Although it is clear that the spread of the digital networks is increasingly important in world politics, there is little evidence of exactly what implications the Internet has had. Some researchers analyze the growing role of Internet in promoting freedom and changing social and political norms. Others emphasize the role of Internet in the context of globalization, and its destabilizing effects.

In order to overcome the main limits of the literature on new technologies—descriptivism and normativism—the volume adopts a perspective able to provide a meaningful framework for several issues related to the social, cultural, and political meanings and implications of the ICTs. The goal of this book is to provide recognition and a reinterpretation of the so-called “digital revolution” relating it to the processes of transformation of the current historical system. Such “digital revolution” is, in fact, a key aspect, perhaps the most important, of the contemporary systemic socio-political change. Why? And what does it mean? I think that a book developing that interpretative key, and articulating it on multiple levels of analysis, could allow to substantially advance this field of study from a theoretical and methodological point of view.

This book is divided in three sections and includes 15 chapters covering many of the important topics which are contributing to frame the historical reality of cybernetic networks within the wider contemporary systemic structure.

The first one reflects on the theoretical perspective, and, as exemple, upon a long term trend. There is no doubt; in fact, that the transformations generated by the ICTs repurpose, mutatis mutandis, something that already followed technological innovations in other phases in terms of: cultural representation, metaphors and symbols production; redefinition of borders between public authority and private subjects; concrete attribution of rights and power. Highlighting these aspects is intended to make clearer the overall framework of the other contributions.

The second section of the book, the most detailed one, analyzes the changes of the last two to three decades—the conjoncture—with a particular attention to the geopolitics of the technological innovations. This section highlights how technological innovation has been and is a strategy of reorganization of political-institutional systems, and how it goes along with specific forms of knowledge production and specific ideologies of social legitimation.

The third and final section examines some themes and issues following the re-organization of political-institutional systems and of socio-cultural practices via digital networks, from Internet governance debate and policies - a more equalitarian, institutional mechanism, or a new formula to hide inequalities? - to the tools of measurement and evaluation of the organizational practices; from ICTs (che) can be seen as destructive, reproductive as well as constitutive of forms of sociality, to “virtual worlds”, computer-generated environments in which large numbers of human beings may interact, do useful work for each other, and build enduring social connections.

Let us consider now the structure and the contributions of this volume.
In the first section, the *Longue durée*, it will be collected chapters which analyze issues concerning the new technologies - and their socio-political implications in the contemporary world - from an historical perspective. This permits to capture relevant constitutive and transformative processes.

In *Electronic Constitution: A Braudelian Perspective*, Francesco Amoretti presents a model for the analysis of time and space structures of digital networks based on the braudelian triad of times: structure, conjuncture and event. Taking the incipit by a short description of this tri-partition, he proposes a historical method to frame the products of innovation processes such as the Internet in their wider socio-economical context.

Thus he argues that the World Wide Web (WWW), with its enormous quantity of easy-accessible and easy-produced information, is just the *evenementielle* of a historical process that could represent a new conjuncture, with its own dynamics and phases based on the structure of capitalist world-system. The thesis at the base of this work is that Internet, rather than being a revolutionary technology that will subvert the current organization of social and economic production is a technological instrument that gives to institutions and organizations a way to re-organize their assets and processes in order to start a new conjuncture of capitalistic structures.

Most of the authors and scholars debating the transformative power of the Internet have up to day focused their attention on the WWW as the locus of a democratising and participative movement that take the technology in service of civil society. With this chapter, Amoretti shed light on the character of continuity that the Internet has regarding such traditional categories of political economy as private property, hierarchy and institutional enforcement.

Such approach conducts us to the second chapter, dedicated to one of the most important themes of the debate on digital networks: their democratic and egalitarian potentialities.

In *Old and New Rights: E-Citizenship in Historical Perspective*, Mauro Di Meglio and Enrico Gargiulo aim to offer a view on the issue of citizenship, and e-citizenship in particular, adopting a long-term perspective and questioning the basic assumptions of most of the literature on this topic, that is, its unit of analysis; in fact, the misunderstanding of the role played by citizenship derives from the attitude to analyse it mainly, if not exclusively, from a nation-state perspective. On the contrary, their analytical premise is that a different, and more satisfactory, understanding of the historical vicissitudes of citizenship requires the adoption of a world-systemic perspective, able to take into account the array of economic, political, and social long-term and large scale processes which, since at least the XVIth century, have shaped them.

