War and Peace in Codesign

This paper argues that co-design should look into how co-design comes into being in practice, what I call design-before-design, and the pragmatic and political questions that arise in this context. Using the example of the work that goes into creating and sustaining interest in co-design among prospective participants the pragmatics and politics of co-design *itself* is questioned. It is argued that co-design is not necessarily in the interest of the people it is ostensibly 'for', and that co-design in its implementation of its particular ideals of participation and democracy is following a 'logic of war' where winning, losing or make a tactical retreat are the only possibilities. However, as co-designers it is suggested that we exchange this logic with a more diplomatic and designerly approach to allow for both creativity and concession out of a concern for improving co-design as design methodology.

Keywords: co-design, participation, politics of design, power, empowerment, participatory design.

Subject classification codes:

Introduction

In recent years, the interest in co-design and co-design methods seems to have increased both among design practitioners and academic design researchers. This is evident in the growing emphasis on the engagement of users, citizens and other stakeholders in, for example, the design of new products, in architecture and urban development, in development of new public services, etc., often in collaboration with academic researchers.

There is not a single definition co-design. Usually, though, co-design means a commitment to direct participation of users and other stakeholders in the design process as designers (Sanders & Stappers 2008; Kensing & Greenbaum 2012). From this perspective co-design is more than a deepened interest in users and their practices – it is a remaking of who can participate in design and who can take up the role as designers.

In Sanders & Stappers' (ibid.) words, users and other stakeholders must be 'design partners', while the role of the professional designer should shift towards facilitating collective design processes rather than being the prime source of creativity.

The reasons for co-design's departure from conventional design practices are both pragmatic and political. The direct involvement of users, it is argued, will allow people affected by the design to contribute creatively to what is being made, and at the same time enable them to represent their political interests in the design process directly. Thus, in addition to attempting to exploit a greater reservoir of creativity, co-design is also distinguished by a desire to empower and give voice to people who are traditionally left out of the design process. This is often expressed with the catchline that design should be 'for, by and with' the people for whom it is a concern (Kensing & Greenbaum 2012).

Co-design's emphasis on design as political is an important corrective to more common understandings of design as primarily about function and aesthetics, and it is also valuable to question how design shall be organized and who shall participate in design work. Co-design, in other words, is a welcome challenge to an overly individualistic conception of design practice and an uncritical view of design's role in society. However, based on experiences from a co-design project that I have been part of recently, I want, in this paper, to question the implicit, if not explicit, assumptions that co-design necessarily is in the interest of the people and organizations it is 'for', despite co-design's declared intentions, and that we can rely on an interest among participants to be directly involved in design activities over a sustained period of time.

That is, that the *particular* pragmatics and politics of co-design, direct participation, necessarily is a superior way, practically and politically, to organize design[1].

On the face of it, the proposition that users and other stakeholders are not interested in participating in co-design may seem bizarre, because co-design *is* for their sake. But there is no guarantee that participants in a project abide by the agenda of co-design and just line up to participate as I shall elaborate below. For seasoned co-design practitioners I don't expect that to come as a surprise, but if we follow the academic discussions about co-design such troubles, even when prevalent in practice, are rarely taken up[2]. And this is in a way understandable — because how could participants for whom the project is 'for' be against it?

The purpose of this paper, then, is to begin to explore this 'possible impossibility', that the people for whom co-design is for are not, in fact, aligned with its agenda *tout court*. It is to draw attention to that co-design is not just staging controversies between various stakeholders in a design process — which, for example, participatory design as a species of co-design has been very conscious about (see, e.g., Ehn & Sandberg 1979 and more recently Björgvinsson et al 2012) — but that co-design *itself* is controversial vis-à-vis its purported beneficiaries[3].

From an actor-network theory (ANT) perspective (e.g. Callon 1986; Latour 1987) this may be easier to grasp. ANT stresses that actors' alignment behind an idea or practice is never a given — rather, a network of actors, whether human or non-human,

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[1] Sanders & Stappers (2008) have confidently suggested that design practice in the future will converge towards co-design.

[2] I have previously written about this in Pedersen (2007).

