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### On Politics and the Little Tools of Democracy: A Down-to-Earth Approach

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KRISTIN ASDAL

## On Politics and the Little Tools of Democracy: A Down-to-Earth Approach

The aim of this paper is not to explore what democracy *is* in some normative sense, but rather how, and with what, democracy gets carried out in practice. In doing this the author seeks to rework the focus on the tactics and materialities of government developed within Foucault's work on governmentality, as well as in actor-network theory, by way of a deliberative approach: Political technologies are not to be understood in a context of the microphysics of power, as techniques of domination exclusively, but as tools for public involvement, for democratisation and deliberation as well, it is argued. Hence the notion 'tool of democracy'. Empirically the paper attends to the early 1970s and explores the contestation over a power plant that never came into existence. It demonstrates that non-existent objects may have long lasting political effects: The power plant took part in bringing a politics of emissions down to earth, thus enabling the environmental issue as well as another political landscape. By exploring these events, closely and historically, the paper argues that perhaps democracy was never like we thought it to be.

### KEYWORDS

*Actor-network-theory; deliberative democracy; environment; governmentality; history of objects; politics and administration; the public.*

In the preface to his three volume book series *Visions of Politics*, intellectual historian Quentin Skinner (2002) argues that in the modern West we have inherited two contrasting views about the nature of our common life: One speaks of sovereignty as a property of the people; the other sees it as the possession of the state. One gives centrality to the figure of the virtuous citizen, the other to the sovereign as representative of the state. Thus, Skinner points out, the question of how to reconcile these divergent perspectives remains a central problem in contemporary political thought.

The aim of this paper is not to explore *visions* of politics understood as political ideas. The title is meant to signal another, a down-to-earth, approach. The topic is not

so much ideas of democracy, or what democracy *is* in some normative sense, but rather how, and with what, democracy gets carried out, in practice. The tricky problem Skinner attends to, namely how these divergent perspectives can be reconciled is, nevertheless, the driving force, the motivation behind the paper: In exploring politics in practice, where and to whom do we attend? To the sovereign and the state, or rather to the citizen at the margins – or at the outside of the political centre and the state? This again should be related to a second, no less important, question: How do issues, political matters, emerge and get to have political effects and consequences?

## Deliberative Democracy and Science and Technology Studies: The Virtuous Citizen

In attempts to renew and reinvent the study of politics, a range of authors are turning to Science and Technology Studies (STS). On the other hand, STS scholars interested in the study of politics attend, to an increasing degree it seems, to theories of deliberative democracy. The combination of STS perspectives and theories of deliberative democracy should come as no surprise to anyone. If proponents of deliberative democracy may be said to be concerned with how ordinary citizens or the public are enabled to take part in politics, a similar concern with the role of the ordinary citizen, the lay person, has certainly been a matter of concern also to STS. Indeed, the intellectual field of STS – or rather, STS as an activist-oriented project – can be said to have been founded upon the concern for democratization (of science and technology) and public involvement (in science and technology) in the first place. The focus upon ‘the virtuous citizen’ then, to use Skinner’s (2002: viii) notion, may be said to unite the intellectual strands of STS and deliberative political theory.

But there is more to this combination of traditions. What a range of scholars engaged in STS and political deliberation seem to have in common as well, when it comes to contemporary debate, is pointing to the emergence of something new. In short, democracy isn’t what it used to be (e.g. Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 2001: 11). What we are facing is an expansive democracy (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003: 3, citing Warren, 1992), a democracy pushed beyond traditional spheres by relating decision making to the persons who are affected. Consequently our concept of politics is changing too: What is being pointed out is the significance of a concept of politics which does not content itself with ordinary political institutions and arrangements, but which opens up for what has been labelled sub-politics and the displacement of politics (Marres, 2005a; Beck, 1992). A concept of politics that is open to the ways in which political events are being conducted in places *outside* what we call the ordinary political system, and that include, for instance, politics of contestation and social movements (Barry, 2001).

