV shows where candidates were asked to empathise with people. Since the French Revolution, politics has been by definition the collective space. It is no longer, or not only, the case (*Le Monde*: 2007).[6]

Sarkozy's acknowledgement of victims of injustice soon slides into political appropriation and expediency: 'I want to speak for them, act for them and even, even if it is necessary to shout in their names' (2007: 3). The line 'I am outraged by injustice' (2007: 3) could be seen as reflecting his critical view of the French justice system, which was often the target of his ire. If Sarkozy stated outright that the judiciary had neglected victims, he could be criticised for targeting a particular group, thus undermining the objectives of the speech which are to reassure and to unite the French electorate. If he extended such criticism to the political system, he could be seen as attacking his own government. Thus, Sarkozy uses the safe, general term of 'society' regarding the neglect of victims: 'and it is one [an injustice] when society ignores the victims' (2007: 3). Sarkozy could well be implying that until now nobody has really been outraged enough like himself by injustice to do something about it. The line 'I am outraged by injustice' ('*Je suis révolté par l'injustice*') is striking in that the structure of the phrase places greater weight on Sarkozy's outrage than on injustice itself which would have been better served by the structure '*l'injustice me révolte*'.[7]

Sarkozy's final use of the phrase 'I have changed' concerns a hero of the French Resistance, Georges Mandel: 'I changed when I met Mandel, this great Frenchman. I had wanted to write about his life in order to repair an injustice, in order to change the view of others on this tragic destiny.' (2007: 4). It is the notion of injustice which apparently motivates Sarkozy to write on the life of Mandel rather than the desire to display some literary talent. One recalls that Sarkozy declares earlier on in the speech that he is outraged by injustice and that he wishes to speak and act for victims of violence. It is evident that Sarkozy feels a kinship with Mandel. Like Mandel, Sarkozy is passionate about politics and is the Minister of the Interior at the time of this speech: 'It is my view on politics which has been transformed. Georges Mandel was passionate about politics. In March 1940, he is Minister of the Interior' (2007: 4). Just as Sarkozy's book aimed to change 'the view of others' on Mandel's tragic fate, Sarkozy's speech

aspires to change 'the view of others' on his personality. His unveiling of his emotions in this speech aims to underscore his proximity to the people and to soften his hard-line personality. The theme of change is a regular feature of presidential campaign speeches. What is striking about Sarkozy's inaugural speech as presidential candidate is that change is as much, if not more, personal as it is political.

Concluding Remarks

Sarkozy's first official performance as presidential candidate was followed by an opinion poll lead over his main rival, Royal, which lasted right until the votes were cast. Royal had been nominated as the PS candidate two months previously following her success in the party's primary. Yet, her campaign launch did not take place until early February and the speech did not stir the campaign to the same degree as that of Sarkozy's campaign launch. Her speech resembled at times a list or a catalogue of propositions. Royal's campaign launch was viewed as a success only for the simple reason that it brought her back to the centre stage of the presidential campaign following her '*phase d'écoute*'. This 'listening period' would have perhaps been more suited to the pre-nomination period. It would have been viewed less as a worrying absence and more as a reassuring Gaullist posture: retreating from the political hurly burly in order to reflect on the state of France and then returning to launch her campaign as a different, wiser, statesmanlike candidate with a vision for France. Instead, this long 'listening period' following Royal's nomination raised doubts about her presidential standing and credibility, particularly in the domain of foreign policy.[8]

The word 'rupture' may have appeared only once in Sarkozy's inaugural speech on 14 January 2007. However, the speech itself heralded a 'rupture' in terms of Sarkozy's image and personality, offsetting the threat posed by Royal's presence in the campaign. The man of consensus was apparent in the staging of Sarkozy's nomination as the UMP's presidential

candidate. With the expression of emotions, the association between Gaullism and his theme of 'rupture', and in the *mea culpa* for his 'hard man image' with the powerful refrain 'I have changed', Sarkozy presented his candidacy in a reassuring, personal and confessional way. The importance of personal change imbued Sarkozy's conception of a more active and transparent presidency in his speech. His performance on 14 January 2007 was viewed as a success because he was able to temper his divisive image as a man of action with a more fitting image for the presidential function, that of a man of reconciliation. This article has shown that Sarkozy's management of his image in the 2007 presidential campaign is an image of self that aligns with the role of 'the changed man' who, with his force of feeling, is in tune with the voting public. Consequently, this performance could be viewed as a foreshadowing of what is becoming more prominent in the current context of declines in institutional trust and party affiliation: a tenacious, personality-centered political leadership that is adept at reinventing itself to fit the public mood.

Notes

[1] For more on the CPE reform and the ensuing protests, see Jonah D. Levy, Alistair Cole and Patrick Le Galès 2008: 6.

[2] See Tabard: 2007, Ridet: 2007, and Jaigu: 2007. In his pre-campaign book, *Témoignage*, Sarkozy reveals (or perhaps it is his *plume*!) that he writes his speeches by hand (2006, 43). All translations from French to English, and thus any errors in translation, are my own.

[3] Perrineau deftly outlines the disadvantages of Sarkozy's image for his presidential candidacy (2008: 125). For more on the riots, see Canet, Pech, and Stewart 2015: 270-292.

[4] For an interesting account of how Royal was imposing her own codes of power in her choice of colour, dress and language, see Guibert 2007: 73-74.

[5] Giesbert observes that this 'televisual' image distinguished Sarkozy from his presidential predecessors who 'had been, in their respective fields, a fount of culture' (2011: 93).

[6] This political focus on individual suffering is mirrored by Royal in the opening speech of her campaign. Royal goes further than Sarkozy in referring to individuals by their first name (Royal 2007: 2). As regards a 'new genre of TV shows', Prochasson probably has in mind TF1's *J'ai une question à vous poser*, a program in which a panel of television viewers (instead of journalists) put questions to the presidential candidates.

[7] See Calvet and Véronis on their comparison of Sarkozy's use of the '*je*" to that of Royal and former French presidents (2008: 39-40, 42).

[8] For more on Royal's campaign difficulties during this period, see Boy and Chiche 2008: 80 and Guibert: 79-81, 83-86, 90-95.

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