Citizens go online

Probing the political potential of the Internet Galaxy

Giovanni Navarria

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A Luciano, Erina e Marcella

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Abstract

This dissertation critically develops the proposition that the Internet provides a framework that offers unprecedented opportunities for individuals and groups to engage with the political process by challenging existing power holders. It explores the complex relationship between the Internet, the changing dynamics and meanings of power, and the wider role citizens can play in network-enhanced political spheres. The dissertation questions a conventional line of interpretation of the political relevance of the Internet: the view that Internet networks are tools that basically enhance governments' power of control over their citizens. While distinct traces of evidence for this view can be found, especially in states that rely on autocratic forms of government, closer inspection shows, particularly in countries obeying the rules of democracy, that average citizens are increasingly successful in using the Internet to alter in their favour the dynamics of prevailing power relations. This study argues that there are three combined factors that are driving this trend. First, the network's structure is intrinsically resistant to total control by a few actors. Secondly, attitudinal change is occurring among individuals and groups, so that with the expansion of the Internet Galaxy, new standards for judging the quality of political participation are being adopted, above all because the potential reach of political action is transcending the limits of traditional practices of citizenship. Finally, this dissertation explains that we are witnessing the birth of a new form of power, one that I call *power as shared weakness* (PSW). At the base of this new concept of power is the idea that within the decentralised and ethereal environments that emerge from distributed electronic networks, power relations are influenced by two distinct variables: *structural weakness* and *consciousness of that weakness*. The power to do things and achieve certain ends in the Internet Galaxy is directly proportional to the degree of knowledge the actors involved in a power struggle have of those two variables. The particular dynamics that inform the many examples of power contestations analyzed here suggest in fact that the Internet Galaxy is a peculiar organizational setting within which the intrinsic quality of power struggle is based on a collectively shared sense of weakness that affects the whole galaxy; that is, power springs from the recognition that within this galaxy, *no one* is ever in the position to dominate it fully. Such shared knowledge, this dissertation argues, becomes a powerful enabler (*the gestalt switch*) of new bold and irreverent forms of resistance that through the use of the Internet (and, at large, the whole gamut of new communication media) stand in strong contrast with traditional patterns of domination.

Table of contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

ACM	Association for Computing Machinery
ANBR	Automatic Number Plate Recognition Project
ARPA	Advanced Research Project Agency
BBN	Bolt Beranek and Newman Company
CBI	Charles Babbage Institute
CERN	Conseil Européenne pour la Recherche Nucleare
CINNIC	China Internet Network Information Center
CMC	Computer–Mediated–Communication
CPU	Central Processing Unit
DCA	Defence Communication Agency
DoD	Department of Defence
DTSS	Dartmouth College Time-Sharing System
FNC	The Federal Networking Council
IMPs	Interface Message Processors
IP	Internet Protocol
IPTO	Information Processing Techniques Office
ISP	Internet Service Provider
IWF	Internet Watch Foundation
MII	Ministry of Information Industry
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MITS	Micro Instrumentation Telemetry System
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NCP	Network Control Protocol
NFT	National Science Foundation
NPL	National Physical Laboratory
NWG	Network Working Group
PARC	Palo Alto Research Center.
PAC	Political Action Committee
PC	Personal Computer
PIs	Principal Investigators
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSW	Power as Shared Weakness
RAND	Research and Development
R&D	Research & Developments
RFC	Request for Comment

RFP	Request for Proposal
RFQ	Request for Quotation
SCIO	State Council Information Office
SRI	Stanford Research Institute
SW	Shared Weakness
TCP/IP	Transfer Control Protocol/Internet Protocol
TFL	Transport for London Authority
TIP	Terminal IMP
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
UCSB	University of California Santa Barbara
WWW	World Wide Web

Chapter 1 - Introduction: theoretical framework

Well, here's this spacecraft that has flown by the Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune systems and is on its way, astonishingly, to the stars, a triumph of human engineering. We turn the cameras back and take a photograph of the planet from where it came. And we can barely see it. Here it is, a fragile, delicate, pale, blue dot, and that's where we live. That's where every human has ever lived, and you can see the vulnerability at a glance. And that gives a humbling, and I think character-building, sense of where we are.

Astronomer Carl Sagan describing a picture of Earth taken by the Space probe *Voyager 1*

'Hello'

One late evening at the end of October 1969, Leonard Kleinrock, a Professor of Computer Science at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), and Charley Kline, one of his post graduate students, managed to set up a phone-line connection between two computers – one located at UCLA and one at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI). At around 10:30 that night, the two partially succeeded in sending a one-word line of text from one computer to the other. Their intention was simply to send a basic command line 'login', but they only managed to transmit 'the "l" and the "o"' before the system crashed. Thus, '*Lo!*', a common abbreviation of 'Hello', was the first message ever sent over the ARPANET (Kleinrock, N.D), an experimental computer network built towards the end of the sixties to connect four American University Research centres: UCLA, SRI, University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), and the University of Utah.

That first message was also the first probe sent out to explore a brand new galaxy of communication still in its infancy. In fact, the technology pioneered with the Arpanet project, by the mid-nineties had become the backbone of the Internet, a global system of computer networks used nowadays by more than a billion people worldwide for a broad range of activities: from communicating with peers to working; from shopping to learning; from leisure to politics.

This dissertation sets out to describe and interpret in fresh ways the long-term implications of that first stuttered *hello* in the mediated field of power and politics - the confined area of interest of the present work. The term *power* is defined here broadly as the mere ability to do or prevent things from happening. The term *politics* instead covers two different meanings: on the one hand, it encompasses the complex dynamics of power struggle, that is a process intrinsic in every social relationship that aims at establishing who gets what, when and how. On the other hand, drawing on some of the elements present in Hanna Arendt's political thought (Arendt, 1958; 2005), the term becomes the bearer of a promise: acting together human beings can raise the bar of the quality of social life to a standard that many would think impossible. These two meanings of politics are nor antithetic, neither mutually exclusive, instead they should be considered as complementary with each other.

Following this line of thinking, the dissertation critically develops the proposition that the Internet provides a framework that offers unprecedented opportunities for individuals and groups to engage with the political process by challenging existing power holders. To clarify the argument, the research explores the complex relationship between the Internet, the changing dynamics and meanings of power, and the wider role citizens can play in network-enhanced political spheres.

The leading claims of the dissertation draw on the works of Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Marshall McLuhan, Manuel Castells, Michael Schudson, and Hannah Arendt. The research uses historical resources, in-depth interviews, and qualitative and quantitative analysis of websites to probe the potential of

this new galaxy of communication[1]. More in details, chapter two and three investigate the galaxy's structure; chapter four and five look at the way in which some governments use new communication media to exercise, to maintain, and to protect their power; chapter six discusses the flaws and weaknesses of governments' relationship with new media. Chapter seven, eight, and nine analyse three different cases of citizens' political use of the Internet; and chapter ten finally enquires on how the Internet affects the inner quality of existing power relations.

This research does not seek final and definitive answers; but more humbly, looking for outposts, traces, and debris, it attempts to find the development pattern that defines the exercise of political power within this new communication galaxy. Each chapter can be considered as a space-probe. At the end of the journey, each probe returns a series of snapshots. The general framework that emerges from those snapshots questions a conventional line of interpretation of the political relevance of the Internet: the view that Internet networks are tools that basically enhance governments' power of control over their citizens. While distinct traces of evidence for this view can be found, especially in states that rely on autocratic forms of government, closer inspection shows, particularly in countries obeying the rules of democracy, that average citizens are increasingly successful in using the Internet to alter in their favour the dynamics of prevailing power relations. This study argues that there are three combined factors that are driving this trend. First, the network's structure is intrinsically resistant to total control by a few actors. Secondly, attitudinal change is occurring among individuals and groups, so that with the expansion of the Internet Galaxy, new standards for judging the quality of political participation are being adopted, above all because the potential reach of political action is transcending the limits of traditional practices of citizenship. Finally, the dissertation shows, through many different examples of power contestations, that within the Internet Galaxy absolute power exercised by some over others is highly improbable; that reversals of power are chronic, often with surprising unintended effects.

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[1] For more details on the research method adopted for this dissertation see below *Appendix A: A note on method*

Finally, this study argues that understanding the dynamics interlocking these three factors is crucial for the success of any Internet-based political action that attempts to resist the hubris of power in contemporary technologically advanced societies.

Before launching our probes, the following pages outline the theoretical framework that sustains the three key elements that make this exploration possible: the Galaxy, the citizen, and the meaning of power.

A new Galaxy?

'The medium is the message' announced in the sixties the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan. With that slogan, McLuhan meant to rebut the popular belief that a medium of communication is neutral and that it is the use we make of it that counts when determining its quality or impact on society. On the contrary, societies are shaped by the inherent nature of the communication media they use. According to this argument, media in fact alter 'our relations to one another and to ourselves' regardless of whether they turn out images, books, cornflakes or Cadillacs (McLuhan, 1964:7). In this context, the term medium broadly indicates 'any technology that creates extensions of the human body and senses, from clothing to the computer' (McLuhan 1997: 239). Every technology posses 'the property of the Midas touch': as the mythical King Midas could transform everything he touched in gold, so every new technology transforms society according to its own characteristics. Each new technology in fact quickly permeates every aspect of society, which then changes itself accordingly, in order to accommodate that technology within its social structure. From this perspective, technologies are never simple pawns on the chessboard of life to be used or sacrificed for the player's benefit. But on the contrary, they are revolutionizing agents that influence the player's choices and tactics, and help shaping new social environments.

Following in the same path traced in the late forties by Harold Innis' analysis of the *biases of communication*[2], McLuhan saw many examples of that *Midas*

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[2] In his works Innis argued that media posses inherent biases that influences the development of society. The history of society is profoundly entwined with that

touch in the history of evolution of social organization: from the late modern era with the electric media (i.e. television and computer) to the ancient world with the invention of the phonetic alphabet. 'Before the invention of the phonetic alphabet', wrote McLuhan, 'man lived in a world where all the senses were balanced and simultaneous'. That was a tribal closed world based on 'an oral culture structured by a dominant auditory sense of life.' (McLuhan 1997: 228) In that tribal society, speech was the crucial medium of communication, and because of that no one could claim exclusive rights over knowledge; no one knew more or less than his or her peers, who were at the same time recipients and sources of information. Tribal culture was based on a minimum degree of individualism and specialization, which represent instead 'the hallmarks of "civilized" Western' societies. The phonetic alphabet brought about the end of the balance of senses that characterised oral cultures, in favour of the visual. That shift made way for a new type of being, the 'literary man', in essence an individual capable of abstract thinking and hence capable of being alone, disconnected from the tribe.

Karl Popper once distinguished between tribal or closed societies, rooted in a biological unity; and modern open societies, largely based on 'abstract relations such as exchange or co-operation' (1966: 171). Following that line of argument, McLuhan maintained that it was the phonetic alphabet that brought about that capacity of abstracting from the concrete here-and-now (McLuhan, 1962: 8). If oral cultures were characterised by the capacity of acting and reacting simultaneously, that is, by the way they unify thought and action, then the new individual could act without reacting, without being involved. He/she could abstract himself/herself from the action and from the other members of its community. The experience of a fact was mediated in time and space, and it was visually codified by that new technology, the phonetic alphabet.

The diffusion in Europe of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press at the end of the fifteenth century widely extended the reach of phonetic literacy. It set in

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of communication media. At each epoch of history dominant forms of media appear, their interaction with the society that surrounds them creates biases that play a major role in shaping processes of culture and values formation (Innis, 1951).

motion an even more complex process of events that in the long term had the effect of reshaping further the western world: 'If the phonetic alphabet fell like a bombshell on tribal man' wrote McLuhan 'the printing press hit him like a 100-megaton H-bomb' (1997: 232). Gutenberg's movable type (see Fig. 1), with its characteristic linearity, uniformity, and repeatability, allowed reproduction of information in unprecedented numbers and speed; it strengthened the need for homogeneity and favoured the visual over the other senses. This new technology 'finally sealed the doom of tribal man' (McLuhan, 1997: 232) while at the same time made knowledge portable, to a certain extent economic, and widely shared across Europe. Through print, the dream of universal literacy was finally within reach. Print technology, 'with its place for everything and everything in its place' produced a shift towards a homogeneous segmentation of knowledge that altered existing social boundaries and patterns of culture. By 'bringing the ancient and medieval world into fusion – or, as some would say, confusion', that process created a new world, the modern world and with it, all its distinct characteristics - including nationalism and the industrial assembly line (McLuhan, 1964: 186).

Figure 1 - Gutenberg and Printing Press[3]

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[3] Source: Internet (www.inkart.com/pages/people/Gutenberg_2.html)

Gutenberg's types institutionalised the schism between thought and action, and fragmented further the unity of the individual: 'man, first sundered by the alphabet, was at last diced into bite-sized tidbits' (McLuhan. 1997: 233). From that moment onward, 'Western man was Gutenberg man', a new individual belonging to a new reality, one that McLuhan called the *Gutenberg Galaxy* (McLuhan, 1962).

Using a parallel approach to McLuhan's, four decades later, the sociologist Manuel Castells has argued that the Internet has become 'the fabric of our life' (2001: 1). For its persistent expansion, for its scope and reach in our society, the Internet is for the contemporary world what the printing press was for the Modern era: it is a driver of socio-economical and political changes. Paying homage to McLuhan's work, Castells maintains that at the turn of the twenty-first century we have left the *Gutenberg Galaxy* and 'entered a new world of communication: the *Internet Galaxy*.' (Castells, 2001: 3).

At the roots of Castells' argument is his theory of the Network Society. By that phrase Castells refers to a new predominant social structure that emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, at the expense of a weakening nation state and it is largely based on a web of networked nodes (such as economic and political supranational institutions) interacting with each other via advanced information and communication technologies (Castells, 1996 and 2004). In this case, the term 'social structure' relates to the ways in which humans organise themselves in matters of 'relationships of production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture.' (Castells, 2004: 3). A node within these relationships represents the point of intersection between communication-links. Each node is at the same time a receiver and a producer of communication; it can be both passive and active. A proper network is one without a centre, that is, an open system in which neither the node nor the subject controlling that node holds an absolute hegemonic position in respect to the others. However, 'nodes may be of varying relevance for the network' (Castells, 2004: 3). Their relevance is measured in terms of capacity and efficiency: the more information a node can absorb, the more efficiently it can process that information, the more relevant

that node is for the network. Relevance in this case becomes a synonym for power: who controls those nodes gains a certain advantage in respect to the other nodes of the network. However, this power position is not absolute, simply because nodes only exist within a network: their existence, their relevance, and their power is inextricably linked to their being part of networks. That is why the defining unit of such social structure is the network and not the node.

Networks process information flows among their nodes, through a set of shared protocols or conventions. It is a process based on a logic of inclusion/exclusion: either a node is part of the network (hence it can receive any element of that information flow), or it is out of the network. In the first case, the node is within reach of the whole network. For Castells, the Network Society is a cluster of many small-world networks: that is, a type of network where any two nodes are networked with each other by a relevantly small number of links (Watts and Strogatz, 1998). Although networks have always existed, only recently, have they surfaced as the material basis of social organization. The reason for this late blooming is simple: the advent of microelectronics-based information and communication technologies, such as computers in the seventies, has made it possible for networks to overcome their long-term subordination to existing hierarchical power structures that are instead organised vertically, guard their power through specific institutions, and distribute it through a 'one-directional flows of information and resources' (Castells, 2004: 4-5)

Until the Seventies, networks had always been less efficient systems of organization, compared to those organised hierarchically (Castells, 1996). In the Middle Age for instance, horse-powered communication networks were efficient enough to maintain an open channel of communication between the centre and the periphery of a large territory. Yet that horse-powered communication system was limited by the lack of an adequate technology (in McLuhan's sense) that could guarantee a fast and reliable exchange of information during the communication process. As it stood, for the long time-lag that occurred between sending, receiving, and re-sending a message, that

system amounted to no more than a unidirectional set of information sent from the centre to the periphery; and by doing so, effectively, it maintained the status quo unchanged. For instance, as John Keane notes, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century communication networks were efficient but extremely slow: 'in 1776, the year of the US revolution – newspapers, books and letters took up eight weeks to travel from Philadelphia to London by packet-boat'. A few years later, 'the coach which brought news to London of the battle of Waterloo in eighteen hours was considered to have performed a miraculous journey; in the same year, the mail coach journey from London to Leeds regularly took thirty-three hours; and around the same time messages shipped from London to the penal colony of New South Wales took at least sixteen treacherous weeks to arrive.' (Keane, 1999:1)

The arrival of mechanical engines, train networks, or even airplanes altered the time-space framework of communications, but not so dramatically. The underlying technology of those communication networks was still limited and thus vertical structures of power remained preferable to other forms of social organization (Castells, 2004: 5). The arrival in the Seventies of Micro-computer-based technology changed everything. Through that technology communication networks became so efficient and reliable that nowadays the information flow from any point in a network to any other is virtually instantaneous, multidirectional, and autonomous from the source from which it originated. The Internet embodies all those characteristics; it represents the 'lever' of the overall process of transition from a society based on hierarchical structures to one based on networks. For these characteristics, the Internet is the essential technology of the Network Society (Castells, 2001: 2). In particular, what makes the Internet different from other communication media (like television or radio) is 'its capacity to recombine' any type of information sent across its networks into a new one, regardless of time constraints or power hierarchies (Castells, 2004: 10-11). More importantly, that new product can be sent back directly into the stream of information flows that runs through this new galaxy of communication without asking permission to any gatekeeper or intermediary. The Internet is the necessary infrastructure that makes possible

the enacting of a continuous process of production, exchange, and sharing of information across many different networks.

Printing's preservation and homogeneous reproduction of knowledge was crucial for the modern world to appear and flourish, similarly, recombination is the crucial element that sustains the Internet, hence the network society: 'recombination is the source of innovation, and innovation is at the roots of economic productivity, cultural creativity, and political power making.' (Castells, 2004: 11) As the second part of this dissertation demonstrates, 'recombination' and 'free access to the information flow' have a potentially revolutionary effect on the dynamics that support conventional structures of power. The possibility to access, to recombine and to distribute knowledge freely can help subvert established hegemonic power positions by providing new access points to the political process for those actors usually relegated in a non-active condition by the predominant influence of existing power-holders over mainstream media networks (such as television or the press).

Historically, in any field of knowledge, the development of new theories and practices has always required a process of recombination of pre-existing data. However before the advent of computers networks that process was limited in its potentials by time and space constraints. With respect to medieval Europe, Gutenberg' printing press had the effect to improve considerably the processes of production and distribution of knowledge (old and new). During the sixteenth century, this *effect* extended the range and quality of scientific and religious debates. It happened, for example, with the Copernican revolution in astronomy and the Protestant Reformation in religion (Eisenstein, 1980). However, the process of printing and distributing printed materials was time-consuming and dependent on the existence of typographies and booksellers in a given territory. This dependence limited considerably the reach of the sources that took part in that process of recombination (that is, to question, to experiment with, to manipulate) of existing knowledge. Computers networks free processes of recombination from such constraints, thus recombination can happen in real time and it can rely on a complex world-wide web of different sources, each connected with all others sources through the network. The

Internet creates a new galaxy of interaction among actors in which the potential of knowledge generation can reach unprecedented heights (Castells, 2004: 11)

Both McLuhan's theory of media and Castells' interpretation of the Internet Galaxy are important elements of the theoretical background of this thesis. Yet – I argue - they suffer from two central flaws that this research attempts to overcome: technological-determinism and obsolescence.

Technological determinism, the supposition that technology is the grand narrative that shapes society (i.e.: its cultural values, its social organization, its historical development), is more acute in McLuhan's than in Castells' approach. In fact, McLuhan emphasises the role media play in the evolution of society to such an extent that he almost annuls the power of the individuals who use those media (along with the institutions that govern society). Castells' determinism is instead of a softer kind; the interaction between media, economy, institutions, individuals/groups (just to list but a few of the factors that influenced the birth of the Internet Galaxy) is more balanced. Castells acknowledges his technological determinism 'in the particular sense that without information technologies, there could be no economic globalization, no network enterprise, no global media, no global communication, and no global criminal economy' (Castells, 2000: 137). But he argues that no one *mentally sane* person could ever say that technology determines society. Technology is an indispensable tool to understand society, but it does not determine it.

At the same time, society does not 'script the course of technological change'. Many factors in fact play an important role in the process of technological innovation. Among these are individual inventiveness and entrepreneurialism (Castells, 1996:5). Nevertheless, Castells focus remains firm on the technological structure of the network society. He offers very few original insights into the role individuals/groups play within this new galaxy of communication.

This thesis tackles the problem of technological determinism by attempting to re-establish a fine balance between the medium and the different agents involved in its development. It offers in-depth insights into the role played by

individuals/groups, networked initiatives, political events, and governments in building the structure that sustains the Internet Galaxy.

Even more important – from the point of view of the aims of this dissertation - is the problem of obsolescence that undermines the scope and value of those two theories. *Becoming obsolete* is a comprehensible process in McLuhan's main works (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*) that date back to the Sixties, an epoch of scarcity for micro-electronic based information technologies. His theories mainly focus on print and electric media. The latter include the telephone, radio and television, and early versions of computers, those only available to a limited number of research centres (McLuhan, 1997: 235). Electric communication media have the capacity of moving information at the speed of light; this is an instantaneous and continuous process that pours upon a user the concern of all his/her peers. For that capacity, McLuhan argued, electric media could have the reverse effect that the phonetic alphabet first, and the printing press later, had on tribal culture: 'the human family becomes one tribe again' (McLuhan, 1964: 187).

McLuhan's focus on electric media is in the present age obsolete. Nowadays, similarly to the electric media are digital media. Digital media – a category that includes media such as mobile phones and portable computers – offer the possibility to transform once again the way in which humans interact and communicate with each other. However, this transformational process does not necessary mean a return to a tribal culture. The Internet Galaxy is far more complex than McLuhan's tribal society.

To understand McLuhan's position and his obsolescence with the present day Internet Galaxy, we need to understand why for McLuhan television (more than the computer) was the most significant representative among the electric media. By re-establishing harmony among the five senses of its viewers, television would put an end to the 'visual supremacy' that had hitherto characterized the Gutenberg Galaxy. McLuhan's argument, based on the ubiquitous spread of television in the American society of the Sixties, is counter-intuitive. Contrary to what people tend to believe Television is not a visual medium. It is 'primarily an extension of the sense of touch rather than of

sight', and in fact viewing a programme on television requires all five senses to work together, in harmony. McLuhan explained this line of argument by comparing television with other visual media, like photograph or film: in the latter cases, the image is perfect, it is in high definition, in the sense that contains every needed detail and thus it requires nothing from the viewer but just to be viewed. The television product instead is an imperfect one by default: it is 'a mosaic mesh' comprising horizontal lines and 'millions of tiny dots'. Part of those dots never reaches the viewer's eye. Thus, contrary to a printed text or image, information sent through television, when it reaches its destination, and because of its imperfect quality, requires an active involvement of its viewers, who need constantly filling in the gaps, using all other senses. In essence, the experience of watching TV is high in terms of participation and low in terms of definition. McLuhan called this 'a "cool" experience', as opposed to the one offered by media like radio which is essentially 'hot', because it provides the audience with a set of highly defined acoustic information that requires no other participation than listening (McLuhan 1997: 235-6).

Despite its limitations and historical obsolescence, McLuhan's differentiation between hot and cool media still offers valuable insights into the influence of technology upon society. The Internet is definitely a cool medium, much more than television ever was. Notwithstanding the aesthetic similarities between the screen of a television set and a computer monitor, the space delimited by the latter in conjunction with the Internet invites the individual to go inside and to be more proactive than with television. Potentially, that space belongs to each individual, who is no longer simply a viewer but he/she has a much wider role to play. Within this context, the viewer becomes an explorer. Individuals navigate the new galaxy and feel as if they are 'moving through that space – a sense we do not usually have jumping from one television station to another' (Levinson, 1999: 6)

Television's dual feature of low-definition/intense-participation, from McLuhan's perspective, regenerates the dynamics typical of tribal culture; but the worldwide reach of electric media, such as television, gives to the tribe a

worldwide footprint. Television, argued McLuhan, links the world in a global consciousness and it makes the tribe global; or better, electric media make the world a 'global village'. The global village is probably the most famous catchphrase coined by McLuhan, one that has transcended McLuhan's interpretation and lived long after his death in 1980. The metaphor of the global village, rather than with television, has been often associated with the Internet, a much more complex communication medium. Calling the Internet a global village is however misleading. This dissertation considers McLuhan's theories limited in their research' scope and historically obsolete in their focal point (television). In terms of social impact and audience's reach in advanced technological societies, like the United States of America (USA), data analysed in this research suggest that television has been equalled (and often surpassed) by the Internet. Especially the younger strata of the population seem to prefer the Internet to television. Yet, the metaphor of the global village cannot really apply to the Internet, at least in the sense that McLuhan gave to the term. McLuhan died in 1980 and was little familiar with the Internet. In his main works, he never talked explicitly of computer networks. Instead, when asked what he thought about the role of computers in the future, McLuhan put forward the idea of a super computer that – similarly to television – could amplify human consciousness on a world scale, while transcending the need for verbalization so proper of the Gutenberg Galaxy (McLuhan, 1997: 253). With hindsight, the global village image could be applied to the early stages of the Internet Galaxy, when the whole galaxy was inhabited by a small community of computer scientists and spoke just one language (English). To some extent, McLuhan's concept can be used descriptively for some forms of online social networking (such as the online communities generated by popular websites like Facebook.com and Myspace.com). Nowadays, the Internet Galaxy resembles more a complex web of *villages* (or local nets), than a world-wide village-like community: this is a galaxy that speaks many languages, follows different rules, and deals with different issues. It develops at different paces. It harbours no dominant tribe, no dominant values or ideas. The Internet, in fact, multiplies those tribes endlessly. On the other hand, it is important to remark here, even though the Internet cannot be considered a global village (in the sense that McLuhan's gave to the term), the term local and the term global find

themselves firmly intertwined within the galaxy. Because these local nets are linked with each other via a world-wide network, they are at the same time both local and global. What happens in one local net is never and simply a local issue; but on the contrary, potentially, due to the open and distributive nature of the network, any *local* issue can be accessed/influenced by *non-locals*. Such openness and interdependence between the nodes makes the network politically relevant. The openness and interdependence generated by the Internet do not transform the world into a global village, but set communities free from space and communication constraints to the point that existing power hierarchies are weakened and often by-passed through the use of the network.

The problem of historical obsolescence is more evident in *The Internet Galaxy* (2001), Castells' main work on the subject. The book provides a broad overview of all the important issues (and debates) related to the relationship between the Internet and society, (i.e. access to technology, culture of the Internet, business, and politics). However, I argue in this thesis, his overview is mired into the logic of the first generation of Internet technologies which either no longer exist, or which have been sidelined by a whole range of new tools or second generation Internet technologies. Only eight years after its first edition, paradoxically, Castells' analysis (comprehensively his data, but more alarmingly his conceptual approach to the issue) sounds more dated than McLuhan's works, which were written forty years earlier.

Seen in terms of present-day trends, Castells' 2001 analysis is no longer able to provide in-depth insights about the complexity of the Internet. For instance, Castells' treatment of virtual communities is rooted in the Nineties' debate about whether or not the Internet was useful in identity building, or had a transformative impact on people's lives. The data and studies quoted in Castells' book show that people seem 'to adapt the Internet to their lives rather than transforming their behaviour under the impact of technology' (2001: 128). Nowadays, the trends in the use of the Internet appear to follow an opposite direction. Castells refers also to chat rooms and highly text-based virtual communities: these are important historically in understanding the early stages of the process of community formation through the Internet; but they are of

little relevance for probing the complexity of nowadays Internet Galaxy, that is a space where video, still images, and texts are combined in ways that were unforeseeable only five years ago. To shed light on that complexity, in this research, I look in detail at the history of the Internet from its early years in the late Sixties to its most recent developments. Furthermore, Castells remains cautious towards the political implications of the Internet Galaxy, he calls this galaxy a 'contested terrain' between governing powers and free individuals (2001: 170-1). It is a space where technologies of control are continuously challenged by technologies of freedom, yet the last word in that ongoing struggle, in Castells' view, belongs to the governing powers: 'global networks cannot be controlled, but people using them, can, are and will be—unless societies opt for the freedom of the Internet by acting from and beyond the barricades of their nostalgic libertarians.' (2001: 184). This research goes beyond Castells' cautious take; it shows that the use of the Internet transforms radically the power relations between governing bodies and individuals/groups to the point that established power holders find themselves critically weakened by their full adoption of the network as the vital infrastructure of their modus operandi.

In Castells' work, even the use of the term galaxy is not particularly elaborated. If for McLuhan the term is dually evocative – it indicates the wide spectrum of events that brought about the Modern world and at the same time it is reminiscent of McLuhan's peculiar method of enquiry (he used metaphors to probe the media environment that surrounded him). For Castells the use of the term galaxy represents a mere analogy with McLuhan's work; the term is used, quite plainly, to stress the importance of the Internet within the Network Society; but Castells never probes the meaning of the word much further than that. In this dissertation, by contrast, the term galaxy is an important metaphor that supports the thesis' theoretical structure. The Internet Galaxy is at the same time an empirical and metaphorical representation of a new kind of space that, similar to an astronomical galaxy, is a complex heterogonous system of bodies that are gravitationally bound to each other. In any galaxy, each element, considered from the perspective of its relationship with all others elements that make the galaxy, plays a crucial role in the equilibrium of that galaxy. That

equilibrium however is never static. Galaxies move and mutate continuously. Similarly the Internet Galaxy is in a continuous state of transformation. It contains new public domains in which new rules of social and political engagement apply. This galaxy is a space in which individuals and groups exploit the potential of the whole gamut of new communication media (i.e. computers, mobile phones, smart phones, satellite television; and so on) to reach beyond the natural limits of their bodies and minds and connect one another. The use of the galaxy as a public domain and as an effective communication medium, in turn, affects crucially the balance of power relationships enacted within its realm.

Castells fails to develop adequately those points. His cautious approach based on his now obsolete data calls for a fresh understanding of the *political* dynamics of the emerging Internet Galaxy. That is what this work intends to do. The method used to achieve such a goal is that of probing. The meaning of the term probing is derived here from McLuhan's approach to social science and from a particular type of computer software.

'Most of my work in the media' McLuhan explained 'is like that of a safecracker. In the beginning I don't know what's inside. I just set myself down in front of the problem and begin to work. I grope, I probe, I listen, I test – until the tumblers fall and I'm in.' McLuhan called his thoughts 'probes'. For him, any of his 'little gestures' were nothing but 'all tentative probes'. That is why he felt free 'to make them sound as outrageous or extreme as possible.' Probes must be extreme to be effective. One of the caveats of such a method of enquire was – as McLuhan admitted – dogmatism: 'of course [these probes] sound very dogmatic. That doesn't mean you are committed to them. You may toss them away' (Stearn, 1969: 274-7).

The Internet Galaxy, for its complex yet open structure (see Fig. 2 below), enables and facilitates that kind of outrageous and extreme probing, both conceptually and practically. As we will see in the cases examined throughout the pages of this dissertation, in the sphere of politics, the galaxy is populated with ideas and practical examples of insolent probes that often defy the conventional thoughts on power relationships.

The second meaning of the term probing is drawn here from the *Computer Desktop Encyclopedia* (2009) where a probe is defined as a 'small utility program that is used to investigate, or test, the status of a system, network or Web site'. Generally, probes helps locating 'weaknesses in the system. A Web probe analyzes a Web site and reports data such as response time, security protocols supported and type of Web server'

Similarly, focusing principally on the relationship between citizens and governments, this dissertation attempts to investigate, to probe and test the embedded weaknesses of the Internet Galaxy and the implications of those weaknesses for existing power holders.
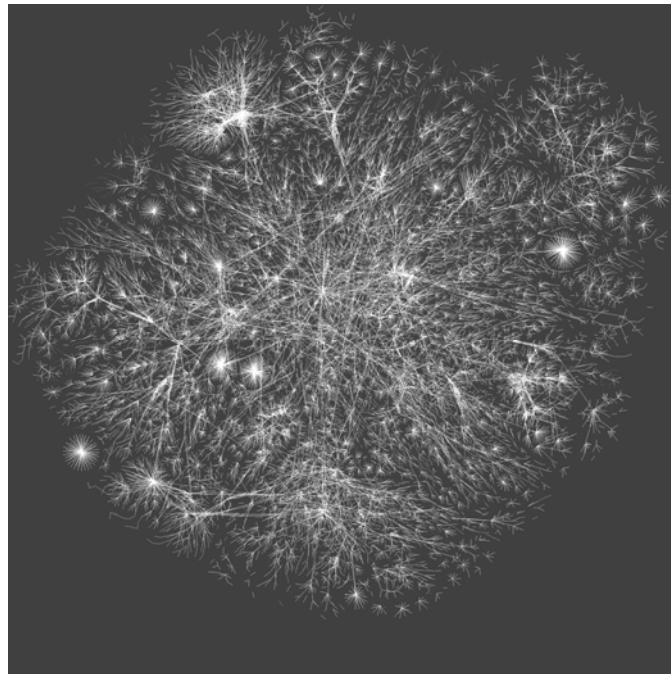
Figure 2 – Partial Map of the Internet - 2005[4]

To probe this new galaxy means, first of all, to understand its matter, its structure (what constitutes the network? what are the tools that help to explore the galaxy and populate it with content?). The 'matter' of the technology used is, by all means, important; but the most important element of this exploration is the explorer (understood here in the singular, as indicating an individual, and

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[4] Source: Internet, image retrieved 11 July 2009 from: http://www.opte.org/maps/

in the plural, as indicating a group of individuals joining together to achieve certain ends) and the political active role each explorer can potentially play within this galaxy. This research argues that, potentially, the Internet Galaxy breeds a new type of citizen (political individual), one that can challenge, humble and defeat established power holders by exploiting the new rules of engagement that apply within this new galaxy of communication. At first sight, citizens seem often to carry out that challenge individually. But within this galaxy individuality is only an appearance. The galaxy exists as the embodiment of the condition of plurality: a single node does not make a network, and a network always connect a single node to many others. It is in that connection, in that *joining together* that that initial apparently individual challenge becomes, potentially, a destabilising political act, one that can change the status quo significantly.

A new citizen

'Who is the citizen?' asked Aristotle in his *Politics*. His answer in 350 BCE emphasised that being a citizen meant essentially sharing 'the administration of justice and [public] offices' with other citizens (Aristotle, 2004:51). For citizenship was understood by Aristotle as a set of rights and duties that prescribed to each *good citizen* the active involvement in the government of the community they belonged to. It meant direct participation in acts of deliberation or decision-making. Bur it also referred to the duty (among others) of defending the city from enemies in the event of a war.

Since Aristotle, broadly, the meaning of citizenship has always been the product of a shifting balance between the rights and duties that, within the boundaries of a particular political community, define the scope of the role played by a citizen in the political life of that community. Traditionally that balance is heavily dependent on the social and political context that surrounds the citizen. For Aristotle, for instance, citizenship was only thinkable within the democratic environment of the *Polis*, the Greek city-state. Other more recent understandings of citizenship (Marshall, 1950, Schudson 1999) are set in the

background of the nation-state - a large and complex political community whose territorial borders are strictly defined and guarded. Within that context, legal rights such as, for instance, universal suffrage, petitioning, freedom of speech, eligibility for public office enable citizens to openly questioning who gets what when and how in their community. On the other hand, duties such as paying taxes or military service insure that the structure sustaining the state remains solid and efficient.

More than twenty-three centuries after Aristotle, the very same question '*who is the citizen*?' begs for a different and bolder answer, one that is more apt for the times we live in. The answer needs to extend the conventional understandings of citizenship beyond the limits of the nation-state, beyond rights and duties, and needs to include in its definition the rising importance of the Internet Galaxy in matters of power and politics. This dissertation argues that the peculiar characteristics of the emerging new Internet Galaxy fundamentally change the context and the quality of political participation, hence affects the nature of citizenship. Within this galaxy spatial, economical, and temporal barriers to political commitment are shattered; citizens are put in a position to monitor, assess, and approve (or reject) easily and (in principle) constantly the actions of those in power[5].

In contrast to the nation-state, the Internet Galaxy is a space made of extremely porous borders. As the present work clarifies, it is within that space that the act of questioning power is never confined entirely within geographically distinct areas; or it is defined by strictly-regulated terms, such as time, limit of age, culture, or legal status. In the Internet age being a citizen takes on a different role, one which is built on a series of different behaviours (only apparently disjointed from each other): among these are the maverick attitude of computer geeks tinkering with the security of computer networks; the law-defiant approach of teen-agers' illegally downloading files from the Internet; the political frustration of online petitioners; or the rebellious verve of bloggers, just to name but a few. The formation-process of this new type of citizen is the

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[5] Nor this section, neither this dissertation are about the history of citizenship. Other authors have already addressed the topic more extensively and successfully (see Marshall, 1950; Kymlicka and Norman, 1995; Heater, 2004)

result of a long and tortoise journey that started with a stuttered *hello* in a computer lab in Los Angeles, California, in 1969 and, in this dissertation, ends in Italy with a crowd of more than two million people shouting *vaffanculo* (the Italian term for *Fuck off*) in sign of protest against a corrupted political class (see below Chapter nine).

 At the core of this dissertation's revised understanding of citizenship is the post-Aristotelian concept of the *monitorial citizen* first elaborated in 1998 by the American Scholar, Michael Schudson, in his *The good citizen – a history of American civic life*[6]. The book is a critique of the predominant neo-progressive view that lies at the foundation of the American democracy: the ideal of an active and fully informed citizen. In opposition to this view, Schudson indicates that there have been four different eras of citizenship since the eighteen century. The first era is based on a *politics of assent* (Schudson, 1999: 20-22): the typical citizen of the thirteen colonies was an adult white male property owner. Soon after casting his vote in the ballot, that citizen publicly announced whom he voted for with clear and loud voice. This was a public act that restated and reaffirmed 'the leading gentlemen's right to govern' (p. 22). The second era of citizenship began in the early nineteenth century and it gave way to the first mass democracy. During this time, voters are still adult white males, but their right to vote no longer requires property ownership. The good citizen no longer bases his actions on a politics of assent, but rather on a *politics of affiliation* with a political party. Political campaigns and the act of voting are in this era expressions of party loyalty; they are rituals of solidarity towards a particular political coalition (pp. 114-5). For the voter, receiving a few dollars from his party together with a pre-printed ticket bearing the name of the party candidate he must vote for is not called bribery, but encouragement to vote (pp. 162-3).

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[6] Schudson's book is quite relevant for this research. It provides the historical and theoretical foundations to sustain a revised understanding of citizenship appropriate to the era of the Internet galaxy – even though the author of *The Good Citizen* had little to say about the Internet.

The third era is dominated by the informed citizen: at the end of the 19th century, reformers decided to put an end to what they regarded as a corrupt voting system. They enacted secret ballots, forbade campaigning near the polling stations, and limited the amount of rewards parties could give to voters (pp. 168-87). Most importantly, they transformed political campaigning from an act based on emotions, to one based on education. During this era, voting was (ideally) a rational, educated choice performed by a citizen well informed on public affairs (p. 182). The fourth era is rooted in the civil rights movement of the Sixties. It gave way to a new model of citizenship: the rights-bearing citizen. Schudson notes that the rise of this fourth type of citizenship has not reduced the value that the ideal of the *informed citizen* still holds in the eye of the public (pp. 293-5). However, the rights-bearing citizen has succeeded in broadening the space of politics: the polling station no longer represents the centre-stage of civic participation, but it is just one of the many locations where citizenship is exercised constantly. Homes, classrooms, courtrooms, interests groups, are all equal repositories of political activities (pp. 298-9).

Nevertheless, neither the *informed citizen*, nor the other three models of citizenship, can 'suffice for the tasks of the present' (Schudson, 1999: 309). The problem is not *citizens' lack of will* to civic commitment, but rather *the practical impossibility* for the majority of citizens to commit more fully to politics. In complex democratic systems like the USA, to be well informed, even on a single issue concerning local politics – such as who has to approve the works for a new State Highway – requires full time dedication and months of preparation (Schudson, 1999a). That is something an average citizen cannot afford. Nowadays, however, a good citizen does not need to be well informed to actively participate in the political life of his/her own country (Schudson, 1999: 310). Schudson therefore advocates a fifth model of citizenship more apt for our times, one based on the sum of those four early models, adequately rethought and strengthened. Schudson' monitorial citizen should not be misunderstood as the *appropriate and only* model of citizenship for our time. 'I propose [the monitorial citizen]' says Schudson 'as a modification of the information-based model and I believe it must and should co-exist with models of citizen engagement based on trust, party, and rights.' (Schudson, 1999a)

The obligation attached to the ideal of the informed citizen must be understood instead as 'monitorial' (Schudson, 1999: 310). We are living, in fact, in the era of the monitorial citizen (pp. 310-11). Citizens may appear often politically apathetic, but, in reality, they are monitoring the situation; they are scanning the informational environment that surrounds them. They are like parents watching small children swimming at a community pool. At first sight, they look inattentive, but that is just a false impression. Although 'they are not gathering information, they are keeping an eye on the scene' (p. 311). If something happens, they are ready for action, if action indeed is required.

Some critics have accused Schudson of advocating a Californian laid-back model of citizenship, but in fact it is the contrary: being a monitorial citizen is more demanding than being an informed citizen 'because it implies that one's peripheral vision should always have a political or civic dimension.' (Schudson, 1999a). But absent from the monitorial citizen's role is the requirement of being always well informed on all the issues. For lack of knowledge, time, and will, in the daily routine of the average person, in fact, active participation in the democratic process often takes place through proxies, or representatives: on many issues affecting the quality of our lives we often trust others to make decisions on our behalf. For instance, when we buy food in the supermarket, we don't check personally if the quality of our food meets the law requirements, we trust that the food quality controllers have done that on our behalf. So ideal monitorial citizens, like parents at the pool, 'should be informed enough and alert enough to identify danger to their personal good and danger to the public good.' And when that danger appears action should follow, meaning that monitorial citizens should have access to adequate resources to 'jump into the political fray and make a lot of noise' (Schudson, 1999a).

Schudson lists several of these resources: trusted relationships; political parties and elected officials; relationships to interest groups and other trustees of their concerns; knowledge of and access to the courts as well as the electoral system; and relevant information sources. However, in that list, there is no explicit mention of the role of media, neither mainstream (like television or the press), nor more complex ones, like the Internet. Schudson implicitly includes them in

the group of reliable sources of information. When asked, he replies that the media's main task is to provide critique, monitoring, to be a watchdog over the authority (Schudson, 1999a). On the role played by television and newspapers in contemporary America, Schudson points out that are the latter that have more authority than the former: if television is a primary source of news for most of the people, newspapers are the primary source of news for television. Television does not own politics, any more than the press, parties, or interests groups, and often it only helps displaying 'a world of power, one that media can observe and transmit but cannot control' (1999: 287).

To those who criticize broadcast media for being just a 'headline service', Schudson responds that the headlines model fits perfectly the purpose of the monitorial citizen: they help him/her scanning what is going on in their own environment. They provide citizens with the minimum amount of information needed to keep them vigilant on the scene. To reinforce his argument, Schudson quotes the example of Paul Revere, the American patriot who at the start of the Independence War in 1775 rode from Boston to Lexington, along the way calling out 'the red coats are coming'. Revere's famous cry was no more than a headline, nonetheless it successfully conveyed all information needed for Revere's fellow citizens to step into action: the British army is approaching fast, be prepared to fight.

Schudson's analysis provides an important theoretical framework to understand the complexity of citizenship and the many challenges that an average citizen is confronted with in contemporary societies. But, as with Castells' *Internet Galaxy*, *The Good Citizen* suffers from having rapidly been outdated by subsequent events. The communication revolution unleashed by the Internet in the last ten years has changed radically the environment surrounding Schudson's monitorial citizens. Given the time-frame of his research, not surprisingly, new communication technologies find no space in Schudson's historical account of citizenship. Nevertheless, when he deals with the issue elsewhere, his position still remains quite cold with regard to the impact the Internet has on citizens' relationship with politics. There is no doubt that the ubiquity of media such as the Internet widen monitorial citizens' scanning

range, but in essence for him they do nothing more than that[7]. They don't change the quality of their engagement. As the author of *The Good Citizen* puts it: 'the Internet does not erase existing structures of politics. If it gives to ordinary citizens new tools for gathering information and expressing views, think how much more it offers to political professionals who spend forty to eighty hours a week on politics, not forty to eighty minutes.' (Schudson, 2004: 57)

In this dissertation I stake out a different position than Schudson's and go further. I suggest that the increasing relevance of the Internet Galaxy in our society not only widens the range of citizens' scanning ability, but also it affects individuals' political life on three different levels: it increases their chances and widens the quality of their political commitment; it connects them with each other in new ways, and by doing so it increases exponentially the effectiveness of those 'forty to eighty minutes' that citizens dedicate to political engagement; finally, and by no means of least importance, the Internet Galaxy changes radically the balance of power between citizens and their representatives.

Schudson describes the monitorial citizen as an active citizen in waiting; it is as if his/her ability to take action is dormant, until the moment that it is needed. He does not however explain what kind of action this monitorial citizen prefers, or how that action is organized, that is, what happens after the *headline* is read and understood by the monitorial citizen?

This dissertation proposes a different reading of some basic trends of our time. It suggests, against the backdrop of the Internet Galaxy, that the concept of the monitorial citizen transcends the historical and geographical boundaries of American democracy and it becomes global. Potentially, regardless of his or her geographical locations or political beliefs, each and every explorer that navigates this galaxy can be considered a new type of monitorial citizen, with a much wider and more active role than the one envisaged by Schudson. New communication media in fact play a three-fold role in the civic life of

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[7] Interview *with Michael Schudson*, San Diego, 28 December 2007

monitorial citizens: they facilitate the awakening of the ability to take action; they provide the tools to organise that action; and allow citizens to challenge established power holders.

In the context of the Internet Galaxy, citizens do not only monitor but also increasingly hit back at those who succumb to the hubris of power. The monitorial citizen of the Internet age can exploit this new galaxy of communication and its extended capacity of acting with and against power to initiate successful and bold acts of resistance. Through the network, a citizen (individually or by joining others) can increase his/her own stake in the politics of everyday life; he/she can keep a close eye on those who govern; he/she can outrageously probe the meaning of power whilst setting off a long-term process of transformation whose long-lasting effects (potentially) may shift permanently the balance of political power from the hands of those who govern to the hands of those who are governed.

A new paradigm of power?

This study seeks to make a contribution to our understanding of power by investigating how the politics of the Internet Galaxy affects conventional power relations. It is a truism within the human sciences that all social relationships are based on relations of power between potentially conflicting forces. Yet any attempt to define the meaning of the term power, or to assess the quality of its modus operandi immediately produces disagreement. The meaning of the concept of power is by definition always *evaluative* and *essentially contested*; it always varies in relation to a given set of variables/assumptions that ultimately define it (Lukes, 1977: 172–3). Consider, for instance, the most general definition of power, one that is usually present in any study on the matter: a subject *A* exercises power over an other subject *B* whenever *A* can carry out whatever action regardless of *B*'s will to resist that action. The resulting effect is the product of one specific form of power: *A* dominates *B*.

Both the action of *A* and the effect of that action on *B* can be the conscious product of someone's will or the outcome of an unconscious behaviour. Action in this case relies on a wide variety of sources of power: *A* can impose his/her own will over *B* by employing direct means of coercion, for instance by threatening *B* at gun point; or more subtly, *A* can achieve her/his own goal by progressively shaping *B*'s mind in such a way that the resulting action ultimately appears as *B*'s free choice, that is, an act of willing compliance, rather than the evident product of *A*'s pressure.

From the standpoint of this (originally Weberian) understanding of power, the social setting in which power is enacted is functional in determining power's inherent quality: in large scale social organizations, such as nation states, the relationship of power between those who govern and those who are governed often depends on the political system that is chosen to govern, which defines the roles and rights of the parties involved in that specific power struggle. Governors in an autocratic regime can rely on a wider spectrum of resources in relation to the ways in which they can exercise their power over their subjects; the exercise of power can be subtle or direct, fair or violent, but overall the freedom of action of such governors is guaranteed by the intrinsic quality of its power: absolute strength, that is, absolute freedom to decide over the ultimate matter of life and death.

Under conditions of free and fair elections, the power of a democratically-elected government is supposed to be different. That government is never in an absolute position in respect to its citizens. Citizens in fact should be the ultimate bearer of power: they authorize or legitimize the government's exercise of power on their behalf by electing it or actively and openly supporting it. People's choice is the true expression of power; acting together they can grant support or, when needed, withdraw it (Arendt, 1958: 199-201). Thus, in principle at least, the choices of the elected government are quite limited, insofar as they are regulated by laws and are under continue scrutiny by a variety of power-monitoring institutions that guarantee their legality. The emergence of a new predominant social structure – in our case the Internet Galaxy - affects the quality of pre-existing power relations in accordance to the

characteristics inherent to that structure. The emergence of networks affects existing hierarchical and centralized structures of power by forcing on them what Thomas Kuhn called a *gestalt switch*, that is, a shift towards a new conceptual structure or paradigm (Kuhn, 1970: 84); in our case is a new way of thinking about power relations as decentralised, flexible, and horizontal; organised through networks and not hierarchically. Communication networks, this research argues, make possible a society where actors/citizens escape the clutches of one unique and hegemonic source of power. The conventional understanding of power as domination of a subject by another actor that runs through the history of political thought is inadequate to understand the nature of power relations within this new environment, thus a new paradigm for that task is required.

In the most recent version of his work on the network society, Castells (2004) argues that power in a network generates from the interaction between two different enablers: 'the ability to program/reprogram the network(s)' and the ability of 'switching' connections between crucial nodal points of the network, the holders of these abilities are called respectively the *programmers* and the *switchers*.

The *programmers* set the network's goals (define what the network is for) and (when needed) they make sure the network can function as part of a wider network. To ensure that, the programmers provide it with a set of shared protocols (or conventions) that are generally recognised by other networks. Connectivity is crucial to enable processes of resource sharing, production, and interaction with other networks. Goals and protocols are not fixed, and they last as long as they are needed. The programmer can always reset the network to attend different tasks or follow other protocols (Castells, 2004: 32). The Network Society is composed by a variety of networks that connect with each other through those shared protocols. The agents that are responsible for the strategic nodes that enable inter-networks connection represent the second major source of power. For their ability to switch on/off that connection they are called the *switchers*. They are the enablers that make possible the

connection/communication process among diverse types of networks (Castells, 2004: 33)

Correctly, Castells points out that the programmers and switchers should not be interpreted as abstract automated networks. At the core of these networks are people and are these people's ideas, projects, and visions that generate the programs around which these networks are organized. Within this context, communication media, and especially the Internet, play a crucial role in sustaining and shaping those programs. They represent the ideal space of interaction between the 'programs' and their would-be constituencies: through the Internet, for example, ideas generated in niche networks (like non-aligned political groups) can be exposed to the constituencies of other networks, reinforce their own, and influence others. (Castells, 2004: 33)

The two enabling mechanisms of programming and switching suffice to a certain extent both the exercise of power and acts of resistance to power that take place within a network. Acts of resistance in this context are simply considered as attempts to re-program the goals and protocols of the network, and take control of the switches. But Castells never really explains what enacts the action of the programmers and of the switchers, especially when that action is a direct challenge of established power-holders. Thus, even though for this dissertation Castells' approach remains important - it provides the initial framework to assess power in a networked environment - his theory of programmers and switchers is not entirely adequate to grasp fully the long-lasting implications in the field of power and politics of many internet-based forms of power contestations.

By contrast with Castells, this dissertation sets out to probe the full political potential of the Internet Galaxy. It carries out this task by examining a small but fascinating sample of new forms of collective action that have found in the Internet Galaxy their sine qua non of existence. To explain the enacting mechanism that lays beneath those actions, the dissertation proposes a new paradigm of power. It calls it: the *weakness paradigm.* The Internet Galaxy is an ideal space to nurture particular forms of political engagement that do not conform to patterns of power relations, as conventionally understood. State-

centred understanding of power that sees in the exercise of strength the perfect means to achieve absolute domination over its subjects no longer works within this new environment. By contrast, the rising importance of the Internet Galaxy as a predominant social structure forces us to rethink the meaning of power through a new paradigm; one that, at first sight, appear to be paradoxical: power springs out from weakness. The Internet Galaxy is a complex and heterogeneous structure, that means that no one can ever be in a condition of entire superiority over the others; everyone in this new galaxy of interaction shares with all the other members of the network a common element of weakness. Given such initial condition of existence for anyone entering the network, can that shared sense of weakness become power? In other words, can the monitorial citizen of the twenty-first century leverage that shared element of weakness into political clout?

Drawing on the case studies presented and analysed in this dissertation, the final chapter answers the question by proposing that for individuals (even those who are simply 'keeping an eye on the scene') – and by proxy for groups – the recognition, even when accidental or intuitive, of such shared element of weakness has the potential to trigger spontaneous and unconventional actions of political resistance by reinforcing the idea that within this galaxy conventional power-holders can be easily humbled, even with the click of a mouse.

In 1995, the Astronomer Carl Sagan described a picture of Earth (see below Fig. 3) taken by the Space probe *Voyager 1* in this way:

'Well, here's this spacecraft that has flown by the Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune systems and is on its way, astonishingly, to the stars, a triumph of human engineering. We turn the cameras back and take a photograph of the planet from where it came. And we can barely see it. Here it is, a fragile, delicate, pale, blue dot, and that's where we live. That's where every human

has ever lived, and you can see the vulnerability at a glance. And that gives a humbling, and I think character-building, sense of where we are.'[8]

Rather like the Voyager expedition, but on a very tiny scale, this dissertation probes a vast uncharted territory. The examples of political resistance discussed in its pages remind us of the pictures of Earth taken from afar during the Voyager expedition: they suggest to those who still believe themselves to be all-powerful actors that they are in fact nothing but pale, blue dots, intrinsically and increasingly vulnerable to the challenges enabled and fostered by this new galaxy of mediated human interaction.

Figure 3 – Earth from Voyager 1 – 1990, a pale blue dot[9]

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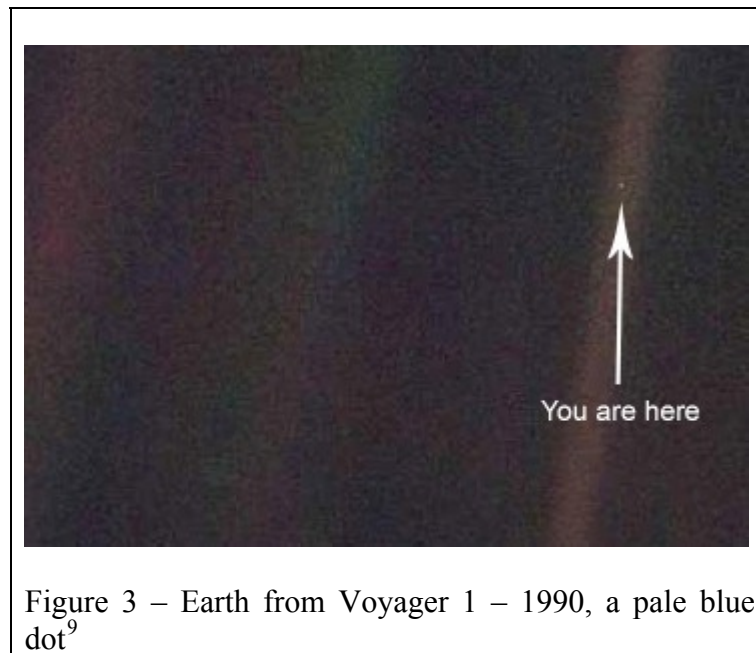
[8] From *The Charlie Rose Show*, January 5, 1995. See a transcript in Head, 2006: 106-112
[9] Source: Voyager 1

Chapter 2 - The Galaxy's Infrastructure: from the Arpanet to the Internet

The fig tree is pollinated only by the insect Blastophaga grossorum. The larva of the insect lives in the ovary of the fig tree, and there it gets its food. The tree and the insect are thus heavily interdependent: the tree cannot reproduce without the insect; the insect cannot eat without the tree; together, they constitute not only a viable but a productive and thriving partnership. This cooperative "living together in intimate association, or even close union, of two dissimilar organisms" is called symbiosis.

J. C. R. Licklider.

This chapter and the next one look at the relationship between the Internet Galaxy's infrastructure and the many different actors that since the early Sixties have been involved in its development. Both chapters narrate a selected history[10] of facts and individuals that stretches over the last five decades, from the first original network Arpanet – nothing but a 'private enclave of computer scientists' (Kahn and Cerf, 1999) –, to the more recent Internet, a worldwide phenomenon of interactivity and connectivity that links together more than a billion people. The aim of the two chapters is to provide the historical and technical framework to help us understand the Internet's embedded complexity. It is that complexity – this thesis argues – that makes the Internet such a formidable political environment to contest power. In the following pages I show that the formation process of the Internet Galaxy was never, historically, the product of a single agent or a single plan. On the contrary, a multiplicity of factors (both at individual and organizational level) played a crucial role for this galaxy to emerge. The lack of an original master-planner; the historical

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[10] For a fuller and comprehensive history of the Arpanet and other computer networks see Heart *et al*, 1979; Quarterman, and Hoskins, 1986; Hafner and Lyon, 1996; Naughton, 1999; and Abbate 2000.

'allergy' for the diktats of bureaucracy shown by those involved in building the structure that sustains the galaxy; the particular technical design chosen for the network; its simple language that makes the network open for everyone; these are all characteristics that reinforce the theoretical framework that supports this thesis: it does not matter how much one tries to exercise power over this network, this is an environment built to resist the concentration of power in the hands of the few.

From the Sputnik to the ARPA

The 4th of October, 1957, from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, the Soviet Union launched a R-7 rocket, the next day, the state official news agency, *Tass*, reported the details of the mission: the rocket had successfully carried into space the Sputnik (Fig. 4), the first ever man-made satellite orbiting around Earth (Krieger, 1958: 311-2). The launch of the small satellite (a spherical object with a diameter of 58 centimetres and a weight of just over 80 kilograms) represented a historical moment for mankind. '[F]or some weeks' in fact, as recalled by Hannah Arendt, the Sputnik 'circled the earth according to the same laws of gravitation that swing and keep in motion the celestial bodies – the sun, the moon, and the stars - [and] it dwelt and moved in [their] proximity as though it had been admitted tentatively to their sublime company.' (Arendt, 1958:1)

The launch had also a strong political significance. In the backdrop of the Cold War, that little satellite represented at the same time a scientific slap in the face of the Americans and a new threat facing the West. All of a sudden the Soviets had the capability of colonizing space, spying on Americans, and (perhaps) soon dropping atomic bombs on American soil directly from space. The Sputnik was the startling proof that, contrary to what most of the Americans believed, the Russians were no longer behind the US in technology. In fact, it was the other way round. As one of Senator Lyndon Johnson's aides, George E. Reedy, perfectly put it in November 1957: 'It took [the Russians] four years to

catch up to our atomic bomb and nine months to catch up to our hydrogen bomb. Now we are trying to catch up to their satellite.' (Launius, N.D.)

For years, while the Russians had bridged the missile gap and put the Sputnik in space, the three separate branches of the US military power (the Army, the Navy and the Air Force) had lost progressively ground by competing against each other. The result of that internal feud was an unsuccessful satellite project called *Vanguard* (Fig. 5) and millions of federal funds and resources wasted developing similar – if not duplicated – programs (McLaughlin Green and Lomask, n.d.).
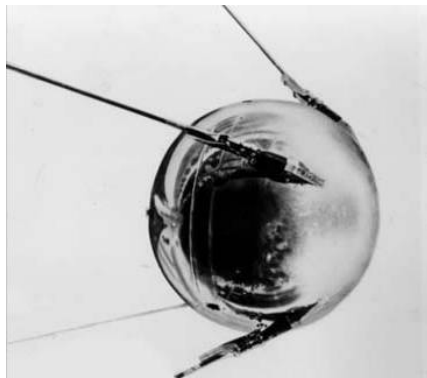
Figure 4 - Sputnik 1 - 1957[11]   Figure 5 - Vanguard 1 - 1958[12]

The Sputnik was a wake up call for the US Administration that had two important consequences: one direct, clear from the beginning, and one

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[11] Source: *Tass*

[12] Source: NASA. Vanguard represented the American answer to the Soviet leadership in space technology. The first test launch for a Project Vanguard booster took place on 6 December 1957. The White House invited the media hoping that a successful launch could reassure the American people that the Sputnik was not such a threat. But the test was a complete disaster. 'During the ignition sequence, the rocket rose about three feet above the platform, shook briefly, and disintegrated in flames' (Launius, N.D). After a series of 'high-profile launch mishaps', the Navy was finally able to put in orbit Vanguard 1, in March 1958.

unintended, that took several years to materialise. The first consequence was political: by starting the exploration of space, the Sputnik opened a new front in the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the US. To catch up with the Russians, President Eisenhower decided to put all the Defence Research and Development programs (R&D) and weapons projects under the central management of the newly established Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA)[13]. The agency had a budget plan of 2 billion US dollars and in its early months of life, in 1958, it played an important role in coordinating the launch into space of the first two American satellites (The *Explorer 1* and the *Vanguard 1*). Notwithstanding these initial successes, to maximise the effort and to ease the political pressure spawned by the Sputnik's success, in the summer of '58, the US Government set up the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a civil federal agency whose mission was to 'plan, direct, and conduct aeronautical and space activities' (Launius, N.D). The birth of NASA effectively stripped ARPA from all its space and missile projects. To avoid quickly falling into oblivion, the agency had to reinvent itself, to find new goals and new sectors for its projects (Hafner and Lyon, 1996: 19). With a reduced but still considerable budget, ARPA found the solutions to its problems in a brand new sector of pure research (Computer Science) and in the visionary leadership of J. C. R. Licklider. The long term effect of ARPA's new path was the second (and unintended) consequence of the Sputnik: the Internet Galaxy.

Licklider and Time-Sharing systems

Computer science was a research sector led mainly by universities, but yet unexplored by the government. The reason for such lack of interest was simple: computer science research required a long-term commitment and a high-risk funding policy, two prerequisites that did not meet the favour of the average government's research agencies. But ARPA was different. The agency 'was

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[13] The Department of Defense directive 5105.15 that established ARPA was signed on February 7, 1958. Later, on March 23, 1973, the name was changed in DARPA to reflect its new status as a separate agency under the Office of the Secretary of Defense (DARPA, N.D.).

designed to be an anathema to the conventional military and R&D structure and, in fact, to be a deliberate counterpoint to traditional thinking and approaches' (DARPA, 2003). From the beginning, the Department of Defence had granted ARPA with an unusual freedom and autonomy that allowed the agency to be relatively free from bureaucracy and invest in projects and ideas that the traditional R&D community would have considered unworthy of the financial risk. The agency had a budget, unused, logistic facilities, and it had freedom to operate. Therefore, ARPA was the perfect sponsor universities needed to make progress in the uncharted space of computer science. In the following years, the union between ARPA and academic research centres formed one of the two building blocks of the Internet Galaxy's structure.

The individuals that worked at the agency represented the other important element of that complex building process. Howard Frank, a network topology expert who collaborated during the Sixties at the original designing of the Arpanet, remarks that point: when talking about ARPA, 'it's easy to say the "government", or ARPA, or something like that, but they are individuals that you deal with and […] the office is defined by those individuals' (Frank, 1990: 23).

Frank's remark is important not only to understand the history and success of ARPA. But, more significantly for this thesis, it represents a key element in framing the complex relationship between the Internet and political control. In the face of the impact of research funding, governments' policies, or the pressure of other higher powers, from the beginning, a crucial role in the shape and scope of the Internet was played by the individuals who worked on it. The story of their skills, of the choices they made, of the dreams they pursued - that often went beyond the will, the command, and the need of those higher powers – illustrates a complex system whose informing logic was never the product of a given hierarchy of power. On the contrary, within this system, traditional power structures were often broken, and power holders sidelined as necessary but not determining factors. That original logic is embedded in the Internet and for that reason the role individuals play within this new communication galaxy is still as important today as it was fifty years ago. Joseph Carl Robert

Licklider (Fig. 6) was part of that original group of individuals, by many considered the most influential, whose ideas and leadership marked the success of many ARPA's projects and inspired the last five decades in the history of communication technology.

Figure 6 - J. C. R. Licklider[14]

Licklider was a visionary. He held three Bachelor Degrees in Math, Physics, and Psychology and a PhD in Psychoacoustics. He was fascinated with the yet unexplored potentials of the symbiosis between computers (linked into a network) and human beings in order to greatly enhance the scope and power of the human thinking process. In his seminal paper *Man–Computer Symbiosis* published in the Sixties, Licklider wrote in the near future 'human brains and computing machines will be coupled together very tightly'. That resulting symbiosis, he postulated, will 'think as no human brain has ever thought and process data in a way not approached by the information-handling machines we know today.' (Licklider, 1990: 2) Nowadays that future has become reality, and, from the beginning, Licklider's vision and leadership played a major role in shaping it.

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[14] Source: Internet

Licklider's theory was based on an experiment he conducted in 1957. The subject of that experiment was his own working routine. The results showed that about 85 percent of his thinking time was absorbed in activities that had nothing of intellectual, that were instead purely clerical or mechanical: 'searching, calculating, plotting, transforming, determining the logical or dynamic consequences of a set of assumptions or hypotheses, preparing the way for a decision or an insight'. Much more time, Licklider found out, 'went into finding or obtaining information than into digesting it' (1990: 5). If science could find a suitable, more reliable, and faster substitute of human being for those clerical activities, Licklider theorised, this would result in an unprecedented improvement of the quality and depths of the thinking process. In fact, individuals freed by that unnecessary burden would have more time and energy to dedicate at 'thinking', at 'imagining'. In short, if machines could take care of those 'clerical' activities, human being would have more time to be more creative, to interact with each other. Licklider's ideas went beyond the era's traditional approach that considered computers simply as calculators. He envisaged a much more interactive and complex environment in which computers played the role of a natural extension of humans. Already in the early Sixties, it was clear to Licklider that computers were destined to become an integral part of human life; to be 'part of the formulation of problems; part of real-time thinking, problem-solving, doing of research, conducting of experiments, getting into the literature and finding references [...and] will mediate communication among human beings' (Greenberg, 1962: 2005). Licklider was thinking of what he later called, with a certain emphasis, 'the intergalactic network.' (Licklider, 1963) That network was a perfect symbiosis between computers and human beings.

The world Licklider envisaged in the papers he published in the Sixties (Licklider 1990; Licklider and Taylor 1990) – a world where humans could interact with machines through interactive displays, and would use input-output devices; a world in which information would be easily retrievable, available for everyone, and from every locations – became a practical possibility in 1962, when Jack Ruina, then director of ARPA, offered Licklider the management of ARPA's Command and Control Division. In this new role Licklider had access

to the power and financial resources to work at the creation of the world he had imagined. Licklider's leadership and vision were crucial for the development of computer science in the US: it is estimated 'that, in the years that followed […] 70 per cent of all the funding for computer science research in the United States came from ARPA, and much of it followed the path set by [Licklider] in 1962.' (Naughton, 1999: 81). Robert Taylor, who worked with Licklider at ARPA, talking about those years said: '[Licklider] being at that place at that time […] was really a fortunate circumstance. I think most of the significant advances in computer technology, especially in the systems part of computer science over the years […] were simply extrapolations of Licklider's vision. They were not really new visions of their own.' (Taylor, 1989: 9)

It is no coincidence that it was under Licklider's leadership that a Ph.D. program in computer science was established in four American Universities. Prior to 1962, such program was inexistent in the US, as it would have been unaffordable for any university, but in 1965, thanks to ARPA's grants, U.C. Berkeley, Carnegie Mellon, MIT, and Stanford were able to establish the first graduate programs in computer science (Cooper, 2007). In the Sixties, computers were incredibly expensive, with prices ranging from $US 500,000 to several millions (Naughton, 1990: 84), therefore when he arrived at ARPA (1 October, 1962), Licklider quickly realised that to overcome the unsustainable costs of ARPA's funded computers research centres, the centres had to be *forced* to buy time–sharing computers.

A time-sharing system is one through which multiple users can connect simultaneously to a powerful mainframe computer and interact with it by sharing processor time to run their applications (see Fig. 7 and Fig. 8 below). During the Sixties, time-sharing systems allowed users (even those not located nearby) to connect to a mainframe computer via a console and from there program, run, or debug an application. In such system the user is automatically allocated a certain amount of Central Processor Unit (CPU) time; however that does not stop other users from using the computer. Before time–sharing systems were adopted, computers, even the most expensive ones, were bound to do jobs serially: one at a time. This resulted in the computer often being in

idle time, while waiting for the users' input or computation result[15]. Time-sharing systems instead guaranteed the most effective use of a computer processing power (see Corbató *et al*, 1962).

Figure 7 - General Electric 225 - 1964[16]	**Figure 8 – A Time-Sharing System**[17]
The General Electric 225 computer, plus software, was paid $800,000. The first *Dartmouth College Time-Sharing System (DTSS)* was born on May 1 at 4:00 a.m., it successfully executed two identical programs from two teletypes simultaneously, giving the correct answer to each.	The first DTSS was designed at Dartmouth by John G. Kemeny and Thomas E. Kurtz. This image reproduces the Computer Interface Unit (CIU) that linked the DN-30 and GE-235 computers. The Disc Storage Unit (DSU) was shared between the two computers.

If the first step was to force universities to invest their funds in time-sharing systems, the next step was to allow network-sharing of off-site resources via other computers. Picture a present day teenager dealing with school homework:

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[15] To be more precise, the 'idle' status is also caused by the peculiarity of computer communication: in fact computers do not usually send continuous stream of data, while 'talking' to each other, they rather send out 'sudden burst' of data, and then remain in idle for a while until is time to send out the next burst. For this type of communication telephone lines and analogue systems were not ideal means. They were too expensive and unreliable.

[16] Source: Dartmouth College. Retrieved : 21 July 2009 from http://www.dartmouth.edu/comp/about/history/timeline/1960s/64/

[17] Source: Internet. Retrieved: 10 April 2009, from http://mcgeachie.net:51964/dtss/

he/she must write an essay about World War II. To carry out that task would most likely mean to use a word processing application (Microsoft Word for instance); to browse the Internet for references, while probably listening to the latest hip-pop tune through an online radio. The student could do that, easily, by using an average economical home computer. In the pre-Internet world, in the era of expensive mainframe computers, that average task would have required access to at least three computers. During the Sixties, computers were only capable to perform a limited number of computational tasks – usually tailored to the need of the customer who owned them or rented them (Zittrain, 2008: 12; see also Ceruzzi, 2003: 154-161) – thus if a research required a variety of tasks this meant for each centre the use of more than one computer. However, given the high costs of the hardware, most research centres could not afford more than one machine. So the solution to the problem had to be found elsewhere: resource-sharing via a computer network. That was by no means a simple task. During the previous decade, the lack of homogeneity in the language of computer programming had created a Babel of multiple languages, of systems or debug procedures that threatened the development of computer science. For Licklider it was clear that the man-computer symbiosis could only pay off if the different systems learned to speak the same language and each of them were integrated in a super-network.

Time-sharing was instrumental in spawning a new culture, among computer scientists, based on the importance of the organization of work through networks and on the need for common standards to facilitate communication through different systems. If, initially, this networking culture was indispensable for time-sharing system to be effective, and to a certain extent confined to the elitist realm of computer science; in the long term, with the spread of the Internet, that culture has a become the norm in the organizing process of many human activities. It is not possible to understand the examples of activism and power contestations discussed later in this dissertation, without understanding the networking culture that originated from Licklider's push for time-sharing systems.

The First Network: The Arpanet

In 1962, ARPA's Command and Control Research Division became Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO), and the IPTO, first under Licklider and then under Ivan Sutherland, became an indispensable ally in the development of Computer Science. The main function of the IPTO was to select, fund and coordinate US-based research projects that focused on advanced computer and network technologies. The IPTO had an estimated annual budget of US$19 millions and its individual grants ranged from $500 thousand to $3 Million US Dollars (Hafner and Lyon, 1996: 44). It was at the IPTO that, following the path traced by Licklider, and under the leadership of a young prodigy, Larry Roberts, the Internet Galaxy began to shape.

At all levels, communication is a key factor to success and development. To advance, society needs what Licklider and Taylor called 'cooperative modelling' (1990: 22), that is, the constructive interaction among different informational models aiming at a common framework. Generally speaking, a model can be described as 'a conceptual structure of abstractions formulated initially in the mind of one […] person' (Licklider and Taylor, 1990: 22) which is then, through a set of protocols – that is, a common language or set of conventions – shared with someone else. It is a prerequisite that the model must be simple and easily recognized from both sides of the interaction: the *communicator* and the *receiver*. During the Sixties, the goal was to establish and reinforce the interaction among creative minds through the use of computers linked up through a network (Licklider, 1963). However, computer networking, that is the 'ability to access one computer from an other easily and economically to permit resource sharing,' was a crucial unresolved problem in the early stages of the Internet Galaxy (Roberts, 1995). Let aside the cost of the whole project and the inadequacy in some cases of the technology available at that time, the realization of a computer network capable to sustain Licklider's vision was bound to face several theoretical and practical problems. The most relevant of these were: the lack of a reliable carrier to transmit information

from one computer to another; the language that computers needed to adopt to exchange information.

