

New Media, New Logics: power and participation among activists in southern Stockholm

Jakob Svensson
Karlstad University
Sweden
jakob.svensson@kau.se

Abstract

This paper discusses the implications of the increasing use of social networking sites for political participation emerging outside parliamentary arenas. The paper is empirically based in a (n)ethnographic study of a network of middle-class activists in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen (southern Stockholm). They were engaged in issues such as saving the local bathhouse, lobbying for a cultural centre, preserve green areas and the quality of life in the attractive and well-located sister suburbs. The studies in southern Stockholm suggest that an increase of social networking sites develops a new kind of network logic underlining identity negotiation as a motivator for political participation. This logic contributes to rationalized practices for expressions of affinity, which in turn disciplines the individual users to connectedness with like-minded people in the neighbourhood through continuous practices of updating.

Keywords

political participation; network logic; late modernity; social networking; updating

I used to share an apartment in Aspudden, just two subway stops south of the Stockholm inner city island of Södermalm. This is a very pleasant suburb with some old architecture, green areas and access to the waterfront. Together with neighboring Midsommarkransen, Aspudden is arguably the oldest suburb in Stockholm. Young couples with

babies, largely populate these neighborhoods, having left the inner city when starting a family. This is illustrated by the large number of cafés, populated with mums chatting and sipping lattes together, while their babies sleep in the trolleys next to them.

One day at the end of April 2010 I got a message sent to me via *Facebook* suggesting I should sign an online petition against the plans to demolish the old community-run (but city-owned) bathhouse two blocks away from where I lived. I was also suggested to join the action group to save the bathhouse. Recently having enjoyed the thrills watching the horror movie *Jaws* in the pool area, on an inflatable mattress with a drink in my hand, my feelings towards the bathhouse and the different activities organized there were very positive. Hence I signed the petition, and also joined the *Facebook*- group and added many of the members as my friends. I also started to follow the *Twitter* feeds, read the bathhouse blog as well as signing myself for two shares in the bath house for 10 000 SEK each. In spite of the protests the bathhouse was destroyed. But what remained was a network of activists that later formed the group SÖFÖ (Södra Förstaden, the southern Suburb) that has continued to act mostly against development plans in the suburbs, in order to preserve green areas, playgrounds as well as lobby for turning an abandoned fire station into a cultural centre or some kind of non-commercial meeting place.

In academia, the rise of new media has been accompanied by a large number of claims of its impact on society and political participation. Since production and distribution of information are becoming more accessible to everyone, citizens are increasingly able to communicate directly with one another. Therefore some argue that we are witnessing the growth of a participatory culture that will fundamentally change citizenship practices (see Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Shirky, 2009). Dystopian descriptions of an increasingly skeptical, distrusting and inward-looking citizenry (Boggs, 2000; Bauman, 2001) is today countered by numerous accounts of a rising network society¹ claimed to flatten out governance hierarchies and distributing power (Rheingold, 2002, p. 163). In network societies, action coalitions are claimed to rather rely on loose, non-hierarchical and open communities of participants often making use of new technology for communication and coordination (Bruns, 2008, p. 362). The Internet is argued to afford possibilities for both reflexive identity negotiation and political mobilization (van Dijk, 2000, p. 36). Hence, the Internet has been conceived of both as a tool for more lifestyle-based participation as well as a remedy for contemporary disinterest in parliamentary politics.

¹ van Dijk (2006: 20) defines the network society as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its mode of organization on all levels (individual, group and societal).

But how to say anything useful of emerging forms of political participation without lapsing into futurology or engaging in the uncritical painting of democratic utopias? My answer has been to conduct a (n)ethnographic inspired case study of the network of activists² in southern Stockholm. Studying these activists I found that power had not disappeared with the rise of network types of organizations, media and communication. Rather what I found was a shift from more tangible and easily observable hierarchical power structures to more non-transparent relations of power. The rise of social networking sites and its access from mobile and hand-held computing devices, seems to encourage or even demand a social negotiation of the political self. By following *Twitter* accounts, joining e-mail and SMS-lists, *Ning*- and *Facebook*-groups, activists became updated on the activities in the neighborhoods and could engage if interested. New media practices both made it easier and seemed to push participants to engage in activities. Hence, this paper will not only echo popular accounts of the mobilizing potential in communities of equals and like-minded people using digital technology (see Rheingold, 2002; Shirky, 2009), but to ground this in a critical analysis of power and discipline (Foucault, 1994). I will argue that a kind of network logic is imposing behavioral patterns of reflexive updating and self-disclosure, disciplining activists to engage.

To do this I will start by referring to ideas of media logic and how to evolve these into a concept of network logic. This section will be followed by an account of the (n)ethnographic inspired methodology used to study of the activists in southern Stockholm. The paper will then continue with a thematic retelling of my experiences and findings in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen, themes that will return in the following analysis where theories of power, discipline and identity in late modernity will be used to understand the findings.

