Track-Change Diplomacy: Technology, Affordances, and the Practice of International Negotiations

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How does technology influence international negotiations? This article explores "track-change diplomacy," that is, how diplomats use information and communication technology (ICT) such as word processing software and mobile devices to collaboratively edit and negotiate documents. To analyze the widespread but understudied phenomenon of track-change diplomacy, the article adopts a practice-oriented approach to technology, developing the concept of *affordance*: the way a tool or technology simultaneously enables and constrains the tasks users can possibly perform with it. The article shows how digital ICT affords *shareability*, *visualization*, and *immediacy* of information, thus shaping the temporality and power dynamics of international negotiations. These three affordances have significant consequences for how states construct and promote national interests; how diplomats reach compromises among a large number of states (as text edits in collective drafting exercises); and how power plays out in international negotiations. Drawing on ethnographic methods, including participant observation of negotiations between the European Union's member states, as well as in-depth interviews, the analysis casts new light on these negotiations, where documents become the site of both semantic and political struggle. Rather than delivering on the technology's promise of keeping track and reinforcing national oversight in negotiations, we argue that track-change diplomacy can in fact lead to a loss of control, challenging existing understandings of diplomacy.

Introduction

We appreciate the hard work you have done on this file. We are ready to lift our reservations on the text. As regards the outstanding issue, I have a very strange instruction [laughter around the table], but the compromise just proposed by Tom can be a way forward. (Ambassador at Coreper 1 February 18, 2015; Nielsen 2015)

This is how a national ambassador explains his country's position in the European Union. What is said may initially appear trivial (the laughter occurred because

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everyone around the table recognized that the ambassador felt a need to signal a subtle difference between the outcome and the instructions he had received from his capital), but it demonstrates how diplomats promote national interests during international negotiations. The ambassador in the quote above refers to his colleagues' preparations prior to the meeting in terms of editing the document—a Word file—which has led to a draft text they are willing to accept. It serves as the perfect example of contemporary multilateral negotiations. These days, multiple authors, based in multiple locations, find compromises using collaborative text-drafting software, email, and mobile devices. The track-change function in word processing software should, in principle, make text changes and revisions more visible during negotiations than would otherwise be the case. Yet, in actuality, the opposite happens. As we shall see, when hundreds of people negotiate on a document at high speed, track-changes can be an instrument of (at times intentional) opacity, rather than transparency, and diplomats can lose control. How can we explain this phenomenon?

In this article, we provide an explanation and add to international relations theory by unpacking how the concept of affordances links practices and technology. We focus on diplomacy where the effects of technology have received little attention (but see Bátora 2008; Cooper, Heine, and Thakur 2013; Bjola and Holmes 2015; Hocking and Melissen 2015; Branch 2017; Duncombe 2017). Innovations in communication technology from the telegraph to the email have not just accelerated international negotiations; each technological innovation has helped determine what kind of diplomacy can take place. Today, international negotiations are largely a digitally mediated struggle for semantic

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control over documents. Yet our theories of international relations have so far largely failed to take the changes in international negotiations attributable to technology into account. One reason is that our understandings of negotiations still revolve around the notion of diplomats acting as mediators (Der Derian 1987; Sharp 2009; Constantinou 2013), whereas ICT has removed many barriers of space and time. Another reason is that it is difficult to gain access to the negotiation table unless you are one of the negotiating parties. For this reason, scholars discover certain phenomena only incidentally.

That is exactly what happened to us in the rounds of participant observation we conducted in the diplomatic engine room of the European Union, the Council of Ministers. Diplomatic use of email, mobile devices, and word processing software features—for example, track-changes, tables, or bold text—may seem inconsequential. However, it significantly affects national positions and the sorts of international compromises that states can reach. It is in the documents' changes, rejections, and acceptances that negotiators enact the politics of international relations. For this reason, "track-change diplomacy" deserves the undivided attention of international relations scholars. By coining the term *track-change diplomacy*, we do not claim to have discovered a radically new process unique to the digital age. Diplomacy has—for a long time—involved collective text drafting (although we have never known much about the process itself). However, as this article will demonstrate, ICT changes international negotiations in significant ways.

We use the term *track-change diplomacy* as a heuristic to analyze how ICT (including, but not limited to the track-change function in word processing software) shapes diplomatic negotiations. We will focus on three main affordances of this technology: *shareability*, *visualization*, and *immediacy*. Affordances are the inherent action potentials of a given technology, which its users do not always realize. We argue that the specific technology used to reach diplomatic compromises fundamentally informs how drafting and negotiating proceed. Shareability allows for multiple coauthors to work on a document, while visualization means these authors operate within a particular schematized design aesthetic, and the immediacy of high-speed text circulation facilitates back-and-forth editing under continuous time pressure. In large multilateral settings that negotiate on a continuous basis, these three characteristics collectively shape key international relations categories: negotiators define the national interest as textual edits, they reach compromises through aesthetically circumscribed drafting exercises, and power is emergent as the individual negotiator experiences a loss of agency when the text gains a life of its own. In some instances, when diplomats deal with nonvital national interests, the characteristics of track-change diplomacy can result in diplomats losing control over the negotiation process and even adopting legislation that none of the negotiating parties intended.

We have divided this article into five parts. The first section unfolds how scholars have analyzed international negotiations and the production of texts in diplomacy to date—focusing on cables, reports, and speeches—rather than internationally negotiated texts. The second section outlines how international relations scholarship has drawn on Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor–Network theory (ANT), but still lacks a language to properly unpack how diplomats use technology in practice. The third section develops the concept of technological *affordance* as something that both enables and constrains the tasks that users can possibly perform. The fourth section presents our ethnography, integrating participant observa-

tion, confidential documents, and interviews. In the final section, we demonstrate the value of our affordance approach to technology through an in-depth analysis of everyday negotiations in the European Union. We conclude by outlining a research agenda on technology in practice, enabling international relations theory to better address how technologies, from artificial intelligence to social media, affect international relations.

Diplomacy and the Drafting of Documents in International Negotiations

The very nature of track-change diplomacy explains why states can lose oversight, and how the process of negotiation tends to gain a life of its own. The Lisbon Treaty (2009) is a case in point. This treaty, which revised the institutional setting of the European Union, includes several provisions that none of the member states cared for. For example, the Treaty's infamous article 50, the so-called divorce clause that the British government activated to begin Brexit, the UK's exit from the European Union, has a complex negotiation history, which its authors do not fully recollect, nor agree upon. According to Lord Kerr, former chief British diplomat, the article was not directed at democratic member states, but it would be triggered in the case of a dictatorship (de Wit 2016). Other members of the Convention on the Future of Europe, including former Member of the European Parliament, Andrew Duff, remember that the motivation behind article 50 was purely symbolic, and that the article was never meant to be used at all (2016). Such puzzling situations where states agree upon negotiation outcomes that they did not really intend calls for an inside view into the diplomatic engine room.

The study of international negotiations presents numerous challenges. Even a relatively open multilateral body, such as the European Union, is secretive when it comes to the performance and defense of national interests. Consequently, scholars and journalists rely on the outcome of meetings in the form of official end documents, formal negotiation rules and distribution of votes, or draw on interviews with negotiators. These sorts of "outsiders" have difficulties asking questions about phenomena they do not know the existence of, or which they may consider irrelevant from the outset, while diplomats might not be fully aware of all the elements that shape their negotiations. Only a few scholars have had the opportunity to actually observe confidential multilateral negotiations. To the limited extent that international relations, diplomatic and practice-oriented scholars have analyzed text production in diplomacy, they have primarily focused on communication within a national foreign service (e.g., cables, notes, and strategy papers) or public texts. Drawing on participant observation in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iver B. Neumann has argued that diplomatic documents such as speeches are about the production of texts that "the entire ministry may stand behind" (2012, 81; see also 2007) rather than attempts to produce or communicate new policies (see also Cornut 2015).