Until the end of the Sixties computers physically located in different sites were able to *communicate* with each other by transferring data along the analogical telephone line, but this system was essentially flawed as the telephone network could not guarantee reliability and performed too slow (Roberts, 1995). In those years, it was not uncommon that whole sets of information and inputs sent through the telephone line were lost in the journey from one computers to the other, hence the whole procedure (not a simple one) had to be restarted and the information re-sent. This procedure was by all means burdensome; it was highly ineffective; costly (as the line remained in use for a long period of time, while computers waited for inputs) and time-consuming. The solution to the problem laid its foundations on a new network theory based on so-called *packet-switching*. Elaborated independently by three researchers in the first half of the Sixties, packet-switching was at the core of the very first nation-wide computer network: Arpanet. The three researchers were Leonard Kleinrock at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Donald Davies in the UK at the National Physical Laboratory (NPL), and Paul Baran at RAND Corporation in California. They had all worked independently on the packet–switching theory: Kleinrock had published a seminal article (Kleinrock, 1961) and the first book on the topic (Kleinrock, 1964); Davies had built a small area network at the NPL (Davies, 1986) and his own word *packet* was chosen as the most appropriate term to refer to the new theory[18]. But it was Baran's work on distributed networks that eventually served as the blue-print of Larry Roberts' Arpanet.

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[18] It was during the 1967 *Symposium on Operating System Principles* organized by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) held at Gatlinburg, Tennessee (see Davies *et al.* 1967) that the term was chosen. 'I thought it was important to have a new word for one of the short pieces of data which travelled separately', Davies recalled; 'this would make it easier to talk about them […] I hit on the word packet in the sense of small package.' (Davies quoted in Hafner & Lyon, 1996: 67). It was during the ACM symposium that the first published document on the Arpanet (see Roberts, 1967) was presented (Roberts, 1978)

RAND (Research and Development) Corporation, founded in 1946 and based in Santa Monica, California, was a non-profit institution that provided research and analysis in a wide range of fields to help develop public policies and improve decision-making processes. During the Cold War era, RAND researchers provided the US government with systems analysis of possible war scenarios such as the hypothetical aftermath of a nuclear attack by the Russians on American soil. Among other things, the analysis conducted at RAND attempted to predict the number of casualties, the degree of reliability of the communication system and the possible dangers of a black-out in the chain of command if a nuclear conflict suddenly broke out (see RAND, 1996). In those years, Paul Baran was one of the key researchers at RAND. In 1964 he published a paper titled *On Distributed Communications Networks* (Baran, 1964) in which he outlined a communication system enough resilient to survive a nuclear attack. Given the threat of nuclear war, Baran argued that it was impossible to build a system of communication that could guarantee the endurance of any single point. 'However' he wrote 'we can still design systems in which system destruction requires the enemy to pay the price of destroying n of n stations. If n is made sufficiently large, it can be shown that highly survivable system structures can be built even in the thermonuclear era.' (Baran, 1964: 16).

In 1964, Baran maintained that although one can think of a variety of possible networks, they can only be built around two main components: 'centralised (or star) and distributed (or grid or mesh)' (Baran, 1964: 1). Baran highlighted three possible types of network that combine those two components: A) centralised; B) decentralised; C) distributed (See fig. 9). Baran's critique over the first two types (A and B) is based on their unreliability in the event of a military strike. In these two type of systems 'destruction of a single central node destroys communication between the end stations.' (1964: 1). The third model instead, the distributed network (C), was far more reliable as it was based on the architecture of the neural nets of the human brain. Influenced by the seminal work on neural nets conducted by the neurobiologist Warren McCulloch (1965), Baran developed a network design in which, in theory, one

could remove or destroy one of its parts, without causing great harm to the economy or functions of the whole network.

Figure 9 - Types of Networks[19]
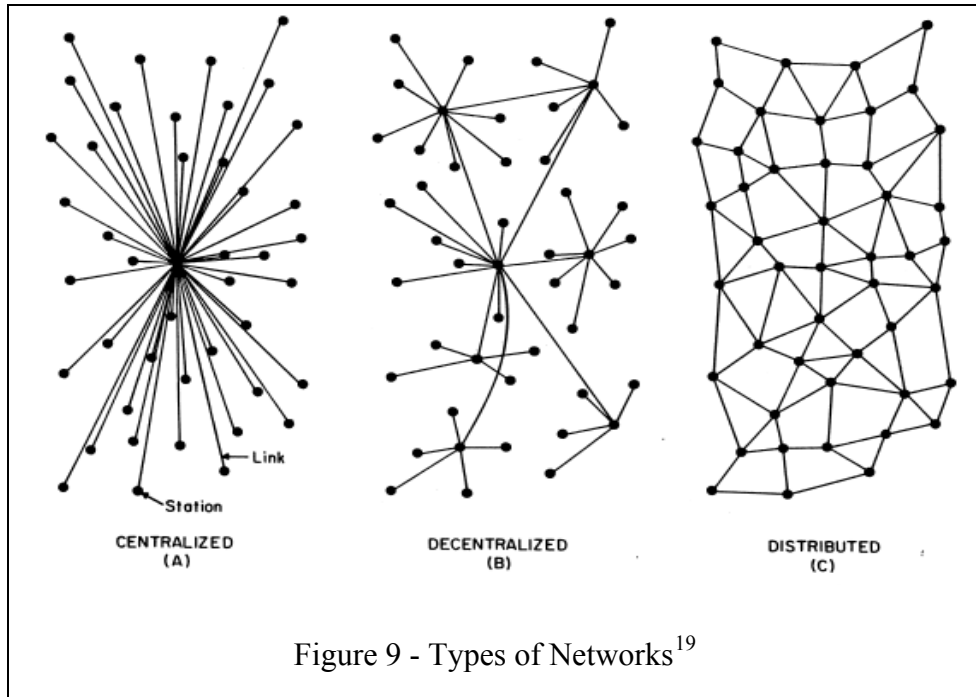
Similarly to what happens in the human brain (as theorised by McCullogh), when a part of a distributed network is no longer functioning, the task performed by that part of the network would move to a different section. A distributed network hit by a bomb would work like an old man brain: 'As [we] are getting older' explained Baran 'we know it takes a little time to remember a word - so we find a synonym. We have more trouble with proper nouns because there's lower redundancy. McCulloch's version of the brain had the characteristics I felt would be important in designing a really reliable communication system.' (Baran, 2001)

Redundancy – the number of nodes attached to each node – is a key element in any distributed network. In order to sustain the required high level of redundancy (at least 3 or 4 nodes attached to each node) Baran's ideal network

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[19] Source: Baran, 1964: 2

was only thinkable within what would soon be called a digital environment (Baran, 1964: 16-17). In the Sixties the communication system was mainly analogical, that is based on the physics of electrical signals (waves). The electrical signal travels along the wires from a switch to an other, however the signal weakens progressively in proportion to the number of switches it has to go through before reaching its destination. The communication resulting from it is of very poor quality, slow and often incomplete. A communication system based on digital technology, instead, is more reliable, as it produces far less signal deterioration, and it suffers little loss of data. In comparison with the analogical system, a digital-based network allows the sender to error-check the information sent out and, in the event that a whole string of data is corrupted or not fully received, to send it again. Digital communication is based on a process of codification of the message (this can be: text, graphics, audio, video) into binary digits, strings of "1s" and "0s". Once the message is encoded, it is sent through the line to the receiver where the message is decoded back into its original format. Any type of message can be encoded with such technology and sent across long distances. 'In choosing the communications links of the future' wrote Baran 'digital links appear increasingly attractive by permitting low-cost switching and low-cost links.' For a network based on packet-switching, 'digital links' Baran argued 'are mandatory to permit tandem connection of many separately connected links without cumulative errors reaching an irreducible magnitude. Further, the signalling measures to implement highly flexible switching doctrines always require digits.' (Baran, 1964: 16-17)

Baran designed a rapid store-and-forward network. 'The key feature of store-and–forward transmission', he wrote, 'is that it allows a high line occupancy factor by storing so many messages at each node that there is a backlog of traffic awaiting transmission.' (Baran, 1964: 24) However, this system's efficiency had a price to be paid: it needed high storage capacity and it could cause time delay. But Baran had come up with a revolutionary solution: 'most of the advantages of store-and-forward switching could be obtained with extremely little storage at the nodes.' (1964: 24) In the system he imagined, 'each node will attempt to get rid of its messages by choosing alternate routes if its preferred route is busy or destroyed.' (Baran, 1964: 25). In such system,

the message is broken into strings of data encoded in 1s and 0s and sent out in many 'message blocks' (this was Baran's chosen term to describe the smallest part of a message sent across his distributed network - Baran, 1964: 22)

A message block (see Fig. 10) or a 'packet' – to use Davies' widely adopted term – has a standard size (1024 bits[20]). Analogously to the ones sent through the post system, each packet contains information about the sender and about its destination. It carries also a sequence number that allows the receiver to reassemble the message in its original form. Baran defined this distributed communication as 'hot–potato routing'. In this type of network in fact each message is handled as it were a hot potato, so once the hot potato reaches the first node, this, rather than holding it, 'tosses the message to its neighbor, who will now try to get rid of the message.' (Baran 1964: 25) The *packets* are therefore rapidly passed from router to router until they reach their final destination.
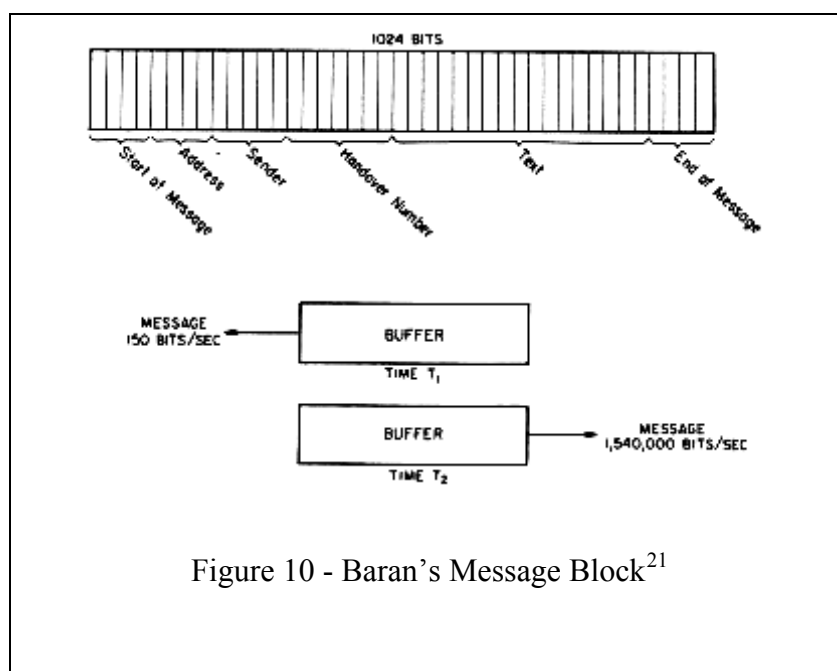
Figure 10 - Baran's Message Block[21]

A router – it must be clarified here – is a small computer linking two different host-computers. Its duty is to store the message for a fraction of a second,

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'learn' the best next route to reach the packet final destination and forward it to the next router. The revolutionary idea in this system is that there is no predefined *route*, but at each router the *packet* is sent through the *best available route*. A simple error-checking procedure makes sure that the package finds its way to its final destination. In fact, at each node a *delivery note* is sent back to the previous node to acknowledge the successful reception of the packet. In this system, the packet is never lost. Even in the worst-case scenario, where the *destination* no longer exists (because perhaps it was destroyed by a bomb), the packet will be returned to the sender with an *undelivered* note attached to it.

Baran's distributed network model was very simple, but incredibly efficient, reliable, and cost–effective. The entire system would have cost, annually, an estimated US\$ 60 millions to support 400 Switching Nodes, servicing l00 thousand users (Baran, 1964b: V). For RAND, the *Distributed Adaptive Message-Block Network* seemed the perfect solution for the communication needs of the Cold War era, thus, after almost five years spent on elaborating the project, in August 1965, they submitted to the Air Force a formal proposal to build the network. The text of the proposal stated that '[t]he need for a survivable […] flexible, user–to–user communication system is of overriding importance. We do not know of any comparable alternative system proposal to attain this capability, and we believe that the Air Force should move swiftly to implement the research and development program proposed herein.' (U.S. Project Rand, 1965)

Notwithstanding the initial favour the proposal encountered with the Air Force, RAND's project never took off. Fifty years later, the story of RAND's failed bid to bring the network to life and the technical structure of Baran's network design are still important as they remind us of some of the most important characteristics of the present-day Internet: a penchant for irony and an embedded structural insolence towards established power hierarchies.

Baran had imagined his network to be highly resistant to total destruction. But to achieve that high-level of resistance, he had designed a network that ultimately was defiant to any form of total control. To survive any attack, to insure that the chain of command would not be destroyed by a military strike,

Baran's network was designed to disregard any centre of power, any hierarchy as not indispensable for it to function properly. Built within that design is a great irony: to defend power one needs to strip it off from those who hold firmly on it. Consequently, power is spread across the network, and it carries with it a shared sense of the impossibility (or embedded weakness) for each node to be the exclusive centre that controls the network.

Another great irony is hidden in the nooks and crannies of the short-sighted approach adopted by those who were offered RAND's proposal in the early stages and refused to take control of its development. Even before contacting the Air Force, a previous RAND proposal submitted to AT&T had been turned down on the ground that such network was neither feasible, nor a better option to the AT&T existent telephone network. But according to Baran, AT&T simply believed that either 'it can't possibly work. And, if did, damned if we are going to set up any competitor to ourselves.' (Baran, 1989) If AT&T had accepted the proposal, the Internet could have been a commercial enterprise from the start, and, probably, a completely different network than the one we use nowadays.

More ironical was the failure of the Department of Defence to seize the moment and take full control of the project in its early stages turning it into a military network from the beginning. After examining RAND's proposal in 1965, the Department of Defence, for reasons of political power struggle with the Air Force, decided to put the project under the supervision of the Defence Communication Agency (DCA) (Baran, 1990: 32-33). For Baran the DCA was the least desirable manager for the project. In 1966 the DCA had no technical competence in digital technology. As Baran put it: 'If you were to talk about digital operation [with someone from the DCA] they would probably think it had something to do with using your fingers to press buttons.' (Baran, 1990: 33) The DCA staff (composed by people rejected by other agencies) also lacked the skills and the motivation that were needed to carry out RAND's proposal. For Baran and his collaborators at RAND working with that agency 'meant betting on a sure loser.' It represented too much a risk that could have jeopardised future attempts; for the detractors, like AT&T, a failure of

RAND's project would have proved that the building network was an impossible task, thus unworthy of any future commitment (Baran, 1990: 33).

For these reasons, in mid 1966, Baran and RAND decided to drop the project and concentrate on other research[22]. It was only in 1969, not far away from where Baran worked, at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) that the first *cornerstone* of the Internet Galaxy was finally laid, and the Arpanet, the first ever computer network was built. Paradoxically, however, what had started a decade earlier as a military answer to a Cold War's threat (the Sputnik), turned in 1969 into a completely different network. Robert Taylor, the Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO) director from 1966-69, said that he had never received any guidelines that the research his office sponsored 'should have any specific military connection.' (Taylor, 1989: 10); thus, not surprisingly, there is no mention of building a network for military reasons in the original documents outlining the new network. In the initial plan for the Arpanet presented at the CM Symposium at Gatlinburg, October 1967, Roberts (1995) gave a series of reasons to establish the network, none of these reasons were concerned with military issues: sharing data load between computers; providing an electronic mail service; sharing data and programmes; and providing a remote service to log in and use computers located remotely.

In the original Arpanet Program Plan, published a year later (3rd of June 1968), Roberts wrote:

'The objective of this program is twofold: (1) to develop techniques and obtain experience on interconnecting computer in such a way that a very broad class of interaction are possible, and (2) to improve and increase computer research productivity through resource sharing.' (Roberts, 1999)

Thanks to this turn of events, the short-sight of the Military and the fear to commit of the large commercial corporations, the Internet that three decades

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[22] After all, even without the DCA, it would have been rather difficult to build Baran's *Distributive Network*. It was a network model, at least, a decade ahead of its time. For instance, Baran had imagined a number of mini computers to be used as routers, but this technology in 1965 wasn't yet available. The network imagined by Baran became economical only when, a few years later, the mini-computer was invented (Kahn, 1990).

later would emerge from the Arpanet's infrastructure was primarily a civil network with a strong inclination for irony and a structural disregard for any centre of power.

Arpanet

During the first half of the Sixties, Licklider had pushed for IPTO grants' recipients to use their funds to buy time-sharing computers. The move aimed at helping to optimize the use of resources and reduce the overall costs of ARPA's project. Nonetheless, that was not enough. To be truly effective, those computers had to be linked together in a network, and that need implied the computers had to be able to communicate with each other. In 1965 that issue became startlingly clear to Robert Taylor, a former NASA System Engineer, who, initially hired as deputy of Ivan Sutherland, became the IPTO director when Sutherland left in 1966. Taylor quickly realised that the fast growing community of research centres sponsored by his office was very complex and poorly organized (Taylor, 1989: 4). In stark contrast with the rising sense of community shared by individual researchers throughout the country (a community fostered mainly by participating at academic conferences), each centre was barely interacting with the others. Resource sharing was in fact limited to one mainframe computer per time. This lack of interaction was partially due to the lack of a streamlined procedure and of a network infrastructure to access those resources located remotely.

In 1965, if a researcher wanted to use the resources (applications and data) stored in a computer at his/her campus at UCLA, he/she could log in through a terminal and use them. However, the procedure became more cumbersome when that same researcher needed to access another resource, for instance a graphic application, which was not loaded on the first mainframe computer, but instead was available at another computer, in another location, for instance, at Stanford. In that case, the researcher was required to log in to the computer at Stanford from a different terminal with a different password and a different user name, using a different programming language. In fact, there was no

possible mode of communication between different mainframe computers. Those computers would speak different idioms; they were in essence like aliens to each other. For Taylor this issue represented a waste of funds and resources. Moreover, he had direct experience of the problem, which was a source of daily frustration for him. Due to the incompatibility of hardware and software, in order to use the three terminals available in his office at the Pentagon, every morning Taylor was required to remember three different log–in procedures, he had to use three different programming language, and three different operating systems (Hafner & Lyon: 1996: 41). For the IPTO, hence for ARPA, the lack of communication and compatibility between the hardware and software of their many supported research centres was causing a widening black hole in its annual budget: as each contractor had different computing needs (that is to say that it needed different resources in terms of hardware and software), the IPTO each year handled several (sometime similar) requests to meet those needs. Following in Licklider's footsteps (Taylor, 1989: 9), Taylor understood that in most cases the costs needed to meet those requests could have been optimised and highly reduced by creating a wide easily accessible network of resource-sharing mainframe computers. To avoid wasting funds and to optimise the use of procedures, each computer had to be different, that is with a different specialization, different applications and hardware. The next step was to create that network.

In 1966 after a brief, quite informal meeting with Charles Herzfeld, then Director of ARPA, Taylor was granted a US$1 Million starting budget to build an experimental network called Arpanet. The network would link some of the funded IPTO's computing sites. More importantly, beyond all expectations, the work carried out with the Arpanet would eventually change for ever the way in which people communicate with each other. Yet, such an important decision took no more than 15 minutes. 'I had no proposals for the Arpanet. I just decided that we were going to build a network that would connect these interactive communities into a larger community in such a way that a user of one community could connect to a distant community as though that user were on his local system.' Explained Taylor. 'First I went to Herzfeld and said, this is what I want to do, and why. That was literally a 15 minute conversation.'

Then, Herzfeld asked: 'How much money do you need to get off the ground?' And Taylor, without much thinking over it, said 'a million dollars or so, just to get it organized'. Herzfeld's answer was instantaneous: 'You've got it.' (Taylor, 1989: 31)

Yet, for more than a year 'there was no ARPA order written or anything'. Soon after Herzfeld gave his *go* to the project, Taylor began circulating the idea to some of ARPA contractors. But, like Baran had experienced few years earlier, a good idea sometimes is difficult to sell. In the case of the Arpanet, the initial reaction was of suspicion: 'Most of the people I talked to' said Taylor, 'were not initially enamored with the idea. I think some of the people saw it initially as an opportunity for someone else to come in and use their [computing] cycles. They never had enough cycles. But Licklider was very supportive.' (Taylor, 1989: 32)

Lawrence G. Roberts (Fig. 11), a very talented program manager from Lincoln Lab at MIT, was chosen as the Arpanet project manager. Roberts was only twenty-nine years old and by then he had already worked on an ARPA funded project, a path-breaking experiment in computer network: in 1966, working together with Thomas Marrill – from The Computer Corporation of America –, using the Western Union Telephone Line, Roberts managed to link in a time shared environment two super computers across the country – the Q–32 located at the System Development Corporation in Santa Monica, California, and the TX–2 (Fig. 12) at the Lincoln Lab, at Lexington, Massachusetts (Marrill & Roberts, 1966).

Roberts recalled that the experiment was simply a 'test environment' whose goal was to verify that it was possible to build a computer network on a continental scale and to find out what were the main problems to face 'without enforcing standardization'. Since the network was built 'to overcome the problems of computer incompatibility' would have been unwise to enforce a standard protocol 'as a prerequisite of membership in the network'. Instead, Roberts and Merrill argued that for a network to work efficiently, it required maximum flexibility. 'If a protocol which is good enough to be put forward as a standard is designed, adherence to this standard should be encouraged but not

required.' (Marrill & Roberts, 1966; Roberts, 1995). The notion of flexibility was another important building block of the Internet Galaxy. It guaranteed the possibility to develop different networks, which, notwithstanding the standards adopted by each network, could still link with each of the other networks. One of the reasons why the Internet Galaxy is such a resistant environment to control is to be found in that original decision of non-enforcing standardization to join the network.

Figure 11 - Larry Roberts, 1966 ca.[23]

Figure 12 - The TX-2 at Lexington[24]

Marrill and Roberts' experiment showed that it was possible to connect different computers and have them sharing resources. However, both researchers faced the same problem Baran had foreseen for his distributed adaptive network: 'dial communications based on the telephone network were too slow and unreliable to be operationally useful.' (Roberts, 1995) One of the important lessons learned from that network experiment with the Q–32 and the TX–2 was that the only solution to those problems was to build a network based on packet–switching.

Larry Roberts' ideas were crucial for the Arpanet, nevertheless his involvement in the project is another telling example of how the Internet Galaxy has

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[23] Source: Business Week

[24] Source: Computer History, retrieved 10 July 2009 from http://www.computerhistory.org/Internet_history/

evolved through a complex web of deeds whose long-term consequences were too often impossible to foresee.

Roberts was not very keen to accept the position at ARPA. By 1966 he was fully immersed in experiments of computer graphics at Lincoln Lab in Lexington, and the computer networking was no longer a priority for him. On the other hand, for Taylor, Roberts was the best possible choice, if not the only one, to manage the Arpanet project. After almost one year of unsuccessful attempts to convince Roberts to accept the job, Taylor decided to force Roberts' decision. Taylor went to ARPA's Director, Charles Herzfeld, and asked him to put some pressure on Lincoln Lab to convince Roberts to accept the offer – after all 51% of the Lab's research funding was coming from ARPA. Taylor witnessed Herzfeld picking up the phone and calling Jerry Dinneen (Lincoln Lab's director). During that brief conversation, Herzfeld hinted at Dinneen that it was in the Lab's best interests (meaning funds) for Roberts to accept the job in Washington. (Taylor, 1989: 32-33) Soon afterwards, Roberts moved to ARPA.

Despite his initial lack of interest in the project, Roberts recalled (1989: 10) that his fascination with the idea of a wide network linking people and resources dated back to 1962, while at a conference on the future of computing at Homestead in Virginia. It is worth noting here that 'usefulness' and 'knowledge sharing' of everyone's work were at the base of Robert's interest, not incidentally these are among the most defining characteristics of nowadays Internet Galaxy. As Roberts explains:

'At that point, [in 1962] we had all of these people doing different things everywhere, and they were all not sharing their research very well. So you could not use anything anybody else did. Everything I did was useless to the rest of the world, because it was on the TX-2 and it was a unique machine. So unless the software was transportable, the only thing it was useful for was written technical papers, which was a very slow process. So, what I concluded was that we had to do something about communications, and that really, the idea of the galactic network that Lick[lider] talked about, probably more than

anybody, was something that we had to start seriously thinking about.' (Roberts, 1989: 10)

Soon after becoming Arpanet Program Manager, Roberts begun to sketch out plans for the network. His starting point was the lesson learned working with Marrill at linking the Q–32 and the TX–2 computers. He drew several sketches of the possible topology and, after discussing the network specifications with many fellow researchers – among others, with Licklider, Kleinrock, Donald Davies, with Davies' representative, Roger Scantlebury, at the Gatlinburg Symposium, and also with Baran, in Santa Monica (Roberts, 1995) – Roberts had a clearer idea about the network's indispensable features: it needed a computer interface protocol acceptable to all sixteen research groups participating in the project, and it had to be able to support the thirty-five computers connected to the sixteen hosts with an estimated 500 thousand packets per day traffic. As envisaged originally by Baran, the Arpanet was a fully distributed network that made use of routers (small computers called Interface Message Processors (IMPs)) at every node to speed up communication between computers. The role of each router was to receive packets of data from both the computers and terminals connected to it then break those message blocks into 128 byte packets (1024 bits), add the destination and the sender address [25]. After that, the router would use a 'dynamically updated routing table', that is, an updated map of the routes available in the network ('considering both line availability and queue lengths') and send 'the packet over whichever free line was currently fastest route

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[25] In his study of packet-switching, Donald Davies had theorized that 'the length of a packet can be any multiple of 128 bits up to 1,024 bits' (Davies *et al.*, N.D.: 3) The 128 bit unit length 'was chosen to give flexibility to the size of packets without complicating their handling by the computer.' In fact, as specified by Davies, the format of a packet is composed by 8-bit bytes (the information carried on behalf of the user); then there is a segment containing 16 bytes (this is information needed by the communication system to handle the package, it is the envelope of the packet) (Davies *et al*, 1967: 10). The 16 bytes (the 'red tape' as Davies called them) 'make it desirable to use the largest possible packet size'. However, as the larger the packets the slower the response time distribution. Davies thought that, considering the experience they had with multi-access computer systems in the 60s, (that is: 'the majority of messages will be less than one hundred characters in length') a good choice of length was no longer than 128 bytes (=1024 bits). (Davies, 1966: 10-11)

toward the destination.' As in Baran's distributed network, at each node, the 'minicomputer would acknowledge it and repeat the routing process independently.' (Roberts, 1995)

The 29th of July 1968, ARPA issued to several companies in the computer sector a 'request for quotation' (RFQ) to build the network switches, the IMPs (ARPA, 1968). Some of the major companies – such as IBM and Control Data Corporation (CDC) – declined the offer, as they simply believed that packet–switching would never work; some others instead responded with detailed proposals. At the end the two best contenders for the contract were Bolt, Beranek and Newman (BBN) and Raytheon (Hafner & Lyon, 1996: 99–101). The former was a small company, while the latter was a major Defence contractor. From the outset, the favourite to win the contract was Raytheon, nevertheless, contrary to the Department of Defence logic, but in line with ARPA's maverick philosophy, in January 1969, BBN was awarded a US$ 1 Million contract to build four IMPs for a four-sites network by the end of that year. The success of BBN's bid is a sign of the original anti-bureaucratic nature around which the Internet Galaxy was built.

However small, BBN was, in the words of one of its most famous researchers Robert Khan, 'the cognac of the research business, very distilled' (Khan, 1990: 10); a sort of haven where people like Licklider had worked, where dozens of graduate students and faculty members from either Harvard or MIT, free from any university duties but research, were encouraged to follow 'interesting ideas and explore than to try to capitalize on them once they had been developed.' (Khan, 1990: 11). Furthermore, contrary to the other bidders, Frank Heart (Head of the Computer System Division at BBN) and his team (Fig. 13), in response to ARPA's Request for quotations, had submitted a two hundreds pages detailed proposal with 'flowcharts, equations, and tables detailing timing, routing, transmission delays, and packet queuing.' (BBN, N.D.)

The well-crafted proposal was surely an important element in the BBN's winning bid, but it was not the only reason. In the decision taken by ARPA's committee to award the contract to the team led by Frank Heart, two factors were crucial: Roberts' personal acquaintance with many of the researchers at

BBN – some of them as Heart and Kahn had already informally participated in the early development of the Arpanet project – let alone the fact that Licklider, who regularly collaborated with Roberts, had strong ties with BBN (Abbate, 2000: 57). The second factor was Roberts' dislike for bureaucracy: in perfect line with the style of major defence contractors, the Raytheon's proposal was very complex and it presupposed an even more complex and multilayered team to manage it.

Figure 13 - BBN "IMP Guys"[26]

BBN "IMP Guys" team in late 1969. From left to right are Truett Thatch, Bill Bartell (Honeywell), Dave Walden, Gim Geisman, Bob Kahn, Frank Heart, Ben Barker, Marty Thrope, Will Crowther, and Severo Ornstein.

In Roberts' experience that multilayered bureaucratic structure would have made things more complicated and ultimately would have slowed down the whole project. Roberts knew that awarding the contract to Raytheon meant exactly that: time wasted in trying to find the right person to talk with for any problem the project would encounter. On the other hand, the BBN team was

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[26] Source: Dave Walden (http://www.walden-family.com/dave/archive/impguys.html)

small and simple: Frank Heart was the head of the team and the whole communication between ARPA and BBN meant a telephone call between Roberts and Heart (Hafner & Lyon, 1996: 101)

The first four nodes of the Arpanet Network (see Fig. 14 and Fig. 15) were University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), University of California Santa Barbabra (UCSB), University of Utah, and Stanford Research Institute (SRI).

Figure 14 - Original 4 Arpanet Nodes Sketch – by Larry Roberts[27]	Figure 15 - Geographical Map of the First Four Arpanet Nodes[28]
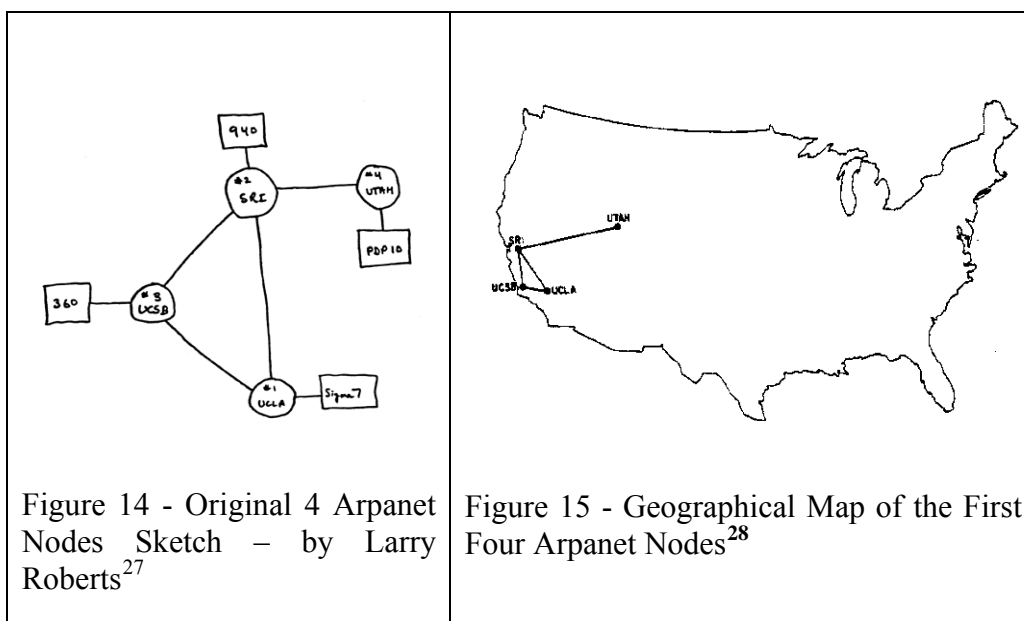
The first computer (see Fig. 16) was installed at UCLA September 1, 1969 (RFC Editor *et al*., 1999: 2). UCLA was chosen because of Leonard Kleinrock and his ARPA's funded Network Measurement Center. The centre had the task to analyze and measure the network traffic and produce relevant statistics to be used in the implementation of the network (Kleinrock, 1990: 5). Stanford entered the project because of Doug Engelbart's Augmentation of Human Intellect project. Engelbart was then already an eminent figure in computer science; he is renowned for the invention of the mouse. Engelbart's work on developing a series of tools (a database, a text–preparation system, and a user–friendly interface messaging system) was for Roberts crucial to make the network more user–friendly (Abbate, 2000: 59). UCLA and SRI formed the

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[27] Source: Computer History Museum, available online: http://www.computerhistory.org/exhibits/Internet_history.
[28] Source: Heart *et Al*, 1978: 79.

first node in 1969. The first message ever sent over the Arpanet took place at 22:30 hours on October 29, 1969 (see log below Fig. 17). It was a message transmission between the UCLA SDS Sigma 7 Host computer and the SRI SDS 940 Host computer. 'The transmission itself was simply to "login" to SRI from UCLA. We succeeded in transmitting the "l" and the "o" and then the system crashed! Hence, the first message on the Internet was "lo"! We were able to do the full login about an hour later.' (Kleinrock, L., N.D)

Figure 16 - Leonard Kleinrock and the first IMP of the Arpanet at UCLA[29]

Then other two nodes were added: UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) and University of Utah, both chosen for their advanced research on Application Visualization Projects. Two UCSB researchers, Glen Culler and Burton Fried were there working on 'methods for display of mathematical functions using storage displays to deal with the problem of refresh over the net' (Leiner *et al.*, 1997). At Utah, were two former IPTO directors, Robert Taylor and Ivan Sutherland working on 'methods of 3–D representations over the net.' (Leiner *et al.*, 1997)

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[29]   Source: Leonard   Kleinrock   website (http://www.lk.cs.ucla.edu/LK/Inet/birth.html)

BBN had been awarded a contract to build a sub-network formed by Interface Message Processors, merely an infrastructure to guarantee that packets could be sent along a network of host computers, from the sender to the receiver. However important it was setting up the first four nodes, that was only the preliminary step in the complex process of building an efficient network through which its various elements (i.e.: Host Computers, IMPs, Terminals) could easily communicate and exchange data between each other. To move the project up to the next level, Roberts and his Principal Investigators (PI - the group formed by the heads of the research projects funded by the IPTO) had to find a solution to another crucial problem: which language would the computers speak? In other words: what protocol would be used in the network?

Figure 17 - An excerpt from the Arpanet logbook. The information pertaining to the first Arpanet transmission is circled.[30]
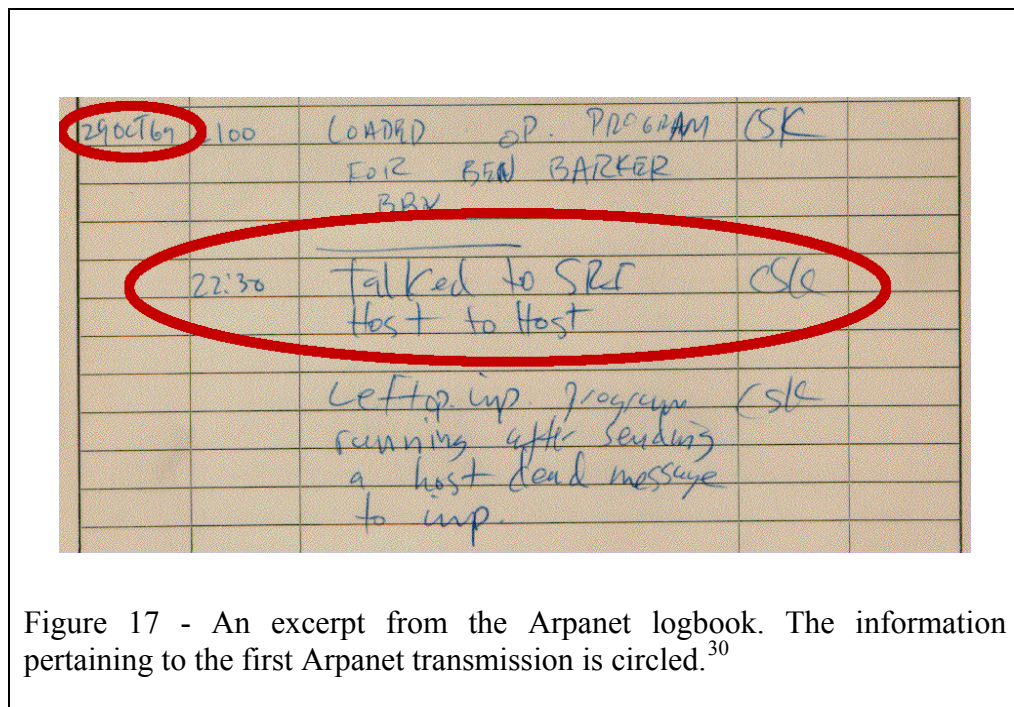
The Networking Group and the *language* problem

Nowadays the Internet is a global infrastructure for communication, formed by 'hundreds of thousands of otherwise independent computers, communications entities and information systems' interconnected between each other (Khan &

[30] Source: DARPA

Cerf, 1999). Any computer (or any other device with network capabilities, such as mobile phones or digital televisions) can connect easily with the global network. That is possible because at the core of this worldwide infrastructure is a set of shared communication standards, procedures and formats called *protocols*. At the end of the Sixties, when the first four-node network was completed, things were more complicated: trying to exchange data between different computers (let alone different computer networks) was not as easy as it is today. The lack of a common language that linked computers and facilitated communication resulted in the Arpanet being scarcely used. In fact, excluding the small number of users represented by those directly involved in the implementation of the infrastructure, a much larger crowd of potential users (i.e. graduate students, researchers) seemed to snub the network. In that early stage of the Internet Galaxy, users were able to access the resources in the mainframe computer at their own institution, but they rarely used the network to connect to other computers, and hence to the other resources available elsewhere. The problem derived from lack of knowledge: as each host had a set of specific protocols, in order to login into that host, a user was required to have a good knowledge of that host's language. In those early months, the only thing that kept the network going was 'the migration of people' (Kleinrock, 1997). It was only when some researcher relocated to one of the other network sites – for instance from UCLA to Stanford – then, and only then, the usage of those sites' resources increased. The reason was quite simple: the *migrant* had direct knowledge of the procedures in use in the other site, and hence he would know how to *talk* with the host computer in his/her old department. To find a solution to this problem, Roberts and his staff established a specific group of researchers – most of them still graduate students – to develop the *host-to-host* software. The group was initially called the Network Working Group (NWG) and was led by a UCLA graduate student, Steve Crocker. Later, in 1972, the Group changed its name in International Network Working Group (INWG) and the leadership passed from Crocker to Vint Cerf. In the words of Crocker:

'The Network Working Group consists of interested people from existing or potential ARPA network sites. Membership is not closed. The [NWG] is

concerned with the HOST software, the strategies for using the network, and initial experience with the network.' (Crocker, 1970)

The NWG was a special body (the first of its kind) concerned not only with monitoring and questioning the network's technical aspects, but, more broadly, every aspect of it, even the moral or philosophical ones. To do so, Crocker employed a highly original method, still in use four decades later. Each member could communicate with all the others by sending a very simple note; to avoid stepping on someone's toes, the notes were to be considered 'unofficial' and with 'no status', and called simply Request for Comment (RFC). Membership to the group was not closed and 'notes may be produced at any site by anybody'. The minimum length of a RFC was, and still is 'one sentence' (Crocker, 1970).

Since the beginning, the RFC process has always been entirely open, 'there wasn't anything closed about it'. This openness helped stimulating participation amongst the members of a very heterogeneous group of people, ranging from graduate students to Professors and Program Managers (Crocker, 1991: 20). Following a 'spirit of unrestrained participation in working group meetings' (RFC Editor *et al*, 1999: 4), the RFCs have been a crucial among the people involved in the project to reflect openly about the aims and goals of the network, within and beyond its technical infrastructure. The importance of the Request for Comment method and of the role played by the Net Working Group goes beyond their historical relevance in building and setting up the standards for nowadays Internet. They both represent the embodiment of a particular novel culture that in the name of knowledge and problem-solving tends to disregard power hierarchies as nuisances, while highlighting the concept of networking as the only path to find the best solution to a problem, *any problem*. Within such environment, it is not one's particular vision or idea that counts, but the welfare of the environment itself, that is, the network. This particular culture informs the whole Internet Galaxy; in fact, it is one of its defining elements. The offspring of the marriage between the RFC and the NGW are nowadays called web-logs, web forums, email lists, while Internet -

working is now a key-aspect in many processes of human interaction, ranging from technical issues, to social or political matters.

The NWG needed almost two years to write the software, but eventually, by 1970 the Arpanet had its first host-to-host protocol, the Network Control Protocol (NCP). By December 1970 the original four-node network had expanded to 10 nodes and 19 hosts computers. Four months later (Fig. 18), the Arpanet had grown to 15 nodes and 23 hosts (Roberts, 1995)

Figure 18 - Arpanet nodes - Arpil, 1971[31]
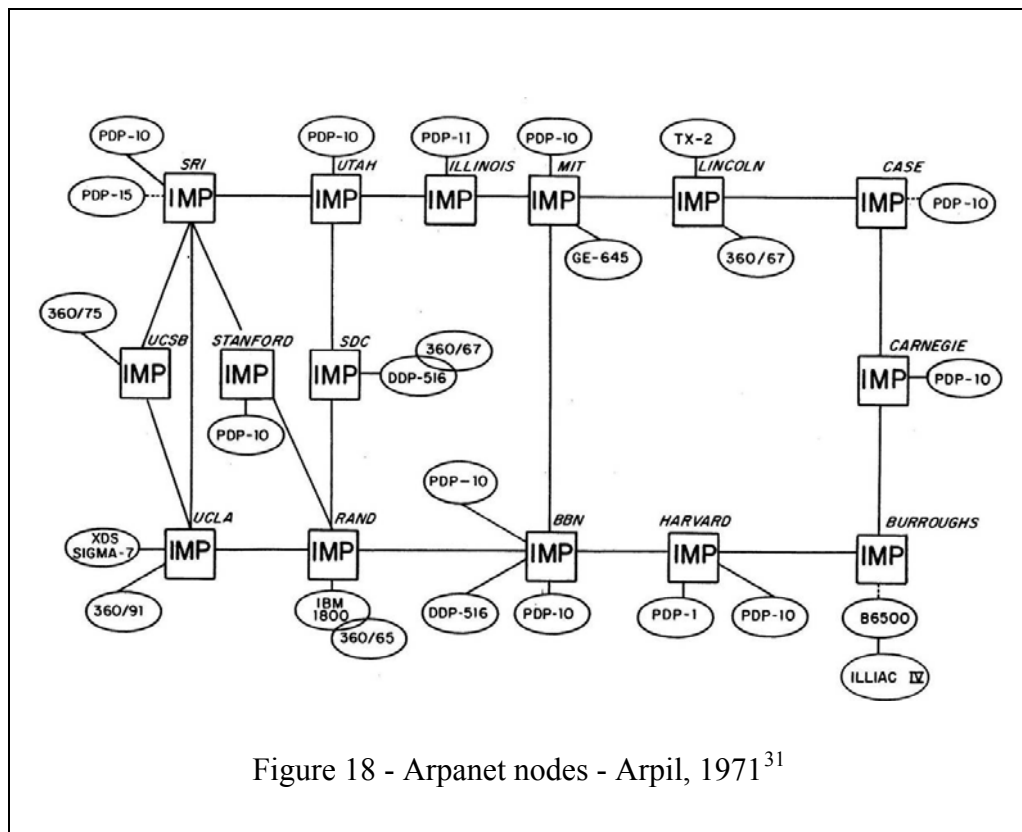
By that time, the Arpanet was a network that on the one hand had been quite successful in delivering packets for more than a year, on the other hand, it showed almost no sign of 'useful interactions that were taking place on [it]' (Kahn, 1990: 21) The hosts were plugged in, but they all lacked the right configuration (or *knowledge*) to properly use the network. To make 'the world take notice of packet switching', Roberts and his colleagues decided to give a public demonstration of the Arpanet and its potentials (Kahn, 1990: 21-23).

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[31] Source: Heart *et Al*, 1978: 143.

The event chosen by Roberts was the International Conference on Computer Communication (ICCC) held in Washington, D.C., in October 1972. The demonstration was a success: '[i]t really marked a major change in the attitude towards the reality of packet switching'. It involved – among other things – showing the tools for network measurement, displaying the IMPs network traffic, editing text at a distance, file transfers, and remote logins. 'It was just a remarkable panoply of online services, all in that one room with about fifty different terminals.' That day, the audience was a mixed crowd of experts and curious, and all of them were impressed by the demonstration: '[there were] the diehard circuit switching people from the telephone industry who didn't believe it could possibly work [and they] were stunned - because it worked. […] "It works? It couldn't possibly work!".' There were also those who attended the demonstration out of curiosity knowing anything about computers, and they ended up 'sort of overwhelmed by the whole thing'. Lastly, there were those 'who had been exposed to the stuff in one form or another and were just as excited as little kids, because all these neat things were going on.' (Cerf, 1990: 20) Overall, the demonstration succeeded in showing how packet-switching worked to people that were not involved in the original project. It inspired others to follow the example set by Larry Roberts' network. International nodes located in England and Norway were added in 1973; and in the subsequent years, others packet-switching networks, independent from Arpanet, appeared worldwide. This passage from a relatively small experimental network to one (in principle) encompassing the whole world confronted the Arpanet's designers with a new challenge: how to make different networks, that used different technologies and approaches, capable to communicate with each other?

'Internetting', or 'open-architecture networking' is a concept that, first introduced in 1972 (Leiner *et. al*, 1997), illustrated the crucial need for the network to expand itself beyond its limited restricted circle of host computers. The Network Control Protocol (NCP) was not able to suffice this need, as it was thought for managing communication host-to-host within the same network. But to make the Arpanet an infrastructure, in principle, to which everyone could connect, the network needed to be able to communicate with

other networks, even those using different technologies (some still experimental, such as packet radio). To build a true open reliable and dynamic network of networks a new general protocol was needed. It took several years, but eventually, by 1978, Robert Kahn and Vint Cerf (two of the BBN guys) succeeded in designing that new protocol. They called it: the Transfer Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). Put it simply: 'the job of the TCP is merely to take a stream of messages produced by one HOST and reproduce the stream at a foreign receiving HOST without change.' (Cerf, 1973: 3) Within a packet-switching environment like nowadays Internet, when one user needs to send or retrieve information - for example, access Web pages, uploading files to a server - the TCP (Fig. 19) on the sender's machine breaks the message into packets and send them out. The IP is the part of the protocol concerned with 'the addressing and forwarding' of those individual packets (Leiner *et. al*, 1997). It makes possible to 'find' the one computer–receiver among the nowadays billions connected to the Internet.
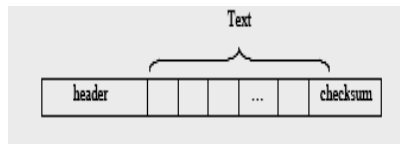
Figure 19 - The TCP/IP Message Format[32]
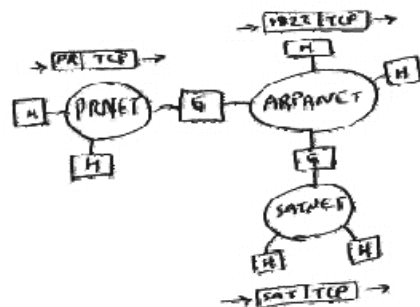
Figure 20 - Internet early design[33]

On the receiving end, the TCP helps to reassemble all the packets into the original messages, checking errors and sequence-order. Thanks to TCP/IP The exchange of data-packets between different and distant networks was finally possible (see Fig. 20).

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[32] Source: Cerf, 1973: 6
[33] Source: Hafner & Lyon, 1996: 224

Cerf and Khan's new protocol opened up new avenues of collaboration between the Arpanet and all the other networks around the world that had been inspired by ARPA's work. The foundations for a worldwide network were laid down, and the doors were wide open for anyone to join in.

The Internet

On July 1, 1975, the Arpanet was placed under the direct control of the Defense Communication Agency (DCA) for 'production work and cloning-in' (Press, 1997), by then there were 57 nodes on the network (See fig. 21).

December 1970

August 1972

July 1975

Figure 21 – Arpanet 1970-75[34]
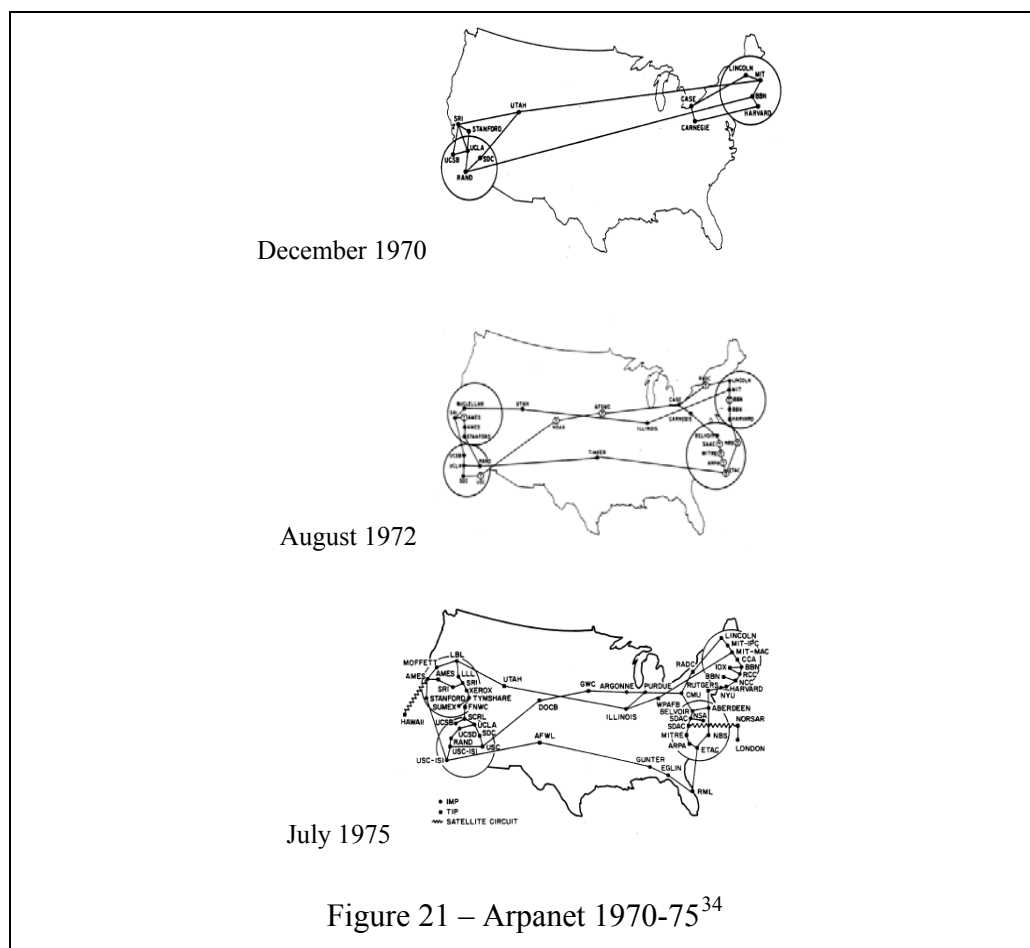
For years, the Arpanet had grown larger but *unknown*. By the second half of the Seventies, it was difficult if not at all impossible to say who was using the network. There were no tools to check the network users' activity. Given the

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[34] Source: Cerf, 1973: 6

growth rate of the network, such lack of control was seen as potentially a serious issue for national security. The early concern produced a series of warnings issued by the DCA to prohibit any unauthorized access to the network. In his last newsletter before retiring to civilian life, the DCA's appointed Arpanet Network Manager, Major Joseph Haughney wrote:

'Only military personnel or Arpanet sponsor-validated persons working on government contracts or grants may use the Arpanet. […] Files should not be [exchanged] by anyone unless they are files that have been announced as Arpanet-public or unless permission has been obtained from the owner. Public files on the Arpanet are not to be considered public files outside of the Arpanet, and should not be transferred, or their contents given or sold to the general public without permission of DCA or the Arpanet sponsors.' (Haughney, 1981)

These warnings however remained unheeded, as most of the networks hosts had 'weak or nonexistent host access control mechanism' (Haughney, 1981). In the early 1980s the network was by and large an open access area for authorized and many unauthorized users. By the end of 1982 however, as the concern raised over the vulnerability of the network due to the increased availability of cheap computers hardware to connect to it, (Abbate, 2000: 143), the Department of Defense 'in its biggest step to date against illegal penetration of computers' – as the New York Times put it – 'yesterday split a global computer network into separate parts for military and civilian users, thereby limiting access by university- based researchers, trespassers and possibly spies' (Broad, 1983). Arpanet was effectively divided in two distinct networks: one still called Arpanet, dedicated to research; and the other one called MILNET, a military operational network, protected by strong security measures, such as encryption and restricted access control. By 1983 all hosts on the Arpanet were using the TCP/IP host protocol, and by 1985 other networks had been established and some of these were using the Arpanet as their backbone: it was widely used by researchers and developers. But also by a growing number of other communities (Leiner *et al*, 1997) The transition towards a privatized Internet took ten more years, and it was largely handled by the National Science Foundation (NSF), whose own network NFTNET had started using the

Arpanet as its backbone since 1984. By 1988 the NSF had already initiated the process of commercialization and privatization of the Internet. To achieve its goal, the NSF actively promoted 'the emergence and/or growth of "private", competitive, long-haul networks'. The role of these private networks was to build new or maintain existing local/regional networks, while providing access to the their users to the whole Internet (Leiner *et al*, 1997).

The Arpanet was officially decommissioned in 1990, whilst in 1995 the NFTNET was shut down and the Internet effectively privatized. The funds recovered from the NSFNET were made available (on a competitive base) to help regional-based networks to 'buy national-scale Internet connectivity from the now numerous, private, long-haul networks' (Leiner *et al*, 1997). By then, the network was no longer the private enclave of computer scientists, or the militaries; but on the contrary, the Internet was a new emerging galaxy of communication ready to be fully explored and populated. As with any other galaxy, all the Internet needed to be explored and colonised was a probe, a map, and smart explorers. The probe was a product of the Seventies; the map of the Nineties, and the smart explorers are the children of the technological cornucopia of the early twenty-first century.

Chapter 3 - The probe, the map, the explorers

'She said why don't you call it Altair - that's where the Enterprise is going tonight.'
Les Solomon on how his 12 years old daughter came up with the name for the very first personal computer

The transfer of the ARPANET under the control of the Defence Communication Agency (July 1, 1975) was a clear sign of changing times. Few months earlier, in January of that year, the front cover of the monthly issue of *Popular Electronics* (Fig. 22) pictured the new product of a little known company from Albuquerque (New Mexico) called *Micro Instrumentation Telemetry System* (MITS). The product was the Altair 8800 and it was designed by the company's founder, H. Edward Roberts. It was the first-ever personal computer (PC), even before Steve Wozniak's more celebrated machine, the 1976 *Apple I* (Mims, 1985: 60). The Altair, whose rather unusual name was apparently inspired by the science fiction television series Star Trek[35], was a groundbreaking product. As the spaceship in the TV series, it was a probe that transported the average American family into the uncharted space of the computer age; it brought down the protecting walls that had

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[35] During the MITS first World Altair Computer Convention (26-28 March, 1976, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA), Les Solomon, then the Editor of *Pupular Electronics* told the convention participants the story of how his 12 years old daughter came up with the name for the computer: 'She said why don't you call it Altair - that's where the Enterprise is going tonight.' (Quoted in Milford, 1976: 7)

hitherto surrounded the young Internet Galaxy, and inspired a new generation of curious and inventive explorers that, in time, would radically transform the shape and quality of that galaxy.

Technically speaking, Roberts' machine was a metal box with a board of integrated circuits at the core of which was a central processing unit (CPU), the Intel 8080 Microprocessor, a new 8-bit chip released by Intel one year earlier and priced at $US 360 dollars.
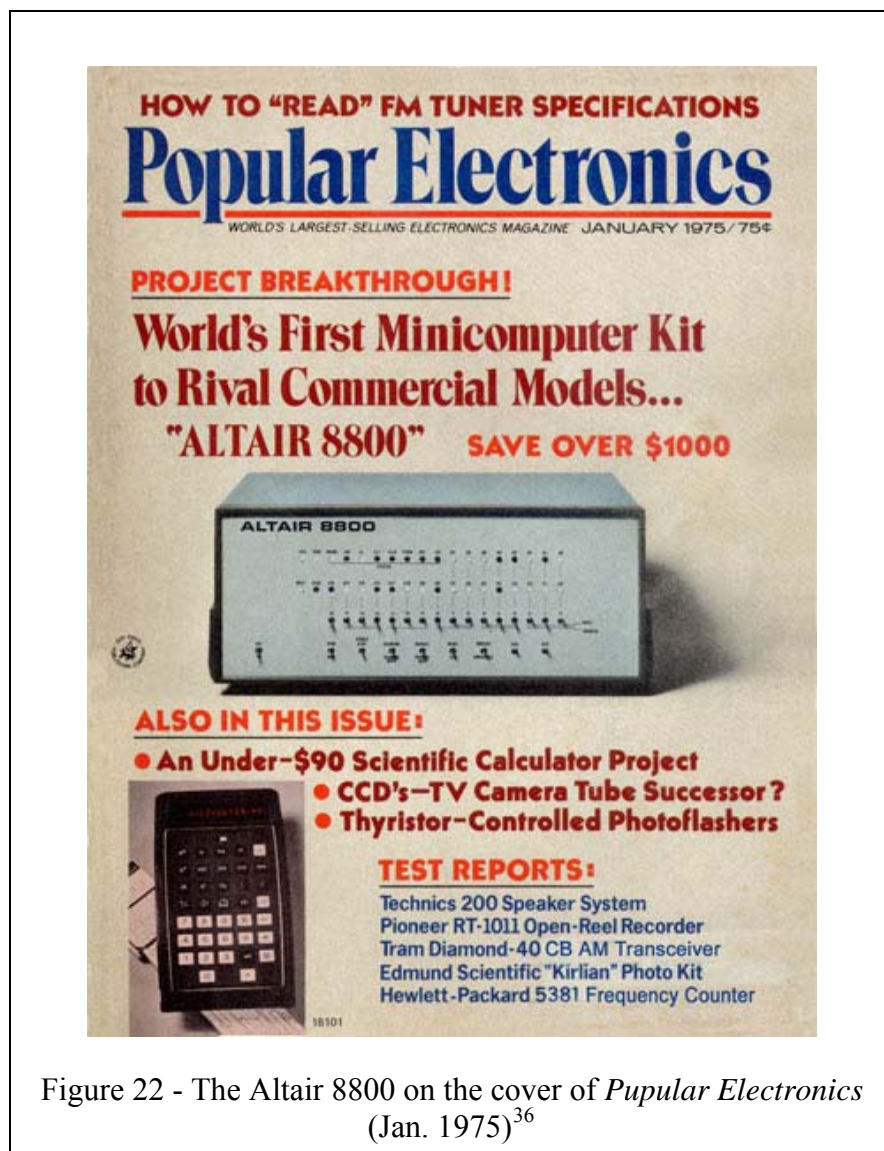
Figure 22 - The Altair 8800 on the cover of *Pupular Electronics* (Jan. 1975)[36]

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[36] Source: *Popular Electronics* , Copyright by Poptronix, Inc, available online: http://www.swtpc.com/mholley/PopularElectronics/Jan1975/PE_Jan1975.htm (Retrieved, 16 October 2008)

In comparison to its predecessors, the 8080 CPU was faster and compatible with programs based on other chips (Ceruzzi, 2003: 221). Apart from the processor, the success of the Altair 8800 derived essentially from the business model and the pricing policy adopted by MITS. The computer was sold as a kit at a retail price of US$ 395 dollars[37]; the fully assembled version with a complete book of instructions went off the shelves for US$ 650 dollars (*Popular Electronics*, 1975a: 26). Both prices - many times cheaper than the average minicomputers[38] available in the market that year and close to the price of a television set - made the Altair 8800 an exceptional bargain. All of a sudden, computers no longer represented the exclusive commodity of an exclusive small elite of the population, but, on the contrary, they were within reach of every household.

The novelty of the product was highlighted by two paragraphs of text that appeared in the advert for the new computer, published in the February 1975 issue of Popular Electronics:

'The era of the computer in every home – a favourite topic among science-fiction writers – has arrived! It's made possible by the […] Altair 8800, a full blown computer that can hold its own against sophisticated minicomputers now on the market. And it doesn't cost several thousand dollars. In fact, it's in a color TV-receiver's price class – under $400 for a complete kit. The Altair 8800 […] is the most powerful computer ever presented as a construction project […] it represents a revolutionary development in electronic design and thinking.' (Roberts and Yates, 1975: 33)

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[37] Intel had indicated the $US 360 tag price for single unit, but Ed Roberts from MITS was able to purchase large quantity of the processor for a discounted price and was therefore able to sell his Altair's kit at such a competitive price. (Mims, 1985: 60)

[38] About the use of the terms minicomputer (as in the Arpanet's IMPs) and microcomputer (as in the Altair 8800), Ceruzzi (2003: 394, note 73) points out that the arrival of the Altair in the market was the element that pushed journalists to use the latter more often. By minicomputers journalists referred to computers like the IMP that did not make use of a microprocessor, contrary to microcomputers like the Altair 8800 which was powered by the Intel chip 8080.

'Not too long ago, the thought of an honest, full-blown computer that sells for less than $500 would have been considered a mere pipe dream. Everyone knows that computers are monstrous, box-shaped machines that sell for 10's and 100's of thousands of dollars. Pipe dream or not, *MITS*, the quality engineering oriented company that pioneered the calculator market, has made the *Altair 8800* a reality. It is the realization of that day when computers are accessible to almost anyone who wants one.' (Popular Electronics, 1975a: 26)

When the advert appeared in the magazine, the Altair 8800's manufacturer hoped the company could at least 'break even by selling 200 of them' (Mims, 1984), but that prediction resulted to be too cautious. The kit was quickly sold in the thousands, the demand was so unexpected and overwhelming that the company 'was backlogged with orders, [they] didn't even have an operator's manual' to assemble the kit (Mims, 1984). It was an earthquake that sent long lasting shockwaves throughout the whole of the computing world. As an editorialist of *Popular Electronics* wrote: 'the home computer age is here – finally' (Salsberg, 1975: 4)

The arrival of the home computer in the early Seventies marked the passage from a technological milieu characterized by non-generative technology, to one that was fully generative. The concept of *generativity*, a term coined by Jonathan Zittrain, co-director of the University of Harvard's *Berkman Center for Internet & Society*, denotes a technology that can 'produce unprompted change driven by large, varied, and uncoordinated audiences' (Zittrain, 2006: 1980; see also Zittrain, 2008) A generative technology has the potential to go much beyond its original aim and its effects on existing social structures are rarely predictable. The degree of generativity of a technology varies considerably depending on a series of factors: it must be capable to leverage across a range of tasks, that is, it should be useful in accomplishing tasks that could be otherwise impossible or unworthy of the effort; it must be easy to adapt to several uses; it should not be too difficult to master; and it should be widely accessible (Zittrain, 2006: 1980-81). Some technology is quite high on leverage but low on the other three factors; some is widely accessible, but not easy to adapt to other tasks rather than the ones it was thought for. Consider the

case of the airplane: it is a technology that can highly reduce the effort of transporting goods or people across wide distances. But it is certainly not easy to master; it cannot quickly be adapted to carry out different tasks than those it was built for; it is the results of a highly specialised technology; and until recently at least – that is, until the recent arrival in the market of low-cost airlines such as *Ryan Air* or *Easy Jet* – for the average person the cost of travelling by airplane was not as affordable as that of a bus ride. On the other hand, a simpler mean of transportation, like a car, has a wider degree of generativity than the airplane: it is not as quick as the airplane, but it could be more easily adapted to do other tasks: for instance, a car can be converted as a tool of political campaigning more easily than could ever be done with an airplane: its windows and bodywork could be covered with adverts for a political candidate, and its radio equipment could be easily linked to loudspeakers on its roof to broadcast the candidate's political message; it does not take too many hours of driving school to learn to use a car; and, although cars are not that economical, still there are more car-owners in the world than jet-owners.

So we could say that the degree of generativity in any given technology is directly proportional to its degree of effort-reduction coupled with the number of tasks that technology enables; its range of adaptability to different tasks; and its wide availability. Similarly to the airplane-car example, a small personal computer like the Altair 8800 was more generative than its former predecessors, the large computers of the Sixties. These latter, notwithstanding their processing power, took up large rooms and could only attend on a fixed limited set of tasks; the Altair instead was a small box that thanks to its hardware and software compatibility could promptly adapt to a wider variety of tasks, many of which were yet to be thought of when it was released. The computers originally used by ARPA's funded research centres cost on average more than $500 thousand dollars; the Altair 8800 had a price-tag of less than $500. Larry Roberts' super computers at ARPA's headquarter were machine for specialists; the Altair was for 'almost everyone'.

Being compatible was a feature that was not only crucial in securing the economic success of those kits (it made them appealing to many hobbyists who liked to experiment with them), but it also provided the fertile ground to stimulate the growth of a young software market that could meet the demands of those many new customers; in the years to come, by exploiting that generative element present in the personal computers of the Seventies, this new market expanded beyond any prediction the potential of those computers. For those who remember the early PCs, the name Altair is not only linked to the 8800, but it is also connected to Altair Basic, the first interpreter language originally written for the MITS' machine, but that ended becoming (for a while) the standard interpreter for almost all PCs in circulation in those years. The Altair Basic was also the foundation stone of Microsoft Corporation, a young company that grew rapidly during the Seventies to become, few years later, the world-leader in the production of computer software. Thanks to Basic (and then later other software), between 1975 and 1977, Microsoft business revenue with just 9 employees grew more than 600%. In 1975 it registered $US 16,000 dollars; in 1976 up to $38,000; and in 1977 $382,000 (Waldman, 1998: 162). At the end of the 2008 fiscal year, the company reported revenue for over US$60 billion dollars, and a net income of more than $17 billions (Microsoft, 2008). Their main software, the operating system Windows, runs, with its many versions, almost ninety percent of the computers in the world[39].

The Altair 8800 and its many clones were to the computer research community what the Renaissance and printing press had been for the late Middle ages in Europe: they inspired a whole generation of scientists and entrepreneurs[40], and opened a breach in the protecting walls surrounding what had been hitherto a closed community. The Altair was also the first economic and powerful probe

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[39] Source: Net Applications Inc., data updated to May 2009. Available at: http://marketshare.hitslink.com/os-market-share.aspx?qprid=9

[40] For instance, Bill Gates and Paul Allen, Microsoft founders, were the authors (together with Monte Davidoff) of the Altair Basic application, which they licensed to Ed Robison at MITS in the early months of 1975. Gates and Allen were greatly inspired by the potential of the Altair 8800, they saw in it the chance of a lifetime: both decided to drop College and start their own business (Gates, 1995). Similarly impressed were Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak who went on to create Apple Computer in 1976.

within reach of everyone to explore and expand the new galaxy of communication that the people at ARPA had helped create by providing its infrastructure: the Internet. That probe started a long process of *invasion* and mutation of that galaxy. As soon as those PCs were connected to the Internet, the network made resources, until then only available to few, potentially within reach of the many; and in the long-run even to those users who knew nothing about the technology they used (Zittrain, 2006: 1974). Furthermore, as the degree of 'generativity increases with the ability of users to generate new, valuable uses that are easy to distribute and are in turn sources of further innovation', then, it is difficult to think of 'a technology bundle more generative than the PC and the Internet to which it attaches' (Zittrain, 2006: 1982).

Without generative technology, the independent process of recombination of information that is at the basis of the Internet Galaxy would be, at its best, very limited in its effectiveness. And the Internet Galaxy would cease to be, as this thesis argues, the ideal place to challenge existing power holders.

It is worth mentioning here that instrumental in this process were two new inventions (two networking tools) that provided the point of contact between those home computers and the wider network, effectively creating the basis for many new small networks to appear and join the Internet. In 1975, Robert Metcalfe and David Boggs from Xerox PARC designed a new 'broadcasting communication system for carrying digital data packets among locally distributed computing stations' (Metcalfe and Boggs, 1976: 1). The system was called Ethernet, because at the centre of it was the Ether[41], 'a passive broadcast medium' technology that Metcalfe and other fellow colleagues from Xerox had developed in the previous years. The Ethernet was a revolutionary invention because it allowed private users to link computers to a Local Area Network

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[41] The term *ether* comes from the Latin word *aether*, and from the Greek αιθήρ (aithēr), which means to ignite or blaze. It refers also to the rarefied element that was believed to be the matter of the upper regions of space (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*)

(LAN), for instance an office, without the need of facing unaffordable costs[42]. Two years later, in 1977, Ward Christensen, a young American computer hobbyist, needed to transfer files from his pc to another. Nowadays to transfer files from one computer to another is a very common task that any user can easily accomplish with any average home computer. In the Seventies, it was impossible. So Christensen, exploiting the generative element of his machine, wrote a software called MODEM. The term stood for modulate–demodulate, that is, the software could translate from digital to analogical and reverse the messages between computers, so in effect enabling the use of the analogical telephone lines to transfer files from one computer to another. Christensen released the software in the network for free and all of a sudden 'home–networking' was available to the fast growing world of computer users.

After the Department of Defence had secured its own space by establishing its Military-dedicated Network (MILNET), in the early Eighties the Internet, technically run by the National Science Foundation (NSF), had practically become a shared experimental space available to anyone who had access to a probe to navigate through it. Nevertheless, orienting oneself in this electronic maze was by no means an easy task. In 1972, the ARPANET had been a network of disconnected nodes not communicating with each other, the Internet throughout the Eighties and early Nineties was a user-*hostile* network of unrelated information resources: retrieving as well as putting new data on the network was a task for the few, than for the many. One needed to be an expert to use that network. For instance, to connect one computer to another, a user needed to know that computer's Internet Protocol (IP) address and then follow a cumbersome procedure to access that machine and retrieve or exchange data with it.

In order to make sense of that chaos; to make the network user-friendly; to turn it into a space universally accessible and inhabitable, in principle, by *everyone*; in other words to make the network fully generative, what was needed was a system capable, at the same time, of mapping the data available on the net and

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[42] For a technical analysis of how an Ethernet system works see Metcalfe and Boggs 1976

create the conditions to make content-creation within the Internet Galaxy as universal as possible. The only way to do that, while maintaining independence of formats - a necessary condition for keeping the galaxy open to every type of network and machine - was to create a system capable of relating data on the Internet regardless of those data's original formats. The consequence of building such system on top of the galaxy's infrastructure, the Internet, was to create the condition of existence of a new type of 'informational space' in which 'anything [that is to say any *bit* of data] could be linked to anything' (Berners–Lee, 1999: 4). It took an English physicist named Tim Berners–Lee working at the European Particle Physics Laboratory, at CERN, in Geneva to create the first version of that complex system. Quite ironically, for such an important invention, but a recurrent theme in the history of the Internet Galaxy, Berners-Lee worked at his pet-project during his spare time.

Mapping and populating the Galaxy

In 1945, the July issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* published an essay titled *As We May Think*. Written by Vannevar Bush, then Director of the US Office of Scientific Research and Development, the essay described a device named *Memex*. The device was 'a sort of mechanized private file and library' (Bush, 1945: 6), that used microfilms to allow its users to store a countless number of sources of information (such as books, records, and communications). The *Memex* was intended to be a fast and flexible system for retrieving and consulting those sources. Bush's mechanised library was an imaginative revolutionary tool. It was supposed to be 'an enlarged intimate supplement to [a person's] memory' that would change the way people relate with information and make use of it (Bush, 1945: 6). In 1965, building on the principles of Bush's *Memex*, Ted Nelson, an American Harvard graduate in Sociology, envisaged a new system for retrieving information on a specific subject. At the core of the system was what Nelson called, with a neologism he coined, a *hypertext* or as he defined it 'non-sequential writing' (Nelson; 1974: 45). Simply put, in this new system, the text displayed (but nowadays the source can be any type of media, i.e. still images, sound, videos) is at the same

time readable information and a *hyperlink*, or a gateway to another text or source that, ideally, is in some way related to that original point of departure. The *hypertext*, however, was much more than a technical wizardry to facilitate the retrieval of information. True, technically, it referred to '"everything" written about a subject, or vaguely relevant to it'; but, instead of following pre-existing lines of development, it was tied together by the authors who wrote it, or at the most, by those responsible for editing its content; hence, a hypertext was not to be ruled by higher external factors, 'NOT by "programmers," dammit' (Nelson, 1974: 45). Embedded in that concept, much beyond Nelson's original idea, was something not entirely clear at first sight: a potentially anti-hegemonic revolutionary element that promised to break, in the long run, with existing structures of power. The new attitude that the concept of hypertext ushered in was the antithesis of the fixed and uniform linearity that had characterised the world organised around Gutenberg's movable type. Within such new system, knowledge was no longer supposed to be constrained within pre-fixed spatially ordered containers (books for instance). The path to knowledge, hence to answers, hence to the way in which one thinks about a specific matter was not bound to a pre-ordered direction (i.e.: from A to Z; from left to right); no longer did it have to follow diktats imposed from above. Seen from the present-time perspective, the hypertext was the key to a new world of social relationships that, in principle, were free from any pre-existing hierarchies of power. Through a hypertext a user could experience knowledge in a whole different way than he/she could do in the Gutenberg's Galaxy. Through a hypertext a person 'may read in all the directions [he/she wishes] to pursue. There can be alternate pathways for people who think different ways' (Nelson; 1974: 45). Nelson however, for economic and technological reasons, never managed to develop his system out of the experimental phase.

