

Resistance as a form of change

Power dynamics, social movements & facilitation

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Human-Centred Research and Design in Crisis (CS-E4002)
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— *Welcome!*

Brief intro

Part I: Lecture

— *Social movements, resistance and power*

— *What about design?*

Brief discussion & break

Part II: Workshop

— *Instructions*

— *Breakout rooms*

Discussion and conclusion

— *Before we start..*

This session is for you and therefore also *by you!**

Please, feel free (**and I encourage you to**):

- Jump in and contribute from your area of expertise or personal experience
- Ask a question if something is not clear or it made you curious
- Point out interesting sources
- Or simply unmute your mic to react!

**Yes, this is an online session. But no, it should not limit the dynamic of the group to one speaking and others quietly nodding.*

Brief intro

Today with us

Adriana Santamaría, Design strategist, Sonder Design
Arjun Harish Rao, Researcher
Arunima Jain, Master student, Aalto University
Avinash Dhital, Project specialist, Aalto Global Impact
Brenda Vértiz, PhD candidate, Aalto University
Emilija Veselova, PhD candidate, Aalto University
Eva Duran Sanchez, Master student, Aalto University
Eva Gallegos, Master student, Aalto University
Floris van der Marel, PhD candidate, Aalto & Swinburne University
Francesca Bogani Amadori, Master student, Aalto University
Hsin Yi Chen, Master student, Aalto University
Jenni, Facilitator
Katri Einola, Master student, Aalto University
Kiko Chen, Master student, Aalto University
Luis Garcia, Master student, Indiana University
Maimuna Syed, Master student, Aalto University

Maria Ferreira Litowtschenko, PhD candidate, Aalto University
Martina Dahm, Master student, Aalto University
Ming Unn Andersen, Master student, Aalto University
Nagadivya Balasubramaniam, PhD candidate, Aalto University
Nitin Sawhney, Professor of Practice, Aalto University
Noora Pitkälä, Master student, University of Helsinki
Pedro Reynolds-Cuéllar, PhD candidate, MIT
Raffaella Carluccio, Master student, Aalto University
Riikka Theresa Innanen, Master student, Aalto University
Sophie Glazik, PhD candidate, Sheffield Hallam University
Tiffany Reasbeck, Researcher, Swinburne University
Tiina Tuulos, PhD candidate, Aalto & Swinburne University
Tom Bieling, Researcher, Zentrum für Designforschung (HAW)
Tugce Ozturk, Master student, Aalto University
Uttishta Varanasi, Master student, Aalto University

--- *Brief intro*

About me

From Còrdoba, Argentina

Background in Graphic Design & Advertisement

Trained in Cultural and Intercultural Mediation

Recently completed MA in Creative Sustainability at Aalto University

Social movements



Women's march, Miami 1972

Personal relevance

The community at the service of the community.

Barrio Los Cortaderos, Còrdoba



Academic freedom and democratization.

Ciudad de las Artes, Còrdoba



Remembrance for Truth and Justice.

Annual 24/03 march, Argentina



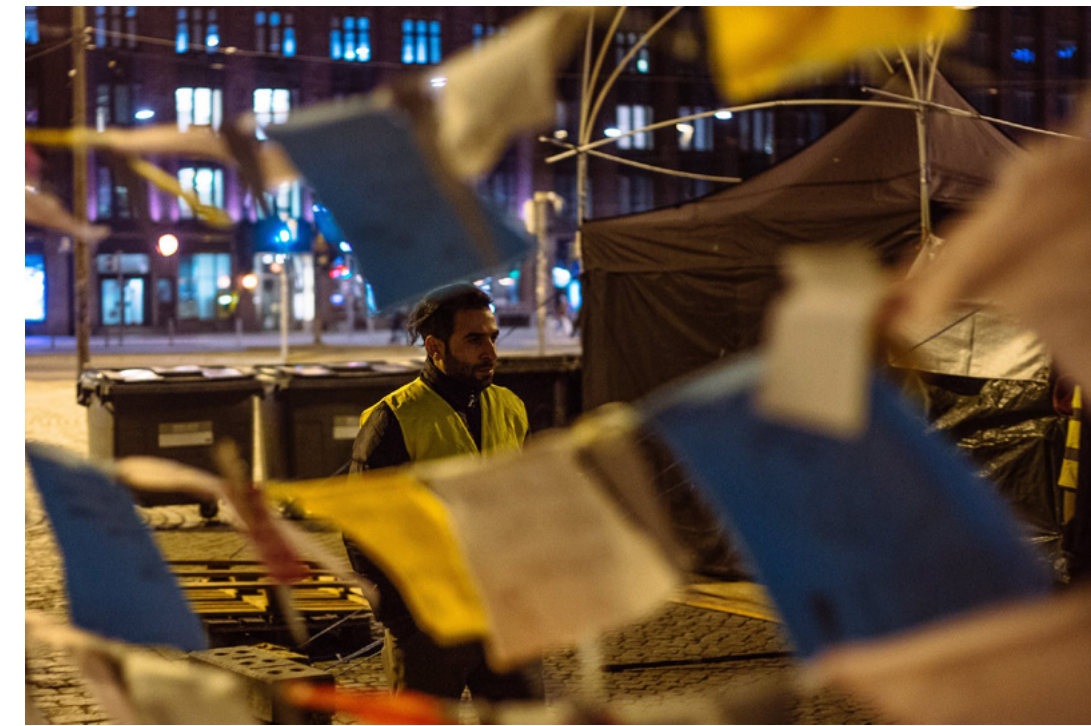
Not one less.

Marching against violence towards women and femicides, Argentina



Political lobbying for fairer asylum policies.

Human rights-based activities in
the US and Finland



Origins

Definition

“A social movement is an organized effort by a group of human beings to effect change in the face of resistance by other human beings. By this definition, a social movement is differentiated from purely individual efforts, from unorganized group efforts such as crowd action (if indeed these efforts are truly unorganized), and from efforts at technological change which proceed only against the resistance of the material world. Under the heading of resistance by other human beings is included passive resistance or apathy. It should be noted that the definition does not require that the resistance be organized.” (Aberle, 1966)

Four types

Redemptive & Alterative → Individual level

Transformative & Reformative → Societal level



Total
(e.g revolutions)



Partial
(e.g inclusion)

Power

What is power?

