Quasi-Quisling:
Co-design and the assembly of *collaborateurs*

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Abstract

In recent years, various critiques of participative approaches to design processes have been presented. Participatory urban planning has been subject to a specific form of criticism, which posits that such processes are 'post-political', inasmuch as they merely legitimise the power and political agendas of elites. Reviewing a case of participatory urban planning in Gothenburg, Sweden, this article suggests that actor-network theory can be operationalised as an alternative means to account for democratic deficiencies of co-design practices. It thus uses the concept of translation to describe how the original interests of participants may be betrayed. It also suggests that the key agency in these unfortunate betrayals is not human, but emerges through the material modes of collaboration. The article thus endeavours to contribute to the debate on how co-design processes may become more effective means to democratise urban planning and design.

Key words

Urban planning; post-politics; actor-network theory; translation; collaborateurs; Quisling

1. Introduction

During the autumn of 2005, we participated in a form of citizen consultation, or so-called dialogue process, on the re-development of the harbour area in Gothenburg, Sweden. As members of one out of six teams – all consisting of designers, architects and citizens – we partook in 'participatory urban planning' or 'partnership planning' (cf. Hamdi 1991; Hamdi and Goethert 1997). The originator of the process (from hereon referred to as 'the Dialogue Process') was a municipal company, which sought to generate a harmonious negotiation between citizens and developers. However, as the process had drawn to a close, we – along with other participants – were struggling to find traces of our input in the final outcomes of the process. Moreover, we failed to politicise the development of the area: Our input did not contribute to the opening of a dissensus regarding the future of the harbour. (Barry 2001, 268f) In the end, we reluctantly resigned to the fact that very little was at stake in this process of urban co-design.

One of the key promises of co-design is that it tends to flatten the hierarchies of power. For instance, Sanders and Stappers argue that 'co-designing threatens the existing power structures by requiring that control be relinquished and be given to potential customers, consumers or end-users' (Sanders and Stappers 2008, 9). This statement may be contested from a number of perspectives.

First, from a design studies perspective, one may argue that the 'design thing' (Binder 2011) of 'material public' (Marres 2012) is at the risk of being corrupted by the very format it is designed by. Even if there are 'critical' (Dunne 1999) or 'adversarial' (DiSalvo 2012) modes of design that may encourage experimentation, they offer little help in co-design negotiations. One of the core problems of co-design and participatory design rests in the limited scope of the designers to 'question the brief' to instead facilitate processes of legitimization and coercion (Miessen 2010). Similarly, there seems to be little room for the mobilising of participants to realize the critical potential of design to be 'micro-utopian'; that is, rendering radical politics imaginable, discussable and realizable (Wood 2007). Struggling to manage the process seamlessly, mitigate conflict, and produce a 'harmonic' or 'realistic' scenario or proposal, the designers may disarm the participants and lower their aspirations, so that they fit the 'formats' of the design process. It may thus be the designers that restrain the visionary height and criticality of the process, rather than the limits of politics itself.

Secondly, the participation discourse has been criticised in the context of international development. For instance, Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari argue that there is a 'tyrannical' potential inherent in contemporary practices of collaboration. This potential is 'not only a matter of how the practitioner operates or the specificities of the techniques and tools employed.' (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 4) Instead, practitioners of participatory methods need to ask some important questions: 'Do participatory facilitators override existing legitimate decision-making processes?', 'Do group dynamics lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the

already powerful?' and 'Have participatory methods driven out others which have advantages participation cannot provide?' (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 7f) Every collaboration has its asymmetries, and this is nothing participation and co-design in itself can override. Instead, the risk is that the designers run the errands of power, where the participatory design process gets used to create coercion and sugar-coat autocratic processes with a shimmer of 'collaboration'. As Cooke and Kothari further highlight, practitioners need to be more careful about

> the naivety of assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes; how the language of empowerment masks real concern for managerialist effectiveness; the quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice; and how an emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice. (14)

