

On the Classified and Classifying Consumption of Digital Media:
Initial Findings from a Comparative Case Study of Young Men in Sweden

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Abstract

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Digital media in general and the internet in particular are regularly ascribed with various democratizing potentials. According to politicians, journalists, marketers and even some academics, the proliferation of internet access (via broadband) will bring about a shift in the power relations between media industries and media consumers, between governments and citizens, between professionals and amateurs, etc. Young people are often conceptualized as a driving force in this change, in so far as growing up in this new communication environment is considered enough for making real the potentials of digital media.

These simplistic ideas draw from technological deterministic assumptions and must be put into question by detailed empirical analyses. Although this has been done to a certain extent, previous research on young people's consumption of digital media has tended to focus on their creative, playful and more or less particular (or peripheral) digital interpretations and interactions. The social structures producing and reproducing themselves through (the lack of) these interactions, on the other hand, have seldom been taken into account. By and large, questions of social power relations such as class, gender and race/ethnicity are missing.

Building primarily on the ideas of technology-as-text as elaborated within the context of cultural studies and on Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture – including concepts such as habitus, capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic), social fields, symbolic power, etc. – my PhD project constitutes an attempt to fill this gap. More specifically, it aims at qualitatively examining the ways in which 16-18 years old Swedish boys with different positions in social space conceive, relate to and make use of the internet as a differentiating and potentially enabling technology in their everyday lives. This will be done through a series of case studies.

This paper presents and problematizes some initial findings from a pilot study carried out in the autumn of 2009, when twelve young men from four upper secondary schools (preparing either for further education or directly for the working life) in one of Sweden's largest cities were interviewed individually. An intercultural comparison between boys occupying different positions in social space (i.e. the discernible volume and composition of their families' accumulated capital) reveal divergent perceptions of the school, further education and one's future more generally, which also tend to have a bearing on their readings of the internet.

The preliminary analyses suggest that, in general, these socially structured readings of the internet are carried out in ways that serve to reproduce existing power relations rather than dissolving them. The boys from families with large cultural capital perceive the internet as a resource for accumulating forms of capital that can be employed in the struggle for positions to which they aspire. For example, they stress its various possibilities for learning. The boys having less cultural capital at their disposal, on the other hand, often articulate a narrower outlook, reducing the new technology to an instrument for immediate amusement or just passing time. Hence, the democratizing potentials of digital media seem to be unequally realized.

Introduction

In Sweden, nearly 75 percent of the population (age 9-79) had access to broadband in their home in 2008. Among the younger ones (age 15-24) the number was almost 90 percent (Nordicom 2009). In other words, the Swedes in general and the younger ones in particular are unusually well-equipped when it comes to making use of the internet and benefiting from its goods. However, home access to broadband obviously is not the same thing as using it and certainly not the same thing as using it in ways that make real the ascribed potentials of the internet. The dominant discourse on the internet – which might be conceived as a joint product of politicians, journalists, marketers and a set of semi-academics – asserts that it will bring about a more democratic society in which a range of long-established power relations will be overthrown, and that the ones who will realize this vision is the so called digital generation, i.e. those who have grown up with and therefore are assumed to know digital technology (e.g. Mosco 2004, Buckingham 2008).

What is left unsaid by this discourse is everything that separates young people from each other and everything that unites them with previous generations, i.e. the historical social structures that have taken form through and continuously inform the practices of history-making agents. To assume that the internet by itself will abolish such structures is to commit the technological deterministic fallacy (e.g. Williams 1975/2001, Murdock 2004). No doubt the internet as a technology carries the potential of greater equality, but so do other technologies and, more importantly, we cannot confuse the potential with the real. In order to avoid this, consequently, we must conduct empirical research on the ways in which the internet is read and used in various contexts, while at the same time taking into account how these contextually embedded readings and uses might be structurally enabled and constrained and serve to reproduce or transform the social world as we know it. In the end, whether or not the internet and related digital media will serve to democratize society is an empirical question. It cannot be taken for granted.

This optimistic discourse on the transformative powers of the internet is accompanied by post-modern claims about the decreasing significance of tradition and a range of long-established social categories.¹ Not least social class has been taken for being increasingly redundant, especially in countries such as Sweden where the economic divides are relatively small and access to higher education is free of charge. However, the fact that agents to a lesser degree than before identify themselves as belonging to a certain class and consequently found their political points of view on different grounds, must not be understood as the death of class (e.g. Savage 2000, Crompton et al. 2000, Devine et al. 2005). As Andrew Sayer (2005) has pointed out, capitalism as an economic system is neutral to identity, which means that the unequal distribution of economic capital will remain even if agents do not identify themselves with a particular class. And as long as economic and social inequalities persist, differences will be experienced – i.e. agents will sense social proximity and distance and by this make sense of their own place – even if such experiences are not necessarily interpreted in terms of class (e.g. Skeggs 1997/1999).

¹ Obviously, these ideas both take as their point of departure the urbanized western world. If there is such a thing as a digital generation, it can only exist in a relatively small number of countries where the internet access is high enough. And I hardly have to point to the continued existence of traditional ways of living – outside the western world, but also in the rural areas of Europe and North America.

It is against the backdrop of this general problematic that my PhD project has taken form. It sets out to examine the significance of social class for the ways in which young Swedish men (age 16-18) perceive, interpret and make use of the internet in their everyday lives.² More generally, the aim is to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge of how the internet is contextually appropriated by young people, but also to pay attention to how such appropriations inevitably are made from a certain position in the larger social structure of power relations, including those of class. So far, this has not been done to any larger extent (for exceptions, see e.g. Livingstone & Helsper 2007, Hargittai & Hinnant 2007, Lee 2008, North et al. 2008). Hence, we ought to intensify the research on the ways in which class matters for young people's everyday perceptions, interpretations and uses of the internet and related digital media.

In this paper I will report and discuss some initial results from a pilot study conducted in the autumn of 2009. Focus will be put on how digital goods and practices are classified and given different value according to a set of norms enforced by various moral entrepreneurs (Becker 1963/2006), most notably representatives of the school system. Consequently, agents too are classified and valued differently depending on the kinds of digital goods and practices they are engaged in. Thus, the consumption of digital media can be conceptualized as a classified and classifying practice, and – as we shall see – class matters for how it is practiced among the young men under study. First, however, I will briefly introduce the theoretical framework for my project.

Theoretical framework

As indicated above, my approach to digital technology is influenced by the idea of technology as text, i.e. as artefacts that do not carry their own intrinsic meaning, but rather become meaningful through social processes of production, promotion, consumption and regulation (e.g. du Gay et al. 1997, Mackay 1997, Silverstone & Hirsch 1992). This is not to say that digital technology is lacking distinctive properties – no doubt there are qualitative differences between e.g. the internet and broadcasting technology – only that these properties are shaped, partly by political and economic interests (e.g. McChesney 1999, Mosco 2004, Chadwick 2006), partly through the ways in which they are appropriated by users living in different contexts (e.g. Miller & Slater 2000, Olsson 2006, Rydin & Sjöberg 2010, Jansson 2010). This way of conceptualizing technology as socially shaped, clearly owes a lot to Raymond Williams (1975/2001) critique of the still widespread ideas of technological determinism, as well as to Stuart Halls (1980) communication model where me-

² My reasons for focusing on men are manifold. First, on a general level, men can be conceived of as a social category which, on one hand, is privileged compared to women in terms of e.g. political, economic and cultural power, but, on the other, is also associated with a range of social problems, e.g. crime, delinquency, violence, sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. This, I think, makes it a fascinating category to study, especially in relation to class. Second, the significance of (digital) media for the construction of masculinities has not – at least not to my knowledge – been examined to any larger extent. One can of course put into question my choice of informants for building on an idea of masculinities being the same thing as men. This is not the case, but in general men and women tend to construct their identities in ways that acknowledge the established gender order. In this sense, thus, it seems reasonable to make an empirical study of men in order to say something more general about the consumption of digital media in the construction of masculinities. Third, one cannot overlook how the fact of me being a man – at least, this is how I am regularly perceived and treated – has probably caused my interest in masculinities. Moreover, there are some pragmatic reasons for focusing on men, having to do primarily with the collection of empirical data, but this is not the place for discussing them any further. I would like to stress, however, that the question of gender, in relation to class, will be critically addressed in my PhD project, but for the purposes of this paper this analysis will be left out.

dia texts are thought of as being encoded with a preferred reading, which might then be supported, negotiated or opposed by the audience at the moment of decoding. Looking at digital technologies as texts, then, implies that certain readings, i.e. interpretations and uses of them, more than others are in line with the interests of the governmental and commercial bodies struggling for control over their meaning.