New Media, New Logics

It is commonplace to claim the strong links between media and democracy to the extent that they can no longer be understood as two different domains. With developments of theories of mediatization and media logics, to which political spheres adapt, media is not only linked to politics and power, but also described as sites out of which power and politics are exercised (Street, 1997; Kepplinger, 2002; Altheide, 2004; Hjarvard, 2008). This brings attention to a double-sided process in which the media emerges as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions have to accommodate to (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). In the

² I use the term activist to refer to political actors outside the Parliament, but with an outspoken political aim hence delineating activists from political actors within parliamentary institutions and actors within popular culture spheres, not primarily set up for political or citizenship purposes (see Svensson, 2011a).

domain of politics, politicians have to adhere to the dramatization style in media discourses, the increasing prominence of short sound bites, visuals and entertainment formats (Kepplinger, 2002; Altheide, 2004, p. 294). Hence, political life in its broadest sense has become situated within the domain of media (Street, 1997).

What is happening today is that the media, whose logic political institutions adhere to, is changing profoundly. Discourses of new media have been around us for some time. But what is new media? According Manovich (2001, pp. 20-37) new media refers to the convergence between computer and media technologies and are based principles of numerical representation, modularity, automation and variability. The principle of numerical representation implies that media has become programmable. The principle of modularity means that media may be manipulated by discerning, assembling, adding or removing pixels, polygons, voxels et cetera. The principle of automation makes programming and manipulating media easier and more accessible to ordinary citizens with the consequence that media are constantly in progress, with an endless variability to it. This to the extent that we today may simulate realities/ fictions and communicate through time and space through a sort of tele-presence (Manovich, 2001, pp. 137, 164). Other characteristics that are often referred to as new are greater possibilities for convergence, interactivity, continuity, content that is individually stored and individually produced, and more personalized forms of media content (see Leaning, 2009, ch. 2).

Many of us think of the Internet and digital communication platforms when thinking of new media. In the 1990s the Internet progressively grew in popularity and the role of the digital computer shifted from being a particular technology to a filter for all culture, a form through which all kinds of material were mediated (Manovich, 2001, p. 64). The Internet has now been around for over two decades, but what is often considered as new, is developments towards mobile access to the Internet (Rheingold, 2002) and web 2.0. (Leaning, 2009, p. 30), often referred to as social media and online social networking. The definition of SNSs (Social Networking Sites) is useful here. Ellison & boyd (2007, p. 2) defines them as different from other sites because they allow the user to articulate their social networks and making them visible to other users. SNSs are thus web-based services allowing individuals to create a (semi)public profiles, connecting this profile to other users (often self-selected), whose contacts in turn will be made accessible by the service (Ellison & boyd, 2007, p. 2). Through SNSs the Internet has established itself as the main locus for mediated communication and socialization among the young crowd (as recent studies from Sweden has indicated, see Medierådet, 2010). This leads to structural, architectural and social developments with its own significance beyond

the technical aspects of digitalization (Leaning, 2009, p. 6). In other words, the Internet is altering the way we live, socialize and it is shaping the way things get done, providing access of information and providing us with new tools for arranging and taking part in all sorts of activities, encounters and social agency (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 152). A major difference from older media platforms, I would argue is the amount of activity demanded of the user. SNSs require the user to be more active, actively search for the kinds of information, entertainment friends and linkages he or she wants. Bruns (2008, p. 14) argues that to be a user already implies a more active role than being a consumer. In this way, the user is also taking part in producing (or producing as Bruns cleverly labels it) information, entertainment and spheres for social interaction.

I wish to contribute with a more critical perspective as a counter weight to the popular conception of the Internet as a media-form that affords user empowerment (see Leaning, 2009, p. 40). While the Internet no doubt opens up new arenas of citizen activities, these arenas are dependent on the network structure, how it is constituted and managed (Sassi, 2000, p. 91). In this way technology structures our choices and even preferences (Street, 1997, p. 34). In other words digital communication technology will have a disciplining effect on its users, something I wish to label as network logic. My argument is thus based on deductive reasoning, when the overall media and communication landscape change, media logics will also evolve, and then politics and participation will be adapting to new circumstances bringing about new types of political engagement and citizenship practices. Media logics should not be understood here as in a causal lineage between media and political institutions. Instead it is more accurate to conceive of these as in mutual and dialectic relationships to each other (see also Leaning, 2009).

