Design and Democracy in a Troubled World

by Victor Margolin

Introduction

The nature of democracy is not a customary topic within design discourse. The question is not whether designers believe in it but whether they think that discussing it has anything to do with their chosen occupation. In recent years, several design organizations and design theorists have claimed that it does. In 1998, the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) 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 at the University of Illinois in Chicago and the AIGA supported the initiative's spread to states across the country.

In this essay, I want to argue that design is 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 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 purpose of this essay, 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.

The structure of the American governance system is specified in the United States Constitution, which was drafted during a Constitutional Convention held from May 14 to September 17, 1787. The document that was ratified at the end of this Convention contained the structure of the governance system we live within today. It is based on a separation of powers within three branches of government – the legislative, the executive, and the judicial.

A comparable system is replicated in each of the 50 states and variations exist at lower levels in the America's many counties and municipalities. This model of governance consists of multiple levels of decision-making by citizens whom the public at large elects to their offices for varying terms. 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.

The activities are regulated by a system of laws that we can characterize as a system of flexible constraints and consequences.[1] The laws 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.[2]

Thus democracy is the condition that citizens who wish to live within a political system of intelligible restraints seek to achieve and sustain.

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. 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.[3] This essay 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.[4] 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

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[1] 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,

[1]MA and London: MIT Press, 1997), 97.

[2] Charles Frankl, *The Democratic Prospect* (New York: Harper Colophon books, 1962), 38.

[3] 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.

[4] Increasingly, human well being is discussed as an importand objective of design. See the manifesto "Brighton 05-06-07" *Design Isssues* 24 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.

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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.

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 whose characteristics are essential to our well 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.

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. The design *of* democracy 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, 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.

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. We can also ask what power designers have to make such changes. On the one hand, designers as citizens have the opportunity to participate in broad political processes that either challenge existing political or legal structures or seek to defend them against others who challenge them. On the other, 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, while 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. 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. More recently, Richard Buchanan has argued in his seminal *Design Issues* article, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," that design could provide insight into "the new liberal arts of technological culture."[5] Buchanan 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.[6]

Writing in 1992 and looking back at history, Buchanan stated that designers were already "exploring concrete integrations of knowledge that will combine theory with practice for new productive purposes…"[7] To characterize the designer's engagement with the 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."[8] He then went on to foreground what would otherwise be

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[5] 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.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] 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 higher 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

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 processes.[9]

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.[10] 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.[11] The goal of this project was not simply to increase the Taxation Office's efficiency but also to create 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."[12] Three Danish ministries – the Ministry of Business and Growth, the Ministry of Taxation, and the Ministry of Employment have sponsored Mindlab, which sees as its brief helping administrators in these ministries generate new ideas about how to accomplish their goals. There are other organizations and projects I could mention but the point here is 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 design theorists and practitioners that this is an appropriate activity to engage in.

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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. http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/feature/design-thinking-comes-to-the-us-army/13478/.Accessed on April 19, 2012.

[9] Ibid. 266.

[10] For a recent discussion of how design and systems theory might be mutually supportive, see Peter H. Jones, "Systemic Design Principles for Complex Social Systems," in Gary S. Metcalf, ed. *Social Systems and Design* (Tokyo: Springer, 2014): 91-128.

[11] 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.

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

Design for democracy

The second realm of design engagement with democracy that I propose is design *for* democracy. By contrast with the design *of* democracy, 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. 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.[13] Transparency can be made visible either by the actual reporting of events or by data and statistics that provide evidence of trends and situations. A graphic form of data presentation is the project that designers Stefan Sagmeister and Matthias Ernstberger did for True Majority, the liberal activist organization that Ben Cohen, a co-founder of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, established around 2007. The two designers created a display for a truck that they moved from place to place. The display consisted of a huge pie chart that broke down the allocations of the federal budget. The designers devised a large three-dimensional bar graph consisting of gigantic fake Oreo cookies to demonstrate the huge portion of the national budget that goes towards defense spending as compared to spending on education and social services.

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

[13] C-SPAN, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C-SPAN. Accessed March 29, 2012.

Government."[14] 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 stated 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.[15]

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 valuable 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. [16] At the time the President announced this initiative, the activities of the National Security Agency were little known to the American people. It was only through the actions of Edward Snowden that they came to public attention, exposing not only the extensive surveillance that the agency had been and continues to be involved in but also its resistance as well as that of the Executive Branch to reveal anything further than what the Snowden documents have exposed and may continue to expose.

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

[14]Government. Accessed March 29, 2012

[15] Ibid.

[16] 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.

The secrecy that enshrouds the NSA does put into a different perspective President Obama's promotion of transparency but it does not negate the many other ways that the workings of government are being made accessible to American citizens. 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 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.[17] 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.

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. The complexity of these issues was evident in the debacle of the website created for people to sign up for insurance under the new Affordable Care Act. The faulty design of the initial site cost President Obama considerable political capital and the problem was only remedied by bringing in a new design team to fix all the bugs in the old site.

