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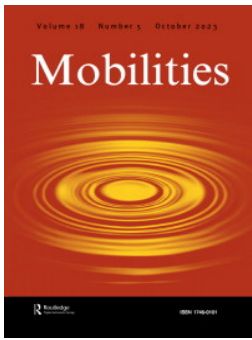


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**Political Rallies as Assemblages for Transportation and
Communication: The Case of the 2016 Democratic Presidential
Campaign**

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Political Rallies as Assemblages for Transportation and Communication: The Case of the 2016 Democratic Presidential Campaign

Although rallies are essential to political communication campaigns, they have been little studied. Thus, this article presents an ethnographic observation of the Democratic campaign rallies during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Two research questions structure the paper: How do material things—including human bodies—and their transportation structure the production and reproduction of rallies as political communication systems? What kind of political communication assemblages constructs the materiality of rallies? The text presents three conclusions. 1) A substantial part of the materiality of these rallies was composed of human bodies and many other things that were transported to a specific space to have copresent interactions with other bodies. 2) The production of these rallies required creating an infrastructural space built upon transporting a myriad of material objects to a specific place. These objects constituted the material bases for developing these rallies as a set of political communication practices. 3) These rallies can be conceptualised as mobile and itinerant assemblages for transportation and communication. These rallies were a means of transportation that moved the candidate's body across a vast territory and a (political) media of communication designed to transcend the time and space in which these events were produced.

Keywords: rallies; political communication; materiality of communication; new mobilities; assemblages; 2016 U.S. presidential campaign

Introduction

Scene 1. The Beginning of the General Elections

At the corner of Broad Street and Montgomery, just outside Temple University's McGonigle Hall athletic facility, twelve police officers riding motorcycles began moving toward the North Philadelphia neighbourhoods. Next, two buses appeared on the scene. A blue sticker covered both buses with the slogan "Stronger Together"

printed in white letters. Inside those buses were Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine, who, after a long Democratic Convention in this city, were about to embark on a bus tour of the Rust Belt. Later, a dozen black vans completed the motorcade.

It was a hot and humid summer day in Philadelphia. Hours earlier, Clinton left her room at a local hotel and started moving as part of her activities after winning the Democratic primary. On July 29, 2016, Clinton started the general campaign by hosting a rally at the McGonigle Hall basketball court. In her speech, she explained that that day marked the beginning of 100 days where she and her team had the mission to "make [their] case to America." That meant deploying a substantial political communication scheme that included travelling for more than three months through most States of the country and sophisticated mass media, digital, and ground game strategies.

Initially, the rally was to take place on Independence Mall, located in the historic heart of Philadelphia. However, East Coast summer conditions, which included temperatures more than 90 degrees, forced organisers to change the location to a local university sports complex. Early in the morning, I received a text message and email informing me of the location change. The email explained that the doors would open at 10 am. When I arrived, around 10:30, a long line of people on Broad Street were waiting to enter the location. As I stood in line, I watched as people continued to arrive via various transportation forms, including the subway, buses, Ubers, and bicycles. Many others arrived on foot at the rally.

We could finally enter the facility after waiting in line along Broad Street. We then spent another hour listening to speeches from various politicians and activists. In the meantime, I spoke with a woman who was at the demonstration with her husband and son. She was enthusiastic and excited because she would be close to Hillary

Clinton. She kept telling her husband and son that Clinton had made history the night before, during the Democratic Convention, by becoming the first woman nominated for president of the United States.

Finally, the song "Ain't no mountain high enough" played over the loudspeakers, and Clinton appeared on stage, accompanied by her husband Bill, Tim Kaine, and Anne Holton. The politicians spent several minutes walking around a platform, smiling, and waving their arms. The crowd used their bodies to clap, wave flags and cheer for the candidate and her running mates. During her speech, Clinton announced the start of a bus tour of cities and towns in Pennsylvania and Ohio. The bus tour included a 626-mile journey, and the main idea was to visit small villages and hold rallies, roundtables, and face-to-face interactions with their residents.

The general campaign had just kicked off. From a distance, I noticed that the woman I had talked to earlier managed to get close to Clinton at the end of the rally. She was looking for a selfie, but I couldn't tell if she had succeeded.

Rallies are relevant political communication strategies for electoral campaigns. In these events, candidates congregate with hundreds and sometimes thousands of supporters in a physical space. During the rallies, candidates speak to their supporters through speeches, and their supporters respond with shouts, cheers, and songs. For citizens, rallies are spaces where they can interact with each other and political elites. This strategy allows candidates to build a public narrative by communicating their ideas and values and interacting with their followers.

Despite their centrality in electoral campaigns, rallies need more research from a communicative perspective. From a rhetorical dimension, rallies have been considered the contextual setting where a candidate, politician, or celebrity delivers a speech (e.g., Ingram, 2019; Lacatus, 2020). Mass communication research has studied how rallies

T.V. broadcasting influences people's perceptions and behaviour (e.g., Lang & Lang, 1953). Political scientists have tried to find relations between "candidate appearance" in rallies and the increase or decrease in the number of votes for a candidate (Herr, 2002; Hill et al., 2010; Hoegg & Lewis, 2011). In particular, the scarcity of research on rallies from a communicative perspective can be found in two of the most important journals on political communication. In *Political Communication*, there are only two papers where rallies are the object of inquiry—both about “candidate appearance”—and in *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, there is only one article where rallies are their central object of study (Althaus et al., 2002; Paget, 2019; Shaw & Gimpel, 2012).

