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Foundations of Information

December 10, 2024

<div align="center">Book Review on Design Justice by Sasha Constanza-Chock</div>

In the world of user-centered design writings, widely regarded design texts, such as Steve Krug's *Don't Make Me Think* and Don Norman's *The Design of Everyday Things,* have laid the essential groundwork in usability and design. They are recommended across the industry as must-read books, but these readings sidestep the realities of intersectionality and power dynamics within the matrix of domination, offering little consideration of how marginalized communities experience design differently. Sasha Constanza-Chock disrupts this narrative with *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, a transformative critique of conventional design practices. The book centers around the voices and expertise of historically marginalized communities, proposing design justice as a framework for designers to move towards genuine justice and equity. As a scholar, activist, and designer, Costanza-Chock brings a wealth of expertise to this work, supported with their experiences as a faculty member at MIT and their leadership within the Design Justice Network. Through a compelling blend of research, case studies, and lived experiences, this book reframes design as a powerful tool for social transformation. However, while Design Justice is a thought-provoking and essential read for any design practitioner, it falls short in explicitly providing realistic recommendations for most readers on how to implement the design justice framework in hierarchical environments with long-established practices, where design justice is the most critically needed.

The introduction of *Design Justice* sets the stage for rethinking design and its broader societal implications, introducing key concepts such as design justice, the matrix of domination,

and community-led design. Costanza-Chock opens with personal experiences of biased design, including the trans erasure at TSA, where airport security systems are designed to detect "anomalies," creating a discriminatory treatment of trans people (Costanza-Chock 14). This example is then fluidly connected to the need for design justice, an approach to design that centers the needs of marginalized communities, as well as broader social justice movements, including #BlackLivesMatter, the immigrant rights movement, and the fight for LGBTQI+ and Two-Spirit rights to recognize the growing awareness of the interconnectedness of social justice issues (Costanza-Chock 33). By grounding design justice within lived experiences as well as the broader history of social justice movements, Costanza-Chock sets a compelling tone for the book. It's clear that the writing is both accessible and thought-provoking, and it begins to ask readers to examine their own position and privilege, urging for a shift from designing for to designing with marginalized communities. The introduction serves as both a call to action and an invitation for designers to challenge their assumptions, leaving readers curious and motivated to explore how design can become a tool for inclusivity and equity.

Sasha Costanza-Chock's first chapter, "Design Values: Hard Coding Liberation," explores how design can embed and perpetuate oppressive values, including "white supremacist heteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, and settler colonialism" (Costanza-Chock 35). By challenging this myth of design neutrality, they argue that all design choices reflect and reproduce specific values, often at the expense of marginalized communities that create unequal impacts (Costanza-Chock 43). This claim is supported by compelling examples, including a Facebook event organized for a trans, queer, and immigrant solidarity protest where the platform's design posed challenges for marginalized users, including limitations of using mainstream social media for activism (Costanza-Chock 43). The author is able to clearly articulate how even neutral platforms, including ones as prominent as Facebook, can

inadvertently create burdens for those outside of the dominant cultural paradigm. Furthermore, one of the chapter's key strengths is how it's able to situate itself within broader design and technology studies that a great deal of designers know, by building upon key concepts in design such as affordances, or the possible actions a user can take with an object. The author argues that affordances aren't universal, and that their perceptibility is shaped by the matrix of domination (Costanza-Chock 47).

Within this chapter, Costanza-Chock also explains how design justice builds upon but also differs from widely accepted frameworks, including value-sensitive design, universal design, and inclusive design. They propose that design justice move beyond these frameworks by prioritizing community control and addressing intersectional forms of oppression (Costanza-Chock 75). This call to shift from participation to power redistribution feels like a significant and much-needed contribution within design equity. However, while design justice urges designers to hard-code liberatory values into designs and makes a compelling argument for why, this chapter could've engaged with a deeper discussion of how design justice can be weaved into the constraints of real-world practice. Designers, especially those not in senior or leadership positions, often struggle with getting their ideas heard, much less holding the influence to implement transformative practices. A deeper engagement with these tensions could enhance the practical relevance of "Design Values". Overall, this chapter effectively critiques the status quo of design values and calls for social justice values and prioritizing community control, though practical applicability is needed for these critiques to be implementable.

The second chapter discusses "Design Practices: Nothing Us Without Us" and focuses on shifting design practices towards community control and accountability, building off the community idea introduced in chapter one. The central argument is grounded on the disability justice movement's slogan, "Nothing About Us Without Us," to highlight the importance of

centering the voices of those most impacted by design decisions, compelling readers "to begin by listening to community organizers, learning what they are working on, and asking what the most useful focus of design efforts would be" (Costanza-Chock 92). This shift towards community-led design processes represents a key strength of the chapter, as it presents readers a practical framework for redistributing power. It also critiques the raced, classed, and gendered nature of employment within the technology sector, emphasizing that equitable employment practices in the tech industry isn't enough (Costanza-Chock 81). This critique builds upon other literature including Ruha Benjamin's *Race After Technology* and Virginia Eubanks's *Automating Inequality*, which both explore how systemic biases in tech employment marginalize underrepresented groups.

