Design and Democracy in a Troubled World

Victor Margolin School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University, April 11, 2012

Introduction

The nature of democracy is not a customary topic of conversation among designers. The question is not whether they believe in it but whether they think that talking about it has anything to do with their chosen occupation. In recent years, several design organizations and design theorists have claimed that it does. (Fig. 3) In 1998, the American Institute of Graphic Arts launched an initiative entitled Design for Democracy, which focused on the American electoral process, especially the design of ballots. It began with a student project in Chicago and the AIGA supported the initiative's spread to states across the country (Fig. 4). The initiative followed by more than twenty-five years The Federal Design Improvement Program, which the United States government launched in 1972. Its purpose was to improve government design in the fields of architecture, planning, and graphics. This program, however, was focused on traditional design activities rather than the process of democratic governance and how design might influence it.[1]

(Fig. 5) In 2005, Gui Bonsiepe, a former student and then professor at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, Germany, and subsequently a leading spokesman for design throughout Latin America, published an article in *Design Issues* entitled "Design and Democracy." In that article he positioned design as a potentially critical response to aspects of capitalism that he broadly characterized as antithetical to democracy as he believed it could be. Bonsiepe had gone to Chile from Germany in the early 1970s to work in a special design unit set up by the new socialist government of Salvador Allende. He later became a consultant to several countries on design policy and design education – Argentina, Cuba, and Brazil among them - and has maintained a consistent critique of excessive consumerism and the way that designers are complicit in it. In his *Design Issues* article, Bonsiepe states again another of his persistent themes - the shallowness of design discourse, which he believes avoids a critical analysis of design activities, while continuing a preoccupation with marketing issues such as branding,

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[1] Neil Kleinman, "Design and the Federal Government," Print 27 No. 4 (July/August 1973): 54-59, 83. Accessed at http://www.backspace.com/notes/images/design_and_the_federal_government, April 8, 2012. See also, Philip Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design, 3rd ed.* (New York et al.: John Wiley & Sons, 1998, c. 1983), 378-381. A more recent use of designers to redesign government forms, one of the projects of the Federal Design Improvement Program, is occurring within the recently established Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

product differentiation, and experience design. "[T]he issue of design and democracy," he writes, "doesn't enjoy popularity – apart from a few laudable exceptions."[2] His own view of democracy foregrounds the idea of individual freedom, which he defines as do numerous theorists, as "a space for self-determination."[3] Bonsiepe is not afraid to put forward a utopian view of democracy that entails an absence of domination and the assertion of a design humanism, which he characterizes as "the exercise of design activities in order to interpret the needs of social groups and to develop viable emancipatory proposals in the form of material and semiotic artifacts."[4]

Throughout his career in Latin America, Gui Bonsiepe has been a fervent spokesman for design's social potential but I do not believe he has gone far enough in considering the ways that design can participate in sustaining and improving democracy as a structure and a process. At the end of his article, he adheres to a traditional role for the designer as a creator of products, albeit that he urges an awareness of their relation to sociotechnical processes and by implication their relevance to meaningful social concerns.

(Fig. 6) I believe design can do much more than what Bonsiepe proposes. Design is also capable of improving the quality of the democratic institutions and procedures that frame and regulate our lives as citizens.

I consider democracy to be both a condition and a system of governance.

As a *condition*, it is the result of a governance process that is based on citizen participation, fairness, and justice.
As a *system of governance*, it consists of institutions and procedures that define our personal and collective spheres of action.

For the purposes of this lecture, I will consider American democracy as a case study since it is the governance system I know best and one that can serve as an example for the discussion of others.

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[2] Bonsiepe's article was originally published in *Design Issues* 22 No. 2 (Spring 2006): 27-34. It was republished with an introduction and an additional interview as *Civic City Cahier 2, Design and Democracy* (London: Bedford Press, 2010). I have used the pagination of the Bedford Press edition, 32.
[3] Ibid. 40.
[4] Ibid. 42-43.

(Fig. 7) The structure of the American governance system is specified in the United States Constitution, which was drafted during a Constitutional Convention that was held from May 14 to September 17, 1787. (Fig. 8) The document that was ratified at the end of this Convention contained the structure of the governance system that we live within today. (Fig. 9a, b, c) It is based on a separation of powers within three branches of government – the legislative, which comprises the United States Senate and House of Representatives, the executive, comprising the President, his staff and the various departments that manage the government's affairs, and the judicial, represented by the Supreme Court and a system of lower courts.