[3] I am not the first to question that the co-design agenda does not align with its purported beneficiaries. For an early feminist inspired critique see Markussen (1994)

must actively be interested, convinced, forced, seduced, etc., to line up. In this light, we can understand the practice of co-design as a network that itself needs to be created, aligned and sustained and which cannot be taken for granted.

Thus we cannot take interest as a given and to see how it arises we must look look where the alignment of actors has not yet been achieved, where the organization of co-design is not yet established. I call this the 'design-before-design' – the activities where the design project itself is designed, and which are typically not described in accounts of co-design projects.

To make it more clear what design-before-design means in practice I shall first give brief examples of how co-design was negotiated and how we attempted to create and sustain interest in a co-design project that I recently was part of as a researcher. It shows select parts of the negotiations we were involved in and some of the resistances we met towards the co-design agenda and what characterized those resistances[4]. Focusing on the negotiations that take place in design-before-design also raises more fundamental questions about co-design and its ideals and how they fare in practice, in particular, questions about power and empowerment.

In the proper design activities co-design ideally attempts to stage a democratic dialogue between the participating stakeholders, but in the design-before-design it is a struggle between different interests, which adhere to what I characterize as a 'logic of war'. I discuss the implications of such an aporia at the heart of co-design and concludes by proposing that it is possible to proceed more peacefully and 'designerly' inspired partly by Latour's figure of the Diplomat.

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[4] Similarly, Signe Yndigegn (forthcoming) describes in detail how seniors in a co-design project resisted participation in design activities.

Design-before-design

When co-design projects are accounted for we are typically told about design workshops, maybe some fieldwork, staged design scenarios and the like. At that point, however, negotiations over the shape and form of the project have already taken place and controversies about co-design have typically been closed at least temporarily. To be able to spot any disagreement about co-design itself (not disagreements about what is being designed) we have to look at design-before-design[5]. By design-before-design I mean those preparatory activities where the 'actual' design activities are designed. 'Before' shouldn't be understood temporally, but 'transcendentally'. It is the creation of the conditions for the possibility of doing co-design, so to speak. In practice, though, a lot of that work may in fact happen before in a temporal sense (as the examples will show below), but it is also most likely the case that creating and sustaining a co-design practice is an ongoing activity throughout a project.

The examples I use of design-before-design are from a co-design project called 'Mobility in Maintenance' – a collaboration between a university and two private companies, one a large global software developer, IBA, and the other a midsized company, Crispy, a producer of snacks and potato chips. I shall focus on two aspects of the design-before-design in the project: the initial negotiation of the content of the project and the work involved in interesting and keeping the participants interested in the project. There are other topics that could have been visited illustrating, for example, the work going into preparing fieldwork and workshops, but due to limited space they

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[5] Johan Redström (2008) speaks about 'design after design' as a way to pinpoint how design of artifacts not just takes place before they are put into use, but also after when they are adapted, reconfigured, etc. by users themselves. Design-before-design is not meant to focus on design of the artifact, but rather on design of the design activities – that which is a condition for the possibility of designing artifacts at all.

are left out here[6]. Thus the examples are not an elaborate account of the project, but select episodes that enable a discussion of some principled questions that arise when the people being designed for are not aligned with the agenda of co-design. The episodes are: 1) negotiating the project charter 2) preparing fieldwork and 3) readying a design workshop and staging of design concepts. The episodes took place over a period of approximately 6 months and the project lasted about 9 months in all.

Mobility in Maintenance

The purpose of 'Mobility in Maintenance' project was to develop new concepts for mobile technology aimed at shop floor workers and to experiment with new ways of involving customers in development and user experience research. The project came to be made up of three main events: two days of fieldwork at the shop floor, one design workshop at Crispy, and a staging of seven new concepts for mobile IT-support of maintenance work also at the shop floor. The process and methods applied and the concepts were described in small booklets with accompanying videos for easy consumption among the project participants and their organizations.