The body of interdisciplinary theory in mobility studies offers a promising path for thinking rallies from a communicative perspective beyond the approaches rendered by rhetorical studies, mass communication research, and political science (i.e., "candidate appearance"). Therefore, drawing from literature related to new mobilities, geography and communication studies (Hildebrand, 2018; Keightley & Reading, 2014; Morley, 2017; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Sterne, 2006), this paper expands political communication scholarship by analysing rallies in the framework of contemporary debates on the materiality of communication (Bennett, 2010; Packer & Wiley, 2013). With this theoretical framework, this article presents Hillary Clinton's rallies during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign as a case study. Through a design based on ethnographic observations under the umbrella of grounded theory, the research asks, how do material things—including human bodies—and their transportation structure the production and reproduction of rallies as political communication systems? and what kind of political communication assemblages constructs the materiality of rallies?

The study reaches three fundamental conclusions. The first is that human bodies, as material things, structure political communication, particularly rallies, which can be

defined as events where bodies are in constant movement and interaction. Secondly, the article introduces the concept of infrastructural space. This concept is based on the idea that every communication practice and system require a material infrastructure to operate. In this sense, the infrastructure of Clinton's rallies was composed of a myriad of material objects, including human bodies, which were transported to the place where these political events took place and which, when assembled, created an infrastructure that made possible the development of political communication. Third, the article explains that the 2016 Presidential rallies can be conceptualised simultaneously as mobile and itinerant assemblages for transportation and communication. These rallies were a means of transportation that moved the candidate's body across a vast territory and a (political) media of communication designed to transcend the time and space in which these events were produced.

The article is divided into four sections. The first is composed of this brief introductory text. The second section details the theoretical and methodological scaffolding that structured this ethnographic research. The third, the most important, presents the ethnographic observations of the rallies and an interpretation from the theoretical lenses of new mobilities and the material turn of communication studies. Finally, the fourth section presents the conclusions. For proper differentiation, all ethnographic observations are presented in text boxes and under the subtitles of "scenes."

Method

The case study of this research is constituted by the rallies of Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. In that campaign, she held 278 rallies as part of two different strategies: the first one to win the Democratic nomination to compete for the U.S. presidency, and the second one to compete against Donald Trump in the general

election. This case study is relevant for two reasons. The first is that the organisation of the Democratic campaign rallies entailed logistics involving thousands of people. The second is that this political communication effort took place in a country composed of millions of inhabitants to whom the campaign was directed. These reasons show a case study with the potential to consider rallies as complex material assemblages aimed at electoral communication.

Under the umbrella of grounded theory, ethnography is the method that structures the design of this research (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). The method is appropriate because ethnography helps to observe how communicative practices occur. In addition, grounded theory helps study reality from a perspective that is not guided, a priori, by a specific theoretical body. Thus, this method allowed me to approach the study of political rallies profoundly from a communicative perspective.

I conducted ethnographic observations at nine 2016 Democratic Party presidential rallies in Philadelphia. These rallies were headlined by Clinton and Democratic Party members such as Tim Kaine, Barack Obama, and Bernie Sanders. Through Facebook Live streaming, I followed those rallies not held in Philadelphia. Monitoring these rallies served to control this case study as I discovered a remarkable homogeneity in the planning and development of these events. In general, and as I explain in the article, these rallies had similar characteristics, such as where they were held, the order in which they took place, and their material and semiotic composition. Thus, the on-site observations allowed me to make "logical generalisations" (Luker, 2010, p. 125) about the 2016 Clinton presidential campaign rallies.

Observations were guided by a protocol based on the SPEAKING method, which helps do ethnographic communication research (Spitulnik Vidali & Peterson, 2012, p. 268). The protocol focused on studying how human interactions and material

objects structured the production of communicative practices. I observed communicative interactions among attendees during the events, conversed with the people around me, wrote notes, and took photos and videos. I also conducted a live ethnography (Chadwick, 2017; Elmer, 2013) on how candidates, politicians, journalists, and citizens used Facebook and Twitter during these events.

My University's Institutional Review Board approved protocol 23855 for this research on July 12, 2016. The review was exempted, and consequently, the requirement for consent was waived. Moreover, all the names of the subjects in this research were anonymised.

Situational analysis, particularly situational maps, was the analytical tool I used to study the data collected during the fieldwork (Clarke, 2005, pp. 86–108). This analysis helped move away from the conceptualisation of rallies as the contextual setting for delivering speeches or as events that influence electoral outcomes. Situational maps offered a route to unveil the role of human, non-human, and spatial elements in the communicative practices that structured the rallies.

Once the situational analysis was done, it was time to think about a theoretical framework for making sense of the data. Thus, I interpreted the empirical observations by considering three theoretical debates. The first is the "new mobilities paradigm," which offers the conceptual tools to understand the social world as a set of movements (Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006). The second is the discussion around the encounters and tensions between communication and transportation (Carey, 2009; Innis, 2008; Packer & Robertson, 2006). Finally, the third debate is the (re)emergence of interest in studying the materiality of communication (Hildebrand, 2018; Morley, 2017).

