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How to Engage Reflexively with Messy Presents and Potential Futures: An Audio Walk for Planners

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ABSTRACT

This article calls for planning practitioners to engage in future-making practices that move from projection to reflexive engagement. We demonstrate how the audio walk, as a method for reflexive engagement, can assist planners in developing future-making practices that 1) strengthen planners' ability to see places and issues through local perspectives, 2) help planners accommodate the messy present in future plans and 3) make planners recognize their own roles and responsibility as active generators of specific images of the future. We conclude that any representations of the future are performative; they bring the future into being and therefore enable or constrain certain (re)configurations of it.

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Introduction

A group of 150 people enters the city (Figure 1), wearing headphones. They participate in an audio walk guided by a synthetic female voice that calls herself 'the Future'. Walking through different parts of East-London, from crowded pedestrian streets to empty churches, from busy market halls to deserted back alleys, the group of 'listeners' encounter a range of voices speaking from the present: residents, politicians, developers, planners and architects share their visions of the future from the perspectives of London anno 2019.

This paper analyses an audio walk as a 'future-making practice' that gives insights into new ways of thinking about and representing the future in planning. We define future-making practices as the specific ways in which actors produce and enact the future in planning processes. These practices take on different forms, from utopian visions to plausible scenarios. The future is traded in future housing markets, promised in development contracts, expected in the form of profit, invested in by developers, visualized through computer generated images (CGIs), commodified by finance capital, coaxed into being through masterplans, expressed through participatory processes, imagined in urban artistic interventions, made less threatening in climate mitigation plans, and so on. Common to these future-making practices is that the future is represented in certain ways (i.e. as threatening, as an investment opportunity, as hopeful) in order to become a cause and justification for some form of action in the here and now. Therefore, how planners represent and relate to the future is a key concern in planning.

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Figure 1. Audio walk listeners by a red stop light (photo: Frederic Tschepp).

Representations of the future in planning are filled with power residing in, at times, rigid representations of the self and the world (Hillier, 2008). Chakraborty and Macmillan (2015) extensive study of scenario planning illustrates the point. They observe a number of common challenges in which the expectation of conceiving, developing and evaluating future scenarios can be reduced to a very limited number of options, such as a sprawl scenario and a smart growth scenario. Such overly simplistic scenarios, they argue, often reveal little more than the preference of the planners and thus work to steer associated participatory processes toward some preconceived outcome. Furthermore, by using the preferred scenario as the basis for action, planners may appeal to precedents that negate the value of present circumstance and eliminate human agency and practice, conflict and non-linear change, despite the fact that these are all key aspects of uncertain futures (Chakraborty et al., 2011; Tyszczuk & Smith, 2018). This points to the need for planning practitioners to include "the ethnographic present" (Holston, 1998, p. 166) to a larger degree in their future-making practices. That is, to acknowledge the futures encountered in existing social conditions, rather than simply replacing these conditions with something new through the emphasis on 'picking' a preferred future. In response, this article explores how planning practitioners may think differently about how the future is represented in and through future-making practices in planning. It foregrounds how standardized future representations of a place infuse power into that place by making only certain people, actions, objects and norms visible. The question, then, is whether we can begin to think of the future less in terms of replacing an unwanted present with a predetermined and desired future, and more in terms of engaging with the many imagined, hoped for or feared futures embedded in the complex lived experiences of the present. This way, planning might be better equipped to open the question of how we might live to much broader possibilities. We argue that in order to achieve this, planning practice needs to move from future-making practices based on projections to future-making practices that stimulate reflexive engagement.

Understood as estimates or forecasts of future situations based on present trends, projections tend to dominate future-making practices in planning. Projections deploy rational and supposedly objective conventions to structure, plot and envision future plans. Reflexive engagement questions these objective conventions by highlighting the planner's influence and responsibility as an active generator of any specific interests, identities, projections and images of the future. Hence, where projection can be seen to reason in terms of standardized information about the future, reflexive engagement foregrounds that this information only has meaning as a function of the labour carried out by an attentive planner. This 'attentional labour' is explored through the analysis of the audio walk.

The article suggests that the potential of the audio walk as a future-making practice is to help planners reflect on their engagement with what they hear and see, highlighting the futures already inscribed into the present through the hopes and dissatisfactions of local voices. This was done by drawing the planners into a constant back and forth between two mutually exclusive but complementary levels of immersion and critique: the audio narrative invited them to become absorbed in a place and the futures envisioned, hoped for or feared by its citizens, while demanding that they literally keep one foot in the 'real' situation of the present as they physically walk through the urban environment onto which these futures are projected and imagined.