From this perspective, two basic aspects of the history of citizenship clearly emerge. First, the fundamentally exclusive nature of this category, as it has emerged and developed in the history of the modern world-system. And, second, the fact that, well before the so-called “information revolution” supposedly generated by the introduction of the information and communication technologies (ICT’s), technology – broadly defined as the application of “advanced” scientific knowledge to practical purposes in a particular field, and given a specific level of economic and socio-cultural development – has shaped the Western social imagination, acting, in historically different and changing forms, as an effective instrument of control and supremacy; producing asymmetric and inegalitarian effects; and providing a yardstick of the different “level of development” of the European and not-European peoples.

Taking for granted this basic asymmetry in the mastery and exercise of knowledge, the image of the European citizen has been constantly modeled on the basis of what has been considered his key features, and strengthened in his certainties of supremacy – both technological and material – over the non-citizen by the evidence of the latter’s inferiority and “underdevelopment”, simultaneously generating the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others. In this view, the most recent phase of the history of citizenship, his e- form, seems to replicate, in new ways, both the explanations of the gap existing both
between and within countries—now conceptualized as “digital divide”—and the illusory universalistic promise of an expansion of the citizenship and the rights associated to it.

In the second section, *The Conjuncture: The Geopolitics of Technological Innovations*, it is offered a group of contributions regarding policies and implementation strategies of e-government and e-democracy worldwide. The time here is that of *The Conjuncture*, the time of capitalistic world-system’s reorganization. The spreading of digital technologies is one of the most relevant pillar, or better the most relevant, of the processes of world geo-political relationships. This consideration appears clear in the analysis of the role of International Organizations. The contribution of Oreste Ventrone, *International Organizations, E-Government and Development*, refers to such aspect.

Following the diffusion of e-government in the technologically advanced high income countries, international organizations, notably UN, OECD, World Bank, have promoted the implementation of e-government practices in developing countries as priority means to further good governance, democracy and development. ICTs can, indeed, be very useful in order to make public administration more transparent, accountable and participated or in connecting and networking faraway places, especially where transports and physical infrastructures are lacking or insufficient.

However, a decade later, the few researches conducted in the field show that the overwhelming majority of e-government projects in developing countries end up in total or partial failure. The best practices identified in high income countries prove difficult to be reproduced in settings that are very different in terms of organizational traditions and level of development. Despite the recognition of the need to take into account local specificities and to get the locals involved in the process, e-government in developing countries still appears essentially as a mere transfer operated by donor countries’ firms with Western technologies. Moreover, as these technologies are mostly proprietary, they prevent institutions and users from developing countries to modify and adapt the tools to their particular needs and lock them in a position of permanent technological dependency.

For what concerns the cost efficiency of e-government projects, it must be said that the advantages observed in developed countries, where the cost of hardware and software is more than compensated for by the savings in terms of costly human labor, are less likely to be obtained in developing countries, where the cost of labor is a small fraction of that in developing countries and the cost of ICTs is proportionally much higher.

The claim that e-government diffusion in developing countries can improve the prospects for democracy is based on a normative assumption supported by little evidence. The causality chain between e-government, good governance, and democracy (with the frequent addition of economic growth as a further stage), if at all plausible, looking at history should be probably read the other way around. In fact, some scholars consider the contribution of e-government to overall development irrelevant, if not negative, in the measure in which it diverts funds from higher priorities.

The relevance of International Organizations in defining digital policies, Action Plans, and the ideological paradigm of digital technologies revolution, certainly refers to underdeveloped countries. More complex and debated is the relation between such institutions and the more developed areas. Yet the diffusion of the digital networks is becoming a flywheel for the world-system transformation. To the United States, whose experience represents an emblematic case, it is dedicated the chapter authored by Fortunato Musella, *American Electronic Constitution: Reinventing Government and Neo-Liberal Corporatism*.

