GÖDE BOTH

A RESPONSE TO MALVE JACOBSEN'S

TEMPORALITIES OF ASSEMBLING TRANSPORT SYSTEMS: PRESENCES AND ABSENCES IN A PLANNING PROCESS

Malve Jacobsen reports on her ethnographic fieldwork on what is to become supposed to emerge as a public bus service operating on dedicated lanes in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. She takes the reader into messy realities of implementing Dar es Salaam Rapid Transit (DART) with compelling and rich descriptions. Jacobsen's essay takes the form of a detective story. She describes different objects and asks what their presences/absences tell about the "socio-political dimensions of this planning process." Although the title of the essay signals an essay about planning processes, my impression is the essay is really a story on implementation processes. The essay features ethnographic stories on how DART changes between how it was originally conceived by planners and a struggle to stabilize as a public bus service in the streets of Dar es Salaam. For example, her observation that the enforcement of a speed limit fails highlights a crisis in the form of a gap between the initial prescription of the driver and the actual subscription by the driver. Through the de-scription of her objects the reader also learns about – what I would refer to as – "trials of strength" (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) between two Machiavellian actors engaged in the implementation process. We do not learn whether DART will eventually become an object, i.e. to achieve a degree of reality and durability independent of the opinion of an observer. However, Jacobsen's essay invites the reader to cheer on a public bus service struggling to come into being. The case also invites for a comparison with failed attempts to introduce a new transportation service, such as ARAMIS (Latour, 1996).

Jacobsen conceptualizes DART as an assemblage of different scripts which could make the essay an interesting contribution to debates within actor-network theory. Her appropriation of the concept script departs from Madeleine Akrich's classic book chapter (1992) in three ways. Jacobsen rejects the network metaphor by mobilizing the assemblage metaphor. It would be interesting to hear why the network metaphor does not do the trick in her study. Why is assemblage a more adequate concept, how does it shift the way it conceptualizes DART? The latter questions could also be discussed with other similar conceptualizations that appear in the essay. For example, the term "system" – is "system" a member's category or an analyst's category? If so, how does it relate to "assemblage"? My understanding is that system and assemblage come with different imaginaries. In addition, I was confused by use of the category "infrastructure". How does this relate to the other categories above? In my reading infrastructure is mobilized with two different meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the

physical infrastructure for the buses and on the other hand, DART itself is figured as an infrastructure in the form of the imagined outcome of the planning and implementation processes.

Departing from Akrich's classic book chapter, Jacobsen's de-scription of the assemblage follows a number of different scripts by shifting between frames of references, for example, "script of ISP operations" or "climate control script". I understand Akrich in the way that "script" is the result of a de-scription by the analyst. Jacobsen appears to mobilize "scripts" with different meanings which sometimes makes it hard to follow the analysis. For example, in the enumeration following "the role of DART's buses differs in various scripts", she lists a number of examples where the buses appear. However, I do not understand what "scripts" and "roles" refers to in each one of these instances. In my mind, appropriating the distinctions between prescription, inscription, subscription, de-inscription, and de-scription could be a way to clarify the analysis. It is a terminology suggested by Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour (1992). Jacobsen's claim, that DART is figured in different inscriptions defining different roles for the buses, begs the question how they are coordinated or how they compete for hegemony. There appears to be some kind of hierarchy of roles topped by a 'super-role' when she talks about DART "overall role to transport passengers". This is an interesting addition to Akrich's actor-network theory which allows for a higher degree of complexity.

Another methodological contribution is Jacobsen's focus on "temporalities". The plural signals that the process described in the essay enfolds within multiple temporalities. Her interest in attending to temporalities in plural is motivated by literature that critiques assuming a linear chronological order in planning and implementation processes. While her argument for multiple temporalities is convincing and backed up by empirical evidence, I failed to see the evidence for "DART is not a stringent, linear process, but rather a process that continuously goes back and forth, up and down, and turns around." Since this point is central to essay, I would like to read more and how she reaches this conclusion.

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