In 1989, struck by the lack of organization of CERN's many projects and resources, Tim Berners–Lee circulated a proposal addressing the issue of how to manage properly information in complex research networks like CERN (Berners-Lee, 1990). The aim of the proposal was to avoid misplacement of data while constructing a clear picture of the ongoing experiments within CERN. Inspired by the work of Bush and Nelson (Berners-Lee, 1999: 5-6), the

solution put forward by Berners-Lee was a 'distributed hypertext system' (Berners-Lee, 1990). It was effectively a system to map and translate in readable format –that is independently from the source's original format - information stored in computers across the Internet. The new system had two important characteristics: it was open, that is, any type of information could be entered in it. And it was *clever*, meaning that within it, people 'must be able to find the information, sometimes without knowing what [they are] looking for.' (Berners-Lee, 1990).

Against the advice of many of his colleagues, who believed the name was too long and unattractive, Berners-Lee decided to call the new system the *World Wide Web* (from hereon: the Web)[43]. Before settling for that name, however, the English researcher played around with a few possible *candidates*: he had thought to call it *Mine of Information*, but the acronym to be used, *MOI* (which means "me" in French), sounded a bit too egocentric. The same argument was used against the second option, *The Information Mine*, the resulting acronym in fact would have been TIM as his author's forename. Furthermore, 'the idea of a mine' recalled Berners-Lee 'wasn't quite right, because it didn't encompass the idea of something global, or of hypertext, and represented only getting information out – not putting it in.' (1999: 26). The concept of a web seemed more appropriate. However, contrary to what many believe, the concept was not drawn from or intended to recall a spider's web. Thinking in terms of a spider web would actually contradict Berners-Lee original idea for that is a type of net that is centralised, that revolves around a centre of gravity (Berners-Lee, 2007). The idea of a world wide web, instead, was since the beginning based on a net-system without a centre. The Web imagined by Berners-Lee was similar to the distributed network that Paul Baran had imagined in the early Sixties, which later became the base of the Internet architecture. But

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[43] The idea of the Web developed from *Enquire*, an earlier software program written by Berners-Lee himself in 1980, during his first experience as consultant at CERN. As Berners-Lee recalls: 'I wrote Enquire in my spare time and for my personal use, and for no loftier reasons than to help me to remember the connections among the various people, computers and projects at the lab.' (Berners-Lee, 1999: 4)

whereas Baran's type of network connected computers, the Web connects data, and, more importantly, people.

Berners-Lee envisaged his Web as an interactive management tool that allowed people to communicate by sharing knowledge with each other (See Fig. 23 for the original sketch of the Web).

Figure 23 - World Wide Web - Sketch from Berners-Lee 1990 proposal[44]
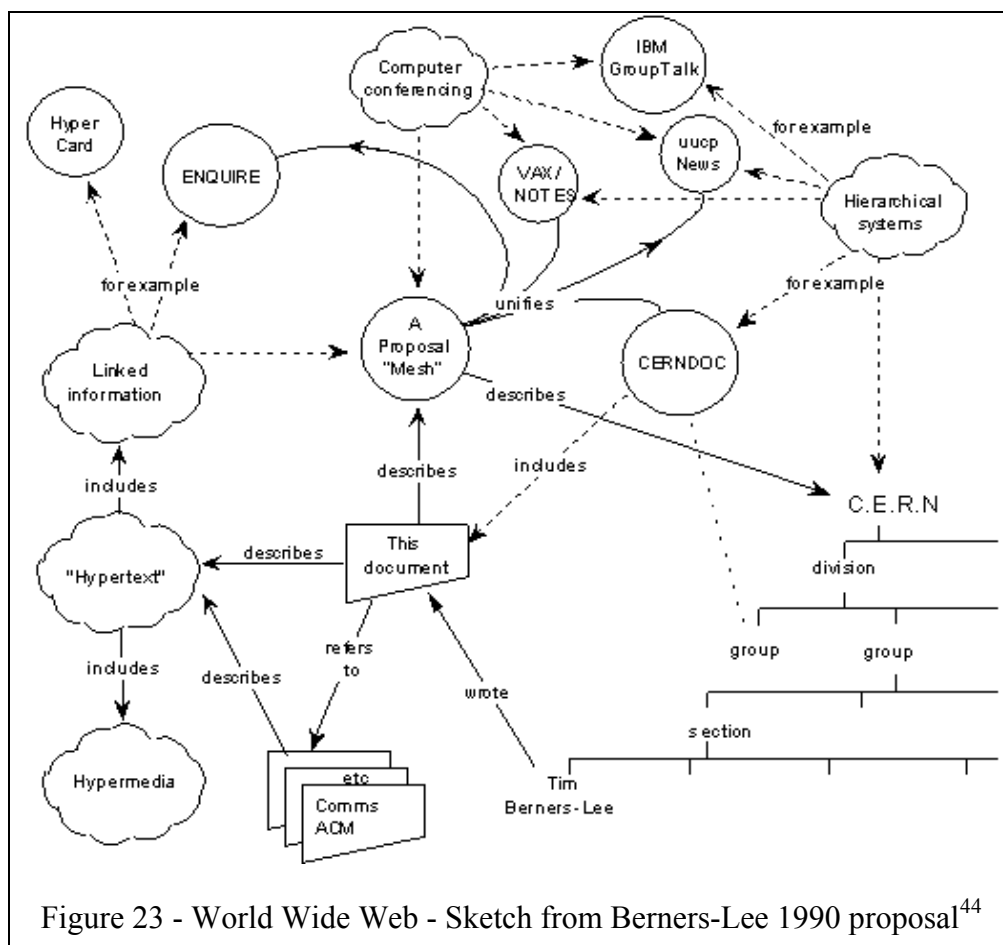
The Web was (and it is) an ideal place where to nurture collaboration and creativity. In fact, if the Internet is the infrastructure of the Galaxy, the Web is an 'informational space' that sits within that infrastructure and connects people, their ideas, their creativity (Berners-Lee, 2007). Within this system, ideally, people should be able to 'easily express themselves, quickly acquire and convey knowledge, overcome misunderstandings and reduce duplication of

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[44] Source: Berners-Lee 1990

effort'. The Web was conceived to be generative on a world-wide scale. It could serve, at the same time, as 'a personal information system'; and as 'a group tool on all scales', that is, the Web could be used to accomplish very simple group tasks, such as 'creating a flyer for the local primary school play', or for more complex, if not utopian tasks such as 'the world population deciding on ecological issues.' (Berners-Lee, 1999: 174-75)

Like the mathematical term that denotes a collection of nodes and links in which any node can be linked to any other, the World Wide Web mirrored 'the distributed nature of the people and computers that the system could link'. Hence, it could serve as the basis for a system that could potentially become global. (Berners-Lee, 1999: 26) But the term *global* does not, and never did, imply uniformity, (i.e., one Web, one world, one society). On the contrary, it mirrors, ideally, the complex diverse nature of society, with its many cultures, languages, heritages and ideas (Berners-Lee, 2007).

From a more technical point of view, the Web is a hypertextual (and hypermedia[45]) system based upon a defined set of three basic rules of protocol - the Universal Resource Identifiers (URIs), the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and the Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML). The first two help find the coordinates and location of the data, the third one is in effect a translation tool that allows to format information that is related to data available on the Internet and, by doing so, HTML allows those data to be shared or accessed across different platforms[46]. Using these three protocols, Berners-Lee built the word's first website (Fig. 24). It was a simple html page with a series of instructions and hyperlinks to teach users what the Web was and how to build a website. Visiting the site, people could learn also how to install and use a browser to find resources on the Internet and how to share their own knowledge with others (see Fig 25 for an example of browser). For this reason that first webpage became quickly very popular, its growth-rate 'went up by a

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[45] A hypermedia has the same quality of a hypertext but refers specifically to media such as sound or videos.

[46] For a brief explanation of the meaning of these three terms see below *Appendix B – Selected Glossary of Terms*

factor of 10 for 3 years; from 100 hits to 1,000 to 10,000' (Berners-Lee, 2007). Thanks to Berners-Lee's invention, the Internet Galaxy was soon populated with hundreds of personal and commercial websites, while the number of the explorers that navigated the galaxy started growing at unprecedented rate.

The World Wide Web project   http://www.w3.org/History/19921103-hypertext/hypertext...

World Wide Web

The WorldWideWeb (W3) is a wide-area hypermedia information retrieval initiative aiming to give universal access to a large universe of documents.

Everything there is online about W3 is linked directly or indirectly to this document, including an executive summary of the project, Mailing lists , Policy , November's W3 news , Frequently Asked Questions .

What's out there?
        Pointers to the world's online information, subjects , W3 servers, etc.
Help
        on the browser you are using
Software Products
        A list of W3 project components and their current state. (e.g. Line Mode ,X11 Viola ,
        NeXTStep , Servers , Tools , Mail robot , Library)
Technical
        Details of protocols, formats, program internals etc
Bibliography
        Paper documentation on W3 and references.
People
        A list of some people involved in the project.
History
        A summary of the history of the project.
How can I help ?
        If you would like to support the web..
Getting code
        Getting the code by anonymous FTP , etc.

Figure 24 - World's First Website – Underlined words are hyperlinks[47]

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[47]   Source: W3.org.   Retrieved   10   June   2009   from http://www.w3.org/History/19921103-hypertext/hypertext/WWW/TheProject.html
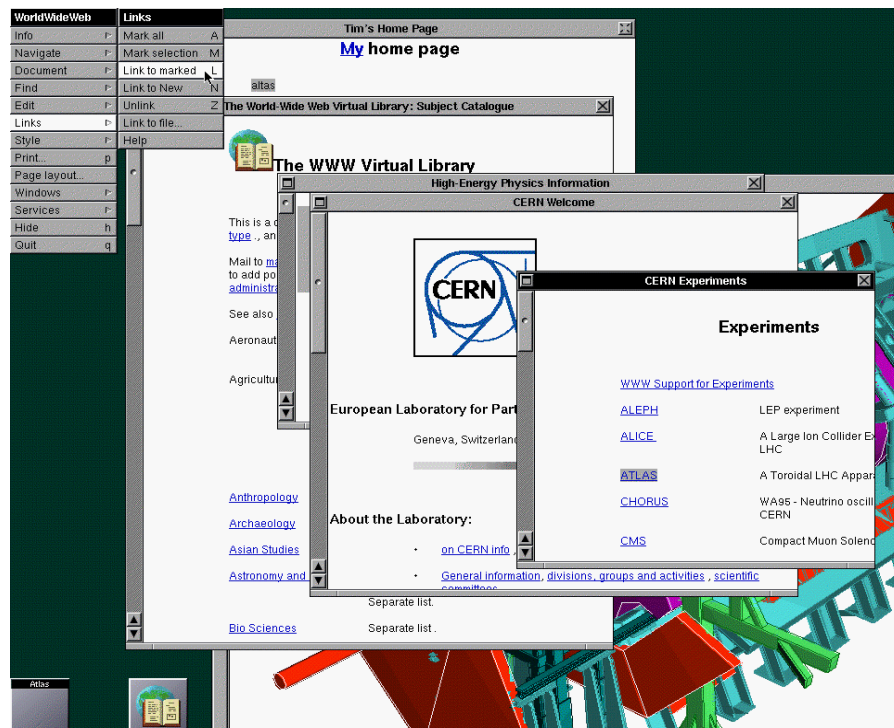
Figure 25 -Berners-Lee' s screenshot of first browser[48]

From Web of data to Web of people

Berners-Lee's Web provided a system to connect different information sources, and made them easily accessible, but it fell short of its higher aim of connecting people in order to generate a worldwide space of collective intelligence where everyone could create and edit or collaborate to others' work (Berners-Lee, 1999). The reason behind that failure was simple: the original Web lacked the technological means to fulfil its intended goals. Adopting the jargon programmers use when numbering different versions of the same software, some authors have labelled Berners-Lee' system Web 1.0: a good first version of a system that ought to be improved, overall a product of a

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[48] Source: W3.org (http://www.w3.org/2004/Talks/w3c10-HowItAllStarted/all.html)

past era. The twenty-first century has ushered in what many have started referring to as Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005; see also discussion in Zimmer, 2008) that is a shorthand buzzword that attempts to capture the technical as well as the social and economical elements of the evolution of the Web in recent years. Notwithstanding its catching sound, the term is ill chosen. It projects the misleading idea of two different entities: the old Web and a brand new Web, this latter is supposed to be a superior version of the former, a replacement of an outdated model. Beyond the evident needs of marketing the overall idea to potential investors (after all the term became widely popular during an Internet-business conference organised by O'Reilly Media, in 2004[49]), the reality is more prosaic.

There are no two systems, but the Web that first appeared in the Nineties has simply evolved, without changing its essence. It has followed the path traced by Berners-Lee, adopted the same standards and, when necessary, complemented its architecture with new features (Berners-Lee, 2006). The main difference with the past is that, originally, the underlying technology of most Web applications was strikingly hierarchical and static in its structural design. It followed strong top-down-based procedures for management and content creation, as it required a basic knowledge more suitable for tech-savvy people (then the majority of the potential users of the Web); therefore end-users experienced the Web simply as a product to *consume* passively. Since then, the Web has evolved considerably towards a new dimension that is more dynamic and participatory. Users nowadays do not only read, but send *inputs*; upload material; actively participate in the creation and implementation process of content and features of websites. Key to this evolution has been the growing popularity of the Internet as communication medium (50 million users in 1995, 350 mil. in 2000 and 1.5 billion in 2008[50]) coupled with the arrival in the market of user-friendly web-editors and content management systems software that allow users to easily create or modify existing pages; while the loss of

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[49] The Conference is now a recurring annual event, see http://www.web2summit.com

[50] Source: Meeker 1996 and World Internet Usage Statistics (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm)

confidence in Internet-based business, a product of the 2001 worldwide economic crisis known as the *DotCom Bubble Burst*, has pushed companies to lower substantially their initially massive top-down investments on Internet start-up ventures and invest more wisely on web-companies that rely on user-generated content (O'Reilly, 2005).

To invest on user-generated content - that is, to allow users to create content and grant them the managing rights to upload that content on the site (instead of relying on paid website editors or content managers to attend those time-consuming and expensive tasks) - greatly simplifies the process of content creation of sites; it reduces also the costs of building a website and its content from scratch to the bare minimum. Consider the case of Youtube.com, a website that is particular relevant to the cases-studies examined in the last part of this dissertation. Created in 2005 by three under-30s former employees of Paypal.com (an online banking service), YouTube soon became the quintessential video-sharing hosting platform on the Web. With minimum staff, and in a relatively short period of time, Youtube managed to achieve what previously would had required a vast workforce, and large investments in money and time. What is YouTube's secret? Users-generated content. YouTube is a Web space where anyone can upload and share (almost) any kind of video. Pornography and copyrighted material are technically not allowed, yet users upload that kind of content regularly. In fact censorship works retrospectively, so for an illegal video to be taken down someone must report it manually to YouTube management. The process of uploading videos and watching them is all very simple. Most of the technical work is handled automatically by the system. In general, 'if you've sent an e-mail attachment, you've got the tech skills to publish on YouTube' (Boutin, 2006). In just over three years, Youtube.com has become the third most popular website in the world, accounting for 20% of the whole of Web users[51]. In 2006 Youtube was acquired by Google.com for 1.6 US$ billion dollars (Google, 2006), by then the number of videos uploaded each day was over 60.000 and the website had a library of over 50 million videos (Sydell, 2006). In the early months of 2008,

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[51]   Source: Alexa.com   Retrieved   10   March   2009 http://www.alexa.com/data/details/main/youtube.com

while its business model was not yet clearly defined (its revenue was mainly drawn from paid advertisements, that takes the shape of either embedded links in each video posted on the site or by giving special prominence to advertisers' videos on YouTube pages), the daily posting had crossed the 200 thousand mark, and the number of videos available on the website had gone over 78 million (Digital Ethnography, 2008). Users have posted all of these videos and the only real financial commitment for YoutTube is its bandwidth usage that grows proportionally to the number of videos and users that it acquires. But that expenditure is something that any popular website must cope with: success in the Internet age comes always with an expensive *Internet bill* for heavy-usage of bandwidth.

By contrast with its earlier stages, part of the Web we use nowadays, at least the successful part of it, mimics the YouTube.com model. It has developed from a bottom-up and horizontal approach. This is an approach that is inextricably linked with the Web's open – we could say generative - technological architecture. Yet the top-down approach has not disappeared. Most of the mainstream or traditional websites (as Corporations' or news-media websites) are often a mix between top-down and bottom-up. Within this framework, Web 2.0 more than a new Web itself, must be understood more as a philosophy and set of guidelines and procedures that identify fully participatory Web-based applications as essential for the development of the many potentials of the Web. It encompasses – as in the case of YouTube - all those second-generation applications aiming at providing their users with partial/full access to their own elements of design and to their own content. Participation in this case is broadly understood: it goes from simply inputting a comment about a newspaper' article, to inserting new content, modifying it, editing and rejecting it (as in the case of the free online encyclopaedia Wikipedia [52]); creating a mash-up video and post it on one of the many available video-hosting-sharing platforms, such as Youtube.com; write new software that implement the user's experience of the Web; or join social network websites (such as Facebook.com or Myspace.com) where users, by

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[52] For a short summary of what is Wikipedia and how it works see below *Appendix B – Selected Glossary of Terms*

creating personal pages, adding material, and keeping in contact with peers, become the driving engine that fill the website with content that can be marketed and sold to customers.

In this new Web-framework, there is no Berners-Lee's father figure to point at as the 'inventor' of Web 2.0. For a fact, this new generation Web is more the result of the continuous collective effort that, since the Web's birthday (Christmas Day 1990 - Berners-Lee, 1999: 33), has aimed at improving Berners-Lee's original idea. This is an evolution process that in less than two decades has changed the way in which people explore and experience the Internet Galaxy. As a philosophy, Web 2.0 and its participatory approach can be applied not only on the technical side of the Web, but also on the social and political aspect of nowadays Internet. That approach is reflected in all of the case studies discussed later in this dissertation.

Crucial in this process of evolution of the Web was Berners-Lee's decision not to patent his technology. He had several options, but the negative experience of Gopher - a popular earlier alternative to Internet browsing that was 'toast overnight' as soon as the University of Minnesota, its copyright holder, circulated a note to users about paying royalties for using it - showed that the commercialization of the Web was probably not the best route for developing the system. In the early Nineties, the University of Minnesota slip put pressure on Berners-Lee and CERN to clarify the issue about royalties and copyright. 'And CERN, to their huge credit', as Berners-Lee wrote 'did produce, 18 months later [October 1994] a document that declared that CERN would not be charging royalties on the World Wide Web. And that's why it happened. That's why [the Web] took off.' (Berners-Lee, 2007)

Berners-Lee's decision to release the Web in the public domain meant that all its features and standards were available to anyone who wanted to use or implement them with new features. Being in the public domain made possible a steady and continuing development process of Berners-Lee's original idea

towards a system with more interactive features and more user-friendly[53]. This is a process that until the Web remains open for explorers to probe its limit, populate it with new content and ideas, has virtually no end.

Towards a public of interactive explorers?

Berners-Lee's Web in 1990 and its evolution in the last decade have changed the way in which people explore the Internet Galaxy. The network has become much more than a network of resources; it is no longer just machines connected with each other. It is a network of people interacting with one another. The importance of the social and political aspects of this two-decades long process of change was made clear by *Time* magazine in 2006. According to *Time*, 2006 was not just about the invasion of Lebanon by Israel; it was not about the American billionaire Warren Buffet donating $US 30 billion dollars to charity. Instead, it was 'about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before'; and more importantly, it was 'about the many wrestling power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes'. In other words, 2006 was the year the world found out about the political edge of Web 2.0, defined as: 'a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter' (Grossman, 2006). For this reason, with a decision that spawned many debates and some criticism, the editors of the American newsmagazine decided to present their renown *Person Of The Year Award* to each and everyone of those many millions of people who use the Web everyday in a meaningful manner; to those who are changing the world through it: 'for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing

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[53] For instance, it is worth noting here briefly that the invention of PHP (a recursive acronym that stands for *PHP: Hypertext Preprocessor*), has increasingly implemented the dynamic feature of webpages written with Hyper Text Mark-up Language (See Appendix B) by allowing web-editors to build websites whose content and features change and adapt according to several factors. For instance a user's geographical location, age, or previous browsing history determine the aspect and features of the webpage viewed by a user. Websites with many dynamic features like Youtube.com or Facebook.com would not be possible without the implementation of Berners-Lee HTML web-feature with PHP scripting. For more info on PHP see http://www.php.net/

the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game, TIME's Person of the Year for 2006 is you.' (Grossman, 2006).

To find a suitable cover for the 2006 *Person of the Year* edition, *Time*'s editors decided to play magic (Fig. 26). Arthur Hochstein, the magazine Art Director designed a slick white cover, with a computer monitor and a keyboard. The computer screen replicated the typical YouTube playback video layout, and it was covered with a piece of reflective Mylar, so that each reader could look at it and see his own reflection (Stengel, 2006). The idea was to 'give a chance to people to look back at a computer screen and really, genuinely wonder who's out there looking back at them' (Grossman, 2006).

Figure 26 - Time Cover - Person of the Year 2006[54]

Time's initiative in 2006, although not entirely without suspicion[55], represented an important public acknowledgement on a global scale of the social and political potential of the Web. The seven million copies of that special edition (the largest ever in the history of the magazine) were not only the mark of a successful marketing idea, but, more importantly, they were the carrier of a very simple message, stated firmly and loudly: the Web was no longer simply a significant repository of information (as it had been seen in its early stages); or the promised land of new business opportunities (as it was considered before the DotCom bubble burst in 2001); nor it could be discarded simply as a neutral virtual space whose activities had no effects upon the dynamics of the so called *real* world. On the contrary, *Time* told its readers and – through the echo the initiative produced in other media – a good part of the world that the Web had become much more than that: it had turned into a complex multilayered powerful space that fostered public engagement and power contestation; it was not an *other* world, as opposed to the *real* world. On the contrary, *Time* acknowledged that the Web had become a constituent part of our daily reality. Without ever saying it, *Time* was calling the Web a contemporary public sphere.

The concept of public sphere refers to an ideal realm of public life that mediates between society and the state (Habermas, 1974: 49). Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffenlicheit*[56], although not the only one[57], is

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[55] The magazine, after all, is owned by the Australian media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, who, incidentally, had bought one year earlier for over $500 million US dollars Myspace.com, one the most popular social-networking websites and a prominent exponent of Web 2.0 (Rosenbush, 2005).

[56] *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

[57] Benhabib (1992) delineates three different theories of the concept of public sphere. Each of them corresponds to three different strands of Western political thought: the first one is 'the agonistic view' which draws its theory from the concept of public space in Ancient Greece. Hannah Arendt represented the leading figure in this current. The second theory is called 'the legalistic model'. Rooted in the liberal tradition of the Enlightenment, it dealt with the problem of a 'just and stable public order'. Bruce Ackerman's concept of political culture as *public dialogue* is at the centre of this second strand. The third strand is instead represented by Habermas' discursive model.

perhaps the most influential and controversial works dedicated to the concept[58]. The public sphere, in particular when seen from Habermas' perspective, is a crucial concept for the study of politics, for it provides, 'a paradigm for analyzing historical change,' while at the same time, it serves 'as a normative category for political critique' (Hohendahl, 1979: 92).

The public sphere can be defined as that particular realm of life where 'private people come together' and shape into a 'public'. Through engaging openly in debates over matters of public interest; by monitoring and questioning publically the exercise of power, the members of this public sphere give shape and substance to what we commonly refer to as public opinion (Habermas, 1989: 27). Habermas traced the origin of this particular type of public sphere in the bourgeois mercantile society of Europe between 1680 and 1730; in the passage from a feudal society dominated by a concept of *publicness* and *representation* strictly tied to the realm of the *personal*, that is, 'directly linked to the concrete existence of a ruler'[59] (1974: 51); to a society in which the term 'public' was no longer tied with the 'representative court of a prince endowed with authority, but rather to an institution regulated according to competence, to an apparatus endowed with a monopoly on the legal exertion of authority.' In the bourgeois society of the eighteenth century, the state represented the public authority whose limits where defined by its territorial borders, whilst the 'private individuals' under its authority became 'the public body.' (Habermas, 1974: 52). This understanding of the public sphere is strictly modern, it differs from more classical theories of the concept of the public sphere that strictly separate the realm of the public from that of the private. For the Greeks, for instance, the individual formed himself as a citizen only once he entered the 'public space' (see Arendt, 1958: 24 f.); for Habermas, instead, individuals fully formed their civic identity within the private realm of their conjugal family. Within that private space individuals could train the skills they needed

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[58] For Habermas' concept of the public sphere see Habermas, 1989 and Hohendahl, 1979; for a critical approach to Habermas' theory, its flaws and historical misconceptions see the debate in Calhoun 1992; Negt and Kluge, 1993; and Keane, 1995.

[59] The term *representation* is understood as the act of the ruler to present himself/herself publicly in front of his/her subjects.

to use in public (as defending arguments, or testing ideas). It is within the boundaries of their private life that in the bourgeois society, individuals become citizens ready to step, fully formed, into the arena of the public sphere.

The roots of the emergence of that particular public sphere are to be found in England's coffee houses, France's *salons* or Germany's *tischgesellschaften.* Those were the ideal places where, in Early Modern Europe, a public of private individuals (mainly composed by white-bourgeois males, property-owners) could gather together as equals; learn about the facts of the world; train in the art of debating and reasoning over who gets what, when, and how; while help shaping a public opinion about the facts that were of public interest (Habermas, 1989: 45). The rise of a print culture among the members of the bourgeois society was crucial in the formation process of the public sphere of early modern Europe. It provided an important source of information about the facts of the world, but more importantly it was a source of self-reflection for the members of that 'reading public'. The presence in the pages of newspapers of continuous references to the *public* and to what that public *thought* about current affairs was an important recognition of the political significance of the collective label called 'public'. That presence openly acknowledged that the public's opinion was an important factor that had to be taken into high consideration by those in power when dealing with matters of public concern[60].

Strukturwandel is a critique of the democratic-capitalist model of social organization that developed from the bourgeois society of the eighteenth century. It depicts a long process of structural transformation of the concept and influence of the public sphere in the politics of everyday life. It's a process that culminates with the almost destruction of the institution of the public sphere in the second half of the twentieth century. This negative trend was

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[60] The term public opinion was for the first time used in a public speech in the UK Parliament in 1793: 'it is certainly right and prudent to consult the public opinion …if the public opinion did not happen to square with mine; […] or if they conceived that another remedy was preferable to mine, I should consider it as my due to my king, due to my country […] that they might pursue the plan which they thought better […] but one thing is most clear, that I ought to give the public the means of forming an opinion.' (Charles Fox quoted in Habermas, 1989: 65)

influenced by the diffusion of mass communication media such as television and the development of a commodity-driven culture throughout the twentieth century that increasingly encouraged 'moral selfishness' and disregarded 'public good' as a concern of the private individual (Keane, 1995: 2). Such development, progressively, transformed the unitary public of critical readers that had characterised the early stages of the public sphere in a fragmented multitude of consumers-publics that had all 'one tendency in common despite their regional and national diversity: abstinence from literary and political debate' (Habermas: 1989: 163).

Habermas' historical study of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere as a blueprint of the flaws of organized capitalism was far from perfect. In the years following its first publication in 1962 in German, and especially since its English translation in 1989, the book has raised many criticisms, along with many praises. The account of a bourgeois public sphere depicted as the ideal space of interaction among equals, open and accessible, at least formally, to everyone, was theoretically and historically arguable. *Everyone* in this context referred to those who were educated and owned a property, including aristocrats and non-bourgeois strata[61]. Taking a cue from Immanuel Kant (1970: 78), Habermas pointed out that to own a property and be educated were the necessary criteria to enter the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, 1989: 85). Ownership guaranteed economic independence, hence enough free time to meet with peers to discuss and to keep oneself informed about public affairs; whilst it protected that person's opinion from the economic influence of others (1989: 109). Being educated, on the other hand, guaranteed the white-male, property owner to be able to read, to understand public affairs, and acquire the debating skills to engage critically with others in public over matters of public

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[61] It must be noted that although it was called *bourgeois*, this ideal model of public sphere was not simply the product of a class of citizens. The term did not refer to the social background of its members, but 'rather, it was *society* that was bourgeois, and bourgeois society produced a certain form of public sphere.' Aristocrats and *non bourgeois* – but educated – *strata* were also *admitted* within the realm of the public sphere; and actually the Aristocrats, as the dominating class of the *literary public sphere* of the Enlightenment were crucial in the formation process of the early bourgeois public sphere (Calhoun, 1992: 7).

concern. The progressive commodification of labour during the nineteenth century deprived the large majority of the public of those essential criteria of participation.

Given these criteria, in this ideal public sphere inequalities of birth and fortune were supposed to be insignificant; within its ideal boundaries, members of that public could engage with each other as if they were socially and economically equals. In fact, notwithstanding Habermas' position, inequality remained by all means a constraint throughout the golden age of the bourgeois public sphere. 'Discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality'. These resulted in an effective, although informal, marginalization of other categories of individuals (women or members of the plebeian classes for instance). Thus, 'the social inequalities among the interlocutors were not eliminated but only bracketed.' (Fraser, 1992: 118–9)

Most criticism against *Strukturwandel* spawned from Habermas' idealization of the public as a unitary body. Excessively focused on the bourgeoisie, and on education and ownership as the essential criteria for entering the public sphere, Habermas failed to address properly the role played in that long historical context by other publics - i.e., the women, or, later, the proletariat (see Landes,1988; Ryan, 1990; Hall, 1992). Underestimating the role of those publics led Habermas to draw a faulty blueprint of the public sphere: based on the idea of a unitary coherent body public, he saw it as a realm monopolized by a leading culture. It was more than that, it was the sphere where different, many, often conflicting, publics on different levels interacted and influenced matters of public concern (Negt and Kluge, 1993; Thompson, 1968; Hill, 1975).

In the age of globalised networks, the thought that a territorially-bounded unified public of citizens that gather together in public spaces and discuss matters of public concern can be used as the blueprint of an ideal public sphere is an idea that is no longer applicable. It could never exist in the present time. It would not be desirable even as 'a regulative ideal because of the inattention to difference and identity that it presumes' (Calhoun, 1997: 241). The

continuous reference to a unified, integral public sphere is dangerous as it turns that ideal 'into a nostalgic, unrealisable utopia', while dangerously ignoring the undemocratic implications that lies beneath that concept. 'The supposition that all power disputes can ultimately be sited at the level of the territorially-bound nation-state', writes John Keane, 'not only cavorts with the dogma of nationalism. It is also a remnant from the era of state-building and the corresponding struggles of its inhabitants to widen the franchise - and, hence, to direct public controversies primarily at the operations of the sovereign state.' (Keane, 1993) That idealised unified public, if it ever existed, has been broken and fragmented in a 'multiplicity of networked spaces of communication', that is a 'complex mosaic of differently sized overlapping, […] interconnected [and cross-national] public spheres' (Keane, 1995: 8).

In light of the technological evolution of the last two decades, an age that has seen new powerful means of expression, such as mobiles phones and the Internet, becoming *almost* ubiquitous source of communication and information (at least in technological advanced societies), the old distinction between private and public can no longer apply; those individuals' relationship with 'space' (both private and public) has changed radically. The space of the 'public' often becomes that of the 'private' (think of mobile phones conversations on public transports); while the private is increasingly turning into the defined and preferred realm of the public. In the age of the Internet Galaxy, individuals have gained full access to the public realm directly from the inner core of their private sphere. For instance, they could be lying in bed and still be able to join and actively participate in an online discussion forum regarding the ethics of politics; the electoral reform of the state they live in, or that of the state they would like to live in.

The concept of a sphere that mediates between the state and society can no longer be identified within the boundaries of an institutionalised space, for the simple reasons that those institutional boundaries have been eroded progressively by the emergency of new complex communication spaces, in the case of this dissertation is the Internet Galaxy. When compared to other communication media, such as mobile phones for instance, the Internet stands

out for its more interactive and more participatory character. Such characteristic makes the Internet a medium that can be easily integrated with any other communication medium. This ability to integrate is increasingly transforming the Internet Galaxy in a receiving and forwarding hub (although not exclusive) of all communications taking place in such complex mosaic of multiple public spheres. But the Galaxy is even more than that. Thanks particularly to Web 2.0 technologies, the Internet is at the same time a communication medium, a space of interaction, a source of information; it is the point of contact between the private and the public. It is at the same time the space where power can be exercised but also challenged in bold and innovative ways that make the reversals of power chronic. In light of this most recent structural transformation of the public sphere, the concept of the public as the representation of a particular type of citizenry is obsolete. To understand the complexity of the meaning of citizenship in the twenty-first century we need to shed light on the long-term political significance of the new spheres of interaction where that citizenship is exercised, that is to say, we need to understand how the Internet Galaxy changes the means and ways of 'representations' of public engagement. It is from this perspective that we should read the 2006 *Time*'s *Person of the Year* award.

Following in the footsteps of the eighteenth century European Press, the *Times'* 2006 award acknowledged publicly the existence of a public opinion that was critical of governing powers and it named the Web as the realm where that public of publics exercises its right to monitor and question who gets what when and how. However, contrary to Habermas' idealised reading public of the age of coffee houses and salons, the public sphere of the Internet Galaxy is more complex: it's not made of a unified body; and it is not defined by national boundaries; it is not only a realm for debates and questioning, but it is also a space and a *tool* for action. There is no predominant class (like the bourgeoisie in the eighteen century Europe) in this new communication galaxy. The best way to understand how this Web-based public sphere works is to see it through the lens of one of its crucial medium of expression: *the blog*.

Blogs and the Blogosphere

A blog, a familiar abbreviation of the word weblog, refers to an online diary or journal whose entries, or *posts*, are usually public, often organised chronologically and archived, within certain categories. The content of a blog is as various as can be imagined. It can contain any kind of user-generated content, from text to still images, from sound to video. The content itself can be downloaded, read, used, commented on, and exchanged easily and rapidly; perhaps, more importantly, the content can be daring and politically incorrect. Blogs are the quintessential embodiment of the Web 2.0 philosophy: they are user-centred, they can effortlessly integrate with other application (i.e., video sharing platforms, or online forums); and thanks to software that automates the process of Web-content production and Web publishing (such as Wordpress and Live Journal, two popular blog publishing applications[62]), blogs are always easily accessible and editable on the Internet. If a user is familiar with common word processing software such as Microsoft Word, then he/she can easily learn how to blog within minutes. These characteristics have made blogs an important medium of expression of the twenty-first century Web-based public sphere; they have inspired a new group of writers and creators to dare sharing their voices openly with the world (Lenhart and Fox, 2006: 17).

Blogging can be seen as the synonym of the new human dimension of the world-wide-web in its more dynamic, user-centred version. Its publishing model has since the start rivalled with mainstream media. The easiness and freedom with which blogs break news have made them a feared competitor for newspapers and Television networks. Technorati.com, the leading blog search engine to determine the search rank of blogs, who tracks, on average, 900 thousands blog posts every 24 hours, recorded that by 2008, there were over 133 million blogs on the Internet and of these over 1.5 Million had posted quite regularly ('they have posted at least once in the last 7 days') (Sifry, 2008).

The latest offspring of blogging technology, Twitter, a form of 'microblogging' as it is limited to messages of 160 characters, has expanded even further the

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[62] See Wordpress.com and Livejournalinc.com

political potential of blogging beyond its original sphere of existence. Users of twitter do not even need a computer to publish their thoughts, or news online and distribute them to all their subscribers. In fact they can use Twitter through the short-message-system that is available in every mobile phone. Twitter has joined together the power of the Web with the power of mobile phones[63]. Blogs and twitter have given the members of this complex public sphere an important medium of expression, one that needs no proxies or dedicated spaces; a type of medium that at the click of the mouse can connect one single individual to many millions. Those who use a blog are not simply a 'reading public', but are *bloggers*. These are a members of a public of publics that write, elaborate, forward and amplify the echo of a message; they are at the same time expression of the private as well as the public realm. The 'intellectual

[63] For its simplicity and its use of both the Internet and the mobile network, Twitter has recently gained prominence among the many social networking applications available on the Internet. Mainstream media and pundits have indicated in Twitter an important new medium to express political dissent in countries where communication media are heavily censored. Given the young age of Twitter there are not enough evidences to justify such claim. Yet, if only in a footnote, it is here worth mentioning the role played by Twitter in the post-presidential election events that took place in Iran in June 2009. To some extent those events show the political potential of Twitter. On June 13, when the polls were closed and the votes counted, Iranian officials declared the incumbent Prime Minister Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the winner of the electoral context. The supporters of the opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi denounced that the elections had been rigged by the Government and called for an official investigation. The protesters' voices were quickly silenced by Iran's state censorship and found no space in mainstream media. All of a sudden Twitter became the unexpected loudspeaker of the protesters. Some media called it the *Iranian twitter revolution*. When all the other media (both national and international) failed to report what was happening in Iran, protesters used their mobile phones and their twitter accounts (which is free) to denounce in real time what was happening in the streets of Teheran and around the country. Most of the Iranian people and the rest of the world were unaware of these events because of the Iran's government strong censorship. The *tweets* (the name given to messages sent via Twitter) broadcasted through the SMS phone network and fed back into the Internet were able to bypass the state censorship. The effect was that people who had Twitters accounts could read those *tweets* both through their mobile phones or through their Internet connection; both from within and across Iran's borders, despite of the government's attempts to muffle the protesters. Within that context Twitter played an important role in attracting media attention and denounce openly the Government's action of repression of the protesters. For a full coverage of the events in Iran and a critical analysis of the impact of twitter on the aftermath of the election see Stone and Cohen, 2009 and Morozov, 2009

space' shared by those bloggers is not called public sphere, but the *blogosphere*[64]

You! Who?

The first reference to the term blog dates back to 1999, when Jon Barger, a fairly unknown American computer-savvy, started his own website, *the Robot Wisdom Weblog*[65]. Barger can be considered the first blogger, the archetypical member of the blogosphere. At the same time, Barger is the antithesis of the ideal-typical bourgeois, well educated, well-mannered, white-male property-owner that was at the core of the eighteen century European public sphere. According to Habermas that bourgeois avant-garde was the ideal public: it discussed matters of public interest according to the rule of rational debate, reasonably, while violence was never tolerated. It was a *vis–a–vis* debate, among equals, where parity was based upon the 'authority of the better argument' (Habermas, 1989: 36) Barger, on the other hand, argued in writing and his style was rather peculiar (See Table 1 below). He kept a public log of his thoughts on his website, as he came across them. The content of these posts bounced 'unapologetically from high culture to low, from silly to serious, from politics to porn' (Boutin, 2005).

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[64] Willam T. Quick, founder, editor, and publisher of *the Daily Pundit*, an online journal, is usually credited as the first to use the term in his most widely adopted meaning, which refers to a contraction of three different words: weblogs, the Greek term logos (meaning: reason, discourse, speech), and sphere (see Quick, 2002, and also Safire 2002) However, it is worth noting here that the actual first mention of the term, although less serious than Quick's post, dates back to a message appeared on Brad L. Graham's website on the 10th of September 1999. The post mocked the use and transformation of new terms popularising the Internet such as weblog. The author wrote: "Is blog- (or -blog) poised to become the prefix/suffix of the next century? Will we soon suffer from (and tire of) blogorreah? Despite its whimsical provenance, it's an awkward, homely little word. Goodbye, cyberspace! Hello, blogiverse! Blogosphere? Blogmos? (Carl Sagan: "Imagine billions and billions and billions of blogs.")' (Graham, 1999)
[65] http://www.robotwisdom.com

Table 1 - Robert Wisdom Blog's Style[66]

My ideal for weblogs is that everybody should keep one-- publicly or privately-- as the most efficient way of archiving good bookmarks. (Since I started keeping mine, I've hardly ever lost an URL!) If this means you copy 90% of my links, I don't mind at all if you also: 1) write your own comments rather than copying mine, and 2) include a link to me from time to time that will let your readers choose whether they want to follow RWWL here, directly.

A nice paragraph from a book about Milosevic: (Telegraph)

"The main culprits for the explosion of Serbian violence in the late 20th century," he writes, "were not primitive cattlemen but highly educated, sophisticated and powerful people. Violent highlanders and urban criminals were their tools; they were given weapons and opportunity to loot, rape and kill in order to realise the ambitions of the elite."

GV Higgins chooses a Churchill bio as the best book of the century! (Telegraph)

Bill's prose is the ex-marine's plainsong, as accessible to the common reader as to the specialist; his art so very perfect that it seems no art at all.

Haunting nude-series of kd lang, from the film Salmonberries: (1024*768 jpg) http://www.naked-celebs.com/px12/kdlang1.jpg

Behind every Marilyn Manson are corporations and corporate executives who cynically draw their large compensation packages from the fruits of such work.

There is nothing Congress could do that is more important than making America's children safe again from the interests that would rob them of their childhood.

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[66] These are examples of blog posts taken from Robert Wisdom Weblog, 8 May 1999 Source: The Web Archive, retrieved 10 April 2009 from http://web.archive.org/web/19990508053702/http://www.robotwisdom.com/index.html

The *You* on the front cover of *Time magazine* in 2006 is the offspring of Barger the blogger. Barger gave a name to a phenomenon that by 1999 was rapidly becoming very popular among Web users and his style provided the guidelines to the many millions more that soon would follow in his footsteps. Nevertheless, that *You* should not be misinterpreted as a collective tag identifying a unified social and political body. One that forms a unified and homogenous public whose main *reason d'être* is to question who gets what when and how. On the contrary, that *people* is formed by a heterogynous group of individuals, whose alliances are often contingent and volatile; whose focus, like Barger's unapologetic bouncing style, is nor always coherent, neither *elevated*, that is interested only in important matters of public interests. Bloggers, youtubbers, twitterers, and in general the majority of Web-users act like those parents monitoring the swimming pool where their kids are playing (to use Michael Schudson's metaphor). They seem inattentive to the scene, only interested in their ordinary chit-chat; sometimes they are just interested in playing the role of *end-users*; but some other times, in the participatory and anti-hegemonic spirit of Web 2.0, they become active participants, creative *producers* of the Web and its content: if something happens they are poised to take action. As the case-studies discussed later in this dissertation argue, this is a public composed by a lively bold generation of individuals from all ages and walks of life who have found, through the Web, a new way of interacting with each other that has no precedents in history. Whereas during the eighteen century, public spaces such as coffee houses and salons provided the ideal meeting points for the members of the public sphere. In the age of Web 2.0, the members of this public of interactive explorers follow Barger's example, speak through a blog. Debates are not only organised around voice, but also around text, still images, videos. Moreover, the importance of *vis-à-vis* meetings is not forgotten. Often, using Web 2.0 websites like Meetup.com, a popular online portal that facilitates social networking at a local level, bloggers meet up in person. Whereas, other Web 2.0 features like RSS (rich-site-summary) that enable users to receive recent updates (or syndications) from blogs they have subscribed to, and *tagging*, the process of attaching to the html code of a

webpage a *tag*, allow bloggers to keep an eye on what is going on in the *blogosphere*[67].

Conclusions

The first part of this dissertation has dealt with the history of the Internet Galaxy. This is a history that starts in the early Sixties, in an age when computers were still oversize machines with blinking lights and a countless number of vacuum tubes and other components that filled in a whole room and were in continuous need of maintenance. These were also so expensive that only few research centres could afford to own or use one of those 'white elephant' mainframe computers (see Fig. 27 and Fig. 28). The arrival on the market of the microchip and the PC between the Sixties and Seventies transformed those 'white elephants' in smaller, more affordable – and more powerful – machines. Nowadays a computer no longer needs a whole room for itself, but it sits comfortably on the palm of one's hand or hides discretely in the side pocket of a jacket (See Fig. 29).
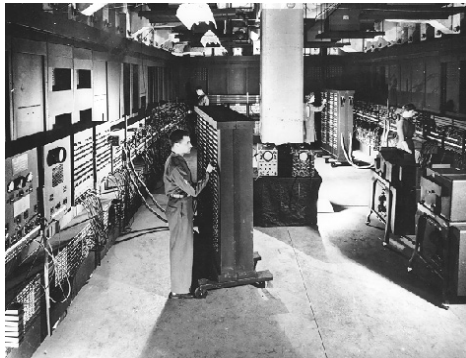
Figure 27 - ENIAC - Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator - 1945[68]	Figure 28 - ILLIAC II, 1963[69]
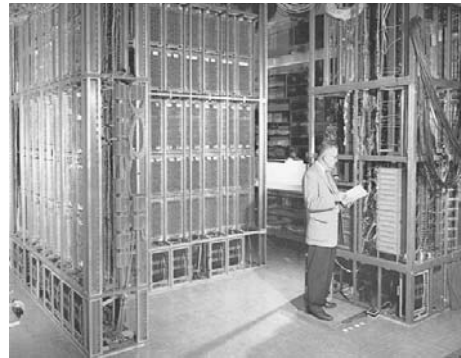
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[67] For a short summary about Meetup.com history and features; about the meaning of RSS and Tagging see below *Appendix B – Selected Glossary of Terms*

[68] The *ENIAC* (or Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator) was built between 1943 and 1945 by two scholars at the University of Pennsylvania - Professor John Mauchly and a young graduate student J. Presper Eckert. It took

Figure 29 - Dell's Inspiron Mini 9[70]	Figure 30 - Apple iPhone 2009[71]

Increasingly, processes of miniaturization and standardization have produced new complex and versatile machines that can serve at the same time as mobile phones, computers, pagers, fax machines, televisions, Satellite Global Positioning System with updated travel maps, and much more. The best examples of such highly technological hybrids are the so-called *smart phones* like Apple's *iPhone* (Fig. 30) or the *Blackberry*.

The Internet has followed a similar pattern of development. It originated from a state-founded research, for it was a project financially too risky and imaginatively too innovative for any private organization to take the full responsibility to develop the network. The State, after all, proved to be the perfect sponsor for that kind of project. It provided the funds and let the people working on the Arpanet relatively free from bureaucratic constraints. The relaxed approach of the bureaucrats was an asset for the network: it helped build an ideal environment for research where the many scientists involved in the project were free to follow their own initiative and push their own creativity beyond conventional limits, towards uncharted territories. In those,

up a whole room of more than 1500 square feet. Source : http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/mauchly/jwm0-1.html

[69] The *Illiac II*, introduced in 1963, it was capable of 500.000 operations per seconds (Petersen, 2002: 464)

[70] Source: Apple.com

[71] Source: Internet. Retrieved 20 November 2008 from http://www.linuxdevices.com/news/NS9975696819.html

early stages, in the Seventies, the Internet Galaxy was characterised by a spirit of free circulation that facilitated the interaction between the many members that composed its heterogeneous community. Yet, that was a closed community for computer scientists. The majority of the world was unaware of the network. During the last four decades, especially since its privatization and the invention of the Web in the early Nineties, leveraging on the generative elements of its underlying technology, that original network has evolved greatly. It is now a global space where more than a billion of people across many borders and cultures interact with each other, learn, work, and have fun (see Fig. 31; Fig. 32).

Figure 31 - Internet Users by Region (in Mil.)

Figure 32 - Internet Usage by Region (in percent)[72]

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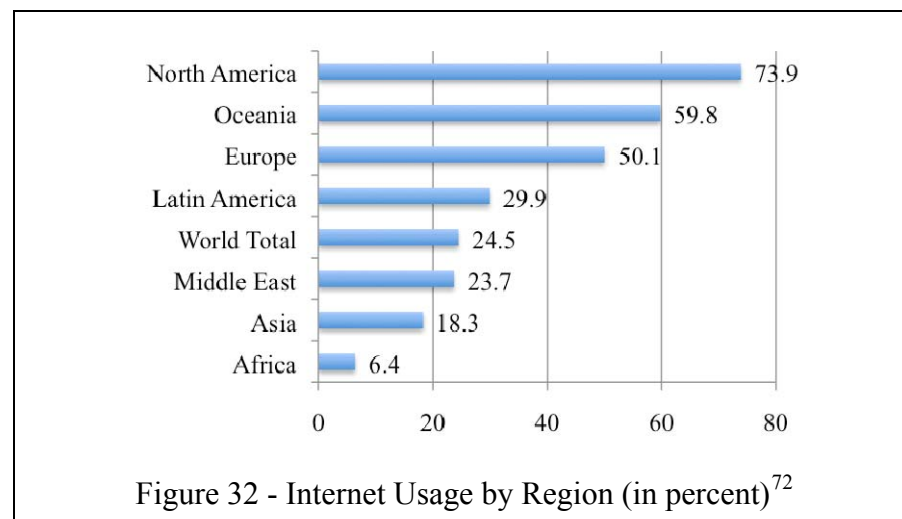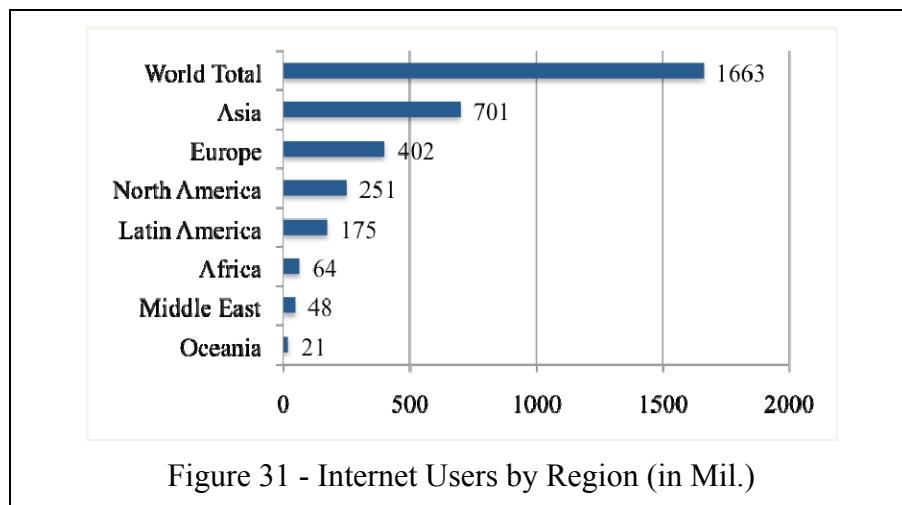
[72] Statistics fro both graphs are updated to 30 June 2009. Retrieved from Internet World Stats, http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm

Interactivity is the key-word in this new public sphere. Computers, ideally, as it was already clear from Joseph Licklider's theories on *human-computer* symbiosis in the early Sixties, should simplify and help the interaction among humans. Interaction, however, is not just about the ability to find information on the Web or to exchange it with peers; but most importantly, it is about creating that information together with others. In this case, *being interactive* indicates the ability to be creative; that is, as Licklider hoped, to *think* in ways that no human being has ever thought before. From this perspective, interactivity 'is the process of making things or solving problems together. If interactivity is not just sitting here passively in front of a display screen, then intercreativity is not just sitting there in front of something "interactive".' (Berners-Lee, 1999: 182)

In the last two decades, the Web has increasingly developed towards this direction. The consequences of this process of transformation, this study argues, have profound political implications. The remaining chapters of the dissertation will probe the extent of such political implications by looking at the relationship between Internet and politics from two opposite perspectives: the first considers the rising importance of the Internet Galaxy within the dynamics of everyday life as a new-found possibility for governments worldwide to increase their power of control over their citizens. As we will see in chapter four and five, new technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for authorities to collect data on everyone using the Galaxy. This is certainly an important element of government's power. The second perspective however challenges that claim and argues that by entering this new communication galaxy traditional power-holders, like governments' authorities, are irreversibly weakened. Such weakness has chronic damaging effects on the quality of their power. The last five chapters of the dissertation show that the distributive nature of the Internet's structure, the high-degree of interactivity of Web 2.0 applications, and the new ability of monitorial citizens' to dispense with proxies by using this Galaxy increasingly facilitate actions of resistance to power that were unthinkable only few years ago. The Galaxy creates the basis for a major paradigm shift in the inner dynamics of traditional power relationships. *Time Magazine's YOU*, the new generation of explorers that I

called *Jon Barger's offspring*, increasingly recognise the Web as a particular sphere of social interaction where power relationships follow dynamics that differ radically from those that enable power in traditional organizational settings; the monitorial citizens of the twenty-first century understand that, contrary to those traditional settings, within the Internet Galaxy power holders can be scrutinised, questioned, and challenged to a degree that has no precedent in history. They also understand that, although the technological design behind the Web is important, it is the people who use it that represent its most important asset. The actions these people take can quickly become a carrier of profound political change.

Chapter 4 - State-power in the age of the Internet: the case of the People's Republic of China

"Technology will make it increasingly difficult for the state to control the information its people receive. ... The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip."

Ronald Reagan, speech at London's Guildhall, 14 June 1989

'*Now, there's no question China has been trying to crack down on the Internet -- good luck. (Laughter.) That's sort of like trying to nail Jello to the wall. (Laughter.)*'

Bill Clinton, Washington, DC, 8 March 2000

In 1917 the delegations of Russia and Germany met at Brest-Litovsk (Belarus) to discuss Russia's exit from World War I. During the talks, Leon Trotsky, the leader of the Russian delegation, defended the Bolshevik regime's use of violence to seize power, by arguing that 'every state is funded upon force' (quoted in Weber, 1991b: 78). The use of violence has always been a characteristic element of the exercise of power of the political organization called State or of the complex set of institutions that forms it. In line with Trotsky's argument, the German sociologist Max Weber defined the State as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate

use of physical force [*Gewaltsamkeit*] within a given territory' (Weber, 1991b: 78), the opposite is instead anarchy. Violence, however, is the last resource. To exercise, to maintain, and to protect power States can rely on other and more sophisticated techniques.

In this chapter and the next, I focus on how those techniques employed by States to maintain and protect power evolve in the Internet Galaxy.

An independent Cyberspace?

In 1996, John Perry Barlow, a former lyricist of the Sixties rock band *The Grateful Dead*, and a co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation - a non-profit organization that champions issues such as free speech, privacy, innovation, and consumer rights for Internet users [73] - circulated an email message among his friends and acquaintances. Paying homage to Thomas Jefferson, he titled the message *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* (Barlow, 2001: 27-30). The text was Barlow's response to the *Communications Decency Act* (CDA), an attempt by the American President Bill Clinton and his administration to censor the free circulation on the Internet of any material depicting or describing 'sexual or excretory activities or organs in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards' (Telecommunications Act, 1996: 95).

Given the structural openness of the Internet during the Nineties, it was in practice impossible to protect minors from being exposed to such *indecent* material. For Clinton and his administration the only possible way seemed to impose a wide ban on all of the offensive content available on the Internet, except for that material offered by sites only accessible via credit-card age verification procedures. Given its intentions, the CDA represented an open threat to the very essence of the Internet: free speech (Goldsmith and Wu, 2006: 19-20). In 1996 free content represented the almost totality of the information available online, and free access to that content was recognised as one of the

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[73] The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) website: http://www.eff.org

new medium's defining elements. But the CDA had a broad and dangerous understanding of what was to be considered *indecent material*. The Act considered illegal to view websites dedicated to under-age pornography as well as make 'punishable by a US$ 250.000 dollars [fine] to say *shit* online.' To discuss openly issues relating to abortion, or any bodily function, was potentially illegal unless it was done in strict clinical terms (Barlow, 2001: 27).

The widespread echo produced by Barlow's *declaration* turned *Cyberspace* – a neologism invented by the science-fiction writer William Gibson (1984) - into the descriptive term of what until then had been nameless: the electronic space produced by computers linked in a network. The word itself indicates a space which is *navigable*. It derives from the greek term *kyber* which means *to navigate* (Dodge and Kitchin, 2001: 1). According to the original definition appeared in Gibson's celebrated science-fiction novel, *Neuromancer*, Cyberspace is a 'consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts'. Gibson refers to it as 'a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system'. It is made of 'unthinkable complexity'; of 'lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding'. (Gibson, 1984: 51)

In his own reading of the meaning of Cyberspace, Barlow went further than Gibson's imaginative narrative, he raised the concept up to a new sphere of political significance. For Barlow Cyberspace was 'the new home of Mind' whose defining element was its freedom from any form of sovereign power, event that of Governments. As he wrote:

'We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.' (Barlow, 2001: 28)

Cyberspace, in Barlow's view was 'an act of nature' which expanded through the 'collective actions' of its cybercitizens. It was an ideal place, a public sphere, where no privilege or prejudice existed; where traditional sources of power (such economy, military force, or birth) had no relevance. It was a place where all were equals. For these reasons, within Cyberspace 'anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity.' (Barlow, 2001: 29)

In response to what he regarded as new 'increasingly hostile and colonial measures' (Barlow, 2001: 30), new laws such as the CDA that attempted to limit the freedom of expression on the Internet, Barlow declared Cyberspace independent from any sovereign power. Within that independent space 'whatever the human mind may create can be reproduced and distributed infinitely at no cost' (Barlow, 2001: 30), therefore the creativity of mind was free, subject to no laws or power.

Boldly addressing the governments of the world, Barlow wrote: 'We must declare our virtual selves immune to your sovereignty, even as we continue to consent to your rule over our bodies. We will spread ourselves across the Planet so that no one can arrest our thoughts. We will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before.' (Barlow, 2001: 30)

Quickly, the echo of Barlow's cry gained momentum, and his *Declaration* was widely distributed and discussed via the Internet. The CDA was eventually declared unconstitutional by several US courts, lastly in 1997 by the US Supreme Court (ACLU vs. Reno)[74]. In the years that followed, Barlow's declaration became the epitome of every battle against any attempt of exploitation of the Internet for business or political aims. Over a decade later,

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[74] The ACLU vs. Reno refers to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) court challenging of the CDA. After the CDA was signed into Law, Barlow and his associates at the Electronic Frontier Foundation joined forces to take the issue of the CDA into a court of Law. The litigation rapidly escalated to the US Supreme Court and on June 26, 1997, the Supreme Court ruled (7 to 2) that the CDA was unconstitutional, and it did hinder freedom of speech. (See Goldsmith and Wu, 2006: 20-22, and Godwin, 2003)

however, it is clear that Barlow's view was rather naïve, a personal reflection upon one's own experience filled with a stream of evidences-free assumptions, rather than an 'objective reality' (Goldsmith and Wu, 2006: 13). With hindsight, Barlow's words could be read as a partial misinterpretation of the mere facts. The reality is in fact rather different. The Internet Galaxy is much more complex than Barlow's Cyberspace. It has never been the reign of a new civilization of the mind, it is first and foremost a complex social space interwoven with a multiplicity of different interests and a heterogeneity of numerous agents. It is and it was never the act of nature, but as chapter two and three demonstrated, the Internet Galaxy is the result of a complex and long process of trials and errors. Initiated and rooted into the efforts of many, it is a process that stretches over time and space; across many geographical and political boundaries. Not least, the Internet Galaxy is the result of governments' investment.

Contrary to what Barlow believed, the Internet Galaxy is a space subject to sovereign power (Zittrain, 2008; Goldsmith and Wu, 2006). Yet, it is important remembering here, the exercise and influence of that sovereign power is qualitatively different from that of the pre-Internet age; that variation of quality changes drastically the relationship of power between governments and citizens.

In the last fifteen years many laws have been passed and new tools have been invented to allow authorities to sift through the increasingly large amount of data that is constantly exchanged by the countless number of nodes that shape the galaxy. Using powerful computers and software, and (in some cases, thanks to the help provided by private Internet companies), states' authorities can nowadays easily (and simultaneously) scan Web traffic; emails texts; video and still images exchanged by users[75]. The ubiquitous use of technology in the

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[75] It is worth noting here that to a certain extent, such power of sifting through the lives of Internet users is not exclusive to the State's authorities. Private companies have access to similar tools, although their scanning range (often for legal reasons) is limited in comparison with that of Governments. After all, most of the Internet Galaxy is made of private networks. Nevertheless for reasons of coherence with our theoretical framework, this dissertation deals with the scanning power of private companies only when that collection of

spheres of censorship and control is now a permanent feature of authoritarian states' regimes such as the People's Republic of China (PRC) or Singapore (Reporters Without Borders, 2004). Nevertheless, well-established democracies, such as the United Kingdom (UK) or the USA, are not immune from the temptation to use the Internet (combined with the whole gamut of new information technologies) for political and social control (Deibert *et al.* 2008). Increasingly, critics refer to those states as advanced surveillance societies (see Fig. 33). Where with the term surveillance they indicate a 'focused, systematic, and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction.' (Lyon, 2007: 14) Surveillance mainly focuses on individuals; and it is never the result of random or occasional strategies of control. It relies on certain techniques and protocols. It is also routine because it is part of everyday life in 'all societies that depend on bureaucratic administration and some kinds of information technology.' (Lyon, 2007: 14) The use of information technologies is instrumental in increasing the surveillance range of the controllers.

In this chapter and the next I follow and expand that line of argument. The two chapters respectively deal mainly with China and Britain [76] and their relationship with digital technologies in matters of censorship and control. The two cases are paradigmatic of the differences between an authoritarian-based surveillance system and one rooted in the rule of law and democracy. The case of Britain or other well-established democracies cannot easily be compared to that of authoritarian states like China, which more openly try to exploit new technologies as a system of total social control and censorship. But the very presence in such longstanding democracies of independent institutions and the hard work of civil society organizations means that control there must operate in a more subtle and invisible way than in many authoritarian regimes.

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information is directly related to the exercise of power of governments' authorities.

[76] The term Britain is here used as shorthand for either the United Kingdom of Great Britain or the UK.
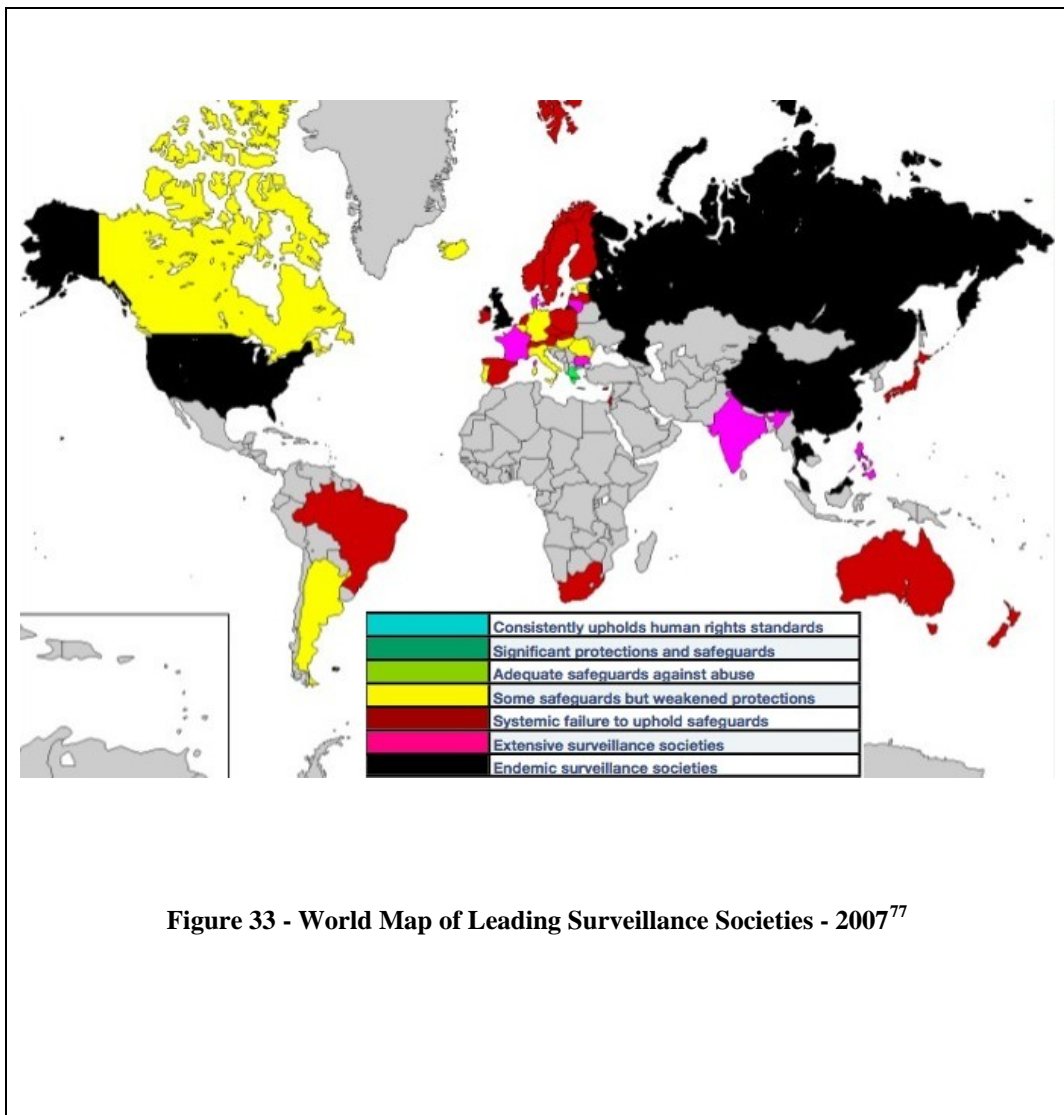
Figure 33 - World Map of Leading Surveillance Societies - 2007[77]

China and the Web

In his 1949 book *Ninety-eighty-four*, George Orwell - inspired by Stalin's Soviet Union - depicts a dystopian totalitarian state (Oceania) in which everyone is under constant surveillance. Orwell's world is one where technology plays an important role in the surveillance mechanism of the state: citizens are visible in any given moment to the ever-present eye (video cameras) of Big Brother, the unfathomable leader of the Party that rules over Oceania. Big Brother is everywhere iconographically represented (in images, posters,

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[77] Source: Adapted from The Privacy & Human Rights Report, 2007

and videos) as 'the blackmoustachio'd face gazed down from every commanding corner' (Orwell, 1949: 2) under which one can read the threatening caption 'Big Brother is watching you'.

Since its first publication many of the terms used by Orwell in the book have entered the common language. The term Big Brother in particular has become a shorthand term for excessive state surveillance. During the last fifteen years, the increased use of technology in the spheres of censorship and control by several authoritarian regimes has led many to denounce the Internet Galaxy as a new, digital version of Orwell's Big Brother. The People's Republic of China is the most prominent example of this trend (Reporters Without Borders, 2004). However, if on the one hand the Internet serves the Chinese government as an important tool for propaganda, censorship, and political control. On the other hand it exposes the Party to an unforeseen degree of weakness that ultimately can favour those citizens attempting to resist its power (see discussion in Chapter six).

The Chinese people and the Web

Chinese relationship with the Internet dates back to the late Eighties. On September 20, 1987, Professor Quian Tianbai sent the first e-mail out from China. The text of the message read: 'Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world' (CNNIC, 2003). The recipient was Professor Werner Zorn of Karlsruhe University in Germany. Since then the growth of the Internet in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been exponential, and the country is now a recognised dominant presence in the Internet Galaxy. China has the largest number of active Internet users in the world. According to a report published by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), in June 2008, the Chinese online were over 250 million (CNNIC, 2008), nearly 30 million more than the USA, the second in the list for number of Internet users (Nielsen Online, 2008). The number of Chinese using the Web has grown beyond comparison in the last decade (Fig. 34). Between 2007 and 2008, there were more than 90 million new users (CNNIC, 2008), and analysts now predict

that the total number will be approaching the 500 million mark by 2012 (BBC News, 2008).

Figure 34 - Internet Users in China[78]
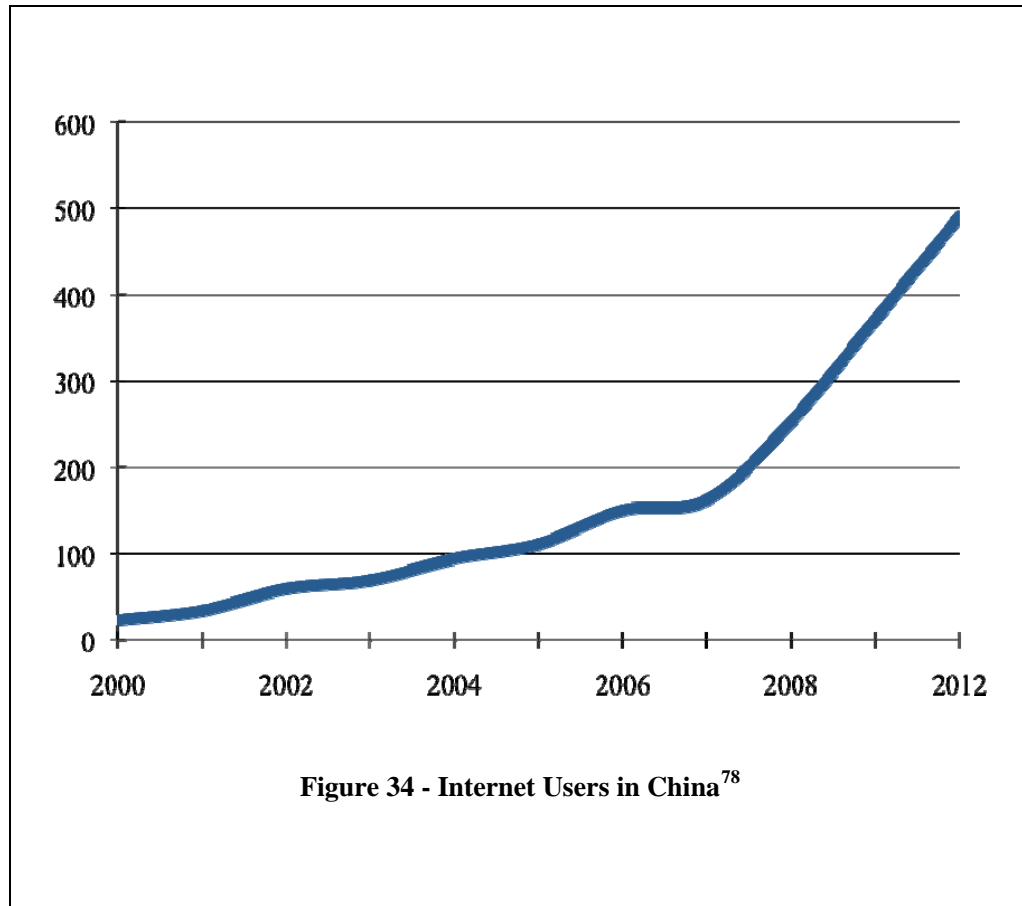
More importantly, contrary to what happens in other regions of the world, the majority of these users (84 percent) access the Internet via fast connection (broadband), and more than 74% has Internet at home (Fig. 35). Communication media play an important role in the life of Chinese people, especially for those living in urban areas. Not only the Internet, but also mobile phones' usage is on the rise: there are almost 600 million users in the country and over 12 % of these use their cell phones to access the Web. On average, the Chinese users spend more than 19 hours per week online (CNNIC, 2008), that is a number of hours that equals that of the Americans (Nielsen Online, 2008).

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[78] Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) http://www.cnnic.net.cn/en/index/index.htm

But while only 39% of American users access the Web to check news, in China that number is doubled. In a country in which all mainstream media are controlled by the State (Easerey, 2006; Qinglian, 2008), more than 80% of the Chinese Internet users turn to the Web for more reliable News; and over 43% of these users have a blog or a webpage (CNNIC, 2008).
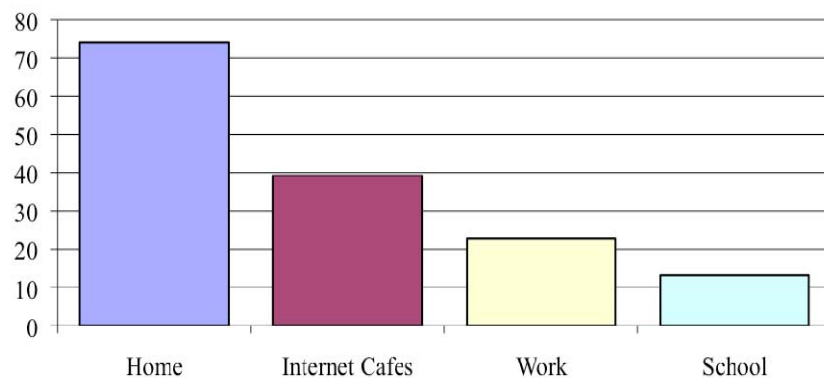
Figure 35 - Places of access to the Internet in %[79]

The government and the Web

Overall, the impressive growth of the Chinese Internet is part of a long-term, state-driven project that with the help of information technology aims at the complete renewal of the economy and bureaucracy of the country (Kalathil and Boas, 2003: 14). It is also a clear attempt to give the government of Beijing a better infrastructure for controlling the administrative processes of both near and distant provinces (Cartledge and Lovelock, 1999). But the harnessing of information technology, and especially the Internet, represents for the party leadership more than a simple economic booster. The Web has become an important medium for propaganda and censorship, a powerful ally that helps

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[79] Source: CNNIC, 2008.

the party to gain greater and steadier support from the Chinese people. Websites such as *www.xinhuanet.com* (the governmental news agency), and *www.chinadaily.com.cn* (the online version of China Daily), which serve millions of users every day, are perfect examples of how the Chinese authorities use the net for shaping public opinion: the content of these websites is entirely controlled by the Communist Party (Reporters Without Borders, 2004). Yet, for the Chinese government rising users' figures mean new unexpected challenges to its firm grip on political power (Kalathil and Boas, 2003: 25-26).