This contribution has been aimed at analyzing the strategic use of new technologies and its representations by an important world power. An evident synergy has been noted between the digital policy projects and the neo-liberal ideology wave that has traced origin in the fiscal crisis of the State in the seventies.
Thus, often presented as an occasion for reinventing national government, ICTs can be interpreted as the latest chapter of a longer-term process of reform. About four decades have transformed some political directions in true imperatives: public sector downsizing, cost-cutting in public agencies, decision-making privatization, and the principle of efficiency as a measure of collective action. If new public management has been imposed as a dominant paradigm for administrative restructuring, ICTs programs sustain reform objectives by putting emphasis on the sure advantages of technological applications.

In this country, Npm trends seem to be in continuity with some American historical tradition, in reasserting a central role of private actor in public activities and denying the dualism state-economic enterprises. Following a rich research tradition developed in the 1960s and 1970s (Kolko, 1963; Miller, 1976), Musella underlines that the political actions of federal government have been essential to the operation of the American business system, since the beginning of last century. According to the author, in the United States it has been realized a silent constitution realizing with the significant “fusion of political and economic power” so that corporations and other large scale organizations have become far more important components than the State. Digital era seems to have added a new chapter to the American corporate liberalism history, with the difference—and the aggravating circumstance—that private organizations have now more powerful instruments to control and regulate society. As remembered, besides obtaining a new role in policy making, private organization are able to intervene on the complex architecture defining the Internet rules as a sort of private law – a scenario that poses, again, the question of the limits between private interest and public functions.

Viewing to the international scene, the structure of global ICTs regime assures a quasi-monopolistic position to US private firms, while less rich states seem dependent to the power of software-hardware providers. Referring to the words of the Human Development Report, according to which «the Internet was created in the United States, but its cost slashing consequences for information and communication enhance people’s opportunities everywhere» (United Nations, 2001: 95), Musella argues that the digital imperatives are still far from hiding perils of quasi-monopolistic hegemony, even if the most recent developments do not exclude that future trends could leave more space for other nations such as Europe or China.

In The European Administrative Space and E-Government Policies: Between Integration and Competition Francesco Amoretti and Fortunato Musella focus attention on the meaning of e-government policies in the European context.

E-government development policies represent one of the most important stages for the europeanization of national public administrations and for the creation of a “European administrative space”. By providing standardization, ICTs turned out to be a crucial lever toward a greater integration within the European administrative structures and the computer-based network became a mirror—and a promise—for a new administrative set-up. In this way technology seems to constitute an essential element for the construction of the European entity, offering a premise for «cooperation mechanisms between Member States administrations, relevant national and European Union initiatives, standardisation and market initiatives, as well as research activities» (European Commission 2003a: p. 14).

A common element of the “European e-Government platform” is the attention to the development of an administrative framework favorable to business, especially through the reduction of the administrative costs, that is, the costs that the corporate sector must make in order to comply with the information obligations resulting from Government-imposed legislation and regulations. For this reason administrative reforms are included as a key element of Europe’s competitiveness agenda, as they may provide user-centred services and cutting red tape (i.e. unnecessary administrative burdens), requiring that information is shared across departments and different level of government. Although the correlation between digitization of public services and a more competitive economy remains complex and elusive, wider benefits have been recognized in the introduction of new technologies.
Another important element of the European strategy indicates the interconnection between e-govern-
ment initiatives and the social dimension of development. On the base of official reports, the authors
underline that such result is fulfilled only through a policy convergence and a willingness to adapt
regulatory frameworks in order to facilitate the mobility of citizens and businesses. By looking at some
initiatives aiming at fostering such strategic objectives, it is shown the scope for the creation of Web
portals designed as a single entry point for businesses, which enabled the interaction between financial
actors and institutions regardless their position at local, national or national level. Although the failure
of the treaty approval, it is not difficult to perceive that e-government represent a pillar of the European
economic and administrative constitution, due to its contribution to the policies for efficiency as well
and for social cohesion.

