AFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURING

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the implications of care within *infrastructuring* processes, through the lens of a case study account and anecdote. The case study, located in Malmö (Sweden), is an on-going project exploring methods for citizen engagement within city planning. The paper seeks to exemplify how affect can travel - and accumulate - in interactions between public sector workers and citizens, and how this affective current means that each actor is simultaneously affect*ing* and being affect*ed* by her surroundings.

INTRODUCTION

This short and explorative paper departs from the notion that the political incentive *to care* forms the bedrock of *infrastructuring* as a practice. Infrastructures come into being relationally (Star and Ruhleder, 1996; Knox, 2017), through the doing and undoing of socio-material and socio-technical assemblages. Infrastructur-*ing*, in turn, is '*an ongoing, long-term and emergent designerly effort aimed at aligning humans and non-humans (technologies, resources, spaces) for the emergence of new practices*' (Seravalli, 2018., p.3). While Actor-Network Theory (ANT) seeks to afford a *narrative or a description* of agency within a network (Law and Hassard, 1999; Latour, 2005) infrastructuring seeks to *further* them, while paying heed to the marginalised voices within the arrangement (Star and Ruhleder, 1996). Within Participatory Design urgency has been placed on allowing the negotiations of infrastructuring to transpire as democratically as possible – a labour and a doing that cannot be performed without the *sensibility* of care.

Care is understood in this paper as on-going shared work or practice, where the notion of "good" care is an innately collective effort (Mol, 2008; Mol et al., 2010) – a mutual agreement locked in time and space. The phrase *sensibility of care,* as seen above, seeks to emphasis the temporal aspect, stressing that caring practices which were 'good' yesterday may not be 'good' tomorrow (but may work again next year). Exercising care is here seen as the building of a *care-full* repertoire (Law and Singleton, 2012) and a *knowing-in-practice* (Schön, 1982). In the case study which this paper draws upon, we will see that different actors not only care about different issues, but that they also practice their care in different ways. The paper will suggest that the care we place into our shared work may be understood in as a *doing of affect*, and that by being part of the infrastructuring process each actor is simultaneously affect*ing* and being affect*ed* by her surroundings (Ahmed, 2004; 2014).

In the case study below, citizens were invited to take part in a city planning project. While it was clear that the citizens participating were welcome, present, and contributing to the project there was still an imbalance of power. As Lauren Berlant (2016) has noted: '*Just because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room together: belonging is a specific genre of affect, history, and political mediation that cannot be presumed and is, indeed a relation whose evidence and terms are always being contested*.' (Berlant, 2016., p. 395).

AMIRALSTADEN

The municipality of Malmö has gradually, and most notably since the publication of the official guiding document for city policy (*The Malmö Commission*, 2013), introduced citizen-engagement into their work. This shift intended to lessen the gap between the city and its citizens, to tackle systemic inequalities, and to begin to build a future Malmö democratically. In a project called *Amiralstaden* (borrowing its name from the area it concerns) new ways for civil servants to work *with* citizens are currently being explored. Over the course of three years the project has engaged civil servants, architects, citizens, and participatory designers with the area, and with each other. Meanwhile the project seeks to design a neighbourhood where a neighbourhood already exists, it is also challenged to test out new kind of practices in a system where an old practice is already in place. This has raised complications for many civil servants around Malmö, who suddenly find that they are expected to work in new ways but to deliver into the old framework. Many of them lack the skills and competences required to interact with groups of citizens, being more accustomed to desk-based work. Others have enthusiastically taken

to the task of talking to people out on the streets, but found that the knowledge that they gained from the conversations did not fit the municipalities' frame: People did not always want to talk about what the municipality wanted to talk about.

Within Amiralstaden a called *Bridging Knowledge Alliances* (BKA) has been used, within which the project conducts citizen-dialogue by inviting residents from the local neighbourhoods to participate in teams of civil servants and citizens. The BKA model is an iteration of the concept *Knowledge Alliances* (Stigendal and Novy, 2018) – originally devised as a '*multi-stakeholder social platform for dialogue and agenda setting'* (ibid., p.204) and a '*partnership between representatives of different knowledges*'(ibid.). By different types of knowledge, Stigendal and Novy point to the critical and theoretical knowledge of researchers, to be matched by the more grounded knowledge of practitioners. In the *Bridging* Knowledge Alliances, a new emphasis was placed on creating platforms where citizens would participate in equal standing to the civil servants. This intention has been continuously exemplified, but one notable effort saw a buddy-system being implemented where one civil servant would be paired up with a citizen participant for the duration of three engagement events. This particular test caused noticeable stress and worry amongst the civil servants. One of them phoned in the day before the first event asking to be paired up with someone who was also a mother, so that they would '*at least have one thing in common*' (Author's field notes, 2018).

