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If only it could speak

- narrative explorations of mobility and place in Seattle

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ABSTRACT

This paper engages with the way we understand 'place' by telling a story about transformation and urban intervention related to transportation, infrastructure and socio-technical mobility systems. By looking into a case of North American urban development with a focus on urban mobility we argue for seeing 'place' as defined by multiple configurations of flow and friction, stasis and speed. The aim is to move beyond a dichotomy of sedentary/nomad understandings of 'place'. Rather we aim to explore a notion of 'place' as defined by relational linkages and mobility patterns (of flow as well as stasis). Empirically we will explore this by 'giving voice' to one of the current and very large urban interventions in North America namely the reconstruction of the State Route 99 connection passing Seattle. The '*Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Project*' is used as a 'prism' letting us explore the usefulness of the 'place' notion advocated here. If we give voice to the hard infrastructures, they would tell stories about how infrastructures and mobility systems are both material and cultural artifacts that we need to understand very different from the utilitarian and instrumental perception guiding much urban planning and design today. Given the complexity of infrastructure and mobility systems the story unfolding is one where the artifact in question assembles multiple voices from the field constituting 'place'. This paper thus invites to explore what would happen in relation to infrastructure and transit space '*if only it could speak*'.

If only it could speak

- narrative explorations of mobility and place in Seattle

1. Introduction

Much inspired by Bruno Latour's story of the 'Aramis' light rail project in Paris (Latour 1996) and Phillip Vannini's story of the ship wreck of the 'Queen of the North' in British Columbia (Vannini 2008) this paper embarks on a less traditionally academic venture of imagining how a re-design of a large urban infrastructure project like the Alaskan Way Viaduct in Seattle would look '*if only it could speak*'. By this is meant that behind any project of physical intervention (from architecture to planning and urban design) there are 'multiple voices' belonging to stakeholders and institutions of all sorts. However this paper engages in a thought experiment, asking '*what if it could speak?*' The idea being to imagine if one as an urban scholar/analyst instead of exploring miles of archival documents, viewing multiple political hearings or conducting many interviews one could 'listen to the project' and explore how it would 'understand' the situation. Needless to say this is not possible within the realms of a scientific culture demanding objective data and reports from the field. Thus we shall pay due homage to the academic virtue of '*documentation, documentation, documentation*' throughout most of this paper. Actually Latour see the way planners and policy makers operate as having a strong affiliation with the imagined and invented; '*They invent a means of transportation that does not exist, paper passengers, opportunities that have to be created, places to be designed (often from scratch), component industries, technological revolutions. They're novelists*' (Latour 1996: 24). But rather than embarking on a literary and non-scientific path of novel writing for instance we will here explore the potential of the thought experiment that we actually can 'give voice' to a physical intervention. But precisely because this work still fall within the realm of research a I shall attempt to create a representational form making the reader recognize when different voices are speaking and what 'kind' (i.e. research reference, stakeholders, the author and the Seawall). Being inspired by Latour's book on 'Aramis' we might take point of departure in his cue for the readers:

'Here is one more cue for the readers: In this book, a young engineer is describing his research project and his sociotechnological initiation. His professor offers a running commentary. The (invisible) author adds verbatim accounts of real-life interviews along with genuine documents, gathered in a field study carried out from December 1987 to January 1989. Mysterious voices also chime in and, drawing from time to time on the privileges of prosopopoeia, allow Aramis to speak. These discursive modes have to be kept separate if the scientification is to be maintained; they are distinguished by typography. The text composed in this way offers as a whole, I hope, both a little more and a little less than a story' (Latour 1996:X)

The first premise I borrow from Latour is thus to 'allow Aramis to speak' here in the case of the Seawall project. Secondly, I try to address the issue Latour terms the 'scientification' by means of a clearly observable distinction between 'voices' of different sorts. In this story I shall therefore discriminate between four basic levels; that of the author, the theories and research based references, the 'empirical voices' of stakeholders and institutions in the field, and finally the 'voice of the Seawall'.

The 'collection of data' that this story leans on is primarily based on what is accessible at the Internet. Needless to say, that is one huge difference (disadvantage some would say) between this account and many standard urban planning stories where the author's field studies are the pivotal

element. However, the work and the information gathering in this case have another genealogy. About five years ago I came across the story of the 2001 Nisqually earthquake and the whole debate about what that meant to the re-design of the State Route 99 (SR 99) passing North-South through Seattle. I found the case so interesting that it became raw material for a PhD course on ‘narrative and power’ as well as three successive workshops in the MA planning program at Aalborg University conducted in collaboration with gifted colleagues like Bent Flyvbjerg, Jim Throgmorton and Tim Richardson¹. One of the methodological discussions that spun off from organizing the workshops were; how do we research real life cases and events at the global distance only mediated by the Internet? This is on its own an interesting issue, but more relevant to this paper there also surfaced a discussion about the multiplicity of voices and the fact that even though MA students and PhD students worked on the ‘same case’ the stories were highly differentiated. Not surprisingly that can be related to different ways of framing the research or differences in interests. Having said that, I am still struck by the multiplicity of voices and narratives coming out of the same case. This eventually made me think hard about the unifying factor being the actual site and the hardware of the SR 99. Creating some sort of narrative order from the vantage point of ‘listening to the main character’ seemed increasingly attractive (despite the less traditional and scientific dimension to the approach). Again I shall draw upon the work of Latour as inspiration when he speaks of the complex relationship between ‘us’ (humans) and our ‘inferior’ and numb brothers:

‘Our collective is woven together out of speaking subjects, perhaps, but subjects to which poor objects, our inferior brothers, are attached at all points. By opening up to include objects, the social bond would become less mysterious’ (Latour 1996:VIII)

The plot of this paper is therefore to give voice to the ‘poor objects, our inferior brothers’ and explore if that perspective will enrich our understanding of mobility and place. We may phrase it so that the artifact in question assembles multiple voices from the field constituting ‘place’. The paper has two theoretical perspectives underpinning the story of the Seawall. On the one hand side theories of narratives and their relations to place within planning and urban intervention are used. On the other hand side, I shall focus on theories of urban networks, socio-technical systems and mobility. The claim of this paper is that the representations and interventions are ‘meeting’ mobility and flows in the theoretical notion of ‘place’. The point is that places must be understood relationally and are defined by the flows that either flow into them (constituting them as active sites of mobility) or bypass them due to reasons of lack of infrastructure, power-laden decisions of exclusion or other factors. However ‘place’ is embedded with meanings and thus stories of the ‘who, where, and how’. The notion of ‘place’ will be unfolded but initially it must be said that this work is based on a notion that does not see place as something unitary, bounded, fixed and self-contained. Neither place is contemplated as having a fixed ‘spirit’ (*genius loci*) in the sense of Nordberg-Schulz (1976). As this paper’s subject is defined by the ‘movement target’ problem it shall not aim to present a detailed conclusion on the project’s actual status. The complexity of such an endeavor clearly is beyond the capacities of this paper (however interesting and relevant this may be seen from a planning and policy analysis perspective). Rather what is at focus here, is the way the project is materialized, debated, and constructed in material as well as immaterial terms. The key idea is to try to uncover (some) of the mechanisms at work in creating a massive urban mobility infrastructure.

In the 1980’s MIT Professor Sherry Turkle showed how computers should be understood as ‘evocative objects’ in which humans invest feelings (Turkle 1984). However, emotional bonding between human and artifact reaches beyond the computer and may include all sorts of machine devices such as cars, trains, weapons, buildings and ferries. The latter is presented in Vannini’s

study of the sinking of '*M/V Queen of the North*' in British Columbia on March 21 2006. This is a story about how the wrecking of a ferry unfolded a number of dramatic and emotive relations between a community and the material artifact of a ferry. In the words of Vannini: '*Funny how you can miss somebody you never met, how you can grieve the loss of a machine. Funny how she doesn't feel like a piece of metal any more*' (Vannini 2008:156). The point in this context is that the Alaskan Seawall may also be thought of as an 'evocative object'. Not necessarily in the same positive way as '*The Queen of the North*', but emotions may also be of the more critical sort. The main thing to understand is that the Seawall is more than an isolated artifact of tarmac, steel and stone. It bonds with agents and stakeholders in multiple and complex ways. Vannini speak of 'technoculture' as an expression of '*what people do together with things*' (Vannini 2008:156) which is close to the way Scollon talks about '*action through the use of objects*' (Scollon 2008:3). Furthermore, to Vannini the technology and its cultural embedding relate to the way people make sense of events and things in a 'dramatic' and narrative sense. From the analysis of the ship wreck of '*The Queen of the North*' Vannini presents a number of interesting theoretical assumptions and ideas bridging technology, narrative, and interaction:

'... the idea that technoculture is a form of dramatic action and that an accident is a discrete performance of that drama; the idea that personhood is diffused and not limited to humans, and that in the case of technics the genesis of personhood lies within a crisis-evoking wrecking; the idea that mobility is expressive, symbolic, interactive, and a form of techne; and the idea that agency is not a power that people have independently of the technics they use but a potential for action residing in the technics that make the action possible' (Vannini 2008:157)

To fully come to terms with such a perspective, one must perform 'technography' argues Vannini. That is to say, one must conduct an ethnographic account of the studies of technology basing it on a bricolage of elements such as dialogues, narratives, observations, and photographs (Vannini 2008:157). This study of the Seawall cannot claim the ethnographic dimension however, as it has become into being by means of 'research at a distance' as mentioned before. However, the perspective of Vannini resonates well with much of the way the Seawall must be understood as a complex technological phenomenon. To put the matter more simple; we may understand infrastructures as a relational assemblage of 'hardware' (e.g. asphalt, concrete, columns, traffic lights) and 'software' (e.g. strategies, traffic codes, campaigns). It is this nexus of material and immaterial, human and non-human that needs to be understood in relation to the flow and friction it affords.

The structure of the paper is as follow; after this introduction we shall briefly look into the two theoretical building blocks; notions of narrative and place, and the idea of place as relational and mobility-defined. In section four the 'real story' unfolds as we explore some of the many voices in the field. In section five we shall withdraw from the strictly scientific realm and listen to the Seawall only to resurface in the academic world in section six for some sobering concluding remarks.

