

# Visibility regimes in mediatized publicness

## *Regimes de visibilidade na publicidade mediatizada*

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### ABSTRACT

Considering the relationship between politics, media and publicness, this paper ponders the consequences of visibility in the political field. Identifying some of its existing regimes, it will posit that today visibility plays an ambivalent function to politics: it can simultaneously operate as a synoptic monitoring and control of politicians; and at the same time it may stand as an opportunity to build a charismatic leadership. In fact, political visibilities are now negotiated between the boundaries of private and public realms, and they can take the form of a risk, or an opportunity to build on a charismatic leadership.

**Keywords:** Publicity, politics, mediatization, visibility, charisma

### RESUMO

Refletindo sobre as relações entre política, media e publicidade, este artigo pondera as consequências que a visibilidade, no contexto da mediatização da esfera pública, provoca no campo político. Identificando alguns dos seus atuais regimes concluir-se-á que a visibilidade possui uma natureza ambivalente para a política, podendo funcionar, quer num registo sinóptico de vigilância e controlo social dos políticos, quer num registo potencial de construção de uma liderança carismática. É na negociação das fronteiras entre o privado e o público que atualmente se jogam politicamente as visibilidades, quer assumam a forma de um risco para a gestão da integridade da imagem pública, quer assumam uma oportunidade para fundar uma liderança carismática.

**Palavras-chave:** Publicidade, política, mediatização, visibilidade, carisma

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## INTRODUCTION

WE LIVE IN societies evidencing an obvious obsession with visibilities. While being passionate to images we surrender to their fascination. And visibility has become in these hypermodern times a core value in politics. In a mediatization context where the informational flow is constant and instantaneous, visibility acquires a new political status: take, for instance, terrorist groups use of video recordings to attract media attention; or the pictures of Iraqi prisoners of *Abu Ghraib* penitentiary, in 2004, depicting the various-forms of torture, subjugation and moral degradation to which they were subject.

In this process of making politics more perceptible, subjecting it to the scrutiny of public opinion, the technological devices of symbolic mediation has an obvious role enabling new forms of communication. Indeed, the mediatized communication cannot be considered only as a technical transmission of information; on the contrary, all the symbolic nature of media creates new communicational forms of action and interaction between individuals (Thompson, 2005: 32). The way mediatization is moving towards a greater transparency of procedures, leads to the creation of a new political stage in which media helped to build and in which new strategic opportunities take shape. If visibility is, in modernity, a political operator of scandal, political exploitation of public commotion is relatively new. Indeed, visibility makes transparency a supplement of belief: *we believe in what we see*. In this sense, visibility is almost a synonym for authenticity and immediacy.

This visibility as a strategy of personal presentation of the politician was not born with the advent of television but it was because of television that it reached a fundamental importance in politics. In 1952, for example, sixty millions of people watched on television the famous *Checkers Speech* where, for thirty minutes, Senator Richard Nixon - publicly accused of being responsible of financial irregularities - refutes the charges through a revelation of his personal motives and good intentions. By exposing his private life, stating (and showing) the benevolence of his character, confiding intimate details of his life, Nixon has shifted attentions from his acts to the integrity of his character. He spoke not only of the republicanism of his wife, but also about their passion for dogs and in particular his dog *Checkers*. This speech might just be the example of how the visibility of private affairs started to work politically in an emotional way.

It is necessary to distinguish two main senses in the word *visibility*. The emergence of technological devices of symbolic mediation and the creation of a digital public sphere came to intensify, not just the visibility understood

from its strict phenomenological sense, but also visibility understood in a broad sense as what becomes public and known. In other words, we will use the word *visibility* in a perceptive and sensory sense as that which is given to do and being watched ( thus becoming something visual); and, at the same time, visibility as everything acquiring a set of symbolic meanings related to particular events (thus becoming something we are aware of). When dealing with the literal and the metaphorical sense of visibility are not reiterating the polysemy of the term, but underlining how a complex social phenomenon has two aspects related to each other. Visuality and visibility are therefore intertwined and interrelated terms. Visibility is an extension of visuality impregnated with the symbolic (Brighenti, 2008: 4). Symbols may be conceived as specific relationships in the field of visibilities that make precisely something recognizable. In fact, it may be difficult to totally separate the visual and the visible. To assume the visibility is therefore to accept the visual infused by the symbolic. Furthermore, to accept the literal sense and the metaphorical senses of visibility means not only the acceptance of visuality as a component of visibility, but also accepting visibility's public dimension. Thus, to say that something is visible points not only to a perceptive behavior but also for a matter of collective interest and social relevance. It is precisely this segmentation of senses that connects visibility, not just to visuality but also to publicness.