The project charter

The idea to do a project arose from a representative of IBA, who had been presented for a co-design project one of the researchers previously had been part of. Originally, we had no clear idea what the project should be about except that it should apply some of the same co-design methods that the previous project had employed. But over the next three months the project gradually took shape in negotiations between first the researches and IBA and eventually Crispy, a customer of IBA that they succeeded in

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[6] For a description of this work see Pedersen (2007).

convincing to participate. During this period, we held a string of meetings, phone conversations and email exchanges with the purpose of creating a project that was interesting enough for the disparate parties to want to participate. IBA had approached several other customers, but they turned down the offer to be a part of the project so it wasn't until later in the process that Crispy joined the project. They could be convinced to participate because they previously had collaborated with IBA on new and experimental information technologies in their production.

Despite the initial interest in co-design methodologies, though, there was no unanimous agreement about the co-design methodologies. We as university researchers wanted the project to follow a path that could be considered to be co-design in an academic setting, because that would allow for contributions to our research agendas. This included a series of iterations of co-design activities including fieldwork, workshops and staging of design concepts in practice moving progressively towards more refined concepts over time. IBA, however, was not entirely sold on the proposal even if they were sympathetic to the overall approach. They felt that the process should be more in line with what their UX-team already were doing on a regular basis when visiting customer companies. The researchers had envisaged each fieldwork pass to last about 4-5 days; IBA believed that half a day was enough. They feared that the fieldwork would be too disturbing for the work and thereby jeopardizing the ability to recruit IBA's customers as partners in the project. The result was a compromise where the length of the fieldwork was reduced to two days and the project to one iteration that could be extended further if the first proved successful.

Crispy's chief technology officer (CTO) was the first we approached and the first to express interest in the project at Crispy. But since the project was going to involve employees on the shop floor and because the CTO (and the rest of the project)

didn't want to impose the project on them, it was also necessary to gain their interest and accept. We did that by visiting Crispy a couple of times to demonstrate our interest in their work and to explain the project to employees that potentially could be part of the project. We also made a small leaflet that presented the project in images and short texts (not unlike a sales brochure) that was handed out to Crispy's management and employees to remind them about the project when we were not there and maybe help to convince them to partake in the project.

After three months of negotiation we had secured enough interest and agreement among prospective participants that we agreed on a written project charter that in broad terms laid out the design process and the expected outcomes of the project. At the same time, we had secured a promise from engineers from IBA, and management, production workers, quality assurance workers and maintenance workers from Crispy to be part of the project.

In negotiating the terms of the project it is clear that the only concern is not to implement what could be considered ideal co-design practice. The participants, IBA in this case, have their own concerns that are somewhat at odds with ideas of co-design. This is not the place to determine whether those concerns are legitimate, but it shows that it is necessary in 'designing' the design project to compromise some co-design ideals (in this case most importantly a more committed collaboration over several iterations) to secure the participation of IBA in the project. It illustrates, in other words, that the participants to a certain extent resist the researchers' co-design agenda and only by accommodating that resistance is it possible to have a project at all.

In negotiating the project charter, we had to strike a fine balance between a project that could reasonably be considered co-design, while securing the interest and participation of our partners. As such co-design worked in some instances against the

willingness of IBA to participate. From an ideal co-design perspective, we would believe that there is no contradiction between participation and co-design. But as the example illustrates that was not the case. In practice IBA had other interests that needed accommodation as well. Thus securing important stakeholders' participation and hence be able to proceed with the project meant, paradoxically, that we had to reduce the level of participation.

Fieldwork

After having created interest in the project and agreed on the charter we were ready to begin the first phase of the project: fieldwork. The plan was to follow maintenance workers, unskilled workers and quality assurance workers (QA) to get a sense of their work and how they collaborated. But before we could begin we had to wait another four weeks for them to find time, and just before the fieldwork started the group of unskilled

Figure 1 Fieldwork at the shop floor

workers decided not to participate because they did not want their work video-recorded and documented. That was a decision we had to respect, but the consequence was also that they had to leave the project and fieldwork was reduced to following only maintenance workers and quality assurance workers (QA) over two days on the shop floor. We documented the work on video so that it could be made object of discussion and re-design in the up-coming workshop. To be able to make the amount of video manageable we as researchers, had to edit and select the video. The workers didn't have time to take part in this selection and editing process, but we presented clips of the video to give them a sense of what we had captured.