A third form of critique may be sourced from the field of pedagogy. By renouncing some of the expert-dominated hierarchies of 'classic' user-centred design, co-design offers a more collegial exchange of experiences and ideas; a dialogue facilitated by the designer. But as noted by educational researcher Andrew Hargreaves, collegiality, however collaborative and participatory, risks to merely reproduce managerial power. 'From the micropolitical perspective, collegiality is often bound up with either direct administrative constraint or the direct management of consent.' (Hargreaves 1992, 83) Such management of consent is similar to the 'tyranny of structurelessness' observed by feminist scholar Jo Freeman, disguising unacknowledged leadership under the cloak of non-hierarchy (Freeman 2013). Flat and cooperative processes are thus arenas for Machiavellian power struggles, even if we may have problems recognizing them in the realm of design.

One way to speak about how co-design processes may be corrupted is to invoke the terminology from the power games of WWII. Participants in co-design processes can, we argue, be imagined as *collaborateurs*, a term that denotes an agency that collaborates with invading powers against the interest of the resisting population. Whereas some studies of WWII focus on the explicit forms of collaboration (cf. Gordon 1980), Rings (1982) differentiates between several modes of collaboration along a continuum: On one extreme, there is 'unconditional collaboration', that is, collaborating with the former enemy for what is now seen as a common cause; on the other, there is 'tactical collaboration', where a minimal collaboration is actually a cover for purposeful resistance. The term 'Quisling' is sometimes used to refer to a person who collaborates in the former sense, an arch-collaborateur engaging in a 'collusion with the enemy before invasion, as well as after' (Davies 2004, 94). A key concern in this article is to inquire how participants in co-design processes can avoid becoming agents that betray the interests of their peers. The argument will point to an unexpected culprit in the story of the Dialogue Process – as it turns out, the role of the 'Quisling' is played by a non-human. It should thus be noted that we use the term in an abstract manner, where the meaning of the term is detached from the original Vidkun Quisling. In other words, this argument is about agencies of betrayal, not about a historical person's

relation to National Socialism.

Along with the claim that the Quisling agency is non-human, we will furthermore argue that it is deceptive to point to a distinct, pre-existing power structure to which co-design participants capitulate. The identity of the Quisling agency can simply not be captured through standard social-scientific models of (human) agency. Our argument will thus depart from the most prevalent critical theory of citizen participation – the 'post-politics' perspective. Instead, we will use this perspective as a stepping stone for the deployment of actor-network theory (ANT) as an alternative and complementary view of how co-design practices may be democratically deficient.

The argument is structured as follows: The next section (2) will outline the 'post-politics' perspective on co-design processes in urban planning. The subsequent section (3) juxtaposes the post-politics argument with some of the key insights from ANT, along with the media studies term 'protocol'. The arguments from this 'sociology of translation' (Callon 1986) – or, alternatively, 'sociology of associations' (Latour 2005) – are then deployed when examining the empirical case briefly introduced above (section 4). Here, it will be shown how ANT's Machiavellian conception of power, as materialised in various inscriptions, may complement the post-politics argument. The article then proceeds to discuss the merits of an ANT perspective on urban co-design processes (section 5), and ends with a short conclusion (section 6).

Before proceeding with the argument, here is a brief note on method: The case described in section four is written up on the basis of our personal experiences from the work in the team. The documents that we refer to are sourced from the archives of the Gothenburg City Planning Office, from newspaper archives, as well as from the project manager of our team. We have also interviewed this project manager, as well as participants from other teams, so as to validate our case description.

2. The 'post-politics' of co-design procedures

The failings of the Dialogue Process has previously been discussed by Thörn (2008), who was also involved in the Dialogue. She describes how the radical proposals presented by her team were ignored, as these propositions implied 'a politicisation of the process'. Ironically, such a politicisation was not 'possible to handle within the framework of the political-administrative discourse' (65). Thörn thus suggests that

> the fact that the proposal was dismissed because it was too political laid bare the conditions related to the discourse of city politics, and the unquestioned values they contain. (66)

Thörn's argument partly rests on the idea of cities have become post-political spaces. (Swyngedouw 2007) What, then, does 'post-politics' imply? The term – which Slavoj Žižek