2. Narratives, representation and the politics of place

Stories are abundant regardless of what field of human activity one studies. Actually one could see humans as 'storytelling animals'. But all stories are situated and have their material 'requisites' that both affords the actions and practices taking place within the stories, but more over also already connect the material to the linguistic realm. The importance of the material placing of 'things' can hardly be underestimated and requires new theoretical and analytical frameworks such as 'geosemiotics' deriving the meaning of signs and objects from their physical placement (Scollon & Scollon 2003). The idea that places and sites are 'laying around' awaiting a human intervention is naïve and not really as innocent as it may sound. Planning scholar Robert Beauregard phrases it this way:

'Places are never emptied. Rather what occurs is a form of discursive displacement. Planners and designers substitute a professional narrative for a multitude of shared histories, collective remembrances, and personal experiences. Unwieldy stories about the place are suppressed and replaced by more actionable understandings. Planners and designers abhor narrative vacuums. Even a cleared site has to have a meaning attached to it. To be cleared is to be prepared for, receptive of, a particular intervention ... intervention cannot occur, development cannot happen, until site is brought under control, situated in a professional discourse. To arrive there, prior narratives are reduced in number or, in some instances, totally eliminated. Emboldened by simplification and standardization, analytical description thrives. Such representations cast a particular place in terms of a category of "problems" that the professional knows how to solve' (Beauregard 2005:54)

Since the days of Aristotle (and probably earlier) the storytelling animal has cultivated particular ways of telling and organizing narratives that now seems taken for granted. Some of the elementary building blocks are the way events are structured in their relation to time and place:

'Events are then structured into a narrative by the conventional means of time, place, actors and context ... No phenomena can have only one narrative or a single genealogy ... Narratives not only give meaning to our past experiences, they also help us envision alternative futures' (Flyvbjerg 1998:8)

However as Finnegan rightly claims '*... a mere listing of past events with no connecting thread does not make a story. We need something more than just temporal sequence, something to give it an intelligible plot*' (Finnegan 1998:10). Precisely the notion of 'plot' is the key here and should be understood as '*the basic means by which specific events, otherwise represented as lists or chronicles, are brought into one meaningful whole*' (in Czarniawska 2004:7). Up till here it may sound as if narratives are detached from the material world. But they are not. In the words of some of the most skilled and reflective narrative planning scholars Eckstein and Throgmorton:

'... story and imagined communities always have a spatial dimension and make a geographical claim. Neither authors nor readers always recognize this spatiality, but it is present nevertheless' (Eckstein & Throgmorton 2003:6)

Being much inspired by their research I elsewhere argued that:

'Whether it being regional planning or urban design a story is constructed to motivate and legitimate the intervention. Furthermore, the making of such a story is an act of re-presentation. No narrative re-presentation can be made without a more or less explicit set of guiding principles. Such principles may be strongly normative and related to notions of the good life whereas other logics of representations might be more instrumental such as cost estimates' (Jensen 2007:216)

But the key issue here is as far as I can see to connect the material/spatial to the representational and discursive (Jensen & Richardson 2004; Richardson & Jensen 2003). In other words, narrative and

space needs to be understood as part of the same assemblage fusing a ‘representational logic of urban intervention’ with materiality and artifacts:

‘... all stories contain plots which are their identifying character ... there is a link between the narrative framing and the spatial interventions made in the city. This idea is captured by the notion of the representational logic of urban intervention. By this is meant that any given urban intervention is embedded in a linguistic representation (and at times a visual one). Such representation is understood to be based upon a set of values and norms guiding the intervention. Using the concept of the representational logic of urban intervention therefore means that interventions are framed by representations that express a specific logic in the sense of a set of guiding principles and values. Social agents give voice to ideas of spatial change in the city by means of local narratives and stories nested within discourses. Any discourse, according to this frame, must be thought of in terms of how the representations in words and images are linked to agents in institutional settings with the purpose of following certain normative ideas and rationales. Narratives are then embedded in localised stories that may link to larger discourses as for example global urban competitiveness via culture-led interventions (often pitted against coalitions of agents telling stories about alternative uses of tax money). Finally, such representations are always spatially embedded’ (Jensen 2007:218)

From an analysis of a harbour front development scheme a simple and tentative dimensioning of the ‘spatial’ and the ‘narrative’ were presented in a simple figure (Figure 1).

Narrative dimension	Information
	Temporal order/structure
	Causality
	Plot
	Discourse institutionalisation
Sense of Place dimension	Relations to other Places
	References to physical attributes

Figure 1: Analytical frame for understanding the representational logics of urban intervention (Jensen 2007:220)

The key is to understand the way narratives (that are composed of information, temporal orders, structure, notions of causality, plots and wider discourse institutionalization) connect or disconnect to the ‘place dimension’ (here illustrated crudely by only two dimensions; the relations to other places and the references to physical attributes). Moreover what at times makes the whole story come alive and touches the deepest level of human emotion is the fact that there is an element of ‘drama’ to most of our engagements with other humans and material artifacts. Vannini’s ship wreck is a ‘drama’ where the technological artifact plays a key role. In a similar way the Seawall destruction due to the earthquake is a drama triggering reactions and unfolding events. Seen this way the drama provides the narrative with a crucial ‘before and after’. Even though this may not be as clear-cut since decisions made before the event actually influence the perception of the event and contribute to the interpretation most people do talk about the Seawall collapse as ‘before and after’. Some agents clearly uses the event to articulate ‘new beginnings’ and as such the drama is inscribed into the socio-material changes gets interpreted and re-told with a particular (political) intention.

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper we shall add an additional theoretical frame for interpreting the case namely that of a relational and mobility defined understanding of ‘place’. It is to this second perspective that we now turn.

3. Place as relational and mobility defined

In the urban literature there is a long standing discussion about the relationship between the static form and morphology of the city and all its fluent elements. In this paper we shall not find time to go into the debate between sedentary and nomad conceptions of cities and place in much detail (see e.g. Cresswell 2006, Graham & Marvin 2001, Kolb 2008, Shane 2005). However, the point of departure needs to be specified here. The basic analytical view point is one of acknowledging how all sites, places, buildings and cities are what they are due to the way they either affords, encourage, and host flows of people, messages, goods etc. Or reversely the friction they may offer either in terms of slowing things down (deliberately or by accident) or by being bypassed by important flows (e.g. capital investments, tourists or tax payers). As already the Danish architect Steen E. Rasmussen made clear decades ago *'the design of buildings, which must be stationary, should be based on the movement that flow through them'* (emphasis in original, Rasmussen 1959:150). If this is the point of departure, then the networked relation of sites (buildings or cities) becomes crucial. In the words of classic urban scholars Lynch and Hack we may start out by noticing that:

'Access is the prerequisite to using any space. Without the ability to enter or to move within it, to receive and transmit information or goods, space is of no value, however vast or rich in resources. A city is a communication net, made of roads, paths, rails, pipes, and wires. The economic and cultural level of a city is in some proportion to the capacity of its circulation system' (Lynch & Hack 1984:193)

In a sense this is banal but never the less much urban thinking seems to be from the vantage point of the city as a bounded, fixed entity. Here we should not fall into the trap of seeing footloose movement all over, but rather understand how fixity gets its meaning due to flow. If this sounds abstract, then we could consult the French urban scholar Henri Lefebvre who gives this account for how a seemingly static 'thing' as a house must be understood in relation to flows and networks:

'Consider a house, and a street, for example. The house has six storeys and an air of stability about it. One might almost see it as the epitome of immovability, with its concrete and its stark, cold and rigid outlines. (Built around 1950: no metal or plate glass yet). Now, a critical analysis would doubtless destroy the appearance of solidity of this house, stripping it, as it were, of its concrete slabs and its thin non-load-bearing walls, which are really glorified screens, and uncovering a very different picture. In the light of this imaginary analysis, our house would emerge as permeated from every direction by streams of energy which run in and out of every imaginable route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio and television signals, and so on. Its image of immobility would then be replaced by an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits. By depicting this convergence of waves and currents, this new image, much more accurately than any drawing or photograph, would at the same time disclose the fact that this piece of 'immovable property' is actually a two-faceted machine analogous to an active body: at once a machine calling for massive energy supplies, and an information-based machine with low energy requirements. The occupants of the house perceive, receive and manipulate the energies which the house itself consumes on a massive scale (for the lift, kitchen, bathroom etc.')

(Lefebvre 1974/91:92-93)

I think this is a very elegant way of putting emphasis on the fact that site and 'place' must be understood in terms of relations and flows. Furthermore, the importance of relational connectivity to other sites in a network must be emphasized like in the notion of 'networked ecologies' by Varnelis:

Networked Ecologies: 'a series of co-dependent systems of environmental mitigation, land-use organization, communication and service delivery ... [being] networked, hyper-complex systems produced by technology, laws, political pressures, disciplinary desires, environmental constraints and a myriad of other pressures, tied together with feedback mechanisms' (Varnelis 2008:15)

The 'city' as we know it therefore is a relationally, mobility defined node in a network of local, regional and global reach. The network understanding of places and cities relate to the notion of place as 'assemblage' which in the words of Dovey means that:

'For instance, a street is not a thing nor is it just a collection of discrete things. The buildings, trees, cars, sidewalks, goods, people, signs, etc. All come together to become a street, but it is the connections between them that makes it an assemblage or a place. It is in the relations of buildings-sidewalk-roadway; the flows of traffic, people and goods; the inter-connections of public to private space, and of this street to the city, that make it a 'street' and distinguish it from other place assemblages such as parks, plazas, freeways, shopping malls and marketplaces' (Dovey 2010:16)

In other words, the Seawall must be understood not so much as an artifact and a 'thing' but more like an 'assemblage of elements' reaching from urban furniture, over concrete pillars to paving. Such a notion of mobility systems being complex assemblies of human and non-human elements point towards a different understanding of the citizen within the system and the way that reflect in planning and designing urban infrastructure:

'What we are exploring within these complex nexuses of physical infrastructures and technology, cultural norms and legal regulations, design codes and architecture, social practices and interaction are in fact the creation of what might be termed 'mobile subject types'. By this is meant the production of relatively clear and well defined categories of imagined mobile citizens in the socio-technical nexus of infrastructure systems' (Richardson & Jensen 2008:218)

That is to say, that a complex infrastructure like the Seawall becomes not only the material venue for physical mobility but it also becomes a site of imagined future mobility (at least this is what takes place in the planning and policy making process where multiple imagined subjectivities are being narrated in stories about the future in Seattle):

'From a mobilities perspective, we see plans reflecting ideas about how certain citizens are imagined to dream and manage their future lives. In other words, mobility systems are designed for certain imagined types of citizens, and urban and regional maps are drawn to fit with the planners' and policy-makers' imaginaries of how these particular types of citizens will want to move in time and space. This means firstly, that in plans, policies and designs there might be several types of mobile subjects present, each with corresponding imagined mobilities. Secondly, it means that the governing technologies and the domains of knowledge embedded in the logic of governing may work strategically to shape these ideas of mobile subject types. Thirdly, it means that in the actual construction of infrastructures and design of urban and regional spaces, these mobile subjects and their anticipated mobilities are present, legitimising new infrastructure types such as urban transit systems, and setting the conditions of possibility for the everyday lives of citizens. Future mobile subject types are imagined and narrated across the complex intertextual fields that lead to the production of mobility systems. Their imagined mobilities are predicated upon, and are used to make thinkable and normal, new technologies of mobility (Richardson & Jensen 2008:220-221)