The case I will explore, the contestation at the entrance of the 1970s over the planned construction of an oil fired power plant, lends itself easily to theories of political trends of expansive democracy. Indeed, without a notion of politics which is open

to what takes place at the outside of ordinary political institutions, one misses crucial and significant political events and transformations, not only when it comes to *this* particular case, but also when attempting to capture the making of environmental politics and a particular political culture more generally.

However, when it comes to capturing how events get to have political effects and consequences, it is not sufficient to look *beyond* the sovereign and the state. Rather, what is crucial is to grasp how events of contestation become linked, or de-linked, with ordinary political institutions. Thus, my concern is with the ways in which an emerging public may act back on government – may take part in re-inventing the politics of the state. In order to explore this, this paper turns around the material practices and arrangements of public administration and a material device, possibly invented to give effect to rule (Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996: 2), but that, nevertheless, came to cause the complete opposite political effect. Hence the notion ‘tool of democracy’ – which also may signal the theoretical ambition of this paper, namely to take seriously the focus on the tactics and materialities of government developed within Foucault’s work on governmentality as well as in actor-network theory, whilst at the same time integrating a deliberative approach: Political technologies are not to be understood in a context of the microphysics of power, as techniques of domination exclusively, but as tools for public involvement, for democratization or deliberation, as well.

### The Ordinary Practices of Public Administration and the Emergence of a Hot Potato

‘I’m glad that hot potato isn’t in *my* hands’. Thus read the letter the Norwegian Cabinet Minister of Industry had just received. The letter began, ‘My dear friend’. But it was more an intervention than a letter of simple friendly support, having been sent from one of the actors involved in a difficult case the Cabinet Minister now faced. The letter was dated the 5th of May 1972. The author was a well known professor of botany at the College of Agriculture, who publicly opposed the very plans to build an oil fired power plant that the Cabinet Minister was now faced with having to make a decision about. The professor was not alone in questioning the plans. Indeed, the planned power plant was surrounded in major public controversy and had caused the rising of a vast local public movement organising protests and arguments against the plant.

The issues deserve more credit, Noortje Marres (2007: 759) argues – rightfully and nicely put, I think – in a recent paper in the journal *Social Studies of Science*. In this respect she, just as much as I do, pays tribute to Bruno Latour (2005: 16) and his critique of political philosophy for having been the victim of a strong object avoidance tendency. When it comes down to *what* is at issue, the *res* – the case – that creates a public around it, political philosophy is much too silent. But, one might ask, what is an issue in the first place? How do scientific and technical entities or objects become issues? Looking at public administration and the *res* that subsequently was to create a public around it – in this case, the proposed power plant, before it was anywhere close

to becoming a hot potato or a political issue – can shed light on this. Thus what I will do is attend to the practices of public administration, to the Smoke Damage Board (Røykskaderådet), the agency that first handled the power plant case before it landed on the Cabinet Minister's desk.

So, when exploring the emergence of political issues, what could be more appropriate than to have May 1968 as our point of departure? This famous political spring with revolution in the air. But, that was in Paris, not Oslo, and certainly not at the office of the so-called Smoke Damage Board. Within the Board and its attached secretariat, established a decade earlier to handle the increasing problem, not of individual smokers, as one might think from the name, but rather of smoke from industry causing damage to the surroundings, things were different. Or, more precisely, things were about the same as they always were. The politics of pollution was handled as a natural part of established ordinary procedure, as part of what we could call 'a politics of no politics' (to rephrase Sharon Traweek and her expression 'the culture of no culture' in high energy physics, see Traweek, 1988: 162). The mandate of the Board was to handle the problems of smoke damage through a system of concessions. No concession, no right to pollute – and thus, in practice, no new factory.