I particularly enjoyed this chapter's critique on the methods of the design process, and feel it's incredibly relevant for all design practitioners. For example, user personas are often taught in education and practice as critical to the design process for understanding and empathizing with the user, but as Costanza-Chock emphasizes, these "users are most often assumed to be members of the dominant…while other users are systematically excluded on multiple levels: their user stories, preferred platforms, aesthetics, language, and so on" (Costanza-Chock 86). This observation highlights how conventional design practices that are integrated into design education and processes, such as user personas, can and will reinforce systemic exclusions when they fail to account for diverse realities. By challenging designers towards a deeper engagement with the lived experiences of marginalized groups, the chapter connects prominent problems in the current design process to practical recommendations for ensuring community accountability and control, such as codesign methods, establishing clear agreements with community partners, and providing resources for meaningful participation (Costanza-Chock 109). This connection makes it a more compelling read than the first chapter,

as it not only critiques existing and well-known practices but also revises them with design justice strategies that can be implemented in real-world contexts.

The following chapter, "Design Narratives: From TWTMob to Twitter," examines how stories we tell about design processes, also known as design narratives, can obscure contributions of marginalized communities and impact who receives credit for innovation. This chapter contrasts the official origin story of Twitter with a counter-narrative that emphasizes the contributions of anarchist activists during the 2004 Republican National Convention protests in NYC, using this to argue how dominant narratives often overlook the crucial role social movements play in technological innovation (Costanza-Chock 115). As Costanza-Chock states, "design justice includes giving credit where credit is due". This principle extends beyond individual designers in order to acknowledge the collective efforts of communities, social movements, and lived experiences. It also illustrates a recurring theme in *Design Justice*: dominant narratives often obscure the contributions of marginalized groups and social movements, perpetuating systemic inequities in whose voices and innovations are validated.

The chapter also stresses the importance of design scoping and framing. It argues that design challenges are often framed in ways that ignore structural inequalities and community-based solutions. The Gates Foundation's "Reinvent the Toilet Challenge" is a powerful example used to illustrate how design scoping can perpetuate deficit-based narratives (Costanza-Chock 139). This framing reduces marginalized communities to passive recipients of this so-called innovation rather than active participants in defining and solving problems. The analysis not only builds upon the previous chapter's call for community-led design, but also to broader scholarship on participatory design and critical development studies, such as Arturo Escobar's *Designs for the Pluriverse*, which advocates for community-led approaches to address global challenges. While the example of the Gates Foundation is insightful, the chapter, similarly

to the first chapter, leaves unanswered questions about how large organizations might reframe challenges to incorporate community leadership without falling into tokenistic practices. "Design Narratives" concludes by urging designers to ask how we can ensure that the contributions of marginalized communities are recognized and celebrated, but it stops right at providing actionable steps for achieving this recognition within the existing power structure.

In Chapter 4 of Design Justice, "Design Sites: Hackerspaces, Fablabs, Hackathons, and DiscoTechs," Sasha Costanza-Chock argues that the physical and virtual spaces where design work occurs are not neutral, but instead reflect and reinforce societal power dynamics. This chapter challenges the celebratory narratives around "privileged design sites," such as hackerspaces and makerspaces, which are often regarded as hubs of innovation and creativity. While these spaces promote collaboration and skill-sharing, they perpetuate existing hierarchies of race, class, gender, and ability. Costanza-Chock notes that "in many ways 'hackerspace' is an elitist name for middle-class white guys screwing around with computers and making a big deal out of it" (Costanza-Chock 143), highlighting the limitations they impose on who can participate in and benefit from design. By contrast, Costanza-Chock also brings examples of design sites that are intentionally reimagined as spaces for community control and social transformation. These include "subaltern design sites," where marginalized communities have engaged in design practices that are often overlooked or undervalued such as "auto workshops, cell phone repair shops, or in audio stores and sound system culture" (Costanza-Chock 146).

