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(New) Public Goods

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THE NEW SCHOOL PARSONS

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(NEW) PUBLIC GOODS

EDITORIAL STAFF

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Volume 9 of the *Journal*, to be published Spring 2017, will address the theme of "Cooperative Cities."

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE DEAN

I am delighted to present Volume 8 of *The Journal of Design Strategies*, "(New) Public Goods." The articles collected in this volume explore, from a wide range of perspectives, the application of design to the development of government policies and initiatives seeking to elicit new forms of public welfare. The articles consider both the theoretical motivations and practical consequences of this development, itself part of a larger movement in which design is transcending a more traditional role as an adjunct of industrial production processes. Of particular interest in this context is the emergence of "innovation labs"—a new type of organization, encompassing a variety of public, private, and hybrid structures and financing models, which is bringing a user-centered design approach to the development of social service delivery. Notwithstanding the differences among them, the labs are animated by a shared goal: improving the relevance and efficacy of government agencies in the lives of the people they are intended to serve. Several such initiatives are described by their founding principals in the pages that follow.

Note that with this issue of the *Journal*, we adopt the new visual identity of our home institution, The New School. The identity consists of specially-commissioned brand, logotype, and color elements, and features a proprietary new typeface called Neue. Several other layout-related changes are also being implemented as of the current issue. I hope that readers will enjoy the resulting update to the look of our publication.

The Karan-Weiss Foundation's continuing sponsorship of the Stephan Weiss Lecture Series and of this *Journal* enables the School of Design Strategies' ongoing surveys of the new roles design is coming to play in private and public affairs alike. I remain truly grateful for the Foundation's support.

Joel Towers

Executive Dean, Parsons School of Design

STEPHAN WEISS LECTURE SERIES

Each year, Parsons' School of Design Strategies hosts the Stephan Weiss Lecture Series on Business Strategy, Negotiation, and Innovation. This lectureship was launched in 2002 to commemorate the life of the late artist and sculptor Stephan Weiss, husband and business partner of the fashion designer Donna Karan. Weiss co-founded Donna Karan International in 1984, and was instrumental in every significant venture the company undertook: launching and structuring new brands, most notably the Donna Karan Beauty Company; signing new licenses; establishing in-house legal and creative departments; devising its computer design technology; orchestrating the company's initial public offering in 1996; and negotiating its sale to the current owner, LVMH.

In Spring 2009, the School of Design Strategies became the formal host of the Stephan Weiss Lecture Series, inaugurating a new format for the lectures, the Design Strategies Dialogue. Weiss lectures have since been conducted as interviews and as larger panel discussions, in addition to traditional lectures.

Recent Weiss lecturers and Dialogue participants have included Yochai Benkler, Berkman Professor of Entrepreneurial Legal Studies at Harvard University and co-director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society; Sonia Manchanda, co-founder of IDIOM Design Consulting in Bangalore, India; João Tezza Neto, Director of Science and Technology at the Brazilian nonprofit organization Amazonas Sustainable Foundation; and Kate Fletcher, Professor of Sustainability, Design, Fashion at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, London College of Fashion.

The Stephan Weiss Lecture Series is made possible by an endowment established by The Karan-Weiss Foundation, Donna Karan, Gabrielle Karan, Corey Weiss, and Lisa Weiss.

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

This edition of *The Journal of Design Strategies* is presented as part of an ongoing conversation facilitated by the Parsons DESIS (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) Lab and engaging a wide range of scholars and practitioners. The Lab, housed within the School of Design Strategies at Parsons School of Design, is a nexus of pedagogical, practical and research activities focused on the intersections of strategic and service design, management and social theory. Current research at the Lab includes the role of design in the conception, production and delivery of "public goods," an expression referring both to public welfare in general and to the creation and shaping of various particular publics. This research interest also extends to a consideration of the kinds of institutional and organizational forms within which such design activity can best take place. The questions driving the DESIS Lab's work in this area are thus both practical and critical in nature: How might design contribute to the definition and production of new public goods? What roles might designers play in comprehending, and acting within, socially and politically complex contexts? What are the qualities, potentialities and limitations characteristic of such new forms of practice, and what institutional structures can encourage the corresponding activities and allow them to have maximum effect?

The DESIS Lab's research is in part a response to a recent proliferation of design-centered practice and thinking in the areas of governance and public life—a shift both in focus and in venue for contemporary design activity.[1] The past 15 years in particular have been marked by a notable departure from more traditional modes of industrially-based design practice. New post-industrial design outputs (e.g. services, strategies, research), new venues beyond the consultancy, and new

1 Christian Bason, ed., *Design for Policy*, (London: Ashgate, 2013); L. Moor, "Designing the State" in Julier and Moor, eds., *Design and Creativity: Policy, Management, Practice*, (Oxford: Berg. 2009); nesta.org.uk/publications/innovation-public-sector.

sites of designerly intervention are heralding a period in which design has become explicitly concerned with issues of social and political import.[2] Of specific concern in this edition of the *Journal* is the spread of "public innovation places": new and experimental institutions driven by design and concerned with the production, and by extension the definition, of the "public good" through their engagement with a wide range of social, political, economic and ecological challenges.[3] How design is being deployed in these spaces varies greatly from context to context, practitioner to practitioner. And with key terms like "innovation," as well as the concept of the "lab" itself, circulating among an ever-growing network of design professionals, civil servants and academics concerned with the public sector and with social impact, there is an increasing need for open and honest dialogue about this emergent space and the kinds of activities it engenders and enables. This volume is an attempt to open up space for such a dialogue.

A related development in the design fields provides further context and motivation for this edition of *The Journal of Design Strategies*. Even before the explosion of public innovation places, the more general idea of "design thinking" had moved beyond the realm of the design consultancy, entering into broader discourses addressing large-scale social issues ranging from healthcare and education to employment and humanitarian aid. Design firms and business leaders have effectively evangelized the concept of design thinking as a valuable capacity for generating creative solutions to complex problems.[4] And as the ostensible scope of design thinking has moved beyond the studio, its allure as a tool for solving "wicked" social and political problems has attracted attention from individuals and organizations in various social sectors who are eager to find new approaches to their own perennially vexing, complex challenges. Areas where design thinking is being actively explored include public service provision, policy innovation, and humanitarian and development work, as well as areas bearing on healthcare and environmental sustainability. Beyond exploring the promise of public innovation labs in general, this *Journal* issue seeks to add concreteness to the discussion around design thinking and its potential role in the development and delivery of new public goods.

New post-industrial design outputs, new venues beyond the consultancy, and new sites of designerly intervention are heralding a period in which design has become explicitly concerned with issues of social and political import.

OVERVIEW OF THIS VOLUME

Leveraging its unique position within the university, as an entity engaging in real-world projects as well as critical research and pedagogy, the Parsons DESIS Lab organized the Stephan Weiss Lectures for the 2013–2014 academic year, hosting two public events that encouraged a group of leading practitioners and scholars to

2 Jamer Hunt, "A Manifesto for Postindustrial Design," *I.D. Magazine*, Nov.-Dec. 2005: 120; Eduardo Staszowski, Scott Brown, and Benjamin Winter, "Reflections on Designing for Social Innovation in the Public Sector: A Case Study in New York City," *DESIS* (2013): 27.

3 See nyc.pubcollab.org/public-innovation-places; mappingsocialdesign.org.

4 Tim Brown, *Change by Design*, (New York: Harper Business, 2009); Roger Martin, *The Design of Business: Why Design Thinking is the Next Competitive Advantage*, 3rd ed., (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009).

reflect on this emergent space and the critical questions being raised within it. The first event, a colloquium that took place in the Fall of 2013, provided an opportunity for a diverse mix of design scholars, anthropologists, political scientists and theorists to reflect on the relationship between design and the political. This event was followed in the Spring of 2014 with a second colloquium, in which representatives from public innovation places at the forefront of the field built on themes from the fall event by discussing and reflecting on their own practices. This issue of the *Journal* comprises two separate yet mutually informed sections broadly reflecting the two-part structure of the Stephan Weiss lectures for the 2013–2014 year.

This edition of the *Journal* examines the spread of "public innovation places": new and experimental institutions driven by design and concerned with the production, and by extension the definition, of the "public good" through their engagement with a wide range of social, political, economic and ecological challenges.

Section 1 of the volume, "Design, Aesthetics and Politics," presents a series of scholarly essays emerging from the Fall 2013 colloquium, and exhibiting a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Participatory design pioneer Pelle Ehn compares the new focus on design for public good to the participatory design movement of the 1970s, and asks whether the new developments may face similar risks of co-optation by systems of corporate management. Design theorist Maria Hellström Reimer describes her recent research comparing design processes to games, and her attempts to apply this research among diverse groups of professionals, academics, and civil servants all focused on the problem of adaptation to climate change. Anthropologist Keith Murphy deploys a linguistic analogy to suggest how design can be used as an "aestheticizing" agent in the service of specific visions of the public good. Design researcher Carl DiSalvo further analyzes ways that design can be utilized in the articulation of a "pre-figurative politics," a fundamentally ethical activity that moves design beyond the realm of addressing current problems into a more speculative space concerned with the envisioning of desirable futures for entire societies. Historian Joan Greenbaum traces specific ways that design has been brought to bear in the defense of specific, but shifting and always contested, definitions of the "public good" within the United States. And design theorist Virginia Tassinari invokes ideas of the political philosophers Jacques Rancière and Hannah Arendt in developing a claim about design's power to help communities envision new forms of life and to create new modes of political participation.

Section 2 of the volume, "Labs, Publics and Practices," reflects outcomes from the Spring 2014 colloquium. Contributions take a variety of forms, ranging from more reflective, contextualizing essays, to case studies, to transcribed interviews. Together, they paint a picture of a particular moment in the historical development

of public innovation places, while detailing lessons learned and developing challenges in this emergent space. Social innovation theorist and practitioner Sarah Schulman recounts efforts undertaken by her social enterprise organization to involve marginalized populations in Vancouver, British Columbia in the structuring and delivery of their own social services. Abby Wilson, Cara George and Arianne Miller describe their efforts to leverage design thinking within various agencies of the U.S. government through their organization, the Lab at the Office of Personnel Management. Urban technologist Nigel Jacob outlines the civic innovation initiative he cofounded through the Boston Mayor's office called New Urban Mechanics. Social scientist and design strategist Chelsea Mauldin describes her work with the Public Policy Lab, a civic innovation incubator in New York City that she directs, and its efforts to bring participatory design principles to the City's office of Housing Preservation and Development. Designer Chris Vanstone describes his work with the Australian Centre for Social Innovation, which seeks to improve the effectiveness of government social spending through the application of participatory service design principles. Public and social innovation specialist Joeri van den Steenhoven provides a theoretical context for his work with the MaRS Solutions Lab, a social innovation enterprise based in Toronto, Canada. Finally, author Christian Bason provides a summary statement touching on many of the opportunities and problems pointed out by the other contributors to the volume, and reflecting his own extensive experience in the analysis and provision of design-led leadership in the service of social innovation, within public and private organizations alike.

Beyond exploring the promise of public innovation labs in general, this *Journal* issue seeks to add concreteness to the discussion around design thinking and its potential role in the development and delivery of new public goods.

The adoption of design as a mode of practice and thinking continues to gain currency and recognition. New organizations and institutional bodies are exploring the potential of design to reimagine, reinvigorate, and revitalize their missions and the services they provide. However, thus far there has been less effort devoted to critical reflection on the nature, and the legitimacy, of the changes design may be able to bring to public life. Yes, design can be powerful, but what, in fact, should be done with it, and how? What are the potentials and limits of design for the public good? These questions echo throughout the diverse contributions to this edition of the *Journal*, and remain key concerns for all those invested in exploring the nexus of design, politics, theory and practice. The contents of this volume should accordingly be seen as part of an ongoing conversation, mirroring the emergent quality of the broader field of practice itself.

A final note: we wish to acknowledge the significant role that a number of our colleagues played in the conceptualization and execution of the 2013–2014 Stephan Weiss Lectures. Vyjayanthi Rao and Virginia Tassinari were heavily involved in the original development of the colloquia, helping to articulate the need for the sort of dialogue they sought to initiate and to identify the invited speakers. Clive Dilnot, Victoria Hattam and Jamer Hunt served as discussants during the Fall 2013 colloquium, providing incisive reactions to the invited guests' statements and stimulating a wide-ranging discussion that included the speakers and audience members. Expert moderation of the Spring 2014 colloquium's two panels was provided by Fred Dust, IDEO Partner and Parsons Board of Governors member, and by Bryan Boyer, co-founder of the innovation consultancy Dash Marshall. We remain very grateful to all these colleagues, from The New School and beyond, for their various contributions to the 2013–2014 Weiss Lectures, and for helping to inspire the documents collected in this edition of the *Journal*.

EDUARDO STASZOWSKI and SCOTT BROWN

Guest Editors, *The Journal of Design Strategies*
Volume 8

SECTION 1:
DESIGN, AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

(NEW) PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AS A (NEW) PUBLIC GOOD

Pelle Ehn

Design and "new public goods": is this similar to or different from "new public management," the attempt in recent decades to improve public service delivery by introducing "market" reforms such as competition within and among government agencies?[1] The current public situation reminds me of attempts, in the early 1970s, to democratize the workplace by involving workers in the design of work environments. There already existed at that time a humanistic paradigm for the transformation of existing socio-technical systems into better ones (associated with Enid Mumford and others).[2] Less spelled out was the fact that a main appeal of new public management was its potential use as a tool for controlling workers. Participatory design—then known in Scandinavia as the "collective resource" approach—emerged in opposition to this trend. Our focus was on workers and their mobilization through local trade unions, their engagement in negotiations with management, and their status as a source of ideas about alternative technologies and work organizations. Later, participatory design became more explicitly "designerly" through the inclusion of professional designers, but the approach retained its focus on designing though inclusive and collaborative processes of making and experimenting with prototypes of potential futures.