Because the article is concerned with the role of the planners in interpreting, creating, filtering and ordering information about both present and future through the experience of the audio walk, we are not concerned here with how the participatory process of making the audio walk stimulated open-ended collective dialogues. This topic is already extensively dealt with in literatures on art-planning collaborations (see e.g. Dang, 2005; Gkartzios & Crawshaw, 2019; Rannila & Loivaranta, 2015; Sarkissian, 2005; Vasudevan, 2020), including our own previous work (see e.g. Sachs Olsen, 2017). What we are interested in, however, is the role of the planner in interpreting, shaping and ordering what they hear in these dialogues. That is, how they engage with the outcomes of any participatory process. The paper accordingly analyses how the audio walk works as what we call an 'aesthetic interface' between planners and a participatory process. The notion of 'aesthetics' here refers to a relation to the world that is one of sensibility rather than objective knowing: "[w]e neither identify nor determine anything in the object presented to our senses but judge it solely in its particularity as it is presented to our senses, without subsuming it under a general rule" (Dikeç, 2015, p. 17). Aesthetics accordingly has the potential to free experiences from their usual sedimented practices, creating opportunities for shifts in perspective. Consequently, we do not understand the audio walk as an artwork in itself but as a future-making practice which works aesthetically by intervening in the general distribution of ways of seeing, doing, being and making (Rancière, 2004). It is by virtue of these destabilizing interventions that the audio walk opens up possibilities for planning practitioners to attend to the future in ways that better enable them to accommodate and navigate the complexity and messiness of the present. Key here is to keep the sphere of meaning open, which is to say, to keep the future open. As an aesthetic interface, the audio walk does not function as an accurate depiction of reality, but rather as a destabilization of the perception of reality by prompting shifts in perspective.

The article is structured in three parts. First, we demonstrate how future-making practices in planning tend to be centred around projection. We argue that planning risks colonizing the present by projecting onto it a specific future, and that representations of the future therefore must be taken more seriously in terms of how they bring futures into being through certain exclusionary mechanisms. Second, we discuss the roles of representation and planners in participatory processes, foregrounding how the former is a performative activity in which planners constitute identities and interests rather than merely reflect pre-existing ones. Third, we demonstrate how this performative activity works in practice by analysing scenes and feedback from the planner's experience of

the audio walk. We conclude by suggesting ways in which the audio walk stimulates a reflexive engagement that has the potential to expand the production and use of future-making practices in planning.

Future-Making as Projection

Through the future-making practices of making plans, strategic documents and decisions, planning practitioners create representations of the future in various ways. These representations are often centred around projection which, as we demonstrate in this part, might have negative impacts on urban development processes. The rational conventions that characterize projections can be seen to constitute a specific "'distribution of the sensible'" (Rancière, 2004) centred around familiar categorizations, such as established views, assigned usage and the spatially constructed order. As such, projective future-making practices allow planners to negate the diversity of the environments in which they operate by 'attending' to the same things wherever they are. The projections accordingly decide what "is seen and what can be said about it, [. . .] who has the ability to be seen and the talent to speak, [. . .] the properties of space and the possibilities of time" (Rancière, 2004, p. 12). The distribution of space is key here: "What are these places? How do they function? Why are they there? Who can occupy them? [. . .] It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say what a particular place is and what is done in it" (Rancière, 2003, p. 201). Projective future-making practices then also connote a 'projection of power', the extreme model being that of a colonizing mission, which deletes local features to impose the colonizer's standards. Discussing utopias and scenarios as forms of planning projection, we argue that in their attempts to 'fix' the future, projections appeal to precedents that negate the value of present circumstance (Holston, 1998).

Utopias, according to Hoch (2016), work a 'motivational magic' in planning as they project expectations that not only describe an ideal future, but also authorize it. A good example is the computer generated images (CGIs) that are now one of the most popular and pervasive ways in which visions of an ideal future urban space are expressed in urban development (Rose et al., 2014). While portrayed as objective and benign representations, CGIs are critiqued for transforming the urban environment into sleek promotional images, displaying racial homogeneity, economic inequality, cultural appropriations, speculative global investments and a privately managed public realm (Dunman, 2017; Speight, 2013). The future is here predicted, transformed and controlled for the benefit and wealth creation of the present (Adam & Groves, 2007). These fixed and predetermined utopias accordingly risk imposing standards that project the future as a terrain that is empty, open and subject to colonisation, neglecting the many unarticulated and fleeting futures that might already occupy it (i.e. in terms of the everyday future hopes and fears of local residents).