From the understanding of networks and flows being fundamentally important to cities and urban agglomerations we shall here add one final element to the theoretical framing. Within such networked ecologies of stasis and flow human subjects produces and re-produces identity and subjectivity in ways that cannot be understood decoupled from the everyday life mobility patterns. Put differently:

' ... our lives are not just what happen in static enclaves, but also in all the intermediaries and circulation in-between places. There is an intricate link between identification processes and the way we engage with the physical environment. Needless to say, multiple layers of identity production may have no spatial component. However, the way we bodily engage with places through multiple ways of circulating in, out of and across them shape an important part of the practical engagement with the

world that ultimately construct our understandings of self and other. Valorisation of the socio-spatial relation depends on the bodily experience of mediated practices in time-space. Identities do not solely reside in place (be that home, neighbourhood, or nation) but rather places are coded and de-coded in a complex valorisation process where the networked connections to multiple communities of interests and practice offer new layers of relational connectivity. However identities, fluid as they may be, both in relation to individual's subjectivities and collectives are constructions made up by material and immaterial 'requisites' of more or less durable sorts. These requisites work as identity markers that continually are being re-produced and re-negotiated. As we are linked-in-motion and thus not just passively being shuffled across town such 'being-on-the-move' is an important contemporary everyday life condition in the city and should as such be re-interpreted' (Jensen 2009:154-155)

From an earlier study of three European Metro systems in London, Paris and Copenhagen I emphasized the complex interplay between artifacts, systems and agents flowing through a mobility systems as well as those agents and institutions designing, managing and controlling these. From the European Metro study we learned lessons of equal importance to the Seattle story:

'... trains, trails, stations, platforms, escalators, metro staff, travellers, signs, commercials, musicians, homeless, police force, tickets, ticket machines, power supplies, news paper stands, coffee shops, customers etc. are assembled into socio-technical systems producing the lived mobility of metro travellers in London, Paris and Copenhagen. The specific assemblage within the socio-technical system is 'what makes metro mobility' by means of sorting, filtering, circulating, and orchestrating mobilities' (Jensen 2008:19)

Much more could obviously be said about the relationship between theories of narrative and place, and place as mobility defined and relational. However, the main idea is hopefully coming through; complex infrastructures for contemporary urban mobility must be understood across the material/immateral division line as well as we should pay attention to the relational and mobility defined character of 'place' within such an infrastructure. Stories about change and transformation (as well as resistance to change, Hommels 2005) should be seen as a complex interweaving of the material and the linguistic. However, as promised and with no further ado we shall embark on the 'real story' of the transformations in Seattle.

4. A narrative exploration of mobility and place in Seattle

Enough has been said from the vantage point of academic theory. Now the time has come to look into the story of the Alaskan Way (figure 2). This cannot however be done in a way that offers justice to the complexity of the case. The ‘full story’ (whatever that is) would need another forum for telling than in this paper.



Figure 2: The location of the State Route 99

Therefore we shall only be able to tune in on a few of the many voices of relevance to this case. A good starting point the 80 pages long “*Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Project History Report*” jointly published by the Federal highway Commission, The Washington State Department of Transportation (WS DOT), King County and the City of Seattle. According to this document the story begins like this:

‘The Alaskan Way Viaduct section of State Route (SR) 99 has’ been a fixture of the downtown Seattle waterfront for over five decades ... The Alaskan Way Viaduct carries about 110,000 vehicles a day and provides a convenient route to and through downtown Seattle. Among its transportation functions, the viaduct provides a north-south route for neighborhoods west of I-5. The viaduct and Battery Street Tunnel play an important role in freight mobility, providing a major truck route through downtown. The viaduct also provides access to the Ballard-Interbay and greater Duwamish manufacturing and industrial centers via the Elliott and Western Avenue ramps. However, the viaduct’s days are numbered. The Nisqually earthquake and wear and tear from daily traffic have taken their toll on the facility. In response to several large earthquakes in other parts of the world, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) began to study the viaduct in the mid-1990s. These studies showed that the 1950s-era viaduct was vulnerable to earthquakes and nearing the end of its useful life. In early 2001, a team of structural design and seismic experts began work to determine what to do about the viaduct. In the midst of this investigation, the 6.8-magnitude Nisqually earthquake shook the Puget Sound region on February 28, 2001. The Nisqually earthquake damaged the viaduct, forcing WSDOT to temporarily shut it down. Post-earthquake inspections of the viaduct by a team of experts revealed that the earthquake damaged the viaduct’s joints and columns, further weakening the structure and exposing its vulnerabilities ... ‘ <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/Viaduct> (accessed March 16 2010)

The historic reference to the project is important since this also is illustrative of how prevailing technologies of mobility and their interpretations may change over time. In the 1950’s when the Seawall were erected it was a symbol of modern and rational engineering (figure 3). But the creation of the Seawall is also an illustrative case of human/non-human collaboration and interaction pivoted by technology and hardware (figure 4, 5).

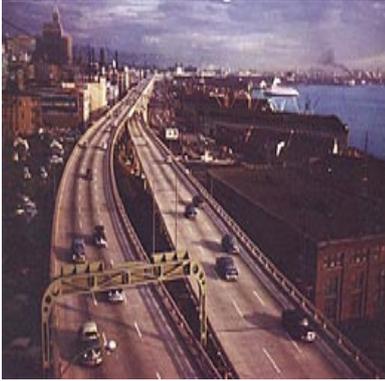


Figure 3: Alaskan Way Viaduct, completed April 4 1953 (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)



Figure 4: Technology and humans in interaction (<http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/pacificnw/2002/0407/cover.html>)

From its very genesis the Seawall is a result of a complex relationship between the human and non-human elements combining a complex infrastructure (figure 5). The presence of the Seawall was dominant over the many following decades and it became not only an important link for transport on a North-South axis, but it became also a barrier separating the city from the water (figure 6).



Figure 5: Human/non-human collaboration and interaction (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)



Figure 6: The road as it looks (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)

Humans and artifacts thus play each their part in this story creating ‘symmetry’ between human and non-humans. In other words we must put emphasis on the ‘hardware’ without which there would be no Seawall (figure 7).

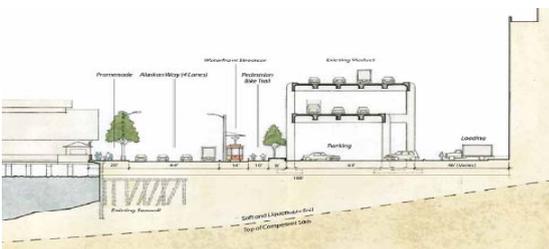


Figure 7: Section drawing (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)

In the process there has been made a number of computer simulations, visualizations and animations providing the process with a digital layer of virtual presence (fig 8).



Figure 8: Being virtually there (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)

Needless to say multiple stakeholders and institutions could be included in a story about the Seawall. Delimitation is the case study key par excellence and the answer to the question ‘when does one have context enough’ is a recurrent issue even to experienced case scholars.

Name and abbreviation	Function/task
Washington State Department Of Transportation (WS DOT)	State transportation authority
City of Seattle and Seattle Dept. of Transportation (S DOT)	Local government body
King County	Regional Government body
Allied Arts (AA)	NGO

Peoples Waterfront Coalition (PWC)	NGO
Puget Sound Partnership (PSP)	Mixed stakeholder group (initiated by Governor)

Figure 9: List of key stakeholders and institutions

The list of key stakeholders and institutions cannot be claimed to be comprehensive and all-inclusive but as it is presented here it reflects the main voices and institutions that as a minimum must be included into the story of the Seawall (Figure 9). In narrative terms we saw in the theoretical section that time is a crucial dimension. So next to this relatively static presentation of key stakeholders and institutions we must pay attention to the chronology of events and the stories that relate to these events as they becomes nodal points in a ‘before and after’ structure of the narrative.

There is an important point to reflect upon if we engage in a narrative account using the chronology of a time line. Evidently this establishes the flows of events and makes many things in the story comprehensible to us. However, the selection of events to be presented is only the first issue suggesting that what might look like an innocent listing of events is by no means a simple and objective account. Power issues and agendas may influence the narrator’s account and selection principles. This means that either we may face arbitrary and innocently looking genealogies or manipulated and carefully orchestrated stories. But even more interestingly is the fact that we will have to recognize that a narrative chronology of events will have to include multiple of phenomena and objects, some often seen as strictly natural (e.g. an earthquake) others clearly of human origin (e.g. the government bodies or the many stakeholder groups). The point is that we include as different realms such as the geology and tectonic plates movements, the political-administrative systems, the human stakeholders, the environment, and the physical-material artifacts. Out of such complex assemblage grows the Seawall project. So besides being a practical argument for listing a number of ontologically different events and objects into the same narrative chronology this also is indicative of the complexity of assemblages of artifacts and people that makes of a contemporary piece of urban infrastructure. The timeline below is a deliberate mix of sources from all of the references stakeholders and institutions created to show the complexity (this list is indiscriminately compiled from a mix of public web sites, documents, new articles and the web links listed at the end of this paper):

The select timeline of events and human/non human elements

- June 29 1869: Earthquake
- December 14 1872: Earthquake
- December 7 1880: Earthquake
- December 12 1880: Earthquake
- November 12 1939: Earthquake
- February 14 1946: Earthquake (6,3)
- April 13 1949: Earthquake (7,1)
- April 29 1965: Earthquake (6,5)

1973: City councillor John Miller states “*the viaduct as the city’s worst mistake, and that it should have been torn down*”

1995: Engineers predict the viaduct will be unable to withstand a 7.5 magnitude earthquake

1997: State DOT recommends that others options be considered, including tearing down the viaduct

2000: Questions are raised as to whether to repair or replace the ever aging viaduct structure

March 26 2000: Earthquake (2,3)

February 28 2001: The Nisqually earthquake damages viaduct Viaduct and seawall replacement project in the area of Seattle (6,8). Time of Occurrence (GMT): Wednesday February 28, 2001 at 18:54:32.78 Z, Time of Occurrence (PST): Wednesday February 28, 2001 at 10:54:32.78 AM, Depth (km) 52.40 Magnitude (Mw) 6.8. Moment magnitude from the USGS National Earthquake Information Center Location 47.1525N 122.7197W, 17.6 km NE of Olympia, WA, 23.7 km WSW of Tacoma, WA, 57.5 km SSW of Seattle, WA (Source: the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network http://www.pnsn.org/SEIS/EQ_Special/WEBDIR_01022818543p/welcome.html)