It is therefore imperative to examine the “articulability of the visible” (Brighenti, 2008: 7) and understand which the regimes of visibility may be. We should ask ourselves about the nature of social relations when this articulation is at stake. This task is so much more important to publicness the better we realize that the intersection between aesthetics and politics is inevitable in contemporary society. At a time where so ubiquitous and immediate media thrive, it is fundamental to ask about the levels of visibility of social activity. In fact, to publicly delineate and manage their own visibilities is something that all social agents do at a daily basis. However, with the emergence of technologies of the image and the internet, this task of defining the field of visible has become more demanding.

In this paper we ponder on the role of mediatization in contemporary visibility tracing some political consequences. After preliminary considerations about the mediatization of publicness and the relationship between visibility, power and social control, we will deepen some sociocultural factors involved in the outbreak of visibilities in politics, and we will end on the classification of typical regimes of visibility in media.

**THE MEDIATIZATION OF PUBLICNESS AND VISIBILITY**

Until modern times, the publicness of individuals and events was spatially and temporally anchored in the sharing of the same place and the same time. Thus, an event became public when it was represented before a diversity of individuals physically present who watched and testified directly its development (for example, in public executions of medieval convictions). Thompson (1995: 125) calls this publicness based on symbolic and dialogic richness typical of face-to-face interaction, “publicness of copresence”.

With the modern consolidation of media, the publicness of copresence was not extinguished but begins to be supplemented by new forms of publicness. With the emergence of press, publicness stops to rely only on visibility (the literal and sensory sense of visibility) to assume the direction of something that is symbolically visible or recognized by society (what we previously referred as the metaphorical sense of visibility). With the press, a topic becomes public without necessarily involve a dialogical interaction since the reader is not a potential participant (as in the case of the publicness of copresence) but a mere reader, someone who reads what the press reports. With the printing, publicness suffers the influence of mediatization and visibility is no longer wholly dependent on direct testimony of sensory perception and visibility.

With the advent of printing, the link between publicness and sensory perception has been transformed. An action or event could now acquire a public status to those who had not been present at the place of its occurrence (Thompson, 1995: 128).

Hence, the mediatization of the publicness has brought an explosive expansion of visibility: a topic is socially relevant not only because it can be directly known as also because it becomes visible and public regardless of the spatial or temporal circumstances. With media, publicness has differentiated itself from the copresence model and the visibility of events became separated from the need to share the same place and the same time. So, the field of vision is no longer constrained by the here and now of temporal properties, being even modeled by the characteristics of media communication (Thompson, 2005: 35). Media have, thus, introduced a non-localized publicness and non-dialogical, in which a plurality of symbolic forms (visual and extravisual) are expressed and received by a multitude of individuals in a non-simultaneous nor copresencial manner. While visibility in the publicness of copresence is located and mutual (the others are visible to us and we are visible to them because we all share the same spatiotemporal definitions), in mediatized publicness visibility breaks free from the shackles of space and time and becomes

independent of this coordinates. Now visibility stretches in space (distant events can be seen live) and in time (past events can easily be retrieved). The mediatization of publicness opens thereby the visibility: media radicalized visibility, duplicated it, made it comprehensive. Something is visible (that is, it becomes a public and socially relevant issue) not only because it can be directly seen but also because becomes object of public awareness. Media intervention on publicness has thus created new ingenious spaces where visibility images, speeches and a whole variety of symbolic forms can suddenly appear and be put to the public eye.

Furthermore, with the modern media like television and the web, visibilities win two fundamental attributes: firstly, they become predominantly unidirectional losing the reciprocity characteristic of copresence visibility. The audience is not allowed to choose the angle of view, or select what they want to see. On the other hand, the spectator may testify that somewhere in the world individuals are being filmed or photographed, but those seen individuals may not themselves perceive who watch them. The visibility of the television or on the internet therefore emphasizes a radical contrast between visibility and invisibility, between those who see and are not seen, and those who do not see and are seen.

Secondly, the actions and events reported on those media become visible to a larger number of individuals which may be found scattered across the planet and living with significant time differences among themselves. In contrast with the few hundreds or thousands of people who witness an event in the context of copresence, media provide a global visibility to billions of people. The mediatization of publicness and the above-mentioned transformations exemplify how contemporary visibility asks original modes of dealing with a wider public exposure which is manifested not only quantitatively - the number of people who potentially assist the particular event - but also qualitatively - on the asymmetry between the visibility of those who are seen and the invisibility of those who see.