In everyday practice, however, this very rarely happened. In reality, the office shared identity with industry. Moreover, 'smoke damage' was established as a matter *for* industry; it belonged, literally, to industry. This is illustrated by the way in which 'industry' was integrated in the Board: the intention was not for the Board to *represent* industry and pursue the interests of industry, but rather for the Board to serve as a source of expertise – *on* industry. Thus engineers and managers from industry were not part of the Board in their capacity as stakeholders, but, on the contrary, in their capacity as experts. The Board explicitly aimed at reducing problems stemming from pollution. But, it was argued, the targets had to be set in relation to the economic burdens this would put on the relevant industry. This meant that in practice the Board put severe constraints on its own agency. Economy-as-normal was established as the crucial context in relation to which the agency interpreted and judged its activity.

Within this established context the Board pursued 'business as usual': a practice not characterized by events or innovations, but rather by slow rhythms of that which *looks like* repetitions, i.e. a rhythm of practices which tend to, which *almost*, repeat earlier cases and practices. As pointed out by Andrew Barry (2001; 2007), politics does not come about easily, and a lot of political and administrative practice is organized not to produce 'the political', but rather to produce a non-political space. This, I would argue, is the relevant frame for capturing what was happening as one of the major Norwegian power companies approached the Board that early May of 1968.

The power company's purpose was to present its plans for the construction of a new oil-fired power plant to be situated at Slagentagen, a headland on the eastern coast of Norway. Within the Board, the letter initially did not have much of an impact. It doesn't seem as if anyone paid any particular notice. The company's approach was treated as yet another case, as an ordinary part of established practice. Oil-fired power

plants were already established as key objects for future energy security. Hence, the question was not whether the company would be granted a concession, but rather under which precise conditions this would happen.

Again, there is ample opportunity to narrate this story in the conventional way. What happened, one could argue, was that the industry pursued its interests, and then the Board followed suit. Even if correct in one sense, stopping here would be too easy, if not premature: it is at this point where things become analytically interesting. Because, the proposed power plant was surrounded not only by (oil) interests. The plant was surrounded by science, by engineering, by knowledge practices as well. Together these knowledge practices took part in forming, as well as controlling, the relevant object – the proposed power plant – in what was understood to be the appropriate way.

The ‘appropriate way’ meant addressing the chimneys. More precisely, the appropriate question was the question of the *height* of the chimneys. This was the shared ‘problem-situation’ defined by and addressed by the Board and the energy company. How tall would the chimneys have to be for the emissions to be distributed in the atmosphere in an acceptable way? These were the precise technical and scientific questions which had to be sorted out in order to grant the concession, hence to secure that only acceptable risks were attached to the plant. Roughly put, the relevant knowledge practices involved in this were a combination of meteorology and engineering: meteorology to understand how emissions are distributed in the atmosphere, and engineering to situate and construct the plant correctly and wisely according to these data. Together, these were to produce the controlled object that was being sought.

### From an Ordinary to a Possibly Extraordinary Object

The situation described above, however, was to change. The framing of the power plant was to be quite radically transformed. The question then is *how*: How did the planned plant develop into an issue? In order to understand this process of transformation, we need to take the materialities of politics and public administration in its co-production with a public – thus the inside and the outsides of public administration – into account.

The interest in exploring the materialities of politics and public administration is, if not widespread, certainly nothing new. The work of Max Weber already implied a concern with the ways in which the orderings of public administration enabled distance, dis-affection, objectivity and authority. In their wonderful edited volume of historical essays on academic and bureaucratic practices, Peter Becker and William Clark (2001: 2–12) point to the work of Weber as well as others who have elaborated on the significance of the bureaucratic office: Distance, it is argued, was reproduced through the displacement of bureaucratic work into the modern office, a separated physical space.

More generally they point out that the claim to authoritative or objective knowledge seems to hinge on the deployment of such little tools of knowledge as images,

graphs, lists, questionnaires, dossiers, tables and reports. Thus the key concern introduced and emphasised by Becker and Clark (2001) is the relationship between the mundane epistemic and administrative tools – ‘the tools of knowledge’ – and authority and objectivity.

