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A large, light gray, stylized graphic of a pirate ship's hull and mast, enclosed within a circular border. The ship is oriented vertically, with the mast on the left and the hull on the right.

Pirate Politics: Information Technologies and the
Reconfiguration of Politics

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to address the question of how Information Technologies (ITs) become politically relevant, both by drawing on different theoretical approaches and by undertaking a qualitative study about the Swedish Pirate Party. The first source of puzzlement that composes our main research question is the phenomena of how ITs have been taking center stage in recent political disputes, such as controversial legislations in Sweden and abroad (ACTA, Data Retention Directive, etc.), and how a new public became engaged in the formation of a political party regarding these issues. This work will address different theoretical approaches, especially Actor-network Theory, in order to revisit how recent developments in information and communication technologies can be of political relevance. It will thus be proposed a political genealogy of ITs – from the moment they are developed to the moment they result in issues to be debated and resolved in the institutional political arena. It is the latter moment in particular, represented in the research of how the “pirates” make sense of ITs, that will be of significance in this thesis. The focus will be laid upon the role they see themselves playing in this larger process of politicization of ITs and how they are actively translating fundamental political values of democracy and freedom of speech.

Keywords: Pirate Party; Information Technologies; Actor-Network Theory; Issues; Politics

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For every work is a collective work.

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List of abbreviations

ACTA – Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement

ANT – Actor-Network Theory

DLD – Data Retention Directive (from Swedish *Datalagrinsdirektiv*)

ITs – Information Technologies

PP – Pirate Party

STS – Science and Technology Studies

1. Introduction

It is not uncommon to see commentaries and analysis about the key role of online social-networking regarding recent uprisings, whether in Egypt or in Spain, Tunisia or the USA. It is not difficult as well for the majority of us users of the Internet to imagine and understand how communication is flowing and how sharing information, opinion and culture in a wider scale have never been so easy. All of these are recognized beneficial aspects of the information technologies¹, but this appraisal often shows up in the public debate accompanied by a concern about how to keep the Internet open, uncensored and uncontrolled by governments or big corporations. Whereas in the non-western world there are or there have been blatant cases of Internet censorship (for example, the Great Firewall of China or the communication shutdowns during the Arab Spring), we can say that in the core of western democracies the fear of censorship, control and surveillance by powerful actors has also been very present. In the recent years controversial laws that seek to regulate the digital environment are popping up one after another: DMCA, SOPA and PIPA in the USA, the French Hadopi law, IPRED and ACTA in Europe and abroad. One could say that behind this letter soup there is a huge discrepancy between what lawmakers and pressure groups behind them want and what is actually being done online. These policies or laws are concerned to a great extent with enforcing copyright laws and a concept of intellectual property that have been defied by the changes

¹ Throughout this thesis the common term “information and communication technologies”, or ICTs, will be shortened to “information technologies”, or simply ITs.

brought by new information technologies. People are sharing music, films, videos, books and a wide range of copyrighted and non-copyrighted material, and these are the daily online practices behind the conflict foregrounded in the political arena today concerning the regulation of the Internet. Although this is not exactly a discussion about how dictatorships are being threatened by online activism, one may say nevertheless that the possibilities and changes brought by new ITs represent a threat to powerful actors in society, be they governments or the American entertainment industry. Another aspect of these policies is the problematic issue of surveillance, which is on one hand supported by arguments of security, law-enforcement and counter-measures against terrorism, and on the other hand a threat to the privacy and possibility of being anonymous for the average user of the Internet and of other ITs such as mobile phones. One can see therefore how these technologies are acquiring, in different and complex ways, a high political relevance. The emergence of these controversies and disputes signalizes that a wide public is displaying a strong and coordinated resistance against these policies, coming from different actors in civil society: citizens sharing opinions on the Internet and rallying the streets, pressure by NGOs and sometimes even by big corporations (Google and Wikipedia engaging in the SOPA/PIPA case for example). By the very nature of the Internet, a decentralized network that cuts across national borders, policies that are driven within a nation-state (like PIPA and SOPA), tend to become problematic for involving a broader public and encountering international resistance, and policies that aim to work on the supra-national level - after all it is hard to enforce law in a global network - and encompass several nation-states (like ACTA), certainly do not escape the same “problem”, becoming even more a case for concern and international public involvement.

In the midst of discontent and the persistence of controversy regarding these policies and other draconian law projects that seek to regulate the Internet there is one particular phenomenon that stands out, the emergence of Pirate Parties and their growing strength in many European countries. This work will limit itself to the study of only one and the first created, the Swedish Pirate Party (PP). The choice of the PP as an object of study is well suited to address the main question of this thesis, which can be introduced already in its simplest form, as the puzzlement of why and how these issues have become so prominent in the political arena, getting so much attention and debate over the past few years. Why do they matter from the political perspective, why are they being debated now in parliaments and engaging politicians? It will be exposed ahead how the investigation of the Pirate Party will be framed by a larger theoretical discussion and which questions have been posed to this object of study.

1.1 Theoretical approach and research questions

Throughout the thesis the reader will notice that when we talk about politics it will not be exclusively about the conventional actors of politics (parties, politicians, voters, etc.), the usual places (assemblies, parliaments) and institutional arrangements. One of the main discussions to take place here is about how to conceptualize what is political about ITs, and different approaches will be addressed.

One possible suggestion is that the recent revolution in information technologies has changed the way civil society engages in political questions and how collective action requires now much less resources than the old bureaucratized and hierarchical forms (Bimber, 2003; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2000). The typical example is about how protests and other forms of political pressure are more easily organized through social medias. This approach can be summed up by the idea that ITs themselves have altered the means and conditions for political action and reunion, but it still does not fully cover the complexity of how ITs can be politically relevant. For example, how can one decide and try to enforce surveillance laws on the Internet if there are a number of ways for easily circumventing them? This question becomes very concrete with the development of technology that enabled easy file-sharing despite all copyright laws: to what extent are some of the proposed laws useful, legitimate or effective in any way if there are clear social tendencies/norms (Larsson and Svensson, 2010) and user-friendly technologies, like encryption, proxies and softwares to preserve full anonymity on the Internet, to disrespect the law and become untraceable? One might ask: is it possible that politics has already being done by other means, decisions are being made or determined in other levels, for example that of software-coding and technological development on the online world? Where is then the space of actual deliberation and democratic politics when it comes to issues related to information technologies, if not exactly inside parliaments? To put it in another way, to what extent can we usefully and legitimately deliberate about the use and creation of ITs within the framework provided by our political institutions? What can possibly be within those limits and what cannot?

These questions introduce another way to think about how technologies can be political. The theme of how technology changes society is at the core of our discussion, a theme that has inspired the development of the so-called Actor-Network Theory (ANT). From an ANT perspective, every bit of innovation, every new technological object or scientific discovery introduces new actors, new meanings and maybe new conflicts in the world, to a smaller or larger degree. This particular but very broad meaning of politics is what Bruno Latour calls cosmopolitics: “the building of the cosmos in which everyone lives, the progressive composition of the common world” (Latour, 2004). This progressive composition of the common world can take different forms (a scientific

research, the making of a policy, a public debate, the creation of a new technology, etc.), and is obviously a broad notion of politics which implies change and redefinition of the actors and their roles in our collective life, specially the creation of new actors. That is the sense alluded here in which ITs can be politically relevant: not just when citizens, politicians and lobbyists are battling over a piece of legislation that would dictate what should or should not be done online, but since the very moment a technology is in its process of creation, defining what its program of action will be and the people it will enroll. Cosmopolitics, according to the interpretation given here, can be either an act of quietly and consensually changing a state of affairs or loudly and disputably doing that, which then could be the case of a typical political issue. We should not lose sight of the particular phenomenon that is the object of study here: these new actors of technology, that already deeply reconfigured the world we live in, are now entering new grounds of dispute, namely that of “conventional” or institutional politics. Recently scholars in the field have turned their attention to reassessing political theory and proposing studies of political processes based on the insights and methods previously developed in studies of science and technology. Not only Latour (2004, 2007) himself, but Marres (2004, 2005) is another example of the references used in this thesis to explain how democratic politics can be better understood not so much by its institutions and the procedures for decision-making, but rather by the issues and their trajectories – that is to say, what is being discussed, where and by whom; what are the things and the public involved and how they change along the way. In this sense, this thesis will try to answer the question of how ITs are becoming a political issue, an object of traditional politics. It will be possible to see how much of the technologies, which already had a cosmopolitical impact in our world, have become entangled with other actors, becoming issues, matters of concern, “problems” and also possibilities in the field of politics.

That being said, these are the theoretical tools that will be used in these thesis to explore the wider question of how information technologies are becoming politically relevant. Particularly, we will research this processes through a couple of more delimited research questions that take into account the perspective of the Pirate Party:

- How are ITs important to the Pirate Party and how do they relate to their fundamental principles uniting them as a party?

The aim of this question is to understand what makes a public concerned with these issues mobilize politically in the form of a party, in other words, why the Pirate Party. We will see that the PP is giving a renewed meaning to certain known values of the democratic political vocabulary (such as freedom of speech, democracy, civil liberties, etc.) by associating them with how these ITs are being used and to which purposes they should or should not be used. What follows below is how this empirical analysis will lead to a thesis statement.

1.2 Research aims and thesis statement

There are basically two aims with this research that were implicitly referred to, but that I would like to resume in a more straightforward way.

- The first one is a much more empirical and exploratory: to provide an account of how the Internet and more broadly Information Technologies are becoming an important matter of concern in politics and how the Pirate Party is an important expression of this process.
- The second task is intimately related to the first one and can be understood more abstractly and in relation to theory. It is to delineate a sort of political genealogy of ITs, by revisiting the concept of political already developed by previous approaches and describing how ITs and the Pirate Party might possibly reconfigure the field of traditional politics.

The latter can be considered the main statement and will be presented as part of the conclusion. To put it in other words, this thesis argues for a more nuanced understanding of how information technologies can perform the political in different and interconnected levels, and sets out to explain how the emergence of a phenomenon like the Pirate Party can also be understood under this framework. It is also consistent with what ANT has argued so far that technology (and science for that matter) brings new actors into the world by rearranging the existing ones. By the same means, when ITs become part of an issue or a political dispute, they can potentially rearrange and modify other actors of politics. Our inquiry into the PP will show just that, how the broader social changes brought by ITs have created a concerned public and how these issues are potentially changing or rearranging not only the ways of doing politics, as it was discussed previously, but our very notions of democratic politics.

2. Methodology

This research is supported basically by two methods/techniques: interviews with active members of the PP and an analysis of written material collected online, such as newspaper articles and documents produced by the pirates. Apart from being qualitative, the techniques applied here share a common philosophical ground, that of constructivism (Bryman, 2012). These methods will be used at certain points of the empirical discussion in an overlapping manner, with the purpose of complementing each other, but they certainly provide this thesis with different materials and serve

different purposes. This will be exposed below in details.

Before moving on to how the methods were deployed we will quickly expose what the “epistemological” assumptions of this thesis are. The broad notion of constructivism lying behind these methods presupposes that social reality is something constructed and not given or transcendental. This assumption is accepted and the different techniques mentioned below are used to explore how a particular group of people is engaged in a disputed construction of reality. There are however some aspects that can be problematized in the notion of constructivism, which I take from Actor-Network Theory. It should be clear the notion of *social* constructivism can bring with it a fixed idea of the social that assumes social explanations for phenomena, instead of assuming that the social itself is what needs to be explained, what is actually being constructed by the phenomenon to be studied (Latour, 2005). What this means in terms of methods is that the political – part of the main question here – as much as the social, is not a given and can only be explained by what the actors are doing or saying. In other words, this thesis aims towards a much more exploratory and descriptive account of how politics is being done by the Pirate Party rather than reducing it to a tight set of idea of how politics works and how it would supposedly shape the ideas and worldviews being analyzed. It is not politics that defines what the actors do but, on the contrary, it is what the actors do that defines what politics is made of.

