

# The Election Machine

## Generating Danish Democracy

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## Introduction

# The Election Machine

On March 21 2013, Michael Aastrup Jensen, IT spokesperson and Member of Parliament for Venstre (the major party of the centre-right in Denmark) withdrew his party's support for law proposal L132 on e-voting in Denmark. L132 would have allowed municipalities to conduct trials with electronic voting and counting in selected municipalities during the forthcoming election. But without the support from Venstre, the government could not form a majority in parliament, and the law proposal was rejected. To a Danish news site Jensen stated that;

Venstre will not take part in undermining the trust in the election. Our democracy is way too important to experiment on in order to test a new technology. At the present moment, e-voting is not secure enough for implementation in Denmark.

(Jensen in Kildebogaard 2013, my translation)

At this time, I had conducted two months of fieldwork in the election office in Copenhagen Municipality, which, as I will describe below, became my major field site. Initially, Copenhagen Municipality supported the law proposal. In a letter to the

Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior in January 2012, Copenhagen and 11 other municipalities requested permission to conduct trials with e-voting at the forthcoming election. In addition, my PhD project is part of the Democratic Technologies research project (Demtech) on voting technologies which played a significant role in the debate on the law proposal: Demtech collaborated with various municipalities, including Copenhagen, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, the project participated in the public hearing of the law, and politicians referred to Demtech's public statements in deliberations in parliament. If the law had been approved, the preparation of e-voting trials in Copenhagen Municipality would have come to play a pivotal role in the rest of my fieldwork. My fieldwork in the municipality thus began in the context of and was entangled with an ongoing debate on e-voting in parliament and in the public media (Version2 2015). I therefore followed the debates on the law proposal intensely. What struck me the most during these debates was the prominence of the concern for the well-being of Danish democracy, nicely summarized by Michael Aastrup Jensen in the above quote.

As Danes we are proud of our high voter turnout and trustworthy polling system. At the last parliamentary election the voter turnout was 87,7% and at the municipal and regional election in 2013 the turnout was 71,9%, the highest in 32 years<sup>1</sup>. Contrary to neighbouring countries like Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany and Great Britain, voter turnout has not declined since the 1980s (Elklit et al. 2005; Togeby et al. 2003). In fact, if we disregard a temporary decline in the 1990s, the turnout for parliamentary elections in Denmark has risen over the last decades. The turnout is also remarkably higher than in other Western European countries<sup>2</sup>.

In public hearings, first readings in parliament, debates on online media and among politicians prior to the dismissal of the proposal, the importance of the existing electoral system was emphasized again and again. Often debaters would compare the present electoral system to imagined situations with new voting devices in use. Superlatives were plentiful. They were used to stress how in Denmark we have the “most fantastic democratic system” and how elections are the “most

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<sup>1</sup> If you disregard the triple parliament, regional and municipal election in 2001 (Togeby et al. 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Beside Malta (95,7% in 2003) and Iceland (91,6% in 2003), only countries with compulsory voting reach the same level as Denmark when comparing voter turnouts (Elklit et al. 2005:14).

fundamental part of our democracy” (Aastrup Jensen 2013; Flydtkjaer 2013). The debates on electronic voting suggested that something really important was at stake. Thus, the e-voting proposal concerned more than ‘just’ another public digitalization project. On February 7 2013, when the parliament held the first reading of the proposal, Michael Aastrup Jensen was the first to enter the podium. “In Denmark we have a very high degree of trust in the democratic process”, he started his speech and continued, “and with it a very high degree of trust in the actual election. This is something we cannot squander away” (Aastrup Jensen 2013, my translation). Dennis Flydtkjaer, a Member of Parliament for the Danish People’s Party, followed a similar line of argument: “We have a fantastic democratic electoral system in Denmark because it is, among other things, very transparent to the citizens. Before the election starts you can control that the ballot box is empty, and throughout the evening you can follow, transparently, the entire poll” (Flydtkjaer 2013, my translation). The law proposal itself also expressed a strong trust in elections. The introduction stated, “Denmark has a strong democracy. Execution of elections in Denmark is characterized by a consistency between the election result and votes cast and that voters trust the poll. This cannot be jeopardized” (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior 2013a).

When the law proposal was rejected I had to renegotiate my collaboration with the municipal election office, but the debates on the law proposal also opened up my study of elections. Trust in elections is, according to the politicians cited above, intimately tied to the election apparatus; it is intimately tied to *how* we organize the poll, cast our votes and calculate the result. Rather than studying an emerging e-voting project, I ended up studying what these debates on e-voting made explicit: that elections and democracy depend on a valued and trusted election machinery which works. In this dissertation this electoral apparatus will be my topic of investigation.

If Election Day is a metonym for a functioning democracy, democracy itself is tested on Election Day. Every time elections take place, questions regarding whether the election machinery can actually produce an election result that is transparent, representative and incontestable are raised. I explore ethnographically this real-life test of the election machine and pose another set of questions: how does

democracy work in practice, and what kinds of relations and assemblages make democratic elections possible? This exploration is based on a fieldwork in the Copenhagen election office during most of 2013, when the office staff planned and managed the execution of the November 2013 municipal and regional elections, which took place simultaneously.

### **Towards a study of democratic practices**

Although Election Day in Denmark is often referred to as *demokratiets festdag*, meaning ‘the festival of democracy’, and this is surely what it is, the day is also much more. The election is an event of profound seriousness and importance. While elections are certainly not sufficient for upholding democracy, their importance should not be underestimated. In 2012, when former secretary general of the United Nations Kofi Annan and eleven social scientists and distinguished former leaders<sup>3</sup> launched the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, they did so to promote “elections with integrity” (The Commission on Elections Democracy and Security 2012). In their view, elections gain integrity when they are based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as expressed in international standards and agreements; and when elections are professionally, impartially, and transparently prepared and managed throughout the electoral cycle. “When citizens go to the polls and cast their votes, they aspire not only to elect their leaders, but to choose a direction for their nation,” Annan argued at the launch of the commission, and continued: “elections with integrity can bolster democracy, flawed elections can undermine it” (Annan 2013). Elections are, in Annan’s words, an indispensable root of democracy, and therefore election integrity must be upheld and honoured. Elections are, as such, not just about forming the next government. Every time we hold elections we also choose whether or not to continue democratic rule, as evident for instance by the fact that Hitler’s antidemocratic Nazi party was democratically elected.

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<sup>3</sup> Other members include former president of Mexico H.E Dr Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, former US secretary of state Dr Madeleine Albright, secretary-general of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance Mr Vidar Helgesen and Professor at Economics at Harvard University Professor Amartya Sen (The Commission on Elections Democracy and Security 2012).

The commission's report builds on the 'Declaration on criteria for free and fair elections' adopted by the inter-parliamentary union at its 154<sup>th</sup> session in Paris, 1994. This declaration closely links the concept of free, genuine and fair elections to the idea that elections should represent the will of the people (Inter-parliamentary Union 1994). The operationalization of a 'free and fair' election is, however, neither unambiguous nor straightforward. In 1997 political scientists Jørgen Elklit and Palle Svensson found that a discussion of what it takes to label elections 'free and fair' was highly warranted as an increasing number of democratization projects was taking place all over the world (Elklit and Svensson 1997). Nineteen years later, the topic is more relevant than ever. It can be argued that discussions of how to define democratic elections are most prevalent in 'new' or 'transforming' countries where "representatives of a post-cold war international order (...) attempt to solve conflicts, reconstruct societies, and transform, incubate, and act as governments" (Coles 2007:11). But I will argue that not even in established democracies can we take elections for granted as smooth and neutral translations of the will of the people into seats in parliament<sup>4</sup>.

With this in mind, it may be surprising that so many studies on voting overlook the management of elections. American anthropologist Christopher Kelty is one of the few scholars I have come across who explicitly tackles voting procedures in studies of democracy (others include Coles 2007, Manow 2010). He expresses a surprise, akin to my own, regarding why so few studies focus on the election apparatus (Kelty 2008). An immense amount of scholarly work has been done on voting behaviour, preferences, demography etc., and the idea of democracy as a form of governance has also been discussed over and over again. But as Kelty argues, few studies investigate how deliberation actually works, materially and practically. Voting is mostly perceived as an uncontroversial procedure secondary to political deliberation (ibid:3). It is often conceived as a technical and preferably neutral infrastructure which can either work or break-down. The question political scientists

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<sup>4</sup> Jørgen Elklit, for instance, has questioned the procedures during Swedish elections due to their system of ballots, which may exclude certain voters from voting for their preferred candidate (Elklit and Widstrand 2010).

most often pose is therefore how democracy and idea(l)s of political deliberation work together. Not often do they ask how the procedures work in practice. The idea of ‘free and fair’ elections is seen as entailing a standardized set of principles, such as equal suffrage, secret ballots and the right to freely express political opinions (Inter-parliamentary Union 1994), and these principles enable an assessment of democratic elections.

One of the most comprehensive research projects of this kind on assessments of voting and democracy is “The Comparative Democracy Assessment – The quality of elections and civil liberties in the 21st Century” led by Danish political scientists Jørgen Elklit and Svend-Erik Skaaning (Elklit and Skaaning n.d.). In this project, Elklit and Skaaning developed a measurement tool with 54 quality indicators, which identify 11 steps in the electoral process from the initial legal framework to post-election procedures. The purpose of the tool is to “gauge the quality of election and election management quality in all kinds of democracies” (ibid). Without going into detail with the framework, it is worth noting that the Danish electoral process for the parliamentary election in 2007 scored 99% and was ranked in the top of the 13 countries assessed<sup>5</sup>. The only parameters on which the Danish process did not receive the best score according to Elklit and Skaaning’s tool was in relation to three indicators on voter education and to a question about the presence of “an independent mechanism for identifying bias in the state media” (ibid). The voting process so highly regarded by the Danish politicians is indeed of a very high quality, according to Elklit, Skaaning and their indicators.

If we broaden the discussion of electoral assessment to Danish democracy more generally, the picture remains the same. The final report from the large research project on Danish Democracy and Power, *Magtudredningen*, conducted by a number

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<sup>5</sup> Other countries assessed in Elklit and Skaanings project is (year of assessment and score in brackets): Afghanistan (2005: 72%, 2010: 57%), Australia (2001: 94%), Denmark (1898: 76%, 2001: 97%, 2007: 99%), East Timor (2001: 90%), Ghana (2008: 79%), Iraq (2005: 68%), Kenya (2007: 51%), Lesotho (2002: 90%, 2007: 84%), Pakistan (2008: 56%), South Africa (1994: 76%, 2004: 85%, 2009: 84%), Sweden (2010: 95%), Rwanda (2008: 52%), Zimbabwe (2002: 44%) (Elklit and Skaaning n.d.).

of Danish political scientists in 2003<sup>6</sup> concludes with a characterization of Danish democracy<sup>7</sup> and identifies five Danish democratic ideals. These are: 1) Equal political rights, based on universal suffrage, majority decisions and protection of minorities. 2) Free opinion formation, based on open and diverse access to information. 3) Broad and equal participation, which depends on relatively large equality in economic and social resources. 4) Effective and responsible governance, meaning that the public sector is capable of solving collective problems in an acceptable and effective manner in accordance with the politically formulated guidelines. 5) A society characterized by trust, tolerance and regard for the community (Togeby et al. 2003). The report's assessment of the current state of political life and democracy in Denmark based on these ideals was rather positive:

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<sup>6</sup> Initially launched by the Danish parliament in 1997, the Danish Democracy and Power Study was a major Danish research project led by political scientists Lise Togeby, Joergen Goul Andersen, Peter Munk Christiansen, Torben Beck Joergensen, Signild Vallgaard. The main objective of the study was to gather and analyze data, firstly, about how the democratic system in Denmark has developed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to assess whether this development is positive or negative. Secondly, the study sought to analyze the state of democracy at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and assess to what extent it lived up to Danish democratic ideals (Togeby et al. 2003).

<sup>7</sup> The characterization takes as its point of departure two different views on democracy, which are traditionally highlighted as fundamental to the ideas and discussions of democracy that have emerged in Denmark. One understands democracy as a method, the other as a way of life, at the heart of which is conversation. The first is represented by Alf Ross, a Danish legal and moral philosopher; the second by Danish theologian Hal Koch (Togeby et al. 2003). Democracy is a form of governance, Alf Ross argues, a particular form of governmental organization and consequently a political method. It is a method to maximize power to the people through universal suffrage and majority vote. Ross, then, sees democracy as a formal legal system that lays down the methods for obtaining democratic influence in accordance with the principle of majority vote (Ross 1946). For Hal Koch, universal suffrage and a majoritarian system cannot be the only source of democratic decision-making processes. A deliberation prior to voting is, in his view, necessary. After having witnessed how the Nazi party in Germany rose to power through a democratic election in 1933, just to leave the democratic ideals behind, Koch was convinced that understandings of democracy had to entail more than the rule of majority (Böss 2013). He therefore developed an understanding of democracy which echoes that which we today know as deliberative democracy. Here, democracy is not just tied to the political sphere, it is perceived as a way of life. Democracy, Koch argues, should be embedded in every aspect of society, as citizens are not merely voters but should be active participants in decision-making processes and public debates (Koch 1991[1945]; Togeby et al. 2003).

“Denmark has done surprisingly well. The Danes are still democratically active, and the political institutions are democratically robust. First and foremost, the Danish people appear resourceful and capable”.

“Society has been through great changes, and many things are different – in some respects very different – than before. However, not all changes represent democratic setbacks, rather the contrary. From a historic and comparative angle, we must say that things have gone far better than we might have feared”

(Togeby et al 2003).

According to this study, Danish democracy is certainly thriving. What I find interesting about this political science study is, however, not so much whether it concludes that Danish democracy is working or not, but that its notion of democracy is based on ideals.

Democracy, here, is positioned as a set of ideals or principles to strive towards, and which can be used as a baseline for assessment of current practices (Coles 2007). Based primarily in the political science literature, this type of assessment has often been followed by a tendency to focus on how the state, political institutions and the rule of law ensure or impose democratic ideals (Lykkeberg 2012). This is exemplified by the influential work of political scientist Robert A. Dahl, known for his pluralist theory of democracy. Dahl situates the state as the primary focus of studies of democracy and argues that the state is of outmost importance when it comes to establishing political institutions that can ensure citizens’ participation in democratic processes. All citizens should be equal before the law and have equal access to legislative processes ensured by legal and political institutions (Dahl 1998). In his reading the democratic state must be understood in terms of how the state ensures citizens’ access to the democratic process. The operationalization of democracy in the Danish Study of Power is similar. Both understand democracy as a (positive) ideal authorized by legal and political institutions.

This assessment of voting practices and political democratic life more generally through indicators and ideals, by focusing almost exclusively on political institutions, attends too much to institutions and too little to practices (Gordon 1991). Rather than situating democracy in the world, democracy is portrayed as a world

apart, as ideals not tampered with by lived life. In this thesis I approach voting and Danish democracy differently. First, I locate ideals and myths in the very particular and local election: the Copenhagen municipal and regional election 2013. Secondly, I do not take the relationship between state and citizen in Denmark for granted. I see this relationship as emerging and situated as elections are carried out in practice. My focus on electoral practices allows me to *not* treat democracy as a set of universal ideals separate from and simply applied to every day life. They are not pure democratic principles that “get dirtied in the harsh and messy social world when they are ‘applied’ in practice” (Mol and Berg 1994:248). Rather, ideals emerge entangled with local practices. In her examination of elections and democratization in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina, anthropologist Kimberly Coles makes a similar move. She does not focus only on democratic principles, but conducts an ethnographic investigation of the democracy in-the-making. She pays careful attention to the socio-technical means and processes through which Bosnia-Herzegovinian democracy came into being (Coles 2007). Coles’s study of international electoral interventions as a means of establishing and normalizing practices of democracy, however, differs from my field. Denmark is characterized by a long and stable tradition of democratic elections. But still, as will be evident, I find Coles’ insistence on studying democracy in practice analytically productive and refreshing.

Following Coles, I do not align my study with more conventional approaches to voting and democracy in political theory and science. In order to sensitize myself to democracy as a phenomenon constantly emerging in practice, I, like her, rather draw on Science and Technology Studies (STS). This provides me with an attitude to studying both democratic principles and practices by always seeing these as entwined (Mol and Berg 1994). In the following sections I will elaborate on this approach to democracy. First, I will account for the well-known line of thought in STS on the construction of scientific facts, as this is similar to how I think about the construction of the election result. Secondly, I will introduce particular conceptual orientations from STS that will sharpen my approach to elections located in the Danish bureaucracy and the municipal office.

### **Democracy in action**

In *Laboratory Life* (1979), a seminal study about the noble-prize winning laboratory at the Salk Institute, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar argue that scientific facts are not given and then subsequently uncovered in the laboratory. Facts are made through work in the lab involving instruments, measurement machines, inscription devices, discussions among scientists, graphs, paper-writing and many other activities. Through a careful investigation of how the neurohormone TRF is constructed in the laboratory setting, Latour and Woolgar demonstrate how this construction depends on processes in a network. Every step in the lab from initial experiments to writing the final papers involves negotiations and sorting. The process is a matter of creating order out of disorder. Latour and Woolgar argue that “the negotiations as to what counts as a proof or what constitutes a good assay are no more or less disorderly than any argument between lawyers or politicians” (ibid:237). Remarkably, however, once a fact is produced, once the chemical composition of TRF is determined, it magically appears unconstructed, as if it was always there. The hard work that Latour and Woolgar identify as instrumental in the making of such facts simply disappear. What is left is this new piece of knowledge about nature which appears to have been discovered. The stabilization of facts relies on the separation of the fact from its production process, which again supports the widespread understanding of facts as free-standing out-there in nature, just waiting to be discovered.

The Copenhagen election can be understood in somewhat similar terms. The final election result for the municipal and regional election was announced at 08:00, November 21 2013. This occurred 47 hours after the first voters cast their ballots, and 37 hours after Election Day ended at the 50 polling stations in the municipality. 281.821 votes had been cast and counted before the final result was announced. Despite bleak exit polls throughout the day, the Danish Social Democrats were announced as the big winner of the election, and following negotiations between several political parties, their main candidate Frank Jensen was reappointed Lord Mayor of Copenhagen. Frank Jensen took the stage at the music venue VEGA and triumphantly announced to his fellow partisan politicians: “The Copenhageners have voted, and they have produced a result which allows me to say to you that for the next

four years the Social Democrats will lead Copenhagen” (Munksgaard 2013, my translation). The Copenhageners had produced an election result. Their votes were translated into the will of the Copenhagen people and subsequently into one Lord Mayor and 54 additional members of the city council. After the final result was announced, and as it remained uncontested in the following weeks, the ballots were burnt together with the electoral material used to keep track of, count and tabulate the election. Now a direct link between the will of the people and the allocation of seats in the municipal council was, indeed, the only thing left. The politicians come represent the Copenhagen citizens as it is deleted *how* ballots were turned into votes, assessed, and counted, *how* political candidates were approved, and *how* the final result was calculated. This is how the construction of election results is similar to the construction of scientific facts in Latour and Woolgar’s study. This may not be surprising to the reader who knows that Latour and Woolgar conceptualize science as “politics by other means” (see Latour 1983:168). Latour and Woolgar draw on a traditionally political vocabulary - including concepts such as spokesperson, interest and negotiation - to analyse scientific representations as a form of political representation. I aim to bring this way of thinking back to a study of politics, emphasizing an understanding of democracy that includes the idiosyncratic, local, heterogeneous, and multifaceted character of electoral practices.

Anthropologist Colin Hoag has suggested that bureaucracy is a “first cousin to science, it being a quintessentially modernist, technocratic apparatus, and one central to the constitution and domination of bodies. Some would even say that bureaucracy is a science, or that science is fundamentally about bureaucratic practices” (Hoag 2011: 84). I do not claim that the production of political representation and authority is identical to the production of scientific facts. Quite obviously, the lab produces *natural facts*, whereas the election apparatus rather produces what one might term *social facts*, to borrow a notion from Emile Durkheim’s classic sociology (Durkheim 1982). The rigor of these social facts is not obtained in same manner as in the lab (see chapter two), but interesting parallels exist. For instance, moments of erasure of practice and procedure can be identified in both places, and as such, bureaucracy and science *are* akin.

STS has always been engaged in critique or problematization of representational practices in science. Politics, however, has only more recently become the topic of empirical studies (Asdal 2007). Key studies for developing an STS approach to politics have analysed the technological society (Barry 2001), the politics of nature (Latour 2004a), pollution (Asdal 2011a), technical democracy (Brown 2009; Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthe 2009). These studies view politics and political issues as emergent practices, socio-material assemblages and technological arrangements. They emphasize how science and technology have become sites of political contestation and work. Just as it takes hard work to produce scientific facts, creating politics is also a laborious affair (Barry 2001).

The empirical move beyond the laboratory to engage in studies of politics entails a displacement of politics as well as a displacement of the state. Kristin Asdal argues that “STS scholars interested in the study of politics attend, to an increasing degree it seems, to theories of deliberative democracy” (Asdal 2008a:12). According to Asdal, the displacement of the state and the focus on deliberation leads STS scholars to pay attention to public involvement and the movements and contestations of deliberation, but this happens at the expense of ordinary political institutions and arrangements (Asdal 2008a). For instance, Andrew Barry points towards an understanding of politics that embraces the ways in which political events may take place *outside* what is normally understood as the political sphere (Barry 2001). Aside from Asdal’s work (see also Asdal 2011b, 2014), relatively little attention has been paid to parliamentary negotiations, public administration, institutions, formal processes and to the practices and material processes through which democracy emerges. This is exactly where my interest lies: in studying one of these sites in which the production of democracy takes place.

The STS attitude which I adopt in this thesis could then possibly be coined *democracy in action*. Paraphrasing the title of Latour’s *Science in Action* (1987), I enter the world of politics and representational democracy by examining democracy as a practical achievement for the public administration. This approach builds on at least two claims about democracy. Firstly, in Latourian fashion I argue against the existence of an ahistorical and pure form of democracy. It is true that the idea of the

Danish deliberative and representational democracy can be traced back to Hal Koch and Alf Ross (see footnote 7, p.17), and doing so is valuable. However, I do not take democratic principles as my point of departure. Instead, I see these as topics for empirical investigation. I see them as intertwined with practices, ideas, concepts and procedures in the public administration. My second claim about democracy is that constructions of democracy are “as social – and material - as anything else” (Mol and Berg 1994:248). Through techniques and technologies, documenting practices and archival work, a democratic order emerges. While often considered the hidden, apolitical and mundane work of the political administration, these technologies and practices are by no means neutral (Barry 2001). On the contrary, they are generative for modern forms of knowledge, expertise and governance (Riles 2006).

My investigation of Danish elections and Danish representational democracy does not provide any final answer to what democracy is, and it does not provide a framework for assessment of ‘the state of democracy’. Instead, it provides an answer to the question: how is democracy done and enacted in a particular case? As such, this thesis can be understood as an addition to an already complex notion of democracy which suggests to see democracy as constantly in the making. It aims to shed light on some of the taken for granted aspects of democracy founded in the public administration. It highlights the nitty-gritty socio-material practices that are easily forgotten when we focus on forms of government and democratic ideals. Thus, my approach to democracy in action is pragmatic and anthropological in that I follow ethnographically some important treads of democracy into the administrative machinery. To be more precise, I follow democracy to the election office in Copenhagen Municipality from where a team of election employees planned and managed the execution of the municipal and regional election in 2013.

### **Locating elections**

Elections are not identical to democracy. Elections are, however, a centrepiece of democracy, and equating voting with democracy is very common (Kelty 2008:12). The establishment of elections remain the top-promoted democratization project around the world (Coles 2007:15), and they are evidently fundamental to the process

of creating political representation. The study of elections may offer only a partial story of Danish representational democracy. But it is one of great importance.

Elections signify a moment of discontinuity between an old and a new government, and in Denmark, Election Day is celebrated by citizens, politicians and the media who all follow the political interregnum closely. Citizens flock to polling stations, exchange their voter registration cards for ballots and place their crosses in the privacy behind blue curtains, after which they drop their ballots into ballot boxes. Parents bring children to the spectacle and families and friends gather in the evening to follow the news coverage and latest exit polls, while the media show images from festivities held by political parties around the country as everyone await the final results.

With this election spectacle in mind, it is not surprising that several studies on voting treat Election Day as a kind of public theatre or state ritual (Brewin 2008; Manow 2010; Orr 2015). In his comparative work on political culture and law in the UK, the US and Australia, law scholar Graeme Orr argues that the legal and institutional bases of electoral practices should, indeed, be explored as rituals (Orr 2015). The prism offered by the concept of the ritual, according to Orr, is the only way to fully grasp electoral practices (ibid:9). His approach to elections is to combine the study of the particular event with the legal and bureaucratic institutions and to inscribe the latter in the first. Elections are, in this view, simultaneously symbolic events that reinscribe political power and a particular set of routines and recurrences. In his brilliant book *In the King's Shadow* (2010), comparative political economy scholar Philip Manow follows this move in a study of spectacular and ceremonial aspects of political rule. Manow breaks with the common assumption that the rise of modern democracy has put an end to the ritualistic nature of the production of political authority which characterized monarchies and other earlier forms of governance. Rather, Manow argues that just as the death of a king in *Ancien Régime* in France marked a discontinuity in political legitimacy, democratic succession takes place through the 'artificial death' of parliament during elections. Elections temporarily "cut the life thread" of popular representation:

Just like the monarch's death brought a crisis of rule but also an opportunity to display his body politic, so must parliament, the visible body politic in the new democratic order, die from time to time in order to indicate and display what usually cannot be seen: the immortal ruling body of democracy, the *demos*.

(ibid:77)

Seeing elections as rituals or ceremonies emphasize how they reinforce or disrupt democratic values and ideals as they display in public the existence of democracy (ibid., see also Kertzer 1988). Exploring elections as ritualistic events would be a natural anthropological move for me as a trained anthropologist, not least since the works of Gregory Bateson, Claude Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas and Victor Turner have made the ritual a cornerstone in anthropological thought (Carrico 2012). It has been tempting to make this move, but as should be evident from the above my focus has been different. As mentioned, my aim is to account for the technicalities and materialities of the electoral process, and these are often unaccounted for in studies of public rituals (Coles 2007:123). Studying elections as rituals would entice me to collapse the electoral process into the one-day event of the Election, studying its symbolisms and meanings. But without downplaying the importance of this day, I am interested in stretching out my understanding of Election Day to cover the months and months of planning, executing and eventually evaluating the event. Election Day might symbolize democracy, and it has ritualistic elements, but I do not want to exaggerate the importance of these. Other moments in the electoral process located outside the spectacle in the polling stations are just as important. At this point, before I continue elaborating on my approach to elections, it is therefore time to introduce my primary empirical field site: the election office.

### *The election office*

In Denmark, the 98 municipalities are responsible for organizing and executing the elections in close cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior (now the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior). Although the municipalities must follow national election law, they have a relatively high degree of autonomy in terms of structuring, planning and executing the election. The ministry attends to general electoral tasks such as writing overall guidelines based on election law,

preparing candidate list forms, and counselling in legal matters. On Election Day, polling stations are manned with election officials recruited from political parties or, if the political parties cannot provide enough officials, citizens in the municipality. At each polling station five officials form a local election committee which has the overall responsibility for running the polling station on Election Day, including counting the ballots. On the day following the election the municipalities are responsible for counting the ballots once more. The responsibility for running the electoral process in Denmark is, thus, split between politicians responsible for Election Day and a municipal bureaucracy in charge of the extra count. This organization of the election is different from the UK and Australia, for instance, where an independent election commission is granted the responsibility.

While it is officially the election committee in Copenhagen, a political organ under the City Council, which is responsible for the election – epitomized in the fact that they sign the final election protocol – in reality this task is delegated to the election office. The setup of the election infrastructure in the months before Election Day is managed by the municipal employees, and on Election Day the election officials are also dependent on an election secretary employed in the municipality. When it comes to Danish elections, and the Danish democratic system more generally, there is no getting around the public administration and Danish bureaucracy (Elklit and Christensen 2013).

As the largest municipality in Denmark counting 562.000 citizens and approximately 385.000 voters, elections in Copenhagen are different from elsewhere in the country. A much larger administrative unit are needed in order to deploy and manage the 50 polling stations and 1500 officials. To compare, the second largest municipality in Denmark, Aarhus, has 37% less eligible voters than Copenhagen, and the smallest polling station in Denmark only serves 30 voters, whereas the average in Copenhagen is 7700 voters per polling station (Danmarks Statistik 2015). The intention of this thesis is not to offer an account of elections in Denmark *per se*. Rather, I investigate Copenhagen Municipality as very particular case of generating elections.

Despite the large size of the municipality, the election office itself is not a big place. It is not even an independent office with its own resources for the election. The election office employees also attend to many other municipal and administrative matters, such as the administration of municipal grants and funds – at least they did so at the beginning of my fieldwork. But as the election drew closer, the size of the election organization grew and enrolled people from other departments, from IT support to communication and facilities management. In the end, over 1500 officials and 300 municipal employees (for counting ballots) were added to a temporary organization for the two days of election and recount. As soon as the election was over, so was this assemblage. I studied the steady growth of the electoral organization by following those in charge of building the electoral infrastructure and ordering the election. In the chapters that follow you will therefore primarily encounter the following seven employees in the election office<sup>8</sup>. You will meet Marie, the head of the office, and Helen, who makes important decisions during the recount. You will be introduced to the tech savvy employee Sophie and her work on a new online

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<sup>8</sup> I refer to the seven informants, just like other employees and officials introduced throughout this chapter, with fictional names. Copenhagen Municipality, on the other hand, is not anonymised. The importance of some specificities of the electoral procedures and the size of the municipality make anonymisation difficult, and after consulting some of my informants, I have chosen not to. This, however, makes my informants at the election office more vulnerable to identification. More generally, because the employees in the election office take such a prominent role in the thesis and are exposed to recognition by colleagues in the municipality and Danish electoral network, and because the thesis at times involves vulnerable statements and difficult decisions, I have chosen a ‘compilation strategy’ when recounting the stories from the election office. Municipal employees, episodes and statements are scrambled together to preclude a direct and consistent link between an informant, the fictional name in the thesis, and the episodes involving the informant. My informants thus take turns occupying the seven fictional names in the thesis. In particular instances, I, however, stray from this strategy, when it is necessary to understand a situation in relation to the informant’s higher or lower rank in the bureaucracy. So a few times, when I refer to Marie as the head of the office, it does in fact coincide with the head of the election office. In some instances I followed the student helpers in the office, as their introductions to electoral processes proved extremely helpful for my understanding of these. In the descriptions of these encounters I refer to their position as student helper to stress the novelty of the situations, but gather them under the fictional name Michael. In instances where I refer to my informants’ ranking, these become extra exposed to identification and I have, therefore, been extra careful not to include any material that would expose them. The politicians in this thesis are not anonymised when I refer to public statements, minutes or results from the election. But when they interact with the election office, in particular in chapter four on candidate lists, I refer to the party names and members using fictional names.

recruiting system, and you will follow Peter as he tries to write guidelines for managing polling places. The student helper Michael pops up from time to time. He and I worked together on some tasks. So does the older employee Carsten who was my go-to guy when I had questions about the electronic systems used in the office. Lastly, you will meet the election employee Ida, who spent several months negotiating how many polling stations to set up for the election.

Following these seven employees and their practices in the election office allowed me to explore democracy in the making. I understand them as the head and heart of the election machinery. Below, I will further describe how an STS notion of the bureaucracy as an election machine oriented my study.

### **The election as a machine**

On the surface, the election that led to the reappointment of Frank Jensen as the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen may appear a straightforward political spectacle. Voters cast their votes in the privacy of a voting booth, politicians chipped in with their opinions during the poll and so on. The political event happened without major complications. Equal suffrage, secret ballots, and the right to freely express political opinions were maintained during the poll without much fuss. The standard electoral procedures and the political spectacle were broadcast, witnessed and praised during the election and in its aftermath, while the mechanisms behind the scenes remained invisible.

Election Day and the recount on the following day are public events, but often what is broadcast from these events are excited voters inside the polling station, politicians in the process of voting and maybe a couple of shots from the count to show when the result is just around the corner. The negotiation of where to place polling stations, the ordering of the names of political candidates on paper lists, the construction of electoral infrastructures in the months before is not part of how the election is officially portrayed. When elections run smoothly, the regulations and practices that govern them work unnoticed. They are seen as practicalities and technicalities that provide a transparent and neutral framing or space for the political spectacle.

But every once in a while this hidden work does take centre stage. This was

the case after the infamous US 2000 Presidential Election. Here, numerous votes in Florida were not counted while others were counted incorrectly due to old vote counting machines using punch card technology. This resulted in a long and intense recount in the swing state, and the outcome of the election was uncertain for more than a month. Meanwhile, the entire nation held its breath for the announcement of the 43<sup>rd</sup> president. In a number of lawsuits several aspects of the election procedure were publicly scrutinized and the voting technologies, normally an invisible part of the election apparatus, became visible (Bowker and Star 2001). Typically, Election Day and particularly the voting machinery provide a seemingly uninterrupted line of communication from citizens to the state and back. As historian John Carson points out in a comment to the Presidential Election spectacle in *Social Studies of Science*, voting machines' communicative functions depend exactly on their ability to create the sense that nothing is added to this communication line (Carson 2001). But in the Florida case, as the link was disrupted, the public began to question the legitimacy of the entire election and the robustness of their democracy. The media depicted "the world's most powerful democracy as just another banana republic, unable to run a fair election" (Jasanoff 2001:462), and when the Supreme Court eventually decided to announce president George W. Bush the winner of Florida's electoral poll by a margin of only 537 votes out of almost 6 million cast, many saw this as a coup and a violation of basic constitutional principles. As many votes ended up not being counted the principle of 'one man, one vote' was challenged. More generally, public trust and the legitimacy of elections became problematized in the aftermath of the election, due to a large degree to practicalities and technicalities which did not manage to provide the political spectacle with a seemingly transparent and neutral space.

Despite the unfortunate circumstances during the 2000 US election, from a research perspective this event offered a rare insight into the hidden world of democracy: the election machine. When I use this term I do not just refer to punch cards or other technologies, but to the entire electoral apparatus. This notion I use to denote the massive invisible work happening behind the scenes of an election, such as the assessment of ballots, punch card technologies and counting methods. Upon

collapse, as during the US 2000 presidential election, some of its hidden world reveals itself. But in my view the machine is no less messy or complex in apparently well-functioning elections such as the Danish. The work that goes on here is also by no means neutral, and at the same time it paradoxically depends on the ability to produce the conviction that it *is* a neutral background for political deliberation. In practice, the more invisible the background, the better. This situation reminds me of an old comparison between sausages and law attributed to Otto Bismarck: “If you like laws and sausages, you should never watch either one being made” (Johnson 1933). In a similar manner, elections are political spectacles, celebrations of democracy, and as long as the election machine runs smoothly, all eyes can focus firmly on the politicians, the voters and the delegation of seats in the parliaments and councils. It could be argued that it might even be necessary for the election machine to work that it maintains an uncontroversial status. But this view underestimates and undervalues elections as practical achievements for the public administration and the rest of society. I want to recognize the technologies, arrangements and standards that normally fade into the background as crucial for how politics work (cf. infrastructural inversion, Bowker and Star 2000:34).

My main reason for introducing the notion of machine is that this is how the electoral organization was articulated in the election office. On several occasions during my fieldwork, municipal employees referred to this concept or a variant thereof (*maskineri, maskinrum*) to describe their work on elections. The notion of machine, however, also aligns itself with my approach to a democracy in action in its focus on the practicalities and technicalities behind the scenes of political deliberation. As a metaphor, the machine is familiar also to anthropologists and science and technology scholars working with the state or other societal infrastructures (e.g. Barry 2001; Mitchell 2009; Pickering 1995; Rheinberger 1998). In his important work on a development project in Lesotho, anthropologist James Ferguson uses the machine metaphor to identify a particularly striking feature of the development discourse. The machine metaphor helps present the country’s society and economy as within the control of a neutral, unitary and effective national government (Ferguson 1994). This happens even though, as Ferguson argues, neither

the state bureaucracies nor the development projects he studies are impartial or disinterested. Quite the contrary. He finds an ‘anti-political’ machine at work in Lesotho, as political questions are systematically reduced to technological problems, even though they carry out political operations. Sociologist Andrew Barry makes a similar argument, although he calls his machine political, and notes that political strategies can have anti-political effects, as they can close down the space of contestation (Barry 2001).

How the politics and anti-politics of the election machine are related I will explore further in chapter two. In this introduction, I will continue with the emphasis on the construction and enactment of a neutral, effective and unison bureaucracy. Anthropologist Colin Hoag, in his review article on the anthropology of bureaucracy, conceptualizes bureaucracy as an “objectivity machine” (Hoag 2011). Bureaucracies are inherently confusing, Hoag argues, as their rules and regulations prescribe idealised, universal and abstract behaviour never specific enough to fit the local context. Thus if we follow German sociologist Max Weber’s definition of the rational-legal bureaucratic ideal type, bureaucrats conduct their offices *sine ira et studio*, without hatred or passion; without affection or enthusiasm (Weber 1978:225). But there is unavoidably a distance between Weber’s historic and idealised accounts of ideals and local bureaucratic practices. As a result of this, Hoag argues, “ideals are always in deferral and they can operate as depoliticizing technologies, masking the exercise of power in the guise of an always emergent – but never attained – perfect order” (ibid:82). The efforts to reach an idealised representation of bureaucracy does necessarily require, Hoag stresses, an erasure game, and this is animated by the objective-subjective binary, as seen in science, and in the bureaucratic context related to other binaries such as policy-practice, formal-informal, dispassion-passion, legal-illegal (ibid:84).

Disengagement, impersonal norms and bureaucratic rationales as parts of an objectivity machinery have long been ridiculed. Most interestingly by Franz Kafka in his nightmarish parodies of absurd bureaucratic forms. The wide-spread use of his surname as an adjective – Kafkaesque – implies that many encounters with bureaucracy echo his parodies: the experience of long waiting lines, slow service,

unnecessary paperwork, and intransparent procedures (Jørgensen 2012). On a more serious note, Hannah Arendt has suggested that bureaucracy fuels violence, as it leaves nobody accountable for his or her own actions. “The rule by an intricate system of bureaux in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many”, Arendt argues, “can be held responsible” (Arendt 1970:38). This rule of Nobody Arendt uses in her critique of how the powerful German Nazi government positioned itself beyond accountability in relation to the Holocaust. Zygmunt Bauman presents a similar critique of bureaucracy. In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) he argues that the Holocaust was intrinsically connected to the creation of the modern order. Bauman asserts that bureaucracy has the ability to dehumanize its object. In the case of the Holocaust such dehumanizing practices transformed German Jews into objects to be handled by purely technical, ethically neutral means as a clearly defined segregated category that should be removed from Germany. Instead of taking a moral stance, adhering to rational bureaucratic procedures enabled German bureaucrats to ‘clean’ Germany. In order to do so, all the bureaucracy needed was a “definition of its task. Rational and efficient as it was, it could be trusted to see the task to its end” (ibid:106). The procedural rationality of the modern bureau, in Bauman’s view, has the dangerous potential to undermine human capacity for moral action and responsibility, leaving the bureaucracy as a ‘moral sleeping pill’ (du Gay 2000). Long before Arendt and Bauman posed their critique of bureaucracy, Weber was also concerned with what he called “the power position of a fully developed bureaucracy” where “the political ‘master’ always finds himself, vis-à-vis the trained official, in the position of a dilettante facing the expert” (Weber 1978:991).

What I take from these critical views of bureaucracy is a sensitivity to the potential power of the bureaucracy in modern states, as both Weber, Arendt, and Bauman emphasize. In a similar manner, I argue that bureaucracy plays a critical role in elections. Without bureaucracy there simply would be no election as we know it. Part of the powerful position of the bureaucracy is associated with its ability to act in what is perceived to be a neutral and objective manner. This neutrality can be accomplished in many ways, by burning ballots after the election or letting the politicians sign propositions, as I will investigate in chapter two. Yet, the objective is

the same; namely to make invisible their own voice and influence on the political process and spectacle. This construction of disengagement is the ‘god trick’ of bureaucracy. The creation of the illusion of unmediated and rational vision providing a gaze from everywhere and nowhere at once (Haraway 1988; Hoag 2011).

I will, however, not let these bureaucratic rationales predetermine the analysis. In the same way as the democratic ideals described above are not my point of departure for studying practices, neither are bureaucratic rationales. But I will also avoid the opposite position. It is not my aim to show how everything about elections really works behind the scenes only. By doing so, I would run the risk of romanticising elections in terms of passions, engagement and inconsistencies, and I would end up reinscribing the same bureaucratic binaries into my analysis which I hope to unsettle (Hoag 2011:87). I instead hope to explore bureaucratic work in practice, without discarding the importance of ideals and the formal-legal set-up. In doing this I follow Hoag’s suggestions to write *from* “the gap” between the binary of objectivity/subjectivity or principles/practices instead of writing *about* it. This involves complicating the legal realism of bureaucratic discretion and demonstrating the contingency, partiality and co-produced nature of bureaucratic knowledge (ibid:86, Jasanoff 2004; Riles 2006; Strathern 2000). In this view, ideals are enacted and negotiated in practice, and they should be seen as a resource among others, which helps to guide and legitimize actions.

What I want to do, then, is to develop an approach to bureaucratic practices that do not take democracy and bureaucracy as given entities. Instead, I propose a reframing of bureaucracy by situating it in practices rather than critiquing it<sup>9</sup>, as

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<sup>9</sup> A similar reframing is also found in sociologist Paul du Gay’s reading of Weber’s classic bureaucracy texts. Here, du Gay promotes another reading of Weber that does not entail a necessary link between the rational bureaucracy and the metaphor of the modern rational society as an iron cage turning bureaucrats and other moderns into inhuman, automated actors without emotions (du Gay 2000). A central point in Weber’s account of the bureaucratic office is rather, du Gay argues, that the bureau embodies a particular ethos. The bureau constitutes a particular ethical and moral institution, which must be assessed in its own right (ibid:9). du Gay’s approach to the writings of Weber resonates with my aspirations to approach the election office in Copenhagen Municipality ‘in its own right’, or, more precisely, to get closer to the bureaucratic production of elections without reading the event through the idea of the inevitable formation of an ‘iron cage’.

Bauman and Arendt do, as a rationalizing machine. This reframing echoes Latour's (2004b) pursuit of a new form of critique emphasising 'matters of concern' rather than 'matters of fact'. Critique, as currently practiced, Latour suggests, has had the unfortunate consequence of moving the social scientist further away from facts and the conditions that made them possible, when actually "the question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism" (ibid: 231). This move away from facts, according to Latour, has left critique in a polemic and almost irrelevant position. Latour introduces the notion of concern to rekindle a closeness to facts, to add to rather than subtract from reality, as "a matter of concern is what happens to a matter of fact when you add to it its whole scenography, much like you would do by shifting your attention from the stage to the whole machinery" (ibid:39). This is how the notion of concern helps me to think about bureaucracy as evolving in connection with political, legal, and organizational matters. Rather than debunking electoral bureaucracy, succumbing to scepticism or treating the election office as a Kafkaesque parody, I try to engage cautiously and empirically with the election machinery by attending to the bureaucratic office as socio-material assemblages of many different and often conflicting concerns gathered with care and passion (Hoag 2011).

In doing so, I stay under the analytical umbrella which I labelled 'democracy in action' above. To further specify this, I will now discuss three concepts which orient my study of the election office: ordering, materiality, and tinkering. In the following, each of these concepts are presented by focusing on one particular scholar; scholars who all share my profound interest in practice: sociologist John Law, anthropologist Matthew Hull, and sociologist Annemarie Mol. These orientations are central to my STS attitude, as they provide me with an overall focus in the study of bureaucracy. But I do not necessarily use them explicitly as analytic terms structuring the following chapters. Instead, in each chapter I will introduce the concepts relevant to the particular analyses.

### *Ordering*

Every chapter in this thesis emphasizes order in some way. Put more precisely, each of the instances from the election office which I analyse in this thesis was in some way or another concerned with creating order. This follows Weber's perspective on bureaucracy in which formal procedures and organized hierarchies are depicted as the most efficient and rational way of maintaining order (Weber 1987). An orderly election – whether created through the construction of an electoral infrastructure (ch 1), ordering polling stations (ch 2), election officials (ch 3), candidates (ch 4) or counting (ch 5) – is a bureaucratic end goal. John Law has elaborated on this issue, which he calls the modernist dream of reaching order, and argues that we do, indeed, all too often take ordering to be possible: “If our lives, our organization, our social theories or our societies were ‘properly ordered’ then all would be well” (Law 1994:5). Within this search for complete order complexity is treated as distraction and sign of possible failure.

But while the dream in the election office certainly was to create an orderly election, the work towards this was never unambiguous or reflecting the modernist binary between order and failure. Rather, practices of ordering various elements of the election were characterized by deviance, conflicting concerns and inconsistency. Creating order was about negotiating particular situations and emerging concerns. This kind of *ordering*, which I will thoroughly explore in chapter four on political candidates, is similar to John Law's focus on plural and often incomplete processes of ordering. In Law's view there is never one single order. Order is a process, it is temporary, and it is the exception rather than the rule. Making order is laborious, even if the order does not last for long (ibid:2ff). But ordering is not only accomplished by election employees. Documents, ideas, laws, and guidelines also contribute to ordering. As Law argues, ordering is the effect of socio-material heterogeneous processes.