A comparable system is replicated in each of the 50 states and variations exist at lower levels in the nation's many counties and municipalities. This model of governance consists of multiple levels of decision-making by citizens who are elected to their offices for varying terms by the public at large. I would like to argue here that this governance system can be considered as a huge design project, one that is rooted in basic structures and procedures but is constantly changing as these are affected by human activities.
These activities are regulated by a system of flexible procedures that we can characterize as laws.[5] They determine the parameters of our actions and define how we can or cannot act. As philosopher Charles Frankl puts it

One large element in what men have meant by 'freedom' is not the absence of external constraints on their behavior, but simply the chance to live under restraints they find intelligible rather than senseless and demeaning.[6]
Thus democracy is the condition that citizens who wish to live within a political system of intelligible restraints seek to achieve and sustain.

(Figs. 10a, b)

I would also argue that what justifies the American governance system as a frame is **its accountability to a set of goals that represent the values of justice and fairness**.

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[5] Political philosopher John Rawls refers to "the basic structure of the society in which they [citizens] are born and in which they normally lead a complete life;…" John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason," in James Bohman and William Rehg, eds., *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge,
MA and London: MIT Press, 1997), 97.
[6] Charles Frankl, *The Democratic Prospect* (New York: Harper Colophon books, 1962), 38.

Just as democracy as a condition depends on a system of institutions and procedures so do the attainment of justice and fairness depend on the fulfillment of certain human rights, particularly rights to health, food, shelter, education, and other necessities of survival.

The relation between democracy and rights remains a subject of intense debate among scholars. Some argue that democracy is only responsible for civil and political rights, while others believe that economic, social, and cultural rights are also within its purview.[7]

This is not the place to elaborate on that debate so I will simply assert my own support for the position that democracies are responsible for a broader range of rights than simply civil and political ones.

The implication of this position is that human well-being in a broad sense is a legitimate goal of a democracy and one to which its achievement or lack thereof a democracy can be held accountable.[8] I want to distinguish here between the obligation of a democracy to create an opportunity for its citizens to attain their basic human rights and its ability to insure that citizens will pursue those rights with integrity.

Although a democracy can create opportunities, it cannot guarantee the qualities of character that shape its citizen's behavior. Thus a democratic system works best when its citizens exemplify behavior that is fair and reasonable and is less successful to the degree that it must adopt defensive procedures to protect itself against behavior that is neither one nor the other.

(Fig. 11a, b) Pursuant to recognizing human well-being as a democratic goal, I will also argue that the way a democracy uses its natural resources is an integral part of its mandate to insure such well being. Natural resources are crucial to the construction of the human-made environment the characteristics of which are essential to our well-

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[7] For a discussion of this important topic, see David Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. The philosophical complexities of defining human rights are addressed in Michael Freeman, "The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 16 No. 3 (Aug. 1994): 491-514.
[8] Increasingly, human well-being is being discussed as an importand objective of design. See the manifesto "Brighton 05-06-07" Design Isssues24 No. 1 (Winter 2008): 91-93. The manifesto was drafted in June 2007 by a small international group of designers and design educators who met for three days near Brighton, England to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing design in the contemporary world.

being and even to our ability to survive. Thus resource use is not ancillary to the process of democratic governance. It is central to it.

 (Fig. 12*) The design of democracy*
I want to delineate three ways that design can relate to democracy, both as a condition and a system of governance. The first is the design *of* democracy, by which I mean **an engagement with the institutions and procedures that comprise a democratic system**. We can question whether designers are prepared to recommend changes in governance systems that are managed by other kinds of professionals: government officials, mayors, lawyers, and a host of others who are knowledgeable about the structure of government and the legal system and to ask what power they have to make such changes?
(Fig. 13) I can say that the power of designers to recommend such changes is growing. Increasingly, they are being asked to think beyond objects to the design of systems and environments. In recent years, for example, a **new field of service** design has become visible among the multiple fields of design and many companies are concerned with the intangibles of the broadly defined field of experience design.
As early as the 1960s, activists in the design methods movement were discussing ways that designers could engage with problems beyond the creation of objects and images. (Fig. 14a, b) John Chris Jones in his widely-read book *Design Methods,* which was first published in 1970, urged designers to look beyond conventional products to think about the design of whole systems or environments such as welfare schemes, banking systems, and computer networks. (Fig. 15) More recently, Richard Buchanan has argued in his seminal article of 1992 for *Design Issues* "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," that design could provide insight into "the new liberal arts of technological culture."[9] He sees design as an integrative discipline and states that