Where we in the project charter had succeeded in convincing all worker groups to participate we lost the participation of the unskilled workers in the actual fieldwork.

We were in competition with other concerns chiefly the demands on the workers to do their work in a busy period before Christmas and New Year. Thus the 'interessement device' (cf. Callon 1986) of the project charter only got us so far in securing Crispy's participation in the fieldwork.

Design workshop and staging of concepts

After the fieldwork was done, the next phase of the project, a design workshop, was supposed to start immediately afterwards. But once more it was difficult to have all people in the project commit to a date. It wasn't, therefore, until two months after the fieldwork that the workshop wa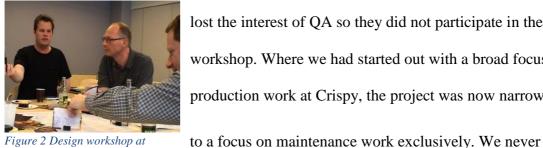s held. Unfortunately, though, in the meantime we had lost the interest of QA so they did not participate in the workshop. Where we had started out with a broad focus on production work at Crispy, the project was now narrowed to a focus on maintenance work exclusively. We never quite figured out why QA didn't want to participate, but we sensed that they were busy with other and more important matters to them since they kept canceling our appointments.

Figure 2 Design workshop at Crispy

We held the design workshop one afternoon at Crispy over three hours where maintenance workers and management from Crispy participated along with engineers and consultants from IBA and three academic researchers that had planned the workshop and also facilitated it. The outcome of the workshop was a series of tentative concepts for mobile technology that should support maintenance work on the shop floor.

It was difficult in just three hours to create very rounded concepts due to the limited time and the disparate interests that were represented in the workshop. The

results of the workshop therefore had to be fleshed out, reworked and to some extent

also re-imagined to achieve a more finished form. Again, because of the limited time the other participants were willing to invest in the project, the researchers had to do the design work of developing the concepts further, so

Figure 3 Staging of design concepts at the shop floor

they were ready for the subsequent staging at the shop floor at Crispy. The staging took place with maintenance workers after a couple of weeks, which concluded the three phases. We, researchers would, very much have liked to do more iterations to continue the co-design process with the other partners. But like the situation with the QA workers it was difficult to schedule the necessary time to carry it out. It was therefore decided to finish the project after just one iteration, the pilot, as originally agreed to.

Like in crafting and negotiating the project charter and carrying out fieldwork, in the collaborative design work, it was a persistent concern to interest participants to take up the role as co-designers. Their various ways of resisting the invitation to be participate in the design, and our ways as researchers to counter them, came to shape the project in important respects. Not least that we had to take over a large part of the design work ourselves, because it was not possible to involve the people at Crispy beyond three hours staging and prototyping at the shop floor.

The question of interest

These brief examples of how co-design was negotiated, and how interest was created, but also eventually lost are instances of what I've called design-before-design. They demonstrate that in this project negotiation and persuasion, but also compromise, was necessary for having some form of co-design at all. That raises several questions about the notion of interests in co-design:

First, even if the ideal about being 'for, by and with' is thought to align co-design with the interests of the people being designed for, it is quite clear in this project that a co-design approach is not uncontroversial. In fact, co-design has to be modified, has to be less co-design (less collaboration), to be able to interest both IBA and the people at Crispy. Despite co-design is supposed to be 'for' IBA and Crispy in practice they sometimes have other interests, which the project must accommodate. Thus, the co-design agenda of the academic researchers is not completely aligned with the agendas of the other partners both the business people at IBA and the workers on the shop floor at Crispy.

Second, 'interest' during the project is more a verb than a noun. Interest is something that needs to be made, not something that can be taken for granted. Interest is a fickle object, that actively has to be sustained, and eventually is being lost. I believe it is fair to say that there is not an interest in being co-designer or design partner for a sustained period of time, that a committed collaboration demands, or at least that we as researchers didn't succeed in producing such an interest.