Despite the valuable insights yielded by international relations theory and specifically practice-oriented scholarship on diplomatic text production such as the importance of "pen-holding" in the UN Security Council (Ross 2007; Farrall and Prantl 2016; Pouliot 2016a) or "audit culture" (Kuus 2016), it has, so far, failed to consider the tools used when producing text, or the way in which technology contributes to representing national interests. Practice-oriented scholars have analyzed text drafting as reflecting

social dynamics in the negotiation, such as a "struggle over competence" (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014) or "collective consciousness" (Ralph and Gifkins 2017), but have not addressed how text drafting coconstitutes social dynamics. They have shown that diplomats conceive and handle multilateral agreements—whether declarations or international law—from the very beginning as documents with shared authorship.[1] As Vincent Pouliot puts it, "[the] skillful practice of multilateral negotiation is—literally—a collective accomplishment" (2016a, 16). Yet, this collective accomplishment, as we will show, is not just due to socialization among permanent representatives; the use of particular software and technology makes compromises possible. Even critical scholars, while attending closely to "narratives of production"—for example, the drafting of UN resolutions (Shepherd 2008)—say little about the work of construction itself. Izadora Do Monte mentions in passing that UN Security Council discussions are "organized through electronic mail and ruled by informal but well-established conventions. The outcome of these discussions, either simply resolved by email exchanges or after a real live discussion, is a resolution" (2016, 674). In sum, while international relations scholars generally acknowledge that "diplomacy has been influenced by the development of available means of communication and transportation" (Jönsson and Hall 2005, 90), they yet have to integrate this observation when studying diplomacy.

Beyond international relations theory, there is a large body of literature on the production of documents and their role within organizations and bureaucracies (for an overview, see Freeman and Maybin 2011). But researchers have rarely established connection between these studies and diplomatic scholarship (for an exception, see Dittmer 2016). Within anthropology and sociology, scholars such as Latour (2005) and Hull (2012) highlight how everyday practices in producing documents—and the material qualities of the text themselves—have tangible social effects. The invention of the printing press was critical to the emergence of modern science, just as particular material properties of documents have enabled governments to act over time and space (Latour 1986). Sociologist Richard Harper (1998) has demonstrated by tracing "document careers" in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), it is possible to discern how an organization is structured. Indeed, by studying the circulation and materiality of documents such as paper quality, stamps, and letterheads, as well as the aesthetics of textual features—"paragraphs, tables, subtitles, fonts, margins, and bullets" (Hull 2012, 255)—we can uncover how bureaucracies function.

Annelise Riles (1998, 1999) comes closest to capturing the nature of international negotiations of text in her fascinating participant observations of the UN. As she shows, delegations place their suggestions to a given text in brackets. The aesthetics of creating a bracket-free "clean" text, rather than having the text convey a particular meaning, becomes the primary logic that shapes the negotiation process. Negotiators dismiss some versions of bracketed text, while they consolidate others. Riles's anthropology offers crucial insight into everyday diplomatic document drafting, including what scholars often overlook, but which is omnipresent in multilateral negotiation: *aesthetics*. However, we still lack knowledge about how diplomats use ICT during negotiations; how it shapes expectations; and the implications for international relations categories such as national interests, compromises, and power. Our analysis points toward not only the dynamics of face-to-face meetings (Holmes 2013), but also the affordances of technology that help shape these negotiations.

Technology and Practice in International Relations Theory

In international relations theory, focusing on idealizations of technology, rather than on technology in practice, can easily distort our understanding of technology. In recent years, however, concepts from STS and the subfield of ANT have gained popularity among international relations scholars in a bid to bring technology deeper into our understanding of world politics. As an interdisciplinary research field, STS is interested in the social constitution of science and technology, and, in turn, how science and technology have constitutive effects on society (Jacobsen 2015).

International relations scholars drawing on STS and ANT aim to show how technologies facilitate different modes of international politics. In a study of the materials of diplomatic practice, Pouliot observes that technology (such as nuclear warheads) may even make people "do things they would not have done otherwise" (2010, 294). Despite this understanding, we still lack a precise explanation of what precipitates this action. Concepts such as *assemblage*, *actant*, and *inscription* are particularly relevant for our research aim, but, as we will argue in this section, a theoretical language to unpack how users enact technology in practice is still underdeveloped.

The concept of *assemblage* is based on the idea that humans, animals, and things dynamically relate to each other in heterogeneous groups, from which productive outcomes emerge beyond the individual (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).[2] Conceptually speaking, this means that international organizations, diplomats, or foreign ministries are not taken-for-granted entities, but rather traceable physical and cognitive processes, events, buildings, borders, humans, and networks (Dittmer 2016; Hoijtink 2017; Lisle 2018; McConnell and Dittmer 2018). Actor–Network theory focuses on such assemblages (i.e., actor-networks). Its founders, Michel Callon, John Law, and Bruno Latour, developed the concept of *actant*—a term which asserts the "quasi-agential properties of matter" (Coole 2013; Cudworth and Hobden 2013; Mitchell 2014, 12). Actants may be algorithms (Amoore and Raley 2017; Aradau and Blanke 2017), drones (Leander 2013; Schandorf and Karatzogianni 2018), flags (Bueger 2013), or many other "things" (Amicelle, Aradau, and Jeandesboz 2015; Salter 2015), and these actants come together to form provisional relations of actor-networks (Law 2008). Actants have agential features in that they are a part of assemblages, where actions are "the emergent product of myriad interacting forces and bodies that collide, respond, react, and counteract one another" (Mitchell 2014, 12; also see Aradau 2010; Balzacq and Dunn Cavelty 2016). Surveillance assemblages, for example, connect technologies such as biometric data collection and body scanners in a way that resembles Foucault's panopticon (Muller, Cooke, Larrinaga, Frowd, Iossifova, Johannes, Multu, et al. 2016). While generating important insights, this approach does not systematically specify the

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[1] Pouliot (2011) and Adler-Nissen (2014) describe how national diplomats rather than defending national interests in terms of substantive "win-sets" (as a range of possible negotiation outcomes on which the parties can agree, Putnam 1988), translate opposing demands between their home and the multilateral UN context they negotiate in.

[2] In his pioneering work on cyberspace, Ronald Deibert was among the first to argue that the "material properties" (2003, 504) and "'biases' of communication technologies [. . .] shape and constrain the environment within which communications take place" (503).

mechanisms through which technology works nor bring us much closer to an understanding of how ICT shapes international negotiations.

The concept of *inscriptions* comes closer to addressing our analytical needs by "making distant events and processes visible, mobile and calculable in terms of documents, charts, forms, reports, signs and graphs" (Walters 2002, 84). Inscriptions are the technologies through which actors seek to translate the messiness of the world—in the laboratory, the battlefield, or the market—into tangible knowledge that is concrete and visible enough for governing purposes (Aradau and Huysmans 2014). While not an STS scholar and not explicitly making use of the notion of inscription, Branch (2011) studies the role of maps in processes of state formation in exactly this way. He demonstrates that "new mapmaking technologies changed how actors thought about political space, political organization, and political authority" (Branch 2011, 1), subsequently influencing their ideas of accepted governance. In a more recent article, Branch (2017) claims that digital mapping technologies structure territorial negotiations in unanticipated ways, because they visualize territory differently from paper maps. Similarly, while not using the concept of *inscription*, Der Derian (2003) focuses on how technological developments have resulted in new modes of representation in warfare, changing the way soldiers perceive the battlefield and how they act in it accordingly.