Notes on Methodology

I have followed the action group for saving the bathhouse, later SÖFÖ, from early 2010 both online and offline. SÖFÖ largely consists of loosely affiliated neighbours, many who have kids in the same school or kindergarten or live close to each other. The community-run (and owned) cinema Tellus serves as a natural meeting place for SÖFÖ. This is where offline meetings take place and many in the core group also work in their free time. Online communication is mostly done through their *Facebook*- and *Ning*-page. During the battle for the bathhouse, the action group also used a blog, a *Twitter* feed as well as an SMS-list to disseminate information. During the battle the group used a *Facebook*-group 'Save the Aspudden Bathhouse' (*Rädda Aspuddsbadet*). When the bathhouse had been demolished and

SÖFÖ created, the group used a *Facebook*-page the southern Suburb (*Södra Förstaden*). *Ning* is a website where you can create your own social network focused around a specific issue or group. SÖFÖ did create a *Ning*-site for their community where members had their own profiles, could connect and message each other as well as starting discussions, groups and forums within the site (see Fig. 1).



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Figure 1: My Profile Page at the SÖFÖ *Ning*-site.

Digital technology and social networking sites are neither neutral, nor do they have inherent capacities for social organization and change (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p. 10). Technology and society evolves in tandem (Svensson, 2011a), hence new media and communication technologies should be understood from its uses and social contexts. These technologies are constructed, maintained and given meaning through a range of complex and social processes (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p. 10). To avoid an essentialist, causal or technical deterministic study, it is important to inquire into how and under which circumstances technology is used. Causal models of explanation are potentially misleading since it is impossible to isolate Internet and media use from other social practices and determine what

causes what (Anduiza, 2009). A case study bypasses such problems. When focusing on a case, the web sites to study are almost given in advance, and researchers may concentrate on events and practices in a more empirically constructive manner (Gerodimos & Ward, 2007, p. 118).

Case studies are most often generalizing in their aim. In this case the choice of activists to study is not based in choosing a representative case out of which generalizations can be made. Rather the choice is made for ethnographic reasons, through having lived and shared experiences with the group and the circumstances they found themselves in. Thus the results of this study may not be applied to political participation in general. But the results will point to interesting aspects of political participation in digital late modernity that I believe will resonate in similar settings. The overall aim is to understand political participation in the particular setting of activists in southern Stockholm. Through this understanding the purpose is also to contribute to a discussion of power and participation in emerging network societies.

This study is inspired by both ethno- and nethnographic methodology. In a nethnographic study we are released as researchers from the physical place to conduct observations in a virtual context on communities that can be understood as social in its character (Berg, 2011, p. 119). The aim of nethnographic research is to understand the social interaction taking place online, hence a focus on user-generated information flows (Berg, 2011, pp. 120). The nethnographic approach thus suits the aims of this paper since I am studying how activists used *Facebook*, *Ning*, *Twitter*, SMS and the blog, the information flow they initiated and took part in.

Doing nethnography I followed the activists on all their different media platforms, took field notes and screenshots when I observed something I deemed particularly interesting. I used their SNSs (Social Networking Sites) as archives of information (see Berg, 2011, p. 126), but I have also created my own archive with screenshots since data and interactions on SNSs are instantaneous and may be changed or disappear. As a participant researcher, I have participated in discussions on *Ning*, *Facebook* and the bathhouse blog, commented on postings and retweeted tweets and forwarded invitations et cetera.

Nethnography is different from ethnography in its exclusive focus on net-based social environments. The physical absence is compensated by different textual and figurative representations, which gives the user larger possibilities to reflect on, test and review different ways of action before they become part of the social interaction (Berg, 2011, p. 121). This also requires the user to make an active and conscious effort when presenting her-self online. Here

we can distinguish between asynchronous postings, allowing for greater reflection and planning (for example on the bathhouse blog and on SÖFÖs *Ning*-group) and synchronous postings, happening in real time (through the *Twitter* feed and SMS-list, see Berg, 2011, p. 127).

Nethnography works well in combination with a more traditional ethnographic method, especially since the online and offline world mutually influence each other (van Dijk, 2006, p. 39). This was especially the case in southern Stockholm with the activists both using online media and communication platforms to communicate as well as meeting, discussing and acting offline. The observations and interventions online have thus been complemented with continuous offline interactions and participations in activities (such as meetings, discussions, lectures et cetera). I have also conducted five in-depth interviews (approximately 90 minutes each) with five different activists during 2010 and 2011.