2.1 Meeting some pirates, establishing some contacts

It is important to describe how I first got in touch with the object of study of this thesis, the Pirate Party, and got to establish some contacts for interviews that proved to be useful later when I decided to write this thesis. The impressions I had from this meeting are also another interesting feature to describe since they give us a quick contextual picture of the pirate’s concerns and help us introduce the discussion of how people are engaging politically in these matters of concern.

It was the beginning of 2011 when, out of curiosity, I went to a local meeting of the Pirate Party in Gothenburg, which was an informal occasion where pirates from the region gather to discuss politics – so-called *piratfika*. It was at the Café Gnutiken, which is coincidentally located right in front of our campus and I could barely speak Swedish. What I remember from that encounter is that it was not what I expected from a political meeting. When one talks about a party reunion it is easy to imagine an audience or a big table of people discussing and deliberating, very often about bureaucratic and organizational procedures. I am not suggesting that the PP does not have its moments very typical of a bureaucratic organization – the little I saw from the International PP meeting this year when it was live streamed on the Internet resembled much more this conventional picture – but the meeting I attended was far from it. There was only half a dozen

people having a loose conversation about various topics, more like friends gathering. There were obviously no hot topics at the time, no manifestations against controversial laws or elections coming soon. Anyhow, the context of the meeting was very interesting and says a lot about the affinities of the PP. Gnutiken used to be a Café where ecological products were sold with no fixed price (now they are renting out the space of the Café and keeping the space of the office), and still is a cooperative that provides services and courses related to Ubuntu and free-software² (hence the name inspired in the GNU project, an operating system free to be used, modified, studied and distributed). Parallel to the *piratfika* there was a meeting of the Fripost³ occurring. Fripost is an organization for maintaining an e-mail service which is fully controlled by the users, where all the data and information is not collected and semantically analyzed by the service provider for marketing purposes, as it is, for example, the case with Google's Gmail.

So, just in one single place during a regular weekday we could find different groups of people concerned each in their own way with how information technologies are being used, developed, appropriated and shared. That gives us a glimpse of a fraction of a much wider movement, global to be sure, of people engaging themselves politically (in the wide sense of the term, discussed in the following chapter) in questions regarding the material components of our everyday lives.

Finally, it is important make clear to the reader what my subjective involvement with the theme is, since it can clearly influence the choices made in during the research process and influence the outcome. Even if I do not consider myself some sort of activist, I am, like many of us, a person highly dependent on the Internet and on computers and I have always been interested in the social and political implications of ITs, always accompanying the quarrels about file-sharing, online economy, "hacktivism" and so on. Given that a study about the PP could imply different questions and different approaches (some examples are given in section 4.2), so what is provided here is certainly a partial account that is, among other things, a reflection of my background of personal interests.

2.2 Written material and discourses

Taking Wodak (2010) as a reference and the distinction between discourse and text we can roughly say that the thesis will deal with the discourse of the Pirate Party and how it is expressed in

² There will be more references in this work to free-software. For the moment it is enough to point out that free-software is not only a way of licensing and distributing a software but also an enactment of moral values and ideals, or a "philosophy" so to speak. See <http://www.fsf.org> and <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/philosophy.html>

³ See <http://.fripost.org>

different texts. “*Discourse* implies patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures whereas *text* is a specific and unique realization of a discourse” (Wodak, 2010:6, italics in original). This broad definition of discourse as part of a meaning-making process will allow us to see how these patterns and commonalities of knowledge are constructed and reinforced throughout different texts, even though the method of gathering discursive material will not be aimed towards a linguistic analysis, but rather in the sense of seeking an answer to our more specific research question of how the pirates are making sense of political issues involving ITs. More specifically, we will be looking at how the pirates see ITs in a politicized manner (their importance, how they should be regulated or not, how they can be dangerous or liberating, etc.) and how the pirates enact some fundamental political values in relation to these views. In relation to our main research question, which lies on a more abstract level, it will be argued that these discursive connections and associations (later on referred to as translations) are an important part in a wider process of politicization of ITs.

Hence, it should be obvious by now that one important criterion for the selection of these texts is the authorship: what was written *by* the pirates, and not just *about* the pirates. The main sources of texts are their official website (Program of Principles), articles published online on the media and articles published on blogs. Access to these materials was by means of resources online, such as search engines of main media publications, but most importantly by subscribing to Pirate Party’s mailing list, which sends out regularly newsfeeds with relevant links to texts and articles published online, among other things. A lot of material could have been included but the second criterion for the selection of a only a few takes into consideration the ones that addressed the main political issues that mobilize the Pirate Party and engage them in a debate aimed towards a wider public, which is also why their authors are usually notorious pirates who have greater visibility. There is a reason for this particular strategy in this research design: basically to understand how their discourse is aiming to engage more people in the public debate about the issues they are concerned with.

The selection of these texts may certainly be a limitation in my account: one can argue if these texts are representative of the discourses and worldviews of other pirates out there or if other voices are being left out and dissent is being omitted. As is the case with any party and political organization, one should expect dissent at many levels, but there is certainly a ‘glue’ that holds them together. It is expected that this common discourse (in the sense presented above) will come through the texts selected here, especially when it comes to the political qualities they attribute to ITs.

Finally, it is important to stress that the analysis of this written material will follow ANT’s social ontology in order to make explicit the connections and associations usually made by the pirates in these texts. These connections and associations will be pointed out not only as their meaning-making process but also as an action that seeks to redefine what these ITs are and what

political values are, which will be argued to be a defining moment in the political genealogy of ITs. Based on our theoretical approach it will be assumed that the construction of a social reality is not solely based on discourses – for example, the Internet does not become important to democracy *just because* the pirates say so. Rather, the discourses themselves are dependent on a material world, but they are not merely a reflection of matters of fact – as if the PP is just exposing a truth that is independent of what they say. Rather, these discourses are struggling to alter a certain state of affairs and to shape the reality by means of enacting certain associations. This is again a constructivist feature and assumption of this thesis.

2.3 Interviews

Interviews were in-depth and explorative, and therefore fairly unstructured. A guide was used, but flexibility was strived for (Bryman, 2012:472). It served mostly as a reminder of the topics and the questions I wanted to ask and suffered changes throughout the interviews. As one can see in the table below, some of them were fairly long. Whenever possible I tried to let my interviewees speak as freely as possible. This was in order to have a broader picture of the person's opinions in relation to the PP and to the specific political issues that the party is concerned with. Yet, however unstructured it might have been, a couple of questions were present from the beginning and the answers I got were important to address the main question of this thesis. Questions of the most relevance were: "Why did you get involved in the PP?"; "Why is a party necessary (instead of acting politically by other means)?" and "what is the impact the PP has had so far?". The answers to these questions were important not only in relation to the theoretical discussion on "sub-politics" or "cosmopolitics", as it will be discussed, but they also revealed the importance attributed by the pirates in organizing themselves politically and the relevance they see in the issues concerning ITs. Besides these questions it was obviously much discussed about their personal thoughts on some of the main issues occupying the PP (policies and laws regulating the Internet, file-sharing, surveillance and the potentials of information and communication technologies), which contributed as well to the empirical section.

Regarding the sampling, a snowball method was utilized, beginning with one of the pirates whom I met in the meeting I attended to and then moving forward in their personal network of contacts. Even though my interviewees did not require anonymity, as a rule of thumb I do not state names, because their identities are not relevant to what is specifically being quoted. The table below shows a quick profile of each one. The main criteria used for selecting my interviewees was choosing those who are or at least were (just the case of one) active somehow in the party. By active

it is meant that either they occupy an official position at the party or take part in discussions, “piratfikas”, the online forum or manifestations.

| # | Relation to the party | Gender | Age | Professional or education background | Duration |
|---|---|--------|-----|--------------------------------------|----------|
| 1 | Was responsible for the local young pirates, no longer active | M | 24 | Automation engineer | 40' |
| 2 | Has been a candidate and the regional leader | M | 40+ | Entrepreneur in the field of ITs | 45' |
| 3 | Assistant of a MEP | M | 32 | Political science | 33' |
| 4 | Member and activist | F | 55 | Social worker | 50' |
| 5 | Member and activist | M | 32 | Free Software developer | 68' |
| 6 | Member and activist | M | 20 | Physics student | 20' |

There are a couple of noteworthy things in the profile of the interviewees. First, and possibly a shortcoming, is the fact that the great majority is male. This is in part a reflection of the non-proportional number of women in the party and the reasons to this have been thoroughly discussed in the public debate⁴. This gender inequality in number of members could certainly be the topic of another thesis, but we assume that gender will be left as an open question and falls out of the scope of this thesis. Second, at least half of the interviewees have a professional background clearly related to ITs. There was not a significant difference however in the way they attribute a social and political significance to ITs, even comparing the least interested to the most interest and knowledgeable. This aspect will be better explained later.

Interviews were recorded and conducted in Swedish – quotes in the original language will appear as footnotes.

⁴ Some examples of an older discussion on this question can be found here:
<http://www.expressen.se/ledare/johannes-forssberg-var-ar-brudarna/>
<http://infallsvinkel.wordpress.com/2009/05/14/piratpartiet-lockar-kvinnor-i-tusental/>
<http://opassande.se/2009/05/14/mansdominansen-i-piratpartiet/>

3. Theoretical discussion

This chapter will be mainly about the theoretical basis that the thesis is founded upon. It is also an important discussion on how to make sense of the data collected in this work, since it also deals with some concepts to be used from Actor-Network Theory. First, we will see different theoretical approaches that explore the relation between politics and information technologies, introduce the discussion on the notion of politics and see how this thesis would fit and relate in this broader perspective. At a second moment, we will review the specific notions of technology and of society, suggested by different authors in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), by exploring some of the traditional texts in Actor-Network Theory. Finally, better informed by the concepts discussed, we will put forward a notion of politics to be developed in this particular study and the questions that can be derived from it as relevant to the study of the Pirate Party.

3.1 Approaches to rethink politics in the information age

Politics is no longer defined as it used to be, and this is due partly to the emergence of new information technologies. Let's begin with the concept of *subpolitics*, as suggested by Ulrich Beck (1997), to rethink politics in a broader sense, and then move on to see how information technologies fit in this picture and what kind of role they might play according to other authors.

The main idea that Beck wants to stress is that politics cannot be equated with the state, with governmental agencies, political careers, parties, a parliament and so on. Subpolitics draws our attention to what is beyond and outside the traditional arena where politics is expected to be found, asserting that “the themes of the future, which are now on everyone's lips, did not originate from the far-sightedness of the rulers or from parliamentary struggle – and certainly not from the cathedrals of power in business, science and the state” (Beck, 1997:100). It is important to keep in mind that Beck is thinking often of examples like the environmental movement and even extreme nationalisms (as an example that subpolitics is not necessarily an optimistic and hopeful theory of the revival of grassroots politics) as some of these themes that originated outside the established institutions. Likewise, it will be discussed here later on that the pirate issues about the Internet are similar in their subpolitical character, even though we are investigating here a form of political organization that fits the traditional picture of a government and its institutions. The notion of subpolitics can be useful in a general sense for our question of where issues concerning information

technologies are emerging from. In a more specific sense, one way to make sense of how technologies are redefining politics in the so-called information age is to assess the impact they have been having on political processes.