The chapter by Clementina Casula, The EU and the Information Society: from E-Knowledge to E-Inclu-
sion, in Search of Global Leadership, considers such point, by considering the rhetoric used worldwide
by policymakers in promoting the uptake of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to
emphasize the advantages deriving for all citizens from the advent of the Information Society (IS). Access
and, increasingly, uses ICT to become acknowledged as part of citizenship rights to be granted in the
new society, which is said to offer unique opportunities for democratic regeneration, besides increasing
competition and economic growth. Among the democratic features of the IS particularly praised are
despatisation processes, leading to a sort of ‘death of distance’ mainly benefitting the inhabitants of
territories traditionally located in peripheral and backward areas, as well as the enlarged global market.
However, research shows that the uptake of ICT varies territorially, mainly following wealth distribu-
tion, among other variables. This consideration would corroborate the view of those reading the rhetoric
over IS as a facade covering the restructuring of capitalist economy at the global level and arguing that
the uptake of ICT, based on an unequal model of development, further strengthens rather than reduces
the territorial and socio-economic divides between centres and peripheries. The chapter confronts those
two readings of the main rationale behind policymaking for the development of an IS by looking at the
case of the European Union (EU). The argument is that, although global economic competition in the
ICT sector seems to be the mainspring that led the EU to promote policies for the IS, social concerns are
emerging as the flagship of the policy, increasingly tuned with other policies within a wider European
developmental strategy, which may start up a new field on which to compete for global leadership.

As the European experience and the American one demonstrate, ICTs policies and Information-Knowl-
edge Society initiatives have to be included in the dynamics of capitalistic world-system transformation.
Yet Europe differs from the USA, as it seems to fulfill objectives such as social cohesion policies and
initiatives for strengthening democracy, in order to reduce territorial and socio-economic cleavages and
the note deficit of political legitimacy.

If the final results are still to be defined, the EU “vocation” to leadership is quite week. The American
role of global player is only contented by China. The contribution by Chin-fu Hung, The Politics of the
Governing the Information and Communications Technologies in East Asian Authoritarian States: Case
Study of China, takes together economic and political aspects.

To date, Internet access has been expanding rapidly and extensively chiefly due to direct support and
promotion by the government. China has vigorously implemented ICTs to foster ongoing informatization
accompanying industrialization as a crucial pillar to drive its future economic development.

The institutional and legal reforms involved were initiated and put into practice in order to meet
the increasing demand for technological convergence and the negotiations for the expected entry into
the World Trade Organization (WTO). Above all, it implies that the authorities in Beijing intended to
restore administrative control over the telecommunications sector from previous stages of devolution,
which had resulted in fragmented governance and intensified pluralization in terms of efficient flow of information among several telecommunications service providers.

The Chinese government has nevertheless long been torn by the ambivalence brought about by the Internet. It regards the Internet as an engine to drive economic growth on the one hand, and as a subversive challenge to undermine the ruling Communist Party on the other hand. As soon as ICTs were introduced and Web sites mushroomed, the Party was so determined to harness the new medium to assure the Internet’s economic and scientific benefits. As a consequence, controls other than stifling ICTs would be critical for the CCP’s agenda to achieve the century-long modernization process and in the meantime, consolidate its power.

Such experiences refer to the contraposition between different uses and interpretations of technological innovation on the global scale. Participation versus control, democracy versus authoritarianism, represents different paths of the current historical conjecture. In the following cases, both regarding the African Continent, such ambivalence are even stronger. Whereas e-government and e-democracy in Western nations is a tool for resolving the perceived crisis of liberal democracies, in the developing countries they are a tool to build democracy, and administrative state.

The contribution by Joseph Ofori-Dankwa and Connie Ofori-Dankwa, *ICT Challenges and Opportunities for Institutionalizing Democracy in Ghana: An Integrative Review of the Literature*, is a rich description of theoretical and empirical studies regarding the potential challenges and opportunities associated with implementing ICT initiatives in developing economies.

