

Petty officers of the political fleet: The impact of personal mobile communication technologies on communicative practices of Italian politicians and the transformations of the public sphere

Enrico Menduni

Abstract: This paper analyses the particular use of personal mobile communication by Italian politicians. Research was carried out in 2004 with semi-structured interviews to professional politicians, journalists and politicians' assistants. The paper intends to demonstrate that personal mobile communication technologies were introduced in a 'Darwinian' phase of political activity, at least in Italy, where every professional politician had to help themselves and survive in a milieu that almost suddenly had become very competitive, without significant support from party's organisation as it were in the past. Personal mobile communication, in this frame of thinking, appears as a 'help yourself' and timesaving technique, especially for second rank politicians who do not have access to large crews of assistants. Personal mobile communication technologies contributed to determine relevant transformations in the public sphere, especially regarding to: a) bargaining and making deals with one's peers and political partners; b) relationships with journalists and the media. At the same time, mobile communications fasten the oral dimension of politics, already pushed by audiovisual media, showing more 'politics' than 'policies'.

Introduction **T**he use of mobile telephony has been investigated with regard to varied social needs and in many, diverse contexts, ranging from private and social life,¹ to workplaces² and public spaces more generally.³ One context seems to be consistently missing in academic literature on the

uses of the mobile phone, that of institutional political activity. We decided to analyse the ways in which the device was adopted and used by Italian professional politicians, through the use of semi-structured interviews with politicians, journalists and politicians' assistants. In addressing this topic, our focus was on the way in which politicians' intense use of the mobile phone has resulted in a transformation of the public sphere. A precise research hypothesis led our investigation: mobile communication technologies could especially benefit second rank politicians who did not have access to large crews of assistants and clerks. These second rank politicians, as we will describe later, are to be considered as 'small public activities'. Further evidence prompted us to engage with this work, just a few studies have been carried out so far about the social history of telephone in Italy,⁴ and the use of mobile telephony is an even less researched topic.⁵

An introductory overview is drawn about the diffusion of the mobile phone as a factor empowering people in private life as well as in the marketplace and in the public sphere; we then firstly clarify how we use the notion of the 'public sphere' and, secondly, examine academic works on the impact of information and communication technologies on the public sphere, with particular reference to the role of mobile telephony. In the following section, the notion of second rank professional politics as 'small public activity' is elaborated and background information provided about the current generation of professional politicians in Italy. Research methodology is described and context data is given about the introduction and diffusion of the mobile phone in Italy. The results of fieldwork are presented and conclusions are drawn in the final sections.

**Mobile phones
between private
life and public
sphere**

Many researchers have focused on the intimate and emotional side of mobile communication, but it also significantly changes lifestyles and communication patterns of some professionals characterised by a nomadic experience.⁶ Travelling salespersons, for instance, can be constantly in touch with their firm's headquarters; workers such as plumbers can increase productivity, collecting new orders while they are working for another customer. Message bike riders or taxi drivers can squeeze transfer times, selecting new orders in areas close to the place they are passing through. These performances were once reserved to police patrols, the first to be connected by early devices of radio mobile communication. As Manning has noted, the adoption of the mobile phone within police departments further improved their work routines.⁷

Even though it is possible to argue that using the mobile in workplaces is likely to increase productivity in general, even before the telephone era, this mutual exchange between a professional and his staff could happen, through mail or special messengers, a couple of times every week; in the wire era, several times a day.⁸

Every communication technology revolution shifts towards the ordinary people, offering possibilities which were before strictly reserved to the elites, representing formerly some of their status symbols. Of course, in this transfer these technologies preserve their technical features with related social uses, but lose completely their role of status symbols. We

thus can say that mobile communication transfers to potentially everybody features that are useful both in intimate, private life and in the marketplace and the public sphere, a term that we use in the meaning given to it by Jürgen Habermas. Our point is that small public activities in particular can take great advantage from the mobile phone.

**Public sphere
and ICTs**

Jürgen Habermas conceptualises the public sphere as that realm of social life where the exchange of information and views on questions of common concern can take place so that public opinion can be formed.⁹ Grounding on this definition of the public sphere, Peter Dahlgren whose focus is on the political public sphere, introduces an interesting issue. He acknowledges that the public sphere today is largely dominated by the mass media, asking what this suggests for the viability of the larger analytical category of civil society.¹⁰ Dahlgren's answer is that we should not equate the public sphere with the mass media; we should also consider the role of social interaction and face-to-face communication among citizens.