Bruce Bimber for example analyzes how technological change contributes toward information abundance, which in turn contributes toward postbureaucratic forms of politics. By postbureaucratic forms of politics he means that “as information grows more abundant and communication costs fall, collective action can more readily be initiated by actors with more modest access to material resources. In principle, collective efforts might even be self-organizing under conditions of information abundance. This implies increased opportunities for collective action by organization-poor or even organization-less groups” (Bimber, 2003:101). One of the features of this postbureaucratic form of politics, which no longer entails centralized coordination and distribution of information, is reflected on the way citizens engage in politics through different interest groups, meaning that group membership in traditional institutions or organizations, such as parties and unions, has declined⁵ (Bennett, 1998). The question of participation and engagement is one of the topics analyzed by Bennett, who undermines the thesis of political apathy and disengagement, saying that civic culture is not fading, but assuming new forms. But naturally the question that pops to mind is: which forms are these? Bennett and Segerberg (2012) try to give an answer and describe the new forms of political engagement and action through what they call the logic of connective action, which are coherent with Bimber’s notion of a postbureaucratic politics, in terms of not requiring so much organizational resources to be mobilized,. What they argue is that this alternative emerging model “applies increasingly to life in late modern societies in which institutions are losing their grip on authority and group ties are being replaced by large scale, fluid social networks.” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012:8). Thus, political engagement takes a new preponderant shape with the help of the Internet and social networks: personalized communication, event-directed and loose ties between different groups such as NGOs, social movements and individuals that do not wish to be a full member and commit to a specific political organization in order to participate. This description is in a sense similar to what Bimber describes as postbureaucratic pluralism, where “the structure of collective action is less tightly coupled than in the past to a marketplace of formal political organizations. Interest organizations exist, to be sure, but the patterns and structures of collective action are less reflective and representative of traditional organizational boundaries and forms” (Bimber, 2003:104).

⁵ These studies (Bimber and Bennet) are conducted in the USA, but the authors argue that these are long-run trends that could be fairly transposed to Western European nations.

That being said, this particular study about how a party is created and what it stands for could be in a sense representative of the theories above of postbureaucratic forms of organization and of the logic of connective action, if we overlook the fact that the PP is a party (!), but their way of organizing themselves have some correspondence to these theories. The focus of this study, however, is to understand another dimension of the relation between information technologies and politics. It does not contradict, but complements what has been shown above in another form. This study about the Pirate Party is not so much about how the activists in the party are organizing and pulling the party together (although that is also interesting and relevant), but about the specific issues that work as a motor for the party's existence. That is to say, if the revolution of information technologies has created a new paradigm for the organization of society and its inner relations (Castells, 2000), including how political action is conceived. This same revolution or conditions created by ITs are now becoming a topic of political discussion among others topics. The approach that follows does not study ITs specifically as the means or as the material base that alters or creates new conditions for participation and organization of politics, but rather as an issue or matter of concern in itself that is coming from the subpolitical and entering the traditional political arena as we know it. It will be argued that following this entrance some notions of democratic politics are also being changed, in accord with what was exposed above, but the approach for showing this will focus on the specific moment when information technologies become a matter of political discussion, rather than lying in the backstage of political action. In the next section, the theoretical bedrock for this approach will be presented and subsequently our discussion of politics (what do we mean when we talk about politics after all?) will be refined theoretically.

3.2 On Actor-Network Theory

To begin with, there are some very basic questions that are often unformulated or simply taken for granted, but that must be dealt with in order to understand a phenomenon like the Pirate Party. If we do not properly theorize the interplay between the material/technology and the human/society, we might not be able to grasp the different stances where the political is being performed, as it will be argued later. These questions are certainly old, but have been for the last decades they reformulated anew by scholars in STS; what is the relationship between technology and society, how is technology itself shaped by social relations and political circumstances and how does it work the other way around, when technology becomes a factor in shaping the social and the political? Although some of these questions have been partially covered by the theories presented above (when it comes particularly to information technologies), another empirical approach is

possible and it will be discussed through examples of some classic studies in the field.

One of the most important contributions in this field is, roughly put, the idea that technology and science are socially constructed - which does not mean that they can be reduced to a mere product of a social context. Purely sociological explanations are not enough to account for the agency of objects in science and technology (any material that might be referred to as “non-human” in the STS) and, likewise and symmetrically, purely epistemological explanations ignore the process and the history of these objects that were only made possible by the associations with actors beyond the laboratory where they were created. It is not easy and worth to summarize here the complexity of an argument and of a method that has been elaborated and deployed for a couple of decades now, but some empirical examples taken from the literature might do the job of making this discussion less abstract.

The *Pasteurization of France* (1988), by Bruno Latour, is our first example of how to speak of science-in-the-making in terms of actor-networks instead of either facts coming to light or of overwhelming social structures defining a scientific outcome. Latour shows how the birth of the microbes as a fact was the product of a work done by Pasteur that crossed through scientific, economic and political boundaries. Pasteur succeeded not only by making rigorous experiments in his laboratory, but the outcome of his experiments also depended deeply on aligning with and translating the interests of other actors, such as farmers, the public hygiene movement, colonialism etc. On the other hand, it would not be enough to say that the microbes themselves were a direct product of this specific social context and could be reduced to it, since they also play a part, they acquire further reality and reshape the French society when adopted in other practices as simple as heating the milk over a certain temperature and preventing people from spitting on the streets. In fact, the very construction of a scientific fact like this (the identification of a living entity in the world with specific characteristics, generally called microbe) is the result of different and heterogeneous experiments within and beyond the laboratory (see Latour and Woolgar, 1986, Latour, 1987). Thus, the scientific work of Pasteur is depicted both as socially embedded and as reshaping a larger social context and the idea of a network aligning human and non-human actors is used to express the formation of certain social order.

Our second example makes it clearer how a description of “society” is inherently depending on the material or everything else that is socialized as non-human. Michel Callon presents the case of the construction of an electric motor by the EDF (Electricité de France). It was predicted by this group of engineer-sociologists - as Callon calls them to stress how they also propose historical and sociological theses in their work - that the electric motor that was being designed would fit well into

the incipient post-industrial society of the early 70's, with consumers engaged in sustainability and not caring about the car as a symbol of status. The success of the electric vehicle would then depend on the alignment of different actors, not only human individuals or groups like consumers, car manufacturers, and governmental agencies, but also material/technical like catalysts and batteries. As we can see, some actors enrolled by the EDF (the project designer) might be as big and abstract as "the whole of French society" or as small and concrete as electrons and catalysts, but the size does not matter, as long these actors remain stable and act according to the role assigned to them. That is, of course, often not the case when we are talking of science and technology *in action* (Latour, 1988). Any scientific work or technology not fully developed and still in progress can be characterized by the instability of actors and the precarious relations that are continuously put to test. Actors themselves are endowed with complexity, which is why they are also considered networks (thus "actor-network") that in practice require simplification. It is clear then that for this reason they might not follow the program of action that is assigned to them, meaning that "simplifications will be maintained so long as other entities do not appear that render the world more complex by stigmatizing the reality proposed by them as an impoverished betrayal" (Callon, 1987:94). To exemplify, in the case presented by Callon, one actor that resisted this simplification in the network tried out by this technological project was Renault, which resisted the role assigned to them of only manufacturing car bodies for the electric vehicles. This would have made a case easily explainable through the lens of traditional sociology. But another actor that appeared to be resistant to simplification and more complex than the program of action initially conceived was the battery design, which did not presented the durability desired to keep other actors "interested" in it. Any explanation that does not consider the role played by the object in sustaining or disrupting the proposed network is therefore insufficient.

The interesting thing about the concept of actor-network is that it stresses how different entities are defined and may acquire stable characteristics only in relation to another, through a work of translation (another important concept that will be presented).

"The actor network should not [...] be confused with a network linking in some predictable fashion elements that are perfectly well defined and stable, for the entities it is composed of, whether natural or social, could at any moment redefine their identity and mutual relationships in some new way and bring new elements into the network. An actor network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of" (Callon, 1987:93)

Thus Callons stresses the feature of instability entailed by the notion of an actor-network.

Pointing this out makes perfect sense in the study of scientific controversies and of technology in the making, but this absolutely does not mean that there are not very stable actor networks out there conferring reality to our social lives (Latour, 1999). The notion of a network can be used to explain provisory networks that are being tested out and constructed in science and technology, that are first local, uncertain and may fail, but that often succeed, acquire more reality and expand to the point of becoming global. Well-defined and stable actor-networks have been understood for a long time by scholars within ANT, especially when it comes to describing the closure of a scientific controversy and the settlement of a technology in our everyday lives, what elsewhere is called “blackboxing” (Latour, 1987). A black-box is a good example of these very stable actor-networks that are silently acting in a fairly predictable fashion in our lives: from the computer I’m typing in right now to the well-packed cheese you are buying tonight at the supermarket⁶. Think of the networks composing each one of them (whose description is only limited by our imagination): the micro-technology of chips, processors and memories, the silicon from the mines into these micro-components, the assembly line with low-waged workers somewhere in China, the research labs and computer designers at Silicon Valley and so on, in the case of the former; the work of the farmers (and of the cow), the dairy factory (where even the work of Pasteur done over a century ago is somehow present), the plastic factory that provides the recipient for the final product, transportation logistics, and the labeling system in the supermarket, in the case of the latter. This is just a very basic and extremely limited list of an infinity of actors, usually silent and discrete, but that are aligned and working more or less harmoniously in a network that extends over time and space. All of this is comprised in one small actor, a black-box that might be unfolded into a network of actors which by their turn can unfolded into other networks of actors. Theoretically the list is endless.

However, it is crucial to notice that studies in ANT are not usually preoccupied with describing all of these chains of associations making up an already stable network. The focus is usually on the process, on unstable networks and on how different elements are being assembled together. This is why the concept of *translation* is important to the process. Translation is all about how heterogeneous actors are associated, and, as we can see in the cases chosen above, it can occur among many different actors – for example when the microbes presented by Pasteur became interesting and necessary for the hygienist movement as a condition for a healthier France, when the project of the electric vehicle was considered initially the most viable solution to non-pollution – but it can also fail sometimes – for example when Renault did not accept being translated as a mere manufacturer of car bodies or when the batteries did not present the durability intended to a car that

⁶ Obviously the notion of black box is specially tailored for perfect functioning machines and technologies, but theoretically there is nothing wrong in using this concept for a cheese, even though it may sound strange

could perform in long distances.

Another very simple example presented by Latour (1991) makes clear the notion of translation. A weight on the key of a hotel room placed there by the hotel manager is an important element that translates and strengthens the hotel manager's wish for the guests to leave the key at the reception after leaving their rooms. It may be not enough to keep most of the guests from taking the key by simply putting on a sign "leave the keys at the desk", but the big and uncomfortable weight on the key, along with the sign and constant warnings, further translates the will of the manager. Hence, a network or a chain of associations is created through a series of translations so that the actor guest-who-forgets-the-key is finally turned into the actor guest-who-will-likely-place-the-key-at-the-desk. Translation means also transforming actors as they carry out their association with other actors. This specific feature will come back in our empirical analysis of how the PP is transforming some particular political values by aligning them with technological features of our contemporary society.

To sum up the point made so far, some conceptual tools provided by ANT can be used not only to give an accurate and empirical account of how technology and society are intertwined, in the sense that there is no possible reductionism that can be made to one or another sphere, but how the concept of society itself can now be reformulated in terms of complex and heterogeneous associations that necessarily include non-humans (Latour, 2005). We cannot think and explain our contemporary society without acknowledging the role that the Internet, for example, is playing. But one might ask at this moment, how is this of any relevance to the analysis of the Pirate Party as a political phenomenon? Not only the fact that the PP is deeply aware of this interaction between information technologies and significant social change - and hence the importance of having laws and regulations more adequate to the reality of online interactions - but the fact that the PP can be seen in terms of an active translator that brings new actors (the Internet, file-sharers, online citizens, etc.) into politics and seeks to redefine some core values while doing politics. We come now to a point where a more careful analysis is required to figure out what exactly we mean when we talk about politics.