### *Materiality*

In my approach to bureaucratic documents I take inspiration from scholars who have ethnographically engaged with documents in bureaucratic practices (Frohmann 2008;

Harper 1998; Riles 2006; Strathern 2008). In particular Matthew Hull's *Government of Paper* (2012) is central to how I think about documents. In a most impressive and original ethnography of the state, Hull studies Pakistani governance through its bureaucratic practices, particularly those of documentation. Files, minutes, charts, plans, elevations, maps, petitions, policy statements, office manuals are just some of the types of documents he carefully attends to. By decomposing state power into artifacts, he explores urban planning and shows how order and disorder are continuously produced through the ceaseless circulation of paper. To emphasize the central role of documents in bureaucracies is not a new thing to do. In the late 19th and early 20th century Weber depicted files as fundamental to modern bureaucracy:

The management of the modern office is based upon written documents (the "files"), which are preserved in their original or draft form, and upon staff of subaltern officials and scribes of all sorts. The body of officials working in an agency along with the respective apparatus of material implements and the files makes up a *bureau*.

(Weber 1978:957)

Writing has been of interest to anthropologists and sociologists of bureaucracy for a long time. But while they have studied "all sorts of interesting and important things looking *through* paperwork", they have seldom "paused to look *at* it" (Ben Kafka in Hull 2012:12). In contrast, Hull pauses to look *at* the documents of the Pakistani urban bureaucracy. In doing so, he follows Latour's emphasis on material representation to make the role of documents visible in bureaucratic work. In one vivid example, Hull demonstrates how files circulating in an office in the Islamabad Capital Territory Administration have particular effects that circumvent bureaucratic ideals of hierarchies, transparency, and accountability. In this case, the head of a division signs off on dozens of files every day without reading or understanding them, and consequently, the files construct an infrastructure of decision-making that constrains his capacity to intervene in matters under his formal supervision (ibid:114). While the Weberian account of bureaucracy portrays writing as being in the service of a hierarchical structure of authority and control, Hull suggests that this is not always so. Files in Islamabad are generated, Hull argues, "in relation to established hierarchies of authority", but "with respect to a particular case, files can

virtually reconstitute the role of functionaries in decisions, remaking formal organizational relations in unpredictable ways” (ibid).

Hull’s attention to how documents relate to the formal bureaucratic organization in unexpected ways allows for seeing bureaucracy as less than stable. In this way, he carries on Weber’s emphasis on written documents but distorts it. He emphasizes the associations emerging through the production and circulation of documents. According to Weber’s notion of bureaucracy, continuous operations by officials together with writing constitutes the ‘office’ (*bureau*). Writing, in this view, is fundamental given that “administrative acts, decisions, and rules are formulated in writing, even in cases where oral discussion is the rule or is even mandatory” (Weber 1978:219). But as Hull points out, Weber characterized documents as the passive instruments of bureaucratic organizations formed through abstract norms and rules. In *Economy and Society* (1978), Weber rejected in one paragraph the “naïve” idea of Bakuninism<sup>10</sup>: the idea that the destruction of public documents would dismantle “acquired rights” together with “domination”. Weber dismissed this idea as it “overlooks that the settled orientation of *man* for observing the accustomed rules and regulations will survive independent of the documents” (ibid:988). Hull, on the contrary, demonstrates how the circulation of files constitutes and mediates bureaucratic activities. And it does so in unpredictable ways which may circumvent the stable reproduction of hierarchical control. In his analysis, documents in the Pakistani urban bureaucracy do not simply reproduce stable bureaucratic dominations. They support a “bureaucratic political economy far more complex than one in which superiors control subordinates or one in which all are subject to a single irresistible discursive formation” (Hull 2012:160).

Although the thesis is not organized around a particular ethnographic artifact, as in recent ethnographies of documents (Riles 2006), I still follow Hull and his insistence on paying particular attention to documents. Thus, how bureaucratic documents are created in the election office and connected to political, legal, and organizational concerns plays a central role in this study. Already on my first day of

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<sup>10</sup> Bakuninism refers to the Russian revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin who argued that the French revolution ultimately failed due to its focus on eliminating people rather than records (Hull 2012:19).

fieldwork, I was presented with a huge pile of documents: election law, propositions, minutes, organizational charts, guidelines and much more. My informants at the election office suggested that showing me the documents would provide me a proper introduction to elections. While I slowly digested the many documents at my new office space I was both frustrated, as I was unable to comprehend everything stated in the documents, and fascinated by the growing pile of paper. I truly felt like I had landed in the middle of a real bureaucratic office. Some of these documents were legal files authored by the Ministry of the Interior, one was a draft of a pending proposition to reduce the number of polling stations in Copenhagen, and still other documents were minutes from an election board meeting describing the negotiations of how to draft the mentioned proposition. From reading these texts, an image of a hierarchical organization of electoral employees and politicians emerged before my eyes. And, as I will describe in chapter 2, so did bureaucratic principles of erased authorship and non-political rationality. These documents were the basic artifacts in the election office, and I will explore them accordingly in the chapters of the thesis. Each chapter scrutinizes a particular electoral moment related to particular bureaucratic artifacts: secretary guidelines (ch 1), a proposition (ch 2), election official registration lists (ch 3), candidate lists (ch 4), and calculation folders (ch 5). While the different documents share some characteristics, usages, and “ideological constructs” (Hull 2012:15), each of them also has its own pattern of use and mobilizes political and bureaucratic concerns in its own particular ways.

Taking my lead from Hull, I explore how working with documents in the election office is simultaneously tied to formal arrangements and a way of getting things done (Mol 2008). Documents are a means to reach an uncontested election result on time at the end of an election, while at the same time they provide a space for negotiation of electoral practices. Elections are a particular case of bureaucratic documenting practices; they are characterized by a high degree of urgency and by the fact that nothing can go wrong. Work on documents in the election office deal with this condition, and Hull’s work on documents allows me to see how bureaucratic documents are involved in processes of ordering, control, unpredictability, and instability.

*Tinkering*

Working with documents reproduces a particular bureaucratic ethos (du Gay 2000:9). Understanding how this ethos is practically produced entails an emphasis on the negotiation, bending, and twirling of concerns at the office. Here, Annemarie Mol's notion of 'the logic of care', which she developed in studies of medical practices, provides an interesting heuristic to think with about this matter. Good care is, according to Mol, not about making well-argued individual choices. It rather grows out of collaborative and continuous attempts to attune knowledge and technologies to diseased bodies and complex lives (Mol 2008). In her studies of diabetes clinics and diabetes self-care, Mol demonstrates how good care is "persistent tinkering in a world full of complex ambivalence and shifting tensions" (Mol, Moser and Pols 2010:14). What follows is that for the logic of care "gathering knowledge is not a matter of providing better maps of reality, but of crafting more bearable ways of living *with* or *in* reality" (Mol 2008:46). It is about how we collectively 'do good'. Care thus emerges as a moral activity:

In the logic of care, the crucial moral act is not making value judgments, but engaging in practical activities. There is only a single layer. It is important to do good, to make life better than it would otherwise have been. But what it is to do good, what leads to a better life, is not given before the act. It has to be established along the way. It may differ between lives, or between moments in a life. But, while it is impossible to ascertain in general what it is good to do, this does not mean that everyone has to figure it out for herself. The task of establishing what 'better' might be involves collectives

(Mol 2008:75)

Mol's logic of care is purposefully vaguely defined. This enables an attention to care and tinkering happening in particular cases, including elections. Although gathering knowledge and constructing documents at the election office was about providing better maps of the electoral reality in order to deal with the unpredictable event ahead, this was only part of the story. The election office spent nearly a year planning the municipal election in 2013, but elections rarely develop according to the plans, and

the 2013 election was no exception. The unpredictable election constantly challenged the election team to craft new ways of dealing with it, and their plans as preordained means to control action were only one among many resources used in practice (Suchman 1987).

As such, the election team, much like Mol's healthcare team, persistently had to attend to new twists, turns, problems, frictions and complications. Understanding bureaucratic ethos and ethics as disentangled from practices, therefore, makes little sense. Rather, I will pay attention to complex and ambivalent moments characterized by shifting tensions, colliding democratic and bureaucratic ideals and inevitable twists and turns. Getting things done at the election office involved managing emerging problems on the fly; it required constant tinkering.

In this light, taking care of elections resonates with what Weber would call goal-oriented rationality (Weber 1978). The election team did what was necessary to reach an incontestable election result. In doing so, however, they did not necessarily and strictly follow given rules and regulations, as Weber suggests, as rules and regulations are constantly challenged in moments of shifting concerns. Consider here how Weber identifies formal rationality as the basis of bureaucracy. Weber writes that bureaucracies' legal-rational authority is premised on a "belief in the legitimacy" (1978:213) of the pattern of normative rules and the rights of those elevated to authority to issue commands under such rules (Stillman 2000). The legal-rational institutional form is superior to any other form, Weber notes, "in precision, in stability, in stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability" (Weber 1978:223), as it operates according to given rules and has a high degree of calculability in its operations. The notion of care challenges this idea of calculability and stringency in Weber's ideal bureaucracy, but interestingly without making the election office seem dysfunctional. On the contrary, I suggest that the bureaucratic organization of elections rely on the careful handling of conflicting ideas about what 'good' democracy is and what 'good' bureaucratic practices are (Law and Mol 2002a). Practices of tinkering in the election office should therefore not be labelled 'irrational': they only seem so when universal and formal rationality is imposed on them as a measuring stick (Berg and Timmermans 2000).

Exploring bureaucratic ordering in terms of persistent tinkering reframes how to understand what is ‘good’ democracy and what are ‘good’ bureaucratic practices. As noted in the beginning of this introduction, plenty of academic work on elections discusses democracy in terms of e.g. ‘free and fair’ elections as universal standards and ideals. In contrast to this, what I hope to do is to open up the space of talking about better and worse bureaucratic practices, without assessing them from the point of view of predefined ideals or pre-existing binaries between order/disorder, objectivity/subjectivity. Rather, by situating, complicating and unsettling these binaries, I will try to show - through a series of fine-grained moments in the chapters that follow - what is considered and enacted as good democratic ideals and good bureaucratic practices in the election office.

### **An ethnography of elections**

In several ways, setting up an election is similar to the ways in which anthropologists set up fieldwork, and the practices of the election machine overlap in interesting ways with the practices of the “ethnographic machine”(Morita 2014). As mentioned, the election office spent months and months assembling an electoral framework so that the political spectacle on Election Day could transpire unhindered. It was the form – not the outcome – of the election which the election office sought to control. In a similar manner, while conducting my ethnographic fieldwork throughout most of 2013 (Jan-Nov), I tried to control the form of the inquiry. Like planning an election, my ethnographic research was to a great extent designed to provide a well-ordered format capable of capturing the unpredictability of the field while allowing me to remain in control. This is not an approach that aspires to methodological certainty or what John Law calls “bankable guarantees” (2004:9). Instead, the ethnographic endeavour on which this dissertation is based is characterized by uncertainty and slowness. As Law states, “(it is) a risky and troubling process, it will take time and effort to make realities and hold them steady for a moment against a background of flux and indeterminacy” (ibid:10).

Just as this thesis is concerned with foregrounding the backstage of elections and emphasizing its importance for Danish democracy, this section is concerned with

acknowledging the methodological choices and conditions and their role in producing the knowledge presented in this thesis. However, just as much as I participated in producing particular realities during my fieldwork, so did the empirical settings influence my methods, as they opened up certain ‘unlooked-for’ (Strathern 1999:3) instances while excluding others. So although I tried to control the form of my inquiry, this was not entirely possible. This was particularly true with regard to the definition of my field site: the municipal election office.

Working on my PhD project, one of the most common questions I received was: “Why the election office?” This question was often followed by a “why *only* the election office?” Ever since George Marcus introduced the term ‘multi-sited fieldwork’ (Marcus 1995) to account for the complex and fluid net of sites, ideas and people that make up the stuff of ethnographic inquiry, doing ethnography at a single, geographically bounded fieldsite has become the exception rather than the rule. And it is in fact difficult to argue that such a thing as the single-sited field site even exists<sup>11</sup>. This is likely why fellow researchers so often questioned my choice of the geographically bounded field site. As mentioned, elections and democracy are usually associated with polling stations, politicians, voters, publics, media coverage, and not first and foremost a dusty, hidden bureaucratic office. So my inquiry certainly had the potential to be geographically multi-sited. But despite this potential, I spent nearly all my time in a small Copenhagen election office with seven municipal employees. This was an intentional choice I made in collaboration with my informants. My ethnographic inquiry has, in this way, been about limiting rather than expanding the field. In his recent reappraisal of the multi-sitedness of anthropological fieldwork, Matei Candea suggests that such an awareness of boundary-making is methodologically necessary, although it often remains implicit (Candea 2009). With the ideas of limitlessness and constant expansion inherent in Marcus’ multiplicity of sites, Candea argues, followed a “suggestion that bursting out of our fieldsites will enable us to provide an account of a totality ‘out there’” and, Candea continues, “when it presents (un)boundedness as a real feature of the world out there ... rather

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<sup>11</sup> In this I follow Matei Candea: “The kind of bounded fieldsite I am proposing is premised on the realization that any local context is always intrinsically multi-sited. The problem...is not finding a diversity of leads to follow, but rather finding a way to contain this multiplicity” (Candea 2009:35).

than a methodological issue, the multi-sited approach forgets the possibility, indeed the necessity of *bounding as an anthropological practice*” (ibid:32).

So while my short answer to people asking about my fieldsite was that I chose the election office because I wanted to situate myself in the engine room of elections, the more elaborate answer would take my own role in limiting this field and the many other places from where the process was governed into account. Below, I illustrate how my fieldsite was bounded by emphasizing some practicalities which led to ‘cuts’ (Strathern 1996) of the electoral network.

My study was first and foremost guided by the time and place of the November 2013 municipal and regional elections. When I first sat foot in the election office in late January nearly ten months before the election, my intention was to follow the nitty-gritty planning and organization of the election up until Election Day in November. With the prospects of e-voting trials I wanted to get a better understanding of the current practices. But as the trials were rejected the main focus throughout my study continued to be on the nitty-gritty planning practices. I chose to follow certain activities carefully, such as the implementation of the IT-system Valhalla, a proposition to reduce polling stations, and candidate list submission; activities which spanned long periods of time. By following these projects, I was simultaneously overwhelmed by the amount of empirical material which my days in the election office produced, and I felt it necessary to maintain a daily presence at the office to follow these activities continuously.

As Election Day drew closer, the amount of activities outside the office rose. Politicians started their campaigns, voters became more aware of the approaching election, and my fear of missing potentially amazing insights by staying in the office rose accordingly. But I stayed. The election office employees went to great lengths to disassociate themselves from the politics of the election, and during my fieldwork they only had a few run-ins with politicians at election board meetings and candidate lists submissions. They built an electoral infrastructure of guidelines and bureaucratic folders (see chapter one) that would enable them to control the polling stations from a distance and thus keep the interaction with voters and politicians at a minimum. Consequently, although the entire election was planned with an ever-present

imaginary about voters, politicians, politics and democracy in mind, I almost never met voters or politicians during my fieldwork, and when I did, it was in the stories which my informants told.

I suggest that this highlights two equally important and inevitable aspects of my ethnographic fieldwork. Firstly, this exhibits the incompleteness of my study of the election machine. Secondly, it stresses my own critical role in producing this partial story of democracy. Candea points out that “the decision to bound off a site for the study of ‘something else’, with all the blind spots and limitations which this implies, is a productive form of methodological asceticism” (Candea 2009:38). Underlying his argument of methodological asceticism is a rejection of the holism and totalizing discourse implicit in the idea of the multi-sited fieldwork. Thus, the ‘something else’ in the quote above is in this present thesis ‘the making of the Danish democracy’, and I bound my fieldsite in order to produce a partial story thereof. You should therefore not be deceived by either the apparent linear storytelling of this thesis or the overlap between the geographical space and analytical interests. These do not represent a pre-existing totality. The different chapters are rather the outcomes of intentionally drawing heterogeneous things, people, places and practices together. Or, to evoke John Law’s idea of ‘fractional coherence’ (Law 2002), the thesis holds together the various electoral fractions without imagining the Danish election or the Danish democracy as a whole.

### *Methods*

As noted, this thesis is about the invisible work behind the scenes of an election. It is about foregrounding the backstage elements of elections, and my research was centred around “finding the unlooked-for” (Strathern 1999:3). The invisibility of the electoral infrastructure, however, often proved so invisible that even I, located in the middle of the election office, struggled with producing accounts of it.

The municipality was a partner in the Demtech project, so access to the election office was negotiated fairly easily. I was kindly offered a workspace in their open office space and immediately became part of their breakfast club which took place each Friday. I participated in various election meetings in the department with

other municipal departments and participated in two national electoral workshops. But apart from these activities, there was plenty of ‘quiet time’ in front of my computer at the office; time when my notebook was not filling up with scribbles and when efforts to strike up conversations with my informants would obviously interrupt their work. In this particular workplace – like in most office settings – many of my informants’ working hours were spent staring intensely into a computer screen, working on various election projects. As a consequence, I also spent a lot of time in front of my computer, typing up field notes from meetings. While I deeply appreciated this joint knowledge production activity in front of our computers, I also had to deal with a nagging uneasiness about this ‘quiet time’ in the office.

My saviour was, not surprisingly, the paperwork of elections. As described above I realized that nearly every electoral task was accompanied by a massive trail of paper: election laws, minutes from meetings, propositions, guidelines, emails and so on. Getting access to and reading these various documents became my means to understand how the bureaucratic machinery worked. While reviewing the paperwork, I took the opportunity to ask election employees, who had written many of the documents and used them in their work, about the content and how they were part of wider bureaucratic and electoral processes. For instance, when I at one point was handed several minutes from previous election board meetings concerning a proposition to reduce the number of polling places in the municipality, I realized that the number of proposed polling stations changed from meeting to meeting, and so did the arguments behind the proposed number. I highlighted this in my copy of the minutes and initiated a short conversation with Ida, an election employee responsible for the polling place minutes. This informal conversation led to a discussion about the politics of creating propositions and the difference between political and bureaucratic decision-making. So although I never got access to the election board meetings, I followed the year-long process of this proposition through such frequent, short conversations or what could be called ‘5-minute interviews’.

I started pursuing more files on the topics I found interesting. I found that I would often receive more thorough answers to questions about the practicalities of the work when my informants were in fact working on that very task and had the

relevant documents located on their desks. More general questions about the election apparatus were reserved for lunch, coffee breaks and the weekly election meetings. I did not record these daily '5-minute interviews', as I did my best to interrupt the work of the election office as little as possible. I also refrained from doing formal interviews (aside from one interview with an IT employee from another municipality, see chapter 3). It proved easier to talk about the election machine and the nitty-gritty every day practices at the election office while engaged in these practical and material practices. So the '5-minute interviews' provided me with snapshots of current work practices and became my way of keeping track of the slowly emerging election apparatus at the election office.

I followed this strategy of emphasizing particular projects, retrieving documents and conducting '5 minute interviews' for a while. This allowed me to follow the quiet pace of the bureaucratic office, shifting between my desk, meetings and informal conversations in the office space. But in the fall of 2013 as the election came closer, the pace of the office work changed. More meetings were set up, deadlines on several projects were rapidly approaching and various important decisions needed to be made. My presence at the election office also shifted. From being an observer in a 9-17 job during the first months, I gradually participated more and more. Numerous practical tasks such as collecting paper folders, double-checking information on election officials, setting up tables for counting of ballots and taking phone calls on election night swamped the election office, and with my growing knowledge about these tasks, I helped out to the best of my ability. The hours spent at the election office became longer, and when Election Day was finally upon us sleep was a rare commodity. At one point, at four in the morning on the final day of the recount, I was so sleep-deprived that while typing the election results into a calculation system, a municipal employee reading the numbers to me had to wake me up in the middle of the process. At this point, I had had four hours of sleep for the last three days. My field notes from these hectic election days were few, random and nearly impossible to decipher, clearly reflecting my state of mind at that point. But I learned an immense amount about the craziness and unpredictability of elections by getting so involved during those final days. I felt on my own body the pressure to

produce an incontestable election result and left my field site in awe of my informants. At a point of time when I could no longer think, let alone stay awake, they were still making vital decisions for the sake of producing the election result.

### **Structure of the thesis**

For the thesis I have chosen different moments in the process of planning and executing Election Day which all address the centrality of the election machine in creating Danish democracy. These moments are tied up with different analytical interests to explore the ordering, tinkering, and materialities of the election further and in different ways. In the first chapter following this introduction, *The Electoral Centre*, I explore Election Day. I describe the bureaucratic set-up for Election Day, and this serves as an introduction to the electoral infrastructure which I explore further in the following chapters. Exploring elections introduces a sense of urgency to the study of bureaucracy. Election day is a critical moment, and nothing can go wrong. Nonetheless, I was repeatedly told that something unpredictable always happens. Central to managing the uncertainties of Election Day is the creation of loops between the election office and the 50 distant polling stations. In the chapter I explore the various documents and folders through which the election office mediates between their central office and distant polling places. In this process of ‘acting at distance’ (Latour 1987), the election office makes the unknown future event known and generates the election from a distance by building, maintaining, and repairing an electoral infrastructure durable enough to control some of the ‘madness’ of Election Day.

The three following chapters expand this argument by exploring the organization of the election apparatus in terms of polling stations, election officials, and political candidates, respectively. In chapter two, *The Politics of the Proposition*, I turn to the bureaucratic work of constructing polling places. I do so by investigating the case of a proposition to reduce the number of polling stations for the upcoming election. Central to this chapter is the term ‘the political’. Both analytically and empirically it emerges as a key concept. In their work on the proposition, my informants made a clear distinction between what they consider to be ‘political’ and

‘non-political’ work. They did so in order to create distance between Politics and their own bureaucratic reality and thereby gain more room for manoeuvre. This distinction challenged not only my own conceptual STS perception of ‘the political’ but also made working with a clear-cut division between a conceptual and an empirical notion of ‘the political’ difficult altogether. This chapter discusses the tension between the analytical and empirical notions of ‘the political’ and explores the constructive potential of thinking with a boundary-crossing concept (Gad and Ribes 2014).

In chapter three, *The Quest for Valhalla*, I examine a web-based electoral system for staffing polling stations during elections, called Valghalla. The system was implemented immediately before the November election, and the hope was that Valhalla would simplify the complicated and time-consuming process of recruiting and managing the nearly 1600 election officials who participate in the election. Even though the implementation turned out to be very difficult and was characterized by organizational struggles, problems with technology transfer and numerous other issues, Valhalla was used during the 2013 election. In this chapter, I argue that Valhalla was kept alive due to the election offices’ hesitant approach to the implementation process (Stengers 2005). Hesitation in this case was not about hindering or resisting the digitalization project; it was about keeping a balance between supporting and questioning the project. Continuing the implementation when deemed necessary but rejecting the digitalization vision when it collided with concerns for reliable elections.

In the fourth chapter, *Ordering Candidacy*, I explore the processing of political candidates at the election office. By weaving together several stories from the candidate list submission, this chapter details how different ordering processes take place simultaneously. In particular, this chapter suggests that Danish democratic ideals of equality and inclusion emerged through the work of ordering political candidates, while these ideas in turn legitimized certain actions at the election office. Democratic ideals, just as bureaucratic predictability, I explore in this chapter as simultaneously given and constructed. Furthermore, this chapter explicitly tackles the notion of order and its relation to messiness at the election office, and suggests that

the political candidate chaos I met during candidate list submission was not exterior to the election office. It was created in the encounters between political candidates and the bureaucratic office.

In the fifth and final chapter, *Counting, Cutting and Calculating*, I turn to what my informants considered the actual highlight of the election: the recount. In this chapter I use the notion of ‘networked decisions’ to conceptualize how the recount is simultaneously a well-oiled bureaucratic counting machinery and a chaotic mix of bending, twisting, and tinkering counting practices for producing an incontestable election result. I explore how counting and calculating consists of both careful counting and of making ‘cuts’ between which ballots should be recounted and which are done. I suggest that bureaucratic technicalities together with changing and conflicting democratic concerns during the recount not only make it possible to reach an election result, they also create an account of the election in which nothing is added to the direct link between the will of the people and those who govern.

The conclusion sums up the story of the election machine told in the different chapters, and I return to the question of what it means to say that principles in Danish democracy are practically produced. Lastly, I discuss the implications of making visible the complex, heterogeneous, carefully negotiated and generative bureaucratic practices, which are normally hidden in the common account of orderly Danish elections and a neutral, merely technical bureaucratic machine.



## Chapter 1

# The Electoral Centre

Election Day has arrived. In less than two hours 50 polling stations will open in the municipality. More than one year of preparation culminates now. This day is also the peak of 10 months of fieldwork. I will witness firsthand if the many months of preparation that I have observed in the election office will pay off and the election will proceed according to plan. My interlocutors have repeatedly told me stories about how fantastic, chaotic, and terrible Election Day is. This event is definitely not for the faint of heart, I am told: You either love it or you hate it. I just hope that we are ready. I arrive at election office - an open office space on the sixth floor in a well-hidden building in the middle of Copenhagen - at 7.55AM. No tasks or assignments besides attending breakfast at nine have been announced. But since the polling stations open at 9AM I thought that arriving one hour early would be sensible. When I enter the room I am neither the first, nor the last of the six person election team to arrive. Peter is already on the phone with an election secretary who is calling from one of the polling stations. The secretary is unsure of how to place voting guidelines in the

voting booth in accordance with law. Peter explains to her how to do so, but otherwise the election office is quiet. Carsten and Ida talk calmly over coffee and they seem to be in no hurry to reach their desks. Marie, head of the election office, even finds the time to pick up bread at a nearby bakery for our breakfast.

I do not know exactly what I expected when I entered the election office on Election Day but certainly not a situation this calm and quiet. Up until Election Day, the election officers talked of it in terms of urgency and unpredictability. Marie stated on several occasions, that “we only get one shot ... something unpredictable always happens on Election Day. We just need to be prepared”. Similarly, election employees in the municipality told me stories from previous elections where they had worked for 36 hours straight before they finished counting ballots; they told me stories of how they had to keep counting when they could no longer stand on their feet; stories of how dogs and a parrot had entered a polling place, and even one story of how a voter tore his ballot to pieces in frustration over the voting process. These stories added to a shared narrative in the municipality about Election Day as an extraordinary event where failure was not an option, even if unpredictable things – and at times outrageous things – will always happen. If the election office is the ‘engine room’ of elections, a term often used by Marie, it seemed like the machine was running quite smoothly at this very critical moment. At least we were able to enjoy our breakfast at 9AM – the exact same time the polling stations opened – in a building far away from voters, politicians, and officials.

My entry to Election Day captures in a simple way a particular duality of election work that I also experienced on other occasions at the municipal office. As events, Elections are extraordinary, unpredictable, and spectacular while, simultaneously, they are incredibly mundane, ordinary, and regulated. This duality and the relationship the duality contains is a (implicit) thread, throughout the thesis. Or more precisely: my interest throughout the thesis is how the election office deals with the unpredictability of elections by means of bureaucratic and mundane practices. Thus, I do not attempt to develop a definition of unpredictability. I treat it as an empirical concern, which the work of my interlocutors’ revolves around. Managing unpredictability is, for them, about *being as ready as possible* on Election Day. This state is achieved through learning from previous elections and by instructing new election employees. In this setting unpredictability should therefore not be confused

with the mathematical connotations of its antonym, predictability. Dealing with the whims of Election Day is not about making it more certain or predictable through calculations or similar means. This is simply not possible according to my interlocutors. The idea is instead to establish a state of readiness to deal with whatever happens and turn uncertainties into manageable risks<sup>1</sup>. To achieve this state of readiness, the election office reproduces a comprehensive amount of electoral documents, guidelines and spreadsheets. They will enrol 50 election secretaries, around 250 counting personnel and 1500 election officials in the election organization, who will all use and learn from these bureaucratic devices. These documents, guidelines, spreadsheets are, thus, important facet of how my interlocutors ordered the election by re-working, or reenacting a diverse and multifaceted infrastructure. From election to election this electoral infrastructure has been adjusted enhanced and enlarged in attempts to make the election more and more manageable and accountable.

The seemingly mundane and disinterested bureaucratic tasks of planning elections are often seen as the practical, technological, and not least apolitical

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<sup>1</sup> The focus on governing unpredictability rather than unpredictability per se in this thesis is similar to a shift, professor of accounting Michael Power has identified within risk management (Power 2007). Here the dominant discourse of risk management has shifted from the logic of calculation to that of organization and accountability, which directs the enquiry towards the practical operations for handling risk. By talking about risk instead of unpredictability, as I do in this thesis, Power explicitly adds to and discusses the fast growing body of literature in fields such as business management, law, sociology, political science and social policy that increasingly analyze the notion of risk and debates what Beck's famously coined the risk society (Beck 1992). But while Power himself creates a distinction between risk and uncertainties (and not even discusses unpredictability), I rather see this distinction as an analytical tool, and thus, still regard his thoughts on govern risk fruitful in this current endeavor. Uncertainties are, according to Power transformed into risk, when it becomes an object of management (Power 2007:6). The distinction between these two are therefore an institutional or managerial one concerned with which issues that "expected to be treated within management systems as 'risks' and those which are not" (ibid). As such, when uncertainty is organized it becomes a 'risk' to be managed, although, Power argues, this is not a claim that all risks are 'manageable'. From this understanding, I could have continued with the notion of risk instead of unpredictability, as these are, indeed, expected to be dealt with, organized and planned from during the election. But to maintain an emphasis on the intrinsic unpredictable character of elections and to avoid inscribing management of electoral unpredictability into the neoliberal logic of the entrepreneurial subject, which risk as an organizing category belongs to (ibid:22), I have chosen the notion of unpredictability; not least because this is notion my interlocutors themselves use (*uforudsigeligt, udfordsigelighed*).

infrastructure for political, representative democracy. My hope with this chapter is, however, to unsettle the idea that Election Day as a political event is separable from the bureaucratic infrastructure upon which it relies. Following the opening analytical approach to elections with inspiration from Latour and other scholars in science and technology studies (Barry 2001; Latour and Woolgar 1979; Latour 1987; Law 1994; Mol 2008), I do not analyse the bureaucratic ordering of Election Day in this chapter as an apolitical means to a political end. Instead, I explore particular bureaucratic entities as means invented by the election office to control Election Day by auditing the polling stations. These bureaucratic technologies are not only instrumental in securing a transparent voting process and incontestable result. They are the ingredients in the enactment of a certain electoral reality.

Emphasizing the re-production of an electoral infrastructure as a way of ordering the election enables me to focus on the mundane bureaucratic machinery without treating it as neutral, or as a merely technical endeavour. This is not to say, however, that electoral infrastructures are inherently political in the common sense of the term. Brian Larkin defines infrastructures as “built networks, that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space”(Larkin 2013:1), but infrastructures are also much more than the vehicle for transporting elements. As Andrew Barry among others also notes, when materials, environments, technologies, humans are brought together and interact (sometimes in unanticipated ways) this has world-making effects (Barry 2013; Rowland and Passoth 2015). The more-than-human relations’ (Braun 2005) of infrastructure provide this chapter with a productive starting point from which to explore the construction, maintenance and adjustments of democratic and political life in the municipality (Appel, Anand, and Gupta 2015). Thus, if drawing election officials, ideas, documents and goods together have world-making effects, the particular forms of political rationality that underlie technological electoral planning projects may give rise to particular “apparatus[es] of governmentality”” (Foucault 2010 in Larkin 2013:3).

This relational approach to electoral infrastructures<sup>2</sup> allows me to recognize “the depths of interdependence of technical networks and standards, on the one hand, and the real work of politics and knowledge production on the other” (cf. the concept of infrastructural inversion mentioned in the introduction, Bowker and Star 2000:34). In this chapter, my concern is with the practices of drawing together and reproducing parts of an electoral infrastructure that allow for some degree of control with the unruly election; an infrastructure that initially allowed us to have a quiet moment in the election office. But, as this chapter will also show, the electoral infrastructure is never fixed or completely stable. It depends on upon repairs and ongoing negotiations (Jackson 2015). As such, the aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, by focusing on the particular electoral documents and personnel who emerged as key actors throughout the election, this chapter introduces the electoral infrastructure, and thereby sets the scene for the following chapters. Secondly, I argue in this chapter that a central aspect of how the election office deals with the unpredictability of elections is to create *loops* between the election office and the 50 distant polling stations. Through various documents and folders, the election office not only mediates between the central office and distant polling places. They also generate the election from a distance. I explore this ‘acting at distance’ (Latour 1987), and how the election office makes an unknown future event in distant places known by building, maintaining, and repairing an electoral infrastructure of guidelines and spreadsheets which becomes durable enough to contain some of the madness of Election Day.

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<sup>2</sup> The relational approach to infrastructures has gained a wide interest both within the STS community and more recently anthropology, and a rich scholarly literature engaged with infrastructures of modern societies and organizations has grown from this (e.g. Bowker and Star 2000; Edwards 2010; Harvey and Knox 2015; Hecht 2012; Jensen and Winthereik 2013; Leigh star and Ruhleder 1996). In these studies, infrastructure is neither treated as a metaphor (Appel et al. 2015) nor merely as a thing or a technicality (Jensen and Morita 2015). Instead conceptualizations of infrastructure insist on engaging with its material form while exploring the infrastructure as a relation; as complex heterogeneous assemblages. Here, the empirical emphasis and foregrounding of roads (Harvey and Knox 2015), databases (Bowker 2005) or pipelines (Barry 2013) suggest that, firstly, studies of infrastructure incite ethnographic research on a object are newer quite finished or stable. Infrastructuring entail ongoing negotiations, which is way the relational approach to infrastructures, secondly, suggest that the complex assemblage is, indeed, political cf. Andrew Barry’s term “political machine” (Barry 2001).

### **Election Day planning**

While the focus of this chapter is Election *Day*, this is an imprecise term (Coles 2007:127). Election Day in Denmark is in fact spread out over several days. Advance voting by mail opens 90 days before Election Day and counting, tabulation, and approval does not end until days later. The election office and several election officials plan the day for more than a year in advance and spend several months afterwards to finish paperwork and handle complaints. Politicians likewise spend years planning campaigns, reaching candidacy and, if elected, negotiating the position to which they are elected. Reducing democracy to Election Day – or even further, to what happens in the polling station or a voting booth – is to neglect the multiple networks and technicalities on which they rely. This does not mean that this day or these aspects are not crucial, or that one cannot focus analytically on them. Scholars have analysed how certain parts of the process – for example the voting booth – have come to symbolize Election Day which in turn symbolised democracy as a whole (Dalsgaard and Gad, forthcoming). But in this chapter I will start with three accounts from the Election Day planning prior to Election Day. They are all closely related to Election Day in Copenhagen Municipality, but for now I will not focus as much on November 19<sup>th</sup> as on the accounts' threads to previous events in the election office. The accounts will introduce parts of the electoral setup and provide preliminary insights into the chapter's overall argument on how constructing and maintaining an election infrastructure allows 'acting at a distance' – a strategy key when dealing with the unpredictabilities of Election Day.

#### *The enthusiastic secretary*

On Election Day, 1500 election officials manned the 50 polling stations. These officials were all Copenhagen citizens, often members of a political party, who had volunteered to help with the registration of voters, ballot handling, making sure ballots were cast properly, and with the count of ballots after voting ended. Five officials were given the special responsibility to act as local election committee members (*valstyrer*), as they together constituted a local election committee. According to the Danish election law (LBK126, 2/11/2013), §16, the five committee members at each polling station are responsible for the conduct of voting and counting at their polling station. By the end of Election Day they are the ones who

sign the finalized poll book, with an account of the vote that took place at the polling station and the numbers from the first count. The committee members' signatures in the book signify them witnessing that the election has been carried out in accordance with that which is stated in the poll book. But in reality the delegation of responsibility was more complex. In the introduction, I described how the political election committee delegates a large part of the responsibility for the municipal election to the election office. The same kind of move happened on Election Day. Importantly, a large responsibility for organizing the polling station was delegated further to the so-called election secretary, employed in the municipality and recruited by the election office. At each polling station the secretary planned, organized and instructed the officials about their duties throughout Election Day until they finished counting in the evening.

The election office recruited the 50 election secretaries from all over the municipality. They were chosen because of faith in their capability to maintain an overview, to organize the work of numerous volunteer officials, and to navigate the sometimes conflicting demands from the committee members, the election office, election law and so forth. In the early planning phase of the election, the election team at the election office often discussed possible candidates for secretary positions. Although they reappointed many of the secretaries from the last parliament election in 2011, they still needed to recruit more than a handful of new ones. Ida, the election office employee responsible for this task, would therefore often discuss possible candidates with the rest of the election team. One morning, Ida had heard about a newly hired male employee in the municipality, who had shown interest in the position as secretary and she discussed with Marie, the head of the office, if she thought that he would be capable of running his own polling station. They concluded that as he was still new to the municipality, "maybe he should just be a trainee at this election". Ida added that she just heard that, Karen, a secretary known for her structured approach and ability to handle a large polling station, just got a new job in another municipality and, therefore, would not be able to serve as secretary this time around. Marie seemed bothered by the news of losing a "reliable" secretary and suggested that Ida could set up a meeting with Karen to "drain" her for her knowledge and experiences, before she left.

The recruitment of election secretaries is thus a process, where the election office approached municipal employees known for organizational skills such as a structured approach, capacity for overview or simply for their experience. Sometimes over longer periods of time the election office would try to convince people to take the position. The secretary role is not part of the job description for any municipal employees so they were asked to work in their spare time although they would receive a one-time payment. The role as a secretary is, therefore, unrelated to current work practices and cannot be forced on an employee via the normal channels of the bureaucratic organizational hierarchy<sup>3</sup>. So while recruiting officials is a matter of battling for manning-resources with other departments, it is also a matter of convincing rather than demanding. The economic compensation is important here, but not the main reason why secretaries take part in the election. During the 2013 election the secretary fee decreased nearly 5 percent. This was noticed, when Ida emailed the secretaries to say welcome, but nobody revoked their commitment for this reason. During a conversation with a returning secretary, she told me that the hours spent outside regular working hours on secretary duties do not match the compensation. Instead, she explained, you choose to become an election secretary because you are thrilled about elections or about particular electoral tasks so you simply “cannot resist the opportunity to participate”. Ida and Marie’s conversations about new potential secretaries echoed this emphasis on enthusiasm. So in addition to competencies in maintaining an overview and having a structured approach as mentioned above, an eagerness to take part in elections was a most valued attribute. The election employees regarded an urge to ‘do elections’ (*lave valg*) a valuable asset, and on this very long day where nothing must fail it is important that the election secretary is able to lead the way all through the night.

This valuation of enthusiasm contrasts to how we usually think about how a bureaucrat must act. Passion is often undervalued or even regarded dangerous to bureaucracy (du Gay 2000:93). Max Weber emphasizes this in his historical accounts of office conduct the spirit of formal impersonality, a form of being without hatred or passion and hence without affection or enthusiasm (Weber 1978:225). Organizational

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<sup>3</sup> And in contrast to election officials as their assignments are viewed as a public duty. But rather than enforcing anybody to serve as officials during the elections, the rights and responsibilities of public duties allowed volunteering officials to take time off work during election day.

theorist Paul du Gay, who advocates for the virtues of bureaucracy, elaborates on Weber's idea of impersonality. He warns us that passion does indeed pose a danger to the bureaucratic ethos of responsibility as it threatens the expectation that civil servants will display procedural fairness and equity of cases (du Gay 2000:93). His warning is aimed at the increasing deployment of performance measures, which he identifies in the British civil service. In his view, the risk is that these measurements will challenge procedural fairness and the bureaucratic ethos of responsibility may be undermined. In this argument, du Gay draws on the example of a child support agency, where demands to meet performance targets led the civil servants to engage in unacceptable forms of conduct when chasing absent fathers. Du Gay argues that "rather than seeking to moderate the perfectly understandable enthusiasm of officials for particular policies and projects the rationale guiding the conduct of agency appears designed to incite them" (ibid).

The difference between moderation and incitement of enthusiasm is important when we return to the case of the passionate election secretaries. In contrast to Weber's historical account of the bureau, at the election office passion seems to be an instrumental and even necessary prerequisite rather than a threat to the election machine. In my interpretation, enthusiasm was expressed in direct relation to current and 'acceptable' electoral tasks: I witnessed a stressed phone call, when a polling station could not open on time, heard a loud cheer when the counting was finally done, and had a tearful, disillusioned conversation about problems with counting ballots. It is important to stress here that while this kind of enthusiasm may be what gets the election secretaries through Election Day in one piece, their passion is moderated and directed carefully through various guidelines and regulations. This weaves passion into the ordinary bureaucratic tasks, which the secretary carries out. So the passion I witnessed during Election Day was a prerequisite force that sharpened bureaucratic conduct rather than something that made election officials engage in what Du Gay identifies in the British Civil service as unacceptable behaviour.

*'Cookbooking' elections - the extensive guideline*

After the recruitment of election secretaries a long process of communicating plans and ideas for how to run Election Day began. Except from one formal meeting two

weeks before Election Day, the medium of communication was emails and an extensive 60-page long secretary guideline. As seen in the snippet below (fig. 1.1), the Secretary Guideline contains a large amount of details on what should happen on Election Day. The guideline states for instance when exactly the secretary should arrive at the polling station and what she needs to check prior to opening the venue.

**The election secretary's tasks on Election Day, Tuesday, November 19th**  
*Before 09.00*

1. Arrive at the polling stations no later than 06.30. The delivery man arrives at 06.00
2. The delivery man receives ballots, posters with candidate names and voting guidelines, which arrive directly from printing between 06.00-08.00
3. **Between 08.00-09.00** it is checked that the delivery man has ensured that;
  - all posters with voting guidelines and candidates are placed in the voting booths;
  - numbers on each election table are hung on the table (unless the polling station uses a digital electoral register);
  - signs with the name of the polling stations are located at the entrance door; s
  - signs and arrows are correctly placed;
  - writing material in different colors (red, blue, and regular pens and pencils) are placed on each election table;
  - a pencil is located in each voting booth;
  - the ballot boxes are marked *BR-VALG* and *REGIONSRÅDSVALG*

Fig 1.1: Excerpt from the Secretary guideline, 2013 (translation by me)

This 60-page long roadmap – or cookbook as an employee called it - contains a collection of experiences from previous elections and elections in other municipalities mixed up with rules and regulations from the Election Law. The book was reassembled before the 2013 municipal election and it prescribes as series of ‘good’ processes that the election team hopes that the secretaries will imitate at the polling stations. Peter, the youngest and most recent employed of my interlocutors, was in charge of rewriting the Secretary Guideline. He started to work on it six months prior to the election by collecting all the material from previous elections that he could get

his hands on. Peter explained during a conversation that in order to compose the guideline he had approached elections as a novice. He had “thought about what kind of information he, as a new election secretary, would like to have”. He started with a twelve-page guideline from the previous election in 2011 and adopted its timeline approach. Subsequently he added several examples of issues that might occur during Election Day. These were either issues which had actually occurred during the last election or they were potential problems discussed at the election office. Other potential issues described in the guideline stemmed from an election guideline provided by the Ministry for Economic Affairs and the Interior. This guideline was based on the election law and was considered a more readable version of the law, where the ministry also highlighted particular important legal issues based on national experiences from previous elections. Lastly, other issues had been discussed at an election seminar targeted at municipal employees, which was held nationwide three months before the election.

The ministry’s guideline and the national election seminar both highlighted the question of to what extent politicians are allowed to campaign on Election Day itself. According to Danish law it is illegal to campaign inside or right outside polling stations. During the seminar the example used of this was a paradoxical situation where a schoolteacher takes his class to a polling station wearing a sweater with his picture on it and the caption: “vote for me”. In this scenario, he is not only a teacher but also a political candidate. Despite the somewhat bizarre example, the trickiness of this situation was discussed thoroughly during the election seminar. Delegates reached the conclusion that the schoolteacher, by virtue of his status as a voter, would be allowed to wear the sweater at the polling station as long as he did not stay at the polling station for a prolonged period of time or try to coerce other voters. This scenario is fictional, but Peter incorporated it into the Secretary Guideline to ensure, firstly, that if a similar situation should ever occur, the secretary at the polling station could look to the guideline for help. But secondly, he added this issue to the guideline aiming to heightening in general the secretaries’ awareness of the rules of campaigning inside the polling station. He wanted them to be more capable of detecting possible campaigning. So it was not only experiences from recent elections within the municipality that he fitted into the cookbook of elections. Experiences from other municipalities, new legislative frames, hypothetical scenarios and nation-wide

municipal discussions all played constitutive parts in the make up of the guideline and in preparing the election secretaries for more or less plausible problems.