(1999, 248) attributes to Jacques Rancière, who in turn denies ever using it (Rancière 2009, 116) – designates a stifling politics of consensus that has emerged from the 1990s onwards. After the proverbial 'end of history', the post-politics thesis argues, democracy has been rendered a mere chimera. In other words, the collapse of the Soviet system resulted in 'an internal weakening of the very democracy that was assumed to have triumphed' (Rancière 2004, 3). For David Harvey, the rich world has seen the rise of a neoliberal state apparatus, which is proving increasingly authoritarian. In Harvey's (2005, 78) terms, this process implies 'a radical reconfiguration of state institutions and practices', where the power of the executive tends to usurp the power of representative democracy. Civil society organisations act as an integral part of this institutional set-up, but fail to present a countervailing power to the neoliberal state. Instead, they have to yield to managerialist approaches to public administration.

This holds particularly true to the specific case of urban politics, and the struggles associated with 'the right to the city'. (Harvey 2008) Erik Swyngedouw argues that citizens and civil society organisations are held hostage when they participate in new governance innovations, such as dialogues, consultations and negotiations:

> Ironically, while these technologies are often advocated and mobilised by NGOs and other civil organisations speaking for the disempowered or socially excluded, these actors often fail to see how these instruments are an integral part of the consolidation of an imposed and authoritarian neo-liberalism. (Swyngedouw 2005, 1998)

Thus, argues Swyngedouw, '"participation" is invariably mediated by "power"', which implies that processes of participation serve the purpose of cementing the power of elites. Indeed, these elites seem to promote techniques of supposed co-determination, co-production and co-design as deliberate co-optive strategies. The power of these elites tends to be exercised through the 'rule of experts'. (Harvey 2014, 122, citing Mitchell 2002) As Žižek (1999, 198) phrases it: 'In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions … is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists…)'. In this way, Žižek argues, democracy is not so much 'repressed' as 'foreclosed'. Citizens may be invited to participate in so-called democratic processes, but the very set-up of the mechanisms of participation precludes any significant influence. Thus, attempts to engage citizens in politics tend not to politicise the *status quo*.

What is the essence of this *status quo*? As hinted above, the idea of post-politics stems from a politico-economic concern with institutional framework of neoliberal capitalism. Ultimately, this very system – and the ways in which it is legitimated – represents the main culprit in the post-politics argument. So,

> if the problem with today's post-politics ('administration of social affairs') is that it increasingly undermines the possibility of a proper political act, this undermining is

directly due to the depoliticization of economics, to the common acceptance of Capital and market mechanisms as neutral tools (Žižek 1999, 353)

To sum up, the post-politics discussion features at least four key propositions. First, the present post-political situation emerges from the *rise of neoliberalism*, which in turn is the ideological outcome of the so-called 'end of history'. Secondly, post-politics implies the *deliberate* deployment of a set of 'new technologies of government' (Swyngedouw 2005, 1992-1995), which renders opposition futile against an 'aseptic post-political administration of public affairs' (Žižek 1999, 210). Thirdly, this administration amounts to an *expert rule*, on behalf of an 'autocratic elite technocracy' (Swyngedouw 2005, 2003). Fourthly, the thing that post-politics ultimately undermines is a critique of capitalism, as it operates in symbiosis with the *ideology of bourgeois economics*, which presents market solutions as natural and apolitical. This puts us in a position to examine how an ANT-inspired approach might provide an alternative account of the failings of urban co-design.