3.3 Issues and matters of concern

So far the main argument that has been developed in the tradition of STS, has been presented, namely the necessary presence and active role of objects and non-human entities in the composition of society. The reason for that discussion is mainly to put forward some concepts and a

framework by which an empirical analysis of the PP can be done. It has however not yet addressed directly the main theoretical questions in this thesis, and in order to do that it is necessary to review a recent shift towards the question of politics in the field of STS.

Let's first begin with a notion of politics that is easily inferable from ANT and many studies in science and technology. From the cases mentioned above, especially from the history of Pasteur and the impact his science had on French society, it seems like the political aspect is always present when it comes to reformulating through scientific work the world understood and shared by everyone. Suddenly new invisible entities enter the scene, affect the most banal everyday practices in terms of hygiene, shift around the way we conceive health and enhance the productivity of some economic activities. That is indeed a process that Latour recognizes as doing politics by other means, far away from the traditional institutional arrangement making up politics. Cosmopolitics is the term used by this author to refer to the progressive composition of a common world (Latour, 2004), which is coherent with the argument that science and technology are inherently political. It is actually not recent the idea that these boundaries of human-machine, society and nature, should be contested in order to see where the political struggles lie. The extensively read essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), by Donna Haraway, has inspired further feminist and anthropological studies that take in consideration how technical apparatuses, human bodies, values and relationships are intertwined in this freaky figure called cyborg.

"The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (Haraway, 1985:150)

Let's turn to a concrete example now and see how "imagination and material reality" are put together and how politics are built into things, an example that might also help us understand part of the ideology and demands of the Pirate Party. Christopher Kelty (2005) in his ethnography about geeks argues how technical activities as the coding of software or implementing network protocols are intimately associated with principles of social and moral order for these geeks. Openness, for example, is an important moral value that is enacted not only discursively, when people are talking about it, but also in practical terms by writing open-source/free softwares and protocols. In that sense, the author draws a parallel to the liberal thinking of J.S. Mill, who sees the right to state an opinion is fundamental in a democratic process, where different opinions can be questioned, contested, scrutinized, adopted and so forth, so that the best one will stand out. The same procedure works for these geeks when coding open-source/free softwares. But above all, Kelty stresses how these geeks form a sort of public (what he calls recursive) that is dedicated to maintaining and

recreating the very means of their association, that is, the Internet. Without talking and writing codes openly, the Internet as they know it would not be possible, with limited flow and exchange of ideas, and this particular public referred to as geeks would not be able to associate and organize itself in order to facilitate even further an open Internet. Therefore, Kelty pursues an approach very similar to the one proposed here, asking related questions: “How are shared ideas filtered through particular technical and legal structures that both constrain and make possible new forms of affiliation and challenge existing understandings of political life? How are these technical and legal structures the products as well as the targets of groups who imagine in common a particular mode of association and political speech?” (Kelty, 2005:188)

As we will see in the next chapter, these answers will be answered as if transposed to the Pirate Party. Although there is a clear difference in the approach towards the Internet by the PP and the geeks – with the former having an agenda of having people elected to directly impact the legal structure behind the Internet - these are certainly not completely different publics, of course, so that it is no coincidence that the moral values concerning the Internet are frequently the same or overlap. But the difference should be stressed: we are talking about a political party and not the act of writing software, and this lead us to some critical questions present in recent political thinking by some scholars in STS.

What sense is to be made of politics if it is to be found inside the laboratory, on the writing of a software, on a distribution license, or even inscribed in the body (as the feminist movements and academics have long shown)? We should be aware that the slogan “everything is political” is true but it does not say much, even when it comes to stating that every technology is political (Bijker, 2006). Yet, it does help to recognize that there are different ways for anything, as an example technology, to be political. It helps recognizing first that the adjective political can be applied to different settings and contexts. For example, it can be a political act how one chooses a Creative Commons license to release a video on the Internet instead of using common proprietary copyright license, but in a whole different way than the political of voting for a party that wants to encourage open licenses and reform copyright. What remains political, again following our definition of being a matter of concern (Latour, 2004, 2005), is the particular issue that may or may not become an institutional matter, something that is brought into a parliament, a party program or on the table of policy-makers. By putting the focus on the issues themselves we gain a much richer perspective than focusing strictly on the institutional setting and the rules of the game of doing politics. This is precisely what has been pointed out by some STS authors: that democratic politics can no longer be understood as a foundational category that might help us organize the political life,

whether in the *polis* or in a globalized world, but rather should be taken as an empirical practice that respects no predetermined settings or forms of deliberation. The suggestion is that in order to understand political practices and controversies, one should not only stick to the institutional framework that (ideally) should embrace a public concerned in deliberating about something; and if it fails to address the question, to ask eventually how it should be reformed (or how new institutions should be created) in order to include more voices and have the decision-making process as democratic as possible. In that sense, going back to authors like Beck and Held, who suggest a crisis in national political institutions, Marres states the following:

“In their formulation of actual remedies for the crisis of political institutions, they refrain from granting the issues a role. When it comes to the solutions for “institutional deficits”, the above political theorists shift the analysis to a more structural level, that of underlying political arrangements. The remedies they propose target on the one hand the design of political institutions, and on the other hand, the architecture of what they call a global public sphere”. (Marres, 2004:129)

What Marres is asserting is *not* that we should not be concerned with how different political institutions are designed, or that they are simply irrelevant, but rather that it is not possible to account for democratic politics if we do not follow the trajectory of issues, the different sites and settings enabling a issue and its publics (Marres, 2007). The case study by Gomart and Hajer (2002) about an urban planning policy in the region of Hoekshe Waard in the Netherlands is an example of how different *settings* and *forms* enabled the issue to be developed, to involve a public and how they actually made possible a final design for a policy that contemplated and *translated* successfully the concern of different actors. Only by experimenting and shifting through different settings – politicians and businessmen working on a policy, designers and architects making an exhibition of their own projects, debates organized by local people – it was possible at the end to achieve a successful democratic outcome. No pre-established form was given that would best fit as a deliberation model for the area affected, closing the controversy and making everyone satisfied, but it took different experiments, different actors and assemblies to be tested out. It began in a typical place where politics is done and decisions are made and went through an art exhibition where the issue really got its momentum. The policy and matter of concern suffered transformations along the path, as it entangled new actors and created a new public. If we remember the ontology proposed by ANT, it is coherent that an issue or a public is constituted through their associations with other actors and thus are translated into something else in the process.

What has been argued is that politics understood as a set of procedures and structures for representation and decision-making covers only half the problem, and that the other half remains

unexplained if we do not turn our attentions to the very objects of politics, the matters of concern. How to account otherwise for what is political in sub-politics (De Vries, 2007)? Despite some different philosophical traditions mobilized for that⁷, the point remains the same and can be summarized as it follows: there is no politics in the absence of issues, of matters of concern. Democratic politics is usually thought of as a politics of who – who is having their voices heard, who has the authority of representing a group and who will actually deliberate on the matter – but that is argued to be incomplete if we do not also see it as a politics of what (Mol, 2002).

To be coherent with the ontology proposed by ANT it should be clear that an issue does not remain the same when it circulates from one setting to another, addressing different publics and entangling different actors. That is why Marres (2004) argues for tracing the trajectories of issues, where the political can again be described differently in different moments. Latour (2007) makes an interesting point about that by distinguishing these moments. For example, one moment was seen in the examples above of how a project for an electric car or an experiment on a laboratory can be political, a stage which has been detected and described by ANT and STS. In this moment the mere presence of new actors brought in by science and technology disturbs the ordinary collective of human and non-humans that make up society, it *changes* something, as small as these changes may be. It is certainly not political in the same way as lobbying for a policy in the national parliament, but it is political in a sense closer, for example, to geeks creating the Bittorrent protocol and consequently changing the possibility of sharing files on the Internet and therefore creating a nightmare for the entertainment industry. Another moment of the political may be classified when a problem arises, something that the ordinary routines of government or science (or whatever the sphere) cannot handle and then a concerned public is created and gets involved. Maybe in that sense we can still stick to the example just mentioned, when a massive amount of lawsuits against file-sharers starts to flood the courts of justice and the issue cannot be settled by these institutions of the law, since the laws about copyright infringement on the Internet are still unclear, outdated, open to interpretation or controversial in many countries. Yet another moment of the political that Latour points out is more familiar to us, which he refers to as the Habermasian moment, when an issue enters the arena where communicative action is expected and where citizens can reasonably deliberate about that issue in a proper assembly. This moment resembles more what is theorized about democratic politics and its institutions, when for example the people's representatives are debating laws on the parliament or when we elect a president. This can obviously be considered as well and not disregarded as a possible fate for an issue or matter of concern.

⁷ De Vries (2007) argues for the idea of *praxis* in Aristotle while Latour (2007) debates with his choice and argues instead for a pragmatist approach that can be traced back to Dewey and Lippman.

Finally, not to get lost in the mess of theoretical references, abstractions and examples presented here, it is important to sum up the main points and arguments discussed so far and connect them to what will be discussed ahead concerning the object of this research.

First, the conceptual tools provided by ANT were deployed to analyze the intricate relationship between technology (the material) and society. By avoiding any form of sociological or technological reductionism, the actor-network was presented as a concept that can account for simultaneous changes in technology and society, showing that actors can only acquire stability, identity, and agency by connecting with others. The concept of translation covers the idea of the work done by actors in association with each other – a design for a hotel key that translates a human wish, hygienic measures that translate the discovery of microorganisms in the laboratory, a project for an electric vehicle that translates a post-industrial society, and so on. It is important to note that these translations might be successful or not, provisional and, if permanent, requiring a constant work of maintenance. Following this conceptual path we will see ahead how the Pirate Party is a relevant actor in the translation of technologies, policies and values.

Second, a notion of (cosmo)politics was put forward as an overarching idea that refers to the progressive composition of a common world. This very broad notion encompasses apparently banal practices such as coding software and, at the same time, the normal and traditional procedures of deliberative democracy. It was discussed that in order to value the notion of subpolitical and not only stick to the political being performed in the traditional institutional settings, some authors argued for looking at the very object of politics – issues or matters of concern – their trajectories and the public they might involve. Following the lead of Latour, we recognized different moments or stages by which we can describe how something can be understood to be political in very different senses: whether it becomes something done and barely disputed in an office or laboratory, if it gets the attention of a wider public by becoming somewhat of a problem or if it becomes a matter of national concern and mobilizes the state apparatus. Having this in mind, our analysis of the Pirate Party will focus on the issues they are engaged in, where they are coming from and where they might lead to. The aim with this is to give a picture of how the Internet and more broadly information technologies are being politicized in new ways, and how the issue itself is likely to redefine, once more, our notions of democratic politics. If this may sound confusing now, it will hopefully be clear as we reach for the conclusion. At least at this point the argument for this thesis can be anticipated and what will follow in the next chapter is the empirical account for this process of issues being recreated in the institutional arena, how a renewal of some traditional values is being performed and how new actors are entering official politics as we know it.

4. A background study

In this chapter the reader will find at first a very concise history of the Swedish Pirate Party. This section should be more relevant to those not very much acquainted with the history of party, but it is important in the framework of this thesis for tracing the issues lying behind the genesis of the party, in a context where controversial laws were being passed, the repression to the common practice of file-sharing was increasing and new problems arose concerning fundamental rights on the digital environment.