What do you associate the term with?

- Diverse and numerous definitions to it
- Different uses, shades, angles
- Focus on the work of Michel Foucault
- In agreement with his avoidance to create theories on power to avoid associating it to a set time placement, to objectify and subjectify it.



Tell
me!

Three core characteristics of power

Subjectlessness

Ability to be independent and detached from any subject form.

Humans as power's vehicle, not the object of this reciprocal communicative bond.

Something that exists on its own, and cannot be objectified (acquired, be bought, given away or stolen).

Something that acts and operates, and can, to some extent, be negotiable (Bălan, 2010 on Foucault, 1980).

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Decentredness

Lacks a definite nucleus.

It is not something fluid, it is something that disperses and circulates

It is decentered, not being characteristic of any particular group or class in society, not belonging to certain individuals over others.

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Ubiquity

It's pervasive, being present in every aspect of our every day.

It becomes ubiquitous as its exertion is itself a possibility within any kind of relationship (Foucault, 1978; 1980 as cited in Kelly, 2009; Bălan, 2010).

Power relations

1) The result of different dynamics (positive or negative)

2) A component of those same dynamics (Foucault, 1976; 1978; 1980, as cited in Kelly, 2009).

Gives room to a refined definition of power:

*“A mode of action upon the
action of others”*

(Foucault, 2000, as cited in Kelly, 2009, p. 66).

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Power relations to be understood as:
those in which the actions
of one prevails, intending to
have a purposeful effect on the
counterpart's behaviour.

(Foucault, 1997, as cited in Kelly, 2009).

Relevant definitions

“Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structure.”

(Foucault, 2000, as cited in Kelly, 2009, p. 69)

“Power is the ability [...] to define and control circumstances and events so that one can influence things to go in the direction of one’s interest.”

(Rorty, 1992, as cited in Dovey, 1999, p. 11)

- Something that comes into play in human interactions
- Something with the objective of influencing to benefit a certain agenda

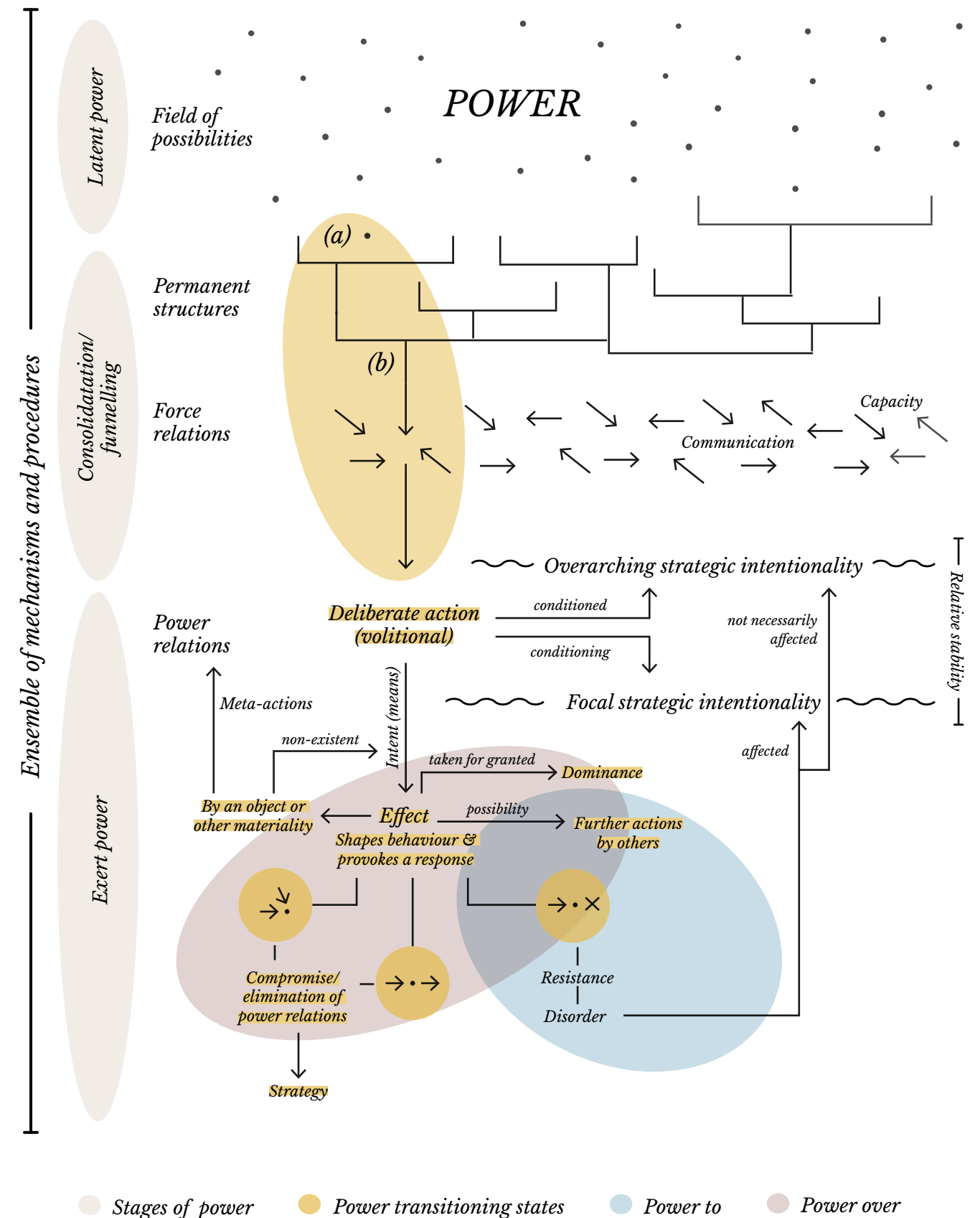
Understanding power exertion

Visualization with the intention to be able to make sense of the complexity behind power.

— Power as a two-faced force: invisible but at the same time visible and with strong consequences.