These different conceptual answers to the relationship between materiality and the social insist on the coconstitution of technology and practice. Unfortunately, concepts such as *assemblage* and *actant* lack analytical precision when it comes to identifying the mechanisms of coconstitution. The concept of *inscription*, in turn, is useful, but it limits the role of technology to representations of reality. It does not encompass that people can use technology as tools to physically aid in actions on the material world, thereby changing it (nuclear weapons, for example, are not inscriptions). Moreover, as Nexon and Pouliot (2013) have argued, there is a discrepancy between ANT and international relations theory, in the sense that ANT tends to focus on concrete microprocesses, whereas international relations theories predominantly revolve around macroprocesses.

The next sections add to the international relations literature on technology by responding to the challenges of analytical precision and relation to macrophenomena. We show that affordance is a theoretical concept geared for an analysis of the forms of action that technologies make possible—but also that these affordances shape macrophenomena such as national interests, negotiations, and, ultimately, international governance.

Theorizing Technology in Practice: An Affordance Approach

To explore track-change diplomacy and precisely identify how ICT and international practices relate requires combining insights from STS, organization, media, and communication studies, and practice theory. Specifically, we introduce the notion of *affordance*, understood as possibilities for action—that is, how an object or technology both enables and constrains the tasks that users can possibly perform with it (Evans, Pearce, Vitak, and Treem 2017, 36).

Cognitive psychologist James J. Gibson developed the notion of affordance in 1977 to explain how people orient themselves to objects in their world in terms of the possibilities these objects afford for action. Donald Norman (1988)

popularized affordance in studies of human–machine interaction, documenting examples of "bad design." Affordances are now key to how social sciences conceptualized technology's role in society (e.g., Hutchby 2001; Hine 2008). The concept is relational—representing potential interactions between people and technology, rather than being a property of either alone. This relational view also explains why there is no singular theory of affordances, as each emerges based on the technology's material features and contextual functionality (Evans, Pearce, Vitak, and Treem 2017, 36).

Casting an everyday perspective on technology with our affordance approach, we are inspired by organizational scholars such as Orlikowski, who developed the term "technology-in-use" (Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura, and Fujimoto 1995) to point out that technologies seldom bring predictable effects to social life. Instead, technological artifacts operate within a web of organizational, occupational, and institutional forces. A practice perspective on technology accounts for the fact that people, organizations, and states do not always "realize the apparent potential of a technology when they use it" (Majchrzak and Markus 2013, 3), and can sometimes use technology in ways the designers never intended. An affordance approach highlights that technology creates conditions for specific forms of human agency, and thus, contrary to most STS- and ANT-inspired international relations scholarship, we do not see technology as having agency in and of itself.

To understand why different individuals and organizations do different things with the same technology requires understanding how cultures and habits shape our use of technology. At the same time, we cannot reduce the use of technology to human attributes such as culture, norms, or habits. We have to understand it in relation to what actions the technology makes possible. The concept of affordance expresses this interrelation between technological functionality and social practice. An affordance approach is agnostic to particular features of a technology and, instead, asks what combination of features enable and constrain the ways people use technology (Zammuto, Griffith, Majchrzak, Dougherty, and Faraj 2007, 752).[3]

To develop this concept for international relations theory, we focus on three affordances of ICT that we have identified as significant influences in diplomatic negotiations: *shareability*, *visualization*, and *immediacy*.

Shareability

The first affordance of ICT is what we refer to as *shareability*. Advances in ICT enable a large number of actors to work on a single (or similar) document across different locations, with several practical implications. Firstly, it can broaden participation in an organization's decision-making processes by including people who may otherwise be working on the periphery. Virtual collaboration increases the potential for bringing people from different organizations and disciplines together, while documenting their decision rationales and work processes in real time (Zammuto, Griffith, Majchrzak, Dougherty, and Faraj 2007, 756). Secondly, it fosters a sense of collaboration and transparency, as it streamlines the ability to not only share but also integrate others' knowledge (Zammuto, Griffith, Majchrzak, Dougherty, and Faraj 2007, 755). In international negotiations, this translates into connecting capital cities more closely to

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[3] Technology features are the ways "that [a technology's] physical and/or digital materials are arranged into particular forms that endure across differences in place and time" (Leonardi 2012, 42).

their diplomats abroad. It also affords a more inclusive, decentralized organization of foreign policy that incorporates other ministries and parliaments, and potentially even substate actors. Enhanced shareability makes rapid feedback possible by enabling quick probes and clarifications from varied sources.

While enhanced shareability affords more input from capitals, in large multilateral settings that negotiate on a daily basis, the massive expansion of individuals involved in diplomatic negotiations is likely to result in the individual negotiator losing control. The lack of centralized procedures coupled with the high speed of back-and-forth negotiations leads to power emerging from the negotiation process, as we will explain further below.

Visualization

The second affordance of ICT is what we call *visualization*. It affords the ability to observe entire work processes in action from end to end, represented through language or images that aid our thought processes in important ways. How we visualize certain phenomena affects how we address them. The philosophers and cognitive scientists Clark and Chalmers refer to "active externalism" to highlight how our environment drives cognitive processes (1998, 7). Objects and technologies help us to not only do things differently, but also shape the way we think (Clark and Chalmers 1998, 8). We reduce the computational load of our brain by manipulating external devices and cultural artifacts such as maps and texts to solve convoluted problems. While this sort of visualization is important for cognitive processes on an individual level, it is even more relevant in collective decision-making. Visualization is an important element of communication (Weber 2008). Visualization aids understanding, it helps keeping a "live record" and enables collective sense-making as "people figure out how to respond" (Zammuto, Griffith, Majchrzak, Dougherty, and Faraj 2007, 754).

Visualization fundamentally underpins the sorts of solutions that diplomats identify in international conflicts. When diplomats negotiate over territorial disputes, the ways in which they draw up the territory constitutively affects the course of negotiations and the solutions that will emerge (Branch 2012, 2017). Similarly, when diplomats visualize the object of their negotiations in text form, and signify changes to the text with the help of track-changes, bold text, or brackets, then they will express the national position in the international dispute in the form of text edits. They seek the solution to a particular dispute with the help of drafting exercises, as opposed to drawing a boundary on a map. In other words, how diplomats visualize the object of diplomatic negotiation has constitutive effects on how they establish the national position toward the object, and how they identify a compromise.

Immediacy

The third affordance that we wish to highlight is *immediacy*. ICT enables "unprecedented speed of access to materials and world events as they happen" (Conole and Dyke 2004, 116). Despite the wealth of information now within reach, speed can raise issues of quality and imply lacking reflection or critical judgment. The speed with which individuals can now exchange information has also shifted expectations in terms of response times. Organization scholars have shown how this intensifies working patterns, with responses expected almost immediately and an increasing number of back-and-forth edits among more authors than in the past (Conole and Dyke 2004, 116). Today diplomats create and recreate documents, and constantly negotiate meanings in rapid feedback circles within the European Union.

Communication speed has a phenomenological effect:

> [Speed] promotes a more pragmatic, reflexive immediate response to new information, as it is pixilated across our screens. This can be said to be particularly true of email, where nowadays users are bombarded with so much information that there is a tendency to skim read and adopt a surface approach in terms of reacting to responses and requests. (Conole and Dyke 2004, 118)

While speed tends to reduce diplomats' and leaders' attention span in their everyday activities, they can consciously counteract these tendencies when dealing with issues of vital national interest. Under these circumstances, they will undertake their best efforts to remain focused. The literature surrounding cognitive psychology and social practices suggests that when difficulties arise, people will raise their awareness (for an overview, see Hopf 2018). In other words, in moments of crisis, deliberate reflection replaces default automaticity (Bourdieu 2007; Baumeister and Bargh 2014).