Results

The Human Body, Transportation, and Geographic Models of Democracy

Let us begin this section with a mental exercise. Imagine a community of ten persons with the task of electing, via voting, as a democratic procedure, an individual who will concentrate political powers during the following years. One day, a community member wakes up and thinks she wants to be the community's leader and concentrate political power. During the morning, she thinks about why she wants that power and designs a plan for the community. Once she has made up her mind, she faces the challenge of communicating her ideas to the rest of the population. To accomplish this goal, she must *move and thus transport* her body toward the other bodies of the community. Once near them, she can communicate her political ideas via interpersonal copresent communication. Then, she could be elected—or not—after an electoral process.

The above mental exercise seeks to illuminate how essential the mobility of human bodies is during processes for distributing political power. This mobility allows people to bring their bodies physically closer and interact with each other.

The importance and relevance of the materiality of human bodies and their kinetic ability that enable political communication practices have been detected since ancient times. In *Laws*, Plato proposed that the number of citizens in his ideal city should be 5,040. This number of people would allow adequate management of the division of labour and efficient distribution of economic and political power. At the same time, Carey, drawing on Dahl, explained that Plato was interested in designing a city where citizens could move about and engage in interactions with other community members. In other words, as Carey explains, "democracies or republics were limited, then, by the range of the foot and the power of the tongue" (Carey, 2009, p. 4).

The possibility that a candidate can communicate with all community members is rare and difficult to achieve today. However, it can still occur. An eloquent case takes place in ground game campaigns through canvassing, a strategy of interpersonal communication in which the physical presence of human bodies is necessary (e.g., Nielsen, 2012; Read, 2008). This strategy consists of a candidate, or someone representing her, going house to house to talk to neighbours and communicate her political intentions. Read (2008), for example, describes how he went to speak face-to-face with a third of the population of a small Minnesota town during a local campaign.

Here we can observe the importance of transportation and movement for political communication. In the exposed case, those who seek political power use their legs and feet as artefacts for locomotion, which allows them to move toward other bodies and establish communicative interactions. If communication is a practice that structures the distribution of political power, then, for face-to-face interaction, bodies must move into a space where they can communicate with those who make up the body politic.

Although there are cases where the “foot and tongue” model still operates, the Platonic city is far from being a reality in the 21st century. Given the population growth and how countries have organised themselves, the old geographical model of democracy has changed substantially. Today, even for a young presidential candidate who can run marathons and who has the will to visit as many individuals as she can, it will be impossible for her, in three months and using only her feet and tongue, to communicate with a population of millions of people who are spread over a vast territory.

During the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton held 278 rallies and campaigned in 37 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, DC (Candence & Kreutz, 2016). The candidate

used various transportation systems to get around to all these places. In her book, where she recounts her memories of the 2016 election campaign, Clinton says, "On a typical day on the trail, after leaving the house, our motorcade of two or three cars pulls upright to the plane on the tarmac. Door-to-door service is both a security must and an extremely nice perk. For the primaries and the beginning of the general, we flew in planes with nine or ten seats" (Clinton, 2017).

In the case of Clinton and other candidates, campaigning involved moving from city to city, crossing multiple state lines, flying from one region to another, and touring small towns and large metropolises. These corporeal travels allow the candidate to reach other bodies and have copresent interactions to communicate her intentions to become president. This is illustrated by the bus tour Clinton announced on the first day of the general campaign after winning the nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. "We loaded onto our big blue bus, with 'Stronger Together' emblazoned on the sides, and set out on a 635-mile journey. At every stop, Tim and I talked about plans to create jobs, raise wages, and support working families" (Clinton, 2017). In other words, the primary purpose of this corporeal travel was to visit cities and hold rallies, roundtables and face-to-face interactions with their residents and offer ideas and plans on why she was the best candidate.

What regularities and ruptures can we observe between the geographical model proposed by Plato and the model under which the Clinton campaign was developed? One regularity is that both models need a human body that moves through a specific territory to approach other bodies to develop copresent political communication practices. The importance of the human body in current times can be illustrated with an example from the 2016 campaign. Clinton fainted during a 9/11 commemoration in New York. Following this incident, she was out of circulation for several days and

remained at home. She could not make public appearances and had to cancel her trips to scheduled events, such as a rally in Philadelphia at which Barack Obama deputised her. While in recovery, Clinton faced two problems. The first operated in the pragmatic world: she lost bodily locomotion. This situation prevented her from moving around to engage in co-presential interactions with supporters and the press.

The second problem was that her lack of mobility had a symbolic impact. In a move charged with misogyny, Trump attacked and accused her of lacking stamina. The press echoed the incident and raised doubts about Clinton's ability to be president (Conroy, 2018), and the age factor played an essential role in public opinion during the presidential campaigns. All of this happened because the principal "communicative body" of the Democratic campaign was sick and unable *to move*.

At the same time, the old and the contemporary model have substantial differences. For example, the territories and populations vary in size. While Plato thought of a city that could be walked with the feet and was inhabited by more than five thousand people, the Clinton campaign had as its working universe a territory of more than eleven million square kilometres and a population of more than 320 million inhabitants. The goal in the Platonic model was for one person to be able to communicate with everyone in the city. In the Democratic campaign, Clinton had to transport her body over long distances to interact with small population segments. In this frame, Clinton's transportation and political communication strategies were far from the old ideal in which one person could meet with all community members.