3 key moments

- 1) latent power
- 2) consolidation/funnelling
- 3) exert power



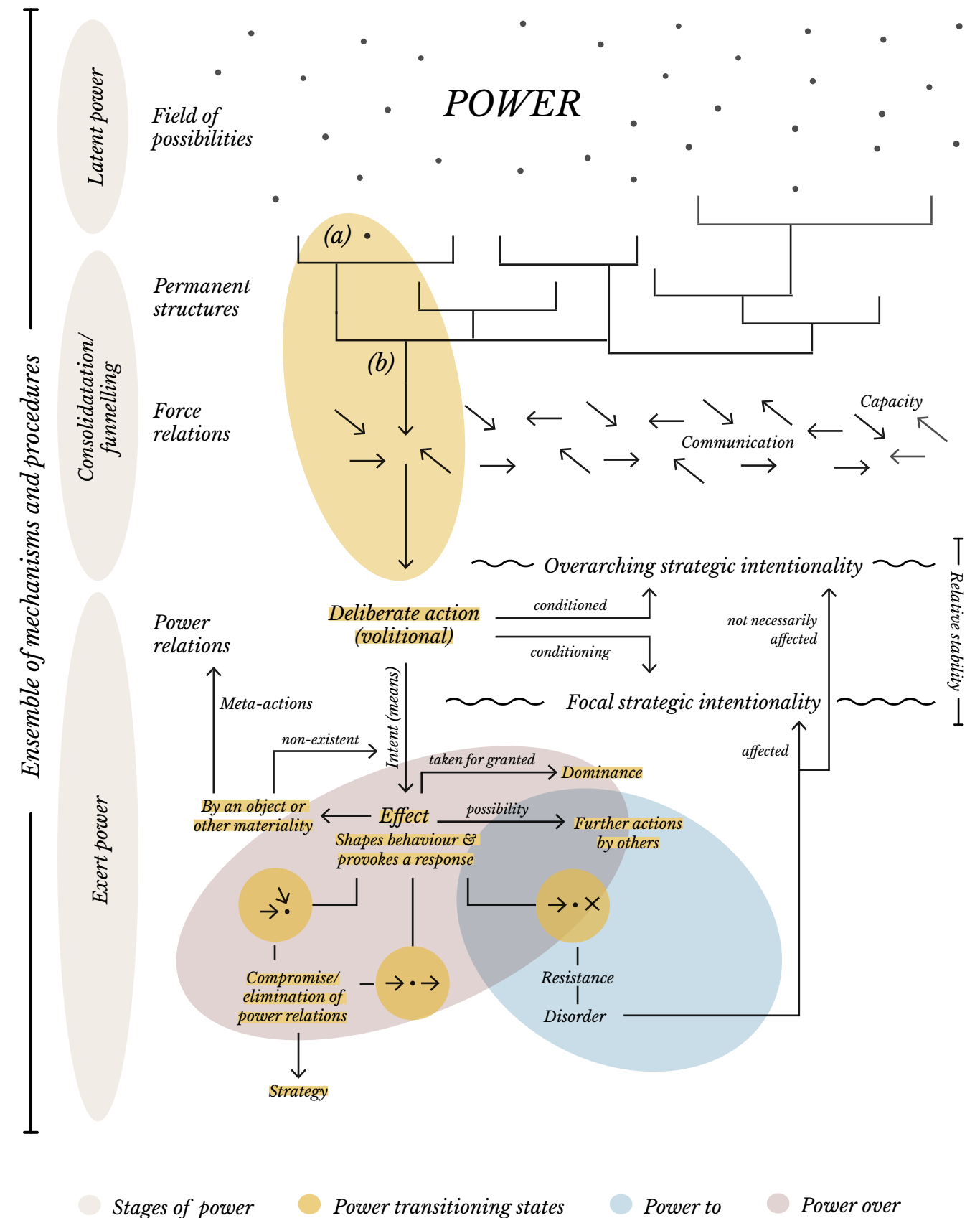
1. Latent power

Power as something that *just is* (subjectless)

Power is untapped, as it is in a dormant state, yet not manifested or exercised by individuals.

Embedded in the structures within which it will be exerted.

However! Power structures do not *own* power, but systems of relations are built and set in motion to exert that latent power.