Yet social interaction among citizens and therefore the public sphere itself have changed because of the diffusion of information and communication technologies. Some of the scholars researching on this topic have pointed to the availability of ICTs as a main factor in the enhancement of democracy. It has been argued that these technologies encourage a broader access to information and a freer debate, thus promoting the establishment of horizontal relationships among citizens and extending political participation to varied groups, both large and small, in civil society.¹¹

Of course, not only political groups and grassroots activists benefit from the increasing availability of ICTs: according to Jan Van Dijk, we are nowadays witnessing an ongoing process of political diffusion towards peripheral social actors in general. ICTs, in Van Dijk's word, feed centrifugal forces within the political system. Institutions must delegate some of their prerogatives to international organisations, corporations, private agencies and citizens. These subjects can thus shape their own policies, bypassing the government monitoring and coordinating role in specific domains.¹²

To remain within Van Dijk's framework, ICTs are widely used also by actors of the political system, such as national and local governments or public administrations. These are actually the contexts where ITC was first introduced. Critics have long blamed governments and enterprises for using this technology in order to have more control over their organisations and employees.¹³ Consequently, networks cause political parties to be subordinate to the central state. According to this line of thinking, ICTs are seen as a key factor not so much in the diffusion, as in the concentration of politics.

If we examine studies specifically dedicated to mobile telephony, the evaluation of its impact on established institutions and on the functioning of democracy seems to be equally controversial. Evidence suggest that the use of the mobile is likely to produce effects that are at odds. On the one hand, the more direct communication provided by mobile telephony

is seen as leading to better coordination and interaction both in democracy and bureaucracy. On the other hand, mobile technologies seem to increase the independence of actors within these institutions, making room for communication patterns and activities that may be at odds with those of the organisations.¹⁴ With reference to democracy, for example, mobile phone can be employed in strategies of social protest to increase cohesion and commitment within the groups involved and to prompt mobilisation in key situations. Yet mobile phones can also act as devices enabling group members to establish parallel channels of communication outside the centralised group's control, thus undermining the group's ability to achieve its political goals and contribute to the constitution of a viable public sphere. The introduction of mobile phone in bureaucratic organisations is seen to produce similar effects. It can either enhance the functioning of the system by increasing the efficiency of communication for example between employers, employees and other agencies or it can be used in order to bypass the centralised control, destabilising the power balance between the various portions of an organisation and the whole functioning of it.

The nature of the mobile phone as a 'double-edged weapon' has emerged at all the interactional levels in society, the interpersonal, the group and the institutional.¹⁵ Within all these contexts, the mobile seems to have a strong impact. Empowering democracy on the one hand and increasing social control on the other; preserving social cohesion and promoting centrifugal fragmentation. In conclusion, there is no homogenous mobile effect. It varies according to the diverse range of users and uses. This makes it difficult to give an evaluation of the role of this device in society; more fieldwork needs to be done.

Professional politics as 'small public activity'

Our hypothesis is that small public activities can benefit from the use of the mobile phone. In order to put this hypothesis to the test, the first step is to demonstrate how the definition 'small public activity' could be applied to non-leaders professional politicians, at least in the Italian context. Until the end of the 1980s, large political parties dominated Italian public life. Party officials could not be employed by their political organisation but they were members of large organisations with many clerks and volunteers, where a team composed of party clerks, volunteers, officials and members of parliament did much of the connected clerical work.

Italian political parties were virtually destroyed by the corruption scandals of the early 1990s and a new generation of professional politicians emerged. Only some of the former professional politicians survived politically and all had to change all their habits. A 'Darwinian' phase of political activity emerged, when every professional politician had to look after themselves and survive in a very competitive milieu, without significant support from their party's organisation. If the politician needed a personal assistant, or a driver, or somebody to keep the electoral office open, they had to pay for them. Only the Members of Parliament got some financial support and only the most prominent political leaders had assistants or drivers paid for by the Government or by Parliament. We

are speaking of 'craftsmen', petty officers of the political fleet, people who have to work personally to have the leaflet or the electoral poster printed in time.

Research methodology and development

Our research was carried out between 2003 and 2004 with semi-structured interviews to professional politicians, journalists and politicians' assistants. Politicians belonged to both majority and minority parties, came from different parts of Italy and all were MPs, in order to select people with a comparable rank. None of them had any particular public office that would provide him/her with employees, benefits or car drivers. Interviews conducted at their desk and recorded with their permission. We also obtained permission to interview personal assistants, in Italian jargon 'portaborse' (briefcase bearer). Some parliamentary journalists were also interviewed. In some respects, they behaved as a control group. We did not ask them what they did with their mobile phones, but how the politicians they dealt with used them.