The Internet Galaxy is an ideal space to escape control and disseminate uncensored information. In a country where an increasing number of users (80%) browse the Web in search of news, that can represent a real challenge to the government's tight control of the media. Authorities, however, seem more concerned by the social impact that the Internet has on Chinese society. If not firmly controlled, this galaxy can be used to mobilise citizens to challenge openly the State' policies. The Internet has the potential to impact negatively the social stability of the country. In January 2007, speaking to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, President Hu Jintao stated clearly that coping with the Internet is a matter of crucial importance for the country because what happens in that galaxy 'affects the development of socialist culture, the security of information, and the stability of the state'. He therefore urged Chinese officials 'at all levels' to work hard in improving all those mechanisms (i.e.: rules and technology) that help the government to spread *healthy information*, control Web content and monitor Internet activities (China View, 2007)

To defend its social stability from the challenges that emerge from the Internet Galaxy, since the late Nineties, the government of Beijing has adopted two main strategies of control that mimic and update the strategies used by Orwell's Big Brother: the authorities monitor the information flow of the Internet and actively promote self-censorship among users (Dieter *et al.*, 2008: 264). To put these strategies in practise the Government relies on four cardinal elements: a state-of-the-art technological infrastructure, known as the Golden

Shield; a growing number of laws that regulate what the users can and cannot do on the Web; a wide range of punitive actions for those who break the rules (these can range from considerable monetary fines to several years of imprisonment); the cooperation of international companies operating in China.

The Golden Shield

Since 1998, Chinese authorities have been working on a long-term project called the *Golden Shied*. This is a state-of-the-art electronic surveillance system primarily sustained by an advanced Internet filtering technology known as the Great Firewall of China - this is a nation-wide electronic barrier that filters and monitors Web traffic. All Internet traffic in and out of the Chinese Internet must pass through a limited number of check-points (gateways) controlled by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) through sophisticated network computers (routers) [80]. The routers have the crucial task to 'route' data packages sent through the network to their desired destination; in principle, they have the ability to control the whole traffic of data (in and out) from the Chinese Internet. Another important element of the Golden Shield is a powerful database software that combines, relates, and analyses any available digital data. Tapping into existing surveillance and communication networks (such as CCTV, the Web, Mobile phones) through this database the Chinese authorities can analyse phone conversations; images; credit card records; welfare and health data (Reporters Without Frontiers, 2008; Bambauer, 2006; Walton, 2001). The Golden Shield, however, is not only about technology, but it is also about people. To work properly, the shield relies on an estimated force of over 40 thousand police agents that patrol and polish the Web, day and night (Mooney, 2004).

Overall, the Golden Shield is a formidable tool for filtering websites, collecting information on Web traffic (who is accessing what and when), email texts and

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[80] According to the CNNIC statistics all traffic coming from the Global Internet is filtered through a backbone of only eight licensed Internet access networks, and only then the data is forwarded to the regional ISPs, and hence to the end-user (CNNIC, 2008: 29)

phone conversations. It enhances greatly the power of authorities to block the flow of undesired information and to catch those who spread it. So, to censor data from the Chinese Internet, authorities provide a list of banned keywords and websites to the Internet Service Providers, which then *programme* their routers to filter out any information related to those topics. All the terms associated with democracy, freedom, Tibet, and the students' protest of Tiananmen Square (4 June 1989) are, for example, blacked out from Internet search engines results when accessed from within China: 'the sites even spot homonyms and synonyms. There are now around 400 to 500 banned key words relating to the events of 4 June 1989' (Reporters Without Frontiers, 2008). More importantly, the system acts swiftly and subtly. Censorship is never announced to the user openly. When a user attempts to access a website likely to be on the blocked list (for instance http://www.pressoftibet.com, the website of the newspaper of the Tibetan community in exile, *Potala Post*), the user never gets an explicit message saying 'Blocked by the Chinese Authorities'. Instead, the computer screen will show a common error message (i.e.: 'site not found'). The list of censored website is never fixed, some sites are in fact accessible during certain days and then blocked some other time – the *BBC* and *The New York Times* website have often experienced such type of censorship (OpenNet Initiative, 2005). Therefore, unless the user has direct access to the list of blocked websites, he/she remains uncertain of whether or not he/she has experienced government censorship (Goldsmith and Wu, 2006: 94)

Legal regulation of the Web

Since 1994, the year of the first Chinese connection to the Web, alongside the development of new technological tools to control the Internet, Chinese authorities have introduced a series of restrictive rules that make the life of the average Internet user as regulated as possible. Between 1994 and September 2005 the government had passed 38 of these regulations to control the Web (Liu, 2005). For the international outcry provoked and the extent of the restrictions enacted, the most interesting example of these many rules are the *Provisions on the Administration of Internet News Information Services*.

Issued in September 2005 by the State Council Information Office (SCIO) and the Ministry of Information Industry, the *Provisions* prescribe to the Chinese Internet users what kind of content they should not read, publish, or distribute. In practice, these provisions limited the freedom of news organisations, and of both individuals and groups to publish online any news-related content. Any Internet-based publishing tool (such websites, blogs, or Internet forums) and even mobile phones text messaging systems are covered by these regulations.

As article 3 of the Provisions states: 'When engaging in Internet news information services, Internet news information service units shall […] adhere to a correct guidance for public opinion and safeguard national and public interests'. Moreover, Internet news information service providers are expressively encouraged 'to disseminate healthy and civilized news information favorable to enhancing the quality of the nation , driving economic development and promoting social progress'. (Ministry of Information Industry, 2005)

The most criticized part of the 2005 Provisions was Article 19, or as Reporters Without Borders dubbed it, the '11 commandments of the Chinese Internet' (Reporters Without Borders, 2005). These *commandments* (see below Table 2) forbid any news provider to publish online content unless the content has appeared already in authorized official media outlets. In order to publish news-content, websites (even blogs) should obtain an Internet news content service license from the State Council Information Office (SCIO). The license however is granted seldom and to a select group of Internet services providers. For instance, *Baidu*, one of the leading Chinese search engines obtained the license only at the end 2006, and it was the first search engine to receive it (Qiang, 2007).

Punishment

Both individuals and companies are liable for their conduct. If caught breaking these rules, depending on the gravity of their felonies, the offenders may incur

first in an official warning, then fines and eventually imprisonment. In the case of the *11 commandments*, the publishing of non-authorized independently gathered or edited information is subject to fines between 5,000 to 30,000 yuan (about US$600 to US$3,700), and may result in the closure of the Web site (Ministry of Information Industry, 2005: Art. 27 and Art. 28).

Table 2 - The 11 Commandments for the Chinese Internet	
In details, the rules prescribed that news published on the Internet shall not contain content that:	
1	Violates the basic principles of the Chinese constitution
2	Endangers national security, leaks national secrets, seeks to overthrow the government, endangers the unification of the country
3	Destroys the country's reputation and benefits
4	Arouses national feelings of hatred, racism, and endangers racial unification
5	Violates national policies on religion, promotes the propaganda of sects and superstition
6	Diffuses rumours, endangers public order and creates social uncertainty
7	Diffuses information that is pornographic, violent, terrorist or linked to gambling
8	Libels or harms people's reputation, violates people's legal rights
9	Includes illegal information bounded by law and administrative rules
10	It is forbidden to encourage illegal gatherings, strikes, etc to create public disorder
11	It is forbidden to organise activities under illegal social associations or organizations

Thanks to the technological infrastructure of the Golden Schield, Internet companies who do not adhere to the Government's policies may find themselves barred from the Chinese portion of the Web. In September 2002, for a whole week access from Mainland China to Google.com, the website of the world leading Internet search engine, was entirely blocked. The reason for

that punishment was that searches run through Google.com returned content not in line with Beijing's policies (Guardian, 2002).

As 39% of Chinese users browse the Web from Internet cafes (see Fig. 35 – above), these are also favourite targets of the government's action of repression. Since 2002, by law, Cybercafés' owners are responsible for their customers' Internet activity: they cannot allow minors to enter the premises; they are required to equip their computers with adequate software to filter Web content and monitor Internet usage. They are also required to keep on record (for up to sixty days) their customers' identity and Web activity logs (State Council, 2002: Art. 19, 21, 23). If the owners do not comply with the Party's directives and any of their customers breaks through the firewall, the owners risk losing their whole business. So to adhere to the Government's provisions, swipe cards, for example, have been linked to users' ID cards. One café manager showed to a reporter of the International Herald Tribune, 'a back room where a police-linked computer, connected to four spy cameras, monitored users.' (Mooney, 2004)

In the past decade many real, or often simply suspected, dissidents have been caught in the Web of the Chinese Internet police. Their crimes range from circulating emails with alleged top-secret information, to posting messages on Web forums that criticise Beijing's policy; from viewing forbidden websites, to using the Web to advocate the need for a more open and democratic society. On May 28, 2003, four bloggers (Jin Haike, Xu Wei, Yang Zili and Zhang Honghai) were sentenced to eight years in jail for attempting to 'subvert state power'[81]. The four were found guilty of creating an informal discussion group online (they called it: *New Youth Study Group*) and discuss China's future progress and prosper (Howard and WIA Report, 2008). In April 2005, Shi Tao, a journalist of the daily *Dangdai Shang Bao* (Contemporary Trade News) in Hong Kong, was sentenced to ten years in prison when he was found guilty of spreading censored material through the Internet. In 2005, the case of Shi Tao reached worldwide resonance as his conviction shed light on the important role

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[81] For more background news about the four bloggers see the *Free the New Youth 4* Campaign Website: http://www.newyouth4.org/about/ (Retrieved 10 June 2009)

foreign Internet firms play in the complex Internet control strategy of the Chinese government's (Reporters Without Borders, 2005a).

Foreign help: four different ways

In 2000, the overall volume of online commerce in the world's most populous country amounted only to $US 9.3 billion (Kalathil and Boas, 2003: 34). In 2008, the size of China digital marketplace had increased to over $US 290 billion (Huang, 2008), while the total number of online shoppers was 63 million (CNNIC, 2008: 25). The fast growth of its Internet market – and at large of its overall economy (OECD, 2005) - has turned China into the new promised land for IT firms worldwide. Not surprisingly, in recent years, leading international companies such as the American-based Yahoo!, Google, Microsoft, and eBay have steadily increased their presence in the Chinese market. Yet, notwithstanding their efforts, none of the leading Internet companies investing in China has been able so far to achieve a dominant position in that market. Meg Whitman, former CEO of the world's leading Internet auction company, eBay, talking to Business Week, explained in one sentence how crucial is China for IT firms: 'Whoever wins China, will win the world' (Einhorn, 2005). Trying to change this negative trend, many Internet firms have increased the number of partnerships with local companies (Barboza, 2007). However, partnership is not enough to succeed. Working in China means to comply with the rules set by the authorities in matters of Web censorship and data flow control. So, in order to safeguard their businesses, many companies have adapted their policies to those dictated by Beijing. Their compliance has proven crucial to help the authorities holding a tight grip on the portion of the Internet Galaxy that falls under China's jurisdiction. This foreign help can be analytically divided in four different types: *technological*, *cooperative*, *proactive*, and *self-censored*.

Technological: foreign companies provide the state-of-the-art technology that sustains the Golden Shield. In effect, the Great Firewall of China has been built with American technology (Goldsmith and Wu, 2006: 93). Cisco Systems, the world leading supplier of networking equipment and network management for the Internet, provides the computer gateways that control the few access points

that allow data to enter the Chinese Internet from abroad. Cisco has been accused of being behind a specially tailored technology called *Policenet* that is at the core of the Golden Shield system. Through that technology, remotely, simply by scanning an ID card, Chinese authorities can cross check in real-time the digital records of the majority of the adult population: from Internet surfing history to contribution to websites; from fingerprints, to pictures, to work unit files (Gutmann, 2004: 167-170). Albeit Cisco management has often rebutted the accusations, in 2008 an internal document leaked to reporters before a US Senate hearing on human rights, showed that Cisco engineers considered the Chinese government's tight grip on the Internet an excellent marketing opportunity for their company and expressively sold their equipment to the Chinese government as censorship-enhancing tools (Cisco, 2008).

Cooperative: some private foreign firms cooperatively share information stored in their own databases with the Chinese authorities to identify alleged offenders, even when their action is a plain violation of human rights. In this regard, the case of Mr. Shi Tao surely set a frightening precedent. In April 2005, the Hong Kong based journalist was inflicted a ten-year prison sentence for spreading across the Internet a message from the Beijing government that warned journalists of the 'risks resulting from the return of certain dissidents on the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre' (Reporters Without Borders, 2005a). The government's request intended to muzzle media on the topic of Tiananmen. From the verdict published in September of the same year it emerged that an Internet company, Yahoo! Holdings, played a crucial role in the trial. The California based firm provided to the Chinese prosecutors the crucial information to win the case: that is to say, the account details of the supposedly anonymous email address (huoyan-1989@yahoo.com.cn) responsible for posting the forbidden information on a foreign website, and the IP address linked to both that email account and Shi Tao's computer. From the verdict it appeared clear that without Yahoo!'s cooperative compliance it would have been impossible for the Chinese prosecutors to prove Mr. Shi's wrongdoing and hence convict him. (Reporters Without Borders, 2005a).

Proactive: other companies do not only share information when officially requested, but actively complement the Chinese authorities' surveillance system by proactively filtering data and/or storing users' logs for future references. Google launched in 2006 the Chinese version of its popular search engine (Google.cn). To avoid problems with the authorities, Google's Chinese version filters search results in accordance with the Chinese government's censorship policy (*Associated Press*, 2006). Since then, a common search through Google.cn with the key words 'Falun Gong' (the most renowned Chinese outlawed spiritual movement) returns just over 620 thousand results for the whole Web. In addition, most of the hits are Communist Party propaganda articles that discard Falun Gong as a dangerous cult that makes its followers insane and prone to suicide. The same search run outside Cisco-routed China firewall returns over 4 million pages of all sorts (Morais, 2006).

A more interesting example of such cooperative code of conduct is the *eBay*'s owned Internet Telephone service company *Skype*. Actively seeking to expand its lucrative business in Mainland China, *Skype* has recently partnered with *TOM Online*, a Beijing based leading mobile Internet company. Despite some early but rather mild resistance, to avoid any troubles with the Government, thanks to its Chinese partner's help, Skype has produced a version of its popular software that censors out forbidden phrases from their users' text-chats (Elgin and Einhorn, 2006). But more alarmingly, as a recent study has found out, the software provided by *Tom-Skype* does not only filter and monitor text chats with sensitive keywords (such as Taiwan, Falun Gong, Democracy) but it stores also on publicly accessible computer servers logs and millions of records, including personal data and contact details for any text-chat or telephone calls placed by Skype's users (Villeneuve, 2008).

Self censored: Self-censorship is a common practice among Internet firms operating in China to prevent any trouble with the authorities. Companies routinely monitor Web content on their websites, and often delete it when they believe the content is in contrast with the law – even in the absence of a formal request by the authorities. A well-known Chinese blogger, Zhao Jing saw his blog shut down and removed from Microsoft web-hosting service MSN Space

without any warning or apparent reason. Zhao Jing's *probable* guilt was to openly discuss on the pages of his blog the strike of 100 Journalists of the *Beijing News* in response to the unfair dismissal of the newspaper top editor. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Mr. Zhao protested against Microsoft decision to delete his blog without even consulting him first: 'I didn't even say I supported the strike,' he said. 'This action by Microsoft infringed upon my freedom of speech.' (Barboza and Zeller Jr., 2006)[82].

For many commentators these recurring cases of compliant censorship represent the rising price Western companies are learning (and willing) to pay to increase their portion of the highly desirable Chinese market (Ginsberg, 2005). The complying behaviour of these companies has spurred a series of harsh condemnations worldwide. Not only human rights and advocacy groups, such as *Amnesty International* and *Reporters Without Borders*, have heavily criticised those companies, but the dispute has also reached the US Congress. In February 2006, during a briefing at the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the California Democrat Rep. Tom Lantos, co-chairman of the Caucus, said that companies such as Yahoo!, Google, Cisco, and Microsoft should be ashamed of their actions. 'With all their power and influence, wealth and high visibility, they neglected to commit to the kind of positive action that human rights activists in China take every day […] They caved in to Beijing's demands for the sake of profits, or whatever else they choose to call it.' (Quoted in Broache, 2006).

At a hearing at the US House of Representatives (15 February 2006) many congressional representatives publicly condemned the *foreign policy* of those companies. One of them, the republican congress-man Christopher Smith accused those corporations to help the Chinese government making the Internet 'a malicious tool, a cyber sledgehammer of repression' (quoted in *The Economist*, 2006).

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[82] For more details on blog censorship by companies operating in China see MacKinnon, 2009

Conclusions

In June 1989, few days after the violent crackdown of the Chinese students' demonstration in Tiananmen square, the former US President Ronald Reagan, delivering a speech in London, praised communication technologies for the formidable impact they have in eroding the foundations of totalitarian regimes: 'technology will make it increasingly difficult for the state to control the information its people receive' and in due course, Reagan argued, 'the Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip.' (*LA Times*, 1989: 10)

A decade later, in March 2000, an other US President, Bill Clinton commenting on China's growing efforts to control the Internet, remarked: 'Now, there's no question China has been trying to crack down on the Internet -- good luck'. He laughed. 'That's sort of like trying to nail Jello to the wall.' (Clinton, 2000)

Ten years more down the line, the Chinese communist party has not yet collapsed under the heavy blows of communication technology and its crackdown on the Internet seems to have been successful enough to nail *a couple of Jello* to the wall. For some critics that is a clear indication that the Presidents' predictions were overly optimistic: at least for a while longer the Party's grip on power will remain strong in China (Goldsmith and Wu, 2006: 87-104; Kalathil and Boas, 2003: 13-42). Furthermore, quite ironically, the authoritarian Internet strategy of control adopted by the Chinese government has been imitated and improved by many democratic countries around the world, as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 - The United Kingdom and the Internet Galaxy

This is a time to push forward, faster and on all fronts: open up the system, break down its monoliths, put the parent and pupil and patient and law-abiding citizen at the centre of it. We have made great progress. Let us learn the lessons of it not so as to rest on present achievements but to take them to a new and higher level in the future.

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, July 2005

In 1787, the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham proposed a new model of prison called *Panopticon* (Bentham, 1995). The name derived from the ancient Greek *pan optikos*, which literally means: all-seeing. Bentham imagined the Panopticon (Fig. 36) as a circular building at the centre of which is a tower whose walls are covered with rows of windows. At each floor, inmates are imprisoned in cells disposed in circle around the tower (Fig. 37). The inspectors instead live in the cabins inside the tower; the head inspector lives on the top floor of the tower. Between the cabins and the cells there is a vacuum, nothing can obstructs the view. During the Seventies, Michel Foucault (1995) used the Panopticon in his work as an important allegory of power relationships in modern societies. More recently, as with Orwell's Big Brother, the rising significance of the Internet Galaxy and the increasing pervasiveness of new technologies of surveillance in the dynamics of everyday life have spawn a new interest in the Panopticon model.
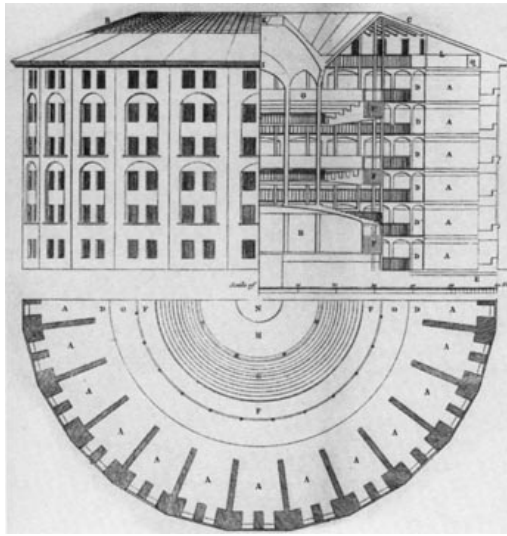
| Figure 36 - The Panopticon[83] | Figure 37 - A prisoner in the Panopticon[84] |
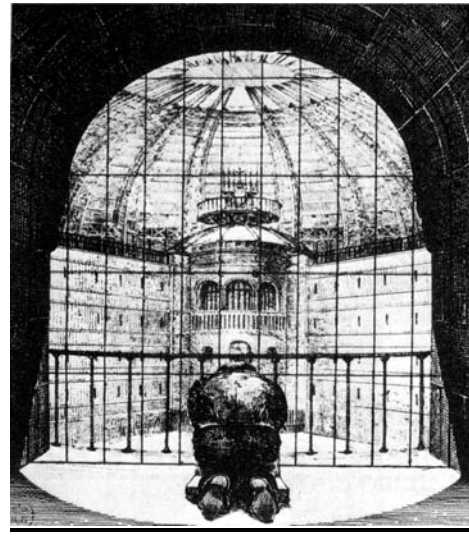
Big Brother and the Panopticon share many common elements. Yet, by contrast with Orwell's allegory of power (originally inspired by Stalin' leadership), the Panopticon is an ideal-type of surveillance scheme that flourishes in democratic capitalist societies (Lyon, 1994: 57-80). In this chapter I probe this line of argument. In the first part of the chapter I use the Panopticon model to explain some of the characteristics of new surveillance strategies adopted in contemporary democratic societies. I focus mainly on the United Kingdom and the ways in which British authorities use new information technologies to control their citizens. I find out that the Panopticon scheme can only grasp an incomplete picture of the complexity of power relationships in the Internet Galaxy. To comprehend fully that complexity, I propose to expand the classical models of surveillance societies with the concept of electronic

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[83] Source: *Panopticon blueprint by Jeremy Bentham, 1791*. Retrieved from the Web 10 July 2009: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Panopticon.jpg

[84] Source: N. Harou-Romain, *Plan for a penitentiary*, 1840. From: Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish. Retrieved from the Web, 10 July 2009. http://christianhubert.com/writings/diagram___abstract1.jpeg

government (that is, the pervasive use of information technologies in the administration of modern bureaucracies). I use this concept as the allegory of a new and subtle form of domination through which the exercise of power becomes almost invisible to the eyes of its subjects; this is a form of power that is often mistaken for the product of the subjects' own free will.

The Panopticon explained

During the Sixties and throughout the Seventies, Foucault challenged the very idea that power is ultimately of repressive nature and that institutions like the State can claim a monopoly on it. By contrast, Foucault argued that power is not state-centred, in fact, it is always a confrontation between forces and therefore all social relationships are based on relationships of power. 'When one speaks of power' he wrote 'people think immediately of a political structure, a government, a dominant social class, the master facing the slave, and so on. That is not at all what I think when I speak of "relationships of power" […] I mean [any] relationship in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of another' (Foucault, 1988a: 11).

These types of relationships are present throughout the entire social body. For this ubiquitous presence of power, Foucault argued that regardless of the nature of the subjects involved in a power relation, power is never the product of a 'consolidated and homogenous domination' (Foucault, 1978: 92). Contrary to more orthodox theories that sees power as being the monopoly of one particular actor, the State for instance (Weber), Foucault's type of power is one that cannot be possessed, but it can only be exercised (Foucault, 1986: 233–234). That is to say that power per se does not exist, but it is only through its exercise that power materialises (Foucault, 1982: 217). Within this framework not only institutions (the State, the prison, the church) play a fundamental role in exercising power, but also individuals become the focus of these relationships, they are active elements of those mechanisms and strategies that ultimately enact power.

What lie beneath power are what Foucault called the *strategies of power*. In modern societies, to secure subjects' compliance, power' strategies employ a vast array of *disciplinary technologies*. Broadly speaking, Foucault identifies those strategies with 'the networks, the mechanism, all those techniques by which [a] decision could not but be taken in the way it was.' (1988: 104) Within the context of what he refers to as disciplinary power, *disciplinary technologies* are meant to help disciplining individuals. In fact, disciplinary power aims at producing an army of *docile people* whose role is to strengthen the efficiency of the social system (Foucault, 1980).

It is important to note that with the term 'discipline' Foucault indicates 'a type of power, a modality for its exercise'. It comprises a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures that can be used either by 'specialized' institutions – for instance prisons – or by those institutions that make use of it as 'an essential instrument for a particular end', such would be schools (for delivering knowledge) or hospitals (to cure patients). More importantly, discipline as a type of power is also used 'by pre-existing authorities' such as families for 'reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power' (Foucault, 1995: 215). Discipline is of course a *technology* also used by administrative and state apparatuses, such as the police. For Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon exemplified the 'architectural figure' of disciplinary power. By reorganizing the space of detention – metaphorically of living -, the Panopticon allows the controllers 'to see constantly and to recognize immediately' (Foucault, 1995:200). Within a system of control that applies the Panopticon model as its architectural matrix, *visibility* becomes a trap.

The Panopticon model spawns an architecture of power that at first sight is very similar to that of Orwell's Big Brother: the efficiency of both types of surveillance system rests upon the dual notion of the visibility of the control mechanism (the inspector's lodge, the eyes of the blackmoustachio'd face of Big Brother) and of the invisibility of the controller (both the warden and big brother are never visible in person). But contrary to Orwell's model, where not everyone is subject to strict control - only the middle and upper classes are, the *proles* instead, the mass that forms the 85% population, go unchecked, because

to use Orwell's words: 'nobody cares what the proles say' (Orwell, 1949: 6) -, the Panopticon extends surveillance to the entire social body, even the wardens are always under the supervision of the chief inspector. More importantly, this type of power relies extensively on individuals: their mental consciousness of being under surveillance triggers self-discipline and compliance with the system. The Panopticon model could not properly function without this strong emphasis on individuals' self discipline.

Overall, according to Foucault's interpretation, the Panopticon is a versatile form of power, a 'figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use' (Foucault, 1995: 2005). That is to say that, for its characteristics, its emphasis on self-discipline, the Panopticon model can be used as the power matrix of a variety of environments in which social control is exercised: it can be a prison, but also a hospital. It can serve to discipline inmates, as much as schoolchildren, workers, insane people. Most importantly it represents an important diagram of power, a 'way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life' of individuals; it is a laboratory of how power is exercised. 'Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed' Foucault wrote 'the panoptic schema may be used' (idem).

Panopticon in the age of the Internet

In the past two decades, notwithstanding Foucault's lack of interest in computer technologies, his diagram of power has inspired many to suggest that new communication technologies, especially the Internet, reproduce the Panopticon model (Brignall, 2002, Lyon, 1998) or actually extend its reach to unprecedented heights (Poster, 1995;). From this perspective, contemporary surveillance technologies coupled with computers and relational databases extend the gaze of the Panopticon beyond its limits. They create a Superpanopticon: this is a system of surveillance that contrary to Bentham's model is one without walls, windows, towers or guards; it is a system where individuals willingly let themselves being the subject of surveillance mechanisms for the benefits that that subjection brings with it (Poster, 1995). Consider from this perspective what has happened in many democratic

countries since the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C. the 11th of September 2001. The U.S. Administration reaction to those attacks – in the sphere of surveillance strategies – can be seen as the first proper attempt to build a superpanopticon that potentially allows the gaze of authorities to see everything, everyone, and everywhere.

In October 2001, shortly after the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the US Congress approved the *USA Patriot Act*, a bill that prescribed 'appropriate actions to develop a national network of electronic crime task forces [...] throughout the United States.' (US Congress, 2001: title I, sec. 105). The Act aimed at providing the US authorities with the legal means for preventing, detecting, and investigating several forms of electronic crimes, including potential terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure and financial payment systems. The act specifies a set of measures to *enhance surveillance procedures*: it extends the authority to intercept 'wire, oral, and electronic communications' relating to 'terrorism' (title II, sec. 201), 'computer fraud and abuse offences' (Sec. 202) and 'to share criminal investigative information' (Sec. 203).

The Patriot Act is only one of many examples of similar legislations adopted in the recent past. It depicts a trend common to many states. Amid a worrying rise in shocking terrorist acts around the world, it is since 2001 that, increasingly, many countries have started a complex process of technological restyling of their systems of control and crime prevention (Lyon, 2003). It is a process that, exploiting advanced information technologies, aims to protect citizens' lives and state sovereignty from worldwide threats such as terrorism, and new forms of crimes such as cyber-fraud. The latest addition to that trend is the European Union's new strategy on cyber-crime, which calls for cross-national cyber patrols and Internet investigation teams to reinforce the EU fight against high-tech crime such spread of malicious programs (like computer viruses), Internet frauds, and identity theft. In practice this new strategy aims to reinforce cooperation between EU Member's states' police departments; and to strengthen their partnership with the private sector by promoting a 'better

knowledge-sharing on investigation methods and trends in cyber crime.' (EU, 2008)

Governments defend this increasing stream of new restrictive laws as a crucial step to protect their citizens' safety and their countries' way of life. 'The Patriot Act has accomplished exactly what it was designed to do,' President Bush remarked in 2006 'It has helped us detect terror cells, disrupt terrorist plots and save American lives' (Gilmore, 2006). Many instead have seen in that process the warning signs that established democratic countries are slowly sleepwalking into surveillance societies. Britain (our main focus in this chapter) is a paradigmatic case of this tendency. Many reports in fact, consider the country as a world leader in practices of technological surveillance (Privacy & Human Rights Report, 2007, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2008; and Murakami Wood, 2006).

British people[85] and the Internet Galaxy

At the end of the 90s, the Labour Party Government led by Prime Minister Tony Blair believed that investing in Information Technology was crucial for the future of Britain (Avery *et al.*, 2007: 14). Since then, as reported by the UK Office for National Statistics (Skentelbery, 2008), the country has witnessed a constant growth in the use of Information Technology both at individual and governmental level. Households' ownership of computers rose from 33 percent in 1998 to 70 percent in 2007. While both the figures of mobile phones and digital receivers have nearly tripled since 1998: mobiles from 27% to 78%, digital receivers from 28% to 77%. The Internet has witnessed an analogous growth and it is now an essential feature in the everyday activities of Britons. From 1998 to 2007, the percentage of households with an Internet connection rose from 10 per cent to 61 per cent (Skentelbery, 2008: 167) - four out five of these users access the Web via broadband connection (Dutton & Helsper, 2007: 8). A recent Survey sponsored by the British Government (Get Safe Online, 2008) has found out that over a third (33%) of the UK users spends between

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[85] With the term British people I refer here to Internet users living in Britain.

one and two hours a day in online activities. 15% instead declared their daily time online ranges from three to four hours. More than half (58%) is confident enough to use the Web to manage their finances (i.e.: Internet banking, or pay bills) and 64% percent shop online regularly. 40% of Britons use social networking site like myspace.org and Facebook.com. That figure is about 70% when we consider only the younger age group (18-24) (Fig. 38)
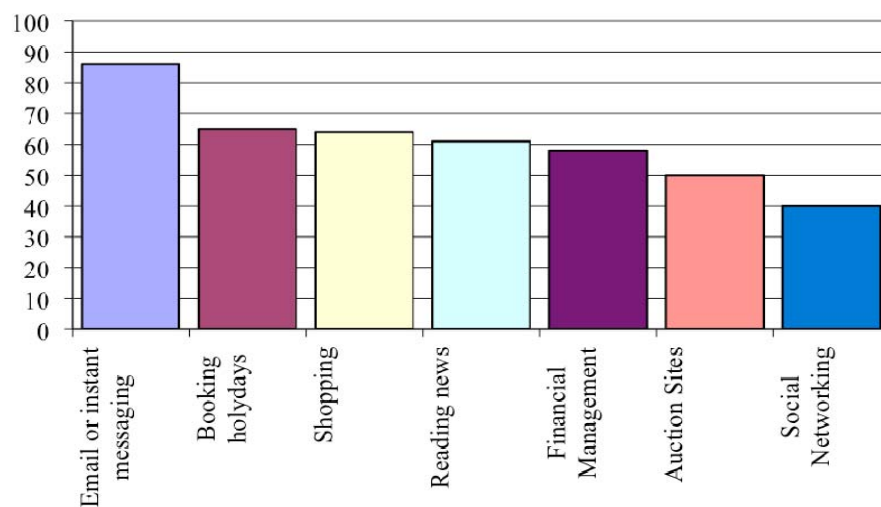
Figure 38 - UK Internet Activities 2008 in %[86]

More importantly, notwithstanding the qualitative differences between Chinese and British broadcasting media, similarly to their Chinese counterpart, increasingly British people explore the Internet Galaxy in search of information. While non-users follow faithfully traditional media such as TV and Radio, Internet users turn 'almost uniquely' to the Internet as their favoured source of information[87]. These figures picture Britain as an advanced technological

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[86] Source: Get Safe Online, 2008

[87] According to the Oxford Internet Institute yearly survey of British Internet users, in 2007, people used the Internet to find information in the following

country where people attitude is generally positive about digital technologies. The Internet especially is considered as an important element of the daily routine. The majority of British users (75%) think that it makes life easier, and that it is an efficient means to gain information (88%) (Dutton & Helsper, 2007: 27).

Britain's super-panopticon

The British government – both at local and national level – routinely employs Information Technology in a wide range of bureaucratic and policing issues. Digital technology and computer networks provide authorities with new tools and options to scrutinize citizens' behaviour (from a nation-wide CCTV network linked to Police's computers, to the national DNA database).

If on the one hand, many have praised the use of technology as an added benefit for citizens. Others, amid a series of recent scandals reported by the British media (ranging from the preservation of DNA records of unconvicted minors to the amount of personal records withhold in Government's databases), have instead denounced the increasing and worrying use of technology in government activities as a potential threat to citizens' right to privacy.

Four different types of technology, in particular, define Britain as a leading surveillance society: the National DNA Database (NDNAD); a nation wide network of Closed Circuits TV (CCTV) cameras; one of the most invasive (not yet rolled out) biometric Identity card scheme, both for British citizens and foreign visitors. And a rising trend in Internet censorship by Internet Service Providers.

The DNA Database

Britain is at the forefront for using DNA tests in crime prevention and population monitoring. It was one of the first countries in the world to build a database in 1995 (*Postnote, 2006*: 1). According to the British law, authorities

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field: planning a trip (54%), finding books (47%), finding the name of a local MP (46%), finding information about taxes (39%) or finding information about local schools (40%) (Dutton & Helsper, 2007: 22-3)

can take DNA samples from anyone arrested or simply detained in police custody in relation with any recordable offence. The offences can range widely from simple binge drinking to murder (GeneWatch, 2006). To take the samples, police do not need the person's consent, unless they require intimate samples, such as blood or semen. The database currently holds DNA samples of over 5 million people (Mery, 2008), that is a number that has soared by more than 60% since 2006 (BBC, 2006). And it represents about 8 percent of the British population (CIA, 2008: UK), far higher than the averages of 1.13% in the European Union (BBC, 2006) and 1.9% in the United States (Nakashima and Hsu, 2008)[88].

Since 2001, DNA samples and profiles are routinely retained for comparisons reasons, regardless of whether or not a suspect is eventually convicted. The government and the police claim that the database has helped reducing crime: data recorded from 2004 to 2005 showed that – nationally - only 26% of the overall number of crimes reported were detected during that period; however, in the cases where DNA crime scene samples were loaded on the National Database, the detection-rate raised up to 40% (*Postnote*, 2006: 2).

Notwithstanding its apparent efficacy in improving police work, the DNA database remains a controversial technology of control. Criticism from the media, political parties, and civil-society organisations escalated in December 2005 when the Conservative Member of Parliament Grant Shapps[89] revealed that the database held over 24,000 DNA person profiles of young people under the age of 18 who had never been charged or cautioned for any offence. (Jones, 2006) That number rose by over 60% in the next two years: as confirmed by the Home Office minister Meg Hillier, by 2008 the national database held the records of over 300 thousand children and of these, nearly 40 thousand genetic

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[88] Enacted by law in 1994, in 2008 the US DNA national database became the largest in the world for number of records stored in its computers (about 5.9 million). Following the UK example, the US authorities started adding people arrested but not convicted. Their aim is to increase the number of DNA samples in the database by one million per year (Nakashima and Hsu, 2006). However, at the state of things, the US database covers less than 2 percent of the US population (CIA, 2008: USA).

[89] See Grant Shapps ' website at http://www.shapps.com/

profiles belonged to minors who had 'not been convicted, cautioned, received a final warning or reprimand and had no charge pending against them' (Drury, 2008)

Many have denounced that the records held in the database are not only used for crime prevention, but more ambiguously, thousands of profiles (including those of innocent people, children, and victim of crimes) are increasingly exploited for controversial genetic research without people's explicit consent. (Barnett, 2006)

CCTV Network

Britain is one of the most wired-watched society in the world, cameras are everywhere. Reportedly, there are over four million CCTV cameras scattered around the country: one every fourteen people (Observer, 2006). Almost everything and every one are watched. Between the mid-90s and the early years of 2000, the UK Home Office spent more than three quarters of its crime prevention budget on improving the CCTV infrastructure (Black, 2003). Britain is certainly not an isolated case in this field. For a long time governments worldwide have used cameras for deterring or detecting crime. However, the advances in technology have turned those cameras in sophisticated tools in the hands of controlling authorities. Thanks to computer networks, database, and powerful software, those cameras are able to function almost automatically: they can catch the image, process it through a powerful database and identify – for instance – a car's registration number plate or someone's face in a crowded street. Many of the newest generation of cameras in fact 'can pan, tilt and zoom, and are networked through the Internet, so video images can be viewed and stored centrally.' (Fountain, H., 2006). That is the case of the British police' Automatic Number Plate Recognition Project (ANBR). Thanks to the ANBR thousands of cameras have been converted to read and record vehicle registration numbers and capture people's movement across the UK. The data are then stored on file for five years (Lewis, 2008). Computers networks enhanced exponentially the impact of surveillance technology in the work of authorities, especially in the aftermath of a crime. In London, after the July, 7, 2005 terrorist attack that targeted the Underground

network, within hours from the blasts, the London Metropolitan Police was able to broadcast through the media still pictures of the alleged suicide bombers caught by the CCTV network minutes before committing the crime (Jordan, 2006). Police agents were able to single out four faces out of many millions and show them to the public at home.

Biometric Identity Cards

In May 2005, the Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair announced its intention to introduce a national identity scheme in Britain. A Biometric Identity Card represents the cornerstone of the scheme: everyone from the age of sixteen and every foreign national working and living in the UK will be required to have such ID. Each card will show the cardholder's photograph, residentail details, and a secure microchip will store the cardholder's biometric data (fingerprints, iris and facial scan – for a detailed list see Table 3 below). These details will be uploaded in a national computer database (the national identity register). In March 2006, the proposed bill was passed into law as the Identity Card Act (Home Office, 2006). However, amid a series of criticisms from the oppositions parties and civil rights groups, the date and details of the full roll-out of the new scheme is currently under review. At the time of writing (August, 2009), Identity card are compulsory only for foreign non EU national citizens entering the UK. By 2011, as confirmed by the UK Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, new biometric passports will enter the National Identity Registry and citizens will be then given a choice to enter the registry with an ID Card. The full roll-out – depending on successful tests and outcome of election – will probably take place around 2017 (Smith, 2008).

The controversy over the DNA database, the CCTV camera network, or more recently about the new Identity Card scheme in Britain represent only some examples of the increasing complex bond that ties the state, technology and citizens in modern, "wired" societies.

Table 3 - The Identity Card Scheme – data stored[90]	
Personal information	i.e. Name, date of birth, gender, address
Identifying information	i.e. Photograph, fingerprint, iris and facial scan
Residential status	i.e. nationality, work permit.
Personal reference numbers	i.e. Identity card number, Insurance number, passport number, the number of any other document that can be used instead of the passport. Number of work permit. Driver license.
Record history	Changes in information provided, date of death.
Registration and ID card history	i.e. Date of every application for registration, particulars of every ID card issued.
Validation information	i.e. Records on information provided with every application
Security information	I.e. a PIN (personal identification number) to be used when making application. Password.
Records of provision of information	i.e. records and particulars of every time information about the individual was shared.

In some circles these tools of controls are seen favourably. For instance the still and blurred images broadcasted by the media after the 7/7/2005 London bombings, are often pointed out as the practical (and positive) justification of the CCTV network (or other similar surveillance mechanisms). In other words, those images represent the living proof of the efficiency and legality of the system. Nevertheless, it is no surprise that in other less aligned circles the views differ radically (Hier *et al*: 2006). In such exercises of information-gathering and information-retention, some commentator see many similarities with the policies of authoritarian states like China. In those strategies of control they see the dark shadow of a developing and sinister British Big-Brother state (BBC, 2005b). The reality however is even more complicated than that.

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[90] Source: BBC, 2006c

Internet censorship in Britain

Britain's relationship with the Internet in terms of censorship and content monitoring, in general, mirrors that of the European Union. Since 1999 the EU has set the legal framework and promoted several action plans to make the Internet a safer place for users (especially children) by establishing a coherent approach among the EU members states in the fight against the proliferation of illegal and harmful content - i.e. child pornography, terrorism related content, spam, Internet frauds, hate-speech, computer viruses (see Table 4 and *Official Journal of the European Union*, 1999, 2005, and 2008).

Table 4 - EU Safer Internet Programme Action Plan[91]	
Actions should address:	
Ensuring public awareness;	Provide users with information about risks related to the use of online technologies, filtering software, services, and about hotlines and self-regulation schemes.
Fighting against illegal content and harmful conduct online;	Particular focus is on online distribution of child sexual abuse material, grooming and cyber-bullying.
Promoting a safer online environment;	Involve stakeholders such as ISPs to to promote a safer online environment and protect children from harmful content. For example, by means of self-regulations, 'child safe' labeling for Web pages.'
Establishing a knowledge base.	Promotion of information-sharing among stakeholders, Member States, and authorities.

[91] Source: *Official Journal of the European Union* (24 December 2008, L 348)

In the EU action plan for a safer Internet, a fundamental role is played by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and their filtering strategies. As for the DNA database and Biometric ID cards scheme, even in this sector the UK is at the forefront in Europe. The British censorship belt around the Internet covers more than 90 percent of home users, and the declared government's target is 100 percent (Coaker, 2006). Unlikely China's national Firewall, the UK system relies on the work of private ISPs that are employed as *voluntary*[92] guardians of the network. Using special filtering software, ISPs are able to monitor and block their users from reaching illegal content (that comprises content related to children sexual abuse, but also, more recently, of racist and obscene nature - See Fig 39) hosted inside and outside the UK.

Figure 39 – Internet Watch Foundation – Web content censored (by category) 2007[93]

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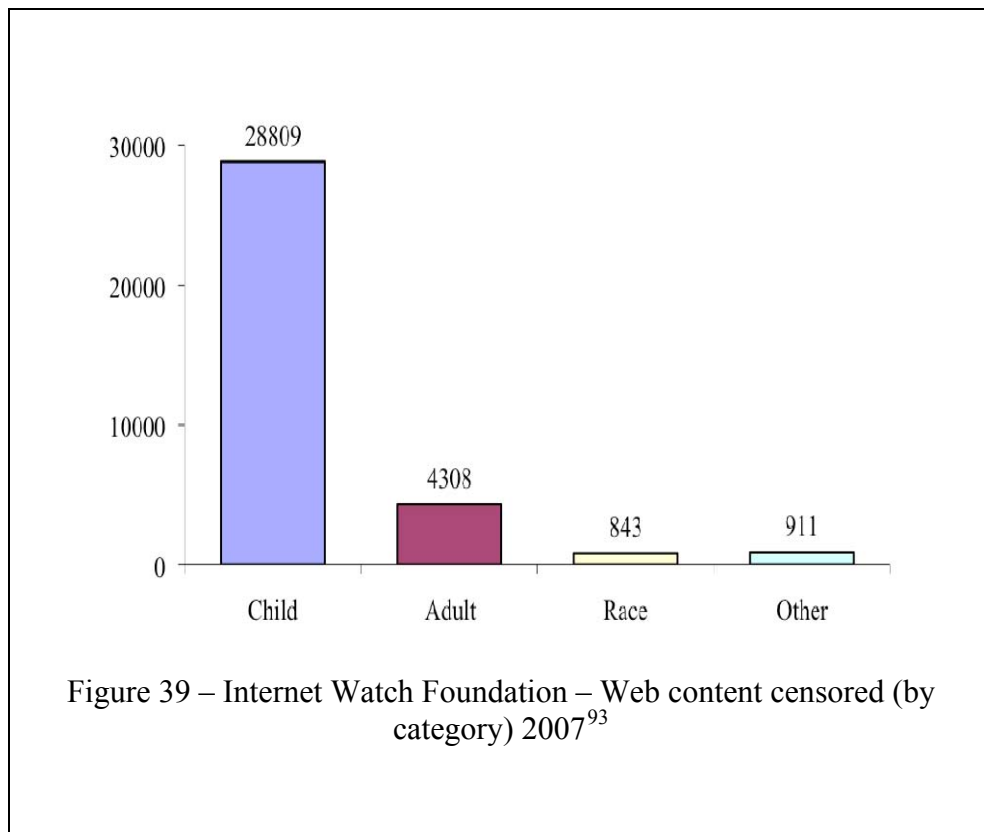
[92] *Voluntary* is in reality an euphemism to say that ISPs have no choice but to comply with the government's will. The following written statement issued in 2006 by Vernon Coaker, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the UK Home Office, is quite enlightening on the matter: from 'ISPs or services, we would expect them to put in place measures within nine months of offering the service to the public. If it appears that we are not going to meet our target [100% homes covered] through co-operation, we will review the options for stopping UK residents accessing websites on the IWF list'. (Coaker, 2006)
[93] Source: IWF, 2008

Of the number of possible ways for censoring content available over the Internet (i.e. barring IP addresses, channeling the entire Web-traffic through a small number of national gateways, like in China; subverting the Domain Name System) the more reliable method is to block access to particular URLs: that system has the advantage (for the user) of excluding only certain parts of a website, and not the whole content available in the hosting server as it happens when blocking IP addresses. This filtering technique, however, is much more expensive. It relies on Web-proxies servers that sit between the user and the content; it is equipped with a software powerful enough to analyze Web data traffic and judge whether or not the content of the 'packets' exchanged is acceptable or not (Clayton, 2005). For instance BT (the largest ISP in the UK[94]) uses Clean-Feed, a successful software designed to maximize the results and lower the costs of filtering Web content. BT has used it since 2004 and it is now widely adopted by other ISPs in many countries (BT, 2008). A crucial role in this filtering strategy is played by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), an independent body that oversees what is considered appropriate content and what is to be filtered out (See Fig. 40 below for a screenshot of the IWF website). The IWF functions as open 'Hotline' for the public to report potentially illegal online content (See screenshot below). Working closely with other NGOs, the police, the government, and ISPs, twice a day the IWF compiles a black list of forbidden websites (between 800 to 1200) and then it passes it on the ISPs (IWF, 2009). As in the case of China's Golden Shield, censorship in the UK works in the background, with the end-user often unaware of it: if the illegal content is hosted by a UK server, the IWF or the authorities contact the relevant ISP and ask for the content to be removed. If instead, as in most of the cases of child pornography, the website is hosted in a server located outside the UK, the URL of that website enters the IWF's blacklist (the list is not public), which is then transmitted to the ISPs working with the IWF. The ISPs update their filtering software (like CleanFeed) with the new list of forbidden URLs and block access to the content hosted on those sites (see the scheme in Fig. 41 below). Any attempt to reach that page by a

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[94] BT accounts for over 30 percent of the UK Broadband market, that is about 4.5 million BT customers. (*BT Press Releases*, 2008)

user will return a typical Internet error: 'Page not found'. The user will never know if he/she has been the subject of censorship.
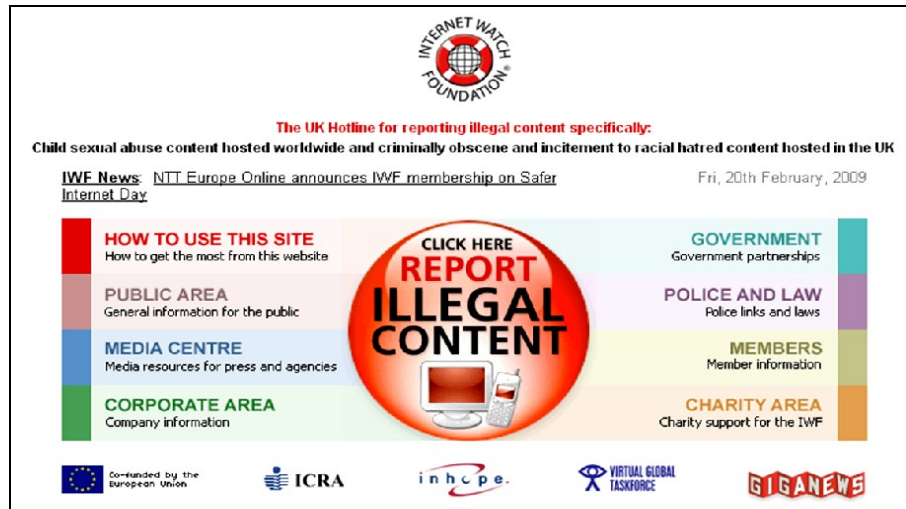
Figure 40 - Screenshot homepage IWF website - Feb 2009[95]
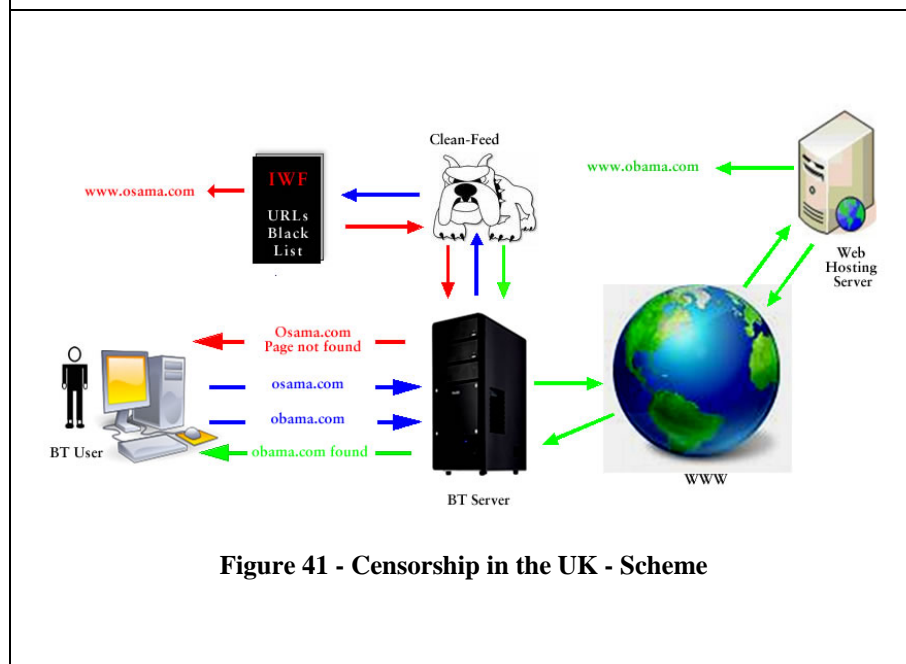
Figure 41 - Censorship in the UK - Scheme

In Britain there is almost unanimity of consensus around the necessity of blocking the proliferation of certain type of content such as images of child pornography; however, on the definition of what accounts as indecent and the

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[95] Source: Internet Watch Foundation website available at http://www.iwf.org.uk/

inclusion in the IWF blacklist of other topics (such as terrorism or hate speech) the debate is quite open. The media and the users quite rightly worry that CleanFeed-type technology enforced by stealth, without a proper public debate, can entrust too much power in the hands of the government and of the ISPs that control access to the Web. At the present time, the two seem poised to have the last word on what the average user is supposed to see or do on the Web (Fisher, 2008). What John Perry Barlow thought to be inadmissible and unthinkable only a decade ago, nowadays it seems a widespread norm: governments routinely attempt to control freedom of speech in the Internet Galaxy, at least for the portion of the network that falls under their jurisdiction.

Criticisms on such practices are well grounded, and much needed. The issue is undoubtedly complicated as shown by a recent case involving the IWF, the cover of a thirty years old music album recorded by the German band Scorpions in 1976, and the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia.

One of the covers of *The Virgin Killer* album reproduced the image of a naked teenage girl. When the album was released in 1976 the cover attracted so much criticism that amid the possible ban of the album from stores, the band decided to replace it with a less controversial design. Wikipedia has a page dedicated to the album and the controversy that it spurred in the 70s[96]. The album cover at the centre of the scandal is reproduced in the encyclopaedia article, which is hosted on the Wikipedia servers in the USA. After consulting with the British authorities, the IWF decided that, because of that image, the Wikipedia page was to be considered a repository of child-pornography. Thus, with a questionable and arbitrary move, the IWF decided to include the page's URL in its blacklist. Thanks to the prompt response of the ISPs to the IWF's request, effectively as many as 95% of British users were denied access to that single Wikipedia article (BBC, 2008a).

Five days later (9 December 2008), after ISPs had been bombarded with complaints by their customers; after receiving an official complaint by the Wikipedia Foundation (which is legally responsible for the Encyclopaedia

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[96] URL of the page is: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_killer (Retrieved: 5 January 2009)

website); and after being widely criticised in the media; after 'careful consideration', the board of the IWF decided to reverse its decision. The statement issued to the press clarified that although the Board considered the image in breach of the UK Protection of Children Act 1978, 'in light of the length of time the image has existed and its wide availability, the decision has been taken to remove this webpage from our list.' (IWF, 2008a)

The *Virgin Killer's* case is a telling example of the risks and limits of Internet censorship in countries ruled democratically. If on the one hand it is technically possible for the government and ISPs to censor the Web; on the other hand attempts to mimic China's authoritarian strategies of control, in countries like Britain, in the long term are bound to fail. Fundamentally, for the democratic nature of the political system that rules the country – that is, for the rule of law, the role of media; the watchful eye of civil society organizations and the action of individual citizens monitoring the web - those authoritarian practices have no guarantee to last more than an election cycle, when no less than a week, as in the Wikipedia case. Moreover, in the eye of the electorate these practices can eventually represent a political stain for both the leader and the party that advocated them in the first place. Therefore adopting such strategies is never without risks.

In such organizational setting, alongside conventional methods of surveillance, such as CCTV networks, DNA databases, or biometric Identity card schemes, governments' exercise of power must rely on more subtle and friendly strategies to exert control over their citizens. In the following section, I use the concept of e-government - that is a process aiming at renovating bureaucracy through the use of digital technologies and computer networks - as the metaphorical representation of this complex strategy of subtle control that characterises democratic surveillance societies like Britain.

The e-Government effect

In his analysis of the dynamics of modern society, Max Weber defined power (*Macth*) as 'the probability that an actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests' (Weber, 1947: 152). That *actor* can be represented by an individual, or a number of individuals seeking 'to realize their own will in communal action' (1991b: 180); or an institution, a government for instance; and that actor's power is the result not simply of its economic condition – as, for instance, claimed by Marx -, but more in depth, the source of that power is rooted into the social order the actor is part of.

Weber's definition focused on one particular type of power, *domination* (*Herrschaft* [97]) understood as *authoritarian power of command*. And with that term, Weber defined all those situations where the *command* of the *ruler* or *rulers* can influence the conduct of one or more others (*the ruled*) and foster obedience as if 'the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake'. But mere obedience however is not a sufficient condition to determine domination; the command in fact must be accepted by the subject as a valid norm in order for domination to be exercised fully (Weber, 1998: 28-29).

A formidable example of such type of domination is represented by bureaucracy: according to Weber (1991: 196-7) the infrastructure of power in modern states is organized bureaucratically, that is according to a set of fixed

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[97] In the original edition of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Economy and Society*) Weber uses the term *Herrschaft* which is difficult to translate in English because, depending on the context, it can assume several meanings: dominion, power, government, governance, leadership, etc. Given such ensemble of possible meanings, in the years, the term has produced some differences in the English translation of Weber's text. Roth and Wittich, the editors of the English edition of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, decided to translate the term alternatively with Authority and Domination, according to the context (Roth and Wittich, 1978: 61, n31). However, some other authors, such as Mommsen (1974) have opted for using only *domination* as most appropriate to render the 'somewhat authoritarian connotation which the word *Herrschaft* has in German, and it is a derivation from the Latin term *dominus* which is a perfect equivalent to the German term *Herrscher* [ruler].' (1974: 72)

principles and a vast workforce of various subordinated officials actively engaged in public office (see Table 5 below).

'Every bureaucracy' remarked Weber 'seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intention secret. Bureaucratic administration always tends to be an administration of secret sessions: in so far as it can, it hides its knowledge and action from criticism.' (Weber, 1991: 233).

In this particular organizational setting, power (as in domination) rests upon what Hannah Arendt called the *rule by Nobody*, that is 'the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible'[98] (Arendt, 1969: 38).

Table 5 – Bureaucracy	
Hierarchy	Bureaus are organized hierarchically from top to bottom, and officials are subject to the authority of their superior.
Tasks	Duties and activities are distributed according to a carefully defined division of tasks
Rules	Laws and administrative rules regulate jurisdictional areas and behaviour, the private preferences of officials are irrelevant.
Decisions	The decisions are taken by applying the carefully defined rules to the particular cases.
Files	The administration and procedures are strictly regulated by "written documents ('the files'), which are preserved in their original or draft form".
Qualifications	Civil servants are recruited based on the skills and qualifications criteria required by the appointment.

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[98] On the basis that tyranny is identified as a form of government that is not held to give account of itself, Arendt argued that the rule by nobody is the most tyrannical form of government 'since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done.' (Arendt, 1969: 38-39)

In the last two decades, the growing importance of the Internet Galaxy (coupled with the increasing digitalization of many of everyday life's activities), has spurred a radical transformation in the modus operandi of modern bureaucracies. As the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair put it, we live in times in which for a government is no longer advisable to lean backward; but instead, the government should 'push forward, faster and on all fronts: open up the system, break down its monoliths, put the parent and pupil and patient and law-abiding citizen at the centre of it. We have made great progress. Let us learn the lessons of it not so as to rest on present achievements but to take them to a new and higher level, in the future.' (Quoted in Cabinet Office, 2005: 2)

Under the pressure of the long-term influence of such transformation, Weber's original framework of bureaucratic power seems in fact to break away from its old self and morph into a new political creature. If for Weber the defining term of governmental power in the twentieth century was bureaucracy, in the Internet era the meaning of this radical transformation is encapsulated instead in an other popular, hyphenated word: e-government.

Technically speaking, 'e-government' (sometimes also known as *electronic*, *digital*, or *transformational* government) refers to the use of information technology in government's activities to store, transfer and elaborate data at a little cost and across many organisational units. Through this process modern bureaucracies are able to provide a better, more sophisticated, fast and smooth, service delivery to citizens and businesses (United Nations, 2003: 1). As indicated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), within this context the term transformation relates to 'the set of processes leading to a change in the features of the public sector from a static organisation-driven model to a dynamic user-driven model'. It means building a structure flexible enough to adapt easily and quickly to an environment where demands and context change continuously (OECD, 2007: 12). However, this is by no means a simple procedure. To achieve their targets and meet their priorities (see Table 6 below) governments need to go through a rather complex and compelling process that involves many interconnected-often-overlapping development stages (for example on the social, political,

economical, and educational level). The ultimate aim of this process is to create a new virtual seamless administrative environment through which the intricate, hidden and often incomprehensible chaotic net that for citizens once stood for governmental bureaucracy, becomes order, and a synonym of accessibility and trust (See below Table 7).

Table 6 - E-Government projects priorities[99]	
Citizen-centred	In order to increase citizens' satisfaction, services must be build around citizens' choices
Effective	It should lighten administrative burden, increase transparency, and accountability
Efficient	It should significantly contribute to high user satisfaction
Inclusive	*No citizen should be left behind*: everyone should be put in a position to access e-government services
Informative	It should provide information responsibly to all citizens
Politically and socially useful	E-government tools should enable *political participation, democratic decision-making*, and social inclusion
Secure	Both citizens and businesses should benefit from convenient, secure and interoperable authenticated public service access

[99] Sources: Office of the President of the United States, 2003; OEDC, 2003a, European Commission, 2006

Table 7 - E-Government: a five-stage model[100]	
Basic electronic commitment	Rudimentary governmental websites with essential information and documents (description of its work, its duties and the services it offers)
Increased online Presence	More dynamic and functional websites with regularly updated news, contacts (few) and inter-agency web-links easily available; forms and official documents or legislations can be downloaded and printed
Interactive government	The agencies' websites boost their interaction with citizens providing extensive email contact list, tailored news feeds, specialised and customisable search engines and databases; forms and requests can be submitted online
Transactional government	The website is a single entry portal, which functions as gateway to each and every government agency website; front and back office are fully linked, the intranet is the indispensable backbone for the government staff's daily working routine (yet, during this stage, agencies are not interoperational)
Virtual seamless government	This is the ultimate aim: all government's agencies and services, information, and transactions are available online and channelled through a single entry-point portal. At anytime and from anywhere in the network, citizens can log on and initiate a process of full interaction with the government as a whole. In this fifth stage, the government and its entire complex structure is "virtually" one click away. In the age of web 2.0 an important element of this stage is the degree of personalization the government online services can offer to the citizens. That is a series of pro-active automated services that are organised around user needs.

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[100]Sources: Deloitte Research, 2000: 21-4; United Nations 2002: 10; National Audit Office, 2002: 11; World Bank, 2002: 3-5.

The fifth and final stage of the path to e-government (virtual government) marks the passage from an organisational milieu based on the complex bureaucratic system described by Weber to a new mechanism structured around a more flexible and automated virtuality. This new system is based on non-linear, non-exclusively hierarchical, highly interactive and always available service. Citizens can use the system whenever and from wherever according to their own schedule and needs.

Nonetheless, to be precise, *virtual government* represents by no means the end or the death of bureaucracy. In many ways, the new environment is similar and often more complicated than the old one, but the perception of citizens dealing with it is completely different.

Information technologies do not *wipe-out* bureaucracy – nor in the private, neither in the public sector – as often *advertised* by politicians and scholars while promoting innovation in government, but they rather settle within it. The original hierarchical and composite structure that informed decision-making in traditional bureaucracies (according to Weber, that structure was the only and indispensable mode of rationalization of modern states complexity) is still in place, but it has grown thinner (Fountain, 2001: 49). Within the technological framework of *e-government*, important decision are still taken at the top of the hierarchy; agencies still play a fundamental role in the management of a country; and jurisdictional areas are still strictly regulated; at the same time, however, coordination and interaction between agencies; allocation of duties; mechanisms of supervision and control undergo through a radical change.

For example, thanks to software and databases (as in the case of the British Identity Card scheme discussed in the previous section) most of the duties concerned with control and monitoring, together with data processing and cross-checking procedures, are automated and carried out in a faster and more reliable way; in the long term they will be instantaneous. The 'files' are in electronic form, easy to transmit, share and maintain[101]. Overall, information technology applied to governments' business improves officialdom by making

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[101] For a fuller and more comprehensive comparison between the two different forms of bureaucratic organization (Weberian and Virtual) see Fountain, 2001

the system faster and by diminishing significantly its inherited, embedded flaws. Nuisances such as slowness and bad quality of service, chaos and inefficiency, with which bureaucracy is often identified – at least from a user's perspective – are reduced to a minimum or completely overcome. This aspect – nuisance reduction – is one of the most important features of the whole process of electronic reorganisation of government administration. Embedded within it is an element of openness and reliability, alongside another quality – not the secrecy and exclusion inherent in Weber's 'ideal-typical' model of bureaucracy, but the government's desire to please its customers, to become an impeccable service-provider.

For an average citizen, dealing with an average government often means troubles. Paying a fine or renewing a driving licence can easily become an exasperating odyssey through a bureaucratic web made of an intricate multitude of disorganised agencies not communicating with each other. In the age of virtual government or, as a recent survey called, *connected governance* (UN, 2008), such nuisance is set to become history, a laughable and primitive aspect of the past.

Political relevance of e-government.

During the last decade, for many governments worldwide to be part of the Internet Galaxy has become a strong priority. According to the United Nations 2008 survey on the status of the e-government projects around the world, data clearly indicate that more countries than ever before are adopting information and communication technologies 'to provide information to their citizens, to provide the possibility of online financial transactions and to include citizens in e-consultation and e-decision-making' (UN, 2008: 46) Of the 192 UN Member States, 189 had an online presence in 2008. According to the survey, most countries have websites with information on policies, laws and an archive section for citizens (UN, 2008: 46). Such trend is justified by the double opportunity that this transformation represents for governments: on the one hand, information technology helps to cut the cost of bureaucracy drastically,

while it improves the quality of the service delivered[102]; on the other hand, when applied to bureaucratic mechanism, that technology enhances the overall quality of the relationship between government and citizens. Especially in democratic regions, a fully functional e-government is considered a fundamental step towards establishing a more transparent and citizen-centric system of governance: it can support trust in government, strengthen processes of accountability, and reinforce the dialogue between political representatives and their electorate (OECD, 2003; UN, 2008). As some scholar rightly emphasises to put government business online can certainly strengthen transparency – for instance by increasing the amount of official information published by the government; and stimulate civic activism – by providing new tools and new spaces for public consultation (Norris, 2003: 3)

This ambition is clearly embodied in the European Union's e-government strategy. Since adopting the *Lisbon strategy* in March 2000 – a plan that sets the goal to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy with improved employment and social cohesion by 2010' (European Council, 2000), the EU recognises the importance for people's quality of life of broad availability of information technology applications and services (in both the public and private sectors). For information technologies play a crucial role in processes of creation, sharing and exploitation of knowledge (European Commission, 2003:11). In 2002, the European Council meeting in Seville announced that by 2004 all EU member-states' e-government projects had to ensure that interactive basic public services were to be made accessible to all citizens (Communication from the Commission to the Council, 2002: 11-12). And the EU *i2010 eGovernment Action Plan* has set the goal for 2010 to achieve 100% electronic availability of public procurement with 50% actual usage across Europe (European Commission, 2006). By 2007 throughout the 27 member states of the EU, an average of 60% of basic public services were already available online (Fig. 42 below). Thanks to such long term strategy and its conspicuous investments in broadband infrastructure and connectivity, in

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[102] The EU estimates that eGovernment initiatives could save a total of 50 billion euro per year if EU Member states were to adopt electronic invoicing as a common practice throughout Europe (European Commission, 2006).

the 2008 e-government readiness ranking elaborated by the United Nations, EU member states occupied six places in the top 10, and accounted for 70 percent of the top 35 countries list (UN, 2008: 20), showing that Europe is fully committed to bring the transformation to its ultimate stage of virtual government (See Fig. 43 and Fig. 44).
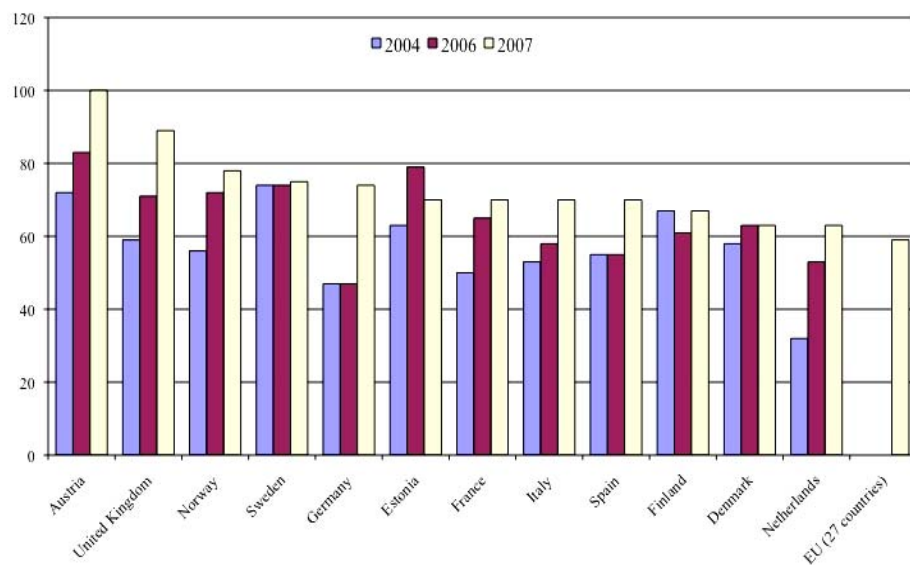
Figure 42 - Percentage of online availability of 20 basic public services 2004-2007 [103]

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[103] Adapted from data published by Eurostat. The indicator shows the percentage of 20 basic services that are fully available online i.e. for which it is possible to carry out full electronic case handling. Data retrieved10 January 2009 from: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/
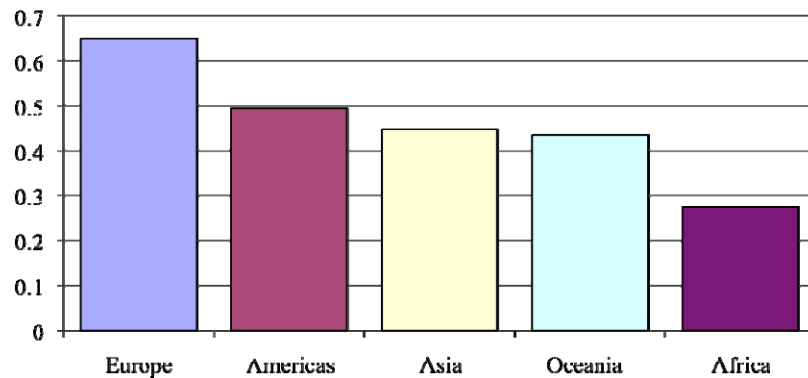
Figure 43 - UN e-government readiness ranking by Region[104]
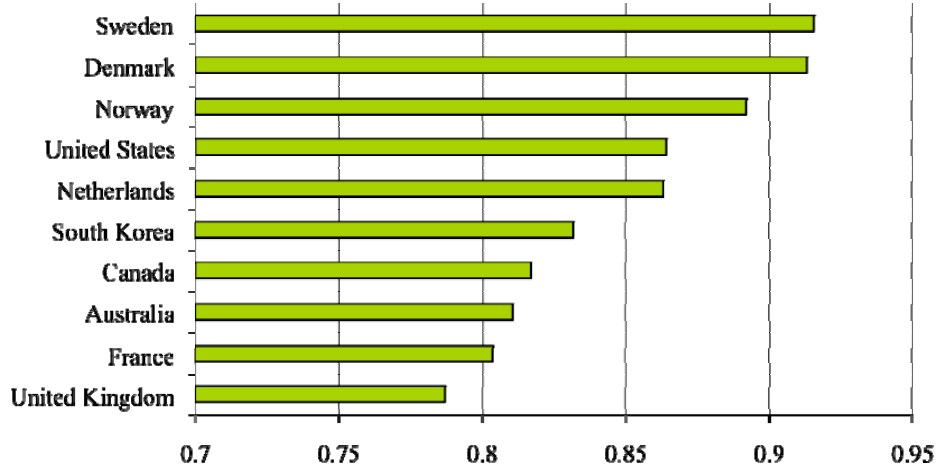
Figure 44 - Top 10 UN e-government readiness ranking[105]

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[104] Source: UN, 2008: 20. The United Nations e-government readiness ranking is based on a composite index taking into account data drawn from three separate indexes: the Web measure index, the telecommunication infrastructure index and the human capital index. The *Web measure index* measures the stage of development of national e-government project, according to a five-stage model similar to the one outlined earlier (see above Table 7). The *telecommunication infrastructure index* measures the quality of a country's infrastructure to delivery eGovernment services. It is based on five separate indicators /100 persons: Internet Users, PCs, Main Telephones Lines, Cellular telephones, and Broadband access. The *human capital index* combine data on adult literacy rate with primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio.

A similar commitment is embodied by the United States' e-government project. In the US President's management agenda of July 2001 the main aim of the project was: 'to make better use of information technology […] eliminate billions of dollars of wasteful federal spending, reduce government's paperwork burden on citizens and businesses, and improve government response time to citizens – from weeks down to minutes.' (Office of the President of the United States, 2003: 7) In the past decade the administration has gone beyond its initial aim. The US now ranks fourth in the top 10 UN e-government overall readiness ranking (See above Fig. 44); but for the strong presence on its Web portal of interactive features that facilitate electronic consultation, that enable citizens to interact fully with the government the US Administration leads the e-participation index. The US government main Web portal *USA.gov* 'remains one of the most comprehensive and effective government websites in existence'; it includes Web 2.0 features such as RSS feeds for news and other information; blogs; wikis, and it has a large section on electronic consultation (UN, 2008: 29)

The examples of the US and the Member States of the European Union make hard to imagine how anyone could complain about governments that are efficient and fast in the services they provide to their citizens. Yet, it is exactly in that *impossibility of complain* that lays the most dangerous treat of this process of transformation. Borrowing from Foucault the concept of governmentality, we could say that this is a subtle process of governmentalization of citizens adapted for the Internet Galaxy.

Governmentality in the age of the Internet

In the last part of his career, Foucault argued that the relationships of power are of two distinguished kind: on the one hand, they are the result of 'strategic games between liberties'; and on the other hand they emerge from what he called the 'states of domination' (Foucault, 1988a: 19). The former indicates the continuous attempts by people to influence the conduct of others; the latter

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[105] Source: Data from UN, 2008: 20

denotes the ordinary understanding of what people call power. In between these two ends of the spectrum of power relations, Foucault places the tactics used by governments to exercise power. To name the totality of these governmental practices, at the end of the seventies, Foucault introduced a new and broader concept of power relations, one that he called with – by his own admission – an 'ugly word' (2007: 115): *governmentality*.