For this reason, a crucial aspect of the technology–diplomacy interaction is not just how word processing software speeds up the circulation of texts, but also how negotiators handle that speed, how they experience and assess it, and, ultimately, how that shapes international relations. For example, the introduction of the telegraph in the 1830s revolutionized diplomacy (Nickles 2009). The technology obviously made it possible to speed up the transfer of messages, but it did more than that. It provoked counter-moves from diplomats keen to protect their autonomy abroad. It also led foreign ministries to compose more concise messages because telegraph services were expensive, thereby changing the language of diplomacy (Nickles 2009, 3).

We expect that in highly institutionalized multilateral settings where continuous international negotiations take place, the affordance of immediacy will result in shorter attention spans during day-to-day negotiations, unless the organization has a slow-moving deliberative culture. By contrast, when one-off negotiations of vital national interest are on the table, participants will do their utmost to increase their attention span and diplomatic focus.

Summing up our theory, in accordance with the affordance approach, we do not make causal claims, but specify conditions of possibility. Thus, we do not predict whether track-change diplomacy will lead to compromise solutions in specific negotiations; the practice does not determine specific outcomes. Diplomats themselves do not know whether their efforts will succeed, but they use track-change diplomacy as their go-to approach to solve disputes. Nor do we predict precisely when loss of authorship will occur or when the negotiating parties will agree upon a text that none of them intended. We propose necessary, not sufficient conditions: in large multilateral settings operating under increased time pressure and with a loaded agenda, track-change diplomacy can make smooth negotiations possible, with the side effect that in moments when diplomats lose focus, it can lead to a loss of control. Inversely, when diplomats and leaders have made key national interests explicit, they will do their best to remain focused and retain some measure of control.

Ethnographic Methods: Participant Observation, Documents, and Interviews

This section briefly outlines our ethnographic approach while our online supplementary appendix provides details on the diplomatic setting, sources, methods, analytical strategy, and relevant literature on EU negotiations and ethnography in international relations scholarship. Our technology-in-practice approach implies an inductive methodology. As mentioned in the introduction, observers of diplomacy would not necessarily know about the existence of track-change diplomacy unless they became privy to the practice.

By analyzing how diplomats conduct negotiations in the European Union's multilevel system, we focus on the Coreper (Committee of Permanent Representatives): the diplomatic engine room where ambassadors of the EU member states negotiate. Coreper meets in Brussels every week and prepares the Council of Ministers in its various formations. At Coreper, the ambassadors negotiate many of the politically contentious issues that their subordinates cannot solve at working group level. Coreper is not very visible to the general public, and it operates largely behind the scenes. As such, this forum resolves a significant number of issues on a de facto basis during its meetings, although national Ministers in the Council are the ones who hold the legislative power (Lewis 2016).

The European Union is not a typical international organization, which raises the question of generalizability to other multilateral settings. Yet, in aspects pertaining to track-change diplomacy, the European Union does not substantially differ from other multilateral organizations. First, while Coreper interacts frequently, thereby affecting the mechanics of track-change diplomacy, equivalent bodies in the UN or NATO also meet regularly (Pouliot 2016b). Second, the European Union has substantive areas in which it does not take decisions unanimously, but by Qualified Majority Voting, which may affect the speed of negotiations and make them even faster. However, in substance, we can observe the same mechanisms in areas where the European Union takes decisions by unanimity—even during major treaty revisions such as the Lisbon Treaty, for example (Interview November 21, 2014; Interview December 12, 2014). Third, the binding status of EU legislation and the extensive powers of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) might influence the mechanics of track-change diplomacy. But, again, we have identified the same mechanisms in areas in which the ECJ does not have any jurisdiction, and in non–legally binding documents. Lastly, one might argue that the European Union is a special case because of the high degree of trust between frequently interacting parties. While EU negotiators do not distrust each other to the extent that warring parties do, the European Union's working environment certainly contends with the same interpersonal tensions as we expect in other large organizations.

In fact, we find similar patterns of track-change diplomacy identified in the European Union in other multilateral organizations such as the UN (Riles 1998), UNESCO (Schaefer 2017), and NATO. Also, the more hybrid multilateral institutional environments, such as the Contact Group on Piracy (Bueger 2017), exhibit similar dynamics. While diplomats also use track-changes when drafting bilateral agreements, we do not expect bilateral diplomacy to have the exact same characteristics. We can attribute these differences to norms and habits typically found in legalized, multilateral organizations with many countries involved, compared with the less institutionalized practices of bilateral diplomacy (Pouliot 2011). The number of actors involved in the negotiation process also makes a difference. Moreover, we cannot expect the same track-change dynamics when states' vital national interests are at stake or when they are deliberately seeking to delay agreements.

We gathered most of the empirical material during two-and-a-half months of participant observation in the permanent representation of an EU member state and in the Council of Ministers in Brussels in 2014. During this period, one of the authors attended Coreper meetings. She also attended numerous working group meetings and Council meetings, as well as the consultations prior to Council and Coreper meetings between Ministers and the ambassador, and between attachés and the ambassador. The other author worked in the Department of European Policy of a member state's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a year (2010–2011), where she helped prepare European Council and Council of Ministers meetings and participated in drafting instructions, while attending various meetings in Brussels.

The participant observations inform the core of the analysis. In addition, we analyzed 266 internal documents that were circulated in preparation for Coreper meetings during the two-and-a-half month period. These documents consist primarily of draft legislation with suggested text edits, Presidency compromise solutions to outstanding issues of negotiations, instructions from a member state, and diplomats' summaries of negotiations.

We supplemented the participant observations with insights from numerous open-ended interviews both authors conducted during the period 2007–2018 with among others active and former Coreper ambassadors, Council secretariat officials, Members of the European Parliament, and employees of the Commission. The interviews served to clarify observed incidents. We have anonymized informants (and most country names) to respect their confidentiality and protect informants' identities.

The participant observations provide exceptional insights to the day-to-day proceedings of negotiations, but also have certain limitations. First, because of the limited time we were allowed to spend in the Permanent Representation and the Council, it was impossible to follow one piece of legislation through from inception by the Commission to its final adoption by the Council and the European Parliament. To be able to analyze the entire negotiation process, we therefore had to rely on different pieces of legislation in their respective stages. Second, conducting participant observation also meant that we could not select the dossier (i.e., a particular negotiated text) on the basis of predefined criteria. Instead, we studied dossiers as they unfolded in front of our eyes, without knowing how they would develop. So, rather than concentrating the analysis on one piece of legislation, we highlight more general patterns of negotiations as we observed them across different cases. This aligns with the inductive method of "practice tracing," that seeks to "map the ways of doing things that [. . .] characterize a given social configuration" (Pouliot 2014, 273), and then analytically generate broader patterns from these concrete observations.

Track-Change Diplomacy in the European Union

From delivering post by wagon to today's word processing software, the nature of diplomacy has advanced alongside ICT. As the French historian Fernand Braudel (1995 [1966]) explains, in the sixteenth century, the "[s]tatesmen and ambassadors, whom we usually imagine with weighty

matters on their minds, are often preoccupied by the arrival or delays of the mail" (Braudel, quoted in Fletcher 2015, 114). Uncertainty about not just when, but if letters and documents would ever reach the envoy hindered international negotiations. The horse carriage and the improvement of road and rail traffic led to incremental improvements in communications, but prior to the late nineteenth century, limited communication was still a major obstacle to diplomacy (Black 2010, 49). As late as 1980s, junior diplomats from EU member states were sitting up all night at the embassy in Brussels, where the one computer dedicated to receive confidential material was located. They waited for draft conclusions, then photocopied them and slid them under the hotel room door of the members of the national delegation at 4 am (Interview April 18, 2018).