In total we had twelve subjects; four politicians, four personal assistants and four journalists. One of the politicians, two of the assistants and two of the journalists were women. The choice of the semi-structured interview reflects the intention to investigate deep motivations of subjects in using mobile communication. Furthermore, conducting the interview in a conversational format has much in common with an interview with a journalist, a genre they all knew very well. It might also please certain narcissism typical of the political discourse!

Mobile phones and related social practices in Italy

In the year 2000, there were 32 millions mobile phones in Italy. This meant that they outnumbered domestic landlines. Fixed wire phones had been introduced in Italy in 1890 and it had taken 110 years to reach 25 million phones; only 10 years were enough for mobile phones to go far beyond this figure. Mobile technology was the first technology having such a wide and fast diffusion in Italy, even faster than TV.

In many countries, mobile phone has led to a more intensive use of public space for informal social interaction, to the disadvantage of offices and other spaces traditionally dedicated to specific social interactions.¹⁶ In Italy too, since the beginning of the 1990s, it was common to hear continuous mobile phones ring tones in offices, restaurants, supermarkets, trains, waiting rooms, and even churches. The phenomenon became so widespread that a specific literature started to develop about the rise of mobile phone etiquette¹⁷ and the use of these devices in public spaces. Some of these last studies, based on data gathered from across Europe, show that using mobile phone in public situations has a disturbing influence.¹⁸ Even Italian parliamentary debates were disturbed by continuous phone calls, so a very drastic decision – quite unusual for Italians – was taken and now electronic devices prevent the main Parliament Halls from receiving or sending mobile phone transmissions. Since it is impossible to make or receive calls inside the halls, MPs may only use their mobile phones outside the Parliament Hall. It is strictly prohibited for anyone who is not an MP to enter the Parliament Hall even if they are MPs' personal assistants.

In terms of mobile etiquette, it is considered impolite to ask for someone's mobile number, this being a part of his or her private life. To give someone your mobile number is considered a proof of trust. If you have more than one mobile phone you can give this without great risk, as you can have a mobile phone for less important contacts and this may be switched off, or handed to your 'portaborse', your personal Leporello with his Filofax pocket diary, a modern day version of Don Giovanni's 'little black book'.

Phones multiple ownership and the boundaries between public and private

We found that the politicians' tended to use be heavy users of mobile phones, while only some of them consider using the internet.

I had my first mobile phone as a Christmas gift in 1990. It was heavy, analogue and difficult to use but I liked it immediately. When digital phones were introduced in 1994, I kept my analogue one, so I now have two. (Politician 1)

At the beginning I didn't take to mobile phones, they seemed trivial. When I was elected to Parliament, I could not avoid getting a second one. My first one is for my husband and children (each of them has one), and close friends. My second is devoted to politics. Later on, I was forced to buy a third one; my personal assistant manages it. What is it for? Local supporters in my constituency. (Politician 2).

I love the Internet, but I never have time for it. My assistant prints out the emails that are more important for me. We keep them in hard paper folders. The point is that to browse the Internet you need time; on the other hand, you can use a mobile phone almost whenever you like. If I am in a meeting, the phone ringing is a good opportunity to come outside, smoke a cigarette, go to the gents'. (Politician 4)

Now I am always in contact with my constituency, the party, and my assistants in Rome and outside. But if I don't want to be traced, I just switch off, and that's it. (Politician 2)

As we can see, some MPs seem to need to justify themselves in owning of such a trivial device, but they all use it and have at least two, sometimes three. Multiple ownership seems tied with functional needs: a first one for private conversations, a second one for important political talk and a third one for less important politics. The separation between work and private life as well as between personal and public sphere are modern concepts that has constantly expanding since the 18th century. According to Grant and Kiesler, mobile technologies blur the boundary between work and personal life and partially reinstate a pre-modern state of social life where this boundary was less distinct. The way in which professional politicians use the mobile phone seems to counteract this trend: owning several sets, each one dedicated to a specific function, helps politicians to keep private life and work separated.¹⁹

The mobile phone is perceived as a timesaving technology, which, unlike the Internet, does not need a special time to use it. The device also serves a second, important function in politicians' work routines, acting

as a time-maker. When a call is received, it is used to go outside a meeting and have a break. Of course, the main advantage associated with the adoption of the mobile phone is seen in the management of social and political relations, even though having one or more mobiles means being always reachable.