More specifically, with that term, Foucault indicated the complex tactics, procedures, and apparatuses that attempt to control and influence the conduct of individuals by means of truth, knowledge, and political economy, rather than violence. In other words, governmentality is the art of governing subjects by fostering in them the will to comply with the soft diktats of power, rather than to achieve legitimacy through the help of brute force. This is a form of power that goes beyond the Panopticon model. If compliance in that model was a direct consequence of the possible presence of the warden in the observation tower, processes of governmentality induce people to comply with subjugation directly from within themselves. In other words if in the Panopticon power is visible to its subjects through the identification of it with its institution (the clinic, the prison); in the realm of governmentality the presence of the exercise of power disappear altogether. To comply, apparently, becomes voluntary; individuals believe themselves to be free, and consider their actions the result of their own free will; in reality, they are responding accordingly to a series of inputs or guidelines coming from an invisible and subtle governing power, that is to say from one of the many institutions that form society as a whole: i.e. family, state, school, health system. For Foucault, governmentality represented the historical process 'through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes 'governmentalized''. (Foucault, 1991 [1978]: 102–3)

Seen from that perspective, the term *government* does not refer 'only to political structures or to the management of the states', but more generally it embraces the mode of influencing or organizing the conduct of individuals or groups. That is why one can say, Foucault argued, 'the government of children,

of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick'. In short, 'to govern is to structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault, 1982: 221).

The complex process of transformation that turns public administrations in virtual governments should be read as another process of gradual governmentalization of society. In technologically advanced societies (for instance the states that form the EU or the USA), where public administration is becoming increasingly technology-dependent, governments find in the Internet Galaxy a fertile soil in which to reinvent themselves. Through the Internet Galaxy, governments' agencies (once upon a time the favourite target of citizens' distrust and complaints) transform themselves in (apparently) trusted humble servants whose only goal is to improve the quality of life of their citizens/customers. At the same time, the further that process goes, the more for citizens becomes a necessary condition of civic life to be part of such environment. Increasingly, in some regions of the world, for a growing percentage of the population interaction with the government via the Internet has now become the norm rather than the exception (see Fig. 45 for data regarding the EU).

Figure 45 - Percentage of individuals using e-government in Europe (2005-2008)[106]

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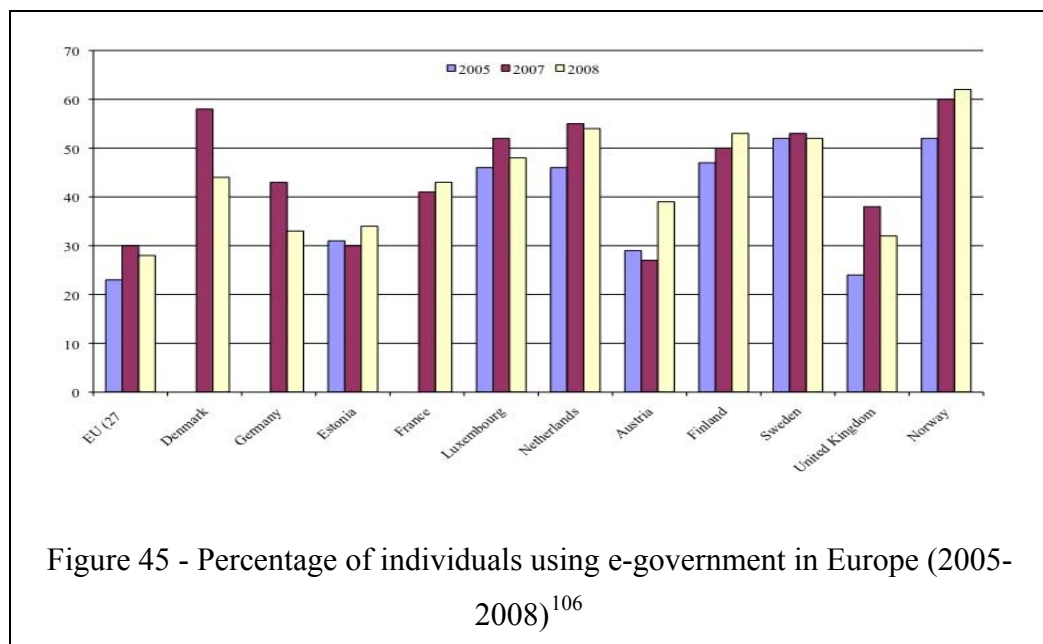
[106] Adapted from data published by Eurostat: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/ (retrieved: 10 January 2009)

For the unprecedented opportunities to choose from a wide array of impressive and new efficient digital services (both from the private and public sectors of society), individuals willingly comply with (almost) any request they receive without showing excessive concern about the effects of those requests. People remain often unconcerned (when not completely unaware of it) that these requests imply sharing their own private data across many companies or government agencies through powerful computer networks that, contrary to Weberian types of bureaucratic mechanisms, make the 'sharing of files' easy and swift; people, in the daily routine of their digital lives, show very little apprehension on how that large amount of private data is used. Increasingly, for the many benefits the process seems to bring with it, people trade in their right to privacy and anonymity without a flinch. They don't even mind to be routinely the object of interest of a countless number of monitoring devices.

Figure 46 - Photo Oyster Card[107]
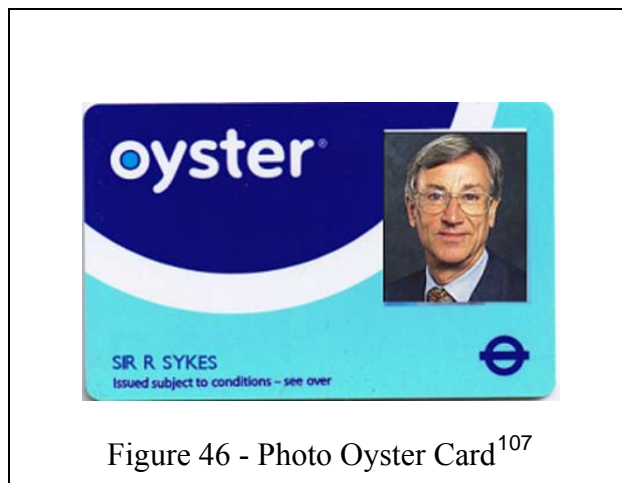
Consider the example of the Oyster Card (see Fig 46 for a sample), this is a relatively new smart-card payment system used to travel across London's public transport network. Launched in 2003, since then more than 17 million cards have been issued by the Transport for London Authority (TFL). The Oyster uses a microchip that can identify the cardholder, keep a log of the journeys, and of the account balance credit. In this way, the card makes life

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[107] Source: The Web.

much easier for the average user. Journeys are cheaper and queue at rush hours quicker. If using a conventional paper ticket, on average, only 15 people a minute can pass through the ticket-gates; with the Oyster card that number goes up to 40 people per minute (TFL, 2008). TFL dual ticket price policy (the same journey costs more with paper ticket than with the Oyster card) 'suggest' to the customers of London public transport Network that Oyster is the best choice for their own benefit. Journeys cost less than paper tickets; and thanks to daily price capping and the smart-chip in the card, travelers are assured that when making several journeys on the same day, once the total cost of these journeys reaches a cap, any further journey that day will cost them nothing (TFL, 2009.) While on the one hand the Oyster Card reduces the problems of travelling across the London public transport network, at the same time, it turns travelers in subjects that are under continuous scrutiny. Each and every journey, the time and the location of the journeys, and for registered cards, the ID of the traveler become records stored in the memory of the electronic chip within that smart-card; and they are also stored on the computers of the stations with which the card exchanged data every time the traveler passed through a check-in gate. Others can then use these data regardless of the willingness of those travelers to share them with anyone. Data can be checked by authorities; it can be sold to market research companies; and so on. Often the resistance to such acts of surveillance is almost nonexistent. The reason for that is a perfect example of governmentality in the era of networks: individuals/customers do not perceive these acts as part of a wide and threatening control mechanism, but they simply see that process as an 'upgrade' of the quality of their life, one they sign on for quite happily. Data need to be collected; control needs to be exerted for the citizens' own benefit (speed up the queue at an Underground entry point for instance) and for safety reasons (Airlines' passengers background must be checked prior departure to avoid any trouble during the flight). Individuals sometimes willingly, sometimes utterly unaware of it, become active part of this process: they buy the latest technological gadget or they use the Internet because is good for them. They forfeit cash to pay by credit cards as it easier and quick. In other words people comply. Although occasionally some might show mild allergic reactions against excessive and pervasive controls (at Airports for instance), in their normal daily routine, individuals pay little

attention to their existence as *digital beings*. As reported by the British Information Commissioner, the average person (at least in Britain) regards the complex and invasive system of surveillance that surrounds their lives as perfectly normal. This is an attitude often reinforced by people's routine experience of the system as consumers, online and offline. Even when noticed, the increased pervasiveness of surveillance mechanisms is considered as a small prize to pay for the notional 'safety' the process brings with it (Murphy, 2007: 4). Citing a common, popular phrase, some critics have rightly pointed out that, naively and rather wrongly, people tend to conclude that: 'if you are neither a terrorist nor a criminal, you have nothing to worry about' (Porter, 2006).

Such growing lack of serious concern among citizens is due to a number of factors, both rational and emotional. In Britain, for instance, people tend to have trust in the good intentions of the state, or they believe surveillance schemes are necessary, while data sharing is unavoidable, and ultimately convenient (See Table 8 below). This kind of approach to the issue of privacy and data sharing, coupled with the pervasive expansion of technology in the constituent processes of everyday life affects greatly the quality of the relationship between governments and citizens. Through this process of digital governmentalization, the government, in its entire complexity of multiple agencies, is silently granted extraordinary power to acquire knowledge about its citizens' lives regardless of those citizens' readiness to share their data. In London, for instance, Police routinely use the Transport Network to gather images captured by CCTV cameras, or ask the Transport for London Authority (on average 300-350 requests per month) for data captured by the Oyster system and relating to individual journeys (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2008: 88). Given the many million passengers that travel across the London public network every year, the number of requests is relative small. But it shows that, when needed, data are available and ready to be cross-checked. Unaware of (or uninterested in) such complex mechanism of control, people – too often – become complying subjects of a power that works at its best when hides behind tactics that are apparently harmless (Lukes, 2005).

Table 8 - British citizens lack of concern about privacy[108]

Issues of hierarchy	National security (i.e. preventing terrorism) and personal security (i.e. fighting crime) are more important than personal privacy
Democracy	This country is a stable and accountable democracy (it is not an authoritarian regime like China) so worrying about such issues is plainly on-sense.
Good intention	In a democratic context, state and security forces are not malign or corrupt by default; actually, they are essential for the protection of innocent citizen.
Innocence	Those who have done nothing should have no fear, while some inconveniences are a price worth paying for the common good.
Selectivity	Surveillance mechanisms watch only those who are actually guilty, are not interested in innocent people.
Sharing vs. Privacy	In the Internet Galaxy sharing data is common and normal. Therefore, privacy is devalued in favour of the increasing benefits drawn from social networking activities.
Consumerism	Allowing consumers data collection by private companies is a necessary act to improve services and speed up online activities. It also brings with it economical benefits.
Law protection	There are certainly laws and bodies overseeing that there is no abuse of data.
Powerlessness	There is nothing one can do to reverse this trend
Unawareness	Many citizens are practically unaware (or uninterested) of the myriad of surveillance and data gathering mechanisms they are subject to on a daily basis and of their potentially harmful uses

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[108] Source: Murphy, 2007: 4

Chapter 6 – The Weakness Paradigm

Weakness is the quality or condition of being weak; it refers to deficiency of strength, power, or force

(Oxford English Dictionary)

The previous two chapters probed the way in which the conventional techniques employed by States to maintain and protect power evolve within the Internet Galaxy. The chapters showed evidences that new communication media can and are increasingly used as the technological base of a complex system of surveillance. At the core of this system is the Internet, that is the infrastructure that allows the numerous mechanisms of control (i.e. CCTVs, DNA databases, Golden Shields) to operate within the system and to exchange data with each other. The chapters painted quite a bleak picture: we are witnessing the emergence of a 21st century society of control; this is a common trend in repressive regimes as well as democratic countries.

The remaining chapters of this dissertation give an alternative reading of that ongoing development. Upon more careful examination the overall picture appears decidedly different than at first sight. True, new technologies amplify the reach of governments' power, yet, the extensive use of the Internet Galaxy and the increasing digitalization of governments' activities, in the long term, add to the relationship between authorities and citizens an important element of weakness that can make any kind of government more liable and controllable than ever before. Power in the pre-Internet Galaxy era was based more exclusively on relationships of forces between two or more subjects. The outcome was often decided by what I refer to as the *strength paradigm*, that is,

a conceptual structure about power relations where the stronger must prevail against the weaker. The nature and meanings of what I call here *strength* are as diverse as are there theories of power. To limit this discussion to the authors dealt with in the previous chapters (Weber and Foucault), we could say that from a Weberian perspective, the strength of a subject (that is the capacity of a subject to impose one's will over another subject) can find its shape ultimately in the annihilating use of violence. From a Foucauldian perspective instead, the strength of a subject to impose his/her own will over another subject is better represented by the invisible gaze of the warden in the Panopticon; or by the subtle processes that shape governmentality, which almost annul any possibility of resistance.

The structural resistance to total domination that is at the foundation of the Internet Galaxy forges instead an environment in which no single actor or group is ever in a position to control fully the existence of others. The effect of this basic condition of existence is that every actor enters the galaxy with a fundamental degree of weakness. For this reason, in the society that emerges out of the Internet Galaxy, power relationships follow primarily a different path than in traditional organizational settings. They form around an apparent paradoxical paradigm: power is shaped by weakness. This new paradigm is only apparently paradoxical because within its logical framework the term weakness becomes synonym of its antonym power/strength insofar as it has the ability to inform the exercise of power within the galaxy. That is to say, if generally power can be defined as the as the mere ability to do or prevent things from happening; within the Internet Galaxy, for the fundamental degree of weakness shared by all actors, power can only successfully spring out from the recognition of the *inability* (weakness) of any actor to do or prevent things - in absolute terms - from happening. The recognition of the existence of that fundamental shared element of weakness becomes then a form of empowerment inasmuch as it inspires averages monitorial citizens (both at individual or at group level) to exploit the Galaxy to challenge traditional power holders through unconventional strategies. As the cases-studies discussed in the remaining chapters of this dissertation demonstrate, the actions

enabled by such unconventional form of empowerment produce, more and more often, startling and chronic reversals of power.

Looking at the issue of power relationships through the lens of the weakness paradigm becomes clear that contrary to what many believe, digital technologies have not turned conventional power holders such as governments in systems of control so increasingly powerful that any action of resistance within their sphere of influence becomes futile. The opposite, in fact, is true. The traditional structure of prevailing power relations is now covered by multiple cracks. These are evident signs that within the Internet Galaxy unprecedented reversal of power are possible in both repressive regimes as well as democratically ruled countries.

Cracks in the Chinese wall

In her 1969 essay *On Violence*, against Max Weber's argument that violence is the ultimate resource of state-power, Hannah Arendt remarked that when a government starts to lose control and uses force to hold its grip on power, that is the proof that its legitimacy (for Arendt the product of people's support) has vanished (Arendt, 1969: 44). The use of violence is never legitimate, not even for a State. An outburst of violence or an attempt (even a successful one) to tighten further the web of censorship signals a structural crack in the system used by the State to exercise its power.

Consider the case, discussed earlier, of China's strict regulations on the Internet (see above Chapter four). Epitomised by the eleven commandments for the perfect Internet user (See above Table 2), China's rules could be interpreted in an Arendtian way as widening cracks in the fortress's wall that protects the power of Chinese authorities. Those rules, in particular, seem more intended to serve as a deterrent for the Chinese users, rather than prescribing an actual code of conduct. Contrary to the common perception of the issue, the continuous and strong efforts of Beijing's government to tame the expansion of the Chinese Internet Galaxy can be interpreted as a growing signal of fear, rather than power. Where does this fear come from?

The data analysed in Chapter four and five showed that being part of the Internet Galaxy is for every State (including China) an essential prerequisite, one that guarantees vital economical and political benefits: the Internet expands financial markets, it helps reducing the cost of bureaucracy, and it can as well help censorship and propaganda. But these benefits come with a high price to pay. In the case of repressive regimes the pervasiveness of the web means the impossibility to 'control information the way they once did' (Friedman, 2000: 78). Given the right political conditions, partial monitoring or a certain degree of censorship of the information flow is clearly feasible as demonstrated by China's *Golden Shield*. Yet, historically rooted in one particular type of architecture (distributed vs. centralized), the Internet is a network that is highly resistant to any attempt of full control. No matter how much authorities try, but controlling the totality of that Galaxy is practically impossible. It is not as easy as guarding the physical borders of a medieval city. The attempt to erect walls, no matter how high and thick, within this type of galaxy made of bytes (rather than bricks) will always result in a flawed system of control. A 2007 report on issues of electronic crime and individual personal security on the Internet produced by the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Lords reporting to the UK government acknowledged that the control of the Internet is impossible. After careful consideration, the committee came to the conclusion that because of the galaxy's structural design, there is no way 'to introduce an "identity layer" into the Internet' to make people accountable. That in fact would require 'rewriting, on a global scale, the entire Internet', which prospect is not foreseeable. That is in fact a path that cannot be taken unilaterally by a single government (Science and Technology Committee of the House of Lords, 2007: 20-1)

Increasingly, the Internet's structural resistance to control represents an important element of weakness – hence fear - for authorities in countries like China, especially during extended periods of social unrest (Reporters Without Borders, 2005). Contrary to the general perception, the concern of the Chinese authorities' with the Internet is not just about the risks connected with the spread of unfiltered information among citizens; but, more importantly, it is about social organization. The aftermath of the students' protest in Tiananmen

Square (June, 1989) – a protest which ended with the death of many young protesters by the hand of the Chinese Army – have taught the government of Beijing an important lesson: media can facilitate social unrest by keeping protests' momentum alive, as it happened in 1989. And when the protest is over, the media become the repository of the collective memory of the event. Twenty years after Tiananmen, the rising importance of the Internet Galaxy has expanded exponentially the width and reach of communication media; that is, it has made communication media more threatening than ever before. 'It's how you act on the information you have' that really worries authorities, said to *Newsweek* Anne Stevenson-Yang, a Beijing-based Internet entrepreneur (Liu, 2005). The Internet can be indeed a valuable tool to organise grass-root movements that challenge the authority of the state. On this regard, it's noticeable that the only new elements in the text of the 11 commandments relate directly 'to banning the calling of strikes or gatherings through the net.' (Reporters Without Borders, 2005) In the present age citizens can use a variety of media to communicate with each other instantly and cheaply, to monitor the movements of the powerful, and to organise events. Given this precondition, if a protest similar for size and impact to that of Tiananmen Square broke out nowadays, then, most likely, armoured tanks and soldiers will be less effective to quash such kind of protest than in 1989. By contrast, the combination of a person's will and skills, the use of computers connected to the Internet might as well be enough to stop a whole of line of frightening tanks (as perfectly rendered by the artist Guy Billout in Fig. 47).
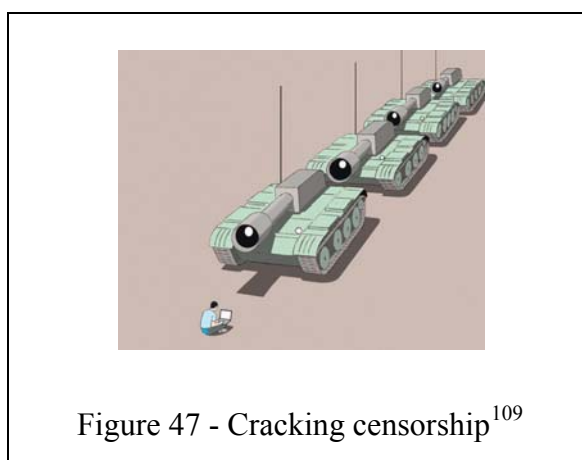
Figure 47 - Cracking censorship[109]

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[109] The original picture has no title, © *Guy Billout* (http://www.guybillout.com/)

Similarly, the highly publicised Great Firewall of China – like any Internet firewall - is far from being impermeable. Notwithstanding the state of the art technology that the system adopts, it is in reality structurally flawed. In fact, many easy-to-use free resources are available on the web for the average Chinese users to break through that allegedly unbreakable system. Consider the case of the many Internet proxy software available to users on the web. These software allow their users to bypass effortlessly government censorship and gain secure and full access to the Internet. To use this kind of software means for the user to explore the Internet not directly but through a computer server, which is located outside the national borders of China and is programmed to avoid government censorship. Proxy servers are set up to do what would be not an easy task for the average user: they change their IP addresses (that is, their ID on the Internet) every few seconds. As the IP address is the crucial piece of information for the authorities to censor foreign computers, the result of this simple action of renewing the ID many times every hour makes those proxy servers effectively free from any censorship, thus allowing the user to access even websites that are banned in China. To explore the Internet through a proxy server is the equivalent of an airplane passenger banned from flying who goes through a passport control at an airport each time wearing a different face and showing a different passport. In this way it becomes impossible for the airport authority to stop that passenger from flying, he or she will never be recognised. In the Internet Galaxy, the passenger can do that trick several times per minute.

Web proxy software require no particular skills or effort from the users, other than downloading the executable file and install the programme in the user's machine. That is a very simple and quick exercise[110]. In the recent past, thanks

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[110] For more technically-daring solutions on how to break through the firewall see the study conducted by a group of researchers from Cambridge University who have shone light on a interesting technical flaw embedded in the Chinese firewall: the Chinese system sits in between two end-points (computers) communicating with each other, but this end-points needs to agree on the system's rules for this to be effective. To clarify, a crucial part of the Chinese firewall system is absorbed by checking the presence of certain blacklisted keywords in TCP packets sent across the Internet. When such keywords are found the systems resend the packets back to both end points of the connection,

to software such as *Ultrasurf* by *Ultrareach Internet*[111] – easily available even on the Chinese Internet – and proxy networks such as *Freegate* by *DynaWeb*[112] - millions of Chinese users have been able to explore freely and undisturbed the Internet Galaxy (Mooney, 2004; Ha, 2006).

The work of others not-for-profit organizations play also an important role in feeding Chinese Internet users with crucial information to get around the Golden Shield. *Radio Free Asia*, a private radio station funded by the United States Congress sends regularly an email to its subscribers with updated information on currently working censorship-free proxies. (RFA, n.d.) *Reporters Without Borders* has published a handbook for bloggers in countries such as China with heavy censorship. In that book, RWB points out that 'bloggers are often the only real journalists in countries where the mainstream media is censored or under pressure' therefore it is crucial for them to be able to use the Internet free from any government control. The idea behind the handbook is to give bloggers 'handy tips and technical advice on how to remain anonymous and to get round censorship, by choosing the most suitable method for each situation' (Reporters Without Borders, 2005b: 5-6).

Furthermore, as a recent study on Chinese bloggers has found out, the system that filters and censors Internet content within Mainland China is in itself far from perfect. Regardless of its embedded structural flaw, the system is faulty because it ultimately relies on a decentralised web of individual companies to exercise censorship and implement it (MacKinnon, 2009). Thus, the extent and quality of the Chinese Internet censorship is never consistent and it depends largely on a series of factors that are beyond the central control of the authorities. The study revealed that despite of the great length of time and

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which then is terminated with an error message. However, as noted by the Clayton *et al.* (2006) the burden to make such a system efficient lays on the shoulders of the endpoints (the provider of the blacklisted content and the requester of that content). 'Because the original packets are passed through the firewall unscathed, if the endpoints completely ignore the firewall's resets, then the connection will proceed unhindered.' For a complete technical description on how to instruct a computer to ignore those resets see Clayton *et al.*, 2006

[111] See http://www.ultrareach.com)

[112] See http://www.dit-inc.us; And also the Internet Freedom Consortium (http://www.Internetfreedom.org/)

quantity of resources allocated to censoring the Chinese Internet, there are still many factors that reduce the efficacy of the system considerably. Among these, are: the exposure of companies on the national market (the less exposed, the less tightened is those companies' censorship); the companies' actual locations (the more distant they are from main political hubs, the less strong is their will to censor); the companies' commitment to actively censor the content published on their websites effectively and consistently. But most importantly – as in traditional media – censorship of *inappropriate* content is ultimately a matter of individual choices, values, and actions. Therefore consistency and coherence can never be guaranteed a priori (Mackinnon, 2009)[113].

The curse of the e-government effect

The weakness paradigm is relevant both to repressive regimes as well as to more democratic countries. As discussed earlier in chapter five, *the e-government effect* widens the reach of the Chinese model of technological surveillance by reinforcing its basis through a widespread process of governmentalization of citizens adapted to the need and characteristics of the Internet Galaxy. In such new organizational setting, complying willingly, individuals feed the system with their streams of meaningful personal data let free to flow across the Galaxy. Captured, elaborated, and sorted, through centres of calculation (for instance forensic laboratories, statistical institutions, or police databases) those broken streams of data are finally 'reassembled and

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[113] The study was conducted in 2008 by a team of researchers lead by Rebecca MacKinnon from the University of Honk Kong. The researchers tested the censorship mechanism of 15 blog hosting services operating from within China by running 108 tests, that is, by uploading forbidden content on ad hoc created blogs in each on those hosting service providers. Content ranged from text referring to the crisis with Tibet to the Olympic Games, hosted in Beijing that year. The results showed that censorship was neither consistent, nor homogenous in quality: the most vigilant company censored less than 60 percent of the tests submitted. The second censored 41 percent, third 32 percent. 'At the other end of the scale, the least vigorous blog host censored only one piece of content, the second most liberal censored only three, and the third most liberal censored nine' (MacKinnon, 2009).

scrutinized in the hope of developing strategies of governance, commerce and control' (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000: 613)

Similarly to China's use of the Internet, this process is not without consequences for States' power. The digitalization of modern bureaucracies progressively weakens the quality of their historical grip on power. Bureaucracy, Weber's perfect machinery of state domination, exercises its power in secret, behind closed doors, according to a paradigm that makes it almost unaccountable for its mistakes. The closer that old machinery gets to the final stage of the process (virtual government [114]) the more it sees the foundations of its power crumbling *byte* by *byte*.

In Weber's ideal typical bureaucracy the 'files' are the most important part in the system. Those vital documents usually take up large amount of archive storage space and are only accessible by the officers working in the bureau. In the past decade most of those files have gone (or are undergoing) a thorough process of digitalization. These files still exist in their physical forms; but in the era of the Internet Galaxy, administrations, authorities, private and public sector companies all rely increasingly on those files' digital counterpart to function at their best. In fact information stored in streams of 0s and 1s is more easily accessible, easily transferable and inexpensive. Thanks to such a process of digitalization, the records of millions of people no longer need rows of archives in the basement of a government building. Thanks to computer networks, and the miniaturization of Mass Storage Devices (such as portable hard drives or memory cards) millions of records can now be easily stored within the space occupied by a small lighter, or sent across the network at the click of a mouse. Yet, as they are easily transferable, these files are also easily misplaced. Thus the system has become as vulnerable to external or non-authorized intrusion as never before.

In the recent past, many recurrent cases of data loss, or successful security breach into governments' networks have brought to the attention of the wider public clear evidences of such new vulnerability. In one of these cases, in

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114 See above Table 7, Chapter five

November 2007, a junior official of the UK Revenue & Customs embarrassed the government by losing the personal records of 25 million people. The data were extracted from a government database and copied into two Compact Discs; then, breaching security protocols, the junior official decided to send the two disks by courier (instead of internal mail) to their intended destination, the National Audit Office in London. The disks contained a wide assortment of highly sensitive information ranging from bank accounts details, national insurance numbers, to the data regarding more than 7 million English families claiming child benefits (Wintour, 2007)

In a similar case, the US Administration lost over 26 million records regarding health and financial information of war veterans. The data were stored in a laptop computer stolen from one employee's home in the state of Maryland. The head of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Jim Nicholson estimated that the cost to prevent and cover potential losses deriving from the theft might range from US$100 million up to US$500 million (Rothstein, 2006). A nonprofit consumer organization, Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, estimates that since 2005 the approximate number of records that have been lost or compromised due to security breaches in the USA is in the range of 250 million (Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, N.D.)

Of all the many cases of security breaches reported, one of the most telling example of government vulnerability in the era of the Internet is a case linked to Gary McKinnon, an English hacker who in 2002 repeatedly broke into NASA's computers network in search of evidences of the existence of extraterrestrial life. The word hacking is usually associated with the action performed by technically skilled computer programmers to hack computer systems protected by a high-level degree of security. In the case of McKinnon the word is misused, by his own admission, his stunt was not that clever: 'I searched for blank passwords' he said to the BBC. McKinnon wrote a very simple computer programme to link with other people's machines and search for blank passwords, 'so you could scan 65,000 machines in just over eight minutes'. With that programme McKinnon found many high-clearance computers connected to the network with no password protection. And, as he

soon realized, he was not the only intruder tinkering with the system. 'There was a permanent tenancy of foreign hackers. You could run a command when you were on the machine that showed connections from all over the world, check the IP address to see if it was another military base or whatever, and it wasn't' (BBC, 2006b). In the world made of bricks, walls, and highly guarded buildings, the situation described by McKinnon could be compared to the Pentagon (the heart of the US Department of Defense) adopting an all open-doors policy for all visitors. That would mean that everyone could be free to go everywhere in the building, Osama Bin Landen included.

To achieve his goal, the English hacker did not need extraterrestrial technology or the financial backing of a rogue country. Relying simply on an average computer and a slow connection to the Internet, McKinnon continued his quest for over two years, browsing undisturbed confidential military data. When once a NASA network engineer caught him online and asked him who he was, McKinnon simply replied (via textual chat) 'I am from Military Computer Security', which excuse the engineer fully believed. (BBC, 2006b)

Commenting on the facility with which many hackers get access into governments' networks, by simply using default passwords or even worst, as in McKinnon's case, blank passwords, Mathew Bevan, a former computer hacker turned security consultant, said that it 'is suggestive of a system that really does not care too much about many of the machines connected to it.' (Leyden, 2008) By contrast, I would argue instead that such frequent cases of breaches in supposedly highly secured networks are indicative of a system whose vulnerability is inherent to its overdependence from the system itself. It is embedded in the digitalization and networking process of transformation of many of the tasks of everyday life; even those tasks related to government's issues. True, in McKinnon's specific case, that is a kind of vulnerability that is particularly exploitable by highly skilled individuals, in fact not everyone can write a computer program whose task is to search for blank passwords – no matter how simple that programming task is. But, as we learned in Chapter two, networking and resource sharing are the matter of which, historically, the Internet Galaxy is made of. Therefore, if someone is not capable to resolve a

problem (for instance, how to find blank passwords or peep into a military network), he or she can use the Internet to find the solution, or someone who can help. More importantly, as in the case of China's censorship, and as shown by the example of McKinnon and the NASA's network engineer, the overall quality of the strength (or we should say vulnerability) of a computer network is highly dependable from its *fallible* human component. The more governments become reliable on the network, the more vulnerable they become through that network. After all, the only computer safe from external intrusion is one not connected to a network.

Who controls the controllers?

In his classical study *The Future of Democracy*, the late Italian political philosopher, Norberto Bobbio addressed the risks hidden beneath the surface of what he called a *computerocracy*. '[The] ideal of the powerful' he wrote 'has always been to see every gesture and to listen to every word of their subjects (if possible without being seen or heard)'. Computer technology, Bobbio argued, make that ideal finally achievable. Thus, the old question running through the whole history of political thought 'who guards the guards?' can now be reformulated as 'who controls the controllers?' For Bobbio finding an adequate answer to that question was a crucial imperative, especially for democratic countries. In fact, if not dealt with 'democracy in the sense of visible government is lost.' (Bobbio, 1987: 34).

As we saw earlier from our analysis of the case of Britain (see above Chapter five), twenty years later, Bobbio's words are still an important reminder of the risks associated with the use of new technologies by governments in democratic countries. Yet his interpretation of computerocracy is to a certain extent misleading. Bobbio's theory implies a hierarchical structure of power relations, one that considers the relationship between state and society within the old framework of the nation-state, that is in Weberian terms the set of institutions that hold the monopoly of the legitimate use of the means of violence within a given territory. Simplifying a much more complex argument,

on top of this structure are the traditional power-holders, those who govern, whose power is nowadays amplified by direct access to advanced information technologies. At the bottom of the structure instead are the subjects of that power; these are the ones who are watched and that, in general, have very limited access to the means of control.

Contrary to this reading of the problem, compared to a nation state, the Internet Galaxy is a radical different organizational setting. In this kind of galaxy unidirectional exercises of power are not as effective as they are in other environments. As we saw in Chapter one, within a network power is not principally exercised through hierarchical structures, but it moves horizontally, from node to node. Dystopian metaphors such as computerocracy, Big Brother or Panopticon are inadequate to explain the use of technology in contemporary societies. In fact, due to the distributive nature of the network, in the age of the Internet, the power of surveillance is diffused throughout the social body rather than being concentrated in the hands of few controllers. For some, the network society, of which the Internet is the defining element, is not the exclusive dominion of a few Big Brothers, but on the contrary, it is a space increasingly populated by an army of 'well wishing little sisters' watching each and everyone of us. In this context, 'the control of the nation-state […] becomes just one means among others to assert power' (Castells, 1997: 304-5). But even Castells' little sisters, a concept dated 1997, cannot adequately grasp the whole complexity of the relationship between the Internet Galaxy and power. Consider the following quotations from Castells' 1997 *The Power of Identity* where the author explains his argument about the effects on the state of decentralized surveillance:

'This trend is even more apparent in the new relationship between state and media. Given the growing financial and legal independence of the media, increased technological capacity puts into the hands of the media the ability to spy on the state, and to do so on behalf of society and/or of specific interest groups.' (Castells, 1997: 302)

To clarify further his argument, Castells reminds the reader of the increased power of media revelations and their capacity to shook the ground beneath the

feet of those in power. Among the examples he uses is that of the heir to the British crown, Charles Prince of Wales, whose telephone conversations with his friends (Castells refers to them as 'postmodern elaborations on Tampax and related matters') became of public domain, and a matter of public concern, when the tabloid press decided to publish their embarrassing and banal content. '[M]edia revelations have always been a threat to the state, and a deference of citizens', Castells writes. 'But new communication technologies, and the new media system, have exponentially increased the vulnerability of the state to the media, thus to business, and to society at large. In historically relative terms, today's state is more surveilled than surveillant' (Castells, 1997: 302)

Castells' argument extends Bobbio's confined structure of power by including in that organizational setting a whole range of new controllers whose power is enabled by the ubiquity in contemporary society of communication media technology. But Castells's argument is fundamentally flawed. As in the case of Michael Schudson's theory of the monitorial citizen, Castells is still thinking through the lens of a society organized through proxies that act on behalf of citizens (as he writes). That is no longer an applicable framework. That is not to say that proxies have disappeared; on the contrary, they have multiplied considerably. Each citizen can potentially become a proxy. In other words, in the Internet Galaxy, citizens no longer need institutional proxies (such as the press) to challenge power holders on their behalf. They can do that all by themselves, with a blog for instance, or through an electronic petition. Contrary to what Schudson's implied, between *monitoring* and *taking action* there is no time or space gap, because the galaxy functions at the same time as the news-provider and the space where the action is organized and exercised. Moreover, in repressive regimes as well as in democratic countries, these recurring cracks in the structure of power have the dual merit to shed light on the hidden risks of governmentalization of citizens through e-government practices; while at the same time they indicate to those who pay attention a degrading pattern in the quality of government control. For the other explorers monitoring the Galaxy, those cracks become as the revealing signposts of an increasing weakness of governmental power. The duplication of these signs throughout the Galaxy; the wide publicity that they receive thanks to the network that, as an echo-chamber,

promotes and amplifies the results achieved; together with the increased possibility of knowledge-sharing that is made possible by the Internet, all of these factors create, through a slow but productive learning process, a collective shared sense of weakness that pervades the whole galaxy and it touches each and every explorer within it.

Chapter 7 – The e-challenge to democracy

The web offers people the chance to express their views at very little cost and, as this week has shown, generate a national debate at the click of a mouse.

Tony Blair, 18 Feb. 2007

The Greek word *dêmokratia* indicates a form of government where the people (*dêmos*) rule (*kratos*), or, to say it with the words used by Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg and often quoted by many sources, it refers to the 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people'[115] (Lincoln, 1992: 405). These worn-out cliché-definitions are often the starting point of many books dedicated to the subject. Their popularity notwithstanding, these definitions miss somehow the point, for they strip bare the concept of democracy to a minimum common denominator (the rule of the people) whose simplicity can never suffice for the inherent complexity that the term carries with it. The term democracy in fact indicates a much more complex form of government with a history that stretches over many centuries and it is much older than many sources believe. Its origins are not to be found among the ruins of its most prestigious site, the acropolis of Athens, the place of Democracy's greatly celebrated golden period (fifth century BCE); but they go back to the ancient civilizations of Syria-Mesopotamia (ca. 2500 BCE). Similarly, the future of its

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[115] Lincoln adapted his Gettysburg Address from a speech given by the Senator Daniel Webster in 1830 on the origin of the federal government and its true character: 'It is, Sir, the people's Constitution, the people's government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people.' (Webster, 1830)

current widely adopted form, governing through elected representatives, is not set in stone. Its fate in fact is inextricably tangled with – among other elements - to the evolution of communication media.

In his *The Life and Death of Democracy* (2009), John Keane shows that during its long history, Democracy has gone through three different phases, corresponding to three different governing models: the assembly, the representative, and the monitory. The first phase, universally epitomized by the Athenian model of assembly-based democracy, began in fact in that region of the world known as the Middle East two thousands years earlier with 'the creation and diffusion of public assemblies', and then moved westward (Keane, 2009: XV). When it reached Athens it was 'by political struggle, from below'. Compared to our current standards of democratic practices, Athenian democracy 'was direct and participatory to an astonishing degree […] extremely constricted, unrelated to any notion of universal human rights.' (Pitkin, 2004: 337)

The representative model has its oldest roots in the undemocratic setting surrounding the Cloisters of San Isidoro, in Leon, Northern Spain - the place where the first *Cortes* were convened by King Alfonso IX in 1188 CE (Keane, 2009: 173-74). By the eighteen century, when Democracy re-emerged in Europe and America, its best champions being France, England and the American republic, 'the practice of (undemocratic) representation was well established' (Pitkin, 2004: 338) and the association between the old ideal of democracy and that of representation seemed the best possible solution to govern large nation states. 'Extend the suffrage, and democracy would be enabled by representation. Since, as John Selden put it, 'the room will not hold all', the people would rule themselves vicariously, through their representatives.' (Ibid.). In this era, those who are granted the right to vote periodically choose their representatives who then govern on their behalf. The marriage between representation and democracy was neither smooth, nor painless. During this second phase 'much ink and blood' was spilled while attempting to define what the term representation meant, who had the rights to represent whom and who had the right to choose; the matter of contention

involved also the quality of the relationship between the electorate's will and the choices made on its behalf by its elected representatives (Keane, 2009: 164).

The third era of democracy is called *Monitory Democracy*. The term is the brainchild of John Keane's historical work on the subject; it attempts to make sense of the transformation of representative democracy since 1945. Monitory democracy emerges from the progressive crisis suffered by the representative model throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Keane, 2009: 583 f). That crisis culminated with World War Two and the 'near-destruction worldwide of democratic institutions and ways of life by the storms of mechanised war, dictatorship and totalitarian rule' (Keane, 2009: XVII). This new historical form of democracy goes beyond the parliamentary politics that defined the representative model. The term monitory democracy refers to a complex and intricate structure of government that incorporates all elements of the representative model and adds to them 'many different kinds of extra-parliamentary, power-scrutinising mechanisms'. Keane calls these mechanisms 'monitory bodies' and they work at national and international level. They in fact can be found 'within the domestic fields of government and civil society, as well as in cross-border settings', the same realms of influence 'once controlled by empires, states and business organisations'. (Ibid.: 689)

Keane's Monitory Democracy (together with Michael Schudson's Monitorial Citizen [116]) is for this thesis the ideal analytic tool to probe the political effectiveness of the weakness paradigm discussed in the previous chapter. If in the case of repressive regimes like China, it can be safely argued that the condition of shared weakness, brought upon institutional power-holders by the rising importance of the Internet Galaxy, is a gift that in the long term can help improve the quality of the politics of everyday life of such countries. On the other hand, when we focus on more democratic environments, the impact of that shared weakness is bound to have ambiguous results. The question

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[116] It is worth noting here that the two concepts are closely related: in his book Keane acknowledges that his concept of monitory democracy is indebted to a series of conversations with Michael Schudson and his *The Good Citizen* (Keane, 2009: 688)

permanently seeking for an answer is whether or not the Internet is good for democracy, or, in its more negative form, whether or not the Internet is in fact the end of it? To understand the quality of that ambivalence, we need to understand how democracy works in the twenty-first century. If seen through the lens of the classical representative model, the political effects of the condition of shared weakness can be judged a harmful threat that sends that system into a standstill. By contrast, if we use Keane's model, the effects of new communication media on democracy appear as the first clues of the fulfilment of a long forgotten promise: politics is a carrier of social change that expresses itself at its best not through hierarchical structure of power, that is, through action organised from above; but on the contrary, that change moves in horizontal waves through the interaction of equals among equals and it carries with it the potential to enhance significantly the overall quality of life of those affected by such change.

Democracy in the 21st century

In a typical representative system, traditionally, the fundamental role of citizens is to take part in regular elections to choose representatives who then govern on their behalf. That simple act of casting a vote, of choosing one candidate (or one party) over others, ideally, has two main advantages: it guarantees to the people a chance to evaluate periodically their political leadership and at the same time it gives the members of that political leadership enough time to earn their voters' trust for a new mandate. In this context, ideally, citizens should rarely be called into action between elections. The system however is far from perfect and too often winning a majority of seats in Parliament for the government of the leading party or coalition equals to a pass to do whatever it likes (at least until the next election day). For this reason, among others, since 1945 that ideal-typical model of democratic government by representation has seen a radical 'sea change' that has deeply altered its essence. The political geography of representative democracy has mutated from its original static hierarchical and territorially-bound configuration (see

below Fig. 48); to one where the exercise of power (willingly or not) is more open to questioning and scrutiny, not only from within the state but also from across borders (Keane, 2009: 695). Representative democratic systems are progressively morphing into monitory democracies (see Fig. 49). In this new form of democratic government, political parties and parliaments are still important; but their grip on citizens' lives has weakened increasingly during the last half a century; even more since 1995 for the emergence of the Internet Galaxy.

We now live in an age where 'Democracy' Keane writes 'is coming to mean more than elections, although nothing less'. Since 1945, we have witnessed 'the birth of nearly one hundred new types of power-scrutinising institutions unknown to previous democrats' (Keane, 2009: 689). Among these are activist courts, electoral commissions and consumer protection agencies, blogs, online forums, and online petitions. These mechanisms of power scrutiny – working from 'within and outside states' – serve the purpose to make democracy and democrats more accountable and more democratic, especially in 'big and complex societies' where an always increasing number of people has lost belief in politicians and politics. In democracies of the Twenty-first century, the monitorial bodies indicated by Keane are crucial elements of the politics of everyday life: they work as antidotes against the hubris of power that constantly threaten the functioning of representative systems. Through these mechanisms, those who represent are constantly reminded that their power is not immune from control, it is never absolute; and they must account for their actions throughout their entire time in office and not only before an election. In a monitory system that works well 'the grip of the majority-rule principle – the worship of numbers – associated with representative democracy' is broken, whilst those that are too often relegated in the back-seats of the political stage, whose rights are only remembered before election day, have the chance, through these new mechanisms, to voice out their concern clearly and loudly, not only at election day, but throughout the whole cycle between elections. (Keane, 2009: 689)

Figure 48 – Territorially bound representative system[117]

Figure 49 - Monitory democracy[118]
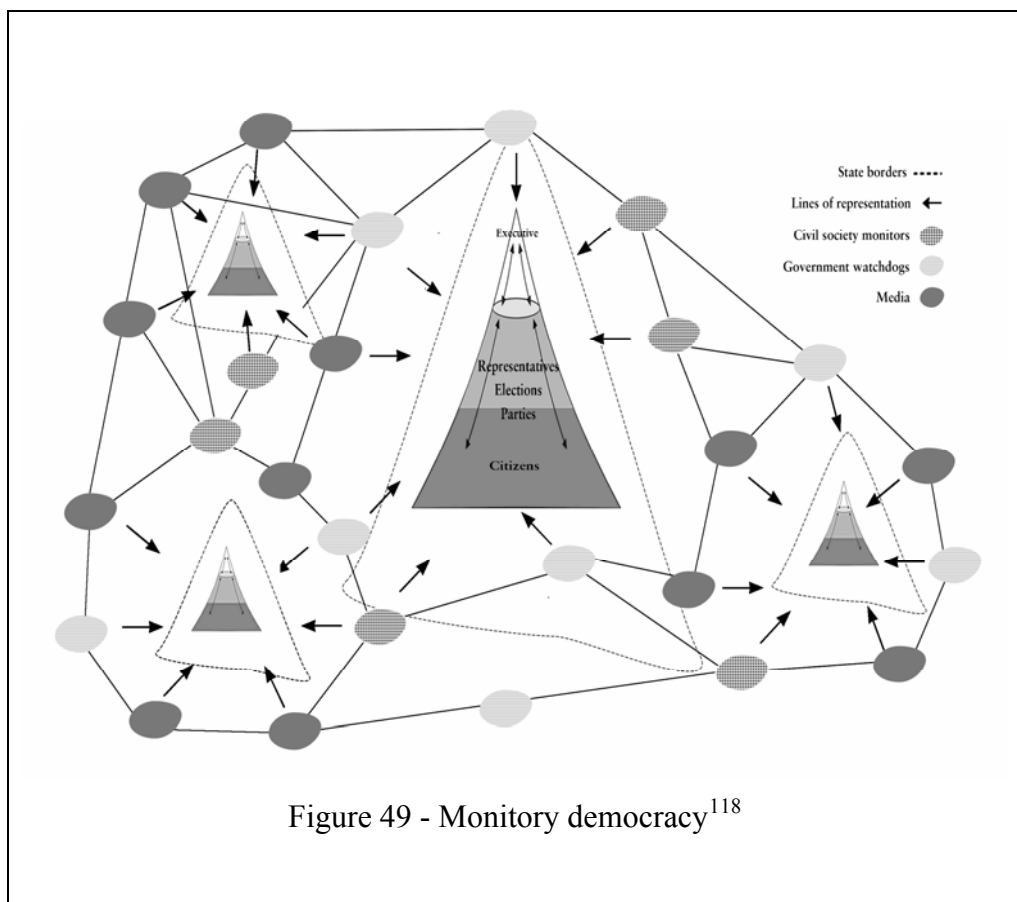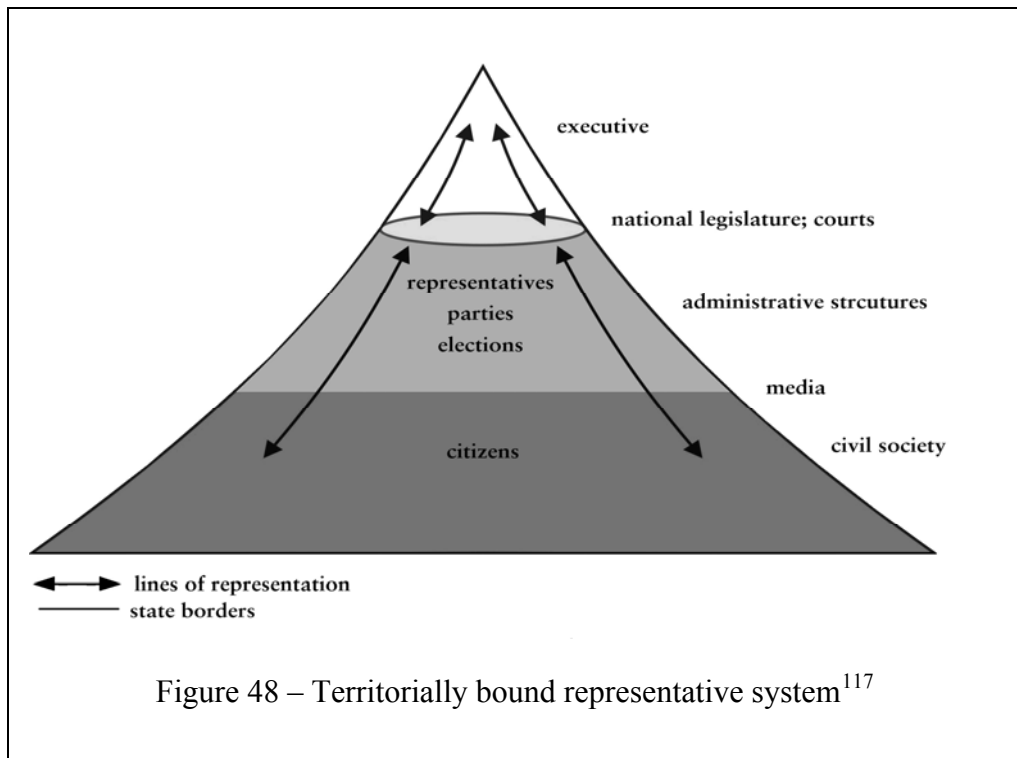
[117] Source: Keane, 2009: 696
[118] Source: Adapted from Keane, 2009: 697

This new political geography of democracy, however, could never be explained (and exist) without understanding the role new communication media play within its complex mechanisms of power-scrutiny. As the previous two ages of democracy were intertwined with the evolution of communication media, so is the current period: the assembly model was 'dominated by the spoken word, backed up by laws written on papyrus and stone, and by messages dispatched by foot, or by donkey and horse' (Keane, 2009: 737). Democracy by representation was nurtured in the age of 'print culture'; the Gutenberg Galaxy (the age of books, newspapers, and telegraphs) was its favorite setting. It is not by chance that the representative system 'fell into crisis' after the spread of mass communication media (radio and cinema, television). Similarly, although it developed in the early television age, monitory democracy's fate and hopes rest principally upon the political potential of the Internet Galaxy, with its entire Web of monitoring tools attached to it: mobile phones, satellite communications, intranets and internets. For its persistent expansion, for its scope and reach in our society, for its embedded resistance to political control, the Internet (and broadly speaking the whole range of new communication media), plays a crucial role in the dynamics of this new democratic settings: 'All institutions in the business of scrutinising power', writes Keane, 'rely heavily on [new communication media]'. Thus he warns: 'if the new galaxy of communicative abundance suddenly imploded, monitory democracy would not last long. Monitory democracy and computerised media networks behave as if they are conjoined twins.' (Keane, 2009: 739)

The political potential of the Internet Galaxy can crucially affect the balance of power relationship in existing representative system; it provides the tools to deal with the historical *flaws* of that system. From a narrow point of view, new communication media seem to play merely a supporting role in the oiled dynamics of representative democracy: they enhance dramatically the possibility for the members of the public to establish a direct and privileged relationship with their political representatives; and vice versa, the chance for politicians to keep in contact easily and inexpensively with each member of their constituency (Coleman, 1999; Kingham, 2003). From a wider and different perspective instead, one that sees politics as an ongoing process of

active (albeit discontinue) participation rather than simply a mere act of delegation, the marriage between politics and new media offers the monitorial citizens of the Twenty-first century the chance to alter the periodicity of the major cycle that rules over who gets what, when, and how in a representative system. Using media like the Internet, this new type of citizen has in its hands an effective tool to easily break that cycle into a stream of continuous public acts of assessment, that potentially are as politically significant as an election can be. But contrary to this latter, the formers are never predictable and can be quite sudden.

'The political dynamics and overall 'feel' of monitory democracies are very different from during the era of representative democracy', writes Keane. 'Politics in the age of monitory democracy has a definite 'viral' quality about it.' (Keane, 2009: 744). This is a crucial quality of politics on the Web. Within this setting, that quality allows actions of resistance to power to follow unconventional paths and make their outcomes rather unpredictable. Citizens acting individually or organised in groups simply using mobile phones, relying on basic Web-tools (such as old style bulletin boards or news groups); or by using more advanced Web 2.0 applications (blogs, wikis, or video-sharing Web-platforms) can 'sometimes manage, against considerable odds, publicly to embarrass politicians, parties and parliaments, or even whole governments.' (Keane, 2009: 744). The facility with which in the Internet Galaxy citizens can monitor, embarrass, and humble those in power reveals the growing importance of the condition of shared weakness in contemporary relationship of power. But those potentials go beyond *monitoring*, or embarrassing, or humbling. More than that, through these new tools of engagement, citizens can overcome the limits of the classical adversarial model of power relationship used normally to frame the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed; within this new organizational setting, citizens not only monitor, but they can be politically creative, and can suggest or pursue uncharted political paths. In other words, embedded within this system there is more than *monitoring*. There is the possibility to break new grounds about how politics is understood and organised.

The three cases analysed in the following section and in the next two chapters form a small but representative sample of these new political dynamics. They are three different cases of Twenty-first century monitorial citizens that exploit the Internet Galaxy (and the condition of shared weakness embedded within it) to initiate political actions that openly questions the authorities of their respective governments, and, in some cases, move politics into new unexplored territories. The first case, discussed below, focuses on the story of one recent British online petition, the Road Tax, so far the most successful example of online petition in the history of the UK. This case is studied here because it can provide us with vital clues on how the weakness paradigm is embedded in any e-government activity, even those aimed at improving government-citizens relationships. The case of the Road Tax represents also an example of the new paradigm's ambivalent effects on democracy: in the best case scenario, a fully working monitorial democracy, the weakness paradigm is a positive element in the fight against the hubris of power; in the worst case, the same tactics and the same weakness can serve the agenda of those who want to influence popular consent in support of questionable politics. Between the end of 2006 and the early months of 2007, the Road Tax petition managed to collect almost 2 million signatures. The populist pressure generated from its impressive success, amplified by mainstream media interest in the issue, was crucial in the Government's decision (one year later) to postpone sine die its plans for a new road tax scheme that many, instead, considered an unpopular but necessary path to safeguard the environment. Moreover, the analysis of the actions taken (or better: not taken) by Peter Roberts, the lead petitioner, in support of his campaign, gives us the negative blueprint of a monitorial citizen in action; it draws for us an ideal map of the blind spots citizens should avoid to be successful in their actions.

The other two cases, respectively discussed in chapter eight and chapter nine, focus on the American advocacy group Moveon.Org and the story of Beppegrillo.it, the most popular blog in Italy. Contrary to Roberts' petition, these two cases represent instead best-practices of collective action organized through Web.

Petitions.pm.gov.uk

In November 2006, in collaboration with MySociety.org (a non-partisan, London-based organization), the UK government, under the leadership of Tony Blair, launched a new service in the form of a website (Fig. 50) to allow citizens to create new or sign up for existing petitions addressed to the Prime Minister's Cabinet. Petitions are not new in the United Kingdom.
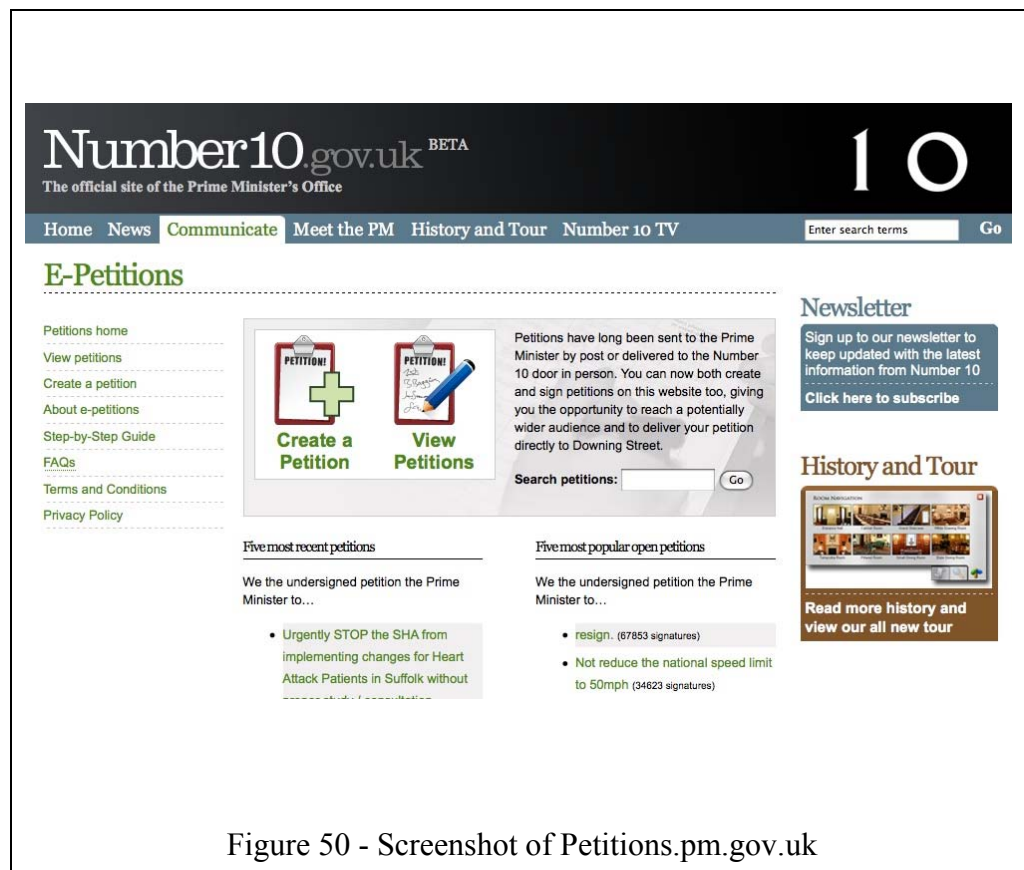
Figure 50 - Screenshot of Petitions.pm.gov.uk

The right to petition the Monarch for redress of personal grievances dates back to the *Magna Carta* sealed by King John in 1215[119]. By the end of the 13th century, 'much of the business of early parliaments was judicial rather than legislative [and] dealt with matters raised by individuals via petitions' (Lyon, 2003: 66). And in 1688 the Bill of Rights signed by King William III and

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[119] The right to petition can be in chapter 61. A scanned version of the *Magna Carta* is available online at British Library website: http://www.bl.uk/treasures/magnacarta/index.html#

Queen Mary II sanctioned that 'it is the Right of the Subjects to petition the King, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal' (William and Mary, 1688, Sess 2, cap 2). Notwithstanding their long lasting tradition, conventional forms of petitioning are often time consuming and difficult to set up. In the age of the Internet and mobile phones, they are still bound to follow a complex (sometimes cumbersome) bureaucratic process. Consider the case of the petitions submitted to the UK House of Commons: the text must be '*respectful, decorous and temperate*'; before submitting it, the petitioner must contact the House Clerk 'to ensure the petition is in an acceptable form'. Only then, the petitioner can finally start collecting signatures. However, for the petition to be valid, 'each signatory must include his or her address' (House of Commons, 2008: 2). To be successful, such kinds of petition – as any other traditional form of grass-root political campaign – must also rely on a certain degree of organization, a substantial financial basis to cover logistical costs and publicity (this latter, nowadays, might also involve costs for setting up a website to publicise the campaign) (Bimber, 2003: 99-101). And many hours of volunteers' time dedicated to exhausting door-to-door canvassing, or spent standing in a public square collecting signatures.

On the other hand, setting an online petition on the UK government website, literally, takes no longer than five minutes of a petitioner's time, and even less to sign it. Moreover, the Government service opens up new opportunities for prospective petitioners to reach a wide audience with virtually no cost or other strings attached. Contrary to traditional petition, an online petition campaign does not need an organised army of committed volunteers. The whole process in fact can be comfortably organised from one's living room with just few clicks of the mouse, some links posted on online forums, and by sending out few emails to friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, as it happens in the case of the petitions hosted by the UK Cabinet website, the institutional location guarantees a wide degree of visibility (in terms of media attention and access to the site); hence, it gives, potentially, access to a much wider audience, than any other normal online petition.

Since its launch the website Petitions.pm.gov.uk has proven very successful. In its first year it published more than 14 thousands petitions that gathered nearly six million signatures (e-Petitions Website, 2008). To make a comparison with traditional means of petitioning, according to official data released by the House of Commons (2008: 8), between 1989 and 2007 the yearly average number of petition received by the British Parliament was just 327, a number far below its online counterpart.

Prime Minister Tony Blair praised the success of the e-petition website as a sign of the good health of Britain's democracy (Blair, 2007). He also pointed out the positive impact the Internet has on the way in which the dialogue between representatives and citizens is organised. Others – and among these his successor Prime Minister Gordon Brown – were less than impressed with the effects of the new service on government's business. The reasons of such discordant judgment are to be found in the attention attracted by one particular petition, commonly known as the Road Tax Petition.

The Road Tax Petition

Started by Peter Roberts (Fig. 51), an accountant manager of an English manufacturing company, the Road Tax was a direct challenge of the government's intention to tackle road congestion and reduce CO_2. To achieve its goal, the scheme, similarly to the one successfully introduced by the Greater London Authority for some areas of the capital, aimed at reducing drastically the number of vehicles on British roads by introducing a nationwide pay-as-you-drive tax for all motorists. Robert's online petition, submitted through the Cabinet's website, asked the Prime Minister to scrap the new scheme on the grounds that it was inappropriate and entirely unfair to motorists. In fact, Roberts argued, a stealth congestion charge was already in use through taxation on fuel: 'the more you travel, the more tax you pay.' (10 Downing Street, 2007).

Figure 51 - Peter Roberts[120]

Furthermore, the new scheme had already raised concern over the risks it represented for citizens' privacy. Messages post on various Internet forums and some part of the press speculated that for the new scheme to be effective and ensure payments, the government was planning to equip each vehicle with electronic tracking devices. These concerns were echoed by Roberts in the text of his petition: 'The idea of tracking every vehicle at all times is sinister and wrong'. Therefore, Roberts asked the Prime Minister to 'forget about road pricing and concentrate on improving our roads to reduce congestion.' (10 Downing Street, 2007)

Until November 2006, the accountant manager had been interested in politics, but had never really been involved in any political activity, neither traditional, nor online. Notwithstanding this lack of experience, thanks to the Web it didn't take him long to step into action. After visiting the webpage of the Downing

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[120] Source: Facebook.com

Street's petition service [121], Roberts realised that a petition could help questioning the Government's policy (Roberts, 2008). It was a quick and small step into the wider political arena. Yet, the petition's success went beyond any of Roberts' expectations. It began with just few e-mails sent to a handful of friends (29) and some links posted on a number of websites that dealt with drivers' issues (Roberts, 2008). Roberts' intention was, in his own words, 'to start a viral email asking people to sign up the petition', hoping to raise around 35 thousand signatures before the petition's deadline in February. However, by the end of the first week the petition was already over 14 thousand signatures (Roberts, 2008). Ten days into 2007, the number had gone up to 125 thousand (Williams, 2007), and by the end of January the petition had crossed the threshold of the half a million mark (Oliver, 2007). Eventually by its deadline, 20 February 2007, the final tally had surpassed the 1.8 million signatures mark (e-Petitions Website, 2007). In fact, at a certain point the petition generated so much Web-traffic that it crashed the Prime Minister's website (BBC News, 2007).

The road to ruin

During its initial phases, despite the rising impressive number of signatures, the UK Cabinet attempted to minimize the significance of the petition. Douglas Alexander, in his capacity as Transport secretary in Blair's cabinet, declared to the BBC that the government intended to proceed in finding a satisfactory solution to road congestion even if that meant asking motorists to pay a road tax. Nevertheless, he reassured, we 'will listen to people' (BBC News, 2007a) and rebutted as 'falsehoods' some of the claims made by Roberts. He promised 'that there would be safeguards to protect motorists' privacy and that the system would not be used to catch drivers speeding' (Webster, 2007). By the petition's deadline, however, because of the pressure generated through the media, Prime Minister Blair could no longer avoid to address the issue publicly.

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[121] During our interview (6 May 2008), Roberts clarified that he came across the e-petition website quite accidentally through a web link posted on an online forum for motorist (Roberts, 2008).

Thus, to explain the government's position, Blair wrote an article published by *The Observer* and personally responded via email to each of the signatory of the petition, reassuring all of the interested parties that the proposed scheme was not about imposing 'stealth taxes', and, most importantly, that the government had not yet made any final decision about it. (Blair, 2007) In that article, Blair remarked that the e-petition and the debate that it had sparked were undoubtedly signs of the good health of British politics. It had brought the government closer to its citizens. During the last decade, the Internet has transformed politics, and Web-based forms of dissent, such as electronic petitions, the Prime Minister pointed out, are as important as any other form of traditional political contestation. Thus, Blair continued, it would be unwise for politicians and surely unhealthy for democracy to ignore the views of such a large number of citizens and simply 'try and sweep them under the carpet.' (Blair, 2007)

Notwithstanding Blair's words, the clamour surrounding the petition did not wither away. Its unparalleled success and its location (the government website), in the hands of the media and of the opposition in the Parliament quickly turned those electronic signatures into a national referendum, the unmistakable mark of the public's will and its hostility towards the new tax scheme.

The Telegraph, a conservative-leaning newspaper[122], used the petition as the foundation of its active and pressing campaign against the government, *The Road to ruin*, which lasted for several months (*Telegraph*, 2007). By the end of 2007, was the current Prime Minister Gordon Brown that at last decided 'to listen' – as the *Telegraph* put it – 'to his constituents' (Millward, 2007) and instruct his cabinet to ditch the scheme. The *Telegraph* (2007a) and other dailies emphasised the role played by the e-petition in Brown's decision (see for instance Mulholland, 2007). Subsequently, in March 2008, Ruth Kelly, the Transport Secretary, surrendered to citizens' criticism and told the BBC that the government had finally decided to withdraw its proposal: 'People legitimately raised concerns about privacy, fairness and how any scheme

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[122] 61% of the Telegraph's readership supports the Conservative party, the main opposition party in Britain. (Mori, 2004)

would be enforced. We don't have all the answers to those questions yet.' Hence, she concluded, the government must put on hold the scheme until all those questions are answered. (BBC News, 2008)

Echoing Blair's words of praise, Peter Roberts said that the new service was an effective instrument to question the government's action and clearly a benefit for the quality of democracy in Britain, without it the government would have certainly gone ahead with its plan (Millward, 2007). Others, like Steve Richards, chief political columnist of the *Independent*, a left-leaning newspaper[123], labelled the Transport Secretary's decision 'a classic case of a necessary policy killed by cowardice' (Richards, 2008). Notwithstanding that many believe that new laws are much needed to safeguard the environment, the electronic *cry wolf* of a tiny minority of the population managed to send the government into a frenzy and decisively affect the rights of the silent majority who did not sign the petition, or express its view on the matter. In a country of sixty million people, the journalist pointed out, this is hardly a sign of the good health of democracy in Britain.

These two views represent the extreme sides of a complex issue: is the Web good or bad for democracy?

The e-challenge to Democracy

Without debating the merits or disadvantages of Roberts' views on the environment, what is interesting about his petition is that in a short period of time, with as little organizational effort as possible and no financial commitment, a citizen with no previous experience in either politics or petitioning managed to achieve something unthinkable for any traditional petitioner in the same conditions as Roberts: the petition attracted the attention of a considerable number of people and of the media, and generated enough public pressure to eventually force the Government to forego its plan for the

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[123] Over 75% of the *Independent*'s readership supports either the Labour Party (36%) or the Liberal Democrats (39%) (Mori, 2004)

proposed new tax scheme. Quite remarkably, as noted by Tony Blair himself, Roberts succeeded in generating a national debate with just few clicks of a mouse (Blair, 2007). Many cheered to that achievement. Others, however, did not share the same enthusiasm. According to a Government's source, who asked not to be named[124], the current Prime Minister Gordon Brown utterly despised the whole idea of the e-Petitions website which he inherited from Blair. Brown's contempt against the petitioning tool is to a certain extent quite understandable. For Brown, as for many elected representatives, tools like the e-petition website encompass some of the most dangerous challenges the Internet can pose to a representative system. A Web-tool that allows citizens to record their own views or cast a vote on important and complex issues in a ways and speed that are unprecedented can corrupt potentially the whole idea of governing through representatives. It challenges the very essence of the system that produced it, and sometimes, ironically, it does that by acting from within that system itself – as it happened in the case of the road tax petition. In such instances, the act of governing through representatives is compromised by the emergence of a new system of government. At the core of this system is the will of the people and the decision-making process that sustains it is based on only two limited options of choices (yes or not) and very little space for debate. This new system masked as Web-enhanced representative democracy is far from Keane's monitory democracy, and in fact it can easily open the door to the worst form of plebiscitary democracy or, as Benjamin Barber would call it, 'plebiscitary tyranny' (2004: 25). That is a system that does not allow 'informed and reflective decisions', or the constructive monitoring of power; but on the contrary the system is based on 'snapshots of individuals opinions suitably aggregated' (Sunstein, 2007: 35). In this new kind of political setting populist charismatic leaders thrive while democracy dies.[125]

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[124] From a discussion with members of the cabinet during a workshop on the effects of the e-petition service. Discussion held under Chatham House Rule of anonymity.

[125] Already in 1992, it is worth here remembering, the American billionaire Ross Perot, well ahead of the Dot-com boom, had spotted the importance of new media for a populist leader like himself. For this reason during his contested presidential campaign, Perot famously promised that – if elected – he would support the creation of electronic town halls to allow all citizens to take

In the case of the Road Tax petition the authority of the British representative system was put in jeopardy since the start by the arguable choice of hosting the petition within the Cabinet's official website. With that move the government gave the new service a public seal of recognition that increased the political weight of the petitions submitted through the site (or at the least altered the perception of citizens and media towards those petitions.) The end-result was that the government found itself in a rather awkward position in the eye of the public and of the media. It was as though the government had publicly announced: let the people speak out loud and clear through this new service, their voices will count. Unsurprisingly, once the people spoke, the media and the opposition parties quite legitimately asked the Prime Minister and his Cabinet: why are you not listening?

Beyond the challenge

The UK press reported that at the height of the road tax controversy, one anonymous Cabinet minister, outraged by the negative effects that *Petition.gov.uk* had had on the Government, said: 'Whoever came up with this idea must be a prat' (Burkeman, 2007). The minister was later be 'rumoured, reasonably enough, to be Douglas Alexander, the then transport secretary' (Ibid.) Ironically, some years earlier, when he was Minister of Commerce, Alexander had a different opinion on the merit of new technologies applied to politics. During a keynote speech on the value of the marriage between democracy and new media, in 2001, Alexander stated: 'In order to attract people to get involved in online consultations and discussions, it is vital that government and representatives demonstrate their commitment to listening to and learning from the contributions that are made and to respond to them in a timely and transparent way.' (Quoted in Coleman and Coetze, 2001: 20)

Alexander's shifting position is an indicator of the growing uneasiness politicians feel towards the impact new media may have on the complex mechanisms of power that constitute the basis of their world. That uneasiness is an allergic reaction from established power holders towards the growing

active part in public debates and voting procedures (Grefe and Castleman, 2005: 163).

importance of the condition of shared weakness in Twenty-first century politics. Brown or Alexander might not know it yet, at least not on a conscious level, but through the Road Tax petition they experienced their first (bitter) taste of only the mild effects of the rules of the weakness paradigm applied to conventional structure of power. Their fear, justified from their own personal perspective (Brown's political career could certainly be a victim of this new political environment); it is unjustified from the standpoint of the quality of democratic systems. There is more to gain than to lose from the use of new communication media in politics.

True, the excessive use of fashionable new tools in government business to reach out to the people, as demonstrated by the case of the Road Tax petition, can sometimes bring a representative system to a dangerous standstill and crucially hinder the quality of its very essence: ideally, the elected representative at the core of this system is never simply the echo chamber of his/her own constituency's will, but he/she must play a more important and proactive role of mediation between the will of the people and the need of the state. The successful exercise of such role can only be guaranteed by a fine balance between the independence of action of the representatives and the need for assessment of the electing constituencies. That, at least, would be the case in an ideal world where elected representatives never succumb to the hubris of power. Alas, the daily experience of the majority of citizens in representative democracies is quite different. Monitoring bodies and new communication media are not a destructive challenge; in fact they are crucial elements to keep that system in balance or, better, to improve its democratic quality. The marriage between the Internet and a representative system is only doomed if and when that fine balance is significantly altered, as indeed happened in the case of the UK government's questionable choice of equipping its own website with an e-petition tool, clearly without properly understanding the long term consequences of that choice. In all other instances, instead, the facility with which political dissent is organised and cultivated through the Internet can only be an asset for democracy, one to protect and nurture. Forcing elected representatives to loosen their firm grip on power can transform a society ruled through representatives in a more democratic environment; one where

monitoring closely those in power becomes an integral part of the political process.