Taking this into account we should acknowledge that visibility struggles are of central importance in contemporary politics (not just recognition struggles as emphasized by Honneth). It is evident that the public arena has expanded with the development of the modern media. And this means a huge opportunity and at the same time a great risk, as we will see. Politicians now have the opportunity to appear before the citizens, to be known, to perform in the flesh, not just as statesmen but, above all, as individuals with whom the media audiences can identify with.

### THE VISIBILITY AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN POWER AND POLITICS – FROM PANOPTISM TO SINOPTISM

The articulation between the state power and visibility/invisibility politics dates back to the tradition of the *arcana imperii* where power is strictly associated with the invisibility of its decisions (Bobbio, 1999). To put it another way, power is conceived as a form of external visibility (its effects) associated with the total internal invisibility (its decisions). While the effects of power are evident to anyone, the government operations should not be shown, but kept in secret (ex: Secret Intelligence). Following Canetti, we can say “the secret is at the heart of power” (1973: 253). Thus, according to the *arcana imperii* tradition it is the invisibility that reinforces power. Spinoza himself (2011: 29), although away from this tradition, admits concealment and secrets to constitute important tools for the usurpation of power since they hinder public debate and criticism. For him, everything that stays in the shade or in the opacity tends to weaken politics given that only the transparency of power may promote the rationality of the laws.

However, as we all know, the most influential model to understand the relationship between visibility and power is due to Foucault (2005), which describes the organization of power in modern Western societies departing from the panoptic model of Jeremy Bentham. Foucault defines the societies of the *ancien régime* as societies of spectacle based on public demonstration of superiority and authority of the sovereign. The power scheme was based on the visibility of an elite as a means to exert power over the rest of the population. At this level, Inquisition’s *Auto de fé* can be considered as a religious form to prosecute political domination. Foucault argues that from the 16th century on, the spectacularization and visibility of power gave rise to disciplinary forms of surveillance that progressively infiltrate themselves in various fields of everyday life. The hospital and the prison, for example, began to employ subtle mechanisms of exercise of power based on discipline, in the examination, on the observation and on recording. From a visibility of some it follows a visibility when many are observed by a few, as this panoptic visibility controls the gaze.

Who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, takes its account of the limitations of power; make it work spontaneously upon himself; inscribes in himself the power relationship in which he simultaneously plays two roles: becomes the principle of its own bondage (Foucault, 2005: 168).

Thus, by internalizing surveillance, the panoptic translates a new model of organization of power in modern societies. It is characterized by making

visibility a means of social control. Each individual is the subject of multiple gazes that scrutinize him and induce him to voluntarily adopt a certain behavior. While the panoptic model can be observed in the use of common surveillance cameras as a dissuasive factor (cf. Lyon, 2004), as well as in all devices every day map our activities (from the ATM to the biometric terminals for control of assiduity), the panoptic as a generalizable model of the exercise of power in modern societies is unconvincing (Thompson, 1995: 134). Media can certainly work in this disciplinary regime of visibility, but this is clearly not their sole register. If Foucault questioned the role of the media in the management of visibilities, he would for sure conclude that media came to draw attention to the existence of new logics between visibility and power that cannot be exhausted in this panoptic model.

To be sure, what the mediatization of publicness really introduced was the opportunity given to vast amounts of individuals to witness at safe distance the behavior of their peers. Modern media (aware of the panoptic visibility where a majority is observed by a minority) nurture another relationship between visibility and power in which precisely those who wield political power (minority) are the same who are subject to the public scrutiny of their lives by citizens (majority). *Thus, one can declare that the electronic media, more than a panoptic model, induct in our societies a synoptic model* (cf. Mathiesen, 1997). Whether they are aware of it or not, today's political leaders and heads of state are constantly being monitored (and thus scrutinized) through the visibility of their actions. Still, the synoptism that media cause on publicness does not resemble the synoptism characteristic of societies of spectacle of the *ancien régime*. While in these societies sovereign and subjects shared the same spatiotemporal copresence publicness, with mediatization the synoptism is now, not located nor dialogic. As matter of fact, the explosion of visibilities that occurred with the mediatization of publicness brings new difficulties for politicians because they cannot completely control the effects of the ubiquity of its visibility (see Thompson, 2000). *The synoptism represents, then, a new type of political fragility*. Today, politicians have to be prepared for the possibility of being photographed or filmed. Each gaffe, scandal or leak potentially threat control and management of the public image that every politician wants to exhibit.