If we examine the assistants' responses, the mobile's uses, functions and limits described by the politicians stand out even more clearly.

I worked with my MP as a political volunteer during the electoral campaign. When he was elected, he asked me to follow him to Rome as a paid assistant. I am interested in politics, so I accepted. My mobile phone is paid for by my MP, although I have another, which I pay for, and use for my personal calls. (Personal assistant 1)

We (my boss and I) have a lot of phones. I have two, but I also manage his third. Furthermore, we have a powerful car phone when travelling. The driver manages it, which is particularly useful when we want to be reached by the driver. We don't like to have the huge luxury car parked outside the meeting room, for instance of a working class union office. We ask the driver to park some distance away, and we call him when we have finished. (Personal assistant 2)

It is hard to manage so many mobile phones ringing or vibrating. I have spent many years in Parliament as assistant to various MPs, but life changed dramatically when mobile phones arrived. I have three sets to control. In particular, when my boss is speaking in public or is involved in important restricted meeting, where he cannot use his phones. And of course in the Parliament Hall. (Personal assistant 3)

My boss has many people he doesn't want to speak to, except on some special occasions. I keep his phones and I am forced to give many excuses when people he dislikes insist they have an appointment or want to speak with him. (Personal assistant 4)

How many calls a day? It depends! It can be between 50 and 100, incoming and out going. Sometimes the boss wants to talk, so he calls colleagues and journalists continuously. Other days they look for him, but he prefers not to be found. At least by most people, not on his selected list. But members of the selected list often change. (Personal assistant 1)

Sometimes my MP disappears. I know almost everything about his political and even his private life, but sometimes he wants to rest. I wonder if he has some date that he doesn't want me to know; may be it is so. A non-written rule between us says: if my phone is off, I don't want to be disturbed. (Personal assistant 4)

Even assistants have their own work mobile, in addition to the personal one, while a further phone can be used to communicate from the car or with the driver. Both politicians and assistants are heavy mobile phone users. Politicians' third and occasionally second sets, dedicated to work, are managed by the assistant, a sort of gatekeeper who decides (helped by the number or name appearing in the display) if he has to answer or not and if he must link the calling person with the boss.

Mobile phones seem to provide an empowerment of the politician's interpersonal relations, adding mobility and intimacy to the usual phone conversations from their desk. Public political activity (meetings, travel, debates) can be better mixed with the underlying (private, not evident, sometimes hidden) relationships with colleagues, allies, even adversaries that form the political manoeuvre.

Mobile phones help the politician to be found everywhere, but permit them also to filter or ban undesired calls. Traceability of the politician increases, especially for their closest partners in their public and private lives. There is also the chance for the politicians to maintain a certain control over their accessibility and avoid incoming calls, even from their assistants, by switching the mobile off. This becomes a signal, like the 'do not disturb' notice outside a hotel room. In this way, mobile communication can act as a system improving accessibility and multiplying time, but also creating a safe and intangible space all around the politician.

The mobile phone as a social filter

The function of mobile phones as a powerful social filter emerged throughout our inquiry. When asked whom they normally talked to, almost all the politicians answered in the same way, journalists, state officials, members of Parliament, party elites, and top members of those involved in the MP's activity. For instance, a politician dealing with agriculture is likely a phone interlocutor of farmers' associations' leaders; a politician from Tuscany is expected to often call the Major of Florence or Siena and to be called by them. Some subjects are always missing in the list, electors, party members, and 'ordinary' people. These are not gratified with the mobile phone number of their MP, a sign of intimacy and power, and are forced to use fixed phone, fax, and email, apply in person to the MP's office or ask for an appointment in the constituency or in Rome. Just one politician out of those interviewed owns a mobile phone entirely dedicated to calls from local supporters in her constituency. By shifting some relations to the mobile and some others to the traditional media, the politician makes a clear distinction, within their social and political networks, between 'A list' interlocutors and 'B list' interlocutors.

Interviewing the journalists proved very useful.