Starting from the consideration that only recently research has focused on the ongoing ICT revolution and its potential to stimulate the institutionalization of democracy in Africa, the chapter focuses more specifically on Ghana—one of the first countries in Africa to begin to develop and implement a broad national ICT strategy. The authors incorporate several key points in their discussion. First, they provide a brief description of the global ICT revolution and its potential implications for enhancing the democratization process in countries, followed by a summary of ICT trends and policies in Ghana and their emphasis on helping to institutionalize democracy and its related free market system, and a description of some of the major challenges to institutionalizing democracy that scholars writing about ICT in Ghana have identified. In addition, they discuss several opportunities for enhancing democracy that scholars have pinpointed. Finally, they make several general recommendations for mitigating potential problems that may arise, and enhancing the opportunities of the ICT revolution for Ghana, as well as the entire African continent.

Such perils and opportunities are strongly tied to the processes of democratic institutionalization via ICTs in developing countries. However, such processes are also connected with the creation of an administrative state. Nicolas Pejout, *World Wide Weber: Formalise, Normalise, Rationalise: E-Government for Welfare State – Perspectives from South Africa*, offers an interesting interpretation of these dynamics, focusing attention on the relationships between formal and informal aspects of political action. The author argues that numerous governments, particularly those of developing countries, have to deal with challenging economic, socio-economic and political realities. More challenging is to deal with unrealities, i.e. realities that do exist but that governments can’t manage because they don’t know about these. These realities are real but informal: the typical example is moonlight work. They all do exist but have no official, formal, legal-administrative and statistical existence. They are “parallel” to the official-formal world of public action and stay “underground”, in the shadow of public policies.

This problem of “informality” is particularly encountered by governments in developing countries. They face tremendous problems in terms of public action upon realities that they don’t know of, that they can’t know of, due to a lack of measuring resources and public management capacities. Various
examples are: the absence of a satisfactory statistical machinery, the ineffectiveness of a formal civil status (for instance, the registry of birth), the inefficiency of tax rolls...

For governments to act upon realities, they need to know them and therefore to reveal and measure them. In other words, they need to formalise them so as to be able to control them. Governments have to normalise human activities, that is to put them into norms, into measurable and controllable frameworks. This explains, for instance, the importance of statistical machineries into the construction of nation-states.

Nowadays, governments can use an extremely powerful set of tools to formalise and normalise realities, in order to rationalise their knowledge and therefore their action upon these: information and communication technologies (ICTs). The deployment of electronic government can support a strategy of formalisation and of normalisation which aims at making a society (groups and individuals) highly visible – some might say transparent – to the power in place.

By producing formatted knowledge for the State, this ICT-based formalisation is supporting a move towards genuine rationalisation: technologies enable an extreme degree of accurateness and sophistication (data mining) so that everything and everyone can be labeled, measured, compartmentalised.

Following Foucault’s analysis (1997), Pejout argues that such power of knowledge, based on the knowledge of power, can threaten democracy: full transparency of individuals to the State is impossible, due to the absolute necessity of protecting the private sphere. However, the development of the welfare State requires the administration to know most of personal data, so as to provide relevant services, for instance well-measured pensions or health care. This is all the more true when the welfare State is getting ICT-intensive, making the most of e-government to provide e-services. For such provision with efficiency and cost-recovery, the State needs to be scientific, somehow omniscient. That is why transparency of the society to the State is necessary, but to a certain extent beyond which democracy is at risk.

Most of governments in African countries are confronted with informal realities, particularly in hard socio-economic contexts. They don’t have enough resources – financial, human, … – to know of realities that they nevertheless need to tackle with. That is why many of African States are focusing on ICTs and developing e-government infrastructures in order to fasten and improve their “formalisation strategy”: by getting to know their society better, they can act upon it better.