But how do politicians seek to deal with the public scrutiny of their permanent visibility? What kind of politics this synoptism inspires? And in what way the management of appearances has adapted to this broad field of visibility?



### CHARISMA AS THE POLITICIAN'S RESPONSE TO THE MEDIATIZATION OF HIS VISIBILITY

From the late nineteenth century, we find a culture of investigative journalism responsible for the public exposure of the private life of politicians. Indeed, newsroom editors as W. T. Stead (in Britain) and Joseph Pulitzer (in the United States of America) fulfilled the claim of the press as a watch-dog of the political power, developing an entire investigative tradition of journalism (*muckracking journalism*) that quickly exposed the secrets and hidden aspects of political functioning. By extension, with the exposure of state secrets came the revelation of personal confidences: deontological codes, which previously discouraged the reporting of the private lives of politicians, progressively became more receptive to those disclosures.

On the other hand, the very political culture has undergone profound transformations throughout the 20th century, facilitating the blurring of the boundaries between the public and the private. Thompson (2005: 46), for example, notes a transformation from an *ideological politics* to a *politics of trust*. To be true, party politics based on traditional social classes has weakened significantly in the post-war period. Faced with the complexity of contemporary societies, individuals were no longer, according to Thompson (2005: 46), able to base their decisions on great ideological jargons.

It was in this historical context that the question of credibility and trust acquired a central role. People began to value more the character of its political leaders than the ideals or ideologies of the party. So, it was in a time where trust has evolved more than ever into a central value of politics that visibility became a test for credibility. And this in two paradoxical ways: on the one hand, as we have seen, the visibility adds the risk of scandals and gaffes. However, on the other hand, it is precisely this visibility that can help build the credibility necessary to win the trust of the electorate.

In this light we can understand why a scandal concerning the private life of a politician is seen as having a huge political significance: not so much because we believe that politicians should adhere to a strict moral code, but because we know that his behavior says much about their integrity and credibility (Thompson, 2005: 47).

So, *a distinctive way of dealing with the public exposure of politicians is to build a credible personality in whom people can trust*. In this process, the political man search the best way to gain charisma. In all periods of history we find examples of a charismatic domination in which an individual acquires an extraordinary quality and is endowed with an exceptional power, seen qualitatively as a superhuman or supernatural being (Weber, 1995: 320). The notions of *Shaman*, *Prophet* or



*Führer* translate, in the magical, religious and political domains respectively, this dimension of extraordinary leadership over other individuals. The charismatic dominion can arise because there are a number of persons willing to follow it. Consequently, the charismatic personality ends when it loses the support of its followers, when they cease to believe in the supremacy of this charismatic leadership. Max Weber (1995: 322) notes that the domain and obedience raised by charisma are based on an emotional community, that is, a tacit agreement in the superiority of its leader by the superlative qualities he reveals.

With the advent of mediatized publicness and the expansion of fields of vision (Thompson, 1995: 148), charisma got a new assessment. While still relying on the panvisibility and scrutiny of synoptism, the politicians seem today to bet on their own appeal. In a world of mediatization, how would the politician oppose the risks of his own visibility? *He seeks now to become a charismatic figure. And does so, diverting attention from his actions to his real intentions, and by subordinating the ideological commitment to his own morality.*

Accordingly, the political charisma still depends of an emotional community as Weber argued. *However, the contemporary charisma is distinct from the weberian charisma to the extent that it is built not so much in public but mostly in private; or more accurately, in a certain publication of the private.* What we notice in our societies is the emergence of a charisma that, to paraphrase Sennett (1992: 269), we designate *secular charisma*. This notion reflects a politics of personality where charisma is mostly obtained through the revelation of personal intentions and the probity of political character. Distancing himself from the formality and stereotyping of traditional politics, today's political man emphasizes his personal qualities as a simple citizen, giving the view in the intimacy of his private life, letting know some details of their family life. What is at the center of secular charisma is a kind of *psychological striptease* (Sennett, 1992: 269) in which through the disclosure of his impulses, routines and habits, politicians try to obtain an emotional bond with voters.

This kind of charisma, backed in a progressive, solid and controlled public exposure of the personality, is, once again, very distant from Weber's charisma: political leaders need not, currently, to express any titanic or heroic qualities to be charismatic. In the era of mediatized publicness – where the visibility is permanent and in which citizens can potentially testify nearly every move – the charisma comes from the competence to charm audiences. It comes not from a superhuman attitude but just through the famous nietzschean aphorism: *human, all too human*. Barack Obama is, perhaps, one of the greatest contemporary examples of how this kind of charisma operates. He won his election with the American electorate by putting himself as a man before the system.