Third, in contrast to how interests are usually understood co-design (especially in participatory design) the problem of interest was mainly practical, not ideological. We didn't experience a resistance towards the idea of co-design and participation. Quite the contrary all participants seemed to like the idea of co-design in principle. The resistance towards co-design activities was more of a practical nature. 'Do we have time?', 'Is it too disturbing?', 'This is not how we are used to do!', 'What will come out of it?', 'Is it any good for us?' Even the non-skilled workers' resistance shouldn't probably be framed as part of a large ideological conflict between workers and management (who respected their decision), but rather as the quite mundane inconvenience of having your work publically exposed.

Fourth, because it was difficult to mobilize the other participants we as researchers had to do a lot of the design work ourselves. It wasn't that we wanted that role, but it was a necessity if the project were to move forward. Thus, we unwittingly came to take up a more conventional designer role than what would at least ideally be expected in a co-design project.

Fifth, with relatively little participation and few concrete outcomes of the project (7 sketched scenarios and a process description) it can be questioned who the project was 'for'. The project resulted in research publications, but it hasn't for all we know changed the work at Crispy or influenced any product development or development processes at IBA. Even though the purpose was different, the project has most concretely and tangibly benefitted the researchers, and this lack of broader benefit might go some way in explaining the relative little interest the partners had in continuing the project beyond one iteration.

Discussion

The skeptical reader might dismiss the problems we had in 'Mobility in Maintenance' as simply a badly implemented co-design project: 'If you just had been more effective and cunning practitioners, and not been the Rudolf Diesel of co-design, who couldn't translate his blueprint for a perfect engine into a successful implementation (Latour 1987), the project would have turned out just fine!'

I believe there are two responses to such a critique. First, there is reason to believe that the difficulties experienced in the project are common in co-design. Participatory designers — who have been practicing co-design for the last 40 years — have had many of the same difficulties in interesting participants and sustaining committed and long term design collaborations (see e.g. Balka 2006, 2010; Kyng 2010; Shapiro 2010). Second, and more fundamentally, it raises questions about how we as

co-designers shall relate to lack of interest or even outright resistance towards co-design from the people it is supposedly 'for'. Should we be better at overcoming their resistance for their own benefit, or should it lead to a qualification of some of the ideals and practices of co-design? I shall now discuss these two different responses to the outlined dilemma.

Co-design at war

If we measure the success of co-design as the degree to which practice aligns and acquiesce to co-design's ideals the solution to our predicament is to increase the effectiveness in design-before-design: find better methods to interest, persuade, convince, and seduce participants to participate in co-design. That is, just as co-design has developed methods and techniques for involvement of non-designers in design, so co-designers should develop more effective methods for creating and sustaining an organization of design that follows its ideals faithfully.

To follow this strategy, the outcome of a co-design project can only be one of winning, losing or tactically retreating vis-à-vis the ideals. What is not given, of course, is what concrete designs come out of the design process proper, but how to organize the design collective is only tactically up for negotiation as we saw in the 'Mobility in Maintenance' project. In the next co-design project we are expected to, once again, to see if we can win the war over practitioners and have them follow the principles of participation and democracy as stipulated by co-design. Resistance towards co-design, in other words, is something that needs to be overcome[7], practitioners need to be won

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[7] Traditionally, participatory design in Scandinavian was based on Marxist class analysis where designers should empower workers through 'work-oriented' technologies to overcome capitalist and managerial dominance in the workplace (see Ehn 1988; Asaro 2000).

over. It is in this regard that co-design can be said to follow a 'logic of war' in its dealings with practice because the principles of co-design are rarely, if ever, up for genuine negotiation.

That co-design should be waging a war against practitioners may, however, seem preposterous to most co-designers for two important reasons, I believe. First, it is a war fought in the shadows, in the design-before-design. As long as co-design research only describe the 'official' design events where the war has already been won (or there is a temporary cease-fire), it is very difficult to see that a war is being or has been waged. We need to look to the work of creating and sustaining the possibility for the condition of doing co-design before we are able to see the fight for putting the ideals of co-design into practice. Second, the warfare of co-design is difficult to notice for the plain reason that we have declared it cannot take place! How could it be that we are 'against' the people when we are 'for' them!?