Some characteristics that defined negotiations in Coreper in 1958, when it was established, are equally important today. Notably, negotiations center on textual edits. This is not surprising given that many of the word processing features used today "build historically on aesthetics, discourse genres, means of distribution, concepts of authorship and ownership, etc., that were developed through the media of paper" (Hull 2012, 261). In other words, the affordances of visualization on paper and word processing features are quite similar, meaning that they affect diplomatic negotiations in similar, albeit nonidentical ways.

By contrast, advancements in ICT have considerably affected the affordances of immediacy and shareability. As one senior diplomat recalls:

> Without thinking, we have just increased the speed and complexity. We handle dossiers just as fast as we did when we were 15 [member states] as we do when we are 28 countries around the table. Basically, enlargement [in 2004, the EU grew from fifteen to twenty-five with the Central and Eastern European countries] wouldn't have been possible without email, mobile phones and software. (Interview April 18, 2018)

Track-change diplomacy as the combination of advanced ICT and diplomatic practices has three defining characteristics: shared authorship, which involves including many people from geographically dispersed regions and institutions; a particular aesthetic centering on textual edits with the help of word processing features; and a high speed of negotiations and textual circulation. This section will show how in multilateral settings that negotiate on a continuous basis, these three characteristics collectively shape key international relations categories: negotiators define the national interest as textual edits in a compressed two-level game (Putnam 1988), they reach compromises through aesthetically circumscribed drafting exercises, and power is emergent. In some instances, when nonvital national interests are involved, the characteristics of track-change diplomacy can result in diplomats losing control over the negotiation process and even adopting legislation that none of the negotiating parties intended.

Shareability: From Shared Authorship to Loss of Authorship in Drafting EU Legislation

The first characteristic of track-change diplomacy is shareability, given the large number of actors who work on a single document across different locations. When one follows the circulation of a draft for an ordinary legislative act through the European Union, it is clear that massive coordination efforts are required for reaching a compromise, which track-change technology makes possible.

The European Commission initiates a text with the involvement of several Directorate Generals and consultations with member states and stakeholders. The text then goes to the Council of Ministers, where it passes through various working groups. The member state representatives as part of these working groups can receive instructions from multiple domestic ministries, and potentially their national parliaments. The text will then go to the Coreper ambassador meeting before the Council of Ministers decides on it. Various political parties negotiate over the text in the European Parliament, and the European Union has only adopted the legal document once the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers have reached an agreement (for more detail, see the online ethnographic methods appendix).

This brief elaboration highlights the many different hands through which the text circulates. As one diplomat explains:

> There is not one author. It is a collective enterprise. Many people are involved. Many institutions are involved. It is the machine of searching for a compromise, which writes the text. (Interview November 20, 2014)

Beyond the technology of track-changes, social norms guide the changes that individuals are allowed to make, so that reaching a compromise between so many actors becomes possible. For example, member states have to show flexibility wherever they can. They have also learned to aggregate positions. To get edits approved, others need to support one's position. Aggregation is crucial to make the interactions between twenty-eight member states, the various national ministries, and the EU institutions more meaningful.

One of the consequences of shareability as an affordance for international diplomacy is that capital cities can potentially better oversee the negotiations:

> I remember, previously, you said: "Okay, I take this one," and then I had to defend the choice at home, but today you say, "give me five minutes, and I've spoken to my Prime Minister." The autonomy of Coreper ambassadors is gone. (Interview April 15, 2018)

However, the implications of shareability are not as straightforward. The fact that track-change diplomacy allows the text to circulate through so many different iterations, creates a situation of shared authorship that can occasionally result in a loss of authorship. As a Member of the European Parliament explains: "so many people are involved, you cannot foresee what the outcome [. . .] is going to be," (Interview November 20, 2014). Contrary to what we commonly believe—that writing is a case of "highly controlled sign usage" (Hirschauer 2016, 55, authors' translation)—the intricate circulation process that negotiation documents go through means that diplomats can, at times, lose control over the production of those signs. While bureaucracies are generally able to expose a similar phenomenon of loss of authorship resulting from a specific bureaucratic culture (as per Weber), observing it in diplomatic negotiations, where diplomats are supposed to represent the interests of states as independent actors, is considerably more fascinating, as it opposes the dominant understanding of what diplomacy is all about.

Visualization: Using Word Processing Software to Reach Agreements

The second characteristic of track-change diplomacy relates to the affordance of visualization. In the European Union, negotiations are extremely aesthetic and text oriented. Diplomats use various Microsoft Word functions to highlight proposed text edits and bring out the different positions of the negotiators. Each of these functions fulfills the role of making changes more visible and therefore allowing diplomats to negotiate around those changes. For example, the table with four columns (see Figure 1) is a typical stylistic device used during *trialogues*.[4] The table permits three institutions (the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council) to add their amendments to individual paragraphs side by side. This makes it easy for a reader to identify and compare them, while the fourth column is left for the compromise solution. The table works well for three negotiating parties, but it would be significantly more challenging to use for all twenty-eight member states. Tools with different affordances for visualizing text edits, such as the track-change function, are more useful under these circumstances.

In terms of formatting, Presidency suggestions for a compromise text at Coreper ambassadorial meetings usually have "new text in **Bold and underlined**. Deleted text is in ~~strikethrough~~" (Legislative proposal by a member state, November 11, 2014). Changes the Council Legal Service proposed for legal accuracy are **Bold and double underlined** and ~~double strikethrough~~ Gray shading serves to highlight politically contentious issues. Alternatively, diplomats can use red font. [Square brackets] indicate that the negotiators have not yet agreed on something. Footnotes commonly serve to write down the delegations' suggestions for modifications to the text, or to highlight delegations' scrutiny and parliamentary reservations. Occasionally, they use the comments function (see Figure 2).

All of these tools are visual markers that allow the delegations to focus on specific passages of the text, while letting the rest fade into the background. The comparison between new and old text becomes easily discernible. These tools help to increase the speed of textual revisions, but they also draw out certain passages from the document's overall context. As a result, diplomats can easily focus on the details of particular wordings, over which they then negotiate out of context. They can lose the overview of the entire text and, therefore, lose sight of the actual subject of their negotiations, contributing to a loss of authorship.

Before text edits reach a point where the Presidency consolidates them into a single set of proposed revisions, national delegations use track-changes to make their suggestions to the text (see Figure 3). Compared with the use of bold and underlined formatting, track-changes lead to the propositions' lower degree of authority, as the delete option is already an integral command function. At the same time, the suggestive nature of track-changes inspires to create new text. Using track-changes allows readers to track multiple authors, which is unnecessary in the case of one set of changes the Presidency has consolidated. Although technically possible, this tracing of authorship becomes impractical when many individuals negotiate over a text.

Immediacy: The Speed of Text Circulation through the EU Apparatus

Information and communication technology permits a third characteristic of track-change diplomacy: immediacy. To an outsider, the European Union might appear to be a slow-moving bureaucracy; but for the people involved in the internal negotiations, they occur at a very high speed. The fast circulation of text among many actors that advancements in ICT make possible also generates expectations of fast responses. Being constantly bombarded with emails can be quite stressful: "If you haven't been up during the night to go to the toilet [and check your mobile phone], then people cannot understand why you haven't answered" (Interview April 18, 2018).