In order to examine the significance of social class for the ways in which young men read the internet, inspiration is drawn mainly from the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. He conceives the social reality as a multidimensional space, whose structure is made up of the relations between the different positions occupied by agents and groups of agents. What positions they occupy are determined by their overall volume and composition of the forms of capital which are effective, i.e. operating as power resources in this space, but also by changes over time in their volume and composition of capital (e.g. Bourdieu 1979/1984, Bourdieu 1985, Bourdieu 1987). Through extensive empirical studies, Bourdieu identified four main forms of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic.³ The concept of economic capital – by no means his main interest (for a discussion on this point, see e.g. Sayer 2005) – is used quite conventionally, referring to economic income, wealth, inheritance, etc. Cultural capital, in turn, can exist as embodied, i.e. as long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body; as objectified, i.e. in the form of cultural goods of various kinds; and as institutionalized, i.e. as educational qualifications, etc. Social capital refers to the actual or potential resources linked to relationships and group memberships (Bourdieu 1986). Finally, symbolic capital is the form the other ones assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1985). Thus, in so far as agents and groups of agents have unequal access to the different forms of capital, i.e. occupying different positions in the social space, the struggle for power is fought on unequal terms, since access to symbolic capital entails the power to define the very terms of this struggle. For instance, in order to achieve academic success, agents entering the field of education have to comply with its established norms according to which manners, activities, abilities, etc. are differently valued, which, in turn, tend to favour those who are already habitual to these norms, i.e. children from well-educated families (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron 1970/2008, Willis 1977/1981). To the extent that these unequal terms are taken for granted, i.e. misrecognized, even by those who are deprived of the capital required, one can speak of a kind of symbolic violence, which can be defined as “[...] the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:167).

Since the forms of capital are transmitted from generation to generation within the family, every single agent is born into a definite position in social space, i.e. she or he starts off with a certain volume and composition of capital at hand (e.g. Bourdieu 1986). Hence, when agents enter the social space they have different life chances, which make certain life trajectories more likely than others. Bourdieu postulates that this is due to the complicity of social position (*habitat*) and disposition (*habitus*). In other words, agents who share similar positions in the social space, have in common certain conditions and so tend to embody similar dispositions – schemes of percep-

³ In addition to these main forms of capital, Bourdieu identified a range of subtypes (e.g. linguistic capital and political capital). Moreover, several other types of capital have been identified throughout the empirical research conducted by others drawing from Bourdieu's theoretical framework, e.g. subcultural capital (Thornton 1995), media meta-capital (Couldry 2003), cosmopolitan capital (Weenink 2008), etc. Bourdieu's ideas have also been used for intersectional analyses, in which e.g. certain masculinities and femininities have been conceptualized as a form of capital (e.g. Skeggs 1997/1999, Adkins & Skeggs 2004).

tions, appreciations and actions, i.e. similar habituses – which, in turn, tend to condition them to the conditions characteristic of their positions and, consequently, tend to reproduce the structure of social space (e.g. Bourdieu 1980/1990, Bourdieu 1987, Bourdieu 1989). Habitus, then, explains why agents coming from well-educated homes often feel more at home in the field of education than agents whose families lack educational merits. Through their upbringing, they have acquired a habitus which fits with the field; without knowing why, they know how to behave, what to do, what to know, etc. in order to succeed. However, since habitus entails the capacity, on one hand, to produce classifiable goods and practices and, on the other, to distinguish and appreciate, i.e. classify, such goods and practices, it is a matter not only of having a feel for one's own place, but also of sensing the place of others (e.g. Bourdieu 1979/1984, Bourdieu 1989). This is also why, even the agents lacking the capital needed for success in the field of education, often take for granted the rules of the game – i.e. “educational merits is not for me, obviously, it is for them” – thereby contributing, although not deliberately, to the workings of symbolic violence. The social distances are, so to speak, inscribed in the body (e.g. Bourdieu 1987, Bourdieu 1989).

I will not dwell any further on the ideas of Bourdieu – his theory is a comprehensive one, developed through and designed for empirical work (e.g. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). From my point of view, it offers the means necessary for going beyond the commonsensical and hopelessly optimistic notion of a digital generation, as well as for questioning postmodern claims about the death of class. Even though Bourdieu (1987) repudiates the idea of objectively existing classes in the sense of self-conscious groups, mobilized for political action upon a common interest, he still asserts that they are more than plain theoretical constructs. Since agents are objectively differentiated in the social space according to their accumulated volume and composition of the forms of capital effective in this space, groups of agents will occupy neighbouring positions and are likely to have similar dispositions, which, in turn, mean that classes exist as a potentiality. In order to realize them, however, political work is necessary. Classes have to be made. This requires symbolic power – i.e. “[...] the power to impose and to inculcate principles of construction of reality” (Bourdieu 1987:13) – but, as in the case of education, not everybody has the same capacity to exercise this power and, furthermore, reality cannot be constructed in just any way:

“In the struggle to make a vision of the world universally known and recognized, the balance of power depends on the symbolic capital accumulated by those who aim at imposing the various visions in contention, and to the extent to which these visions are themselves grounded in reality.” (Bourdieu 1987:15)

Hence, Bourdieu argues, the chances for dominated visions of the social reality to become constituted and prevail are small – firstly, because they tend to not exist in the minds and bodies, i.e. in the habitus of the dominated and, secondly, because the dominant continuously try to impose their own vision, by means of which they can legitimize their privilege (Bourdieu 1987). Taking Bourdieu's sociology as a point of departure implies, consequently, that when the concept of class is invoked, it refers to a constructed class of agents who share similar conditions due to their neighbouring positions in social space and, for that reason, also are likely to embody similar schemes of perception, appreciation and action, i.e. similar habituses.

Method

From Bourdieu's point of view, thus, the social reality must be understood as a space of relationships between agents and groups of agents, who are defined, ultimately, by their relative positions – determined by their accumulated volume and composition of the forms of capital effective in this space – to each other. This implies a relational mode of thinking, which, in turn, suggests a comparative method as adequate for examining this reality. Consequently, I have designed my PhD project as a comparative case study, in which qualitative methods – most notably individual interviews and focus groups, but to some extent also observations and document analysis – will be employed in order to grasp the significance of social class for young men's perceptions, interpretations and uses of the internet and related digital media.

This paper presents some preliminary results from the very first round of fieldwork, which was carried out in one of Sweden's largest cities during the autumn of 2009. In sum, twelve young men (age 16-18) were interviewed individually in their upper secondary schools. The schools and study programmes were carefully chosen so as to obtain informants occupying different regions in social space. When it comes to the selection of informants, though, I was not fully in charge. At two of the schools, the teacher/principal with whom I had been in touch, picked the informants for me. From my point of view, having no control of how the project is presented to the potential informants is quite problematic, since it is hard to tell to what extent it was properly understood by the teacher/principal. However, below is a table summarizing the upper secondary schools, study programmes and informants that were included in the pilot study:

	Type of upper secondary school	Type of study programme	Informants (age)
School A	Preparatory for higher education (private)	Social science programme	Carl (16), Neil (16)
		Natural science programme	Eddie (16)
School B	Preparatory for higher education (private)	Social science programme	Ian (17), Robert (18), Oscar (17)
School C	Vocationally-oriented (public)	Vehicle programme	Jimmy (18), Gökhan (18)
School D	Vocationally-oriented (public)	Individual programme ⁴	Patrick (16), John (17), Simon (17), Daniel (16)

Table 1: The upper secondary schools, study programmes and informants included in the pilot study.