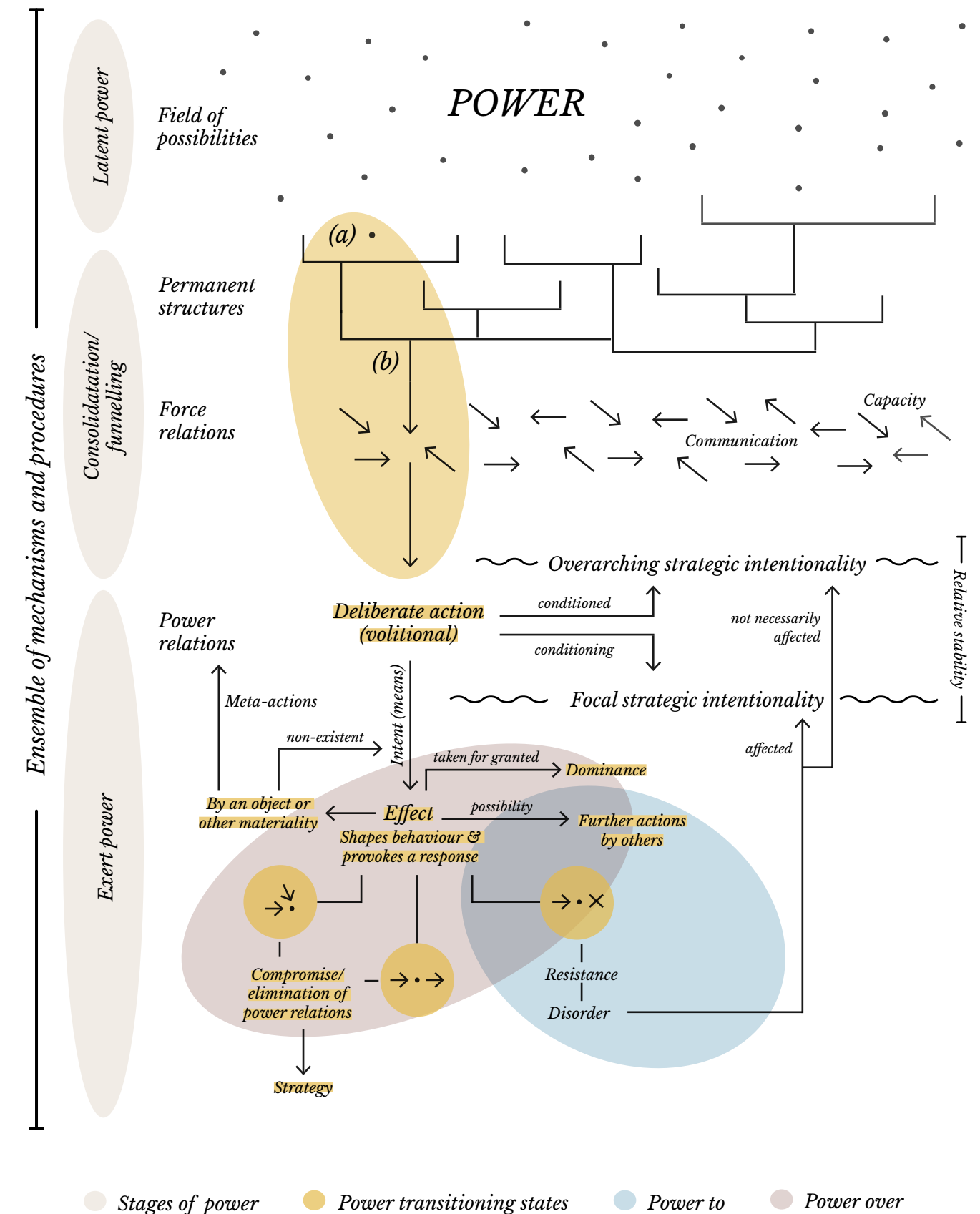
2. Consolidation/funneling

Power having a logic and intent of its own (self-organization of forces) (Kelly, 2009)

Still not exercised power! However, two dimensions come into play: communication and capacity

Communication: a way to exchange information
Capacity: the potential of making something happen

↓
channels through which power can be exerted



3. Exert power

Actions as the turning point. However.. **not all of them!**

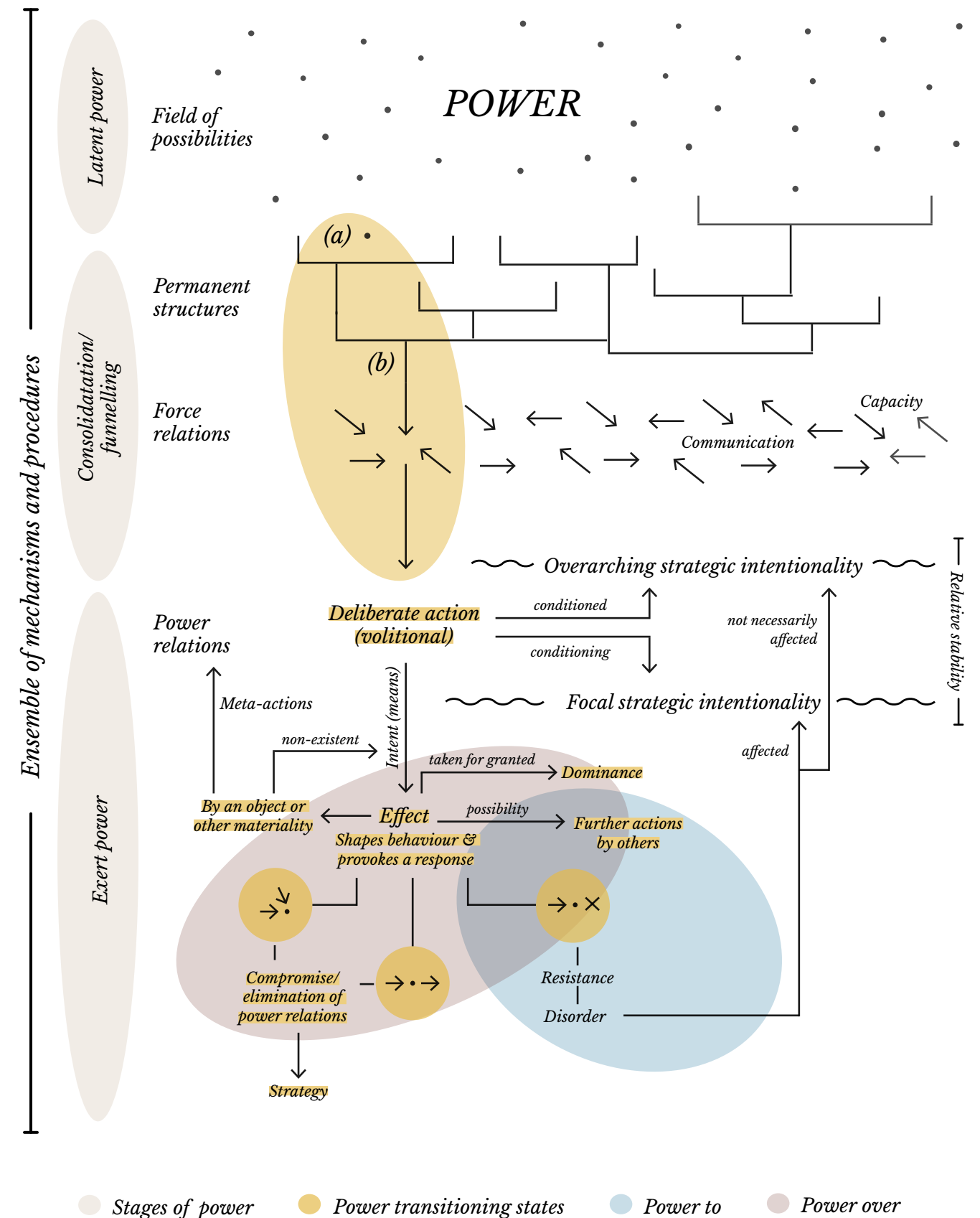


Casual:

- Carried out involuntarily
- Do not intend to influence or imply ambition to coerce, force or manipulate someone else's behaviour or actions



- They do not exert power
- They behold the possibility to exert power, but it is latent
- Power is understood as capacity and will remain dormant