3. Sociologies of translations and associations

Approaching the Dialogue Process from an ANT perspective forces us to reorient the scope of the analysis. Indeed, in *Reassembling the Social*, Bruno Latour posits that 'the first source of uncertainty' for any scholar wishing to do ANT relates to the radical agnosticism regarding group formation. (Latour 2005, 29) In other words, an analysis of the Dialogue Process cannot start from a pre-existing social-scientific account of the supposed role of capital, labour and the state in a stylized account of the 'neoliberal state'. This is a reflection of ANT's proposition of 'radical indeterminacy of the actor' (Callon 1999, 181), and the idea that interests are merely 'temporarily stabilised outcomes of previous processes of enrolment' (Callon and Law 1982, 662). It also reflects the Garfinkelian heritage (cf Latour 2013, 6), which postulates that the concepts of the actors are allowed to be stronger than those of the analysts (Latour 2005, 30). So, while the 'sociologist of the social' may proceed from general categories, 'imposing some order beforehand' (23), the 'sociologist of associations' must pay closer attention to the situation at hand – in our case the Dialogue Process – and conduct an open-ended examination of the modes by which groups are assembled. Another key source of divergence from the post-politics discussion relates to the role of ideology critique: ANT precludes an easy delineation between scientific fact and ideological delusion. (Latour 2004) Thus, item one and four on the list of propositions from the post-politics discussion have to be omitted from the analysis: The inquiry may not start from the proposition that we live in a neoliberalism borne from the idea of the end of history, nor can it depart from an *apriori* assumption that a supposedly 'bourgeois' economics produces post-political effects.

An ANT analysis is nevertheless amenable for explaining how processes like the Dialogue Process may prove democratically deficient. Latour (2005, 22) locates a second source of uncertainty in the nature of actions; 'in each course of action a great variety of agents seem to

barge in and displace the original goals'. This is demonstrated in Latour's (1999, 80-112) description of how the work of physicist Frédéric Joliot is propelled forward by aligning his interests with those of the French state, more specifically the National Centre for Scientific Research. Where Joliot's goal is to be the first to master a nuclear chain reaction, the state's representative, Raoul Dautry, has another goal – to secure national independence in the face of foreign military threats. By aligning their interest, they form an alliance around a new composite goal: to establish a nuclear physics laboratory. Thus, in such 'translation' of goals, there is always 'a drift, a slippage, a displacement'. (88)

As shown in Michel Callon's (1986) classic study on scallops, fishermen and researchers in St Brieuc Bay, such translation processes are rife with betrayals. This article will suggest that when participating in co-design processes, there is a risk that one's goals are being betrayed or translated away through successive enrolments – though the benefactors of this process can never be known in advance. Graham Harman has stated that 'for Latour *every actor is a Joliot*, a medium of translation able to link the most far-flung objects' (Harman 2009, 102). Susan Leigh Star famously questioned such a 'managerial and entrepreneurial model of actor networks' (Star 1991, 26). By focusing on successful Joliots, it neglects 'the world of the non-enrolled' (49), and may ultimately cause researchers to side with the powerful. While not specifically studying those who are altogether Other to such enrolments, this argument shares an interest in all those actors who are not successful Joliots. Indeed, some people may become losers in the process of translation, causing their original objectives to be substantially marginalised. Thus, in co-designed urban planning, participating citizens and civil society groups may see their original goals becoming diluted in the process of goal translation.

An ANT perspective would not, however, present such dismal outcomes as preordained. The Machiavelli-inspired, micro-oriented conception of power proposed by ANT (Callon 1986; Latour 1988; Clegg 1989, 203) suggests that there the proverbial 'powers that be' may not always control citizens through the new modes of participatory governance. It would therefore, *pace* Žižek, be misleading to state that democracy is always 'foreclosed' in processes of participation. This aspect of ANT also places a question mark over item two and three on the list of post-politics propositions: One cannot assume that technocratic elites will always be fully in control of the outcomes of co-design, and that this is a deliberate strategy on behalf of the powers that be. Moreover, as Callon (1991, 143) insists, that there is no such thing as 'translation "in general"'. The ANT researcher must pay close attention to the *material media* in which such translations of goals are 'inscribed: roundtable discussions, public declarations, texts, technical objects, embodied skills' and so on. Hence, in the next section, this article will analyse the co-design process by studying such inscriptions.