The interviews were organized around three main themes: (a) a set of background questions, (b) questions regarding thoughts and consumption of media in general, and (c) questions about thoughts and consumption of the internet and related digital media. Within these general frames, there were plenty of room for the interviewees to speak freely and at length, which regularly made new questions arise during the course of the interviews. The length of the interviews varied between around 50 minutes and one and a half hour. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed by myself. When transcribing the interviews, certain themes and patterns of similarity and difference started to crystallize. One of the most significant with reference to the theoretical problematic at hand, was the ways in which digital goods and practices are classified and operate as classifiers in ways that tend to privilege the privileged.

⁴ The Individual programme is set up for pupils who did not make the grade in Swedish, English and/or mathematics in elementary school, and therefore cannot enter regular study programmes in upper secondary school.

The context of consumption

In order to better understand the young men's readings of the internet and related digital media, their diverse everyday contexts – including their families, schools, leisure and friends – have to be taken into account. The young men from School A and B, i.e. the private ones preparing for higher education, have parents with middle and upper middle class occupations, such as lawyer, teacher, associate professor, veterinarian, corporate manager, small business manager, etc. Almost all of the parents have a university degree and some of the boys also have older siblings who are currently attending higher education. Eddie, however, makes an exception, not only because he is the only one with immigrant background among the boys from School A and B (his parents migrated from Lebanon), but also because his parents have never attended university and have a different type of occupations; his mother is a child-care worker and his father a self-employed pizza cook in another Swedish town. Apart from Eddie, however, it seems fair to say that the young men from School A and B have been born into and brought up in families who are relatively privileged in terms of economic and cultural capital.

This point becomes all the more apparent when comparing with the young men from School C and D, i.e. the public vocationally-oriented ones. Although several of these boys were more or less uncertain about their parents' educational background, which is quite telling in itself, it seems that none of the parents have any experience of higher education, therefore lacking the kind of institutionalized cultural capital that has become more and more important in today's labour market. Nevertheless, some of them have middle or lower middle class occupations, e.g. medical secretary, writer or administrator. At the same time, some of the boys have parents who are nowadays either unemployed or obtain disability pension, while others' parents make a living from clear-cut working class occupations, such as shop assistant or customer service employee. Hence, while the occupational status of these parents is quite varied and difficult to briefly summarize, their educational backgrounds at least have in common the fact that they do not involve higher education. Among the parents of the boys from School A and B, on the other hand, the situation is easier to sum up: All young men, except Eddie, come from well-educated families where the parents occupy middle or upper middle class positions.

The relative positions of the young men's families in the larger class structure play an important role in shaping their everyday lives. Being born into and brought up in families with unequal volume and composition of capital, the young men under study seem to have incorporated distinctive habituses, which, in turn, tend to shape not only their ways of thinking about and acting towards school and leisure, but also their aspirations for the future. Those who come from well-educated middle class homes (henceforth: the middle class boys) are clearly more enthusiastic about school than the boys coming from families with no experience of higher education (the working class boys). In many cases, as demonstrated above, this is manifested through their choice between vocationally-oriented schools and schools preparing for higher education, but the different thoughts and feelings *vis-à-vis* education become even more spelled out by the following

quotations.⁵ Neil comes from a well-educated middle class home and aspires for a career as journalist. He has recently started upper secondary school:

Martin: But how do you feel about school in general? What's your relation to school?

Neil: Well, I think it's... Before it wasn't that good because I was a bit excluded. I was the jerk, sort of. But now I think... now I'm in a class with many like-minded people, people who share my interests, people who... I mean, I am committed to my education and... Yeah, now it's kind of fun to go to school.
[...]

Martin: Why did you choose this particular school then, when it was time to choose which upper secondary school to attend?

Neil: Well, I thought, at my former school there were like... maybe two teachers who were considered good. And I thought that I'm... after all, I'm committed and want to perform well, and I want to get a good education and a good job. And I want to be able to look back and say that I did... that I managed [sighs]... How can I put it? I don't want to lose anything in the future by feeling lazy now, but I want to do my very best and make sure I have as many doors open as possible. So I thought... a lot of people said that the teachers at this school were supposed to be good and that it was supposed to be motivating.

While Neil describes himself as committed to his education, reckons it fun going to school, and expresses not only a will to perform well, but also some reasoned arguments for his school choice – an account resembled by the rest of the middle class boys as well – Patrick, who is struggling for the grades necessary for being accepted at a regular study programme (thus having no school choice to make a reasoned argument for),⁶ can serve as an example of a completely different school experience, shared by most of the working class boys:

Martin: So this is your first year here at School D then?

Patrick: Mm. Actually, I was supposed to be here last year too, but I quit. [...]

Martin: What happened? Or how come you...?

Patrick: Well, I skipped a lot of classes [inaudible]... I was only here like one day, so it was sort of pointless to [inaudible] [...] I guess I was quite tired of school. That's why I had to start here too, because I skipped a lot of classes during elementary school. I was tired of school and had skipped a lot of classes and stuff.
[...]

Martin: But what do you think about school in general? Going to school, what are your feelings about that?

Patrick: I think it's boring. You have to do it, but... it's not fun, for sure. What do you think? You're a student, right?

Martin: Haha, yes... Well, I guess I thought... I know what you're saying, that...

Patrick: You'd hang out with friends rather than study, right?! But you have to study if you're going to get a job [frustrated]...

The accounts of Neil and Patrick reveal not only the dissimilarities between the middle class and working class boys when it comes to thoughts and feelings about school, but also the presence of the future in the everyday lives of these young men. While Neil speaks of his current schooling as a means of providing himself with a good education and career, thereby complying with the rules of the game in the field of education, Patrick sees it more like a necessary evil that has to be suffered in order to get a job. The construction of future aspirations seems to be carried out under structural constraints, in the sense that the workings of habitus cause the middle class boys to perceive higher education as a matter of course, more or less, and to aim at relatively prestigious

⁵ All excerpts from the interviews are translated by me. I have tried to stay as true as possible to the actual words, phrases and meanings, but since my English has its flaws, meaningful nuances might have been lost in translation.

⁶ In Sweden, you have to make the grade in Swedish, English and mathematics in order to enter regular study programmes in upper secondary school. If you do not, you may attend the so-called Individual programme and make sure you pass those subjects.

occupations such as e.g. journalist or diplomat. Among the working class boys – i.e. those who come from homes with no experience of higher education and attend vocationally-oriented schools (apart from Eddie) – on the other hand, some have typical working class occupations in mind, such as welder or caretaker, while others are aiming at professions where some kind of higher education is required. In these cases, however, there is often a good deal of uncertainty involved. Eddie, for example, wants to serve as a doctor, but does not think he will get the grades necessary in order to get accepted for medical training, while Gökhan, who wants to be a police officer, considers himself working as a security guard as a more realistic scenario. Daniel, finally, aspires for neither working class occupations nor professions requiring a university degree – he wants to make a career as a professional e-sports player. At the same time, he is well aware of how hard it can be to realize such a dream – a dream which moreover probably has been deemed unrealistic by the adult world, similar to how boys wanting to be football professionals are disarmed. This is manifested through the quite ambivalent picture that he paints of his future:

Martin: So you want to work for this particular company [Blizzard Entertainment] then? That's what you...?

Daniel: Yes, that's one thing. Or e-sports maybe, this computer games sport, sort of, where you create your own team with professional gamers. Maybe! But then I need money for it! And sponsors...

Martin: Okay, right, so you want to specialize in your gaming and make a living from e-sports?

Daniel: Yes, yes, that's what... that's what I want, sort of. [...] And then maybe another, eh... apprenticeship, carpentry work and that.

[...]

Martin: What do you think you will do then, in the future?