Scenarios are used to selectively compose and compare alternatives to inform current choice about what to do to prepare for the imagined future (Hoch, 2016). As mentioned in the Introduction, a number of issues remain when using scenarios in planning. These include inadequate consideration of uncertainties, an overemphasis on 'picking' a preferred future (Chakraborty et al., 2011), and a lack of effective public involvement (Bartholomew, 2006). Using a wide range of tools, from economic forecasts to population projection, scenarios aim to order complexity in ways that frame future conditions by informing current policies, practices and behaviour. Hoch emphasises that planning practitioners make these frames with specific stakeholders in mind, as the resulting plan only works if stakeholders take some of the advice. Metzger (2013) points out that this enactment of specific identities and interests are often not recognized within planning processes. Stakeholders are mainly regarded as pre-existing the planning process, and the role of the planner is

seen to merely 'assist' these stakeholders in articulating and placing their stakes. This view, according to Metzger, ignores the role of the planner in actively enrolling stakeholders in planning processes. What is at play here is not a negotiation between given interests, but rather a situation in which planners actively foster a projection of certain interests and the mobilisation of forces around these. Lejano and Gonzalez (2017) observe how planning processes tend to project onto place imagined communities, often consisting of specific cultural and economic types, and then direct stakeholders, growth and change toward the same. In some cases, the imagined community is constructed as a polar opposite or antithesis of the existing community, and often legitimizes itself by problematizing this community. In such cases, future-making practices are not about the enhancement and flourishing of the existing residential population but its replacement. In response, Lejano and Gonzalez (2017, p. 14) call for new planning practices that institutionalize 'community-preserving' as alternatives to traditional redevelopment.

Rather than seeing the future as a blank canvas, the 'community-preserving' approach recognizes that the future is densely populated with all sorts of messy ideas of what's worth preserving. Such recognition hinges on acknowledging that practices concerned with projecting specific ideas and visions of the future onto a place, infuse power into that place by making only certain objects, actions and norms visible. As Hillier (2008, p. 29) argues, representation always comes at a cost: "the failure of our systems of representation to acknowledge the constitutive outside, the excluded other". This failure, according to Hillier, relates to a tendency of traditional planning to regard planners' representation of people and space as value-free and objective. Saward (2010) accordingly observes how most accounts of representation presume that the signified is a given, transparent and largely stable entity. Within this logic, the world – and the future for that matter – is seen as more or less specific, controllable, definable and decided, and thus planners can create accurate and valid representations of it in texts, scenarios, maps, images and plans. However, as Saward emphasizes, the role of representation needs to be taken more seriously as a performative activity that constitutes identities, interests, constructions and images, rather than as an activity that merely reflects pre-existing ones. While this process can be seen as manipulative, it is not necessarily malevolent. Rather, it could be thought of as "a careful attention to conditions of collective becoming which may be a fundamental necessity of a democratically conscious craft of planning" (Metzger, 2013, p. 783). This requires a specific sensitivity to the power that future projections wield in developing and destroying the places that people become attached to (Marotta & Cummings, 2019). As we discuss in the next part, this focus moves beyond simplistic notions of the planner as a neutral facilitator of participatory processes for the sake of integrating local knowledge into future scenarios and plans. As Metzger (2013) observes, such notions reflect a discourse of distance and detachment – exemplified by use of terms such as 'stakeholder analysis' and 'assistance'. In contrast, future-making practices that stimulate reflexive engagement destabilize the role of planners in participatory processes by prompting planners to acknowledge their roles as active participants in the ongoing relations with the people and places through which the future is brought into being.

Destabilizing Participation

Recent years have seen a growing interest by planners in the potential of art to develop forms of citizen participation that is (more) open to new voices and perspectives. Here, planners gain insights from, among others, artistic walking practices (Gkartzios & Crawshaw, 2019), community-based arts practice (Dang, 2005; Sarkissian, 2005; Vasudevan, 2020), film (Lundman, 2016; Sandercock & Attili, 2010) and theatre (Rannila & Loivaranta, 2015). Yet, as Holsen (2020) observes, a weakness with

many of these studies of participation is a lack of understanding of the planning system in which participation is embedded. The question of how planners engage with the outcome of participatory processes is far less understood than more limited studies of participatory methods in isolation. This has had the unfortunate effect that, even though planning theory recognizes that participatory practices have strong exclusionary effects (Hajer, 2005; Young, 2000), planning practice tends to see participatory processes as an act that speaks for itself. That is, as a process that simply transfers knowledge from citizens to planners, followed by the assumption that there are distinct realms of knowledge that exist prior to the participatory process. This approach ignores the role of the planner in interpreting, shaping and ordering the outcomes of the participatory process. What makes the participatory process discussed here different, is how the audio walk enabled a critical reflection on this role of the planner by staging a mediated encounter with participatory outcomes.