As one senior diplomat notes:

> Things need to be very swift, because we are working up against a deadline, so it's seen as good service by the Presidency to send an email and say: 'Here is the document,' and they will often send it out at 4pm in the afternoon for a meeting at 10 or 11am the next day. This wasn't the way we operated previously. Before mobile phones, there was a compromise text and then you would have one or two days to react. Time has become compressed. Sometimes I receive a new text in the rotating door into *Lipsius* [the Council of Ministers building in Brussels] on the way into the meeting. (Interview April 18, 2018)

The high speed may, in part, be self-perpetuating with the urge to respond quickly emerging from shared experiences of rapid text circulation. But it is also due to a more or less implicit norm of measuring success on the basis of how many texts diplomats have approved. To reach a speedy agreement and get legislation through the apparatus might be one of the most crucial objectives underlying the negotiation process today.

Information and communication technology in tandem with individual role perceptions supports fast negotiations. Given Coreper's substantial agenda and the fact that there are twenty-eight member states around the table, the ambassadors are not allowed to speak for more than three minutes per item. They often make explicit that they comply with these rules or apologize if they do not: "Sorry I took up a lot of time there, but I think it was important," (Coreper 1, February 18, 2015). The silent procedure also enhances the speed of negotiations. It implies that Coreper has adopted a proposal, unless a member state objects within one of the deadlines specified by the Presidency (General Secretariat of the Council of the EU 2011, 56). Furthermore, "agreed language" expedites searching for compromises. Agreed language refers to formulations that diplomats have agreed upon in previously approved texts. Diplomats copy and paste these directly into new texts that address similar issues. The purpose is to save time and to avoid replicating the same complex procedures of searching for a compromise. One possible danger of this procedure is that the insertion of agreed language passages into a slightly different context may create new, unintended meanings.

The three affordances of ICT—shareability, visualization, and immediacy—fundamentally shape how negotiators define national interests, how they reach compromises, and what constitutes power in large multilateral settings.

Defining the National Interest as Text Edits

One of the key questions in diplomacy is how the national interest gets represented and performed. Concretely, national capitals write the national interest in their instructions to the EU delegations. Yet, as we will show in this section, the way in which capitals produce these instructions makes it clear that EU negotiations do not center around predefined interests, but rather around the

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[4] *Trialogues* refer to negotiations between the European Commission, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, and the Rapporteur of the European Parliament.

Commission proposal	EP amendments	Council position	Presidency suggestions
Amendment 18 Article 1 – point 1 - (Article 2 – subparagraph 1 – indent 15)			
- 'hybrid propulsion vehicle' means a vehicle within the meaning of Directive 2007/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 September 2007 establishing a framework for the approval of motor vehicles and their trailers, and of systems, components and separate technical units intended for such vehicles, equipped with one or more traction motor(s) operated by electric power and not permanently connected to the grid and one or more traction motor(s) operated by internal combustion;	*– 'low carbon technology' means technology which does not fully rely on fossil oil sources in the energy supply to transport and which significantly contribute to the decarbonisation of transport. The sources include:*	"– 'alternative fuels' shall mean fuels or power sources which serve, at least partly, as a substitute for fossil oil sources in the energy supply to transport and which have the potential to contribute to its decarbonisation and enhance the environmental performance of the transport sector. They consist of:	Same objective as the EP. Keep Council's text.
	– electricity	– electricity consumed in all types of electric vehicles,	Same objective as the EP. Keep Council's text.
	– hydrogen	– hydrogen,	
	– synthetic fuels		These fuels do not need extra weight.
	– advanced Biofuels,		These fuels do not need extra weight.
	– natural gas, including biomethane, in gaseous form (compressed natural gas – CNG) and liquefied form (liquefied natural gas – LNG), and	– natural gas, including biomethane, in gaseous form (Compressed Natural Gas – CNG) and liquefied form (Liquefied Natural Gas – LNG),	

Figure 1. Example of the table used at trialogue negotiations

performance of interests expressed through text revisions using a particular software that also shapes the way diplomats conduct these edits. In short, the text helps produce national interests—just as much as the national interests are manifest in the text. The somewhat emblematic national interest emerges out of the negotiation process, based on the three affordances we have identified.

The high speed of ICT means that email and mobile devices afford almost complete flexibility in terms of being able to constantly edit the text. Previously, the capital sent instructions to the embassy (since instructions represent the government's view), but in practice, it was often the representative in the mission abroad who wrote a first draft the capital then approved. These days, this has taken a radical turn with instructions sometimes drafted at the same time as negotiations take place. A diplomat highlights, "We work a lot with the instructions. It may as well go back and forth a number of times" (Interview April 20, 2015).

The affordance of shareability, together with the imperative of high speed, circumscribes the national interest. The Presidency needs to aggregate national positions between multiple delegations, and there are unwritten rules on how many edits (i.e., track-changes) one country is allowed to make. As one senior diplomat in the Council secretariat explains:

> It happens regularly that a country uses too many track-changes and then it has no impact. We simply ignore it. We can't take that seriously. We cannot take that much from one single delegation. The delegation must find out what's most important. (Interview April 15, 2018)

The affordance of ICT visualization shapes the aesthetic form that a national interest takes. A discussion during the negotiations of the Single European Sky 2 + (SES 2 +) legislation, which regulates EU airspace, illustrates how the aes-

thetics afforded by Microsoft Word enact the national interest. To understand this negotiation context, it is important to know that Spain and the UK's ongoing sovereignty dispute over Gibraltar complicated the SES 2 + negotiations. Both parties disagreed about whether to include Gibraltar airport in the legislation. The ambassadors at Coreper could not find a solution to this key issue concerning national sovereignty, so they left the topic for the Transport Council on December 3, 2014. The UK expressed its national position in the form that it "will only accept a general approach if it is absolutely clear that Gibraltar will be included, without footnotes in 5 and 2." For Spain, the national position was to include a text in the SES 2 + legislation, which recommended "temporally [to suspend] the application to this airport until an agreement has been reached between Spain and the UK." To move the legislation forward, the Presidency proposed to:

> [. . .] put paragraph 5 in square brackets, and include a footnote stating 'the issue as to how in the text to reflect Gibraltar will depend on the results of talks between the UK and Spain.' The other two footnotes will be deleted, and I hope that this will be a neutral solution. [. . .] There are precedents for this type of solution. The proposal that we are making is that we would have a general approach, paragraph 5 in square brackets, with a footnote.

Spain responded:

> The solution is neutral, so we are able to approve the solution. We still stick to our solution, but with a view to reaching an agreement we can accept that solution.

To the surprise of those present, the British Minister refused the proposal on the grounds that it "is not a neutral approach." Given that the remaining interested parties thought it was a neutral solution, the Presidency had the

Article 2

Definitions

1. For the purposes of this Regulation, the following definitions shall apply:

    Definitions related to devices:

    (1) 'medical device' means any …

    ……………………………….

    The implantable or other invasive products, **intended to be used for human beings, or** products ~~for~~ **intended to** deliver~~ing significant amounts and/or intensities of~~ energy **onto or into the human body**, ~~intended to be used for human beings,~~ which are listed in Annex XV shall be considered medical devices, regardless of <u>whether or not</u> they are intended by the manufacturer to be used for a medical purpose. **However, this Regulation shall only apply to a product in Annex XV following the adoption of relevant common specifications pursuant to Article 7[4] for that product.**

2. The Commission shall be empowered to adopt delegated acts in accordance with Article 89 to amend the list in Annex XV referred to in the last subparagraph of number (1) of paragraph 1, in the light of technical progress, <u>in order to</u> **protect the health and safety of patients, users or other persons or other aspects of public health,** and taking into account the similarity between a medical device and a product without a medical purpose in respect of their characteristics and risks.