3. Exert power

Actions as the turning point. However.. **not all of them!**

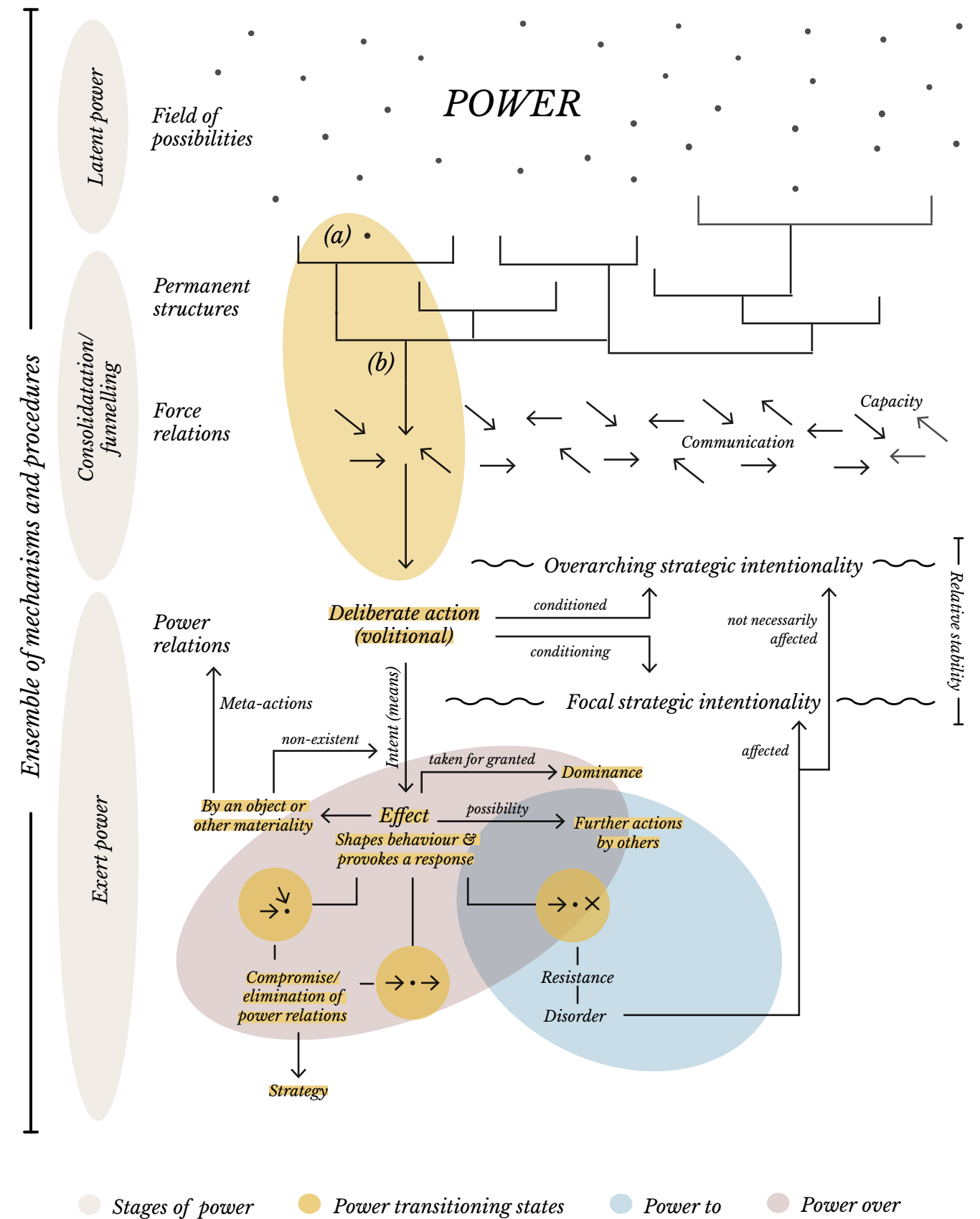


Deliberate:

- Charged with intent
- Thought out, intentional, planned actions that aspire to provoke a response in whoever they are directed to



- They aim is to disrupt somebody's otherwise stable state



Resistance



Concepción, Chile, 2019

Definition & assumptions

What do you associate
the term to?

How do you see it
employed generally?



Tell
me!

A particular facet of power relations whose concept is not covered by that of power (Barbalet, 1985), therefore not reducible to it.



Whenever power is exerted, someone is inevitably resisting it. (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Bălan, 2010).



Resistance does not necessarily equal conflict.



- Common word association in activist and political discourses in a way to express the existence of a conflict.
- Despite the link, resistance can take other non-conflictual forms

Whenever power is exerted, someone is inevitably resisting it. (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Bălan, 2010).



initiative → What resistance is opposed to and puts constraints on.
(e.g to the initiative of closing down a university programme.. students resist it)

Whenever power is exerted, someone is inevitably resisting it. (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Bălan, 2010).



**How is power exerted
in this situation?**

**Where is the initiative
coming from?**

- Hierarchy
- Agency distribution
- Control
- Coercion
- Framing
- Consensus
- etc.

(un)balanced power relations

Whenever power is exerted, someone is inevitably resisting it. (Foucault, 1978 as cited in Bălan, 2010).

Power relations imply an inherent imbalance in power distribution.



Dominant

Those on whose power
is swayed towards



Subordinate

Powerless, yet still able to influence
the outcome of the power relation

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Powerless, yet still able to influence the outcome of the power relation