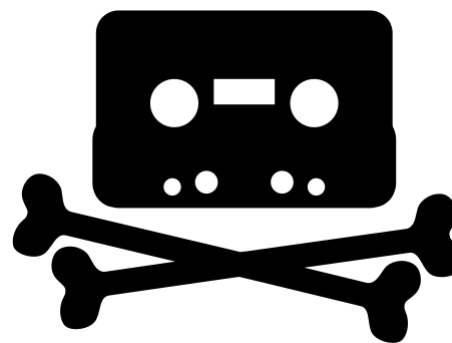
At a second moment we will go through some studies previously made about the Swedish Pirate Party and comment in what way they might relate to this thesis. Some of them bring different analysis of the PP as a political phenomenon strictly speaking, that is, its performance on elections and the profiling of voters, whereas others try to frame its significance in terms of broader changes in society. These studies can be considered useful as a starting point to some of the questions discussed here.

4.1 A Brief History

A good account of its history for those not acquainted with the party should probably begin with its most notable feature, the name. Piracy in modern times is no longer exclusively associated with the activity of attacking and stealing from ships, but the meaning that most often comes to mind is related to online piracy, that is, sharing copyrighted material (software, film, music, etc.) on the Internet. The interesting thing about the term is how it became an object of semantic and political dispute⁸. Anti-copyright movements adopted the label of "pirates" given by the entertainment industry in order to positively shift the meaning of a word that was and still is being used to disqualify file-shares as thieves. It is still a commonplace tactic used by the entertainment industry and copyright lobbyists to moralize the issue of piracy by directly associating it with stealing and theft. Probably the piece of advertisement that has been the most popular and passes this message most explicitly is a DVD trailer called "Piracy. It's a crime", that begins with the question "Would you steal a car?" and finishes with the statement that downloading a movie from the Internet is a crime, implying that it is just as morally wrong as stealing a material object. Quite

⁸An easy parallel can be drawn to the term *queer* and how was subverted by the queer movement into something positive and that asserts an identity.

interestingly, the trailer resulted in several parodies on the Internet⁹, and the usual response given by pirates is no, they wouldn't steal a car, but they would certainly download a movie... and a car, if they could! This anecdote is only one episode among many others in the war between copyright holders and file-shares, but it helps illustrating what it means to be a "pirate" in a particular way: the recognition that the Internet and digital communication made possible the easy access to cultural objects and is changing the very production of these objects in unprecedented ways. Pirates are convinced that copyright law is outdated (ignores recent technological developments and the changes that came with it) and therefore unbalanced (favors a minority and does not really promote its original intent of being an incentive to artists and creators). Pirates do not really buy the argument that piracy on the Internet is forcing artists and business into bankruptcy and seriously damaging the economy, but see instead the Internet and all file-sharing practices as democratic tools for spreading knowledge and culture and most of all enabling new ways of knowledge and culture creation that do not depend on old-fashioned mechanisms, such as the existing copyright laws and big medias to distribute and market products that would be filtered or censored otherwise.



Piratbyrå's logo reminds us of the time of the slogan "The tape is killing the music"

The purpose here is not to take part and argue for a side (although I do take a stand on the issue), but to go back some years in history and make visible the context of discussions and issues behind the origins of the Pirate Party. In Sweden particularly, Piratbyrå, a "think-tank" (in the lack of a better word to describe it) created in the beginning of the 2000's, can be considered a watershed in the discussions concerning file-sharing and the criticism to copyright industries. Piratbyrå is also related to the famous bit-torrent tracker and website The Pirate Bay and helped set up the stage for the public debate of these issues. Although the PP is not directly connected to Piratbyrå or The Pirate Bay, their affinities can be explained as part of the same process by which these issues have been brought to light. Together, they can be considered historically the main figures of the anti-copyright movement in Sweden.

The Pirate Party, more specifically, was founded in January 2006 by Rick Falkvinge and came up initially as a reaction and a protest to a change in Swedish copyright laws that would make illegal any download of copyrighted material from the Internet. Just some months later, the servers

⁹ Unfortunately this thesis is not multimedia, so the videos cannot be displayed here, but if you are already bored of reading this you can check the original video and the parodies here: <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/anti-piracy-parodies-you-wouldnt-steal-a-car>

hosting The Pirate Bay and Piratbyrå were raided by the police, which had the effect of doubling the number of members in the party in just a couple of days. That made possible the first participation of the Party in the elections in the autumn, and the party could be characterized by them, as described by one of my informants, “a big ballot papers distribution machine”¹⁰. Likewise, a series of events in the following years contributed to the growth and solidification of the party in the public debate, namely the discussions on FRA and IPRED laws in the beginning of 2008 and 2009 respectively, and the trial against The Pirate Bay beginning just some months after the latter. Considering the protests that followed each of these cases and the media coverage, it is possible to see how the issues relevant to the PP got more public attention and reaction, therefore boosting the exposure and the ideals of the party. Not coincidentally, one of my interviewees named specifically the case of Pirate Bay trial as one of the (many) reasons for engaging himself in the party. He was disappointed with the way the case was handled, with how little technical knowledge the court had and how it was pressured by interest groups.

This was then the initial impulse for Piratpartiet to adopt a name related to an issue that has been going around since before the party’s creation. Yet, as it will be argued ahead, the party’s agenda has not limited itself or reduced to the very particular issue of advocating a copyright reform and setting file-sharing free on the Internet. Associated but not limited to that, the issue of surveillance of citizens and their communication online or on telephone networks is another main issue in the party’s agenda. Regardless if private actors are tracking down file-sharers in order to enforce copyright laws or if governments are constantly monitoring citizens’ communication to prevent criminal activities, the PP considers these measures as an unacceptable violation of individual’s right to a private life and a hindrance to free and democratic communication. Discussions in Sweden on laws such as FRA, IPRED and recently the Data Retention Directive are significant examples of issues engaging pirates to enact the protection of the right to privacy. Some of these discussions will be used as examples in our analysis, but it suffices to note that beyond file-sharing the party’s agenda has been mainly concerned with the broader question of the impact and the possibilities (for good or bad) of information and communication technologies in our lives and society¹¹. How these new matters of concern can be interesting to our established notions of democratic politics will be argued ahead.

¹⁰ Each party in Sweden has its own ballot papers. Parties that do not reach a certain threshold do not have the cost and distribution of ballots paid by the government, which was the case of the PP at the time.

¹¹ Lately the party has been going through a process of broadening their politics beyond these particular issues. Since the discussions are still very incipient and also for the sake of simplification, this thesis will not deal with that.

The purpose here is not a long detailed history of the party, for that can be easily found on the Internet, but long story short, it is clear that the Pirate Party has acquired some political significance and importance in advocating these issues, not only in Sweden but beyond national borders. The Swedish Pirate Party in particular had its most significant election victory in 2009, when it conquered 7,13% of the votes, which gave them 2 seats in the European Parliament¹². Although its popularity and number of members have decreased recently in Sweden, numerous Pirate Parties are spreading across Europe and even abroad. The German *PiratenPartei* specifically, which unfortunately is not covered by this study, has been quite a surprising and noteworthy case. It has had its most expressive outcome in the Berlin elections, winning 15 seats (8,9% of the votes) in the local parliament, and it also had other significant outcomes in the regions of North Rhine-Westphalia, Saarland and Schleswig-Holstein¹³.

It is therefore not strange to see that the Pirate Party reaches beyond national borders, since the issues that the party deals with can be very similar and very often transnational, especially in post-industrial and developed countries where information technologies play a very significant role in the economy and people's lives. That does not mean, however, that the national context can be of no importance in determining the failure or success of a PP.

4.2 Former studies about the PP

There are not so many academic works I could find directly about the Pirate Party, but a number of interesting articles or references in books. Some of them are concerned with more classical questions in political science: about the profiling of voters and party's sympathizers (Oscarsson and Persson, 2009) or about what motivated people to cast their vote on the PP in the 2009 EU-elections (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011). In the first study, one of the findings I consider

¹² <http://www.val.se/val/ep2009/slutresultat/rike/index.html>. At first one MEP elected, but then two after the Lisbon Treaty was ratified.

¹³ For official numbers, respectively: <http://www.wahlen-berlin.de/Wahlen/BE2011/ergebnis/karten/zweitstimmen/ErgebnisUeberblick.asp?sel1=1252&sel2=0651>;
<http://www.wahlergebnisse.nrw.de/landtagswahlen/2012/aktuell/dateien/a000lw1200.html>;
http://www.statistikextern.saarland.de/wahlen/wahlen/2012/internet_saar/LT_SL_12/landesergebnisse/;
<http://www.wahlrecht.de/news/2012/landtagswahl-schleswig-holstein-2012.htm>

the most interesting is that the majority of their voters are *young men*¹⁴. This supports the thesis often stated that there is a generation gap in the understanding and the importance that is generally attributed to the PP. This is what Miegel and Olsson (2010) are arguing when they say that file-sharing and surveillance are two issues engaging the otherwise politically unengaged. According to them, the Internet is more a *reason* than a *resource* for young people to engage themselves politically, in the sense that we are not exactly talking about the power of the Internet as a communication infra-structure to connect and organize people politically – which is what academic work relating Internet and political action usually focus upon – but rather a question in itself that is becoming a matter of concern, which in its turn requires political engagement. “File-sharing and surveillance questions appear also to have the power to provoke engagement among youth who traditionally have shown little or no interest in political matters” (Miegel and Olsson, 2010:63). The fact that information technologies become an object of politics, rather than one extra scene where politics is being enacted, is also part of the argument, as it has been said previously.

Back to a review of the studies mentioned above, the point made by Erlingsson and Persson (2011) seems also quite confirming of the fact that the relative success of the PP (at least during the 2009 EU elections) is really because of the ideas defended by it and its ideological program, rather than merely a form of protest vote and an effect of voter’s dissatisfaction with the established parties. However, the question about the significance of these issues and how they are entering the political arena remains almost undiscussed, and that is a possible gap that might be covered here.

There is nonetheless a very important cue to this discussion in another article by Miegel and Olsson (2008). I quote:

Piratpartiet’s picking up of classical political values of democracy, freedom of speech, right to information, equality, justice and so forth, can be analyzed as an attempt to revitalize them and adopt them to a society and political context they see as fundamentally different from the ones in which these political key values and the laws serving to uphold and protect them were once developed. (Miegel and Olsson, 2008:213)

This passage expresses, firstly, an idea that I frequently encountered in my interviews and that is also present in the party’s pronouncements in the media: that politicians nowadays either do not have an understanding or are underestimating the importance of Internet in our society. Second, and most

¹⁴ The fact that most of their voters are also men can be a very interesting gender issue to be researched. Within the party most of the members are men as pointed out before but women have clear a visibility in it, if one thinks of the party leader Anna Troberg and MEP Amelia Andersdotter being among the main figures.

important, it refers to how certain classical values have to be renegotiated or reassessed in face of the new circumstances. The proper concept actually, to be coherent with what was discussed before, is neither of those, but rather the concept of “translation”, as it was discussed in the section about ANT. In the following section I will give a more detailed and meaningful picture of what was mentioned by Miegel and Olsson by describing how the PP is translating some of these classical political values by engaging in some disputed issues.

The last analysis about the PP that I would like to discuss and probably the most interesting is the one found in the book “Kampen om kunskapen” (2008), by Bjereld and Demker. The book’s general thesis is about the central role that knowledge plays in different social and political struggles in today’s society. They frame the emergence of the PP in terms of the struggle over the right to knowledge, where the conflict between market and knowledge is considered in this case as one of the defining political lines of conflict¹⁵ of our times. Another line of conflict where knowledge takes center stage is between national and transnational actors, but we don’t need to go further into their argumentation. Curiously, during one of my interviews this particular view in the book was brought up by my interviewee. He made no direct reference to the book and I didn’t ask either if he had read it, for I only discovered this book some time after the interview, but the thesis held by him about new political lines conflict in society was basically the same. I would not disagree with the general argumentation that the fight over knowledge in its different forms has been emerging as an important line of conflict in politics, and that the PP can be seen as one expression of that. However, I would be careful in generalizing that thesis to an extent that it would not recognize the diversity of issues in politics. New issues arise in politics, but they have to be recognized by their differences and the specific languages that groups involved are enacting to express them.