Amounting to nearly 60 pages, the Secretary Guideline was over four times as long as the guideline used for the previous election. During a talk with Peter he expressed ambiguity towards both the thoroughness and length of the guideline. On the one hand, Peter said, the length was the result of the fact that secretaries had requested that the election team compile all relevant information in one guideline, thereby streamlining and simplifying the flow of information. On the other hand, this put Peter in a very vulnerable situation. If the guideline contained any misleading or incorrect information, Peter himself could be held responsible for ensuing mishaps. “You put yourselves out there”, Peter explained, “and you can get beaten up for it”. At previous elections when the Secretary Guideline provided less information and did not touch upon so many aspects of Election Day, the election secretary would be more responsible for organizing a polling station that lived up to rules and regulations. This included taking into account things which were not mentioned in the guideline. As Peter explained, “you would expect the secretary to investigate these matters on her own”. But even though the guideline was now so much more comprehensive, secretaries were still expected to take matters into their own hands. Peter noted so during our conversation: “It is important that they [secretaries] get some clear to-do lists, but it is equally important that they understand that their job is not done, just because they have accomplished all the tasks on the list”. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the election team look for enthusiastic, yet well-organized secretaries, as these are people who need to simultaneously create an orderly polling station following the guidelines *and* be ready to quickly and smoothly handle unforeseen events.

As a bureaucratic document, the Secretary Guideline is quite different from the document you will encounter in the next chapter (a proposition to reduce the number of polling places). It is different in that the author – here Peter – is not just the author, but the responsible author for the information provided by the guideline. As anthropologist Nina Holm Vohnsen has observed in her studies of the making of the Danish Labour Policy in a Danish ministry, public documents often have no identifiable authors. Authorship is attributed to organizations, in her case, ‘the Ministry of Employment’ or ‘the National Labour Market Authority’ (Vohnsen 2011).

The author(s) of the text or parts thereof can neither claim ownership nor responsibility for the produced documents. This does not mean that it is difficult to find or that civil servants do not receive positive or negative acknowledge for their work. Instead, Vohnsen argues, this entails that the link between responsibility and ownership is cut. The same can be said about the election Law and the ministry's guideline to elections, mentioned above. Here, the government and the ministry respectively officially claim ownership and take responsibility for the written texts, the civil servant(s) who has produced the documents are invisible in the text. But when Peter transformed the local secretary guideline, he was also instated as the responsible author. Even if the election team was the responsible bureaucratic entity, Peter remained the author of the written texts and was accountable for it. The guideline has not undergone the same process of authorship-removal, as in cases of the ministry guideline or the Danish Labour policies, which Vohnsen studied (see also ch 2), where the civil servant is slowly removed as author and the responsibility is transferred to the political entity. Conversely, in my case, the link between the author and the responsibility is maintained, which may be why Peter struggles to find the right balance between what to put in the document and what to leave out for the secretaries to handle in practice.

This use of explicit bureaucratic authors and Peter's considerations of "putting yourself out there" instigates a space for critique and dialogue between the election team and the secretaries that is not normally found in official bureaucratic documents. Normally, if you disagree with a law, you take it to court of appeals and not the author. Marilyn Strathern argues that it is difficult to critique bureaucratic documents, as they cannot be read in the same ways as scholarly publications (Strathern 2008). In her work on bulletproofing in mission statements from British academic research institutions, she finds that absence of authorship, arguments or references, makes these documents difficult to analyse, discuss and interpret:

There [is] no narrative and no plot, there is no record of the process of compilation, no internal monitoring of discourses, not authorial self-scrutiny, but then there is also no social observation, no science, and in that sense no facts.

(ibid:196)

In these documents the analytical steps leading to particular arguments and conclusion are deleted, and the only task left for anthropologist studying such texts become to analyse the politics of compilation (ibid:195); a strategy Strathern follows when she

describes the events, demands and political requests leading up to a British university's mission statement. But while the analyst's room for critique of bureaucratic documents might be very narrow, the secretary guideline was no ordinary document. Critique, although it came from the electoral setup and not from the analyst, was an integral part of guideline usage and production during the election. Thus, when Strathern and Vohnsen explore bureaucratic documents in their respective settings, they emphasize fixed, readymade, public documents, which are presented to the outside world, whether that be other Danish departments working with and affected by labour policies or in response to requests from education councils in the UK. These documents will, at earlier stages, have been less fixed, less readymade, less done. But the work, arguments and references that went into compiling the document are erased, as they become public documents and perform as such. The guideline is different from these more stable documents in that it is never fixed or sent out to a wider public in a firm form. Instead it is constantly under construction, added to, and tweaked between elections in a continuous dialogue between the election team and the secretaries. This constantly emerging format of the guideline gave me a unique insight into the building of arguments. It helped me understand the references to a wider electoral network and authorial scrutiny that are difficult to discuss when a document is collected, cut loose from all the internal relations and ready to perform in the world. Thus, instead of 'merely' looking at the politics of compilation as Strathern suggests as the only analysis possible when dealing with bureaucratic documents, I still had access to the immense labour and negotiating that lay behind every word in the guideline.

Some of the insights into the compilation of the document presented here stemmed from an evaluation meeting after the election, where several secretaries were critical towards the amount of information in the guideline. Its size made it difficult to find particular paragraphs or materials, on the spot when they were needed. A young secretary, who had just participated in her first election, stated on the other hand, that a lot of vital information was too implicit in the guideline. These arguments were taken back to the election office to be taken into account when developing the next version of the guideline. So while the secretaries did not pass judgment on the document per se, the activity Strathern suggests is the difficult task for an analyst, they drew for their critique on knowledge from their polling stations and on the

interplay between the Election Day practices in their little corner of the Election and the guideline. Critiquing the guideline at the meeting was, thus, something quite different from the troublesome critique of anonymous bureaucratic documents. It was not as difficult as Strathern warns. It was rather instrumental in reconstruction and maintaining the document.

To critique the guideline and not least the form in which it is presented is, thus, a process of discussion and negotiation between author and recipient of the document. It is about negotiating the infrastructural setup and the flow of prescribed processes from the election office to the polling stations. This I suggest exemplifies the continuous work to maintain a link between the author, the election team, and the recipients, the secretaries. These links are instrumental in the electoral infrastructure as this is what allows the electoral centre to act at a distance on the polling stations. They do so through the knowledge compiled in the documents. How the election office gains control with and can audit the polling stations will become more evident in the next and final story of documents used on Election Day.

#### *Documents of accountability*

It was nearly nine o'clock and at the polling station in the city town hall<sup>4</sup>, the officials and the secretary were making the final preparations before opening the polling station. The large hall was organized so the first thing citizens would meet when they entered the room was a row of five green registration tables, with officials ready to convert the citizens' voter registration card to a white and yellow ballot – white for municipal and yellow for regional election. The voter registration card had been mailed in advance to all eligible voters, as in Denmark eligible voters are automatically registered to vote.

Behind the tables were a row of voting booths with blue curtains and ballots boxes on the other side towards the exit. The cardboard ballot boxes had just been

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<sup>4</sup> While the story of Election Day 2013 is written as my experiences with elections at the city town hall, this is in fact the result of drawing together various experiences from several locations and elections. My emphasis during the 2013 municipal election was the election office. Consequently I did not spend an entire day at one polling station. Instead I spent some hours in the morning at one polling station, Bakke School (which will be unfolded later in this chapter) and the afternoon at the polling station in the city town hall, as the election office set up a temporary office here. Together with my experiences as an ordinary election official at the polling station at Copenhagen City town hall during the 2015 parliament election, these encounters with Copenhagen polling stations provide the empirical material in this section.

assembled and closed with tape. The secretary, some officials, and the handful of citizens, who had already entered the building ready to vote, had overseen this process. This is a ritual conducted at all polling stations to make sure that the ballot boxes are in fact empty before the election commences. During this ritual, the official in charge of ballots had handed a stack of white and yellow ballots to officials sitting ready at the registration tables. When doing so the official registered how many ballots he had handed over to each registration table in the 'table account' template (*bordregnskab*). Throughout the day, when the registration tables were running low on ballots, he would repeat this procedure. In this way, it was possible for the official and the secretary to keep track of ballot papers. At the end of the day they would add up these numbers to make sure that they matched the number of counted ballots. In a similar manner, when the voters handed over their voting registration card, the officials numbered them in the upper-right hand corner in consecutive order. Whenever the officials collected 25 voter cards they bundled those cards with a rubber band. This practice made it possible to check throughout the day whether the number of collected voter cards corresponded to the number of ballots handed out or not.

Transferring voter cards for ballots and thereby turning Copenhagen citizens into voters (Coles 2007:158, see also ch 5 on registration of voters and what counts as a vote) was a process of registering and keeping track electoral documents. All of this was to make sure that one person indeed equalled one ballot and one vote, not two, three or none. The guideline authored by Peter described in detail how to hand out ballots and keep track of voter cards and the secretary's introductory speech to the officials in the morning furthermore stressed this aspect. But the document templates used to keep track of ballots, voter cards and votes casts were as or more essential in making sure that the election processes happened in accordance with rules and regulations. As tools of accounting for the electoral process, the document templates—with their predefined boxes—made the election process accountable, not only for the secretary and the local election committee at the polling station, but also for election team sitting far away from the Election Day action.

It is hard to tell if it was a sudden realization of the importance of these templates (templates which link the election office and the polling stations) that prompted a flurry of activity just a few days before Election Day. At this point, the

election team decided to make physical copies of the material and compile a Secretary Folder complete with all the templates. A week before the election team originally decided that the secretaries would be themselves responsible for compiling all the necessary information. The election team ought not to service the secretaries in all their tasks, Marie had stated. But just three days later Peter and I were, nevertheless, compiling all 50 secretary folders one late evening. To my question about why we were doing this, Peter answered that he actually did not remember why or even who decided to go forward with the Secretary Folders, while quietly starting to laugh about that. He added, however, that it was easier for the election team to print copies of the appendix than for each secretary to make her own copies. “And then I feel comfortable with knowing that everybody got it [the information]...but maybe we are doing them a disservice (*bjørnetjeneste*), since they will now also expect a folder for the next election”.

The folder was thus not just a practical item. Rather, it put Peter’s mind to ease knowing that the secretaries had received all available information. But while Peter was not convinced that the Secretary Folder was entirely a good idea the election secretaries felt otherwise. During the evaluation meeting, the secretaries praised the physical folder. Their only request was to receive it earlier than the day before Election Day. According to several secretaries the certainty that every important document on elections was collected in *one* folder was extremely reassuring.

Intentionally or not, the Secretary Folder – together with the secretary and his or her guidelines – to a large degree framed the election at the polling stations. Not only were rules, regulations and desired practices written in these documents. In a very precise manner, they framed the political spectacle and how citizens were turned into voters at the registration table and in the ballot box.

How documents and folders as tools of accountability affect the election is probably nowhere more evident than in the case of the poll book. The poll book is a four-page summary of Election Day. Each and every polling station is required by law to provide such a book at the end of the election. Two pages must contain information about the election result and two pages must provide information about the local election commission, the layout of the polling stations, the time when the result was called in to the election office, a summary of remarks to the course of Election Day

and finally signatures from the five polling station committee members. The election office, however, enclosed a poll book template in the Secretary Folder, which only left a few predefined boxes for the secretary at the polling station to fill out.

With its predefined indicative boxes, the poll book summarizes and simplifies Election Day into numbers and notes in a manner similar to the ‘table account’ mentioned above. Together these elements, thus, calibrate and discipline the polling station. They calibrate the polling station to follow certain electoral practices and to focus on certain indicative numbers, such as the number of voter cards versus the number of ballots, while other aspects are left unaccounted for. John Law identifies this kind of accountability as “an active process of blocking, summarizing, simplifying and deleting...[which decides] what is to count and what, therefore, becomes counted” (Law 1996:291). Marilyn Strathern further explores this kind of accounting by focusing on the quantification of output into already-agreed-upon indicators, which in her study sets in motion the abstraction and decontextualizing of research into assessable and accountable criteria. Indicators are a key mechanism, Strathern argues, for emphasizing a focus on outcome “for it restricts the output (results) of observation to data suitable for constructing measures of it” and “indicators come in turn to have a life or efficacy of their own” (Strathern 2002:307). In this way, things are no longer measured by indicators, but rather indicators establish targets to aim toward. By turning around the way we think about indicators, the number of voter cards, ballots handed out and information provided in poll books appear not just as indicative of a smooth election measured retrospectively. Rather, the small predefined boxes in the poll book reserved for these create electoral targets to aim towards in the name of transparency and accountability, while leaving other events at the polling station unaccounted for, treating them as unforeseen events.

### **Managing electoral unpredictability...**

The three snapshots of secretaries, guidelines and election documents are some windows to the multifaceted production of the electoral infrastructure that facilitate a flow of people, voters and ideas about election and democracy. In the following, I will argue that this bringing together of documents, secretaries, polling stations and the election office has further world-making effects. It is not only the construction of voters, ballots cast and polling stations which is at stake: so is the bureaucratic set up

itself, including the election office's capacity to deal with unforeseen events at the polling stations. Through standardization of techniques such as poll book templates, 'table accounts' and procedural descriptions of voter registering practices, the election team manifests its instrumental and central position in the electoral apparatus. Here, the production of an electoral infrastructure in particular creates links and loops between polling stations and election office, which allow for a centralized management of election events and processes scattered around the municipality. To develop a language that allows me to address the infrastructure in terms of this distant control, I will draw on Latour's notion of a 'centre of calculation' (Latour 1987).

In *Science in Action* (1987) Bruno Latour describes a flow or transition between distant places similarly to how I have addressed distance between the central election office and polling stations. In 1787, Latour writes, the king of France sent Lapérouse, captain of L'Astrolabe, to the East Pacific. His orders were to draw a complete map of the Pacific. Part of this assignment was to determine whether the engraved shape of "Sakhalin", a much-discussed potentially existing peninsula, was tied to Asia or not. This was unknown at this point. After several months at sea Lapérouse arrived in the East Pacific close to the "Sakhalin" area, and asked an older Chinese man about the peninsula. The Chinese man replied with a sketch in the sand including China and the island of Sakhalin, while gesturing that a strait separated the two. A younger Chinese man drew a similar map in Lapérouse's notebook and added scale by drawing little marks. As Lapérouse had to cancel a trip to the strait due to bad weather, he had to rely on these Chinese witnesses to settle the question of Sakhalin Island. Instead of visiting the strait he continued with his mission in the East Pacific and sent a younger officer – under the protection of Russia – back to Versailles with the valuable little notebooks that indicate the shape of Sakhalin (ibid:216). But why this hurry to settle the question of Sakhalin, Latour asks. Could they not have stayed longer, waited for better weather and learnt more about this island from the Chinese? "No, because they are not so much interested in this place as they are in bringing this place back first to their ship and then to Versailles" (ibid:217). Once the place had been brought "home" in this way, other fleets would know it through Lapérouse's notebooks and maps; they would then not need to rely as much on native knowledge.

[They] will be better able to domesticate the Chinese since everything of their land, culture, language and resources will be

known on board the English ship before anyone says a word. Relative degrees of savagery and domestication are obtained by many little tools that make the wilderness known in advance, predictable.

(ibid:218)

From the story of Lapérouse, it is evident that a map was considered mobile, whereas the lands it represented was not. By producing maps it was possible for Lapérouse to bring home distributed and complex knowledge of the area in a singular stable form. Those who initially were the weakest in the sense that they were the farthest away from the area now emerged as the strongest. They would become familiar with and dominate many more places than the natives or the travelling captains were ever capable of. To dominate unfamiliar places, events and people, the story of Lapérouse's notebooks and maps tells us, you need to use devices that render them mobile, stable, and combinable—so they can be moved back without decay, be aggregated and “shuffled like a pack of cards” (ibid:223). Latour calls these means “immutable mobiles”.

These insights into how small tools, such as the map, can make the wilderness known in advance illustrate two important aspects of the use of secretary guidelines and electoral documents. Firstly, while the election office may not make the wilderness of Election Day entirely predictable, they are indeed tools for making Election Day known for the secretaries and officials before they enter their polling stations on Election Day. The electoral guidelines are set up to provide a roadmap to elections and thus to make unpredictable issues manageable. Secondly, by the end of the day, the different electoral documents and in particular the poll book offer an account of polling stations. Just like Lapérouse brought home maps of distant places, so too at the end of the day the account from the complex and messy election is brought back to the election office in the stable form of a poll book. This makes the election office familiar, not only with one polling station, but with all of them—and the office can speak thus on behalf of the entire election in Copenhagen municipality. Becoming familiar with the unruly Copenhagen Election and how it was managed was, however, no easy task; in the following I will dwell on these two aspects of creating loops between the 50 polling stations and the election office to emphasise the work that goes into maintaining these.

*Creating durable links*

When Peter assembled the secretary guideline, he did so on the basis of previously existing guidelines and by drawing on conversations about past experiences among election employees. This had happened many times before. Knowledge from past elections was gathered and reconstructed in each new version of the guideline—so that, ideally, for each election more and more of this important day would be known. For the 2011 election, the secretary guideline contained a template for calculating the number of officials needed at each individual polling station; it also introduced a timeline for secretary tasks. For the 2013 election, the guideline furthermore included thorough descriptions of assisted voting for citizens with disabilities and a suggested work schedule, modelled on a secretary's schedule from the previous election. Knowledge is gathered, formalized, reshuffled and circulated anew, to provide a more extensive playbook on elections. Each time something is added, a little more of Election Day is made known to the secretary and the election office: fewer issues fall outside the realm of the playbook – fewer issues are unknown or unpredictable.

The role of documents as a means for limiting and managing uncertainties is even more evident if we look at the many templates and documents enclosed in the secretary folder. The poll book and table account has predefined boxes leaving only a few blank spaces for the secretary to fill out throughout the day. They provide aims for the day, and they indicate how to get to the end. The use of guidelines, secretary folder and poll is not unlike Lapérouse's map complete with an itinerary describing how to reach distant and unfamiliar places helpful for those who travel through this terrain at a later date. Part of creating durable links between the election office and secretaries is similarly about the continuous collection of distributed knowledge from election secretaries and the broader electoral community, which can then be returned to the election team, to be reshuffled and distributed anew.

But the election secretaries also need to familiarize themselves with the guidelines and the enclosed documents. Even the most thorough accumulation of knowledge of elections does not matter if the secretaries decide to navigate on Election Day without their roadmaps. Thus, it is not enough to invent methods and technologies for making the election known, if the secretaries do not care to read let alone follow them or find it difficult to obtain the information they need from the documents. So while Peter was gathering the various documents, he emphasised repeatedly that it was in fact the secretaries' job to familiarize themselves with the

material. In practice, however, several secretaries did just quickly glance through it, and instead, according to Peter, during the election they used the guideline more like an encyclopaedia, and would call the election team when in doubt. This was evident on Election Day, as phone calls from secretaries to the election team mostly concerned the tabulation in the poll book and regulations for putting up posters in the vicinity of polling stations, issues which were both thoroughly explained in the guideline. Knowing that the guideline and the enclosed documents in the secretary folder would not be read in its entirety by most and that the secretaries would more often use it as a step by step itinerary throughout the day, Peter tried to make the information accessible in several ways.

The comprehensiveness of the 60-page Secretary Guideline was one of the strategies Peter used in the attempt to make sure that the secretaries could in fact easily familiarise themselves with the election process when needed. As mentioned earlier, after the last election the secretaries had requested a simpler and a less fragmented flow of information to provide them with an overview of Election Day. Accordingly, Peter explained to me, he tried to collect several otherwise separate guidelines in one document, and emailed them to the secretaries one month prior to Election Day. But despite his intention to streamline the information flow, Peter found himself adding more and more information to the guideline as Election Day approached. He added new specifications from the ministry on how to assess letter votes and seven new or updated appendices. One week before the election, he emailed the 50 secretaries again explaining the changes and the attachments to the email. This email was neither the first nor the last email with extra information. So although Peter and the election team were aware of the problem and tried to keep the number of emails to a minimum, the thread of emails kept growing. This was also noted during the evaluation meeting with the secretaries after the election where several secretaries pointed out that the stream of emails was confusing. With the growing information flow, they quickly lost track of new updates especially since every email was forwarded and therefore they did not have their own headlines. The emails intended to clarify turned into an information overload where important news on the election got lost. Maintaining a durable link or flow of information between the election office and the polling stations was, thus, a balancing act. This balancing act involved providing as much updated information as possible to the secretaries before Election Day

without ruining the streamlined link. For the election office to successfully act at a distance was a fragile endeavour, one which could be destabilized or challenged by even a simple (over)flow of emails. Setting up the electoral infrastructure months in advance is not enough to ensure long distance control. The relation between the central office and the polling stations needed to be maintained throughout the entirety of the election. Maybe this is the reason for the sudden and late decision to provide the election secretaries with their own folders of electoral documents, as this folder, as explained above, reassured both Peter and the secretaries that every important document on elections would indeed be ready to hand throughout the day.

So whereas the confusing email thread created insecurity, according to both Peter and several electoral secretaries, the making of the Secretary Folder reassured that the secretaries were ready for Election Day. Thus, various linking methods and technologies recreate, maintain, or challenge the relation between the election office and the polling stations. In this light it is obvious that setting up and maintaining an extended network as a patchwork of different, heterogeneous elements, folders, guidelines, secretaries and officials is no straightforward task. It requires continuous and careful negotiations and even the most tedious emailing duties can destabilize the infrastructure.

### *Bringing the election home*

Despite their highly thought-out strategies on how to make the polling stations manageable, the election team would not know exactly how everything had worked out before all the polling stations closed and all the accounts had been collected. This depended of course on the electoral infrastructure not breaking down during the day. If it did, the secretaries would at some points need the election team's help to repair and reconfigure the process, a process I will explore at the end of the chapter.

When the polling stations closed at 8'o'clock the election team sat by the phones in an interim office at the city hall ready to receive calls from the 50 secretaries. The latter would hand over by phone the preliminary poll book results and numbers from the polling stations. The ballots were larger than usual, which had made the counting more difficult and the results came in later than expected, so we sat in the small office and received numbers until 3.48am, when the 50th and last polling station finally reported their count. On some occasions discouraged secretaries

complained on the phone about the late hours, about the difficulties reaching a final result and about how hard it was to motivate the officials to keep counting.

Domesticating the unruly day was then also about producing accounts, despite the difficulties at some polling stations, in a form that made it possible to bring them to the election office with a simple phone call. Late in the evening, I assisted by answering the phone and received several calls from secretaries, who presented their account with both excitement and tiredness. The conversations followed an almost identical route, dictated by a spreadsheet on the computer screen in front of me with boxes to be filled out. I needed a long list of numbers from their poll books, which I filled in a spreadsheet on the computer, saved, printed and handed over to the election team, who would then enter the numbers into an electronic election system<sup>5</sup>.

“Can I get the overall number of votes for the Social Democrats and so on”, were the words with which I started the conversation with Line, who was calling from the polling station at Guldbergsgade School. We spent a couple of seconds figuring out how to best hand over the number of votes for the 32 different parties. “Social Democrats, 1302 votes, Danish Social-liberal Party, 276 votes”, Line recited and I repeated the numbers as we went over the list, making sure I got the correct numbers. These 32 numbers were automatically added together in my spreadsheet and I had so far recorded 3902 ballots cast. I asked Line if she had the same number. She confirmed that she did. Then I asked for the numbers of blank and invalid votes. 86 and 15, Line replied and I checked once more that the new total of votes cast including the invalid votes, 4004 was the same. It was, Line assured me. So we went on with boxes in the poll book named ‘Total 1’ and ‘Total 1, total (*Total 1, I alt*)’. These referred to the number of letter votes and the total amount of votes cast according to the electoral registration list. 68 and 4006, Line replied. The ‘Total 1, total’ was nearly identical with the 4004 votes cast above, Line and I declared, very happily, in unison. These numbers are indeed supposed to coincide, as both refer to an account of votes cast: one from the registration list and the other from the ballots counted. I now only needed three numbers from the tally account, before we could end our conversation: the number of replaced ballots, returned ballots and supply of

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<sup>5</sup> The electronic election system will be introduced in chapter 4, where it is used to check candidate lists and in chapter 5, where the election team uses the system to calculate the results and create the final election account from among other things the numbers added by the election team this night.

ballots left. 10, 4, 4235, Line told me, after a little help with finding these in the poll book. After a little less than ten minutes of exchanging numbers, we could end our conversation.

The numbers I received from Line were derived firstly from her poll book, but also from the different table accounts used throughout the day – all templates and documents provided by the election office and enclosed in the secretary folder. These documents and in particular the poll book created a very particular numerical account of what I imagine was a more colorful and festive election day at Guldbergsgade School. In this account on the phone, the election was presented in numbers nicely ordered in rows and columns which made it possible to phone in the Election Day results. Hence, this numerical, standardized form of the documents not only prescribe certain actions at the polling stations, it also makes it possible to bring ‘home’ the finished account of the election.

If the first way of dealing with unruly elections by continuously maintaining links between the election office and the polling stations is concerned with setting up a durable infrastructure and negotiating the information flow with the secretaries, then the second way is about regaining control over the election. When Latour talks about inventing maps and other objects that make acting at a distance possible, it is because these objects have the properties of being immutable, presentable and readable (Latour 1986a, 1999); they can stabilize complex and messy knowledge, make it travel and presentable in other settings than the local here and now. The poll book summarized Election Day as a set of numbers and this is instrumental for making loops between the election office and the Copenhagen polling stations. In the poll book, the account of Election Day is made mobile and stable enough to move through space via a phone call and presentable enough to be understood by election employees not present at the given polling station. For each secretary calling in numbers from the poll book, the election team slowly got to know the municipal election 2013 and ultimately they knew more about the election than any individual secretary or officials present at the different polling stations. When the last secretary phoned his numbers in at 3.48AM, it could be said that the election team was the only entity which could really claim to know the Copenhagen election.

While this could be the end of story about Election Day, it was also the beginning of a new cycle. The knowledge gained at the election office would

contribute to a roadmap for the next election. More of the election wilderness was now known. Simultaneously, however, other areas of the election are continuously becoming unfamiliar again, as secretaries leave, the law changes and new setup is needed. I have suggested that these cycles or loops between the election office and the polling stations – reproduced and maintained through various bureaucratic methods and documenting practices – were instrumental for dealing with the ever-present unpredictabilities of elections. While these electoral technologies will never make future election entirely known pre-emptively, the disruptive potential of unforeseen issues at the polling stations are somehow contained.

### **... when it (finally) happens**

So far in this chapter I have focused on how the election office takes part in building a durable and accountable infrastructure through bureaucratic means to deal with the whims of Election Day. Spreadsheets, poll books, guidelines, and secretaries are all set in motion by the election office to make Election Day as known and transparent as possible. But what happens when unpredictability finally strikes? Because it will, at least according to Marie as quoted in the beginning of this chapter. Unpredictability did actually strike early in the morning on Election Day when two polling stations in the municipality were not able to open on time due to problems with the digital electoral register. The digital electoral register, used at half of the polling stations in Copenhagen municipality (the other half use a paper register) contain lists of all citizens registered to vote at the particular polling station and is used to check the voter's identity in order to avoid voter fraud<sup>6</sup>. At polling stations with digital lists, voters would be registered by scanning a barcode on the registration card and only after doing so they would receive two ballots, if a little box on the computer screen showing information about the voter also lit up green and stated "hand over ballots". But at two different polling stations, the digital register would not open, and the officials were therefore not able to register voters and to hand out ballots.

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<sup>6</sup> When an election official based on the information given on the voter card, either manually or digitally, find the voter in the voters register, the official firstly confirm that the voter has already voted during this election (if so the voters name will be crossed out in the register). Secondly, the official tests the voters identity by asking the voter about his or hers birthdate and checks the date against what is recorded in the register.

The calm breakfast situation opening this chapter was, thus, only short-lived, as the two secretaries from the polling stations in question called and told the election office how voters were waiting anxiously outside their polling stations. It seemed like the electoral infrastructure, carefully reproduced and adjusted in the many months prior to this day, was at the verge of collapse. I will explore the story of the breakdown of a register's at a polling station at Bakke School, to identify some of the different strategies used in efforts to keep the polling station open and hence to repair the electoral infrastructure without jeopardizing either the smoothness or accountability of the election.

*Regrouping in the electoral setup*

"Here's the taxi vouchers". Marie handed me two taxi vouchers while I quickly grabbed my jacket. Even though I would only need to walk a few meters from the taxi to the polling station the Danish November weather still required a warm jacket. It was nearly 10.00 AM on Election Day and I was being sent to the polling station at Bakke School to help with problems after the breakdown of the electoral register. So was Michael, a student worker from the election office. The election secretary from Bakke School, Kenneth, had requested extra staff and since Michael and I were the most expendable at the election office, we were sent to the polling station.

When we arrived at Bakke School and entered the large and bright gymnasium (see fig. 1.2), the election seemed to be up and running again. Some voters were waiting in line but nothing seemed out of the ordinary and I was struck by the ordinariness of this emergency situation we were supposedly sent out to. Kenneth, who requested our assistance, was, however, nowhere to be seen. Instead an election official greeted us and explained that the morning had been really busy due to the computer failure so Kenneth was still running around making sure everything was all right. According to the official, despite the computer failure they managed to open the polling station only a few minutes after nine. As soon as the tech-savvy municipal employee responsible for the computers at the polling station told Kenneth that the digital electoral register was not running correctly, he changed the electoral set up from digital to analogue and reinstated the paper register.



Fig. 1.2. Polling station, Bakke School

In the meantime the head of the tech support team and expert on the digital electoral registers rushed to the scene, grabbed the three laptops with the registers and disappeared to his working station elsewhere in the city to try to fix them. The shift from digital to analogue election meant several last minute changes to the layout of the polling station. In the digital register, the officials have quick access to the entire register, but the paper register for this polling station is split into six different books with voters listed in alphabetic order for convenience. With six paper books and a slower registration process, where the officials had to manually look up voters' names, Kenneth firstly had to double the number of registration tables from three to six. Secondly, with the six books distributed at the six tables, Kenneth had to put up new signs at the polling station to redirect and evenly distribute the voters to tables with their registration information. Finally Kenneth changed and added to the staffing schedule to accommodate the extra polling tables, and this was where Michael and I came into the picture. The reorganisation of the polling station was all done in the last minutes and seconds before scheduled opening time, so when we arrived an hour later, there were no more fires to put out. We simply entered into what seemed like a well-running polling station and after the official had told us about the events, Kenneth, who seemed busy but calm, greeted us and gave us our work schedule. I was

located at the polling booth making sure that voters got into empty polling booths for the next hour.

The calmness reminded me of a brief conversation between Marie and Peter earlier that morning at the election office when they realized that the digital electoral register at Bakke failed. Their first reaction was to check in Valhalla, the digital staffing system that I investigate in detail in chapter three, if the polling station at Bakke School had enough election officials assigned to run the election with a paper register. Sophie, who was responsible for Valghalla, reassured them, that they overstaffed the polling station with ten extra officials, so they should be able to handle the transition. During this conversation, I thought that more important things than staffing had to be dealt with in order to get the polling station up and running again. What I did not realize at this point was that as soon as the digital register failed a long string of tasks to regroup and repair were already initiated by Kenneth, which had also been initially planned by the election office. The regrouping and reuse of paper registration lists or what was known as the ‘fall back procedure’ at the election office had already taken place before we entered Bakke School, effectively led by Kenneth. But while I was letting voters into the polling booths at the school, I was furthermore getting small glimpse of the second part of the strategy of reorganizing the polling station; a strategy concerned with repairing the digital electoral register and with what could be called regaining accountability. So while Kenneth’s first task at Bakke School was to open the polling station as quickly as possible by returning to an analogue election, his second task was to secure the accountability and transparency of the election process despite the change in electoral set up

### *Regaining accountability*

Soon after Michael and I arrived at the polling station, two younger women from the municipal civil register unit (*folkeregisteret*) also rushed into the polling station. They were carrying several heavy files and books. During elections in Copenhagen municipality, this unit is responsible for keeping the municipal electoral register updated until the last deadline set by the ministry, so if people for instance move in this period this is also recorded in the register and they become eligible to vote in their new municipality. But since the polling station at Bakke School was considered digital, only the digital register had been updated and the paper version did not

contain the newest information about voters. The two women's task was therefore to update the paper register located on the six registration tables in accordance with lists of people who had either moved out of the municipality or died so close to election day that they had not automatically been deleted from the list. This was done to make sure that only voters recorded on the electoral list would receive ballots and vote at this polling station.

As soon as the civil register women entered the polling station they borrowed a physical voters register from one of the six tables and sat down behind the registration table. Carefully they matched the register with their lists and crossed out voters who were no longer eligible to vote. Although their job was interrupted from time to time when a voter at the polling table needed to be checked in the register, they updated the entire register within an hour.

In a similar manner an election official and I were given the task to update the same registers with information on advanced letter voters. If you have voted in advance by mail you are not allowed to vote on Election Day during the municipal election. It was, therefore, important that these votes were registered in the electoral register and normally this was done on the day before Election Day. But at this polling station the advanced votes were, just like the withdrawn voters, only registered in the digital electoral register. Consequently we had to update the paper register to avoid the possibility that citizens could vote both in advance and on Election Day. In the twenty minutes we spent on this task, the election official, I worked with, meticulously read the names of advanced voters from her register and I marked them with red pen in the electoral register.

Updating and keeping track of voters, registration cards and ballots, despite changes in the electoral setup, was important to be able to provide an account of the number of ballot cast and votes counted. As described above these numbers figured in the calculation in the poll book that Kenneth would have to phone in to the election office by the end of the election. So when Jens, the technical expert, returned to the polling station with three functioning computers a little after eleven and employed the digital register to one polling table at a time, the register was updated once again to maintain an accountable track of the election. This time the updating was from the paper register to the digital register. Jens methodologically scanned all the voter

registration cards handed in during the breakdown to update the digital register with the newest information, so that their presence on Election Day was recorded digitally.

In this way the shift back to a digital election did not jeopardise the possibility of accounting for every ballot handed out on Election Day. Slowly, and as Jens scanned more and more registration cards, the election officials at the registration tables shifted to the digital electoral register. They started to scan voter cards instead of looking for voters in the paper register, and they removed the extra registration tables. The two ladies from the civil register left the polling station, and while Jens did the final tweaking of the computers, Michael and I took a taxi back home to the election office.

### **Mundane infrastructuring of the unruly election**

When the unforeseen event struck at Bakke School early in the morning, it was dealt with by means of a combination of a fall-back procedure to paper registration (which secured a smooth and nearly on time execution of the election) and different practices for updating the electoral register. These two strategies illustrate that managing unplanned issues relies on the continuous work of maintaining the accountability built into the infrastructure via adjustments and repairs. It is about installing a prepared and structured secretary, who knows the guidelines and knows which account s/he needs to provide at the end of the day, so s/he can calmly adjust the set up if need be. It is about having tables, paper lists and civil registers ready. Being as prepared as possible for unforeseen events at the election office and the polling station is, thus, also about discussing possible fall-back procedures and possible scenarios, such as the need to update the paper register, if the digital version is malfunctioning. The breakdown of the electoral infrastructure, although it was only momentary, reminds us of the extent to which infrastructures are fragile phenomenon and that their all-encompassing and impressive, yet invisible status are “earned and re-earned on an ongoing, often daily, basis” (Jackson 2015)

Paradoxically, due to the diligent response and adjustments to the electoral setup, the breakdown at Bakke School seemed to me, when I entered the school at

10am, to appear not as a highly problematic or as a completely unforeseen event<sup>7</sup>. But that this was indeed a break-down became more evident, when I was back at the election office. Here I was told stories about citizens, who had torn their voter registration card apart in anger because of the 22-minute delay occurring at the other polling station where the electoral register did not work. Marie had to publicly apologize for the incident, when she was interviewed by several news media about the matter, stating that the municipality was doing everything they could to solve the matter. Although handled through calm, mundane and very practical processes, this was indeed no ordinary, invisible or appreciated event. At the very moment of breakdown, the cracks in the infrastructure were not just apparent to us working with it. It also became evident to the citizens and to the media. If for just a second I had forgotten about the important extraordinary aspect of Election Day, the media coverage, torn voter registration cards and angry voters certainly reminded me of this. The repair strategies in this section point out the close relationship between the mundane infrastructure and the important event. The ordinary and the extraordinary; the lengthy planning and the one-day unruly event, are, thus closely related, when it comes to elections, and as Election Day was upon us, infrastructure was under pressure and had to adapt to the unruly electoral process. The importance of the electoral infrastructure was, thus, not only about acting at a distance far way from polling stations. It was also about providing a flow of knowledge, documents and election personnel to deal with the whims of Election Day, so the election process even at verge of breakdown is guided in a particular direction with concern for accounting for ballots and making this account presentable and movable.

As the particular infrastructural arrangements generated voters from citizens, votes from ballots paper and political authority from votes cast, they were involved in the careful and ongoing work of redefining the political landscape and relating the

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<sup>7</sup> Here it should be noted that the implementation of the digital electoral register at 27 out of the 50 polling stations in the municipality during the November 2013 election was done with extreme care, as the election office feared the consequences of a failure. According to Marie, they chose a belt-and-braces approach to make sure they were ready if anything went wrong on Election Day and this may be why they were extra prepared do deal with the malfunctioning register. This approach included the employment of a so-called technical election secretary at each digital polling station. The 27 technical secretaries were normally employed in the municipal tech support but on Election Day their only task was to safeguard the digital register. Furthermore the digital polling stations had been staffed with extra election officials so that they could shift to an analogue election if necessary.

actors – voters and politicians - in ways that were both transparent and accountable (Jensen and Morita 2015). Here, the poll book accounts for the numbers of ballots handed out and votes counted, without leaving any traces of all the mess and the work that goes into producing the account. With this erasure, the addition of numbers instead leaves a sense that nothing was added to the link between voters' will and political authority. I will explore these effects of electoral accounts further in chapter five. For now, I will end by arguing that with the imaginary that nothing is being added, the election apparatus appeared apolitical, as merely innocuous technicalities, providing space for the political spectacle with the politicians battling for seats in the municipality at centre stage. The bureaucratic apparatus emerges, as such, as a political and anti-political machine at the same time. In the next chapter, I will tackle this notion of 'the political' explicitly in relation to infrastructuring work done at the election office.



## Chapter 2

# The Politics of the Proposition

We could decide whether or not to send the proposition to reduce the number of polling stations to the local City Council for further investigation. This would make it an administrative decision. But we chose to pursue a political assessment. After all, it is the politicians, who govern.

(Helen, election office employee)

By politics, I do not mean conversations on explicitly political topics, such as parliamentary elections, corruption among elected representatives or laws, that need to be passed. (...) It is clear the politics, like science, law or religion, forms heterogeneous institutions which simultaneously belong to all enunciation regimes.

(Latour 2003).

Elections are obviously tied to politics, when we consider the appointment of political candidates, political campaigning and the mobilization of citizens. But Danish elections are also intimately tied to those bureaucratic institutions which organize and execute elections. In the above quote, Helen invokes a divide between political and

administrative responsibilities in reflecting on how to rewrite a proposition to reduce the number of polling stations for the upcoming election in Copenhagen. This move associates Politics, with a capital P, with the political sphere in the explicit and common sense of that term. As she states it: it is, after all, the politicians, who make the political assessments and decisions. Bruno Latour provides a different account of politics. In this view, politics is much more than what we commonsensically consider political topics and processes. In the context of science and laboratory studies, he argues that *science is politics by other means*, as scientific facts are not discovered *out there* but emerge as the result of construction work and negotiations in the laboratory (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Latour 1983, 1987). Latour express here a Foucauldian view of politics and power as a productive micro-dynamics – in this case in the making of facts and ‘nature’ – rather than seeing power as unidirectional social force or simple expression of hierarchical structures (see also Latour 1986b). In a similar manner I argued, in the previous chapter on Election Day, that the transformation of citizens into voters, and the transformation of ballots cast into political authority depends on a politics of bureaucratic infrastructuring. My argument draws further on the analogy between scientific and bureaucratic practices, which I outlined in the introduction. If science is politics by other means, *so is bureaucracy*. Viewing bureaucracy in this way, however, is interestingly complicated by the fact that bureaucracy explicitly serves political purposes such as elections. In other words, the politics of bureaucracy serves ‘the politics of politics’, while at some key-moments it has to present itself as non-political.

Emphasizing, as I do, the political nature of bureaucratic election planning is seemingly different from the clear dissociation, which Helen expresses in the quote above. Helen’s distinction is between, on the one hand, the politics of the election and, on the other, the bureaucratic world. However, while the notion of ‘the political’ is important both in my empirical setting and in my own conceptual toolbox, what is implied by the term is more complex. To consider the differences as epitomized by my juxtaposition of Helen’s and Latour’s statements, requires careful consideration, which also means considering similarities between them. I am, thus, interested in challenging the clear-cut division between a conceptual and empirical notion of ‘the political’. As such, in this chapter, I explore the constructive potential of thinking of the political as crossing the boundaries between the domains of the conceptual and the

empirical (Gad and Ribes 2014). I am interested in how my interlocutors consider the ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ in ways that dissonate with my perception, but I do not take the division of politics and administration for granted even though these are often discursively separated. Starting with the longstanding slogan in STS that ‘it could be otherwise’ (Woolgar and Neyland 2013), I examine political and administrative practices in the election office as they emerge, collapse, overlap, and separate in processes of compiling a proposition to reduce the number of polling station, and here I focus on work in which ‘the political’ and the distinction to the non-political plays a role in practice.

### **Compiling and complicating**

The proposition is a three-page document. The document lists six arguments for reducing the number of polling stations in the municipality. This is the result of a long process. Since early 2012 drafts of the proposition had circulated between meeting rooms and offices, employees and committees in the municipality. It all started when the Election Committee asked the election office to investigate if it was possible to reduce the number of polling stations in order to cut down on the costs of the election. Two months later, at the next meeting in the Election Committee, the election office presented a proposition to reduce the number of polling stations from 54 to 38. The election team presented a rough draft as they wanted to know whether or not to continue in this direction before they put more effort into it. While the election committee was happy with the work at this point, several members emphasized that it was important not to remove polling stations from districts with low voter turnout. The election team was, therefore, requested to revise the proposition. Furthermore, the election committee agreed upon the importance of broad political agreement on this matter. So the election team was requested to involve the political parties represented in the city council before discussing the matter again at the next election committee meeting.

In November 2012, the political groups leaders were therefore involved in the process. At this point, the reduction of polling places in the proposition had had been revised to 40 following the suggestions made at the initial meeting with the election committee. The majority of party leaders did, however, not support the proposition’s arguments to reduce the number of polling stations based on the prospect of financial

savings. They stated that polling stations are about improving voter accessibility, e.g. better facilities, and not about costs. Consequently it was decided only to look at into possible mergers of polling stations that would improve accessibility. The politicians' argued that democracy is expensive by nature and it would be important that any reduction in polling stations would not affect voter participation. After this discussion among group leaders, for the election team it was back to the drawing board to rewrite the proposition again. Coincidentally, the revisions of the third version of proposition started at the same time as I started my fieldwork in the election office, and for the next six months, I followed the "immense labor and negotiating skill, that lies behind the formulation of every sentence" (Strathern 2008:196) of the final proposition.

### *Learning bureaucratic argumentation*

How do you write a municipal proposition? This was the question Ida, a recently hired municipal employee, faced one cold January morning in the election office. As a recent university graduate, she had little experience with municipal bureaucratic work and she had never written a proposition before. She was quite unsure of how to start writing the document and turned to Helen, who sat next to her, for help. Helen had worked with cases for many years and had also written the previous two versions of the proposition. She shared her practical and analytical insights about this particular proposition, which helped Ida frame the document and guide her work.

First, Ida found the latest version of the proposition in the municipal case- and document management system, Edoc, along with the document template. With these key elements in view on the screen, Helen taught her some basic formats for a proposition. Ideally, a proposition should be no more than three pages long and contain only four to five arguments. This ideal concise format was a result of the politicians' tight calendars, Helen explained, which only left them an hour for committee meetings and even less time to study the agenda and preparation material beforehand. If documents were imprecise or too lengthy, the politicians would be unable to make informed decisions. Helen suggested that Ida needed to have a clear idea of which arguments to include in the proposition and while they discussed these, Helen used term 'strategic argument' to explain what should make up a significant part of a proposition. A strategic argument refers to an argument which meets the objections made earlier by the Election Committee or City Council. The argument

would thereby align to the Committee's way of reasoning. Simultaneously, Helen expressed an aversion towards the notion 'strategic' in relation to arguments, as she did not like the negative connotation of coercion which may be associated with the term. The goal of the proposition is not coercion, she argued, but to provide the foundation for making an informed decision.

The previous version of the proposition, which Ida opened, already proposed splitting one polling station into two in an area with both a growing population and new housing projects. This version argued that despite the growth of the population in this area throughout the past decades, the polling station was still located in the same old building. Furthermore, the polling station usually had problems with long queues on Election Day. A second polling station within this area was therefore proposed. In the revised proposition, Ida underlined that setting up a polling station in a centrally located and entirely new public building would future-proof the polling station with regards to location and increased capacity, and offer easier access for voters. Furthermore, it would "contribute to solidarity and local identity in the new neighborhood", Ida wrote. Strategically reframing the argument of the proposition to meet concerns of access and queues, as democratic issues, such as those the Election Committee had already emphasized, was thus an important way in which the election office proposed to reorganize the electoral reality.

Working with these arguments, Ida was learning to navigate between political objections and bureaucratic, administrative reasons for suggesting fewer and newer polling stations. She was learning to use politically safe expression such as accessibility instead of the more ambiguous notion of financial cost. Thereby she aligned with and promoted the Election Committee's concern with the democratic ideal of accessibility.