We Parliamentary reporters divide our job in two parts, policies and politics. 'Policies' means how to rule the country. Unfortunately, our readership is too fond of 'politics': verbal brushes among political adversaries, without any practical consequence on the life of common citizens. (Journalist 1)

We cover debates on new legislation, especially the most controversial, like abortion, artificial fertilisation, peace, justice, taxes, finances and so on. Each of these policies will cause a clash on various issues, which sometimes crosses boundaries between parliamentary majority and minority. Usually the politician in charge for his party to deal with a certain policy, for example finances, or his assistant, hands us his mobile phone number. We call him and try to make him utter the issue his party is fighting for. Than we call a

member of the opposite party, or of the government, and we do the same. (Journalist 2)

Our job has changed. Before we had to walk in parliamentary corridors fishing for some politician's statement to quote; now we can sit in a chair and dial a lot of mobile phone numbers. (Journalist 3)

Maybe it is a consequence of show biz, but politics is more and more gossip. Politicians tell you confidentially gossip about their colleagues and then, always confidentially, they tell the same story to another journalist. A reporter as soon as he receives a piece of gossip, or simply a statement, about another politician calls him asking for feedback. Then call the first politician for cross feedback. In addition, it is only 11 am! It the same old story until 7 pm, when tomorrows' newspaper are made. It is a hard work... (Journalist 4)

Political discourse is more and more composed by phone talk, a flow of conversation – somehow similar to radiophonic orality – often stimulated, requested and even provoked by journalists. Every statement produces feedback, then a new proposition, which reacts to the former but, in the meantime amends it. This of course does not represent an absolute novelty. Very often in the past politicians consigned to the press speeches, declarations and statements, which where printed together with adversaries' commentaries. The day after, there was room to answer and to modify slightly the proposal taking into account various commentaries and amendments. The debate was consigned to the press and entirely public.

As a timesaving technology, mobile phones squeeze all this process into one day only and take it back backstage. For example, twenty years ago, a MP with an idea such as selling the public broadcasting corporation to private companies, could make his statement and read it the following day in the newspapers, surrounded with approval or criticism. Of course, he could change his mind, but his proposal was made public and published by the press. Today an idea of that kind, expressed at 10.30 in the morning, receives immediately comment, because parliamentary reporters become facilitators who help create the comment. If the proposal has been made early enough, there is time during the day to make three turns of statements, in which the politician can also say they have been misunderstood and correct their political position. In the following day's newspapers or in evening TV news, only the final proposal becomes public. Of course, journalists could use texts or their conversations (often tape-recorded) and demonstrated how political discourse in the morning was significantly different at 7 pm, but being oral and not written their use is restricted to some limited but crucial issues and cannot be iterated everyday.

We asked politicians if sometimes they spoke many times with the same journalist in the same day.

Yes, it often occurs. If I have something relevant to say, I have a couple of friends in newspapers and TVs, not necessarily sharing my

ideas, and I call them early. They immediately collect comment and criticisms and call me back. Maybe I give my feedback or even make some changes. Real friends call you a third time so I can strengthen my proposal and answer questions that are more frequent. (Politician 3)

It is important to make sure that what you say is well understood. After I make a declaration, I always want to know what others say about it: And 'others' means also my party fellows! You can never be sure! If there is some point that merits being better explained, I do so, even several times. Fortunately all this work doesn't appear (or only in a small proportion) in the news. (Politician 4)

The important thing is television and then newspaper; but also, radio news especially in the morning. If you are not a member of the Government and you have no office, the only way to be known is to declare, and to find journalists who report and who cover what you have said. Maybe it is just a polemic argument, but if you are not on the radar screens of the press (generally speaking, TV and radio included), you are Mr. Nobody. Better a polemic argument than noting. Furthermore, you also have to be careful in avoiding appearing as somebody irrelevant, speaking on everything; the people reporters look for only when all mouths are shut. If you have the chance to refine and better what you say, incorporating objections and criticism from adversaries, you look more effective. Mobile phones help to do so. You can come back on your statement many times, before the newsroom is closed, even if you are in your car, driving towards some meeting. (Politician 1)

As we can see, mobile phones permit a trial-and-error path to effective public speaking, which is particularly relevant for those whom we called petty officers, minor politicians, people who have to fight hard to find a political space.²⁰ We asked also if this continuous bargaining of sense with journalists and the public opinion, helped by mobile phones, could be applied also to the decision making process. Evidence shows that something of that kind now happens.

When some important governmental office is to be appointed in our constituency, my boss asks me in a hurry to produce a chart containing all appointed public offices in the Province, and CVs of our candidates. Being accustomed to these sudden hurries, I keep up to date and refresh continuously an electronic data bank with all available offices and a list of party fellows suitable for office. When the moment comes, he begins to make telephone call to everywhere, calling people even at odd hours. Do you want to know which people? Party leaders, members of Government, majors, other competitors. After half a day he begins to call and call back always the same interlocutors. (Personal assistant 1)

It is evident that mobile phone permits mobile bargaining and making deals, a continuous flow of orality, reaching interlocutors everywhere and every time, unless they don't like to be called.