Within Amiralstaden each BKA would begin with a question or issue raised by a person, group, or an institution. The BKA then formed out of people who felt that the question was of relevance to them, personally or professionally. At times the groups were small, with only 3-4 people, and at other times the groups could grow into more than 20 people working together. The process has been open-ended and explorative, to allow the BKAs to follow the situation where it takes them. In this way, Amiralstaden has been building relationships with people, and the network around the project has been constantly growing. Both citizens and civil servants have often returned for several BKAs. The citizens have said that their participation has increase their understanding of the municipality, and that the organization now is more transparent to them. Civil servants have explained that much of their everyday work is about making negotiations, and that the exchanges in the BKAs has helped them navigate difficult decisions.

MRS E.

Mrs E. worked with the project for the best part of six months, and partook in two BKAs: '*I'd heard about her before I had a chance to meet her myself. Because* [Mrs E.] *begun to develop a reputation for being difficult very soon after she entered the project. The civil servants in the project told me that she would come in once or twice every couple of weeks and "do her part" - participate in the tasks at hand. But while there she would seize every opportunity to talk about her balcony. She wanted an enclosed balcony, and she wanted Amiralstaden to make it happen for her.'* (Author's field notes, 2018)

As Mrs E. was new to Sweden and spoke very little of neither English nor Swedish, there was a common belief amongst the civil servants that her constant insistence in talking about her balcony stemmed from a misunderstanding on her part. She, they speculated, simply did not understand the purpose of the project. The civil servants explained to Mrs E. that to get her balcony enclosed, she would need to consult her landlord, but that she of course would still be welcome to carry on working with the project should she wish to. Mrs E. did continue working with them, but she also refused to let the balcony go. Her increasing frustration was obvious, and the patience of the civil servants was running out. While they welcomed her participation in the knowledge alliance, it was clear that they were avoiding unnecessary interactions with her where the infected issue of the balcony might arise. There was, they reasoned, nothing that they could do for her; therefore, no point in continuing the conversations.

It wasn't until a few weeks later, when the aforementioned buddy-system took place, when story behind Mrs E.'s balcony began to emerge in a one-to-one conversation with a civil servant. This time, there was space in the work for open-ended conversations and there was an interpreter present to enable the two discussants to speak freely to each other. The same interpreter had previously participated in the project work, but not as part of informal conversations. And so, in this particular constellation with Mrs E., the interpreter, and a civil servant with the fortunate skill of being an excellent listener, it was found that Mrs. E, had recently had a break-in in her ground floor apartment, and would feel safer with an enclosed balcony as this would offer her the possibility to lock it. She told the civil servant about the conditions on the street on which she lived, and the tensions she experienced there. She explained that she wouldn't know what to do with herself if there was a burglar in the house, because her family – including her husband and children – were all living abroad. She explained that she would not be living in the area at all if given a choice to move, but as she was not given a choice, she hoped that a glass balcony would at least make the situation bearable.

DISCUSSION

Sara Ahmed (2014; 2004) has described the ability of affect to transfer from one person to another as a *stickiness*:

'*Stickiness then is about what objects do to other objects – it involves a transference of affect – but it is a relation of 'doing' in which there is not a distinction between passive and active, even though the stickiness*

of one object might come before the stickiness of other, such that the other seems to cling to it' (ibid, p. 91).

In the same way that stickiness can be transferred from a sticky hand to a non-sticky hand through a handshake, emotion can travel from one person to another through contact. So, when Amiralstaden brought together people who had a shared concern, privately or professionally (or both), for the area and its future, it was not agonism (Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Mouffe, 2000) which set the infrastructuring into motion. Rather, it was in their collective *doing* of care that conflicts arose. Hannah Knox (2017) describe these emotional clashes with the infrastructure as *affective ruptures* (Knox, 2017).