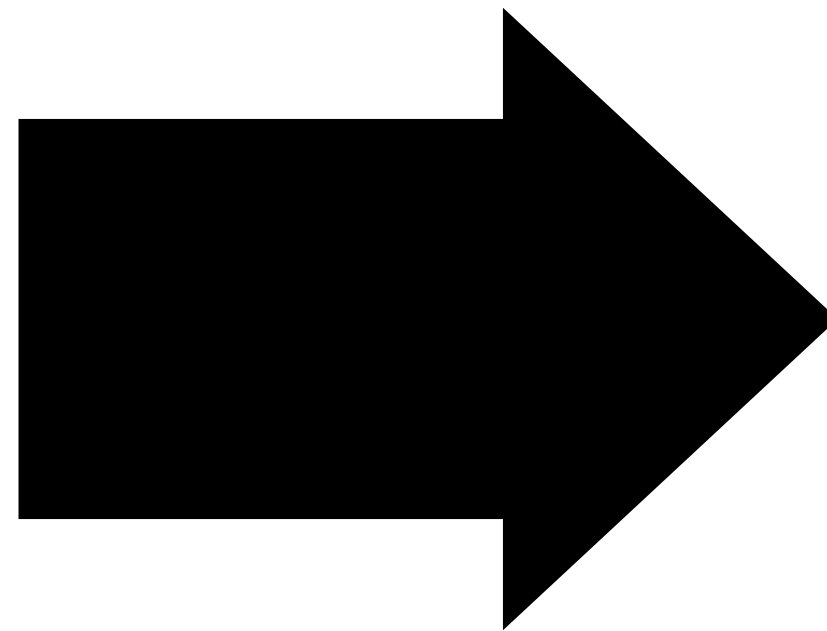
Resisting

Active mobilization of *other social resources towards the objective of limiting the power of those in control.*



Disrupting

Despite being caught up within the sphere of power, resistance can take a non-power form



Transferring to design

Design

A “study of human action that arises from social situations” (Margolin, 2010 as cited in Muratovski, 2016) of inherent political and ideological nature.

However..

“In the past, lack of involvement in political design, concerned with societal issues and their implications, has led to a general neutralization, a crucial tool in creating undiscussed power structures”.

Designers

Engaging in a socially and politically committed practice (Mazé, 2019)

Engaging in a *rearticulation of politics* (Keshavarz, 2016)



- Endorsing counter-hegemonic practices
- Resisting dominant ways of doing
- Redefining the way in which we see things
- Exposing long-existing hegemonic practices

--- *Resistance & Design*

At first glance

I see..

In participatory practices such as design facilitation power imbalances are highly present, and resistance - both from designers and participants - tends to be low.

I seek to..

Fostering a space for reconsideration and reconceptualization through first-hand resistance to the effects of existing power in design facilitation.

How to “foster resistance”?

Tackling the discontinuity in design research regarding power exertion and agency distribution.

Highlighting matters of ethics, ownership, accountability, empowerment and claims of power positions among designers.

Delving into the unacknowledged implications of intentional actions.

Spotting different aspects which allow pointing out intents of imposing power, to alluding to participation and to steering agency.

— Choosing an area. —

Facilitation — Can it be reconceptualized*?



At the basis of every human interaction

Cultural mediation

“A social agent who acts as a bridge between an individual (asylum seekers/refugees) and local authorities in order to facilitate communication, mediate legal processes, ensure basic human rights and bring down cultural and language barriers” (Villaman, 2018).

Design

- 1) Process within the realm of participatory design in which the leading designer facilitator acts as a mediator between various actors and towards a set goal.
- 2) Overarching participatory process from getting a brief to compiling and disseminating results.

* To (re)form a concept we are already familiar with, implying that new interpretations or elucidations have penetrated its original definition.

Design facilitation = Buzzword*

*as many other terms within the design realm

Buzzword

1. Adoption and adaption of different definitions to it.
2. Highlights design facilitation's versatility.
3. Leaves room for deliberate and convenient interpretations of its meaning, use, and ethical limitations.

“The more embedded structures are in the everyday, the less questioned/questionable they become, and therefore they become more effective in terms of maintaining the status quo”.

How to counter this?

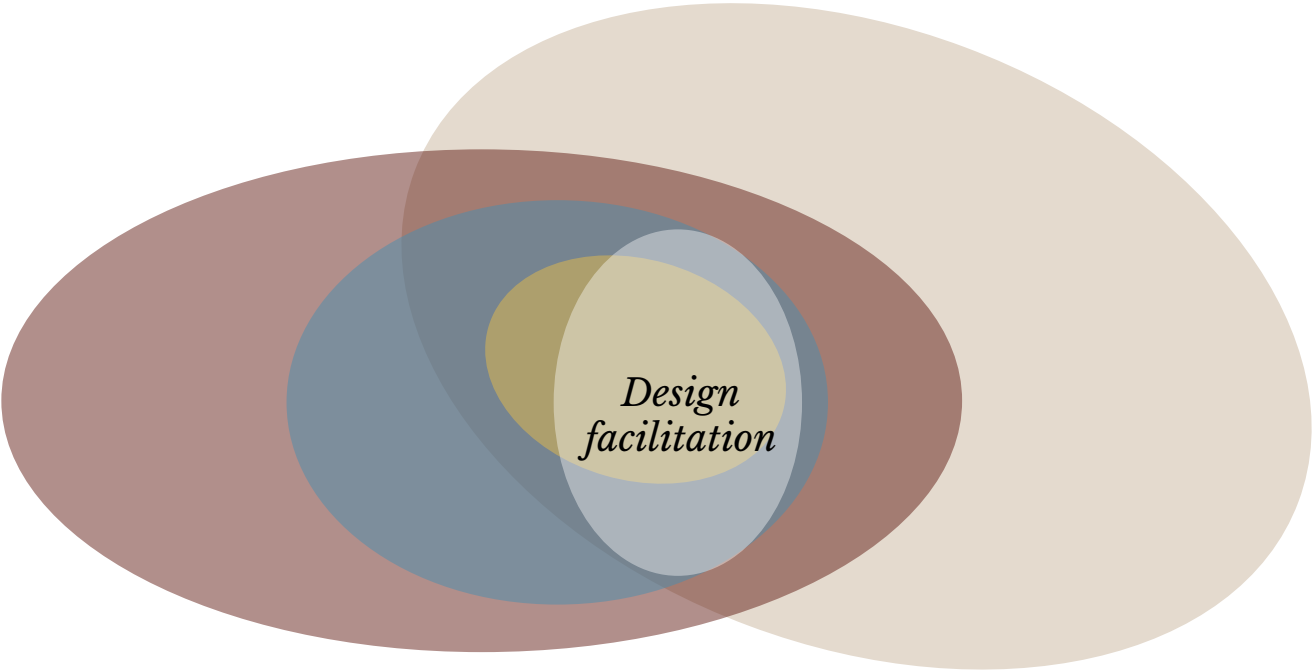
Acknowledging and rendering visible the often unaddressed political nature of design facilitation by making more explicit its underpinning structures and components.