This leads us to a further key point of divergence from the post-politics approach stems from the third source of uncertainty – that of the nature of objects. Accepting that 'objects too have agency' (Latour 2005, 63), forces the analyst of co-design processes to interrogate the role

played in the paraphernalia of artefacts that feature in such processes. This article will argue that these artefacts may prove influential in producing democratic deficits of co-design processes. As a preliminary illustration of how such a deficit emerges, one may compare the ANT approach – and our focus on translation and drift – with Rancière's notion of '*mésentente*'. For Rancière, democracy is intimately tied to this French term, which means 'quarrel, disagreement', but also 'the fact of not hearing, of not understanding'. (Rancière 2004, 5) Democracy means breaking down the delineation between the reasonable 'voice' articulated by the patrician, on the one hand, and the incomprehensible 'noise' coming from the plebeian, on the other. This article too deals with the problematic of how co-design processes cause some voices to be treated as 'noise', causing them to be filtered out. However, whereas Rancière's argument comes from a context of pre-existing social divisions among humans – that is, masters and slaves – our argument is more interested in how non-human entities contribute to this very sorting operation. In other words, our inquiry is into the role of the quasi-objects as protagonists in this story. More specifically, we are interested in the quasi-objects that cause voices to be interpreted as noise.

Here, we will borrow the term 'protocol' from media theory. On a basic level, a communications protocol is a system of rules that regulate data exchange, the most famous being the TCP/IP which governs the internet. Alexander Galloway, however, defines it more abstractly as 'a technique for achieving voluntary regulation within a contingent environment'. (Galloway 2004, 7) As such, protocols are not power-neutral, as they produce 'a distributed management system that allows control to exist within a heterogeneous material milieu'. Thus, protocol 'is to control societies as the panopticon is to disciplinary societies.' (13) Thus, though these references point towards Deleuze (1988; 1995) and Foucault (1977) rather than ANT, the notion of protocol is nevertheless useful for the purposes of this article. Protocol allows us to explore mundane and practical modes of co-design interaction as artefactual modes of ordering – more specifically for sorting out noise from voice. Crucially, it allows us to do so while retaining the ANT proposition that groups are to be studied as emerging rather than a predefined categories of 'the social'. (See the first source of uncertainty, discussed above.) It also allows for a depiction of this control as an interlacing between humans and non-humans, with a close attention to quasi-objects – to objects with agency. Thus, we may speak of the protocol as a 'quasi-Quisling', and the assemblage of citizens and artefacts as an 'assembly of *collaborateurs*'. In the next section, we will make use of this conceptual apparatus when analysing the empirical case of the Dialogue Process.

4. Translation and drift in the case of Gothenburg Dialogue Process

As mentioned in the introduction, the material that will be presented below emerges from our experience having participated in an experiment in participatory urban planning in Gothenburg. The city in question is Sweden's second largest; a harbour city with a population of approximately half a million. In the 1980s, Gothenburg suffered from a decline in ship-building, causing large areas on the waterfront to become vacant. These have subsequently been

regenerated, currently hosting attractive housing and office spaces. In order to facilitate this process, the municipality started a company in the 1990's, Älvstranden AB, which led the re-development of the harbour area. This company also launched the ambitious six-month Dialogue Process, meant to generate 'visions' for the future development for the area. As hinted above, this process was rife with translations, which caused a drift – and a concomitant democratic deficit.

The team that we participated in, 'Team Rhizom', endeavoured to assume what Thorpe and Gamman refer to a 'responsive' role. This implies 'that as a designer you do what you can, working with other social actors to leverage the community's assets to effect positive change, but do not seek to take it upon yourself to try to do it all, for other social actors.' (Thorpe and Gamman 2011, 221) Yet, in the end, the format of quasi-subjects (the co-design participants) and quasi-objects that constituted the protocol (the material formats for the processing the communication of development proposals) turned the team into an assembly of *collaborateurs*.

The process of becoming *collaborateurs* was not evident at the time. During the initial design process, the Rhizom team generated a series of 'visions' that indeed seemed to represent 'outside the box' thinking. One key idea was that urban planning is about more than the physical manifestation of the built environment; the team wanted to introduce more abstract propositions, such as experimental governance arrangements, and new economic models that would safeguard social justice. As we shall see below, these ideas got filtered out as the proposal was rendered into the drawings and plans that were to be communicated to politicians, city planning office and the public. However, to state that this filtering was related to a supposed neoliberal consensus, or by bourgeois ideology, would be to simplify this process. Again, the outcome can be accounted for by paying close attention to the protocols of participation. It is here, by highlighting the Machiavellian micro-power of the protocols, that the ANT perspective may complement the post-politics argument.