Things are different now, but also similar. Participatory design is less and less engaged in the factory and the shop floor; instead, new emergent forms of publics and public spaces have come increasingly to the fore, representing both new forms of "democratic" civic engagement in relation to administrations, and new forms of "open" production that bypass some of the imperatives governing production in the commercial private sector.

1 Christopher Hood, "A Public Management For All Seasons?" *Public Administration* Vol. 69, (Spring 1991): 3–19.

2 Enid Mumford, *Computer Systems in Work Design—the ETHICS Method: Effective Technical and Human Implementation of Computer Systems*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1979).

Notwithstanding the progress made, however, without critically inquiring into how truly democratic and open these supposedly participatory practices really are, we risk ending up as the providers of a designerly form of legitimation for a new type of public management, one that increasingly introduces corporate values and administrative norms into the public life of communities.

Public space is not a harmonious, open and democratic playground, a commons, but rather a contested terrain—frequently dominated today by regimes of new public management, but also shaped by softer practices like human-centered design, user-driven innovation, and open sourcing. Can designers serve as trailblazers in the contested terrain of public space? Should they? I do not know, but I believe today's challenges require concepts, tactics and strategies that are different than what has come before: smaller than reforms and yet bigger than revolutions, more mundane and oriented to the everyday, and at the same time truly cosmopolitan. To indicate a design orientation:

With Dewey and with Marres, we have to rethink the very concept of publics, seeing them as plural and paradoxical, and as continually generating issues that exceed the available expertise for resolving them.[3] With Mouffe and with Disalvo, we have to reconsider public space as adversarial, controversial and agonistic.[4] With Latour and with A. Telier, we must recompose the "thing," the very object of design, as socio-material public assemblies evolving over time.[5] With Lindström and Ståhl, we must carefully "patchwork" the very making of these often quite mundane emerging public practices.[6] Always and with Marx, we have to remind ourselves that capital has many faces, some looking seductively like genuine public goods. Thus and finally, with Michael and with Stengers, we must ask "the idiot" for help in slowing things down, being more inclusive with design, and committing to work within the widest cosmopolitan frame of reference.[7] In this view on design and public goods, as consisting of a series of small "democratic design experiments," I guess we could say with Wittgenstein that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.[8] Now, as then, it is all socio-technical politics anyway!

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3 Noortje Marres, "Issues Spark a Public into Being: A Key but Often Forgotten Point of the Lippmann-Dewey Debate," in B. Latour and P. Weibel, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

4 Chantal Mouffe, "Some Reflections on an Agonistic Approach to the Public," in Latour and Weibel, *Making Things Public*; Carl DiSalvo, *Adversarial Design* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

5 Bruno Latour, "From *Realpolitik* to *Dingpolitik*—or How to Make Things Public," in Latour and Weibel, *Making Things Public*; A. Telier, *Design Things* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

6 Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl, *Patchworking Publics-in-the-Making: Design, Media and Public Engagement* (Doctoral Dissertation, School of Arts and Communication K-3, Malmo University, 2014).

7 Mike Michael, "'What Are We Busy Doing?': Engaging The Idiot," *Science, Technology & Human Values* Vol. 37 no. 5 (2012): 528-554; Isabelle Stengers, "The Cosmopolitical Proposal," in Latour and Weibel, *Making Things Public*.

8 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuiness, (New York: Humanities Press, 1961 [1921]), prop. 6.421.

ACTING OUT, KICKING BACK: THE HALF-WAY REALISM OF DESIGN GAMES

Maria Hellström Reimer

INTRODUCTION

There we were, engaged participants, entering the circle, prepared to sharpen our attention, to adjust our bodies, to interact and respond to the situation. We started to play, committed to follow the jerky wanderings of the first ball. Then the second ball entered the circle, and with it came a new rule for throwing it, challenging our coordination and signalling skills. When the third ball came into play, intersecting in a new way with the trajectories of the first two, the calls, glances and moves across the field of interaction intensified into a palpable present, frequently interrupted by thudding and bouncing—sounds of misjudgement, friction, or misalignment. As a fourth ball was introduced into the circle, along with yet another set of throwing instructions, the communicative tension reached its breaking point, or its point of implosion, manifested in reflexive, collaborative laughter. We had played, hesitatingly at first, but soon with increasing enthusiasm. And as the game progressed, balls had travelled faster, accompanied by more and more imperative shouts, growing agitation and intensified responses. Finally, as the gameplay was broken, the balls rolled away, leaving us with an awareness of the fragility of collaboration, but also with an appreciation for concerted juggling. Flexibility, timing, spatial understanding, expressivity, alertness, foresightedness: these are all social skills most clearly revealed precisely at the point of miscarriage, insufficiency, or breakdown.

Flexibility, timing, spatial understanding, expressivity, alertness, foresightedness: these are all social skills most clearly revealed precisely at the point of miscarriage, insufficiency, or breakdown.

CLIMATE MOVES

The above anecdote describes an improvisation and communication exercise conducted with a group of Swedish PhD students and their supervisors visiting Parsons School of Design in October, 2013. Coordinated by acting coach and part-time Parsons instructor Roger Manix, it was an exercise that evoked, in a surprisingly straightforward way, the impatience and frustration characterizing both design research and design practice today. There is a growing readiness among designers and design researchers to take on the big challenges of community formation and shared existence, to step into the complex circles of users, participants, and publics. At the same time, playing such a communitarian game, catching different kinds of "balls" and passing them on in different directions and according to different rules, easily gives rise to a feeling of awkwardness, an unease that stems from not knowing whether the performance of which you are a part is in fact socially mobilizing, cohesive or transformative, or simply a fanciful form of make-believe in the often uncompromising arena commonly referred to as "the public good."

Some of the inflated promises surrounding "design thinking" as a putative panacea for stimulating organizational creativity have turned out to be little more than business quackery.

The question raised by my anecdote is whether, out of the simple activity of a collective game of catch, a design sociology of sorts can be unfolded. I see design researchers today as engaged in, but also struggling with, a somewhat similar game of call and response, in which they expectantly and uneasily but also self-consciously act out materialities and trajectories, trying to make sense of increasingly complex and contested societal dynamics. Part of my own research involves the development of collaborative prototyping processes in the service of public institutions, with a particular focus on collaborative competencies shared across municipal, national, and regional borders as well as across diverse fields of expertise. For example, in a project entitled *Urban Transition Øresund*, together with colleagues I focused on the facilitation of situated interplay for climate transition in the Malmö-Copenhagen region. Supported by the European Union and its regional development fund, the project gathered municipal officials and researchers from a number of planning departments and universities on both sides of the strait separating Sweden and Denmark, with an explicit intent to promote joint climate action and narrow the gap between sustainability-oriented research and *in situ* implementation. In this context of transition, design, or more specifically, design research, was drawn in as a normative practice with a bordering and translational function within the municipal context, and also as a practice which might suggest new entrepreneurial ideas or ventures.

Sometimes regarded a bit suspiciously as a "soft" way of seeking out new working procedures, design approaches have nevertheless found their way into

administrative and strategic spaces. Beyond the routines of board meeting protocols, local plans, consequence analyses and "vision" booklets, design, broadly speaking, presents methods for materializing complex problems, making it possible to twist and turn, modify and simulate, apply and contest. Yet, the sometimes-derogatory designation of such tentative and provisional approaches as unscientific play, subjective vagary, or commercial spectacle has all along been close at hand—and indeed, these accusations have not always been entirely inaccurate. Some of the inflated promises surrounding "design thinking" as a putative panacea for stimulating organizational creativity have turned out to be little more than business quackery.

Rather than relying on design thinking, therefore, our research approaches planning practice in terms of the concept of *games*. Games are relevant to planning in more than one sense. Besides general ideas of collective life as essentially "ludic," and of humankind as a species reflecting upon its own social conditions through more or less formalized modes of play, there are other more pragmatic reasons to explore the diversity of social interactions that can be comprehended within the conceptual rubric of games or of play, from open-ended, self-rewarding and mundane playfulness to regulated, competitive sports to escapist "gaming."[1] In relation to climate transition, however, the most pertinent reason is a renewed attention to the spatiotemporal dynamics of complex and emergent systems, combined with an interest in games from a computational point of view. While this interest is often aimed at optimizing digital, financial and social performance, typically by spreading risks and mitigating negative effects, our ambition was different. As Habraken and Gross observe in connection with their work developing "concept design games" for planning contexts, games provide an environment for exploration as opposed to rationalization, a milieu for a constellation of stakeholders or "players" to tentatively act out their different interests within a framework or program characterized by interdependence.[2] Within the confines of the game, we wanted to explore, but also creatively modify, complex infrastructural and societal configurations independently of current functional limitations.

The specific reasons for us to turn to games were the material, processual and dynamic qualities of game frameworks, as well as their combination of collaborative, agential and occasional aspects. The idea was that a reformatting of the initial phases of the planning process, not simply in terms of games as such but in terms of game *development*, would help support the needed transition from compartmentalized planning regimes to a more collaborative planning practice based on a broader ecological awareness of resources, distributional flows, temporal variations and feedback loops.

1 While the standard reference on the cultural significance of play is Johan Huizinga's 1938 classic *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, a ludic approach to design, learning and social creativity has over the last decade become more widely accepted. See William Gaver, Andy Boucher, John Bowers and A. Law, "Electronic Furniture for the Curious Home: Assessing Ludic Designs in the Field," *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction* Vol. 22, no. 1-2 (2007): 119-152; Jennifer Light, "Taking Games Seriously," *Technology and Culture* Vol. 49, no. 2 (April 2008): 347-375; Alice Y. and David A. Kolb, "Learning to Play, Playing to Learn: A Case Study of a Ludic Learning Space," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* Vol. 23, no. 1 (2010): 26-50; M. A. Eriksen, E. Brandt, T. Mattelmäki and K. Vaajakallio, "Taking Design Games Seriously: Re-connecting Situated Power Relations of People and Materials," in *PDC 14: Proceedings of the 13th Participatory Design Conference: Research Papers Vol. 1* (2014): 101-110.

2 N. John Habraken and Mark D. Gross, "Concept Design Games," *Design Studies* Vol. 9, no. 3 (1988): 150-158.

Within the context of "sustainable urban development," the critically exploratory aspects were decisive, focusing everyone's attention on the scope of the region's environmental problems, if not thereby leading to easy agreement about potential solutions. Indeed, the ensuing encounters between researchers and civil servants, and between officials from different departments or fields, are not always smooth, and at times are quite conflictual. Like games, these processes develop different power dynamics and different kinds of tension or *agon* (to use a game-related term). In our case, one fundamental agonism concerned the very notion of "public service," conceived by some as a "procedural" idea oriented towards management and by others as a "transitional" quality, alternative to other kinds of services, and as such facilitating change. Yet within the conceptual space of the game, a common point of departure would be the necessity of collaboratively engaging in, meddling with, or playing out of possible "public goods."

Games provide an environment for exploration as opposed to rationalization, a milieu for a constellation of stakeholders or "players" to tentatively act out their different interests within a framework or program characterized by interdependence.

Without explaining in detail how this meddling unfolded and against which background, it is of course difficult to determine its success. It was, however, generally felt to be a meaningful and productive learning experience, opening up new avenues for argumentation, new methods for the processual situating of specific issues, and even new possibilities to ground collaborative decision making.[3] The biggest challenges centred largely around post-game questions about how to develop and implement new insights, and how to deal with the participants' growing frustration with the asymmetries and short-sightedness of current urban ecological policies. One of the main values of the game development process, therefore, was its "non-ludic" and more serious facilitating of due space and time for a critical investigation of systems limits and of the process scope of public infrastructures and goods. The participants were led to grapple with basic questions such as: What are the issues around which publics appear? Who is included and who is excluded? What are the implicit values embedded in service infrastructures? Who benefits from certain mechanisms and arrangements, and who is disadvantaged? Finally, how are we to assess the performance of public services? Or rather, what service is needed in order to facilitate public assessment?

These and similar political questions frequently surfaced throughout the research experiment, contributing to an increasing sensitivity as concerns micro-political power plays and social controversies, but also to a growing awareness of the need to intervene in, or even interfere with, larger financial and technological systems if we hope to make real progress on climate transition. The game development approach therefore both necessitates and facilitates the uncovering of

3 Regarding the concept of "productive" learning, see Celia Peirce, "Productive Play: Game Culture From the Bottom Up," *Games and Culture* Vol. 1, no. 1 (2006): 17-24.

the materially built-in value systems, programs, registers, "scapes," and norms scaffolding practices such as urban planning and design.

THE GAME OF THE GAME

Focusing on game development rather than simply on game play allows an environmental reflexivity and attention to the situatedness and material conditions of the very cultures of planning, not least in relation to "natural" systems. According to Félix Guattari, while ecological breakthroughs might have called our attention to the fundamental imbrication of culture and nature, scientistic structuralization has prevented us from fully recognizing the ontological consequences. Instead, an over-confidence in technoscientific ideas of natural and self-organizing systems has "accustomed us to a vision of the world in which human interventions—concrete politics and micropolitics—are no longer relevant."[4] On the one hand, this vision points to the risks of a "gamification" of social life that merges social, technological and ecosystemic management into one integrated machine driven by the laws of supply and demand. On the other hand, it draws attention to the coordinating power needed in order to sustain such a "hegemonic equilibrium."[5] Today, the monitoring of this equilibrium increasingly happens through the translation of political decision-making into quantified rating systems or spreadsheet processes, reflecting an uncritical confidence in game-like platforms and their seeming capacity to automatically negotiate human needs as well as those of other organisms, thereby maximizing the good "for all."[6] Paradoxically, the political relevance of a design games approach emanates precisely from these and similar, functional rather than political, expectations. Whether economic, technological or social in nature, complex systems are supposed to run by their own inherent and organic rules, not to be messed with by humans. A design games approach, however, starts off with the opposite idea: human social systems are bound to interfere, and there is indeed a creative potential in this frictional interference—a performative and materially constructive potential, to different degrees conditioning what we refer to as societally meaningful, genuinely *public* good.