2002: Conceptual engineering for replacement begins. WS DOT and the City of Seattle consider a list of 76 replacement concepts and narrow the list to five alternatives for further consideration. 80 Suggested solutions are proposed

June 16 2002: Allied Arts initiate campaign for a new waterfront

July 15 2002: Initiation of formal process for a new waterfront (city council resolution)

2003: Select environmental review alternatives

PWC coalition is formed

November 2003: Allied Arts present a waterfront vision at a public event

2004: The proposals are reduced to 5 options

WS DOT produce a document stating the replacement road must be able to accommodate the same volume of traffic or be able to accommodate more

Release [Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) with five alternatives. State and City of Seattle select cut-and-cover tunnel as preferred alternative

2005: State and city refine cut-and-cover tunnel and elevated structure alternatives. Engineers complete further design work on the tunnel and rebuild alternatives

January 10 2005: Tunnel becomes ‘preferred option’ (city council resolution)

January 12 2005: Governor Christine Gregoire replaces Governor Gary Locke

2006: Only 2 options remain

May 15 2006: Allied Arts release final report for the waterfront at a public event

Governor concludes: finance plan for elevated structure is “feasible and sufficient”; finance plan for Tunnel Alternative is not “feasible and sufficient”

Councillors Dela and Licatu have been against the tunnel from the outset

Release [Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) with two alternatives

The “rebuild alternative” is renamed the “elevated structure alternative” to better represent changes made to the design since the draft EIS was published

The Washington State Legislature passes legislation requiring an expert review panel to study the feasibility of both alternatives- As a result of the review panel's report, WSDOT updates cost estimates for both alternatives to adjust for rising inflation rates and worldwide increases in construction material costs. The legislature directs the Seattle City Council to adopt an ordinance stating their preferred option. The council reaffirms its support of a tunnel. WSDOT releases a [Supplemental Draft EIS](#) to provide more detailed information on the two alternatives and potential construction plans. Governor Gregoire calls for a vote by the citizens of Seattle

January 17 2007: The tunnel is taken off the table by Governor Chris Gregoire

Chris Gregoire sets a 2012 deadline for a solution – Demolishing of viaduct to begin after this deadline stating “*Watch me tear down the viaduct*”

An advisory vote is held in Seattle, calling for an up-down vote on a surface-tunnel hybrid and an elevated structure. Both receive a majority “no” vote

2008: State, King County and City of Seattle, with input from the public, reexamine [options](#) for viaduct's central waterfront section

Release [Environmental Assessment](#) for replacing the viaduct's south end between S. Holgate and S. King streets

WSDOT, King County, and the City of Seattle work together to find a [solution](#) for the viaduct's central section

These options are narrowed down to two hybrid scenarios - an “I-5, surface and transit” alternative and an “SR 99 elevated bypass” alternative

2008-2013: Make [roadway and system improvements](#) to keep people and goods moving during south end construction

2009: Governor, King County Executive and Seattle Mayor recommend replacing the viaduct's [central waterfront](#) section with a bored tunnel beneath downtown, new waterfront surface-street, transit investments, and downtown city street and waterfront improvements

State Legislature approves bored tunnel funding

In January Governor Gregoire, King County Executive Sims, Seattle Mayor Nickels and Port of Seattle CEO Yoshitani recommend replacing the [central section](#) of the Alaskan Way Viaduct with a deep bored tunnel beneath downtown, a new waterfront surface street, transit investments, and downtown city street and waterfront improvements

The Washington State Legislature passes legislation in April that endorses the bored tunnel and provides the budget authority necessary for its construction. Governor Gregoire signs the bill into law in May

In July crews begin relocating utilities in preparation for road and bridge construction to replace the viaduct's [south end](#)

The Governor and Seattle Mayor sign a memorandum of agreement in October that outlines the State and City's responsibilities for the viaduct replacement program

At the end of the year, crews finish [relocating electrical lines](#) from the viaduct's south end

2010: Begin construction to replace viaduct's [south end](#) between S. Holgate Street and S. King Street

Release second Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement

WSDOT releases an updated cost estimate and tolling study for the Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement in January

2011: Release Final Environmental Impact Statement and issue Record of Decision

Begin construction of the viaduct's [central waterfront](#) replacement

2013: New SR 99 segment south of downtown, between S. Holgate and S. King streets, opens to drivers

2015: New SR 99 segment through downtown Seattle opens to drivers

2016: Remove viaduct along central waterfront

Obviously the government documents laying out plans for the future direction is an inevitable expression of ‘colonizing the future’. Here the main idea has been to assemble human and non-human, physical and institutional elements that all has effects on the Seawall. Moreover, the arbitrary dimension to list suggests the importance of the storyteller and the selection criteria at work whilst telling a story like this. Besides the chronology of events presented here (and we should say that the list moves beyond the ‘official’ list from e.g. WS DOT to include many other items and events) the WS DOT in particular has taken a number of other interesting techniques into use in order to shape the immaterial and communicative dimension of the whole project. These range from site seeing, over blogging, to the creation of ‘FAQ’ web links. We shall shortly look into each of these discursive tools.

Citizen’s blogging and e-mailing - the narrative re-assembling of the Seawall

The WS DOT applies a number of media and forums to facilitate public debate about the project. Internet located video streaming of hearings and public meetings are one valuable source of information. Also the WS DOT organizes ‘citizen tours’ at the site (see below) and the WS DOT homepage hosts a blog where citizens can voice. Concerning the latter here is a small selection of blog contributions to give an impression of the discussion. Under the heading ‘new simulations showcase proposed Alaskan Way replacement’ Jeremy Bertrand on August 10 2009 wrote:

‘Trying to convey the changes that will result from a large transportation project is a challenge. For smaller projects – repaving a road, adding a roundabout – it’s easy for people to picture what the end result will be. For a project like the SR 99 bored tunnel that will replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct, it’s a little more complicated. Not only does the proposed replacement include an almost two-mile-long bored tunnel beneath downtown, we also plan to rebuild the surface street along the waterfront. People ask – What will the tunnel look like? How will I be able to access it? How will the new waterfront street be different than what exists today? Well, we now have some new tools to help provide answers. The program team has posted two simulations to YouTube. The first video shows the current design concept for the proposed SR 99 bored tunnel. The drive-through starts at the tunnel’s south portal, which is near the stadium district and the Port of Seattle’s terminals, and takes you to the exit in the north, onto Aurora Avenue N. Along the way, you can see the ramps at either end of the tunnel that will allow drivers to access the downtown street grid from SR 99, as well as the new street connections that will be built over the tunnel’s portals. Once the tunnel is built and the viaduct is removed from the waterfront, what will go in its place? The answer is in the second video. We plan to build a new Alaskan Way boulevard in the footprint of the current viaduct. The new road will connect to Elliott and Western avenues, which is important for those traveling to the northwest section of the city, and will provide access to downtown and SR 99. Removal of the viaduct will allow creation of new public open space on the waterfront’ (Jeremy Bertrand, WS DOT Blog, August 10 2009)

Here are a few comments that this sparked:

‘My opinion of the waterfront video: 1. The pedestrian amenities seem acceptable, but the bike situation looks horrible. This is a great opportunity to make bike lanes/trails that are separated from motor vehicle traffic. It is inexcusable to squeeze bikers into the small space between parked cars and moving ones. 2. There could be much more green in this. The occasional tree poking up from the

orange pavement is not enough. those entire median strips (where it doesn't impede the view of left-turners) should be completely green, like some other medians we have in Seattle (L. Smith, WS DOT Blog August 19 2009)

Although design issues are still to be determined, these simulations, although very expensive and professionally rendered, seem extremely automobile heavy. Not a knock on WSDOT,(builders of freeways), I think the animations would be more effective if they included some of the non-car features that have been talked about. The current bike-ped path along the waterfront isn't even shown. Does it go away? Seattle citizens have made it very clear that they don't want wall-to-wall cement along the waterfront (*TallDavid*, WS DOT Blog August 12 2009)

'Lovely. Now when a breakdown happens it goes from 2.5 lanes to 1 lane. Did the politicians learn anything from I-5 downtown under the Convention Center? Reducing the lanes through downtown is the opposite of what you want to do! Plus the view is gone for us little people. How much is this going to cost us? \$12 billion?! And just who will it benefit? Not the average Seattleite! Vote for a new mayor and new County Executive! This is ridiculous! At least with the replacement viaduct there were three lanes and a view. Why are we supporting these politicians?' (Anonymous, WS DOT Blog, August 12 2009)

'This is ridiculous. 99 carries three lanes of traffic each direction and this plan takes it down to two lanes with on-ramps as you enter the tunnels. Looks exactly like Mt. Baker tunnel on I-90 East. Expect huge backups. There is no improvement in street-level and no improvement for bicycle traffic. In fact with the "shared bike lane" (which is a recipe for car-cycling rage) you would actually slow traffic more than today on Alaska. As has always been a concern there looks to be no solution to the port/semi traffic which creates constant surface-level jams today as freight enters/leaves the port. I would definitely urge a re-thinking of this plan' (Jeff Webb, WS DOT Blog, August 12 2009)

'This entire thing is completely unAmerican. We voted AGAINST this solution and they are building it anyway. We are being lied to, robbed and utterly ignored. The land that will be opened up is being proposed to the public as public waterfront property, but in time, it will be sold to private investors. Its time for a change in Washington State and Seattle. We need new politicians who will properly represent the public and what we the public vote on. what a joke' (Anonymous, WS DOT Blog, August 12 2009)

There are many more voices articulating critique, support or more technical viewpoints at the blog. Here we only scratched the surface of yet another layer of the public sphere that is at work in this complex case. Seen from a point of view of trying to make an overall sense of the whole project the sheer volume and complexity of documentation, data, and voices however makes a golden overview next to impossible. This, however, is an important lesson about how infrastructure projects are assembled by multiple layers of physical as well as communicative networks.

As a further (and earlier) dimension of the written communication with the public we shall present a few examples of e-mails from citizens that the WS DOT also has made accessible at their web site. Here we will show a few selected e-mails to get an impression of the debate and the citizen's engagement:

From: Andrew Hitchcock <mail@andrewhitchcock.org>
To: <waterfrontplan@seattle.gov>
Date: 7/26/2006 3:27:26 PM
Subject: waterfront

Greetings.

I agree with most of the plan for the waterfront: I would love a green, beautiful, quiet, walkable waterfront. However, I am worried about one part... the tunnel.

The tunnel is a bad idea on so many levels. First and foremost is the sheer expensive of the tunnel. With all the other projects being proposed (the roads package, funding the school district, etc.), I don't think we should mortgage our future to fund the tunnel. Also, it is unfair to ask the citizens of Washington to fund a small tunnel through downtown Seattle (and I say that as a citizen of Seattle).