The rising importance of the Internet Galaxy in the realm of politics can transform, in principle, an essentially flawed system of government based on representation into a fully working monitory democracy. The Internet Galaxy provides a whole new range of tools and spaces that, on the one hand, enable citizens to monitor constantly those in power; on the other hand, they increase citizens' chances to influence directly the political dynamics that inform their every day life (Wilhelm, 2001; Coleman and Norris, 2005). Apart from *Petition.gov.uk*, the case of Britain provides us with some other good examples of this dual effect. Through the Internet citizens can access websites that feed them with crucial information to monitor what their representatives are constantly doing on their behalf. An example of this is *Theyworkforyou.com* a non-partisan website that provides data on the daily activities of the Members of Parliament - i.e. voting record, texts of speeches, expenses claims[126]. So if a citizen wants to know whether or not an MP has kept his or her campaign's promises, he or she can simply visit the website and type in the name of the MP and he or she will be given access to that MP's historical record. Consider for instance Gordon Brown and David Cameron (at the time of writing, respectively the leaders of the Labour party and Conservatory party, the two main political forces in Britain). If we check their names through *Theyworkforyou.org.uk* we instantly gather a snapshot of where they stand in political matters debated in parliament. We can then easily compare their Parliament's records and see, for instance, that Cameron has 'voted strongly for laws to stop climate change' whereas Brown 'has never voted on laws to stop climate change'. (See Table 9)

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[126] It is worth noting that the presence of similar web tools is already a trend in advanced democracies. Theyworkforyou.org.uk in fact is not an isolated case. Similar services are provided for other parliaments: in the US is Watchdog.net; Italy's is watched over by openparlamento.it; while the European Union MPs are monitored by Epvote.eu

Table 9 - Cameron Vs. Brown - Voting record	
How David Cameron voted on key issues since 2001[127]	How Gordon Brown voted on key issues since 2001[128]
- Voted a mixture of for and against a transparent Parliament - Voted moderately against introducing a smoking ban. - Voted strongly against introducing ID cards. - Voted strongly against introducing foundation hospitals. - Voted strongly against introducing student top-up fees. - Voted strongly against Labour's anti-terrorism laws. - Voted very strongly for the Iraq war. - Voted strongly for an investigation into the Iraq war. - Voted very strongly for replacing Trident. - Voted very strongly against the hunting ban. - Voted moderately for equal gay rights. - Voted strongly for laws to stop climate change.	- Voted a mixture of for and against a transparent Parliament. - Voted moderately for introducing a smoking ban. - Voted strongly for introducing ID cards. - Voted very strongly for introducing foundation hospitals. - Voted strongly for introducing student top-up fees. - Voted moderately for Labour's anti-terrorism laws. - Voted very strongly for the Iraq war. - Voted moderately against an investigation into the Iraq war. - Voted very strongly for replacing Trident. - Voted moderately for the hunting ban. - Voted for equal gay rights. - Has never voted on laws to stop climate change.

On the other hand, blogs and free video-sharing services (such as *youtube.com*) provide instead access to independent media platforms that allow citizens to denounce wrongdoings, and openly question who gets what when and how without relying on the public service broadcasting to do that on their behalf. In

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[127]   Source: http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/david_cameron/witney (Retrieved: 15 June 2009)
[128] Source:
http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/gordon_brown/kirkcaldy_and_cowdenbeath   (Retrieved: 15 June 2009)

this category, *Guido Fawkes's blog* is probably one of the most famous of such examples of monitorial bodies. The blog is run by Paul Staines, a self-described Libertarian and former Conservatory Party activist, who 'campaigns against political sleaze and hypocrisy' and 'doesn't believe in impartiality nor pretend to' (Staines, 2004.) In the recent years the blog has become quite popular in Britain. *Guido Fawkes* is considered the most influential independent political blog in the country 'devoured by politicians, lobby correspondents and anyone with an interest in the seamier workings of the political process' (*Guardian.co.uk, 2008*). Devoted to uncover 'parliamentary plots, rumours and conspiracies'[129], the blog has played some crucial role in uncovering stories regarding politicians misconduct that were often ignored or sidelined as not very relevant by mainstream media. In 2006 Staines was the first source to name Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's lover when other media had instead refused to publicise the story of Prescott's extra-marital affair (Barkham, 2006). And in 2008, Staines's 18-months long uncovering of a scandal related to undisclosed campaign donations forced Peter Hain, a long standing Member of the Labor Party to resign from his Cabinet post. Hain had hitherto served as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and Secretary of State for Wales in both Blair's and Brown's cabinets. Mick Fealty from the pages of *The Telegraph* called Hain: 'Blogging's first UK scalp'. And giving credit to Guido Fawkes' work, Fealty went on writing that after the *Hain's affair* 'the mainstream will be able to publicly recognise that the blogosphere is more than just a collection of 'human interest' stories. And not least, that it ain't fluffy and has real teeth that bite.' (Fealty, 2008)

Lessons learnt

When it all started, at the end of 2006, Tony Blair and his staff were seeking to break new grounds for strengthening the Government's relationship with the public by providing citizens with new ways to engage directly with the Cabinet and vice versa (Winnet and Swinford, 2007). The e-petition website was indeed a precise effort towards that direction. Reportedly, the original idea behind Tony Blair's decision to equip the Government website with an e-

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[129] Guido Fawkes' motto, as it appears on his blog: http://order-order.com/

petitioning tool was influenced by a meeting the Prime Minister had with Eric Schmidt, the chairman and chief executive of the Internet company Google Inc., in October 2006 (Winnet and Swinford, 2007). Interestingly, Schmidt is not only the number 3 in Google's power hierarchy, but he is also a man who believes that 'the true political power of the Internet will be to hold politicians to account. Computers will be able to test politicians' statements for truthfulness' (Forbes, 2006). To a certain extent, that is what happened with Peter Robert's Road Tax petition. Yet, notwithstanding its success – the road scheme was shelved by the government - somehow, the political potential of Robert's campaign remained underdeveloped. A closer look at the reasons behind that lack of accomplishment can give us a negative blueprint of a monitorial citizen in action and can help us better assessing the cases discusses in the next two chapters.

Peter Roberts fits *almost* the profile of what I earlier referred to as the monitorial citizen of the Twenty-first century: a citizen monitoring his political environment, who uses the power of new media to step into the political fray, without the need of any proxy or agency to organise that action on his behalf. However Roberts' attempt cannot be considered entirely successful, he is a *quasi*-monitorial citizen. The reasons behind this assessment are to be found in Roberts' failure to take full control of his campaign, in his lack of vision in broadening the political reach of the petition and in his basic short-sightedness in understanding the political potential of the Internet Galaxy.

Roberts initiated the petition, sent the link to some friends via email, and used Web-forums and motorists websites to publicise the petition. He was interviewed by the press and by many Television networks, but did very little beyond that. He and his petition became the symbol of the opposition to the government, but the battle was led by *The Telegraph* and by the Labour Party's political opponents in the Parliament. Roberts did not play any meaningful role during that political battle that lasted thirteen months - from the petition deadline (Feb. 2007) to Ruth Kelly announcement that the government had decided to shelve its road tax scheme (March 2008).

Roberts showed an incredible lack of vision and understanding of the political dynamics of the Internet Galaxy. Since the start, the petition remained confined to its virtual status, mostly on its original website (controlled by the government). The result was that *Petitions.pm.gov.uk* was the sole beneficiary of the wide Media's exposure given to the petition in the early months of 2007, while Roberts could not capitalise on that exposure as his campaign even lacked an independent website. It was not until after the petition had expired that Roberts registered a web domain to continue his battle (http://www.traveltax.org.uk/). But the website failed to capitalise on the petition success: the momentum had gone, and the new website was never publicised by the Media, it did not even have a cross link from the petition page on the Downing Street website. One year after its launch, *Traveltax.org.uk* had raised the meagre sum of £200 British pounds in voluntary donations and could count on an e-mailing list of about seventeen thousand people. A pale figure if compared with the almost 2 million signatories of the Road Tax petition. During our interview, Roberts admitted that the website's structure and goals were not really thought through. He regretted the choice of the domain name, it did not pay off and confused people. However, he mostly blamed the failure of his post-petition campaign to the government's obstructionism: by repeatedly denying him access to the petition's contacts database (on the grounds of British privacy laws), effectively, in Roberts' view, the government undermined his chances to capitalise on the petition success and carry on with his battle. He said: 'I had every right to access those contacts because those people had signed *my* petition, and I was denied that right' (Roberts, 2008)

Quite strikingly, especially if compared with MoveOn and Beppe Grillo's experience, notwithstanding the impressive numbers of petitioners, despite the free publicity the campaign received by mainstream media, Roberts never attempted to move the Road Tax battle offline and turn those electronic signatures in a more impressive crowd of flesh and bones protesters. When I asked about the reasons of such inaction, Roberts answered: 'I was not confident enough and did not have enough money.' (Roberts, 2008) In fact, as he explained, 'for these kind of things you need to invest money. I mean you

can organise 10.000 drivers to come down to London and protest in front of Downing Street but that will cost a lot of money. I had no idea how to do such a thing. I had very little knowledge of the whole thing.' (Roberts, 2008) In fact, as we will see in the next chapter from the examples set by Wes Boyd and Joan Blade with their MoveOn.org, and later by Beppe Grillo with his blog, Roberts was utterly wrong: one of the strengths of the Internet is that it helps to reduce the costs of political campaigning; it allows a campaign to float easily between the *online* and *offline* world. And the Internet Galaxy's political potential, as we will see, goes much further than that.

Chapter 8 – How the Internet won the 2008 US Presidential campaign

> 'They've got millions of dollars in corporate money [but what] we have is people power. So it's going to take every last one of us - working together - to win.'
> Adam Ruben (MoveOn.org)

Towards the end of my interview with Peter Roberts, I asked him if he had ever heard about the American grassroots organization MoveOn. His answer was quick and frank: 'Never!' (Roberts, 2008) Had he known anything about the American-based advocacy group, his Road Tax campaign would have probably looked much different; while his approach to the whole issue would have been bolder and more creative. Roberts would have realised that in the age of the Internet Galaxy to organise a successful political campaign is much easier than he had thought. The Web has in fact given a new life to many of those grassroots groups that are too small and can count on too modest resources to afford the rising costs of traditional forms of campaigning. Consider the case of the United States, our main focus in this chapter. There, external lobbying and grassroots campaigns play a critical role in the dynamics of the country's complex political system[130]. In the past, however, the prohibitive costs of traditional forms of campaigning and lobbying has had the effect to reduce drastically the chances for the majority of local groups, minor parties and several other political actors to organize large scale political mobilizations;

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[130] The USA is a federal constitutional republic formed by 50 states and a capital city, Washington D.C., which is a federal district. States take care of local legislation, while the Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives) takes care of the federal law. The president of the federation is elected every four years.

often even the costs of collective action at a local level have proven to be beyond the financial reach of most of those local groups. In his seminal book, *Information and American Democracy*, Bruce Bimber reported that the cost of sending campaign mails to hundred thousand people (depending on the paper's quality) ranged between $30,000 and $100,000 US dollars; labour for the task is not included in that sum (Bimber, 2003: 100-1). Given these financial pre-conditions, most of the smaller and less resourceful activist groups abstained from campaigning altogether: '[a]bout 56 percent of groups with fewer than 5,000 members undertake no collective action at all, compared with only 14 percent of those groups with 100,000 members or more.' (Ibid: 101).

New communication media change that situation. They make the process of campaigning affordable by any political group, regardless of the group's members' base or available financial resources; campaigns become also fast and easy to organise. Through the Web and its many applications (from blogs to video-sharing platforms; from forums to email lists) a campaign's message can easily become viral and reach across many different constituencies. A viral email is the Internet equivalent of the word of mouth method used in traditional campaigns; however, in comparison with the latter, the former is inexpensive, and, potentially, a viral campaign can spread to many thousands of people in a much shorter period of time than any word-of-mouth-based campaign can ever do. Each recipient can easily and without any financial commitment forward the campaign message to all his/her contacts with just one click of the mouse.

With these characteristics in mind, we can divide political organisations in *Bureaucratic* (traditional campaigning) and *Postbureaucratic* (increased use of new media); for each group we can identify four different key features (Table 10). This division is useful in the assessment of complex Web-based political actions.

Table 10 - Organising Collective Action[131]	
Bureaucratic	*Postbureaucratic*
Collective action requires substantial material resources on the part of organisers.	Collective action does not necessarily require substantial staff, money, or organization on the part of the organisers.
Organizational boundaries are sharply defined	Organisational boundaries are often permeable and not sharply defined
Membership is formally defined and structured	Informal association and affiliation are important and sometimes replace formal membership.
Collective action is typically broad-based and oriented toward entire memberships, with the organization seeking to act as a whole on the basis of centrally determined priorities.	Collective action is often narrowly focused on subsets of members or affiliates, with the organization reconfiguring itself between issues in opportunistic responses to the flow of political events.

If we apply this scheme in the case of the Road Tax petition discussed earlier, on the one hand, that campaign would fall in the post-bureaucratic group: it needed no staff, or any financial basis; its organizational structure was inexistent, or, more precisely, it was a one-man organization; all affiliations were quite informal (no paid membership, just a signature on an electronic petition); its focus was very specific. On the other hand, Roberts' attitude towards collective action was leaning more towards the bureaucratic side of the table: he was thinking in terms of substantial material resources, of the need of having more people help him with his campaign. The case of MoveOn instead (see below) is clearly post-bureaucratic in both the structure and in the attitude of its members. The American group is a perfect example of the transition from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic types of collective action. More importantly, the ten-year long experience of MoveOn as web-based advocacy group

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[131] Bimber 2003: 105

represents an important blueprint of the great political potential of the Internet. Barack Obama's historical victory in the 2008 US Presidential election cannot be fully understood without highlighting the significance of the long-lasting impact of MoveOn on American politics.

MoveOn.org: origins

In January 1998, Matt Drudge, from the news-aggregator website *The Drudge Report*[132], broke the news that the US President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, a young intern at the White House, had been involved in an extra-marital relationship (Drudge Report, 1998). The news quickly spread across other media and in the months that followed became the top story of that year (CNN, 1998). The scandal sparked from President Clinton's act of perjury committed while testifying in a sexual harassment lawsuit filed against him by Paula Jones, a former Arkansas State employee when Clinton was the Governor of that State (CNN, 1998a). On that occasion, on January 17, under oath, President Clinton denied any sexual relationship with Lewinski. The truthfulness of that statement became the centrepiece of a federal investigation lasting several months (Starr, 1998) and culminating in President Clinton's impeachment by the US House of Representatives in December 1998. Following up the House' deliberation, the US Senate tried the President on two accounts of perjury and obstruction of justice. The unfolding of the Clinton-Lewinski scandal and the independent counsel Kenneth Starr' thorough examination of the affair attracted the full attention of the media. It sparked a nationwide and bi-partisan debate about the President's misconduct.

After several months, and a considerable amount of taxpayers' money spent on questioning whether or not 'oral sex' equalled to 'sexual relationship', the public started growing weary of the whole matter. Some questioned the reasons behind Starr's perseverance; others judged the issue of little significance to deserve so much attention. Among the critics were Joan Blades and Wes Boyd, husband and wife (Fig. 52).

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[132] http://www.drudgereport.com/

Figure 52 - Wes Boyd and Joan Blades, Co-founders of MoveOn.org[133].

Tired by the whole Clinton-Lewinski's scandal, Boyd and Blades, acting as perfect examples of monitorial citizens, decided to do something to change the inertia of the situation. During the previous months, the couple had become 'increasingly frustrated by the paralysis of the government, particularly the failure of our elected leaders to get back to the business of governing.' (Blades and Boyd, 2004: xii). In their opinion, the public had been already overwhelmingly informed about the whole affair, and was inclined to censure the President for his misconduct; but more importantly, people wanted to see their representatives, quickly, turn their attention back onto more serious matters. Contrary to that widespread feeling, 'the folks in [Washington] DC', Boyd and Blades commented, 'seemed to be living in a parallel universe – one that didn't put the needs of citizens above the advantage to be gained through partisan politics.' (Blades and Boyd, 2004: xii).

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[133] Source: Associated Press

Their reaction was simple and at the same time path-breaking. They started a petition called *Censure and Move on*[134] requesting the US Congress to censure President Clinton for his behaviour in the Lewinski's case and swiftly move on to issues more relevant for the country. The petition, however, was not a traditional one. It was electronic and supported by a website, Moveon.org.

In 1998, Boyd and Blades were two former Silicon Valley entrepreneurs with no previous political background. They were citizens keeping an eye on the scene, monitoring their informational environment. *Censure And Move On* marked the moment when the two decided to wake up from their inactive state and enter the realm of action. In the previous chapter we read about the English petitioner Peter Roberts blaming his lack of *action* to his shortage of funds to support it. That was not the case of MoveOn founders. In 1998, Boyd and Blades were a wealthy couple who had sold one year earlier their own software company, *Berkeley Systems*, for about $US 14 million – (Wolf, 2004). Their financial situation, however, played no role in the success of their grassroots group; on the contrary they demonstrated that a successful grassroots campaign can be built from below with virtually no starting funds, but indeed with a lot of will and a creative understanding of new communication media to network people together and raise the necessary funds to campaign.

Early steps

Initially, *Censor and Move on* was a relatively basic and low-cost campaign: a one-sentence email sent to fewer than 100 friends and family members, who belonged to both sides of the American political spectrum, Republicans and Democrats: 'Congress must immediately censure President Clinton and move on to pressing issues facing the nation.'(See Appendix C), please sign and disseminate. One important element that set MoveOn in a different league with traditional campaigns was their intuition to support the petition with a website. It was a very simple, text-based and quite economic website: some of the founders' friends helped them build it and the costs amounted to only $89 Dollars (MoveOn, N.D.) Given these pre-conditions, the response to the

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[134] See Appendix C: Move On (original page, date: 19 Dec 1998)

petition was quite impressive. Its message soon became viral: as the original email was received, recipients started to forward the link to the petition to their own contacts; quickly the petition became known to many thousands of people (Blades and Boyd, 2004: xii). The website was setup on September 22 and aimed to collect 10 thousand signatures (Business Wire, 1998), but the petition reached the 100 thousand mark only seven days later, on September 29 (MoveOn, N.D.). Within a month, that number had gone over 250 thousand signatures. Blades and Boyd interpreted the success of the petition as a sign of gratitude. People 'had been watching a political drama unfold, as they sat by speechless and impotent', the couple wrote, 'at last, they had found a voice and were moved to action.' (Blades and Boyd, 2004: xii-xiii).

Notwithstanding the early, unexpected success of the petition, MoveOn's call for action went beyond the basic traditional act of collecting signatures. Boyd and Blades' intention was to keep the campaign alive and dynamic until the last word had been written on the Lewinski case. Their campaign's strategy was simple: every time Kenneth Starr or the Congress made a new move towards formalising the impeachment procedure against Clinton, MoveOn would respond quickly and swiftly. Each time, the group adapted its strategy accordingly, using all the means at its disposal (especially the Internet) to organise and mobilise rapidly its supporters against its opponents. For this reason Boyd and Blades called it a *flash campaign* (MoveOn, N.D.)

A flash campaign in four phases.

During its first phase (Sept. 22 – Oct. 8, 1998), the group focused on gathering consensus around the petition and raise awareness about it among the members of the House of Representatives before they voted on the Impeachment Inquiry (8 Oct. 1998). To do so, they use emails and their website to ask each of the signatory to lobby their Representatives to stop the inquiry. In the first five days of October, eighty thousand volunteers were provided with phone, fax numbers, email addresses to call, send faxes, or email (daily) the petition to their district's representatives. A thousand people volunteered to do the same with the members of the Judiciary Committee, the body overseeing the inquiry (MoveOn, n.d.). Sending the petition via email was easy and quick, yet it faced

two majors downsides: in 1998 not every member of the House of Representatives had an email address (only 80 percent of the districts were covered); electronic mails were likely to have less an impact than other forms of communication, such as hand written letters or face to face confrontation (Chadwick, 2006: 121). When MoveOn's staff realised their strategy was flawed, they quickly adapted and decided to 'move their action offline' (Brown, 1998). They mobilise their volunteers and delivered by hand a copy of the petition to each member of the House of Representatives before they voted, on October 8.

Notwithstanding the growing success of the petition and the commitment of MoveOn's volunteers, on October 8, the House voted in favour (258 to 176) of opening an impeachment inquiry against the President (Knowlton, 1998). The day after, MoveOn began a new phase of its campaign. This time, the strategy revolved around that year Mid-term General Election (2-3 November). During this period the number of people who volunteered to help with the campaign on the ground reached the 3,000 mark (Oct 22). Having learned from its previous mistakes, on October 29, the Group mobilised its volunteers and delivered by hand the printed petition to 226 Congressional districts offices in 44 states. The action – claimed to be the first of its kind by the organisers – was set up in less than a week using the Internet. It had the precise aim to show to those elected representatives that behind the electronic signatures of *Censure and Move On* were the marks of 'real people in your district', the signatures represented potential voters who believed the time had come to move one and get back to work (MoveOn, 1998)[135]

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[135] Talking about the event, Annie Dorsey, a Volunteer Director, wrote, 'the recipients were enormously impressed by both the way our groups conducted themselves - their sincerity, commitment and professionalism - by the size of the printed out petitions, and -- most of all -- by our ability to mobilize via the Internet and convert a cyberpetition into "real world" political action.' (MoveOn, 1998)[135] An other volunteer, Phoebe Alexiades, from Santa Barbara, California, reported attention the media gave to MoveOn's initiative: 'In my area, Censure and Move On was mentioned in the nightly TV news, 2 newspapers, and I personally did a live 40 minutes radio show on the topic of www.moveon.org.' (Move On, 1998a)

For the 1998 Mid-term Election, pundits and media had indicated voters' turnout as the crucial element that would decide the final result (BBC News, 1998). To bring as many people as possible to the polling stations, the day before the election (Nov. 2), MoveOn emailed all of those who had signed its petition to remind them how important was their vote for the success of their campaign (Move On, 1998a). On November 3rd, the turnout reached 38 percent, 3 points higher than expected (BBC News, 1998e). The election results were also surprising. Statistically, the Mid-term election in the sixth year of a presidency tended to favour the opposition party (BBC News, 1998d). That year's results followed a different pattern. Before Election Day, the Republicans believed that their impeachment campaign could win them an extra forty seats majority in the Congress (Corera, 1998). On the night of November 3rd, the opposition party found itself in control of the Congress (as hoped) but with five seats less in the House and zero-gain in the Senate. While the President's party had instead increased its number of seats in the House of Representatives, for the first time in a mid- term election since 1934 (Corera, 1998). Higher-than-expected turn-out and anti-impeachment campaigns like the one organized by MoveOn had in fact played an important role in swinging votes towards the Democratic party, while Republicans saw the 'building blocks of the Ronald Reagan era - California and the Deep South – captured by their rivals' (BBC News, 1998d).

To assess the effectiveness of their get-out-the-vote campaign, after the election, MoveOn surveyed its members. Days later, the organization released the survey's results (Move On, 1998a): one third of its members were under thirty-five years of age; mostly Democrats (six for every Republican) and self described independent (30%). More interestingly, the survey also found out that about 10% of the members were first-time voters. To the question *Did impeachment hearings affect your vote?* more than 60% answered *yes*. According to the data released by MoveOn, the 'highest impact was felt in highly Internet connected states like New York and California'. It is worth noting that in 1998, those two states represented also the hard-core base (42%) of MoveOn's membership: 31% in California, and 11% in the state of New York. (MoveOn, 1998a) Showing the power of viral politics, the survey found

out that each of the members interviewed had on average contacted more than 13 additional people (friends and colleagues). Hence, according to MoveOn's best estimates, the campaign had reached over 4 million people. That number far exceeded the reach of traditional small-party get-out-the-vote campaigns. 'And since these messages came from friends and other "trusted" personal contacts' commented a spokesperson for MoveOn, it is logical to assume that 'their power was far greater than ordinary direct mail or the broadcast media' (Move On, 1998a).

Incidentally, the state of New York and California were the most affected by the electoral sweep that took place on Election Day: in California, voters chose a Democrat governor for the first time in 16 years. (BBC News, 1998b); and in New York, against all predictions, the Democrat Charles Schumer won the Senate seat against Alfonse D'Amato, the Republican incumbent. (BBC News, 1998c)

MoveOn's get-out-the-vote campaign during the 1998 Mid-term Election showed, for the first time, that the use of the Internet had great political potential. It could help small political organizations like MoveOn to reach out to large constituencies with little financial effort; and also capture the attention of young citizens who were new to politics, but increasingly eager to be actively involved in the political process. Overall, during those initial months, 3,000 volunteers had helped MoveOn distributing over 20,000 paper pages of comments to politicians, and had made more than 30,000 phone calls to District offices (Brown, 1998)

The third phase of *Censure and Move on* (Nov. 3 – Dec. 16) began as soon as Election Day ended. It aimed at lobbying the House and the Senate before the formal impeachment vote took place (December 19th). Some pundits had interpreted the 1998 Election as a referendum on the Clinton's impeachment inquiry. Thus, the results were received as a good omen for the President's future, and a defeat of the Republicans' support of the impeachment (Corera, 1998). The pundits, however, were wrong. Despite the petitioners' efforts and the election results, by early December it was clear that the congressional leaders intended to impeach the President (MoveOn, 1998b) To fight back,

once again MoveOn adapted its strategy. Between December 8th and 16th, the group – in partnership with an other no-profit organization (Working Assets Long Distance) – started a *call-in campaign*: dialling a toll-free number (1-877-TO-MOVEON) volunteers made more than 200,000 free of charge calls to their Congress' Representatives and ask them not to impeach President Clinton. Only in the first three days, were over ninety thousand the calls made by the petitions' supporters. And when some people began to report that the telephone of the main switchboard of the House of Representatives was jammed, MoveOn quickly adapted and posted on its website direct phone numbers of Representatives' offices to bypass the switchboard (MoveOn, 1998c). More than 500,000 email messages were sent from constituents to their representatives. And on December 15th, with the help of 40 volunteers MoveOn delivered by hand over 300,000 anti-impeachment letters and petitions to every Member of Congress (MoveOn, 1998c).

These many efforts notwithstanding, few days before the vote deadline of December 19th, it was finally clear that Clinton's impeachment was inevitable. In this last phase of the *Censure and Move On* campaign, Boyd, Blades, and their supporters started concentrating on what to do after Clinton had been formally impeached[136]. The battle had been lost, but the war was not over yet. Just one minute before the vote, MoveOn e-mailed its '450,000 supporters and urged them to make a "We Will Remember" pledge' (MoveOn, 1998d). The new campaign asked supporters to remember how their Representatives voted on December 19 and commit themselves to support financially those candidates that at the following election would directly oppose those Members of Congress who had voted pro-impeachment. The strategy employed to gather financial support mirrored the technical limitations of the time. If compared with today's standards where supporters can easily transfer money to their candidates' campaign accounts with just few click of the mouse, MoveOn's mechanism would appear quite rudimentary: people were only asked to make a

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[136] The original *Move On and Censor* campaign was kept alive. The Senate, in fact, had yet to deliberate on the issue. The mission remained the same: 'to promote a sensible approach to swift and fair closure. As the petition drive continues to garner signatures, MoveOn.org will continue to help constituents communicate powerfully with their Senators. (MoveOn, 1998d)

pledge to donate money, there was no transfer of funds involved; and in due-course, MoveOn was to remind them to fund the individual campaigns of the selected candidates. These technical hiccups notwithstanding, the new campaign succeeded in gathering media attention; in showing the financial potentials of Internet fundraising; and in tracing a clear path for MoveOn's future. In less than twenty-four hours, MoveOn had received more than 8,000 pledges accounting for over $5 million dollars in value (MoveOn, 1998d). Few days later, the number of pledges had doubled and the amount of funds committed was nearing $11 million (Clausing, 1999). Commenting on the House's vote, Boyd remarked: 'On Saturday [19], we witnessed the most reckless and irrational act in congressional history […] The only way to save our system from permanent harm is to insure historic consequences for the perpetrators.' Echoing her husband, Joan Blades added: 'Politicians think the public has a short memory [but] they are mistaken. Americans are passionate about fairness and revere the Constitution. We are not vindictive, but we will remember that these representatives do not reflect our values and do not hear our voice.' (MoveOn, 1998d)

What's next?

After being formally impeached, President Clinton's position was eventually cleared, few months later, by the US Senate[137]. With hindsight, Blades and Boyd's petition had clearly failed in its original aim to avoid the President's impeachment. Their campaign, nonetheless, seemed to have hit a raw nerve in the American public sphere. Polls showed that it was not just MoveOn and its petitioners who were dissatisfied with how Kenneth Starr and the Congress had handled the whole impeachment story. After the House voted in favour of the impeachment, President Clinton's approval ratings were at a personal all-time

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[137] To clarify the impeachment procedure in the US: the House begins the procedure and then vote for the impeachment (in Clinton the House' voted yes). Then the President is formally declared "impeached". At that point, the Senate must try the impeached officer and decide whether or not he/she must be removed from office. In the case of Clinton he was acquitted. After Andrew Johnson in 1868, Clinton was the second president ever in US history to be impeached.

high: a Gallup poll found that 73% of Americans supported Clinton and 68% were against the impeachment. Meanwhile, despite of the Republicans' effort, the numbers of those who supported Clinton's resignation had fallen by 30 points (Barkham, 1999). During their three months spent campaigning, MoveOn was able to tap into that spread public discomfort. The grassroots movement had caught the attention and had become the point of reference of thousands of citizens spread throughout the US and ready – if needed - to step into action and get more involved in important political matters.

To coordinate all those individuals and make their voices heard and accounted for when political decisions were to be made, the two former Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and their affiliates needed to transform MoveOn radically. Until the early months of 1999, the group had essentially acted as the custodian of a petition; now it needed to transform itself into something with a much wider field of action, and with a long-term plan. The *We Will Remember* pledge' was the first step towards that direction. Since then MoveOn has diversified its efforts and energy. On the one hand (as *Move On Civic Action*) it has concentrated on education and advocacy on important national issues such as campaigns to reform the media or against war (MoveOn, n.d.a). The anti-war protest between 2002 and 2003 to pressure the Bush Administration to find a diplomatic solution to prevent the imminent invasion of Iraq was among *Civic Action's* most notable efforts. In that occasion, MoveOn joined forces with several other groups (civic, environmental and faith organizations) to form *Win Without War*[138], a broad bi-partisan national coalition representing millions of Americans that attempted to challenge the President's position on the invasion of Iraq (Win Without War, 2002). MoveOn was a major player in that campaign. It raised funds to support the coalition; it helped spread anti-war information and organise many events and protests throughout the world (i.e. more than three thousands simultaneous candlelit vigils in 122 countries) (Chadwick, 2006: 123). Boyd and Blades indicated the *Win Without War* campaign as a landmark in the history of their Organization: 'Our campaign to avert war in Iraq propelled us onto center stage in 2002.' (Blades and Boyd,

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[138] See a complete list of Groups participating to the protest at http://winwithoutwarus.org/html/coalition.html

2004: xiii). Employing strategies similar to those used during their anti-impeachment campaign, MoveOn's activists helped make telephone calls, wrote letters to newspapers and other media organizations; they organised meeting with US Senators, handed out leaflets; joined the marches held around the world in February 2003; and when needed they inundated MoveOn's accounts with donations to pay for their first full page advert in the *New York Times* headlined "Let the Inspections Work" (Blades and Boyd, 2004: xiii-iv)[139].

Civic Action is only one side of the advocacy group. On the other side is *MoveOn Political Action* that since the 2000 US General Election has focused its effort on the mobilization of citizens throughout the country to support political battles in the US Congress by helping to select and elect candidates who reflect MoveOn's members' values. It is a recognized federal Political Action Committee (PAC)[140] whose goal is to link like-minded, concerned citizens in order to have a substantial impact on the outcome of congressional elections. Most individuals have usually very little political power, for them MoveOn PAC represents 'an opportunity to aggregate their contributions with others to gain a greater voice in the political process' (MoveOn.org, N.D.) Being a PAC, MoveOn cannot accept donations greater than $5,000, nevertheless the bulk of its contributions is made 'by people who give less than $100 – folks who don't have a lot of money but want to see a change.' (MoveOn, N.D.)

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[139] 'When we asked [our members] to support our first ad […] our members knocked our socks off with their response. We were hoping to raise $35,000; we got $400,000, from more than 10,000 individual contributions.'(Blades and Boyd, 2004: xiii-iv)

[140] In the US system, 'while corporations and labor organizations are prohibited from making contributions or expenditures in connection with federal elections', the Federal Election Campaign Act and the Federal Election Commission regulations permit them to set up political committees, which may make contributions to and expenditures on behalf of federal candidates and other committees. In other words, PACs are all those private groups that are involved in lawful political action aiming at helping to elect (or to defeat) candidates in political elections. Or promoting (or attempting to defeat) proposed legislations. All those organizations receiving or donating funds exceeding US $ 1000 dollars are considered PACs. The Act limits contributions by individuals to PACs to a maximum of $5000. (Federal Election Commission, 2007)

Thanks to this approach and to the use of Internet, in the last ten years MoveOn PAC has become a key player in the US political arena; it has distinguished itself especially for its formidable fundraising tactics. Its use of the Web has inspired and changed the way in which fund-raising is organised throughout the country. In the pre-Internet/pre-MoveOn era, traditional fundraising strategies often relied on generous donations by wealthy supporters. Dinner and lunch parties where the perfect locations to raise funds. MoveOn showed that there was a hard-rock bed of small donors that politicians had mistakenly neglected, as they regarded these potential donors not worth their campaign managers' energy. In the subsequent years, the example of MoveOn showed those short-sighted politicians that in the Internet Galaxy, even $5 or $10 dollar donations could help win a campaign. In 2008, Barack Obama's successful bid for the US presidency was built on that system (as we will see more in details below)

In the years, MoveOn has also learnt from its mistakes. Its first attempt at fundraising, the *We Will Remember Pledge*, while it had the merit to put MoveOn in the spotlight as fundraiser, failed to live up to the expectations: only $2 Million of the $11 million Dollars pledged were eventually raised for the year 2000 Election[141]. Since then however, the scenario has changed radically, MoveOn has sharpened its fund-raising mechanism: it started in 1998 with just US$ 12,000 dollars in donations; for the 2004 Presidential election, it collected over US$32 Million; and during the 2008 US Presidential Campaign declared over $88 Million in receipts (MoveOn, 2008a). Through the years, MoveOn has been able to raise over US$ 150 Million in support of its candidates and its political campaigns (Fig. 53).

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[141] According to data released by the Federal Election Committee, for the election cycle of the year 2000, the one that interested the We Will Remember pledge. Source Opensecrets.org. Available at http://opensecrets.org/pacs/lookup2.asp?strid=C00341396&cycle=2000
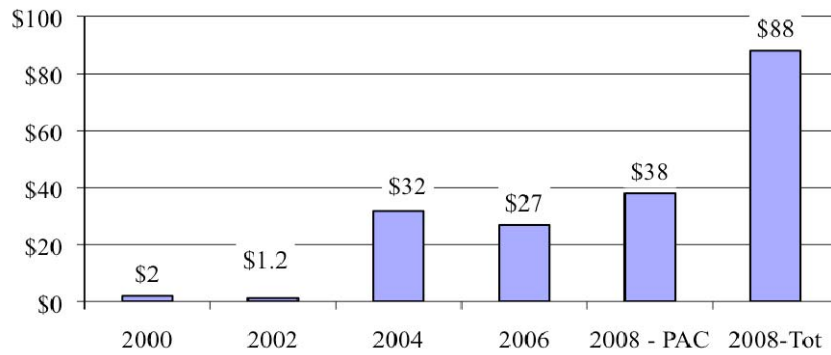
Figure 53 - MoveOn PAC Tot. Elections Contributions 1998-2008 (in Millions) [142]

People-Powered Politics

At the core of MoveOn's concept of political power is a concept of politics that is participatory in essence: each and every citizen can make a difference if he or she is actively involved in the politics of everyday life. Yet, this approach should not be misinterpreted simply as the antithesis of the Representative model that is at the basis of democracy in American. On the contrary, in a democratic system like the US, where professional Lobbies and nation-wide Advocacy groups play a crucial role in the policy choices the government makes, MoveOn sees in the involvement of the average citizen in the dynamics of that system an important chance to raise the overall quality of the choices made by the political leadership. It is a chance to make politics and politicians more accountable to their electoral base, whilst put pressure on those politicians to make choices that better represent the people who have elected them. MoveOn does so by creating a direct bond between the representatives and their electorate, by making each hour of volunteer work or dollar donated to candidates as important as the many seven figures cheques traditional lobby groups and big donors give away every election cycle in support of their chosen candidates. MoveOn's members call this approach: *People-Powered Politics*.

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[142] Source: Opensecrets.org. 2008-tot refers to the total amount contributed in the 2008 election cycle (Source: MoveOn, 2008a)

Adam Ruben (Field Director of MoveOn.org Political Action) defined people powered politics in an email sent to all MoveOn members in the occasion of the launch of the *Win back the House* campaign[143]. Ruben wrote: 'Control of the House [of Representatives] is in reach but making it happen is going to take a big push.' Differentiating People-powered politics from traditional lobbying, he said: 'they've got millions of dollars in corporate money [but what] we have is people power. So it's going to take every last one of us - working together - to win.' (MoveOn, 2006)

Notwithstanding Ruben's words, the idea of *people-powered politics* should not be misinterpreted as the direct expression of an army of fully informed, fully active, always present citizens. On the contrary, the average MoveOn member acts more like Schudson's monitorial citizen: he/she keeps an eye on the political scene, receives all messages sent out by the advocacy group; but, ultimately, there is no guarantee, or strong commitment (and there should not be) that he/she will read each and everyone of those messages or forum posts; or join every campaign the group advocates. The system in fact does not need that degree of commitment. All it needs to work well is to provide its members with the possibility to step quickly into action, when something gets their attention and they decide they want to be actively involved.

Generally, it is important to understand that MoveOn and its members are linked by a dual-bond of reciprocal trust which is fundamental for the group's success. On the one hand, through its staff, MoveOn acts towards its members as a trusted source of information (the management group sends regular emails and posts threads on its online action forum). On the other hand, MoveOn's members are not just donors and labour, but they are also a productive source of ideas and information. Through emails, surveys or suggestions posted on the group's *Action Forum*[144] – that is a Web-forum where MoveOn members can easily vote for or against a post –they can propose new campaigns, openly question choices or give feedback on proposed actions.

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[143] Since 1994, for twelve years the House of Representative had been under the control of a Republicans majority. MoveOn's campaign wanted to help Democrats win the back the House.
[144] http://www.actionforum.com/

In 2006 MoveOn declared it had over three million members registered in its database. These are no paying-members, their membership cannot be compared to traditional political parties affiliation. To become a member of MoveOn is to follow an easy procedure and sign up to the group's mailing list. But for a group like MoveOn that is enough: for people-powered politics to work and be effective the organisation does not need – at all time – the entire members' base to be ready and active, or fully committed. Consider the case of the *Win Back The House* campaign in 2006: of those three million members only a small percentage took an active role in it. MoveOn organized seven thousand house parties to promote the campaign and make phone calls to potential voters. These parties attracted over fifty thousands people. While a similar number of people did the same from their own homes. They managed to make over seven millions calls and targeted 61 districts. All together, six hundred thousand individuals contributed a total of US$ 27 Million in funds to the campaign (MoveOn, 2006); but their commitment was – economically – far from astonishing: on average $45 dollars each[145]). Eventually, the Democratic Party resulted the winner of that year Mid-term Election, regaining full control of the Congress for the first time since 1994[146].

The concept of people-powered politics played even a more crucial role in the 2008 US Presidential race when for the first time since its foundation, MoveOn endorsed a candidate for President in the Democratic primary (MoveOn, 2008). After a 2-day online election (from January 31st to February 1st, 2008), and a *turn out* of over 280 thousand members, 70.4% of the votes went to the Illinois Senator Barack Obama and only 29.6% were for the other Democratic candidate, Hillary Rodham Clinton, New York Senator and former First

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[145] The money was used to fund House and Senate candidates. And to buy Television adverts in targeted districts. Source: data released by the Federal Election Committee and quoted by Opensecrets.org: 2006 list Available at http://opensecrets.org/pacs/topacs.asp?type=R&cycle=2004&filter=P

[146] The Democratic Party won a majority of 233 seats against 202 of the Republicans in the House, and 51 vs. 49 in the Senate. (CNN, 2008 'Democrats retake Congress', in *CNN.com*, http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/ (retrieved 12 December 2008)

Lady[147]. The results were announced just before *Super Tuesday* (February 5th): with 24 States simultaneously holding caucuses or primary elections, that particular day was the most important election day in the 2008 Democratic Party primaries. The endorsement represented an opportunity for MoveOn to campaign as a unified movement, to be a clear force in the electoral race: 'If we can agree on a candidate by [February 1st], our endorsement will give that candidate a significant boost going into Super Tuesday, just a few days away', Ely Pariser, MoveOn's Executive Director wrote in an message sent to the group's mailing list. 'In addition to mobilizing MoveOn members to vote, our endorsement would mean that we campaign actively, as a unified movement, to elect a candidate who will represent us.'[148]

Soon after the official endorsement, MoveOn began to mobilise its wide network of activists to help Sen. Obama succeeding in the February 5th electoral context. According to MoveOn, 1.7 million of its members were registered voters in Super Tuesday states (MoveOn, 2008). At the end of that important Election Day, Senator Obama resulted the winner. He prevailed in 14 States against the 8 won by Senator Clinton.

In the following months, MoveOn contributed almost 1 million volunteers to the Obama's Campaign. That support translated in over 20 million hours of unpaid work. Following the same tactics experimented during their 2006 *Win Back the House campaign*, MoveOn volunteers registered over half a million new voters in battleground states; and raise funds to support Obama's campaign. In total, during that election cycle MoveOn collected over $88 million in small contributions[149].

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[147] In details: Obama: 197,444 preferences; Clinton: 83,084. Source: *MoveOn Members Endorse Obama*, Email from MoveOn email list, received February 1st, 2008, 17:15 (See Appendix C).
[148] URGENT: Presidential Endorsement: Vote Today! Email from MoveOn email list, received 31 January 2008, 17:50.
[149] Source: MoveOn, 2008

A model imitated

In early 1999, commenting on the figures of the original *We Will Remember pledge*, Jonah Seiger, co-founder of *Mindshare Internet Campaigns* in Washington D.C., told the *New York Times* that MoveOn represented 'a signal of the future of the political process'. The two entrepreneurs from Silicon Valley had shown that in the Internet age organization and coordination of monitorial citizens can spring overnight: the new recipe for political activism is *just* 'someone with access to technology, a little bit of money and a compelling message' (Seiger in Clausing, 1999) Yet, in 1999 it was not at all clear how in practice that signal's long lasting consequences would affect American politics. The 2004 US Presidential campaign provided some glimpses of those potentials: in that election cycle, MoveOn's support was key in helping to propel Howard Dean, the former Governor of the state of Vermont, from the role of underdog to frontrunner for the Democratic party nomination race.

In June 2003, for the first time, MoveOn asked its members to take part in an 'online vote' to choose the Democratic nominee for the 2004 presidential election (See Appendix C for the Poll card). Over 300 thousand members voted. Dean resulted the unexpected winner with 43% percent of the votes (MoveOn, 2003)[150]. Although his nomination campaign was short-lived (it lasted until the early stages of the primaries), Dean's experience proved that the Internet could play an important role in challenging established hierarchies of power in the American political milieu. Building on MoveOn's early support, Joe Trippi (the Dean Campaign's manager) used the Web to strengthen his candidate chances to win the nomination. The strategies adopted by Trippi emulated MoveOn's fund raising tactics, and used online networking sites like Meetup.com to coordinate supporters. More importantly, Trippi and his staff had the merit to understand that for an Internet campaign to work at its best they had to listen to their supporters input and let them free to be creative.

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[150] MoveOn Primaries started on Tuesday, June 24 2003 and last 48 hours. The top three candidates were: 1) Dean (votes 139.360 = 43.87%), 2) Kucinich (76000 = 23,93%); and 3) Kerry (49.973 15.73%) who eventually became the Democratic Party nominee for the 2004 Presidential Election (MoveOn.org. 2003).

Towards the end of 2003, the MeetUp group of Howard Dean had more than 190 thousand members, had organised hundreds of rallies and sent thousands of hand-written letters to fellow voters in caucus states like New Hampshire (Trippi, 2004: 86).

One of the early and most telling examples of Trippi's successful use of the Internet to support his candidate is represented by the so-called 'Cheney Challenge' campaign. In July 2003, taking a cue from *MoveOn's* previous experiences, the Dean Campaign demonstrated the efficacy of *news-pegged fundraising appeals* (Cornfield, 2005): promptly reacting on news announcing the presence of Vice-President Cheney at an imminent $2,000-a-plate fundraising lunch event, a blogger, who supported Dean but was not a paid member of his staff, 'came up with the idea of to put up a Cheney bet that day, along with a live streaming Web-cast of Howard [Dean] eating a three-dollar turkey sandwich' (Trippi, 2004: 148). Dean Campaign's strategists that day used emails and blogs to challenge the Governor's supporters to raise more money than the Republicans by the time the event started. By the end of the event, Cheney had raised $250,000 from 125 guests. 9700 people had instead contributed on average $50 each to meet Dean's challenge: in total that day Dean raised over $500,000 (Trippi, 2004: 148).

MoveOn's online primary results and the success of Trippi's flash campaigns like the *Cheney Challenge* generated over US$ 40 million dollars in donations and an increasingly favourable and free press coverage. In an age where what the Bush/Cheney website called a blog was in reality 'nothing more than a bunch of press releases' with no room for readers' comments or any other input from their supporters; it was a website where the whole communication flow was 'top-down' (Trippi, 2004: 102), the media were captivated by Dean's campaign tactics; by his ability to use the Web to mobilise a wide grassroots network of supporters, and his innovative use of the Internet (innovative at least for a presidential race). Trippi and his staff had the merit of expanding the model the campaign had borrowed from MoveOn's earlier experiences, and improve it with the use of Web 2.0 tools: MeetUp.com was crucial for the organization of his wide network of local grassroots supporters groups; while

the use of the blogosphere amplified the range of the campaign's messages, it served as an invaluable source of information, and as powerful monitoring body of unfair media coverage (Cornfield, 2005)

Eventually, poor results in the early caucuses, personal gaffes, and political inexperience resulted in Dean's withdrawal from the race (Trippi, 2004). Notwithstanding his failure, Dean's meteoric ascendance to glory had the merit to shed new light on the Web's political potential. In the past MoveOn had demonstrated that the Web could be used to raise funds and organize wide advocacy campaigns; but in 2004, Dean, for the first time, showed to the American public that the marriage between Internet and politics, potentially, could propel a little known candidate all the way to the White House. Thanks to Trippi's innovative use of the web, thanks to the blogosphere and his many thousands MeetUp's friends, between the end of 2003 and the early months of 2004, Dean became in the public eye the most likely candidate to win the Democratic nomination for the 2004 Presidential race. After Dean, politicians' and media's attitude towards the Web's political potentials changed irreversibly.

Barack Obama 2008

MoveOn's model and Dean's experience was replicated, with varies degrees of success, by all candidates in the 2008 US Presidential race. The effect was so overwhelming that Jose Antonio Vargas (a *Washington Post* Reporter) talked of the rise of a new form of politics based on what he termed a *clickocracy*: 'Just as MySpace and Facebook change the way we communicate, just as YouTube alters the way we entertain ourselves, just as eBay and iTunes modify the way we shop, the Internet', Vargas wrote, 'is transforming the way we engage with this never-ending presidential campaign. Like it or not we now belong to a clickocracy - one nation under Google, with video and e-mail for all.' (Vargas, 2008)

Clickocracy is not the most fortunate choice of term: vaguely cacophonic, in my opinion it emphasises excessively the rather simple minimal action of clicking a mouse button, thus promoting the idea that that click is a pure act of

power. By referring to a *clickocracy* Vargas misses the point. In fact, talking of *clickocracy* is to look at the whole issue of power relationships from an outdated perspective. It means applying the old and inadequate *strength paradigm* to new power structures that exist within the Internet Galaxy. That approach – not so different from Prime Minister Blair's take on the Road Tax petition (see above chapter 7) - can never work because it ultimately considers power as a commodity that belongs to *this* or *that* power holder: i.e., the state, the president, the CEO, the People, God. On the contrary, we should look at the matter from the opposite perspective. If we adopted the rules of what I earlier called *the weakness paradigm*, we would realise that the most distinguished element in the marriage between politics and the Internet is that there is no 'clickocracy' ruling over this new communication galaxy, for the simple reason that there is no 'ocracy'. No one is ever in an absolute position of supremacy, of ruling others. No one can ever say: 'I am in power'.

Furthermore, the term *clickocracy* undermines the overall perception of Web-based political engagement by fostering the misleading idea that Internet activism spawns from mechanical and unmediated reflexes, rather than from far more complex processes of peer-to-peer networking and information sharing. That term is unable to capture the intricate dynamics of Monitory Democracy (Keane, 2009) and the depths of the role monitorial citizens (Schudson, 1999) play in this new political milieu.

Nevertheless with that ugly word, the *Washington Post* reporter definitely spotted an important trend in US politics: throughout the 2008 Presidential race the Web (and at large the whole range of new communication media) was very influential in sustaining candidates' campaigns. But more importantly, the Web proved to be a formidable instrument to enact political change from below. With hindsight, it is probably not surprising that the electorate rewarded the candidate that more than anyone else advocated a politics of change in Washington. On November 4, 2008, Senator Barack Obama was the unlikely winner of a historical race that ended with 'an improbable candidate fulfilling a once-impossible dream' (Dorning and Tankersley, 2008): the American people sending to the White House the first Afro-American president.

The negative legacy of the eight years of the Bush administration and the worldwide economic crisis that broke in the second half of 2008 (coupled with a growing desire for change) played certainly a major part in the electorate's preference for Barack Obama over the Republican candidate John McCain (Von Drehle, 2008). But in addition to those core elements, many pointed out that at the foundations of the new President's success (unthinkable only one year earlier) was Obama's ability to harness the power of new communication media in support of his campaign and to the demise of other more experienced candidates (with better odds to win), such as Hillary Clinton or McCain (Talbot, 2008; Carr, 2008). Notwithstanding the many praises received, Obama's campaign strategy did not entirely break new grounds. Rather, it capitalised on existing models (such as the ones pioneered by MoveOn since 1998 and by Howard Dean in 2004). Leveraging on the full potential of existing Web 2.0 applications, using social network websites like Facebook and Myspace, and video sharing platforms like YouTube (tools that were not present or had little relevance in 2004), Obama brought those two models to unprecedented heights. He was the first candidate to recognise in the Internet Galaxy a formidable environment to develop social capital.

The concept of social capital is a twentieth century invention. The sociologist Robert Putman traced 'at least' six original and independent definitions of the term. The oldest of these definitions, the one that 'virtually anticipates all the crucial elements in later interpretations' dates back to 1916 and it was coined by J. J. Hanifan, a state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia (Putman, 2000: 19). Hanifan used the term to refer to the value of social ties in community development. 'Tangible substances' such as 'good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families make up a social unit', wrote Hanifan. These social units are essential for the development of individuals, in fact, 'the individual is helpless socially, if left to himself'. Instead if 'he comes in contact with his neighbour, and they with other neighbours', Hanifan argued, 'there will be an accumulation of social capital' (Quoted in Putnam, 2000: 19) which in time will improve the living conditions of a whole community.

Social capital is based on a strong sense of reciprocity among the members of a social network. An individual does something for the community or for someone else because, in the end, that good deed will benefit that individual as well. If a citizen calls the police when he/she notice a thief breaking in his neighbour's house is an act that has a double value: on the one hand it benefits the neighbour's property, on the other it benefits the citizen as it increases the chances that that neighbour would do the same if the parts were reversed. During the last century the concept of social capital has evolved considerably. Families, bowling club mates, Sunday school classes, as well as college roommates, professional networks (Putman, 2000: 21) and, nowadays, Internet-based social networks like those developing through Facebook or Myspace, they all represent forms of social capital (Ellison et al, 2007; Valenzuela et al, 2008). Obama, a former community organiser, was the first presidential candidate to realise the political relevance of those new territories of social capital.

Since the start of his campaign, Obama's approach was different from that of other politicians. Marc Andreessen, co-founder of Netscape Communications Corporation and board member of Facebook.com, met Obama in February 2007 to discuss the potentials of social Web networks for political campaigning. Months later, commenting on that meeting, Andreessen said that Obama was one of a kind. Other politicians he had met before showed curiosity about the Web, were even surprised of its potentials 'but their interest sort of ended in how much money you could raise.' But Obama, Andreessen remarked 'was the first politician I dealt with who understood that the technology was a given and that it could be used in new ways.' (Carr, 2008) Thanks to their leader's attitude, their knowledge of pre-existing models of people-powered politics, and their understanding of the potential of Web 2.0 applications, Obama's strategists were able to connect with that part of American social capital that had hitherto been largely left out from politics. They established a thriving grassroots movement of many millions of people whose influence on the election was unparalleled by any of the other contenders' supporters group (Talbot, 2008). Through the official campaign website (mybarackobama.com), or Facebook.com - as it had happened ten years earlier with MoveOn's anti-

impeachment campaign - Obama's supporters were able to make a difference: create local support groups to attend rallies; organise door-to-door canvassing to register voters; arrange fund-raising house parties; make millions of phone calls to potential Obama's voters and then remind them to go to vote on Election Day; fight back negative smears from political opponents; create and distribute a wide range of campaign promotional material (videos, posters, flyers and many other gadgets).

At the end of the campaign, the numbers were impressive (Vargas, 2008a): 35,000 volunteer groups, over 200,000 offline events; an e-mail list with over 13 million addresses. 7,000 different email messages sent out to supporters; 1 billion total emails sent; 1 million text-message subscribers. 3 or more text messages to every subscriber in a battleground state on Election Day. Over 2 million profiles on MyBarackObama.com. 400,000 blog posts written. 3 million calls made by volunteers through the campaign's virtual phone bank during the final four days prior to the election. 70 thousand personal fundraisers on MyBO.com responsible for raising over $30 million dollars. 5 million supporters in other social networks. Furthermore, speaking at the Web 2.0 Summit (San Francisco, 7 Nov. 2008), Joe Trippi, the former Howard Dean Campaign Manager, estimated that Obama campaign videos, with reference only to the official ones posted by Obama's staff on YouTube, produced more than 14.5 million hours of viewing time. To buy the same amount of time on broadcast Television would have cost about $47 million, that is more than a 'half the amount the McCain campaign received in public financing'. (Trippi, 2008)

Contrary to McCain, betting on the fundraising power of new media, in June 2008, Obama opted out of public financing and decided to pay for his campaign with donations. He was the first presidential candidate to do so since 1976, when the system was enacted by the Government (CNN, 2008). His choice paid off beyond expectations: Obama raised a staggering sum of over $US 740 million dollars (Fig. 54). Nearly a third of that sum was raised in the last quarter of his campaign. It was a sum of money unparalleled by any previous candidate.

Figure 54 - Obama's funds raised and spent (in mil.)[151]
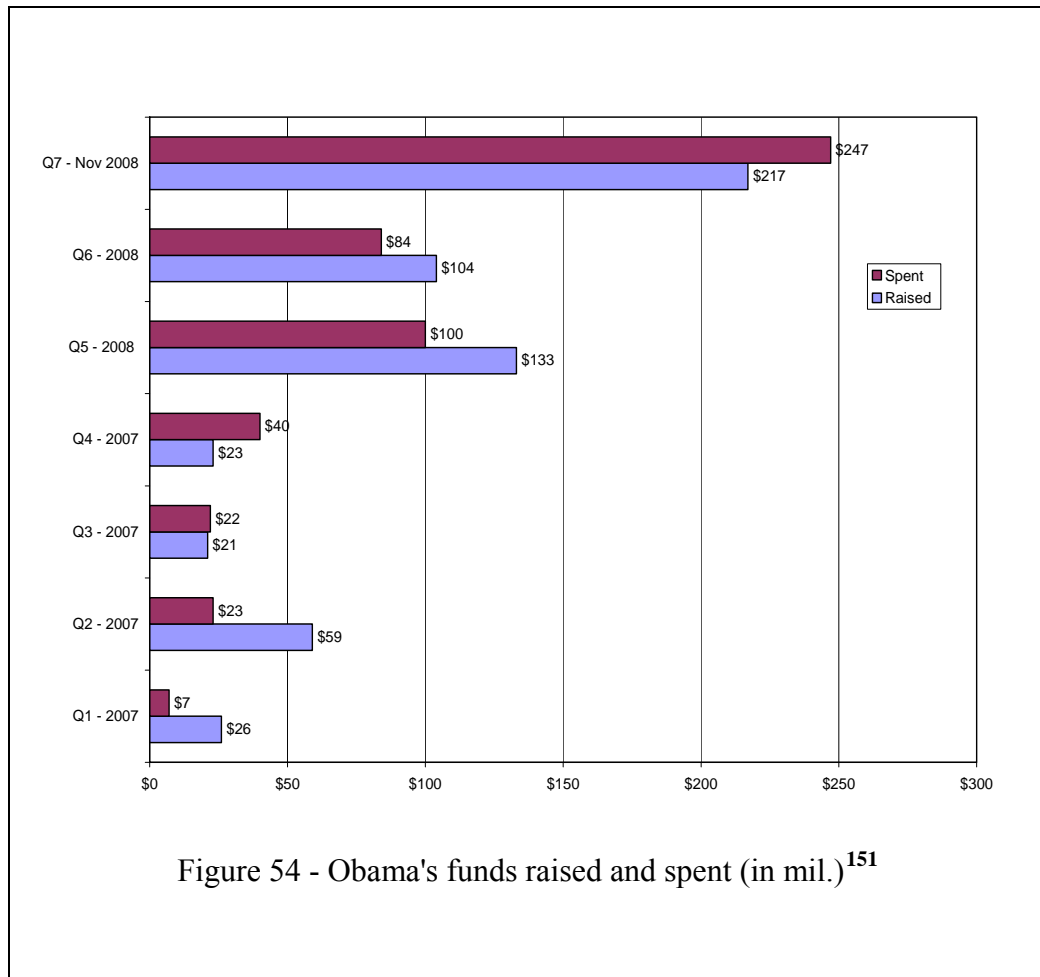
Most of those donations (about 6.5 million) came from the Web, from over 3 million individuals (Vargas, 2008a). More importantly, like MoveOn had experienced since 1998, about 90 percent of those contributions were under $100. In comparison, the Republican candidate, John McCain raised almost 370 million, but only 54 percent of that sum came from individual contributions[152]. A perfect example of those three million donors is Linnie Frank Bailey, a 52-year-old mother of two from Riverside, California. Prior to the start of the election season in early 2007, Bailey was neither a political activist, nor she had ever heard of Barack Obama. She learned about the

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[151] Source: Center for Responsive Politics, data updated to 17 November 2008. http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/summary.php?cycle=2008&cid=N0000642 4 – Retrieved 12 December 2008)

[152] Idem

Senator from Illinois in 2007, from his official website. She watched many times the videos of Obama's speeches on Youtube.com, and she felt inspired by him. Bailey then decided to get involved, for as much as she could (in terms of money and time). Most of her donations amounted to $10 or less. Her first online donation to Obama, $10 US dollars, dates to June 25th, 2007. Few months later, she gave a bit less: only $5.20. That month she earned $520 in total, so she figured out that 1 percent of her salary was a reasonable figure and all she could afford. Two days before Election Day, she logged in on Mybarackobama.com and donated $10 more dollars to the campaign. Total amount donated in two years: $120.40 (Vargas, 2008b). Obama supporters were not big-fat donors like the majority of those supporting the rest of the other presidential candidates. Instead, these were normal people, average citizens like Mrs Bailey, who contributed as much as they could to the campaign, because, for the first time, they felt that this presidential race was different to the previous ones: their action, even their '10 dollars bill' or 30 minutes of their time could finally make a difference. In fact, the progressive success of the Obama campaign, week by week, million by million, showed that within this complex new system of digital networks and grassroots politics, change was possible and could be enacted from below. Established candidates who would have normally been the favourite for the final race (such the former First Lady Hillary Clinton, and the 'old maverick' John McCain) within this new political environment had suddenly found themselves in a position of weakness. Notwithstanding the support of their large Lobby Groups and big sponsors; notwithstanding their illustrious political past, they were no longer in control as before.

The Obama campaign was the quintessential embodiment of MoveOn's people-powered politics empowered by new tools and by a more widespread use of the Internet. It represented the perfect symbiosis between online organization and on-the-ground activities[153] (Vargas, 2008c). Obama's success

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[153] Thanks to the enhanced features of Web 2.0 applications, once a volunteer logged in at Mybarackobama.com, the database supporting the website (as any normal social network website) provided him or her with a series of option to take action, either online or on the ground. For instance, the volunteer could access a list of fellow supporters within walking distance of his house. The

was not just about money, but it was more about the wide network of people that had the practical chance to be actively involved in his campaign.

Conclusions

During the last weeks of 1998, MoveOn was just a *pledge* about the future. A decade later, it has become a strong presence in the American political milieu, one that cannot be ignored. It is a group capable of mobilising thousands of people and raising millions of funds for its campaigns within hours. Since its first act, the movement has grown steadily: by 2004, MoveOn.org had over 2 million members; by 2006 their base had crossed the threshold of 3 million. And in 2008 that number went over the 4 million mark (MoveOn, 2008b). Nevertheless, the group's main goal has remained constant throughout this period: to bring 'hundreds of thousands of small donors together to elect candidates who will represent the American people'. Over the years, MoveOn.org has used television, print advertisements, and Internet campaign to amplify the voices of its members, to give life and shape to a politics that comes from below, one that they call 'people powered politics' (MoveOn, 2006).

Meanwhile, the innovative use of the Internet Galaxy in grassroots politics that MoveOn pioneered in 1998 has transcended the movement's original borders, and it has become a fixed feature of American politics. In the last decade, *MoveOn's model* has been replicated by many with varies degrees of success; two of these (Howard Dean and Barack Obama) however, have improved that model considerably. They all understood, better than others, the importance of the Internet Galaxy in empowering citizens' collective actions. They all recognize that in a network-based society (more than ever before), established

software could match skills and tasks, easily and quickly. With just few clicks of the mouse, an Obama supporter had access to a tailored list of addresses, names, and phone numbers of dozens of undecided voters living in his neighborhood. At that point, that volunteer could either call them using the website phone tools, send them an email, or simply print out the addresses and some leaflets, and go door by door and talk to those people, face to face, neighbor to neighbor.

hierarchies of power have less advantage and face stronger challenges from below. The case of Barack Obama's triumphal victory against more credited contenders is the most recent evidence of how powerful can be the idea that change is possible when people are given the means to enact that change, despite any pressure from established power holders; despite their wealthy donors; their means and their media. Within this new context, a single ten-dollar bill or one hour unpaid volunteer work, paradoxically, can have more influence than a seven-figure cheque.

Notwithstanding the commonalities, one important element of difference separate the Obama's campaign from both MoveOn's experience and Dean's 2004 presidential race: during the last ten years the technological environment that surrounded those three examples has changed considerably.

At the end of 1998, the Web was still in its infancy, it was technically limited and little integrated in society to allow MoveOn's new model of civic engagement to reach its full potential. The percentage of the American population using the Internet was at a meagre 42 percent (Norris, 2001: 74). Aware of such limitation, and to reach out to those 58 percent of Americans that were offline, MoveOn adopted a hybrid approach in its campaigns that integrated Web-based and traditional strategies together. Following this principle, the website had a feature that allowed supporters to print out a paper petition or the petition's bumper sticker: 'for […] friends without email or Web access.' [154] . Back then, MoveOn.org, an organization renown today for aggressive use of mainstream media to support candidates and campaigns, was purely based on 'personal connection', and in strong 'need [of] traditional media to spread the word' (MoveOn: N.D.a) . If we travel back in time with the way-back machine of the Internet Archive, and visit one of Moveon.org's early webpages, we would read the following text:

'We don't have a PR firm and we're not buying media time, so we are dependent on our volunteers to reach out to local and national media. Talk radio, local papers, local TV news, as well as online newgroups and chat are all

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[154] From the original homepage of the *Censure and Move On* petition at moveon.org. See Appendix C

opportunities. If you have quality contacts with national press, we are even more in need of your help. One personal contact is worth a hundred cold calls, Email press@moveon.org with your hot leads' (See Appendix C)

In 2004, when Howard Dean and Joe Trippi pushed MoveOn's model a step up further, time seemed yet not ripe for that particular kind of Web-based campaign. In 2004, the percentage of US Internet users who had Internet at home was 65%, but of these only 20% had broadband access (Horrigan, 2008). Dial-up Internet can be very slow and frustrating, that limited the range of users that could (and wanted to) fully participate in the Howard Dean campaign. Fast speed Internet (broadband) has in fact changed radically the users' experience of the Internet Galaxy; the rising adoption of broadband has been a key factor in the rising importance of Web-based politics. For Internet-based communication, by definition, the wider is the bandwidth, the greater is the information-load capacity of the line. That results in faster and qualitatively enhanced transmission of data. So, broadband users can easily watch and broadcast live-video feeds, playback audio, download and exchange large files. Social Networking sites like Facebook and MySpace would be unthinkable or be very limited in their features without broadband. Sites like YouTube would not survive in an environment where the upload (or even playback) of a 10 minutes video can take several hours of the user's time.

At the end of 2008 the number of American people connected to the Internet reached over 75 percent of the entire population, but broadband use had crossed the 55 percent mark, more than double the 2004 access rate (Horrigan, 2008). According to data released by Nielsen Online in April 2008, an estimated 221 million Americans used the Internet regularly either from work or home, and on average, they spent more than 19 hours per week browsing the Web (Nielsen Online, 2008a). Not surprisingly, that year, for many Americans the Internet became a major source for campaign news. A survey conducted by the PEW Research Centre reported that the percent of people who got most of their campaign news from the Internet had tripled in just a few years: from 10% in 2004 to 33% in 2008 (PEW, 2008). Barack Obama used YouTube constantly during his campaign, as his preferential channel to communicate

with his supporters, and this trend continued after the election[155]. Obama's campaign would have been unthinkable without Web 2.0. Thanks to the Internet, Obama can be considered a new kind of president whose relationship with his wide-base of supporters is something never seen before. Different than his predecessors, often elected thanks to large donations from wealthy donors or organizations, the day after November 4, Obama owed nothing to anyone (but his many million supporters): nor to interest groups, neither to lobbyists. Even mainstream news media could no longer expect to have preferential access to the President or be able to threaten him. From that day onward, they all have to deal with a President that can do without them, and simply 'take its case directly to its base without even booking time on the networks' (Carr, 2008).

In 2004, commenting on MoveOn's achievements, Blades and Boyd remarked that their advocacy group was composed of people who had had no time for politics in the past, but thanks to MoveOn were finally 'reading, talking, asking questions, and engaging'. (Blades and Boyd, 2004: xiv). More importantly, the group's founders remarked that MoveOn was not a single case in a deserted island. Nowadays, there are many organizations like MoveOn populating the American public sphere – and as we will see in the next chapter that model has crossed the US borders: 'as people connect with the political dialogue on issues they care about', wrote in 2004 Boyd and Blades, 'it's only a matter of time before our politicians will better reflect our values.' (Blades and Boyd, 2004: xiii). Barack Obama and his new administration, could be argued, is the answer to that hope.

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[155] For instance, for the past 26 years, the US President has been delivered a weekly four minute long radio address to the American people. Given that the reduced importance of the Radio as a communication medium, for many Presidents the weekly has often been 'a task to be endured rather than an opportunity'. Since he was elected Obama started using his airtime to make important announcement, but to widen its reach he has begun posting his announcements on YouTube. (Cillizza, 2008)

Chapter 9 – The Talking Cricket and the Media Tycoon

'Se io ho un euro e tu hai un euro e ce li scambiamo, alla fine restiamo con un euro ciascuno. Ma se io ho un'idea e tu un'altra idea e ce le scambiamo, alla fine ci troveremo con due idee ciascuno!'[156]
Beppe Grillo

Il Bel Paese (the Beautiful Country, the nickname by which Italy is sometimes known) is a land of many contradictions. Throughout its boot-shape length, the beauty of its many thousands artworks often coexists with the ugliness of the many architectural and environmental eyesores that scar its landscape. The same can be said of its political scene. Italy's recent history has produced some remarkable political anomalies: from Benito Mussolini and his two decades of Fascism in the first half of the twentieth century; to the Red Brigades and their politics of terror in the seventies. From the Sicilian Mafia in the last part of the nineteenth century, whose culture of organised crime is now spread throughout the country' social and economic strata - it represents a thriving business accounting for about 9 percent of Italy's GDP[157]; to a republic state in which, since its birth in 1948, the political class has made Mafia's peculiar practice of clientelism and corruption the norm in the politics of everyday life of the country, rather than the exception. For a long time, Italy has been a country

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[156] If I have one euro and you have one euro and we exchange them, at the end we are left with one euro each. But if I have an idea and you have another idea, and we exchange them, at the end we are left with two ideas each. (Translation is mine) Retrieved from Beppegrillo.it: http://www.beppegrillo.it/2005/05/liberiamo_linfo/index.html

[157] This is a cumulative data that accounts for the whole organized crime in Italy, see D'Emilio, 2009

where the rule of law and the ethics of politics have been continuously bent to accommodate the will of the patron and the need of the client. Emulating the modus operandi of Mafia's dons, Italian politicians or civil servants often act 'as a sort of gatekeeper, distributing selected public resources (jobs, pensions, licences, etc.) to clients, friends and relations in return for fidelity, both personal and electoral' (Ginsborg, 2003: 100), or money. In 1992, *Mani Pulite* (Clean hands) an investigation of the District Attorney of Milan brought to light a deeply corrupted nationwide system that for decades had made the practice of bribery a synonym for Italian politics. The scandal, known as *Tangentopoli* (Bribesville), shook the foundations of the country's political system; while, virtually, it wiped away from the electoral map two political parties, the Socialist Party and the Christian Democrats, that for half a century had played a very influent role in the history of the Republic. Out of the Bribesville's earthquake, supposedly, a new political class emerged. Ironically, the most prominent figure of this new breed of politicians, since 1994, has been the controversial entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi, a man that many consider the ideal-type of the corrupted Italian politician[158]; more dangerously, he is also the expression of a unique – at least for democratic countries – political anomaly: the election of Berlusconi to the leadership of the country concentrates in Berlusconi's hands the power of politics, the power of wealth, and the power of media. Berlusconi is, simply put, the incarnation of a democratic paradox. Perhaps the actor-comedian-director Roberto Benigni is after all right when he argues that the rise to power of Berlusconi shows the most comical and paradoxical aspect of Italian's attitude towards politics: 'we are the birth land of Francis of Assisi, the saint patron of the poor, and yet we always vote for the richest candidate … as soon as someone with bags of money [like Berlusconi] puts himself forward we all vote for him.' (*Il Fatto*, 1995)

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[158] For a broader analysis of Silvio Berlusconi's corruption cases and his links with organised crime, see Travaglio and Veltri, 2001 and Gomez and Travaglio, 2003; For an in-depth analysis of the ties between mafia and politics, and the spread use of 'clientelistic' practices in modern Italy see Ginsborg, 2003: 100-2 and 179-212

The constitutive elements that built the system of *Tangentopoli* and paved the way for the subsequent rise of a questionable leader like Berlusconi did not emerge simply from the historical flaws or lack of integrity of a corrupted political leadership. Berlusconi's Italy is the product of several different factors. The historical role of the family as the centre of gravity of individuals' lives and interests in the Italian society has been a key element in the formation process of that system. 'Strong and cohesive family units' in fact have the tendency to look after their own interests, and hence develop 'defensive, cynical and even predatory attitudes towards much of the outside world, [and] towards the institutions of the state' (Ginsborg, 2003: 99). Families often despise public authorities and consider the public sphere simply as a 'plundering ground' for their own private interests. Another important element at the foundations of the *Second Republic* – as many called the alleged new political system that emerged in the aftermath of *Tangentopoli* – is the diffuse political culture of *clientelism*, that is, a well-oiled system 'of interpersonal relations in which private ties of a kinship, ritual kinship, or friendship type are used inside public structures, with the intent of making public resources serve private ends' (Amalia Signorelli, quoted in Ginsborg, 2003: 100).

Italy's complex history, nonetheless, has often provided many opportunities for antibodies to emerge and challenge the country's historical anomalies. From the *Resistance* that stood against Fascism during World War Two (Ginsborg, 1990: 42-71), to the anti-mafia movement that in the city of Palermo, during the 80s and 90s, dared to say no to the racket of organized crime (see Schneider, 2003: 160-92). Now, to escape the paradoxical trend set in motion by *Tangentopoli*, what Italy needs is a strong and active civil society, that is, a powerful internal social antibody capable to reject (or at least resist) dangerous political anomalies like Berlusconi.

The term civil society, broadly speaking, identifies all those associations or political actors that work outside the sphere of the State, the family, or the market, whose most important function is to monitor the exercise of power and its excesses. The expression properly 'describes and envisages a complex and

dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organising, self-reflexive, and permanently in tension with each other and with the state institutions that "frame", constrict and enable their activities' (Keane, 1998: 6). Organisations such as trade unions, community based groups, charities, or non-governmental organisations and advocacy group are among the many examples of civil society organisations. However, the term civil society is an ideal-typical category, and hence it cannot be found in its pure form in the real world, in fact its boundaries are often blurred and confused with those of the State, or the market.

The role of civil society in Berlusconi's Italy is a complicated matter. As I explain in the following pages, Berlusconi's tight control of mainstream media (especially during his second term as Prime Minister, 2001-2006) has weakened the leverage of traditional means of resistance commonly used by civil society. Public gatherings, picketing, or strikes lose their effectiveness when national television networks – following the government's diktats - fail to report those actions accurately (Gomez & Travaglio, 2004: 284–291). Consequently, civil society actors must find new ways to operate and manifest their dissent. That is exactly what has happened in Italy in the recent past. The political anomaly represented by Silvio Berlusconi's rise to power has produced a new antibody in the form of a web-based civil society. By exploiting the political potential of the Internet Galaxy and the condition of shared weakness that is embedded within the network, a community of active monitorial citizens orbiting around a renowned comedian's blog (beppegrillo.it) has many times in the last few years challenged Berlusconi's political clout. The degree of success of such a challenge is anything but insignificant.