In other words, when tracing how post-political outcomes emerge, the devil really is in the details. However, before delving into the specifics of this protocol, we may first make a general point regarding the *modus operandi* of protocols. As noted by Galloway, 'Protocol is not a superego (like the police); instead it always operates at the level of desire, at the level of "what we want."' (Galloway 2004, 241) In the case of our urban co-design process, this subtle form of power is manifested in the following manner: If the process is conceived as a chain of sequential data exchanges, each link is governed by desires of receiver, implying that the non-desired voice is treated as noise. In what follows, we will first describe the set of protocols that governed the design process of the team, sorting out voice from noise, and then focus on the protocols that guided outside audiences' processing of the design proposal. We will do so by examining the inscriptions (Latour and Woolgar 1986, 45-53) generated within the design process, thus construing the protocol as something that guides the chain of successive inscriptions.

The design process started off from the generation of inscriptions in the form of post-it notes. Indeed, in a public presentation of the results (see below), one of the citizens designated to the Rhizom team described the co-design process in the following terms: 'We've discussed a lot and moved post-it notes!'. (Team Rhizom 2005) This post-it note-generating brainstorming session constitutes a prime example of a consensus-oriented 'designerly' method, which in our case implied a filtering operation. Here, we followed the typical rules of this exercise, actively avoiding negative ideas or criticisms. Indeed, as design agency IDEO suggests, 'defer judgment' is the first rule of brainstorming; 'creative spaces don't judge.' (OpenIDEO 2011) Thus, some early words of warning never made it onto the post-it notes.

Some of the 'positive' and 'constructive' ideas generated in brainstorming sessions were elaborated upon through inscriptions such as word documents and emails. This material dealt at length with the more abstract ideas mentioned above, such as reformed governance structures of the municipal company that owns the land (Älvstranden AB) and the formulation of a separate constitution for the planned area. It also included microfinance for local entrepreneurship, as well as plans for enabling spontaneous and small-scale activation of the urban space. One further idea was that of the area being developed on the principle of 'purchase on approval' – the development trajectory would be subject to constant revising, and housing programmes would not be set in stone. These ideas were however severely truncated as they fed into the next step in the chain of inscriptions; the presentation poster. (See figure 1, 'The team Rhizom proposal: Poster from the Dialogue Process'.) Here, the *visionary* had to be translated into the *visualisable*. This designerly mode of inscription was an obligatory step in communicating the internal work of the team to outside audiences – that is, the wider public, as well as the municipal planning professionals. In other words, the team management is not to be blamed for the filtering of non-visual ideas: The foregrounding of the visuality of the physical built environment, at the expense of abstract proposals on governance and socio-economic issues, was hardwired into the co-design process.

The poster represented the interface between the internal process of the team and the outside audiences. This inscription thus featured in the public communication produced by the municipality (Gothenburg City Planning Office 2006a) as well as in the local newspaper. Another inscription situated at the interface with the outside audiences was the slideshow presentation, which – much like the poster – foregrounded ideas that could be rendered into visual expressions. This implied that the 'purchase on approval' idea – which could be visualised in the form of a photoshopped receipt (see figure 2, 'Purchase on approval forever: Slideshow image') – was emphasised, while other abstract ideas were somewhat sidelined. The slideshow presentation was showed during two occasions in late 2005: One presentation to planners and local politicians, and one to the general public at the city's largest cinema. These events followed a strict time schedule, in which the teams were allotted brief time slots, which undermined any room to 'question the brief.' Here, our experience is close to that of Tufte (2006), who has

famously denounced PowerPoint's tendency to truncate complicated arguments. While, in theory, PowerPoint may facilitate a cognitive style that could 'allow heterogeneous materials to be seamlessly re-presented' (Stark and Paravel 2008, 30), that was not the effect it had in our case.