Also, Mayor Nickels is a proponent of the Kyoto protocol and wants to get people out of their cars. Creating this tunnel encourages car usage and discourages transit. The only way to get people out of their cars is to make it expensive and difficult to drive. People /will/ change their habits, it just takes a few years. Plus, gas is becoming more expensive. With peak oil on the near horizon, fuel will only become more expensive.

We should move Seattle beyond the personal automobile and start designing for humans, not vehicles.

I agree with most of the ideals for the waterfront, I just don't like what Nickels wants under it.

Sincerely,
Andrew Hitchcock

And another citizen refers to the waterfront in San Francisco:

From: "Arlen Levy" <arjolel@msn.com>
To: <waterfrontplan@seattle.gov>
Date: 8/13/2006 6:47:58 PM
Subject: comment

hello

I have recently returned from San Francisco. It has a beautiful waterfront stretching from the Embarcadero to past Fisherman's Wharf. Shops, restaurants, runners, walkers, strollers, all ages, condos, apartments, so much more make it an amazing place to live, work and play. It's time for Seattle to realize the possibilities of becoming a truly beautiful city with a viable waterfront.

A Levy
Bellevue

A number of citizens have written e-mails about the wish for an amusement park alongside the waterfront, and the issue of high rise flats and generic shopping malls are also addressed. Even the public health issue from the point of view of physical exercise is addressed like here:

From: Michael Lapin <michael.lapin@philips.com>
To: <waterfrontplan@seattle.gov>
Date: 5/26/2006 9:36:18 PM
Subject: Parks & Playfields

I hope Seattle devotes some space in any viaduct replacement to create additional playfields. Seattle is woefully short of usable playfields relative to other cities of comparable size. The open space realized by removing the viaduct should yield benefits to all, including the city's sports playing community

Michael Lapin Legal Counsel, Philips Medical Systems 22100 Bothell-Everett Highway, MS 522 Bothell, WA 98021 Phone: 425-487-7009, Fax: 425-487-8135 E-mail: michael.lapin@philips.com

Many other topics are abound but again this is not so much a case of showing the precise content of the Seawall process as it is an attempt to show the plethora of narratives unfolding from the event of the 2001 earthquake. It becomes clear that such events may facilitate public debates and discussions about what to do with a city that may have been dormant for years before the event takes place. Also we find illustration here to the point that the Seawall assembles multiple publics, institutions and technologies into one large complex socio-technical conglomerate.

Inspection processes – citizen tours as a technique for re-assembling the Seawall

The physical site is visited on regular basis of a number of interested citizens at tours organised by the WS DOT. Here is the announcement text for a March 27 event:

March 2010 Program information:

- Join us for a tour of the Alaskan Way Viaduct on Saturday, March 27 during the semiannual inspection. Tours will be held between 9:30 a.m. and noon. If you would like to participate, e-mail viaduct@wsdot.wa.gov or call 1-888-AWV-LINE and leave a message with your contact information.
- On Feb. 25 we met with 50 property owners who have buildings above the route for the proposed bored tunnel. Information from the meeting is available on the [property owners](#) page.
- How are we benefiting from lessons learned by [other tunnel projects](#) as we design the [proposed bored tunnel](#)?
- Learn more about the bored tunnel's north and south connections on the [portal design](#) page.

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/Viaduct>, accessed March 16 2010)

Seawall FAQ

Another technique applied to facilitate the public debate is the FAQ (Frequently Asked Question) section at the WS DOT web site. This list is rather comprehensive, so here we will present only a selection from the list to get a sense of another technique applied (selected list here, taken from <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/Viaduct>, accessed March 16 2010):

What part of SR 99 will be replaced?

We will replace the double-deck bridge section of SR 99 that runs along Seattle's waterfront from S. Holgate Street up to the Battery Street Tunnel. This structure is called the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

Why is the viaduct a safety issue?

The 1950s-era viaduct was already showing signs of age and deterioration before the 2001 Nisqually earthquake, but the earthquake heightened the need for its replacement. The major risk facing the viaduct is its [seismic vulnerability](#). The viaduct stands on fill soil bounded by the seawall. Marine organisms have slowly eaten away parts of the seawall and weakened it. In an earthquake, the fill soil is subject to liquefaction, where a shaking motion causes the soils to turn into a quicksand-like condition. Another major earthquake could collapse the seawall and liquefy the soil, damaging the viaduct beyond repair.

Is most of the traffic using the viaduct today going to downtown or through downtown?

The current viaduct carries approximately 110,000 vehicles per day just south of the mid-town ramps. Of this amount, approximately 17,000 vehicles enter or exit downtown at Columbia and Seneca streets, and 33,000 exit or enter at Elliott and Western avenues toward Belltown, Uptown, and neighborhoods along the 15th Avenue and Elliott Avenue corridor. The remaining 60,000 vehicles continue north through the Battery Street Tunnel, either exiting in the South Lake Union/Queen Anne area or continuing north across the Ship Canal.

Can we afford the tunnel?

The 2010 [cost estimate](#) for the proposed bored tunnel is \$1.96 billion. The total estimated cost of the viaduct replacement, including the S. Holgate Street to S. King Street replacement near the stadiums, is \$3.1 billion. The viaduct replacement has \$2.4 billion in committed funding from the state gas tax and federal sources. The remaining \$700 million would come through [tolls](#) on the bored tunnel and a \$300 million contribution from the Port of Seattle.

How is the bored tunnel different from the tunnel that was rejected in 2007?

The tunnel proposed to Seattle voters in 2007 was a cut-and-cover tunnel, which would have been constructed by excavating a 60-foot deep trench along the central waterfront. It would have required closure of the viaduct for almost four years, causing disruption to traffic and businesses. The bored tunnel would be located beneath downtown and Belltown and be up to 200 feet below the surface, minimizing impacts on businesses and traffic. Traffic would be able to stay on the viaduct through most of the bored tunnel's construction. Visit [tunnel comparison](#) for more information.

How would the bored tunnel and city street and transit improvements help the economy?

The proposed bored tunnel would support the economy by preserving capacity on SR 99 and I-5 for state and regional trips. Preserving capacity on SR 99 would keep pressure off streets near the port's container terminals. The city street improvements and transit investments that are part of the [central waterfront](#) recommendation would help accommodate future growth. The viaduct could remain open during construction of the bored tunnel, minimizing disruptions to businesses and traffic. The SR 99 closures required during construction of a cut-and-cover tunnel or new viaduct would have required longer trips on detour routes through downtown Seattle for three to four years.

How was agreement reached on the viaduct's central waterfront replacement?

Agreement was reached after an intensive public outreach effort. A 29-member [Stakeholder Advisory Committee](#), which provided feedback on replacement options, met 16 times, and a majority asked that a bored tunnel replacement be considered further. Ten public meetings and more than 85 community briefings were also held. Comments from the public covered a range of topics, focusing on preserving capacity for the future and opening up Seattle's waterfront

It is worth paying attention to the hyper text organization of the FAQ site. In this way the Seawall becomes embedded into a complex web of intertextual linkages offering the vigilante citizen opportunity for further knowledge – or perhaps paralysis by information overload!

Documents and faces power

This would however not be a proper planning case if there were not a long series of official as well as unofficial documents shaping the agenda, showing perceptions and motivations from involved stakeholders and institutions. The list of relevant reports and documents is very long so here we shall only find space to delve upon a few from some of the most conspicuous groups and institutions. As already mentioned, the WS DOT has put a lot of information on their web site and this goes for the Seattle City Government as well. Here we shall only focus on a few documents of centrality.

In the document *'Waterfront for All'* published by the NOG 'Allied Arts' in 2006 the Seawall project is addressed at the very beginning in this "letter" (page 4):

'Fifty years ago, our civic leaders made a serious mistake. They cut off Seattle from its waterfront by building the Alaskan Way Viaduct. Now, the people of Seattle and the Northwest have an opportunity to correct this error and redirect the future of the region. We have the choice of giving future generations a vibrant Waterfront neighborhood, or cursing them with an even larger viaduct ripping through some of the most significant urban land in the Northwest. Though removing the viaduct is the single most important step toward creating a great waterfront, planning and designing the surrounding neighborhood are also critical. Since the Nisqually Earthquake in 2001, public discussions have primarily focused on choosing a viaduct replacement and finding funding for it. Today's leaders can leave a legacy by refocusing their attention on the societal and environmental benefits that a revitalized

waterfront will give to generations to come. Ironically, 50 years from now, few people will criticize removing the viaduct or take issue with how much public funding was used to pay for the tunnel. Yet future generations will no doubt shake their heads in disbelief if we don't seize this opportunity to create an inspiring Waterfront neighborhood for people of all walks of life. Seattle and the Northwest are focused on several values that, together, define our quality of life. Thoughtfully managed growth, economic vitality, environmental stewardship and a vibrant culture are among the keys to keeping our region a great place to live. Allied Arts stands with countless other civic and community organizations that believe our new Waterfront is the best opportunity we'll have to maintain and enhance our region's quality of life for the foreseeable future. We see the redeveloped Waterfront neighborhood as a place that will invite people to move into the city, serve as a stronger economic engine, provide more and better salmon habitat and act as a centerpiece for our arts and culture. The community Waterfront Master Vision Collaborative was an effort to provide the inspiration to create a Waterfront for all. As civic and community groups interested in making a great Waterfront came together and communicated their interests to six teams of architectural designers, engineers and planners, a vision for Seattle's Waterfront neighborhood was born. Allied Arts is grateful to the countless people, organizations and government agencies that contributed their knowledge, time, funding and wisdom to this vision of the Waterfront neighborhood. We believe the ideas that arose through this Collaborative came from a synergy that is only achieved through an altruistic spirit, a desire to do what is good for the community and generations to come. We also recognize and appreciate the work and public processes being led by the City of Seattle and the Washington State Department of Transportation. Because these governmental entities seek and are interested in civic input, the ideas that come from this broad array of waterfront stakeholders have social, environmental, economic, political and historic relevance. The work of the Waterfront Master Vision Collaborative is not intended to be the final say in what changes should occur in the Waterfront neighborhood. Rather, it is a vision that meets the social, economic and environmental goals of a diverse set of concerned interests, and therefore dares to say, "It can be done— we can have a Waterfront for All."

David Yeaworth, Executive Director

Sally Bagshaw, Waterfront Committee Chair

Laine Ross, President'

The document is special in the sense that it also contains a number of colorful images that illustrates the architect's and urban designer's imagined future for the waterfront (figure 10).



Figure 10: Rhetoric of Illustration (Allied Arts, *Waterfront for All*, p 48)

This 'rhetoric of illustrations' is interesting to add to the many verbal contributions about what should be done as well as it illustrates a different dimension of the 'power of representation' than the many rational and quantitative numbers related to engineering, economics, and traffic flows.