In the Clinton campaign, the foot and the tongue constituted relevant material tools for transport and communication practices. The foot was central to the candidate's ability to move. However, unlike the old model, the foot, in locomotor terms, was connected to other means of transport such as bicycles and cars, buses and trains, ships

and planes, as well as to the infrastructures that enabled these technologies to function, such as streets and roads, railways and stations, docks and airports. This assembly allowed Clinton's body to travel long distances during the 2016 campaign. The "tongue" was also critical, enabling the candidate to speak and communicate with her peers in copresent interactions. However, like the foot, language was enhanced by communications technologies and infrastructures. The volume of Clinton's voice was increased through microphones and loudspeakers, allowing her to communicate with thousands of people at once. In addition, her voice was broadcast through radio, television, and digital media.

Infrastructural Spaces for Political Communication

Scene 2. The President: A Powerful Body

On September 13, Barack Obama held a rally in Philadelphia. It was a Tuesday. The campaigns were picking up the pace after a sluggish summer. Though leading in the polls, Hillary Clinton lost momentum because she had to stay home recovering from pneumonia. Her allies supported her during her recovery and held rallies nationwide, including Obama, who travelled to Philadelphia to help the Democratic cause.

The rally was celebrated at "The Eakins Oval," a traffic circle in front of the iconic Philadelphia Art Museum with the famous "Rocky steps" and where tourists congregate to take a picture with Sylvester Stallone's sculpture. This space is near the renovated Schuylkill River trail, Centre City, with its skylines and the adjacent neighbourhoods that have been gentrified in the last decade. As local people name this place, the Oval has grass, trees, and a large open area where concerts, beer gardens, and festivals occur.

The Oval was about a mile from my apartment, so I walked to it. When I arrived at the venue, the extent of the security detail surprised me because it was much more sophisticated than at other Clinton rallies. It was a hot summer noon, and people wore shorts and dresses, hats, and sunglasses. The police closed the streets surrounding the traffic circle, and people had to walk several blocks to find a place to park their cars.

There were three security checkpoints. At first, campaign volunteers asked people to register their names and personal information on small paper forms. The forms asked for name, address, phone number, email, and social media accounts. After this process, the staff gave us a sticker to put on our clothes: a blue sign with a large white H. The sticker indicated that we were already registered. I saw the same registration process at the nine rallies I attended during the election cycle in Philadelphia.

At the second checkpoint, five volunteers asked people to form a line. To be there, attendees had to hand in forms with their data. Most of those who, like me, were waiting in the line were glued to their smartphones. I spent about twenty minutes waiting to move forward. In the meantime, I observed a group of people protesting the construction of the Dakota Pipeline. I also observed the van of a T.V. outlet and a group of technicians setting up communications equipment to broadcast the event.

Finally, we were able to move. The Secret Service oversaw the third security checkpoint. Then I remembered the digital email invitation to the rally, explaining that people should expect airport-style security. The third security checkpoint was, indeed, close to what happens in a United States airport. There were six lines of

twenty people. At the end of every row, groups of three agents thoroughly revised personal belongings using metal detection arches and police dogs.

It took me an hour to pass the three checkpoints. I was sweating. I made my way to the centre of the traffic circle and grabbed one of the bottles of water the campaign was offering to the public. Staffers and volunteers were working hard. Some were gathered around a table, registering people to vote. Others carried campaign materials, such as flags, banners, placards, leaflets, voter registration forms and many other *things*.

At that time, the rally was not yet crowded, and it was easy to move around. The stage, which consisted of an elevated scenario, a lectern, a teleprompter, and a microphone, was surrounded by three bleachers adorned with American flags and a large blue banner communicating the campaign's leitmotif: Stronger Together. People carried banners with messages of support for Clinton, waved American flags and wore T-shirts with Democratic motifs. In these grandstands, people waited for Obama and listened to speeches from local activists and politicians.

I approached the stage as Katie McGinty, the Democratic candidate for Senate, spoke to the crowd. She was making the case of why people should support Clinton when the roar of various motorcycles suddenly interrupted her speech, and the public cried out: The President was arriving. We could watch Obama's motorcade from The Oval, which inevitably interrupted McGinty's speech.

An hour later, Barack Obama took the stage waving his arms and hands. More than a politician, he looked like a rock star. U2's "City of Blinding Lights" was playing over the loudspeakers. People were excited to see, hear and be close to such a prominent figure. The president gave a speech praising Clinton and encouraged people to vote. "Don't boo, vote!" he exclaimed. He also asked the public to volunteer

for the campaign and do concrete communications work. "I need you to knock on doors. I need you to make phone calls. You've got to talk to your friends, including your Republican friends. You need to go to IWillVote.com and register to vote by October 11. Then you've got to go to the polls, and you've got to get people to go to the polls."

At the end of Obama's speech, I saw a T.V. journalist interviewing Clinton's staffers. Later in the afternoon, I watched the local newscast, where the reporter provided a live report from The Oval. As she narrated Obama's performance, the journalistic piece showed footage of workers dismantling the bleachers and fences and transporting materials to large cargo trucks. Others were cleaning up the space. Adjacent streets were already open for daily automobile traffic, and The Oval had returned to its original state. She reported that 6,000 people attended the rally.