Highlighting the importance of unpacking concepts and areas of design to foster a more accountable practice and research.

Contrasting contemporary views of design facilitation against revised notions that take into consideration its complex power dynamics and political implications.

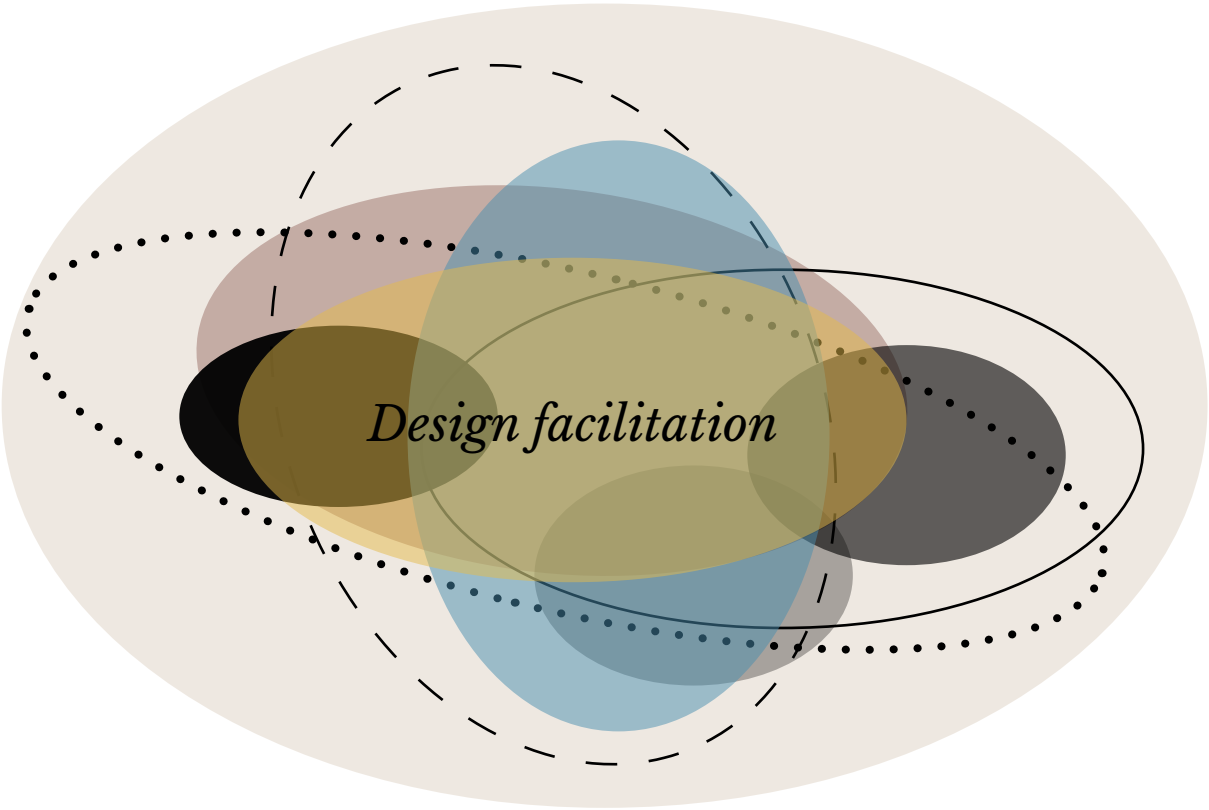
Allocating time and resources to draw attention to politically concerned issues.

Macro level



- *Design*
- *Politics*
- *Power*
- *Participatory Design*

Micro level



- *Materiality*
- *“The social”*
- - - *Interactions*
- *Design*
- *Politics*
- *Power*
- *Verbality*
- *Artefacts*
- *Environments*

Power & Design

(more) characteristics of power

Productivity

- It also causes a positive effect, against the common understanding that it is just an exercise of oppression or repression.
- Serves as a means to create the quotidian, fabricating behavioural patterns and gestures (Foucault, 1977 as cited in Bălan, 2010).
- Kim Dovey's notion of authority: the unquestioned nature of certain structures & the indisputable compliance due to a bigger purpose (Dovey, 1999).

Strategy

- Power as “the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1978, as cited in Kelly, 2009, p. 47).
- In design, strategy defined as the practice of formulating and shaping decision-making (Helsinki Design Lab, 2010),

Three lenses

Critique

Solid bases for exploration and to “make things crumble” (Villaman, 2020)



- Prompt a reaction in commodity culture
- Poke the current status quo
- Acknowledge disguised facets of design

Unpacking

Engaged unraveling of issues that ought to be looked into.



- Increase explicitness
- Acknowledging complexity

Language use

Draws attention to demonstrative rhetoric (Buchanan, 1985) in design as a means to persuade and exert dominance.



- Attention to the use of terminology
- Focus on ownership and accountability

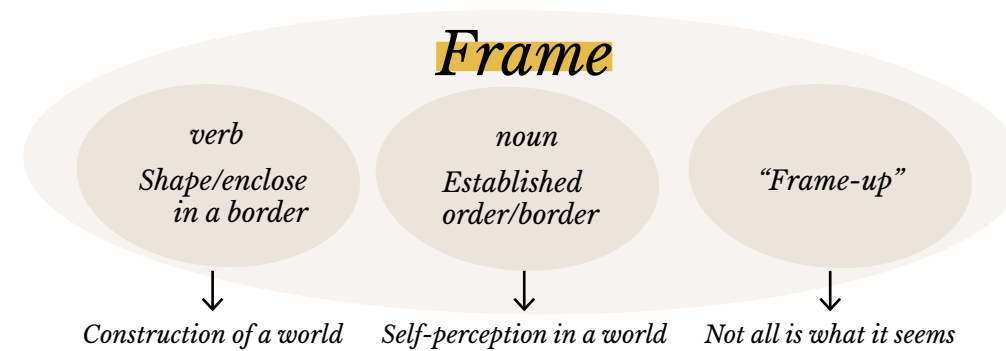
Inflection points in design facilitation

A moment when significant change may occur.
An opportunity for disruption.
A turning point.