According to Pejout, this philosophy drives the South African State in its impressive efforts to deploy efficient and pervasive e-government architecture, for its citizens to enjoy accurate public services and for this young democracy to be “useful” to them. By focusing on the South African case, the author underlines that the role of ICTs as tools to register, formalise and normalise, supporting the final objective of Weberian rationalisation. By considering the historical process of this strategy, across different political regimes (from Apartheid to democracy), he analyses how it is deployed within a young democracy, aiming at producing a balance between two poles: a formal existence of citizens for them to enjoy a “delivery democracy” in which they are to be transparent; an informal existence of citizens for them to live freely in their private and intimate sphere. In this tension, South Africa, given its history, is paradigmatic and can shed light on many other countries, beyond Africa. Such reflections on the African Continent, certainly the more penalized in the power resources distribution, close the second part of the volume, dedicated to geo-political strategies and dynamics on the global scale (in the current world-system). The central idea of such section is that the ICTs have to be analysed in the reconfiguration of the world-system. This process, encouraged by the International Organizations action, id based in a neoliberal ideology (or paradigm), which brings together all Western experiences (EU, USA), and those countries that depend from Western countries (Africa). Yet Chinese case shows the limits of a neoliberal paradigm that have led e-government and e-democracy policies. Indeed the growth of Chinese power
the authoritarian feature of Chinese regime weakens the equation on which neoliberalism is based: more economic growth-more democratic development.

It exists also a further level of analysis, besides the Longue durée and the Conjuncture. As demonstrates the increasing amount of research conducted on the political, cultural, and social implications of the ongoing digital revolution (transformation), such level collects relevant themes and issues featured by a more contracted “time”. The contributions presented in the Third Part are aimed at focusing on some themes not sufficiently discussed in the literature on digital technologies and cyberspace.

The first two chapters of this section concern the theme the Internet Governance, an object of political and academic confrontation from more than ten years.

Building on a socio-political approach to governance and focusing on global information policies and networks, the chapter by Claudia Padovani and Elena Pavan, Information Networks, Internet Governance and Innovation in World Politics, aims at developing a understanding of the possibility of change in world politics nowadays, by critically analysing two innovative elements: the reality and relevance of “multi-stakeholder” practices and the growing role of information technologies as a complementary support to actors’ relations. Looking at Internet Governance debates, they reconstruct networks of interaction connecting actors in the virtual space, and they look at actors’ communication modes. Thus they analyze the extent to which technological, as well as processual and cognitive innovation, shapes actors’ orientations and the structures within which they interact in the specific context of Internet Governance.

Considering the rich literature on the concept of “multi-stakeholderism”, they emphasize how such term has almost become a passé-partout, widely adopted in political discourses, often with the implicit assumption that a consensus exists on how participatory political processes should be organized and managed. According to the authors, it is growingly evident that stakeholders’ participation risks becoming a rhetoric exercise aimed at neutralising criticism through the adoption of an unproblematic consensual understanding of political life. Moreover it is crucial to take into consideration the objective constraints and necessary preconditions to full and effective participation, such as financial and knowledge resources, or the available power base on which actors define their positions in governance processes. To better articulate the multi-stakeholder notion, they suggest relating multi-stakeholderism to the very concept of diversity, to be conceived as a matter of actors involved, issues addressed, knowledge produced and, in the end, power relations.

On the base of this conceptual reformulation, they look at how organizational actors involved in Internet Governance (IG) debates at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) translate their awareness of the dynamic potential offered by ICTs into an intentional strengthening of networking relations aimed at fostering new configurations of power. Thanks to the use of a research software which analyses the Web-sphere, this contribution underlines the correlation between three areas - what kind of actors are involved in the web-based “conversation” about IG, what are the prevailing issues in the IG debate, and, finally, what is the actors’ capacity to (re)present and express their differences in the debate, from a geographical, linguistic and cultural point of view. If the interplay between information technology and the conduct of world affairs offers the possibility of innovation in world politics, the case of contemporary Internet Governance produces dubious results. More particularly, the most controversial aspect remains one of inclusion and exclusion. The Global South, and in particular its localities, with their languages and cultural ways of expressing different concerns and needs, have not yet found adequate space in the on-going conversations in the Web-sphere.

In spite of the expectation that actors engaged in Internet Governance, the analysis of how actors involved in Internet Governance conceive and make use of technologies does not allow a very optimistic conclusion in terms of world politics innovation through communication, at least not for the time being.
In *Who Governs Cyberspace? Internet Governance and Power Structures in Digital Networks*, Mauro Santaniello proposes a critical approach to Internet Governance. Refusing the common image of a politically neutral network administered through technical consensus and shared responsibilities, he focuses analysis on those geo-strategic issues relating to international flows of data and to remote control activities deployed by a small group of software houses and hardware manufacturers.