Daniel: Well, either I'll work in a game store [...] or for some game industry here in Sweden. Because there are some, like Nintendo. Most of them are abroad, though, so I don't know really. Or I'll simply be one of those who work in a supermarket. [...] But I want to go abroad, or work here... with computer games.

Eddie, Gökhan and Daniel all exemplifies how the complicity between social position (habitat) and disposition (habitus) must not be absolute, since they are aspiring for positions beyond the class position of their own family. At the same time, their habitus seems to exert a certain force on them, causing them to doubt their own abilities to actually transcend the constraints of class. The general picture that arises from the empirical data, then, is still one where the working class boys feel bad about school and uncertain about their future career (unless they are determined to get a typical working class job, e.g. welder or caretaker), while the middle class boys give value to and invest time and effort in their education – sometimes with a certain profession in mind (e.g. journalist), but mostly in order to keep as many doors open as possible.

Furthermore, the stances taken towards education and the future have consequences for how the young men think of their leisure. Even though the internet and related digital media play a significant role in the teaching activities at the study programmes visited (apart from the Vehicle programme at School C, where they seem to play a more peripheral role),⁷ the young men primarily make use of them in their spare time, i.e. in the time out of class. Hence, their different feelings about school and different aspirations for the future also tend to produce different readings of media in general and digital media in particular. The middle class boys seem to interpret and use

⁷ It is important to note, however, that in this respect there are material differences between the vocationally-oriented public schools and the private ones preparing for higher education. While the class visited at School D had to take pot luck with six relatively old computers, donated by a parent of one of the pupils, School A provided every single student with a personal MacBook that could be bought at reduced price when leaving school. The other private school – School B – did not provide their students with laptops, but was equipped with several computer halls.

their spare time drawing from the idea of a productive leisure, i.e. they are tacitly conceptualizing their time out of class as a scarce resource that has to be carefully invested in order to acquire future benefits in the struggles of the social field. This must not be a deliberate strategy – although it might be the case, judging from some of the interviews – but is better understood as a product of the underlying workings of habitus. The idea of a productive leisure, geared at education and a future career, becomes apparent through their use of spare time for homework, extra work, voluntary work and socially approved hobbies such as sports or music (i.e. cultivating the body and soul). It also serves as a basis for how they value different media goods and practices:

Martin: And then you watched TV when you came home in the evenings. What kind of TV programmes do you watch?

Carl: Well, the thing with TV is... actually, I don't watch TV that much. The only time I watch, basically, is when mum asks me to watch the news, because she thinks it's good. So I feel like the TV is almost... out of my life now. [...] Before, it was pretty much TV, but now it's not much at all.

Martin: How come?

Carl: I don't know really. I caught myself thinking... like six months ago, that I almost never watch TV. But I guess that, well... you have more homework and other things to do. [...] It's like... TV is just a way of killing time, kind of, and if you don't have any time to kill, it won't be that much TV. Besides I think that most TV programmes are quite boring, actually. I feel like I'm watching other people living their life, doing stuff, while I just... watch.

[...]

Martin: So when you're watching TV, it's mostly...

Carl: News. [...] Of course I watch other programmes as well, but not that often, actually. At the weekends, maybe you watch a movie or something like that. But it's not only school that takes the time, but the older you get, the more friends you get. You're constantly building up your social network. And that's time-consuming too.

Martin: Right. And you've been practicing judo, you take guitar lessons, and you...

Carl: And I sail.

Martin: And you sail as well. That's quite many hobbies too, besides school then...

Carl: Yes.

To Carl, then, leisure is not primarily the same thing as rest and recreation, but rather time to be used, while not necessarily consciously, for the acquisition of the kind of cultural and social capital that can be successfully used in the field of education and later on also in the struggle for certain social positions (Carl wants to be a diplomat). Hence, television as a means of killing time is not considered productive, while regularly watching the news is believed to be of value – not only by Carl's mother, but also by himself. He is a relatively heavy news consumer and describes himself as having an interest in politics and public affairs – in Sweden, as well as internationally. It is important to note, however, that not all of the middle class boys express the idea of a productive leisure as distinctly as Carl, even though it is more or less present in all of their accounts. Furthermore, we cannot forget that they also use their spare time, especially the media, for escaping the demands of school once in a while, and that the practices here interpreted as strategies geared at future struggles in the social field, might very well be experienced as sheer fun.

Among the working class boys, on the other hand, spare time is not used in order to make profit within the field of education. This is not to say that they do not invest this scarce resource strategically. Daniel, for example, uses most of his spare time for playing computer games, which seems quite reasonable considering his dream of make a living from e-sports, and John, who wants to work as a caretaker, earns some extra money by occasionally taking care of the industrial estate owned by a friend of his father. In the same vein, one can argue that Gökhan's frequent

visits at the gym are strategic in the light of his ambition to work as police officer or security guard. Thus, when it comes to the non-mediated leisure, there are similarities between the middle class and working class boys in that both groups use it for earning some extra money and for exercising sports and music (although the latter tends to be done in a more formal, organized way among the middle class boys). The point is that neither playing computer games,⁸ nor weight-training, nor taking care of estates can be converted to symbolic capital in the field of education, hence being of limited use also in the struggle for goods and practices that are commonly valued, but typically reserved for the upper classes of society. The pursuit of homework, on the other hand, entails this capacity, but quite tellingly it is rarely mentioned in the interviews with the working class boys, while playing a significant role in most of the middle class boys' accounts.

Similarly, while Carl and the other middle class boys tended to perceive and use media in compliance with the demands of school, e.g. by stressing the importance of keeping up-to-date in areas such as politics and public affairs, most of the working class boys took a quite different stance *vis-à-vis* spare time media use. Daniel can serve as an example. For him, television basically amounts to comedy series such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *Two and a Half Men*, *South Park* and *Chuck*. While some of these series are popular among the middle class boys as well, along with news and various high-brow television programmes, Daniel conveys a strong dislike for news in general (“a waste of time”)⁹ and televised news in particular – especially if broadcasted in some of the two main channels of Swedish public service television (“those channels suck”). The distaste for public service television is quite distinctive for the working class boys, as is the lack of interest in news (with the exception of Eddie and Jimmy, who share an interest in politics as well as thoughts about attending higher education).

To sum up: How the young men think and feel about school and their future career, gives rise to certain interpretations and uses of leisure and media. While the middle class boys conceptualize spare time as a scarce resource that has to be carefully invested in order to gain future benefits in the field of education and their careers, the working class boys – who are generally all but enthusiastic about school and therefore either are uncertain about or not interested in higher education – sometimes use it in ways that might be called strategic in the light of their future aspirations, but seldom in order to succeed educationally. These different strategies must not be deliberate, but have their common root in the different schemes of perception, appreciation and action, i.e. the different habituses, incorporated due to different life conditions. It is through habitus that the planning for higher education, including homework and the regular consumption of televised news, becomes a given for someone coming from a well-educated family, while for others – i.e. those who come from families with meagre educational merits and who aim at becoming e.g. welders or professional gamers – it is not (not even in Sweden, where higher education is free of charge). For them, playing computer games might very well appear as a more appealing leisure pursuit than using media in order to keep up-to-date with what is happening in the world.

⁸ It is of course rather crude to talk about computer games in such a general manner, since there is a steadily growing number of genres and subgenres ranging from violent action games to games developed for the purposes of formal education. In this article, however, the term computer games refers to the kind of games the young men under study engaged with, i.e. games often categorized under labels such as action, adventure, war, strategy and sports.

⁹ Note the reversal of e.g. Carl's approach to television viewing, in which news consumption, as opposed to most other forms of television viewing, was not considered a waste of time.