Findings

Connectedness and Responsiveness

Observing and talking to activists in southern Stockholm it becomes evident that they use digital media in general and *Facebook* in particular to connect to issues and people with similar opinions. One young student tells me that he is against the expansion of cars and motor traffic in the Stockholm region. He has therefore joined several groups on *Facebook* against highway constructions. Hence, whenever he logs in to his *Facebook*-account he will be updated on what is going on concerning these issues. Similarly a middle-aged Green Party politician and IT-technician told me that he joined SÖFÖs *Ning*- and *Facebook*-group in order to get in contact with the group and to become informed about their various activities. This is the same reason why I joined the *Facebook*-group to save the bathhouse and started to follow the action group on *Twitter*. From that moment I was connected to the cause and information concerning the issue started to flow towards me as soon as accessed the Internet. During the battle for the bathhouse there was a wide range of different ways to connect to the cause and to the core people in the action group. Besides the blog, the *Twitter*-feed, *Facebook*-group and SMS-list, the action group organized a festival (see Fig. 2), different cultural activities and produced a song that were spread on *Facebook* and YouTube.

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Figure 2: The Poster for the Support Festival to save the bathhouse

During the battle for the bathhouse, the SMS-list as well as the *Twitter*-feed served to inform the followers directly of the happenings around the bathhouse. For example if there was a new decision made in the City Council, if the Police had been there or what kinds of cultural activities were taking place in the bathhouse. This information also seemed to push followers to

react and to take part in activities. Some people I talked to outside the bathhouse during the police eviction of activists who had camped inside, implied that they felt compelled to come when the action group called for their participation. One young mother phrased it as if she had no choice than to come and show her support for the cause and the activists camping inside. Also the young student describes a kind of request inherent in the information sent out by the action group. This invoked what he describes as a kind of duty to respond. He felt he ought to go down to the bathhouse and join the activists on place, in order to show for them and others his support. Hence, it seems that to connect to a cause and to other activist also tacitly implies that you should respond to the information and requests generated by this connectedness.

Updating

The practice of sharing is often referred to and praised when discussing political participation online. From what I experienced following the activists in southern Stockholm I would rather use the term updating. When asking the student how he should proceed if for example the city would close a bicycle path or plan to build a new highway (issues that he cares for), he says that he would first of all start a *Facebook*-group in order to update his network on what was going on and to see if there was any interest among his connections there. Similarly a female artist, entrepreneur and student in her 30s tells me that she uses *Facebook* because of an urge to tell her friends and connections what is going in and happening in her different projects. The constant updating process is the right way to accomplish things, you have to be hyperactive she says to me. A middle-aged mother and part of the core of the action group, underlines the importance of updating practices during the battle for bathhouse. In the beginning important documents were uploaded on the bathhouse blog. Later the *Twitter*-feed and SMS-lists were pivotal. For example one activist read on the responsible politicians blog that the Sport- and Leisure Committee would take the decision to demolish the bathhouse during their next meeting. This information was immediately sent out on the SMS-lists and the *Twitter*-feed together with a call for an emergency meeting. At that meeting it was decided to guard the bathhouse twenty-four/seven. From then on, the bathhouse guards started to manage the SMS-list and *Twitter*-feed in order to update and quickly mobilize activist to protect the bathhouse from the police. During the final stages of the battle there were a lot of text-massages going out, both on SMS, *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

The importance of updating is not only to inform the network on what is happening, but also to be updated in the sense of being informed on what is happening in your different

networks. The young student, interested in reducing cars and motor traffic in the Stockholm region, tries to follow the decision-making processes concerning these issues, especially by following Green blogs and joining *Facebook*-groups. In this way he is updated on what is happening with the issue. When asking him what kinds of discussions is taking place on these *Facebook* he says that there is not so much discussions as there is information and updatings on political decisions and committee statements. Hence SNSs do not seem to contribute to deliberation, rather what is going on is practices of updating among like-minded people. The student further tells me that he would not have known about the plans to destroy the bathhouse if it was not for the Internet. Maybe he had been able to read some in the newspaper but he would never been able to get as much information on the issue as he got from the bathhouse blog. And this blog-information made him act. First he attended a meeting and later he sign up on the SMS-list and from then on he also tried to responded calls sent out on that list.

The Green Party politician claims that if he is not constantly updated on what is happening on the SÖFÖ *Ning*-group it is easy to slip out. He tells me that it is sometimes difficult to start a discussion thread online, and if you have not followed the thread for a while you are left behind. Some activists I talked to describe a reluctance to join an online discussion that they had not followed or maybe had not all the information about. Reasons for this were that they did not want to risk stating the obvious or repeating things that already had been mentioned. This reasoning suggests that some activists felt they had to be updated otherwise their information might not be accurate and they might be left behind. I also recognize this urge to update in my own behavior, how I during the battle of the bathhouse where checking my *Facebook* and *Twitter* several times an hour in order to follow what was going on.

Identity and Reputation

Observing the different profiles of SÖFÖ activist on the *Ning*-site it becomes obvious that a lot of what is going on is identity negotiation and maintenance. The groups and forums they participate in and the kinds of photos they upload can all be conceived of as material in their identification processes. This is even more the case when observing their *Facebook*-profiles where even more space is allowed for linking to all different kinds of people, causes, brands and popular culture, whereas the *Ning*-site is more group-specific. The student underlines the importance to join political groups on SNSs online not only to get updated, but also to show support, to tell to the members in the group that you are with them and to show for

your friends and network connections that you support this cause. This was indeed one reason why I joined the *Facebook*-group to save the bathhouse.