> *Without integrative disciplines of understanding, communication, and action, there is little hope of sensibly extending knowledge beyond the library or laboratory in order to serve the purpose] of enriching human life.*[10]

Writing in 1992 and looking back at history, Buchanan believed that designers were already "exploring concrete integrations of knowledge

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[9] Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," in Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan, eds. *The Idea of Design* (Cambridge, MA. and London: The MIT Press, 1998, c. 1995), 4.
[10] Ibid.

that will combine theory with practice for new productive purposes…"[11]

Of particular significance in Buchanan's article is his designation of four placements, which he calls the "ordered or systematic approach to the invention of possibilities."[12] These are first of all symbolic and visual communications, then material objects, third activities and organized services and fourth is "the design of complex systems or environments for living, working, playing, and learning."[13] Buchanan is reluctant to assign particular design professions to these placements but rather to think of them as "*places of invention* shared by all designers, places where one discovers the dimensions of design thinking by a reconsideration of problems and solutions."[14]

To characterize the designer's engagement with this realm of complex systems or environments, Buchanan has been using the term "Fourth Order Design," which has been picked up by some others. The term figured in the title of an article that Tony Golsby-Smith published in *Design Issues* in 1996. Golsby-Smith argued for "a widening of the influence of design outwards into the surrounding medium – the life of organizations in the modern world, or of governments and communities."[15] He then went on to foreground what would otherwise be intangible elements that would very likely be missed by someone who approached a problem without the wide perspective that he calls for.

Just as the product is not only a thing, but exists within a
series of connected processes, so these processes do not live
in a vacuum, but move through a field of less tangible factors
such as values, beliefs and the wider context of other contingent

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid. 11.

[13] Ibid. 7

[14] Ibid. 8.

[15] Tony Golsby-Smith, "Fourth-Order Design: A Practical Perspective," in Richard Buchanan, Dennis Doordan, and Victor Margolin, eds. *The Designed World: Images, Objects, Environments* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), 260. For an account of how design methodology might be applied to complex issues related to international disarmament, see Derek Miller and Lisa Rudnick, "Trying It on for Size: Design and International Public Policy," *Design Issues* 27 No. 2 (Spring 2011): 6-16. Elizabeth Coleman, President of Bennington College, has also written about how design can help to think through the complex problems within a higner education institution. See Elizabeth Coleman, "Design matters, Design Issues 26 No. 4 (Autumn 2010): 3-8. The United States Army also incorporated design concept into the preparation of their Field Manual 5-0, which was released in 2010. See Roger Martin, "Design Thinking Comes to the U.S. Army," *Design Observer*, May 3, 2010. Accessed at
http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/feature/design-thinking-comes-to-the-us-army/13478/
on April 19, 2012.

processes.[16]

In this sense, we can characterize Golsby-Smith's approach as a more holistic way of approaching a complex problem or situation than traditional systems theory, which considers the system to be a thing or object rather than an instrument for facilitating human action.

Golsby-Smith began to apply this wider approach to design as a consultant to the Australian Taxation Office, which embraced a long-term process of rethinking its operations.[17] The goal of this project has not simply been about increasing the **Taxation Office's** efficiency but also creating an on-going process of design activity within the organization to best guarantee that it will continue to operate in an effective manner. Similar projects with government agencies have been undertaken in Denmark by **Mindlab**, which characterizes itself as "a cross-ministerial innovation unit, which [that] involves citizens and businesses in creating new solutions for society."[18] (Fig. 16) Three Danish ministries – the Ministry of Business and Growth, the Ministry of Taxation, and the Ministry of Employment sponsor Mindlab, which sees as its brief helping administrators in these ministries generate new ideas about how to accomplish their goals. Likewise, there are other organizations and projects that I could mention but I hope to have made my point that thinking about how design knowledge can be applied to the amelioration of a democratic system is consistent with the purview held by a growing number of theorists and practitioners of design that this is an appropriate activity to engage in.