Understood as a mode of systemic interference or friction, design unfolds as a non-neutral yet publically accessible faculty for societal becoming, as such continuously and creatively regulating distributional patterns and courses of events, and constantly challenging the supposed naturalness of given orders.

Such an understanding of design as systemic interference, or friction, is qualitatively distinct from an understanding of design as a limited, formal expertise or consultancy function within the context of a given mode of production. While this latter definition of design refers back to its function within an industrial economic system, the former suggests a wider role for design as relational and performative, fundamental for the continuous facilitating of different kinds of exchange—or different degrees of

4 Félix Guattari, "The Three Ecologies," trans. Chris Turner, *New Formations* 8 (1989): 134.

5 Robert Cassar, "Gramsci and Games," *Games and Culture* Vol. 8, no. 5 (2013): 330-353.

6 The "game" of environmental certification and the consequent "trade" among rating systems is increasingly governing urban sustainable development. See breeam.org or usgbc.org/certification.

openness and permeability between human and non-human systems. Understood in this way, design unfolds as a non-neutral yet publically accessible faculty for societal becoming, as such continuously and creatively regulating distributional patterns and courses of events, and constantly challenging the supposed naturalness of given orders.

The staging of design as a dynamic force field or societal game does not disqualify the idea of design as a possibly intuitive and spirited acting-out of abundant potentials. Instead, it calls into attention the function of creative impulses as agitated and critical moments of potential reconfiguration, as power-sensitive interference evoking systemic change. Within the framework of a design game, singular moves may have decisive and transformative effects. However, as expressed by one of the design PhD candidates participating in the workshop referred to previously, "we are not trained to do activism." Designers and design researchers are not trained to question the rules, or educated to act outside of professional hierarchies. Despite their training in creative moves, designers are poorly prepared for the consequences of those moves: for the effects that their throws, catches, and leaps might have within large and intricately entangled settings.

Building on the fact that even the same present may appear differently depending on the "mechanics" through which it is being approached, games problematize the entire idea of "the future" as a common horizon.

One of the advantages of design games is that the engagement and embodied expression that take place in games are separate from a given reality. As pointed out by Roger Caillois in his classic study of play and games, "play and ordinary life are constantly and universally antagonistic to each other."[7] There is a separatist tension in games, potentially reflecting and potentially undermining the institutions, habits and patterns of the "real." Nevertheless, games are no less intense than any serious activity; they encourage people to apply greater energy and attention than they otherwise would. There is thus an ambiguous freedom of behaviour in games, a scope of action including agonistic confrontation, unpredictable turns, metamorphosis and vertigo—all occasions of transformation exempt of answerability, which, for Caillois, is precisely what explains their articulating power, showing the degree to which games reveal "the character, pattern and values of every society."[8]

Considering this ambiguous combination of open-endedness and habituation in games, it comes as no surprise that today there is an enormous amount of corporate interest and capital invested not only in game design, but precisely in design games—both as an efficient mechanism for the user-generation of data and the subsequent mapping of habitual behavior, and as a model for innovation as the rapid prototyping of futures for development. However, inasmuch as design is a

7 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 63.

8 Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 66.

What modes of knowing allow for *response*-able re-orientation, re-positioning and re-location? How can one facilitate the crisscrossing and navigation of multiple positions and boundaries? What "formats" allow for local and material specificities to play a role, while also taking into consideration the tensions and shifts introduced by relational circumstances?

socially constructive game it is also corruptible, always vulnerable to being dissipated into speculative gambling and narrow profit-seeking. In their computation and channelling of probabilities, design games are increasingly fundamental for an economy that feeds on socially transformative flows. In a target-setting and revenue-oriented rather than relational and transformative mode, the game of design can be a controlling and manipulative practice, just as it can be an enabling and differentiating one.

HALF-WAY REALISMS

Collaborative design game development, including the multidisciplinary approach referred to as design thinking, in no way offers a suspension bridge to sustainable futures. Building on the fact that even the same present may appear differently depending on the "mechanics" through which it is being approached, games problematize the entire idea of "the future" as a common horizon. In the words of political theorist William Connolly, one could say that as with any other creative complex, design is in fact a "machinic assemblage" operating here and now—performative rather than representational, "neither pulled by a final purpose nor reducible mostly to chance, nor simply explicable as a mechanical process."[9] Actualizing the very staging of primary conditions or the degree of "fairness" of the initial scene, a design game makes it clear that there is neither a pre-given holistic oneness from which to depart, nor a single common outcome to be reached, but rather a set of more or less unbiased game "rounds" or decisions through which to proceed.

The question raised through design game practice is therefore also ontological. How does "the world" as we know it come into being? The only way to answer this kind of question is from within the dynamic of that "world" itself, from within the specific modalities of adaptation and change that it makes possible. The experience of *staging* and *restaging* these modalities therefore offers an important refutation of scientistic or computational forms of game-inspired modelling methods, which continue to reserve a neutral position for the game master as arbitrator

9 William E. Connolly, *The Fragility of Things: Self-organising Processes, Neo-liberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 87. The performative concept of "machinic assemblage" originates with the process philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and has further inspired process-oriented and social constructivist thinking in many areas, not least in science and technology studies, e.g. in the writings of Bruno Latour. For a related discussion from a design games perspective, see M. A. Eriksen et al., "Taking Design Games Seriously."

or referee. In her version of realism, theoretical physicist and feminist scholar Karen Barad insists on a more complex and dynamic idea of knowing as *intra-action*, emphasizing the constructive entanglement needed for any circumstance whatsoever to emerge.[10] There is an independent reality, albeit one graspable only through "agential" configurations, temporary regulations, constitutive and positioning "cuts." As dynamic exercises of power, "intra-actions reconfigure what is possible and what is impossible."[11]

In a similar way, the design of a game constitutes a situated knowing, which, as Donna Haraway has expressed it, also makes us aware of "our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings"[12]—our own game mechanics, if you will. In strategic and transitional design processes, at the intersection between economies, technological infrastructures and ecosystems, semiotic technologies are never given and are often hidden, embedded in scientific conceptualizations about reality. Typically taken for granted as "natural" features of the world itself, these hidden value systems eventually reveal themselves, seemingly unpredictably, as unwanted bugs: accidents, break-downs, paralyses. Uncovering the field of tension, intra-active design games do not remedy or establish one's total agency over matters, since as Barad puts it, the world, including the self-organizing processes referred to as systems, whether economic, technological or ecological, inevitably and repeatedly, "kick[s] back."[13] This "kicking back" is moreover not negligible, but materially merged with our more or less entangled coming-in-to-being. The question posed here is really one of responsivity and answerability. What modes of knowing allow for *response*-able re-orientation, re-positioning and re-location? How can one facilitate the crisscrossing and navigation of multiple positions and boundaries? What "formats" allow for local and material specificities to play a role, while also taking into consideration the tensions and shifts introduced by relational circumstances?

It may be that trying to "understand" is spatially and materially the wrong attitude. Instead, what we should aim for is to *interstand*, to actively relate.

These questions coincide with the questions lurking behind the idea of "public goods"—questions that are fundamentally political, concerning the potential intra-agency of different more or less creative, more or less self-organizing, spheres. There is in the proliferating notion of "design thinking" an ambiguity at play, a vicissitude in between morality and recklessness, an acting out of a pre-staged randomness under the cloak of the "public good." As seductive and successful as this interchange might be, it unveils a problematic merger of relativism and fatalism, effectively eliminating the potentially transitional effects of the design game as an open matrix for exploring a situated and material assemblage of relations and variations.

10 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 422

11 Karen Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," in Lynn Hankinson Nelson and Jack Nelson, *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Press, 1996), 177.

12 Quoted in Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway," 186.

13 Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway," 188. See also Guattari, "The Three Ecologies," 134.

CONCLUSION

Design processes can be understood as diverse varieties of games: transitory, materially messy and condemned to endless iterations, endless annulations of results, endless new beginnings. Yet, on the privileged ground of tentative becomings, within designated circles, interrogative "perspective-taking" may be acted out, attentive interception may take place, as well as transgression of individual limits and proscriptions. For these reasons, the serious game of design potentially constitutes an ontologically different point of departure for our further entanglements with the world. In summing up what it means to actively "meet the universe halfway," Barad invokes the American queer poet Judy Grahn, who proposes that trying to "understand" may be spatially and materially the wrong attitude. Instead, what we should aim for is to *interstand*, to actively relate. Barad playfully returns her gambit through an *intra-standing* move. There is not one game of design, and not just one way to play the game. Instead, as a "gymnastics" of material sensibility, design as game might unfold as what William Connolly has called an "ethics of cultivation,"[14] an ethics of cultural and social emergence. Infused with mutable intensities and dramatic options, the multiple game of design might provide an unsettling yet reconfigurable ground for such emergence, allowing for "intra-standing" launches and cuts that, in being acted out, also call forth the kicking back of an obdurate but evasive "reality."

14 Connolly, *The Fragility of Things*, 104, 110.

THE AESTHETICS OF GOVERNANCE: THOUGHTS ON DESIGNING (AND) POLITICS

Keith M. Murphy

There is some evidence that the word "good" in English is etymologically related to the word "gather": the possible link suggests that goods, by definition, are things brought together, joined, and fit. Indeed, there is even a hint in the word's meaning that all goods began as shared, common, and "public." By contrast, "public goods" are today typically understood in the specific and limited sense of services offered by governments and other institutions—services that in some way benefit the "public," both its individual members and as a whole. Whether provisioned through the public sector itself or outsourced through private contracts, these services constitute some of the most basic functions of government in modern times. The most obvious contemporary examples of these types of public goods are found in various forms of social welfare or public aid programs pursued by governments. They are thus most visible in highly developed welfare states, like the Nordic countries, where universal education, healthcare, and unemployment insurance are financed primarily through high rates of taxation, and administered largely through highly visible, mostly public institutions.[1]

As opposed to direct provision, public aid may also take the form of subsidies for things like education, healthcare, public transportation, and home buying. Of course, not all such subsidies are really public in any direct or obvious sense. Government subsidies for already-profitable agribusiness or extraction industries, along with other forms of corporate welfare, for example, tend not to be among the best examples of public goods, even if they do lead to some beneficial trickle-down effects for a broader population, as supporters of these arrangements frequently claim.

1 Note that this contemporary usage also contrasts with the way that "public goods" are discussed within classic economic theory—that is, as goods which are non-excludable (you can't keep free riders from using them), and non-rivalrous (extra users don't diminish the possibility that others can use them, too). Among non-naturally occurring goods in this sense, the classic example is a lighthouse: whether or not you have helped pay for its construction and operation, you will be able to use the lighthouse's revolving lamp to steer your ship; and this use in no way impairs others' ability to similarly benefit.

Public policy making itself may in some instances fall under the rubric of "public good," though not unproblematically. As Suzanne Mettler points out, much of the direct social benefit that governments offer their citizens is hidden away in policies and regulations whose effects tend to be invisible in everyday life. She calls this condition the "submerged state," referring to the difficulty citizens often have in comprehending the actual role that governments play in fostering and maintaining public goods.[2] Although we may actually experience the benefits of public services, we often misrecognize them as pre-given aspects of reality rather than as outcomes of political intervention.

Institutions that provide public goods are, of course, not restricted to democratic regimes. They exist in practically any kind of contemporary state, including democratic republics, socialist republics, monarchies, and other political forms. The differences primarily involve the degree to which these institutions and the work they do are actually accountable to the publics they ostensibly serve. But beyond distinctions among types of government, what is most interesting and important about public goods is not that they are either "public" or "goods," but rather the constitutive relationships that obtain between particular "goods" and the "publics" they help to elicit or craft. The implementation of public goods, in other words, is always a dynamic process: the ways in which goods are specified and brought into being by states helps give shape to different publics—publics that themselves look "good" to state interests—and at the same time various publics strive to interface with states, through the goods (services) to which the states grant them access.

Definitions of what counts both as "good" and as "public" are varied and contingent—sliding in some extreme cases deeply into the realm of evil—but as an idea that has appeared across a vast range of cultural and historical contexts, "the good" has exercised power in having helped steer and justify various kinds of political action.

This is where the potential bearing of design on the articulation of public goods becomes evident. Indeed, in its concern with shaping "good" publics, governance in general can itself be considered a kind of design. The materials, processes, and tools, as well as the historical trajectories out of which the various contemporary design disciplines and modern statecraft have respectively emerged, are obviously different. But some elective affinities subsist between designing and governing—affinities that are interesting especially in light of both fields' ostensible commitment to somehow fostering and promoting some version of "the good."

Of course there are indefinitely many ways to define, and pursue, political goals. One can point to population control policies,[3] environmental planning,[4] social hygiene and eugenics movements, and the cultivation of productive workers,

2 Suzanne Mettler, *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

3 Susan Greenhalgh, "Planned births, unplanned persons: 'Population' in the making of Chinese modernity," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 30, no. 2 (2003): 196-215; Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

4 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

consumers, and taxpayers as different examples in which some conception of "the good" has motivated a government's actions in crafting its public. Definitions of what counts both as "good" and as "public," in other words, are varied and contingent—sliding in some extreme cases deeply into the realm of evil—but as an idea that has recognizably appeared across a vast range of cultural and historical contexts, "the good" has exercised undeniable power in having helped steer and justify various kinds of political action.