Digital media as classified

As implied above, media goods and practices are classified and given different value. Carl and his mother, for example, regarded the regular consumption of news as important, while depreciating the use of television for killing time. Daniel considered news consumption as a waste of time and thought that Swedish public service television was more or less useless. The fact that cultural goods and practices are differently valued means that they are not harmless, but rather a matter of symbolic power. How are the norms for valuation set? Who have the authority to act as judge? Who are privileged by the dominant norms and values, and who are not? What groups have access to the valued goods and practices, and who are the ones that must accept what is discarded as trash? The rest of this paper will deal more specifically with how digital goods and practices – i.e. goods and practices associated with the internet and related digital media – are classified and so also operate as classifiers. It will also approach the question of how the prevailing norms for valuation tend to favour some and disfavour others. Ever since computers and the internet became available for private consumption, digital media has been hailed for its democratizing potentials. Now, it was argued, everyone could have equal access to information and equal opportunities for making their voices heard. The structural barriers of class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, etc. would soon be abolished. Even though critical voices have been raised against such technological deterministic claims, the myth is still alive – essentially because there are political and economic interests in keeping it that way (e.g. Mosco 2004). The critics, however, have mainly been concerned with questions of material access to computers and the internet, while the significance of persistent norms according to which cultural goods and practices are valued have rarely been thought of as impeding the realization of the democratizing potentials of digital media.

The school is one of the most important institutions for upholding established norms and the current social order. At the same time, formal education – the good produced by school – often is the key not only to general wealth, but to individual affluence too. For someone born into poverty, thus, going to school and get an education is the most reliable means of prosperity. In other words, the school has an ambiguous function; on one hand, it serves to maintain the established social order and, on the other, it is supposed to lay the groundwork for greater social equality. As implied above, certain uses of leisure and media are more in line with the norms and requirements of school than others, e.g. consuming news in order to keep up-to-date with current affairs. The investment of time and effort in cultivating ones gaming abilities, on the other hand, is of limited use in the field of education. It does not comply with the dominant social norms reproduced in school. Later on, when looking closer at the young men's readings of the internet and digital media, we will see how this situation becomes rather problematic considering the idea of formal education as a means of greater equality.

That the school system plays an important role in instituting a certain standard for the classification and valuation of digital goods and practices becomes even more apparent when turning to the accounts of the young men interviewed. When asked about their experience of how various goods and practices associated with digital media were perceived by teachers, parents and the adult world in general, the middle class and working class boys painted a more or less consistent picture. First of all, digital media is regarded as bad when jeopardizing practices that are valued more positively. Carl, whose family was relatively late on broadband, says:

Carl: Well, my friends really liked computers and stuff like that. And when mum and dad noticed this, that they sat in front of the computer all the time, they got really scared and sort of "Oh, if you get broadband, you too will sit in front of the computer all the time, and you're going to lose all your contacts and you're not going to do something reasonable with your life" [...] So they were cautious about it... they were pretty afraid of it. It was the same thing with, well, digital TV. My friends were like real couch potatoes and sat in front of the TV all the time, and then my parents thought it was terrible and that if we got digital TV it would, well, happen to us too, sort of.

Martin: Alright. But later on they changed their minds then?

Carl: Yes, yes... the older it got, the... well, they understood that it wouldn't be that way.

The moral panic of the early days of internet has gradually become weaker and today Carl's parents think he should use it, but for doing something "reasonable" with his life. Implied here is not only the fear of an excessive digital media consumption stealing time from school work, friends and outdoor activities, but also that different digital practices are differently valued. Countless are the news stories on teenage boys addicted to computer games, so it is hardly surprising that gaming is thought of as the major threat to pursuits that are considered more productive. Daniel tells about his experience of these ideas about gaming among the adult world:

Martin: I was thinking about what you're saying about computer games... What are your thoughts about how adults, like teachers, parents, politicians and so on, look at games?

Daniel: Wasting time, probably. The school I went to before thought so, that you should do more homework. This was the boring thing with it, really, because I like to do more of... like playing games and stuff, so... But here they care... here you can work with computers and stuff [quiet]... And then my parents, they've tried to check out what I'm doing a little bit, sort of, get a grip of it, the game. And they think it's okay, sort of, but... Then I don't really know what the politicians, Reinfeldt [the Swedish Prime Minister] or whatever their names are, think about computers. They have to use a computer sometime at least. But I don't think they like young people playing too much... computer addiction... And there are people who've died playing that game, World of Warcraft. It was someone who stayed up for like 48 hours and then he died or something.

The boys are in agreement about parents and teachers wanting them to use digital media not for playing computer games, but for information seeking and learning activities more generally. It is important to note, however, that not just any kind of information and learning will do. What is referred to is the acquisition of knowledge that is traditionally valued in the field of education, i.e. theoretical/factual knowledge rather than more practical/bodily forms of knowledge, such as the ones cultivated when playing certain computer games. Patrick highlights this distinction:

Martin: But do you think there are ways of using computers and the internet that they [teachers] want for you, rather than playing computer games?

Patrick: Yes, probably.

Martin: Like what?

Patrick: Information seeking. [...] For learning, sort of. That's what all teachers want, isn't it? That you learn, basically.

Martin: Yes. But if you think about when you use computers and the internet and things like that, do you feel... Can you describe how you learn when doing this?

Patrick: I learn English if I play.

Martin: Yes? So you think there are some sort of learning involved in the gaming as well?

Patrick: Mm. [...] You learn to think fast as well, because that's what you've got to do sometimes when you play. But other than that, I don't think there's anything special, really...

Martin: But do you think it's useful in school too?

Patrick: To think fast?

Martin: Yes, and the English as well...

Patrick: Yes, the English is good I guess, but fast thinking, it has... it's like something else. I guess it's something you use only when you're gaming.

Furthermore, even if the boys perceive the information seeking capabilities of the internet as highly valued according to the norms established and enforced by various moral entrepreneurs, it is also, obviously, a matter of what the information is about. Gökhan, for instance, reports on how his school has prohibited access to websites including recipes for drugs (along with various betting sites).¹⁰ Likewise, the information searched has to be classified as factual in order for the activity to be encouraged. Jimmy tells a story about his mother taking the internet connection out of the household altogether, when finding out that he visited sites containing extreme right-wing propaganda. In the same vein, some of the young men mentioned pornography as another type of web content strongly discouraged by the prevailing moral order. Using the internet for consuming the kind of information we usually refer to as news, on the other hand, was perceived as digital practice generally regarded as good – presumably because keeping informed about current affairs falls within the confines of the kind of knowledge valued by school. Eddie says:

Martin: Do you feel like there are certain ways of using the internet that are more highly valued by society in general? That are considered better than others?

Eddie: Eh... that are considered better?

Martin: Yes, like... well, let's put it this way: How does the society want you to use the internet?

Eddie: I think they want you to read the news online, for sure, and... to have some sort of social function. Nothing special really, but you should have some sort of social function. Yes, that's what I think at least.

This quotation also touches upon a belief widely shared among the boys, namely that the social uses of digital media are positively valued by society at large, that it is considered a general good to make use of social media for keeping in touch with existing friends as well as for making new ones. Gökhan implies that this might be due to the need for social control, i.e. making people stay at home instead of meeting outdoors (a statement reminding us about the fact that the young men interviewed live in an urban area, not a rural community):

Martin: But how, then, do they [teachers] want you to use the internet?

Gökhan: In a positive way... so that you learn something, so that you can gain something from of it...

Martin: For example?

Gökhan: Well, like for help in school... eh, for keeping in touch with others... instead of going out at night, you stay at home in front of the computer. I think it's like this. That's the way they want it.

Besides the practice of social networking, there is another digital practice which might be categorized as explicitly social and which also is experienced by the young men as highly regarded. The use of internet for expressing one's opinions and discussing politics with others, i.e. using it for civic purposes, seems to be perceived not only as a socially desirable digital practice, but also – at least by some of the boys – as a distinctively high-brow one:

Martin: Do you feel like there are certain ways of using the internet that are valued more highly than others? That are considered better in general and have like a higher status in society?

Simon: Yes, I think so.

Martin: Which?

¹⁰ The prohibition most likely included other types of websites as well, e.g. file sharing sites and sites containing racist propaganda or pornographic material. At least, this is the standard in Swedish schools.