The first actor to add new links to the chain of inscriptions was the local newspaper. As mentioned above, the paper reprinted the poster, and reported from the public presentation at the cinema. Interestingly, the newspaper article is somewhat cynical towards the glossy, visually striking presentations of the other, more architecturally oriented teams. However, while the reporter approvingly notes that 'the buildings are mere illustrations' of the wider strategy proposed by our team, the format of the newspaper article precludes any communication of that strategy. (Granath 2005, 82) The same newspaper subsequently publishes an interview with the team leader, which followed the same logic: While failing to communicate the more abstract ideas of the team, the article instead focuses on the proposals that directly relate to the built environment. (Nyström 2006, 18) This implies that the idea of building a swamp in the middle of the river – a proposal that the team members originally construed as of minor relevance – was brought forward as key to the team's proposal.

Along with the media inscriptions, the planning professionals of the municipality produced a bifurcation in the chain of inscriptions produced during the process. As an integral part of the Dialogue, the planners made their own interpretations of the six proposals, condensing them under the following pre-determined headings: Bus/tram transport; car transport; junctions; parks and greenery; environment, sustainability and safety; housing; trade; and real estate ownership. (Gothenburg City Planning Office 2006b) These themes, in turn, are meant to fit squarely into the format of the existing legislation on urban planning, treating any incompatible information as noise. Indeed, when questioned about the de-politicising effects of this operation, the planners respond that they can only cater to 'the views that are directly applicable on a development plan'. (Hagberg 2006, 90) Or, in the words of the designer of the Dialogue Process, the planners cannot, should not, and do not want to process 'political proposals', as this was not part of the Dialogue brief. (Strömberg 2006, 86) Again, this highlights how the protocol exerts a subtle form of power. The planning profession is not consciously taking an ideological line – it is not explicitly 'neoliberal' – it merely follows the protocol.

As inscriptions can be seen as the material form of the translation of interests (Callon 1991, 143), each new link in the chain of inscriptions also indicate how interests and goals have drifted. In this process, the original intentions and interests of us (the authors of this text) had to be aligned with the other team members, then the team as a whole, then the planners and the media outlets, and so on. Thus, when reviewing the key determining factors that shaped the outcome of the Dialogue, one may note how the divergent interests and goals of the actors involved caused radical proposals to be marginalised. For instance, while the newspaper may not fit into the

cliché of the media corporation whose prime goal is to sell cheap content, the description above nevertheless suggests that the circulation of newspaper content was governed by principles of visual popular appeal. Similarly, the planners seemed to approach the visions with the goal of processing the material into a workable development plan. If we turn to the architects and designers we worked with, the prime objective was to remain in the participation game – to follow the brief and hopefully win commissions for the future development of the area. Indeed, we shared this desire with them.

However, given the proposition of radical indeterminacy of actors, a review of these diverging interests points the ANT-inspired analyst towards the surrounding network of elements that stabilise such interests. In other words, the search for the key factors that determined the outcome of the Dialogue ultimately leads us towards examining how the artefacts of the co-design process shaped the agency of the participants. When reviewing the inscriptions produced during the Dialogue process – post-it notes, posters, slideshow presentations, newspaper articles, development plans – it is clear that the design methodologies used were simply inappropriate for mediating between radical visions, on the one hand, and actionable development plans, on the other. Thus, the initial post-it note session failed on two accounts – the brainstorming usurped our ability to question the brief, while simultaneously failing to turn positive visions into development plans. Similarly, the visually driven communication of the poster and the slideshow presentation filtered out abstract proposals that are difficult to visualise, while simultaneously failing to speak the language of the policy professionals that were to process the input from the participants.

In concluding this section, we may also point to the limited techno-managerial investment of the team, which made the quasi-Quisling protocols so effective in treating more radical ideas as noise. At the outset, there was limited time for us to determine how the Dialogue protocol would limit the outcomes of the process. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Dialogue, we did not fight hard and long enough to rectify the outcomes generated by this protocol. These two limitations are, we argue, related to the notion of co-design; the very format of this co-design process did not provide a sustained arena for politically challenging the design brief. As designers, our belief in the co-design process, and a general positive hope that deliberative democracy would automatically be 'good' (and not corrupted), led the team to become hijacked. Through the quasi-Quisling protocols, the radicalism of the original visions was *disarmed by design*. As constituent elements of this assemblage, we became *collaborateurs*.