His charisma, he got it, not from a messianism, but above all through a public image based on demonstration of a solid and honest personality. He was seen as a common and honest man who fought *status quo*. More than to profess ideologies, Obama has carefully displayed his modest intentions and, thus, gained popular sympathy. The apparent integrity of his personality is at the heart of its political credibility.

*So, in a time of visibility's mediatization, politicians seek advantage precisely in what initially looked like an embarrassment. The visibility afforded by the media is not only a risk for the management of the public image of their careers. It is, above all, a means to the formation and consolidation of political charisma.* In fact, media themselves encourage this kind of charisma by exposing the character and the privacy of politicians (Sennett, 1992: 282). Media promote secular charisma insofar as, since the emergence of radio and, then, television, conditions were created to establish a certain familiarity in the midst of the public sphere. Politicians were then able to proceed directly to his constituents and look them in the eye, just if they were friends or family. The voice and the gaze are unexpected catalysts of public intimacy, each viewer judging every facial expression and mannerism. With television, some characteristic indicators of face-to-face interaction were replicated. For example, the courtesy given by the political man towards the camera simulates the attention given to each citizen, fostering a relationship similar to those closest to us.

The impersonal indifference of most of the political leaders of the past was, increasingly, replaced by this new kind of mediated intimacy through which politicians can present themselves not only as leaders but as human beings, as common subjects, which address his subjects as fellow citizens, selectively disclosing aspects of their lives and of their character, in a conversational mode or even confessional mode (Thompson, 2005: 38).

To summarize, the mediatization of publicness was accompanied by social transformations and changes in political culture that gradually made visibility a paradoxical aspect: if visibility can potentially destroy the public credibility, at the time, it is also a fundamental tool in the manufacture of a charismatic leadership. It is true this is a differentiated form of Weber's charisma but it is also true that answers a politics of trust based on the integrity and credibility of the personality.

## REGIMES OF VISIBILITY

Politics is today closely attached to the outbreak of visibilities permitted by the mediatization of publicness. Visibility works, then, as a *pharmakon*. Its ambiguous and equivocal nature caused by its ubiquity is not just a risk to the integrity and rectitude of the personality, but simultaneously a panacea

for handling these risks. In the face of the ever-present possibility of scandal, the mediatization of visibility also enables the political man to conquer, in a conversational tone, a charismatic leadership. The secular charisma is achieved, not through the mythologization or transcendentalization, but above all, through a benevolent approach putting the politician as a man among men. The confessional display of intimacy is adopted as a strategy to acquire this secular charisma, taking advantage of the technical characteristics of media.

Having said that, it is necessary to examine, in the context of a mediatized publicness, how this burst of visibilities happens. In other words, we will proceed to a brief examination of the regimes of visibility in their articulation with publicness.

We wish now to emphasize the internet *medium*. Several reasons justify this choice: on the one hand, the internet has intensified the quasi-mediatized interaction initiated by television, shaking the spatial and temporal rooting of face-to-face interaction (Thompson, 1995: 94). At the same time, internet is clearly anchored in visuality, specially in the visibility of the political field. Technical features make this *medium* a special case in what the relation between politics and visibility concerns.

Firstly, the accessibility. On the internet, we find a panoply of subjects, opinions, reviews, pictures and videos for immediate consultation in a degree that no other media, until now, has reached. Its great asset is, perhaps, the gratuity of the access combined with the speed with which such contents access the public domain. Thus, it is a matter of minutes before the slip can be reviewed on the internet (whether in the blogosphere, in a press title, or *twitter*, etc).

Secondly, the internet establishes a social hipermemorialization. Once published on the web, a content can be available for years. Thus, incidents linked to the management of political visibilities may never simply be forgotten and, after years, they continue to be seen and remembered<sup>1</sup>. The famous lapse on the part of a candidate in municipal elections that, inadvertently, claims by the rival party leader instead of the name of his town, is an example of that; even after years, some events are kept available (and alive) on the web to be once again brought to the public sphere<sup>2</sup>.

Thirdly, we have the iterative nature of the internet. Because its contents are always available, each visibility can be repeatedly revisited, reentered, reconsidered. This not only tends to cod the web of time (mixing past and present into a single temporality), as it increases the degree of visibility of any speech or political deed.

Taking into account these three attributes we will resort to the internet to discriminate visibility regimes associated with the mediatization of publicness. We will have two cores – the public visibility and private visibility – each declining itself, in a private and public dimension.

1. This, of course, brings new problems to political charisma, but for the sake of brevity, we leave the development of this subject for another opportunity.