*(*Fig. 17*) Design for democracy*
The second realm of design engagement with democracy that I propose is design *for* democracy. I distinguish it from the first realm in the following way. The design *of* democracy addresses the actual institutions and procedures that make up a democratic political system. It focuses on the structural elements that function as frames and regulators of human action. As institutions, I refer to the branches of government, departments, agencies, bureaus, courts, and offices that exist to facilitate the on-going affairs of democratic governance, which include the provision of services to its citizens. As procedures, I refer to the laws,

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[16] Ibid. 266.

[17] John Body, "Design in the Australian Taxation Office," *Design Issues* 24 No. 1 (Winter 2008): 55 – 57. Body's article was published in a special issue of the journal on Design and Organizational Change.

[18] www.mind-lab.dk/en/about_mindlab. Accessed March 28, 2012.

regulations, rules and protocols that establish the boundaries for human behavior. The design of democracy constitutes these institutions and procedures as parts of a whole, similar to the components of a building or a city plan. Although the structural elements are not physical, they nonetheless have a presence, albeit immaterial, that determines effects and consequences.

By contrast, design *for* democracy addresses the opportunities for citizens to participate in democratic processes. Its emphasis is not on the fixed structures or frames of the governance system but instead on mechanisms and instruments for citizen engagement. Two of the most important pillars of a democratic system are transparency, which enables citizens to be aware of the on-going process of governance and the enforcement of laws, and participation, which is the opportunity to be involved in the process of government. This involvement need not be as an elected official or government employee but rather as a citizen who can voice opinions and express views with the intention of influencing the outcome of political decision-making.

Transparency is crucial to a democracy in many ways. First it enables citizens to monitor the deliberations and decision-making that are conducted by their elected representatives. (Fig. 18) In March, 1979, C-SPAN, the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network, started to broadcast live coverage of congressional sessions from its studio in Washington. Beginning with the House of Representatives, the network expanded in 1986 to cover the Senate and subsequently added C-SPAN Radio to cover similar events to those of the cable channels, frequently simulcasting their programs. It is now streamed live on the Internet.[19] (Fig. 19) More recently, Lisa Strausfeld, an interaction designer, has left Pentagram to start a new venture, Major Politics Online, with the goal of emphasizing a different aspect of transparency, the presentation of government data in a visual form that makes it easily accessible and understandable.[20] (Fig. 20) A more graphic form of data presentation is the project that designers Stefan Sagmeister and Matthias Ernstberger did for True Majority, the activist organization that Ben Cohen, a co-founder of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, established around 2007. The two designers created a vehicle carrying a huge pie chart that broke down the allocations of the federal budget. They devised a large bar graph consisting of gigantic fake Oreo cookies to demonstrate the huge portion

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[19] C-SPAN, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C-SPAN. Accessed March 29, 2012.
[20] "Lisa Straussfeld Announces New Data Viz Venture," http://pentagram.com/en/new/data-visualizations. Accessed March 29, 2012

of the budget that goes towards defense spending as compared to spending on education and social services.

(Fig. 21) On January 21, 2009, President Barak Obama issued a Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government that was intended to "create an unprecedented level of openness in Government."[21] The President equated transparency with accountability and promised that his administration would disclose information rapidly in forms that the public would find easy to locate and use. He was actually proposing an enormous information design project that would require the work of many information, interaction, and new media designers as well as technology experts to carry out. As a justification for the project, the President stated that government should be participatory, a tenet that is in line with the claim numerous theorists make about democracy. He goes on to say that

> Executive departments and agencies should offer Americans Increased opportunities to participate in policy-making and to Provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information.[22]

Access to information should also encourage government departments and agencies to "use innovative tools, methods, and systems" to cooperate across all levels of government and with organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private sector. Although we have yet to see much of this activity, the President set a noble goal, which, if pursued, would require contributions from designers to assist with the creation of instruments for this purpose. The President's Memorandum launched the Open Government Initiative in which all departments of the federal government were mandated to participate. [23]

(Fig. 22) The initiatives listed in the Open Government Partnership's National Action Plan, which was published on September 20, 2011, include the "We the People" Petition Platform to enable the public to

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[21] Barak Obama, Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government, January 21, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Transparency_and_Open_ Government. Accessed March 29, 2012

[22] Ibid.