However, in trying to understand the nature or identity of the Smoke Damage Board, the above approaches all seem rather misplaced. As I have already indicated, the Board did not establish distance or authority through securing an enclosed, separated mental or physical space. On the contrary, the Board was careful *not* to secure management, establish independent authority or execute independent control, and did not possess a closed and separated identity. But as I already indicated above, their mundane epistemic and administrative tools and practices were nevertheless directed towards producing controlled, objective and non-politicised situations and objects. This administrative space, however, was broken open. Most noteworthy and significantly by way of a report from a newcomer to the Board, a physician at the University of Oslo, who, by way of another prose and another (medical) expert knowledge, took part in re-contextualising the planned power plant.

‘In a Norwegian context, the planned oil-fired power plant is of extraordinary dimensions’, the report, or policy note, stated. It was pointed out that at full capacity the plant could consume up to 750,000 tons of oil a year, whereas the whole of Oslo, the capital, consumed less than half of this, less than 300,000 tons. Thus, from within the Board, reports produced a somewhat different object – not the *ordinary* product of an ongoing industry, but an *extraordinary* object. In addition, the plant was made part of another future than the one exclusively preoccupied with energy-security. Thus, the question was raised whether the planned power plant would fit into the future as smoothly as was initially assumed. Perhaps extending the chimneys wouldn’t be sufficient in the future? Thus, instead of representing the future, this intervention could be read as a way of reframing the plant as something possibly *old fashioned*.

A parallel shift was made possible by extending the context of the plant beyond the national level and textually establishing it also in an international perspective. At the European level, the note pointed out, efforts to reduce emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), or at least hamper the increase of emissions, were under discussion. Acid rain, it was argued, was to an increasing extent being acknowledged as a problem throughout the European continent. In this way an issue of ‘acid rain’, which was emerging in other places and within other institutions in the same period (see Hajer, 1995, Lundgren, 1997, Roll-Hansen, 1986), was translated into the Smoke Damage Board as well. The very notion of ‘acid rain’ was in itself an expression of the way in which the framing of the factory somehow shifted: from being a question of emissions released into the atmosphere, to being a question of rain, which, by its very definition, falls to the ground – and in so doing, takes the form of an acid. Thus the power plant became surrounded by a different context, where the crucial aspect was the tracing of emissions (SO<sub>2</sub> compounds) *from* the atmosphere and, literally, down to earth, down to the ground where these compounds landed and would eventually have an impact.

## From Enabling Authority and Distance to Enabling a Public and Involvement

Within the Board, however, these shifts, no matter how important, did not in themselves make that much of a difference. More important were the ways in which this approach also circulated outside and indeed *out* from the offices of public administration, for this is precisely what happened. Pieces of data, articles and questions which were emerging and circulating within the Board also circulated *out* from the Board. Thus it was not like in Becker and Clark's (2001: 10) account, that the composure of the bureaucrat was instrumental in distancing 'him' from the temptations, trials, and travails of civil society, as well as from nonofficial relations with clients. On the contrary, the composure of the bureaucrat took part in closing the gap between politics and administration, scientific expertise and the public. As, for instance, in the letter of information from the secretariat of the Board sent to the ad hoc organisations which had been set up in response to the proposed plant: 'Obviously, extended chimneys do not reduce the total amount of SO<sub>2</sub> emitted into the atmosphere'. The letter referred to an enclosed copy of an article published in the journal *Water* that described an emerging problem resulting from emitted SO<sub>2</sub> compounds being 'washed out' and then falling to the ground in the form of acid rain.

I already pointed to the fact that the interest in exploring the materialities, the mundane epistemic and administrative tools, is not new. This applies, of course, not only to Max Weber and an interest among historians in exploring the politics and administration of the 19th century, but also to actor-network theory, as well as the work of Michel Foucault. Interestingly, however, the concerns with authority and objectivity in the approaches discussed in Becker and Clark (2001) above have their parallel in actor-network theory and governmentality studies. The predominant concern has been with management and 'centring', the ways in which centres and long-distance control are made and enabled.