2. We are referring to Valentim Loureiro, PSD candidate of the municipality of Gondomar that in 1995, sings “Guterres” instead of “Gondomar”. See “Valentim Loureiro” [online], accessed in September 2012, available at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLR1OETuYA0>>.

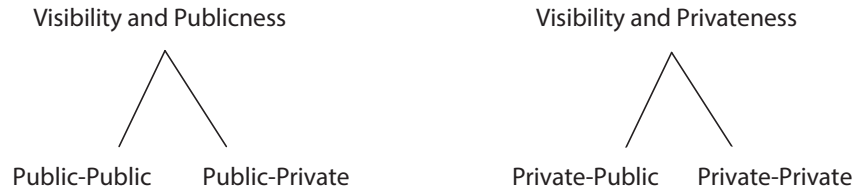


Diagram 1 – Declination of visibility in different regimes according to the mediatization of publicness

### Public-Public Regime

The first regime of visibility is one in which the political actions of flagrantly public character are reinforced (in its socially relevant value) for their mediatization. It corresponds to all events that are traditionally associated to the public service of information. Hence its public nature is doubly reinforced: not only because it consists of events of public nature, but also because they are publicized by media. Their publicness is therefore taken from dual constitution: it is given by the intrinsic nature of the event and, at the same time, by its mediatization.



Figure 1 – The public-public regime: manifestations in Syria (Euronews, 2012) (videos run on Acrobat Reader.)

We detect the public – public visibility regime on the occasion of official events, evocative ceremonies or solemn proceedings, such as the celebration of national holidays, ceremonies of possession, or tributes to personalities that stood out, for example, in the social, political, economic or cultural fields. In addition, contestations and protests<sup>3</sup> (fig. 1) are also included in this regime. It

3. RTP Notícias, “Manifestações ganham força nas redes sociais e demarcam-se das estruturas políticas”, [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.rtp.pt/noticias/index.php?article=587330&tm=8&layout=122&visual=61>>.

should be added that journalism has a central role in the development of this regime through its own agenda. Thus, the political events journalism reports help to define this visibility and give extra publicness to events already public and socially relevant<sup>4</sup>.

The internet reinforces this duplicity of public status by making available, at all times, the re-presentation of the event (TV Play Service, Podcast, etc). In this way, it fills the social function of an unofficial history recording (literally, twenty four hours a day, three hundred sixty-five days).

### Public-Private Regime

The second regime of visibility here considered is the public-private. It encompasses all those occurrences of eminently state and public contours accessing the public sphere and acquiring media visibility but that, nevertheless, are not disclosed for their entirety. So when, for example, elements of government participate in parliamentary hearings, citizens have access only to the partial reporting of this conversation. In public-private visibility, the functioning of the state is both transparent and obscure: there is some degree of visibility and public knowledge but there is also the space of silence and obscurity considered necessary so that the excess of visibility, caused by the mediatization, does not harm the normal exercise of this events. This silence is often filled with speculations, interpretations and analyses made by political commentators.

Media reports on meetings between heads of state and representatives of European institutions, or the successive summits between unions and government are typical examples of this regime. Thus, this public-private regime make public events that, until then, remained unknown to the society. So it is a regime of visibility simultaneously public and private: on the one hand, the public sphere takes note of its occurrence but is not informed, in full detail and with exactitude, of what has been truly discussed (fig. 2). Therefore, it is not uncommon for the media to end up reporting these meetings, or to echo the uncertainty of the debated issues<sup>5</sup>.

### Private- Public Regime

This is the most delicate of all regimes. It is also the most provocative questioning distinction between the public and the private. It consists in the exhibition, revelation and display by media of particular aspects of the private life of individuals. In the case of politics, this may be of two distinct senses already alluded to: on the one hand, the visibility can be understood as a surveillance device of power in which the wide exposure of the politician puts

4. Jornal de Notícias, "Seguro falou com Cavaco sobre situação política 'grave e bastante preocupante'", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <[http://www.jn.pt/PaginaInicial/Politica/Interior.aspx?content\\_id=2510189](http://www.jn.pt/PaginaInicial/Politica/Interior.aspx?content_id=2510189)>.

5. RTP Notícias, "Reunião com troika e contradições", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.rtp.pt/noticias/index.php?article=584316&tm=9&layout=123&visual=61>>.