Italy's political milieu has been instrumental in the blog's success. During his second term in office (from 2001 to 2006[159]) Berlusconi was able to muffle

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[159] For reasons of coherence and availability of data, the focus of this chapter is mainly on the period comprised between 2001-06. However, it is worth noting briefly that in April 2008, Berlusconi and his coalition managed to win again the general election. At the time of writing (Summer 2009) Berlusconi has been governing for just over a year. His new government since its early stages has followed a similar pattern to the previous one: the Parliament has been

most of the voices that attempted to criticise the activity of his government; or openly discuss his many troubles with the Law. To achieve such goal, he leveraged on his own dual role of head of the government and media tycoon. By doing so, Berlusconi was able to exercise a tight control on national television networks, while putting left-leaning national press under a continuous political and economic pressure. The press and television are the most influencing communication media in the country. Hence, there is no much surprise to notice that, up until recently, while much of mainstream media were the target of Government's continuous pressure, the Internet Galaxy has virtually remained untouched. Such a-typical freedom from Berlusconi's tight grip on national media has made the Internet Galaxy the favourite harbour for nonaligned audiences and dissident voices like those orbiting around beppegrillo.it.

Berlusconi's media regime (2001-2006)

Silvio Berlusconi (Fig. 55) is the richest man in Italy (Forbes Magazine, 2007) and the owner of the largest commercial television group, *Mediaset*, through which he personally controls three country-wide television networks (*Canale 5, Italia 1,* and *Rete 4*). The media tycoon is without doubt a controversial figure in the Italian and international political scene. He is loved by his supporters and hated by his enemies. He has often been indicated by many – on the opposite side of his political spectrum - as an open menace to democracy (Economist, 2001); by his supporters, however, he has always been hailed as the only Italian leader able to guarantee political stability and economic growth to the country. Whatever side one takes, one undeniable fact remains: the last two decades of Italian history are inextricably intertwined with the figure of Berlusconi.

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devoted to pass laws to protect Berlusconi's interests and save him from judicial prosecution (see Grossi and Zanca, 2008; Dinmore, 2008)

Figure 55 - Silvio Berlusconi campaigning[160]

Notwithstanding his many trials; mishaps; flawed policies; his personal use of the Parliament to protect his personal interests; despite his never resolved conflicts of interests (one for all: being at the same time the recipient for the concessions of three national television networks and Prime Minister), since 1994, Berlusconi and his centre-right coalition have won Italy's general election for three times (out of five). Last electoral success is dated April 2008 and it was by a wide margin over the incumbent centre-left coalition. Berlusconi's strong influence on Italian politics, however, goes further than 1994, the date of his first run for public office. In 1984, the Government led by Bettino Craxi, the leader of the Socialist Party and long-time friend of Berlusconi, passed a landmark law (by decree) to protect Berlusconi's interests. Between 1983 and 1984, in fact, Berlusconi had added to his television network (Canale 5), his two main rivals (*Italia1*, and *Rete4*). The move had given Berlusconi a *de facto* monopoly in the private broadcasting sector. By using a stream of local networks and a system of synchronised broadcasting, Berlusconi's networks were able to broadcast nationwide. It was a direct infringement of the Italian law that granted national frequencies only to the Public Service Broadcaster, RAI. Thus, when in 1984 an Italian Court ruled against Berlusconi and ordered him to close some of his local stations and stop his illegal broadcasting, Prime Minister Craxi and his government rushed to his help. To avoid the lengthy Parliamentary process, Craxi passed a law by decree to protect Berlusconi's interests (Ginsborg, 2003: 155-6). The decree

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[160] Source: Guardian.co.uk. Retrieved 10 July 2009 from (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/08/italy.italy)

effectively lifted the restrictions on national broadcasting and concentration of media ownership, and put the basis for the foundations of Berlusconi's media empire (Ginsborg, 2005: 38). Since then not a single law in matters relating to the regulation of the media market has been approved by the Parliament without safeguarding or helping in some ways the expansion of that empire (Gomez and Travaglio, 2004: XIV).

The strength of Berlusconi's clout on Italian politics is firmly anchored in his strategic use of his televisions networks, newspapers, and publishing houses, to pursue his own personal agenda. From 2001 to 2006, Berlusconi did control virtually all of Italian television networks. He owned *Mediaset*, and, serving as President of the Council of Ministries, effectively, he had decisional power over the Italian public service broadcaster, *Radiotelevisione Italiana* (RAI). Created in 1954, RAI has developed in a complex state-owned media company comprised of three terrestrial nation-wide networks, radios, satellite and Internet television. Its main revenue is based on a national TV license fee and is administered by a nine-member board. By law, these board members are chosen by political parties—seven elected by a parliamentary committee and two by the Ministry of Finance (Repubblica, 2005).

The editorial policy of the Italian public broadcasting service, historically, has always reflected the power hierarchies in the political sphere. Since its early beginning, RAI has been subject to a strong political pressure. During the 50s and 60s, it was controlled by the ruling Christian Democracy party, but since the late 70s has been subject to the so-called system of *lottizzazione*: that is, the political partition of the public broadcasting system between the major political parties (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 180). The term *lottizzazione* was originally used to indicate the 'parcelling out' of land; in present day Italy it has become 'a shorthand for the way that hiring for executive posts, journalists and producers is determined by the political parties, especially the ruling coalition' (EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, 2005: 870). The system emerged from the 1975 Broadcasting Act that divided RAI in two separated networks (Esposito and Grassi, 1975: 53) and expanded in 1979 with the creation of a third network (RAI3). The 1975 Act served to split RAI into two

separate networks with two different directors and governing bodies. The reform of RAI through the 1975 Law 'aimed at transferring control of public television from the executive branch to the [many] political parties represented in Parliament'. It intended to serve as a tool that could help to mirror the political pluralism of the Parliament in the management of RAI. De facto, the 1975 Act meant that control of RAI was handed to a parliamentary commission (composed by members of all parties represented in the Parliament) and to a board of directors. The idea was that seats on the board to be allocated *pro-rata* between the parties of the governing coalition and the opposition. In fact, the law enacted a simple 'lottizzazione', of partition of RAI's three networks according to parties' power (EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, 2005: 875). Since 1994, the *control* of RAI 1, the major Italian network for audience viewing ratings and budget, is usually allocated to the leading political party in the government coalition. Before the political earthquake caused by the corruption scandal of *Tangentopoli*, RAI 1 was usually the media bedrock of the Christian Democrats, since then it has often been Berlusconi's party *Forza Italia* (now *Partito del Popolo della Libertá*) that has had a firm control of the network, even during the time when Berlusconi was technically in the opposition side of the Parliament. RAI 2 instead has always been the official mouthpiece for the 'secular parties' (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 180) During the Craxi era in the eighties it was typically the network of the Socialist party, the Republicans, and the Liberals. In the recent past, National Alliance (now part of Berlusconi's party) and the Northern Liga had a strong influence on the network. *RAI 3*, on the other hand, has always been the defined garrison of the government opposition, for many decades represented by the Communist party (historically the second party in the country for number of votes). Nowadays, regardless of who is governing the countries, RAI 3 is allocated to the Democratic Party and other smaller parties that emerged from the post-1989 transformation of the old Communist party[161]. With Berlusconi in power the practice of *lottizzazione* continued to be used, although in a less democratic fashion. The balance in fact has often leaned towards Berlusconi's coalition,

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[161] On the practice of *lottizzazione* and the reform of public broadcasting service in Italy from the 70s to the post-Tangentopoli era see also Hibberd 2001

while the opposition has found itself with less Air time and budget. This was indeed favoured by the reduction of the number of members of RAI's administering board. That move decreased the power of the opposition parties sitting on the board. Nevertheless, the practice of *lottizzazione* in Berlusconi's era does not mean that RAI's networks apply a blank censorship on the other political parties. On the contrary, the impression given to the audience is often of objective pluralism. The historian Paul Ginsborg gives a good portrait of the way in which some News programmes work in Italy:

'Take the example of the news on Rai Uno, where an almost ritualistic pluralism prevails: there is a regular parade of politicians, among whom figure members of the opposition. They all say something briefly. Berlusconi himself often appears, to say something at greater length. There then follows the *cronaca*, [that is, the recounting of] mainly a series of depressing incidents and fatalities of varying nature. The Pope is given a ritual few minutes and at the end it is time for sport. The general impression conveyed is of desperation at the state of the world, the vacuity of the politicians, the need for religion and the good sense of the Prime Minister'. (Ginsborg, 2003: 37-8)

Furthermore, Berlusconi 'has always had his own team of 'organic' intellectuals of variable quality […] whose programmes have barked out the line incessantly, at all times of the day and night' (Ginsborg, 2003:38). But it was only from 2001 to 2006, governing the country for the first time for a long period of time, that the richest man in Italy had the first real opportunity to gain a virtual monopoly over the country's media [162]. Contrary to previous governments, Berlusconi's coalition in 2001 did not only have virtually exclusive access to RAI (thanks to the practice of *lottizzazione*), but also it could count on the support of Mediaset, a Network group owned by the Prime Minister. Mediaset and RAI, combined together, account, on average, for over 87 percent of the daily share of the entire Italian television audience (Repubblica, 2006a). This virtual monopoly coupled with the silencing of the

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[162] Berlusconi's first spell as President of the Council of Ministries in 1994 cannot be counted because it only lasted for 11 months. It was too short a period of time to have an impact on the system.

center-left press via means of political and economic pressure (Blatmann, 2003; Gomez & Travaglio, 2004: 217–246), effectively allowed Berlusconi to establish a firm *media regime* on the country.

A *media regime* is a type of regime in which to take and maintain power all that a dictator needs is the control of communication media. The late Indro Montanelli - a strong critic of Berlusconi's power and one of the most respected Italian journalists of the twentieth century – argued that the example of Berlusconi showed his contemporaries that in the present time 'to introduce a regime, one no longer needs to march towards Rome, nor does one need to set fire to the Reichstag, neither one needs a coup at the Winter palace. All that is needed are the so-called mass communication media: and among them, sovereign and irresistible is television' (Travaglio, 2006: 228[163]). Given his predominant position in the Italian media landscape, there was no doubt that Berlusconi represented a great danger for democracy: 'if Mussolini could have counted on Television networks, he would be still around' (Montanelli quoted in Gomez and Travaglio, 2004: XIII).

The regime was a perfect tool to distribute wealth, grant favours, and help to secure the career of the many working in the media sector (such as journalists, directors, editors, and publishers); those who supported him were rewarded with a steady presence in his Televisions (RAI networks included). On the contrary the regime was merciless with those who dared to oppose it openly (Gomez and Travaglio, 2004). Yet, this was nor a Stalinist, neither a Fascist system. The term regime, in fact, should not mislead the reader. Unlike Mussolini's fascist government, Berlusconi's regime was one that needed no gloomy atmospheres, iron clubs, or terror. Not even public mobilization. Berlusconi did not impose his will by sending opponents in exile on prison's islands; or with the help of physical violence. Berlusconi's version of a regime was shiny and smiley. 'His media regime is thus one based not on the silencing of all dissenting voices, as under Fascism' writes Ginsborg 'but on the rule enunciated with acumen by the talk-show compère, Maurizio Costanzo:

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[163] This and all the other quotations from books by Travaglio are originally in Italian, translation is mine.

"Power does not belong to those who talk on television. It belongs to those who permit you to talk on television"' (Ginsborg, 2003: 38). Unlike the Soviet dictator Stalin, Berlusconi's regime did not need to purge all of the dissident voices. More productive in this mediated environment was to inform potential critics of the leader that to follow the lines of the regime was actually in their careers' best interest. For this subtle *educational programme* to work effectively, the public punishment of a few 'dissidents' can be the perfect vehicle to send a clear and loud message out to the many who might be tempted to follow suit: *imitate these people's attitude and that is the fate you would meet*. The best example of such modus operandi is the now notorious *Editto Bulgaro* (the Bulgarian Diktat or *Ukaze*, as the press often refers to the incident).

The *Editto Bulgaro* took place on April 18th, 2002, during an official visit in Bulgaria. At a press conference in Sofia, Berlusconi openly sanctioned the work and 'abuse' of public television by prominent RAI journalists like Enzo Biagi, Michele Santoro, and successful comedians like Daniele Luttazzi. From Sofia, Berlusconi openly *suggested* to RAI's newly appointed management group that those who made such an immoral use of mass media should no longer be allowed to work for the public broadcasting service which is owned and paid by the people. 'Santoro, Biagi and Luttazzi' said the President 'have used in a criminal way[164] Public television […]; I think it is the precise duty of RAI's new management [which had been previously appointed by Berlusconi's government] to prevent that from happening again.' (Repubblica, 2002)[165] For clarity, briefly, it is worth here examining each of these three cases of 'criminal' uses of public television.

Biagi invited Roberto Benigni (actor, Academy Award winning director, and well-known left-leaning thought-provocateur) as principal guest of his popular

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[164] In Italian: *uso criminoso*

[165] A video excerpt from RAI 2 News cover of Berlusconi press conference in Sofia is available from Youtube.com: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShKZuGTswdg (Retrieved: 10 July 2009)

evening daily TV show, *Il Fatto* (The Fact). That night (10 May 2001)[166], Benigni – with his trademarked unpredictable style - amused the many millions of viewers of *Il Fatto* by mocking Berlusconi's decision to do politics.

Figure 56 - Berlusconi signs the Contract with Italians[167]

In particular, Benigni mocked Berlusconi's spectacular *coup de theatre* that marked the end of his 2001 political campaign: while guest of one of Italy's most popular evening television talk show, *Porta a Porta*, (8 of May 2001) the owner of Mediaset publicly signed the *Contract with the Italians* (Fig. 56 above) - a document similar to Newt Gingrich's 1994 "Contract with America" (Republican National Committee, 1994). By signing the contract, Berlusconi pledged to step out from politics if, by the end of his mandate (2006), he had not achieved four out of the five points listed in the document (Pasquino, 2007). Berlusconi later claimed that Biagi's and Benigni's show had cost him and his

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[166] The video of that episode is no longer present in the RAI's Internet archive, however with a simple web-search, it can easily be retrieved from one of the many video-sharing hosting websites present on the Internet. In the years, in fact, many copies of that video uploaded spontaneously by users have re-surfaced on the web. See for instance Google Video: http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7232933248521052528 (Retrieved: 10 June 2009)

[167] The image was captured from a video posted on Youtube.com, retrieved 10 January 2009 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIcSlkWWCtg&feature=PlayList&p=558E F65A13351DD6&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=46

party *Forza Italia*, more than one million voters (Di Caro, 2005). Michele Santoro, a highly successful and opinionated (left-leaning) investigative journalist, in the early months of 2001, had *criminally used* his evening show *Sciuscià* to criticise Berlusconi's policies.

Daniele Luttazzi, a popular stand-up comedian and television host, in 2001 had instead *dared* to invite on *Satyricon*, his evening show dedicated to political satire, Marco Travaglio, a well known and respected investigative journalist of *La Repubblica* and an expert on Berlusconi's trials (*Satyricon*, 2001). During that night's show (14 March 2001), quoting sources such as the official Court's papers of the District Attorney of the County of Palermo (Sicily), Travaglio explained that he had found strong evidences to suggest that Berlusconi's wealth and his much advertised entrepreneurial success were entangled with Mafia's illicit businesses (Travaglio and Veltri, 2001; see also Emmott, 2003).

Shortly after the events of Sofia, Biagi, Santoro, and Luttazzi were unceremoniously sacked by RAI's management. In his reply to Berlusconi, the same evening of the *Bulgarian Diktat*, Biagi explicitly asked the President:

'What crime am I supposed to have committed? Rape, murder, hold-up, theft, incitement to crime, forgery, defamation? [...] Mr. President please proceed with my removal from my position, in fact my age and the respect I have for my self forbid me to meet your requests […] I remain convinced that there is still room for freedom of the press in our Republic [...] even in [RAI] which, as you said, is a service that belongs to the whole Italian people, and thus it should be open to every opinion. That [freedom of opinion] is the principle of our democracy. It is written in our constitution, have a look. […]' Then addressing his audience, Biagi concluded: 'after 814 episodes, this could be the last time you watch *Il Fatto*. However, it is better to leave for having said some truths, rather than staying, paying the price of compromise. Mr. President is not up to you fire me.' (*Il Fatto,* 2002)

The dismissal of Biagi is a telling example of the modus operandi of RAI under Berlusconi: notwithstanding Biagi many decades of work for RAI and that *Il Fatto* had been ailed by critics as 'the best programme in 50 years of TV', Biagi received the notice of the termination of his employment simply 'via a recorded delivery letter'. Commenting on RAI's lack of style, the journalist said: 'I don't think is me the one who should be ashamed' (Di Caro, 2005).

When Daniele Luttazzi was finally allowed to step again into a Television studio (3 November 2007), after successfully defending himself in a five-year long trial for defamation against Berlusconi who had sued him for about 20 Million Euros, the comedian opened his new show, *Decameron*, by commenting on the facts of 2001. He stated what he rightly considered a simple truth: he had done nothing wrong. His only sin was 'to ask fair questions during a TV show, questions that no journalist dared to ask. And in a democracy to ask questions has never hurt anyone, on the contrary to hide the answers to those questions often does' (*Decameron*, 2007).

While in power, Berlusconi used his wealth and his control of media to muzzle any attempt of thorough analysis of a series of trials and investigations into the sources of his wealth that in any normal democratic country could have ruined him politically and economically (Blatmann, 2003). But his grip on media (especially on RAI) was not only useful to silent dissenting voices, but it helped to manipulate information and broadcast only those news that the government's approved. The way in which News programmes dealt with Italy's state of economy during Berlusconi's government is a perfect example of this particular method of tailored broadcast: in 2004, it was still plausible for prime time news programmes to attribute the country's growing economy crisis to the economical repercussion of the 9/11 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington; or, worst (as Finance Minister Giulio Tremonti did), it was possible to use RAI 1 evening news programme (the most popular in the country in terms of audience) to falsely accuse the former centre-left government of a 60 billion Euros deficit in the country's budget (Travaglio and Gomez , 2004: XV).

In such kind of regime, information is often twisted by those in power with a candid reassuring smile before an audience of millions of people, while journalists do not even attempt to mediate or confront the truthfulness of the information given. The system was also instrumental to dictate the Government agenda to the electors/audience. What was important, what was bad, what was good, what had to go first in the main News programmes was dictated from above. Consider the cases of news related to immigration and criminality, two important topics in the political platform of Berlusconi's coalition. In the months preceding the 2001 general election, Tg5, the primetime evening news programme of Berlusconi's *Canale 5*, each night compiled a *war bulletin*. The news were filled with an increasing worrying stream of illegal immigrants' landings and with disturbing reports on the rising numbers of hideous crimes against private middle-class owned properties. The 'crime emergency' was a fixed feature of the evening news before the general election, but it suddenly (almost entirely) disappeared as soon as Berlusconi took power (Gomes and Travaglio 2004: XVI). A similar trend was evident in the building up of the 2008 general election. Even though Berlusconi was officially the leader of the opposition, therefore allegedly with less control over RAI's management, yet 'Berlusconi's mastery of the media' allowed him to undermine the work of the ministers of the Prodi's Government. Those ministers were constantly damaged 'by negative reporting that played up savage crimes allegedly committed by foreigners.' In fact, contrary to what the Italian media reported daily, 'Italy's crime rates [were] below the European average'. Nevertheless, any attempt by Prodi and his cabinet to reassure Italians that crime rates were declining went unheard (Dinmore, 2008).

To demonize those who spoke of facts that might be inconvenient for Berlusconi was another tactic of such system of political control. As the regime could condition the agenda of the news, some facts were never (or misleadingly) reported back to the audience. If the majority of mainstream media remains silent (or give little ambiguous coverage) about penal trials involving Berlusconi; if important issues like the economy are never assessed earnestly; if journalists appear confident about the capacity of the government

to boost the welfare of the country, then the audience can potentially be led to believe that partial or factious representation of reality as truthful. Whether or not then people believed that truth is certainly an open (empirical) question. Nevertheless, in this context, anyone who dared to oppose the government's *facts*, through the same media became the subject of a demonizing campaign. Through its media networks, the regime subtly (and sometimes outrageously openly) undermined the important role (and the authority) that monitorial citizens and monitorial bodies have within a democratic system. In fact, this process of demonization did not only involve political opponents, but also all those individuals and institutions that in a democratic environment exist to guarantee justice and fairness. In Berlusconi's Italy, judges are no longer those who guarantee justice, but instead are portrayed as the 'metastasis of a democratic society' (Berlsuconi, 2008). They become individuals whose actions are not inspired by the Constitution and the Law, but by their ideological creed. Mass media are perfect instruments to portray those judges as the evil demons that constantly try to overturn the will of the people who have democratically elected Berlusconi. Judges do so by dragging Berlusconi endlessly and pointlessly from court to court (Berlsuconi, 2008). Within this system of media and political control, it bears no importance the fact that Judges might actually have the substantial legal rights and duties, let alone considerable evidences to put Berlusconi on trial. Journalists who attempt to clarify the facts fall prey to the same kind of treatment. In a fully working monitory democracy, with a free press and non-monopolised media, the likes of Berlusconi would have guaranteed freedom of speech, but their opinions would be critically assessed by the journalists who report them back to their audience. This modus operandi was never really the case during Berlusconi five-year tenure, between 2001 and 2006.

During Berlusconi's second term in office, his unique media regime was instrumental in silencing or misreporting information that might have had dire consequences for the President's image and business interests. As it happened in July 2003, when Berlusconi caused a wave of indignation throughout Europe and a diplomatic row with Germany by comparing a German Member of the European Parliament Martin Schultz to a Nazi concentration camp commander

(Guardian, 2003a). By contrast with most of European networks, RAI's main evening news programme did not even show the footage of the incident and only briefly reported on it; coverage on other networks was 'deliberately softened and cut' (Arie, 2003). Most of the Italian press downplayed the affair, and many newspapers relegated the story to their minor sections (BBC, 2003).

Not surprisingly, in this political milieu, Freedom House listed Italy as the least democratic country in Europe: in 2006, Italy was ranked eightieth in the world, immediately after Tonga and Botswana and just before Antigua and Burkina Faso (Freedom House, 2006). The problem with Berlusconi's Italy between 2001 and 2006 was very simple: it was a political and social context where the role of informing the public sphere on matters of public concern was, almost entirely, the exclusive domain of television. Hence, given Berlusconi's monopoly of media, the many voices that dared to dissent with the party line were almost never heard. Even in *the ritualistic pluralism* of RAI 1 'the multiple associations of Italian civil society simply do not exist—unless they reach such mass proportions, as with the European Social Forum's peace march in Florence in November 2002, that they cannot be ignored' (Ginsborg, 2003: 38) But even in this latter case, that is not always true, as exemplified by the partial reporting of the 2003 peace protest against the military intervention in Iraq. Three million people gathered in Rome to protest against the Italian Government's support of the Bush Administration and its invasion of Iraq. Yet, notwithstanding the size of the protest, RAI decided not to broadcast it in order to spare politicians pressure from the people (Guardian, 2003b). Roberto Natale, head of RAI Journalists Union, stated that he and his colleagues at the network were explicitly instructed to minimize the size of the protest, not to show the Peace flag; and to refer to the protesters not as *pacifisti* (pacifists) but with the more negative adjective of *disobbedienti* (disobedient people) (*The Prime Minister and the Press*, 2003).

After a short spell in the purgatory of the opposition side of the Parliament, in April 2008 Berlusconi returned to power. Judging from his first year of government, his government approach to media control has not changed much

since the Bulgarian diktat. The latest scandal (at the time of writing, Summer 2009) surrounding the private and public life of Prime Minister Berlusconi is a perfect example of this continuity. In June 2009, a professional female escort, Patrizia D'addario revealed that the leader of *Il Popolo della Liberta'* paid her about 2000 Euros to spend the night with him at *Palazzo Grazioli*, Berlusconi's official institutional residence in Rome. The revelations were part of the body of evidences of a larger investigation of the District Attorney of the city of Bari. The investigation however did not centre around Berlusconi, in fact, it was about a case of solicitation of prostitution and illegal drug trafficking connected with the suspicious awarding process of public contracts to certain private companies in the Italian southern region of Puglia. The investigators came across Berlusconi's indirect involvement by chance, by listening to telephone wiretappings of their main suspects (See Follain, 2009).

The story was potentially devastating for a leader like Berlusconi who is a married man with a political platform that firmly defends the unity of the family; the ban of immoral sexual behaviour; and that has strong ties with the Roman Catholic Church. Backed by pictures, videos, and recording of the voice of Berlusconi taken with a mobile phone inside *Palazzo Grazioli*[168], the evidences were judged by the Press reliable enough to be published. The vast majority of the Italian newspapers such as *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*, not controlled by Berlusconi or linked to his allies, gave intense cover to D'Addario's revelations. Similarly, most of the international press dedicated ample space to the story in their printed and online editions. The list of the papers included the American *The New York Times*, the London's *Times*, and the Spanish *El Pais*. Yet, the news went almost unnoticed in the national television networks; and, when reported, the handling of the story was quite misleading. Consider only the case of RAI 1's evening news programme; most of the other national networks news programmes followed a similar path. In a normal country, where the Public Service broadcasting is more autonomous

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[168] All the transcripts and the audio recordings of the meetings between Patrizia D'Addario and Silvio Berlusconi are available from the website of the magazine *L'Espresso*. URL: http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/intercettazioni/2104809//0 (Retrieved 23, July, 2009)

from political power, the news of an affair between an escort and the Prime Minister would have probably been the first item to be discussed, even without the ties with drug trafficking and corruption as the case in question. On the contrary, RAI 1 waited more than ten minutes. Then, when it finally address the news, the report began directly from Berlusconi's defence, without prior explaining what the news was about: 'one more time newspapers are filled with rubbish and lies about me. I will not be influenced by these attacks. And I will continue working, as always, for the good of the country' (see video in Tonacci, 2009). Then followed the actual report by Gennaro Sangiuliano, a RAI1 Journalist, who, after repeating one more time the very same words taken from Berlsuconi's statement, described the investigation of Bari's District Attorney as 'one of the many investigation in the Health system and public contracts', nothing but 'things of ordinary Italian life'; he briefly mentioned parties in Berlusconi's villas, but he never said that D'Addario's allegations directly involved Berlusconi in the story. In fact, the journalist twisted the news against Massimo D'Alema, one of the historical leaders of the Left, who had some days earlier announced a possible political earthquake in the near future. The cut given to the whole story by the RAI 1 reporter aimed to downplay the importance of D'Addario's testimony, while arguing that the whole story was a fabrication of Berlusconi's adversaries. To give to the report a sense of pluralism the journalist quoted two members of the opposition, then, to reinforce the original point, he concluded his piece with two exponents of Berlusconi's coalition who barked out the party line one more time (see Tonacci, 2009)

Beppe Grillo: the Talking Cricket

At first sight, in this kind of media regime, acts of resistance seem often futile. Moreover, the D'Addario's story seems to confirm that Berlusconi's clout on mainstream media and Italian politics is in 2009 as firm as it was in 2001. Yet, at a closer inspection, things look different. Berlusconi's power has weakened. In the recent past something has changed. Reacting against Berlusconi's control on traditional media, the Italian civil society has sought out new ways

to express its dissent. Most recently, through the use of the Web - a communication galaxy that for many years has been left unharmed by a regime that seems more at easy with traditional media like television than with computers and broadband - a reinvigorated web-based civil society has been successful in infiltrating the regime with recurrent streams of that kind of information that the regime is continuously trying to censor; this civil society has been capable to organize nation-wide protests and bring to the attention of the wider public issues that are often neglected by national media. The best example of this new trend is Beppe Grillo (Fig. 57) and the community of active citizens orbiting around his blog, beppgrillo.it.

Figure 57 - Beppe Grillo on the Cover of Rolling Stones, 8 September 2007[169]

In Carlo Collodi's classic children tale, *The Adventures of Pinocchio,* a talking cricket (*grillo* in Italian) is killed by Pinocchio for trying to impart wisdom to the wooden-headed marionette. In the contemporary Italian media landscape

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[169] Rolling Stone Magazine, n. 47, September, 2007.

there is another controversial cricket, Beppe Grillo[170], one of the most popular and controversial stand-up comedians that has ever appeared on Italian television. Grillo began his career at the end of the 1970s and by the early 1980s, high audience ratings and critical acclaim made him a national celebrity. Toward the end of the decade, he began criticizing prominent Italian politicians and big corporations for corrupt practices (Grasso, 1992: 467–468). That kind of satire had dire repercussions on his career. One joke in particularly changed forever Grillo's relationship with Television. In 1986, during a guest appearance at Fantastico 7 (a popular Saturday night show), Grillo mocked Bettino Craxi's Government and his notorious State visit of the People's Republic of China in October 1986. That year, at the expenses of the Italian taxpayers, Craxi had brought to China a large delegation of people (fifty-two), eleven were part of Craxi's personal's entourage (his wife; his son; his daughter; his son's fiancé; his personal photographer; three personal secretaries; and so on) and, except for his wife, all the others had no rights to accompany the Prime Minister (Ginsborg, 2003: 185). In Grillo's joke, Craxi is pictured at a dinner party in Beijing surrounded by the entire Italian delegation and by the representatives of the Chinese Communist Party. Suddenly, Claudio Martelli, Craxi's right-hand man in the Socialist party, asks the President: 'Let me understand, here there are one billion people and they are all socialists, right?', 'Yes, why?' replies Craxi. 'Then' continues Martelli 'if they are all socialists… who do they steal from?' After the joke, realising that he had probably said too much, Grillo quickly waved goodbye to the audience in the theatre and at home, and added: 'well, this was terrible, after this … see you [no sooner than] *Fantastico* n. 18'. The host of the show, Pippo Baudo, one of the most respected figures in Italian Television, minutes after Grillo had left the stage, publically dissociated himself from Grillo's 'bullshit', as he referred to the comedian's words[171].

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[170] Grillo is the comedian's Family name.

[171] For a transcript of that night's events, see Grasso, 1992: 468. The video of Grillo's joke can be found on Youtube.com, in 'Il motivo per cui Beppe Grillo è stato cacciato dalla Rai' available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTJMAQyoQ3A&feature=related; For Baudo's reaction and an interview with the popular TV presenter about the reasons of his 'dissociation' from Grillo's words can be found in 'Beppe

In the following years, because of mounting pressure of politicians and advertisers against Grillo's satire, TV producers stopped inviting him on their shows. Sent into unofficial exile, Grillo was forced to perform in theatres, sports arenas, and public squares. From the early 1990s the comedian appeared only twice on public television. Yet Grillo's ban from the small screen made him even more popular with the Italian public, which regards him as the outspoken talking cricket, a vociferous critic of political and economic corruption, and of the lack of democratic openness in contemporary Italian politics. Audiences see in him someone who fights to unveil the truth about issues that mainstream media and politicians do not dare to address (Grillo, 2004:405). In 2005, for his capacity to 'illuminate and inspire, persevere and provoke', *Time* magazine named Grillo among the 37 European heroes of the year (Israely, 2005). In recent times, Grillo has been able to increase his popularity by transforming himself from a well-known television comedian into a blogger. Through his site beppegrillo.it, he and his staff offer nonaligned and critical political information that rarely finds space in today's mainstream media. At the same time, thanks to the comments and countless feedbacks that are either posted daily on the blog or sent via email, Grillo himself has access to information and stories that otherwise would remain untold.

Numbers and features of an Italian blog

The case of beppegrillo.it represents an important example of how monitorial citizens with limited access to mainstream media, but who are equipped with a strong sense of civic engagement and who are willing to support each others, can indeed harness the power of the condition of shared weakness enabled by the Internet Galaxy to fight against any attempt to hinder the quality of the democratic process they are part of; while, at the same time, promote a politics that rather than simply being dictated from those in charge, is instead participatory in essence. This is a form of politics in which individuals are at

Grillo's cacciato dalla rai', available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N94GsKmbOQY (Both videos last time retrieved 10 July 2009)

the same time monitorial and proactive agents of change. The underlying meaning of politics advocated by the community orbiting around Beppegrillo.it is very similar to that of MoveOn's or Obama's supporters (See above Chapter 8). It is shaped by the belief that acting together, using the web as an amplifier of individuals' potential can, in the long term, raise the bar of the quality of democracy to an unprecedented standard.

In January 2005, Grillo begun blogging through his official website. His first post was just a generic one-line sentence about the blog and its relation with the ongoing tour of performances of the comedian: 'This is an open post for arguments not related to [my tour of performances]' (Grillo, 2005). Less than one year later Grillo's blog was already among the most appreciated in Italy. In mid-December 2005, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the most popular Italian financial daily, rewarded the blog with its annual *WWW 2005 Prize*. Beppegrillo.it was voted *best Internet site* in the category "News and Information" 'for the interactivity with the public, the ample documentation on the Internet and the commitment to tackle topics of use to citizens' (Grillo, 2005d). In the words of Grillo, a 'blog is an amazing thing that connects people', virtually and practically (Grillo, n.d. -a). Since its start, Beppegrillo.it has distinguished itself for the dynamism of its many thousands readers who use the blog daily as an online platform to share ideas and information about the state of the country, and to organize political campaigns. The thousands of comments posted daily by Grillo's readers are clear indicators of the blog's vitality. Comments in fact are often the prime means by which the readers can be actively involved in the blog's discussions. Monitoring the blog for a 12-month period (May 2005 - May 2006), I found out there was a constant growth in the number of comments, especially those with a focus on politics. During that period, in fact, the most active site of comments was "Politics" (see below note 173) which received more than 111,000 comments (Fig. 58), accounting for almost a quarter of the total number of comments posted on the blog (463,000). On average, the subject of politics scored over 1,300 comments per post. Showing a rising popularity of the blog, in the same period, the overall number of

comments grew by 368.87 percent. It jumped from 17,021 comments (May 2005), to 62,786 (April 2006) (Fig. 59)

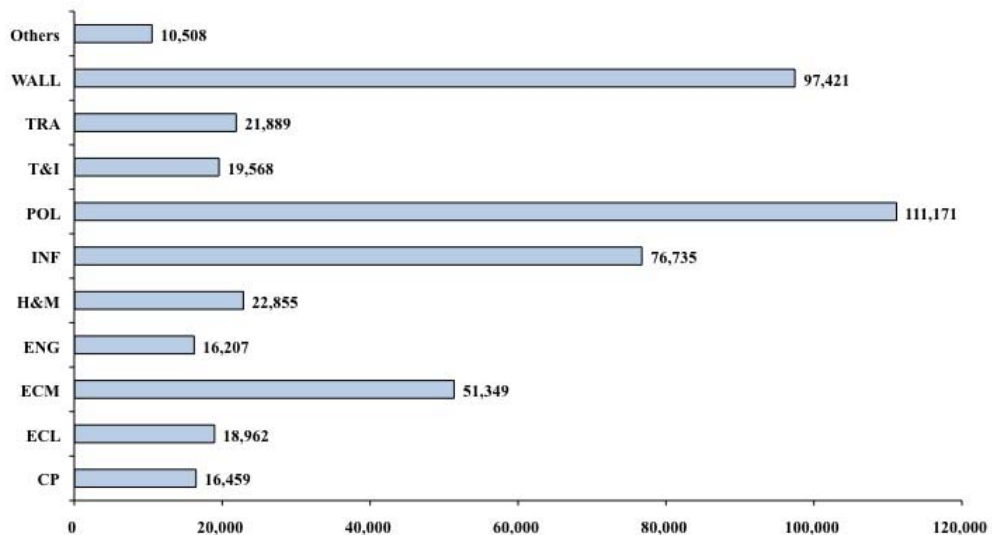Figure 58 - Comments per section (May 2005 - April 2006) [172]
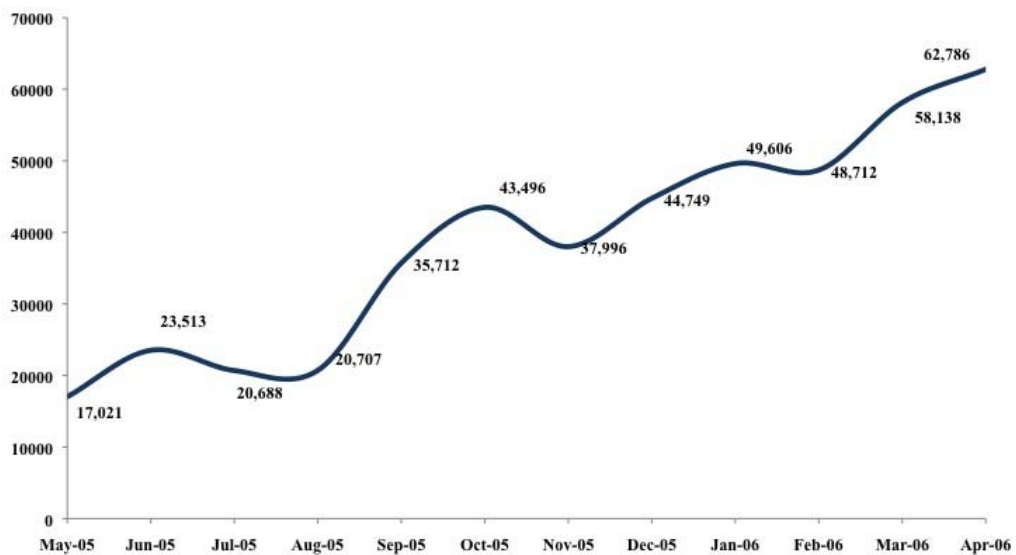

Figure 59 - Comments month by month (May 2005 - April 2006)

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[172] In August 2007, when I conducted the final survey, the blog's post were archived according to ten topic categories: Citizen Primaries, Ecology, Economics, Energy, Health/Medicine, Information, Politics; Technology/Internet; Transport/Getting About; Wailing Wall

The 12-month period taken in analysis was important because it culminated with Italy's 2006 general election. April was a crucial month that year: after five years of Berlusconi at the helm of the country - the longest serving government in the history of the Republic (Smith, 2004), the Italian people were once more called to cast their vote in the ballot box. Civil society organizations mobilized their volunteers to get people out to vote and help Romano Prodi and his centre-left coalition win the election. Beppe Grillo and his readers followed suit. The site became increasingly active around the period of the election, as is evident from the rise in the number of comments posted daily. In May 2005, there was a monthly average of 405 comments per post. Throughout the year, the number of comments increased constantly, while in April 2006 the figure topped 2,025 —nearly 500 percent more than in May 2005 (Fig. 60).

Figure 60 - average n. of comments per month (May 2005 - April 2006)
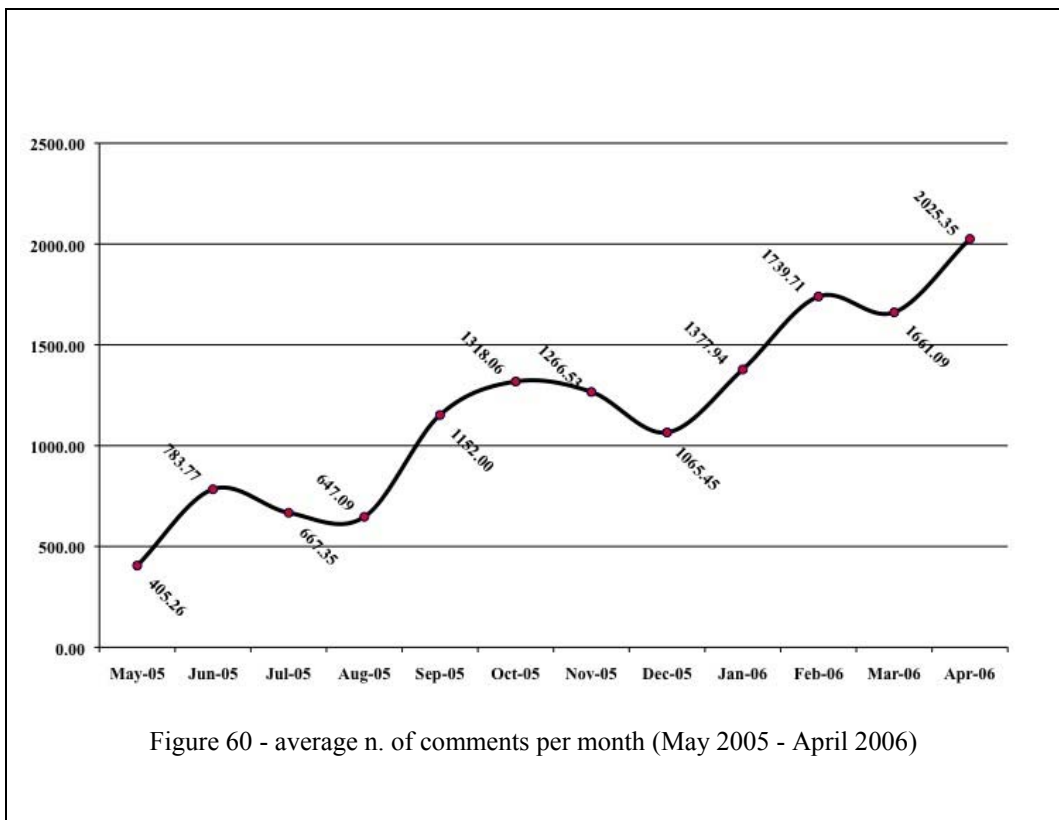
The message posted by Grillo the day after the election, April 11, "*C'è chi*" ("There are those …"), produced 4,198 comments, the highest number of comments for that whole 12-month period. Grillo's message commented on the close-call victory of the center-left coalition. The closing words of the message can be interpreted as the unofficial motto of the blog and its community: 'There are those who looked up at the ceiling from under the covers [of their bed] and decided never to give in' (Grillo, 2006a).

The impression gathered from a closer inspection of the content of the comments was of a jubilant optimism mixed with several degrees of caution; there was a sense of shared faith in the possibility that the new leadership, with the help of citizens like those commenting on Grillo's blog, could successfully change the questionable direction given by Berlusconi to Italian politics; and the quality of life of the Italian people could certainly be improved; at the same time, among the many thousands lines of text was present a whispered acknowledgment that the close-call election victory showed a divided country, and that could make things more difficult for Prodi's coalition (as indeed happened – the coalition did last less than two years). The first comment was an euphoric '*evviva è finita!!! evviva la legalità*!!' ("Hurrah! It is over!!! Hurrah for legality!!"). Then later, more cautiously, one of Grillo's readers, Angelo Mieli, admonished his fellow bloggers: 'guys this is a new beginning, but the members of the Centre-left coalition must now bear in mind that they need to avoid doing anything stupid such as fighting for the next five years. At the next election I want to win with 60% of votes.' And another reader warned: 'now let's be careful to the dirt deals'. Naturally, even though the majority of comments were from readers who voted for Prodi, there were also comments posted by Berlusconi's supporters. Some of these were plainly denigratory remarks of the thin-victory of the Center-Left; others instead were particularly balanced. For instance, Beppe Boselli asked for respect for those 49 percent of Italians like him who voted for the center-right coalition and he wished good luck to Prodi, hoping that Italy will be governed better than in the past (Grillo, 2006a).

Notwithstanding these numbers, Beppegrillo.it is not simply a community of readers whose activities are confined online. Like the American MoveOn, the blog aims at being the first point of call for people who are looking to engage both online and off in a fight against the monopoly grip on truth and information exercised by politically biased media. Facilitated by a direct link with the online social networking portal Meetup.com[173], Grillo's community organises regular meetings and *real world* events. At the time of writing (July 2009), the Meetup.com group category "Friends of Beppe Grillo" had around 77 thousands members, themselves organized in 437 groups, located in 325 cities, in 17 different countries (Fig. 61 and 62). The groups meet regularly and have organized over 17,000[174] meetings. Sometimes, when possible, Grillo himself attends their meetings, either in person or in video-chat.[175] Slowly, but steadily, these groups are shaping up into a self-aware international network of committed activists capable of organizing themselves beyond geographical boundaries, independently from the blog and Grillo. The network uses Meetup and free web-applications, like Skype.com (the Internet-based phone software) to coordinate and organize international online meetings between its members or to discuss future course of actions[176].

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[173] In the center right-hand-side of the webpage there is a red-bordered logo labeled Meetup. That is a link to the section of the website dedicated to the lists of Beppe Grillo's meetup groups.

[174] Data updated December 2008, source: Meetup.com

[175] See for instance the International Meetup (January 19/20, 2008), organized by the Beppe Grillo's Friends Amsterdam Meetup Group; during that meeting Beppe Grillo himself connected to the audience via video-call through Skype. A Programme of the meeting is posted here: http://beppegrillo.meetup.com/434/messages/boards/view/viewthread?thread=3 871169. A recording of his message is uploaded on the Ustream TV: http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/GraU4QNDsf,HhpRDmDhnscjXC2JHyRUF (Retrieved 25 February 2008)

[176] Personal communication with Ethel Chiodelli, Organizer of the London Beppe Grillo Meetup Group, 10 October 2007

Figure 61 - Meetups Grillo - August 2007[177]
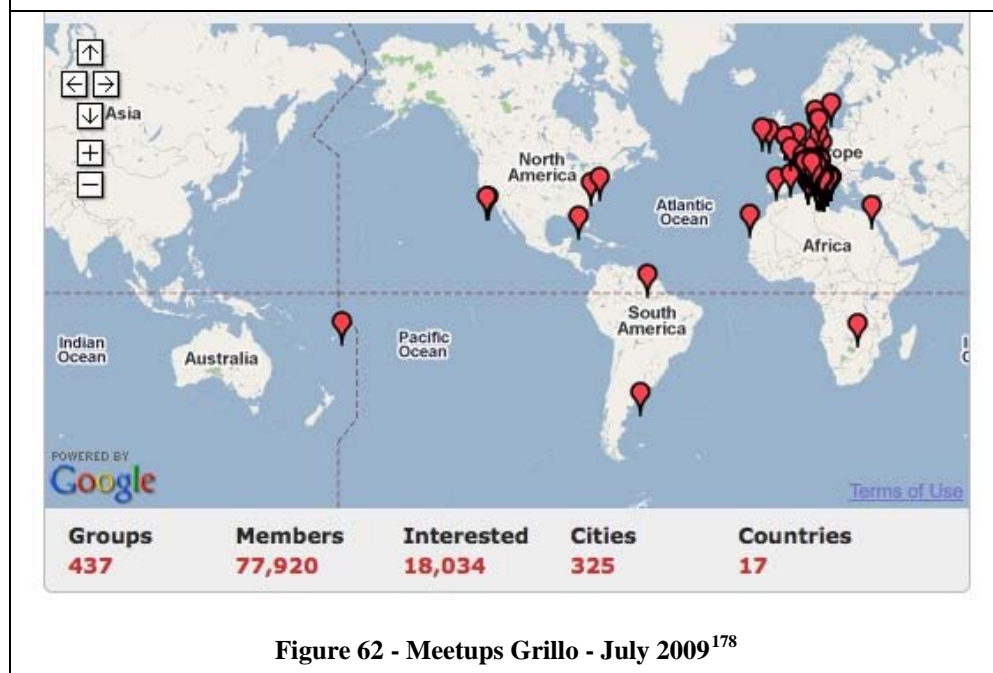
Figure 62 - Meetups Grillo - July 2009[178]

Another important feature with which the blog seeks to widen its own reach beyond the Web is *La Settimana* ("The Week"). *La Settimana[179]* is a printable magazine that contains the articles published on the blog during the previous

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[177] Source: MeetUp.com, August 2007
[178] Source: MeetUp.com, July 2009
[179] See a sample page of *La Settimana* below in Appendix D

week. In a country like Italy, where 42 percent of the population is disconnected from the Web[180], this rather old-fashioned weekly pamphlet is an attempt to export information, from the Web onto the streets. In an editorial published in the first issue of *La Settimana*, Grillo called for taking what he called a step back. He wrote (making fun of Lenin) that *La Settimana* was in effect 'one step back in order to go forward' (Grillo, 2006a). What he meant was that the blog uses a traditional method of distributing political information (the printed pamphlet) in order to bridge two different worlds: the world of bits with the world of bricks.

If at first *La Settimana* represented simply an attempt to widen the reach of the blog beyond the Web; soon after it marked the official entry of Beppegrillo.it in the world of Youtube.com. On December 4th, 2006, a video version of *La Settimana* n. 48 (that is, a video of Grillo talking about the topics discussed by the magazine) was uploaded on the popular free-video-hosting platform (StaffGrillo, 2006). That first [181] YouTube video can be seen as Grillo's declaration of video-independence from the many censors that many times in the past had attempted to silence his cricket's shrill chirping voice whenever he appeared on national television. Since its first release, *La Settimana n. 48* has been watched more than 1.3 million times[182]. Since then, it has been followed by over 380 videos. In the last 3 years, Grillo's YouTube videos have been viewed by millions of people. To date, the top 20 videos for number of viewers have been watched over 13 million times, on average each by 600 thousands viewers[183]. Thanks to YouTube and his blog, similarly to the case of the US President Barack Obama, Beppe Grillo can reach out directly to his supporters-

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[180] Internet users in Italy represent 58% of the population; of these only one third uses broadband. Source: the Internet World Stats Website. Data for total users updated to March 2008; for broadband: June 2007 (http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/it.htm (retrieved 20 December 2008)

[181] The video of La Settimana n. 48 is actually the third video uploaded under the account of StaffGrillo; however the first two were videos of Grillo's performance in theatre. La Settimana n. 48 was the first video directly related to the topics discussed in the pages of the blog.

[182] Data retrieved from YouTube.com on 20 July 2009. Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1u7SNSRK4zY

[183] From data I retrieved from Beppe Grillo's YouTube channel on 20 July 2009. Link: http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=StaffGrillo

base without bowing to the will of the heavily politicized Italian television networks.

The origins of *La Settimana* are unclear, however, browsing through the comments posted on the blog, I was able to single out one entry that seems to imply that the magazine originated from a reader's suggestion. Just over a month before the first issue of *La Settimana* appeared, a reader of the Blog, Vincenzo Curcio wrote a comment about one of Grillo's post. Addressing the issue of how to make available the content of the blog to those who cannot use the Internet, Curcio suggested that on a weekly basis the various arguments discussed on the blog could be collected in a few pages and then published on newspapers—such as *City, Metro, Leggo*—that are distributed freely in many Italian cities (Grillo, 2005c, the comment is dated: November 29, 2005 15:39). The origins of *La Settimana*, as those of other elements of the blog (for instance, the MeetUp groups, and the campaign Clean up Parliament, discussed below), show an important component of beppegrillo.it, one that the blog shares with the cases discussed earlier in Chapter 8 (MoveOn.org, the Dean Campaign in 2004, and the Obama Campaign in 2008): beppegrillo.it is a blog that is highly dependent on its readers' suggestions. Important collective actions organised through the blog often originate from readers' inputs: sometimes by emails sent to Grillo or, more often, via comments posted on the blog after each of Grillo's posts. For this reason, the blog's readers consider Grillo's approach to politics entirely different from that of politicians like Berlusconi. With his non-aligned posts; with the freedom he gives to his readers to comment on his ideas, Grillo has showed to those who follow his blog a sensibility towards their issues and needs that is far from common in the political Italian milieu. 'Grillo does what no other politician does. He listens to [our] suggestions … he feels the wave.' Wrote on the blog one of the comedian's readers, '[Grillo] does that not to protect his own market-share, but to be in synchrony with the people.'[184]

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[184] Comment posted by Viviana Viva, 13.09.07, 18:05 see Grillo, 2007d (translation from the Italian is mine)

Clean up Parliament

Facilitated by powerful and low-cost *tools* such as the portal Meetup.com and the Internet-phone software Skype, in the past three years, the lively and growing civil society orbiting around Grillo's blog has been able to organize a number of grassroots campaigns. These campaigns range from efforts to protect and sustain scientific research to economic and political issues. The community has often taken a firm stand on matters that have been underrepresented or misrepresented within the mainstream media. Of these campaigns, one stood out for its success in engaging the public participation and the interest that surrounded it: *Parlamento Pulito* (Clean up Parliament[185]). The campaign and its organizing process represented an important blueprint of how this Italian web-based civil society works: on the one hand it showed the strengths of the blog in functioning as a virtual public sphere where its community of monitorial citizens can bring to the light and actively debate social and political matters that are often neglected by over-politicized mainstream media; on the other hand, it raised some important questions about the organizational process of the campaign, the strength of the involvement of its supporters, the procedures of accountability inherent to this campaign, and the ultimate political impact of the campaign. Overall, Clean-up Parliament represented a promising start for this new web-based civil society; the outcome of the first act of the campaign, however, showed that the path to enact significant changes from below in the Italian political sphere is a long and tortuous path.

Clean-up Parliament can be considered a two-act campaign: the first act (at the end of 2005) aimed to inform the Italian public of a simple but rarely discussed fact: that year, the Parliament saw the election among its members of more than 20 candidates who had been already convicted by the Courts (see Gomez & Travaglio, 2006). Considering that the Parliament houses more than 900

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[185] This is the English title that appeared in the English version of the blog.

MPs[186], some could argue that Grillo's blog list was rather small. Yet it was not an insignificant ethical issue for the country, albeit one not many media discussed openly. It summarised the nonchalant attitude of Italian politicians towards ethics and truthful information. It seemed only fair to ask that those who had been convicted by Courts should at least have the ethical duty to tell the electorate about their criminal record before entering an election. In Italy instead, starting from the top with Berlusconi, usually happens the opposite. Being convicted is often not a reason for shame or resignation. Moreover, who is convicted often argues – either through the media or addressing directly his constituencies - that he or she was acquitted, even when that is not the case. Berlusconi is a perfect example of this modus operandi. He often says that notwithstanding his many trials – or as he often refers to them 'acts of persecution' - he has never been convicted. In fact that is *only* technically true. In most of his twelve trials, Berlusconi was acquitted because the 'statute of limitations' had expired. But the devil, as usual, is in the details. Many of the so-called laws *ad personam* (laws passed to defend a person's specific interest) passed by Berlusconi's government have always played a crucial role in his acquittals. In many cases existing laws were modified to reduce the number of years of the statue of limitation for the crime contested; in other cases, new laws were introduced and applied retrospectively to Berlusconi's trials to make the prime minister immune from prosecution. In other words, the three-time Prime Minister has been acquitted not because he was found innocent, as he often declares, but because he has cheated justice (see Gomez *et al*, 2008).

The second act of *Clean Up Parliament*, two years later, moved the fight a step further. The first act had gone almost unnoticed outside the blog's circle: nor the Parliament, neither the media had taken it seriously. So the second act was organised around a public petition that aimed to gather enough signatures and make enough noise to force the Parliament to take notice of the issue officially.

As it has often been the case for the blog's campaigns, *Clean up Parliament* originated outside the blog, from an early initiative of the *Beppe Grillo Meetup*

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[186] The Italian Parliament is divided in two Chambers; the Chamber of Deputies has 630 members and the Senate 315.

group in Milan. The ultimate aim of that new initiative was to protest against the lack of an adequate legislation for preventing convicted politicians to become Members of Parliament (Grillo, n.d.-b). What started as a simple leaflet with a list of names of convicted politicians soon became the focus of a heated debate on the blog. 25 posts were published on the blog and received a total of over 29 thousand comments (on average 1175 per post). The comments focused principally on the campaign's issues and on the tactics that could be employed to turn the campaign into a successful nation-wide protest. At an early stage of the campaign, Grillo and his bloggers addressed an electronic petition to Jose Barroso, the European Commission's President. They sent to Barroso over 14 thousands emails asking him to take a public stance on the issue. Barroso was not required to express his institutional views on the matter. But more simply, the petitioners asked him to publicly acknowledge the importance of the respect of the law as *a sine qua non* for Democracy. '[We ask you] a thought as a free man, not as a politician. If there isn't personal freedom, how is it possible to have freedom in Europe. [We] hope to have a signal from you' (Grillo, 2005d) Notwithstanding Grillo's many efforts, the campaign failed to receive any public recognition from either Barroso or the Commission.

Few months earlier, in the summer of 2005, Antonio Fazio the Governor of the Bank of Italy was involved in an insider trading scandal. Police wire-tapping recorded the Governor's attempt to obstruct the Dutch Bank ABN Amro in its bid to buy the Italian Bank AntonVeneta. Fazio intentionally manoeuvred to favour a friend instead of the Dutch buyer. Following the publications of the recorded conversations, Grillo's blog campaigned to force Fazio's resignation. In perfect MoveOn.org's style, through small donations of 10 and 15 Euros, the blog raised over 24 thousand Euros and purchased a page in the daily *La Repubblica* to ask publically the Governor to resign from his post (Grillo, 2005e). Fazio, eventually, resigned. The merit was not only of Grillo's blog, yet the resignation was perceived by Grillo's bloggers as one of their first victory. Following a strategy similar to that employed against Fazio, two months after the failed petition to Barroso, Grillo begun a new campaign to

raise enough funds to purchase a one-page advertisement in a newspaper and denounce publically the presence of convicted politicians in the Italian Parliament. This move intended to make the *Clean Up Parliament* campaign known to the wider public. The campaign successfully managed to raise almost sixty thousand Euros. At first, Grillo tried to publish the one-page manifesto in one of the Italian dailies. However, after many of the papers declined the request, the blogger turned his attention to the international press. Eventually the page appeared on the *International Herald Tribune* (*IHT*). The one-page of text[187] drew attention to the problem and asked the Members of the Italian Parliament whose names were among those convicted to resign (Grillo, 2005b, 2005c).

It is interesting to note that after the page appeared on the IHT, some of the members of the blog's community openly criticized the lack of transparency in Grillo's modus operandi. Some attacked the use of the comedian's name as the recipient of the donations. Grillo, in their opinion, should have opted for a bank account with the name of the initiative, as some suggested; others criticized the choice of the IHT: there was no previous discussion about which newspaper should publish the campaign's poster. Moreover, the text eventually published was quite ambiguous: it read almost as an advert for the blog than for the campaign (see it in Appendix D). The text was a short summary of the campaign's purpose, but without the names of the politicians convicted — as instead was indicated in the original proposal from which the whole campaign had stemmed. In addition, neither the list of contributors, nor the invoice of the payment made to the IHT was ever uploaded on the blog (see comments in Grillo, 2005c).

With hindsight, this first act of the campaign did not achieve much in terms of political results: the law never reached the Parliament, and not a single MP resigned. However, it raised some interest and praises in Italy and overseas, most notably from Anupam Mishra secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation of New Delhi in India who, in a long letter addressed to Grillo and then posted

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[187] See a copy of the page below in Appendix D

on the blog, commented: 'On behalf of our organization […] we Congratulate you on such a courageous advert and the important piece in the services of civil society. […] We have circulated your inspiring advert to some news channels and Hindi newspapers […thanks] for this small but greater step in the direction of upholding the democratic values.' (Grillo, 2006b)

Although politically ineffective, this first act of the campaign was instrumental in consolidating the foundations of the blog, at such an early stage of life. After the page appeared on the *IHT*, it became clear to the many members of the community that their electronic actions could achieve tangible effects. Almost two years after the appeal published on the *IHT*, Grillo and his followers gave life to the second act of the Clean Up campaign, it was in the form of a new campaign called the *V-Day* or *Vaffanculo Day* (*Vaffanculo* is the Italian for 'fuck off'). The day chosen was September 8, 2007. That is the date in which Italians commemorate the armistice in World Word II (September 8, 1943), and, as Grillo himself ironically put it during his appearance at a rally in Piazza Maggiore in Bologna (below Fig. 63), 'the day when Vittorio Emanuele III of Savoia, King of Italy left his people adrift; since that day nothing has really changed […] People, given the present-day state of things of our country, we better laugh' (ACUstaff, 2007[188]).

For that campaign, Grillo asked his fellow bloggers to sign a petition to propose a new electoral law to the Parliament. Although, generally, the power to initiate the process for a new law belongs to the Executive Government and to the Parliament, Article 71 of the Italian Constitution provides the means for citizens to directly propose a law outside of the normal institutional procedures. It is called *proposta di legge popolare*, a proposal for a law initiated by the people. If a petition with at least fifty thousand signatures accompanies the proposal, then the Parliament must discuss the proposal[189]. Grillo's *proposta di legge popolare* was composed of three different elements: candidates convicted

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[188] Translation from Italian is mine

[189] See the online version of the text of the Constitution from the website of the President of the Italian Republic: http://www.quirinale.it/qrnw/statico/costituzione/costituzione.htm

by courts of law should be forbidden from running for public office; political careers should be limited to only two terms; and that the Members of Parliament should be directly chosen by the people (Grillo, 2007a).

Figure 63 - Grillo at the V-day in Bologna 8 Sept 2007[190]

Many Members of the Parliament, representing both the governing coalition and the opposition, publically took stance pro or against Grillo's proposal. To stimulate a debate and gather feedback from the elected representatives, few days before the event took place, Grillo sent an email to every MP asking them to express their views about the proposal. Over 200 of the 945 MPs contacted responded to Grillo's email. The results of the survey (Fig. 64) were published on the blog, along with the names and argumentations of the representatives.

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[190]   Source: Web   (http://inform-azione-fareimpresa.blogspot.com/2007/09/beppe-grillo-vaffa-day-e-media-la.html)
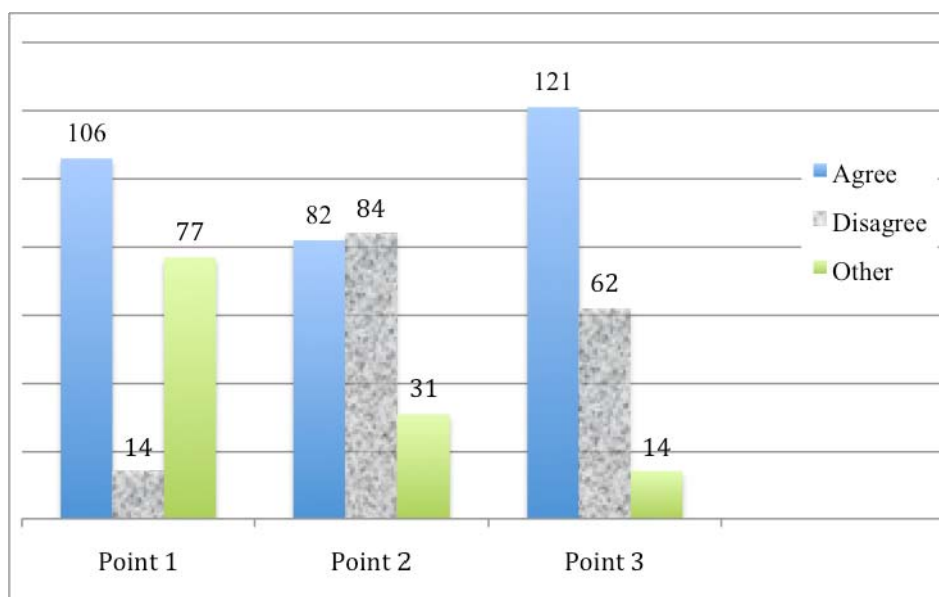
Figure 64 - MPs answers on V-Day Proposal[191]

106 MPs agreed with the first point of the proposal about the ineligibility of those candidates who have been convicted by courts of law for felonies that carry a sentence of 10 or more months in prison. That point was the direct offspring of the first act of the Clean Up Parliament campaign in 2005. However, 77 of the MPs surveyed could neither agree nor disagree with Grillo's suggestion: for the many of the undecided the question was not only a matter of yes or no, but it deserved more careful consideration. Other instead objected that the question was ill framed and it sounded populist. If on the one hand, that first point of the proposal could certainly draw easy consent from that large part of the electorate that felt disappointed by the ruling political class; on the other hand, to deny indefinitely the right to stand for public office to those convicted, even when they have served their sentence, could have had the effect of undermining democracy itself. Unless explicitly prescribed so by a Court's sentence, by law a person convicted for a crime, regains all his/her citizens' rights once he/she has served his/her conviction. Even more divisive was the second point of the proposal. 82 of the MPs who answered the email

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[191] Source: Grillo, 2007b

supported the limitation for candidates to only two terms in Parliament, while 84 instead disagreed. The main issue here was about experience. With his proposal Grillo attempted to export to the national stage the successful model used at the local level, in the Italian Mayoral elections. Some of the MPs however rightly objected that Grillo's point was a clear misunderstanding of the differences between the national and the local level. At the local level it can be argued is important to avoid continuity, for the close-ties that can be developed between the elected and the electors in the long-term could favour corruption. But at national level, politics is based more on the Representative's experience of the system. Two terms in that context are too short to gain that experience, while the risk of corruption (at least in principle) is limited by the actual distance between the elected and his electorate. The third point of the proposal (MPs should be directly named in the ballot paper by their electors, rather than chosen by the party) recorded most of the pro-votes: 121 vs. 62, among those who agreed with the proposal was Gianfranco Fini, the President of the Chamber of Deputies and close ally of Berlusconi (Grillo, 2007b).

Whether one agrees with Grillo's proposal or not, is not that relevant, for the purpose of this dissertation. What is interesting about it, is that a comedian, who is by trade supposed to entertain and make an audience laugh with his jokes, thanks to the Internet Galaxy and the weakness of the power of traditional politics inside that Galaxy, managed to kick-start a national debate about the ethics and rules of Italy's representative democracy; that was a debate that took place outside the institutional walls of the Parliament. It started as a whisper on a blog passed along from post to post, from comment to comment, until it became a scream roaring in more than 200 public squares in Italy (see Fig. 64) and abroad. That was, by all means, no little achievement.
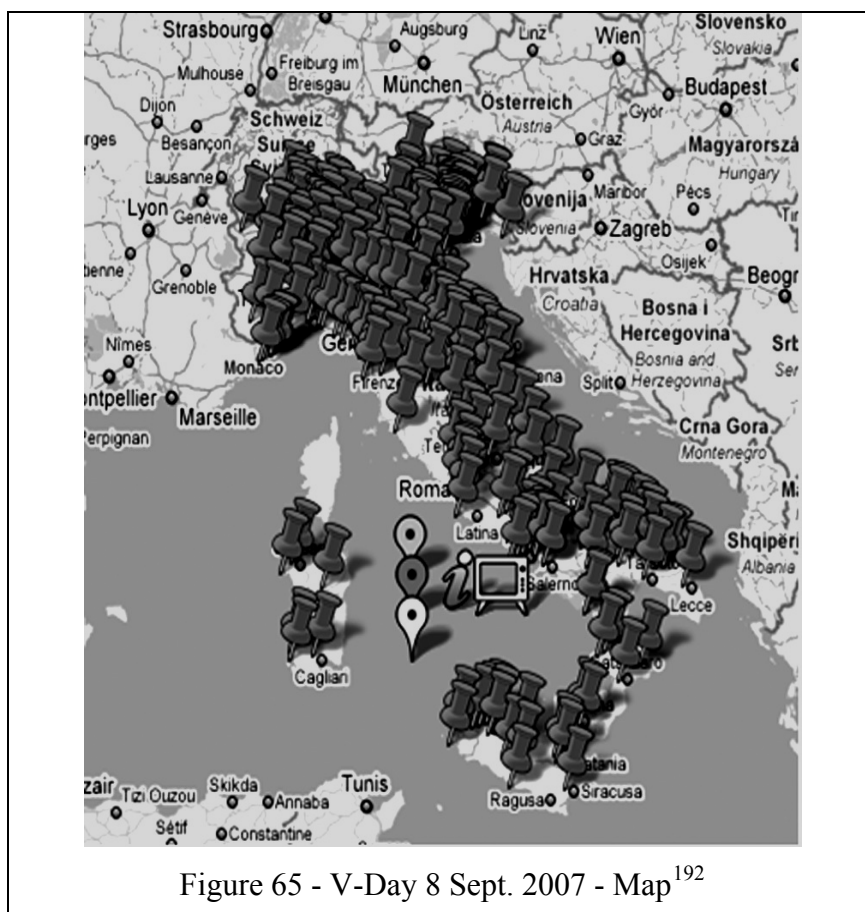
Figure 65 - V-Day 8 Sept. 2007 - Map[192]

Overall, the V-day was a success both in terms of numbers and media exposure. Following in the footsteps of the American MoveOn, the event was by and large a product of the grassroots groups that supported Grillo. The volunteers used the space on the blog and especially the contacts with the many thousands members of the Beppe Grillo's friends Meetup groups to raise funds and coordinate the many simultaneous events. On September 8, over two million people gathered in more than 200 cities worldwide to shout *vaffanculo*[193] to the

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[192] Source: Google Maps: Retrieved August 18, 2008, from: http://maps.google.it/maps/user?uid=117013866427879023294&hl=it&gl=it

[193] To render the atmosphere of such a large protest is almost impossible only with the help of still images and text. This is a protest that showed a high degree of passion and anger in the Italian electorate. To hear the sound of that roaring *vaffanculo* is much better to watch a video. A video of the gathering in Piazza Maggiore in Bologna, an event with reportedly over 50 thousand people listening to Beppe Grillo, shows that precise moment. The video is available on youtube.com, go to minute 1:45 and you can hear the crowd shouting *vaffanculo*. To see the video follow this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmoYFuBEM3s&feature=related (Last time checked: 10 July 2009)

Italian political class (Mueller, 2008). Eventually, the number of signatures collected did not match the impressive number of people that attended the events. Grillo justified the fact by saying that the volunteers ran out of forms, as they were not ready for such unexpected turnout (Grillo, 2007c). The final tally, however, was over 330 thousands (Grillo, 2007d), a number over six times higher than the 50 thousands mark required by Art. 71 of the Italian Constitution in order to submit a proposal of popular law to the Parliament. Only in Rome the volunteers collected over 20 thousand signatures (Fig. 66)

Figure 66 - V-Day: Number of Signatures per City[194]
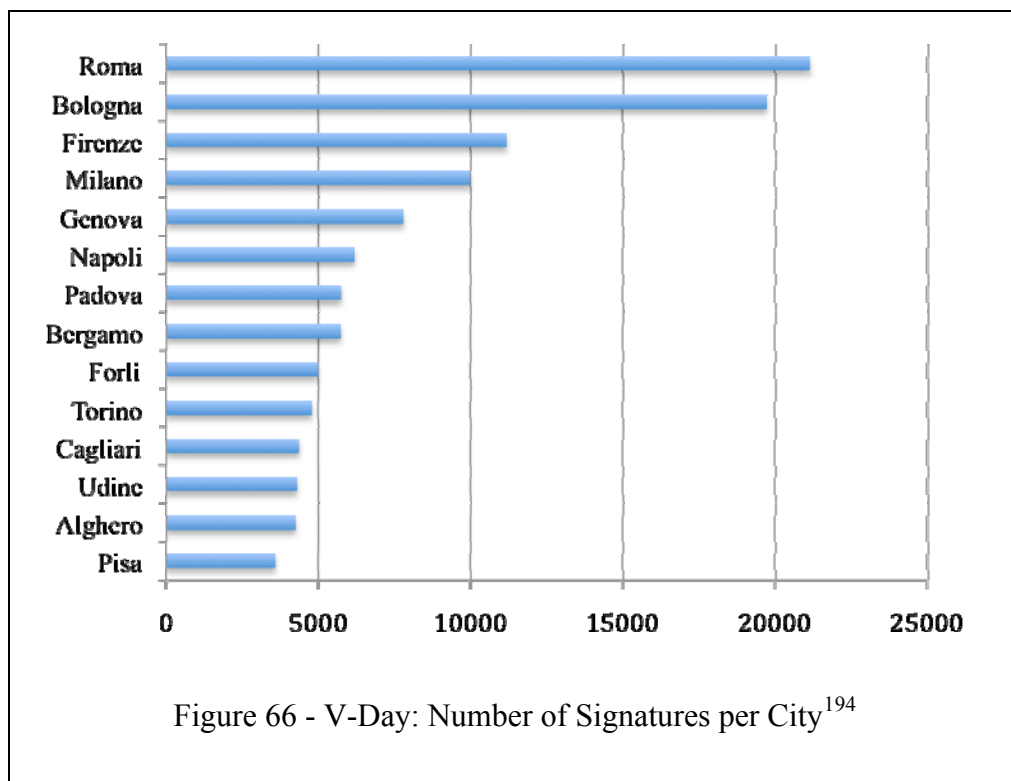
The V-day was a crucial moment in the young history of the web-based civil society inspired by Grillo. For the very first time since the birth of the blog, the many thousands members that are actively involved with the blog's online community materialised on a national (and international) stage.

[194] The chart takes in consideration only the first 15 cities per number of signatures. Data were retrieved on January 10, 2009 from the Map created by Beppe Grillo staff with Google Maps, available at: http://maps.google.it/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=it&num=200&start=0&msa=0&ll=41.787697,12.744141&spn=10.875114,20.566406&z=6&om=1&msid=105899767908383675040.000439d89ff7375562a7f

Figure 67 - V-day - Catania[195]

Figure 68 - V-day – La Spezia[196]

They showed to the media, but also to themselves, that theirs is a large movement of real committed citizens who have the ability to organise a nationwide protest; to sign a petition (see above Fig. 67 and Fig. 68); to vote in an election, influence others, and, why not?, in the long term, change the status quo of the country. As one of the signatories of the petition commented on the blog, 'when we went to sign in Piazza Dante, in Naples, we thought we would have met no one there; we were resigned to the idea that Italians were all coward sheep, then when we saw we had to join a queue to sign the petition …

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[195]   8   September,   2007.   Catania.   Source: Flickr. http://www.flickr.com/photos/adribelfiore/1351556670/
[196] 8 September 2007. V-day. Piazza Ramiro Ginocchio, La Spezia. Information   Point   and   Signatures   banquet.   Source: Flickr. http://www.flickr.com/photos/13087831@N07/1350759067/

we realised that Italy is waking up, the sheep are becoming lions.' (Grillo, 2007d)[197]

Politics vs. Antipolitics?