5. Discussion

This section will discuss three themes that emerge from our encounter with the Dialogue Process, and from the attempt to deploy ANT as a means to account for the potential democratic deficits of co-design. First, we will specify what we mean when we speak of a democratic deficiency in methods of participation. Secondly, we will outline the merits of introducing ANT

in this case, juxtaposing it with the type of critique presented by the 'post-politics' discussion. Thirdly, we will expand on the benefits and perils of using the term 'protocol'.

First, the issue of democratic deficits. In this text, we have tried to move beyond critical accounts that tend to dismiss all kinds of engagement with the world of formal politics. Therefore, we must be clear that terms like 'democratic deficiencies' must be used against a recognition of the fact that formal politics *is* about reducing a plethora of dissonant voices into one consensus, thus facilitating legitimate decision-making. Therefore, representative democracy invariably features 'anti-political elements.' (Barry 2001, 195) Our concern in this article, though, is the manner in which this consensus is reached. The exposition of translations and drift presented above suggests that the material forms of participation – that is, the protocols of co-design – facilitate a consensus-making that systematically filters out certain types of voices.

Secondly, as stated in the introduction, there is a form of Machiavellian micro-power struggles that may be exercised in co-design processes. These forms of power, some critics of the process suggested, need to be addressed in further detail. One of the great benefits of ANT is that its very mode of operation starts from a detailed study of these very forms of micropower, not from pre-existing social 'structures' of power. (Remember, as highlighted in the theoretical sections on post-politics and ANT, this is one of the main themes of doing actor-network research.) Another benefit is the focus on the mundane use of artefacts that invariably influences agency. In this way, it puts the spotlight on entities that might otherwise escape our attention. Having experienced a democratically deficient process of participative planning, one tends to search for culprits among human actors – the power-hungry politician, the boring bureaucrat who turns politics into administration, or some other villain. ANT, instead, renders other problematics visible – in our case, the problem of democratic deficits seem to be related to the material modes of collaboration that we call protocols.

By pointing to such new 'culprits', ANT may shift the debate on participation. Indeed, the post-politics argument may create an unproductive schism between the professions involved in urban planning and design, on the one hand, and the critics of these professions. Here, it is worth bearing in mind that different theories are more or less useful in particular contexts. Whereas ANT was useful for analysing democratic deficiencies in our case, the post-politics argument seems apt for capturing Thörn's (2008) experience. Nevertheless, the ANT position, as operationalised in this article, suggests that some of the democratic deficiencies of co-design may be assuaged by a re-engineering of the protocols of collaboration.

This leads us to the third and final point, about the notion of 'protocol'. We have previously used this term for re-imagining design management: Protocols may be engineered to facilitate decentralised modes of co-design that do not require top-down regulation (Palmås and von Busch 2011). However, as this article argues, the notion of protocol ought to be understood as a non-normative, neutral term. Organisations or processes governed by protocols are not

necessarily 'good'. The existence of a protocol merely suggests that the organisation or process takes place in an open setting, and is based on voluntary collaboration. However, for this very reason – that protocols can be engineered in ways that both liberate and restrain – we believe that they should be at the heart of the discussion on co-design.

6. Conclusion

This article has reviewed a case of a co-design process within urban planning, and shown how that process can be analysed through the ANT notions of translation and drift. Such an analysis suggests that the drift of goals may cause participants in such processes to betray their initial interests, and thus act as *collaborateurs*. The main Quisling in this story is not any individual human actor, but the material modes of collaboration.

As such, the article makes three contributions. First, it wishes to prompt a discussion on the potential democratic deficits that may emerge when co-design practices are operationalised in the context of public life. Secondly, it presents an operationalization of actor-network theory that may serve as an alternative to the already existing discussion on post-politics in participatory urban planning. Thirdly, the article puts the spotlight on the need for a careful re-engineering of the protocols that govern co-design processes.

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