Besides the transparency of how congressional representatives and government officials conduct their affairs and make that conduct known to the public, there is also the transparency of how other kinds of civic employees, notably law enforcement officers and members of the military, behave. These two groups are governed by strict codes of conduct and yet the 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

[17] 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.

rights through racial profiling, unauthorized uses of force, illegal arrests, and even murder. 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 video camera and photographed a group of Los Angeles police officers brutally beating a black man, Rodney King. The nine minutes of grainy videotape Halliday shot played a central role in the trial of the four 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 Facebook and YouTube make it easy to spread photographs and videos around the world in a matter of seconds. 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. [18]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. One good example is the organization Copwatch, which trains citizens to use their cellphones and other technology to document police violence wherever they see it.

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

[18] 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.

> 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.[19]

Although Cohen does not explicitly mention being informed as a requirement for reasoning, I will assume it to be an essential attribute of reasoning capacity and will support the connection between a society of open access to information and one where reasonable public discourse is central to citizen participation in governance. 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. 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.[20]

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 evidence 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 started in 2011 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 Bank of America and take them elsewhere.

The social concept and technological ingenuity that gave birth to Change.org led to an organization that facilitated social action in a way that was not possible before. With the success of the Katchpole petition and others launched 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

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

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

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. 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. 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 saw in the demonstrations of the Arab Spring, has been an instrument to organize large rallies and public actions, while YouTube has made possible the worldwide distribution of videos such as the documentation of the harsh treatment of peaceful demonstrators at rallies and demonstrations around the world. 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 controversial 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. 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. 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. 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 (UIC), proposed to Chicago election officials that she work with students to redesign the city's butterfly ballot. The proposal was accepted and this led to a considerably expanded project involving other UIC professors and their students who 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.[21] The components of this system that UIC graphic and industrial design students designed became part of the AIGA's Design for Democracy initiative and the subject of a book that Lausen wrote. They were adopted by Cook County election officials and are currently in use. An additional partner in the project was the State of Oregon.

Design in a democracy

My intent in defining this third sphere is to foreground initiatives that are particularly responsive to the goals of democracy that can be addressed, at least in part, through design.[22] These include the provision of basic human rights such as access to food, shelter, health care, and education.[23] Such rights also take into account the responsible use of energy, which for designers usually goes under the rubric of design for sustainability.[24] The close connection between social and environmental concerns was first articulated in the Bruntland Report, *Our Common Future* in 1987. The authors of the United Nations report, which was prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development, argued that environmental *and* social issues had to be considered in order to create a truly sustainable society.[25]

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 a *Design Issues* article I published in 2002 with my wife, Sylvia, then a social work professor, we defined social design as

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[21] These are described in Marcia Lausen, *Design for Democracy: Ballot + Election Design* (Chicago and London; University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[22] 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.

[23] 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.

[24] 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.

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

"the satisfaction of human needs."[26] We did not describe a "social model" of design that was opposed to a "market model" but we noted, "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." We were referring to "people with low incomes or special needs due to age, health, or disability."[27] 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.[28]

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.

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" and "open source" policies, whereby city governments seek to create technological systems for

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[26] 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).

[27] Ibid.

[28] 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.

addressing public needs.[29] One example of "smart city" design is the Operations Center that IBM created for the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro and is now in the process of marketing to cities around the world.[30] 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.

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.[31] 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.

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."[32] The book posits good design, that is, design to address needs, as a right rather than a luxury. The various

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[29] 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, Architectecture, and the Future of Urban Space*. New York? The Architectural League and Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2011.

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

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

[32] "Design Manifesto" in Michael LaCoste, ed. *Design Denied: The Dynamics of Withholding Good Design*. Introduction by Stanley Tigerman (Chicago: Archeworks: 2005), n.p.

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.

The number of ways that design can address human needs is too vast to enumerate in an essay 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 insure 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.

Conclusion

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.[33] 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 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.

Looking at what is happening today in the United States, one can without question identify strong tendencies that are moving 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 pour untoward amounts of money into electoral campaigns, 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 contributing to the de-

[33] Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 14-15.

democratization of the United States. Notions of equality are being questioned in many ways from the right of religious worship to the entitlement to basic social services. 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. The disparities in income were equated with concomitant disparities in political power in a recent study, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and average Citizens, " conducted by Martin Gilens of Princeton and Banjamin I. Page of Northwestern. The authors found that the influence of economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have far more influence on American politics than average citizens do.[34]

At the same time that ideological politicians are attempting to alter or 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 f*or* democracy, and design *in* a democracy. There is a growing need for design capabilities to generate new instruments for social transformation and precedents in each realm to support designerly interventions.
END

[34] Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," http://www.princeton.edu/~mgilens/Gilens%20homepage%20materials/Gilens%20and%20Page/Gilens%20and%20Page%202014-Testing%20Theories%203-7-14.pdf. Accessed on May 18, 2014. The study is scheduled for publication in the Fall 2014 issue of *Perspectives on Politics*.