The role of regulatory algorithms in controlling information circulating in cyberspace is thus observed and explained according to two main dimensions: the elaboration levels upon which algorithms work, and the functional areas of cyberspace where machines are established. By following this interpretative grid, it is presented an analysis of the main control centers operating nowadays in such networks as Internet.

 Particularly, power centralization trends operating on personal computers and devices alike, as well as on the Internet infrastructure and on the so-called hosting servers, are described in their historical deployment, shedding light on the political consequences of some important processes currently re-engineering digital networks’ architectures. This kind analysis provide an interpretative framework to keep together some of the most controversial issues of digitalization, such as the “appliancization” of terminals, the decline of network neutrality, and the information accumulation at computing centers whose resources in terms of processing power, bandwidth and storage capacity are pushing for a monopolistic situation.

This chapter also provides an insight of relationships between information code producers and the legal code produced by territorial authorities. As the most of coding authorities are U.S. companies, in fact, the geopolitical location of a government and its international relations can lead each country to adopt a different set of cybernetic strategies: from the articulated and complex ones that are followed by China, India and other “emerging countries”, to the limited and simplistic one shown for example by EU countries.

Presenting cyberspace as a conflictual scenario where companies and governments compete in order to gain control upon a wider and wider part of networks, this chapter re-contextualize the so-called digital revolution in the historical processes of capitalist world-system re-organization.

In the contribution by Diego Giannone, *Measuring ICT: Political and Methodological Aspects*, the attention is focused on the production of knowledge as expression of capitalistic system geo-culture.

Starting from the assumption that any technology embeds the ideology, politics and culture of the society where it was created and that any technical fix to its measurement represents a “political” solution, behind which they operate the more general mechanisms of reproduction of existing hegemonic powers, the author reconstructs the specific historical and political link between the affirmation of neoliberal paradigm, which has occurred since the 1970s in Western industrialized capitalist countries, and the dissemination of ICT. Neoliberalism has played a decisive role not only for the rapid dissemination of ICT, but also for their legitimacy as a criterion for measuring the progress of society. Indeed, the trajectories of neoliberalism have intersected perfectly with the incentive to produce new technological infrastructure (software and hardware), since the latter were: a) a new area of prolific development of the capitalist economy; b) an effective solution for the decrease in production costs and the acceleration both of economic transactions and of financialisation of the economy; c) an appropriate solution to the imperative of statehood more streamlined and less expensive; d) an ideological tool to reaffirm on a global scale the superiority of some countries than others. Within this process, the problem of measurement of ICT has emerged functionally to the need to identify new tools to legitimize the hierarchy of development, giving some countries the label of “most advanced” and the others of “developing” or “underdeveloped”. The need to obtain data, information, and sound knowledge on the state of ICT was therefore certainly a strong motivation for the development of methods for measurement, but it is clear that the framework within which it was included transformed it into a primarily political problem and
project. Taking the lesson of Wallerstein, and in the wake of the considerations already made by Gramsci, the author argues that the measurement, acting as a scientific justification for the Western superiority, is a part of those structures of knowledge which constitute an essential element in the functioning and legitimacy of the political, economic and social structures of the existing world-system. The measurement is a method of knowledge whose reform is indispensable in the battle for the realization of a hegemonic apparatus. Giannone reconstructs this process of reform of the methods of knowledge deployed first at the international level, within and through the work of those actors who have taken the leading role in defining the interpretative lines of the measurement of ICT: the OECD, ITU, the World Bank. These institutions, mostly controlled by Western countries, have worked out guidelines, selected indicators, built models of measurement that only apparently respond to the logic of a “universal universalism”, instead they configure as a specific expression of a “Western universalism” and hegemony.

In *The Fabrication of Networked Socialities*, Paolo Ladri, following the approach presented by Latham and Sassen (1995a), criticizes the analyses of digital worlds dominated by a focus on technical properties, and on technology and society as if they were two separate worlds.