### *Complicating the proposition*

One afternoon, about one week into the revision process I found Ida glancing at a large map of Copenhagen hanging in the middle of the office (see fig.2.1). The floor to ceiling map showed nine different voting districts and 54 different polling station areas in the municipality, each outlined with a different colored lines. Small dots showed the 54 current polling stations and small arrow stickers highlighted the polling stations under consideration for change.



Fig. 2.1: Snippet from map of polling districts

Ida was still in the process of adjusting the arguments to reduce the number of polling stations from 54 to 50 instead of the 38 and 40 polling stations as the first two versions of the proposition had suggested and she needed an overview of current and proposed polling stations.

As it turned out, Ida explained, issues of financial benefits and democratic accessibility were no longer the only concerns in play. After the election team was asked to propose a reduction of polling stations with focus on costs, during their initial investigation they discovered several irregularities in the current set-up. The election law for municipal elections, §51 states that each of the 54 areas must be associated with a polling station and although this is not specified in detail, Ida and Helen interpreted the rule as if the polling stations must indeed be located within the area that it is associated with. But currently this did not apply to three polling stations. One of them was even located in another district. So despite the committee's immediate reluctance to reduce the number of polling stations on the basis of costs, these irregularities had to be dealt with first. Ida had, therefore, visited possible polling stations around the city to get a sense of their accessibility and she had discussed the matter with people in the department which governs the portfolio of municipal buildings. Back in the office, she was now staring at the map to gather all her arguments in the proposition and mumbled: "By now, the arguments have almost got me blocked. They have been in the making for so long".

She put her finger on the polling station in district 1 and I asked her about the arguments for removing it. Firstly, Ida stated, the polling station is not even located in district 1, but in district 3. Secondly, the school that holds the current polling station is not particularly accessible. It is undergoing reconstruction and as a result the entrance is not on level with the surroundings, making it difficult to access for the walking-impaired. Formerly, another school very close by and located in the correct area and district had been used as polling station, Ida continued. But due to the building, its entrance and previous problems with voters waiting in long queues, Ida did not find this other school suitable as a new polling station. But she had not been able to find any alternative locations in the area. Instead, she explained, the polling place should be merged with another, which was both accessible and more centrally located. This is what Ida eventually suggested in the proposition along with the removal of four other polling stations through merging them with already existing polling stations: two of those due to similar district irregularities. One because it was located at school that was closing and that therefore would be unavailable for the next election. The last polling station was deemed very inaccessible, and as it was situated very close to two other polling stations, the election team proposed to merge them. So despite the fact that legal concerns were clearly the main reason for taking a closer look at these polling stations, the proposition highlighted the accessibility of the merged polling stations.

While strategic arguments are important to accommodate politicians' concerns regarding accessibility, writing a proposition was not only a matter of rearranging the argument to fit perfectly with the interests of the political committee. It was also a matter of complicating issues. When the election committee asked the election team to look into whether it would be possible to reduce the number of polling stations, the election team did not only seek to cut down. They also followed a multitude of other concerns, traveled to possible polling stations and discussed many different scenarios. What was initially raised as a financial question was, thus, in the work on the proposition, complicated to include concerns regarding accessibility, voters waiting in queues, legal regulations of polling districts and hopes for the development of new neighborhoods.

*Circulating the proposition*

It was now late February and one afternoon Ida stated “it doesn’t get any better now” and sent her proposition to Marie, the head of the election office, for review. Ida was done with constructing her six arguments: five arguments for merging the five polling stations and one argument for setting up a polling station at a new location in a new neighborhood. The proposition was now ready to be circulated through multiple political and bureaucratic units for approval before being ready for the final verdict in the city council. Two days later it was on the election committee’s agenda and during this meeting<sup>1</sup>, Frank Jensen, lord mayor and chairman of the committee, asked the other members if it was clear and evident in the proposition that the change of polling stations would improve voter’s accessibility. Marie and Ida from the election team, who were also present at the meeting, clarified that some of the changes were also due to legal regulations. But after discussing this matter, the election team agreed to go over the suggested changes in order to clarify how they affected accessibility. With that settled, the election committee unanimously approved the proposition on the condition that the last member of the committee, not present during this meeting, would offer his written consent. This, it turned out, caused further complications. During the 2013 election, the election team had been organized under the financial department and the proposition needed approval from their own political board before being discussed in the city council. The next stop after the election committee’s approval would therefore be another municipal committee, the finance committee. But the road to the finance committee was still bumpy.

By now it was the beginning of March and Ida immediately reread the proposition with the accessibility argument from the election committee meeting in mind and added a sentence here and there and changed the structure of the arguments a few places to emphasize accessibility and regulations. But despite her quick revisions, the proposition did not make it onto the agenda for the next meeting of the finance committee on March 19<sup>th</sup>. The politician not present during the previous election committee meeting had still not given his written consent or answered the email that Ida sent him about this matter. I soon realized that he was not the only one

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<sup>1</sup> As I did not have access to the election and finance committee meetings (which will be introduced later in the chapter), the insights in this chapter into discussions of the proposition during these meetings stem from agendas, minutes and conversations with the election team prior and after the meetings.

stalling the process. As the proposition was now up for discussion in the finance committee, more high-ranking employees in the finance administration also needed to look at the document. For each step up in the political structure for the proposition, it seemed like a parallel step was needed in the bureaucratic administration. This approval process was slow and the proposition was stuck on the leading managing financial director, Erik Poulsen's, table in the finance administration. It could not be put on the political agenda before he had approved it. His stamp of approval was not an actual stamp, but a digital stamp, in the sense that if the proposition made its way into the municipal document system, then reminders to read the proposition would be emailed to relevant parties. Nevertheless, the proposition was stuck and in the meantime, the concerns for costs re-emerged.

Before I started my fieldwork, the department of citizen services and all its sections, among these the election team, was moved from the culture and leisure administration to the finance administration in Copenhagen Municipality. This move effected, perhaps not surprisingly, an increased focus on finances and costs, which then affected the approval process for the proposition. So while the proposition remained stuck on the managing financial director's table, several employees closer to the director in the organizational hierarchy emphasized the concern with costs. Remember, in the first version of the proposition from 2012, financial savings were the main driver behind reducing the number of polling stations but this concern was not shared by the election committee or the political group leaders, so both the first and the second versions of the proposition were revised to emphasize voter accessibility above savings. But now, in this third revision—and prompted by the financial administration—a section on cost was reintroduced to the proposition. Ida therefore added to the proposition a rough estimate of savings in 2013 and 2014 if the number of polling stations were to be reduced. While the savings from having fewer polling stations in 2013 would be balanced out by the added cost of an information campaign, potential savings for 2014 were more difficult to estimate. There was no budget for elections in 2014 yet and Ida struggled to calculate the numbers. Paradoxically at this moment, the election team was trying to figure out how to incorporate the new overall administrative concern with finance in their work without compromising the Election Committee's dismissal of financial arguments, Marie told me. She debated with Ida and other employees in the department which numbers to

include and where to send it for approval. They were, for instance, unsure if Erik Poulsen, the managing director of the finance administration, would have to take a second look at the proposition with the budget numbers even if he had initially approved it. In the end they decided to send the proposition with Ida's budget to a center for finances in the finance administration and to same administration's secretariat for check of numbers.

The uncertainties of how to integrate an election budget became even more visible when the secretary questioned the election team's method of calculation. Ida had calculated the cost based on the expenses of establishing a polling station, whereas an employee in the finance department suggested that the calculations should be based on the yearly costs of running a polling station. Ida revised the proposition accordingly and added a new section named "Economy".

**ØKONOMI**

Valgsekretariatet vurderer, at der kan spares ca. 72 t.kr. ('13 pl.) per afstemningssted, svarende til ca. 360 t.kr. ('13 pl.) for 5 afstemningsområder. Hvis der oprettes et nyt afstemningsområde i Sydhavn vil en eventuel besparelse blive reduceret med udgifterne til oprettelse af et nyt afstemningssted, som vurderes at være 258 t.kr. ('13 pl.). Den resterende besparelse på 102 t. kr. modsvarer i 2013 af en udgift til en oplysningskampagne, der skal informere de berørte vælgere om ændringerne i antallet af afstemningsområder. Det forventes således, at der ingen bevillingsmæssige konsekvenser vil være i 2013.

Effekten af ovennævnte besparelse i 2014 behandles i en særskilt sag om budgettet for Europaparlamentsvalget i 2014, som lægges til drøftelse i Valgbestyrelsen medio 2013.

Fig 2.2. Section on cost from the proposition

This third version of the proposition with the section of costs resulted in approval from the finance administration. The proposition was, however, still not ready for the finance committee's agenda. After reviewing the document, the secretary had requested that the proposition be sent to the political group leaders of each party in the city council for further discussion. The opening quote in this chapter relates directly to this suggestion. Helen and Marie discussed who should make the decision on whether or not to comply with the request. As mentioned, the suggestion was to circulate the proposition to a group of politicians, who were initially very lukewarm and returned it for revisions. The risk—as they saw it—was that this could result in a time-consuming detour at best – or at worst another rejection or at a request for further revisions. But instead of going for what Helen referred to as an 'administrative decision', they decided to go for a 'political assessment' which implied asking the

politicians in the election committee. “After all, it is the politicians, who govern”, Helen explained, as mentioned. The constant redirections and the complicated approval process was, thus, not over yet, and as Helen pointed out to me during a meeting: “there is never a direct route to approval and if different departments are bickering sometimes you just have to chose one direction”. I added that it would be interesting to see where the proposition would end, then, to which Helen replied with a smile; “hopefully in the finance committee”.

Her prayers must have been heard, because the election committee decided not to redirect the proposition to the political group leaders for now. After three months of circulating between different political and bureaucratic units in the municipality, the three page long proposition (with an appendix of snapshots of the municipal map locating the six proposed attached) was finally ready to be discussed during the finance committee in the last week of May, 2013. Here, it was recommend by 11 out of 12 members of the committee. Only a politician from the Conservative People’s party voted against the proposition to reduce the number of polling places. On June 4<sup>th</sup> the proposition was, therefore, on the agenda at the city council meeting. On the day of the city council meeting, Ida got a phone call from one of the political group leaders. The leaders always meet before the city council meetings, and Ida explained to me that during this pre-meeting several questions to the proposed reduction of polling stations emerged. Ida clarified for the politicians over the phone the arguments presented in the proposition and when the city council at their meeting reached the proposition on the agenda around 6pm, it was approved without a vote. Ida was later told, that if she had not taken the call from the political leader, the proposition would not have passed, and an amendment to the proposal would likely have been suggested by one of the politicians instead. However, with the final stamp of approval, the reduction of polling stations was passed. As a result, multiple tasks to do with merging polling stations, changing registration cards and providing information about the changes were waiting for the election team.

### **Chains of responsibility**

The story of the process prior to approving a reduction of polling stations is about how a number of bureaucratic practices shape the proposition’s road to approval in the city council. Firstly, the delegation of a political issue on election costs was

transferred to the election team. Then Ida complicated the matter as she linked the financial concern with legal regulations and ideas about catering for new neighborhoods. Secondly, the election team was asked to reconsider the proposition in relation to democratic ideals of accessibility. Ida tore the structure of the argument apart and rearranged the links between costs, accessibility, election districts borders, interpretations of the election law, and numbers on population growth in new areas. She negotiated the importance of costs versus the importance of accessibility. As they were constantly rearranging the arguments and relinking the initial issue of cost to multiple other concerns, Ida and the administration were, as such, engaged in case practices similar to the ones Latour identified in handling cases in French administrative law (Latour 2010).

In his work on the French Council of State, Latour examines the weaving together of legal reasoning and the material infrastructure on which the legal processes of the court relies. He explores the fabrication of legal files from a compilation of already existing empirical evidence taken from documents, reports, attestations, witness statements and other various documentary evidence from all of France:

When the counselors a few years later say ‘the council of State has decided’, it has only pronounced itself on a file which is composed of documents that have already been profiled so as to be so to speak ‘judgment-compatible’. The minute part of the work of the Council must merely be added to the immense labour of ‘shaping’ and ‘formatting’ evidence which alone allows for the Council to carry out its task efficiently. The whole of France, if we agree to see it that way, tirelessly ‘produces’ and in a way secretes innumerable documents through all its pores, which are able to transform themselves immediately, in circumstances require it, into useful pieces of evidence in a case.

(ibid:75)

As council officials in Latour’s descriptions enunciate the law, they mobilize all possible ‘useful pieces of evidence’ that may serve the final decision. In doing so, particular issues in their files are initially isolated and unlinked and then linked up anew with these other useful pieces of empirical evidence. As Latour puts it, the officials crunch and crush their files by making them “react with a sufficient number of texts” (ibid:194).

In this moment of preliminary unlinking, Latour argues that a capacity to hesitate and slow down, seems to found freedom to maneuver, before the issue is

again linked up in the final decision (ibid:151). Similarly, when the second version of the proposition to reduce the number of polling stations to 40 based on the cost arguments was rejected, Ida tore the text apart, unlinked the issues of reduced polling stations from the notion of costs and investigated other possible arguments. In doing so, she studied school layouts, drew maps, found reports on population growth and new neighborhoods and other ‘facts’ to evidence her accessibility arguments, which became the main focus. She picked elements which allowed the file to move forward aligned with the critique of politicians. But this unlinking and recompiling was by no means a linear progress. As the proposition circulated, Ida was pulled in one direction by the politicians in the election committee, in another by the law, and in a third direction by the finance administration. Rearranging the proposition for the third time, linking the issue up differently to nurture a different political decision, did, therefore, not involve a process of reasoning, “in which flow of homogeneous ideas are linked together more or less logically“ (ibid:140). Rather, as the proposition circulated between offices and departments, a series of concerns were made or unmade in complex and messy negotiations, where some ended up in the final proposition, while others were discarded, altered or rearranged. The financial concern exemplifies how the weight of the argument was undergoing changes from being the most important argument in the text, to being irrelevant, to finally regain a small space in the proposition.

Rearranging the proposition is, thus, a way for Ida to take multiple and diverging concerns into consideration before linking them up again. This freedom to maneuver, which Latour emphasizes in relation to the unlinking of issue, is in the case of the proposition, closely related to several political and administrative concerns: as these change, so do the arguments and here Ida takes a position from which she can introduce knowledge not yet invoked in this context to guide the proposal forward.

#### *A collective proposition*

For each round of circulation, comments, addition and rearrangement, the argument did not only carry more and more weight by being linked with important concerns and empirical evidence. It also gained more organizational authority in the municipality as people higher up in the organizational hierarchy was drawn into the process. Relinking the issue to legal, demographic and location ‘facts’ and the negotiation of

multiple concerns may therefore be instrumental in the process as noted above. But for each round of approval, it is the signatures the proposition gains that carry it successfully to the City Council and convince those who allocate resources and make decisions to approve it.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the secretary guideline maintained a link between the author, Peter, and the responsibility for the text. A short paragraph in the final proposition handed over to the city council for discussion shows, however, that the opposite happens in this chapter. In the final version of the proposition that was put on the agenda for the city council meeting, a short overview of the ‘political process’ (*politisk behandling*) leading up to this point was included. Here it simply stated that;

The financial administration advises the Finance Committee to recommend to the City council that...

The quote was followed by a summary of the six proposed arguments and the document was signed by two directors from the finance administration: Erik Poulsen, the financial managing director, and Bent Skov, the managing director. From this short paragraph in the proposition, it was evident that what was being put up for political decision-making in the city council had been proposed by the finance administration *as a whole*, having been signed by the managing directors and recommend by the political finance committee. There was no individual author listed. Instead the finance unit was responsible for the text. As the document circulated up and down the chain of command in the finance administration, the individual author, Ida, was, thus, slowly removed. In the end, it was the finance administration as a whole which recommended the reduction of polling stations and through this process, the proposition had been transformed into a collective endeavor. Anthropologist Matthew Hull identifies a similar process related to circulating bureaucratic documents in Pakistan. Moving files along the chain of command in an organization is the most basic practice in the construction of cooperate authority, Hull argues. As a file moves through other officers, to other departments and is distributed over a larger and larger network of functionaries, all adding signatures, comments and so on, the movement produces on the file’s note sheet a “representation of collective agency” (Hull 2012:138). Eventually—and if the circulatory events are successful—the most senior functionary in the department will add his initials and in doing so, enact the decision listed in the file. What would otherwise just have been a collective utterance

is hereby transformed into an authoritative collective decision (ibid:136ff). With the circulation of files through different Pakistani bureaucratic departments, Hull, thus suggests that responsibility is distributed in the growing network of functionaries, who participate in the circulation. As such, he rarely finds the first person pronoun *I* in the files. The responsibility that follows with the individually distinguishing use of *I* is avoided. Rather, he finds references to the individual functionaries as signatures, which places them as one node in the long chain it takes to produce a file.

Through the circulation among different Copenhagen municipal employees, the proposition undergoes a transformation in authorship and redistribution of responsibility similar to the Pakistani bureaucratic files. With each round of revisions and signatures from higher and higher ranking employees in the finance administration, the proposition arises as a collective endeavor and collective responsibility. It is no longer in the hands of Ida or the election team. The proposition is in the hands of the entire administration as this entity becomes the final sender. Continuing with Hull's arguments above, the proposition as collective utterance will finally carry authority, when the managing directors, in this case Erik Poulsen and Bent Skov, sign the document and enact the decision to recommend a reduction of polling stations from 54 to 50. Thus, despite the collective and distributed responsibility and the removal of individual authorship, the reference to the highest-ranking employees is instrumental in giving weight to the proposition's argument. But with an authoritative and collective proposition decided upon in the finance administration, the circulation of the document was done, and the game shifted so to speak. Now it was up to the politicians, first in the finance committee and subsequently the city council, to decide on the fate of the proposed reduction.

### **Disengaged responsibility**

With the last signature in the bureaucratic entity, the work of Ida and the election team on the proposition; the thorough revisions of arguments, the time-consuming circulations up and down the organizational hierarchy, was all erased. It was only the finalized 3-page long document with Erik Poulsen and Bent Skov's signatures that the politicians in the committee and council encountered.

In contrast with Ida and the election team, who had been working with the polling stations for more than twelve months, these politicians had never seen the

proposition before and when they familiarized themselves with the issue prior to the meetings it was through this short document provided by the finance administration. The politicians would, thus, familiarize themselves with the polling stations from the very particular way in which the administration had chosen to present the world of elections on paper in six neatly arranged arguments. This particular way of referring to the world of elections in the municipality's political decision-making process can be teased out even further if compared to the scientific practices of fact-production. Here, the world is also packed into words, but in ways that differ from the political decision-making procedures described above.

In one of his essays on circulating references in *Pandora's Hope* (Latour 1999), Latour eloquently shows the processes through which information from the Brazilian Amazon is translated into a scientific paper. Following botanists and soil scientists' investigations into whether the savanna is encroaching upon the forest, or the reverse, he explores how scientists collect samples, transport and transform these from objects to words. For instance, small samples of branches bought back from the forest, neatly stored and rearranged in a cabinet in Manus, are slowly transformed into notes and botanic categories in the hands of the botanist, as she looks for emerging patterns in the leaflets. But even within this botanist's collection, where the forest is reduced to its simplest expression, the reverse process is never far away; the simple expressions can "quickly become as thick as the tangle of branches from which we started (ibid:39). Thus, while some original context may be lost in the transformation and simplification, the reference back to the forest remains intact and the chain of reference between the forest and the scientific paper is always reversible (ibid:69).

References are not circulating with the same kind of reversibility in the municipal decision-making process. While the politicians are provided with an appendix of maps over the polling stations in question that allow them to track some of the arguments in the proposition back to areas in Copenhagen, these short referential chains are rarely explored further and they are not supposed to be. The politicians keep themselves within what is narrowly defined as the issues in the file. The task of the municipal employee collecting the file is therefore not to create a two-way path as seen in scientific research practices. Rather the task at hand is to provide the politicians with a number of unquestionable and thoroughly investigated arguments for reducing the number of polling stations. Ida's assignment in the

election office was, therefore, as mentioned to create narrow, ‘strategic’ arguments from which a decision could easily and without doubt be made. This was not done by accumulating more and more data without necessarily being able to rearrange them into arguments in relation to already articulated concerns, as would be the approach of the scientific researcher Latour describes. Instead, Ida archived a narrow, coherent document by linking and unlinking the issues in several ways (Latour 2010:228).

So when I argue above that the finance administration is collectively taking responsibility for the document, it is not taking responsibility for the transformation of the electoral world into six arguments oriented at reducing the number of polling stations. These arguments, although produced in terms of referential chains leading to the reality *out there*, cannot be reversed by the finance administration to recover the steps which brought them into being. Rather, the finance administration is taking responsibility for and providing a thoroughly investigated basis for decision within the set limits of the issue defined by the politicians. There is no need to trace back and learn more about the issue than what is already provided in the document by the election team. An instrumental part of this mode of referral to the electoral reality in the proposition is therefore more related to the election team’s ability to rearrange arguments from conflicting and changing concerns than to the endless pool of new knowledge on the issue. To constantly perform this task of unlinking and rearranging the issue, Ida could not be married to any of the arguments or concerns set forward. She needed to move into a disengaged or unattached position, from which she could recognize the plurality of concerns, complicate the matter and rearrange the issue according to new conditions, without being bound either to the concerns raised by the politicians or the arguments found in events and ‘facts’ outside the election office.

So while Ida was indeed very passionate about her work on the proposition, her focus was on the bureaucratic craftsmanship of constructing arguments that would make the proposition “go all the way”, e.g achieve approval in the city council, rather than any particular issue, costs, accessibility or any of the other arguments emphasized by the politicians. This detachment from the issue at hand was, however, initially difficult for me to pinpoint during the work of the proposition, as I saw Ida working so intensively with the document. Several comments made by election team members when the proposition was sent to the finance committee and city council for approval suggest, however, the more unattached position. When the proposition was

sent to the finance committee, Helen, Ida and I were discussing the likelihood that the politicians would approve the project. At that point, the politicians in the election committee were in favour of an approval, but Helen did not believe the proposition for reduction of polling stations would be well received by the majority of politicians in the finance committee: “People change their mind and they need to align with their base [their political party]”. But, as Helen also pointed out, if the proposition was rejected, the election team would not have to carry out the political decision of altering polling stations before the November election. It would be “less work for us. So we can be indifferent”. I noticed a similar kind of disinterest in the outcome of the political meetings, when the proposition was finally approved in the city council. The election team had been working on the proposition since May 2012, so when Ida told me about its final approval, for a split second I thought about congratulating her on the success. But with the previous conversation about the additional workload a reduction of polling stations would entail at the election office, I calmly replied; “That’s good”. Ida must have been able to read the implicit question mark after my hesitant remark as she responded, “it is certainly new”.

Later when I talked to Ida about the entire process, she did, however, mention that when the election committee requested and decided to move on with the proposition to reduce the number of polling places, it was indeed a criterion for success in the election office that the proposition was approved. But this would require, Ida stressed, that everybody in the process was heard. Long and time-consuming procedures were therefore not a sign of failure, but a pre-requisite of approval, she argued. Indifference about the issue is, thus, not about not caring for the document or not tirelessly putting all your efforts into producing the arguments. It is about, as already mentioned, not being attached to any particular arguments, so that the unlinking and rearranging of these is possible. The disinterest in the political approval process can, thus, be seen as an enactment of the bureaucratic office as not concerned with political arguments, decisions, ideals, political schemes or hopes for the city and the citizens. This is the job of politicians, whereas the bureaucrats carry out the work which politicians impose on them, whether this is reconstructing the arguments in terms of accessibility or changing the polling stations. So, by continuously performing the relationship between the election team, as responsible for the *basis* of the decision, and the politicians as responsible for the decision itself, the

election team creates a small, disengaged space for maneuver in which multiple and diverse political and bureaucratic concerns can be taken into account.

### **The politics of the proposition**

As should be clear now, the process of compiling and negotiating the proposition involved time-consuming work to make the proposed reduction ‘go all the way’. At the same time, in the circulation of the document, a boundary between political decisions and bureaucratic case-work was also performed. This, as I suggested above, allowed the election team to occupy a disengaged position from which they could unlink and rearrange conflicting concerns, and they put a lot of work into creating this non-political space for maneuver. This was explicated several times during my conversations with Ida and the election team about the differences between political and bureaucratic work, and it is clear in Helen’s quote opening this chapter. Here she emphasizes that the politicians are those who govern and make assessments, implying that this contrasts with their own work. The proposition was, as such, Ida explained to me, first and foremost an administrative document. “But it is of course constructed in consideration of politics”. When the politics of the proposition sent the documents into circulation, they ended up in the hands of political groups who needed to have an extra look at the proposed changes, Ida continued. In those cases, she said “you just need to accept that it is out of your hands and controlled by the politicians. That’s politics”. Helen added that the proposition to reduce the number of polling stations was particularly “politically sensitive”, as most politicians in the city council were very concerned about the effect of reducing polling stations on voter turn out. “One vote lost is one to many”, as a member of the election committee stated during the first discussion of the proposition in the committee. That the politicians were the decision-makers with the mandate to alter the proposition’s process and concerns was highlighted again and again during my fieldwork; not least in ways that differentiated this power to make decisions from the administrative work the election team put in on the proposition.

Taking a step back from this argument, it is very tempting to redescribe the efforts of my informants in articulating and demonstrating the arguments as itself political work. They are, indeed, constructing a particular discourse and in their work on the proposition, a bureaucratic space emerges where arguments for reducing the

number of polling stations can transform, move and be negotiated. Describing these efforts as political would be a classical STS position fitting the paraphrased slogan that bureaucracy, like science, is politics by other means. Anthropologist Matei Candea, however, warns us against this temptation to redescribe empirical practices and processes as political through and through (Candea 2011), as happens when we say that ‘everything is political’. In his work on bilingual education in Corsica, Candea offers a fruitful argument for the importance of making room for the non-political in anthropology of the political. During his fieldwork among Corsican language activists working on a bilingual teaching project, to his surprise he observed several attempts to keep the politics out of the classroom. This separation of education and politics had productive potentials for Candea’s informant Pascal. In the way Pascal articulated the distinction he obtained through it a measure of personal freedom (such as the freedom to vote in whatever way he wanted), without necessarily bringing the political dogmatism from his political affiliation and vote into the classroom, when he acted as a teacher (ibid:318). According to Candea, what is considered political in anthropological analyses has expanded so much in recent years that it is has become impossible to deal with attempts like Pascal’s to create non-political space. In anthropological thought, politics has become a form of natural and uncontested “really real ground of reality” (ibid:320), he argues. This ‘naturalization’ of politics removes or makes invisible the non-political spaces which give his Corsican informants’ practical interventions their power and effects (ibid).

A similar tendency to make the political a ‘natural’ basis can also be identified in STS. In a recent publication on the notion of politics in STS, political scientist Mark Brown argues that STS scholars have carefully showed how science and technology are intertwined with politics and emphasizes that science involves activities that amount to politics (Brown 2014:2ff). What these studies often lack, however, is a discussion of what is actually meant by ‘politics’. Brown contends this is a “view of politics as anything that affects the common world [because it] tells us little about what political activity might entail” (ibid:21). Instead, he invokes the methodological argument that the politics of science and technology is best explored with concepts and methods that facilitate dialogue between actors and analysts. A similar empiricist approach to the study of politics is also found in Candea’s work, as he suggests that we refrain from viewing established politics as either figure or

ground and rather attend to it as the people we work with as ethnographers make it appear.

In this chapter, I do indeed follow Brown and Candea's suggestion to approach empirically the notion of the 'political'. But just like Candea warns against redescribing the work of informants as political, in this I resist the temptation to accept uncritically the way my informants describe the proposition as non-political. This is equally tempting but not satisfying either – the reasons therefore will be elaborated below.

So far, I have outlined the argument of the disengaged position from which the election team could unlink concerns in different ways. Following Candea's analysis of language activists, it would be straightforward and indeed partially fruitful to suggest that the election team both discursively and through their actions create a non-political space through which they can attend to the proposition in a disengaged manner. They make short and clear arguments, they send the document up and down the organizational chain and eventually their work forms the basis on which the politicians make decisions. Hereby, Ida is enacting the administrative and the political worlds as different. In other situations, such as the discussion over who should decide on the circulation of the proposition to the group leaders, the borders between the political and non-political are not so clear. This is renegotiated. So far so good; the political and the non-political emerge as opposed performative projects rather than figure and ground (Candea 2011:321).

By simply accepting an opposition of the political to the non-political, you run the risk, I suggest, of missing some of the complexity of the notion. When the election team makes sense of their work as non-political and as opposed to the politics of the city council this is done in terms that resemble a more fixed idea of political power as given from ideals of a 4-year cycle where citizens delegate authority to the politicians, who then govern and make decisions. This understanding of politics follows democratic principles of the representative democracy and is as such independent of (administrative) practices. It is Politics with a capital P that is site-dependent to the City Council and related to the humans of the political sphere, the politicians. In other instances, however, the emerging dichotomy between the political work of the city council and the non-political work of the bureaucratic office, appear less unambiguous. For example, when Ida was altering the proposition she was dealing

with conflicting concerns. The financial administration emphasized cost and politicians demanded accessibility. This illustrates how the administrative making and editing of the proposition does not precede political concerns or decision-making in a linear fashion. Throughout the revision of the proposition Ida paid attention to the political concern with maintaining voter participation regardless of costs. Yet, eventually she also included a small paragraph on the expected savings if the number of polling stations was reduced. To complicate even further, cost did in fact start out as a political concern, or at least it was first mentioned at a committee meeting and then turn into an administrative concern. Through the process with the proposition, administrative and political concerns are mutually brought into being and adjusted. They sometimes collided when arguments of cost encountered arguments of accessibility or overlapped (Law 2004). Politics (and non-politics) in this situation were both emerging and given, site-specific and not-yet-located, both worked on and perceived as something independent of the administrative but still dictating and framing work.

The distinction between the political and non-political gives Ida some freedom to maneuver. But exactly this maneuver, the unlinking and rearranging of concerns is not non-political in the ideal way that my informants at times articulated. It is also something else. Here Latour's notion of politics can be helpful in exploring this. Following Noortje Marres's reinterpretation of John Dewey's pragmatism, Latour argues that politics has always been issue-oriented. In his view, the machinery of what is officially political is "only the tip of the iceberg when compared to the many other activities generated by many more 'activists' than those who claim to do politics *per se*" (Latour 2007:3). 'The political' is not some essence or an adjective that defines a profession, a calling, a site or procedure. Rather, Latour argues, actors clash around political issues and attachments to matters of concerns in different ways in the timespan of an issue. Politics, thus, moves and has a trajectory; "it is what qualifies *a type of situation*" (ibid:4, italics in original). What is more, it is not the *who* of politics which is the only important thing in this matter, but what emerges from practices and technologies. In this view, politics and 'the political' refer to many different things, actions and phenomena. Different moments in the trajectory of an issue have different meanings and the key task, according to Latour, is exactly to make all the definitions of the 'political' turn around the issues rather than inserting the issue into an already

given political sphere (ibid:2).

From this issues-oriented politics, Latour outlines five different meanings of the 'political'. Political-1 is derived from STS discussions on the often-invisible ways in which technoscience shapes and redefines our common world. Political-2 conveys the pragmatic approach to politics as always involving a concerned and unsettled public in the generation of issues. Building on Carl Schmitt's political theory, Political-3 is concerned with what happens to issues when they enter the regime of sovereignty and are subjected to state power. Political-4 denotes itself to the Habermasian way of dealing with issues by the normal tradition of deliberative democracy. Lastly, political-5 appears in the life history of an issue, when an issue has stopped being political-2, -3, -4 at least for a while as it has become part of daily routine in e.g. administration or management. Politics 5 is the government of issues in a silent, ordinary and fully routinized way that resembles Michel Foucault's idea of 'governmentality' (ibid:5-7).

For Latour, the point is, firstly, every stage in the history of an issue may be labeled political, but political will carry completely different meanings. Secondly that the first and fifth meaning are often seen as 'apolitical' (ibid:7). These different meanings of the 'political' can shed further light on the trajectory of the proposition. Following Latour, the issue of reducing polling stations where I left it above, has arguably entered stages political-3 and -4. It has entered the regime of sovereignty, and it is subjected to state power as the proposition is circulated between different committees and councils and subjected to political deliberation. But the careful construction of the strategic arguments in the proposition, highlighted above, and denoted as a-political by the informants, does not fit this model in the same way. At least to understand my informants I need a little help from Latour's definitions of political-1 and -5. The work on the proposition is part of an ordinary and routinized way of dealing with the issue of managing polling stations, but in reducing the number of polling stations in this case the proposition rearranges or reshapes the electoral worlds in terms of accessibility and costs. The 'apolitical', the negotiation and reassembling of electoral concerns has, as such, effects for the common electoral world. Thus, the politics of the proposition and its strategic arguments refer to emerging and fluctuating issues, and Ida learns to work with these by working with the document as a formal element of decision making in the organization.

### **Taking the proposition seriously**

The work on the proposition appears diffuse, practical, emerging and fluctuating. This image does not fit well to the dichotomy between the politics done in the city council and the non-political work done by bureaucrats, even if the latter articulate this division. It would, therefore, make little sense for me keep this framework to describe the practical work on the proposition. It would, however, make just as little sense to discard immediately my informant's description. The discursive work of drawing borders to the political sphere is instrumental for enacting the democratic ideal of elected politicians making the decisions on an informed basis. In both cases, actors are engaged in constituting electoral realities. Instead of settling on one definition of the political, which may or may not include an idea of the non-political, I suggest we keep all the different meanings and notions of the 'political' alive. This leaves room for multiple political worlds, but leads me to another point: I suggest that these are not necessarily just names for different stages in the lifespan of an issue, as Latour suggests. The continuous negotiations and circulations of the proposition show that ontologically different political and non-political realities may co-exist (Mol 1999). At the election office, the election team thus make sense of their work with reference to a concept of a pre-existing, non-political, disengaged administrative entity, while their work on the proposition can simultaneously be viewed as an emerging heterogeneous practice that shapes the political issue and negotiates various matters of concern. As such, the process is both political and non-political, but not in the same way. Or to recall the concluding remark in the previous chapter, the election office appears as both an anti-political- and a political machine. The political is one instance defined by opposing it to something else and this is all about changing distributions of responsibility in organizational processes. In the other instance, the political is related to how mundane and routinized practices also have world-making effects.

By not resolving the tension between multiple meanings, I do not only take seriously my informants own thinking and conceptualization of their work as non-

political. I also aim to take seriously their practices and processes<sup>2</sup>. As such, I am keeping with the ‘taking seriously’ trope emerging in anthropology’s recent turn to ontology and the conceptual innovations this entails, but incorporates a sensitivity towards practice (Gad, Jensen, and Winthereik 2015; Henare, Wastell, and Holbraad 2007).

The turn to ontology, represented among others by anthropologists Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Morten Axel Pedersen, Morten Nielsen, Martin Holbraad, Sari Wastell and Amiria Henare enables the ethnographers to find ‘alterity’, in their fields (Henare et al. 2007; Nielsen 2013; Pedersen 2007; Viveiros de Castro 2004). Drawing on his work on Amerindian peoples, Viveiros de Castro in particular forcefully demonstrates how Amerindian cosmology is not just different from the Euro-American understanding of the world. They live in different worlds altogether. Rather than subsuming the Other in our own realm of understanding and reducing our object of study to our own conceptions of the world, Viveiros de Castro proposes that the Amerindian cosmology should be viewed as something ontological different; not just as a different perspective on the world but as different worlds altogether (Viveiros de Castro 2004). This argument for taking local phenomena seriously requires that the anthropologist understand and accept that analytical concepts at disposal are necessarily inadequate to describe the studied phenomena. As a result, the ontological move involves a focus on conceptual innovation:

“The question then becomes not just how human phenomena may be illuminated (...), but rather how the phenomena in question may themselves offer illumination. How, in other words, the ways in which people go about their lives may unsettle familiar assumptions, not least those that underlie anthropologists’ particular repertoires of theory.”

(Henare et. al. 2007:8)

Taking your informants, in my case the election team, seriously does, therefore, not literally entail making sense of or fully explaining the election machine. In a 2011 article, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro remarks that considering “the idea ’to take

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<sup>2</sup> By including both instances of my informants’ own conceptualizations and the practices of the proposition without settling the question of ‘the political’, I hope to accommodate the critiques of STS as emphasizing practices and processes over informants own thinking and in this circumscribe the possible worlds expressed by this other (Henare et al. 2007; Miyazaki 2013).

seriously' as synonymous with 'to take literally' and then to consider "taking literally" as meaning 'to believe in'" strikes him as singularly naive (Viveiros de Castro 2011). Isabelle Stengers has further stated in this regard, that she does not take her informants seriously because they "know the truth", but because they put our preconceived ideas as risk (Stengers 2002).

While certainly I do not have concepts sufficient to explain the world of my informants, I am also not certain that my informants can fully explain and make sense of the processes at play<sup>3</sup>. This means that the analytic task rather becomes to dwell at and learn from the instances where the empirical material unsettles the familiar conceptual assumptions. Following Christopher Gad, Casper Bruun Jensen and Brit Ross Winthereik (Gad et al. 2015), I do not believe that this learning endeavor is limited to acknowledging the statements of my informants. In what they call 'practical ontology' a central point is exactly that informant's statements "are simply seen as parts of a heterogeneous practical ontology, situated among many other parts (...) We see concepts and epistemologies as some of the elements that, in conjunction with many other things, create world(s). Epistemologies, ideas, and concepts, too, are ontological building-blocks " (ibid: 77).

With this idea of practical ontology in mind, I believe taking seriously the complex and messy notion of 'the political' in the election office allows me to dwell simultaneously at both my informant's understandings of their work as non-political and different from the politics of the city council and at their multitude of practices as yet other 'ontological building-blocks' in construction the electoral world. Thus, in the election office one meaning of politics as a given, pre-existing sphere associated with party politics and state power in decision-making seem to work as a given. But alongside this given, careful negotiations, rearranging of concerns and circulation of documents go into reenacting the political and non-political. Neither of those understandings of the politics of the proposition is, however, necessarily worlds apart from my own conceptualizations of politics. Nor are they in any ways equal to. Rather, the different meanings of the political exist both empirically and conceptually. The story of the proposition suggests so. It does not make sense then to substitute my concept of the 'political' with theirs in order to take the empirical material seriously.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this argument, see the sections on 'Good counting' and 'The networked decision' in chapter five.

The empirical and the analytical ideas of politics are already too mixed up, just as I was also heavily entangled with my field site. The notion of politics as a concern with representational democracy, state power and politicians deliberation and making decisions, which my informants continuously performed, was not strange to me as a Danish citizen, with a minor in political science and researcher in the Demtech project. But simultaneously, I was endlessly puzzled by their enactment of a political/non-political dichotomy at the same time as they were engaged in practices, which resembled bureaucracy as politics by other means. At times, my conceptual understanding of the political and my informant's seemed similar. But at other times they seemed worlds apart. Following Casper Bruun Jensen's argument on the continuous variation of the conceptual and the empirical, I do not think that this is a matter of epistemological preferences (Jensen 2014). Rather the political is instead "produced in multiple versions, which depend on context and circumstances, as much as on predilection and rigor" (ibid:202). The blurred lines between them and me – between inside and outside the field and between sameness and differences of concepts – are thus continuously producing new variations of the relationship between the empirical and the conceptual in my study.

Ethnographic descriptions of the frictions that emerge in this oscillation between multiple ways of approaching the notion of politics are one way of taking this into account<sup>4</sup>. At least it has been the way for me to explore the proposition's complex way to approval in the municipality. Thus, what apparently look like a short document with six arguments and what made up a rather simple basis for political decision-making in the municipality turned out to carry a lot more weight when followed during the long process of revising the proposition. Throughout the revisions and circulations, democratic ideals of accessibility were negotiated and boundaries between the politics and administration were redrawn. The proposition was part of

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<sup>4</sup> In many ways, this echoes anthropologist of science Antonia Walford's work on scientific practices in the Amazon (Walford 2013a), where the 'nature' of researchers, she worked with, in several important aspects resembled the universal 'nature' of many social scientific discussions. Yet at the same time, Walford demonstrates how, if one dwells at the subtleties of her researchers practices, it is evident that they simply do not only make singular representations of an universal reality. Rather than denying or settling this juxtaposition on one side or the other, Walford suggest, which I find very productive in my own work, to take empirically account of this oscillation (ibid:208).

constructing an unattached, neutral bureaucratic administration and placed responsibility for the decision at the political authority, while still playing an important role in negotiating the setup of the electoral world. Thus, this document, as with the guidelines in the last chapter and the lists and protocols in the next, are central elements of the paradoxical electoral infrastructure that simultaneously construct and erase itself from the politics of Election Day. In the next chapter, I will go into more detail with yet another part of this election infrastructure, the recruitment and ordering of election officials and another part of bureaucratic office conduct, that of hesitation.

## Chapter 3

# The Quest for Valhalla

In the election office, Valhalla was mentioned time after time during coffee breaks, lunch and at the recurring Friday meetings. Valhalla will be coming soon, I was repeatedly told. This ever-present matter of concern, Valhalla, was a new online recruiting system, which the municipality intended to use to register and manage the distribution of election officials for the upcoming election. According to Marie, the election office had hoped to be running Valhalla before the previous election in 2011, but they had failed to implement the system in time. This time around, in 2013, they need to start early if they want to use Valhalla or at least to test the system. Marie tells me so at a Friday meeting in late January, ten months before the election. She follows her remark to me with an appeal to the entire election team to get started right away. “But who is responsible for Valhalla”? Peter, a young member of the team asks. His question was directed to Marie but it also seemed like Peter hoped that one of the other three team members present would just take charge. He continued: “I would prefer not to take responsibility for something I do not have the skills to handle”. Peter, who holds a degree in political science, was reluctant to take charge of an IT-project. “Of course there should be a project leader from the department of digitalization”, Marie replied, and then added: “but since our team has the overall responsibility for the election, we also have the overall responsibility for this system”.

In Norse mythology, Valhalla, “the hall of the fallen”, refers to the final resting place of the bravest Vikings; the hall where Odin houses the dead, whom he deems worthy of dwelling with him. To set foot in the incredible Valhalla, one is required to have been victorious in many battles and one must have suffered a heroic death in combat against a worthy opponent. In Norse mythology, this is revered as an almost impossible accomplishment; only the few will enter Valhalla (Crossley-Holland 1981). The first time I encountered Valhalla, the new online recruiting system, it seemed similarly to exist as a kind of promised land. In the eyes of the election office team particularly, Valhalla would be a sanctuary, easing the work on political officials helping out during the election. But while it was not difficult for the *officials* to be deemed worthy to enter Valhalla – they just needed to be either part of a Copenhagen political party or hold a Copenhagen citizenship and eligibility to vote to set foot in Valhalla – reaching Valhalla – getting it up and running – in the election office was a nearly impossible accomplishment. Still, just like the hall of the fallen, Valhalla in Copenhagen municipality was nevertheless something one should continuously strive towards. At least this is how everybody but Peter, seemed to relate to the system. He would “prefer not to take responsibility”.

Peter’s hesitation parallels that of Bartleby, the scrivener, in Herman Melville’s famous short story (Melville 1856). In this story, the narrator, a Manhattan lawyer, is puzzled by Bartleby, his scrivener who replies “I would prefer not to” when asked to help proofread a document. This becomes Bartleby’s perpetual response to all following requests. At one point during the story, the lawyer is startled by the fact that Bartleby does not even prefer to leave the office after his employment has been terminated:

“Will you, or will you not, quit me?” I (the lawyer) now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

“I would prefer *not* to quit you” he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*.

“What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?”

He answered nothing

(Melville 1856)

Bartleby would prefer not to proofread, to quit his job, to move out of the building and eventually to eat, when thrown into jail for vagrancy. This ultimately leads to his death. Still nobody reaches an understanding of why Bartleby preferred to not do

things. His total refusal of social norms leaves the lawyer, and the reader, confused and baffled. Philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers, from whom I learned of the story of Bartleby (Stengers 2005), uses the figure to urge us to resist the temptation to always enforce participation and to demand causal explanation. We almost intuitively think that there must be some identifiable reasons for Bartleby's strange behavior. However, according to Stengers, as a figure Bartleby, with his 'idiotic, presence, rather helps us "slow down" the formulation of knowledge claims (Stengers 2005). Stengers borrows the conceptual character of the idiot from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (see e.g. Deleuze and Guattari 1994) to illustrate the creation of a space for hesitation where definitions of 'good' procedures or 'good' outcomes of – for example public digitalization – can be examined and developed (ibid:995). The idiot does not, Stengers argues, resist the consensual way in which a situation flows or is presented by others, because he believes the presentation to be false. He resists because he senses "there is something more important" at stake (ibid:994). But don't ask him for a way out of the situation or to explain it, Stengers warns. The idiot cannot point to what is more important and is incapable of contributing to a solution. In Bartlebyesque fashion, he will either remain mute or prefer not to participate. The idiot rejects the consensual without presenting an alternative, and thus he produces an interstice.