Figure 2 – The public-private regime: meeting of the Council of State (President of the Portuguese Republic, 2011)

constraints to the management of the integrity of their public image; on the other hand, the private – public regime visibility represents an opportunity for the political man to foment a charismatic leadership and establishing ties of empathy to ensure emotional adherence of citizens (and audiences). *To be brief, the private-public regime of visibility is precisely what gives visibility its ambiguous character, working as a synoptic monitoring device, and also, working as a means of communicating charisma.*

Internet is quite rich in examples.

In what the synoptic function concerns, the private– public regime happens in the form of repository of all mistakes and gaffes committed by politicians. We easily find all kinds of inaccuracies, unkindnesses or distresses that have occurred, sometimes, ten years earlier. In this case, the private – public regime operates as a sort of referee or judge which epitomizes mistakes and draws attention to the failures on the part of politicians. Thus, in the video “Paulo Portas apanhado a mentir”<sup>6</sup>, someone laboriously compares two televised statements of the leader of the Portuguese party CDP-PP and insinuates the logical contradiction between the two (even if the context in which they are spoken differs substantially, and if several months have passed between them). Internet reinforces the fact that someone wants this incongruity not to be forgotten. In this archival role, it helps to evaluate the coherence of politicians. In another example, “A maior gafe de Sócrates” it is the former Prime Minister of Portugal that is tried through the media visibility of his mistake (fig. 3).

6. “Paulo Portas apanhado a mentir”, [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgee1ESTDag>>.





Figure 3-The private-public regime: Prime- Minister's gaffe (RTP 1, 2007)

Other cases exist in which there is, on the part of citizens, this political control through visibility (and visibility). We also note synoptism in the numerous videos reporting the lack of commitment on the part of some politicians. Thus, we can find on the internet many videos where politicians are caught on camera playing or sleeping during the national or European parliament's sessions<sup>7</sup>.

On the other hand, the synoptism of contemporary media visibilities sometimes arrives through indiscreet acts. Every once in a while politicians don't notice that there is still at least a camera filming, and what is supposed to be a strictly private conversation ends up achieving worldwide fame in the public arena. We refer, for example, the video "Sócrates apanhado por microfone antes do debate com Louçã a cortar na MMG"<sup>8</sup>, where we see the common individual José Sócrates chatting calmly with the Francisco Louçã about the holidays, before the start of the debate and before the time when each of them will respectively assume the role of Prime- Minister and coordinator of *Bloco de Esquerda*. Thus, in this regime of visibility details of the personal relationship of politicians jump the privacy barrier and become object of scrutiny and judgment on the part of public opinion.

Finally, we present the example of the elections of 2012 Republican candidate for the Presidency of the United States of America, which was caught by a rear camera to make unworthy and unseemly confessions during a private dinner to raise funds for the campaign<sup>9</sup>. The ubiquity of technologies of the

7. TVI24, "Estes políticos foram apanhados a... dormir", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.tvi24.iol.pt/acredite-se-quiser/politicos-dormir-apanhados-deputados-parlamento-tvi24/1320070-4088.html>>.

8. "Sócrates apanhado por microfone antes do debate com Louçã a cortar na MMG", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGh8F7ILwc0>>.

9. GlobalGrind, "Busted! Romney Caught In Secret Video: I Don't Care About 47% Of America!" [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://globalgrind.com/news/mitt-romney-secret-fundraising-video-trashes-obama-supporters>>.



image causes this risk of unveiling the secret and to show publicly what is not to be public. This video also shows how the candidates have different speeches depending on the type of audience they address. The private – public visibility regime, in the case of scandal, introduces a new factor in the management of the image and creates a short circuit between the facade and backstage zones that exposes and weakens the integrity of the politician.

Let's take a look at a charismatic leadership as featured in the private – public regime. Indeed, no politician today undervalues internet as a means of reaching citizens through digital social networks as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube*. But, as we have already stressed, internet can work, too, as a way of taking over charisma while revealing in conversational and confessional tone, voluntary, intentional and selectively details of intimacy and domesticity. The American President Obama frequently appears with his family, as a dedicated father and husband. In these family interviews<sup>10</sup> it's not the political (or ideological) program that is in the limelight of publicness: is the political character and the ability, as an unpretentious man, to inspire confidence in citizens. What Obama gives away are the details of family life: for example, what he usually does in his daughter's birthday, or how does he stay in constant contact with his wife through video-conferencing. Taken together, these details allow Americans to assess Obama's temperament. This exhibition of intimacy in the public-private regime, thus, humanizes and singularizes character removing it from the amalgam of vague and abstract stereotypes. This is why, a presidential candidate, in America, has always to present himself as a family man and why their wives end up having a huge role in the persuasion of the undecided electorate.