During hard bargaining, it very often happens that some important

personage doesn't want to be called. My boss doesn't consider it a humiliation, or at least doesn't show it. After many calls, he charges me to continue calling with the spare mobile phone he gives me. Of course many times, in our turn, we don't answer less important persons whose numbers appear on the display. (Personal assistant 4)

Mobile communication permits also a sort of 'surprise effect'.

I have the privilege to have the restricted number of almost all the leaders in this country. If I really need a favour, I choose to call very early in the morning or late in the evening. You could not imagine that the ruling class of this country wakes up much earlier than the blue collars. At 6 o'clock in the morning only a few people can speak with leaders and a sort of untold complicity arises: (Politician 4)

SMS and VMS do not seem much used.

Short messages? Stuff for kids. Political language is too sophisticated to enter that small display. The only use I make of them is to ask my secretary to send me a SMS with a phone number I miss, so I can call it directly. (Politician 3)

If I want a written text I dictate to my secretary. The mobile is for speaking, and discussing. In some cases, you have better not to put in a written text what you think, but just to tell it. My first political crash was an interview with a weekly on a controversial bargaining. The story came out ten days later, and I had changed my mind two times already! (Politician 1)

My son sends me SMSs but I have no time to answer and neither am I sure that I am able to do so. (Politician 1)

Video messages? Please don't. I am so weary in the afternoon that I prefer to be heard, not seen unless I have a little time for make up. (Politician 2)

I tell little lies on the telephone. I could not stand that a video message would reveal that I am not at that public meeting but in a restaurant *à la page* speaking with a political adversary. (Politician 4)

There seem to be several obstacles in using video and written texts on mobile phones. Firstly, a technological difficulty in writing rapidly combined with the desire to talk and not to write, oral communication being more politically ambiguous and easier to deny. In particular, writing as a cultural form 'freezes' thinking or bargaining in a determinate position, while speech seems more to be a continuous flow. Lastly, a visual image is connected too tightly to truth. If you show yourself, the expression or your face will be evident, and unavoidable lies will be unmasked.

Conclusion Starting from the classic work of Habermas, the public sphere has enlarged to include audiovisual and audio media and more and more has been shaped or influenced by performances of politicians on the media stage. Joshua Meyrowitz, combining Marshall McLuhan²¹ and Ervin Goffman,²² discussed a complete redefinition of time and space, consequently scrambling any traditional split between private and public

sphere. His celebrated book 'No sense of place'²³ prophetically seems to foresee an era of mobile communication and thus of mobilisation of the public sphere.

The most important transformations produced by Italian politicians' adoption of the mobile phone appear to be in the way political debate is conducted and become public through the press; in the way decisions about political issues are made; in bargaining and making deals about power and spoils to divide with one's peers and political partners and finally relationships with journalists and the media. The politician's constituency seems less concerned by mobile communication, which seems to be a peer-to-peer communication, restricted to political tribes living in an inner circle of parliamentary life. Simple electors, citizens, party members, volunteers and members of spontaneous groups are invited to use other channels, more traditional, more formal and sometimes different modes of communication (paper letters, fax, requests for personal consultancy). Internet contacts are left to assistants; it means that they are considered only an introductory relationship, which can be steadier only with subsequent more formal relationships.

All this generates a peculiar blend of novelties and tradition, feudality and modernity. Politicians, officials, journalists belonging to an inner circle, with its networks of mobile communication, with large areas of availability and traceability, but also a dialectics 'on/off' that generates gaps of deliberate unavailability and severe selections, at certain times, of potential conversation partners by watching the calling numbers on the display.

Mobile communication exploits scraps of time previously unserviceable (car rides, waiting in airports) or succeeds in doubling time areas dedicated to other activities (phone calls during meetings or social events), while it weakens the need for actual presence in space. Consequently, it multiplies the amount of political communication, lowers reaction times to external events and speeds up the pace of political life. This can outline a different public sphere, in a different culture of time and space. At the same time, however, mobile communication speed up the 'oral' dimension of politics, already pushed by audiovisual media, shifting it closer to everyday life, showing more 'politics' than 'policies', more talking than acting.

- Notes**
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