Bartleby's "I prefer not to" uttered in a Manhattan lawyer's office in a novel and Peter's identical remark at the Danish election office seem worlds apart. However, both can be said to produce a pause. They produce the opportunity to slow down. Although I am reluctant to call Peter's comment idiotic, irresponsible or an evasion of social norms, his "I prefer not to" did indeed require the election team (and me) to pause for a moment. He threw responsibility for the system up in the air, and when nobody immediately grabbed it, room for hesitation arose. During the implementation of Valhalla at the election office, I experienced several occasions, such as the present one, where my informants Peter, Marie and others slowed down processes by questioning and discussing the implementation of the system. Here I choose to pause with them.

Following the lead of this pause, this chapter is certainly about the problematic implementation of Valhalla, but is it not (yet another) story of a failed public IT-project. I rather focus on moments of hesitation; moments of pausing and questioning

during the implementation of Valhalla. It is about the constant negotiation of the claims related to a ‘good’ implementation and consequently about the interplay between the vision of public digitalization as a driving force towards a future public administration and an election where nothing can go wrong. My argument follows the negotiations over who is responsible and accountable for Valhalla. These negotiations, and those discussing the overall future of Valhalla, were often explicated through what Stengers would call idiotic situations, and through an ethnographic account of implementation from January to November 2013, this chapter will provide ‘slow’ insight into a public IT project without trying to provide any well-defined answers or reasons as to why it ended up the way it did, at the November 2013 Election.

### **Valhalla**

Valhalla was developed by Aarhus municipality with guidance and help from the private IT company ACCESS. Valhalla is an open source<sup>1</sup> technology in the public domain, and as such it was free for Copenhagen municipality to use. When Aarhus initiated the development of Valhalla, they did so to digitalize the existing process – ‘the good old days’, as they called them – when municipal employees would manually enter the names of election officials in an outdated database system. Lars, a part-time municipal worker and a major force in the development of Valhalla during 2010 and 2011, told me during an interview that before Valhalla, a representative from each political party<sup>2</sup> handed in a list with the names of the party members that wished to act as election officials during Election Day. In 2009, when he was part of his first election in Aarhus, he was so amazed by how time-consuming the task of recruiting 1068 election officials was that he could no longer stand to “just watch this continue”:

I told myself that I would start with being instructed in the task and suppress my natural inclination to suggest changes to current work tasks. This worked for one day. Then I simply had to tell them that

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<sup>1</sup> Valhalla was on several occasions in both Aarhus and Copenhagen municipality categorized as ‘open source’. In practice this covers over a software system, which is freely available to Danish municipalities. Valhalla is built in the open source CMS platform Drupal, but ACCESS has been handling the implementation in the municipalities using Valhalla so far, as the different municipal versions of Valhalla are connected in a multisited Drupal solution run by ACCESS.

<sup>2</sup> In Denmark polling places are administrated by officials from the different local political parties with help from an election secretary employed within the municipality. If the political parties cannot provide enough officials, citizens in the given municipality can fill up the open spots.

this processing can be done in a more clever way, and then I made a excel spreadsheet.

Before Valhalla the recruitment process in Aarhus was time-consuming and troublesome, according to Lars. The party representatives would hand in their lists of officials in a range of different forms, from orderly lists in emails to a single name on a napkin. After several phone calls and emails back and forth to the party representative Lars would be able to put the bits and pieces of information about the officials together and add the information to a database:

This created a bottleneck when data was transferred from different pieces of information and into the database. It was manually entered into an old database from 1995, but you cannot work with data in this manner. You actually put it into a system that obstructs your data processing.

Carsten from the Copenhagen election office told me a similar story about “the good old days” in Copenhagen Municipality. Recruitment was a very complex process, he recalled. They spent extensive amounts of time deciphering information gathered from the different parties and on appointing the officials to polling stations. With present day, where expectations of efficiency rule the public domain, these procedures were deemed too old-fashioned and complicated. Inefficiency was something Valhalla would hopefully change. Implemented in Aarhus just before the 2011 parliament election, Valhalla promised, according to Lars, to displace responsibility and work from the election office to the party representatives. “You simply reassign the task to those who can meaningfully solve it”. Instead of sending information in various ways to the election office, the representatives would type in the data on officials directly in Valhalla, assign the officials to the different polling stations in Valhalla, and Valhalla would then send auto-generated emails to officials about their tasks. The election office would take a step back from the delegating task and simply monitor the recruitment making sure that the polling stations were properly staffed close to Election Day.

When I went to Aarhus to talk to Lars about Valhalla, I initially set up an interview about the creation of Valhalla and Lars’s experiences with implementing the system. But although the interview was concerned with a past experience, our talk constantly turned towards the future. As such, we ended up discussing mostly the different future developments he had envisioned earlier and his current hopes for a future Valhalla. In the future recruitment setup, as Lars envisioned it in 2010,

Valhalla would rectify existing time-consuming practices and the problems associated with these would more or less cease to exist. The task of assigning officials would be displaced, he told me, as had also happened during the implementation at the 2011 election. In October 2013, when my interview with Lars took place, his visions for the future of Valhalla, building on the success of the 2011 implementation were equally grandiose:

My wish is to carry Valhalla into a shared community between the municipalities, in which every municipality can commit to developing a new module to the existing framework. It needs to be a small speedboat instead of a big vessel and thus be able to maneuver freely in the community instead of holding on to the ideas of Valhalla. Valhalla should be set free.

Lars's vision for the future development of Valhalla was that more efficient work processes were just around the corner. Valhalla would be distributed across the country and constantly provide digital responses to current problems with electoral recruitment. In Copenhagen Municipality the hope of dealing digitally with the time-consuming and complex recruitment tasks was equally a guiding vision. But while the vision of Valhalla as a tiny speedboat that navigates in the sea of election recruitment was driving implementation forward in Aarhus, the Valhalla I witnessed in Copenhagen municipality – and the Valhalla you will be introduced to below – was far less maneuverable or seaworthy.

### **The search for the system**

One month after the first January meeting on Valhalla, described above, I still had not seen Valhalla and neither had my informants. Peter, who initially hesitated to take responsibility for the new system, was still trying to figure out who would be responsible for Valhalla. In addition he also tried to *locate* Valhalla. In this section I will present this search for the system. The search consisted of a series of interactions between the election office and various other departments, and in my description of these interactions I highlight how the election office dealt with implementing Valhalla, since this office was not only instigating the implementation but would also be the main user of the system.

*February – “I do not know shit”*

On the last Wednesday in February, Peter wrote yet another email about Valhalla to Morten from the municipal digitalization department. He added the different heads of departments to the emailing list. To cc's the heads of departments was a rather indiscreet move, but after a month of unanswered emails Peter took this step in order to get an answer about Valhalla's current whereabouts. “It is like the digitalization department downgrades election tasks for now. I guess this is all right if only they would just tell us”, Peter complained to me right after sending the email.

Only five minutes later Morten entered our office. His opening remark, “well, when you add my boss”, hinted at the email sent Peter had sent just five minutes before. This was the first time I saw Morten from the digitalization department even though it was located only two floors below the election office. “We need to talk Valhalla” Peter started and Morten changed from a joking tone to a more serious one although still flashing a smile: “I don't know shit. This is the status. You are nice and all that but you are not my first priority. However we need to get this Valhalla to work and we need to cut the crap. So lets talk work process”. So Morten started to list the different tasks and expectations in the process towards a Valhalla implementation. But Peter soon took over: “I have received this task and Brian [a consultant from ACCESS, the external IT partner] needs to report on the status of Valhalla. Your expectation of me is that Valhalla will work and then I need to fight with my boss over how many hours I can use on this task.” Peter nodded in agreement and Morten quickly ran back down the flight of stairs to the digitalization department.

A week later Morten emailed Peter stating “Valhalla is now on a server”. He attached a link – an IP-address – but Peter did not understand the link and emailed Morten back asking where Valhalla was located. “In Valby” Morten jokingly replied, indicating that the municipal servers were hosted by a service unit run by the municipality located in Valby. Morten could not get any closer to an answer than Valby as he did not understand the IP address either.

*April 2<sup>nd</sup> – Job Well done*

“What is the status of Valhalla?” Morten asked Peter on one his few trips to the election office. Peter was on his way out the door and did not reply immediately. Morten asked again if Peter had located Valhalla. Peter shook his head and added that

the service unit must know something about Valhalla. He would email them right away. “Can we then conclude that my task is solved?” Morten continued referring to the process talk earlier where they had agreed that Morten’s job consisted in getting Valhalla installed. “Job well done?” Morten tried once more. This time in English with an additional; “I’m sorry for the delay”. Peter was reluctant to accept Morten’s version of the situation and did not answer immediately. Instead Morten raised his hand for a high five, and after leaving Morten hanging for a few seconds, Peter returned the gesture without a word and walked out the office.

*April 8<sup>th</sup> – Hidden behind a firewall*

Six days and a couple of unanswered emails to the service unit later, Valhalla was still nowhere to be found. In the meantime, the election office, in cooperation with the digitalization department, had hired Sophie, a tech-savvy project leader to take responsibility for digitalization in the election office including Valhalla. On the first day of her quest to find Valhalla, she contacted ACCESS. According to Brian, a consultant in this company, ACCESS had already handed over Valhalla to the service unit in Copenhagen but due to some security issues it remained hidden behind a firewall on the service unit servers. Therefore Sophie and the election office could still not access the system from their computers. A couple of days later I saw Sophie raise her arms over her head. The security issues were finally dealt with, and she was now able to see Valhalla on her screen. It still was not possible to log in, but she had the first visual contact. Soon everybody in the election office heard the news: Valhalla was up and running.

Five minutes later, John from the service unit called Sophie to talk about another matter, but Sophie interrupted him promptly. “I’m actually just looking at Valhalla. Do you know how I can login?” John told her to contact ACCESS, and with their help Sophie was finally ready to log into Valhalla later that day. Excited, she explained the different pages, application and functions to me. “On this page, you enter in the different constituencies, so the party representatives fill out each constituency with election officials”, she told about a particular page and added. “This will change the relation to the election officials dramatically”.

*Late April – allocating the responsibilities*

The service unit had not yet safety-approved Valhalla. The system had already been reported to the Danish Data Protection Agency, an independent Danish institution responsible for the protection of personal data in Denmark, but the internal safety approval in the municipality was still pending. Sophie was in contact with the service unit, who told her that they would need some more specifications and descriptions of Valhalla before they could give it their final stamp of approval required for the election office to start using it. According to Sophie, this approval process was about taking responsibility for a new system. As long as the service unit was unsure whether or not Valhalla lived up to internal safety regulations, they would not approve it and take responsibility for its installation on their servers. Moreover, Sophie also needed, she explained to me, to secure a contract for offering technical/user support with ACCESS. Much to her surprise, Sophie found out when she started her new job that no such deal had been made. Before going any further with the implementation, she therefore initiated a meeting with Brian from ACCESS to discuss the future collaboration and start the negotiations of the contract, which in her opinion were long overdue.

Later the same day, we all attended an information meeting with Brian where he thoroughly introduced Valhalla. Both Sophie and Marie, the head of the office, hoped that Valhalla would allow them to add data on the 1500 election officials at a much earlier stage, preferably before the summer holidays. This, however, required that the party representatives cooperate smoothly, Marie told me at the information meeting, and the election office had chosen a different strategy to the one originally intended. As mentioned above, the idea of Valhalla was to shift the responsibility for recruiting election officials and adding their data to the database to the party representatives. Aarhus Municipality followed this strategy, but the election office in Copenhagen was a bit more hesitant. Marie did not want to impose the task on the party representatives the first time they used the system. Instead Marie found it satisfactory for the representatives to send CSV files containing information on election officials, after which the election office would import the files into Valhalla. During the information meeting, we were, therefore, introduced to the import function in Valhalla; a function that was a bit unstable and tricky, ACCESS's Brian told us. This was because all the information had to be listed in a very particular manner in

order to work. ACCESS had therefore made an Excel template to make the import easier and as soon as the information meeting was over, Peter, Sophie and I gathered around Sophie's computer to try the import function. Peter emailed Sophie some information from the previous elections for us to play with. She copied the information into ACCESS's Excel spreadsheet, had to change all the social security numbers (SSN's) of the officials to fit the right format and change the format of the SSN's cells to .txt. This, however, changed the entire document to a .txt file, which could not be imported into Valhalla. Sophie gave it another try, with the same result. After a few minutes and still no import, we decided to stop. "Brian must send another template that works", Peter stated before returning to his own desk.

*June 12<sup>th</sup> – "They are not allowed to do that"*

Over the last ten days, Sophie had been put on standby. While she had already added all the information about election districts, polling places and the number of officials at each station to Valhalla, she was still struggling with importing data on officials from previous elections. The import was so slow and challenging that Sophie wanted to include this task in the support deal with ACCESS. The only problem was that Sophie had not been able to reach Brian from ACCESS since their last talk about the support contract. For the last ten days, she had been trying to reach him and finally on the tenth day, on June 12<sup>th</sup>, he did return her call. I could hear him through the phone apologizing for the delay, blaming sickness and absentees. Sophie, clearly annoyed, explained to me after the phonecall how this unavailability was exactly what she feared. She worried that ACCESS was simply too small a company to lift the heavy task of support during an election, where nothing can be delayed or postponed.

A week later Valhalla was out of operation for nearly 24 hours. Sophie asked the service unit to deal with the matter, as they were responsible for the server and database. The problem did, however, not reside on their end, and Sophie, had to contact ACCESS once again as the support deal, which the parties had just signed, dictated that any communication between the service unit and ACCESS should go through her. She had not get through to ACCESS before John from the service unit called her back. Valhalla is now up and running again, he told her. ACCESS had added an extra module to Valhalla on the KS server, which crashed the entire system. "But they cannot do that. They are not allowed to do that", Sophie said to John over

the phone, “we need assurance that they do not just add functions as they please, because you need to be able to check these”.

*September 27<sup>th</sup> – The jaw-dropping deletion*

After the holiday on a Friday morning, Sophie was in a foul mood. “ACCESS has deleted all data”, she explained to me. My jaw dropped to the ground. What about all the information about polling places and officials, she and others had already added to the system? What about all the standard emails set up to be sent out to the officials? It is all gone. “You just listen to this” Sophie started and took me through the events that led up to the removal of all information.

ACCESS was working on some new features for Valhalla and while adding new modules to the system, they also added some test-data from Aarhus and Odense municipality. Two days later, Sophie asked ACCESS to delete the test-data from Valhalla as she had now received information on officials that she wanted to plot into the system “and I do not want to clean up after them”, she said. But when she arrived Friday morning, everything, not just the test data, had been deleted, and it could not be restored. Sophie was astounded by the fact that ACCESS could delete all the important information and that there was no backup of this anywhere. While explaining this to me, Sophie realized that at some point she did send some draft standard emails to me and that other material from Valhalla had also been circulated in the office for proofreading. This information could be added to Valhalla again. Sophie thus started collecting everything she could find on Valhalla and planned to send it to ACCESS later that day, so that they could add all the data again. “And this can not go fast enough”

But what really bothered Sophie about the deletion was ACCESS’s relaxed attitude towards it. They had apologized but overall they seemed *too* calm about the situation. “We are looking into the issue all day today, so I can call you later with peace of mind. We are currently having troubles with accessing your server”, she read aloud from an email Brian from ACCESS sent earlier and commented; “They are sitting right over there at Noerreport” while pointing out in the room towards Noerreport, a location only less than a kilometer away. “They should have showed up here as soon as the error was discovered”. Peter, in calmer but still irritated voice, dryly noted; “They don’t ride the same day they saddle”.

After this major issue, Marie, the head of the election office, stressed to me that they now worked with a ‘soft’ implementation of Valhalla. This meant that at the 2013 election, they would simply only be testing it, putting in all the manual labor themselves; importing and distributing the information on the election officials themselves, as they could not rely enough on Valhalla to let the political parties use it.

### **Softening and slowing down the implementation**

At this point of time, less than three months before the election, Valhalla was something quite different from the vision which Lars had presented to me in Aarhus. It was definitely not a finished and ready-to-use technological system and it was also not a technological dream slowly but steadily coming into being. Rather, Valhalla was oscillating in and out of existence as the election office, the service unit and ACCESS negotiated its locations, its modules, its use and implementation. It was ontologically unstable (Jensen 2004; Latour 1993), and its existence was hanging by a thread, dependent on negotiating a fit between the usage of the system and the upcoming Copenhagen election. It was only because Marie paused, scaled down the implementation and decided not use Valhalla as a communication channel with the political parties that the implementation process had not already failed completely at this point. Valhalla in Copenhagen was thus also something quite different from Valhalla in Aarhus. It reacted to transformations in its environment, such as pausing or adjusting the implementation and excluding the direct access from political representatives as it came into existence. At other times efforts to develop the system, or add to it, almost killed it.

Valhalla was emerging within a complex network of people working with and on it. This also means that competences and knowledge needed to work with Valhalla became distributed between various units in and outside the municipality. While the employees in the election office know all about the election, including how to contact the political parties and distribute election officials, they know very little about server access and the technical development of Valhalla. The service unit and ACCESS have the know-how and competences to deal with technical issues but from very different positions. So when ACCESS logs into Valhalla on the municipal server to add its newly developed modules, they are potentially stepping on the service unit’s toes as this unit is responsible for the server location and access. With entangled yet

distributed competences and knowledge, Valhalla is changing shape from unit to unit. The election office, service unit and ACCESS all ascribed different meanings to Valhalla: Valhalla is an electoral system, Valhalla is an installation task, Valhalla is located on a server, Valhalla is a delay, a hidden entity and a job well done. With these multiple competing ideas of what Valhalla is, expectations to Valhalla and the implementation project multiplied. Most telling, Morten from the digitalization department considered Valhalla a “job well done” at a point in time when Peter was not even able to *locate* the system.

It is in this complex situation that Peter’s preference not to take responsibility for Valhalla must be understood. Being responsible, to be able to respond or be answerable for something as the Latin origin of the word suggests, is not easy when you only know one version of the system, which in the case of Valhalla was not coordinated well with other versions. For example if one does not know why or how all the information in Valhalla can suddenly be deleted, it is difficult to respond in a timely manner. Taking responsibility for Valhalla in the election office was thus, and this will be more evident below, also about aligning the system – all the versions of the system – and, when this was not possible, pausing for a brief moment and restarting negotiations on Valhalla with the different units.

As Dutch philosopher Anne Marie Mol (2002) observes in quite a different setting even if an entity such as Valhalla is different from department to department, multiple in Mol’s words, it is made to hang together through various forms of coordination (Mol 2002:55). In her study of the day-to-day diagnosis and treatment of atherosclerosis at a Dutch hospital, Mol argues that atherosclerosis is a single disease that in practice appears to be more than one. To the vascular surgeon atherosclerosis manifests itself as white paste scraped out of blood vessels. Radiologists deal with the disease through x-rays of blocked vessels, and the family physician responds to illness described by the patient and examinations of pain while walking. Everyone working with atherosclerosis has his or her own understanding of it and enacts the disease differently. The shift towards a patchwork image of atherosclerosis does, however, not, Mol argues, entail a shift into pluralism (ibid:151). Her emphasis is instead on the “coexistence of multiple entities that go by the same name” (ibid), and the various varieties and shapes this connectedness take. Being multiple instead of plural is, thus, a matter of being “more than one and less than many” (ibid:55) as Mol arcanelly puts

it. Connecting atherosclerosis while enacting different versions of it makes coordination of treatment possible across medical sectors to such a degree that coherence between the various atheroscleroses may transpire, leaving the patient with if not a single disease, then at least a single treatment plan (ibid:84).

In the case of Valhalla, I suggest, implementation was exactly dependent upon coordination of the various versions of the system being enacted. Here, incidents such as ACCESS's deletion of data in Valhalla, or Valhalla's invisibility behind a firewall can be viewed as a lack of – or at least a very troublesome – coordination between the various versions of Valhalla. The struggles to align Valhalla made it very difficult to come up with a single implementation plan, but as the snippets above show, the election office never stopped trying. Hesitation, combined with hierarchically connecting the various versions of Valhalla are, I suggest, two of the modes of coordination involved in their efforts to drive the implementation forwards. A form of coordination that draws diversity together by hierarchical addition is seen both in Valhalla and in Mol's examples of how singularity is created in the hospital. There, Mol argues that one way of coordinating the disease and reaching a treatment plan is by "adding up" the various findings, symptoms and diagnostic techniques. But if a test result does not add up with a symptom, e.g. if a technician finds the so-called ankle/arm index within a normal range, while the patient still feels pain while walking, coherence is sought elsewhere: A hierarchy between divergent measurements is established with in this case "the lab on the top" (ibid:63).

While I do not want to suggest that coordination in a hospital setting is the same as the implementation practices at the election office, I would like to dwell for a moment on Mol's ideas of addition and hierarchy, as they in some ways speak to the alignment of Valhalla that I witnessed. By regarding coordination of Valhalla as hierarchically additive, implementation is first and foremost about connecting Valhalla as an electoral recruitment project at the election office to Valhalla as an installation task in the service unit and a development project at ACCESS. It is about taking all versions into account and tackling the different problems the various Valhalla realities encounter. But this addition rarely runs smoothly at the election office. Morten made it quite clear in the beginning that Valhalla was not his first priority, and ACCESS was – while supporting the election office – still developing their own ideas of what Valhalla was. Contrary to what Mol identifies as indicators

and symptoms that are not necessarily played out against each other when added up (ibid:68), it, thus, seemed like the different versions of Valhalla were constantly bumping heads in the first months of implementation. When Sophie was employed, her job description was to align the incoherence between departments, and with her central position in the election office, to do so in order to create a reliable electoral system. She therefore often asked ACCESS to develop new functions that would make sense to the Copenhagen election, while stressing during the deletion debacle that ACCESS could not just add functions as they pleased. She initiated support agreements with ACCESS and the service unit to secure their engagement with and support of Valhalla, even if they could not make it their first priority. So, if a module in Valhalla did not make sense to the Copenhagen election, Sophie would ask ACCESS to modify it. Due to the unpredictability of the election, the ability to immediately respond to issues arising was highlighted in the engagement with the two partners. Along with the quality checks and workarounds, which will be highlighted below, these initiatives were all part of the consolidation of a coherent Valhalla, with the electoral reality coming out on top of the hierarchy. Once in a while, Sophie succeeded in coordinating the various Valhalla worlds. But this was only a temporary state, to which the deletion above testifies all too well, and when this hierarchical mode of coordination did not suffice another one was installed: that of hesitation. To simply stop for a moment, pause the implementation and eventually slow down in order to rearrange the Valhalla worlds and stay on top of the implementation.

### **Cleaning the data**

While Valhalla was quickly up and running again after the major deletion in late September, the election office stuck to the soft implementation of Valhalla through October and up to the November election. The fear of another deletion was too strong. As a result of this slow down and eventual choice of a 'softer' initial use of Valhalla came the major task to receive and type in the data on election officials. In the following I will continue the story of Valhalla with a focus on what Lars' and others called 'cleaning the data' and thus on continuous tweaking, tinkering and negotiations necessary to use Valhalla to assign the Copenhagen election officials. But while this extra task of manually entering the data was instigated by a hesitant first use of

Valhalla, the following account will explore how Lars' practices of cleaning the data were indeed also part of driving the implementation forward.

*Initial request of data*

Peter had emailed the various Copenhagen political parties requesting lists with information about what role the election officials would play on Election Day. They could either act as normal officials or be part of a polling station's election board. In the email, Peter suggested a particular excel format (fig.3.1), which would contain all the relevant information (party, name, address, SSN, email and phone number) and desired constituency and polling station.

The deadline for handing in the lists was September 30<sup>th</sup>, but the information received by this date was, unsurprisingly to the election office, incomplete. The information was received in nearly as many formats as there are political parties. Some forgot the SSN's, others forgot the email addresses and quite a few were uncertain which polling stations the officials wanted to be stationed at. One party representative wrote comments next to each name on the list and others forgot to put some names on the first list and emailed several times to add information. It was therefore necessary for Peter to email back and forth with the different representatives repeatedly to get all the information needed to plot the officials into Valhalla. Often 5-6 different documents and emails ended up constituting a party's list of officials, and Peter therefore printed and stapled all these together.

This messy collection of information on officials was only the first step in a long process. As it was, printed and clipped together, the data was not ready to be copied into Valhalla yet. Several steps were missing.

Checking the information on officials in the national social security register, where basic personal information such as name, address, marital status and place of birth of all residents in Denmark is gathered, was the next step of this cleaning process. While some lists were incomplete, it was still possible for Sophie to compare them with the register. This task was tedious and with around 1500 officials to check, two student helpers were sent to the rescue. They started with newly printed documents, which Peter placed in a small cardboard box attached with a post-it saying: "needs to be checked". Checking was done by typing the SSN into the register and checking that the official was both living in the municipality and eligible to vote,

which would allow them to act as election officials. If the SSN was missing, the officials name would often provide enough information to locate the SSN and add that to the paper document. Names of persons not eligible to serve as officials were crossed out on lists. When an entire Party list had been checked, the name of the person who did the checking and the date were written on top of the first page and the entire document were placed in a second cardboard box with the text “Ready for Valhalla”.

With lists from this second cardboard box, Sophie started typing in the checked information in Valhalla. She had a list of 50 different polling stations in Valhalla, and she manually typed in information on each official under the requested polling station. Beforehand, each polling station had been conferred a particular number of officials, both ordinary officials and election board officials, and Sophie needed to align the request from the political parties with this number. “This is not an easy cleaning” Sophie explains. “The parties are providing the wrong data and there is no control with the placement of the election board officials. One Party hasn’t even supplied any information about their election board officials yet”, she complained. The delegation of the election board officials proved especially difficult during the cleaning phase. The seats on each polling station had been distributed according to the D’hondt method<sup>3</sup>, calculated by Peter, and each political party therefore had a certain number of election board seats at each polling stations. But the information received from the parties often diverged from this calculation. One party had too many election board officials at one polling station while others had too few. The allocation of election board seats had a lot of history to it, so Sophie could not just make the information fit into the structure of Valhalla. Officials favor some polling stations over others, preferring to work with particular other officials, as they had done for many years. Sophie could not just change this social arrangement.

Especially assigning the prestigious role of heading a polling station’s election board was an especially serious matter. Sophie found she had to talk to the different parties about these issues. She made one such phone call to a politician in the beginning of October, as he had provided six candidates for head of election boards,

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<sup>3</sup> The D’hondt method, named after Belgian mathematician Victor D’hondt, is a method also used to allocate seats in political systems with party-list proportional representation used at both regional, municipal and parliament elections in Denmark. The method aims to allocate seats in proportion of the votes received (See also Elklit og Christensen 2013).

although according to Valhalla they only had five spots. On the phone, Sophie suggested that the extra official could be allocated to another polling station and thereby not serve as a head of the election board, but this idea was not well received. The politician wanted his official to be placed at a particular constituency (7.East) and he had swapped seats with another political party to make this happen. Sophie was unaware of this so-called ‘political swap’, where the political parties swap polling stations between themselves, and said that she would try to accommodate to this. “This is not going to be fun, this one”, Sophie said to me after the phone call.

Political deals needed to be taken into account, but often Sophie and the others at the election office did not know about them and they would have to decipher from partial information provided on the incomplete lists and through phone calls. After Sophie, one document, phone call and email conversation at a time, had finished typing in the verified data in Valhalla, she put the sheets of paper in the last cardboard box with the inscription “finished”.

### *The officials puzzle*

Although the last cardboard box read “finished”, the delegation of seats was still only in its early stages and a lot of maneuvering between political swaps, bureaucratic allocation and Valhalla’s own ways of structuring the officials was still needed. Sophie called one instance of such reorganization “an issue between theory and practice” and she explained: When the Danish social-liberal Party could not provide enough officials to fill their spots at the polling stations, these would at some point be distributed to other parties. The Social Democrats were especially known for providing a surplus of officials and would often fill such open spots. But if Sophie manually added a Social Democrat to a spot reserved for the Danish social-liberal Party, their party representative would get access to the personal information on the Social Democrat in Valhalla<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, if the Danish social-liberal Party later in the process provided the missing official, they should be given the spot, and there was currently no way of putting the Social Democrat on a waiting list in Valhalla. You either occupy a spot or not.

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<sup>4</sup> Although the political parties did not add their own information to Valhalla during this election due to the soft implementation, they were still given access to Valhalla. This allowed them to accustom themselves with the system and, according to the election office, hopefully more easily take ownership over the system at future elections.

However, when this issue occurred, ACCESS was ready with an update which would offer a waiting list option, along with some other fixes to the system. At this point, Sophie and the student helpers had nearly added information on 1000 officials to Valhalla. With the unsuccessful update in mind, the prospect of another update made Sophie nervous. She therefore asked ACCESS to send a written description of the update and furthermore she printed information on the officials for each of the 50 polling stations. If something unexpected happened once again, she wanted to make sure that she had all the information needed to delegate the officials once more.

The update seemed to run smoothly. But while putting officials on the waiting list was now an option, the assignment puzzle was still nowhere near to being solved. The mess on Sophie's desk testified to this. It was filled with print-outs from Valhalla and lists of various officials that had already been checked, as she tried to make sure that all the information on paper was also registered correctly in Valhalla. This was, however, not the case for Thomas Larsen, an election board official from the Social Democrats. In Sophie's printed document from the Social Democrats, Thomas Larsen was listed as election board official at the polling station in Tingbjerg, 8. South district. This was also registered in Valhalla under the polling station icon, but in Sophie's overview over polling stations his name was missing and so was his name in the overview over social democrat officials. In some screenshots Thomas Larsen was, thus, registered and in others, missing. During this particular day when the 'Thomas Larsen' issue was discovered, Sophie had sent over 30 emails to ACCESS, she explained. The last email's subject read "The polling station that went missing" and concerned a polling station, that went missing in her overview, but was later found under another district. "Something is completely wrong. I cannot trust what I see [on the screen]" Sophie sighed and complained to Peter, "I am paralyzed. I cannot trust the data, I see and I cannot add any new data".

These inconsistencies in Valhalla, and the political importance of seat allocation, prompted the election office to undertake a 'quality control' review of the specially appointed election board officials. Both Peter and Sophie wanted to cross-check the information on the received list with the lists in Valhalla. Sophie, assisted by a student helper and me, therefore began this extra check. We printed all the relevant lists, and found a quiet spot in the office. With the lists distributed between us, we checked around 200 (4-5 at each polling station) election board officials, one at

a time. During this process, a list with officials from the party SF was misplaced on our messy table, an official was located at the wrong polling station and an entire list from Liberal Alliance went missing. Peter helped us locate the last list in a cardboard box and Sophie moved the official to the right polling station in Valhalla.

Despite this “quality check”, Sophie was still nervous about the data structure in Valhalla. But Election Day was approaching, and it was, therefore, time to “press the button”: To hit the key in Valhalla that would trigger an auto-generated email to nearly 1300 officials with information about polling station, meeting time and a RSVP link. With only twelve days left until Election Day, the first email merged various pieces of information from Valhalla incorrectly. So, for instance, the meeting time was set to 6am instead of 8am and most emails contained the wrong information about the role of the official on Election Day. Sophie tried to send out another auto-generated email with an apology for the mistakes in the first one. But Valhalla again merged information incorrectly. Consequently, Sophie received more than 300 emails and phone calls from confused officials that day. Overwhelmed by the massive response to Valhalla’s merging errors, she spent the next couple of days sorting out her mailbox. In the end she just hoped that the officials would know when and where to show up.

At this point, Peter asked whether they should drop Valhalla entirely, and simply email the final information using their own mail system. Valhalla was, Peter argued, filled with errors. But Marie, the head of the office, still thought that the benefits of having all the information on officials collected in one place – and being able to pay officials allowance via the system – overshadowed the current problems. Marie, however, acknowledged the highly problematic email with incorrect information. She feared that the officials were getting so tired of this that they would stop reading any further emails, and they still needed to send a final email with a summary of information previously received. In dialog with the digitalization department, they therefore decided to check how Valhalla merged information before “pressing the button” one last time.

At noon, November 18<sup>th</sup>, one day before Election Day, Sophie officially stopped further changes to Valhalla. It was no longer possible to swap polling stations or meet other requests from the officials. During the last week, Sophie had tried to fill up the polling stations one at a time, calling the 150 officials who had not replied to

the RSVP. She had swapped officials to meet request to be stationed at specific polling stations and she had added more officials to the polling stations in most need. But now she was done. Valhalla was closed to any further changes. The election office would now wait and hope that the officials would show up at the right time and place the following day<sup>5</sup>

The outcome? One man showed up at a wrong polling station on Election Day. That was all. Over 1300 officials showed up at the 50 polling stations at 8am. Sophie, relieved by the outcome of her work, was not even sure that he showed up at the wrong place due to wrongly merged emails.

### **Keeping Valhalla alive**

In Latour's famous book about Aramis (1993), a failed Parisian guided transportation system, we witness a high-technology murder mystery centered around Latour's main question: "Who killed Aramis?" Aramis began as a dazzling technological centerpiece, a French dream of automated trains with independent modules that would make traffic jams a thing of the past. A small, enclosed and automated car would take passengers to the destination of their choice. The car might join with others for shorter stretches and then separate to go in their different directions. The journeys would be completed with no stops and no transfers along the way. But despite the great technological vision, Aramis was shelved as its promoters, one by one, began to falter. Latour argues that the technology failed not because any particular actor killed it, but because various actors failed to sustain it through negotiations and adaptations to changing social situations. The story of Aramis is, thus, the story of a technological object that gained and lost liveliness in relation to an array of actors and events. Aramis struggled to exist in its dependency on other actors, and this struggle of existence at the center of tense negotiations is similar to the story of Valhalla.

A technological project must relate to its surroundings, Latour argues, if it wants any hope of staying alive: "If it refuses to contextualize itself, it may remain technologically perfect, but unreal" (ibid:127). The actors who do the work of

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<sup>5</sup> The election secretary at each polling station had weeks prior to the election received preliminary lists of officials at their polling stations and had often been in contact with the officials via email, why the election office's concern was pointed at those who had been added or swapped late in the process or in other ways had not been in contact with their election secretary.

contextualizing are thus crucial for the survival of a project<sup>6</sup>. All actors who engage in a technological project, and who “connect the fate of a project with the fate of the small or large ambitions they represent” (ibid:137), engage the project in their own way. No two processes of contextualization are thus identical. This is what makes the liveliness of technological projects, and in this particular case the life and death of Aramis, so multilayered and unascertainable.

Although Aramis was killed of in a very early stage and Valhalla is in the process of being implemented, we can still follow Latour’s idea of contextualizing work to shed new light on especially the very practical labour of ‘cleaning the data’. Valhalla was, as mentioned, never quite safe. Its survival was discussed as late as a couple of weeks before the election. At that point, Peter simply had enough of being unsure of Valhalla’s ability to distribute officials. It was Sophie who continuously worked to keep Valhalla alive. Her efforts were not about linking the project to ‘big politics’ as Latour describes in the story on Aramis, quite the contrary. Where Aramis gained and eventually lost its life in the network of governmental and private institutions, engineers, bureaucrats and even the mayor of Paris, Valhalla was much more at the mercy of the election office and especially Sophie. Thus, in a very practical manner, she kept linking Valhalla to the election office by continuously placing Valhalla at the center of their practices of receiving and handling data about election officials. As such, Valhalla was grounded in the election office because of the many workarounds Sophie implemented to make Valhalla usable. Sophie manually checked the SSN’s in the national register, cleaned the data and created a reality in which Valhalla was usable. Valhalla, thus, became more and more contextually attached to the electoral work as Sophie typed and retyped information on officials and requested customized modules from ACCESS. Bringing Valhalla to life in the election office was an ongoing practical activity, making the decision to implement Valhalla for the election seem more and more irreversible.

But the irreversibility was challenged at times. Sometimes Valhalla, assisted by ACCESS, decontextualized itself from the electoral setting. This was the case when all the information was deleted and ACCESS’s services were subsequently

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<sup>6</sup> I here refer to Latour’s use of the term ‘contextualization’, which must not be confused with the often used, but much more static notion of context. He writes: “In a given context, the same projects do or do not feel an impact; a single context can bring about contrary effects. Hence the idiocy of the notion of “preestablished context.” The people are missing; the work of contextualization is missing. The context is not the spirit of the times which would penetrate all things equally” (Latour 1993:137).

unavailable. Doing elections involves quick responses to unforeseen events, and when ACCESS failed to react, Valhalla itself was deemed unreliable. As a result, Peter withdrew his support for Valhalla. His interest was the execution of the election rather than the technological project, which he saw as separate (contrary to for instance Sophie's work in which Valhalla and the election was rather perceived as one thing). When Peter hesitated for a moment it seemed like the implementation of Valhalla could in fact be reversed, but Marie stated that Valhalla was there to stay. She breathed life into Valhalla again as she chose to focus on the vision and hope of a technological solution rather than the setbacks. The implementation therefore gained momentum; many people were involved, money was allocated and key persons were heavily invested, so in the end the election office went ahead with the implementation.

### **Hesitation as a response**

While the continuous contextualization work provided Valhalla with so much momentum that even severe setbacks could not kill it, the election office did not let Valhalla run loose as a monstrous vision. They constantly hesitated during the process. We have seen that Peter explicitly questioned Valhalla on several occasions, but this was not the only way in which the election office slowed things down. The election team also paused with much more subtlety, such as when they requested a quality control, when they decided on a slower implementation or when they printed the data during a Valhalla update. I suggest that the way in which my informants paused was very similar to the hesitation Stengers urges the analyst to create. She argues that slowing down is a method for examining and developing new definitions, and by slowing down and recontextualizing the implementation of Valhalla, the election office was doing just that. Or in other words, the election office was continuously negotiating, questioning and examining what is a public digitalization (and electoral) project.

Digitalization has been a buzzword within the Danish public sector for a while. In 2011 the municipalities together with Local Government Denmark<sup>7</sup> announced a joint municipal digitalization strategy for 2011-2015. In the strategy,

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<sup>7</sup> Local Government Denmark (LGDK) is the interest group and member authority of Danish municipalities. It is voluntary to be a member of LGDK, but all 98 municipalities are members (LGDK 2015).

digitalizing is highlighted as one of the core instruments for maintaining and developing the Danish welfare system.

The municipalities do not only wish to energize current work practices. It is the municipalities vision that digitalization towards 2015 participate in creating a efficient and attractive sector, in which digitalization is a innovative driving force in the development of the municipal services

(LGDK 2011)

The strategy suggests 37 digitalization projects. Digitalization of elections is not one of them. But it seemed like the municipal digitalization buzz streamed into every little part of the municipality, including the small election office. Future ways of handling officials, registering voters or counting ballots was often discussed with digitalization in mind. This staggering emphasis on a digital future was much in line with Lars's vision for Valhalla as a digital answer to the complex allocation of officials to polling stations. But there was some distance from the vision of public digitalization to the actual digitalization project in the election office. Similar to the way Stengers's idiot resists consensual presentations of given situations, not because they are false, but because "there is something more important" at stake (Stengers 2005:994), Sophie, Peter and the others at the election office did not necessary believe the commonly emphasized dream-like digitalization to be false. They even at times showed support for it and aspired to it. Nor did they have any clear answers or solutions to what digitalization, then, was, if not a perfect vision. But what was immensely more important than the dream-like vision of digitalization as a driving force for innovation in the election office was the reliability of and responsibility for the election.

What started out with Peter's "I prefer not to" as a clear rejection of the digitalization project turned into a more nuanced, complex yet very practical negotiation of Valhalla in relation to creating a reliable system that the election office could vouch for. Unlike the fate of Bartleby, whose unceasingly refusal of social norms led to his death, Valhalla was kept alive because the election managed to slow down the vision en route to a digital future and instead redirect the implementation towards concerns about the reliability of an election system. In practice, hesitation as a response to the fast-paced digitalization allowed the election office to keep utilizing Valhalla instead of killing it off at first sign of instability, and thereby also, quite paradoxically, keep a little bit of the digitalization vision alive.

While hesitation was key to keeping Valhalla alive, it is very important to stress that hesitation at the election office was not about hindering or ignoring the digitalization project. Hesitation was about keeping a balance between supporting and questioning the project: continuing the implementation when it was deemed necessary and possible and rejecting the digitalization vision when it collided with concerns for reliable elections. Thus, while I use Stengers to emphasize hesitation as vital to Valhalla's survival, Latour on the other hand reminds us that a technological project can be buried by just "doing nothing" (Latour 1993). Just as Aramis was terminated simply because some actors did not connect "the fate of the project with the fate of the small or large ambitions they represent" (ibid:127), Valhalla was also dependent on practical activities to stay alive. Balancing hesitation and actively pushing Valhalla forward is, thus, not a sign of indecision, I suggest. It is rather a productive strategy of taking responsibility and regaining control with an unruly system. When Peter suggested a quality control of the information on election board officials or when Sophie introduced cardboard boxes to the data cleaning process, it was their way of taking responsibility both for the system and for the election officials. Hesitation is, thus, at the election office a strategy for handling an unpredictable, yet irreversible technological project as it is introduced to an election, where nothing must go wrong.

### **The successes and failures of Valhalla**

Introducing hesitation as a way to explore Valhalla's implementation process in the municipality does not only make us attentive to the constant negotiations of responsibility. It also gives room to a municipal IT project that does not necessarily align with the optimistic vision of a public digitalization project without immediately deeming it a failure. Based on my arguments in this chapter, dwelling at the moments of hesitation (whether these are very explicitly uttered such as the Peter's retraction of support for the system, Marie's decision for a slow implementation or the more subtle resistances to the fast-paced digitalization such as extra checks of emails and data) open up for multiple versions of Valhalla and multiple ways of approaching implementation. So although it may seem counterintuitive to emphasize hesitation as vital in the implementation of an otherwise fast-paced public digitalization project, moments of questioning the given direction reveal and give the possibility for realigning the various versions of Valhalla.

The constant tweaking, tinkering and negotiations, where Valhalla was linked to election practices and departments were coordinated, were, as I suggest throughout the chapter, necessary for the election office to take responsibility for the systems and eventually necessary for the survival of Valhalla. As such, this chapter is not so much concerned with Valhalla's abilities as a technological system per se. As I have show, the success or failure of the system depended rather on the ability to coordinate between involved departments and link Valhalla to elections. It was here Valhalla went from being a success to a failure and vice versa in the matter of days, depending on how well it 'hung together'. When Peter refused to high-five Morten for a job well done, it could even be argued that Valhalla was simultaneously a failure and success. Thus, there are as least as many claims of what constituted a successful or 'good' implementation, as there are versions of the system.

Perhaps it is in this linked, relational and local perspective on IT-implementation that clues to the seemingly very different experiences with Valhalla in Aarhus and Copenhagen lie. There is only 157km between Aarhus and Copenhagen, but as the story of Valhalla and Lars's statements above testify, the two municipalities' experiences with Valhalla seem worlds apart. Differences in organizational setup, the scale of elections and electoral practices mattered in terms of what needed to hang together, what was questioned, negotiated and tweaked. Valhalla in Aarhus in all its complexity and multiplicity was, thus, nothing like what Valhalla in Copenhagen was evolving into. It would therefore be a naive, although not uncommon, expectation that the Valhalla of Aarhus could just be transferred to the Copenhagen setting and simply work<sup>8</sup>. It had to be carefully linked to the Copenhagen electoral reality. Here hesitation, slowing down and questioning the optimistic visions and given organizational procedures, proved to be a powerful method to steer towards not necessarily the ideal technological system or the Aarhusian Valhalla, but an electoral system that could be used during the municipal and regional election 2015 in Copenhagen.

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<sup>8</sup> Debates on technology transfer has often been related to moving technology to lesser developed, unconnected and marginalized areas to foster digital inclusion in a time of the great digital divide (Castells 1999). These debates are fuelled with fear of exclusion, dependency, network imperialism and it is obvious that processes of transferring technology are by no means straightforward or merely technical (Andersen 2013). Moving technologies locally from one city to another has not received the same careful treatment. But as I show with the transfer of Valhalla, even the smallest relocation could not be controlled as software "is not predetermined, but emergent, always remaining an empirical matter" (Berg 1998:475).

## Chapter 4

# Ordering Candidacy

Wildness does not precede order, but creating order produces *its* wildness  
(Anne Marie Mol in Berg, 2000)

When a voter enters a Danish polling booth, ballot in hand, they are faced with the central question of any election: who to vote for? For many reasons, this may not be a simple choice. At the 2013 municipal election voters in Copenhagen municipality could pick between 269 candidates from 32 different political parties many of which are local and relatively unknown. That year, over one hundred different political parties and over 9000 candidates ran for election nationally. But what does it take to make it practically doable for voters to mark their choice on a ballot? The existence of the ballot paper, in its particular form, testifies to the fact that a vote is not the *only* stamp of approval a politician needs in order to be elected. A person will usually become a political candidate only after a history of rejections and acceptances and engaging in a series of political battles to decide who become the top candidates of a political party. In this chapter, however, I show how the ballot and the list of names it contains is equally crucial part of this process. And this again depends on careful work in the election office. The

existence and content of the ballot on Election Day depends on the effort of my interlocutors along with the candidates who produce so-called ‘candidate lists’. Making these lists is often as messy and chaotic as the political battles over candidacy just mentioned.