In order to offer a more encompassing view of the electronic constitution of society, the chapter indeed adopts a perspective which looks at the mutual constitution of technology and society, arguing for the appropriateness of the analytical categories of the social studies of science and technologies (in particular, from the ‘actor-network’ theory) in addressing the imbrications of technology and society. He argues that technologies can be seen as destructive, reproductive as well as constitutive of forms of sociality, not relying on the essence, substance, or intrinsic logic of technology but on the situated fabrication of technology and society. In this sense, Landri tries to expand the analysis of the forms of sociality given by Latham and Sassen, by encompassing the dystopian effects of technologies, such as the destruction of sociality inherited by the sociology of industrial society, or the post-sociality forms of post-modern reflections on the re-shaping of knowledge societies.

After highlighting the analytical fruitfulness of this perspective by describing some digital formations, such as social network sites, virtual communities of practice, and electronic markets, he discusses the effects and the implications of such networked socialities, looking at three issues.

Firstly, the fabrication of networked socialities represents an experiment in the reconfiguration of the social. It is a sort of laboratory for the making and the remaking of the social through digitations. Here, the new technology of information and communication does not simply reflect upon, but tries to constitute and partly stabilize forms of sociality derivative or transformative of the society. This reconfiguration is not virtual, in the sense of being potential; it has its specific materialization, its electronic space and the respective socio-technical infrastructures.

Secondly, the concept of post-social relationship seems to be able to grasp some characteristics of this emergent sociality. It implies an engagement bringing the object-centred social relationship to the forefront. Most critical theories focus on the negative, and dystopian, effects of the recent transformations. Yet, it fails to recognize the transformative and stabilizing effects of these changes. In order to address this aspect, it should probably refine the way of conceiving sociality, usually understood in reference to humans with human relationships, by taking into account the relevance of the non-human side (objects, artefacts, tools, technologies) in the social fabric (Latour, 2005). This post-social perspective helps to visualize how the modern emancipation of selves from previous social belongings (communities, social classes) has been accompanied by an increasing objectualization of social life.

Finally, the analyses of these forms, and the reflection on the objectualization of sociality, introduce the theme of the risks resulting from the electronic constitution of society. This issue can be addressed from different angles: in a sense, the traceability of the sociality can multiply the possibility of growing surveillance and control (Lyon, 2001); on the other hand, this objectualization could also reveal
the fragility of modern societies (Stehr, 2001). The uneven and often contradictory character of digital
technologies, their variability as shaped by diverse operational logics of social and cultural forms, is
also the analytical focus of the final chapter.

In Virtual Nations William Sims Bainbridge analyses “virtual worlds”, computer-generated environ-
ments in which large numbers of human beings may interact, do useful work for each other, and build
enduring social connections. By giving attention to some examples of contemporary virtual worlds such
as Second Life (SL) and World of Warcraft (WoW), he considers potentialities of virtual worlds in offer-
ing models of future computer-organized virtual groups, and in enhancing government operations and
popular involvement in public decision-making. For example, in World of Warcraft an estimated nine
million subscribers form short-term action-oriented groups and long-term guilds, employing a variety
of software tools to manage division of labor, spatial distributions, activity planning, individual reputa-
tions, and channels of communication, to accomplish a variety of often complex goals. Developed for
online virtual worlds, these social technologies have a clear potential to supplement and render more
flexible the existing structures of government, and they may represent a significantly new departure in
human social organization. They could be also adapted to mediate in new ways between government
and its citizens.

Yet this may lead to the dark side of virtual world. Digital instruments could also be used in order to
give governments’ greater control over their citizens. Bainbridge reminds the presidential candidate Ron
Paul’s words, interviewed on the influential television program, Meet the Press, late in 2007, when he
expressed concerns felt by many Americans that their nation was decaying into some form of imperialism
or fascism: “We’re not moving toward Hitler-type fascism, but we’re moving toward a softer fascism:
Loss of civil liberties, corporations running the show, big government in bed with big business”. As
users become more accustomed to the technical and social characteristics of virtual worlds, the worlds
themselves will evolve still further, posing new challenges and opportunities for users. Yet the use of
such new technologies by traditional governments represents an important element to be investigated
in future research.