Thus, when we're thinking about design and public goods in the context of progressive action, we must be careful about how we're conceiving both social change and "good." The idea of "social change" itself tends to be steeped in the language of left-leaning, progressive politics, but this can be misleading. For example, in recent years states including Texas, Wisconsin and Mississippi have passed legislation ostensibly intended to increase the safety of abortion procedures, but whose real purpose is widely considered to be a simple reduction in the de facto availability of abortion providers—and hence in the number of abortions performed in those states—through the imposition of onerous regulations that many abortion clinics will be unable to comply with, thus forcing them to shut down. These so-called TRAP (Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers) laws clearly seek to redesign the healthcare landscape in these states, and represent, therefore, an effort to design social change—change that for many people does constitute an obvious good, but for many others, including many self-described progressives, is decidedly a change for the worse. The point is that we need to make sure that we don't simply accept that something is "good" just because someone sees it as such. And exploring how designers and policy makers actually do their jobs can reveal quite a bit about how concepts like "the good" are locally organized and activated. Above all, we should strive to maintain a sensitivity for the ways that design, politics and "the good" are often mutually constitutive in particular contexts.

A helpful starting point is to think about governance as a field or set of conditions that are predisposed to incorporating design principles and motivations. Indeed, part of what I explore in my own work is how design and politics both help us to construct a sociomaterial world in which particular cultural values and political ideologies are rendered credible and sustained in everyday experience.[5] In particular, I have examined some of the processes and practices through which everyday artifacts (like furniture and other household objects) have been made to "true" (in the sense of aligning) with welfare state politics in Sweden. What I try to show is that designers, objects and ideologies are all entangled in a web of historically contingent relations that collectively produce the objects of an ordered world, which

5 Keith M. Murphy, "A Cultural Geometry: Designing Political Things in Sweden," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 40, no. 1 (2013): 118-131; Keith M. Murphy, *Swedish Design: An Ethnography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

Exploring how designers and policy makers actually do their jobs can reveal how concepts like "the good" are locally organized and activated.

semiotically "matches" (in Sweden's case) social democratic politics. As noted, this overall process is highly visible and articulated in advanced welfare state countries, but I suspect that similar processes are at work in many contexts where design is a factor in the organization of daily life.

Jacques Rancière describes politics as the "distribution of the sensible"—that is, as the apportionment of perceivable "facts," like things, times, spaces, and actions, such that access to those facts—and the particular ways they are, or can be, experienced—is unevenly allotted to different social groups.[6] To be sure, this distribution is achieved through countless processes and practices, some of which are more overtly "political" than others, and the effects of which are not always foreseen or planned. Yet amid all the complexity that attends the distribution of the sensible, I think that designers actually play quite a significant role—especially those who operate in or near the institutions charged with actually carrying out government policies. By giving intentional form to public policy initiatives, designers serve as "distributors of the sensible" in the lived social world. How exactly this works is an ethnographic question—that is, one that shows the necessity for paying close attention to how design works in particular cases.

By giving intentional form to public policy initiatives, designers serve as "distributors of the sensible" in the lived social world.

It is crucial to grasp the importance of *form* in design—especially in political contexts. Critics often describe contemporary design as less focused on form—supposedly an older, outmoded concern—than on process and transformation. The distinction is obviously overstated, since in fact, throughout its existence, design has concerned both form and transformation. Moreover, in the push to look at design in a contemporary light and tease out its emergent peculiarities, we mustn't ignore some of design's core, longstanding attributes. Form—which need not be material—matters because it is the most significant surface to which meaning adheres. To really understand the role of design in the production and distribution of public goods, we need to look at how actual forms of various sorts subsist alongside all sorts of other stuff.

Let me make a brief but relevant divergence here. My background is in linguistic anthropology, so for better or worse I often find myself turning to language as a way to understand all kinds of phenomena I encounter. And in this case I'll turn to *registers*.

In sociolinguistics a "register" is a collection of linguistic forms that are linked, in culturally specific ways, to particular people, practices, values, and social roles. This collection of forms can be made up of certain words, or certain kinds of

6 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.

The task that those of us who study the intersections of design, aesthetics, and politics are charged with is trying to figure out the complex role that design and designers play in distributing the sensible—that is, distributing what is experienced—thereby participating in the creation and provision of public goods in situated contexts of governance.

words, like slang terms associated with youth populations, or the jargon used in specific professional settings. A register might also be based in particular phonological features, for instance the simplification of consonant clusters common to baby talk ("tummy" for "stomach" and "choo-choo" for "train"), or the classic "r-less" character found in many East Coast working class dialects. Perhaps the most critical aspect of registers, though, regardless of the linguistic and cultural contexts in which they operate, is their capacity to create meaningful associations between identifiable linguistic forms and other specific, recognizable ideas, things, attitudes, kinds of people, and so on. The particular ways in which registers come to be—that is, how these links are forged, how certain bits and pieces of language come to be recognizably matched with particular culturally-inflected social values—is what linguistic anthropologist Asif Agha calls "enregisterment," or "processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms."[7]

7 Asif Agha, "The social life of cultural value," *Language & Communication* Vol. 23 (2003): 231.

I'm making this excursion into the terrain of language not because the specifics of linguistic register are necessarily relevant to design, but because I think the general concept of linguistic register exemplifies broader semiotic processes that play a significant role in how particular forms and particular social values have been brought together to help create a category called "design." While the entanglements of form and value are quite conspicuous in the domain of language, processes of enregisterment—of linking values to forms—also underlie and in many instances help explain how design can acquire a status as something more than simply "making," as leading to something other than mere things, and in particular, how design contributes to the construction of politically consequential public goods.

Using the concept of enregisterment to think about design offers a systematic way to examine design as a *process of aestheticization* extending across multiple sociocultural domains: studios, boardrooms, homes, retail spaces, the public sphere,

mediascapes; but also in governing spaces, lobbying spaces and more. It's an approach that privileges neither form nor process nor meaning, but concentrates on the specific relationships that inhere between these aspects—how they are constructed, maintained, transformed, reinforced, torn apart, rebuilt, and so on. What this requires is sustained attention to forms and values, to patterned reactions to those forms and values, to the processes that stitch those forms and values together, and to the distributed consequences of those relations. Again, "forms" need not be material: they can also be forms of action, forms of thought, forms of affect, forms of interaction. They can be, as Wittgenstein would have it, forms of life: ways of being in the world that give meaning and structure to experience.

The task that those of us who study the intersections of design, aesthetics, and politics are charged with is trying to figure out the complex role that design and designers play in distributing the sensible—that is, distributing what is experienced—thereby participating in the creation and provision of public goods in situated contexts of governance. This research program is, of course, quite broad, and what we come up with will necessarily look different in different cases. But as a basic starting point we should look to processes that shape and emplace and enstructure bureaucratic regimes, including the structures and infrastructures necessary for the provision of public utilities; the processes, places and interactions of public services; and the language, documents and implementation schemes of public policy.

DESIGN AND PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Carl DiSalvo

It seems like designers always want the world to be different. And even when it's not the specific desire of designers themselves to spark a particular change, designers and the practices of design are constantly being brought to bear by others to initiate change. After all, it's unusual to encounter products or services that have been designed to keep things the same. It's as if *difference* is a mantra associated with the best design. In the late 1990s, "Think Different" was the tagline for Apple, a company renowned for, even synonymous with, pristine product design. Striving for difference seems to be a hallmark of design, and delivering difference a laudable achievement in the field.

This difference that design strives for serves many purposes, though most often it is a market purpose—difference for the sake of the reward that comes with the new or the perceived-as-better-than-before. But to be fair, it is not just market purposes that motivate design. There are some examples, historical and current, of designers and the practices of design being applied to the work of effecting social change.

Some aspect of social change seems to be inherent in the topic of "New Public Goods," which joins together the essays in this volume. Many design theorists have spoken about the role of design in social change, and many designers provide examples of what that practice might look like. In this essay I will briefly address a single idea related to social change—prefigurative politics—and begin to explore what might be possible articulations between prefigurative politics and design. Although the term "prefigurative politics" may be unfamiliar, and is certainly a bit awkward, the ideas it encapsulates are, I believe, important for emerging practices

of design and design research. My intention, then, is to provide a way we might appreciate another set of possibilities for political design.

PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Prefigurative politics refers to practices that strive to enact desired political conditions or systems. When "doing" prefigurative politics, we act out the social values and relations we want to see realized—we perform them into being. This can occur at various scales, from individuals to groups to institutions, and in all manner of engagements within, between, and across. Likewise, there is no limit to the kinds of social relations that can be acted out; these can include organizational structures, modes of economic or communicative exchange, or affairs between friends, family members, or lovers. Prefigurative politics is a kind of demonstration that another way is possible, often one that takes place within a condition or system that would seem to suggest otherwise. For example, community land trusts, legal entities that allow for collective ownership of property, might be considered an example of prefigurative politics, since they enact and demonstrate the possibility of alternative forms of property ownership within the more pervasive institution of private property that characterizes many contemporary societies.

Prefigurative politics is both an expressive and experimental endeavor. Through the processes of enactment, we not only indicate the social relations we desire; we also test what works, and does not work, in the construction and maintenance of those social relations.

Although prefigurative politics has no essential political position or affiliation, many of the salient contemporary examples come from recent forays into direct democracy or modes of radical political organizing and action. Two such examples are the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) demonstrations in Seattle, Washington, and Occupy Wall Street (OWS). As anthropologist David Graeber has commented with regard to the WTO demonstrations:

> *When protesters in Seattle chanted "this is what democracy looks like," they meant to be taken literally. In the best tradition of direct action, they not only confronted a certain form of power, exposing its mechanisms and attempting literally to stop it in its tracks: they did it in a way which demonstrated why the kind of social relations on which it is based were unnecessary. This is why all the condescending remarks about the movement being dominated by a bunch of dumb kids with no coherent ideology completely missed the mark. The diversity was a function of the decentralized form of organization, and this organization was the movement's ideology.*[1]

Similarly, though under quite different circumstances, OWS too exemplifies a practice of prefigurative politics. OWS is a demonstration of a new form of political

1 David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 84.

structure and action within contemporary society. Like the WTO protests, OWS was accused of lacking a coherent political ideology or set of demands. But this lack of demands is precisely one of the characteristics of this particular prefigurative politics—it seeks to enact a condition that does not conform to politics as usual. To many, this is disconcerting, and perhaps that's also part of the point. Bernard Harcourt uses the term "political disobedience" to describe these actions.[2] Just as civil disobedience counters received norms of civil behavior, so political disobedience is intended to counter the norms of "politics as usual," while pointing the way toward alternative forms of political organization. And as with the WTO protests, the organization of OWS strives to enact, in a reflexive way, the politics it advocates. Thus, for instance, decision-making processes are built around a consensus model, with room for dissent, and leadership is distributed.

2 Bernard E. Harcourt, "Political Disobedience," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 39, no. 1 (2012): 33-55.

Prefigurative politics is both an expressive and experimental endeavor. Through the processes of enactment, we not only indicate the social relations we desire; we also test what works, and does not work, in the construction and maintenance of those social relations. True, these experiments are not formal ones, with stated hypotheses, independent and dependent variables, controls, and so on. But they are experiments nonetheless, in line with a long and continuing tradition of experiments with political form and social life. Through this experimentation, the constitution of the politics is iterated upon over and over again, as desires are achieved, thwarted, abandoned, or reimagined.

The signage of the Occupy Sandy Wayfinding project exemplifies the notion of design in service of a prefigurative political endeavor. The purpose of the signs qua signs is simple and straightforward. What is striking is their role, their use as material infrastructure for a politics of mutual aid, operating in parallel with established municipal services.

The question is how to move from a discussion of prefigurative politics to design, or rather, how to connect them in a productive manner that provides insights for appreciating another set of possibilities for political design. In the remainder of this essay, I will briefly indicate two ways that we can articulate design and prefigurative politics. The first is to show that the skills of designers might materially contribute to prefigurative politics. The second is to suggest that we might consider, in some cases, design research as itself a method of prefiguration.

DESIGN IN THE SERVICE OF PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Perhaps the most direct line between design and prefigurative politics is the use of design skills in direct material support of a prefigurative political endeavor. This is different from the use of design for marketing purposes, propaganda, public

relations, or advocacy. What I am talking about instead is the use of design in the service of producing, or contributing to the production of, the conditions, relations, or values desired.

Occupy Sandy, one of the many offshoots of the OWS movement, provides an example of design in the service of a prefigurative political endeavor. Initially a collective effort to support and provide relief to the victims of Hurricane Sandy, Occupy Sandy now includes an array of relief services, from providing hubs for distributing basic survival goods such as food, clothing, and provisions, to information exchange through a variety of social media platforms in support of community-based disaster resilience generally.[3] Similar in spirit is the Occupy Sandy Wayfinding project, which provides "crisis signage" templates to support collective efforts to point people toward relief services in the aftermath of a disaster.[4] The signs give basic information regarding the location of distribution points for food and water, clothing and fuel, medical services, and so on. Yellow and black with strong sans-serif typography, they are well-designed and wonderfully ordinary (the most inventive aspect of the signage is their ability to accommodate adjustments to the built-in arrows and numbers, respectively indicating direction and distance to various relief services, depending on the signs' location). The signage of the Occupy Sandy Wayfinding project, then, exemplifies the notion of design in service of a prefigurative political endeavor. The purpose of the signs qua signs is simple and straightforward. What is striking is their role, their use as material infrastructure for a politics of mutual aid, operating in parallel with established municipal services.

Design researchers Tau Ulv Lenskjold, Sissel Olander, and Joachim Halse describe a kind of "minor design" in the context of activist oriented co-design.[5] This conceptualization is informed by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a "minor literature."[6] For Lenskjold, Olander, and Halse, a minor design activism "is one that, rather than proclaiming a critical distance from the existing conditions, tries to move the internal organizational structure through design interventions that alter

The designer is one of a multitude of participants, bringing whatever knowledge and capabilities she has to address a problem or opportunity. Such a role for design does not require a radical reconsideration of what it is designers do as laborers within a given craft or art. But it does require a commitment to a purpose of practice that is, for many designers, unfamiliar.