Latour in his 'War of the Worlds: What about Peace?' (2002) describes in the wake of 9/11 how the Modern Westerners have been at war with Nonmoderns in their attempts to spread democracy, science, human rights and enlightenment in general but without knowing and without acknowledging it, and therefore also, as Latour observes, without the capacity to make peace, because before peace is possible there needs to be a recognition that a war is being waged. The supposed universality of their values makes the Moderns unable to see that they in fact are parochial Western inventions. But in the eyes of the Westerners the composition of a common world is created by adhering to the in their eyes universal Western values. Any conflicts could be ascribed to distorted subjective views that with time would disappear or could be (condescendingly) tolerated as colorful cultural expressions, but nothing that could be taken seriously, nothing with real import.

I suggest that there is a parallel between Latour's Moderns' and the way that co-design understands its own ideals and how it approaches their implementation. Co-design is not just blind to the war it wages because it happens in the shadows, but also because it understands itself not as a powerful actor, but rather as an empowering one. Co-design proponents want to empower participants to become design partners and in the same moment purportedly put their own power and interest in service of that goal as e.g. Sanders and Stappers (2008) argue. But as the examples from the 'Mobility in Maintenance' show, it is far from clear in whose interest the co-design activities were undertaken. It was not clear with what interest the participants could want to participate (in a committed and sustained fashion), and more principally what would register as participants 'real' interests in the project.

Thus an alternative interpretation of the empowering idealist is that it is in fact her own interests that are promoted under the guise of being 'for' someone else's power[8]. Whether that is the case in general is an empirical question, but in 'Mobility in Maintenance', the tangible results produced were mainly in the interest of the researchers. Therefore, in this case, and possibly more broadly, it ought to alert us to the question of whose interests co-design serves; whether, for example, participation in such projects in the large serves to empower researchers' agenda about empowerment and participation as an academic concern more than it empowers the participants the project is 'for'.

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[8] I'm here indebted to authors – inspired by Foucault's analyses of power and governmentality – that have problematized a simple relationship between empowerment and emancipation, and a simple distribution of power between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' of power. See, e.g., Cruikshank (1999); Dean (2010); Fogh-Jensen (2013).

Now this doesn't mean that we should strive for a space where we have no power – and indeed how could such a space exist? The issue at stake is rather *how* we relate both to our own and the power of 'the Others'. What I've tried to make clear is that co-design tends to relate to the Others as if it was a 'powerless' relation; only *they,* the Others, have power struggles among them, which co-design, then, should attempt to arbitrate democratically. In the shadow war, there appears to be no real power struggles between co-designers and the Others, there is only empowerment, and therefore do both the power of co-designers and the Others disappear from view.

This lack of transparent power relations, arguably, creates two problems for co-design. The first is moral. When co-designers want to be 'for' the people they engage, they ought to take into account grievances they could have with co-design. Co-design ideals don't represent a moral high ground that can be left unquestioned irrespective of how the ideals fare in practice.

The second problem is strategic, because, co-design is, arguably, more often losing the war than winning it. As 'Mobility in Maintenance' demonstrates the co-design researchers are in many respects the weak part who must surrender their agenda. Historically, this has also been the case as the history of participatory design illustrates (see e.g. Balka 2006; Shapiro 2010; Karasti 2010; Markussen, 1994). The question becomes, then, if there is a more productive way of engaging the power of the Others? Is there a way not just to give the Others a voice (as it is often said), but also listen more carefully to the voice they already have?

Co-design at peace

In 'War of the Worlds: What about Peace?' (2002) Latour suggests that the first step in making peace between Moderns and Nonmoderns is for the Moderns to recognize that there is, in fact, a war going on. I suggest, that the same is the case with the proponents

of co-design. As co-designers we need to realize that creating the conditions for co-design is a power struggle, because we cannot expect participants to be aligned with our agenda. And I've also tried to explain why it, in the case of co-design, is particular difficult to see, because co-design covers up the war, like the Moderns do, by framing the interests of co-design and the invited participants as aligned. We must as co-designers, in other words, like Donna Haraway (1991) would say, recognize our own partiality in the project. There are no innocent positions even if we are 'for' the Others. If we recognize that co-design is controversial — again not necessarily in an ideological sense, but more likely in a mundane, practical 'does it work' sense — how can we participate in these controversies openly as a discipline, and not only in the shadows in each particular project?