The activists in the SÖFÖ network nurtured a political identity as active and involved. The Green Party politician tells me that he has always been interested in acting for change and that he cannot avoid writing to the City Planning Office when he reads about development plans he does not approve of. He cannot just sit with his arms crossed and do nothing. He describes his participation in the activities both as an ego-thing but with an idealistic component. Similarly the middle-aged mother talks about her engagement in SÖFÖ and Cinema Tellus as creating an environment she likes and wants to promote. She tells me she is not interested in shopping, she is interested in doing things together with her neighbours, such as showing movies and running a community café. Also the student talks about his political activism in different organizations as something he likes to do. He tells me he prefers going to meetings and debates instead of playing badminton or soccer. By being engaged in different activist groups, he conceives of himself as part in the formation of a new way of approaching politics. He wants to promote a society where people feel more included. It is obvious that I am studying people who see their activism as a part of their identity, as a kind of lifestyle.

Observing the different activities online, what seem to be at stake are processes of identification through the positioning yourself within the peer network. This is illustrated when talking to the artist. She describes what seems to me as a strategy of commenting. She tells me that she comments a lot on friends' postings on *Facebook*. Her rule is that all of her comments should consist of some kind of feedback that also contributes with something, for example a link to an interesting article et cetera. She conceives of herself as a fire starter, and that she always comes to occupy the centre of attention in projects she gets involved in, a centre that she then uses to promote different projects and issues that she is involved in. She tells me that before taking part in an activity she makes sure that her friends know what she is doing, for example through a status update on *Facebook*. She also checks who else is going to participate in the activity, adds them as friends and if they already are friends perhaps make a comment on their *Facebook*-wall. In this way it will be easier for her to connect with them when seeing each other at the event. Hence in order to keep her position in the network she has to connect, comment and update. Similarly the Green Party politician claims that you have to be continuously updated on the discussions and happenings in the network otherwise your information might not be accurate and then you have to renegotiate the position in the network.

Hence it is not only exchanges of information that is going when SÖFÖ activists log in to their computers, they are also negotiating their social place within the network.

Power and Discipline in Digital Late Modernity

Identity and Reputation

Having described the experiences and findings in southern Stockholm I will now turn to the analysis of them, embedding the findings in theories of power and participation in digital late modernity³. It is common to conceive of our time as late modern (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1995; Bauman, 2001). Dahlgren (2006) characterizes late modernity by identifying two interrelated cultural processes: dispersion of unifying cultural frameworks and individualization. The first refers to the increasing pluralization, fragmentation and nichification of society along lines of ethnicity, media consumption, cultural interests, lifestyles, interests, tastes et cetera. Individualization refers to lacking a sense of social belonging, a process where communities, personal relationships, social forms and commitments are less bound by history, place and tradition (Miller, 2008, p. 388). In other words, the collective and the traditional has faded in importance in favor of the individual identity formation project (Giddens, 1991). However, self-realization is an elusive goal since it can hardly be achieved once and for all. Thus the making and molding of the self becomes a continuous and never ending process (Miller, 2008, p. 388). This underlines reflexivity as a dominant theme in late modernity. Reflexivity means that we consider our selves and our practices from different perspectives, always re-considering previously acquired knowledge. It is especially our life choices and individual identities that are continuously being scrutinized, redefined and subject to our reflections (Giddens, 1991).

Arendt (1998/1958, p. 41, 49) noticed that already the public realm in ancient Greece was reserved for individuality and permeated by a spirit where everybody had to distinguish him or herself. Today this public realm has largely moved online. Who to text message, who's posting to comment on, and how to respond to messages and postings are used by young people as "the raw material for identity and group-shaping activities" (Rheingold, 2002, p. 25). In my own work I have labeled expressive rationality as *the* motivational force in digital late modernity (see Svensson, 2011b). With the increasing possibility of identity on SNSs, a kind of do it your self-biographies emerges, especially online (see Hodkinson 2007, pp. 627- 628;

³ By labelling our time as digital late modernity I wish to underline that societal and cultural changes in late modernity are happening at the same time as we experience a technological shift towards digitalization.