### **Ordering politicians**

A candidate list is a list on paper of political candidates running for either a municipal or a regional election. The list contains at least one candidate and no more than 59<sup>1</sup>. In addition to the candidates’ names and addresses, the list includes information about at least 150 supporters and their signatures<sup>2</sup>. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior provides the candidate list template and a guideline on how to submit the list, with reference to the Danish Election Law. First, the political parties fill out the form. Afterwards it is the election employees’ task to check the information provided on the submitted list and accept or reject the candidate or party. Of the 38 political parties in Copenhagen, which submitted a candidate list before the 2013 municipal election, 32 parties and 269 candidates in total ended up on the ballot. Six parties were consequently left out as they either did not collect the required number of signatures, manage to fill out the template correctly or withdrew their candidacy during this process.

Adherence to a general set of legal rules and regulations would commonly be perceived as the cornerstone of the submission process and, more generally, in the conduct of Danish elections. If you ask the ministry or the municipality how to deal with candidacy, they would immediately refer to the applicable law. The election law, in this view, imposes a certain order and frames candidacy submissions. Consequently, the bureaucrats and the politicians can adhere to, work around, challenge, or even avoid the rules and regulations – although the latter is not likely to lead to a political candidacy.

But there are many issues that do not fit well with this view of general rules as the steady backdrop of local bureaucratic submission practices. There is

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<sup>1</sup> A political party can only have four extra candidates on their list than the number of seats in the council. Consequently, since the city council in Copenhagen Municipality consists of 55 members a Copenhagen candidate list can only contain 59 candidates.

<sup>2</sup> Depending on the size of the municipality party or candidate need between 25-150 signatures from supporters to run for candidacy. Copenhagen municipality is the only municipality in which 150 supporters are needed to run for election.

more messiness, particularly when experiences from past elections are brought into the picture. ‘General rules as a steady backdrop’ therefore does not describe my experience or interpretation of the encounters between municipal employees and politicians during the candidate list submissions, which I observed in October 2013. In these encounters, the worlds of politics openly encountered the election machine, which does not happen that often before Election Day itself (see chapter two on the proposition for another encounter between the political and bureaucratic worlds). These situations were by far the most intense, chaotic, and hectic events I witnessed during my fieldwork. I watched as politicians vigorously negotiated the fate of their candidacy with bureaucrats, bureaucrats who were simultaneously trying to figure out how to respond rapidly to multiple issues – for instance – the submission of an invalid list or a politician behaving anxiously. It would therefore be a mistake to claim that the legal framework was fixed or simply imposed in a straightforward sense. Rather, during the election, and through employees’ efforts to handle a given situation, rules and regulations were actualized, put into play, rejected, and negotiated in relation to other ways of creating order; especially the election team drew on experiences from past elections. Rules were, thus, only one resource among others for situated action, rather than a prescriptive device (Suchman 1987).

The candidate list submission processes and encounters it entail thus prompt me to include literature from social theory that rethinks order in a way that locates legal forms of ordering in practice and in relation to other kinds of ordering (cf. Riles 2011). This focus also shows that the familiar dualism between order and disorder or between a universal legal framework and local messiness – does not adequately describe the entangled and messy ordering practices at the election office. I want to develop a better understanding of these practices, and therefore suggest thinking about ‘order’ differently. I argue, following John Law, that we need to think about various ‘modes of ordering’ instead of one single, overarching (legal) order (Law 1994). In his influential work, *Organizing Modernity* (1994), Law starts by highlighting that ‘the problem of social order’ has been central to social theory since its dawn. He goes on to problematize exactly these terms, ‘social’ and ‘order’, refusing their commonsensical meaning entirely (ibid:1). Arguing for a sociology of verbs, Law instead insists on

addressing *ordering* rather than order and the material heterogenous rather than the social. The problem with the concept of ‘social order’, he describes like this:

Many of us have learned to want to cleave to an order. This is a modernist dream. In one way or another, we are attached to the idea that if our lives, our organizations, our social theories or our societies, were ‘properly ordered’ then all would be well. And we take it that such ordering is possible, at least some of the time. So when we encounter complexity we tend to treat it as distraction. We treat it as a sign of the limits of order. Or we think of it as evidence of failure.

(Law 1994:5)

In response to this modernist dream of an ideal social order, Law argues that we, as scholars should investigate plural processes of socio-technical ordering. This displaces an idea of a single order with a view of varied, incomplete processes of ordering. In accordance, the concept of the ‘social’ is replaced by an idea of how heterogeneous networks of bodies, documents, machines, and many other things are “all implicated in and perform the ‘social’” (ibid:2). This view, Law argues, allows for a focus on the world as messy and complex, where no single order can dissolve or overcome messiness. In this light, the idea of a persistent and fixed social order is clearly an illusion. Order is process, temporary, and the exception rather than the rule. However, this does not mean that order-cum-illusion have no consequences; on the contrary they have many effects in practice.

So how does this approach help me understand the candidate lists? Following Law, I do not see ‘social order’ as something, which exists outside or beyond local practices. Consequently, this chapter is not about how candidacy or non-candidacy is steered by set of generalized rules. My story is rather concerned with an array of different ordering processes at the election office. It is about the hard and often invisible work that goes into creating a sense of electoral order symbolized by the fixed list of names on a ballot paper. Past experiences and messy encounters with politicians at the election office cannot then be understood as merely noise, distractions, or deviance of only rudimentary interest to ethnographic inquiry. On the contrary, these phenomena may instead be understood as central aspects of local processes and modes of social ordering. This also means that standardized legal regulations are still seen as playing an important part – just a different one than normally conceived. The messy submission process requires attentiveness from employees at the election office.

These situations are matters of practical and persistent tinkering in the flux of ambivalence and mess.

In what remains of this chapter, I explore several sociotechnical local ordering practices at the election office by weaving five stories from the candidate lists submission process together. In so doing, I do not only contribute to the ever-present debates on ordering and organizing in social theory. By focusing on different modes of ordering candidacy, I also highlight particular Danish democratic ideals – such as equality and inclusion as elastic entities, which legitimize certain actions at the office. Thus, the rethinking of ordering also feeds into a further discussion of what ‘democracy in action’ entails.

### **The two Leaf Parties**

On a Tuesday morning in late October, the deadline for handing in candidate lists is less than an hour away, and the small office temporarily set up to handle submissions five floors below the main election office is buzzing with activity. Politicians – or their party representatives – are submitting lists, and election office employees are checking, copying, and signing them. I am sitting in the corner of the room trying not to obstruct the process. This gets difficult, however, when six people occupies the office, which is no more than ten square meters large. Helen, one of the three municipal employees in the office, is ready to handle the next candidate waiting in line outside. Her name is Elena. As she enters the office the room is immediately filled with her lively presence. Her leopard patterned shirt and leggings stand out from the otherwise black, grey, and pale autumn clothes on the rest of us. A much taller, longhaired skinny friend with a bag full of witch hazel branches in hand accompanies Elena. As if the room was not crowded before, the bag with branches takes up what seems like the last space in the room. But Elena and her friend, to my amazement, manage to put the bag in a corner of the room without anyone bumping into the branches. Elena is now ready to hand in her candidate list.

Elena’s party is called “The Leaf Party”, and both her leopard-themed clothes, the branches, and the party name are tied to her parties’ project of “taking care of nature, because it takes care of us”. The politics of the different parties is, however, not an issue at the temporary election office. Instead, when Elena hands

Helen her candidate list, Helen's focus on the list and the small boxes on the paper, which contain information. Are the names, addresses, and signatures from both candidates and supporters represented on the list? Have at least 150 supporters signed the list? Has Elena indicated on the list how potential seats in the municipal council will be distributed internally in the Leaf Party? While Helen is checking these issues and more, Elena asks her if it might be possible to add another candidate to the list. Earlier this morning Elena had talked to her friend, Karen, about the possibility of running for election, and she would therefore now like to know if Karen could be added to her party this late in the process. This is, however, not possible, Helen tells Elena. All information about every candidate on the list must be filled out before one collect signatures from supporters. But Karen may become a candidate, if she hands in her own candidate list at the election office before the deadline at noon today, Helen says. This is in twenty minutes.

Some confusion arises during this conversation. While speaking to Helen, Elena calls Karen, and it turns out that another friend – and an unofficial organizer of several party lists – has already handed in a candidate list on Karen's behalf. In addition to this, he has also listed Karen on another party's candidate list, The Stevia Party. So although it is not possible to add Karen to The Leaf Party list, her name has already been submitted as a prospective candidate. This situation, however, soon becomes even more complicated. As Helen explains to Elena and thereby to Karen at the other end of the phone, a candidate cannot appear on two different candidate lists. This adds to the confusion about Karen's candidacy, and Karen eventually decides to drop by the office. She has to hurry, however, if she wants to make it before the deadline.

Five minutes before the deadline, Karen finally shows up in the office. She and Elena are now ready to solve their candidacy issues. The situation at the office at this moment is hectic as several candidates are in the middle of submitting their lists at the very last minute. In addition, one candidate has brought a team of radio journalists with him to the office to broadcast live from his path to political candidacy. In the middle of the busy office, Karen and Elena suddenly start a loud discussion. It turns out that the name of Karen's party on the list that their common friend submitted is also called "the Leaf party". Elena is

outraged by the fact that Karen has apparently stolen her party name. In a mixed state of rage and tearing up Elena starts explaining to Helen how much work she has put into building the Leaf Party. She has shared her views on nature and politics in videos on YouTube and Facebook, and now Karen will ruin all this work by proposing a different agenda under the same party name. Helen tries to calm the situation by trying to explain to Elena that the election law actually allows two parties to bear the same name at a municipal election unless this name resemblances to much the name of one of those parties which also run for parliament, such as The Social Democrats. In this case the problem can be solved by marking the two parties on the ballot paper with different numbers to indicate to the voters that two separate parties exist. This information does, unsurprisingly, not do much to calm down the situation, and Elena is not the only who is now in a tense state. Karen also seems distressed and confused. She tells Elena that she did not know anything about the overlapping party names or multiple candidate lists with her name on them. On the contrary, she just hoped to be part of Elena's Leaf party. But here, five minutes before the deadline, Karen is not only listed on two different lists, she is also, according to Elena, stealing her party's name.

In what seems like a deadlock situation, Helen tries to reach some sort of settlement and switch the focus to Karen's multiple candidacies. In contrast to two parties with the same name, if a candidate is listed on more than one candidate list, this is in clear violation of election rules and regulations. According to the election law, the Election Board should then ask the candidate on which list the candidate wish to be listed on (§21,3). However, since none of the candidate lists in question have enough signatures listed and they have not been approved yet, Karen can potentially handle this matter without the interference from the Election Board. She can simply choose not to obtain a final approval. At this point, due to the lack of supporters, Karen and the main organizer of the lists will receive six more days to rectify this minor lack before handing in the lists once more. So Karen can simply choose not to submit the list a second time. With regards to her candidacy for the Stevia Party, this approach will, however, not only have consequences for her own candidacy but for everyone else on this list, as it will be completely rejected. Karen, thus, finds herself in a difficult situation. She cannot be added to Elena's list. She can, however, run for election on a

second Leaf party, if she collects enough signatures within six days. She can also run for the Stevia party together with other fellow politicians, if they collect enough signatures. But she cannot do both.

In the small election office, Elena and Karen continue their heated discussion and Elena is getting louder and louder in her efforts to persuade Karen to withdraw her candidacy for the Leaf Party. We are now only seconds away from the deadline and other potential candidates are still entering the very small office. Helen, therefore, kindly but firmly asks the two candidates to take their quarrel outside and to come up with a solution.

### **Candidate list chaos**

Although this story about the disagreement about a party name between two very passionate politicians is not representative of the many encounters between politicians and election employees during the submission of candidate lists, it illustrates quite well the sense of chaos which characterized the process from the point of view of the election office.

In this situation, the candidate list did seem to work like an ordering tool by means of which the election team could sort out the messiness and decide who could run for election and who could not. The list classified what constituted a political candidate at the election office. From this ethnographic experience, it would be straightforward to narrate a story of how the bureaucratic election office used submitted lists to organize, accept, and reject potential candidates; like a funnel the candidate list weeded out the messiness of a political reality outside the election office.

However, such a narrative of how local chaos is gradually transformed into order, risks treating this particular ordering process as the only or main way to define political candidacy. This leaves out other definitions and other ways of ordering. They become invisible, seen as part of the mess or just as plain wrong. However, while Elena, Karen, their dispute and even their branches filling up the small office space seemed messy to the election employees and me, Elena and Karen, may have experienced the encounter in an entirely different way. When, Elena insisted that her YouTube videos evidence her eligibility as a political candidate, and that this made evident that she was the true representative of the

*real* Leaf Party, this hints at the co-existence of a different understanding of political candidacy than the one offered by the point of view of the election office by means of the candidate lists; As Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star points out, there is no such thing as a natural or universal classification system and, thus, what appear eloquent and commonsensical in one setting may appear forced in others (Bowker and Star 2000). Order to one person can be mess to another. The politicians understanding of candidacy was not primarily based on names, numbers and signatures entered into textboxes in a template. Which is why the process of enacting candidates in terms of filled and filed paper lists, as the election office did, may, have appeared equally strange or chaotic to Elena. One cannot, of course, say that the modes of ordering necessarily mirror each other, but one might even say that the vocabulary of classification on the candidate list does not necessarily appear as order or as the primary order to candidates. In another instance, a candidate called the election office and asked whether or not he should write all the information on the candidate lists in capital letters just to make sure that they could read it and approve his candidacy. This illustrates the extent to which potential candidates struggled with finding the right vocabulary, the right arguments and the right register in order to be heard.

The story of Karen and Elena's battle for candidacy, thus, challenges a commonsensical understanding of the ordering process at the election office. The origins of messiness and order it seems is in the eye of the beholder, and the very particular classification of some political candidates and their conduct as messy is by no means natural. The emergence of order and mess is related to very particular tools and practices in the election office, and messiness does not preexist in some reality outside the office. Instead, it emerges in the meeting between potential candidates, the election team and the candidate list template. In the following sections, I will, therefore, unfold and explore more of the work it takes to make up candidates via different and interrelated ordering processes.

### **Ordering practices**

As mentioned, candidate lists are paper lists based on a template provided by the municipality and approved by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior (see fig 4.1). Political parties must fill out the candidates' names, addresses, and

social security numbers as well as the signatures, names and social security numbers (SSN's) of at least 150 supporters. The format of the list and the deadlines for when it must be submitted are heavily regulated by the Election Law. Times and dates for distribution, submission, and correction of errors are therefore specified in the law and identical in every municipality in Denmark; the deadline for submission is four weeks before the election, in this case October 22<sup>th</sup> 2013, and the deadline for correcting errors occurs six days later, October 28<sup>th</sup> 2013. Through this nation-wide distribution of candidate list templates, what one candidate is (a name, address, signature), how many candidates a party can consist of (no more than four more than the total number of council seats) or how a citizen can support a party (by providing name, SSN and signature on the list) are standardized and harmonized. Governmental classification and legal protocols of political candidates are, thus, inscribed into the material artifact, the candidate list. The candidate list template furthermore prescribes a series of bureaucratic conditional actions and responses: for example, they need to check that all the names are written correctly, check that the party has enough signatures, and if not, they must either offer the candidate six days to correct the list or reject it.

As should be clear from the above, seeing the submission process as a set of standardized responses to a nationwide ordering processes proposed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, and anchored in law does actually not do analytic justice to the process. At one point, Helen told me that the election law only covers 90% of inquiries and incidents involving the candidate lists. Not only does the election office, then, need to consider these last 10% very carefully. They also have, according to Helen, to provide an overall direction, so that every candidate knows what to expect – and not only those who fall into the 10% group of exceptions. Focusing on only *one*, the main standardized ordering practice at the election office is thus also in this regard insufficient. In their book *Complexities* (2002b), Law and Mol explicitly emphasize that lists do not necessarily impose a single mode of ordering. Lists, they argue, may be the result of the work of many different people, who have each added something to it, a list may differ from classification in that it recognizes its own incompleteness and it can be (it is certainly not always) non-hierarchical (Law and Mol 2002b:14).

KOMMUNALBESTYRELSESVALG
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Udfyldes af valgbestyrelsen:

Modtaget den \_\_\_\_\_ kl. \_\_\_\_\_ Bogstavbetegnelse: \_\_\_\_\_

På valgbestyrelsens vegne: \_\_\_\_\_ Listebetegnelse: \_\_\_\_\_

(underskrift)

## Kandidatliste

ved

valget af medlemmer til kommunalbestyrelsen for \_\_\_\_\_ Kommune

1. Vi underskrevne vælgere i \_\_\_\_\_ Kommune anmelder herved som stillere omstændige kandidatliste til valget den \_\_\_\_\_ november \_\_\_\_\_ med følgende listebetegnelse: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Vi oplyser, at kandidaterne er opstillet sideordnet. \_\_\_\_\_ (Det ikke gældende skal overstreges)  
Vi oplyser, at kandidaterne er opstillet i en bestemt rækkefølge (partiliste).

3. Vi anmoder om, at kandidatlisten tildeles samme bogstavbetegnelse som andre kandidatlistes, der anmeldes under ovennævnte listebetegnelse. (Anmodningen overstreges, hvis der ikke ønskes fælles bogstavbetegnelse).

4. Vi anmoder om, at der på stemmesedlerne anføres en betegnelse for de enkelte kandidaters bopæl. (Anmodningen overstreges, hvis betegnelse for bopæl ikke ønskes anført på stemmesedlerne).

5. Vi bemyndiger nedennævnte stiller(e) og/eller kandidat(er) til at anmelde listeforbund og/eller valgforbund. (Bemyndigelsen overstreges, hvis der ikke ønskes meddelt bemyndigelse).

Bemyndigelsen gælder de bemyndigede hver for sig. (Overstreges, hvis bemyndigelsen gælder de bemyndigede i forening).

6. Vi bemyndiger endvidere denne/disse stiller(e) og/eller kandidat(er) til at give meddelelse om tilbagetrækning fra et anmeldt listeforbund eller valgforbund. (Bemyndigelsen overstreges, hvis der ikke ønskes meddelt bemyndigelse).

Bemyndiget stiller(e)s og/eller kandidat(er)s navn(e):

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Vi bemyndiger følgende forening og/eller vælger(e) i kommunen til at ansøge om og modtage tilskud på kandidatlistens vegne efter lov om økonomisk støtte til politiske partier m.v. (Overstreges, hvis der ikke ønskes givet en bemyndigelse).

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
(Navn på forening eller vælger, der er berettiget til at ansøge om og modtage tilskud på kandidatlistens vegne) (Navn på forening eller vælger, der er berettiget til at ansøge om og modtage tilskud på kandidatlistens vegne)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Adresse, telefon og/eller mobiltelefon og evt. e-post)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Adresse, telefon og/eller mobiltelefon og evt. e-post)

8. Henvendelse om kandidatliste kan rettes til følgende stiller eller kandidat (kontaktperson):

\_\_\_\_\_ (Navn) \_\_\_\_\_ (Adresse) \_\_\_\_\_ (Telefon)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Mobiltelefon) \_\_\_\_\_ (Telefax) \_\_\_\_\_ (E-post)

Godkendt af Økonomi- og Indenrigsministeriet 2013

Fig. 4.1 Candidate List template (first page)

In contrast to the lists that Mol and Law discuss, the candidate list is not quite so flexible. Things cannot just be added at any given time, no matter whether they are deemed important. But the candidate lists are indeed an exercise in grouping together different people without taming them, as the story I told about Elena in the above makes evident. The following two ethnographic vignettes will show how the candidate list submission process is open to surprise and that the lists can prompt two very different responses to ‘the same’ problem. This, I propose, opens up for the possibility to see the alternative orderings happening at the election office – one based primarily on experience or prior knowledge, negotiation and discretion rather than standards.

*Moving on thin ice*

“It is almost impossible to declare that it is valid.” Ida, an election office employee, waves a piece of paper in the air to draw attention to the artifact in question. “I completely agree. Maybe Kevin still believes he is running for election. Or maybe he or another person has withdrawn his candidacy during or after collecting signatures?” Marie, the head of the election office asks. After a long day working with potential candidates, Marie and Ida discuss a problematic piece of paper: the list of candidates for the Welfare Party. On the list, the name of candidate Kevin Olsen has been crossed out and the question is now, firstly, whether Kevin Olsen is actually running for election, and, secondly, whether the list is now invalid. “When we do not just deem this list invalid we are moving on thin ice,” Ida argues. Marie asks her if candidate lists are publicly available. “They are. Everything will be publicly accessible beside the four last digits of the social security number“, Ida explains. Marie consequently calls for a further investigation into what has happened to this list and why Kevin’s name is crossed out; “We need to call Arnold and then we should also talk to Kevin”.

When Arnold Hansen, the top candidate for The Welfare Party and responsible for their list, submitted it for approval just before the first deadline, Kevin Olsen’s name had already been crossed. According to the Election Law this is a major error and such a list cannot be approved, undone or corrected. The list ought to be rejected and another one handed in at the election office before the second deadline six days later. Helen explained to me that the purpose of this rule

is to protect supporters. They need to know who they support when they offer their signature. If a political party hand in a list where the name of a candidate has been crossed out, the election office cannot know if the name has been deleted before, during or after the collection of signatures. Consequently, the election office cannot be sure whether supporters has signed the list before or after it was changed and thus precisely which candidates they supported with their signature.

To deal with this problem Ida took an extra look at the specification of the Election Law. More importantly, she also conferred with some paperwork including candidate lists from previous elections stored on a small red shelf in the middle of the election office. With the help of Carsten, an older employee with an overview of these documents, she quickly found the candidate lists from previous elections in 2009 and 2011. On several of these lists names of candidates had been crossed out, so after a quick glance Ida noted, that “previously we have not been that consistent regarding this issue”. This was followed by a long discussion with Marie and a phone call to Arnold to verify Kevin’s withdrawal from the list. Ida decided in the end to accept the candidate list from The Welfare Party including Kevin Olsen’s withdrawal. Soon after this decision I asked Ida why they decided to do this, despite the obvious error in conflict with law. She explained that they must be consistent in their work. If, in the previous elections, they had accepted candidate lists with crossed out names, they could not start rejecting lists at this election for that same reason. That would make it difficult for returning candidates to recognize the candidate list practices, she said. Instead, she noted, they would try to change this practice in the future and communicate this change clearly to the political parties.

#### *The swift add-on*

On the final day of the initial submission of candidate lists a young man rushed into the office an hour before the deadline. He carried a candidate list complete with names and signatures from three candidates and over 150 supporters for his party, The Eco Party. Despite the many signatures and the detailed information about candidates, the list had one important and very visible flaw, which Ida quickly noticed. On the first page of the list a cross was missing supposed to indicate how potential seats in the municipal council would be distributed

internally between the three candidates in case they were elected. When made aware of this the young candidate-in-the-making swiftly found a pen and drew the cross. This adjustment to the list, made right in front of Ida and Marie in the last minute, is, however, not legal, and in this case it was not accepted by Ida and Marie, for the same reason mentioned in the case of Kevin Olsen above. The supporters also need to know how the party they support will distribute potential seats in the municipal council before they sign. Therefore Ida and Marie rejected The Eco Party candidate list and sent them into the streets to collect 150 new signatures on a new and correctly filled out list. This happened only a few days before the second deadline. Interestingly, later that day Marie remarked that a former election employee had actually accepted a last minute correction of this kind to the list during the last election. Ida, however, commented that, “just because a mistake was made four years ago, we cannot accept the same illegal actions now”. To Ida, the swift addition of a cross right in front of her was simply too evident a violation of the election law to let it pass by.

### **Confined concerns**

How can two so similar cases prompt so different or even opposite responses? Perhaps, I suggest, this has something to do with different registers of ordering co-existing at the election office. In the first story about The Welfare Party, the braiding of past and present experiences with the candidate lists could be described as an eager attempt to “correct the lack of linearity”(Walford 2013b) in electoral practices. Ida’s check of old candidate lists and her insistence on carrying on with practices from a previous election can be seen as an effort to create continuity in the relationship between past and present electoral practices, and also reliability, especially in the eyes of prospective candidates. This observation echoes Antonia Walford’s descriptions of how micrometeorologists in the Brazilian Amazon bridge between the past and the present through calibrating their instruments. To calibrate an instrument, a set of stable, verified, and known measurements is used to ensure its accuracy and trustworthiness. This is how, Walford argues, predictability is maintained, rather than taken for granted (ibid). I suggest analogously that the election team creates a link between past and present practices is created by investigating traces of the former in the present. Or

put differently, past practices are used as a steady measurement against which the election team's new practices are assessed.

In the second story, a way to understand my interlocutors' practices is to view the standardization by the ministry as resource to current practices, as the rejection of the candidate list from the Eco Party emerges in relation to established legal rules. In this sense, the rejection creates the calculability and predictability highlighted by Weber as a classic bureaucratic ideal (Weber 1978:956ff). What is interesting here, is that the first story of Kevin Olsen's candidacy, although it does not strictly apply given regulations, also generates its own form of bureaucratic predictability; one based on consistency in how issues with candidate lists are handled from election to election. Here, the future is made manageable when the election office affirms old judgments by following their lead. Bureaucratic predictability is, thus, not a fixed practice or concept at the election office, and what seems like a consistent response within one mode of ordering may seem inconsistent within another.

Thus, despite two so seemingly different modes, I do not wish to portray one as more or less "rational" than the other. Instead they each "carve out a different ideal world" (Berg and Timmermans 2000) and what constitutes the yardstick against which election office responses are assessed in each world differs. In the one case a local yardstick is used versus a national standard of law in the other. In a rather peculiar way, however, the different ordering practices do not seem mutually exclusive in the election office. Instead these are heavily entangled, negotiated and weighed against each other. For it could also be considered *comme il faut* or even a general norm in this bureaucracy to be consistent in casework over time. As such, the election team in both cases weighed legal concerns against the importance of continuity in their own bureaucratic practices. While they found that the need for continuity was more important in the first case, after investigating the circumstances of the deleted candidate name, the obvious violation of the election law in plain sight in the latter case could not be ignored in the name of continuity.

The two candidate list vignettes demonstrate how tensions between different bureaucratic concerns arose during candidate list submission, and how the election team found themselves in situations where new submissions

challenged their standard responses. This happened quite often, as stated in 10% of the cases. But although the particular cases reconstituted and stretched the different registers of reasoning in new ways, the candidate list-mediated decisions were still generated, I suggest, in relation to what were perceived as bureaucratic roles and practices. For instance, the handling of Elena's Leaf party shows how Ida from the election office had a clear sense of which concerns mattered during the submission process and which did not. When Elena and Karen discussed loudly the coinciding party names, Ida kindly but firmly asked them to continue the discussion outside. This is an example of how the bureaucrats at the election office make cuts between what is political and what is not, as I explored in more detail in chapter two. Elena and Karen's quarrel was deemed a political matter that should be dealt with separately from the candidate list submission itself. In another instance, the candidate from the Eco Party, who had his list rejected, tried to convince Ida about his eligibility as a political candidate anyhow by showing her pictures on his phone from his participation in the United Nations Climate Change Conference a few years earlier. Ida explained to him that the rejection of his candidate list was not at all due to doubt in his political engagement. Her concern was the candidate list, and late added cross, and nothing else.

In responding to the political candidates, the election team drew on many different resources, but the politics that the candidates represent was not one of them. Instead, a notion of bureaucratic predictability – whether that was in terms of concerns for the law or for past practices – seemed to be a commonality. While the notion of predictability is never stable and it is negotiated as I have described, in terms of concerns for the law or for past practices, the election team, I suggest, relied on this notion to legitimize their actions. Predictability was, thus, the bureaucratic concept my interlocutors continuously referred to in order to legitimize seemingly contradictory actions. But, and this is important, the principle of predictability was not separate from and applied to the different submission practices in the election office. As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, Mol and Berg point out that principles, scientific, medical democratic or bureaucratic, are practically produced (Mol and Berg 1994). Thus, while accepting or rejecting each and every submitted candidate list, the election office team in a very practical manner produced their bureaucratic and indeed

heterogeneous predictability. What is interesting, here, is that these two practices of predictability explored above are not irreconcilable at the election office. Indeed, they co-exist and, I argue, could be seen as generative for making the future candidate list manageable. To sum up, the ordering processes at the election office suggest paradoxically that the election team simultaneously legitimize their response to the candidate list submission on heterogeneous yet co-existing principles of predictability while reworking these as new lists were submitted. Analytically, the submission practices thus touch upon the classic debate on the relationship between continuity and change within anthropology (Seymour-Smith 1986:35ff). What is striking with the case of the submission process in this regard is that continuity or change of ordering practices are not mutually exclusive and it is, thus, difficult and not necessarily feasible to distinguish between those two a priori. Instead, and this leads us back to John Law's modes of ordering, continuation and negotiation of past hand-in practices are growing out of the nitty-gritty ordering processes at the election office.

### **From lists to candidacy**

Thus far, I have explored how candidate lists are first checked. This initially happens during the submission process, when some candidate lists end up with a stamp of approval. This approval does not, however, mean that the candidates are ready to run for election. One more round of approval is still needed and this time the approval is done in front of a computer at the main election office.

The second verification process requires a lot of work on behalf of the election employees on their computers in an election system based on CICS<sup>3</sup> or the 'black screen'<sup>4</sup>, as election office employee Carsten prefers to call it. In this system, the election team checks data provided by the candidate lists on both candidates and supporters. Carsten's nickname for the system, the 'black screen', is quite fitting, as the interface to the computer program is indeed a black screen with some simple white boxes and words. The election system CICS was

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<sup>3</sup> Customer Information Control System

<sup>4</sup> "Sort skærm"

developed by KMD<sup>5</sup> more than 15 years ago and due to the outdated ‘appearance, in 2013 KMD had started to develop a new so-called “skin” to update the visuals of the program. Carsten, however, told me during a talk about the system, that he actually liked the system’s old appearances and also its functionalities. In using the system, you have to follow a particular route and visit particular pages in a certain order, like pearls on string. You cannot just jump between different phases. According to Carsten, this prevents you from making any mistakes when entering the candidate list data. Despite Carsten’s appraisal of the old system, I was not quite convinced about its usability when I was first introduced to it. The ‘black screen’ was so alien to me that I required numerous descriptions of how to use it to check candidate lists until I reached a very basic understanding of how the system processed information. Fortunately, Carsten had time to slowly show me the different hotkeys and numbers used to navigate the system. On several occasions I followed his work checking candidate lists in CICS. I therefore gradually got somewhat of an understanding of the ‘black screen’. When the deadline for submitting candidate lists came closer, and the temporary office delivered more lists, I felt somewhat comfortable with helping out a student worker in *his* first shot at using CICS. Our shaky effort to enter candidate list data in front of the ‘black screen’ will now serve as an introduction to how candidates are checked for a second time, a process which is necessary for them to become actual candidates for the election.

#### *Checking the candidate list – translating the data*

Michael, my coworker for the day, had just received a candidate list from the Danish Social Democrats. On the ‘black screen’ (see fig. 4.2) he entered;

```
3
a110
x (next to the xxx party)
```

These three commands let him into a candidate list template at which he could enter the SSNs of the list’s candidates.

---

<sup>5</sup> KMD (previously *Kommunedata*) is the one of the largest Danish IT companies. It has specialized in IT solutions to the Danish public sector and was until 2009 owned by the municipalities and KL (*Kommunernes Landsforening*). Due to its close relationship with the municipalities, issues with monopoly on the public IT market is often discussed in Denmark (cf. Kildebogaard 2012; Kristensen 2015).

O

<enter>

240660-2484

<enter>

The name Marie Lillian Jensen popped up next to the SSN. CICS was linked to the Danish social security register and automatically filled out the SSN holder's first and last names. These names did, however, not match the name, Marie Lillian, on the paper list. The candidate did, apparently, not wish for her last name to appear on the ballot and Michael therefore deleted it.

R

<delete Jensen>

Next up was her occupation. According to the paper list, Marie Lillian was a 'special advisor in the UN', but this field in CICS could only contain 12 characters, so Michael wrote 'advisor'. "It just has to make sense", Carsten told us, when we asked him if there was any rules guiding how to abbreviate in this way. With the job title settled, Michael was done typing the first candidate in CICS, and he continued with the remaining 15.

```

.....
: Folketingsvalg          Kandidater          10.02.04 13:55 6KNT 1018 :
:
: Miljø: Prøve 6          Fase: Forberedelse      018 Roskilde Statsamt    :
:
: Parti . . . . F Socialistisk Folkeparti      Sideordnet              :
:
:                                     Mere: > :
:
: F Nr.  Personnr.  Navn          Stilling          Bem. :
:
: X 001 251248-4916 Nancy Ann Berggren  Afd.Sygeplejerske      :
: _ 002 150222-2747 Morten Bastrup      Logerende               :
: _ 003 010772-4869 Max Berggren          Stud polyt              :
: _ 004 150277-4855 Ruddi Berggren       Livredder               :
: _ 005 150631-2791 Palle Ritter         Cykelrytter            :
: _ 006 150967-4872 Lone Maja Hansen     Husalf                  :
: _ 007 250947-4829 Bruno Elmer Berggren  El-installatør         :
:
: _ _____ :
:
: _ _____ :
:
: _ _____ :
:
: F1=Hjælp F3=Afslut F5=Opfrisk F6=Udskriv F7=Tilb F8=Frem F11=Godkend :
: F12=Annuller F20=Højre(Opstillingskreds) :
:.....

```

Fig 4.2. Screenshot CICS (sample provided by KMD, information is fictional)

When we reached candidate number 12, Dragan Vukovic, and Michael entered his SSN, a four-digit code – 5438 – appeared on the screen next to the candidate’s name. Michael pressed the information button, F1, to find out what the code referred to, but we did not find any information about what this meant, other than that we needed pay attention to this candidate. Michael therefore put a little red mark next to the candidate name on the paper template and we continued with the last candidates. After we finished processing the fifteen candidates, Michael entered F17 and we were now ready to type the names of supporters who had signed the Danish Social Democrat’s candidate list into CICS.

<SHIFT-F5>

<enter>

130687-0213

<enter>

Christian Nielsen, Ryhaven 7, 2300 Copenhagen S, appeared in CICS. This information corresponded to the paper list. Michael made sure that the supporter had signed the candidate list, before entering the next supporter. This time, however, it was quite difficult to read the name of the supporter and the SSN was even worse. Michael tried to enter in 041067-4598, but CICS did not find a match. As it was nearly impossible to see if the supporter’s SSN ended with an 8 or a 4, I suggested trying the other. But this didn’t work either. Michael switched out the first 4 in SSN with an 8 and entered 081067-4598 and a name, Lisbet Andersen, Nørregade 12, 2200 Copenhagen N, finally appeared.

It happened often that either names or SSNs were impossible to read on the candidate list. The politicians collected most of the signatures on street corners, at shopping malls, or by knocking doors in their neighborhood. The paper lists were therefore often in a bad condition when submitted. They smelled of cigarettes if the candidate had been smoking, some were stained by coffee, others with mud. The lists have been out there in the world and it really showed. Furthermore, when supporters signed candidate lists, they may be in a hurry, they may be standing outside in the cold October weather or they might not have had a proper surface to support when filling out the form, which often resulted in unintelligible handwriting. At the election office, the employees, as a consequence, must often guess numbers and names, and here the employees went

to great lengths to decipher numbers, try out different combinations system etc. until they got it right and could identify a supporter.

When Michael finally finished checking Lisbet Andersen in CICS, this was only the second of about 160 supporters on this particular list. You find 25 supporters on each page and the Danish Social Democrats has filled out over six pages. So Michael continued. As he reached supporter number 107, the system froze. Following instructions from Carsten, Michal hit the red button in the right corner of the screen, the system closed, and we started over. The last seven supporters have not been saved, so Michael started with candidate number 80 and continued still checking if the data on the list of paper corresponded to the data in CICS. The programme froze from time to time, but Michael just quickly closed it and reentered the deleted data. With in a couple of hours he was done typing all the supporters in CICS and it was now time to take stock of the numbers. Supporters may not be eligible to support a party for various reasons, such as having residency outside the municipality, they might not be eligible to vote, or as we saw in the previous examples, they might have offered their support to more than one party. These are marked with a code and will not count. Subtracting such incidents, the Danish Social Democrats now has 139 eligible supporters. This is not enough to approve the candidate list, and the political party will now need to collect additional signatures. Michael stuck a post-it note with the number of approved candidates and his initials to the candidate list and put the list in a box labeled “too few supporters”. The election team would call the Danish Social Democrats later that day to notify them about this, so the party could pick up the list and collect additional signatures from supporters before the second deadline six days later.

Although this apparently seems like just a banal and mundane task, typing and checking the candidate lists in CICS is important. This work translates the messy and dirty information on the paper lists into verified data that can later be used to print the ballot. Information on the paper lists, collected on the streets of Copenhagen is compared to data and in pre-defined rows and columns in CICS. Deviation is investigated and either it is corrected so that it fit the rows and columns in the system or it is marked as an error to be investigated further. This is to make sure that the output – the information about candidates from the lists on

the final ballot – is comparable on Election Day. The translation of candidate lists information into a ballot via the CICS system is a crucial step in the process of composing political candidacy, and in the following, I explore in further detail this translation process.

### **Reversibility and irreversibility of candidacy**

Identifying errors, or data that does not fit the boxes in CICS in one way or the other, is an important step in the process of translating the candidate lists into political candidates. This does not mean, however, that information that is considered erroneous is simply discarded. On the contrary, the election team goes to great lengths to convert dubious data into information on candidates in CICS. So when Michael and I showed Carsten the little red mark next to candidate number 12, Dragan Vukovic, and told him about error code 5438, he immediately started to investigate further.

Carsten told me that despite nearly 40 years in the election office and nearly just as many working with CICS, he had never seen this code before, which was why further investigation was necessary. Carsten printed the candidate data in CICS and also Dragan Vukovic's data from the Danish social security register. He hoped that comparing the print-outs would offer him clues as to why an error code was triggered. According to the register, Dragan Vukovic has lived in Denmark since 2006 but he still holds Serbian citizenship. This should not, however, prevent him from running for the election. You do not need Danish citizenship to run for the municipal election, Carsten explained. You just have to fulfill the residency requirements, which means that you must have lived in Denmark for at least three years prior to Election Day. Carsten double checked this rule in the election guidelines and took a second look at the two print outs, but he did not find anything on the print-outs that would prevent Dragan Vukovic from running for election. In that same moment, Carsten suddenly realized that code 5438 was not an error code at all. It is a Serbian country code taken from the social security register. CICS does apparently not distinguish error codes from other codes such as a country code in the layout. The result of this little investigation of uncertain data, the candidate from the Danish Social Democrats was cleared. His name remained in CICS and he could now run for the election.

Errors, however, do not always emerge from uncertainty. They are, just as often, the effect of very certain circumstances, namely so-called double support, which is illegal as discussed above. Copenhagen citizens seem to be unaware of this rule or they do not put much thought into what it means to officially support a political party, when they are approached at—for instance—their local supermarket. In any case, double support occurred quite frequently. When a supporter appeared on more than one list, error code 4637 appeared, and consequently the supporter's name was discarded from both lists. So besides being checked against external national registers, the candidate lists is also compared to data about other candidate lists, which have previously been entered into CICS.

What caught my attention during in this process was that the election team had developed what Carsten referred to as a “bullet proof system” to check and re-check the candidate lists. If a supporter had signed more than one candidate list, it was necessary not just to erase the supporter name from the current lists, but also from the lists, which had already been checked. In order to catch instances of double support and more generally to recheck the list to make sure that all the candidate names are spelled correctly and the number of supporters are up to date, the election team had developed a rechecking system which consisted of a row of cardboard boxes. The first box was for candidate lists with minor flaws, mostly those listing too few supporters. In this case, the election team would need to call the party in question and tell them to fix the problem. After this call had been made, the list would be placed in another box labeled “dialed”, where it would sit until the political party picked up the list for collecting more signatures. A third box was for candidate lists that have been checked once, without any problems, while the last box is for the candidate lists that was checked by both Carsten, Ida and Helen. Using this system of boxes the election team managed to recheck the data in CICS at least three times, updating the current number of supporters for each party each time. I find it very interesting in relation to the theme of this chapter how these boxes organize a continual correspondence with politicians. After the initial and rather chaotic submission of lists, explored in the first part of this chapter, the election team still tried to resolve errors by communicating with political candidates. They called them if they had questions about the lists, and candidates with too few supporters were

offered the opportunity to collect more names. At this point of the submission process it was, thus, still possible to reverse a pending rejection until the final deadline six days later.

These six days of possible reversibility did not only apply to the candidate lists with an insufficient number of supporters. It involved all candidate lists, since no list could be approved in CICS as long as there were still new lists handed in with potential overlaps. To deal with these possible overlaps, the election team at one point asked a party with 153 registered supporters in CICS which was only three more than the minimum of 150, to provide a few more, so that they could be sure to make the cut. In addition, several employees started talking about a need to approve at least some of the candidate lists right after the first submission deadline. “We simply have to make a cut at some point”, Helen told me on Thursday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2 days after the deadline, “we cannot wait anymore”.

The hurry Helen felt herself to be in arose because of a meeting the following Monday, the final deadline for submission. Here, the election team had to present the final list of party names and candidates to the Election Board. The Board would then provide the lists with a final stamp of approval. Before this meeting, every list had to be rechecked and proofread by Carsten, Ida and Marie. The hurry, however, also partly stemmed from the hope that the lists originally handed in with no deficiencies would be accepted quickly. These lists should, according to Helen, not be held accountable for duplicated supporters across lists. Thus, if candidates in efforts to lengthen their list before the second deadline recruit new supporters who already appear on lists handed in with no deficiencies at the first deadline, the supporters should not be deleted from this first list as would normally be the case with duplicates. So while the election office goes to great lengths to ensure a recursive approval process, they are also somewhat restless until the final approval. On Friday the 25<sup>th</sup>, Carsten told me that Marie, the head of the election office, had decided to start approving candidates. They would “finally press ‘approve’” (*endelig trykker godkend*) in CICS as Carsten described it. Six to seven lists might still at this point be handed in. But if new issues of double support were to occur later, they “would need to deal with it at that point”,

Marie explained. For now, they started re-checking and approving lists and did not finish until 10 pm in the evening.

The following Monday, only one more political candidate handed in his final list at 10.48, and at 12 o'clock the election team let out a sigh of relief. The candidate lists submission process had come to an end and all the chaotic encounters and a long night of proofreading had, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, now resulted in 32 approved candidate lists with 269 candidates in total. These were now ready for final approval by the Election Board, which according to Helen, was more or less "pro forma". While this second process of approval in CICS took place in the secluded main election office at a distance from complex encounters with politicians, the process of checking and approving candidates also entailed continuously bringing the politicians back in. It was a process of maintaining reversibility up until a certain point, when the concern for proper checking and proofreading made further recursive loops unnecessary.

The processes I have sketched out in the above, resonate with Latour's opening portrait of science in *Science in Action* (1987) as the two-faced Janus. Latour portrays science as a something that can both be understood as in the making and on the other hand as science ready-made, but not easily at the same time. On the one hand science is lively and filled with controversies while on the other it is also black-boxed and severe (Latour 1987:4). Like the dynamic making of scientific facts Latour outlines, in the processing of candidate lists into political candidacy they are also negotiated and subjected to different ordering practices: here ordering and messiness are closely entangled. But around noon on Monday, October 28<sup>th</sup> the heterogonous space, the reversibility of candidacy, and its uncertainty ends abruptly. The final list of accepted candidates, generated from the data stored in CICS, is presented to the election board. After their approval the list is ready to be distributed on ballot papers at the polling stations three weeks later. The ballot now represents candidacy ready-made, while the battered, stained candidate lists, from both approved and unapproved parties, are archived in the aforementioned red shelf at the election office. Like Latour's Janus face describes two sides of the same coin, it is hard to keep both versions of the candidate list in view simultaneously. On the one hand, the deletion of the messy production of the list is what allows for one clear reality of political candidacy to be presented to

voters on the ballot on Election Day. On the other hand, the process of entering data into CICS, I suggest, disentangles political candidacy from the heterogeneous, messy and controversial world I witnessed in the election office. By sorting names and numbers in columns and rows, and by sorting the lists into those containing errors and those with approved candidates, etc. CICS slowly creates a political candidacy that does not correspond to or represent the political spectacle witnessed during the submission. Instead, it carries with it its own political reality; a clearly defined number of named political candidates up for election.

### **An ambivalent companionship**

In this chapter, I have argued that a ballot does not simply emerge from an external political mess, which is then ordered. Rather, order and mess co-emerge. Firstly I have demonstrated this co-emergence using the case of Elena and Karen's dispute, and secondly through the series of errors that fall outside prescribed rows and columns in CICS. My argument is that political candidacy materializes from a practically produced and continuously emerging distinction between accepted candidates and the production of mess and errors. But I wish to put forward a further aspect of ordering argument. In the final part of the chapter, I suggest that not only do the different orderings produce political mess; the orderings crucially depend on it. They invite the messiness in to negotiations between different ordering practices. I have already touched upon this above, in my discussion of the reversibility of the supporters' signatures. Here the election team goes to great lengths to bring the candidates back in and let them repair their lists. Furthermore, they negotiate bureaucratic predictability to ensure consistency, so that no candidates are rejected on the basis of actions, which has been previously allowed.

Marc Berg and Stefan Timmermans illustrate the relationship between emerging orders and messiness in the context of medical resuscitation practices and decision analysis. They write:

Every order necessarily envelops the disorder it has brought into being. It invariably contains its Other – both in its history, and in its everyday operation. It does not know a pure state; even the ideal-typed logics in the writings of their advocates twist and

swirl in the attempt to deal with the impossibility of their own purity.