'The outcomes' that we discuss in this article refer to the recordings of local voices that constituted the main content of the audio walk. These recordings were collected and edited into audio tracks by the first author of this article in collaboration with the artist Nina Lund Westerdahl, as part of the British Academy funded public engagement project *Urban Voices* (Zurich/London, 2018/2019). The project involved local communities in a series of workshops. Participants were recruited through local art centres and organizations, and included local residents (young and elderly), artists, council workers, planners, politicians, architects and students. In groups, workshop participants were given a map with specific locations marked on it and a stack of envelopes containing site-specific games. One of the games was a 'sound bingo' in which participants were asked to find and record sounds 'that might no longer be here in the future', 'sounds they want more of in the future', 'a sound that doesn't fit the place' etc. In another game, participants took turns placing themselves at the centre of an elevated band stand and declaring to the others how they would like to live in the future. A third game was titled 'curiosity chair' where participants could ask each other any questions about each other's relationship to the area and its future. Key to these games were that they provided an enjoyable experience in and of themselves. The games did not respond to specific plans or ask for specific opinions, nor were the residents framed as representatives of particular stakes. Equipped with audio recorders, participants recorded the conversations these games generated as well as the sounds they encountered on their way.

The recordings were edited by Nina and the first author, into three audio tracks that in the audio walk played simultaneously on three channels. The audio tracks were timed so that they folded the voices back into the local environment through the audio walk's trajectory. The voices were furthermore edited together so that they intersected, talked to and challenged each other. As we demonstrate in the analysis of the audio walk in the next part, the planners accordingly had to navigate the cacophony of voices without a principal narrative to defer to, relying solely on their own interpretation and ordering of the material presented to them. As an interface that simultaneously provided a connection and separation between the planners and the participatory process, the audio walk highlighted the processes of editing, interpreting, filtering and constructing that are present (and indeed necessary) in any form of representation and participation, insisting that participatory processes are not just about giving residents a chance to speak, but also about providing frameworks that enable planners to reflexively engage with what they hear.

Stimulating Reflexive Engagement

The audio walk was produced as a pilot project in Zurich and experienced by 30 planners and architects in a series of test-runs (autumn, 2018). A more expansive version was produced in London

and experienced by 150 planners, architects and researchers at the one-day conference, *Planning 2052* (January, 2019). The group of listeners was guided through the city by 'the voice of the future' and her real-life helpers – people in yellow vests whose task was to ensure that the group stayed together and followed the same pace. Each listener was equipped with headphones that had three channels in which different voices expressed different concerns, perspectives and visions for the areas through which the group walked. The listeners could choose which channel to listen to and switch between them as desired.

To analyse what happened in the encounter between the edited audio tracks and on-site experiences in both Zurich and London, we draw on fieldnotes from the second authors' experience of the audio walk in London, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted with the listeners and anonymous feedback forms produced by the first author. For the purpose of this article, we have selected feedback from listeners who are urban professionals (i.e. architects and planners), and who responded to the audio walk in light of their professional experiences. In the analysis, these professionals are referred to simply as 'listeners'. The fieldnotes and feedback were analysed with regards to how listeners navigated between what they listened to and what they experienced during the walk. Summing up the analysis, these experiences highlight one central feature of the audio walk's potential as a future-making practice, centred around reflexive engagement: Its way of demanding an 'attentional labour' of its listeners by constantly making them navigate between two places at once, the space of the audio narrative (expressing future dreams, needs, speculations, visions and dissatisfactions) and the space of the city (the physical here-and-nowness of the walk). Being in two places at once is exactly the challenge for planners who are charged with the task of making the future present.

The analysis is structured in three parts. The first two parts focus on the two sites of the audio walk: the audio narrative and the urban environment, while the third part focuses on the audio walk as an aesthetic interface that constructs specific relationships and meanings between the audio narrative and the urban environment.

Audio Narrative

Demanding that the planners participate actively and curiously in the knowledge emerging from the participatory process, the audio walk destabilizes the conventional passive position of the planner in participatory processes. The implication for future-making practices is that this unfamiliar positioning can strengthen planners' ability to see the city through another's perspective.

In the fieldnotes below, the listener describes a scene where the group of listeners walk down the busy Kingsland Road towards Liverpool Street Station in London:

I listen to the voice of a man with a Spanish accent speaking very quickly, which makes me accelerate my walking: "So all these developments, it is going faster and faster … you get bits of land which are empty, we build the buildings in them, we then inhabit them, we sell them and then someone else inhabits them, we rent them, we refurbish them, then we knock the buildings down, and that cycle continues". Other voices remarks: "They say that the skyline of a city is a monument to what is important in that city. I try to not think too much about that here – it is too depressing!", "Things are changing all the time, I mean, in the morning it is one thing, in the afternoon it is something else". While listening, I start to see what is right in front of my eyes as somebody else's imagination of the future. It brings out the surreal in what I see and gives me the impression of the future as something catching up on us through forces that are beyond my control. As we arrive in Spitalfields – a gentrified food market- I am presented with a conversation between two women that amplifies this impression: "Do you remember

when Spitalfields was Spitalfields? You could just, you know, be anyone and have a stall, you'll have the smell of curry … What is the smell now? I can't smell any bloody thing now! I can't smell! They took away the smell! It makes me angry". As we walk, I imagine a less sanitized marketplace filled with strong smells and colours.