The civil servants, tasked through their professional roles to perform an emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012; 1979) of hosting and listening. The risk, as Haraway has noted, '*of listening to a story is that it can obligate us in ramifying webs that cannot be known in advance of venturing among their myriad threads*' (Haraway, 2016., p.132). The risk for the civil servants in this case was not small. They risked getting affected by someone else's emotions by coming into contact with them. This civil servant who called in and asked to be paired up with a "buddy" who was also a mother was in grave danger of stepping into an unknown affective terrain and become contaminated by emotions which she may not be able to afford within her professional role. In Arlie Hochschild's writings (2012; 1979) the ethical dualism behind our abilities to *will* our feelings is clear: to care for someone does not *sui generis* mean that we love them. The affect that we experience is not necessarily of the loving, tender kind, it may just as well be that an encounter leaves us with feelings of anger, disappointment, fear or other 'negative' emotions. These are emotions that are conventionally repressed or managed. This social stigma, in turn, determines how we chose to act on our feelings. And further, it is part of the value package of services. What Hochschild (2012) describes as emotional labour is the ability of service professionals to repress, at will, feelings like tiredness or anger, for the benefit of the paying customer. But, Hochschild asks, what does this do to the emotions of the service professional: '*if we can become alienated from goods in a goods producing society, we can become alienated from service in a service producing society*' (ibid., p.7).

The emotional labour, as Hochschild describes it, is also not necessarily a mutual practice, but rather the work of one actor on behalf of the other actor. An important notion in Ahmed's reading of affect is the notion of accumulation: '*Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an affect of the circulation between objects and signs'* (Ahmed, 2004. p.120). Ahmed draws upon the formula by Karl Marx for the creation of surplus value, and suggests that it may be translated into affect. According to Marx it is through movement and exchange that the value of a commodity increases (Marx, 1976., p. 248). Criticised, as it has been, for formulating affect as a kind of excess (e.g. Wetherell, 2013), the notion of accumulation nonetheless aids our understanding of *stickiness*. It is also congruent to Hannah Knox's definition of an *Affective Infrastructure* where affect is embedded in the socio-material infrastructure (Knox, 2017). Knox outlines how critique directed towards the *ontological turn* of ANT suggests that it is pacifying inherently political connections - and replacing the vocabulary of activation with a vocabulary of analysis (Martin, 2014; Bessire and Bond, 2014) – but that by tracing '*the way that materials become political*' (Knox, 2017., p. 367) can become a way of marrying material politics and the so-called "language ideologies".

The irony in the anecdote about Mrs. E. lies in the fact that the engagement events which she participated in sought precisely the kind of stories – of affective infrastructures - that Mrs. E. was denied telling. The engagement events had been set up to catch and gather narratives that could help the civil servants contextualize the area they were working in. Public engagements events are often curated in such a way that they frame what kind of participation is welcome (Michael, 2012). "*Engagement events can entail a range of happenings which, in one way or another, 'overspill' the empirical, analytical, or political framing of the engagement event*" (Ibid., p. 529). Mrs. E. here serves as an example of a "bad" participant overflowing the parameters of the engagement events. Star and Ruhleder (1996) have suggested that one of the defining features of infrastructures is that they *become visible upon breakdown*. The misbehaviour, or affective overspill, on Mrs. E's part here is perhaps better described as a *rupture* (Knox, 2017) than a breakdown within the infrastructure: "*Recognizing that failure is not a feature of materials themselves but an experience that is determined by expectations about appropriate functioning of materials allows us to understand how material relations might be participating in the production of political modes of engagement*" (Knox, 2017., p.376).

CONCLUSION

Within Amiralstaden, the care for the area was the commonality which brought all participants together, only to find themselves caring in different ways. If this paper had sought to discuss the effect of affect in ANT, then it may have suggested to follow the affect in the same way Latour suggests we follow actors (Latour, 1987): As an agency in its own right, doing and undoing assembled relations. Here, instead, the focus is on infrastructuring were the participants seeks to intervene in the making of things, and must exercise sensitivity of mutual caring.

We are, in the words of Donna Haraway, '*at stake to each other*.' (2016., p.55)

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