3 See occupysandy.net

4 See occupywayfinding.crowdmap.com

5 Tau Ulv Lenskjold, Sissel Olander, and Joachim Halse, "Minor Design Activism: Prompting Change from Within," *Design Issues* Vol. 31, no. 4 (2015): 67-78.

6 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

the perceptual outlook of decision-makers about possible futures."[7] This notion of minor design is relevant to a consideration of design in the service of a prefigurative political endeavor. Common design skills may be made use of in the production of familiar artifacts and systems, which themselves contribute to the experimental instantiation of the desired conditions, relations, or values. The designer is one of a multitude of participants, bringing whatever knowledge and capabilities she has to address a problem or opportunity, whether in the present or in an anticipated future. Such a role for design does not require a radical reconsideration of what it is designers do as laborers within a given craft or art. But it does require a commitment to a purpose of practice that is, for many designers, unfamiliar.

7 Lenskjold, Olander, and Halse, "Minor Design Activism," 78.

DESIGN RESEARCH AS A METHOD OF PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

If design practice might be put toward useful ends in the service of prefigurative politics, what might be the value of design research? How might the research capacities of design contribute to the endeavor of prefigurative politics? To answer that question, I offer the possibility that design research might be directed toward first producing a better tactical understanding of how artifacts, systems, and environments shape our social structures and actions, and then, as a main agenda, experimenting with new forms and configurations of artifacts, systems, and environments in order to discover, if only in abbreviated ways, the desired conditions of a prefigurative politics.

It may seem odd to think of using design to "discover" possible political forms, but in fact it is common to examine existing products and services and analyze them for their political qualities or effects. That line of inquiry is present in design studies as well as fields such as science and technology studies, which has a rich and nuanced body of literature examining the politics of artifacts. Indeed, those studies, and the theories and methodologies that undergird them, are important for the first application of design research toward prefigurative politics: producing a better tactical understanding of how designed things of all kinds shape political possibilities, experiences, and agencies. What can be added to these studies is a set of implications for political design: informed propositions for how and what we might design differently, so as to achieve the desired conditions of a given prefigurative politics.

Design research could be a method of prefiguration, combining reflexive learning of what we aspire to in our social relations and values and the invention of possible courses of action in the service of those aspirations.

Hints of the use of design research to discover the desired conditions of a prefigurative politics are found in speculative design—the use of design to imagine and

instantiate possible futures, the primary purpose being to elucidate what social conditions might be associated with those futures. Indeed, in their book *Speculative Everything*, Tony Dunne and Fiona Raby explore speculative design at the scale of society.[8] But speculative design alone is not sufficient for research into prefigurative political conditions; moreover, too often it celebrates the spectacle over inquiry or critique. What is needed is a kind of speculation without the spectacular. Although hints of this form of design research exist, as a general practice it is still at an early stage of development.

Design research to discover the desired conditions of a prefigurative politics would use a research-through-design approach to produce prototypes of artifacts, systems, and environments through which we could experience possible political conditions. We might, as I have suggested elsewhere, experiment with modes of an agonistic democracy.[9] Or we might experiment with modes of communitarianism or with modes of withdrawal. In this way, design research could be a method of prefiguration, a means of inquiry that is particular, but also partial, allowing for exploration through iteration. Arguably, as with other prototyping practices, such exploration might allow for the discovery of desired conditions—that is, to a combined reflexive learning of what we aspire to in our social relations and values and the invention of possible courses of action in the service of those aspirations.

Design can make political speculation easier to experience, to experiment with, and ultimately to enact.

There is a challenge in pursuing design research as a method of prefiguration: we must embrace the deep impact of designed things in the construction of our social and political lives, while resisting a deterministic perspective. What knowledge we get from this design research will be limited, situated and particular. And although design has effects, those effects are bounded. One of the most important lessons we can learn from science and technology studies is that the agencies and consequences of design are not universal or timeless—quite the opposite. But even as a tentative practice, design research as a method of prefiguration has the potential to contribute to new forms of politics, to social change.

CONCLUSION

The articulation of prefigurative politics and design is something other than design as problem solving—that is, design as usual. This articulation of prefigurative politics brings together speculation and direct action. The speculation is not so much in the design itself, but rather, in the politics. Put differently, it is not that designers are themselves called upon to speculate, but rather, that designers may be called upon to enable speculation. In the best of circumstances, design can make political speculation easier to experience, to experiment with, and ultimately to enact.

8 Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

9 Carl DiSalvo, *Adversarial Design* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

When pursing an agenda of social change, prefigurative politics may not be enough. And there is more that design has to give in the service of social change. Articulations between design and prefigurative politics can, however, be part of an overall strategy. Theorist Tony Fry has written extensively about the prefigurative role and potential of design. In discussing strategies for change, he states:

> *This perspective cannot be singular, nationalist, or utopian. The vision has to be able to be pursued by plural means, be lodged in the local and the global, and be a regime able to deliver realizable results framed by actual needs in time rather than by pragmatics. As such, the address to change has to be reactive (identifying and responding to what needs to change), prefigurative (establishing new directions) and bonded to a new economic paradigm.*[10]

Fry's conception of prefiguration is as one element in a multi-faceted approach to social change. As Fry notes, prefiguration is a way of using design to stage possible courses of action. At the same time, it is necessary to have a reactive mode of design as well, to act in and for the moment, in that space of politics that is not prefigurative. Both are necessary. Any approach to a pluralistic political condition must itself be pluralistic.

My hope for this essay was to tentatively explore a way we might appreciate another set of possibilities for political design—the possibilities that emerge from an articulation of design and prefigurative politics. At present, these possibilities are still just fragmentary hints of what might be. As the field of design continues its forays into new contexts and purposes, many of which are social, if not explicitly political, it's worth constantly considering new modes of design, new uses of design, and new purposes for design research.

10 Tony Fry, *Design as Politics* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 166-167.

CONTESTED TERRAIN: (NEW) PUBLIC GOODS AND PARTICIPATORY DESIGN PRACTICES

Joan Greenbaum

Those things created by and for the public have historically been a contested terrain, particularly in the U.S. Understandings of where to draw the dividing line between private (and more recently, corporate) ownership and those goods held collectively by the public has shifted with changing ideologies and developments in the social and economic spheres. This article will first examine historical examples of public goods in the American context, followed by more recent examples of practices drawn from the field of digital design.[1] I then address some of the policy implications surrounding the issue of internet access. Since the central theme is that of "contested terrain," there will be no grand conclusions. Rather, the examples and theoretical perspectives will illustrate my conviction that design practitioners today need to feel comfortable operating within, and above all engaging in, public discourse around the shifting sensibilities regarding public versus private goods. This is not as easy as some practitioners in traditional design disciplines would like to think: in the field of digital design, for example, standard textbooks typically lay out principles and methods as if there were a simple, linear path to completed projects.[2] In exploring the broad terrain of diverse perceptions regarding public goods, I hope to help design professionals better understand ongoing practices, thereby to intervene more effectively in the service of progressive social and political change.

PUBLIC GOODS IN U.S. HISTORY

Road construction and access to roads offers a classic example of how Americans have tussled with the issue of defining "public" goods. At the end of the 18th century, all of the original colonies, and in some cases individual counties, had their

1 My research has focused for the last 40 years on computer system design, followed by participatory design in internet or digital based environments.

2 See, e.g., Joel Spolsky, *User Interface Design for Programmers* (Berkeley: Apress, 2001).

own laws both about who could build roads and who had the right to access and use them. New Jersey, for example—an important transit point between the shipping ports of New York and Philadelphia—allowed each county or municipality to build its own roads, for which tolls could be collected. Toll collectors were able to put pikes (sticks) across the roadways, forcing drivers to stop and pay the toll before the pike would be lifted or "turned." To this day, the New Jersey Turnpike remains an artifact of this piecemeal approach to land transportation, although the tolls are now collected by a state agency. By contrast, the Garden State Parkway, another major New Jersey route, still collects tolls by individual county agencies, maintaining a public-private structure. Other colonies drew the public/private boundary differently, with Massachusetts and New York State, for example, centralizing control over local road building and access—and later in the 19th century, over canal construction.[3]

This differentiated handling of what became, in many cases, public or semi-public infrastructure was reflected in the Constitution of the United States, which initially created a small Federal government, granting most rights to the states and further limiting Federal prerogatives with the Bill of Rights, which gave individuals power over the government they had jointly created.[4] Thus, "contested terrain," both between individuals and their government and between communities, was inscribed in the nation's founding documents. The tension remains not only in the current ideologies of the Republican and Democratic parties, but in the differing ways corporations are allowed to function and be licensed in each state.

Design practitioners today need to feel comfortable engaging in public discourse around the shifting sensibilities regarding public versus private goods.

Debates about the appropriate boundary between public and private affairs continue to this day, adding to the considerable confusion around what should be considered "public" goods, and what goods should be construed as being entirely private. Attaining a better understanding of the issues requires us to examine the shifting historical connotations of these terms. In the late 19th and early part of the 20th century, for example, a wave of populism swept the U.S., the result of joining the concept of democracy with the idea that individuals could do more through collective action. Populist speakers, thinkers and government representatives helped build support for new public goods such as settlement houses for indigent people, public health clinics, birthing clinics and public schools. One result of this commitment to provision of public health and public education was the construction of thousands of large, airy school and hospital buildings, with large windows and high ceilings to let in lots of light and fresh air.[5] In these instances, public

3 See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005).

4 See Zinn, *A People's History*.

5 See Thomas P. Hughes, *Human-Built World: How to Think about Technology and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

"goods" were realized both in a product—for example, a school building—and a *process*—namely, the process of building an educated citizenry, and thereby a thriving, vital democracy. The two uses of "good," as product (often infrastructure) and as process (something leading to and supporting other functions), remain relevant in current discussions about public goods, including those in the digital realm, a topic I address below.

It is also important to note that, up until the early 20th century, the process of creating American infrastructure was one in which the "designers"—whether road builders, architects or surveyors—were largely self-taught lay people. As the century unfolded, however, the institutionalization of education helped to raise standards and expectations surrounding the increasingly specialized design and engineering professions.[6] This process had a drastic impact on urban design, as is illustrated by the city planning model dominant during the late 1950s and 60s. Behind this model was a view of inner cities as "blights" or "cancers" on the land, and a corresponding belief that the only way to eradicate these cancers was to knock down buildings and rebuild on a massive scale. New York City, among others, saw entire neighborhoods razed and housing blocks, often offered as public housing, erected in their stead. Highways, the new and much-praised form of publicly funded private transportation, were similarly planned in ways that disregarded the integrity of neighborhoods, reflecting the relentless march of "progress" regardless of its effect on local communities.[7] Predictably, this "modernist" concept of urban development gave rise to new counter-movements, including calls for human-scale development, architectural preservation and strengthened or revitalized public transportation.[8] With the public housing and public roads projects heavily subsidized by large outlays of city, state and Federal monies, the enormous scale of construction and the associated sale of lands created fantastic new opportunities for the real estate and building industries and their investors—further complicating the question whether these initiatives should be understood as establishing primarily "public" or "private" goods.

There remains a gulf between the private development of large-scale information and communication technologies (ICTs) and those smaller-scale experiments, like open source coding, that operate in a "bottom-up" fashion. The customer often suffers.

FROM COMPUTER SYSTEMS TO DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS

Similar debates have also characterized the introduction of computer systems and the ways they have been designed, controlled and accessed. In the 1960s and 70s, the early years of commercial and governmental computer use, data systems were designed for big corporations and built around large mainframe computers. The design of these "data processing systems" was based on developments in operations research during World War II. Operations research proceeds from the

6 See Stanley Aronowitz, *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

7 See Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974); see also Joseph Tirella, *Tomorrow-Land: The 1964-65 World's Fair and the Transformation of America* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2014).

8 See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

Given the current debates concerning issues of internet access, control of information, corporate domination, and ownership and use of big data, it is important to look for spaces where bottom-up actions could make inroads for generating new public goods.

assumption that every large problem can be broken down into smaller problems, and linear computer models can be programmed from the resulting specifications. Customs, traditions, and end users' human needs tend to be left out of these equations.

Much as with urban planning and construction in the mid- to late-20th century, occupations such as computer programming and systems analysis, which had generally been of the "learn-on-the-job" variety, began to become more specialized, routinized and focused on increasingly narrow tasks.[9] Many of the free-wheeling, self-educated practitioners of the previous generation, meanwhile, became part of the bureaucratic hierarchy dominant at the time. A similar process was repeated in the 1980s and 90s, as the first commercially-available microcomputers were mainly programmed by end users—many of them, once again, self-taught. At first, therefore, the actual use of personal computers developed in relative independence from the intentions of the large institutions that had dominated the mainframe era; however, as software became a more important part of the economics of the computer industry, programmers, analysts and engineers were increasingly folded back into corporate structures.[10]

Unlike other design fields such as architecture, clothing or furniture, in the computer-intensive parts of the U.S. economy there were few, if any, known "designers," although corporations like Microsoft and Apple strongly branded the work done by their employees. Contrasting with the recent lionization of Steve Jobs, in the early decades of the industry both computers and the software programs they ran were mostly designed and developed by ordinary, unsung employees.[11]

Many inside the information systems field held high hopes for the internet, and its supposed power to break down corporate control of the technical development process. The actual results, however, have been more mixed. There can be little doubt that open source code and the "coding commons," in which programmers and software engineers share codes and ideas, have been welcome additions, contributing to a more public process and more widely-shared information technology

9 See Joan Greenbaum, *In the Name of Efficiency: Management Theory and Shopfloor Practice in Data-Processing Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).

