The presented research is part of my thesis for the MA in Creative Sustainability at Aalto University. It focuses on unpacking and delving into the political nature of design facilitation, considered both as the mediating act between a facilitator and other actors, and the overarching participatory process. By taking a theoretical approach drawing on principles of transdisciplinarity, the research looks at facilitation by contrasting different notions from design, philosophy, social studies and political sciences. The idea was to take a concept that is currently being (mis-)over-used and for which there seems to be a common understanding on the mainstream level to then attempt to disarticulate it and understand its various underlying components.

An introduction to the world of design facilitation is provided to then look into power exertion and what I refer to as otherwise unaddressed politically-charged aspects of facilitation such as framing, empowerment, consensus and agency, among others. This exploration is carried out through a systematic literature review which, combined with a narrative synthesis, allowed for a deeper and more critical approach to the topics. The first part of the research is complemented with a critical and personal analysis of three doctoral dissertations that aim at challenging participatory practices from different angles, in order to contemplate an even bigger picture of design facilitation.

Conclusion:
It is proposed to further look into two alternative approaches when it comes to design facilitation. To begin with, the voluntary engagement in an exercise of ‘power to’ through a deliberate resignation of it, which I call “deliberate resistance”. This could potentially open up ways to collaborate in a less dominant way. Secondly, it is encouraged to adopt principles from prefigurative politics to foster a means to react to existing situations while envisioning desirable futures in participatory practices, aspects that can be addressed both through research and practice.

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