The listener is affected by the voices in the audio narrative; the fast voice makes her walk faster, the exclamations about the urban development as out of control makes her see the city as surreal, as out of her hands. She sees the food market in light of the women's conversation, as something it once was. The emotional outbursts she listens to differ from the dispassionate, fact-based, orderly and articulated opinions that are favoured in participatory processes (Young, 2000). As one listener remarks in an interview: "This is not facts, it is mostly emotions! If you are an expert you might want the facts, but these are emotions that you otherwise don't get access to, so it complements the facts […]". Another listener observed how the audio walk accordingly made him "feel more local": "I see the struggles the inhabitants have to cope with". In this way, the audio walk performs the function of Sandercock's plea for the ability of the planner to "imagine oneself in another skin, another story, another opening of space" (Sandercock, 2002, p. 8). At the same time, it made this position more tangible and embodied than in public hearings or as a debrief after a participatory process because the emotions and opinions constantly interfere with the listeners' experiences of the spaces around them. This is demonstrated in the fieldnotes and is further described by another listener: "The walk is accelerating the attentiveness, mindfulness, and takes away the focus from your own daily reality. The walk is relativizing and allows for other thoughts". These descriptions indicate an experience of local voices independently of a demand for immediate 'usefulness' or translations of these voices into facts.

Experiencing the city through other peoples' eyes (or voices) also involves an element of self-alienation as listeners have to dis-identify with their own identity and position. Hence, listeners dis-identify as experts who are used to listening to facts rather than emotions and opinions. This self-alienation builds on the function of aesthetics as setting the stage for an estrangement of that which is familiar and taken-for granted (Metzger, 2010). Hence, adding an aesthetic dimension to imagining oneself in another's skin, the audio walk enhanced a "perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society" (Marcuse, 1978, p. 9). This holds the potential to destabilize the familiar position from which planners are used to listening, highlighting the planner's responsibility as an active generator of certain encounters and interests, as well as patterns of feeling, thought and judgment. In an interview, one listener realized how the different channels made her aware of how she listens and what kinds of voices she likes to listen to. She noticed that she likes to listen to energetic voices more, and that she tended to switch channels if the voice was too slow or low. Another listener would use the possibility to switch channels when she got frustrated about the one-way communication: "When I am not able to respond to what is said, I can at least change channel and respond that way, like: yeah, yeah, I've heard this [a] hundred times".

The reflexive engagement with the local voices makes apparent how making plans for the future – both projective and the ones that, like the audio walk, seek to work in a more open-ended manner – determine possible modes of perception as they constitute a system of what is visible and audible (Rancière, 2004). As illustrated, the listeners avoid confronting themselves with certain things (certain voices or opinions) while choosing others. The audio walk did not intend to 'fix' this normative interpretation and judgment but rather to make it apparent as a dynamic involved in all encounters. This way, the audio walk has the potential to introduce the idea of the distribution of the sensible into planning discussions on future-making practices. As mentioned, the distribution of the sensible refers to established views, assigned usage and the spatially constructed order which governs possible modes of perception. This is illustrated in the following feedback in which listeners note how listening

to the audio walk made them aware of their own assumptions and modes of perception: "Being invited to listen without being able to interrupt, agree, disagree … was a good experience for me".; "I had this picture of who I was listening to and suddenly this person starts talking about her experience of racism and I realized that I had just taken for granted that she was white!" Listening may certainly not always be neutral, open or empathetic. On the contrary, listening might be selective in the sense that it functions to preserve rather than transform established hierarchies of attention. The audio walk itself becomes another such distribution of the sensible. It does not stand outside of it, but – as we demonstrate in more detail in the next part – it reconfigures it by demanding the 'attentional labour' of its listeners. The audio walk itself was a "delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise (…) " (Rancière, 2004, p. 13) which can raise conversation in planning about how we represent the future not through projection but as an on-going experience of the present that we need to turn our attention to.

Urban Environment

The audio walk pushed the listeners to interact with the urban environment in ways which resisted given representations of a place. This interaction demanded the 'attentional labour' of the planners when navigating the physical surroundings in which the walking took place and the audio narrative that invited the future – through dreams, dissatisfactions, needs and speculations – into the listener's imagination. As demonstrated in the following scenes, the implication for future-making practices is that this 'attentional labour' can make planners engage reflexively with the many possible futures encountered in existing social conditions, as well as in how to bring the messy present into visions of the future.