Livingstone, 2008). This is one reason behind observing processes of identity negotiation and maintenance on *Facebook* and *Ning*. The need to feel connected to an issue, evoking some kind of citizen identity, has proven to be an important incentive for communication on websites set up by political institutions (see Hilts & Yu, 2010). Hence, choices of arenas and topics for political participation are to a large extent reflexively chosen since it is increasingly likely that we will update our different networks on our engagement. Individualization is in this sense not only the liberation of the individual from social regulation of modern institutions (family, church, social movements) but also a demand for supplying our biographies, to import our selves into our biographies through our own actions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, discussed in Leaning, 2009, p. 76). In this sense a kind of network logic is disciplining the activists in southern Stockholm to practices of reflexive updating and self-expression.

The network logic underlines late modern processes of identification and reflexivity. A continuous emphasis of the self as something that can be managed bears upon the individual to such a degree that the self becomes a *reflexive* project (Giddens, 1991, p.32). It thus seems that the late modern self, anxiously trying to confirm who she really is, uses SNSs both to monitor her identity as well as testing it in front of selected others (peers). This takes the form of reflexive connectivity and reflexive responsiveness when making links to other users public (as well as causes, organizations, brands) and hence freeloading on their supposed connotations, connotations to which we wish to tie images of our selves (see Donath & boyd, 2004). From this perspective it is not surprising that Green Party sympathizers engage in battling extensions of the highway and trying to save forests and green areas.

Rheingold (2002, pp. 35-37) claims that at the core of collective action is reputation, something that lays in-between self-interest and altruistic goods. This is illustrated by activists using their participation for identity purposes but also referring to an idealistic component. According to Bruns (2008, p. 84) contribution to online communities build individual status. Being recognized as the originator of interesting new content or as key facilitators of the sharing (updating) process could be conceived of as individual rewards (Bruns, 2008, p. 249), important for constructing and maintaining an identity as active and involved. A retired media entrepreneur tells me that he will at least get a tombstone, referring to his fellow pensioners who just sit and complain while he is having fun, hanging out with smart and interesting people more than half his age. Listening to him as well as the middle-aged mother socializing with her neighbours in the community-run cinema and café, it becomes evident that a social element in participatory practices are intertwined with identity, lifestyle and reputation.

Taking social aspects of participation in southern Stockholm into account as well as values of connectedness and responsiveness, dystopian illustrations of late modern individualization of individuals as isolated islands (see Bauman, 2001) or the online as an illusion of community with users becoming more individualized with increasingly personalized portfolios of sociability (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 629), misses the point. The individual and community are not in a dichotomized relation to each other. The activists in southern Stockholm are autonomous and dependent on each other at the same time. On the different media platforms they negotiate themselves, and incorporate other activists and causes into this negotiation. This underlines a form of networked individualism (see Castells, 2001, pp. 129-133). Hence online communication is not so much about narcissistic self-absorption as it is about embedding the self within the peer group (see also Livingstone, 2008). We are thus talking about identity through connectedness.

Concerning reputation it becomes important to study whether the highly esteemed contributors are also automatically positioned as the undisputed and indisputable leaders, in other words whether reputation is transformed into power (see Bruns, 2008, p. 314). Obama was retweeted more than any other democratic politician during the campaign because he was the Democrats' candidate for president. Newcomers trying to relate to originators and frequent contributors, in other words the core of the political community, illustrate reputation turned into power in political communities online. For example, when I joined the online battle against the destruction of the bathhouse, I soon realized who belonged to the core of the group, not only through observing who was posting messages but also whose postings were retweeted and echoed by thumbs up on *Facebook*. In hindsight, I also realize that I became part of this by posting encouraging entries on the *Facebook*-page for certain members' and not others, rather retweeting some activists' messages than others. By echoing popular arguments, I was not only showing my sympathy for the participatory and expressive values of the activist group, but I also reinforced these values and reinforced the authority of certain other active group members. It could be argued that reputation systems are important to filter out anomalous participants and to highlight those who are seen as most creative, exciting and active (Bruns, 2008, p. 329). In this way reputation, social filtering and peer-power is linked to each other (see also Rheingold, 2002, p. 114). My argument, though, is that reputation not always relies on merit but also on status and hence masks relations of power.

The Urge to Connect, Respond and Update

According to Foucault (1994/1973, pp. 52, 57) we are in the midst of a disciplinary society. What is constitutive of this society is that power is exercised through disciplining, normalizing power and the knowledge-power formations that support these largely discursive practices. The control of individuals started to be performed by a series of authorities and networks of institutions of surveillance and correction (Foucault, 1994/1973, p. 57). Disciplining should be understood as increasingly controlled and rationalized processes of adjusting activities, communication networks and power relations (Foucault, 1994/1982, p. 339). Power is a type of relationship *between* people, not properties of individuals or collectives as such, influencing others' actions rather than acting immediately upon others (Foucault, 1994/1979, p. 324). Hence through the exercise of power people are disciplined to act in certain ways, in turn structuring the field of further possible actions (Foucault 1994/1982, p. 343).