To sum up, many of these studies have suggested in one way or another that the Pirate Party is an expression of how recent developments in technology have created and enabled new political disputes and challenges. What follows in this thesis is an attempt not only to continue on this track and to deepen our understanding of how this process is actually occurring, but to suggest how our very understanding of democratic politics can be reevaluated in face of these new issues.

¹⁵ In the original “Politiska skiljelinjer”

5. Pirate Politics: Information Technologies as Matters of Concern

This chapter will start answering the question of how ITs become politically relevant by focusing specifically on the significance of the Pirate Party. On the first section we will address more generally what their principles and core values are and try to see how ITs fit into this picture, what role they play. It will be argued that their shared principles and broad political ideals are closely related to the specificity of the issues and the political struggles they are involved with. This will lead us to the second section, where the focus will be set upon how the pirates are trying to reinterpret some classic political values, such as democracy and freedom of speech, in face of these new political struggles involving ITs. Third, the importance of building up a party will be revised according to what was found in the interviews. The point with this section is to revisit our main research question of how ITs are acquiring a new dimension of political relevance. Finally, the analysis section will take a step back to relate the empirical findings more explicitly to the theoretical discussion presented above and to summarize the main statements of this thesis.

5.1 Pirate Principles

What is commonly shared by the pirates in terms of principles and values that unite them into a party? And how are Information Technologies relevant to these core political principles? The answer to these questions will be sketched out here and we will start with what is probably the most basic source of information, their declaration of principles. The official document is important in the sense that it serves the purpose of stating the main principles, the values and worldview shared by all members of the party, as an outcome of what was voted by members in the forum¹⁶. However, its official message can be quite shallow for the purpose of this research and therefore its interpretation will also be complemented by what I heard during my interviews.

The PP has recently voted in their spring meeting 2012 a new platform – principrogrammet 4.0 – which states their basic ideas about society and fundamental values that should be strived for. The basic conception underlying the first part of the document is an appraisal for the strengths and possibilities coming from new technologies. The introduction states:

¹⁶ It was decided in a general meeting during spring 2011 that a small group in the director's board would be in charge of writing the material itself, which was revised at different stages by the board, and the preliminary drafts were made public twice so that anyone could give opinions and suggestions.

“We see that the new modern information technologies open new possibilities for people to empower themselves, to be a part of and influence the development of society. We see how a freer flow of information makes thoughts, cultural creativity and economy grow”¹⁷ (PiratPartiet, 2012)

The positive tone continues along the document underlying the “fantastic possibilities” created by modern information technology.

“Never before have so many had the possibility to communicate so easily with each other. Never before have so many had access to so much knowledge. Never before has the spreading of information contributed to so many fast technical, cultural and economic developments, and besides opened new conditions and possibilities for participation and democracy.”¹⁸ (ibid.)

It is clearly stated not only in this passage but several others that democracy, freedom and participation are strengthened and facilitated by these technologies. Further ahead we will see how an open Internet, where people can freely communicate without being watched and tracked, is translated not only into a facilitator, but into a necessary guarantee for democracy and freedom of speech. But let us return now to the idea that recent developments in technology introduce new possibilities for the production and exchange of information, knowledge and culture, and how new “problems” arise along with that as well. It is representative of this discussion the issue of copyright and the Internet, as we have seen as a main identifier in the history of the party. When asked about it, I heard a reasoning that I believe is very common and representative of what the pirates think, which is the following:

“What I have seen in the course of time is that artists themselves go around that [copyright licenses], they want to be seen online. The copyright industry has its own artists. And shared culture to me is something completely different. It’s that more people have the opportunity to be seen, to be heard and to show what they are doing. That needs to be developed. Of course artists should be paid, but in what ways? Is it like the industry that will dictate what is worthy, which artists we should listen to? And dictate that we should overpay for it?”¹⁹ (Interview, 06/2012)

¹⁷ “Vi ser att den moderna informationstekniken öppnar nya möjligheter för människor att själva ta makten över sina liv och vara med och påverka samhällsutvecklingen. Vi ser hur ett friare informationsflöde gör att både tankar, kulturellt skapande och ekonomin kan växa.”

¹⁸ “Aldrig tidigare har så många haft möjlighet att kommunicera så lätt med varandra. Aldrig tidigare har så många haft tillgång till så mycket kunskap. Aldrig tidigare har spridande av information bidragit till så många så snabba tekniska, kulturella och ekonomiska framsteg, och dessutom öppnat nya förutsättningar och möjligheter för delaktighet och demokrati.”

¹⁹ “Det jag har sett med tiden, det är ju att artisten själv går runt, de vill vara synliga på nätet. Upphövsrättindustrin kör sina artister. Och delad kultur är helt annat för mig. Det är att fler ska få möjligheten att höras och synas och visa

Another interviewee resorted to an explanation that would be typical of micro-economy in order to make the same point. He argued that the possibility of making digital copies reduces the marginal cost of “producing” a copy of the same product close to zero, and therefore it would not make sense from an economic perspective to set prices on digital copies as if they were physical ones. That is only made possible because of the monopoly that copyright regulation provides today, which limits the access to these protected goods. In this particular explanation the interviewee is pinpointing from an economic perspective how the current system of copyright protection is unbalanced in the current scenario of easy distribution and reach that a work can have. It is unbalanced, because it favors much more the rightholders (who are not necessarily the actual authors) than the public, and therefore does not abide to its original purpose as law: an incentive for authors and creators to produce any kind of work.

What these arguments show us, together with what is written on the declaration of principles, is that the pirates constitute a public aware of how modern technology enhances enormously the potential for the democratization of the production and access to information and culture. It is a central matter of concern what kind of role the ITs will play in the advancement of what they believe to be principles of democracy, freedom of speech and social development. However, this description is incomplete and inaccurate if we assume that the PP is all about some sort of technophilia, only about an enthusiasm for modern technology. What we see is that there is also a dark side to it, that this positive view goes hand in hand with a negative view that stems from all the political critiques partially exposed above.

The Declaration of Principles is also a document embedded with a history behind it, like many other documents, so if we look a bit beyond it we will find not only the official message sent by the Party. Going back to the previous declarations (from 3.0 to 3.4, for example), it is possible to see how this positive view is closely connected to their critical view. According to the first draft of this document (the new declaration of principles 4.0) (Piratpartiet 2012b), where you could find the comments made by the director’s board (styrelse), the strategy adopted by the PP in formulating it again was to adopt a less “negative” and “alarmist” tone than the previous ones. In fact, the introduction and the first part of the declaration is much more positive, but the criticism towards the actual state of affairs is still present and making up the whole second part of the declaration, entitled “Strong powers want to obstruct development”. The obstacles pointed out are created by “many of

var de gör. Det behöver utvecklas. Självklart ska artister få betalt, men i vilka former? Är det liksom en industri som ska sitta och diktera villkoren för värden, vilka artister vi ska lyssna på? Och dikterar villkor för att vi ska överbetala?”

those with political and economic power”²⁰ who see these developments in communication, exchange of ideas, knowledge and culture as a threat. In fact, “political and economic power” addresses more specifically and respectively any government that tries to censor or monitor communications in the Internet and corporations that want to regulate the Internet in order to enforce their “intellectual property” rights. One common thing I heard from the pirates is that the PP goes beyond the left-right distinction. That is of course very arguable depending on how one defines left and right, but this perception is very much related to the fact that their main targets of critique are equally the state and private corporations, both powerful actors that can possibly threaten and suppress civil liberties on the Internet.

“By obstructing free communication through surveillance and repression they, for different reasons and different motivations, want to limit the exchange of thoughts, ideas, expressions and knowledge, that throughout history has been the basis for human development.”²¹ (Piratpartiet, 2012)

This short passage sums up the two tones making up the structure of the document. The critical view on the one hand is surely determining how the pirates express their principles and values, since this criticism stems from the concrete issues experienced by the party (an idea that will be more thoroughly commented ahead). On the other hand, the positive view on ITs are definitely founded upon a somewhat shared experience that recognizes again the benefits and possibilities created by ITs, their crucial role in “human development”. This historical perspective on the development of technology is a common discourse to be found in the way the pirates make their interpretation of current issues. This I observed, for example, in a lecture I attended on the 23rd of May 2012 about ACTA (more ahead about this policy), given by local PP activist Jacob Hallén. In this lecture Jacob discussed the history of ACTA and its critical points, but the interesting point is that a great deal of the introduction was a summarized history of revolutions in technology, from the Gutenberg press to the Internet, and how the number of people with access to information has raised exponentially. The point made was exactly the one expressed in the passage above, that is, that the tools that we have at our disposal now and that are being created are the essential material means for human development based on communication and the exchange of knowledge and culture. This is basically how the importance of ITs and adequate legislation was enacted in the

²⁰ “Människors fria kommunikation och utbyte av idéer, kunskap och kultur ses som ett hot av många politiska och ekonomiska makthavare”

²¹ “Genom begränsningar av den fria kommunikationen, övervakning och repressalier vill de av olika anledningar och med olika motiveringar begränsa det utbyte av tankar, idéer, kunskap och uttryck, som genom hela historien varit grunden för mänsklighetens utveckling”

context of the criticism presented by Jacob to ACTA and more generally by the Pirate Party to any law or policy threatening the access to information and the free exchange of culture.

To conclude this section, there is a general understanding among the pirates that Information Technologies are crucial in the historical development of how people produce and gain access to knowledge, how culture is shared and the free flow of information can be highly democratizing. This can be understood as a first draft to answer the question of how ITs become politically important. It has also been argued here that these principles unifying this public into a party can only make sense as being part of a context where political issues are being created and disputed. Thus, the focus will now be shifted to these particular issues

5.2 Pirate Issues

It has been argued before in the theoretical chapter that an approach to politics should consider the specific issues at stake. In this session we will see some concrete examples of the struggles where the pirates are discursively enacting some of their fundamental principles exposed just above.

The brief history of the Pirate Party presented before was meant to bring to the fore some issues making up the context in Sweden that fueled the creation of the party. Up to this date, these issues remain more or less unaltered if we consider the main problems behind them. Maybe not exactly the same actors, not exactly the same controversial laws, but the same thematic keeps mobilizing the Pirate Party and makes it evident for them the need for an alternative normative view on them.

Beginning with the how they relate freedom of speech and surveillance of communications, the FRA law²² in Sweden and the European Data Retention Directive (DLD)²³ can be considered two major examples of laws and policies that the PP has strongly opposed to. The former was voted in 2008 and allows the security agency FRA to eavesdrop and wiretap all communication going in and out of Sweden as a measure of military intelligence and to fight potential “external threats” such as terrorism and international crime, whereas the latter is a EU directive issued in 2006 that was passed this year (2012) in the Swedish parliament, which obliges telecommunication

²² Law named after the agency responsible for this kind of activity: Försvarets radioanstalt

²³ In Swedish Datalagringsdirektiv, hence DLD

companies to save data about user operations under a certain period of time so that the police or other security agencies can have access to this data in order to make investigations and enforce the law.

Pirates see a threat and a violation of rights in these proposals of surveillance of communications. In an article by Anna Troberg, current PP leader, this type of translation becomes clear when she makes the contrast between the government's declarations and support for net-activists in Egypt and Tunisia, on one side, and their domestic policies (FRA and DLD), on the other side.