Simon: It's different, I guess. I think that... eh, there are probably not that many young people who use... like news sites every day, or sites that... where you're supposed to tell your opinion or what you think about politicians and shit like that, or elections and stuff like that. I don't think there are too many people using such websites. I think it's just the... posh people [sarcastically] who make use of them... I really think it's that way.

Martin: And somehow it's considered sort of better, then, to use the internet in that way?

Simon: Yes, I think so.

If social networking and discussing politics are digital practices believed to be good, along with information seeking and the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge, then betting and the sharing of copyrighted music and movies are experienced as practices generally depreciated by the adult world. As mentioned above, Gökhan told about his school prohibiting access to betting sites at its computers. And when it comes to file sharing, the recent criminalization of such activities speaks for itself. To sum up so far, thus, it is clear that different digital goods and practices are experienced by the boys as differently valued by parents, teachers, policy-makers and other keepers of the established social order. Using digital media for educational, social and civic purposes is seen as valuable and desirable, while e.g. playing computer games, watching porn and gambling is deemed as morally dubious, if not simply objectionable.

However, it seems as if it is not only a matter of what digital goods and practices one engages with, but also of how one engages with them. When asked about the valuation of such goods and practices, many of the boys agreed to a well-established standard not only saying that production is better than consumption, but also advocating an ideology of professionalism (e.g. Carpentier 2010). In other words, agents ought to be productive and professional when engaging with digital media, at least if they are to use them in the struggles of the social field. There are, however, certain risks associated with such a strategy, as spelled out by this quotation:

Martin: Are there ways of using the internet that have higher status than others?

Carl: Yes, there are. I think that, well, sending information yourself has higher status than just receiving. That if... if you wrote something in a forum, it would give more status than just reading the forum. And to start a debate in the forum, it's even greater... well, status. And then there's... if you would get a debate article published in an online newspaper, like Aftonbladet, it would be like really really great status. To me, that is. And then to, well, build your own website, it can be even higher status, because in that case you have created everything on your own. [...] It's exactly this, to create rather than to just take part of, that I consider as... status.

[...]

Martin: Are there any more ways of using the internet, then, that have lower status? That are devalued in society or...?

Carl: Yes, there are such things as... If you create something by yourself, but something which is really really bad, that person would lose a whole lot of status. Then it's lower than just receiving. [...] The thing is that if you write something that someone thinks is bad, then it's really low status. Then you get lots of these... sort of evil eyes on you.

Martin: Right. It's a kind of balancing act then?

Carl: Yes.

When agents produce and make public their own digital creations, they also run the risk of being classified as unprofessional, as amateurs, which – considering the seemingly prevailing ideology of professionalism – might be disadvantageous. The ideology of professionalism also manifests itself through the way in which Carl values more highly a text published in the traditional Swedish tabloid Aftonbladet than texts published in an internet forum. The very same basis for valuation

can be noticed in relation to websites more generally, in so far as the young men tend to judge them in terms of their perceived professionalism and the number of visitors they have – the more professional and the greater number of visitors, the better website. But just as the production and distribution of self-made digital creations involves the risk of being classified as amateurish, so too is it a thin line between being appreciated as a professional and depreciated as a computer nerd. Surely, it requires a considerable investment of time and effort in developing the skills necessary for successfully building websites or playing computer games, but agents cannot invest too much time in cultivating such abilities, forsaking e.g. their social life. Ian argues that neither this, nor the opposite position – i.e. being digitally illiterate, not knowing how to use e-mail – functions as capital to be used in the struggles of the general social field:

Martin: But these status hierarchies, do they exist online as well? That different ways of using the internet are more highly valued than others, so to speak? Or not just the internet, actually, but new technology in general...

Ian: Well, I don't know really. I think that if you're like too good at using it, there is a risk with this too, in that you become a bit nerdy, sort of. If you think about someone sitting and writing these digital codes and playing World of Warcraft, then maybe he's like smart as hell, but you probably look down on him a bit, sort of, and think he's quite fishy. Eh, and the opposite too, that... well, if someone can't check his e-mail, you probably think he's a weird dude as well. So I guess the best is probably to be rather normal and stick to Facebook and Aftonbladet, hehe.

Hence, in order to use the internet and related digital media in compliance with dominant social norms, as experienced by the young men under study, agents must know how to make use them, obviously, but knowing this, they must use them reasonably – both in the sense of “not too much” (i.e. not jeopardizing time to be invested in activities considered more valuable) and in the sense of “for the proper reasons” (i.e. educational, social and civic). Furthermore, agents ought to be active, productive and professional, rather than merely passive consumers of digital creations made by others, but coming off as too digitally skilled, at the same time, involve the risk of being depreciated as a computer nerd. It is obvious, thus, that to the extent that digital goods and practices are classified in line with certain norms and values, people will also be classified simply by engaging with digital media (or not). Simon, for instance, interpreted the practice of discussing politics online as something high-brow or snobbish, while Ian – along with most of the other middle class boys – decoded people who play World of Warcraft as somewhat deviant.

Digital media as classifying

In the light of how the young men under study perceive the dominant norms and values regarding digital goods and practices – established and enforced primarily by parents and various moral entrepreneurs, e.g. teachers and policy-makers – we must assess how their own readings, i.e. interpretations and uses of the internet and related digital media, relate to these norms and values, but also the significance of class in this respect. As demonstrated above, the middle class boys tend to think of higher education as a matter of course, recognizing it as the means necessary for leading a good life. For some of them, this seems to amount to a career in typical middle or upper middle class professions, such as journalist or diplomat, while for others, it is more a matter of keeping available as many career paths as possible. The point is that the dreams they have tend to cause them to value their education and take seriously not only school, but also their leisure.

To a large extent, spare time is thought of as time to be invested in pursuits that can be converted to symbolic capital in the field of education, and later on in the struggles of the general social field. The working class boys, on the other hand, are either uncertain about or not interested in higher education (in most cases manifested also through their choice of school and study programme), depending on whether they doubt their abilities or aspire to occupations not requiring a university degree. Consequently, with the exception of Eddie, they do not value their current education to the same extent as the middle class boys, whereas leisure becomes primarily an opportunity either for escaping the demands of school, sheer fun or for gaining experience relevant to their non-university future aspirations. These divergent approaches to school, leisure and the future are apparent also in relation to the internet and related digital media.

First of all, it is important to note that all young men, regardless of class, expressed more or less positive feelings about the internet. Some of the middle class boys even echoed the romanticizing discourse of a digital generation from time to time. However, the reasons for these positive feelings seem to be not only different, but also distinctive of their class habitus. While the middle class boys valued the internet as a resource for learning, social networking, (civic) participation and amusement, thus perceiving it largely in compliance with the norms and values established and enforced by institutions such as the school, the working class boys tended to position digital media as oppositional to education, mainly valuing their capacity to entertain. This is not to say that middle class boys do not play computer games at all or that working class boys never take part of the news online, only that there are differences when it comes to how the internet and related digital media are interpreted. In the light of the divergent outlooks on school, leisure and the future – caused by the habitus embodied through the upbringing under certain life conditions – this is hardly surprising. However, these interpretations also have a bearing on how the internet is actually used, thus having the potential of real, material effects. There is a difference between having a quick look at the top news at MSN once in a while (Daniel) and visiting various online newspapers on a daily basis (Carl), just as gaming several hours per day (Simon) is something else than playing a couple of times a week (Oscar).

In other words, the middle class boys also tend to make use of the internet and related digital media in ways that comply with the rules of the game played in the field of education. It is hardly necessary to dwell any further on the middle class boys being more frequent and versatile news consumers than the working class boys, but there are more ways of using digital media for educational success than keeping up-to-date with current affairs, through which the boundaries of class are reproduced. Although several of the working class boys pointed out the easy access to information as one of the upsides of the internet, they generally referred to it as a resource either for the banal activities of everyday life (having a look at the timetables for public transport or finding recipes for food) or for their depreciated interest in computer games (e.g. keeping track of forthcoming game releases). In some cases, of course, it was talked about as useful in the accomplishment of mandatory school assignments as well, but not only did the middle class boys stress this good more explicitly, some of them also claimed to use it as an integral part of an informal learning process, pretty much, it seems, in line with the requirements of their formal education:

Neil: If I'm bored, really bored, I might... like, if I don't feel like watching anything on Youtube or if I can't come up with something to search for at Google, I usually go to Wikipedia and just sort of browse

through a random article. Just for fun really, hehe. [...] So it gives... I have always considered myself quite well-read, and I think of it as... I think it's rather... to learn gives me pleasure, so to speak. And I can get that from Wikipedia.