"I want to live in a place with a cat flap", "I want to live in a place where slugs do not invade the living room every night"; "I want to live in a place where the bathroom has a window".

While listening to these humble hopes for the future spoken by different voices in turn, I peak through the fence to a community garden in which someone has actually realized their hopes for the future by creating a space of their own. "You never get that in planning policy, you know" continues a female voice, and it almost seems like the statement is a comment to the community garden I am looking at. "I think the ability to be authors of the city and yourself as a person is absolutely dependent on the preservation of those kinds of places". It's up to me to understand what the voice in the conversation means by "those kinds of places", but to me, the community garden is definitely something worth preserving. We pass the community garden and cross a pedestrian bridge. Here, I see another version of self-made (although less dreamy) ways of living in the city: Human excrements tell us that this slightly hidden space, out of developments' eye, is also a place where homeless people seek shelter and privacy. Encountering this space makes my thoughts change – the wish to live and shape your life without planning is also a privileged dream, and perhaps there is a task for planners after all.

The fieldnotes show how the listener relates what she hears to what she sees while walking. The audio walk neither guides her look towards the community garden or towards the traces of homeless – these are rather backgrounds that emerge as meaningful when combined with the audio narrative. Several listeners accordingly noted the reciprocal relation between how the places they were in influenced the ways in which they were listening, and how listening made them look more intensely on their surroundings, seeing things they hadn't noticed before, even in familiar spaces. In the fieldnotes above, we see how the explicit hopes for the future in the audio tracks intersect with the hopes for the future that are released by the material surroundings of the community garden and the traces of homeless people. The encounter between recorded material and the city produces

an experience of being in two places at once: In the voices' idealistic emphasis on taking the city and one's life into one's own hands, and the rough realities of having to get by without being cared for by planning. By presenting certain dreams for the future, the audio walk prompts the planner to perceive her surroundings in this light, to look for the many layers of dreams for the future that can be found in existing social conditions. Being confronted with both of these realities at once (indeed we do not mean to say that dreams of having a cat flap or a bathroom with a window are less real), the listener starts to reflect on the role and responsibility of planning to intervene more or less in the city. This perceptive condition of reflexive engagement, actively enhanced by the audio walk, might help planners to bring the messy present – not as an image, but as a lived condition – with them when planning for the future. One listener confirms this potential in an interview: "What hit me the most with the audio walk was that you want the city to go on, but you also want your places to stay the way they are. It takes you out of your comfort zone when you have to change the city in a place that is actually beautiful". Such experiences show how the state of immersion holds potential for making planners aware of the many elements of the present to which people are attached. However, it was also the aim of the audio walk to constantly break this potentially passive state of immersion, which involves the risk of overlooking planners' responsibilities when they are faced with having to change "places that are beautiful" or that people become attached to. This was done by the voice of the Future making the listeners 'perform' their own roles in urban development processes:

We are asked to take each other's hands and shape a large circle outside Spitalfields market, under a gazebo which becomes our stage. As we listen to the audio track I realize that we are re-enacting a 'Gentrifiers' Anonymous' meeting in which people deal with their inevitable complicity in gentrification. We are performatively made to confess, both because we are mimicking the circle but also because of our privileged positions as participants in a conference on urban planning.

In these fieldnotes, the listener seems to see herself from the outside, as she follows the instructions of the Future. Her experience of a collective moment of confession arises because she starts to analyse the situation, thinking critically about her own role in urban planning. This oscillation between immersion and critique was picked up on by another listener, describing a feeling of being 'inside' (immersed in the audio walk, enhanced by the headphones), while listening to stories from the 'outside'. Another listener described the audio walk "almost like virtual reality" that made her forget to look when she crossed the street because she was so into the experience: "Everything seemed at the same time surreal and more real than usual", she said. As the audio walk unfolded through navigating the urban environment, such feelings of immersion and estrangement occurred throughout the walk. In a feedback interview, one listener describes the difference between regular city tours and the audio walk with the difference between observing and being absorbed. Unlike projective future-making practices such as CGIs, that tend to give audiences the future of a place 'ready made', the audio walk prompted a performative exploration of place and its many possible futures, such as when questioning gentrification. Hence, the audio walk differed from audio-guided routes through areas, such as those used for commercial and touristic gains. These are often audio walks simply used as rational instruments of navigation that give its listeners a singular, generally accepted and 'given' representation of a place (Saunders & Moles, 2016). In contrast, navigating between urban environments and the situations created by the audio narrative, the audio walk that we discuss here accommodates an active role of the listeners, creating their own narratives as they weave the lifeworlds in the audio walk into their own rhythm and experiences. These open-ended insights into a place through a reflexive engagement with it, make stabilized forms of representation

impossible. In the next part, we demonstrate how the audio walk accordingly worked as an aesthetic interface between the audio narrative and the urban environment.