The official City government document *Waterfront Concept Plan* (figure 11) carry the note on the front page stating that this is 'the mayor's recommendation'. The document was issued in 2006 and in it we find an explicit perception of the meaning of mobility to the imagined future scenario under the heading of 'Movement':

'Seattle's waterfront is a place of movement. Pedestrians, bicycles, cars, trucks, streetcars, trains, ferries, water taxis, cruise ships, and more are continuously and simultaneously moving about the

waterfront 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Pedestrian movement on the Waterfront is a fundamental activity for relaxation, health, and enjoyment of the waterfront's, public spaces, art, views, landmarks and shoreline. As people move between the city uplands and the waterfront, their experience is one of viewing landmarks in sequential relationship to each other. Imagination, Memory and Movement may take form through a sequential "knitting" of public spaces, landmarks, vistas, habitats, connections, public art works, development opportunities, and more along the promenade of the waterfront ... This sequential "zigzag" knitting of features along the waterfront will create a varied yet unified experience during all seasons of the year and visually connect shorelands and uplands spaces on either side of the Alaskan Way promenade. Each of these features are described in the sections under Mayor's Recommended Objectives and Strategies that follow' (Waterfront Concept Plan, 2006, p. 15)



Figure 11: The Mayor's Recommendations: Seattle's Central Waterfront Concept Plan

The 'Peoples Waterfront Coalition' NGO also works to provide an alternative imaginary of the waterfront development in the aftermath of the earthquake. From their web site we learn they are urban designer and landscape designers/architects with a strong interest in the urban development of Seattle (<http://www.peopleswaterfront.org/>). According to their leaflet they work for a flexible transportation solution:

'... The No-Highway solution improves existing arterials, untangles I-5, and better integrates our two new transit systems. It works by capturing and reusing existing capacity already in the system ... With the viaduct gone, the downtown shore will be an economic, ecological, and civic jewel for Seattle. We believe taking full advantage of this precious public property is a better legacy to leave the future than relegating it to a new highway. Cities that will thrive in the 21st century will have dense, walkable neighborhoods, excellent non-car choices for mobility, and great public spaces. Let's invest in that future, not perpetuate the past ... Our goal is to build broad public support to achieve a more affordable and sustainable solution for mobility and the great benefits of reclaiming the downtown shore. We've made a lot of headway ... To continue meeting our objectives, the organization needs sustenance. We need your financial support to keep educating the public and motivating decision-makers. And we need your voice to help spread this grassroots vision: tell your friends, tell your elected officials, and help us connect with community organizations' (<http://www.peopleswaterfront.org/>)

The Seattle City Department of Transportation (S DOT) published the '*Urban Mobility Plan*' in January 2008 which is a rather comprehensive document including a number of technical as well as participatory issues related to the re-construction of the Seawall. Furthermore, there is an extensive list of global reference projects of relevance to the Seawall. In the introduction of the briefing book it is stated that:

'Well before the Nisqually earthquake shook the Alaskan Way Viaduct, the City of Seattle had adopted a policy that put Seattle on a path toward a dramatically different future for how people access and move through Center City. Seattle's downtown is the heart of the region and a focus of much of the

state's economic energy. In the next half century, downtown employment is projected to roughly double, and residency to more than triple. Regardless of the future of the viaduct, environmental concerns, energy concerns and raw growth projections demand a comprehensive systems approach to move people and goods efficiently in downtown's highly constrained rights-of-way. The Urban Mobility Plan (UMP) is an opportunity to ensure Seattle's Center City will continue to grow in size, economic vitality and accessibility because existing infrastructure is made more efficient, inviting, and accommodating. The Plan also recognizes the importance of the effective movement of goods, protection and support of industry, facilitation of Port activities, and continued attraction of large and small business. The Nisqually earthquake reinforced the need to look at alternatives to the current Alaskan Way Viaduct, which divides Seattle's waterfront from its downtown core. The goal of the Urban Mobility Plan is to develop one option for removal of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, consisting of a combination of physical and service-oriented improvements and policy changes designed to optimize the movement of goods and people to and through Center City, without requiring a new elevated viaduct or replacement highway tunnel. While the Urban Mobility Plan is a project of the City of Seattle, it is being completed with the full cooperation of the King County and the Washington State Departments of Transportation (WSDOT). Many of the concepts developed for the Urban Mobility Plan are likely to be included in other alternatives for viaduct replacement, as all alternatives developed and evaluated through the Collaborative Process for the Central Waterfront (described below) are expected to include multimodal elements and enhancements to the transportation system' (Urban Mobility Plan, SDOT 2008, p. 1A-1, <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/ump.htm>)

Like the list of documents and plans, the potential list of influential social actors is long. Here we attach face to some of these again merely as an illustration of the multiplicity and complexity of the case rather as a comprehensive list of people. To start out this bricolage of voices we shall bring two press releases from the WS DOT that tries to capture the debate and the different opinions:

COSTLY TUNNEL NOT THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ALL

'Working Families Deserve Better'

9/22/2006

SEATTLE - **Council President Nick Licata** and **Councilmember David J. Della** issue the following statements in response to today's decision by a majority of council members to recommend to the state that the tunnel is Seattle's preferred alternative for replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

Councilmember Della, an advocate for rebuilding the Viaduct as an elevated structure with available funds and a supporter of an advisory vote on the issue, stated, "I don't think that we can comfortably say that the most expensive and unaffordable option is the preference of the people of Seattle. We had an opportunity to gauge the public's opinion by floating an advisory measure and should have done so. I think tunnel advocates were just too afraid to discover that a majority does not support pricing working families out of our city all in the name of better views. Working families deserve a choice and they deserve an alternative that is affordable."

Council President Licata, who sponsored legislation that would have put an advisory measure with cost estimates on this November's ballot, added, "Tunnel vision is taking our city deeper into a black hole of insufficient revenues and unknown costs. The tunnel is the most expensive option and will be the most expensive project in the history of our city. The fact that a tunnel will dry up so much of our revenue should have been the driver of our discussion-not aesthetics."

COUNCIL: THE TUNNEL IS THE BEST ALTERNATIVE
The Council reaffirms that a cut-and-cover tunnel is the City's preferred alternative for replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

9/22/2006

SEATTLE- Seven members of the Council today reaffirmed their decision of January 2005 that the best alternative for replacement of the dangerously damaged Alaskan Way Viaduct is a cut-and-cover tunnel. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to realize a 21st Century waterfront. The tunnel is a means to that end," said **Councilmember Jan Drago**, Chair of the Transportation Committee. The City's recommendation will now directly go to Governor Christine Gregoire as she considers her decision on what to do about the crumbling elevated structure.

Councilmember Richard Conlin said, "We want to create a waterfront that works for all our people, that is ecologically sustainable, and that is consistent with the values that our city embodies of open access and environmental stewardship. A cut-and-cover tunnel along the waterfront is the best way forward at this time." **Councilmember Jean Godden** said, "The Viaduct is an unsafe, substandard, noxious polluting structure that has blighted the city for two generations-fifty years. Too often in the past, we have been foolishly cheap and shortsighted. We must restore the City's portal to Puget Sound with a cut-and-cover tunnel."

Councilmember Tom Rasmussen said, "The Viaduct was planned and built when freeways were seen as the solution to our transportation needs. Like many other cities, we will not repeat the mistakes of the past. This Council has its eyes fixed on the future."

Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck said, "The state gave Seattle only two options, an even larger elevated freeway or a tunnel, so I am supporting 'a tunnel option.' My heart is more with a sustainable future, such as a surface option as a back-up plan, with more funds for rapid transit."

Earlier this week, the Governor's Expert Review Panel affirmed that the tunnel's finances were sound and reasonable despite rising costs. **Councilmember Richard McIver** said, "I am pleased that a review panel made up of national experts on public finance and construction has expressed confidence in the identified funding for this project. I love the tunnel."

The Washington State Legislature asked the Council to express its preference for a Viaduct replacement either through Council action or an advisory ballot for Seattle's voters. Councilmember Drago said Council action was the only reasonable course. "The Council has been elected to make the difficult, complicated decisions as the representatives of Seattle's voters. Since the Viaduct planning is still in very early stages, it doesn't make sense to ask the public to vote on a project where construction figures are not secure," said **Councilmember Drago**. Added **Councilmember Conlin**, "There is a time to go to the voters: when you are asking them to raise money for a project that is solid. That time will come, but it hasn't yet."

Councilmember Sally Clark reminded everyone that today's decision is not the last one on the Viaduct replacement. "This is not the end. It is just one point along a very long journey. We are smarter today than we were 50 years ago. We can do better than an elevated freeway along the waterfront. I support the tunnel."

From these two press releases one gets the sense of who the important players are as well as a sense of the lines of demarcation being drawn around and by means of the Seawall. It becomes a vehicle for articulating different hopes and visions for the future of Seattle, as well as for the more mundane ambition of shutting up one's political opponents. One particularly important (and we may add skilled) voice is the one belonging to Mayor Greg Nickels (figure 12).



Figure 12: Mayor Greg Nickels (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)

Mayor Nickels is one of the key stakeholders who is particular keen on the ‘making history’ and ‘new beginning’ discourses that we see a number of people giving voice to:

‘Today we’re making history! ... Today we make a decision that recognises how our waterfront has changed ... Today we make a decision that will affect Seattle for the next 100 years ... With this decision we will change our city for the better we will change our city forever’ (Mayor Gregg Nickels, Mayor’s Press Conference 6th December 2004 <http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/press.htm>)

In this political rhetoric statement the city is not only facing ‘new beginnings’ that may offer the window of opportunity to create a new infrastructure, it is also an event and a point in time where the inhabitants of Seattle become united by these new challenges:

‘The City of Seattle approaches this issue united. Even though we are obviously a democratic community and we will have lots of voices speaking to this issues in different perspectives in different ways, the Seattle City Council has been a partner on this the whole way ... it’s important that we speak with one voice on an issue of this magnitude with our transportation future’ (Mayor Gregg Nickels, Mayor’s Press Conference 6th December 2004 <http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/press.htm>)

That the voices of power do not stand un-contested can be seen in this article from December 9 2004 in which Cary Moon wrote against the perception of Nickels’ portrait of the big unifying event (headline title ‘A Bad case of Tunnel Vision’):

‘I think Mayor Nickels has underestimated how deeply Seattleites care about creating a sustainable urban future, and how many of us probably actually would prefer a simple and affordable solution to an expensive, complex megaproject. So why do project officials continue to ignore this potential solution that costs a fraction as much as the tunnel, avoids the costs and risks associated with megaprojects (Hello! Boston?), could make the whole system function better, and may offer a far superior economic payoff? Clearly, there is a poetic and powerful vibe emanating from the gray, hulking mass. Anyone tapped into the layered history of our city knows that the grit and decay of this place is a rare bit of this essence and soul left downtown. But the beast is dying; there’s no reviving it. Let’s say our goodbyes, have a wake, and close that chapter of our history forever’ (Cary Moon in *The Stranger*, December 9 2004, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=20044>)

The Mayor did have to address more difficult issues in 2005 where he had to address the fact that there was ‘no pot of money’ large enough to accommodate to the issue of re-building the Seawall:

‘Right now there is no pot of money at the federal level that we can go to for this project. But there are half a dozen projects around the country, like this, ageing infrastructures that the local area can’t afford to do on their own. So we formed a coalition with those other cities, those other metropolitan areas.