(Berg and Timmermans 2000:51)

Berg and Timmermans argue that the contingency, the politics, and the context that is related to the emergence of a particular entity or order, will remain at its core. Disorder in their case is not a temporary imperfection that is slowly erased; it is a necessity. Similarly in my case, disorder in encounters with political candidates during the submission of lists was related to ordering practices emerging negotiations between legal matters and concerns for past procedures. Acts to create bureaucratic predictability hinged upon guessing and helping candidates convert errors into cases to support real candidacies. But at no point were the election team's workings with political candidacy completely distanced from political messiness. On the contrary, the election team invited the political mess in, and they also went to great lengths to make sure that these encounters would take place. I realised this at a two-hour meeting in September, during which the decision was taken about where candidates should hand in their lists. The fieldnotes, which I review below, are exemplary of the way the election team invited in the political mess.

This meeting in the middle of September was a regular Friday election meeting at the office. We were eating breakfast together while presenting the status of current work tasks, issues and so on. Normally we did not spend more than an hour on these meetings, but on this day the meeting was nearly two hours due to the discussion of one particular topic: the location of the election office during candidate list submission. The election team had recently moved to a new office building in Copenhagen. The building lies at a remove from the street and can only be accessed through a small wooden door. The only indication that this is a municipality building is a small sign next to the door which reads "Back Office". This is fitting, since the building hosts municipal departments with little daily contact to citizens, including the election team. But the hand-in of candidate lists would entail direct contact with politicians and other guests, so for these purposes, "sitting in a backyard is not particular clever", as Ida noted during the meeting. She commented further on the building: "It is like Fort Knox here. It is impossible to find". Prior to the meeting, one candidate had already been directed to a wrong location and had to find his own way to the back office to collect a

candidate list template. “This is just not great service”, Carsten noticed. During the meeting, the team therefore discussed where to locate themselves. The election office on the fifth floor did not offer citizens direct access and was not deemed appropriate. They considered several alternatives. One obvious location could be the town hall. Copenhagen citizens associate the municipality with the town hall, Marie argued and much confusion of where to submit a candidate list would be avoided if they picked this location. The town hall, however, is located a fifteen minutes walk from the election office building, and choosing that location would thus entail splitting the election team up into two groups. Furthermore, it would complicate the loop between checking candidates in CICS and returning lists to parties. With a few other possible locations on the table, Marie started writing the different pros and cons on their whiteboard. One of the other locations was the first floor of the back office. Here candidates would be able to access directly from the street, if the door could remain unlocked, that is, and it would still be possible for the election employees to cooperate with only three floors separating them. But then again, Ida noted, the back office is still a quite neutral building that might be difficult for candidates to spot.

The discussion went on like this for the next hour, and they did not reach any clear decision. A newly employed member of the team and I were looking at each other in astonishment. Why was it so important to decide on a new and suitable location for the submission? Are politicians not capable of following directions and finding a Copenhagen backyard? What I didn't realize at this point was that the discussion of location was not a simple discussion about easy access. It was rather an extreme version of this. The election office wanted to make sure that everybody who wanted to hand in a candidate list could do so even if they lacked a basic sense of direction. One candidate getting lost and thus not being able to hand in a list in time would be one to many. It would be a democratic problem. Everybody can run for the municipal election (if they are eligible to vote) and the election team wanted to remove even the smallest practical obstacles for this. When they finally settled on setting up a temporary office on the first floor, they also created a large paper sign and taped it to the front door, so that the location of the office would be very visible from the outside.

Although this meeting about a very practical matter seemed unnecessarily time-consuming to me at the time, it illustrates a very central part of the candidate list submission process; messiness is welcomed at the election office. By going to lengths to secure easy access, moving their office down-stairs and separating the team during hand in, they reproduce a very inclusive notion of equality, where everybody can run for election.

So when Berg and Timmermans propose that disorders are necessities for an order to thrive, this seems, indeed, also to be the case at the election office. Not only does the candidate list submission process produce notions of equality, the election team seems dependent upon political mess to create democratic ballots. For this reason I have also refrained from calling the messy encounters disorderly, as Berg and Timmermans suggest. The inclusion of candidates throughout the process is very messy, but the election team would definitely refrain from talking about it as disorderly. If it is anything it is, in their view, a given, democratic necessity they need to work with and ensure – for instance – through making the submission office accessible and through maintaining a constant loop between checking the lists and letting the politicians rectify them. Valorizing inclusion as an ideal is, however, not without complications. As I have shown at the election office the political messiness sometimes disrupts formal procedures, and the tension between the two does not go unnoticed. For instance, at one point Carsten despairingly sighed “democracy” after he had just spent another five minutes trying to decipher a supporter’s social security number without luck and realized that the entire list was unreadable. The tension between bureaucratic orderings and their democratic Other was even more evident when Ida made a comment after a group of candidates had just handed in their list. During the hand in, the candidates had chattered enthusiastically, Ida recounted to me after they left. They had discussed how they found collecting the many signatures on the streets of Copenhagen to be hard work. When they stated that “we are doing a great job for democracy”, Ida somewhat cynically said to me that “this has nothing to do with democracy. This is employment support for disability pensioners”<sup>6</sup>

Despite this tension between a democratic necessity to include everybody in the process and the formalized practices inscribed in the candidate list and

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<sup>6</sup> ”Beskræftielsehjælp for førtidspensionister”

CICS, the inclusion of candidates were never questioned or countered<sup>7</sup>. It was rather seen as an inevitable given – a part of democracy – that the potential candidates should be invited in and would potentially complicate the election team’s work. But while being continuously invited in, the team also cut away the political mess at certain points in the process, as described above. Thus the complex relationship between order and messiness at the election office seemed to involve a diverse mix of containment, cuts, divisions and absorption, that is not necessary captured within Berg and Timmerman’s ‘envelope’-approach to the relationship between order and messiness, where every order necessarily contains its Other. For now, however, Berg and Timmerman’s study of order and disorder serves as a helpful lens to in a concluding zoom in on the entangled relationship between political mess and bureaucratic ordering.

When voters on Election Day in 2013 were presented with a fixed ballot with 269 names on it, they remained unaware of the hard, complex and messy work behind creating a sense of electoral order for that day only. They remained unaware of the continuous negotiation of bureaucratic concerns for the law or for past practices. They remained unaware of the heated discussions of democratic ideals of inclusion and the constant flickering between reversibility and irreversibility in the submission process. Thus, for a short period of time, a fixed electoral order

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<sup>7</sup> This was, however, questioned in the political arena. At the meeting in the capital regional council after the election in 2013, the high number of candidates on the regional ballot and indeed the messy encounters with several of the same politicians that run for the municipal election in Copenhagen municipality were discussed. While one politician during the meeting emphasised that it is a democratic right to run for election, others recommended increasing the number of supporters in order to make it more difficult for candidates to end up on the ballot. For instance Lars Gaardhoej from the Social Democrats stated that; “maybe we should take a look at how easy it is to run for election. If we want to take each other seriously, I also think you need to be serious, when you run for election” and Kirsten Lee from the Danish-social liberal party added “we need to work on this for the sake of democracy” (Regional council meeting, 22.11.2013). Thus while everybody in theory can run for election (if they are eligible to vote in the municipality or region), in practice the number of supporters needed to run servers as a buffer insofar you will need to put in a bit of cumbersome work collecting the signatures. But maybe the work of collecting signature for the regional election was not cumbersome enough, several politicians hinted. The number of signatures needed was, however, regarded a political discussion and the election office in Copenhagen municipality did not discuss this any further. Rather they saw the high number of candidates handing in lists as part of the current democratic reality.

symbolized by the fixed list of names on ballot paper emerged from the messy, complex and very practical work at the election office. In Law's work on ordering, he suggests that we tend to cleave to a modernist dream of a single and attainable order, and thus treat the kind of complexity I experienced at the election office as distraction or even evidence of failure. But when I look at the various submission processes highlighted in this chapter, the messiness of submission was anything but a preexisting, soon to be excluded, entity or evidence of failure. Instead, political candidacy materialized from a practically produced and continuously emerging distinction between accepted candidates and the production of mess and errors, while at the same time the emerging electoral order was heavily entangled with and dependent on inviting the political mess in. Emphasizing the plural processes of socio-technical ordering at the election office does not only tie the political mess and bureaucratic order together in the nitty-gritty practices at the election office. It is also an attempt to occupy or remake that precarious place "where relations have not been frozen into snapshots of synchronicity" (Law 1994:13): a place where bureaucratic concerns for predictability and democratic ideals of inclusion are still negotiated, emerging and enacted together with the dualisms between orderly candidacy and messy rejected candidates. In this chapter, that place was remade through ethnographic stories from the submission process in the election office. In the next, the complexities of ordering the election result through counting constitute the starting place for the continued discussion of emerging bureaucratic and democratic concerns.



## Chapter 5

# Counting, Cutting, Calculating and Accounting

Big celebrations are often followed by massive hangovers, and Election Day in Copenhagen is no exception. Late in the evening, the rough count had revealed Frank Jensen as the elected mayor, and the media flooded with stories of winners and losers. The following day, while the citizens of Copenhagen were slowly waking up to a new political landscape, the election office, on the other hand, did not have time to linger on the previous day's successes. This was their big day. The time had come for *the fine count*. On this day they would recount all the ballots and – in addition – count the personal votes, and on this day the election office team would not manage these events from an office in a place secluded from the public spectacle as they did on the previous day. Instead they placed themselves in the middle of the fine count and orchestrated the entire count from a plateau overlooking all the large counting tables in the big hall. Their job was, here, to manage and support over 300 elections officials in the fine count so that by the end of the day, each of the 281.821 votes cast would be associated with an individual politician and translated into seats in the municipal council for particular candidates.

Numbers have an unmistakable political power, wrote sociologist Nicolas Rose in *Powers of freedom* (1999). This is probably never clearer than during elections. The election result provides a set of numbers, which turn people into

members of the city council or the parliament. As ballots are sorted and counted, political authority is delegated, and in this sense numbers make people “whose claim to power is justified” (ibid:197). Numbers are political here, not just because they delegate political authority to certain politicians, but also because even the simplest counting comprise choices of how and what to count (ibid:198).

In this final chapter of the thesis my concern is with these choices of how and what to count. I am concerned with the aspects of counting practices that are normally unarticulated, and at first hand appear apolitical. They may look like the simple addition of ballots. But the story is more complex. Throughout the chapter, I will focus on the election team’s efforts to produce an incontestable and trustworthy election result through various ways of counting and calculating. By doing so, I continue the discussion in the previous chapters on how bureaucratic ordering practices manage the uncertain. One of these methods of ordering is what one of my informants referred to as making a “pragmatic decision”. Helen, the municipal employee we meet in the last chapter and now a member of one of the expert teams during the fine count, introduced me to this term during the fine count. As part of the expert team, she was continuously making decisions on whether or not to approve various counts and calculations, and this was not a straightforward task. In one situation it was particularly difficult to figure out how to continue counting as the result for a particular district was ambiguous. In this case Helen commented on her decision telling me that it was pragmatic and maybe “even be a bit too pragmatic”. So how can we interpret the meaning of this comment in relation to the making of numbers, which in the end are supposed to be not just pragmatic but incontestable and precise? Helen’s decision explored below acts as an opening illustration of this chapter’s concern with making the numbers add up and with constructing an indisputable election result.

### **The pragmatic decision**

The fine count took place in a nearly 10.000-m<sup>2</sup> large industrial building on the outskirts of Copenhagen Municipality (see fig. 5.1.). In the past this building had served as a train workshop. Nowadays it serves various purposes, and on this day the building was transformed into a bustling counting central. Side by side, 300 municipal employees counted over a quarter of a million votes.



Fig.5.1. Picture of the fine count

50 large tables were set up on the floor of the building – one table for each polling station. The tables were covered with black plastic, and packed with either white or yellow ballots from the municipal election and the regional election respectively, ballots that were meticulously laid out by municipal officers throughout the day. Ten municipal employees encircled each of the 25 first tables (and shifted to the 25 last when done counting the ballots from the first polling stations to avoid too much waiting time between the shift of polling station ballots). Here, they were counting and bundling votes for 23 hours straight, from 8am this morning to 7am the next morning.

At 4pm and in the middle of this industrial mixture of municipal workers, old rail tracks, tables, ballots and coffee cups the count for the polling station 7. East had come to a halt. Something did not add up. Helen therefore left the central plateau to try to resolve the issue. By the counting table the team leader, Brian, greeted her. He told Helen, that the team had spent nearly eight hours first bundling, then counting 4918 votes. They had checked for invalid votes and if any errors had been made during the rough count on Election Day. Now big stacks of ballots lay side by side on the table. There was one pile for each party and for each one individual candidate. The counting team had already moved onward and started to sort the ballots from a new polling station at a neighbouring table, but the ballots from 7. East were still sitting there, while the team leader, Brian, was waiting anxiously for a final approval.

This was the first time that he served as a leader for a counting team. He really hoped that he had correctly filled out all the spreadsheets provided by the election office to each table before the count. But the approval team did not approve the papers. Brian had not correctly filled out a space in the spreadsheet regarding “intake” and “outtake” of 28 votes. Helen’s task, as the expert was to solve this problem.

The intake/outtake numbers refers to ballots bundled incorrectly during the rough count. The problem with 7. East, was that several votes considered invalid during the rough count, turned out—on closer inspection— to be valid after all. These votes and several other ballots had been misplaced in wrong bundles throughout the day. The counting team had registered the bundles they removed the ballots from, but only registered which party the votes had been added to and not to which individual candidate. The votes had already been added to the appropriate bundles and therefore it was impossible for Helen to identify which individual candidates should be awarded the votes. Together with Brian, she examined for a while the numbers in the spreadsheets, but when she realized that it was impossible to know the individual votes, without doing a complete recount, she made a quick decision. She decided that all the votes in question would be awarded to the political parties in the way that Brian had already registered this. According to Helen, out of the 28 votes in question, no more than six votes would be for a single party and thus the problem was fairly small. It would presumably not affect the outcome of any individual politician’s battle for a seat in the city council. The approval of the distribution of these 28 votes rather than starting a recount of every single vote in 7. East was, according to Helen, a pragmatic decision – and maybe even a bit *too* pragmatic.

### **Counting toward the election result**

Counting is often considered a straightforward and unproblematic task. Simple enumeration of objects is one of the first things we learn in school, and once mastered, the task itself rarely draws attention (Martin and Lynch 2009). It is not difficult to agree with this observation that the ‘countability’ of things, as Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star label it, is often rather uncontroversial. “The current imaginary of most Americans”, they write, “is that everything is, in principle countable” (Bowker and Star 2001:424). The idea of countability however, is not always innocent as it also feeds into a strong tendency to quantify everything which

characterizes the modern state (Porter 1995). As Bowker and Leigh-Star note about citizens: “A good citizen is a citizen who can be well counted – along numerous dimensions, on demand”(Bowker and Star 2001). And the assumption of the Danish electoral system is also that the process described here is open to public scrutiny because most members of this public can count and therefore inspect the procedures.

This imaginary of countability is strong, especially in the case of elections. The existence of an actual and achievable count – “the performance of precision” (Martin and Lynch 2009:260) – is critical to the electoral process in all democratic countries. During the US 2000 election, this imaginary was, however, questioned especially in Florida as mentioned in the introduction, when it was revealed that the counting process in poor, multi-ethnic areas was insufficient due to an outmoded kind of voting equipment, the now infamous punch-card technology. The Florida race was extremely close with a margin of only 537 votes out of almost 6 million cast between Gore and Bush. Comparing these numbers with the U.S Civil rights commissions’ conclusion that out of 180.000 spoiled ballots in Florida, 54 percent was cast by African Americans (U.S Commission on Civil Rights 2001), it is evident that these invalid ballots could have made a great difference for the overall result. But due to among other things out-dated punch-card technologies and highly problematic registration processes in poor, multi-ethnic areas, these districts never got the change to affect the result. They simply did not have the means to generate a reliable count. Counting then is, after all, never just counting. It is intermeshed with politics of exclusion and questions of what gets to count. Acts of recognizing, classifying, and arranging voters and their votes makes up what is counted. In the Florida case, sadly, just because you voted you could not be sure that your vote actually counted.

This is just one reason why numbers and calculative practices have been of interest to ethnographic research (e.g. Neyland 2013) and numerous science and technology studies (e.g. Asdal 2008b; Porter 1995; Verran 2001; Watson 1990) for a long time. Here, STS has highlighted themes like “politics of exclusion” (Bowker and Star 2001), the construction of social/natural order through numbering (Martin and Lynch 2009), the blackboxing of counting practices and technologies – themes that all align with the classical STS focus on the socio-material construction of science. In general terms, the research on numbers has largely been twofold: the interest covers both how numbers are made and follows their performativity: what their effects are

and what do they do. In this chapter I am mostly concerned with the former: I investigate how the election result was produced in the Copenhagen warehouse. Here, Helen's notion of the possibly "too pragmatic" decision described above shows that in Denmark counting practices are also not necessarily as unproblematic, simple, or smooth as commonly imagined, although never nearly as controversial and publicly debated as the Florida case.

Whereas both Martin and Lynch and Bowker and Star discuss the politics of counting in relation to a public and technical controversy of the punch card machines, the Copenhagen election result in 2013 was immensely uncontroversial. It was, however, no less political. All Danish citizens<sup>1</sup> have the right to vote in elections and they are automatically registered to vote. Voting technologies – pen and paper – are nearly identical throughout the country and several initiatives have been taken to ensure that disadvantaged groups also have the possibility to vote<sup>2</sup>. In this sense of who is counted and who is 'discounted' (Neyland 2013) the Danish situation is certainly less problematic than the American case described above. But in this chapter I argue not so much on *what* is actually counted. Rather I focus on *how*. This is a complex and mixed process, which involves checking number, discussing and eventually reaching a decision, and here (too) pragmatic decisions were probably the exception. The main bulk of counting consisted of standardized practices of classifying, arranging, and calculating. But as will be evident in the following, these practices were not ambiguous. In practice the distinction between quantitative counting and qualitative categorical judgment of votes became blurred, as counting

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<sup>1</sup> In most cases, citizens aged 18 and above holding Danish citizenship and living in the country has the right to vote. For citizens under guardianship or citizens not residing in Denmark, special rules apply. At the regional and municipal election, you are meant to vote in the region and municipality where you officially reside. Furthermore, citizens residing the municipality and region with citizenship in another European country, Iceland or Norway or citizens who have lived in Denmark, Greenland or the Faroe Islands for at least three consecutive years also have the right to vote at the regional and municipal elections (Danish election law, §1).

<sup>2</sup> Besides the possibilities to vote at for example hospitals, nursing homes and own homes if needed, before the 2013 election Copenhagen municipality initiated several initiatives to enhance the voter turnout among marginalized groups (young citizens, homeless, immigrants), where voter turnout is considerably below average. These projects were started at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior initiative as the overall Danish voter turnout at the 2009 regional and municipal election fell to 66% - the lowest in 35 years (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior 2013b). The election office did not organize or run the Copenhagen projects, so despite the very interesting implications of these projects for the production of the election result, these were not within the empirical scope of the thesis.

the ballots and calculating the result involved an “active process of blocking, summarizing, simplifying and deleting...what becomes counted”(Law 1996:291).

The fine count involved over 300 municipal workers from different departments, which the election office organized in 25 teams. As mentioned, each of these teams counted for nearly 24 hours straight, one polling station and one political party at the time. On Election Day the ballots were bundled in stacks for the particular parties and candidates. The municipal employees check each ballot to ensure that it is in the correct bundle and that it is valid. Then they count the ballots, check the results against the rough count (numbers provided by the election office in a red folder), and ask for the count to be approved. This procedure was repeated throughout the day, and each team re-counted the votes from approximately four polling stations. Bundling, counting and approval were repeated and repeated, running in sequence as a well-oiled machine.

After checking for invalid votes and counting the valid and invalid votes, the team leader entered the results into excel spreadsheets with some pre-defined rows and columns. The spreadsheets were used to check the numbers and calculate the result one more time. After final approval, the result was entered into the election protocol via the electronic election system. This is the same system as that shown in the previous chapter – it checks candidates as they submit their candidate lists and on Election Day (chapter 1) is used to enter in the results from the rough count, phoned in by the secretaries. Because it is the same system, information on the political candidates and the results from the rough count are, therefore, already present prior to the fine count. The final protocol contains a number of predefined boxes, rows and columns that define what information is needed from the fine count. First, the result of the count of party and candidate votes, the number of invalid votes, invalid letter votes. Second, the reasons they have been declared invalid (selected from a fixed set of possible causes), and finally, the ballot tally and general comments on the election process. The various spreadsheets used by the team leaders collect the information required by this protocol and the entire count is, thus, organized to achieve these numbers.

The election numbers slowly emerging during the fine count were made up by bureaucratic procedures of counting; standardized, ordinary, technical and repetitive procedures. It is therefore not surprisingly, that anthropologists Aradhana Sharma and

Akhil Gupta in their introduction to anthropological work on the state (2006), highlight how scholars such as James Ferguson approach bureaucratic proceduralism as apolitical and as merely doing the technical work of the state (ibid:11). But as discussed in chapter two, while democracy is indeed dependent on bureaucratic ‘apolitical’ proceduralism, this should not be seen as opposite to the politics of counting. Quite on the contrary. When Ferguson identifies an ‘anti-political’ machine in Lesotho’s bureaucracy, his aim is to illustrate how political questions are reduced to technical problems and end up carrying out a political operation (Ferguson 1994). This chapter, in contrast, is taking a closer look at the technicalities that summarizes, simplifies and excludes what gets to count. Taking a closer look at the repeated bundling and counting of ballots suggest that these processes are themselves a political machine. As such, the ‘anti-political’ machinery in Lesotho is not that different from the political machinery of counting in the Copenhagen warehouse. Indeed, part of the politics of counting is to reinstate and maintain an account of the election procedures as apolitical and merely technical. But before I reach this construction of transparency and accountability, I will illustrate the politics of classifying the ballot and deciding how to count.

#### *Classifying and recognizing ballots*

The ballots for the municipal and regional election in Copenhagen were considerably larger than they are for parliamentary elections, not to mention referendums, due to the high number of candidates in the municipality. Furthermore, for the election officials, the crosses on the ballots were difficult to detect. For the first time in a Danish election, a very small box had been placed next to each candidate’s name on the ballot paper and voters had to mark this box with a pencil. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior added the boxes to avoid invalid votes, since voters regularly mark their ballots ambiguously. But by doing so the ministry had made it much harder for the elections officials to actually find the mark when scanning a ballot. Glancing down a large ballot to detect one or more small crosses was so challenging that a noticeable amount had been bundled incorrectly during the rough count on Election Day and had to be resorted the day after (see fig 5.2.).

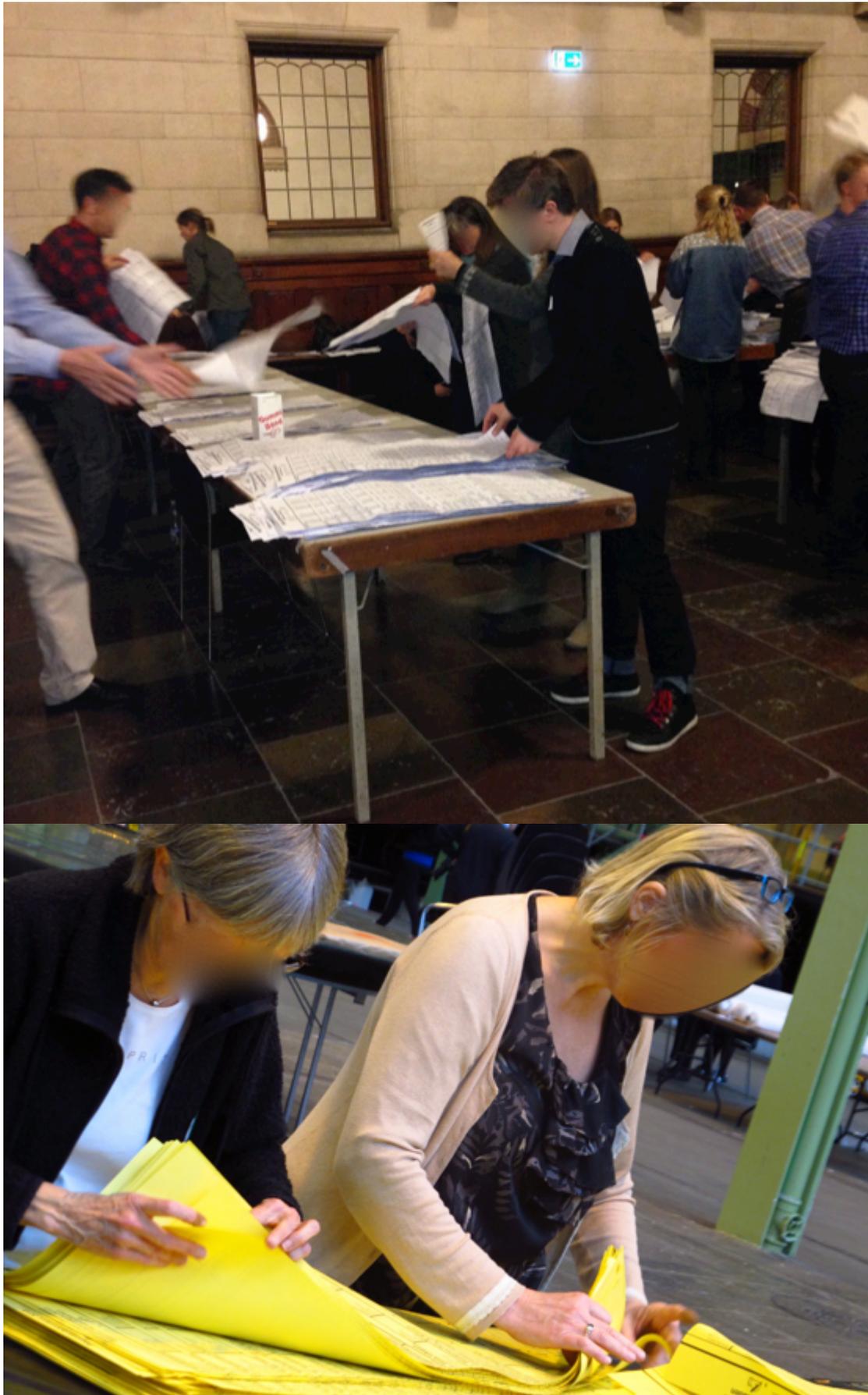


Fig 5.2. Pictures of counting during Election Day (above) and the fine count (below)

The significant number of ballots that had been declared invalid on Election Day increased the workload considerably for the so-called expert-group, who was assembled during the fine count to do a final check of these. This group consisted of specially appointed municipal employees with much experience with elections and a solid understanding of the rules on invalid votes that are thoroughly described in the National election law. Here, among other regulations, the law states that a ballot with a cross or a mark derived from a cross, such as a plus sign or a check mark are accepted, whereas a ballot with half a cross (just a line), a letter or a star must be declared invalid. A voter can make up to three marks on the ballot, as long as they are not conflicting (e.g. marks on different parties would be a conflict, while two crosses, one for a party and a candidate from that party would not), but he or she is not allowed mark the ballot in any other way than with a cross. But while the Election Law is very comprehensive on this matter, the rules still leave room for decisions to be made on the spot. For instance, some voters had made rather larger crosses and the law states that such ballots are valid, if the essential part, including the intersection of the cross is clearly within a particular party's field on the ballot. The expert team had to decide from case to case where 'the essential part' was located.

What counted as a legal vote was, here, not so much a question of whether or not a voter's intention was reflected in the vote. Several voters had drawn hearts to show their love for a party or candidate. But these ballots were deemed invalid due to the symbol. This is part of the enactment of the secret ballot that no one should be able to prove how they voted. This illustrates that even if the voters' intention was evident, a standardized set of rules regarding how to place the cross on the ballot paper was mobilized to determinate what counted as a vote.

As such, classifying and recognizing ballots as valid was an integrated part of counting, and activities of enumerating and sorting ballots took place simultaneously. Counting the election result was never just the simple addition of ballots; ballots were rather classified and counted so that the information would fit into the predefined tables on the spreadsheets. It was through such processes that finely ordered numbers slowly appeared. But despite these procedures and counting practices, fine-tuned in the municipality over many years, the numbers did not always add up. When a team was done counting the ballots from one polling station, the numbers were entered into an excel spread sheet and compared to the result from the rough count. But when you

recount more than 280.000 ballots the numbers are bound to not match. This was at least the realization among my interlocutors. Whereas the Election law prescribes a recount and reassessment of ballots during the fine count it does not explicitly relate to the unavoidable margin of error. Other, local, mechanisms and procedures were instead instated.

*Practices of reversibility and irreversibility*

An older team leader walked nervously from his counting table to the plateau where the expert teams were situated. “This is my first-born”, he stated as he handed over the red folder with the results from the rough count and an USB-stick. Both contained that day’s calculations, which he was handing to the approval group as his team had finally finished their count of ballots from polling station 4. North. The numbers, meticulously entered into a spreadsheet and saved on the USB stick, were ready for scrutiny. This was his debut as a team leader, and now he just hoped that the numbers would be approved. According to Martin from the approval team, unfortunately, the numbers for four parties in the spreadsheet did not correspond to the numbers from the rough count listed in the poll book in the red folder. Two parties had gained ten new votes, while two others had lost five and eight votes respectively. Martin is a young but experienced economist and his task for the approval team was to recalculate and eventually approve the result from 4. North. The approval team’s overall tasks were to check the new numbers from the fine count and match them with the numbers from the rough count. If they could not, and this was not due to simple calculation errors, they needed to engage in some ‘detective work’ to find out why and where in the process something had gone wrong. This role required some skill with numbers and sense of quality, according to Marie, the head of election office. “You are quality assuring tired election secretaries ... and you are chosen based on your understanding of numbers”, she told the team during a pre-meeting in the election office.

So when Martin could not make the numbers add up for polling station 4.North, he started to examine the numbers in the spreadsheets and poll book from the rough count once more. He did reverse calculations and also did some new calculations, but the numbers still did not add up. Then he decided to walk down to the counting table to have a look at the ballots in question. With him, he brought the

team leader and a small note where he had written the four party names and the numbers in question. Together, Martin and the team leader glanced over the batches of ballots and discussed the counting of the four parties. This continued for nearly half an hour but they were still not able to identify any errors. A recount was thus necessary, Martin decided. The team leader picked two of his most skilled team members to run the recount, while the rest of the team began counting the ballots from another polling station at another table. After finishing the recount, the team leader walked back to Martin on the plateau with new numbers in hand. These were closer to the numbers from the rough count on Election Day, but they still did not correspond to these. And they also did not match the numbers from first fine count. Although not disastrous, a margin of error was still present, so Martin started to check the numbers once more.

The status of the vote from district 4. North was uncertain for a while, and although numbers had been entered in spreadsheets and printed out on paper to offer Martin a better overview, the numbers were not fixed. At least not yet. And this was not a unique situation. Throughout the day, election results from polling stations were reversed, recalculated and reassessed. This was done as many times as deemed necessary, and during the fine count I witnessed several times how members of the approval group walked back and forth between plateau and counting tables with a team leader at his or her heels to check the ballots and recalculate numbers. But while the reversibility of the numbers was instrumental for reaching a trustworthy election result, at some point irreversibility had to be created.

In the case of 4. North, Martin decided to stop after the first recount. Or rather the approval team decided collectively to cut the counting, as they reckoned that the inconsistencies were within reasonable margins of error. When the approval team accepted the result, the team leader stopped walking back and forth between the tables and returned to his team to start counting the ballots from the next polling station. Martin printed the final result for 4. North, enclosed it in the polling station's red folder with results and handed it to the 'typing team', located next to the approval team on the plateau. The 'typing team' entered the results into the election result system. Finally, the election office team used the system to print the election protocol listing the final election result to be signed by the election committee, the body

officially responsible for the election in Copenhagen, before forwarding a copy of protocol to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior.

When Martin approved the result from a polling station, it was no longer up for discussion or subject to recalculation – a cut was made. A document was printed and handed over to another team on the plateau. The results were now approved and irreversible. This means that the making of the election result is as much about reversibility and irreversibility as it is about addition. It is about deciding when to recount and when to cut. So far I have examined how the approval team decided to shift the status of the numbers from reversible to irreversible; at what point they deemed the result reasonable. This judgement, however, follows complex bureaucratic practices, and in the next sections I will dwell on these key moments of cutting the count.

#### *Cutting the count*

When Martin decided to stop the count for polling station 4.North, the result of the second recount was right in-between the results of the rough count on Election Day and the first fine count. More importantly, the new result only differed approximately 0.04% from the Election Day result. Before the election, the head of the election office and several high-ranking officers in the municipality had debated what would be the acceptable margin of error – or rather what margin of error would be possible to enter into the electronic election system. They decided to allow a margin of error of 0.2%. If the margin was larger than this, a red warning would appear in the election result system when the numbers were added. With only 0.04% margin of error for 4.North, Martin could approve the result and to hand it over to the typing team. But, interestingly, he was still reluctant to do so. The young economist wanted the numbers to add up more precisely or at least for the result of the fine count to be a bit closer to the result from Election Day. Dissatisfied, he asked an older man standing next to the approval table for guidance. I had never seen this person before, but I was told that he used to be employed at the municipality and that he was one of the most experienced persons when it came to calculating election results and checking the spreadsheets. He and Martin discussed back and forth about 4.North. Eventually, the older man concluded that they should approve the result. Or rather, that he would approve it and take responsibility for it. Martin handed the man the printed

spreadsheet and the older man signed it with his initials: HP. In case of questions, the typing team would then know who to contact. Martin, still dissatisfied with the approval, went back to his seat at the approval table. Sulkily he briefly discussed the situation with a fellow economist. But the next team leader was already anxiously waiting in line with results from another polling station, and Martin started again, crunching numbers and searching for deviations.

The decision to stop counting was made by a senior team-member at a moment when one extra recount had already occurred. Reaching the irreversibility of the result was thus about precision but also a matter of expertise and bureaucratic hierarchy: the practices of circulating spreadsheets from the counting table to the plateau was part of the enactment of a bureaucratic chain of command in the organisation.

In this Copenhagen warehouse on a late evening, these practices were, however, also quite simply means of getting things done. In the chapter on Valhalla, I focused on how bureaucratic hesitation and slowing down implementation was a key strategy for dealing with the whims of a new computer system. While repeated recounts and recalculations did prolong the process of counting all the ballots similarly, the slowness or hesitation here was different. The very thorough and slow approach to counting was not a way of questioning normal procedures or trying to readdress consensual ways of dealing with the election to new concerns (Stengers 2005). The fine count procedure did culminate in moments of questioning the numbers but the approval team was expected to do exactly this. The election officers did not strive for hesitation – rather they displayed determination to solve the puzzles they encountered. Thoroughness and quick decisions, as exemplified with HP's cut in counting above, are integral, expected and instrumental aspects of reaching an election result. When to invoke one and when the other, however, was a situational matter of timing.

### **'Good' counting**

Often it was difficult for me to pinpoint exactly how decisions were made on whether to continue or stop counting. But moments such as the one described above provided me a window of opportunity for understanding in more detail particular aspects of counting practices as they evolved. Whereas my interlocutors were definitely

determined to solve the puzzles which they encountered, moments where decisions were made to cut the count created a space for me, as an analyst, to slow down and dwell on the bureaucratic and democratic ‘goods’ enacted in the process.

In one situation, Helen pragmatically wanted to approve the distribution of ballots previously bundled incorrectly, while in another Martin preferred an extra recount before approving the result. Neither of these decisions is more ‘correct’ or ‘better’ than the other. What constituted ‘good’ bureaucratic counting practices and decision-making shifted throughout the night. In §77 in the Election Law it is stated that the final tabulation for the municipal election as well as the regional election is carried out by the Election Commission no later than the day after the election. This fixes a timeframe for the fine count. Although the law does not state a fixed hour for the deadline, the fine count would have to be finished on that day including the following night. This expectation was underlined as politicians waited anxiously in the wings, unsure of whether they had secured a seat in the municipal council for themselves or not. A handful of these politicians had even dispatched campaign assistants to the warehouse, so as to receive the result of the count as quickly as possible. As the fine count is a public event the assistants had their own small waiting area on the aforementioned plateau at the centre of the hall. From time to time the election team printed out a preliminary result and hung it on the wall, and each time the assistants competed to read the numbers first, sometimes pushing and elbowing their way past one another to get to the numbers. Then they would quickly call “their” politicians. Only a handful of people waited all the way to the end for the final result, but this pushing and shoving illustrates the strong demand to get the final result as quickly as possible. This created a special atmosphere during the fine count, where considerations of thorough counting, recounting and spending time solving puzzles were constantly competing with the goal to be able to present a result at the end of the day. As the night came closer, the officials got tired and politicians grew more and more impatient, and what constituted ‘good’ and thorough counting practices shifted. This was, however, not just towards the end but throughout the day, almost on a case-to-case basis, it seemed.

In their brilliant paper on train accidents (2002a), John Law and Annemarie Mol discuss ‘the good’ in relation to British railway safety. They investigate public debates and court proceedings following train accidents to inquire practical aspects of

‘the good’, which provides a way for me to think about the competing concerns and how decision-making happened during the fine count. In their inquiry, Law and Mol do not predefine, frame or standardize the ‘good’, as in traditional philosophy. Instead they explore how ‘the good’ is done in everyday practices:

For this is an everyday activity. Attempts to differentiate between errors and achievements, failures and successes, falsehoods and truths, problems and solutions, or catastrophes and triumphs (the terms vary), are not the prerogative of a specialist academic discipline. Most everyday practices make use of, or try to create, scales to measure or contrast ‘goods’ and ‘bads’. This opens a space for an empirical philosophy. An ethnographic interest in practice can be combined with a philosophical concern with ‘the good’ to explore which ‘good’/‘bad’ scale is being enacted, and how this is being done.

(Law and Mol 2002a:3)

Engaging with the ‘good’, Law and Mol argue, often entails encountering a utopian narrative which suggests that a single, purified ‘good’ exists. In their study of several British train disasters they find that this singularizing mode of narration dominates news coverage, and in this discourse, indignation over missing crash barriers, poor door design or flawed procedures for detecting malfunctions abound. The ‘good’ is here “pressed with singular urgency” (ibid:5). Instalment of crash barriers, changes in doors or safety procedures are separately stressed as *the* single-most important way to manage railway safety. Each call for a total commitment disentangled from any other goods at play.

This mode of thinking about goods, which Law and Mol call “mobile utopianism”, is quite different from the practical decision-making during the fine count. When numbers did not add up in this process, decisions on how to proceed were heavily entangled with concerns for both a thorough count and a quick result. These concerns were constantly competing and it was impossible to single out what was a singular and explicitly ‘good’ counting procedure. These goods could of course also be interpreted as instances of a more general good: to produce the good result. But this would possible miss some of the dynamics of the situation made visible by considering how several frictious goods are at stake in the situation.

In line with my experiences at the fine count, Law and Mol suggest that the disentangled utopianism does not do a good job of describing the mundaneness and complexities of situated practices. As a result, they turn to a ‘non-utopian’ mode of relating to the good that is situated in the present rather than retrospectively imposing

a logic of cause and effect (ibid:15). Law and Mol illustrate this point with a story of a signaller's actions during the few minutes before a train collision happened in Ladbroke Grove in 1999. During the inquiry following the collision, a barrister asked the signaller to recollect the events. The barrister did so in order to assess if the signallers acted correctly during the few crucial minutes between realizing the approach of a bolting train and the collision. While the barrister asked how the signaller 'identified the problem', 'analysed the situation', 'took a decision' and 'acted on it', the signaller could only answer vaguely about his overall 'monitoring and determining the overview' (ibid:13). Thus, whilst the barrister was looking for a linear narrative of discrete units – a narrative where identifying the problem would be followed by analysis and decision making – the signaller could only offer a messy account, with few units and an unclear timeline. The point here, Law and Mol, emphasize, is that the barrister's effort to recompose the chain of events leading up to the collision in order to single out a wrong decision where doomed to fail as it, "goes against the logic ingrained in the practice itself" (ibid):

This is one in which different relevancies come together. Where they flow on, disrupt one another, go into turbulence, or suddenly form a vortex. Our point is not only that in the daily practice of the control centre no single 'good' takes precedence over all the others. It is also that there are not multiple 'goods' waiting to be balanced in that practice. ... Neither the work nor the 'good' it seeks to achieve are discursively distinguished. There are no discrete elements to be balanced or added up into coherence. It is all a matter of tinkering.

(Law and Mol 2002a:13)

Viewed in this way, the 'good', whether in a railway control centre or at a fine count is something you enact through practices of tinkering. So when I identify various concerns such as time constraint and thorough counting at the fine count, these cannot be understood universal or even articulated 'goods'. They were enacted in practice at the warehouse throughout the day, as the election team tinkered its way towards an approved result. I am the one who sums up these practices retrospectively for analytical purposes in this chapter. As I showed previously, every round of counting ballots from a polling station eventually led to a point, where counting stopped. This decision was not only made differently at different points of time. The decisions did not appear to follow a linear or singular logic. Like waves of different intensities throughout the day, various and shifting concerns seemed entangled and embedded in

those decisions making the counting unpredictable. It constantly challenged the election team to come up with new ways of dealing with it. This resulted in a multitude of situated actions some enacting good and some as bad counting practices. This was particular evident at 4.21am. After nearly 20 hours of counting, as a disagreement over some missing ballots arose.

*This is not f\*\*\*\*\* Uganda*

In the early morning, Martin was typing results for a polling station in the electronic election system. We were now close to the final and several employees from the approval team lent a hand to the typing team to help them enter results. But the numbers Martin was typing did not add up. 300 votes – all advanced votes – were missing. The approval team had approved the result after a longer discussion with high-ranking members of the election office. They simply could not locate the 300 votes anywhere and decided instead to note the problem in the election protocol. As mentioned, the election protocol is the final summary of the municipal election containing all results. These take the form of numbers but it also notes important incidents, inconsistencies or problems from the election, so these are evident to the local election committee who has to approve the election protocol at the end of the election. While these incidents recorded at this election were important, none of them, according to election team, jeopardized the course and procedures of this November 2013 election. They were simply dealt with before it got that far. The failure of the digital voter register at Nyboder School, explored in chapter 1, was for instance noted in the protocol, although the shift between analogue and digital election went fairly smoothly with no effects on either the election's transparency and accountability. So when 300 ballots went missing, Martin was supposed to enter the numbers into the election system and the election team would add a note about these in the protocol. But Martin was – once again – quite reluctant to type a deviating result, even if this time the result had already been approved. He was tired and clearly annoyed by the situation. He stated that he found it unfair that he had to type a result where three numbers deviated more than ten digits from the rough count result as the consequence of the missing letter votes. “This is not f\*\*\*\*\* Uganda”, he murmured and continued, “we are slacking off”. At this point, we were all tired and most people around the table just continued their own business. One argued the obvious point -

that the result had already been approved. But before anyone else had a chance to say more, the missing ballots magically reappeared. The 300 letter votes had not been forgotten and close to 5am in the morning the hunt bore fruit. The numbers could then be adjusted and the note deleted. The discussion of missing votes and whether to compromise faded away.

In the end this incident was not mentioned in the election book, yet Martin's frustration illustrates both conflicting concerns and how 'good' counting practices are enacted, in this case, because the good was not attainable. Again, democratic concerns about presenting a result conflicted with the thoroughness of counting. Marie, the head of the election office explained to me that 300 missing ballots was indeed a big problem and that it was not amusing to accept a note on such a matter in the election protocol. But as was clear early in the morning it was not possible to stop the entire counting machinery to look for the missing ballots. I am not sure that they would have approved the result if the number of missing ballots had been 400 or if it had been 5 in the afternoon, and I do not think Marie knows either. But 300 missing ballots from a particular polling station at the end of the fine count was obviously on the edge of acceptability. While the concern of the approaching deadline was growing, the approval team kept looking for the missing ballots. Despite the initial approval, they kept the possibility of reversibility extraordinarily open. This shows how the concern about thoroughness was present all the way through. It was never trumped by the concern with time.

Simultaneously with the incident of the missing ballots, another member of the approval team walked the floor trying to solve a problem about a small deviation in counted numbers from one of the few polling stations, the results of which had not yet been approved. He was on the hunt for 7 votes. 7 votes may seem like a very small number compared to the 300 missing advanced votes, but this only stresses that the counting 'goods' enacted in the warehouse did not simply balance out or take precedence over each other at different times. Even at 4 am in the morning, they were looking for 7 votes if deemed necessary.

The emphasis on 'good' counting practices as emerging and enacted in the Copenhagen warehouse makes it impossible to decompose one general logic behind decisions to recount and decisions to cut the count. Different relevancies come together, they clash, they compete and sometimes they overlap or absorb each other in

non-linear ways. The count twisted and turned in unforeseen ways. This does not indicate that decisions in the process are random or meaningless. They might be messy and impossible to detangle, but they are aspects of the production of a good count. To conceptualize this situation I will now introduce the notion of ‘networked decisions’.