Aesthetic Interface

Navigating between urban environments and the situations created by the audio narrative, the aesthetic interface of the audio walk produced a "threshold condition that both delimits the space for a kind of inhabitation and opens up otherwise unavailable phenomena, conditions, situations, and territories for exploration, use, participation, and exploitation" (Hookway, 2014, p. 5). As such, the audio walk may help develop future-making practices that are better attuned to the inherent constructedness of such practices as well as of any form of representation. In turn, this attunement may open up more expansive representative frames, as demonstrated in the following scenes:

The voice of the Future keeps confronting us with our values. Throughout the walk, she makes us confess (if nothing else, to ourselves): Am I hopeful for urban planning in the future? Make a choice and, quite literally, stick to the route this choice leads to (we are instructed to switch channels according to our choices). What would I like to keep in this place? "Choose and attach yourself to this thing!" the voice of the Future demands of us. Sometimes, our answers are made visible to the other listeners because we have to move around according to our answers, which make me feel slightly vulnerable, as if it displays: Over there, the cynics, over here, the idealists!

The constructed 'voice of the Future' goes one step further than only giving the listeners' voices of locals or making them engage with urban environments. It asks listeners to critically apply their own visions for the future onto the present by switching channels, changing routes and physically positioning themselves in space. One listener indicates a meta-consciousness at work when prompted to make choices by switching channels, which she describes as 'a challenge': "[S]hould I change channel or not, am I too comfortable or not?" Two other listeners discuss the effect of the three channels, which to them produced a constant fear of missing out. While one of them saw this as a weakness of the audio walk – that you would necessarily not 'get it all' – the other found that this is how the city works: "[Y]ou can never get only one story, there are always hundreds of other stories going on". Another listener expresses a similar feeling of missing out on many things in the audio walk, not because of the channels but because of the different points of opinion that are presented rapidly. When asked whether this frustrated her, she answered: "No, I think the city is like that".

What happened in these moments of making choices and of becoming aware of one's own position (as planner, as 'too comfortable', as missing out) was that the immersion previously described was broken, and the constructedness of the audio walk became visible. This effect emphasized the ongoing responsibility of planners to reflectively engage by constructing meaningful compositions out of what they see and hear. What the listeners hear on audio tracks are not the 'clean' outcomes of participatory processes given as pre-existing knowledge, but a result of mediating perception (Blackman, 2016). Blackman defines a mediated perception as "a performative method [which] is both an intervention and representation, which sorts, aligns, and makes links across a distributed and scattered array of traces, gaps, silences, submerged narratives and displaced actors". (2016, p. 41). As an aesthetic interface, the audio walk similarly mediates between two modes of perception, an immersive one and a critical one in which listeners become aware of the effects the audio walk has on the way they see things. As a methodological tool, Blackman highlights how such mediation reveals how knowledge is brought together in a specific way to "produce a very particular 'turning up of the background' of sound" (Lury & Wakeford, 2012, p. 9). All methods mediate their content by putting forth knowledge in certain ways. But unlike the 'invisible' shaping of what can be seen and said in focus group interviews or public hearings,

the mediation in the audio walk dramatizes, stages and frames certain issues that could always have been framed differently (Blackman, 2016, p. 38). Rather than offering one homogeneous story, critique or take on the local area and its future, the audio walk displayed how 'local knowledge' requires us to talk of constructions and inventions, of 'might' and if', of mess and what is missing, of tensions and contradictions. As a planning tool for future-making, the audio walk breaks the idea of local knowledge as something already given, to instead emphasize that planners have to take part in its 'construction process'. Immersion is good for creating engagement, but to use this engagement actively in future-making practices, a critical destabilization also needs to be present. Without this destabilization, even an audio walk can end up functioning as a projection that does not contribute to a reconfiguration of the possible (Rancière, 2007, p. 259), or that claims to be a perception without mediation. As an aesthetic interface, however, the audio walk was designed to bring attention to its own 'constructedness' and thus highlighted the 'attentional labour' that is present (and indeed necessary) in any encounter between planners, people and places, and thus that any participatory process is highly 'manipulative' and constructed. Where projection can be seen to reason in terms of standardized information about the future, the audio walk emphasizes that this information only has meaning as a function of the labour carried out by an attentive planner.

Conclusion

In this article we have argued for developing future-making practices that move from projection to reflexive engagement. Discussing future-making practices centred around projection, we have illustrated how the future appears as controllable and decided, and planners are seen to be able to create accurate, value-free and objective representations of it. This view obscures how future-making practices are in fact constructing identities and interests, rather than merely reflecting already existing ones. By unfolding how the audio walk worked as an aesthetic interface, we have demonstrated the need and value of reflexive engagement for enabling less static and more open-ended modes of addressing and representing the future in planning.