Figure 2. Examples of Presidency suggestions for a compromise text

member states vote on the general approach with the compromise solution, although it concerned an issue of vital national interest. The UK voted against it, but the general approach passed because it was in a policy area of Qualified Majority Voting. This illustrates that when vital national interests are involved, the parties do their utmost to retain control.

The Reaching of Compromises through Drafting Exercises: Getting to the Clean Text

As indicated in the example above, negotiations take place through text edits, and the European Union has developed a real skill of reaching compromise solutions through "drafting exercises"—a process where diplomats draft and redraft texts until they have identified an agreeable solution in the wording of a text. The speed and aesthetic affordances of ICT are crucial for the practices through which negotiators seek compromises in large multilateral settings.

One strategy of collective drafting, for which the affordances of shareability and immediacy are key, is to split the text into pieces that negotiators then circulate in parallel with the more official negotiation process. Whereas they circulate the official documents in full length with track-changes, the use of mobile devices encourages small snippets and fragments of text to circulate at the same time, as member states cut and paste their way to compromise. As one ambassador explains:

> We had an Eastern Partnership summit where we needed to refer to language on 'European aspirations

for Ukraine.' The working group had negotiated long and hard and couldn't get any further. At the one end, you had [Member State 1] blocking. They could not accept any recognition, any aspirations for Ukraine whatsoever. On the other end you had [Member State 2] and some of the other [States], [Member State 3] and [Member State 4] that couldn't get enough. I was tasked by the Presidency to find a compromise. So between two Coreper meetings, I worked with the External Service. First, I called my colleague from [Member State 2]. Then I sent a text to my [Member State 1] colleague, and we pushed it back and forth over the phone. And then they started to see themselves in the text. And then at Coreper, the compromise was presented orally. . . . (Interview April 15, 2018)

These are the hidden layers of negotiations that ICT makes possible.

The visualization of ICT also shapes how negotiators work with textual edits, and how they reach compromises. In the negotiations concerning Council Conclusions for an Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council for instance, how to treat e-books and regular books became a contentious issue between Northern and Southern states. The text the Presidency initially proposed explicitly referenced the differences in VAT applied to regular books and e-books. However, Northern states argued that VAT does not lie within the competency of the Council for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport, but in that of the Economic and Financial Council. For this reason, they wanted to omit the statement. Given this resistance, the Presidency changed the text to:

CHAPTER I

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1

Subject matter

This Regulation lays down rules ~~on the design and construction of cableway installations designed to transport persons and~~ on the making available on the market and the free movement of subsystems and safety components for ~~such~~ **cableway** installations. **It also contains rules on the design, construction and entry into service of new cableway installations.**

Article 2

Scope

(1) This Regulation shall apply to **new** cableway installations designed to transport persons**, to modifications of cableway installations requiring a new authorisation,** and to subsystems and safety components for such installations.

(2) This Regulation shall not apply to the following:

(a) lifts within the meaning of Directive ~~95/16/EC~~ **2014/33/EU** of the European Parliament and of the Council[8] on lifts;

Figure 2. Continued

promote reading as a tool to spread knowledge, enhance creativity, support access to culture, cultural diversity, [. . .] develop awareness of a European identity **and to support the application** to e-books **of** the same treatment applied to printed books[5] (diplomatic notes).[6]

Several member states still opposed this text, so the Presidency made further changes:

promote reading as a tool to spread knowledge, enhance creativity, support access to culture, cultural diversity, [. . .] develop awareness of a European identity and to **consider to apply** ~~support the application~~ to e-books ~~of~~ the same treatment applied to printed books. (ibid)

The like-minded states that disagreed with this proposal developed their own compromise text, which read:

promote reading, **through printed books as well as e-books**, as a tool to spread knowledge, enhance creativity, support access to culture, **and** cultural diversity, ~~[. . .] develop awareness of a European identity and to support the application to e-books of the same treatment applied to printed books~~. (ibid)

As this text was not satisfying the Southern states, one state suggested another alternative wording:

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[5] New proposal from the presidency.
[6] We copied the quotes' formatting from the original internal documents in which they appeared.

promote reading as a tool to spread knowledge, enhance creativity, support access to culture, cultural diversity, [. . .] develop awareness of a European identity, ~~and to apply support the application~~ also applying to e-books ~~of~~ the same treatment applied to printed books, **except where different treatment results from EU-law.** (ibid)

But this wording was unacceptable to both groups, so the ambassadors at Coreper were unable to agree and left the issue for the Council of Ministers. The final compromise text in the Conclusions on a Work Plan for Culture (2015–2018) reads:

promote reading as a tool to spread knowledge, enhance creativity, support access to culture and cultural diversity and develop awareness of a European identity, taking into account the various conditions applied to e-books and physical books.

The shareability, visualization, and immediacy of ICT allow many actors to negotiate at high speed around textual edits. It also means that the substance of the negotiations can occasionally fade from view in a quest to get the wording right, and with a focus on only the contentious textual passages, not the full document. During negotiations, the text acquires a particular meaning. Thus, in the example above, the claim that "equal treatment of e-books and regular books" refers to an equal VAT is not apparent from the language itself; it only emerged in relation to the different positions at the negotiation table.

14. Responsibility for the control and surveillance of the **external borders** lies with the Member States which, in performing this function, are also acting in the common interest of all Member States. In order to ensure that Europe's external borders are effectively managed and that the same standards apply everywhere, all relevant instruments must be used in an optimal manner and be adapted where necessary. The European Border Surveillance System will be further developed as a matter of priority in order to become operational by 2013 and allow Member States' authorities carrying out border surveillance activities to share operational information and improve cooperation.

15. These efforts will also be strengthened by pushing forward rapidly with work on "smart borders", to ensure that new technologies are harnessed to meet the challenges of border control. In particular, an entry/exit system and a registered travellers' programme could be introduced. Before creating new systems, however, an evaluation of existing systems should be made and the difficulties encountered when they were set up should be taken into account. The European Council welcomes the agreement reached on the agency for the operational management of large- scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice.

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Figure 3. Example of a track-changed document

Once the text is enshrined in law, it often acquires a new meaning that is in line with the practices of legal interpretation. This legal meaning can be quite different from the meaning that emerged during negotiations or that the diplomats who wrote the text intended.[7]

In a dispute between the Council Legal Service and member states over the meaning of a clause in the European Union's Lisbon Treaty, the Council Legal Service responded in an informal meeting (November 11, 2014):

> Send us legal arguments about this, not political ones. Usually we stop at the letter of the treaty. I understand that you are not satisfied with it at all. [. . .] We cannot rely too much on the history of treaty making, on the *travaux preparatoires* to the treaty, we have to find the arguments in the law as is.

Clearly, the text has gained a life of its own.

Emergent Power in Track-Change Diplomacy

One of the benefits of an affordance approach to technology is that it overrules the idea that technology has any automatic consequences, thereby allowing for human agency. Human agency does not disappear with technology; what a given technology and established societal practices offer shape its expression. Within international relations theory, scholars often see agency as an exclusive prerogative of the human domain involving intention and freedom of will—which is particularly evident in international negotiation studies (see Braun, Schindler, and Wille 2018). A range of perspectives, from poststructuralism, over ANT, to practice scholarship have criticized this assumption of conscious agency. For instance, practice scholars promote a logic of practice over a logic of consequences or appropriateness when analyzing diplomacy (Adler-Nissen 2016).

This explains why Pouliot can quote a UN diplomat as saying: "Diplomatic issues are not resolved through the quality of arguments, but thanks to a capacity to imagine steps that people can engage in [and to find] the next step to rally people to move forward" (2016a, 16).