### **The networked decision**

Building on Mol and Law’s idea of a non-utopian mode of relating to the good, *networked decision* is my concept for highlighting the gathering of multiple concerns, ‘goods’, knowledges, spreadsheets and municipal employees that all played a part in making decisions on when to recount and when to approve. This term highlights that decision-making is not exclusively about the will of Martin, Helen or other individuals. The final spreadsheet needs the signature of an individual to count, but the decision to stop emerges from the election as a network<sup>3</sup>. It is impossible to disentangle all the events that led to Helen’s pragmatic decision not to conduct an extra recount or Martin’s choice to do so. Procedures and practices during the initial fine count, spreadsheets with calculations, the poll book from yesterday’s elections, reports from the team leader concerning the ease of the count, reports from yesterday’s count, time constraints, advice received during the training meetings, experience from past elections, numbers on the size of the polling stations and quick

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<sup>3</sup> With an emphasis the practical aspects of decision-making based on ever-changing pool of knowledge at disposal, the notion of ‘networked decisions’ conceptually draws on or are inspired by both Herbert Simon’s notion of bounded rationality (Simon 1972) and the notion of ‘phronesis’ relating back to Greek philosophy and Aristotelian ethics (Urmson 1989). Bounded rationality refers to decisions based on the – limited – available information. With this notion, Simon tries to break with the idea of the fully rational man. Instead decision-making should be viewed, he argues, as the rational process of finding the optimal choice given the information available. In a similar manner, the notion of the networked decision in this chapter emphasizes the diverging availability of knowledge in the various decisions. But deciding upon the best choice at the very particular moment in time is a practical matter. This is where the idea of practical wisdom, ‘phronesis’, has provided a conceptual source of inspiration. Thus, the networked decision cannot be removed from the time, place or practice it emerged from, or at least it would rarely make any sense if done so, and it is difficult for my informants to retrospectively and discursively recollect their decision. Despite these sources of inspiration, I have, however, chosen to explore a notion of ‘networked decision’ rather than transferring, adapting and exploring further the ideas of ‘bounded rationality’ or ‘phronesis’ in this chapter. I have done this, primarily, in order to emphasize the distributed, entangled and more-than-human aspect of the decision-making. Thus, while the notions of ‘bounded rationality’ or ‘phronesis’ starts with the human actor, I try to start with the electoral network and the idea of ‘networked decisions’ allows me to do just that.

calculations on how diverging numbers relate, were just some relevant elements for decision-making. For instance, just before Helen chose to award votes to parties instead of candidates, she did a quick calculation of the 28 votes in question. As mentioned, less than six votes would be given to a single party and since the polling station in question was one of the bigger ones, 28 votes was an acceptable margin of error in Helen's view. In a similar manner, it was not simply decided to make a note in the election protocol on the 300 missing votes because time was running out. The counting team who were counting the polling station in question was well-organized and known for quick and exact counting. The rough count for this district had been unproblematic and none of the numbers in the spreadsheet hinted at a miscount. A third recount was, thus, deemed unnecessary, as it was evident that the votes were missing and not miscounted.

As such, the process of decision-making during the fine count was considerably distributed in the election apparatus. Quick decisions on what to do when the numbers did not add up was not an extra dimension to the counting practices, separate from the procedures of counting in the hands of an individual expert. Instead these decisions were emerging from the counting procedures in which they are entangled. The socio-material practices from which the different decisions emerge, are furthermore important *practices* and not necessary discursively composed (Law and Mol 2002a:13). Above I have tried to sketch out a few of countless ways of dealing with numbers that do not add up. But as unforeseen counting issues arise, so do new ways of dealing with them and new ways of negotiating bureaucratic practices.

In these situations it is not possible to identify a final cause of decision-making. What is possible, however, following Law and Mol's argument on enacting 'goods', is to explore decision-making practices. This includes moments where concerns for thoroughness and time are negotiated, where they conflict, and where they flow together or disrupt each other. Thus the stories I have told about pragmatic decisions or 300 missing ballots would appear as irrational or as cases of 'bad' decisions if assessed by universal standards for 'good' bureaucratic conduct, or they might even seem absurd (Vohnsen 2011). Democratic purists could be outraged by how incoherent these bureaucratic practices at the heart of democracy seem. Indeed, people have reacted in such ways when I have shared these stories at academic

conferences or dinner parties. Stories of the embodied, practical and situated elements of decision-making do not always perform well outside the old warehouse. Or maybe they perform too well ‘journalistically’ creating a sense of something potentially scandalous. They sometimes make my interlocutors look like disengaged counting officials making random decisions. At worst, they may even sound like they evade the rules and regulations to finish the count faster. But by emphasizing the decisions on when to cut and when to recount as networked, I want to make quite a different point. This is a story about a group of municipal employees who go to great lengths to count *well* and create an incontestable result; they are constantly weighing different bureaucratic and legal concerns in the effort to make the best counting processes happen; they work for 22 hours straight without taking short cuts; they deal with diverging calculations and conflicting concerns, which necessitate complicated negotiations of rules and regulations. This is a story of how decisions “that [have] less to do with thought and more to do with matter” (Law and Mol 2002a:15) – a story of how decisions emerge from the electoral socio-material web of counting employees, practices, experience, calculations and spreadsheets, and thus a story of how decisions are networked.

But still when a number is settled, the approval team member writes his or her initials on the final sheet with the approved result and thereby assumes responsibility for the settled numbers, whatever mess they grew from. So while the accounts above could be imagined to contribute to the credibility of the process to an STS or anthropological readership, when the officials account for the process to the public, the press or the state, the story is told quite differently. In the last part of the chapter my concern is, therefore, with how election teams accounted for the counting results as a fixed trustworthy number and unambiguous result to the world outside the warehouse, and thus with how the messy counting practices gain credibility and authority in some contexts outside the warehouse.

### **Electoral accountability**

In the above I have been concerned with complex counting practices leading to a state of irreversibility, when the negotiations of numbers finish and the results are approved. At this point, the vocabulary of counting shifts. From dealing with an array of spreadsheets, folders, numbers from yesterday’s election and counting teams, only

one spreadsheet is left for each polling station. This sheet now represents the number of votes awarded to each party and to each candidate, a ballot tally, a count of invalid votes, a list of reasons for these and other comments deemed necessary. The approval team member prints the document, signs it with their initials, enclose it in the red folder and hands this over to the typing team on the plateau.

Subsequently, the complex and messy practices leading to the networked decision are no longer relevant. Instead what has emerged is a representation of the polling station's result; an account nicely ordered in rows and columns. The shift of accounts was evident in the counting of 4.North, investigated above. As described, it was the more experienced approval team member who added his initial to the summery of the count, thereby approving the results despite Martin's dissatisfaction with the numbers. By doing so, HP took responsibility for the margin of error and certified that a 'good' bureaucratic counting had preceded the account on the spreadsheet. Implicit in cutting the count is, thus, a twofold process of separation and creation (Law 1996:286). In the creation of an account of the election on a spreadsheet, the election result is produced, and HP emerges as an approval team member with particular expertise. The messy counting practices are on the contrary separated<sup>4</sup> from this account.

The orderly account of the election result slowly emerged one spreadsheet at a time – 50 in total. While they may seem different, it is important here to stress that the stories of messy counting practices and my use of the term 'orderly account' are not conflicting. Instead, I see them as closely related and dependent on each other. My informants carried out counting and accounting practices simultaneously. Rather, in these practices the accounts have different ontological statuses. While the complex calculations and decisions leave room for negotiating 'good' counting practices as the election team tinkers towards the final result, the accounting practices created an orderly result deemed acceptable outside the warehouse. The counting practices are in a flux, while the status of the account is durable (Woolgar and Neyland 2013:34). While it is impossible– if not meaningless– to recompose a logic chain of effect in

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<sup>4</sup> In that sense, what could be called modes of accounting is closely related to or part of the modes of orderings discussed in previous chapters. I for now, however, emphasize the messy practices as hidden from the election account. For ideas on how to explicate the much more complex relationship between this account and the practices on the warehouse floor, I suggest you look at the previous chapter on candidacy.

counting, in accounting the election the team is responsible for doing just that: creating a report that explains and justifies their counting.

Accountability is the link between democracy and bureaucracy, Michael Lipsky argues in his work on street-level bureaucrats. Modern democracy depends on the accountability of bureaucracies to carry out declared policy and administer government regulations (Lipsky 1980). Public institutions are expected to be democratic accountable. Election is a case in point. Thus, if democracy is put to its test on Election Day, as claimed in the introduction to this thesis, and the goal is an uncontested election result, an account of how the election result was produced is paramount. This is only highlighted by the fact that the political election committee is responsible for the election by law, but in practice they delegate this responsibility to the bureaucratic election office. An account from the bureaucratic counting team to the political election committee to redistribute responsibility then becomes key. It is a link between electoral processes. Accountability appears, then, to have a twofold character; to be accountable is to create an account of the election while being responsible or answerable to others. This definition is in line with the theoretical work on accountability by the founding father of ethnomethodology Harold Garfinkel, who has often been cited for the following on this matter:

Any setting organizes its activities to make its properties as an organized environment of practical activities detectable, countable, recordable, reportable, tell-a-story-aboutable, analyzable-in short, *accountable*.

(Garfinkel 1967:33, emphasis in original)

Here, making sense of the world is closely tied to demonstration, that is, making an account available. This may be done discursively, bodily or through more formal mechanisms which are also dependent on moment-to-moment interaction through which sense is made of systems (Markussen 2007; Woolgar and Neyland 2013). Building on the argument above on networked decisions, it is not so much the inner capacity to account that is of interest to me, but rather the practices of accountability. Important here is first that the capacities to render the election result accountable – as shown by HP and Helen above – are also effects of the entire counting network. The final account stems from counting procedures and networked decisions and is just as distributed in the network (cf. Ubbesen 2015). Second, and of central interest to me in this section, is that making the account of the election result acceptable or durable relies on practical work (Woolgar and Neyland 2013:34). In the transition from

unsettled numbers to a fixed account, the spreadsheets and the final election protocol could be viewed, I suggest, as devices of accountability – devices that gather and make the final election result not only visible to the politicians, the public and others waiting outside the warehouse, but also acceptable. The spreadsheets from each polling station and the final protocol provide a coherent and linear narrative from the elections results from the previous night to the results of the fine count, including an account of letter- and invalid votes, ballot tally and comments on particular incidents. This report happens with a margin of error of no more than 0.2%. The narrative of the account was structured by an election protocol template provided by KMD and approved by the ministry. The template provided the overall information about the election with rows and columns for results and left blank spaces for local information about the Copenhagen election, such as time and date for the fine count, and number of ballots produced before the election. Established regulations on—for instance—materials that were supposed be available during the fine count (e.g. ballots, invalid votes, poll books) were printed on the template next to a blank space, to note if any materials were missing. As such, the protocol tells a story of a long, but mechanical and mundane day of counting at the warehouse through the numbers approved by the election committee and in a language approved by the ministry.

Creating an account of the fine count is therefore not so much about creating a neutral all-embracing depiction of the course of events. This misses the purpose of the account: to become acceptable outside the warehouse. Recall the signaller in Mol and Law's story on train accidents. When he could not retrospectively recollect the exact events and actions leading up to terrible train accident, he received massive critique from the barrister interrogating him. His vague timeline of the events was interpreted as inadequate by the barrister, even as a possible attempt to avoid responsibility (Law and Mol 2002a:13). The account sought by the barrister is something different from a summary of distributed and incoherent practices. It is an account of events, ordered in a way that can only be done retrospectively. Similarly, the account from the fine count is not about messy counting but needs to demonstrate finalized numbers. This is why it needed its own devices of accountability as described above.

The presentation of the account was, however, also discursively recomposed for the municipal election committee. This committee, which approved the election result by signing the finalized election protocol, consisted of five politicians, all

current members of the city council. So when I talk about addressing the ‘world outside the warehouse’ in the first instance it is these five politicians, who needed to approve the result and the counting process. On the day of the fine count, these five politicians were scheduled to meet Marie, the head of election office. Since Marie was responsible for the fine count, she met with the five politicians and the head of citizen services at 8’o’clock on the evening of the fine count. Their meeting table was elevated on the plateau, with a view over the entire counting space. At this point most of the municipal votes were recounted although not every polling station had been approved. So instead of providing the election committee with the final election protocol, the five politicians received a preliminary status report based on the approved numbers in the election system, a presentation of ballots deemed invalid and an oral account of the entire election, from the events of Election Day up through to 8pm that night. While I did not participate in this demonstration of the election and the emerging result, I did attend a meeting several months before when the election office briefed about the purpose of this approval meeting. Marie and others from the election office met employees from the Capital region of Denmark to discuss their cooperation during the election. As mentioned in chapter 1, the election in November 2013 was a dual election, where voters voted for both the regional and the municipal election on two separate ballots. The municipality was, however, solely responsible for carrying out the election and counting the results. Only if the result of the regional election’s fine count conducted in the Copenhagen warehouse by Copenhagen officials was not approved by the regional council, would the capital region need to carry out their own recount. The capital region employees were therefore not familiar with counting ballots, and at the coordination meeting they were discussing the practicalities of counting in case a recount was needed. At the previous regional and municipal election in 2009 the Capital region election committee did, indeed, decide to carry out a recount in three municipalities (not Copenhagen) and if the election result were to be rejected once again, they wanted to be prepared. But while the election team in Copenhagen willingly shared their experiences of counting and discussed possible locations for a recount, they were also stressing the minimal chances for a recount to take place. After the meeting, Helen from the election team first explains to me that they would of course look into possible ways to transport the ballots and rent locations for the recount, “as they will not rely on luck” in the case of

a recount. But she was also a bit baffled by the capital region's concerns and worries. In her opinion, this was much more a question of presenting the election result to the election committee in a convincing manner, so that they would approve it rather than preparing for an additional count.

But where the region election employees failed to do so in 2009, Marie must have succeeded at the plateau in the warehouse in 2013. Under an hour after arrival, the five election committee members signed the election protocol and as soon as the final numbers were approved by the approval team and entered into the system, the protocol was ready for release.

The election protocol is considered the official account of the election, but this accountability device does not stand alone. At least not initially. It is accompanied by an oral demonstration of the election, stories and discussions of the events during the election with the politicians, who approve it. In this situation the politicians may question the numbers to get a sense of what has been going on during the election, and the election officials not only have to demonstrate their numbers but also show the chain of calculations from the rough count to the fine count and ballot tally, to the final result. As mentioned it is stated explicitly in the election law, that the election committee is in charge of the fine count and by signing the election protocol, they thus (re)take responsibility for the events during the count and the margin of error negotiated so far. What's more, accounting in this instance does entail a direct relationship between the bureaucracy and democracy in Copenhagen municipality, as the politicians in this situation hold the counting machinery accountable. Here, accountability is not just an internal practice in the bureaucratic machine, but reaches outside the warehouse towards the politicians. Thus, whereas the complex tinkering towards the final result described above in this chapter leaves room for negotiating 'good' counting practices, the accounts of the election results provided above are meant for the politicians and the public outside. And the accounts do, indeed, have effect on the politicians, as the municipal political landscape for the next four years is decided from the numbers in the election protocol.

### **'Countability' and the uncontested election result**

Another effect of the produced account is the reinstatement of the imaginary of countability mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. With each step closer to the

public and the politicians outside, the account was modified and adjusted to make the account more streamlined and orderly and, eventually, which made the election appear countable. First, the oral account was deleted. From the point at which the election committee signs the election protocol, the oral demonstration was no longer relevant. Along with the protocol, the oral performance provided a satisfactory story of a thorough count. The protocol is the only *official* account of the election result that leaves the warehouse. At around 7 in the morning, after over 23 hours of counting, the final and approved protocol for the regional election was ready to be released and publicly announced via the electronic system. The election team also sent an electronic copy to the ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior (the protocol for the municipal election was ready some hours before this as the counting team started with counting the municipal ballots). The original protocol printed from the election system was kept by the election committee together with the approved spreadsheets from each polling station.

The story that meets the ministry is, therefore, an account of the election result with the final number of ballots awarded to the different parties and candidates, invalid votes and letter votes, overall ballot tally, possible comments as explained above together with the record of the delegations of seats in the municipal council automatically calculated from the result of the count<sup>5</sup>. As described above, what emerges through the protocol is a coherent story about the Election Day that was carried out in accordance to the prescribed rules and regulations and it makes no mention of the complex counts and numbers that at times did not add up. These were within the acceptable margins of error and therefore did not give rise to any comments in the protocol. With the numbers from the rough count left behind, there is no sign of diverging numbers in the final protocol. Instead, a direct relation between the ballot tally, e.g. number of ballots handed out and voters registered, and the votes counted and awarded political was created. The result appeared as the only possible result.

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<sup>5</sup> At elections in Denmark, the D'hondt method is used for allocating seats in city councils and parliament. This mathematical method certainly has its own sets of 'politics' related to who receives political authority during elections, but these were not part of the counting machinery I explore in this chapter. Instead, the electronic election system did the calculations automatically, and while it could be interesting to dwell at these calculations, it lays outside the scope of this chapter.

Kommunalvalg d. 19. november 2013		Kommunalvalg Regionsrådsvalg			
<b>København Kommune</b>		Status på optælling:	Resultat	Ajourført:	2013-11-21 00:35
<b>Se den nye Kommunalbestyrelse</b>		Stemmeberettigede:	460.449	Pct. optalt:	100.0%
		Stemmeprocent:	61.2%	Afstemningsområder:	50
		Optalte stemmer:	281.821	Kommunens	Afstemningsområder
Kandidatlister	Stemmetal	Procenter			
Klik på partiet og se fordelingen af personlige stemmer.	Tal i parentes er ændring i forhold til sidste valg.	Tal i parentes er ændring i forhold til sidste valg.			
A <a href="#">Socialdemokratiet</a>	76.524 (12.401)	27.8	(-2.2)		
B <a href="#">Radikale Venstre</a>	30.843 (12.953)	11.2	(2.8)		
C <a href="#">Det Konservative Folkeparti</a>	13.860 (-812)	5.0	(-1.9)		
D <a href="#">Kærlighedspartiet (Regnbuefolket/B</a>	923 (537)	0.3	(0.1)		
E <a href="#">Retsforbundet - Danmarks bæredygti</a>	462 (267)	0.2	(0.1)		
F <a href="#">SF - Socialistisk Folkeparti</a>	27.547 (-20.184)	10.0	(-12.3)		
G <a href="#">Velfærdslisten</a>	215 (147)	0.1	(0.1)		
H <a href="#">Højhuset</a>	74 (74)	0.0	(0.0)		
I <a href="#">Liberal Alliance</a>	10.632 (8.819)	3.8	(3.0)		
J <a href="#">Hampepartiet</a>	777 (191)	0.3	(0.0)		
K <a href="#">Kristendemokraterne</a>	815 (815)	0.3	(0.3)		
L <a href="#">Lavere skatter og afgifter</a>	195 (195)	0.1	(0.1)		
M <a href="#">Miljøpartiet Fokus</a>	522 (522)	0.2	(0.2)		
N <a href="#">Byrådslisten i Valby</a>	259 (259)	0.1	(0.1)		
O <a href="#">Dansk Folkeparti</a>	20.391 (3.862)	7.4	(-0.3)		
P <a href="#">Piratpartiet</a>	695 (695)	0.2	(0.2)		
Q <a href="#">Naturpartiet (Yara Brasil)</a>	302 (302)	0.1	(0.1)		
R <a href="#">Kommunisterne</a>	1.163 (711)	0.4	(0.2)		
T <a href="#">Schiller Institutets Venner</a>	546 (468)	0.2	(0.2)		
U <a href="#">Danskernes Parti - de nationale</a>	340 (340)	0.1	(0.1)		
V <a href="#">Venstre, Danmarks Liberale Parti</a>	31.442 (11.916)	11.4	(2.3)		
Y <a href="#">Den Lille Mand og Krigsveteranerne</a>	91 (-6)	0.0	(0.0)		
Z <a href="#">Parcelhuslisten</a>	152 (152)	0.0	(0.0)		
Æ <a href="#">Gasværksvejslisten</a>	328 (328)	0.1	(0.1)		
Ø <a href="#">Enhedslisten - De Rød-Grønne</a>	53.672 (30.119)	19.5	(8.5)		
Å <a href="#">Christiania-Listen</a>	1.527 (-433)	0.6	(-0.3)		
01 <a href="#">Copenhagen</a>	171 (171)	0.1	(0.1)		
02 <a href="#">Det Grønne Parti/Danish Green Part</a>	258 (258)	0.1	(0.1)		
03 <a href="#">Dovne Robert</a>	550 (550)	0.2	(0.2)		
04 <a href="#">Forenede demokrater</a>	256 (256)	0.1	(0.1)		
05 <a href="#">Havnefronten</a>	97 (97)	0.0	(0.0)		
06 <a href="#">Sunshine Partiet</a>	57 (-8)	0.0	(0.0)		
Øvrige stemmer fra forrige valg	0 (-3.912)	0.0	(-1.8)		
I alt gyldige stemmer	275.686 (62.050)	99.9			
Blanke stemmer	5.009 (2.690)				
Ugyldige stemmer	1.126 (499)				
I alt afgivne stemmer	281.821 (65.239)				

Klik på et afstemningsområde og se flere resultater.  [vilkår](#) © 2013 KMD A/S

[1. Østerbro, 1. Nord, 1. Syd, 1. Vest, 1. Nordvest, 2. Sundbyvester, 2. Nord, 2. Syd, 2. Vest, 3. Indre By, 3. Nord, 3. Syd, 3. Øst, 4. Sundbyvester, 4. Nord, 4. Syd, 4. Øst, 5. Nørrebro, 5. Nord, 5. Syd, 5. Øst, 5. Vest, 5. Nordvest, 5. Midt, 6. Utterslev, 6. Nord, 6. Øst, 6. Syd, 7. Brønshøj, 7. Nord, 7. Syd, 7. Øst, 7. Vest, 7. Nordvest, 7. Katrinedal, 7. Kirkebjerg, 7. Vanløse, 8. Valby, 8. Nord, 8. Syd, 8. Vest, 8. Sydøst, 8. Midt, 9. Vesterbro, 9. Nord, 9. Syd, 9. Øst, 9. Vest, 9. Midt, 9. Sydhavn](#)

Fig. 5.3 Election Result, municipal election 2013

And while the entire account reached the ministry, one more step of deletion takes place, as it was only the finalized result (fig 5.3) that reached the wider public. After the committee had approved the electoral protocol and it was distributed outside the warehouse, there was still one last possibility to contest the result or the procedures during the election. Any complaints over the procedures during the election had to reach the city council within a week of Election Day. At the 2013 election, Copenhagen Municipality received 20 complaints, which the election team presented for the politicians during a city council meeting shortly after the election. Most complaints were concerned with the processes and facilities on the polling stations during Election Day, and the election team therefore wrote in their proposition to city council that none of the complaints was of such a nature that they would affect the

result of the poll. The city council complied with the election office's proposition, and this closed the last window to contest the result. Ballots, letter votes, lists of all voters in the municipality and other voting materials were transported to the local incineration plant and burnt.

The ballots, the many spreadsheets and folders that testify to and form part of the very complex counting practices, were thus, slowly, through each iteration of the account, removed from the final account of the election, making the election result less and less contestable. Eventually, when the voting material is burnt to pieces, it is impossible to recollect the events on Election Day, let alone contest them. The final election result, on the other hand, was, now removed from these materials, ready to take on the world: It had become ultimately irreversible. The numbers were now ready to determine political authority and ready to engage in other political settings, be scrutinized for public discussions on politicians' capabilities and public participation.

As such, the election protocol shares some characteristics with Bruno Latour's conception of immutable mobiles (Latour 1986a, 1999). The notion of immutable mobiles, Latour argues, emphasises objects such as texts, maps, graphs and other inscriptions that stabilise scientific knowledge and enable its dissemination. Remember the maps of the Pacific mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, commissioned in 1787 by the king of France from sent Lapérouse, captain of L'Astrolabe? In this story, since maps are more mobile than the lands they represent, the cartographers in Europe slowly gained more and more knowledge of more and more places through their production of maps and ended up dominating the world from their chart rooms (Latour 1987).

The immutable mobile acts, in this story, as a vehicle for producing and reproducing domination, Latour explains and continues; "No new theory, world view, or spirit is necessary to explain capitalism, the reformation and science: they are the result of a new step in the long history of immutable mobiles"(Latour 1986a:12). But to convince or force others to conform "you have to invent objects which have the properties of being *mobile* but also *immutable*, *presentable*, *readable* and *combinable* with one another (ibid:7, emphasis in original). Latour focuses on maps and the printing press, but numbers are indeed also powerful in terms of immutability and mobility. Latour himself notes this by asking the question:

What is this society in which a written, printed, mathematical form has greater credence, in case of doubt, than anything else: common sense, the sense other than vision, political authority, tradition, and even the Scriptures?

(Latour 1986a:24)

The numbers on the electoral protocol does not necessary reach the same stability or universality as scientific facts or world maps. Despite the lack of knowledge of the counting procedures in Denmark, there is after all an understanding of the election result as derived from some sort of work and it is not believed to be a presentation of a world or nature *out there*. Nonetheless, the election result consists of numbers that are easy to handle, easily transported from the warehouse and to the ministry, politicians and the Copenhagen public and recombined in a number of ways when analyses and statistics appear in news coverage and public discussions. The convincing and dominating character of immutable mobiles is, thus, also an important aspect of the election protocol. The numbers carry with them so much authority that the result is not questioned. Instead, what is questioned and debated is the effectiveness of politicians' campaigns, the different parties conditions, the voter support and the new political landscape. Similar to Latour's argument on how cartography's supremacy should be found in its ability to produce maps, so are these coherent, uncontested election numbers reproducing the high trust in Danish representative democracy. Thus, while democracy in general and elections in particular are dependent upon the complex counting practices to produce a election result, it is also dependent on the work of traveling *and* stable election results to remain trustworthy. If the number leaves too many unanswered questions or opens the door to too many of the ambiguities and uncertainties of the count, the possibility for a breakdown of democracy is dangerously near. The November 2000 U.S election is a constant reminder of this. Accountability is, thus, closely related to the ability of the election results to travel outside the warehouse. Just like the immutable mobiles of scientific facts, the more the numbers are recognized in the broader public, the stronger they become.

As Kimberly Coles remarks in her study of elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Coles 2007), the myth of democracy hides the reality of democracy making. The particular myth of representational democracy pushed forward here by publishing a protocol of an ordered election result in Copenhagen municipality, relies heavily on a another myth – that of 'countability'; that it is in principle possible to *just* count the

votes and that nothing *else* is added in this process. Numbers nicely ordered, the ballot tally in balance and the signature of five politicians make a convincing argument for an objective and just election result, where one man has indeed been translated directly into one vote, without any interference from bureaucratic machinery. It was, after all, merely adding up the ballots and arranging the results in columns and rows. The numbers do not carry with them any of the messiness from the warehouse and in the election protocol the link between the votes, numbers and awarded candidates seems certain and stable; the election result represents the will of the people. The reproduction of Danish democracy is, thus, closely linked to an autonomous numerical account and a myth of ‘countability’. While the first brings associations to scientific facts and the latter to fetish and belief, both are indeed fabricated to appear autonomous and removed from the messy counting practices from which they emerged. But it is exactly because they are constructed that they are “so very real, so autonomous, so independent of our own hands... the terms “construction” and “autonomous realities” are *synonyms*”. They are factish (Latour 1999:275).

The first part of the politics of counting is concerned with messy and heterogeneous counting practices. But the second, as I have shown here, is paradoxically, concerned with the very practical and indeed political construction of an electoral account. This is an account that both limits and redirects the possibility of questions (about the result) back towards the politicians and their battles for political authority.

## Conclusions

# The Election Machine made Visible

In this thesis, I have explored bureaucratic practices and processes of executing the Danish municipal and regional election in 2013. I have followed the different tasks, projects, and meetings that make up Election Day organisation, and I have examined the election office's partial role in the re-enactment of Danish democracy. The result is a series of accounts of nitty-gritty, practical and technical practices: entering the names of officials or candidates in it-systems, revising bureaucratic guidelines and propositions, and recounting nearly 300.000 ballots. These tasks may seem dry, neutral, or mundane and they are often hidden in the background of the political spectacle which is Election Day. But each chapter tells a different story of these tasks. The central argument of this thesis is that the election machine is generative, and I argue that the translation of citizen's will into political authority emerge from this heterogeneous electoral apparatus. This does not mean that the election team generates and participates in the same way as politicians or citizens. Rather, the election office orders the Election Day, the citizens, and politicians in very particular ways and orchestrates the public demonstration of democracy. The election machine, thus, participates in performing a particular version of Danish democracy, and in this its own bureaucratic conduct is also performed. Paradoxically, reenacting a particular bureaucratic ethos for democracy involves performing the bureaucratic machinery as neutral, orderly, rational, and policy-servicing. Not the least, the machine must be disassociated from political processes on Election Day. Bureaucracy must erase knowledge of its generative nature from any perception of itself, it must add nothing but

natural service to a political process. In this sense the election machine is an “objectivity machinery” (Hoag 2011), and in the case at hand it seemed to have worked quite effectively. There have been few if any electoral scandals in Denmark unlike the US. The continuously effective and successful executing of Election Day is probably one of the reasons why still so little is known about the immensely important work which the election machine carries out and which make us not always able to recognize it.

The election machine is both my analytical lens and my empirical field. With this notion, it has also been my analytic interest in each of the five chapters to recognize the technologies, socio-material arrangements and standards that are related to the work of politics, which normally fade into the background of Election Day (Bowker and Star 2000). Making visible the election apparatus ethnographically does, however, not mean that I do not recognize the work of the objectivity machinery. But it does imply a need, which I share with my informants, to keep different accounts of the election in view. This was most evident to me during the fine count (chapter 5) where the election office used one account to take on the outside world and to make them accountable while another account encompassed the complex counting practices involving reversibility and irreversibility. Where the first account performed the work of the objectivity machine, the latter showed entangled practices in flux. Despite these different accounts, the election office sometimes seemed to make sense of elections and legitimize electoral processes using binaries such as principles vs. practices, political deliberation vs. bureaucratic execution, or politics vs. non-politics which are closely related to idealised understandings of the objective bureaucracy. Still, I demonstrate in all five chapters how these binaries, and democratic ideals e.g. of ‘free and fair’ elections were not simply applied to practices. They emerged from practice, and in conjunction with other concepts and ideas, paperwork, polling stations, ballots, protocols, laws, election employees electoral worlds emerged (Gad, Jensen, and Winthereik 2015; Mol and Berg 1994).

The notion of the election machine provides a space for thinking about how democracy keeps running no matter whether democratic ideals are partially or fully realized. I use the concept to keep the oscillation between binaries on the one side and heterogeneous socio-material processes on the other side unsettled; yet I locate the oscillation in a particular bureaucratic office – the head or heart of the machine. Hence, each chapter provided a partial story of how democracy relies on office conducts, relations and assemblages. In the following, I pick up some threads running across the chapters which all highlight the plurality and complexity of the electoral practice. Finally, I discuss some broader implications of making visible the messiness of elections.

*Ordering bureaucratic elections*

Preparing Election Day in the election office involves different ordering practices which in different ways infrastructure the event. As I showed in chapter one to four this includes the ordering of polling places, officials and candidates, and as I explored in the fifth it also involves the creation of an orderly election result during the fine count. While these different practices create order differently, all the cases show, I suggest, that ordering elections does not imply simple adherence to given standards. Rather, following John Law's conceptualisation of *ordering* as a plural and incomplete process (Law 1994), I show how the practicalities and technicalities of ordering the election entail constant negotiations of conflicting bureaucratic and democratic concerns. In the first chapter on the election infrastructure, I emphasised this point in the case of Peter's work with secretary guidelines. As Peter was compiling documents and drawing roadmaps to Election Day, concerns for making information accessible while still leaving it up to the secretaries to take action and make decision on Election Day were discussed. In conjunction with this, responsibility for the events at the polling stations was also negotiated. Thus, the more thorough guidelines Peter provides the more he take on the vulnerable position of author of and responsible for the entire set up.

The complexities of ordering elections became even more evident in chapter four on candidate lists. In this chapter, I suggested that two different yet heavily entangled ordering practices are taking place. One is concerned with legal regulations and the other with braiding past and present experiences on candidate list submissions. In this view, constructing political candidates at the election office involves the careful negotiations of what bureaucratic predictability means. These different ordering practices create in the end an orderly ballot, but the handling of candidate lists at the election office it not about erasing a pre-existing mess. Rather, I argue, order and mess co-emerge in the election office as politicians fill out forms and bureaucrats check the lists. What is more, the emerging messiness is even welcomed at the election office. In their view, it is a given, democratic necessity, which the election team needs to work with and uphold by making the submission office accessible and by maintaining a constant loop between checking the lists and letting the politicians correct them. Valorizing inclusion as an ideal is, however, not without complications, as the political messiness sometimes disrupts formal procedures, and the tension between the two does not go by unnoticed in the office.

With the different electoral ordering practices different bureaucratic forms of responsibility also emerge. Part of ordering the election is the distribution of responsibility

for tasks which needs to be accomplished during this event. As I noted above, as long as Peter held the position of author in relation to the guidelines, he was also held responsibility for their content. This link between an author and responsibility is, however, a rare occurrence in bureaucratic work. Commonly bureaucratic writings undergo a path of circulation in the hierarchical chain of bureaucratic command, and in this process authorship is eschewed and responsibility displaced (Hull 2012; Strathern 2008). This was also the case in the election team's work on the proposition to reduce polling station which I explored in chapter two. Here, I argued, Ida was slowly written out of the document as it circulated in the department and reached approval. The proposition became the subject of a collective responsibility in the department, before signatures from highest-ranking employees finally gave weight and authority to the proposition's arguments. Yet another form of responsibility and authorship is found in the recounting practices which I accounted for in chapter five. While the election and expert teams managed the counting practices and, indeed, initially took responsibility for these by signing the spreadsheet with the approved result, this was deleted from the final account. Instead five politicians in the election committee signed the final election protocol and took the overall responsibility for the election. The bureaucratic work of counting, recounting, checking and approving was made invisible again while the political spectacle shined.

Some of these ordering practices are rather fast-moving while others involve careful hesitation. I have argued that hesitation was a productive response to an otherwise fast-paced digitalization project in chapter three. Problems with the online recruiting system, Valhalla, were dealt with by equal amounts of hesitation and efforts to relate the system to its Copenhagen election environment. Here, hesitation provided a space for renegotiating responsibility for the system and time to relate it to its surroundings which secured its usability. Hesitation is often a very privileged task or response reserved for analysts (Stengers 2005) and certainly not necessarily a very popular stance in relation to visions of a future fully digitalized public administration. When implementing Valhalla, I argue, however, that hesitation is not sign of indecision or dismissal of the public digitalization project per se. It is rather a productive strategy which in this case involved taking responsibility for election official assignments and regaining control with an unruly system.

Hesitation was about slowing down, but during the election other moments required another pace. I described Helen's pragmatic decision in chapter five and Marie's decision to start approving candidates in chapter four as examples of quick decisions in the election office. In these instances, decisions were concerned with cutting of

bureaucratic work and leaving behind the messiness of electoral processes. So when Marie chose to approve political candidates, the messy encounters with politicians and the work to correct deficiencies on list ended. Instead the election team shifted to making an orderly list of political candidates. Similarly, when Helen chose to redistribute 28 votes in the count of a polling station's ballots and afterwards to approve the result, the possibility to reverse the calculations and count was no more. Instead, this enabled the ability to present an orderly and approved election result. Thus, the different paces of the bureaucratic work on elections seem, I suggest, closely related to reversibility and irreversibility, to decisions on when to cut and when to continue.

Decisions on when to hesitate, recount, rectify and when to stop, cut and erase are not decisions made solely by the seven election team members presented in this thesis. Rather, as I suggest in chapter five, these decisions were *networked decisions*. Building on Mol and Law's idea of a non-utopian mode of relating to the good, networked decision is my concept for highlighting the gathering of multiple concerns, 'goods', knowledges, spreadsheets and municipal employees to play their part in making decisions on when to continue or when to cut. For example, the decision on what to do when the numbers did not add up during the recount in chapter five was not made by one individual expert. Instead, this and other decisions emerged from the counting procedures in which they were entangled. By emphasising the entanglements of decision-making, the notion of 'networked decision' is central in my orientation towards democracy in action for two reasons. First, in this thesis I have emphasised democracy as practically produced in the election office, through techniques and technologies, documenting practices and registration work. The notion of networked decision highlights exactly how it is this assemblage that makes decisions. Second, the concept emphasises that at particular points the messiness of practice is replaced by a more orderly account. The notion of networked decision takes into account the complex, messy, and changing practices of negotiating electoral concerns and how from those practices more fixed, durable and not least orderly accounts of the election arise; it takes into account the practicalities and technicalities of creating a neutral and accountable election administration and an approved election protocol, and it takes account of the very particular ways in which accountability is constructed in the election apparatus. Accountability in this case is closely related to the ability of the election result to travel outside the election machinery – to politicians and the public. Thus, while the polling stations and the count were open to the public, the nitty-gritty technicalities of the election apparatus, on the other hand, could not be part of the accountable and transparent election presented to the public.

In this thesis I have taken into account both the election as it was presented to the world outside and the election as it emerged in the election office. While the first account proved stable and durable, the last is plural and in flux. To some this might seem inconsistent. Sometimes the election team is hesitating, sometimes they are making quick decisions. Legal concerns weigh more than past practices in some instances and in others it is the other way around. At times, employees are disengaged from the issue while at other they may be more attached and more vulnerable. Rather than labelling this work as inconsistent, I have presented these as careful negotiations of concerns and sometimes conflicting ideas about what ‘good’ democracy is and what ‘good’ bureaucratic practices entail. Following Mol’s idea of a logic of care (Mol 2008), I show how the multiple ways of dealing with the whims of elections do not necessarily follow a clear, linear logic. Rather elections are about ambivalent moments characterized by shifting tensions, colliding democratic and bureaucratic ideals, and inevitable twists and turns. In these situations of unpredictability good bureaucratic practices are about negotiating and tinkering rather than following a given set of rules of bureaucratic conduct. But then again, the election team is very much aware of what is considered proper bureaucratic work and perform this idea as well. This was most notable in the second chapter on the proposition, where I analyzed how the election team goes to great lengths to enact itself as a bureaucratic, non-decisive, non-political, impartially entity. In the same manner, in chapter two and four I explored how the two central democratic ideals of accessibility and equality were negotiated as they collided with other concerns for cost and bureaucratic procedures. Yet, the election team, as the chapters show, also refers to these ideals as a given part of democracy – as something they have to take into account when handling a proposition or candidate lists and as something that legitimize their actions. From this, it could be argued that the election team as Bruno Latour (1993) describes it are quintessential modern as they are able to juggle almost seamlessly between work of hybridization and work of purification.

In the election office, the team is constantly shifting between different vocabularies while tinkering towards an incontestable election result. These complex practices of getting things done in the election machinery should, I suggest, be partially accounted for without reading it through the binary lenses of legal formalism or ideal bureaucratic standards. The latter view would all too easily consider practices *too* passionate, informal, disorderly or even Political, what to me appears to as careful, thorough and good bureaucratic work on elections. In the idealistic view these practices

can never be good enough even if they are as good as it gets, and I, therefore, suggest a different starting point for knowing and developing such bureaucratic practices

*Implications of making the election machine visible*

By locating the democratic election in the election office, I strongly emphasize the importance for taking the bureaucratic organisation into account when studying democracy. Elections do not equal democracy, but they make it possible to attain it. As the election team plans and executes the election, they play a role in what future democracy will look like. If the election machine fails, democracy will, at least for a while and in a serious way come to a halt. The study of electoral assemblages at the Copenhagen election office highlights therefore, I suggest, how bureaucracy and democracy cannot be understood as two radically separate domains. They are rather “inexorably entangled” (Riles 2011). Locating democracy in the election office, as I have done, opens up for further debates and investigations into bureaucracy’s position within democracy and points at first towards entanglements and messiness not captured seeing bureaucracy as only the supposedly neutral management or ‘service’. But while I believe this is a necessary and important road to follow in studies of election and democracy, it is also a difficult one.

In the election office, the employees go to great lengths to disassociate themselves from the political spectacle on Election Day. They do so above all to create the sense that nothing is being added to the translation of voter’s will into political authority. Because bureaucrats themselves perform this binary for citizens, for politicians and for me, the election apparatus remain hidden from the spectacle on Election Day. This not only make studies of bureaucratic fieldsites difficult (Hoag 2011:83). Ethnographic studies are to some extent also bound to reverse this common-sense assumption that Danish democracy is an independent mode of government and a system fuelled by principles. When Member of Parliament Martin Flydtkjaer praised the Danish democratic system because of its transparency, as I noted in the introduction, he was not referring to the election machine examined in this thesis. Rather, he was referring to the control and accountability mechanism carried out by election officials on Election Day, which I explored in detail in chapter one. Making the election machine visible and locating democracy in the practicalities and technicalities of the bureaucratic office, thus, challenge a well-established separation between political authority delegated via democratic elections and public administration. By making visible how an election result is a socio-material achievement, I interfere with central democratic belief that nothing is being added to the

direct link between the will of the people and those who govern. The practices of the election office are to large degree still invisible and from a certain perspective it is still best if they remain so. Returning to the old comparison by Bismarck in the introduction between laws and sausages and how you should never watch either one being made (Johnson 1933), it could equally be argued that the public do not need or want to know about the election machine.

It is, therefore, not without potential implications to make the hidden visible. Research on processes which states normally keep hidden (on for example weapon discussions, dual use technologies, military operations, Federman and Holmes 2011; Gregory 2011; Suchman 2015) have often taken the position that we should know about these issues as citizens in democratic societies. The argument is that in a democracy nothing ought to be hidden. But in the case of democracy and elections it could be argued that it works exactly because something is hidden. The vote must be secret, anonymous, and so must the election machine, if trust in elections is to be maintained. So although MP Martin Flydtkjær emphasizes transparency in the electoral process and I in chapter one and five explored how paper trails create the possibility of accounting for the steps of translating ballots into numbers, trust is not only dependent upon a visible apparatus. Making things visible may instead have negative implications for trust in the democratic process.

When Danish journalist Jesper Tynell in 2014 released his book *Mørkelygten*, it was followed by intense debates in the Danish news media about the role of the civil service in political decision-making processes. In this book, Tynell scrutinizes a number of cases where civil servants in their construction of notes or propositions manipulate with numbers, legal regulations and ‘facts’ to support a given minister’s political proposal. The Danish title of the book, *Mørkelygten*, refers to practices of highlighting certain aspect of an issue so much that others are disguised and thereby often making the minister’s proposal appear as the only possible solution. In Denmark civil servants in the central administration are obliged to serve the minister they work for, but Tynell’s work suggests that this obligation may have been taken too far as it misrepresents knowledge and issues before parliament and citizens. The book release was followed by a massive public debate in which the manipulative work of the civil servants was posed as a democratic problem (Danmarks Radio 2014; Goetze and Rytter 2014; Knudsen 2014). An article in the Danish newspaper *Information* stressed that what was at stake here was the ideal of Danish enlightened democracy, and suggested that the rules and principles for the conduct of civil servants should be sharpened to avoid further misrepresentations and politicization of

bureaucratic work (Goetze and Rytter 2014). In a similar vein, Tynell in his book stresses the problems of current practices in relation to the ideal of enlightened democracy and emphasizes that it is a problem when politics are disguised as technical matters. His hope is to make these matters political again; to make the politicians in parliament decide between different alternatives rather than having a situation where civil servants construct only one argument (Boegelund 2015; Tynell 2014).

The work of the civil servants in the Danish central administration is not identical to the work of the municipal election employees which I have explored in this thesis. And I am not in a position to judge the bureaucratic practices in the Danish ministries. Rather Tynell's book and the following discussion show how bureaucratic practices do not fit into a neat division between politics and civil servants. But when this point sees the light of day, it is perceived by most as highly problematic and as threat to the democratic ideals. When somebody crosses the line, democracy is at stake, the system is absurd or the bureaucrats are seen as misrepresenting.

I have made visible the messy achievements of an office that depends on its ability to perform itself as a seemingly neutral background for political deliberation. Therefore I believe it is important to further emphasize that when we discuss public administration in Denmark this is too often done on the basis on a dichotomous view. Principles are dislodged from practices, and politics from administration. This leaves little room to discuss, nuance, change or develop the work of the bureaucratic office without being outraged by a seeming lack of consistency, neutrality and homogeneity. There is little room to discuss the importance of the careful tinkering involved in reaching an incontestable election result, but this is crucial, how else can we learn from past practices and discuss 'good' and 'bad' bureaucratic conduct in a productive manner?

If we return to the e-voting debate in Denmark opening this thesis, the debate on electronic voting may for now be at a standstill in Denmark, but around the world countries are still looking to digitalise parts of the electoral process. My study of the careful, practical production of the Danish election demonstrates the immense work it takes to generate democracy. This work involves negotiations and decisions in a network. This involvement of all these actors, I believe, is what produces a collective responsibility for elections – a shared responsibility that may be challenging to reproduce if the socio-material assemblages of the bureaucratic machine are replaced with a technical apparatus. In any case, whatever changes future digitalisation might imply, the robustness of the existing system is remarkable and should be taken into account. This is first and foremost what I have tried to make visible.



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