[23] A good example of such transparency is Recovery.gov, a website that the federal government set up to explain how funds allocated under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 were being spent. To assist with this process, President Obama appointed Edward Tufte, a recognized specialist in information design, to the Recovery Independent Advisory Panel I, which was established to advise the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board. "Edward Tufte Presidential Appointment," White House Press Release, March 5, 2010, http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=0003e0. Accessed April 16, 2012.

initiate online petitions on a range of issues. The Action Plan also supports the development of best practices for public participation in government, the improvement of records management across the Executive Branch, and the continued facilitation of access to documents covered under the Freedom of Information Act. There are numerous other initiatives in the plan but those mentioned give some idea of the scope and seriousness of the Open Government Initiative.[24] The website Data.gov was set up to provide information about applications available for data transmission and display, to share open source code, and to make contact with others who share an interest in these topics.

(Fig. 23) In the years before digital technology, such proposals would have been pursued without the help of technological systems such as those we are able to create today. Of significance here, is that the introduction of such systems for the conduct of government affairs requires large numbers of designers as well as technology experts. The Open Government Initiative is a far more complex project than designing a website for a company, even a large corporation. There are numerous issues of access, accountability, engagement, and communication that must be addressed in order for the system users to maintain their faith in the political motives that launched the initiative.

Besides the transparency of how congressional representatives and government officials conduct their affairs, there is also the transparency of how other kinds of civic employees, notably law enforcement officers and members of the military, behave. Both police departments and the military services are governed by strict codes of conduct and yet these codes are not easily available to the public and consequently adherence to them remains obscure. Police officers across the country have been and continue to be notorious for violating the public's civil rights through racial profiling, unauthorized uses of force, illegal arrests, and other means. Until recent years, the public had no means to document these actions. This changed on March 3, 1991, when George Halliday, awakened in his Los Angeles apartment by police sirens, went out on his balcony with his Sony Handycam videocamera and photographed a group of Los Angeles police officers brutally beating a black man, Rodney King. (Fig. 24) The nine minutes of grainy videotape Halliday shot played a central role in the trial of the four

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[24] The Open Government Partnership. National Action Plan for the United States of America, 3-4; www.whitehouse.gov/sites/.../us_national_action_plan_final_2.pdf. Accessed March 29, 2012.

officers whose verdict of not guilty set off widespread riots in Los Angeles that resulted in the deaths of more than 50 people.

Video technology has advanced rapidly since the Rodney King incident, notably in scale, portability, and price. The term "citizen journalism" has come into use, denoting the participation of ordinary people in reporting and disseminating news and information. Today, mobile phones routinely come equipped with photo and video capabilities and Internet sites like YouTube make it easy to spread photographs and videos around the world in a matter of seconds. (Fig. 25a, b) Consequently, when the police force of the University of California, Davis, sprayed peaceful demonstrators with mace on November 18, 2011, a video of the action went viral on the Internet, evoking sympathy with the students and antagonism to the police from viewers around the world. [25] The ubiquity of such handy devices as mobile phone cameras has put law enforcement officers everywhere on notice and no doubt has helped to contain illegitimate impulses to violence that might otherwise have been acted upon.

(Fig. 26) The second major pillar of a democratic system is participation. As President Obama noted in his Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government, participation and transparency are closely connected. All theorists of democracy, particularly those who espouse a philosophy of 'deliberative democracy' that entails strong citizen involvement in governance, rely on an informed citizenry to conduct meaningful debates. In an essay on "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," Joshua Cohen reinforces this reliance when he delineates one of five conceptions of deliberative democracy:

The members [of a democratic association] recognize one another as having deliberative capacities, i.e., the capacities required for entering into a public exchange of reasons and for acting on the result of such public reasoning. [26]

Although Cohen does not explicitly mention being informed as a requirement for reasoning, I will assume that quality to be an essential attribute of reasoning capacity and will support the connection between a

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[25] As a consequence, the students sued the university which agreed to pay them one million dollars to settle the suit as well as $250,000 for attorneys' fees. Each student received as well a personal apology from the chancellor. The university also fired the campus police chief under whose watch the pepper spray incident occurred.

[26] Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in Bohman and Rehg, eds., *Deliberative Democracy; Essays on Reason and Politics,* 73.

society of open access to information and one where reasonable public discourse is central to citizen participation in governance.

(Fig. 27) As an example of how such discourse can be conducted among a large number of people, I can cite MoveOn.org's Rebuilding the American Dream movement in which hundreds of people throughout the United States participated in a project to create a Contract for the American Dream with ten priorities for action. Launched in June 2011 under the leadership of Van Jones, the movement made use of diverse on-line strategies as well as face-to-face meetings of small groups across the country to generate the Contract. It was a perfect example of crowdsourcing, whereby the ideas and opinions of large number of people were solicited, evaluated, voted on, and then formulated into a document that represents their collective views. My emphasis here is on the process of arriving at the document, which I will characterize as the consequence of a design that included in the most basic sense the graphic design of the movement's identity and the forms of its public communication but in a more significant sense, the conceptual and technical plan that made the process possible.