“It's hypocrisy to speak well about freedom and freedom of speech on the internet, whilst in their home country they pass several laws that slowly dismantle both. Gunilla Carlsson and Carl Bildt are cabinet ministers in a government, which through its meddlesome laws slowly dismantle the basis for fundamental democracy.”²⁴ (Troberg, 2011)

In a couple of sentences the link between freedom of speech in the Internet and democracy is made, asserting that laws like FRA and DLD present a threat to democracy and therefore should be rejected if the government wants to be coherent. The recognition that the Internet is a powerful tool to throw down dictatorships and rebuild democracies is obviously shared by the Swedish government. However, the government does not share with the PP that communication on the Internet needs to be free of constant surveillance if it is to be as effective or as important to maintain democracy back home. That does not necessarily mean that as soon as these laws were passed democracy and freedom of speech immediately crumbled in Sweden, but what Troberg argues is that some guarantees were taken away.

“You should never pass laws that make the citizens completely dependent on the authorities' good will. It is just to look around on the world and see what happens when the powerful choose to take back their good will. It is not a pretty sight. That is why laws should always act to build and support democracy, not dismantle it”²⁵ (Troberg, 2001)

²⁴ “Det är hyckleri att tala sig varm om det fina med frihet och yttrandefrihet på nätet när man själv på hemmafronten skapar lag efter lag som så sakteliga monterar ner båda. Gunilla Carlsson och Carl Bildt är båda ministrar i en regering som genom sitt klåfingriga lagstiftande sakta med säkert monterar ner själva grunden för allt vad grundläggande demokrati heter”

²⁵ “Man ska aldrig stifta lagar som gör medborgarna helt beroende av makthavarnas välvilja. Det är bara att se sig om i världen och se vad som händer när makthavarna väljer att dra tillbaka sin välvilja. Det är ingen vacker syn. Därför ska lagar alltid verka för att stödja och bygga demokrati, inte montera ner den.”

Here we have one example of what was presented above, that ITs brings new possibilities also for misuse by powerful actors such as governments, an issue that implies a broader discussion in the political sphere concerning fundamental rights and democracy.

Another example is the debate about ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trading Agreement), probably the most recent and visible issue for the Pirate Party and others concerned. ACTA consists basically of a treaty among various nations to create a common legal framework to deal with counterfeit goods, not only physical goods, but goods “online” regarding copyright infringement²⁶. One of the main aims of the document is “to promote cooperation between service providers and right holders to address relevant infringements in the digital environment”²⁷. In other words, the idea is that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) would be liable for collecting and disclosing information about users who infringe copyright online and passing it to right holders, giving the possibility to private parties to enforce the law. Again we see a debate about online piracy and a desperate attempt to have control over the consequences coming from the development of technologies and the Internet. Even if we assume that the lobbyists who came up with the text (and the industries hiring them) do actually see this issue merely as a problem of enforcing their commercial interests, already guaranteed by copyright law, it is clear by now that it has indeed become a political issue that encompasses much more than that.

“The monopoly lobbyists never quit. Now they’re at it again, this time saying that if authorities can’t shut people off en masse due to that “amendment 138” [referring to the Telecoms Package], maybe they can get private corporations – the ISPs – to do it instead through third-party liability forcing certain terms of service and wiretapping. Hence, ACTA. [...] sharing and preserving contemporary culture is not a problem. It is a power base of 250 million voters that will kick you out of office if you dare so much as touch the net.” (Falkvinge, 2012)

The passage above is a common illustration of the pirate discourse that puts issues like ACTA into the wider perspective of commercial interests (specifically the American copyright industry) versus the established democratic force of the Internet, where anyone can share and have access to a huge number of cultural goods. It also argues how the public has been able to mobilize politically to fight this “agreement”, a characteristic that is often used by the pirates to describe the emergence of the party, as we will see ahead. This last particular feature (public engagement) is

²⁶ There are a lot of details in the history of ACTA and in the document itself that need not to be covered here. Interesting sources to read more about ACTA is Wikipedia itself, but especially the following blogs held by FFII (Foundation for a Free Information Infrastructure) and by EP Carl Schlyter, respectively, are an important critical source: <http://acta.ffii.org/> ; <http://acta.mpblogger.se/>

²⁷ http://www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/assets/pdfs/acta-crc_apr15-2011_eng.pdf

quite notable: how it has scaled up and received criticism and opposition not only by Pirate Parties around Europe, but by different political groups at the European Parliament and NGOs, not to mention the thousands of people who rallied on the streets around Europe to protest. Particularly in Gothenburg I heard from one of my interviewees who participates in a manifestation that she has seen people gather from different parties and even people who are not usually part of any political group were very engaged in the organization of the protest. There is no doubt this whole process has attracted different actors trying to participate and influence politics in the many different ways they could. In next section we will see how the pirates see the role they played in this process.

To conclude this section, it was suggested that the pirates are engaged in processes of translation and renewal of fundamental and widely accepted values in democratic politics. We should recognize that the positions taken by the PP and the opinions quoted are certainly local and not necessarily an affirmation that everybody is accepting, for example, that democracy implies the right to privately communicate on the Internet. Some of these associations are in fact not recognized and rejected by those involved in pushing forward these controversial laws, policies and “agreements”. However, it is undeniable that these matters are being discussed. Politics, in the traditional sense, is now partly impregnated with these discussions and new issues. We have been observing how new actors (still following the definition proposed before by ANT) are coming into play – the Internet, file-sharers, the notion of intellectual property, communication online, and so on – things that were not enacted before whenever “freedom of association”, “democracy” or “civil liberties” were discussed. This is obviously not thanks only to the Pirate Party, but they are an interesting knot in the process happening in the last years, whereby ITs become a matter of concern in our political institutions and a matter of concern for the very idea of democratic politics.

5.3 A necessary step. Making issues visible

It was just exposed above how the pirates are arguing for the importance of ITs in the political context and what constitutes some of their shared political values. This gives us an idea of how they are politicizing ITs in a certain way, but does not fully answer one of our main questions. Why have these issues become so crucially important that it is necessary a party to deal with them and how do the pirates see their work? I asked all of my interviewees why they engaged themselves in the party. And to nearly all of them I asked the direct question of why they think a party is needed and what is the impact it has had so far. I heard repeatedly very similar answers and we will explore them in detail.

On the very first interview and straight away, without previously mentioning anything on information technologies, the interviewee answered the following to the question of why he got engaged in the party:

“I think such issues are very important, about ITs, computer and technology in general. Today we have many political parties who are engaged in most issues, but not very much in the technology issues.”²⁸

This seemed to be the most natural answer among my respondents about how to make sense of the PP. The lack of understanding or engagement from other parties and politicians in these issues is the reason often heard both to explain their personal motivations and to why the party was founded in the first place. One interviewee (#4) just puts it bluntly that “it is that simple that no other party has understood the power of the Internet” whereas another (#3) answered the following to the question of why a party is needed, instead acting politically by other means:

“The party was created out of necessity, I’d say. Piratbyrån had existed since before the law [criminalizing file-sharing] in 2005, as a think-tank/activist organization that worked against all other parties, to have an influence. When the law passed in 2005 it became very clear that this was not enough. We got a much worse legislation albeit all the academics, thinkers and organizations fighting against it. The founder [of PP] thought then that the only solution was to challenge the current politicians, since they did not listen – it was about threatening to take their places and force these issues into the debate. And we have succeeded very well.”²⁹

The success referred to is, as we will see from other interviews, the fact that the PP could create greater visibility and debate around those issues. However, that certainly does not mean that the party’s agenda cannot be considered as fully adopted by other parties. As one interviewee said (#6), they were naïve enough in the beginning to believe that, as soon as they grew big enough, other parties would take on their positions, values and opinions, and the PP would no longer be necessary. The question about the perceived impact of the PP will soon come back. For the moment, it is interesting to observe two very different profiles when it comes to their understanding of ITs and the issues around them, and what their motivations are for engaging in the party. One

²⁸ “Jag tycker såna fragor är jätteviktiga, när det gäller IT, datorer och tekniken över huvud taget. Idag har vi flera politiska partier som engagera sig i dem flesta frågorna, men inte speciellt mycket i dem tekniska frågor.

²⁹ “Partiet skapades av nödvändighet, skulle jag säga. Piratbyrån hade funnits sedan förre lagen 2005, var en tankesmedia/aktivistorganisation som jobbade mot alla partier för att påverka, och när lagen slog 2005 så var det väldigt tydligt att det inte var tillräckligt. Vi fick en förvärringen av lagstifning trots att det fanns mängder av duktiga akademiker, tänkare och org. tankesmedia som arbetade emot det. Grundaren tänkte då att enda sättet att lösa det var att utmana dem rådande politikerna, eftersom man inte lyssnade så var det att hota att ta deras plats och tvinga in de här frågorna i debatten. Och där har vi lyckats extremt bra.”

more typical example is interviewee #2, who has been for a long time working in the IT area, had one of the first Internet companies in Sweden and before the PP was previously involved in the fight against patent software. According to him, after following the Pirate Bay trial and seeing how unfair it was (for the court was much uninformed about the technical aspects and there was clearly a strong pressure from interest groups) he got involved in the PP. On the other hand, our interviewee #4 claims to be not so much interested in technology (at least directly), unlike many others in the party, because the developments are so quick that she does not follow. I wondered then why she took an interest in the party. Curiously, the answer was the following:

“It’s because of technology and the Internet. It’s above all because of the positive power of the Internet that has made me engaged”³⁰

In our conversation, she pointed out the many different aspects that she considered positive, some of them already enunciated in the ”pirate’s principles” section, but more broadly the possibility for people to be heard and seen.

Although it is clear that many of the people engaged in the party have a background in information technologies, the above is one example among others – which can even be found among the top figures of the party – of a person with a different background who assigns the highest political importance to these issues. As interviewee #3 stated, “many come from a technological background and many were not politically engaged before”³¹. This reflects the statement made by Miegel and Olsson (2008) that the Internet is a reason for engaging the politically disengaged, but we can also observe how one does not necessarily need to have a background in the area to understand and realize the political relevance of ITs.

Back to the questions of the possible impact it might have had in the political scenario, there seems to be a wide understanding among the pirates that the party is a necessary step to make these issues an important part of the political debate, where their considerations will not be overlooked. It was also a shared idea among my interviewees that the PP started to be heard. Below I present a passage from the fifth interviewee which goes in line with this reasoning, but adds a concrete example that makes it interesting for the reflection proposed here.

- What is the impact the PP has had so far, generally speaking?

³⁰ “Det är på grund av teknik och nätet. Det är framförallt nätets positiva kraft har gjort att jag engagerad mig”

³¹ “Väldigt många kommer ifrån en teknisk bakgrund och väldigt många var inte politisk engagerad”

- "It has made these issues visible³², to become something that other politicians must discuss. A theory I have is that in politics it's not so much about what you opine: if one thinks that this or that is right. It is rather about the issues that are considered in the first place, that is, the things that you consider as important. [...] And that was noticed in the EU Parliament [...] He [Christian Engström, Pirate Party's MEP] made that entire group, the Greens, engage themselves in these issues in a way that they did not before. The green parties in Europe haven't changed their minds. It is just because before they were not important issues for them. They have only changed how much they talk about it and how much they try to influence it. And that's had quite a big effect on the way ACTA was handled, for instance."³³

To put it in the context of our previous discussion, the passage above highlights how certain issues changed from being more or less "quiet" matters of concern to being hot topics of discussion by politicians on duty, who might have realized how significant these issues are. One might object to this example and say that the Greens did not suddenly started paying attention because of one single MEP from the Swedish PP. But the specific question of how much Christian Engström by himself was able to influence and make them accept these issues is of less importance here, what is relevant is that these questions were indeed made visible and eventually became part of the Green's agenda in the EU Parliament, engaging also all other political groups in the discussion of a thing like ACTA.