Latour suggests — with inspiration from Isabelle Stengers (2011) — that we should look to the figure of the Diplomat if we want to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Others: As Latour (2002) says about the diplomat:

> 'Diplomats know that there exists no superior referee, no arbiter able to declare the other party is simply irrational and should be disciplined. If a solution is to be found, it is there, among them, with them here and now' (p. 37-38)

The issue is that in the negotiation between Others there are no common rules to appeal to and answers cannot be given beforehand. The answer — in our case — to how the design collective should be organized cannot in a diplomatic encounter be settled a priori as undisputable dogma, but must be established as part of a negotiation in practice. This doesn't mean that power has disappeared, but diplomacy travels in a different register and moves us out of what I've I called 'the logic war' where winning, losing or tactical retreat are the only options. In contrast, in diplomacy, creativity and

concession allow for the transcendence of existing positions and the emergence of new options while reckoning with the diverse powers in the situation.

Latour doesn't elaborate the figure of the diplomat in practical detail, but there is a striking resemblance between the modus operandi of the diplomat and the designer. Like diplomats, designers do not know the solutions to their problems beforehand — and often don't even know what the problems are either. They must stay open to what emerges out of the situation and in particular have an ear for the feedback they get from their proposals and be ready to adapt or discard them if necessary (Schön, 1983). Designers do, in other words, also live with creativity and concession as crucial elements of their practice.

If co-design as a discipline adopted such a diplomatic/designerly attitude, took itself to be an object of design, the ideals of participation and democracy in design could be regarded not as a priori principles, but rather as sketches to be prototyped, revised, re-designed, re-imagined, etc. Propositions which could be qualified and nuanced for every co-design research project in a public fashion. Being unable to implement co-design ideals fully would not be losing a battle, but be an occasion to reflect on the desirability and feasibility of co-design in the situation, and an inspiration for further qualification and development of when, where and under what circumstances the involvement of non-professionals directly in design activities as designers is a sensible proposition.

This would also require co-design research to be more reflective of its own practices, as others also have suggested (e.g. Balka 2006; Pedersen 2007; Karasti 2010). Co-design researchers may even be curious about alternative ways of organizing the design collective — for example as found in more conventional design organizations — to contrast and strengthen their own case. There has been a tendency in co-design to

disregard other ways of organizing design, for example, traditional user-centered approaches, as rear-guarded and politically problematic (Sanders and Stappers [2008] is an influential example; Beck [2002] is another). But a more pluralistic and descriptive understanding of the 'co' in co-design could be helpful before stipulating a particular organization of design. In fact, if we go back to the inaugural editorial of the CoDesign Journal (Scrivener, 2005) we find a much broader conception of what research into co-design could entail including an interest in how designers and relevant stakeholders in actual practice work together.

It would be beneficial to report from, as I've tried briefly in this paper, co-design practices in-the-making (cf. Latour, 1987), what I've called design-before-design and not just from ready-made co-design practices as it is usually done, and thereby be able to evaluate and discuss the pragmatics and the politics of co-design more fully as it plays out in the shadowy parts of design projects. To consider co-design itself controversial is the first step towards a more diplomatic and peaceful, if unstable, relationship with other powerful participants and practices whom co-design inevitably comes to engage.

Conclusion

In this paper I've argued that co-design researchers should look into how co-design comes into being in practice, what I've called design-before-design. Using the example of the work that goes into creating and sustaining interest and participation in co-design I've questioned the assumptions that co-design necessarily is in the interest of the people and organizations it is 'for', and that we can rely on an interest among those participants to directly be involved in design activities over a sustained period of time. Consequently, I've argued that co-design is inscribed in a logic of war when it attempts to impose co-design ideals on practitioners who often have other and more important

concerns than being 'design partners'. Finally, I've suggested that we replace this belligerent approach with a more diplomatic/designerly attitude marked by concession and creativity in relation to the ideals of co-design. If we truly want to be 'for' the 'Others', and we also want co-design to succeed practically, we, as co-design researchers, should take up a less dogmatic and prescriptive attitude and be more experimental and descriptive in how we approach the co-design specifically and the organization of design practice more generally.

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