The problem of the state is overevaluated, Michel Foucault argued in one of his famous lectures on governmentality at the Collège de France (2007: 109). Still, in drawing attention to the art and practices – the tactics or the technologies of government (as opposed to reducing the state to a number of functions) – the power of the state nevertheless risks being understood as all-encompassing. The programmes and tactics of the centre or the state can be found virtually everywhere. By adding actor-network theory terms such as 'action at a distance' and 'centres of calculation', the world-transforming effects of these arts and practices are underlined. But there are limits to the centre. What are these? What is the significance of contestation (Asdal, 2007)? Can there be material devices invented to give effect to rule that not only have impacted upon those who have been the subjects of these practices of government (Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996: 2), but that also have had the opposite effects and consequences?



It is about time we turn to the public hearing institution and the ways in which it ensured that the plans for the power plant were made public and thus available (to the reader of the local newspaper), as well as took part in orchestrating collective action and securing the return to public administration of a very different object than the one first presented to the Smoke Damage Board by the Power Company.

When the Power Company (A/S Hafslund) applied to the Smoke Damage Board for a concession to construct the power plant in line with their plans, the Board followed normal procedure, administration as usual. The application was, quite simply and straightforwardly, made public, in the sense that it was printed in the newspaper. Moreover, in line with administration as usual, interested parties were given the opportunity to respond to these plans. Within a specified time limit, six weeks it was announced at first, interested parties could voice their opinions on the plans. And interested parties there were indeed. This was probably why the first deadline for responding was extended. As the second deadline for commenting on the plans began to loom, a range of objections entered the offices of public administration. Along with the already organised environmental movement and committed natural scientists at the University of Oslo, there were, for instance, more than 22,000 signatures collected by an ad-hoc movement set up to intervene in relation to the planned power plant.

The ad-hoc committee put forward the possible effects of SO<sub>2</sub> as the most serious threat. Experts, both nationally and internationally, agreed, the committee argued, that SO<sub>2</sub> was the most dangerous of all the gasses causing air pollution. One of the experts who was used as an example was the physician and newcomer to the Smoke Damage Board referred to above. His work on the health effects of SO<sub>2</sub> compounds was a pioneer work, and his talk at an expert conference on air pollution 'had made even the most sceptical Nordic politicians shrug their heads in worry', it was argued. Thus, through the public hearing institution, questions and problems which had been touched on within the Smoke Damage Board returned – in a more decisive, openly critical and problematising manner.

Most noteworthy, however, was the way in which the power plant was reframed by linking the emissions from the upper atmosphere to their possible effects on the ground. For instance, a statement from the botanists and zoologists at the University read: 'Even if the smoke is released from a tall stack, one cannot exclude the possibility that, taking the weather conditions in the area into account, the smoke will reach the ground, causing immediate damage to plants, animals and humans'. Hence, by reframing and recontextualising the plant, it stood out as a clearly different object than it had previously appeared.

### A Down-to-Earth Approach: From 'Smoke-Emissions' to 'the Environmental Issue'

Even if the Smoke Damage Board acted with rather modest agency, it was nevertheless set on the move. What would be the effects of the finished power plant? This was the

question which the public engagement took part in fuelling. The immediate effect was that the Board delegated more and more questions to the surrounding research and development sector. In this way, the politics of no politics at the office of public administration developed instead into a kind of a laboratory in its own right – a laboratory in a situation we, in line with the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1964), could label a crisis stemming from a possible shift in paradigms: Were the emissions (i.e., the problem) to be traced up in the air, or rather as they landed on the ground? And what would the possible effects be as they landed? Thus engineering and meteorology met with botany and an emerging ecological science. Through these exchanges and confrontations, the ordinary practices of an established politics of smoke emissions could no longer be taken for granted. Instead, the space of public administration was broken open – towards uncertainty.