In the previous section, I argue that the materiality of a candidate's human body and her possibility to transport herself from one place to another is an essential element that structures the various communicative activities of a political campaign. However, for rallies to exist, it is not enough for a candidate to transfer her body to a car, where a driver takes her to the airport, and then a pilot flies her to a distant community. For a rally to occur, a myriad of material things must also be mobilised. As I explain in this section, these things build an *infrastructural space* for political communication.

Copresence is an essential feature of political rallies, which implies that two or more human bodies physically interact in the same space. In the case of rallies, the interaction is between hundreds, sometimes thousands of people in the same place. I attended the first rally for Hillary Clinton's campaign on April 21, 2016, at the Fillmore, a concert forum in the Fishtown neighbourhood. According to newspaper reports, the

audience consisted of two thousand bodies. On the last day of campaigning, November 7, 2016, Philadelphia's Independence Mall was filled with 30,000 attendees who watched Jon Bon Jovi sing, listened to the Obama family's speeches, and saw their presidential candidate for the last time. Although rallies are also designed to be mediated through radio, T.V. and social media, their fundamental feature is the physical congregation of people in the same place: without the copresence of human bodies, rallies would become meaningless.

The transportation of things from one place to another mobilises the materiality that enables copresence (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 4). If the above is true, the question arises as to what material elements must be mobilised during a political campaign to create the rallies. The first element is all those things that produce spatial materiality (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 216). In this case, things help the structuring of spaces, one in which copresent political communication can develop.

The Oval was closed to the public the day before Obama's rally in Philadelphia. From that point on, an array of professionals and technicians began creating the space for the event. Security fences covered the perimeter of the traffic circle, and metal detection arches were installed. Some workers oversaw setting up the podium and the stage from which Obama addressed the audience. Others assembled bleachers for attendees and set up tables and chairs for journalists. Dozens of local volunteers put up campaign signs with slogans like "I am with her" and "Stronger Together." They also brought flags, campaign banners, posters, pins, and stickers to hand out to rally attendees.

The organisers created the spatial conditions necessary for political communication by transporting some things and not others. For example, things that belong to the security realm shaped the spatial materiality of the demonstration. The

Oval underwent an ephemeral transformation from a public space where people could regularly enjoy the gardens to a semi-private one, enclosed by fences and guarded by campaign staff, local police, and the Secret Service. All the security stuff, such as fences and metal arches, served to organise filters for the entrance and exit of people to the rally. The attendees, to enter, had to identify themselves at these filters and agree to let the police officers check what objects were entering the fenced space.

The first objective of this control was to protect the bodies of politicians such as the president of the United States, senators, and other public officials. These bodies, which represent political powers, must be safeguarded to ensure the functioning of the political system. The second objective was to control who could enter. The rallies were not spaces for anonymous people but for those willing to identify themselves publicly. At all the Democratic campaign events I attended, the organisers asked people to sign in on paper forms and write down essential information such as name, phone number, and email address. Those of us who went to these rallies knew that we were under surveillance and that the information we provided would be used for security screening during the event and for the campaign to add us to their databases for sending political advertising.

Things also structured the visual narrative of the space. The campaign decorated the venue under a pre-designed aesthetic, including logos, typography, and specific colours, such as the big H representing the candidate's name, the predominant blue of the campaign, and political slogans written on banners. Staffers and volunteers decorated the spaces with enormous flags and visual campaign motifs. People were not allowed to bring their things to support the candidate (e.g., homemade signs) and had to use those provided by the campaign.

The platform's location from which the political leaders addressed the crowd was determined by the conditions the television cameras needed to portray the event. Clinton spoke in the foreground on television, and the crowd was in the background. This arrangement of things was uncomfortable for many of us in the audience since we saw the back of the presidential candidate most of the time. This happened, for example, at the event with which she opened her campaign in the Temple University athletic facility. In addition, campaign staff determined which bodies could be seen on screen. People standing near Clinton wore T-shirts with the colours, logos, and slogans of the Democratic campaign.

The configuration of material elements that allowed the mediatization of Clinton's rallies has some relationship with the "media events" theory (Dayan & Katz, 1992). This concept helps study ritual events produced to be broadcast and consumed through television. The rallies I observed were designed to be broadcast through television but also to be reproduced through the hybridization of interpersonal, group, mass, and digital communication (Chadwick, 2017). Moreover, unlike media events consumed live by millions of global audiences, Clinton's rallies were watched by many small and fragmented local audiences (see, for example, scene 3 on the following pages).

The on-site ethnographic observations of the rallies were made exclusively in Philadelphia. However, I also analysed dozens of rallies in other cities. This was made possible by the Democratic campaign's streaming of most of Hillary Clinton's copresent events via Facebook Live. All the rallies I analysed presented a homogeneity in their visual narrative. In these videos, it was possible to see whether the event was in a gymnasium, a park, or a school. Some were for hundreds of people, others for

thousands. Nevertheless, they were similar spaces thanks to the communicative objects the organisers brought to each event.

The communicative materiality of rallies comprises many things. In this case, human bodies, microphones, loudspeakers, banners, fences, stands, mobile phones and many other things make up the materiality of the rally. The analysis of this materiality allows us to observe how actants are a source of action (Latour, 2005) and how "the locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group" (Bennett, 2010, p. XVII). Rallies are no exception, as their communicative power comes from this interaction between human and non-human materialities.