→ Framing

→ Empowerment

Framing



The process of delimiting something into well-defined borders; it is a practice that encloses, sets boundaries within which actions can take place.

Framing, design & power

Another facade of design, aside from being a normalizing practice, is its *configurative nature* (Akama & Light, 2018).



The particular disposition or arrangement of different parts to serve a particular purpose.



The ability that design possesses to plan and craft courses of action, as well as predicting possible outcomes.

How do these frames look like?

Are they isolated units or are they embedded in bigger structures?

Can this framing be tackled?

Empowerment

- The term arose within social movements (Cruikshank, 1993) and activist groups
- Process of proactive fighting back the oppressions that the system would pose against minorities comprehending repressed and unprivileged groups of people.

Empowerment has become a buzzword.



Social movement-based

“Empowerment is the fulcrum whereby particular crowd events can become social movements, and therefore hence how social change can occur” (Drury, 2007)

Fostered within communities, moving towards a common purpose.

Ego empowerment

Commonly associated as a process of “awakening”

Associated with self-esteem

Tends to be a solitary and introspective process, either sought for or impromptu.

This use belittles revolutionary connotations into “a model of personal recovery” (English, 1992 as cited in Cruikshank, 1993, p. 327).

Illusory empowerment

Empowerment as:

1. Higher capacity to act
2. The act of giving someone the freedom to act or express themselves

Whoever becomes “empowered” was previously entrapped into something bigger, and is now gaining autonomy from it (Dovey, 1999).

Given freedom can be partial, limited, or it is conceded as long as it responds to a bigger scheme

Empowerment can be “driven by the desire to harness the capacities of others to one own’s” (Dovey, 1999, p. 11).

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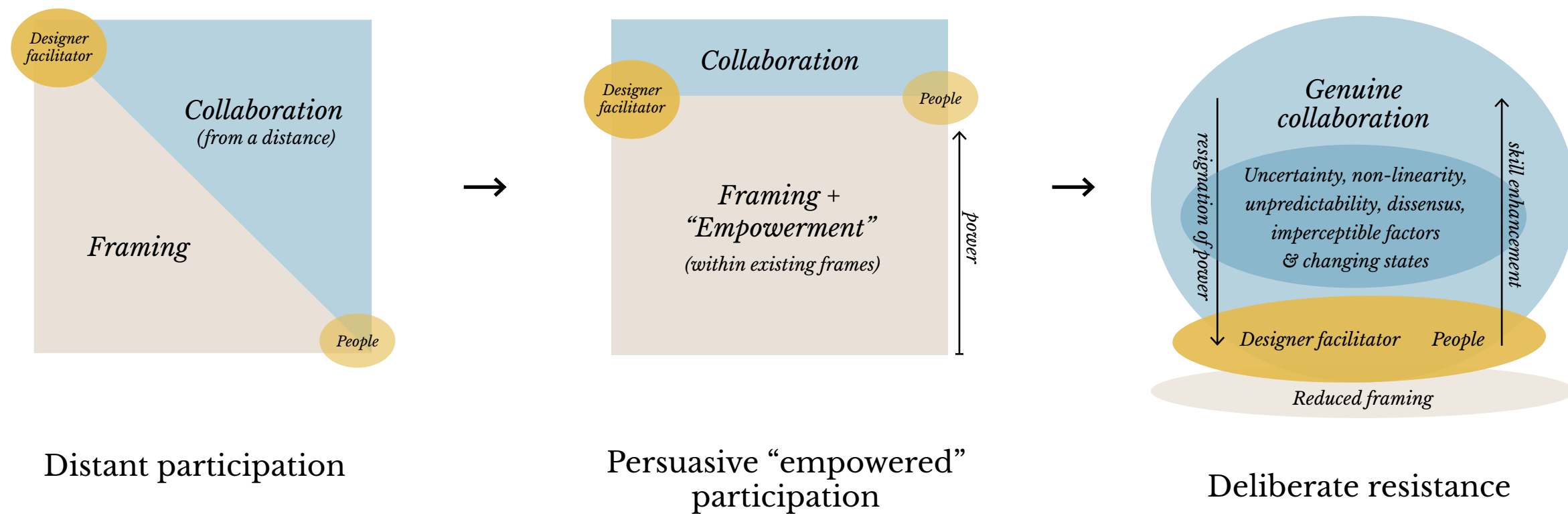
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From inflection points to reflections and action

Balancing power




An ideological approach

Prefigurative politics




- A form of possible resistance
- A means to react to existing situations while envisioning desirable futures in participatory practices, aspects that can be addressed both through research and practice.

17 Breines et al., 1980;1982, as cited in Cornish et al., 2016



“[...] guided by the idea that radical social change requires creating and experimenting with the kinds of egalitarian practices, democratic spaces, and alternative modes of relating that anticipate a future society that cannot yet be fully realized¹⁷”.



**Socio-politically aware facilitation +
Prefigurative politics**



Critique of the status quo with
the end goal of implementing
balanced and democratic practices.



Proactive iterative
experimentation of alternatives.

Thank you!

Now, workshop time!

Workshop

Resistance and inflection points.

Design as a discipline capable of upholding structural socio-participatory systems.

The workshop aims to *influence the “conditions of reproduction of those social systems”* (Barbalet, 1985, p. 542) by highlighting some otherwise often unaddressed factors.

Individual work (20min)

- 1) Familiarize yourself with the case: [HCD in contact tracing technologies](#)
- 2) Use the three given lenses to identify mainstream practices, analyze language use and find areas to unpack
- 3) Identify inflection points!

All together

Discussion & conclusion
How does a pref politics scenario look like?

In groups (20, max. 30 min)

With the gathered information...

- A) Think: what kind of resistance is being exerted? What is the dominant power, agency distribution, causality, etc.
- B) What are the design aspects in these power relations that can be intervened? What kind of deliberate resistance and could be facilitated?

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Final remarks

How was the exercise?
How did it feel to have these prompts?

Had you given this another name?
Barriers? systemic and maybe personal?

Resistance is not something new, but in design, it is often overlooked as it highlights the political nature of our actions.

Let's stay in touch.

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[Feedback!](#)