(Fig. 28) We are beginning to witness the creation of multiple digital programs that are facilitating and widening citizen participation in deliberations and actions and consequently having an ever-greater influence on how political decisions are made. The Contract for the American Dream, for example, was a factor in the legislation introduced by Representative Jan Schakowsky to create jobs for Americans and it has become a basic document for public discussions of America's future that are taking place around the country. We are also witnessing the emergence of focused social action networks that have become on-line loci for groups of people who share a concern for a particular issue.[27]

(Fig. 29) Another technique that has become a staple of a new emerging democratic political process is the on-line petition. Such petitions have amassed thousands and sometimes millions of signatures as demonstrations of support for or opposition to specific policies or actions. A good example is Change.org., which enables its subscribers to introduce petitions on social issues that will be delivered to a specific organization, corporation, or individual. Such petitions have become increasingly effective and have enabled individuals to find support for issues that are important to them. A salient example is the petition

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[27] "Social Action Networks Defined," http://www.bivingsreport.com/2010/social-action-networks-defined. Accessed March 30, 2012.

started by Molly Katchpole, a young woman who invited others to join her protest against a five dollar debit card fee that Bank of America planned to introduce. The petition, which garnered more than 300,000 signatures, was instrumental in getting the bank to rescind its plan, while also encouraging large numbers of people to close their accounts with the bank and take them elsewhere.

(Fig. 30) The social concept and technological ingenuity that gave birth to Change.org created an organization that facilitated social action in a way that was not possible before. With the success of the Katchpole petition and those of others run by related organizations such as Credoaction, SumOfUs.org, Watchdog.org, and SignOn.org citizens have found a new way to make their voices heard and to actually effect change. Not all the petitions are worthy nor are all the worthy ones effective but gathering large numbers of signatures to state a position on an issue is now an essential instrument of civic action.

One could cite numerous other instruments that have been created to facilitate civic actions. <u>Besides the instruments created specifically for that purpose, it is worthwhile to mention others such as PayPal, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Kickstarter that have enabled political actions while not having been created specifically for that purpose</u>. Both PayPal and Kick-Starter have been used to raise funds for everything from alternative news services such as Truthout and Nation of Change and documentary films to rallies and public actions. Facebook, as we have seen in the recent demonstrations of the Arab Spring, has been an instrument to organize large rallies and demonstrations, while YouTube has made possible the worldwide distribution of videos such as the documentation of the harsh treatment of peaceful demonstrators at the University of California, Davis. Design is central to the creation of all these instruments. While designers' traditional contributions to protests such as posters are still part of the political process, newer digital means have become much more powerful transmitters of information and exhortations to act.

Along with participation in public discourse, fair elections are central to a healthy democracy. Incidents in recent years and today have shown that considerable work is required to prepare citizens to vote. This includes voter registration drives, informing voters about the issues, getting them to the polling places, and insuring that the ballots are well designed to avoid mistaken votes.

The closeness of the presidential election in 2000, which was decided by the controversial vote tally in Florida and a subsequent

Supreme Court decision, called attention to the problem of ballot design, which was claimed by some to have been a cause of confusion to many voters. (Fig. 31) In particular, the design of the "butterfly ballot" caused some people to vote for unintended candidates or to vote for more or fewer candidates than intended. (Fig. 32) There were problems as well with the punch card method of registering votes on the Votomatic machines. Partially punched holes resulted in the infamous "hanging chads," which were pieces of the ballot that were not detached when the hole was punched. This prevented the ballot from being counted and consequently a vote was lost.

Following that election, there were numerous calls for reform that resulted in more than one redesign of the ballot and a shift to electronic voting machines. (Fig. 33) On behalf of the Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), Marcia Lausen, a professor of graphic design at the University of Illinois Chicago, proposed to Chicago election officials that she work with students to redesign the city's butterfly ballot. (Fig. 34) The proposal was accepted and this led to a considerably expanded project involving other professors that looked at the larger set of components that comprise what Lausen has called the "election design system" – the voter registration graphics, polling place signs, portable voting booths, and the like.[28] (Fig. 35) The components of this system that graphic and industrial design students at UIC designed, which became part of the AIGA's Design for Democracy initiative and the subject of a book that Marcia Lausen wrote, were adopted by Cook County election officials and are currently in use. An additional partner in the project was the State of Oregon.