10 See Joan Greenbaum, *Windows on the Workplace: Technology, Jobs, and the Organization of Office Work*, 2nd ed., (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004).

11 See Thomas Streeter, *The Net Effect: Romanticism, Capitalism, and the Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

products. But there remains a gulf between the private development of large-scale information and communication technologies (ICTs) and those smaller-scale experiments, like open source coding, that operate in a "bottom-up" fashion. The customer often suffers: among other clients, government agencies in the U.S. have often been poorly served in purchasing information systems from large vendors, systems that either don't fit or can't be tailored to meet specific agency needs. The most recent well-known case was the failure of the Affordable Health Care Act's web-based enrollment system, a Federal project intended to make it easy to research, compare, and purchase health insurance online.[12] Similarly, a centralized 911 emergency calling system in New York City has been repeatedly faulted for being unable to differentiate a call highlighting a merely potential fire hazard from one requiring an immediate police or Fire Department response.[13] Other problems in the purchase of ICT systems by government entities have included poor bidding processes, attempts by some contractors to cut corners or otherwise defraud the government agency that hired them, and managers who are not always knowledgeable enough to order or coordinate an ICT installation. Today, large information system design remains an evolving and complex process, and one which should not be confused with newer public goods that can be put into play on very local levels by citizens themselves.

Similarly, it is obvious that widespread internet access and the success of social media applications has opened up computer use to larger populations—a good thing in itself. While early claims that so-called Web 2.0 applications would democratize the internet were overblown, there are clearly multiple new opportunities for people to participate rather than act as a passive audience. But participation needs to be seen in the wider context of control and access to the internet itself. Much like the diverse roadbuilding initiatives of the 19th century, and the urban "renewal" schemes of the 20th, internet control and access is an important contemporary example of an evolving contested terrain highlighting the boundary between public and private goods. While earlier internet sites were predominately educational, individual and governmental, the bulk of Internet sites today are owned by commercial concerns. This has given rise to new applications that gather "big data" on people's internet use.[14] Of equal concern, of course, is the issue of large-scale government surveillance of individuals and groups—concern that has grown much more acute in the wake of the revelations enabled by Edward Snowden's release of thousands of classified government documents. One piece of good news has been the Federal Communications Commission's recent ruling in favor of the principle of net neutrality.[15]

Like the diverse roadbuilding initiatives of the 19th century, and the urban "renewal" schemes of the 20th, internet control and access is an important contemporary example of an evolving contested terrain highlighting the boundary between public and private goods.

12 Eric Lipton, Ian Austen and Sharon LaFraniere, "Tensions and Flaws Before Health Website Crash," *New York Times*, November 22, 2013, nytimes.com/2013/11/23/us/politics/tension-and-woes-before-health-website-crash.html?pagewanted=all.

13 Michael Schwirtz, "More Computer Failures in City's 911 System," *New York Times*, July 22, 2013, nytimes.com/2013/07/23/nyregion/more-computer-failures-in-citys-911-system.html.

14 See Robert W. McChesney, *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

15 Rebecca R. Ruiz, "F.C.C. Sets Neutrality Rules," *New York Times*, March 12, 2015, nytimes.com/2015/03/13/technology/fcc-releases-net-neutrality-rules.html.

DESIGN PRACTICES TODAY: PARTICIPATION AND BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES

Given the current debates concerning issues of internet access, control of information, corporate domination, and ownership and use of big data, it is important to look for spaces where bottom-up actions could make inroads for generating new public goods. As noted above, the customer, client, or end user of an emerging new technology often finds a use for it that transcends the expectations of the experts who designed the technology.[16] In digital design, this process has taken many forms. By the end of the 1980s, social scientists studying the ways that computer systems were used enabled designers to see practices on the ground—what was really happening in actual use situations, as opposed to controlled tests in company labs.[17] This influx of empirical information helped lead to a break from the rationalistic approach in favor of more collaborative methods.[18] Thus, during the 1990s a Participatory Design movement developed in the computer field, giving rise to biannual conferences and new fields of study focused on how designers could develop computer systems that better fit actual client and consumer needs. As the field has grown, and as computer systems have evolved into digital applications, even more emphasis has been placed on viewing the world from the bottom up.

The *Handbook of Participatory Design*, an outgrowth of this work over twenty years, offers examples and approaches for designing both large-scale ICTs and smaller digital tools.[19] Process is key to participatory approaches, since involving and giving voice to groups of people obviously affects the outcomes or products. Participatory research and design raise the likelihood that both the intended users in the target market, as well as historically marginalized or underprivileged people, can join together in proposing alternatives to corporate dominance over computer and software development. Active participation is certainly necessary, but is it sufficient to challenge the now international landscape of large-scale control over digital resources? In the contested terrain of digital design as a potential source of new public goods, it is still too early to tell.

16 See also Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

17 See Lucy Suchman, *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

18 See Joan Greenbaum and Morten Kyng, eds., *Design at Work: Cooperative Design of Computer Systems* (New York: CRC Press, 1991).

19 See Jesper Simonsen and Toni Robertson, eds., *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

AESTHETICS AS POLITICS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DISRUPTIVE DESIGN PRACTICES

Virginia Tassinari

ART AND LIFE

Today in the West, we are witnessing a shift in the idea of politics. The political paradigm that has dominated Western societies for the past several centuries is breaking apart from within. Grassroots social innovation—together with design practices that work to empower such innovation and disrupt the status quo—can be interpreted as an ensemble of moments of self-criticism, in which new ideas of politics can be fostered. These new practices open up spaces for social interaction, and possibilities for new kinds of collaboration. One result is that today, we are undergoing a transformation in the notion of the "public realm." Many practices around the world are showing evidence of this shift. In this essay, I aim to indicate a few possible tracks that may inspire further investigations of this issue. I believe there are two authors in particular who can help us in this task, and in establishing an adequate theoretical framework for understanding and fostering new forms of public good: the philosophers Jacques Rancière and Hannah Arendt.

Rancière maintains that the contemporary rise of a new political paradigm coincides with the emergence of a new conception of aesthetics. Aesthetics can alter received understandings of the public realm because it makes visible and tangible—and, as such, accessible—that which previously was not. It opens up to each citizen new possibilities for having a stake in the shared task of communal living.

Rancière's understanding of aesthetics recuperates ideas previously introduced by Friedrich Schiller, often cited as the "father" of modern aesthetic theory: "Schiller says that aesthetic experience will bear the edifice of the art of the beautiful and the

art of living."[1] To Rancière, aesthetics is not the exclusive province of the fine arts alone: it also involves the "art of living" within society. Aesthetic experience is "a specific sensory experience that holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community ...."[2] Rancière's general name for the domain of aesthetic experience, in its full breadth, is the "distribution of the sensible."[3] Here, the notion of aesthetic experience as something *distributed* is intended to register the various inequalities, in wealth, political influence, and so on, that characterize all modern societies. The concept of the "distribution of the sensible" reveals, therefore, that aesthetics coincides with politics. The "facts"—spaces, times, experiences, and access thereto—of contemporary social contexts show how deeply the general look and feel of things is connected to the manifestation of power—in particular, the power to participate in, and to propose alternatives to, a common realm:

> *The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed[;] it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.*[4]

In a word, aesthetics ultimately is politics, inasmuch as "politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time."[5] At least implicitly, then, aesthetics thus involves a promise of a new way to experience the world, to be part of it and act within it, and suggests new forms of social interaction that may support the emergence of more genuinely democratic societies. Indeed, aesthetics holds up the possibility of developing a "new sensorium"[6]: a re-configuring of the terms of shared social existence, such that individuals might have a greater stake in society than at present. The "new sensorium" is the field of action where new modes of living can be configured, and "a consensual framing for the common world"[7] reformulated. This new sensory field, Rancière maintains, consists of

> *a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation.*[8]

So art and life, including political life, are bound together in the aesthetic experience. But different societies and civilizations have had varying success in

1 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 116.

2 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 115.

3 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 13.

4 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

5 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

6 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 118.

7 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

8 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 119

registering this fact in the political discussions of their day. Rancière cites ancient Greece as a culture that successfully integrated art into the wider social context. The Greek polis, he argues, presents a model of "a collective life that does not rend itself into separate spheres of activities ... a community where art and life, art and politics, life and politics are not severed one from another."[9]

Grassroots social innovation and disruptive design practices exemplify the rise of a new aesthetics, which may lead to new forms of politics.

In the modern age, however, art and life, aesthetics and politics did become separated into distinct spheres of thought and action. Politics became the prerogative of a small professional class whose members make decisions on behalf of the collective. Democracy became representative, thus no longer requiring the ongoing active participation of the citizenry, as it had used to do with the aristocrats of the ancient Greek polis. Aesthetics, meanwhile, became the prerogative of art alone, and not also of a generalized "art of living" as in previous centuries. Indeed, art ceased to be overtly connected to life at all, ending in the theoretical cul-de-sac of *l'art pour l'art*, aesthetics understood as a discourse exclusively focused on art works. Yet Rancière argues that the modern separation of art and life, aesthetics and politics, is now coming to an end. A new aesthetics is emerging in its place, one which again, as in ancient Greece, makes the fundamental coincidence of aesthetics and politics more visible and hence something subject to discussion and debate. Indeed, he says, today we are witnessing new aesthetic experiences—new forms of living, a new sensorium—in which the prevailing, inherited boundaries between private and public are increasingly called into question. Individuals are being empowered to take part in the public sphere, and indeed, in a much more fully democratic way than in ancient Greece, where political participation was limited to adult male citizens (women, slaves, and most foreigners were excluded from voting or other forms of political activity). Rancière calls this emerging movement "the aesthetic revolution."[10]

DESIGN AND DISRUPTION

I believe that evidence of this revolution can be seen in emerging forms of grassroots social innovation, representing alternatives to the corrosive individualism and unsustainable consumerism afflicting many Western societies today. Similarly, design practices that challenge mainstream consumer society can be understood as "art" in Rancière's broad sense, which includes any and all creative practices that help make visible and tangible a new paradigm for organizing our lives and communities. Grassroots social innovation and disruptive design practices exemplify the rise of a new aesthetics, which may lead to new forms of politics.

9 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 118.

10 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 124.

Examples of "disruption" in the relevant sense are increasingly prevalent today. The "maker" movement seeks alternatives to industrial forms of the production and distribution of goods. Community gardens and Community Supported Agriculture initiatives can be seen as emergent, bottom-up practices that disrupt industrial modes of food provision. The introduction of alternative currencies is similarly disruptive to the international monetary system. The shift from the notion of private ownership to that of use—as in car- and tool-sharing, for instance—is a direct challenge to the institution of private property.[11]

11 For numerous other examples of bottom-up design-driven initiatives, see the collection of cases in the online repository desis-showcase.org. See also Thomas Markussen, "The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics," *Design Issues* Vol. 29, no. 1 (2013): 38-50.

The emerging aesthetics/politics is a reconfiguration of that which can be seen, heard, or become an object of sensory experience in any way. It represents an enabling factor for more actors to play a role in society. Contemporary design practices and bottom-up changes can be interpreted as signals—still weak but growing stronger—of an increasing sensitivity which opens up a new idea of the public sphere, the space in which citizens are enabled to take action within society. This emergent aesthetics/politics, then, represents the possibility for new types of social interaction in which the idea of shared or public goods can be re-shaped and redefined. Here, for instance, ownership might be replaced by sharing, individualism by co-responsibility, and zero-sum competition by collaboration. According to Rancière, the emergence of a new aesthetics/politics can be encouraged by means of dialogue and debate: given the entrenched and widely divergent interests involved, consensus is not to be expected in the near term; political progress will require a space for dissensus and agonism. But in order to facilitate these productive democratic confrontations, one needs new agoras.

Contemporary design practices can be interpreted as signals of an increasing sensitivity which opens up a new idea of the public sphere, representing the possibility for new types of social interaction in which the idea of shared or public goods can be re-shaped and redefined.

Hannah Arendt writes about the Greek agora as the place where citizens could discuss important matters regarding the life of the polis, the common realm, and address their general and specific concerns in a collaborative way. The public was empowered by the dialogue between various stakeholders, and the resulting agreements could often be immediately translated into action. For Arendt, dialogue is itself the form of political action par excellence, the medium through which politics is formed. Dialogue and debate about shared or public goods is what enables the democratic process of joint decision-making regarding matters of common concern. Moreover, for Arendt, the corresponding possibility to fulfill one's own vocation as a citizen and to take responsibility for one's actions in society is actually constitutive of individual identity and human fulfillment. As Aristotle also believed, human nature is irreducibly political: we are *zoon politikon*,

Designers, policy makers, civil servants and citizens alike can contribute to the creation of "safe spaces": temporary arenas for emerging forms of visibility to be expressed and shared.

the political animal. When we find our vocation in society and our own voices therein, we also fulfill our destiny as human beings. This is Arendt's interpretation of the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia*, often translated as "happiness" but which actually refers more broadly to a holistic human flourishing that, in her view, essentially includes political participation and action. Arendt thus believes that one cannot be truly happy or fulfilled without articulating and enacting one's own stake in the ongoing constitution and definition of a common realm. Like Rancière after her, Arendt believed that genuine politics—the configuration of public life though human interactions taking place in the agora—essentially ceased with the introduction of representative democracy: we have never had true politics since, the citizenry now having abdicated its public responsibilities and powers, outsourcing these to a professional political class.[12]

Rancière's heralding of an emergent "aesthetic revolution" amounts to a call for a return to politics in Arendt's valorized sense—that is, as involving the participation of the individual in the public realm through discourse and action.[13] Rancière believes further that the redefinition of the commons is something empowered by contemporary artistic practices and arts of living. Disruptive design practices and grassroots social innovation are together helping to frame a new idea of aesthetics/politics. In a world in which things are increasingly brought into visibility, a growing number of citizens can have access to the process of becoming an active part of the political process, redefining the commons and claiming a stake therein.