Expanding on the previous idea, we can argue that any communication practice requires a material infrastructure for its operation. Infrastructures are assemblages that enable "the flow of goods, people or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (Larkin, 2013, p. 328). Thus, for a rally to occur, it is necessary to create a material infrastructure that facilitates the flow of ideas between a candidate seeking elected office and her supporters. Moreover, rallies are practices that occur in a physical space, allowing for copresent interaction between the people participating in these events.

The above arguments show that some spaces are created to enable the flow and exchange of ideas in copresent contexts. The creation of these spaces is based on transporting objects to a specific place, and their assembly allows the development of communicative practices. Thus, I propose the concept of *infrastructural space*, which accounts for spaces created from the transport and subsequent assembly of objects and that have the purpose of creating a material infrastructure that structures communication practices.

In the infrastructural space, the role of people and, thus, the materiality of their bodies is prominent. As an object, a human body, like a mobile phone, is part of the

materiality of a rally. This idea resonates with the findings of Simone (2004), who proposes the concept of 'people as infrastructure', which explains that actions and collaborations between people create platforms for urban life, which operate as an infrastructure. In the case at hand, the actions and collaborations of candidates, politicians, staffers, volunteers, journalists, police, and technicians, which were embodied practices, created a platform (i.e., an infrastructure) for developing political communication systems.

In the case study, Obama's rally took place where only grass and trees usually existed. That same space, with the transport and assembly of specific objects, became an ephemeral infrastructure for political communication.

Rallies As Transport & Media Assemblages

Scene 3. Narrowcasting a Rally

On October 5, one day after the vice-presidential debate, Tim Kaine held a rally at the Sheet Metal Workers Union headquarters.

I learned about this event through the Democratic campaign's newsletter. Three days earlier, I received the following email [emphasis added]: "I'm going to be in Philadelphia on Wednesday to talk about the ways in which we really are stronger together, and I *would love to meet you in person*. Can you be there? RSVP now to reserve your spot. *I'm loving crisscrossing the country and talking to voters* just like you about the issues that concern you most, like raising incomes and making education more affordable -- it's one of the most rewarding parts of my job. For the last few months, I've heard your stories and seen firsthand the problems facing our country, and I know that Hillary is the right person to take on these challenges. These

events are the perfect opportunity for me to tell you about Hillary's plans to make life better for folks in Pennsylvania -- and to tell you about my personal experiences and how I came to be a part of this incredible campaign."

The headquarters was in South Philadelphia, on Front Avenue, near the docs. The size of the rally space was tiny compared to the gymnasiums, concourses, and plazas where Clinton appeared throughout the campaign. However, the security setup was about the same. At the entrance, I had to register. I was asked for my name, email, and phone number. Afterwards, members of the Secret Service checked that I had no weapons or explosives with me.

Inside the auditorium was a stage where the politicians gave their speeches; on one side was a grandstand, and several rows of chairs were in front of it. You could walk from one place to another in the remaining space. After wandering here and there, I placed myself just behind the rows of chairs, about ten meters from the stage. As Tim Kaine's turn came, I chatted intermittently with Jorge, a member of the local Democratic Party. He told me he was working on the Clinton campaign and tried to attend all her public events in Philadelphia.

Kaine took more than an hour to appear on stage. Jorge, who was by my side during most of the event, made two phone calls, one to his daughter, letting her know he would be arriving for dinner, and another to his mother, to whom he gave a detailed account of the venue. Each time the speakers preceding Kaine appeared, Jorge took several photos, including selfies in which the stage appeared in the background. Finally, when Kaine appeared, Jorge streamed the event through his Facebook Live account. He told me that his "Lives"—as he called this communicative practice—did not have a large audience but liked to do these

exercises so that his friends and family could also see the event. According to what he told me, ten people followed his streaming.

Tim Kaine gave a speech on the importance of family. He also recalled the story of Philando Castillo, killed by police officers in Minneapolis. He used this story to explain proposals on police training and presented Clinton's tax bills. Finally, he asked, "Where can we register to vote?". Then the audience waved signs with the message "I will vote.com." Then, while showing his cell phone on the air, he explained how to register on the Democratic campaign website and by texting 464. He finalised by saying, "Pennsylvania looks pretty good!"

The ethnographic observations show that rallies result from strategies for transporting human bodies, communicative technologies, elements for security control, and much more. These strategies are composed of millions of movements that interact with each other (Adey, 2006, p. 90). What kind of hybrid transportation and communication systems develop from this mobility of material objects? In this section, I argue that a rally is a specific sociotechnical assemblage: a mode of transportation and, simultaneously, a means of communication, sending and receiving information (Hildebrand, 2018, p. 350).

What is a sociotechnical assemblage? An assemblage is a social process consisting of continuous, complex, and chaotic flows and interactions between material and symbolic objects, technologies, and infrastructures. Based on Deleuze and Guattari's original definition, this concept has been used to formulate theoretical developments such as the hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2017) and the mediated mobilities (Keightley & Reading, 2014). A rally can be conceptualised drawing from this definition of assemblage. These events are made of continuous interactions between

thousands of human bodies that seek to communicate with each other using different technologies and infrastructures.

Thinking of rallies as assemblages also imply understanding that human bodies increase their power through heterogeneous assemblages of material and symbolic things (Bennett, 2010, p. 23). In this sense, a rally, as an assemblage of different bodies and material things, increases the communicative power of a public figure. This means that part of the communicative power of a political campaign resides in its capacity to transport things and ideas from one place to another.