(Fig. 36) *Design in a democracy*
My intent in defining this sphere is to foreground design initiatives that are particularly responsive to the goals of democracy that can be addressed, at least in part, through design.[29] (Fig. 37) This includes the provision of basic human rights such as access to food, shelter, health care, and education.[30] It also takes in the responsible use of energy

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[28] These are described in Marcia Lausen, *Design for Democracy: Ballot + Election Design* (Chicago and London; University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[29] One of the early books on this subject was Nigel Whiteley, *Design for Society* (London; Reaktion books, 1993). Whiteley's emphasis was on topics that were popular at the time he wrote the book, consumer-led design, green design, socially responsible design and ethical consumption, and feminist perspectives.
[30] These rights and others are delineated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948.

which for designers usually goes under the rubrics of green design or design for sustainability.[31] The close connection between social concerns and environmental concerns was first articulated in the Bruntland Report, *Our Common Future* in 1987. The authors of the report, which was prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development, argued that both had to be considered in order to create a truly sustainable society.[32]

(Fig. 38) Since design originated within the market sphere of society, the term "social design" has sometimes been used to differentiate it from design for the market. In an article I published in 2002 in *Design Issues* with my wife, then a social work professor, entitled "A '<u>Social Model' of Design: Issues of Practice and Research," we defined social design as "the satisfaction of human needs."</u>[33] <u>We did not describe a "social model" of design as opposed to a "market model" but we noted that "the market does not, and probably cannot, take care of all social needs, as some relate to populations who [that] do not constitute a class of consumers in the market sense.</u>" We were referring to "people with low incomes or special needs due to age, health, or disability."[34] (Fig. 39) The distinction between social and market goals has also been addressed by Geoff Mulgan in an article on social innovation where he says that

> *Social innovation refers to innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social.*[35]

Mulgan distinguishes social innovation from business innovation, stating that the latter is generally motivated by profit and diffused through organizations for which making a profit is the primary goal.

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[31] See my essays "Expansion or Sustainability: Two Models of Development" and "Design for a Sustainable World," in Victor Margolin, *The Politics of the Artificial: Essays on Design and Design Studies* (Chicago and London; The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 78-91, 92-105.

[32] *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[33] Victor and Sylvia Margolin, "A 'Social Model' of Design: Issues of Practice and Research," *Design Issues* 18 No. 4 (Autumn 2002): 25. The definition of a social need is controversial. For some needs refer to basic human survival but even that is hard to define definitively. Needs are also compared to wants, desires, and other means of bringing about human satisfaction. For a broad discussion of needs that includes quantitative needs estimates, although it does not represent the most current thinking on the subject, see John McHale and Magda Cordell McHale, *Basic Human Needs: A Framework for Action*. Introduction by Harlan Cleveland (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1978).

[34] Ibid.

[35] Geoff Mulgan, "The Process of Social Innovation." Reprinted from the journal Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization and accessed on the website http://www.scribd.com/doc/8177770/Geoff-Mulgan-The-Process-of-Social-Innovation-2007, Accessed March 30, 2012.

Where social design focuses on a specific population, however, design in a democracy is far more inclusive and incorporates many more people as beneficiaries of socially responsible design practice. Environmental issues, for example, affect everyone, as do issues of decent housing, nourishing food, quality health care, and good education.

One locus for bringing many of these concerns together is the city, where increasing numbers of Americans and people in all parts of the world live. Though few cities have their own design departments, design will become increasingly important to metropolitan governments as they attempt to cope with problems of infrastructure, population, energy conservation, waste, human services, and other aspects of civic life. What will further enforce the need for designers is the implementation of "smart city" policies, whereby city governments seek to create technological systems for addressing public needs.[36] (Fig. 40) One example of "smart city" design is the Operations Center that IBM created for the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro.[37] The center integrates data from more than thirty municipal agencies for a multitude of purposes including combatting crime, responding to natural disasters such as rainstorms and earthquakes as well human-made disasters like crime, fires, and collapsing buildings. Thus far, the system has demonstrated its success by enabling the rapid delivery of coordinated responses to such events. The project was carried out by an IBM unit called Smarter Cities and was headed by Guru Banavar, IBM's Chief Technology Officer. (Fig. 41) More closely related to the needs of special populations is Universal Design, a term coined by the architect Ronald L. Mace to designate products and the built environment that are accessible to everyone.[38] Known in some countries as Design for All, this design concept recognizes that buildings and products must be adapted for special needs in order to include people who would otherwise have problems using them. The Americans for Disabilities Act of 1990 was replete with mandates that led to the construction of ramps for buildings to make them accessible to people in wheelchairs and special lifts on public transport vehicle for the same purpose.