Today new technology such as e-mail, SMS and SNSs make large networks are possible. Large number of people in connected societies has devices that will enable them most of the time to link to places, objects and people (Rheingold, 2002). Given the increasing mobility of communication platforms and mobile access to Internet through smart-phones, expressions and maintenance of network connections have the possibility to take place all the time. Following the experiences in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen I would argue that a central aspect of the emerging network logic is that it disciplines us to be *constantly updated* in two different ways – to update the network of our doings, thoughts and feelings as well as to be updated of the doings in the network. In order to know what is going on in your networks, you need to be updated. During the battle for the bathhouse the SMS-list as well as the *Twitter*-feed served to connect the followers directly to the happenings around the bathhouse. But continuous communication does not only lead to instantaneous information. In the case of the activists in southern Stockholm, inherent in this information was a kind of request or a demand to act.

Networks of peers and like-minded people also influence our decisions because they work as a filter (see Anderson, 2006, p. 108). Life choices seem to be multiplying and the responsibility for making the right choices is increasingly put on the individual when modern institutions loose in relevance. In late modern societies, every citizen can construct her own custom lifestyle and select her ideology from a large number of choices (Manovich, 2001, p. 42). We are thus experiencing an ever-expanding range of elective identities on offer together with the ease with which they may be embraced or rejected. This can be liberating (see Becks treatment on subpolitics, 1995) but also loaded with stress about making the right choices.

When tradition and modern institutions become less prominent we need other guiding mechanisms and this is where our networks are having influence over our decisions and us. The network has become an increasingly important filter, through which the activists take part of information and conceive of the world. Through networks they reflexively organize their social life, interact with each other, share and get information. Hence the Internet and mobile accesses make it easier to connect to like-minded people with similar interests in their vicinity. And it becomes easier to tailor and filter what kind of information on what issues and from whom that will reach them. But informing us about the variety of choices and what others before us have done with these choices, the network also functions as peer pressure (Anderson, 2006, p. 174). In this way, pictures of like-minded peoples' and peers' likes and dislikes together with aggregated past choices and behaviors make us anticipate our future needs and wants (Hands, 2011, p. 128). Hence, needs might be created with this information.

To be successful online, you need to master a new form of sociability, through management of your friends and network connections and through continuously updating, negotiating and maintaining an attractive self on as many stages as possible in order for peers and like-minded people to visit your profile and leave comments (see Livingstone, 2008). Practices of updating illustrate a kind of power that reveals itself in the continuous preoccupation with expressing and negotiating our selves and our positions, as well as interpreting others through the production, maintenance and sustenance of network visibility. Social control today would be the constant monitoring/ supervision of both oneself and others through practices of updating. Foucault's discussions of power can be applied remarkably well in digital arenas. He outlines a form of power that makes individuals into subjects, ties them to their identity by conscience and self-knowledge (1994/1982, p. 331). In other words the late modern reflexive subject is, following Foucault, a result of a form of power exercised upon it. The individuals over whom power is exercised are those from whom the knowledge they themselves produce is extracted and used in order to control them (Foucault, 1994/1973, p. 84). The central question to deal with today is thus to decide what shall be public and to whom. This decision is to a large extent put in the hand of the everyday Internet user. This is a balancing act on what to publish or not in order to avoid this information being used to control you but at the same time keep your social place in the network and manage a continuous identity. Studies have shown that working class kids are not as successful as middle class kids in using SNSs for enhancing capital(s) (this indicating a second digital divide, see, Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008).

The implication on politics and participation of values of connectedness and responsiveness through practices of updating would be that we tend to reveal our political interests to a larger extent online than offline. Even though the middle-aged mother, the young student and the middle-aged artist were not outspoken sympathizers of any political party, their *Facebook* networks were to a large extent updated on their opinions and what issues they were engaged in. An American study from the 2008 presidential campaign showed that twenty percent of the survey sample had discovered the political interests of their friends by using SNSs (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, 2010, p. 80). This seems to counter Eliasoph's (1998) well-known ethnographic study of American volunteers, where she contends that people tend to avoid politics. Through a network logic, in which updating practices are highly valued, users are to a less extent shying away from making their political opinions visible to others.

The possibility for quick reaction, easy reach of local (and global networks) has turned the Internet and mobile technology into efficient channels for social movements, political protest and mobilization as the study in southern Stockholm underlines (see also Heller, 2008, p. 35). The power of digital communications, networks and mobile technology is a limitless snowball effect made possible by the design and structure of modern digital communications (Hands, 2011, p. 3). The uprisings in Arab countries demonstrate the sheer power of cumulative connections. In this way network society is a society of coordinated movements of movements (Hands, 2011, p. 105, see also Shirky, 2009). Rheingold (2002) talks about smart mobs in this context, groups of people who are able to act together even though they do not know each other. The bathhouse action group is an example of a smart mob, made possible because the activists carried with them devices with both communication and computing capabilities.