Grassroots social innovation represents a new development in the "arts of living." When designers make new social practices visible and tangible, they contribute to enlarging the field of action in the new aesthetics/politics, since their work helps to elicit a new sensibility and thus create the preconditions for the rise of a new common realm. The designer today works to create, as Rancière puts it, "not only objects but a new sensorium, a new partition of the sensible."[14]

This is a process that takes time. The transition toward a new aesthetic/political paradigm, therefore, requires patience: new forms of visibility and accessibility of the commons need to be experimented with and further shaped. In order to do so, one needs "safe" environments that allow these experiments to take

12 See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958).

13 Yet as noted, Rancière also stresses the necessity of a *dissensus* between citizens, rather than the consensus celebrated by Arendt in *The Human Condition*. He speaks, that is, of disagreement and agonism as being necessary to the sort of dialogue that has the potential to lead to a genuine (re)formation of the public sphere.

14 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 122.

place. Designers, policy makers, civil servants and citizens alike can contribute to the creation of such safe spaces: temporary arenas for these emerging forms of visibility to be expressed and shared. Public innovation places such as MindLab in Copenhagen[15] and La 27ième Region[16] in France are examples of such initiatives, in which a wide variety of civic actors are enabled to experiment with new types of agoras, and to safely try out new forms of redefinition of the civic realm. What is at stake here is precisely the possibility, identified by Arendt, for individual citizens to find their *eudaimonia*, their happiness and full flourishing, in re-discovering our lost vocation as the "political animal."

The advent of a new aesthetics/politics is a process emerging slowly and for the most part independently from what designers do. Nevertheless, their work of disrupting the status quo, and of representing and enabling alternative arts of living, can be seen as a catalyst and accelerator of those processes that may yet lead to an aesthetics whose political dimensions are once again overt, as in ancient Greece. It is our role as designers to start to imagine this landscape, in which citizens are empowered to take on more active roles in public discourse. Designers in the field of social innovation have a political impact. When they become aware of this fact, they can contribute to the creation of new agoras, thereby advancing the difficult but necessary work of redefining common goals and envisioning new public goods.

15 mind-lab.dk/en.

16 la27eregion.fr/en.

SECTION 2:
LABS, PUBLICS AND PRACTICES

REDEFINING THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION WITH GEORGE AND DUSTIN

Sarah Schulman

George knocks in patterns of three, five minutes before 11pm, despite the sign on apartment door #303 alerting fellow residents that the InWithForward team has gone to bed. “The rattlesnakes in my mind won’t quiet down,” George, age 56, announces as we open the door. “I’m tired of being so lonely.”

Based in Burnaby, a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia, the InWithForward project team is made up of six members including myself (I’m a sociologist), two designers, an urban planner, and two secondees from local community living agencies. We are embedded researchers, process facilitators, investors, neighbors. We are friends. Our task is to understand and reshape lived realities with the residents we live alongside, and the professionals and policymakers we work alongside. Our ambition is to peel back the labels attached to people—homeless, addict, offender, senior, single mom—and remake social safety nets, so that welfare systems and social services operate more like trampolines: supporting people to bounce up over time, rather than simply cushioning people’s fall at a given point in time.

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The methods we apply (ethnography, co-design, prototyping) and the organizational structure we use (change lab) are inherently political, meaning that they explicitly involve the possible redistribution of power. I believe that the ability of these methods and structures to prompt lasting change depends on our redefining political concepts such as “participation,”

"inclusion" and "exclusion." In what follows I will also critique and offer alternatives to the verbs "imagine" and "design" and the nouns "publics" and "citizens." Throughout, I will interweave examples from two of InWithForward's on-the-ground case studies: the *Me, Us, and Them Starter* Project in Burnaby, and the *St. Chris Stories* Project in Toronto, Ontario.

TWO CASE STUDIES

InWithForward is a social enterprise I co-founded based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. During the spring of 2014, InWithForward ran two projects in Canada to test twenty-one "hunches" animating the organization's mission about how to change simultaneously the behaviors of people and of systems.[1] After ten years of (mostly ineffectual) individual efforts to redesign social services in Australia, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, we hoped to set up, sequence, and finance project work more like a social movement. To do this, we would bring together service delivery organizations, service users, and community members to raise the visibility of populations ill-served by existing systems, to advocate for system engagement, and to demonstrate viable alternatives. In order to amass evidence of alternatives, we would invest in intensive bursts of fieldwork.

The *St. Chris Stories* Project unfolded over twelve days at the corner of Queen Street West and Bathurst Street in downtown Toronto.[2] Perched on that street corner is The Meeting Place, a drop-in center for people who are homeless or precariously housed, most living with drug and alcohol addictions. In the twelve months preceding the project, over twenty-two members of The Meeting Place had unexpectedly passed away, more than in any other year. In partnering with the leadership of The Meeting Place, we asked: how do we not just keep people alive, but enable them to move forward with their lives? By spending mornings, evenings, and weekends with sixteen Meeting Place members, we were able to re-frame the problem (drop-in centers as places encouraging *too much* belonging and providing *too little* incentive for change), and to develop scenarios for a more differentiated range of supports. Local organizations are now using these scenarios to broker partnerships with foundations and government agencies for nine months of prototyping new support mechanisms.

Our first act is always to question the naming and framing of a social problem, since the construction of a problem is, in and of itself, a political act and intervention.

The *Me, Us, and Them Starter* Project took place over ten weeks in the Edmonds/Kingsway neighborhood of Burnaby, British Columbia.[3] Our team of six moved into a social housing complex to develop answers to the question: how do we increase connectedness and belonging, particularly among residents who are left out and stigmatized, including the disabled, unemployed, seniors, and refugees?

1 To read the twenty-one hunches, see inwithforward.com/resources/hunches.

2 For more information about the St. Chris Stories Project, see inwithforward.com/projects/toronto.

3 For more information about the Me, Us, and Them Starter Project, see inwithforward.com/projects/burnaby.

Fifty ethnographies of residents and frontline staff later, we had begun to reframe the challenge of serving these populations.

Most residents were connected—to friends, family, or services—but these connections often perpetuated the same scripts, and hence the same stuckness. These relationships weren't a source of new input, ideas, or experiences. Working with the residents, we co-developed ten scenarios for new services and neighborhood networks that might increase people's sense of self and their own future. Alongside the fieldwork, we curated a "Debriefing Team" for social service providers and civil servants to gain exposure to the methods and emergent solutions. Social service providers from the debriefing team are now negotiating with their government and foundation funders to finance a nine-month prototype of new community living services.

FROM IMAGINING TO IMMERSING

For us, project work always starts in context, with members of our target population experiencing a social challenge identified by *others*. Our first act is always to question the naming and framing of a social problem. As feminist writer Carol Lee Bacchi explains, the construction of a problem is, in and of itself, a political act and intervention:

> *Any description of an issue or a "problem" is an interpretation, and interpretations involve judgment and choices. Crucially, we also need to realize that interpretations are interventions since they have programmatic outcomes; that is, the interpretation offered will line up with particular policy recommendations.*[4]

To reframe problems, then, we must recognize *where* our interpretations come from. From experts and secondary sources? From experience and direct observation? While design methods emphasize the latter, they say little about *why* or *how* to observe. Are we to observe in order to empathetically imagine what it might be like to be in somebody else's shoes? Or are we to observe in order to immerse ourselves in that somebody's context in a deeper and thus more critical way?

FIGURE 1: Dustin's favorite panhandling spot, Toronto, March 2014.

4 Carol Lee Bacchi, *Women, Policy, and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 1-2.

FIGURE 2: Testing ideas with George in Burnaby, June 2014

Dustin's context is the stained sidewalk in front of the coffee shop. There he sits most days, reaching up to press the electronic door opener, in exchange for a coin or dollar bill. There he lies many evenings, passed out, until the police prod him to go home—because Dustin has a home. Were Dustin the subject of a user-centered design project, we might interview him at one particular time, on one particular day, retuning to our studio to develop a representation of our conversation: perhaps as a persona, or as an element in a "service journey" map. Forming representations of objects, events, or scenes is the essence of imagination. But while imagination is a critical component of creativity, without immersion, our representations risk missing critical components for change.

For example, had we not observed Dustin late in the evening, we might have missed him swaying in front of a music club, entry denied. We would have missed how he craves dance—and also how, without an increasingly potent drug cocktail, he is in too much physical pain to move. None of this information was elicited during our talk-based interview. Yet understanding Dustin's triggers and his aspirations gave us important hints about the kinds of intervention that might address both what *others* see as the problem (his drug use) and what *he* sees as the problem (his lack of mobility).

FROM DESIGNING FOR TO MAKING WITH

Immersion is not a guarantee against the design team's possible misrepresentations of what they are seeing. No matter how many hours we spend in context, we remain privileged visitors, able to choose the times of our arrivals and departures.

Our outsider status encourages our own biased perspective, through which our ideas are filtered. The only mechanism we have found for making our own biases contestable and malleable is to return our ethnographic stories, generative scenarios, and mocked-up touchpoints with the user to those users themselves, soliciting their feedback.

Indeed, it is through multiple rapid cycles of feedback and iteration that we transfer—and share ownership over—our insights and suggested interventions. Unless end users and system stakeholders feel a sense of control and competency over what is emerging, they are unlikely to invest in the hard work of behavior change.[5] In the act of making our assumptions explicit and our ideas real *with* users and stakeholders, we hope to increase receptivity and motivation for change. By contrast, when we design *for* people, we risk overlooking this important potential basis for instituting lasting change.

FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE

Most of the levers for changing behaviors lie in the crevice between the private and public spheres. Dustin's craving for drugs is heightened late at night, long after the social workers and drug addiction counselors of Toronto have gone home for the day. Similarly, George, our neighbor in Burnaby, felt most alone late at night. What George wanted above all was to meet a woman and get married. He is a heavy user of publicly subsidized mental health services; but although his case workers could talk to him *about* relationships, they could not cross the public-private line and accompany him to a pub to meet women. In the absence of changes in his private life, George's cost to the public will most likely continue to rise.

Too often, "design for the public sector" fails to critically reassess what actually constitutes the public and private spheres in a given context.

Too often, "design for the public sector" fails to critically reassess what actually constitutes the public and private spheres in a given context. Political studies professor Raia Prokovnik argues that what brings us together as citizens isn't our shared activities within the public sphere (such as employment or voting), but the diversity of our activities in the private sphere. She goes on to critique the very idea of a public-private divide: "For it is the very tendency to think in dualistic terms about public and private—the need to define oneself in opposition to, in rejection of, and in a hierarchy with something else, rather than in connection to it—that needs to be overcome."[6] Rather than accept a received dualistic boundary between public and private, we attempt to efface it, both in our methodology and in our (co-)designed solutions.

5 See Albert Bandura, "Self-Efficacy Mechanism in Human Agency," *American Psychologist* Vol. 37, no. 2 (1982): 122.

6 Raia Prokhovnik, "Public and Private Citizenship: From Gender Invisibility to Feminist Inclusiveness," *Feminist Review* Vol. 60, no. 1 (1998): 87.

CONCLUSION

Blurring boundaries between the public and private spheres; between designing *for* and making *with*; and between imagination and immersion is not without ethical tensions and risks. As much as we intend to shift power and control to end users and system stakeholders, we retain significant power and control, even in our hybrid roles of neighbor, friend, researcher, and facilitator—roles that end users and stakeholders sometimes struggle to understand. But rather than redraw a fixed line between research and day-to-day living, we aim to be upfront about our dual motives, and to open up our process for all to see. At all times, end users and system stakeholders can read our notes, see our photos, and participate in our work of sensemaking. That makes our inclusionary practice a constant, negotiable work in progress.

THE LAB @ OPM

Abby Wilson, Cara George and Arianne Miller

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is in some ways an unlikely spot for the first human-centered design "teaching hospital" in the federal government. It's a small agency, and with few exceptions—such as running the federal jobs website and promoting employment opportunities in the federal sector—it has relatively limited public-facing work compared to other departments and agencies. OPM's primary "customer base" is the estimated 2 million federal employees and their family members. The agency handles traditional human resources functions such as employees' background investigations, their health benefits, and their retirement plans. It also advises the President on workforce matters, issues government-wide guidance on human capital policy, and regularly designs and conducts research into best practices for managing and deploying talent across government, from nuclear engineers to park rangers.

At a time when many in the Federal workforce are preparing for retirement, recent college graduates express low interest in federal service and budget constraints make hiring more difficult than ever. As a result, federal HR issues have become critical and strategic, not transactional, matters. With that in mind, President Barack Obama challenged OPM soon after being elected to "make government cool again."

The Lab @ OPM is housed in a former records storage facility in the sub-basement of the Theodore Roosevelt building, the agency's headquarters just a few blocks from the White House. The Lab opened as a co-working environment and creative event space in spring of 2012, and has been offering a variety of

Creating new federal programs in a dicey budgetary environment is no easy task, but political and career leadership at OPM knew that an alternate approach to solving increasingly complex problems was a must—and that the Lab was the place to incubate that approach.

design-related programs since then. Creating new federal programs in a dicey budgetary environment is no easy task, but political and career leadership at OPM knew that an alternate approach to solving increasingly complex problems was a must—and that the Lab was the place to incubate that approach. OPM Leadership visited Stanford's d. school, worked with IDEO on elevating the prospect of public service, consulted Christian Bason of Denmark's Mindlab on public sector design and innovation, and worked with LUMA Institute to co-design a fundamentals curriculum for a federal audience. The halls of a relatively traditional bureaucratic environment soon started to hum with words like *empathize*, *ideate*, and *prototype*. Underground, on the other hand, there was much more than talk.