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[36] A book that presents a group of projects related to smart cities and raises a number of issues on the topic is Mark Shepard, ed. *Sentient City: Ubiquitous Computing, Arcitecture, and the Future of Urban Space*. New York? The Architectural League and Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2011.

[37] Natasha Singer, "Mission Control, Built for Cities, *The New York Times*, Sunday Business section, March 4, 2012, pp. 1, 6.

[38] "Universal Design," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_design. Accessed March 30, 2012.

(Fig. 42) Without legal mandates, however, design has only been infrequently applied to the needs of poor people. This point was strongly made in a publication, *Design Denied*, that was prepared over a three-year period beginning in 2001 by students at Archeworks, an alternative multidisciplinary design school, in Chicago. In a manifesto that introduced the volume, the students made a distinction between those who had access to good design and those who didn't. "Yet the wealthy," they noted, 'are far more immune to the effects of bad design…Other segments of our society – the poor, elderly, disabled, and other public housing residents lack such choice [a being able to buy a well-designed condominium] and are far more likely to be saddled with bad design."[39] The book posits good design, that is, design to address needs, as a right rather than a luxury. The various student authors characterize it as an instrument to improve lives and they recognize that those who live in environments where it has not been used for that purpose are design deprived.

(Fig. 43) The number of ways that design can address human needs is too vast to enumerate in a lecture or even a book. To bring the subject into a discussion of democratic society, however, requires connecting it to agreed upon social goals. As previously mentioned, there is considerable debate about these, especially whether a democracy is obliged to do more than support public discourse without specifying any mandates to promote human welfare. What should happen is that design becomes part of these debates and that the ongoing literature on democratic theory begins to include design as a worthy subject for reflection.

(Fig. 44) *Conclusion*

(Fig. 45) In his book *Democracy,* sociologist and political theorist Charles Tilly, posits four dimensions that determine whether a state can be considered a democracy: breadth, by which he means the number of citizens who have rights of citizenship; equality – the rights that prevail among all citizens; protection – the enjoyment of due process under law; and mutually binding consultation – the obligation of the state to deliver agreed upon benefits to its citizens.[40] To characterize the degree to which a state can or cannot be characterized by the presence of these four dimensions, Tilly created a diagram of quadrants in which to locate

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[39] "Design Manifesto" in Michael LaCoste, ed. *Design Denied: The Dynamics of Withholding Good Design.* Introduction by Stanley Tigerman (Chicago: Archeworks: 2005), n.p.
[40] Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 14-15.

states from the most democratic to the least. Within this diagram a state can move either towards more or less democracy. The latter is a process he calls de-democratization. The diagram makes clear that the perpetuation of democracy is not a given. States that were once democratic can become de-democratized.

(Fig. 46) Looking at what is happening today in the United States, one can without question identify strong tendencies that are leading in the direction of de-democratization. Attempts to exclude people from voting, to eradicate decades-old social programs, to ignore the needs of the poor, to deny basic and essential health services to women and men, and to allow financial institutions to operate solely for their own gain are all making the United States a less democratic country than it once was. Notions of equality are being questioned in many ways from the right of religious worship to the entitlement to basic social services. (Fig. 47) The characterization of a split between the 1% of most privileged Americans and the 99% less privileged has become a powerful trope in recent political demonstrations, particularly within the Occupy Wall Street movement.

(Fig. 48) At the same time that ideological politicians are attempting to dismantle many of America's traditional democratic institutions, there are myriad positive social organizations, groups, and individual activists who are inventing forms of public debate and especially protest as well as new ways of creating a livable environment. America is in a state of political disequilibrium, which provides a great opportunity for designers to propose and implement new projects. As I have argued, these projects can operate in the three realms of design of democracy, design for democracy, and design in a democracy. There are precedents in each realm and a growing need for design capabilities to generate new instruments for social transformation.