And we are seeking to create a new category called ‘projects of regional and national significance’. Clearly the port of Seattle is one of the most important ports on the West coast. The failure of this structure would be of national significance in terms of its economic impact. So we’ve made a lot of progress on the ‘how’ side. Their last bill set aside 6.6 billion dollar for projects of regional and national significance. That’s what we need to do in order for our senators and our representatives to be able to get in there and make a peak for those dollars’ (Mayor Gregg Nickels, Mayor’s Press Conference, April 26th 2005)

Clearly such ‘appeals’ to higher tiers of government and funding are seen in most debates over funding costly infrastructure. Seen from the vantage point of the relational and mobility defined sense of place presented earlier in this paper, this does make sense since a city like Seattle is relationally configured into a region and a nation-wide network of mobility that would not function if only the local agencies were to fund. The key issue here is that the Seawall in this section of crossing the down town area of Seattle actually is a State Road. Significant as that may be for the actual outcome of the discussion we cannot go deeper into this, but just make a note that also on a political-administrative a ‘thing’ like the Seawall draws upon multiple network relationships crossing physical scale as well as administrative government tiers (Throgmorton 2005). As such the ‘solutions’ abound also cross-references scales and institutions as they become part of an international reservoir of ‘travelling ideas’ (Tait & Jensen 2007).

Another key stakeholder (precisely representing another layer of government) is the Governor Christine Gregoire (figure 13).



Figure 13: Govenor Christine Gregoire (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)

The Governor stresses the economic dimension of the Seawall as she gives voice to a regional economic concern:

‘The viaduct is not just about the economy of this area. It is virtually about the economy of the entire State of Washington. So it’s important that we move forward here on this and recognising that it is a very important mega project for the entire state’s economy’ (Governor Christine Gregoire at [Mayor Nickels Press Conference: Viaduct Inspection with Governor Christine Gregoire](http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/press.htm) Feb 15th 2005; <http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/press.htm>)

Another initiative created by this powerful stakeholder is the creation of the ‘Puget Sound Partnership’. According to their advertising material they bridges the market concerns:

‘Saying that we must “do more” and “do it better” to protect and restore Puget Sound, Gov. Chris Gregoire launched an initiative in December 2005 to revitalize efforts to protect one of the state’s crown jewels. The Governor enlisted some of the region’s leading citizens to form a new public/private group called the Puget Sound Partnership to develop an aggressive 15-year plan to solve Puget Sound’s

most vexing problems. As part of her initiative, the Governor and the 2006 Legislature put into place a \$52 million spending package and two laws that will address critical short-term needs. Acknowledging the hard work already underway, the governor said at the Dec. 19, 2005, press conference that more needs to be done to protect and restore the Sound. And it needs to be done now. "Cleaning and protecting Puget Sound must be at the top of our state agenda. But I know from experience that state government can't do it alone," she said. (<http://www.psp.wa.gov/>)

According to the web site of the PSP they have 17 members and 4 legislative liaisons making them a rather strong body bridging market stakeholders with politicians.

The final official government voice that we shortly include here is the one of Council member David Della. As we saw in the press release above he was advocating the elevated structure and furthermore drawing up a demarcation line between the working class community and the city government:

'I don't think that we can comfortably say that the most expensive and unaffordable option is the preference of the people of Seattle. We had an opportunity to gauge the public's opinion by floating an advisory measure and should have done so. I think tunnel advocates were just too afraid to discover that a majority does not support pricing working families out of our city all in the name of better views. Working families deserve a choice and they deserve an alternative that is affordable' (City council member Della, 22nd September 2006, <http://www.seattle.gov/council/newsdetail.asp?ID=6530&Dept=28>)

On January 4 2006 Allied Arts wrote a letter to David Della expressing the disagreement that the AA had with Della's change of heart as he shifted from being a tunnel solution advocate to arguing for a solution that did not '*price the working class out of the City*':

ALLIED ARTS :: WATERFRONT COMMITTEE

January 4, 2006

David Della
Seattle City Council
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Dear Councilmember Della:
RE: Seattle's Waterfront For All

Allied Arts read your December 27, 2005 editorial with interest. We concur with you that the Alaskan Way Viaduct corridor is a critical piece in our transportation system and that jobs and safety are serious concerns. And we further concur that the leadership in our region must act now to fix the aging seawall and viaduct. However, we strongly disagree with your conclusion that rebuilding the viaduct is the right solution. We believe that you and the majority of your council colleagues made the right decision last January when you endorsed the tunnel option. You got it right last year; unfortunately, your recent change of heart, however well intentioned,

is ill conceived. We ask you to help us build the tunnel and thereby create a Waterfront for all

To end this section on voices and faces of power, we shall bring an image from the symbolic event of the signing up the agreement on January 13 2009 to go forward with a bored tunnel (figure 14).



Figure 14: Signing up the deal (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/Gallery.htm>)

The political opportunity to claim this as a historic moment was not missed by Mayor Nickels who in his official January 13 2009 statement boldly stated that:

‘Many of you will remember that going back a few years, I was an early supporter of the idea of a tunnel. And there are those who will say we’ve come full-circle. But we have followed a process that enabled us to reach a remarkable consensus. We heard many voices, reviewed much data, and came to the decision that this package represents the best way forward. For the last 22 months, we have worked very hard—Governor Gregoire, County Executive Sims and I, and our teams, to break the logjam. There is a time for compromise. And that time has come. My focus was to reconnect Seattle to the waters of Elliott Bay—a connection severed over half a century ago by the existing double-deck freeway. I sought to accomplish this goal by taking down the viaduct and offering residents more transit and other options to driving alone. I had hoped that we could find an answer that did not require building a new traffic corridor. But as you heard the Governor say, we are not persuaded that is possible. So in the spirit of compromise that is required when people of different perspectives work together in good faith, I endorse the Governor’s proposal for a deep bore tunnel. The tunnel, along with surface street improvements and significant transit investments, gives us a project that enjoys broad public support. I want to particularly thank the Alaskan Way Viaduct Stakeholder Committee—the business, labor, neighborhood and environmental leaders who gathered together and worked so hard to evaluate all the options and ideas that came forward, and were willing to ask the tough questions. This was truly a community effort. The package announced today is a victory for the people of Seattle, King County and the state of Washington. Once and for all, we will tear down the ugly and dangerous viaduct that divides our city. The proposal allows for the fast movement of freight and commerce – so vital to trade in a Pacific Rim economy such as ours. And, as our region grows, we will provide more transit to allow our residents better ways and more choices for getting around. As part of the agreement announced today, I pledge Seattle’s commitment to repair the seawall, to relocate the necessary utilities, and to make local transit and street improvements—including a First Avenue streetcar from Pioneer Square to Queen Anne Hill. We will widen the Spokane Street Viaduct and solve the “Mercer Mess”—vital corridors to and from I-5. We have been assured that the Governor and County Executive will partner with us, as we seek federal and state help in holding up our part of this bargain. I’d like us for a moment to take a step back and reflect on what we are accomplishing here today. There are pivotal moments that define a city, that create history. With consensus and popular will, we have written the future of Seattle and region. Consider the future: This July, light rail will begin running to downtown Seattle. As a region, we decided on November 4th to build out a rail network that will connect us to Lynnwood, Redmond, Federal Way and Bellevue. This will have profound impact on how we travel, where we live, and what kind of planet we leave to our children. Today, we reclaim our waterfront, create more transit options for people coming downtown, and ensure that we will remain economically competitive. This is what great cities do. We come together and move forward. We are

not afraid of progress, but embrace it. We debate, we plan, and now, together, we are ready to make history' (Mayor Nickels official statement, January 13 2009, The Mayor's Office)

Not all felt this optimistic about the process and the plans to replace the Seawall. Let us turn the attention to some of the NGOs to hear different opinions.

NGO voices

Next to these powerful institutional stakeholders from the established political institutions in Seattle there are as mentioned a number of NGOs present in the case. Here we shall tap into a few of these well knowing that we cannot possibly pay justice to the complexity nor the differentiation of their arguments.

Allied Arts

One of the influential NGO's that has done a lot to influence the public debate about the Seawall project is the 'Allied Arts' organization. The mission statement of the NGO is presented at their web site under the heading 'the Promise of City Life' and is the following: '*The mission of Allied Arts is to enhance the cultural livability of Seattle and to create a social network of people who care about the Arts, Urban Design and Historic Preservation*' (<http://www.alliedarts-seattle.org/>). Also this stakeholder group refers to the 'making of history' and the earthquake as an event making a 'new beginning' possible:

'The Seattle waterfront has a long tradition of making bold changes to meet the needs of Washingtonians. Just as we poured Denny Hill onto our shoreline and constructed a viaduct along the waterfront last century, we should not miss this once in a century opportunity to make the waterfront a legacy that will bring pride to Seattleites and Washingtonians of the future' (Allied Arts, May 31st 2004, Letter to Allison Ray of AWW project Office Seattle Washington on environmental impact)

Likewise the 'people's Waterfront Coalition' is an important NGO attempting to influence the debate about the waterfront.