Martin: So you go to Wikipedia, find an article on random and then just go on...?

Neil: Yes, just wikipedding around...

Martin: Right, haha!

Neil: Hehe! And just... no, but... yes, well... it might sound extremely boring to others, but, hehe... No, but you might actually catch yourself doing really weird things when being really bored, because... yeah, suddenly you're just sitting and playing with something [...] I'm going to Wikipedia instead, just to browse through and look... if there is something. Because I'm really thirsty for knowledge and I want to understand why things are the way they are and... like why... why did the king of Portugal stop Columbus from travelling? Such things. [...] And we've just recently seen the movie Elizabeth. Then you go there and check up a couple of things, like what... what actually happened and things like that, and so you get sort of... No, but I'm interested in it!

Neil's experience of using the internet, or, more specifically, Wikipedia for spontaneous learning, is shared also by Ian, who, in his turn, reveals a stance *vis-à-vis* information that might be described as relatively refined for a boy in upper secondary school. Not only seems he aware of the problematic status of truth, but he also knows how to make use of it in school:

Martin: Judging from what you've told before, I guess you consider the internet being of concrete use in your everyday life, but could you describe more specifically in what ways it's useful?

Ian: Well, partly when you... If we're talking about actual use, it's... when you're writing school assignments, it's like a piece of cake finding facts and things like that. And loads of different facts and you can write from a range of angles because you're able to find facts from various perspectives and things like that. So that's a big thing. And then, socially speaking, it's very good to be able to communicate without actually meeting. You certainly know some people living far away and things like that, so I mean, it's damn great in a number of ways, yes.

As demonstrated here, the perceived benefits of the internet do not stop at operating as an accessible resource for finding information and spontaneous learning, but extend to the opportunities of social networking as well. Here, too, the difference between the middle class and working class boys is not so much a matter of "if", but rather of "how". In general, thus, the use of social media in general and Facebook in particular is popular, but for somewhat different reasons. However, before going further into this, it is worth noting that not everybody engages with social networking sites. Patrick has a Facebook account, but is almost never logged in. Instead he uses his mobile or MSN Messenger in order to get in touch with his friends. Daniel, on the other hand, neither has a Facebook account, nor uses MSN Messenger – not anymore, mostly because it interfered with the gaming experience – and cannot really see the point with social networking:

Martin: And Facebook is pointless?

Daniel: Yeah, I don't get it! Could someone please explain it to me?! I get what it's about, sure, but... a lot of people think it's good, but... maybe one can say that they don't really get the point of it.

Martin: I guess that most people use it for keeping in touch with friends and things like that, but how do you and your friends usually...?

Daniel: Phone calls!

Martin: You call each other?

Daniel: The traditional way [sighs]... That's about it... Sure, you had MSN [Messenger] before, but it happened... it was totally strange... Well, it pops up... it's so annoying when it pops up while gaming!

It is not only working class boys, though, who stay away from Facebook and other social networking sites. Although (or perhaps because) Neil makes use of a range of other digital means for

socializing – MSN Messenger, ICQ and various internet forums – he has not yet signed up for Facebook. He differs from the working class boys, however, in that he speaks about his non-membership as a strategy of distinction. Neil can also serve as an example of what seems to be the main difference between the middle class and working class boys in terms of their approach to social networking. While the users among the latter tend to perceive it first and foremost as pastime, the former also recognize the productive side of maintaining and extending their social networks. Neil, for instance, reveals the element of (intercultural) learning hidden in the digital practice of social networking:

Neil: But for example, now I might just log on to ICQ and enter some chat room, and all of a sudden I'm talking to a girl from China. So it's kind of... it [the internet] improves the communication between countries altogether. And hopefully it also increases the understanding for how different peoples and religions can look at things differently.

Martin: Do you often talk to people that you don't know and things like that?

Neil: Sure, it happens. It can... well, I guess you can say that the internet, going online, is mainly about boredom, that you don't have anything better to do, hehe, really. And so I use to... when I have nothing better to do, I log on to ICQ, enter a chat room and talk to someone. Yeah, I'm like just making contact saying "Hi!". It's quite cool in a way, that you so easily can make a relation with someone who lives like really far away. For example, I have a contact on MSN [Messenger] who lives in Egypt, who's really nice. I know him through the high jumping, though, so, well, yeah...

Thus, when Neil has "nothing better to do" he visits chat rooms in order to connect with people coming from other countries, seemingly with the ambition to learn more about different cultures and religions. To engage in such practices can be understood as an investment of time in the acquisition of what has been called cosmopolitan capital (e.g. Weenink 2008). Once again, this must not be a deliberate strategy, but to Neil, who aspires for higher education and a career as journalist, the current investment is likely to pay off in the future. Similarly, when it comes to the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, the accounts shared by the middle class boys lay bare how it is not only a matter of the joy of socializing with friends or making new ones, but also of preserving, increasing and – not least – displaying one's (social) capital. Carl, Ian and Oscar, for instance, speak about Facebook as if it was a game of honour. The number of friends cannot be too small, obviously, but it cannot be too big either, since this is perceived as a misconception of the meaning of being friends – as something limitless or tasteless, quite in the same way as the conspicuous consumption of the *nouveaux riches* is often depreciated as vulgar. The rules of the game is further elaborated by Carl, who claims himself never declining a friend request because he reckons it impolite, and prescribes value to the photo tags given and received between friends (i.e. being widely tagged seems to constitute a mark of distinction). I will not dwell any further on the seemingly intricate rules of facebooking; the point is that the middle class boys tend to take them more seriously than the working class boys who use the website.

If the middle class rather than the working class boys both recognize and invest time and effort in realizing the digital potentials for learning and social networking – i.e. practices that are socially valued and so have the capacity of being converted to symbolic capital in the field of education and the general social field – what, then, distinguishes the digital media use of the latter group? One of the most palpable differences between the groups under study has to do with their divergent approaches to computer games. While the middle class boys stated that they play computer games once in a while – i.e. moderately, in line with the norms and values enforced by for exam-

ple the school – mostly with the co-presence of friends or siblings as a part of a social activity not reducible to the gaming itself, the working class boys tended to talk about computer games with both enthusiasm and expertise, clearly putting the gaming *per se* in the centre of attention (without neglecting the social aspects of it). They take computer games seriously and invest time, money and effort not only in various modes of gaming, but also in a range of associated goods and practices, such as visiting news sites about computer games, taking part of gaming manuals, reading game-related discussion threads, or watching game videos uploaded to YouTube by other players (using them as instruction videos and for inspiration). In short, computer games are significant for the working class boys and they use them extensively. This has been underscored above, for example by Daniel and his dream of making it in the field of e-sports. There are more examples of this approach to computer games, however. Patrick, for instance, tells a story about himself investing his savings in an expensive desktop computer in order to enhance the gaming experience – a purchase he regrets today, since he does not use it as much anymore. Even though he still plays quite a lot, it is certainly not as much as it was when he skipped school:

Martin: Do they [parents] think it's important that you and your siblings use the internet, or what's their attitude to...?

Patrick: It depends on how we use it. They think it's a good thing basically, so that you can check like buses and stuff like that. But they sure don't like if you sit down and play for like six hours, then they get grouchy. I don't know... it's hard to explain... It simply depends on how you use it.

Martin: I see. Does your mum usually bark at you when you're playing too much, or...?

Patrick: She did before. Or she got grouchy at me, sort of. Then I was playing heavily, though. It was like six hours in a row. But then you went out with some friends. You played from 8 AM until like... when they got home from school, and then you went out with them. Then she used to be pretty pissed off.