However, assemblages are not the result of a single person's power but of the co-operation of thousands of individuals. Rallies, then, rely on social co-operation to unite and bring things closer together (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 216). In this case, it brings together a body that seeks to concentrate political powers with groups of people who support that body—as in the mental exercise described in a previous section. This ability is only possible through the coordinated actions of individuals. At the same time, not all people attending a rally have the same power of transportation and communication as, for example, a presidential candidate.

Now, suppose we understand rallies not only as a communication system in which a public figure addresses a crowd but as a series of coordinated movements that allow transporting of a political body and its ideas across vast territories. In that case, we are also facing a mode of transportation (Hildebrand, 2018). To illustrate this concept, let us think of trains that transport things. As a material object, the train is insufficient to move things from one place to another. To be a means of transportation, the "train" must be considered an assemblage of railroads, rails, stations, engineers, administrative personnel, and users. This whole assemblage constitutes the concept of a train as a mode of transportation. A rally can be thought of similarly. As a mode of

transportation, rallies depend on the assemblage of different technologies, infrastructures, and the coordinated efforts of other people that allow the movement of a candidate and her campaign throughout a country.

At the same time, rallies are media that send and receive information (Hildebrand, 2018). A political event of this nature can be seen as a sociotechnical assemblage that sends information to the public. At the first level, rallies enable an exchange of information between political elites and an audience composed of campaign staff, journalists, and those who decided to attend the event. For example, this can be seen in various communicative practices, such as the speeches delivered by Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and Tim Kaine, or the information the campaign sent to the audience on how to register to vote in the elections, how to sign up to be a campaign volunteer, as well as information related to campaign proposals.

The rallies also received information, especially from attendees. The campaign collected information through various processes. Checkpoints were assembled to create a safe space for the public and the political figures who headlined these events. The checkpoints were used to collect information about who attended the event, their age, phone number, and social media accounts. At all the campaign rallies I attended, Clinton and her staff asked people to pull out their phones, subscribe to a text messaging service, and visit her website. In addition, during the general campaign, volunteers were tasked with helping people register to vote. Registration consisted of filling out a form with personal data that was then processed by the campaign on a website.

On a second level, the rallies operated as a media that allowed these assemblages to send information beyond their time and space. The first modality of this phenomenon was narrowcasting. Cell phones were part of the experience of being at

these events. Rallies consisted of arriving at the venue and waiting for Clinton to show up. Meanwhile, people chatted with each other, listened to the speeches of political figures, danced to the music played by the campaign, and used their mobile devices. Some used Facebook Live to stream the event to their family and friends. Others utilised WhatsApp and text messages to share their photos. They also took advantage of Twitter to send information about the details of the rally, such as the public's response and memorable quotes from the candidates.

Campaign staff used social media platforms to broadcast the rallies to wider audiences. Most of Clinton's appearances during the 2016 general election were streamed via Facebook Live. At the same time, during all the Philadelphia rallies, staff sent live multimedia tweets narrating how the events unfolded. People who were not present in Philadelphia could watch the rallies as they were happening. In this sense, rallies are media that send information about a political event to other cities, states, and countries.

Journalists played an essential role in structuring the rallies as media. In Philadelphia, journalists had locations where they set up their cameras and sound recorders and used tables and chairs to work with their computers. During these rallies, journalists sent real-time information to their newsrooms and followers on social networks and made multimedia reports. For example, during Obama's rally, a reporter posted tweets quoting some of the president's most important ideas (e.g., "We cannot afford to treat this like a reality show" - @POTUS supports @HillaryClinton in #philly"). At the end of the event, she interviewed audience members and did a live broadcast for the evening newscast, offering more details about the event.

Conclusion

In a time when, apparently, mass, and digital communication dominates politics,

thinking about communication from transportation and materiality may seem anachronistic. The advent of mass communication and the rise of the Internet has monopolised political communication scholarship. In a way, it appears that, in the realm of politics, we live in a post-material digital world where political communication is dematerialised. This is because many theories start from an ontology that assumes that communication only occurs in a symbolic dimension (Packer & Wiley, 2013, p. 3) or that digital communication is only about ones and zeros. However, as this article shows—aligned literature related to the material turn of communication and new mobilities—transportation and materiality play an essential role in communication and, therefore, in the production and reproduction of the political world.

This article presents a new way of observing rallies from a perspective of the materiality of communication and mobility. First, it shows that Clinton's rallies were constituted by material objects. These objects included human bodies, which allowed political elites and citizens to make corporeal travels and thus be part of rallies as co-presential events. The ethnographic description of the materiality that composes a rally, which was portrayed in throughout the article, leads to an understanding of the role of human bodies as transportation tools and as technologies for political communication. Human bodies enable locomotion, facilitating bodies to engage fluidly in "practices involving meeting, collaborating, observing and communicating" (Strengers, 2015, p. 601). People used their bodies to interact with their peers.

Furthermore, human bodies were means to transport things. People carried the material elements that constructed the infrastructural spaces of political communication. If we could watch an aerial drone recording a rally's organisation, we would see thousands of human bodies moving and carrying things. We would observe, for example, the candidate being transported to the rally site; local contractors carrying

security fencing; staff members carrying advertising pins and stickers; volunteers distributing water bottles; and residents carrying placards supporting Democrats and smartphones for taking selfies and sending messages.