Carrying mobile devices with access to the Internet and computing capabilities also made the activists easier to engage. Take for example the student who says that he participates more in debates and information meetings because he joined different *Facebook*-groups and follows certain blogs. The Green Party politician would not have known about SÖFÖ and their different activities if he had joined the *Ning*-group. By following these groups, blogs and lists the activists were updated on the different activities in the neighbourhood and could engage if interested and suitable. In other words, by making sure they were updated, they also made themselves engagable. Referring to Heidegger, Hands (2011, p. 25) describes activists as *being on standby*. I like this expression because it captures what I have come across in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen. A lot of inhabitants are on standby, not least during the height of the battle of the bathhouse when quick mobilization was of utmost importance. When asked about his

political engagement nowadays, the student describes his engagement as sleeping but that he follows the debate closely (updating) concerning the issues that are important to him and his identity. In other words, he is on standby. When something happens he is ready to write to politicians, attend a meeting or a demonstration. With the Internet the possibilities to involve people increase, not the least since many activists are on standby, waiting to find the right circumstances to engage, favorable circumstances for reflexive updating and identity negotiation and maintenance.

We should not underestimate the disciplining effects of the emerging social practices online. It is almost as if SNSs would pressure us to be updated. When the Green Party politician talks about the bathhouse blog as something that could be followed, he also implies that he had to follow it in order to know what happened and to become informed about the different activities there. To be updated here is also intertwined with the demand for reflexive self-presentations in late modernity. This disciplines us always to be ready to respond, connect and update. The artist talks about her online channel as something that has to be used in order to update her network, to get things done and get attention for it. Self-disclosure, to update the network on your doings and engagements, is thus equally important to gain trust and achieve authentic and contingent relationships with others in the network. This leads to an ever-increasing need for self-clarification, social validation and relationship development that is satisfied through acts of self-disclosure (Miller, 2008, p. 389). This is one reason to focus on an emerging network logic in order to underline that these practices also carries with them a logic based in other kinds of norms and values to which we have to position our selves.

Discussion

In this paper I hope to have established that relations of power are at work even when activists use media and communication platforms that are supposed to be more equal and horizontal. However, one question remains unanswered. Who or what is benefiting from power mechanism pushing us to reflexive updating, identity negotiation and maintenance? Power relations are rationalized through different logics operating in different contexts. For example, social control was used at the end of the 18th century in relation to the formation of capitalist society as a way to protect economic wealth (Foucault, 1994/1973, p. 69). The question is what social control is used for in network societies? These are questions that remain to be thoroughly addressed, but to end this paper I would like to offer some reflections on these issues.

Identity, subpolitics and recognition are often used as positive notions when trying to understand politics in late modernity. However identity is also connected to capitalism in ways that might not always be considered positive. The most obvious cases are through acts of consumption and advertising where identity and lifestyle are tightly connected to things that we are made believe we have to buy in order for us to negotiate *that* particular identity or *that* particular lifestyle. Consumer society offers to the subject a range of choices from which to create biographies of the self (Miller, 2008, p. 388). Identity becomes a vehicle for how the capitalist system can penetrate the life-world and vice versa. And technology makes this possible by smoothing over alienations and antagonisms through highlighting consumer distractions (Hands, 2011, p. 33). Hence, from a normative horizon, Hands (2011, p. 103) sees a problem using identity as a primary component in digital late modernity, given that many identities' positions are actually created by capitalist systems to begin with. In this way it can be argued that expressive rationality and reflexive participation becomes part of the coordinated system of interdependence of capitalist societies, capitalism constituting the power mechanism pushing us to reflexive updating, identity negotiation and maintenance. At least this is the case when the negotiation of political identities not only requires participation in different activities, but it is also connected to things that have to be purchased.

I would suggest though that the uses of commodities in which meanings and lifestyle values are invested, are more prominent when negotiating social place and identity among youth peer groups on SNSs than when negotiating political identities on activist groups online. I do believe that activist and political identities are not as embedded in the capitalist logic to the extent that Hands argues. In contrast many political identities are based in antagonism towards unjust distribution of wealth and a will to change society since equality is embedded into the very meaning of the political (see Svensson 2011a). According to Hands (2011, p. 38) technology is increasingly open for local change and adaptation. This then implies that technology very well may well be used to counter a capitalist logic. Important as it is not to be too negative, as critical scholars we need to be aware of the potential hegemonic embrace of network logic into a larger capitalist logic. Technology is not neutral; it is constantly evolving in a dialectical relationship with society and culture. And it is within capitalist societies that technology now is evolving. Commercial interests may very well be able to capitalize on the goods created by online communities and innovations.

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