The audio walk stimulated reflexive engagement in three steps. Firstly, it made listeners aware of their own role in constructing, interpreting and filtering the knowledge emerging from participatory processes. Secondly, it resisted given representations of a place and thus demanded of the listener an 'attentional labour' that challenged their customary standards, criteria and expectations. And thirdly, it worked as an aesthetic interface that oscillated between immersion and critique, present and future, local voices and urban environments, highlighting how meaning is relational, contextual and contingent. The implications for planning are that the reflexive engagement fostered through these three steps can assist planners in developing future-making practices that 1) strengthen planners' ability to see places and issues through local perspectives, 2) better equip planners to engage with the many possible futures encountered in existing social conditions and to bring the messy present into visions of the future, and 3) open up more expansive representative frames that are better attuned to their own constructedness as well as to the many ways the future is produced and altered.

As a tool for reflexive engagement, the audio walk, then, can be understood as a means to "transform the planner", as suggested by Inch (2010). By this, he means that efforts to transform planning require a transformation of the planner. Jupp and Inch (2012) accordingly call for planning theory to examine questions concerning upon what interactions, relationships and knowledges the profession of planning depends. Addressing such questions, the audio walk encouraged planners to break down and dismantle sedimented practices and perceptions of representation in planning. The questions that remain to be asked are how is this potential

capable of influencing planning practice, and how can practitioners incorporate audio walks as a viable method within their work?

While we do not suggest that planners should start making audio walks as such, we argue that it provides a method that could be incorporated into planning practice. For example, the first author of this article is working with a team of planners, architects and designers to turn the audio walk into a digital 'place-listening tool', as an alternative to the focus on 'place-making' that often dominates planning processes. Place-making tends to rely on visual sensory experience in which city landscapes are increasingly under pressure to perform as marketable commodities, which in turn has led to a 'spectacularization' of how the urban environment is seen (for critique, see e.g. Degen & Rose, 2012). This focus on visual experience risks neglecting how the city is experienced through multiple senses relating to the shifting mobilities and temporalities of everyday urban experience. In response, the place-listening tool focuses on an auditory sensitivity that is concerned with recording multisensory embodied experiences that include memories, speculations and dreams, rather than focusing solely on visual compositions or views. Practically, the tool will function as a site-specific digital platform through which self-identified stakeholders of specific places are able, via a downloadable app, to record snippets of conversations, sounds and monologues about a place and its futures. The recordings will be uploaded to a digital archive that grows over time. Municipalities may subscribe to the tool, and the subscription will cover the costs of designers organizing the accumulating soundtracks and mapping these onto the places in which they are created. The aim is that planners, developers or architects working with the municipality on a specific site have to engage with the tool when planning future developments. Key here is that the recordings can only be listened to *in situ*. Hence, the tool replicates the process of meaning-making from the audio walk, in which the listener constantly has to combine the information she receives with what she sees and experiences in the place it is related to. Due to the durational nature of the tool, some of this information may relate to aspects of places that have already transformed into something else, and thus replicate the destabilization of present and future of the audio walk as well as the destabilization experienced by residents living in places that are undergoing rapid transformations. This kind of 'durational' and continuous engagement with a place is seldom available to planners as participation processes are often conducted within short time-frames and in response to specific developments. As one of the team-members remarked, the information gathered in such processes are often quite limited as the process is shaped by rigid ideas of what is considered 'relevant'. And, furthermore, the information is – after the end of the consultation phase – "put in a drawer never to be seen again". The place-listening tool, on the other hand, is concerned with an open-ended and durational exploration of a place, and thus provides living and lively encounters with the social and cultural complexity of a place as multiple and dynamic social constructions (see e.g. Massey, 2005). As the analysis demonstrates, such encounters have the potential to evoke possible futures that are sufficiently open, to encourage participation and interpretation rather than a blueprint for what will unfold. As with the audio walk, the aim here is not to enable the planner to better predict the future of a place but to better understand and address the complexity of the present and accommodate this in plans for more open-ended futures.

The place-listening tool is in an early phase of development and several questions concerning availability, inclusivity, logistics and design remain to be answered. Yet, the tool points to a possible trajectory for how the approaches and methods developed in the audio walk can influence planning practice. Stemming from methods and approaches rooted in the aesthetics, the audio walk does not simply provide an alternative account of those futures considered plausible and desirable and that can therefore be controlled, directed or projected into being. Rather, it provides possibilities to enrich future-making practices by enabling more reflexive and

open-ended frames of representation that start from the messiness of the present rather than a predetermined image of the future.

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