In addition, bodies were used as communicative technologies (Jensen, 2010, p. 66). These devices enabled interaction between the candidate and the audience and among the attendees. Politicians used their bodies to deliver speeches and their faces, arms, and hands to structure body language. Attendees used their bodies to express their support using hats and T-shirts. Their ears were useful for receiving political speeches, and their phonological organs facilitated communication with other audience members. In addition, these bodies were connected to other technologies, especially cell phones, thus forming hybrid communication systems.

Secondly, the article shows that when transported to a specific geographical location, all these material objects created what I have called infrastructural space. Any communicative practice or system requires a material infrastructure for its operation. As communicative systems, the rallies required creating an infrastructural space for them to operate. This ephemeral space was constructed from human bodies, communicative technologies, and a myriad of things. All these objects constituted the material basis for developing these rallies as a set of political communication practices.

Thirdly, this paper shows that the interaction of all these material objects constituted Clinton's rallies as assemblages of political communication. These assemblages allowed rallies to operate as a) means of transport for a candidate to make corporeal travels across a territory during an electoral contest to interact with her fellow citizens. On the other hand, these assemblages allowed rallies to operate as b) a means of communication that transcended the time and space in which these rallies took place. Regarding political communication, the rallies transcend the event that originated them,

as they were broadcast live on radio, television, and the Internet and reached different communities where the event occurred. Thus, from the perspective of mobility studies, an electoral campaign can be defined as a set of strategies to transport the body and ideas of someone who wants to show her will to obtain political power.

Why do political campaigns coordinate sophisticated transportation strategies to move a candidate in an age when she might well interact solely through mediated communication? The observations presented in this text show that the human body's material, public, and mobile life is an essential feature of ancient and contemporary models of political communication. In the ancient geographical model of democracy, which was structured by the "foot and tongue" communicative model, people moved their bodies to public spaces to hold conversations with their peers. In the contemporary model, which I refer to as the hybrid assemblage communicative model, people seek to move their bodies into public spaces to interact with as many people as possible. In the first model, there was a real possibility of communicating with all community members. In the contemporary model, that aspiration is impossible. However, in both cases, campaigns depend on a person willing to participate in public communication processes. Campaigns would become meaningless without the public, material, and mobile presence of someone fighting for political power. In short, the human body's materiality remains central to these practices and systems of political communication.

Now, what do these findings say about politics and specifically about political communication? Political communication is a practice that structures the production and reproduction of the political world. Hence, one avenue for reflection is to ask what kind of power relations are produced in these rallies. We know that the Clinton rallies could take place thanks to the assemblage of thousands of material objects that allowed the creation of infrastructural spaces. These spaces were the product of the cooperation of

thousands of people who made these events possible through their movements and work. However, it would be a mistake to consider that all people have the power to make this cooperation possible. Organising rallies require financial resources to set up communication and transport infrastructures. In the case at hand, Clinton's *assemblage power* was based on a long political career and financial resources in the millions. Most citizens do not have that background or resources and generally have little access to them. In other words, not everyone in the body politic, which in theory should be programmed under democratic values, has the assemblage power to organise rallies.

On the other hand, one of the article's conclusions is that rallies are mobile means of communication that enable the movement of a body that aspires to concentrate political power. In this framework, a relevant question is, where do rallies move to? From a normative perspective, we might think that rallies should reach all the territory where a political dispute occurs or at least aspire to do so. However, Clinton scheduled her rallies with her electoral expectations in mind. During the campaign, she visited Pennsylvania several times. Nonetheless, she never visited dozens of states where the polls overwhelmingly favoured her or where her rival's lead was so significant that it was not worth extending the campaign to those places.

Additionally, the study of infrastructures is relevant because their materiality allows communicative practices to be structured in very particular ways. Controlling which objects are transported and assembled to create a space allows for the political control of communication. For example, the Clinton campaign constructed infrastructural spaces that allowed the flow of people and ideas favourable to the candidate. Conversely, these decisions prevented the development of rallies anyone could attend without identifying themselves, including the candidate's critics.

Thus, in political terms, electoral profitability was a criterion that structured the *power of mobility* at these rallies. This criterion, from a democratic perspective, is questionable, as it results in millions of citizens missing out on the opportunity to attend and participate in these political events.

Both reflections on the powers of assemblage and mobility show that the technologies and infrastructures assembled to structure political communication practices are programmed from very particular values (Howard, 2005). These political values impact how electoral systems are structured and configured. Therefore, research such as this can help think about how to design political communication assemblages based on criteria that transcend electoral profitability.

Future research can think about rallies beyond the rhetorical study of speeches, the mass communication approach, or the relationship between the holding of such an event and vote shares (i.e., candidate appearance). Researchers could focus on understanding the formation and behaviour of the audiences produced and reproduced at rallies. In this case, concepts such as “mobile publics” (Sheller, 2004) could be used to make observations of the practices of those who attend rallies and thus advance an updating of political theories on the publics and the public sphere. Other studies could look at what kind of power relations enable or impede the circulation of objects in rallies, what geographical models of democracy structure these kinds of communicative assemblages or focus on understanding why people attend rallies and how they understand, decode, and interpret these assemblages created by professional politicians.

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