In short, the SO<sub>2</sub> compounds and the ways in which these were attached to the power plant were crucial. On the one hand, these compounds took part in enacting a distinct and difficult *political* landscape. If the plant was to be built, then this would later hamper Norwegian efforts to establish international agreements to mitigate the problem of acid rain. On the other hand, the emissions took part in enacting another natural landscape as the ground surrounding the plant was established as *the* relevant entity to be taken into account (Asdal, 2008). Thus it was not only another power plant which was about to emerge, but also, literally, ‘the environment’ and ‘the environmental issue’.

### The Fierce Reaction from the Public: Public Opinion Revisited

‘I’m glad that hot potato isn’t in *my* hands’, said the letter to the Cabinet Minister of Industry from one of the involved political and expert actors. The citation with which I introduced the story of this paper points directly to the way in which the object had been transformed to become a real issue; an issue no one really knew any longer how to handle. Whereas the power plant only a few years earlier, towards the end of the 1960s, had represented an ordinary extension of industrial and energy policy, it had grown in size and significance until it now, in the spring of 1972 stood out as a potentially risky object.

Attempts to delimit the plant had been made, in parliament as well as other places: ‘when thinking of the fierce reaction that emerged when the plans for the power plant (...) were made public (...) it is appropriate to provide some information regarding oil-fired power plants’, stated one of the official committees established to deal with air pollution issues in April 1971. According to this official committee, which included the director of the Smoke Damage Board, oil-fired power plants would probably become a reality, also in Norway, until nuclear power could become competitive.

Only a few months later, however, the committee and the director of the Smoke Damage Board witnessed that the elected Board came to the rare conclusion to turn down an application for a concession: A majority of the Board decided to advise the

government to say no to the planned power plant. This was the background of the difficult situation the Cabinet Minister now found himself in.

But can these events be ascribed to the public – and their ‘fierce reaction’ – alone? In shifting to the public (the people directly or indirectly affected by the proposed power plant), it seems reasonable to draw on theories of deliberative democracy. The idea of deliberative democracy, or ‘decision making by discussions among free and equal citizens’, revolves precisely around the transformation (rather than simply the aggregation) of preferences (Elster, 1998: 1). If we stick to the French context, and French Revolutionary history, the approach can be traced all the way back to 1789 and the argument that political decision making shouldn’t be about fixed interests and ready-made opinions, but on the contrary, on *changing* one’s opinion – in order to collectively form a common will (Elster, 1998: 3).

But in our case it was not so much the change in public *opinion* as the ways in which a public took part in reframing the power plant, thus transforming it into an issue in the first place. ‘No issue, no public’, Marres (2005a) argues, drawing on John Dewey (1927: 27) and his argument that it is only when existing institutions and communities prove incapable of settling an issue that publics come into being. However, as Marres (2005b: 216) notes, it is often hard to grasp just what the sources of agency are that make a particular event happen. Maybe, in our case, we could just as well frame it the other way around: ‘No public, no issue’.

Because how do we explain the above events, the unsettling of the power plant and public administration as well as the emerging environmental issue? Obviously, we can seek to explain these events by referring to a new, radical and revolutionary context: first it took Paris, then the southern parts of Norway, and then a French revolutionary spring reached the cold north. If the public was not in the streets fighting, it was at least protesting, writing letters! ‘The environment’ is precisely a field of interest which has easily lent itself to such explanations: How often didn’t we tell our stories about the past, the 1970s, by referring to a supposedly green wave, rolling its way over new land? But if this is correct, there isn’t much to explain, really, as the actors in our stories only follow, only *do* what is expected of them, act in line with the new context. But how are new contexts created, in practice? How do new contexts find their way into, for instance, public administration: a smoke damage board? As has been pointed out, however differently, by a range of authors, ‘the public’ is not a naturally given entity; publics always have to be constructed and come into being only in co-production with the architecture or materialities of politics and public administration (Sloterdijk, 2005; Marres, 2005b; Latour, 2005; Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 2001; Passerin d’Entrèves, 1996).