"Design Sites" makes it apparent that design takes place in diverse settings, not just in formal design studios or tech-focused spaces. By recognizing and valuing these subaltern design sites, this chapter expands the reader's understanding of what constitutes design and who gets to participate in it. As an alternative to traditional hackathons, Costanza-Chock points to the emergence of "DiscoTechs, " Discovering Technology events, where they prioritize community

engagement, skill-sharing, and collaborative design processes that center the needs and experiences of marginalized communities (Costanza-Chock 143). The chapter concludes by offering specific recommendations for how to create more inclusive and just design sites, including centering community needs and values, promoting accessibility and inclusivity, and more (Costanza-Chock 176). Through this contrast of privileged design sites versus subaltern design sites, "Design Sites" substantially adds to the book's overarching argument that design justice is required for transforming spaces of systemic inequity to center marginalized voices and redistribute power.

Chapter 5 of *Design Justice*, "Design Pedagogies: 'There's Something Wrong with This System!'" explores how to develop pedagogies that empower learners to challenge oppressive systems and create more just and equitable designs. It opens with an anecdote about MIT students in a community organizing meeting at City Life/Vida Urbana, a Boston-based housing rights organization. After witnessing the devastating effects of housing inequality firsthand, the students expressed a desire to understand the systems perpetuating such injustices (Costanza-Chock 181). This laid the foundation for discussions on how design education can be reimagined to prioritize justice and community-driven action, which became based on Paulo Freire's popular education (pop ed) framework (Costanza-Chock 182). It emphasizes dialogue, critical thinking, and action for social change, and this framework is beautifully summarized by civil rights activist Ella Baker, who stated "'oppressed people, whatever their level of formal education, have the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it is, and move to transform it'" (Costanza-Chock 179). The chapter goes on to provide examples of design justice pedagogies in practice, including DiscoTechs, critical community technology pedagogy by designer and educator Maya Wagoner, and data feminism, showcasing how pop ed principles can be applied to technology and design education (Costanza-Chock 186).

Furthermore, this chapter draws on Costanza-Chock's own experiences teaching the MIT Codesign Studio, a course that partners students with community organizations to address real-world social challenges through collaborative design (Costanza-Chock 192). They reflect on the challenges and successes of this course, highlighting key lessons learned in relation to the Design Justice Network Principles, emphasizing insights such as balancing structural critique with concrete action, centering community voices, prioritizing community impact over designer intentions, and more (Costanza-Chock 194-198). The chapter ends on a particularly thoughtful and compelling note, as it acknowledges the challenges posed by neoliberal education frameworks, which prioritizes individual achievement, market-driven solutions, and technical skills over broader social concerns. The author understands that this creates tension with the goals of design justice that seeks to challenge systems of oppression and promote collective well-being. However, the chapter's practical examples and connection to the Design Justice Network Principles provide educators with a more actionable guide to begin shifting these paradigms. This makes it an invaluable resource, illustrating how design justice principles can not only inform pedagogy but also inspire educators and students to envision design as a tool for systemic change.

This final chapter of *Design Justice*, "Directions for Future Work: From #TechWontBuildIt to #DesignJustice," explores potential avenues for expanding and deepening design justice theory and practice. It uses yet another powerful example to kickoff, examining the #TechWontBuildIt movement, where tech workers are refusing to participate in projects that contribute to oppression (Costanza-Chock 214). Costanza-Chock sees this movement as a potential turning point within how tech workers view their role in society, and concludes by outlining specific directions for future work, organized according to the book's chapters. For example, for "Design Values," Costanza-Chock urges designers to develop evaluation guidelines

to assess whether designs embody intended values and address potential unintended consequences (Costanza-Chock 225). This chapter also serves as a call-to-action, inviting readers to join the community of design justice practitioners and "build the worlds we need" (Costanza-Chock 237). This closing chapter encapsulates both the strengths and limitations of the book. It excels as a roadmap for reflection and inspiration, offering valuable insights for those in positions of influence to drive systemic change. However, as the broader review highlights, the book's practicality is limited for individuals navigating corporate or hierarchical environments, where these principles may face resistance.

Sasha Costanza-Chock's *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need* offers a thoughtful and compelling critique of conventional design practices while presenting a transformative framework for centering equity and justice in design. Throughout the entire book, they use rich examples, theoretical insights, and practical frameworks to support their argument and challenge designers to rethink whose voices are included, whose needs are prioritized, and whose values are embedded in the systems we create. While *Design Justice* makes it clear that we need to redistribute power and elevate community leadership, the lack of realistic recommendations for how to balance these ideals within rigid structures may leave readers, particularly those in less influential positions, uncertain about how to apply its principles. Expanding the book to include case studies or frameworks for implementing design justice within corporate settings could make its vision more applicable for a wider audience. All in all, Costanza-Chock's ability to ground complex theories in accessible language and wider frameworks in the design industry makes this work an essential read. Design Justice makes for an essential and thought-provoking read, equipping all designers, regardless of experience, with the critical lens needed to challenge oppressive systems and imagine a more equitable future.

Works Cited

Costanza-Chock, Sasha. (2020). *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*. The MIT Press.