Summing up, a couple of important conclusions can be drawn from what has been said in the interviews. First, all of them demonstrated that engaging in the party equates with assigning a great political importance to "technological" issues. Second, it has been show that they did not see any other political alternative that could properly represent and put forward their views about these issues. It would not be far-fetched to conclude that it is a common view within the party that issues about the Internet and the many things it represents was not at all being taken into proper consideration at the high ranks of politics and that the party had a positive impact in this sense, it was considered a necessary step to turn ITs into a real matter of political concern.

³² In the original: "De har fått de här frågorna att synas [...]". Given the context, the word issues was used to translate the Swedish word *frågor*. There is no specific word in Swedish as there is in English to express this semantic nuance between the words *question* and *issue*.

³³ "De har fått de här frågorna att synas. Att blir nåt som faktiskt andra politiker måste diskutera. En teori jag har är att inom politik handlar det väldigt mycket oftare inte om hur man tycker, om man tycker att det här är rätt eller det här är rätt, utan vilka frågor man över huvud taget man tycker om. Alltså vilka saker man ser som är viktiga [...] Och det märktes i EU parlamentet. [...] Han har fått hela den gruppen att engagera sig i de frågorna på ett sätt som de inte har gjort tidigare. Och det är inte för att miljöpartierna i Europa tycker annorlunda än vad de tyckt tidigare. Det är bara för att före de inte var viktiga frågor för dem. De har inte ändrat åsikt, de har bara ändrat hur mycket de pratar om det och hur mycket de försöker driva på det. Och det har haft en ganska stor effekt på hantering av ACTA till exempel."

5.4 Sketching a political genealogy of ITs

At this point, what was investigated and presented above regarding the Pirate Party will be contextualized in the theoretical discussion from the beginning, also addressing alongside our research question. The main question of how ITs are becoming politically relevant was firstly addressed through different theoretical perspectives. The most significant to observe is how these different approaches conceptualize the political, the technological and the interconnection between these two categories. If one could then summarize them very quickly we would have:

- A) ITs constitute an important material basis or a backdrop that is highly conditioning of how political action is made possible. This approach was exemplified with the theories and studies of Bimber (2003), Bennet and Serberg (2012) and Castells (2000);
- B) The construction of technology in general is simultaneous with the construction of society, a basic argument stemming from the STS tradition. Politics in this sense has its meaning widely extended to (cosmo)politics (Latour, 2004), a progressive composition of a common world that is defined, among other, by techno-scientific activities. A particular example exposed, more related to ITs and this thesis, is Kelty's study (2005) about the geeks, their values and technical practices.

The perspective "C" is the one that frames the inquiry here and it aims to add empirically to the others. ITs are represented in our approach as a direct object of political discussion (how they are regulated, etc.), a matter of political concern in itself, and the Pirate Party was depicted as an important and representative actor in this process. Different strategies were used to describe how this process is taking place. By exploring some of the fundamental values and principles that unite the pirates we have assessed how ITs play a central role in their view of a society where knowledge and information should be accessible and communication uncensored. We have seen that this particular view is also stemming from the "issues" lived by the PP, exemplified in the controversial policies and legislations concerning ITs. A crucial feature of how they deal with these issues and turn these technologies into matters of political concern could be observed in their discourse, where they actively "translated" basic political values, giving them a renewed meaning in a context of dispute. The notion of translation is again a conceptual tool provided by ANT that helps us describe how technologies are inherently political in different stances by redefining other actors in society, from its most fundamental stage, when a technology is still in its developing phase, until its more complex stages, when it becomes widespread and entangles many other possible kinds of actors when it becomes a political issue, in the strict sense. From our discussion we have seen that

fundamental political values can also be affected and slightly resignified in this process. For instance, it has been argued by the pirates that democracy requires as a necessary condition a digital environment where people have the possibility to communicate privately, free from state surveillance (or even private surveillance, in the case of ACTA). Furthermore, interviews with the pirates gave us their perspective of why it is important to organize themselves into a political party. The most regarded aspect in their answers was that political action was insufficient outside usual politics, and the party was needed because politicians did not understand (how the Internet works, for instance) or cared properly about these issues. It was significant to observe that ITs have become that which is being discussed in usual politics, which is exactly the perspective explored here about how ITs becoming politically relevant.

Finally, the notion proposed here of political genealogy assumes that there is a much broader political process when it comes to ITs, which goes beyond the workings and the awareness created by the Pirate Party, and therefore it is not completely covered empirically by this thesis. It encompasses the perspectives A and B mentioned above and the perspective exposed here that takes the PP as a main example, taking into account how they are interlinked. The means by which ITs can be of political relevance are manifold: it may begin by how and to what purpose it is conceived and constructed, to how it is used and finally to how it becomes a central object of discussion and deliberation, where it will be decided what can be legally done with them. Referring back to the literature, this portrays the different moments of the political (Latour, 2007). Concretely, this can also be observed in connection to the PP and its history: take the creation of peer-to-peer and BitTorrent technology for sharing files and subsequently the creation of the Pirate Bay, how it escalated then to a “sub-political” (Beck, 1997) issue, involving many other actors in society and later how this issue fuelled the creation of a party. Although the development of these technologies is (cosmo)political per se, it only becomes part of a typical political issue when it escalates into a problem involving other actors previously unlisted, which is why the notion of issues, their trajectories and the public involved (Marres 2004, 2005, 2007) was deployed. Another aspect which would take us closer to the “A” perspective and that was barely discussed in this thesis is how the PP is organized and structured, how decisions are made and people mobilized through online forums, social networks and other online tools, that is, through the very tools they are discussing.

The notion proposed of a political genealogy of ITs should not however be understood strictly as a historical and linear development. Political action regarding ITs does not escalate and finally ends up restrictively at the sphere of usual politics, parties and parliaments, but it can find its way back to the most “basic” level precisely as a consequence of usual political decisions. The development of tools that guarantee anonymity online and their growing use as consequence of

repressive legislation has been mentioned already as a good and researched example of this (Larsson and Svensson, 2010). Any outcome of a traditional political decision may effect in one way or another how these technologies will continue to be developed and/or used. As we have seen, the pirates are well and reflexively aware of that, hence the need for organizing themselves as a political party. Nonetheless, the notion of a political genealogy of ITs might be helpful precisely in distinguishing the different expressions of the political, played out in different levels, moments or spheres of action, and understand how a phenomenon like the Pirate Party fits and shapes this broader process.

6. Conclusion

The Pirate Party was portrayed throughout this thesis as representing an important part of a wider process of politicization of information technologies. It has been argued that in order to understand how a party like this was created, a party which is primarily based on new discussions and issues emerging from the social impact of the Internet and other ITs, we needed to reconceptualize again how these technological tools can be of political significance and the meaning of the adjective political itself. A brief theoretical overview has shown how we can consider the different stages and means whereby ITs acquire political relevance – from its inception to becoming a matter of discussion in a parliament – and therefore direct our attention to what kind of role the PP is playing in this political genealogy of ITs.

In this sense, one of the things observed is how they pirates perceive the party as a necessary step in bringing these issues and their views to the political agenda. This has been made evident by how our interviewees expressed the need for a party, given the lack of political alternatives to defend their views (both within established parties or outside traditional politics), and by how they assess the impact they had in making such issues visible, an achievement proudly claimed by the pirates. Moreover, the descriptive and empirical task of this thesis went also in the direction of exploring what kind of importance the pirates are giving to ITs and the meanings they are making out of it. By investigating some of the principles and ideas that unite this specific public into a party, we came to some defining issues where ITs are of fundamental importance in their view: the Internet and other ITs create the conditions for the widespread exchange of information, knowledge and culture, and copyright laws should be adjusted to allow such practices like file-sharing. Another crucial issue is non-surveillance of communications and how it becomes in their view a necessary condition for freedom of speech and democracy.

The idea that these issues were previously not included in the political debate in these terms is another important feature that has been stressed in our interpretation. By translating them in terms of fundamental political values, the PP is helping to perform a crucial move in the process of politicization of ITs. It is not new after all the idea that fundamental political values are culturally and historically embedded (or even more, context-dependent and pragmatically asserted³⁴). Democracy for instance was not born meaning automatically universal suffrage and the right for women to participate in public life. It is possible that in the future, depending on the outcome of these struggles, democracy will also imply a universal right to Internet access and to freely exchange information, culture and entertainment (or not...). Maybe freedom of speech will be widely accepted as being dependent on the right to privacy and non-surveillance of communications online, and it will be practiced that way (or not...). What is certain is that information technologies have now made their way into politics and are now being assessed according to these parameters as well. This phenomenon is occurring certainly not only because of the Pirate Party, but the pirates are definitely a part of the equation that should not be overlooked.

To sum up, this thesis has hopefully accomplished two basic results: First, an empirical description of the role played by the PP in the process of politicization of ITs and second, the outline of a political genealogy of ITs by making sense of previous theoretical approaches that describe the relationship between technology and politics. The latter considers not only how these technologies have changed society in a more fundamental level but how they are resulting in a gradual reconfiguration of politics, with values being reenacted and with the creation of a plane of immanence where future political action will be defined. It is clear that the outcome of decisions and what is created in the field of institutional politics is also of great impact, producing therefore new conditions (although not fully determining) of political action back again in the most basic level, where technology is developed and used. What has been shown is that the pirates are well aware of that – otherwise it would not make any sense the creation of a political party – but are also aware of the “cosmopolitical” effects already produced by these technologies – it is indeed constitutive of their discourse and political view.

Finally, the idea of a political genealogy of ITs can be useful in the sense that it provides a description of a phenomenon that is still in progress, namely how information technologies become a matter of concern, a collective issue that now enters and becomes part of our political institutions, considering not only the genesis of this process but also how political action is interconnected and

³⁴ Take for instance the question of whether or not democracy needs foundations, long discussed in political theory (Benhabib, 1996). What is proposed in this thesis is probably closer to the negative answer and the pragmatic understanding of democracy given by Barber (1996).

made possible in different levels. The concepts developed here might serve somehow to an analysis of other political processes and relevant issues of the public debate, but the theoretical ambitions are limited so far to an account of how ITs are becoming politically relevant, or, to “pirate” once again Haraway’s words, of how our cyborg, human-machine ontology structures any possibility of historical transformation.

6.2 Possible shortcomings and uncovered grounds

The focus on the PP does not fully cover the main question, much broader, of how ITs are becoming politically relevant. There are a huge number of actors worldwide working with the same issues and politicizing ITs in different ways and at different levels – to name just a few and more known, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Free Software Movement, various IT-based corporations that now and then lobby for or against certain policies, different activist movements and so on.

The approach here covers only one part of the equation in the process of politicization of ITs, namely the one more connected to traditional politics, such as lobbying and influencing the public debate. Other studies should also consider political action in a more fundamental level, for example of how certain values and worldviews are being enacted in new technological projects in different contexts. Some examples can be found already in the STS literature, such as the aforementioned ethnography of the geeks by Kelty (2005). Regarding the methodology, using a qualitative method based on a very few number of interviews and analysis of documents still does not give us enough for solid generalizations on how much the Pirate Party itself was able to influence the public debate and the outcome of official decisions. However, we had a good glimpse of how the pirates see the role they are playing in traditional politics and it does give us a solid view of the key issues mobilizing a public represented not only by the party, but by other actors trying to shape and influence policy.

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Useful Websites

<http://www.greens-efa.eu/50-reasons-to-reject-acta-7398.html> - The Greens Alliance in EU Parliament on ACTA

<http://www.piratpartiet.se> – Swedish Pirate Party website

<http://thepiratebay.se> – “The galaxy’s most resilient Bittorrent tracker”

<http://www.torrentfreak.com> – News portal about torrent technology and copyright related news