## From Centring to De-Centring Politics and Administration

Above I already pointed in the direction of a specific version of the architecture of public administration: the public hearing institution. In many ways, the events and trans-

formations I have outlined above parallel studies of the material practices and arrangements involved in the execution or performance of management that good old actor-network theory was so clever at demonstrating. Material arrangements are crucial in enabling agency. Precisely like the role of the spread sheet which, in the description of John Law (2000), takes the form of a performative planning and management tool which enables that information and plans *return* in a certain version to management and the centre, the hearing institution enables the relevant object (in this case the planned power plant) to return to the offices of public administration. They draw things together (Latour, 1990) in a particular way.

However, there are some striking differences. So let's use the technology of the spread sheet in Law's account in order to make the contrast and elaborate on this. The spread sheet is an agent of homogenization. It enacts quantitative relations; there is no space in the spread sheet for that which cannot be counted or rendered into symbolic form. It is a strategy for producing simplification and overview, a series of figures which can be assimilated by a single person in a more or less single scan. Hence, the conceptualising of the spread sheet as a 'major socio-technology for centering' (Law, 2000: 6). The public hearing institution, however, enacts things rather differently and produces other effects. To begin with, the hearing institution does not enact quantitative relations. On the contrary, the point of the hearing institution is to give space for other people's *judgements*; thus it relies on a series of textual and rhetorical strategies. In doing this it also enacts difference and multiplicity. Rather than producing one single overview and one authoritative account, it may, through the return of a series of new judgements and viewpoints, take part in breaking a managerial space open – that is, take part in enacting uncertainty. And rather than enabling management, it may enable a public to come into being; hence creating this abstract phantom (Lippmann, 1927; Marres, 2005b: 216) which in turn may take part in re-framing the relevant object as an issue and act as a form of pressure for the re-direction of government. This was to be the case here.

Thus, contrary to the technologies for long- and short-distance control, *the public hearing institution* played a role in *undermining* management and the very object that had been part of public administration in the first place. Rather than stabilising or increasing the power of the centre, this tool at the heart of administration took part in transforming or undoing administration-as-usual. What landed on the tables of public administration was a radically unstable, even risky object, under much less control by the public agency responsible for dealing with the case.

Moreover, in turning down, eventually, the plans for the power plant, the ground was laid for enacting Norway as a country at the forefront in the battle against what was to be known as acid rain. Rather than having to combat SO<sub>2</sub> emissions from its own industry, attention could be redirected towards the causes of acid rain imported from abroad, such as Germany and Great Britain. Thus, the power plant that never materialised, never became a reality, was, nevertheless, to have a lasting impact on the Norwegian landscape.

## A New Expansive Democracy? The Scandinavian Utopia Revisited

I introduced the article with the mutual interest between Science and Technology Studies (STS) and deliberative theory and policy studies – and linked this to a shared concern with the citizen, or lay knowledge and the role of the public. In working from an explicitly deliberative approach, Hajer and Wagenaar (2003: 3) argue for the changing role and status of the public in public policy:

Clearly, much of the business of governing is still affected by the traditional hierarchical institutions of government. However, they must now increasingly compete with open-ended, often unusual, ad hoc arrangements that demonstrate remarkable problem-solving capacity and open up opportunities for learning and change in exactly those circumstances where classical-modernist institutions have failed to deliver.

Thus, society *is* to an increasing extent asking for public involvement, and actually, it is argued, trying to involve the public. Related to this is the argument that science has lost its hegemony: What used to be matters of facts have turned into public controversies (see e.g. Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 2001: 11):

The Mad Cow Disease has taken part in throwing out in the public the news that some of us have been aware of for a long time already: the relationship between science and power will never be as it used to be. Previously, one thought that in order to make the good descions, it was sufficient to lean on the unquestionable facts (...); now we find ourselves in the midst of the most profound uncertainty. (my translation)

So the message is, democracy isn't what it used to be. And this can be traced back to the relations between science and politics and consequently, to the role of the public. As the experts do not know their right from wrong any longer, the public is given an unprecedented new and important role, hence the increased focus within STS on the sites and material arrangements through which public controversies unfold. Indeed, lay people's or consensus conferences are the topic of interest in Callon, Lascoumes and Barthes book (1999), as it had earlier been for Donna Haraway, albeit in a less extensive fashion (1997). The notion 'tool of democracy' has been taken into use precisely in relation to these ways of enabling public participation (Blok, 2007).