However, this narrative still allocates agency and power with human agency and creativity. Our analysis of track-change diplomacy shows that multilateral negotiations are more radical. Writing diplomatic text cannot be reduced to human agency (i.e., moves of diplomats alone), but it is shaped by technological affordances that significantly impact how diplomats think and handle text as a collective networked exercise. As we have demonstrated, the negotiation process itself takes an emergent character as ambassadors continuously circulate and edit text, while they experience being stripped of the agency they once had.

What we suggest here is that if it is not merely the meeting of different national interests, diplomats represent around a negotiation table, that produces the text, then track-change diplomacy enables power to work in a different way. Being influential as a diplomat entails being able to use technology effectively. This means being able to edit text and time interventions at a high speed. Of course, the size of member states will influence their ability to get edits approved, because individual voting weights in the Council determine a certain hierarchy and social pressures associated with that hierarchy (Pouliot 2016b; Towns and Rumelili 2017).

> It is clear that a small country cannot take the floor as the first [member state] each time. It would be totally out of place [. . .] It would also be noticed if we always have to say something to all agenda points. (Interview January 1, 2015)

Ultimately, however, the most crucial diplomatic skill in terms of enhancing a state's negotiating position is the ability to maneuver one's edits through a complicated negotiation process. In this sense, the text becomes the object over which diplomats hold the negotiations. Power gets expressed both in the process of drafting and through the clean text as a collective achievement.

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[7] Occasionally negotiators can deliberately leave text unclear, knowing that they are unable to solve disagreements—in tune with Kissinger's understanding of constructive ambiguity (Jegen and Mérand 2014). However, at other times, the process can be automatic and unintentional.

The barometer of power (invisible to outsiders, and often to participants in the process) is whether a country's most important text edits make it into the final version. Linguistic skills are important. Negotiators who can achieve balanced wording and possess a certain institutional memory to recall previously "agreed language" that they can reapply to new circumstances, are the most likely to embed their preferred solutions in the final document. As a senior diplomat in the Council secretariat explains:

> If you are a competent negotiator, you are able to propose something that can easily slide into a text. You need to be textually economical with suggestions for changes. I remember [Member State X's] ambassador [. . .] suggested to the Prime Minister to put a comma in the text. We got the comma and it changed the meaning completely and it meant that the Commission couldn't use the proposal for what they had planned to use it. Sometimes a surgical, technical and economical edit has a better chance than a complicated suggestion. Also because the latter can raise all kinds of questions from the others about what this means. Drafting skills are crucial for how lucky you are to get your proposals through. (Interview April 15, 2018)

Developing a strategy to subtly navigate one's way through the different iterations of the text is important. As Riles (1999, 2006) points out, agency or politics do not disappear; rather they emerge in the ways in which diplomats manage amendments and procedures. Diplomats have to strategize their edits and interventions, based on the affordances particular technologies offer. Coalitions and negotiations occur so fast that a parallel conversation to the one at the negotiation table happens on the diplomats' mobile phones and along the outskirts of the room. Diplomats send each other comments about how the meeting is developing, and they strategize about who should speak first. Being able to integrate the same textual revisions in the various fora through which the text circulates—and to make sure that one's voice is heard and understood—also matters. At times this may require that negotiators reiterate their points, as an ambassador said during a Coreper meeting: "I have said this before, but I am happy to repeat." At other times, it may require that an ambassador writes an edit of the text out by hand and passes it on to the Mertens (the assistant diplomat) who will photocopy and distribute the sheet to all Coreper participants, so that they can see the suggested revision in a hard copy in front of them.

Being able to fit into the collective track-change process significantly bears on the result. Power is emergent in these negotiations as it originates from specific social interactions, and we cannot reduce it to the meeting of preexisting national interests (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014). However, as we have demonstrated in this article, how we use technologies both enables and constrains this emergence. Negotiations become a fluid maneuvering through textual edits with an uncertain impact on the final outcome. Ambassadors typically find out whether they won or lost a particular edit, when they read a revised version of the text with consolidated changes, but they do not always recall their starting position. Power is highly situational, embedded in the process of negotiations rather than clearly dispersed between involved parties. Moreover, diplomats do not own the text. Once they have negotiated it, lawyers will interpret it, and this will not necessarily align with the intended meaning that emerged from negotiations. As an ambassador said

to his foreign minister, "I would be curious to know who is ruling this whole thing"—he meant the European Union.

Conclusion

The digital information and communication revolution has turned everyday multilateral negotiations into a semivirtual space of constant exchanges and proposed edits. Today, a majority of multilateral negotiations takes place via the computer screens, tablets, and mobile phones of diplomats, whom distance may separate, but who negotiate 24/7. Track-change diplomacy—negotiating with the help of word processing software, supported by email and digital devices—has made the otherwise long and complicated process of editing documents to reach international compromises, quicker and more collaborative than ever.

But technological advances and the ubiquitous nature of ICT do more than just facilitate negotiations. They also push negotiations in a particular direction, sometimes with unexpected consequences. To understand the role of track-changes, and ICT more generally, we developed the notion of affordance for international relations theory. Technological affordances (i.e., the way a technology both enables and constrains the tasks that users can possibly perform) lead us away from the idea that we can deduce the effects of a particular technology from its features. Instead, we can understand technology better by focusing on its enabling and constraining power for particular international practices. The methodological implications of this practice-oriented approach are important. Rather than studying technology in isolation, it is necessary to work inductively to analyze how users employ technology in specific contexts. By turning our attention to the technology in practice that scholars often overlook, we can uncover how it shapes international negotiations.

There are three main characteristics of track-change diplomacy the particular affordances of ICT shape. *Shareability* denotes shared authorship; *visualization* means a particular schematized design aesthetics; and *immediacy* affords high-speed text circulation. Together these characteristics challenge established wisdom about diplomatic negotiations in institutionalized multilateral settings in at least three ways. Firstly, they affect how negotiators define national positions (as edits to the text more than as substantive positions originating from capital cities). Secondly, they impact how diplomats reach compromises (through collective drafting exercises by circulating snippets and track-changed documents, involving more authors and less time for reflection). And thirdly, they shape what constitutes power (the skillful use of language within specifically set design parameters, circumventing the diverging text edits to assert a preferred meaning). As our analysis has shown, the track-change function—originally intended by Microsoft Word to help a group of coauthors keep track of their changes in documents—may in fact lead to a loss of authorship and control of the negotiation process, characterized by its networked complexity. Track-change diplomacy can thus provide an additional explanation for the occurrence of pathologies in international organizations that might help scholars to understand not only the outcomes of multilateral negotiations, but also their everyday bureaucratic operations (Barnett and Finnemore 2004).

If international negotiations appear so strikingly different through a technology-in-practice lens, the same is likely the case for other phenomena in world politics, from international conflicts mediated on social media such as Twitter and Facebook, to nuclear deterrence and cyber security.

Just as barbed wire changed the logics of war in a symbolic and material sense (Barder 2016), digital technology shapes world politics—and does so in ways that designers did not necessarily intend. It is crucial that international relations scholars analyze the technologies that are currently merging physical, digital, and biological worlds in the "Fourth Industrial Revolution." Central to this revolution are technological breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, and 3D printing, which will undoubtedly have wide-ranging implications over the coming years. However, international relations scholars need to think methodically about these technologies and analyze the practices they afford, instead of focusing on their abstract or idealized forms. This is the main value-adding contribution we believe a practice perspective can offer a study of technology in international relations.

Supplemental Information

The Online Ethnographic Methods Appendix, available at https://www.diploface.ku.dk, https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/people/view/330594-drieschova-alena and at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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