In the aftermath of the V-day protest, the issues raised by the event were debated in the pages of the Italian newspapers and on television. The behaviour of Grillo and his *Grillini* (Little Crickets) as many in the media referred to those who attended the protest, sparked harsh reactions from politicians from both sides of the political spectrum; and also from representatives of Berlusconi's media regime[198]. Grillo and his followers were accused of lacking sense of respect for the Institutions that govern the country; of shallow demagoguery and populism (Povoledo, 2007); of even fostering terrorism: 'what would happen if a crazy man listening to Grillo's accusations decided to take a gun and pull the trigger against those attacked by the comedian?', asked alarmed the director of RAI 2 News, Mauro Mazza (*Corriere della Sera, 2007*). To explain the phenomenon of *Grillismo* (the name given to Grillo's movement), many compared it with Guglielmo Giannini's *qualunquismo*. In 1946, with the slogan *non rompeteci le scatole*[199], Giannini, a journalist, tired of the Italian political establishment, founded *Il Fronte dell'uomo qualunque*[200]. In that year election, the new party, with its anti-politics and the support of the 'common people', surprisingly won 30 seats in the Parliament. Giannini's ascendance to fame lasted only one term and many critics foresee for Grillo a similar meteoritic rise. For those critics, Grillo's politics and his v-day, as for Giannini's exploit in 1946, were simply inconsequential anti-politics, 'a mediocre and vulgar matter' (Scalfari, 2007). But those critics were wrong.

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[197] Translation from the Italian is mine
[198] For articles and news about the V-Day, see: http://www2.beppegrillo.it/vaffanculoday/
[199] Don't bother us.
[200] *The Common Man's Front*. The Italian denigratory term *qualunquismo* derives from Giannini's Front. It cannot really be translated in English. Generally speaking, the term refers to a cynical approach towards politics and political leadership as potentially dangerous for the stability of the life of the common man. For a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of *qualunquismo* and the history of Giannini's movement see Setta, 2005 and Zanone, 2002.

Grillo and his *grillini* are not like Giannini. They are not the antithesis of politics and the impact of Grillo's movement is certainly not insignificant, especially if seen in a long-term perspective. The Grillini are nor vulgar, neither mediocre. It is the contrary. The V-day was the gestalt switch that showed a paradigm shift in the approach towards politics of many Italians, a large part of which is new to politics. Those people who signed the petition and crowded the squares of more than 200 cities represent a new and bold civil society who is not afraid to ask questions, who believes that together they can build a better country. They are not against politics. On the contrary, they fully understand and embrace political life, understood as a continuous struggle for power and a never-ending process of questioning and trying to improve the quality of the status quo. That struggle always requires from the individual who addresses himself/herself as a political being to act, often publically, to defend and support his/her own beliefs. Grillo and his Grillini did exactly that. They acted together, outside the boundaries of the traditional and institutional realms of Italian politics; together they dared to shout *vaffanculo* to a political class (some correctly use the term *caste*) that they feel no longer represent them. Publically, those people started a complex political process that, in the long term, may have serious repercussions for the way in which politics is understood and experienced in Italy. They may well be a clear sign of the shape of things to come.

Politicians find hard to understand the Grillo's phenomenon. Some of them are probably scared of the consequences of something they cannot really control. When Grillo was simply a comedian *imprisoned* within the controllable space of a TV screen, things were much simpler: to silence his voice all that was needed was to blacklist his name. But now, with the Internet, the situation has changed radically. People like Grillo cannot longer be easily controlled. On the other hand, the V-Generation, the generation of those who signed the v-day petition and the Italian politicians are fully immersed in a generational conflict, which is not based on age; but it revolves around different views about the meaning of politics. As Grillo himself has often repeated, the problem is that the majority of the politicians sitting in the Parliament are too old; they belong

to a generation that has done its time. They have an understanding of politics that is completely out of touch with the reality that produced the V-day. To illustrate his point, Grillo told the crowd convened for the V-day meeting in Piazza Maggiore in Bologna a joke about Fausto Bertinotti (class 1940), the leader of *Rifondazione Comunista*, a former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and, it must be said, a supporter of the V-day. During his joke, Grillo said that the first time Bertinotti saw a laptop computer he was unable to open it. Thus, in despair, the long-serving MP asked: is there one of those without the lid (i.e.: an old desktop computer) (ACUStaff, 2007b). 'I am not sure if the story was true' commented Viviana Viva, one of the signatory of the Clean-up Parliament petition 'yet it rendered the idea of an antediluvian world, out of sync with the passing of time, out of sync with history. We cannot modernise that world, we can only wipe it away as something that is obsolete or that must be stored in a museum.'[201]

Critics like the editorialist of *La Repubblica*, Scalfari (2007), have argued that the Grillini promote destructive anti-politics. They are wrong. On the contrary, those many thousands of people are eager to participate to the political process and, if possible, improve it. Andrea Venuti, one of the many thousands of those who signed the petition, on a comment posted on Grillo's blog, made the point clear: 'I am one of the many who was in Bologna [on the 8th of September] and I would not like this day to become just a memory. Please [let's continue] what we just started. Let's not lose sight of each other [...] yesterday was one of those days where it was not important whether our neighbor was Left or Right. Our presence was a statement pro-legality, a way to say that we deserve to be represented by honest people'[202].

Commenting on the success of the V-Day, Grillo said: 'I was really surprised. I didn't expect such a big turn out ... What happened out there was the release of

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[201] Comment posted by Viviana Viva, 13.09.07, 18:05 see Grillo, 2007d (Translation from the Italian is mine)
[202] Comment posted by Andrea Venuti, 9 September 2007, 17:55 (Translation from the Italian is mine)

a virus that's about to attack the political class. But in this case there's no vaccine' (Povoledo, 2007).

A blueprint for the future?

From 1996 to 2001 Italy was governed by the centre-left coalition of the Olive Tree's movement, led in its early stages by Romano Prodi. Overall, it governed well. It worked hard on the country's balance sheet, but fatally that government showed little understanding, if not complete lack of interest in involving the people in the political process. At times, the coalition's leaders seemed uninterested or sceptical of the capacity for civil responsibility of the people who had voted for them. They operated from above, detached from their citizens. They never really tried to build support from below, to mobilize the grassroots; to foster passion in the electorate and build a strong base that could sustain the coalition in the future. The result was unavoidable. When the Election Day came in 2001, the centre-left coalition that had led the country for five years, notwithstanding its good record, found itself with little support from the people, for 'in the country there was scarce enthusiasm for, or even knowledge of, what it had done.' (Ginsborg, 2003a, 26-27) Unsurprisingly, Berlusconi, by far a better communicator than his opponents, won that election.

Grillo, since his first blog post, has adopted a different political strategy, based on a simple philosophy: grassroots first and *vaffanculo* to all the rest. Regardless of what some critics argue, Grillo is not an Internet age clone of Berlusconi: a populist who strives for power and defends his own interests. Of course, he is not perfect. His tours of performances have certainly benefited from his new life as a blogger. But he understands that the Net is not like Television. Even if he had the will and aims of Berlusconi, someone in the position of Grillo will never be able to apply Berlusconi's method on the web. He or his editorial staff could certainly censor the comments posted on the website, yet, during my monitoring of the Blog's activity, I came across a great number of comments that openly criticized Grillo's positions. Moreover, contrary to Berlusconi' clout on traditional media, any systematic attempt to censor the blog will eventually backfire, as nor Grillo, neither his Staff have

any control on the rest of the web.

The success of the blog however goes beyond Grillo. Grillo and his blog have become a symbol and an instrument of change. The growing success of beppegrillo.it and of initiatives like the V-Day show a new emerging trend in the Italian political sphere, one that dares to challenge what many of those using the blog perceive as an old sclerotic form of politics. However, whether or not Grillo is right in arguing that the trend set by his community of active monitorial citizens is *a blueprint for the future* (Povoledo, 2007) is an open question. At the moment some things seem certain, others are all to be proven.

It is clear that those who read and comment on Grillo's posts are members of an active public inspired by the comedian. In addition to posting thousands of comments on the blog, they post videos on external platforms; create and participate in social and political campaigns; publicize the blog and the work of its community; and organize regional and international gatherings via Meetup.com. In these ways they fight against the political establishment and actively attempt to give life, substance, and direction to a form of politics that aims to create a better alternative to the existing status quo. They believe that change can certainly be achieved and consider the web an important instrument to enact that change from below, because in this new social environment the power of the political caste is fundamentally less effective than on traditional media. The content of some of the comments posted on the blog are revealing of this belief. Many of them in fact show a sense of shared faith in the possibilities of changing and improving the quality of life of the Italian people. At the same time, however, there is an acknowledgment that the road is long and difficult. Consider, for instance, the comments posted soon after the close-call election victory of Prodi in 2006 was announced. A closer look at those comments showed that the jubilant manifestations of hope coexisted with sceptic fear that a difficult path laid ahead for the new government; that hard work was needed to heal Italy from Berlusconi's legacy. The first comment unsurprisingly was a jubilant "Hurrah! It is over!!!" Then later, more cautiously, another reader, Roberto Rondini wrote: 'now […] let's start working to return straight away free information to the (many) citizens who

still know nothing […] 9 Million of Italians […] voted again, in 2006, a person like Berlusconi […] How many would they be if they could listen to the news? I don't mean partisan news, but simply news' (Grillo, 2006a).

In reality nothing really changed. The new centre-left coalition government led by Romano Prodi failed to enact the legal changes needed to repair the damage of Berlusconi's five-year tenure, especially those changes concerning the electoral law and the problem of media ownership. After the chance they had had in 1997, the Left once again missed the opportunity to properly address the issue of Berlusconi's media ownership that is in stark conflict with the role of Prime Minister and constantly threatens the country's future. By not-acting on those issues, Prodi and his allies kept alive Berlusconi's political career at the expense of the quality of democracy in Italy. The result was, to say the least, disheartening: Prodi's government, weakened by internal feuds within his unsteady coalition – the offspring of Berlusconi's electoral law that made difficult for any coalition to reach a solid majority in the Senate – did not even last three years. And in the following election, in April 2008, with a landslide victory, Berlusconi returned undisturbed to power.

At first sight, if one looks at the political achievements of the blog's many campaigns, little or nothing has changed in Italy since Grillo started blogging. Clientelism and corruption are still strong components of Italy's political life. Grillo himself has sometimes admitted that his battles seem to resemble the battles of Don Quixote, Manuel Cervantes' fictional hero: they lead nowhere. One year after the V-day, Grillo bitterly wrote: 'The collection of signatures for a Clean Parliament has been ignored.' (Grillo, 2008) Those in power have politely overlooked the many thousands of people that gathered in the streets in less than a year protesting against Prodi and Berlusconi's governments. Berlusconi keeps looking after his own interests. The left is uninterested, or, worst, is a washed-up copy of the Right. 'The time of referendum and popular laws has finished' remarked Grillo. In fact, he dared to say, politicians 'use [our] signatures [as toilet paper] to clean their arses' (Grillo, 2008). At a much closer inspection, however, there are evidences that trend is slowly changing,

and maybe Grillo's politics represent, after all, an important blueprint for the future.

Eventually, even if it took almost two years (10 June 2009), Beppe Grillo, on behalf of his bloggers, was received by the Committee for Constitutional Affairs of the Italian Senate to discuss the V-day proposal (Grillo, 2009; *Corriere della Sera, 2009*). It was not a grand victory; in fact, at the time of writing there are no indications that the law will ever be discussed by MPs in the Parliament[203]. Yet, once again, Grillo's feat was no little achievement. It showed to the many thousands that signed the petition that the Blog's movement is not that insignificant and its existence is not relegated outside the institutions. In fact, it is capable to produce tangible political effects. Since the first blog post in 2005, and especially since the first V-day in 2007, the blog's movement has kept going forward. Slowly, but steadily, it has started a long process of change: from being merely the disorganised hideout of a dissatisfied civil society to one that is not only able to make proposals, but if needed is ready to take action. Consider what happened in the aftermath of the V-Day. The harsh reaction of the ruling political class on the one hand and on the other the great enthusiasm of those who participated to the event, suggested that time was ripe to break with the more traditional representatives of that out-of-touch political class, whilst returning control of the political process into the hands of the citizens.

Riding the momentum of the 2007 V-day, soon after the event ended, Grillo launched *Liste Civiche* (civic lists), a new initiative that aimed to be an open challenge to the political establishment. *Liste Civiche* are collaboratively created lists of local administrators that meet, among others, the quality standards requirements promoted with the V-Day petition.

To receive the Blog's stamp of approval (Fig. 69), the lists can not be linked to existing political parties; their members must have a clean legal record; each

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[203] The progress of the law archived as *Atto Senato n. 1936* can be checked online at the following address: http://www.senato.it/leg/15/BGT/Schede/Ddliter/29393.htm (Retrieved 10 July 2009)

candidate should reside in the same location of his or her constituents; and candidates may not have served previously more than one term in office — either at local or national level (see Grillo, 2007e). Grillo, however, remarked that his intention was not to create a new political coalition. In fact, he said, 'I am not promoting any Civic List, whether local or national. The participants of the V-day do not lend their voices to anyone. They are megaphones of themselves. They are citizens that do their own politics' (Repubblica, 2007). But the importance of the initiative goes further: it advocates an understanding of politics freed from the chains of higher interests and locate its essence in the grassroots. It is in the City councils that important decisions are taken and most of the mishaps are made. So to take back the country, one must start from the ground level. One city council-seat at a time. From this perspective political action is seen as it were the release of a virus. This is an understanding of politics that aims at changing the mentality of those involved in the political process, while using the Internet Galaxy as the indispensable instrument of expression and control. The ideal-citizen for Grillo should walk into a city council meeting with a webcam on his/her head and record everything. Then upload the film on youtube.com, for everyone to see it. In this case the activity of monitoring power is coupled with the activity of being dynamically involved in the shaping process of the politics of everyday life.

Figure 69 - Civic List - Stamp of Approval

Overall, during the 2008 Local elections, 19 lists[204] received the Blog's stamp of approval. On average these lists gathered in their constituency about 2.8 percent of the votes[205]. The most significant results were in Rome and in Palermo were the two candidates supported by Grillo (Serenetta Monti as Major of Rome and Sonia Alfano as Governor of Sicily) received respectively almost 45 thousands and 70 thousands votes[206]. This was not an insignificant result for outsiders promoted mainly through the Internet. That is only the start, Grillo promised. 'They will never give up, neither will we.' (Grillo, 2008)

Time will tell if Grillo is right or wrong. In the meantime, in less than four years of life, a blog that started with a simple line of text in January 2005 has evolved greatly beyond any expectation. It has become an important instrument in the hands of a new breed of civil society composed by bold individuals who believe in the importance for democracy of a healthy political class; who continuously monitor those in power and openly contest their authority. These are citizens who are conscious of their strength and are capable to step in to the political fray if action is indeed required. Contrary to many of the representatives of the traditional Italian political class who comfortably occupy their Parliament' seats, the civil society that orbits around Grillo's blog is made of citizens who know very well how to harness the power of the Internet Galaxy to challenge Italy's political status quo and achieve their intended goals.

Conclusions

In a political context defined by a controversial figure like Silvio Berlusconi, and for the personal history of the comedian's defiant relationship with political power, Beppe Grillo's website has quickly transcended its initial

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[204] See http://www2.beppegrillo.it/listeciviche/amministrative2008.html (retrieved 21 June 2008)

[205] Data retrieved from the Italian Interior Minister website: (20 June 2008): http://amministrative.interno.it/amministrative/amm080413/G0700900.htm

[206] For Sicily data retrieved from the election Website: http://www.elezioni.regione.sicilia.it/publicsite/rep_7/riepilogoRegionale.html; for Rome from the Italian Interior Ministry website: http://amministrative.interno.it/amministrative/amm080413/G0700900.htm

status of simple weblog of a comedian's thoughts and ideas. Since its birth in 2005, it has increasingly acted as an electronic beacon whose signals manage to attract on its virtual shores the many thousands loose members of an otherwise fragmented and geographically dispersed civil society. The blog has become one of the main reference points through which many Italians, scattered around the country and across the globe, can make sense of the state of things in Italy.

Berlusconi and Grillo represent the two opposite sides of the meaning of politics and power in the *Bel Paese*; and, at the same time, the two poles of reference of two different media galaxies: Berlusconi's Galaxy is made of televisions, of mass audiences, of 'manufacting consent' through traditional mainstream media; his power is rooted in the long-lasting practice of clientelism, one of the defining elements of the dynamics of Italy's political establishment; Berlusconi's is the bearer of a power that moves fearless within the boundaries of what I earlier called the *strength paradigm* (See above chapter six); Grillo's Galaxy, on the other hand, is structured around a complex interactive web of invisible bytes that bonds the generative power of computers technology together with the defiant creativity of monitorial citizens. Grillo and *his* citizens exert the power of the Web's weakness paradigm to contrast the political establishment that has in Berlusconi its leading exponent, while attempting to enact a long-term process of change of Italian politics from below. Berlusconi, born in 1936, is a man that owes much of his success, as a politician and as entrepreneur, to his ability of harnessing the power of mainstream media, especially that of private Television networks, for his own benefit. For Berlusconi the Internet has never played any meaningful role in his life. For Grillo instead, class 1948, things went quite different: grown up in television as a successful comedian, at the climax of his career, his vis-à-vis with political censorship pushed him out from the limelight of television. Slowly, in the following years, in ways similar to the American MoveOn, he found in the Web a new uncharted territory for his own particular never-aligned vision of politics. If the electoral victories of Berlusconi in the last fifteen years can be seen as a looming shadow hanging over the future of

democracy in Italy; the success and constitutive elements of Beppegrillo.it are, on the other hand, an important blueprint of the bright development of a new reinvigorated Italian civil society.

At the time of writing (July 2009), the results of two recent electoral contexts showed new strong evidences in support of the political potential of the Blog's community. In June 2009, without the extensive help of television networks, or political parties, Grillo's *Liste Civiche* successfully managed to elect 31 candidates in over 20 local administrations[207]; but more importantly, for the first time two candidates openly supported by the blog were successfully elected to the European Parliament. Sonia Alfano and the magistrate Luigi De Magistris, presented in the lists of *Italia dei Valori* (the party of Antonio Di Pietro, the former Public Prosecutor of the Clean Hands scandal and a favourite of Grillo's blog) were both elected. In the aftermath of the Election, with videos posted on Youtube.com, both Alfano and De Magistris openly thanked Grillo's community for its support (See Staff Grillo, 2009a and 2009b). Instrumental to this success, as both candidates acknowledged, was the use of the Web – Beppe Grillo's blog, Meetup.com, and social network websites like Facebook.com. They all contributed to shape the skeleton framework for a valid alternative to Berlusconi and his way of understanding and doing politics. Both Alfano and De Magistris are the first representatives of a new way of understanding politics, one that develops around the strong synergy between the political representative and his/her electorate. Thanks to the Web, the elected representative becomes an ever-present reference point in the institutions of power and in the political sphere for the members of the civil society who supported his/her candidacy. The success of the two newly-elected Member of the European Parliament was impressive: the little known Alfano received over 165 thousand votes; while De Magistris with nearly 500 thousand votes was second only to Silvio Berlusconi for number of preferences[208]. That was by all means not a negligible result.

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[207] See details of those elected candidates at http://www.beppegrillo.it/listeciviche/eletti/

[208] Data were retrieved from the Italian Interior Minister website: (20 July 2009): http://elezioni.interno.it/europee/ET0.htm

Chapter 10 - Conclusions: Power as shared weakness

These private walls the Minotaur include,
Who twice was glutted with Athenian blood:
But the third tribute more successful prov'd,
Slew the foul monster, and the plague remov'd.
When Theseus, aided by the virgin's art,
Had trac'd the guiding thread thro' ev'ry part,
He took the gentle maid, that set him free,
And, bound for Dias, cut the briny sea.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VIII

The Internet Galaxy, this dissertation has argued since the beginning, is an empirical and metaphorical representation of a complex and heterogeneous system of relationships among a diverse group of *actors* that interact with each other. The meaning of the term *actor* spans across a wide range of connotations. It can refer to machines for instance – the Internet after all can be defined, at least from a very narrow perspective, simply as a network of computers interacting with each other almost independently from any other actor; human beings are also *actors*, both in their capacity of action as independent individuals or as members of large and complex groups. We have made references to niche-groups such computer scientists or hobbyists; but also to large political organizations such States. These relationships however are quite flexible and dynamic. For this reason the Galaxy is never in a state of stasis. Such active and complex dynamism influences considerably the dynamics of prevailing power relations.

For years, like the confused needle of a Geiger counter that is unsure of the quality of the radiation surrounding its sensors, the assessment of that influence

has swung between two opposite extremes: freedom and domination. On the one end of the scale sit some of the early adopters of the Internet. *Early adopters* are typically, by definition, very enthusiasts about the new product they adopt. The early adopters of the *product* Internet were no different. They hailed the new galaxy as the new home of mind and creativity; as a space free from the influence of conventional power holders, such as governments or big corporations (Rheingold 1993; Barlow, 1996). On the other end of the scale, are, instead, the skeptics. For the members of this category the alleged bond between the Internet and 'the illusions of consumer choice and individual freedom' is nothing but 'the ideological oxygen necessary to sustain a media system (and a broader social system) that serves the few while making itself appear accountable and democratic' (McChesney, 1999: 185). Some have gone even further by stating that computer networks not only help dictatorial regimes, but, in fact, are more likely to hinder democracy than save it (Barney, 2000: 190).

Throughout its journey, this dissertation has probed the claims of these two opposite camps against a variety of new evidences drawn from our in-depth analysis of some of the most recent trends in the use of the Internet Galaxy for political aims. The evidences analyzed showed that the notion that considers the Internet simply as an amplifier of pre-existing patterns of domination, although seemingly plausible, cannot entirely account for some types of web-enhanced activism, such as those analyzed in the second part of the dissertation. It is true that, at least at first sight, the Internet Galaxy seems to favour ultimately conventional power-holders (such as states) to the detriment of traditional subjects of power (i.e. citizens, users). The People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom (our two main case-studies on state-power in the Internet age) show clear signs of such tendency. Nevertheless, at a closer inspection, the reality appears rather different. The lessons learned from the history of the origins of the Internet Galaxy; the ever-increasing difficulties that states face in their attempts to control how the Internet is used; the rising importance and long term consequences of new forms of collective action (such as those led by MoveOn.org in the USA or Beppe Grillo in Italy), question the assumptions drawn from conventional theories of power when

applied to this galaxy. Those theories are based on what I called the *strength paradigm*, that is, power based on absolute authority (the weberian *Herrschaft*); or on subtle processes of domination, (the foucauldian *Governmentality*). This old paradigm belongs to a pre-Internet world and cannot entirely explain the complex relationships of power that form within the Internet Galaxy. In chapter six I proposed the adoption of a new paradigm of power, one that I called the *weakness paradigm*. The particular dynamics that have informed the case-studies analyzed here suggest that the Internet Galaxy is a peculiar organizational setting within which the intrinsic quality of power struggle is based on a collectively shared sense of weakness that affects the whole galaxy; that is, power springs from the recognition that within this galaxy, *no one* is ever in the position to dominate it fully. Such shared knowledge, this dissertation has argued, becomes a powerful enabler (*the gestalt switch*) of new bold and irreverent forms of resistance that through the use of the Internet (and, at large, the whole gamut of new communication media) stand in strong contrast to traditional patterns of domination. The concluding part of this dissertation is dedicated to explaining this new form of power, one that I call *power as shared weakness* (PSW).

Power as shared weakness

The concept of power as shared weakness (PSW) is an ideal type, an abstract model of power relations that is nowhere 'mirrored' in the complex realities of the Internet Galaxy. PSW refers to the complex processes through which network-based actions of resistance are formed, power relations contested and altered, in ways that tend to favour the powerless. At the base of the concept is the idea that within the decentralised and ethereal environments that emerge from distributed electronic networks, power relations are influenced by two distinct variables: *structural weakness* and *consciousness of that weakness*. The power to do things and achieve certain ends in the Internet Galaxy is directly proportional to the degree of knowledge the actors involved in a power struggle have of those two variables.

The term weakness here refers to the practical impossibility of any actor to exert complete control over a highly distributed network like the Internet. As we have seen in the case of China, the more the daily modus operandi of a typical agent of power is network-dependent, the more that agent exposes its regular exercise of power to a series of effective actions of resistance. Those actions would be unlikely to succeed without the existence of this kind of communication galaxy. That structural weakness however is not enough. Popular slogans like *the Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it*, coined by the libertarian activist John Gilmore (Elmer-De Witt *et. al*, 1993), often lead to a sterile and misleading understanding of the nature of the galaxy. Gilmore's words epitomize, in my opinion, the great difficulty that lies in any attempt to underpin the relation between Internet, politics, and freedom. The cornerstone in that statement is the Internet per se: it interprets censorship as damage and it routes around it. Positions like Gilmore's – or Barlow's, as we have seen earlier – dangerously lean over the edge of an unfounded technological determinism; thus, they help to spread the erroneous assumption that the Internet Galaxy is a power-free territory. That was rarely the case in the past, and it is certainly not the case in the present time. On the other hand, the distributive nature of the Galaxy's structure, coupled with the political potential of Web 2.0 applications, such as blogging, can facilitate the emergence of new unconventional forms of collective actions.

From this perspective, the Internet can become an important ally in citizens' perpetual struggle to monitor and to contest the exercise of power. Yet, the outcome of that struggle is never determined a priori, not even in the Internet Galaxy; the only certainty, it is worth remarking here, is that within that Galaxy no one is ever in a position to dominate it fully. Starting from that certainty, a recurrent theme in this dissertation has been that in politics, as in life, people's attitude, wills, and choices make the difference. If the infrastructure is in place, are those choices, attitudes, and wills that can change the outcome of a power struggle. Seen from this perspective, the Internet Galaxy is much more than an infrastructure. It is 'structuration' (Giddens, 1984), the process of continuous interaction and reciprocal influence between the social structure (the Internet in our case) and the people that make use of it.

The political relevance of the galaxy is always linked to its collaborative nature, or networking logic that informs it. Thus, in today's world, I would rephrase Gilmore's statement as follows: people interpret censorship (in both democratic and undemocratic settings) as damage and, with the help of others (attempt to) route around it by using the Internet.

This dissertation has shed light only on a small but fascinating sample of what is a much wider pattern. The whole galaxy in fact is populated with many examples of citizens using the network to fight against censorship or boldly challenge established power holders. Some have seen in those examples the embodiment of the unstoppable 'power of many' (Crumlish, 2004); or the gathering of an 'army of Davids' (Reynolds, 2007) ready to strike each and every Goliath of this world. Those catching labels, however, are the offspring of a conception of power rooted in *the strength paradigm*: through the lens of those labels, power is understood as strength over others, as ultimately force; while the Internet plays the role of the glue that links the many together and makes them unstoppable. This dissertation disagrees with such a line of argument. True, as we have seen in the previous chapters, the Internet facilitates collective action, but in each of those cases is not the consciousness of strength that should be seen as the sine qua non of action. Instead, I argue, what plays a fundamental role in the dynamics of web-based power relations is the understanding (sometimes present only at an intuitively level) of the condition of shared weakness that affects every actor in the galaxy. That understanding feeds a gestalt switch that initially functions as the enabler of web-based actions of resistance; this is a gestalt switch that spreads through the network from subject to subject. The more the consciousness of such weakness awakens within traditional powerless subjects, the more effective those subjects' resistance to concentrated power becomes.

Understanding Power as Shared Weakness for the monitorial citizens of the twenty-first century means to be in the position of not only monitoring the many mechanisms of power; but, if and when needed, it enables those citizens to take swift action against those who betray their mandate or succumb to the hubris of power. That action can be translated in public denunciation of a

politician's misconduct; or through electoral punishment, that is, withdrawal of political support; and, more importantly, as we have seen in the case of Grillo, in web-enabled action that can effectively transform politics from below; for instance by proposing new laws and by supporting a new-generation of representatives that obey to new codes of conduct.

Conceptually speaking, PSW is an ideal-type that can be used in three ways: as a term to describe existing power relations within the Internet Galaxy; as a strategic tool in the manoeuvres and conflicts that take place within such galaxy; and as a term that exemplifies and prescribes the norms, the ethical rules for the (self-) regulation of power relations within the Internet Galaxy. To repeat, PSW does not exist in pure form; instead hybrid versions of it intrinsically inform actions of resistance that strategically use the Internet Galaxy to challenge conventional power holders. Nevertheless, empirical evidence of PSW can be found in examples of web-based collective action such as those promoted by advocacy groups like MoveOn, or bloggers like Beppe Grillo. Neither the peculiar modus operandi, nor the success of those groups' campaigns can be fully understood without using the theoretical framework of PSW and of the weakness paradigm.

The whole idea of PSW constitutes a frontal challenge to more orthodox understandings of power. Consider Max Weber's simple and pure representation of the basic structure of power relations. In Weber's formula (1947: 152), power is depicted as a complex form of domination or the securing of compliance, more precisely, as the probability that an agent *A* can carry out whatever action over a subject *B,* despite whatever resistance *B* opposes to *A. A* is an established power holder (typically, for Weber *A* represents organisations such as government bureaucracies and large-scale corporations) that applies a degree of strength (or power) over another subject *B* to shape, influence and control *B*'s actions. B's power is inversely proportional to A*'s.* In Weber's formula, power is ultimately a zero sum game. That is, the greater is *A*'s power, the weaker is the degree of *B*'s resistance. Furthermore, for Weber, *A* exercises its power within a given territory and *B*'s

resistance is hopelessly quashed by the knowledge that *A* can ultimately rely on violence to win any resistance.

Compared to an ideal-typical Weberian setting, the Internet Galaxy is an utterly different field of power. It is a complex space in which the efficacy of violence as an element of power is greatly minimized, at least for what concerns traditional power holders such states[209]. State borders, as we have seen from the case of China, become increasingly porous, while collective action within and across borders is facilitated. Thus, in the Internet Galaxy, power follows a different logic. When the relationship between *A* and *B* is considered within the Internet Galaxy, a new variable affects that relationship. That variable is what I call *shared weakness* (SW). *SW* is an element common to all agents actively present within the galaxy. It is the offspring of the architectural and historical characteristics that shape complex distributive networks such as the Internet and make them intrinsically resistant to total control. In this context, any given $A \longrightarrow B$ relationship of power is influenced by that shared element. The relation between *A* and *B* is thus reversed: paradoxically weakness and not strength informs their relation of power. The variable *SW* in that instance becomes power, understood as the limited ability to control the actions of others. PSW is a form of power that nurtures the sense of a paradox: people are strengthened by the recognition of their powerlessness. *B* can exercise power in a way directly proportional to the degree of *A*'s embeddedness within the network. *B*'s perception of *A*'s weakness is equally important. Both *A* and *B* are affected by the variable *SW*. However, in the transition from a non-network relationship to one based on networks, is *A* or the established power actor that

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[209] Chapter four and five demonstrated that, to a certain extent, the Internet can be seen an amplifier of Weberian-types of power. So it must be noted here that the Internet galaxy minimises the importance of violence as an enabler of power, but violence itself, at least considered as a form of resistance to traditional power holders, does not disappear. In fact, the use of new communication technology to carry out violent acts and escape authorities' control is now a common trend among many terrorists groups. In one of those instances, in November 2008, terrorists occupied two prominent hotels and a Jewish centre in the Indian city of Mumbai. During their 3-day siege that cost the lives of over 170 people, the terrorists used extensively Internet-powered mobile phones (using Voice over IP technology) to coordinate their attacks, escape police control and communicate with each other. (Blackely, 2008)

potentially loses more: *A* goes (in principle) from a position of absolute strength (as in Weber's model) to one where the value of its power is relative to the value of the variable *SW*.

Constitutive elements of PSW

PSW has several constitutive elements. Among these, as argued earlier, is the fact that the network typology (distributive versus centralised) plays an important role in the origins of PSW. As empirically demonstrated in the previous chapters, networks have potentially subversive effects on power as domination. Consider the case of what I earlier called the 'curse of the e-government effect'[210]. The increasing digitalization of bureaucratic matters is turning into the Achilles' heel of governing powers. There is also an element of promotion embedded within PSW, that is, a core belief in the capacity to act within networks to promote networks as ideal places for power contestation, and therefore, indirectly, promote power as shared weakness. This element is exemplified for instance by the case of Grillo and his bloggers' fight against Berlusconi's media regime. Many of the comments posted on the blog depict and promote the Internet as the only space that escapes even the control of powerful figures like Berlusconi. Not surprisingly, a 2005 survey found that nearly 40% of Internet users believe that 'going online can give people more political power' (Centre for Digital Future, 2005: 105), that is, a higher degree of influence on both the political choices that affect their lives and on the actions carried out by their political representatives As exemplified by the lessons learned from the campaigns organized by Grillo's supporters, by the activities of MoveOn's members and by Obama's successful race for the US Presidency in 2008, the perception among monitorial citizens that their resistance efforts are more effective within the Internet Galaxy, than they were in the pre-Internet world, is crucial in the organization and success of online political campaigns.

At the basis of PSW is an element of contractualism: there is a strong recognition of the mutual interdependency of its components (that is among

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[210] See above chapter six

networks or nodal points) and it is this sense of interdependency that fuels PSW. We first encountered this element in the early stages of the Internet Galaxy, in Licklider's theories of time-sharing networks. More recently, it is exemplified by the case of China: notwithstanding the government's continuous attempt to control the web tightly, if it wishes to enjoy the beneficial effects of the network, China needs to recognise the importance of the other nodal points. It cannot close its electronic walls completely. That closure is technically not feasible, and commercially not advisable.

The belief in the politically subversive potential derived from the recognition of a shared weakness among all of the agents inhabiting the galaxy is the gestalt switch that sparks PSW. In practice, it means that even before PSW is empirically proven by facts, the belief that total control is unachievable within that kind of network structure can be used strategically. That belief in a weakness that is not yet proven works as a trigger for actions of resistance that boldly attempt to challenge traditional power holders. From this perspective, we could say that even misleading *coups de theatre*, such as Barlow's declaration of independence of cyberspace, can consolidate and reinforce this belief. However, as I argued earlier, libertarian approaches such as Barlow's or Gilmore's, if not corrected or seen through the lens of their historical and political context, may lead nowhere, or to sterile consequences.

Conventional theories of power are all dependent upon an alibi of some kind, that is a justification of their existence, one that ultimately makes them seem forever legitimate. Max Weber's understanding of bureaucracy, for instance, supposes that bureaucracy sustains its power by laying claim to the knowledge of the experts (alibi = expertise). Foucault shows that disciplinary power justifies itself as necessary for life: it is for the good health of the subject for instance that one should avoid excesses; it is for the protection of citizens that police makes extensive use of surveillance systems such as CCTV networks or DNA databases; and so on. These are immunity-granting alibis: such kinds of power exist and persist as long as those alibis are recognised and accepted by actors. PSW is different. It is nurtured by a multitude of co-existing alibis, or better it is characterized by the absence of a dominant alibi. The reasons for such absence must be sought in another defining element of PSW: the

distributive structure of the network provides a plurality of spaces for a plurality of stories (that is, alibis) none of which is ever in a position of dominance. Let's consider again the case of Beppe Grillo's fight against Silvio Berlusconi's media regime. In this case, Berlusconi is the epitome of the leader continuously seeking an immunity-granting alibi for his power. Within the tightly guarded boundaries of his media regime, Berlusconi is within an environment that allows him to keep a monopolising grip on the stories told within that space. Thus, Berlusconi can periodically justify his power through his media outlets by appealing to a series of alibis (Fig. 70) - from the strictly democratic (the people have elected me, they love me), to the more extravagant and vaguely blasphemous (I am the anointed by God).

Figure 70 Everybody hates me ...the people love me[211]

Because of the lack of openness in the traditional Italian media system towards alternative point of views, these alibis are rarely questioned or face very little resistance. Grillo's voice remained silence (or little heard by the wider public)

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[211] This is a cartoon by Sergio Staino, appeared in *L'Unità,* 18 February 2005. Berlusconi: 'Everyone hates me: magistrates, journalists, pensioners, civil servants, housewives, students, professors, researchers, entrepreneurs, blue-collar workers, actors, comedians, doctors, nurses, foresters, temporary workers, intellectuals ... ... but the People love me',

for almost two decades within that heavily politicised media environment. The Internet Galaxy, by contrast, does not allow monopolizing positions. The story-telling mechanism that churns out the alibis that sustain Berlusconi's power is ineffective in an environment that does not recognise Berlusconi's position as dominant, and often prefers Youtube.com to television. Furthermore, the technology that sustains the web is continuously improving, making it ever easier for users to break off from those monopolising positions. The case of *TimeTube*, a website that uses Web 2.0 technology to simplify and organise chronologically the videos uploaded on YouTube, is worth mentioning here, albeit briefly. Thanks to *TimeTube*, with a simple keywords search, for instance 'Silvio Berlusconi' (Fig. 71), any user can easily and instantaneously access a 'videography' of the prime minister; many of those videos are the ones that could never find space in Berlusconi's politicised television networks. The galaxy serves as a vast place of plurality. By exploiting its networking logic within this space individual actors can strategically gang up together against any (potentially) dominant alibi, as we have seen happening in the case of Beppegrillo.it.
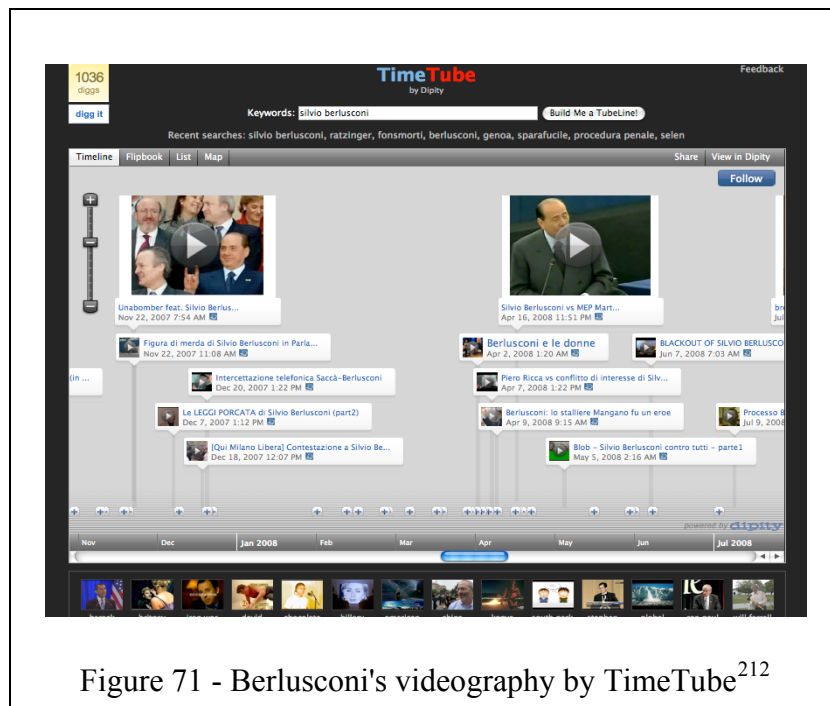

Figure 71 - Berlusconi's videography by TimeTube[212]

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[212] Source: http://www.dipity.com/timetube

There are attempts to simulate alibis, especially from those who attempt to downplay the importance of the Internet as a political tool for contesting power. From this perspective, Grillo's blog success can be explained only because of the comedian's charisma; or (to take another example) MoveOn's appeal lies in its opposition to Republican Party. But these 'alibis' are nothing but smoke screens. In the Internet Galaxy, thanks to the condition of shared weakness, any attempt to create dominant alibis is bound to fail. The absence of a dominant alibi makes PSW evanescent, contingent, powerful, but also limited. Thus, in contrast with the other forms of power, PSW is the only one that admits, or better that has built within it the actual limits of the exercise of power. As it checks and pluralises alibis, PSW does not rest on any particular ontology, but it rests on the complex and heterogeneous system of relationships that constitutes the network.

The Arendtian roots of PSW

In some of its constitutive elements, PSW echoes Hannah Arendt's concept of power (Arendt, 1958; 1969). Arendt's theory is the expression of a political thought that has its deepest roots in the civic republicanism tradition of the Greek *Polis* and in Aristotle. Her concept of politics is essentially participatory. At the centre of it is a community of citizens that are actively involved in matters of public concern. Their lives are divided between a private and a public realm, but it is only within the public realm that individuals constitute themselves as citizens. Following Aristotle, 'to be political' for Arendt meant 'to live in *polis*,' that is, 'that everything' must be 'decided [publically] through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.' (1958: 26). Force and violence belonged to a pre-political world, the world outside the polis; that *outside* included also the private sphere of the household. Arendt's theory of power is thus radically different from that of Max Weber. What in Weber is called *power* (*macht*), in Arendt is simply called *force* (*gewalt*). In her 1969's reflections *On Violence,* Arendt questioned the validity of all those theorists and theories that equated *power* with *force*, or better with *legitimized force.* It was a frontal challenge of the Weberian understanding of violence as 'the most

flagrant manifestation of power' (Arendt, 1969: 38). By contrast, for Arendt violence and power are incompatible: the presence of the former, in fact, excludes the latter. Violence is an indicator of the loss of control and legitimacy (that is people's support). It 'appears where power is in jeopardy,' however, she added 'left to its own course [violence] ends in power's disappearance' (1969: 56).

The fundamental distinction between violence and power is related with their *means-ends* matrix: the former is seen as an instrument, whereas the latter is an end in itself. To say that p*ower is an end in itself* indicates that power is the sine qua non of the political status quo. Power is in fact embedded in the *life and death* of political institutions that guard and secure the *outcome* of people's agreement and the existence of the public realm. 'All political institutions are manifestations and materializations of power' she argued (1969: 41), therefore, as soon as those political institutions betray their mission or become obsolete or unable to protect and preserve their citizens' will, people support is withdrawn, whilst the institutions 'petrify and decay' (1969:41). From this perspective, power is therefore defined as 'the human ability not just to act but to act in concert.' (1969: 44). It is *that* original action of *getting together* that legitimises *power*. For this power is something that 'cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in actualization'. Power is actualised whenever individuals act together, linked by a strong bond of solidarity with each other; but it 'vanishes the moment they disperse' (Arendt, 1958: 200). Power exists only when and where 'words and deeds have not parted company' (Arendt, 1958: 200); only when and where people live (act) together. And it typically 'manifests itself (a) in orders that protect liberty, (b) in resistance against forces that threaten political liberty, and (c) in those revolutionary actions that found new institutions of liberty.' (Habermas, 1986: 77)

Similarly to Arendt's views, PSW exists always as a potential that to be effective needs constant actualization by those who want to exploit it. PSW works like a switch: in the *off* position it is harmless, but when the lever is next to the *on* sign, PSW becomes a weapon that, if used efficiently, can threaten

the dominating position of established power holders (i.e. leaders or authorities) in several ways: by shedding light on their activities and misconducts; by giving citizens the actual possibility to publically withdraw their consent and to openly question who gets what, when, and how. But the effectiveness of PSW does not materialise only as a negative act (that is, as in opposition to, or as in denunciation of). It also allows positive acts: by exploiting PSW citizens can actually propose new solutions to problems and find independent ways of achieving those solutions. This *existence in potential* of PSW not only affects *established* power holders; it can also be used against the leaders of any contestation. Consider the example of Beppegrillo.it: the comedian's blog can be a powerful tool of resistance against Berlusconi's media regime, insofar it meets the approval of its large community, if Grillo abuses his position as *non elected* representative of his community (i.e., by using the blog to push a personal agenda or achieve an economical benefit) Grillo's supporters can withdraw their consent by simply stopping to visit the blog, or by staging an electronic uprising, that is, by inundating the blog with negative comments. If the comments are then censored, they can create alternative sites of public dissent, which cannot be controlled by Grillo's staff. Grillo's videos posted on Youtube.com are a good example of this possibility: Grillo has control over his videos, but limited control on comments (he can only choose between two options: no comments at all; or have all of the comments regardless of the content). He has no control at all over the many videos the software running Youtube.com links to the comedian's videos. Hence, if a user plays one of the many of Grillo's approved videos, automatically, thanks to the Web 2.0 technology of the site, together with Grillo's video, the user will see a list of all those videos that share *tags* with that specific video, potentially even those videos that are critical responses to the video in question. The same restrictions apply to MoveOn: given that MoveOn Political Action Committee plays an important role as the group's main fundraising mechanism, members can withdraw their consent by simply stopping donating funds or actively participating to their campaigns.

As in Hannah Arendt's theory of power, the concepts of togetherness and solidarity play an important role in the dynamics of PSW. PSW in its purest

form comes into its own when actors act together in unison and feel solidarity with their peers. Ideal-typically, when PSW works well actors manifest openly a strong sense of solidarity with others. On the Internet, bloggers/activists often maintain a dormant bond of solidarity with each other; they use that bond often as an antidote against the hubris of power. For instance, when in China an activist's blog is deleted and the blogger arrested, his/her fellow bloggers react by republishing that blogger's articles on their websites. By doing so they replicate, multiply, defend and amplify the range on those original posts and show to the authorities that their action of repression is ineffective. But PSW fuels also a sense of solidarity that often transcends the virtual boundaries of the Internet. The two million people that took part in Beppe Grillo's V-Day where the clear expression of that strong (latent) sense of solidarity. The reason why sometimes that sense of solidarity is weaker or apparently inexistent can only be explained by the fact that, in contrast with the Arendtian/Aristotelian types of citizen that lives life primarily as public/political life; the actors that use PSW are both private and public individuals. Predominantly their lives within the Internet Galaxy are characterised by their many private interests (not all of them political); their public lives as citizens are nested within the protective boundaries of their own private sphere; they exist as citizens only in a monitorial status: they scan their informational environment; they keep an eye on the scene, but act only if and when they believe action is required.

Why PSW is important?

One of the most famous characters of Greek Mythology is the Minotaur, a monster half-man, half-bull that lived in a Labyrinth in the island of Crete. According to Plutarch, after they had been defeated in war by King Minos of Crete, Athenians were requested – every seven years – to send seven boys and seven girls for the Minotaur to dispose of them. The cruel ritual continued until a young man, Theseus of Athens, bravely entered the Labyrinth and killed the Minotaur. The young man succeeded thanks to a sword and a ball of red thread given to him by his lover Ariadne: the sword slew the beast's throat and the red thread guided his steps out of the Labyrinth.

The cases analysed in this dissertation show that there is a multitude of figures like *Ariadne* and *Theseus* who populate the Internet Galaxy. They bond together against the hubris of power. The actions of this multitude are inextricably rooted in the shared consciousness that within the Internet Galaxy total control by established (or institutional) power holders is *de facto* impossible because of the complex nature of the network. When compared to more traditional forms of the exercise of power, power within such network obeys the rule of a different paradigm. It is of a fundamentally different kind. Once an actor (be it a single individual, a group, a corporation, or a state) becomes active within the galaxy, and for whatever reasons, be it leisure or work, business or politics, that actor finds itself suddenly exposed to a vulnerability or shared weakness that can be exploited by monitorial citizens who, like Ariadne and Theseus, are willing to resist the many abuses of power that periodically hinder the quality of their everyday life.

The task of understanding PSW is to grasp the meaning of political power struggle in the age of the Internet. The power of shared weakness is embodied in the actions of any activist who uses the web to resist the politics of authoritarian regimes; who by-passes politicized mainstream media with the help of a blog and an online video sharing platform to denounce politicians' mishaps; who organizes rallies with the help of an online networking site and collect with the click of a mouse over 700 million dollars to send the first Afro-American president to the White House. Such actions not only show that online politics are as effective as standing defiantly in front of a military tank; more importantly, they show that the monitorial citizen of the twenty-first century can successfully leverage that shared element of weakness to amplify their political clout beyond the reach of other conventional methods.

The understanding that the power to do things can spring from the condition of shared weakness it signals – beyond the apparent paradox – the awakening moment of a new and bold civil society that is gradually becoming self-aware of its political potential. In this process of awakening, power as shared weakness acts as the red thread that can guide the members of a civil society through the secretive routes of the labyrinth of power. Yet it is only when the many *Ariadnes* and *Theseuses* that populate the Internet Galaxy act together, in

concert, that PSW truly acquires a significant political weight (Fig. 72). In that very moment, in the hands of that young and bold civil society, power as shared weakness becomes the sword whose thick and sharp blade all *Minotaurs* of the 21st century should start worrying about.

Figure 72 – The V-Day Generation[213]

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[213] The poster says: *and now ignore us*. Source: Beppegrillo.it, retrieved 10 July 2009 from http://www.beppegrillo.it/2007/09/vgeneration/index.html

Appendix A – A note on method

Writing about the Internet is often like 'skating on quicksand' as John Naughton perfectly put it in the introduction to his *Brief History of the Future – The Origins of the Internet* (1999). Naughton remarked that when people learned about his project, their reaction was of incredulity; not because they thought the Internet was still too young to have a history, but their surprise was more related to the fact that 'they regarded it as somehow absurd that one should try to pin down something so fluid' (p. 265). The same thought has occurred to me in many occasions during the various stages of the research carried out for the present work. Thus I posed my self the question: How does one deal with such state of continuous flux? Should I, the researcher, follow the stream? Inebriate my self with the hype and think later about the consequences? If that kind of solution/approach could be fine for any one set out to enjoy the heat of the moment, it is certainly not an advisable method of research for a doctoral student. Then how to go about understanding something that is so fluid and that changes so rapidly as the Internet Galaxy? How to deal with the scepticism and make sense of data that seem remarkable but indeed, someone could point out, too much young a data to be considered solid ground upon which to build a theory? And how one can avoid falling in one of the many black holes of hysterical excitement (typically, the result of an intoxicating mix of clever marketing, uncritical consumerism, and lack of basic knowledge) that often suddenly appear in the discussions surrounding the potential of Internet Galaxy?

To solve the problem, to get rid of the hype and understand the limits of the theory proposed, I used two different approaches: on the one hand I followed McLuhan's method: *I groped, I probed, I listened, I tested – until the tumblers fell and I was in*. A research should always be based on a certain degree of boldness and creativity. On the other hand, I set for my self few guiding principles or rules that should inform my research; and approached each of the

issues concerning the research topic from three different angles: the historian, the 'subject of the theory', and the researcher who conduct the research.

Know the History

It was always clear since the early stages of the research that only a detailed historical knowledge of how the Internet came about could help me build the knowledge-base that the research needed to accomplish its tasks. If I wanted to write about the Internet I needed to know its history in details. That meant that I could not simply confine my research only on secondary sources, even though, admittedly, many of the books on the subject are excellent; but, stepping into the role of archaeologist and historian, I set out to unearth as many original sources as possible and learn from them. The main historical sources in this research could be divided into two different types: the people and the Internet (as a subject of research). I set out to learn as much as I could about the ideas and the people that, bit by bit, had helped building the network. In accomplishing this task, of particular importance was the Oral History Collection[214] of the Centre for the History of Information Processing at the Charles Babbage Institute (University of Minnesota). The archive is about the history of computers, software, and networking. It holds an extensive collection of interviews with many of the protagonists of the last fifty years of computing and network history. I studied most of the interviews and, even if the vast majority of the material at the end did not find space in the final version of the thesis, it helped me shape my understanding of the Internet Galaxy and gave crucial insights about the people who had built it. Another important source of information was the Request For Comments archive[215]. The archive gave me important technical knowledge about the Internet and fed me new insights on the people who were beyond those ideas. Whenever the chance aroused, I met *vis-à-vis* with some of those protagonists. It is worth mentioning here an informal chat with Ted Nelson (the inventor of the hypertext) at a barbecue at Oxford; and a lecture (Oxford again) by Tim Berners Lee (the one who developed Nelson's ideas in what we called today

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[214] http://www.cbi.umn.edu/oh/index.phtml
[215] http://www.rfc-archive.org/

the Web). Interestingly, Nelson remarked that Berners-Lee 'got it wrong'. According to Nelson, Berners-Lee never understood the principle of the hypertext.

The second type of historical source was the Internet per se. I soon realized that – as often repeated in the dissertation – the Internet Galaxy is in continuous transformation. Websites and the applications that run them are usually the first point of contact of an explorer travelling through the galaxy. One of the best ways to understand the complexity of that transformation was to find out how websites had changed through the years. The Internet Archive was crucial in accomplishing this task. I used extensively the Internet Archive Way-back Machine[216] to find out especially about the websites of the case studies discussed in the dissertation. Most of the information unearthed was no longer available in the present-time websites. The Archive for instance was essential to understand how MoveOn evolved from being a petition website to an advocacy group.

Use the Web

An essential part of the research revolves around the idea that the web is a critical element of our daily routine. It seemed only logical to me that if one wants to defend that idea, the idea itself must be put into practice. Naturally web-based research was crucial for the dissertation, but I made a point along the way to show that the web is an ever-growing remarkable repository of knowledge. With a bit of patience and some research skills one can find (almost) anything about everything and everyone. To demonstrate the truthfulness of this statement I frequently attached weblinks to most of the references quoted. Even when (as in the case of many of the newspaper article cited) my first source of information was a broadsheet, I made sure I found the web-link of that article and attached it to reference. The vast majority of the references quoted have links to online versions. Video-sharing websites like YouTube were also important resources of information. Considering the fact that the principle case-study of the dissertation revolves around the battle

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[216] http://www.archive.org/web/web.php

between a television outcast turned blogger and a prime minister's control of media (Chapter 9) I used YouTube as case-in-point to prove that in the Internet Galaxy to control information is not as easy as with television. Through the web I found all video-resources quoted in the dissertation. Even those that are no longer available in their original website (as it is the case of Enzo Biagi's video in RAI's web archive.)

Test your ideas

In my academic journey I set out to conduct my research not only as a doctoral student but also as a 'monitorial citizen' of the twenty-first century. Part of the dissertation is about the ways in which monitorial citizens scan their informational environments, learn more when they need, and act when action is required. Many times throughout my research I followed a similar modus operandi. When I read an article or came across interesting ideas, I tested the usefulness of the web to help me out in find more about those topics. Following ethnographic research methods (Hammersley M. and P. Atkinson, 1983), to study the subjects of my research in their natural settings I actively participated in events (both online and offline) that involved the members of the communities of citizens that were at the centre of my research. For instance in the case of Beppegrillo.it, I observed the blog's activity regularly. I joined the Beppe Grillo's Friends Meetup group in London and attended some of their meetings and discussions. I joined online forums discussion and email-lists from MoveOn.org and BarackObama.com. Exploiting the fact of living London, I attended many events, workshops and conferences that took place in the city and revolved around the social and political potential of the Internet. This gave me the opportunity to talk to practitioners and activists on the field; but also to understand the importance of the marketing and commercial interests as a driving force (not always positive) of change in the Internet Galaxy. Particularly enlightening from this perspective were the many workshops I attended regarding the relevance of Web 2.0 (some of these were only for activists; some instead only for business enterprises; some for academics).

The importance of Images

A PhD, at least in my field of studies, is often an extended text about the results of research. However, because the dissertation revolves around the idea of the monitorial citizens in action, I thought it was important to show, at least, the faces of many of the people discussed in the thesis and some of the pictures of those 'actions'. Again in this case, the web was an excellent resource to find those pictures.

Personal reasons are important for the research's direction.

The three main case studies on monitorial citizens in action analyzed in this research were chosen in a reverse order compared to the numbering of the chapters dedicated to them. Beppe Grillo was the first case; studying his blog I grew interested in finding out the origins of that particular type of web-based collective action. My research brought me to MoveOn. When then the Road Tax case exploded in Britain I realized that it could have been an interest case of counter-blueprint of MoveOn and Grillo. Aside from the reasons cited in the dissertation, personal reasons played an important role in the choices made. I am one of the many Italians who have left their country because they could no longer fit (for a series of reasons) in that particular system. Having experienced first-hand the impact of Berlusconi's politics on the country, I wanted to understand the phenomenon and look at it from a 'distant' and 'detached' perspective, yet, bearing in mind the importance of objectivity for research, I wanted to see the phenomenon with the eyes of an Italian and not simply those of a anonymous researcher. I wanted to understand whether or not the sense of hopelessness for the future of the country that many Italians seem to share was actually grounded or instead was the product of a pathetic and unfounded nostalgia. The study of Beppe Grillo gave me some hints on the possible shape of Italy's future. MoveOn and the experience of Barack Obama in 2008 showed me the weight that belief in change couple with the political potential of the Internet Galaxy carry with it and how far that belief could go. The Road-Tax petition showed me the downsides of that belief and risks hidden beneath the use of the Internet in politics.

Appendix B – Selected glossary of terms

HTML

Hyper Text Mark-up Language is the basic and default language with which data are encoded on the web. It provides a common translation tool for those computers that do not speak the same language. Consider the case where a user on a computer needs to exchange a text document formatted in Word with another computer. By using the Web, that exchange-operation can be done in two different ways: in the case both computers have a Word reader application installed (for instance the popular but copyrighted Microsoft Word), they can simply exchange the document using its original format, for instance by emailing it; or, as it is most likely that computers use different applications, to avoid any problem with the communication process, the sender's computer can translate the file in HTML and send the document in that format. (Berners-Lee, 1999: 45)

HTTP

Hyper Text Transfer Protocol is a protocol – that is 'the language the computer uses' (Berners-Lee, 1999:40). It is not the only protocol available, but, contrary to other protocols such as Files Transfer Protocol (FTP), HTTP is a 'generic' and 'stateless' protocol that does not identify the location of the resource itself. But instead it sends a generic command to a computer server on the net: 'get the file'. That *genericness* is a crucial feature for the internet-working of the many different systems populating the Internet Galaxy. In effect, HTTP allows users on the internet to build systems that are not required to be, by default, compatible with every piece of data they retrieve/receive from the network (Fielding *et al.*, 1999).

Meetup.com

Founded in 2002, MeetUp is a popular online portal that facilitates social networking at a local level. According to figures published on the portal's website: each month, Meetup attracts the attention of over 5 million visitors and helps organising more than 100 thousands local Meetups. On a monthly average, over

1.5 millions of people participate to the meetings organised through the portal. Although originated in the USA, Meetup.com is not geographical limited to that region, but it has a worldwide footprint: there are in fact almost 50 thousands local groups in over 3500 cities. (MeetUp, N.D.) The stated aim of the portal is to help 'people find others who share their interest or cause, and form lasting, influential, local community groups that regularly meet face-to-face.' (MeetUp, n.d.) In a 2004 interview, Scott Heiferman, CEO and co-founder of Meetup.com, said that the website was a reaction to Robert Putnam's thesis that social capital in America's local communities had been on a steady decline since 1950s (Putnam, 2000). According to its founder, MeetUp proves that Putman's theory is wrong. 'The Internet' argued Heiferman 'does a number of wonderful things, but it treats geography as irrelevant. We still live in a world where the local level is extremely important.' (Heiferman, 2004) Overall, MeetUp is very user-friendly: a visitor to the site can search for meetings by topics and/or postal code or browse through the 5000 topics of interest listed on the website. Meetup members can find and then join other people organized in groups that meet regularly. To create a group, the organizer is required to pay a monthly fee of $19 US dollars. In 2004, during the US presidential campaign the portal became renowned as a formidable non-expensive campaign-meetings organizing tool in the hands of presidential candidates, especially for outsiders such as the democrat Howard Dean. It helped them mobilising grassroots organisations and help coordinating meeting at the click of a mouse. (Wolf, 2004)

RSS

RSS stands for really simply syndication (or rich-site summary – see Libby, 1999). It is a type of web-feed feature for users. Associated with other software or RSS readers such as Bloglines.com it enables users to receive recent updates (or syndications) from blogs they have subscribed to, but RSS also applies to more traditional and more intuitional sources of web information, like online newspaper.

TAGGING

Tagging is instead the process of attaching to the html code of a web page a *tag* (a keyword, a one word description) to a file or comment or article published on a website or blog, or generally speaking made available on the web. Tags are very

useful for indexing the information stored on webpages, especially those that are updated very often, such as blogs and news websites. Tagging and RSS greatly facilitate the process of exchanging and retrieving information on the web.

URI

The URI, like its subsets the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and Uniform Resource Name (URN), has the goal of identifying the network location of a resource (Berners-Lee *et al.* 1998). It does so by representing the resource through a specific standardized syntax, that is through what nowadays is commonly known as a web-site address, such as http://www.w3.org/History/1989/proposal.html. Each section of that address has a specific meaning: the first section indicates to the browser application used by the user (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox) which protocol to use to look for that page or document (in this case HTTP). The second section, the domain name (www.w3.org) specifies the location of the computer where those pages or documents are stored. The last section (History/1989/proposal.html) indicates the precise location of the page that the user is looking for. (Berners-Lee, 1999:43)

Wikipedia.org

Wikipedia is an online encyclopaedia, free of charge that allows any registered user to create and edit entries on any topic. Its founder Jimmy Wales started Wikipedia in 2001. It is rooted on the Wiki software created in 1995 by Ward Cunningham, an American computer-programmer[217]. For Wales, Wikipedia is made *by-the-people-for-the-people*, that is 'a bid to give everyone free access to the sum of all human knowledge.' (Gets, 2007) Registering is very easy, simple and it is free of charge: a potential user needs to choose a username and password and provide a valid email address. Anonymity is guaranteed, but the process of participating in Wikipedia is fully transparent. Once registered, a user is free to create or edit any page, quite easily, but the Wiki software stores any previous draft of that entry on its database, hence it allows easy correction or restoration to a previous version of a page if that has been deleted or altered either by mistake or

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[217] See http://www.wiki.org/

on purpose. In only a few years, Wikipedia has grown exponentially, both in size and in reputation: originally created in English, it has now versions in 255 languages. The English section, by far its most active, has over two and half million articles (Wikipedia, 2008). Furthermore, a 2005 study conducted by *Nature* confirmed that Wikipedia is as accurate as the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Giles, 2005)

Appendix C – Move On

Censure *and Move On*

home | faq | media coverage | press room | volunteers | paper petition | bumper sticker | link to us

Over 300,000 petitions signed.

ACTION ALERT and **A LIST OF SWING VOTES**

Despite strong public disapproval, congressional leadership continues to pursue impeachment. This is not in the best interests of our country. We face real economic and foreign policy challenges. A besieged President and distracted Congress will not address these issues. Through this web page, ordinary citizens are organizing to demand that our congressional representatives lead us out of this mess. We believe:

"The Congress must immediately **Censure** President Clinton *and Move On* to pressing issues facing the country."

If you agree with the quote above and wish to forcefully deliver it to Congress and the President, you can,

(1) **SIGN UP**. A compiled petition will be presented to Congress and the President:

Your Name:

Your Email: Home Zip Code:

Comment (optional):

☑ Email an individual petition to your representatives in your name.*

submit petition
(see privacy policy below)

(2) **TELL OTHERS.** This campaign is based solely on word of mouth. It's CRUCIAL that you tell others. To transmit a brief letter to your email circle, just press:

Pass it on

(3) **HELP ORGANIZE**.
Volunteers: We need your help. If you have some time to give, press here for more information.
Endorsements: If you are a public figure and would like to endorse this campaign or perhaps serve as a local spokesperson, press here for more info.
Organizations: If you are a member of a national or local organization you think might be interested in endorsing this campaign, press here for more info.

Privacy Policy

Censure and Move On will send a compiled petition, with your comments, to the President and key members of Congress, without disclosing email addresses. We will send individual email communications in your name, and with your email as a return address, to your representatives in Congress. We will not provide your contact information to any other organization unless specifically authorized by you. We assume any comment you enter is public information and may be included with your name and city in campaign press releases.

Censure and Move On will update you on campaign initiatives by email. We expect email will be a crucial organizing tool in this effort, but we will do our best to respect your time and attention. You can "unsubscribe" to the list at any time.

Other Resources

For more information about the campaign, try our **Frequently Asked Questions** page.
Our **Media Coverage** page gives a quick summary of early coverage of the campaign.
Click on the **Press Room** for press releases and press contact information.

Volunteer Resources

VOLUNTEERING

We need your help. If you have some time to give, we need
- volunteers for general MoveOn initiatives and
- volunteers for the "Gun Safety First" campaign.

VOLUNTEER DIRECTORY

Press here for the Volunteer Directory, available to current volunteers.

WORKING THE PRESS

The foundation of MoveOn is the personal connection, but we need traditional media to spread the word. We don't have a PR firm and we're not buying media time, so we are dependent on our volunteers to reach out to local and national media. Talk radio, local papers, local TV news, as well as online newgroups and chat are all opportunities. If you have quality contacts with national press, we are even more in need of your help. One personal contact is worth a hundred cold calls. Email press@moveon.org with your hot leads.

When talking to the press, make sure you're very familiar with our faq and press room.

We have a list of spokespeople available for reporters who want to go deeper into this story. The spokespeople come from all over the country, represent all party affiliations, and have a diverse set of reasons for supporting the campaign. We try to highlight our breadth of support, whenever possible.

WORKING CONGRESS

The congress works for us, although sometimes they forget. We need to remind them.

Contacting the Congress is a great resource for specific contacts, by member, state or zipcode.

For a quick summary sheet of Senate contact info, go to our Senate Contact page.

The official source for the House of Representatives is www.house.gov.

KEEP IT GROWING

Send us links to additional resources you think might be useful to others:
joan@moveon.or

http://it.mg41.mail.yahoo.com/dc/blank.html?bn=1277.43&.in...

Dear MoveOn member,

With hundreds of thousands of ballots cast across the country, for the first time in MoveOn's history, we've voted together to endorse a presidential candidate in the primary. **That candidate is Barack Obama.**

Something big is clearly happening. A few weeks ago, MoveOn members we surveyed were split. But with John Edwards bowing out, progressives are coming together. Obama won over 70% of the vote yesterday, and he's moving up in polls nationwide.[1] As comments poured in from MoveOn members across the country, the sense of hope was inspiring. Here's how Christine Y. in New Jersey put it:

> "I've never felt so strongly about any one candidate in my entire life. He's truly an inspiration to all of us—especially the younger generation. I will stand by him 100% for as long as he's willing to stand up and fight for this country!"

What does MoveOn's endorsement mean? People-power. Together, we are 3.2 million Americans who care about our country and want change. Half of us live in states with primaries or caucuses this coming "Super Tuesday."

MoveOn members voted to endorse Barack Obama.
By volunteering these next four days before "Super Tuesday" we can help elect a progressive president for the next four years. **Can you volunteer to help Obama win?**
I want to help.
Volunteer today!

Vote results		
Obama:	197,444	70.4%
Clinton:	83,084	29.6%

We know how to roll up our sleeves and win elections, and if we all pitch in together between now and Tuesday, we can help Sen. Obama win the biggest primary day in American history. Think about it: **volunteering during the next four days could mean four years of a progressive president. Can you sign up right now to volunteer for Obama's campaign? Click here:**

http://pol.moveon.org/volunteerforobama/?id=12015-4219711-ad8bKY&t=535

There are lots of ways to help. You can call voters from home, go door-to-door with others in your community, travel to "Super Tuesday" states, donate, put up a yard sign, volunteer in a campaign office, or join a local meetup. Senator Obama is running a grassroots campaign, and there's a role for everyone.

Many of us feel like change is within reach for the first time in years. Here's some more of what MoveOn members see in Obama:

> "This country needs real, progressive transformation. Barack Obama is the candidate who gives us the best hope of uniting and inspiring the nation to move in that direction, while also restoring America's dignity and standing as a member of the global community."—James M., Connecticut

> "While I'm impressed with Clinton and believe she would make a very good president, I'm actually MOVED by Obama. In the end, I believe if Obama is elected he has the potential to bring the country together behind him."—Patricia S., Wisconsin

> "He was right on the biggest question of the era—opposing the war from the start."—Jacob S., Washington, D.C.

> "I support Barack Obama for the same reasons I support MoveOn.org: the more people are inspired to get involved, the better the outcome for our country. Senator Obama has demonstrated a unique capacity to inspire participation and to make public service 'cool' again. He is also sound on all the issues that matter to me and my family."—Liz B., New York

> "I live in a red state, and I see my conservative neighbors and friends showing a positive interest in Barack. They like him. They are ready to be swayed. And I see my Democratic friends and family members getting excited like never before...With Barack as our candidate, I am convinced that we can

21/6/09 08:23

MoveOn.org PAC

http://web.archive.org/web/20030629012556/moveon.org/pac/...

MoveOn.ORG PAC

Home | View Candidates | Make a Donation | Who We Are | Press Coverage | Contact Us

ELECTRONIC BALLOT FOR: Jane Smith
Email: jane@sample.com

Research the candidates:
www.MoveOn.org/pac/cands

QUESTION 1	QUESTION 2

The following people are running for the Democratic nomination for President in 2004. Please vote for ONE candidate by clicking on the circle next to that person's name.
Note: if a candidate wins more than 50% of the vote – including those who respond undecided – MoveOn.org PAC will endorse that candidate for the Democratic Presidential nomination.

Are we unified to beat Bush, no matter who the eventual Democratic nominee is?
Please select all of the candidates who you would **enthusiastically support** in the 2004 general election against George W. Bush, if chosen as the Democratic Party nominee next summer after the Democratic Primaries:

(Choose as many as you like.)

○ ▢ Carol Moseley **BRAUN**

○ ▢ Howard **DEAN**

○ ▢ John **EDWARDS**

○ ▢ Richard **GEPHARDT**

○ ▢ Bob **GRAHAM**

○ ▢ John **KERRY**

○ ▢ Dennis **KUCINICH**

○ ▢ Joseph **LIEBERMAN**

○ ▢ Al **SHARPTON**

○ ▢ Undecided

○ ▢ Other
If you chose 'other', please write in a candidate:

▢ ▢ Carol Moseley **BRAUN**

▢ ▢ Howard **DEAN**

▢ ▢ John **EDWARDS**

▢ ▢ Richard **GEPHARDT**

▢ ▢ Bob **GRAHAM**

▢ ▢ John **KERRY**

▢ ▢ Dennis **KUCINICH**

▢ ▢ Joseph **LIEBERMAN**

▢ ▢ Al **SHARPTON**

▢ ▢ **ANY** DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE

VERIFICATION

Following the MoveOn.org vote, there will be a

20/6/09 12:44

GIOVANNI NAVARRIA

Appendix D – Beppegrillo.it

Volume 1, numero 01

La Settimana

di Beppe Grillo

Temi dal blog www.beppegrillo.it

Sommario 09.01.2006

Editoriale

"La Settimana" è un ritorno all'antico, al volantinaggio, alle copisterie nelle cantine. Una nuova Carboneria. Stampatelo e diffondetelo, ma senza dare nell'occhio, come se faceste parte di una P3, una sorta di P2 buona. "La Settimana" è un passo indietro per poter andare avanti: informazione nata in Rete e portata sulla strada. Un oggetto di modernariato mediatico. Usatelo! In dosi massicce è utile per controllare i nostri dipendenti e riportarli al loro unico ruolo: quello di amministratori della cosa pubblica.

Beppe Grillo

Dipendenti co.co.co.
Politica
02.01.2006

Co.co.co. e lavoro a progetto

EDIZIONE 2004

Siamo tutti preda di un incantesimo. Un incantesimo creato da noi. Ci siamo autoipnotizzati! Abbiamo creato un gruppo di persone che parla, che fa e disfa, che influenza le nostre vite. Giornalisti che sentenziano (in base a quale competenza?), politici (ma ormai che mestiere è?), finanzieri che creano soldi (ma i soldi non si creano), ministri (senza conoscenza di ciò che gestiscono), dirigenti di azienda (che pensano di essere loro i padroni al posto degli azionisti). Signori del nulla. Un incantesimo malato, che premia i peggiori, quelli che non creano valore, quelli che non hanno una professione. E che fanno della politica e dell'informazione una cosa loro, privata, non un servizio. Un incantesimo che emargina chi vuole cambiare, che fa emigrare i nostri migliori ragazzi, che ha impoverito la nazione. Esorcizziamoli, proviamo ad annullare l'incantesimo, questa gente non ci serve, è indispensabile solo a sé stessa. L'incantesimo si può spezzare con qualche amuleto. Incominciamo con un primo amuleto, dedicato ai nostri dipendenti: una proposta di legge popolare per ridurre a due sole legislature la possibilità di essere eletto al parlamento, italiano o europeo. Ovviamente con effetto retroattivo. Basta con i pomiciniandreottimastellacasinidalemavi olanterutelli. No ai politici a vita, si ai dipendenti a tempo determinato.

H5N1: informazione diretta
Salute/Medicina
03.01.2006

La notizia più "submarine" di questo inizio 2006 è l'influenza aviaria (H5N1). Non ne parla più nessuno. Gli italiani che hanno comprato decine di migliaia di dosi di tamiflu cominceranno a pensare che i temuti effetti dell'influenza aviaria (milioni di morti nel mondo) siano in realtà una brillante idea marketing delle società farmaceutiche. Il tamiflu non si trova più da nessuna parte (esaurito) e neppure notizie sull'epidemia. Che sia un caso? Sul tamiflu non posso aiutarvi, ma sulla diffusione dell'influenza aviaria qualche informazione posso darvela. L'ultima morte sospetta per H5N1 è avvenuta lunedì 2 gennaio 2006 all'ospedale Sulianti Saroso di Jakarta in Indonesia. La persona colpita dalla malattia era spesso in contatto con pollame d'allevamento ed è il dodicesimo decesso di H5N1 in Indonesia. La contabilità mortuaria è a questo punto di 75 morti per H5N1 dal dicembre 2003, tutti in Asia: -Cambogia   4 -Cina   3 -Indonesia   12 -Tailandia   14 -Vietnam   42 Ad oggi il pericolo di pandemia dai flussi migratori degli uccelli è considerato marginale. L'influenza si diffonde con l'aereo e il pollame contaminato. Queste informazioni si trovano in un sito che ogni giorno fornisce tutte le informazioni sull'H5N1: www.promedmail.org, usatelo per saperne di più e iscrivetevi alla sua newsletter giornaliera. E, se la notizia che ricevete è importante, inviatela con una mail ai giornali, così, tanto per informarli, e in copia anche a Storace.

1

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