The opponent of Obama in the presidential election of 2012, Mitt Romney, also used television (and internet) to reveal his private life and, thus, conquer charisma. It will not be by chance that Ann Romney proposed publicly, during the National Convention of the Republican party, to witness the determination of her husband in the objectives proposed in the campaign and emphasized the more sensitive side of the candidate<sup>11</sup>. In addition to the usual family conversation, the revelation of family photos<sup>12</sup> and testimonies of friends attesting the endearing person he is, Romney featured the support of his wife as a strategy to gain charisma. One big example of this was the expression of Ann Romney romantic feelings to her husband, during a live interview to CNN<sup>13</sup>, where she reaffirmed the excellent family life of the Republican candidate.

The examples are numerous and come from a variety of contexts. We intended only to loosely enumerate some web references that exemplify how mediatized publicness, the explosion of visibilities and the private – public regime are used currently by the political field.

10. "Barack Obama Michelle Malia Sasha family full interview", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLWkPGjmZtA>>.

11. Yahoo noticias-br, "Esposa de Romney revela lado humano do republicano", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://br.noticias.yahoo.com/video/esposa-romney-revela-lado-humano-014122214.html>>.

12. The Boston Globe, "Part 4: The Romney Family", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww7HoPpKthI>>.

13. CNN, "Ann Romney sends Mitt Romney love", [em linha], consultado em Setembro de 2012, disponível em <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ht-hWFwaKNQ>>.

### Private-Private Regime

Of all visibility regimes, the one that shows more fugacious is the private-private regime, the last of the four regimes. It refers to private aspects that, in spite of becoming socially visible, are never displayed publicly. We refer, in this private-private regime, for example, to media cases of alleged wiretaps or video recordings obtained covertly. Because it engages the particularly sensitive issues of private law and because they become public through indirect references, we do not present any concrete example to this regime of visibility. However, in spite of not exposing directly, visual or sonorously the intimacy of the politician, the truth is that suspicions of such recordings gives the spied person a huge visibility – if, as established at the outset, we agree that visibility is not just a visual dimension but mainly a publicness dimension and a verbal symbolization of visibility.

In some respects, the private-private regime reminds us of the public-private regime to the extent that what is socially visible is not the event itself but its emergence on publicness. Yet, the private-private regime stands out because its public visibility comes, above all, from the discussion it originates. What usually access publicness, in most cases, are only discourses on those recordings. More than the access to the content, what emerges publicly is the discussion of informations that recordings supposedly reveal.

*Thus, this regime presents a particular character: its visibility needs no visual component.* All the controversy and debate raised in publicness (we remember the alleged wiretaps, in 2010, to the Portuguese Prime-Minister José Sócrates) are based on comments, opinions and references. What it is discussed there are mere conjectures and hypothesis on the matter; the effective value of the bugs and recordings is unknown and remains to be proven. As we see, in the private-private visibility regime we do not need to display anything to win a huge visibility and access to the public sphere: the fundamental politics of visibility lies in its symbolic discoursivization.

### CONCLUSION

In this paper we pondered the political role of visibility in contemporary societies. Given the spread of visibilities risen with the mediatization of publicness, *the political field is facing an ambivalent situation: the public exposure to this global scrutiny capable of opening new fields of visibility can function socially as a synoptic control of acts of political power revealing private aspects hidden from public scene; and, at the same time, it can incorporate strategies aimed at the formation of a charismatic leadership able to establish empathetic connections with citizens.*

*In both cases – in visibility as synoptic political field surveillance and visibility as charismatic strategy that consists in selective exposure of privacy as a means of obtaining membership of individuals’ emotional approval – the privileged visibility regime is exactly the same. Although we have identified three more regimes, it is the regime of private-public visibility that stands out from the point of view of an analysis of the relationship between politics, media and publicness. Politically visibilities are defined (and played), precisely is in the negotiation of borders between the private and the public, whether it takes the form of a risk to the integrity of the public image, whether it is an opportunity to obtain charisma and establish the political personality – not in the titanic hero but in the unpretentious man of family that cherishes trust and honesty as fundamental political values.*

Therefore, in the face of the mediatization of publicness and the intensity of visibilities, and also in the face of its worldwide dimension, *it is necessary to take into account the public and private declinations of visibilities.* To analyze how visibility regimes currently hatch and develop may reveal crucial to evaluate the way in which, in contemporary societies, politics and communication converge with each other in a symbiotic activity unique and original, never before seen in political and social history.

More work on these regimes should provide us with new and invaluable insights on the 21th century politics and media. **M**

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