When talking about this period, Patrick describes himself as being addicted to computer games, or, more specifically, to World of Warcraft. He says: "I played games all the time, nonstop, except when sleeping and eating and things like that. [...] I couldn't picture myself having a normal life, hanging out with friends and stuff like that. All I wanted to do was to play games, sort of." Simon, too, has a great interest in gaming. During the interview he recurrently spoke at length about different games and the various gaming practices he usually engages in:

Martin: So you've got some game consoles then?

Simon: Yeah, I hang around at home with my Xbox 360.

Martin: That's the one you play at?

Simon: Yes. I think I'll get Playstation 3 soon... still, it would be nice to have one. After all, there are different games, but... the Xbox is probably the one I'll use most of the time.

Martin: Do you like Xbox better than Playstation, or...?

Simon: Yeah [quiet]... The only negative thing with the Xbox is probably that the internet doesn't come for free. So you've got to pay for [inaudible]...

Martin: Yeah, right, you're able to connect it to the internet, aren't you? And play against other users...

Simon: Yes.

Martin: Do you often do that, or...?

Simon: Yeah, sure, I play... one game is like thirteen million connected users like every...

Martin: What game?

Simon: Call of Duty: Modern Warfare. Fucking great. I'm waiting for the second one now, it'll be released in about a month. Then it'll probably be more, though there are a lot of people playing Halo, Gears of War and stuff like that too. [...] Mainly action games, I guess, but then you can play other games as well, like NHL... I play that a lot too.

Martin: [...] So, Call of Duty, Halo and... what was the name of the third one?

Simon: Gears of War 2.

Martin: Gears of War, alright... And they're all action games, or...?

Simon: Yeah, or maybe... yeah, it's action games. Halo is like sci-fi action. Gears of War, it's monster action where you fight against monsters. And then Call of Duty, it's like war, modern warfare sort of [inaudible]... So it's pretty cool.

Not only is the interest in computer games among these young men tied in with a relatively extensive game consumption, but it also seems to shape their uses of other digital goods. Daniel, for instance, quit using MSN Messenger since it interfered with his gaming experience, while Simon specifies as one of the main reasons for using Facebook the various games connected to the website. The same goes for John, who asserts himself spending a considerable amount of time playing such games, most notably Mafia Wars. Thus, among the working class boys actually using the digital means of social networking, which are generally considered a good, there seems to be a translatory tendency, very much related to the depreciated digital practice of gaming, so that the potential benefits of these means might not be realized. This can be conceived of as the same kind of translation as the one carried out by the working class boys when they visit internet forums not for deliberating on various matters of concern, but primarily for taking part of advices on how to solve game-related issues. In other words, there seems to be a considerable distance between the digital potential and the digital real.

The only middle class boy expressing an explicit interest in computer games is Robert, who describes himself as "somewhat of a gamer". Even so, his approach to games differs from the one shared by the working class boys above. While both Daniel and Simon are seriously considering a career related to the gaming industry in one way or another, Robert wants to work as a journalist in the future. Consequently, although appreciating computer games, he nevertheless makes manifest an awareness of this being an interest he neither can nor should prioritize. For instance, he emphasizes that he never allows his interest in computer games to intrude on activities related to school. Rather than building his future aspirations around gaming, he tries to capitalize on his hobby in order to find his way into the journalistic field. By the time of the interview he had just recently applied for serving as a writer for a website about Playstation 3, where he since long had been a frequent visitor and active forum participant.

Robert is not the only middle class boy using the internet and related digital media with a future career in mind. Ian, for example, started a blog in order to explore and develop his writing outside the restrictions laid down by formal education and he has also published a chronicle at the official blog of his favourite football team, while Neil, who recently had become interested in poetry, publishes his poems at a website where the users are able to comment on each others' works – both practices being clearly strategic in the light of the young men's dreams of making a living of their writing in some way. These examples also highlight another difference between the middle class and working class boys when it comes to their readings of digital media. The potential for using the internet for the production and publication of digital content – such as chronicles, poems or blog posts – seems to be far more thoroughly realized by the former – a tendency perhaps best epitomized by how Robert actively participated in discussions about computer games, while for example Daniel, although taking games far more seriously, stated that he never wrote something in such forums. Discussing games will not make you a better gamer, but maybe a better writer. Thus, it might be of use in relation to the journalistic field (Robert), but hardly if one wants to make it into the field of e-sports (Daniel).

Conclusion

The preliminary results of the pilot study suggest that social class, in the sense of agents sharing similar social positions characterized by certain life conditions, tends to shape – through the workings of habitus, i.e. embodied schemes of perception, appreciation and action – the ways in which the young men feel and think about their education, leisure and future. The middle class boys are dedicated to school and perceive their present education as important. For them, attending university after upper secondary school is more or less a matter of course, partly for keeping as many doors open as possible, partly for being able to reach the social positions to which they aspire (e.g. journalist or diplomat). This also gives rise to a certain approach to leisure, constituted by the idea of spare time as a scarce resource that must be strategically invested in goods and practices – digital or non-digital – having the capacity of generating profit in the field of education and later on in the general social field as well. Consequently, the middle class boys tend to perceive, appreciate and make use of digital media in compliance with the perceived norms and values instituted and imposed by parents, teachers, policy-makers and other holders of the moral order of society. For instance, they highlight the internet as a resource for learning, information seeking, social networking, and production/distribution of digital content. And when engaging in digital goods and practices perceived as depreciated – i.e. those excluded from the idea of a productive leisure, for example computer games – they do so moderately.

The working class boys, on the other hand, consider school as boring, and tend to perceive higher education either as out of the question or as a distant possibility not really meant for them, depending on whether they aspire to clear-cut working class occupations (e.g. welder or caretaker), to professions beyond their class position (e.g. doctor), or to a career related to their hobby (e.g. e-sports). They also make strategic use of their spare time, but since most of them do not take school as seriously as the middle class boys, their investments are not really made in goods and practices convertible to symbolic capital in the field of education and the struggles of the social field (presuming that institutionalized cultural capital, i.e. educational merits, play a major role in these struggles). This is manifested through their general tendency to think of digital media as oppositional to education, so that when not engaging in socially devalued practices – e.g. playing computer games (which most of them do quite excessively) – they tend to use also the digital good for the mere purpose of having fun or killing time, thereby failing to realize the potential future profits hidden in seemingly banal digital practices such as information seeking, social networking, content creation or online discussions.

Hence, even though recognizing the dominant norms for valuation of digital goods and practices, the working class boys tend to use the internet and related digital media in ways that are at odds with these norms. How, then, can this apparently paradoxical circumstance be explained? If the working class boys recognize the moral order of digital goods and practices, how come they do not comply with it? Why do they read digital media in ways that seem to maintain their subordinate position? Bourdieu offers a rather convincing answer to these questions when claiming that agents, being born into a social reality which is already ordered, tend to internalize this very order in their habitus, thereby taking for granted not only their own position in it, but also that of others. To the extent that agents who are privileged/disprivileged by this order misrecognize the true source of their own privilege/disprivilege – i.e. the unequal distribution of effective forms of

capital, may it be economic, cultural or social – one can speak in terms of a symbolic violence. In other words, when the working class boys recognize the different value given to various digital goods and practices, they simultaneously perform an act of misrecognition, in so far as they take for granted the rules of the game – or, perhaps better, the dominant norms for valuation – without recognizing how these norms tend to privilege the privileged and disprivilege themselves. The class rule remains hidden and so remains – not through brutality, influence or propaganda, but quite simply through the symbolic power to enforce and encourage a certain vision of “the order of things” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:168). The force of “the order of things” appears to apply also to the supposedly disorderly or fluid digital media, regularly ascribed with the potential of bringing to an end the enduring inequalities of social class. The preliminary results from the pilot study presented here, suggest that digital media are appropriated in ways that rather serve to reproduce such inequalities. Hence, the assumed democratizing potentials of digital media in fact seem to be unequally realized – even within the so called digital generation.

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