Peoples Waterfront Coalition and other voices

The peoples Waterfront Coalition is a NGO advocating traffic solutions to the area from the point of the mass transit, pedestrians and cyclist. They also use the earthquake event to articulate discourse about 'new beginnings' but with a very different direction:

'With the viaduct gone, the downtown shore will be an economic, ecological, and civic jewel for Seattle. We believe taking full advantage of this precious public property is a better legacy to leave the future than relegating it to a new highway. Cities that will thrive in the 21st century will have dense, walkable neighborhoods, excellent non-car choices for mobility, and great public spaces. Let's invest in that future, not perpetuate the past' (Peoples Waterfront Coalition, Leaflet 07.11.2006 <http://www.peopleswaterfront.org>)

On the 9th of December 2004 Cary Moon, an urban designer and co-founder of the People's Waterfront Coalition (PWC) wrote:

'Compare the two legacies we could leave: A city reconnected to the bay on which it sits, with civic spaces and smartly planned new development, or a new highway with a lid covering just 12 blocks of its length ... In the last seven months, we've built a growing coalition of citizens and organizations behind this solution [the No-Highway solution]. In October, when the city council held a public meeting to hear what people were thinking about the viaduct alternatives, 40 percent favoured the No-Highway solution - more than supported either the tunnel or the rebuild option' (Cary Moon Editorial The Stranger Dec 9th - Dec 15th 2004)

Julie Parrett, another PWC member argues that for 50 years the transportation solution in cities across the country has been to build highways. What the PWC is asking for is a solution that moves beyond the wisdom of 50 years ago and accordingly ‘*Seattle can live without the Viaduct*’ (Julie Parrett, PWC). Cary Moon, using the platform of the journal ‘The Stranger’ argues that the political establishment and the Mayor in particular seem out of touch with the electorate: ‘... *Mayor Nickels has underestimated how deeply Seattleites care about creating a sustainable urban future, and how many of us probably actually would prefer a simple and affordable solution to an expensive, complex mega project*’ (Cary Moon Editorial, The Stranger Dec 9th - Dec 15th 2004). On December 11 2002 Brian Steinburg who is member of ‘*Action: Better City*’ which is a non-profit organization that advocates and fosters discussion for more liveable communities wrote the following in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer:

‘The viaduct shouldn't be the waterfront's dark alley. Our waterfront should be enjoyable for citizens and tourists alike, because if we feel disconnected from the waterfront we won't make the effort to go there. The waterfront can be a great place -- if we want it to be. To create a truly memorable waterfront, we need to engage the region's imagination and design a place that residents and tourists alike will enjoy. To do this, we need to admit the root of the problem -- the elevated structure. Human scale and activity, noise, light, texture and material all contribute to the success or failure of creating places that people want to be versus places that people tolerate and move through. It is not enough to hope the waterfront will be successful despite the viaduct. Either we craft a waterfront for the needs of people, selecting the appropriate transportation infrastructure to meet those needs, or we relinquish our waterfront to cars, columns and concrete again. The choice is ours’ (http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/opinion/99286_viaduct11.shtml)

On November 13 2003 Seattle Times’ Susan Gilmore wrote a piece titled ‘Designers illustrate visions for a viaduct-free waterfront’. It started out stating:

‘Imagine a viaduct-free waterfront with an outdoor movie screen, a hill overlooking Safeco Field and a school. Mix in a promenade from the Pike Place Market to the Seattle Aquarium, a grocery market and canals carved into Pioneer Square. Six architectural firms and a University of Washington design class did just that, etching their vision for the Seattle waterfront when the Alaskan Way Viaduct is gone. Not if, but when’ (<http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/pacificnw/2002/0407/cover.html>)

Hereafter follows interview quotes with participants in the visioning process. Amongst these are Dennis Haskell from the offices of Seattle based Mithun Architects. In the article he states that: ‘*We will never build another viaduct ... Politically and emotionally, people will never go for it. I guarantee it. If we did we'd be going back to the Stone Age*’. According to Susan Gillmore the designers followed three guidelines: The viaduct will be removed, all traffic through Seattle will be below or away from the waterfront, and human activity will take priority over cars.

I must be admitted that this has been a cacophony of voices and that a ‘real’ planning study would have to order these voices into theoretically informed themes or using the chronology of events much more actively. But as stated a number of times the concern here has been one of understanding the ‘messiness’ and jumble of vocals in relation with technologies, institutions, and hardware. Thus we cannot in any way claim to have given a scientific and accurate representation of the Seawall cases as seen from the point of view of a policy analyst or a planning scholar. Rather we have opened up the box into a complex phenomenon that we will struggle to make sense of and order into a neat narrative. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, I was inspired by Latour’s strange story of the failure of the Parisian light rail project ‘*Aramis*’. Coming from such a line of inspiration I thought; *I wonder what we would find if only it could speak?*

5. Listen to the Seawall

Here I will jump the standard academic format and offer an imagined dialogue as I think it might have sounded if only the Seawall could speak. Needless to say this may be provocative to some readers, but since it is only one page I ask the reader to bear with me (very scientifically committed readers may skip this paragraph and go straight to the conclusion). So let us for a brief moment imagine what the Seawall would say, if only it could speak. I have chosen to re-present this as an imaginary dialogue between me and the Seawall, taking point of departure in the fact that I have not seen the site and thus has a natural propensity to inquire. Thus imagine me talking to the Seawall:

Ole: *So tell me, what actually happened that day back in 2001?*

Seawall: *Seriously, how much time have you got? Some think it all started with the shaking of the earth on that Wednesday back in February 2001, but actually they had started inspecting me and discussing my physical condition long before. I suspect they had plans for my future in the pipeline then. But you're right, the earthquake changed things. Not least in the public debates. Suddenly I was the window into a sea of change, a new tomorrow and all that ...*

Ole: *How did it feel to become the center of so much attention in the City?*

Seawall: *It is kind of odd. I had been here for some time but after I got real sick by the earthquake it has been amazing to hear how the many agents and stakeholders are drawing me in multiple different directions and how they evoke emotions and feelings that are hurtful. How would you feel if you had carried thousands of vehicles throughout decades and then when you get temporary ill you must listen to people calling you all sorts of negative things and even some arguing that you were a disgrace for the city...*

Ole: *Hmm, I sense a certain disappointment in your voice. Are you thinking different about us humans after your last decade of experiences?*

Seawall: *There's a lot of talking. There are a lot of words. I mean, there's a lot of articulating ideas in words and images whenever a large urban proposal for change is coming around. I don't mind. I guess that is only natural. I just don't understand how humans can fail to see that there are important elements of an urban intervention that is not derived from their immediate faculties, actions or doings. We are actually a fair number of material artifacts and objects in the world that are the preconditions of contemporary urban life, regardless if the self-propelling human agents reflectively and consciously intervene or not. Life without objects would mean a very different life both socially and aesthetically as well as in political-economic terms you see. Humankind has experienced this before, but it seems such a long time ago that they have forgotten how pre-technological life felt like. I guess what I am saying is ... just don't forget how we shape and forms your life!*

Of course the Seawall cannot speak. But from this exercise it seems that we may enhance our sense of understanding how complex the relationship between human agents and material artifacts really are. If I had written a narrative about how a car would have felt, or a Personal Computer the reader might had understood and accepted it more easily since it seems that within the technoculture we inhabit there are some machines and artifacts to which humans bond emotionally more than others. But of course they cannot speak either. Here the key point is to open up our understanding of for example road infrastructures as something that goes way beyond just fulfilling their instrumental goals of providing for mobility from point A to point B. The Seawall (and thus any other huge urban artifact) is an evocative and cultural artifact that becomes taken for granted as a proverbial black box in its daily use, but which also becomes a site of contestation as soon as an event happen that opens up for a re-interpretation of what it actually means to the city and its inhabitants.

6. Concluding remarks

As promised in the introduction we shall return to the academic realm of theory, data and what can be concluded upon. Obviously I cannot claim that the imaginary dialogue between me and an infrastructure makes sense in the scientific world. However, for the sake of the argument I have engaged with this thought experiment in order to try another angle on the complex issue of human/non-human interaction. Asking the ‘*what if?*’ question is a key part of the scientific tool box even though I readily admit that the standard way of putting it often related to less stretching of the imagination. The more serious point about playing with the thought of having numb objects thinking and speaking is to articulate that shifting perspective may be necessary for us to understand the importance and meaning that lies outside of human agency and control. Having said this, we should obviously make some references to the more ordinary territory of academia. From this story many lessons are possible. One is the importance of understanding how an earthquake is more than a natural ‘event’. Obviously it is a natural event but the meaning and repercussions of it are deeply embedded into the socio-material fabric of the city. In exploring the narrative of the Seawall we meet a story about ‘*Utilitas*’ and the instrumental organization of flows, but also about culture and inhabiting place via an understanding of the meaning of movement. The relational linkages and mobility addressed opens up for seeing the Seawall as a material and cultural artifact that assembles multiple voices from the field thus constituting a specific notion of ‘place’. Theoretically and methodologically this raises interesting challenges to urban studies as well as to technology and cultural studies.

As always large infrastructure investments and interventions pitch environmentalist versus economic growth advocates, car-oriented commuters versus walking and cycling residents, aesthetic considerations versus efficient transport logistics etc. This is also the case with the Seawall in Seattle and would need much more careful and systematized research if the point of the paper was to assess what the ‘correct’ decision and solution is. However, here our concern has been another with much more emphasis on the way stakeholders and institutions blends with hardware and technology assembling into huge socio-technical complexes. To return to the point from the introduction; we may understand infrastructures as a relational assemblage of ‘hardware’ (e.g. asphalt, concrete, columns, traffic lights) and ‘software’ (e.g. strategies, traffic codes, campaigns). It is this nexus of material and immaterial, human and non-human that needs to be understood in relation to the flow and friction it affords. Obviously the imaginary ‘dialogue’ between the me and the Seawall can be seen as a gimmick and a non-scientific lapse. However, the thought experiment conducted in all its simplicity and amateurism do lend itself to the question that arises out of Science and Technology Studies and Actor Network Theory whilst being applied to urban interventions. This paper cannot claim to contribute to either of these consolidated fields, but what it can do is to open up the perspectives focusing on how to re-present urban interventions in a narrative and discursive format with concerns for the notion of mobility and place. *If only it could speak* we would listen to exiting stories about power and politics, but also about how dependent we are on technologies and hardware that seemingly is under societal control. This is the potential of this beginning cross-fertilization between narrative theories and the mobility turn. Where that will lead is premature to foresee, but here an invitation has been made to explore notions of narrative, mobility and place seen through the story of the Seawall in Seattle.

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Seattle City Council

<http://www.seattle.gov/council/>

Seattle's Central Water Front Plan

http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Central_Waterfront/Overview/

Washington State Department of Transportation

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/Viaduct/>

Puget Sound Partnership

<http://www.psp.wa.gov/>

Allied Arts of Seattle (NGO)

<http://www.alliedarts-seattle.org/>

People for Puget Sound (NGO)

<http://www.pugetsound.org/>

People's Water Front Coalition

<http://www.peopleswaterfront.org/>

The Stranger

<http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=20044>

Real Change News

<http://www.realchangenews.org/index.html>

The Seattle Times

<http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/pacificnw/2002/0407/cover.html>

History Link.Org

http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=7072

Video Archive: Seattle City Council Committee of the Whole (COW)

http://www.seattle.gov/council/video_archives.asp?program=COW

Video Archive: Seattle City Council Committee of Transportation

http://www.seattle.gov/council/video_archives.asp?program=cityTransportation

Video Archive: Seattle City Council Urban Development and Planning Committee

http://www.seattle.gov/council/video_archives.asp?program=urbanPlanningDevelopment

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