Pointing to the significance of these political arrangements or technologies, however, has also been a way of pointing to the Scandinavian countries, as these have been experimenting with exactly these types of arranging, enabling and mapping public opinion, not the least in controversies involving science and technology (Rem, 2008, Blok, 2007; Bruun-Jensen, 2005; Fixdal, 1999). As I have flagged already, the Scandinavian case I have explored lends itself easily to theories of such political trends of expansive democracy: At the heart of the case I have explored was a tool of democra-

cy, a condition of possibility, which took part in displacing and unsettling a technical object, which reworked the object into an issue.

However, this did not happen by way of a *displacement* of politics or by the public 'alone', but rather by ensuring the orchestrating of a public in the first place and, simultaneously, because public matters of concern *returned* to the offices of public administration, hence, to an ordinary political institution. If now the citizen is the focal point in a certain version of STS and deliberative political theory, Michel Foucault's work on governmentality may be said to take the complete opposite point of view; the view from the sovereign and the state. However, as he pointed out, government is a relation, not a matter of acting *on*, exclusively (Foucault, 2007; Burchell, 1996). On the contrary, government is to be understood as a point of contact where techniques of the self interact with techniques of domination or power. Strangely, however, there seem to be few studies of contestation and resistance that go beyond a focus on the individual (Asdal, 2007).

In his work from the late 1920s, Carl Schmitt argued that the state was no longer the centre and model of political unity (see Szabo 2006: 29–30). Thus, the present urge to move beyond a narrow definition of the state to capture politics and 'the political' is nothing new. Moving beyond the state or arguing that politics has been displaced should not be equalled (at least not always!) with moving around politics *without* the state. Rather, there is a constant need to keep in mind or reinvent the point above from Michel Foucault, that government and the making of the present is to be grasped as a relational space that is not exclusively concerned with either acting on or acting outside government.

Notions of a politics displaced should not lead us to leave unexplored the ways in which issues get tied, or not tied, to government and to ordinary political institutions. As I have used my case to demonstrate, there was, even in the early 1970s, at the heart of a classical-modernist institution like the Smoke Damage Board, a tool of democracy, a machine for public involvement. However, it was not that this little tool 'delivered' as if political technologies are to be understood within the context of a certain version of technological determinism. Rather, the outcome in *this* particular case should be seen in the context of an exchange between an emerging public and specific versions of an academic as well as a bureaucratic personae. Thus it is the co-production of the insides and outsides of public administration, as well as the co-production of publics and expert knowledge, that should draw our attention.

Neither 'public' nor 'experts' are isolated spheres or fields of practice. In exploring this exchange, the technologies of politics are worth studying. The aim of this paper has not been to explore what democracy *is* in some normative sense, but rather how, and with what, democracy gets carried out in practice. In doing this I have sought to rework the focus on the tactics and materialities of government developed within Foucault's work on governmentality, as well as in actor-network theory, by way of a deliberative approach. Political technologies are not to be understood in a context of the microphysics of power, as techniques of domination exclusively, but also as tools

for public involvement, for democratization. Maybe this French-inspired 'regard' on Scandinavia might make visible another significant approach to government: government as a point of contact between expertise, the offices of public administration and the public. Because, it is through these exchanges that the histories of technical objects get their biographies written differently (Daston, 2000). Some technical objects never even come into existence, never materialise. Non-existent objects may, nevertheless, have long lasting political effects. Like in our case, where the power plant took part in bringing a politics of emissions down to earth, thus enabling the environmental issue as well as another political landscape. Through exploring these exchanges, closely, but also historically, maybe what we will find is that democracy was *never* like we thought it to be.

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