The Lab was initially assigned to a forward-thinking career executive, Dr. Sydney Smith-Heimbrock, who now also serves as Deputy Director for OPM's Center for Leadership Development. It was "staffed" by a team of employees in the agency's policy division, each of whom supported the nascent effort in addition to doing their full-time jobs. During interactive workshops, the team applied design methods on topics ranging from retirement reform to eliminating domestic violence in the federal workforce. They conducted research on the future of learning in the government. They developed a prototype of a more user-friendly health plan selection experience. This team questioned strategists and technical experts to understand the unique skills and experiences of the cybersecurity workforce in order to recruit individuals with this skillset—while acknowledging that they were competing with private sector employers who could pay these people more, and hire them faster.

Four key lessons emerged from this early work:

1. Design methods were extremely effective in helping people downplay the significance of rank, increasing comfort with idea generation in a risk-averse environment, and fostering more productive and co-creative dialogue among stakeholder groups that either don't typically communicate with one another, or communicate from traditionally adversarial postures;

2. This approach couldn't be applied exclusively within the confines of the Lab itself. Users needed to take the human-centered design methods out of the Lab and deploy them "in the field" to generate more empathic and resilient outcomes over a period of time;
3. The facilitated application of design methods by relatively inexperienced individuals who didn't own the outcomes of the work could inject creativity into process improvement efforts or the development of new policies and programs, but the impact is difficult to measure, and;
4. To anchor the Lab, the program needed subject matter expertise and leadership in-house to select and lead higher-impact projects, build a core team, and expand its network of contributors by equipping them with design-led innovation skills.

I joined the Lab as its first director in 2013, and had the pleasure to build a program and a team—both of which are still very much evolving—in a resource-constrained environment with high visibility. The Lab is lucky to have had consistent support from the highest levels of OPM, other Executive Branch agencies, and the White House as we try to foster a policymaking environment that is biased toward action, intelligent experimentation and collaboration across disciplines and varying levels of expertise and rank.

We have enjoyed some successes in the last two years, engaging with well over 1,000 federal employees from at least 50 agencies, whether through training, facilitated workshops, creative co-work, or project-based learning experiments. We're currently teaching design methods and running pilots at five agencies. We have found that the best way to solve our most pressing challenges in public service is rarely aligned with the design of large and siloed bureaucracies.

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Working under the leadership of Melissa Kline-Lee, an OPM colleague and former fellow at the Stanford d. school, we launched a research and design initiative called GovConnect at the White House in March 2014. The goal of GovConnect is to implement new models for more agile talent development across the government. For example, scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can work with planners at Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and economists at the Department of Commerce—learning one another's approaches to community conservation and development, while generating ideas around collaborative approaches to pressing problems. We coached a team from the Food and Drug

Administration (FDA), working with FDA leaders to solicit and integrate alternative perspectives about the future of battery-powered medical devices. We worked with another team from the U.S. Coast Guard to collaboratively design that service's long-range strategy. We've worked with industrial and organizational (I/O) psychologists to examine alternatives to traditional focus groups that allow for more co-creation and richer data. We are currently in the thick of a project designed to better engage retirees in the digital environment.

The best way to solve our most pressing challenges in public service is rarely aligned with the design of large and siloed bureaucracies.

With a modest budget and a staff of six, we have developed and leveraged dozens of contributors at OPM—and even more at the Food and Drug Administration, Coast Guard, State Department, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Department of Defense, and the General Services Administration. The notion of a federal design lab is no longer a foreign concept, it's a movement. We seek to more effectively measure impact and better leverage the federal innovation network, while serving as a hub for innovation practitioners across government as well as thought leaders from around the globe.

A few final thoughts about what we've learned along the way:

- Leadership support for a collaborative, empathy-driven, and iterative approach is critical. Learn your leaders' decisional styles and preferences. Equip them with stories and vocabulary.
- An internal effort of this kind requires as much investment in trust-building and culture change as it does service delivery.
- Be clear about the technical skills we rely on from interaction designers, visual designers, and beyond—and foster dialogue about what big "D" design is and is not. We're not training technical experts, we are cultivating behaviors and mindsets that anyone can access.
- Decide whether you are serving a research and development function or a rapid response function. We've done both simultaneously, and it has been a challenge, to say the least.
- Select projects carefully and transparently. Think about readiness, risk-aversion, the ability to measure outcomes, and the project owner's comfort with sharing methodology and results with external audiences.

The LAB remains a work in progress: a design choice we have made to assure we continually evolve the discipline of design-led innovation for changing Federal

needs and capabilities. But that's the nature of this work, and we are increasingly serving as a center of design-led innovation across the federal government. It's an exciting time in the sub-basement!

Update: In the year since this article was originally written, the Lab has grown and evolved to serve an even wider array of federal partners, and has become a more vocal and active member of the international design community. Noteworthy projects from the past year include the redesign of the application for the National Free and Reduced Price School Meals Program and the redesign of USAJOBS.gov, now currently underway. For the latest on our work, follow us on Twitter @LABopm.

DESIGN FOR CIVIC INNOVATION: INTERVIEW WITH NIGEL JACOB

Eduardo Staszowski

Boston's New Urban Mechanics co-founder Nigel Jacob sat for the following interview expanding on themes Jacob introduced in his contribution to the (New) Public Goods colloquium in May 2014. The conversation explores the challenges of pursuing design-led innovation from within a local government agency, the interdisciplinary nature of the agency's work, and some of the many projects the unit has completed to date.

EDUARDO STASZOWKI (ES): Can you first tell us a little bit about New Urban Mechanics in the context of the local government in Boston, and then its position within the emerging landscape of government-sponsored innovation labs more broadly? Can you describe how the lab was created, and say a little bit about what you do as well as how you see your work in relation to the larger movement explored at our May 2014 event?

NIGEL JACOB (NJ): Sure. New Urban Mechanics was formed as an agency of the Boston city government in 2010. We were started by Boston's mayor at the time, Thomas Menino, and our starting point was really Mayor Menino's insight that local government often is able to innovate, but that it generally does so in very haphazard or ad hoc ways. Given the challenges cities need to address—everything from multigenerational poverty to climate change—we need a more reliable pipeline of innovation. So the essential idea was to train a team whose job it would be to explore what's over the horizon, and to look at ways to adapt what we're currently doing by incorporating new practices, approaches, technologies and methodologies. The structure of the organization, and how the team works in general, was something that evolved over time. Originally there were just two of us, Chris

The traditional kind of "waterfall" approach to project development is really inadequate relative to the complex urban problems that we most need to be working on. You can't take a multi-year, multimillion-dollar approach to addressing urgent problems of urban life.

Osgood and myself. The way we started working was to draw upon the Mayor's example: Mayor Menino had a nickname, "the Urban Mechanic," because of his style of mayoral leadership, focused on quality-of-life concerns and other nuts and bolts issues that urban dwellers face: smooth roads, safe neighborhoods, schools that graduate your kids on time, those kinds of things. We realized that this was the perfect platform on which to base our innovation practice. The specific idea behind the name *New* Urban Mechanics was to take all the different approaches to innovation that we're seeing out there, to bring in different partners and collaborators, and to orient our projects specifically to the public, as opposed to focusing primarily on efficiency gains for government itself, a dominant trend in discussions about government innovation in recent years. We wanted instead to focus on topics such as citizen engagement and participation, to work at the interface between the public and the government.

When we began, Chris and I had already been working for the local government for three or four years, and we each had our own ideas as to what works and what doesn't. One of the things that we both understood was that the traditional kind of "waterfall" approach to project development is really inadequate relative to the complex urban problems that we most need to be working on. You can't take a multi-year, multimillion-dollar approach to addressing urgent problems of urban life. So we've developed alternative approaches, generally much smaller and more experimental, but always with a focus on scalability.

Today, we generally describe New Urban Mechanics as a civic innovation R&D lab and incubator. Our work is all about exploring experimental projects that are oriented toward some kind of improvement in the quality of life for our residents, which we typically try out in a particular community as a pilot. It could be some type of design, it could be a new program, it could be a new technology: whatever the project is, we'll run it as an experiment or prototype, and if it appears to be working, we'll look at possibilities for scaling it up. We'll start generating data and develop a sense as to, if this new service were to be expanded, how would we fund it, how would we operationalize it, and how would we observe, measure and assess it? Working in this way has really become our core competency.

It's interesting to me, because when we started New Urban Mechanics, this way of working—this experimental, resident-focused approach to thinking about innovation and change—was very different than the ways that most other cities in the U.S. were thinking about innovation. We typically found that people were either talking just about technology, or they were talking about making government better. Obviously, there's a need for both of those things to happen, but if that is the full extent of the innovation team's charge, that is in my opinion too narrow a frame. If all you're doing is focusing on technology, then there's so much that you're not doing. Technology is just one of many different tools we have at our disposal. As for improving government, certainly government does need to be improved. But the risk of this way of framing the issue is that, by not focusing explicitly on the outcomes relative to our residents, it's very easy for a government's approach to innovation to end up just "tuning" metrics that don't actually result in improvements to service delivery. As a result, it's very easy for government service providers and decision makers alike to get out of touch with what's really going on in our communities.

Similarly, unlike some of our counterparts in other cities, we were never an initiative focused on "open government" or "open data" as such; nor have we really been part of the "smart cities" movement. Instead, we took our own approach, eventually developing a mechanism that has been really effective at first understanding a problem; then generating a range of potential solutions; and then looking at what might be feasible, fundable, workable. New Urban Mechanics is also not an external consulting service. We are entrepreneurs working inside of government, and not just in a figurative sense: we are literally entrepreneurs in terms of the way that we have to be creative about finding funding, collaborators, and other resources, and in how we think of our work in terms of *products* and not just as open-ended *projects*. I think that these aspects of our approach—experimental, iterative, entrepreneurial, outcomes-oriented—have been influential. People have begun to explore how to adapt our methods—certainly within the U.S., and I think internationally too. I think we've begun to influence how people understand the role of city governments in stimulating innovation generally.

ES: Can you discuss the role of design in your work more specifically? What are designers bringing to your team? Do you envision a greater role for design in your organization's projects in the coming years?

NJ: Everything that we do in New Urban Mechanics is by design, in the sense that, our primary focus being on impacting people's lives, we have to spend a lot of time looking at how people interact with the services that we're developing. If they're not good experiences for our residents—or for the government workers

that are going to be delivering them—nothing else we do will matter. Both the deliverers and the recipients of government services need to experience the delivery process in a positive way. So design, in particular the tenets and general approach of human-centered design, really infuses everything that we do. We conduct a lot of iterative prototype development and testing, where we assess how people react to new program or service concepts, in both positive and negative ways. However, despite this commitment to design-based methods, until a few years ago, we really didn't have the capacity to hire designers; the only people we had access to in the building were people with a public policy background. And that was quite limiting, as it led to very narrow frames for developing our work and explaining it to others. But over time, we've been able to change the way our host organization, Boston City Hall, thinks about the role of design in the management of city life. And so now, people in all these different departments that we've worked with are much more comfortable talking about design and design processes and user experience: you know, that whole language. These are words that we didn't hear just a few years ago, and so, I think we've been able to encourage a shift in the culture, and partly as a result, we've been able to hire people with that kind of background.

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ES: Could you say a bit more about the team you're working with now, especially the members' backgrounds or areas of expertise? Are all the people assigned to a given project employees of your office, or do you work with external consultants or experts, too?

NJ: We currently have six full-time team members, including Chris and myself. Taken together, our people represent expertise in domains including education and education policy, talent acquisition and retention, engineering and planning, as well as public art and infrastructure. We have also started a one-year fellowship program. Our current fellow has a design background; she's doing a whole range of work looking at how we can make public spaces more inviting and welcoming. For example, she is developing a set of recommendations for the Boston City Hall building itself, organized around treating the building as a sort of "front door" for the city administration in terms of making it a friendlier, more interesting, more easily navigated space for members of the public who have business there.

In terms of working with people and organizations outside the government, pretty much everything that we do involves collaboration, both with colleagues

inside of the government offices and with collaborators from outside government altogether, many of them research labs housed in local colleges and universities. For example, we have a longstanding partnership with the Engagement Game Lab at Emerson College; together, we've been exploring how games and digital tools can be used to improve the depth and quality of civic deliberations.[1] We have an ongoing collaboration with a group based at Harvard University called the Boston Area Research Initiative, in which we're looking at how different kinds of new civic tools and technologies may change people's sense of civic investment, and analyzing whether these tools actually do encourage greater civic participation.[2] We also have a multiyear collaboration with Boston University, exploring new kinds of tools and technologies to gain greater insight into the city. That collaboration, for example, has yielded a mobile phone app called Street Bump, which crowdsources information about road conditions, greatly accelerating the dissemination of that information.[3] BU has been helping us develop new algorithms for that app.

ES: Do you want to talk a little bit more about any other projects you are working on, or perhaps one that you consider to be representative of the kind of work that you are doing, or the aspirations of your agency?

NJ: One of my favorite projects is a platform that we've developed with Boston Public Schools. Historically, the Boston school system made it very difficult for parents to choose their children's schools. Boston has an algorithmic system for determining which schools an individual child is eligible to attend. It's a complicated system to begin with, but for parents, just learning how to navigate the system was incredibly cumbersome, requiring that they find, download and read through a long and dense pamphlet; non-native English speakers were particularly ill-served by the arrangement. We realized that this poor user experience was ripe for a design-oriented rethink.

We originally began working with the open-source government services network Code for America, and then with one of that organization's former fellows, Joel Mahoney, to redesign the school search experience in collaboration with our colleagues at Boston Public Schools. The outcome of this collaboration is a web-based platform called DiscoverBPS.[4] Its structure is similar to those of consumer-facing comparative search tools such as hotels.com or TripAdvisor, websites that allow you to explore multiple commercial options in an elegant, seamless manner. Our idea was that Boston-area parents should be able to explore the various available school options for their kids in the same basic way. The early response has been very encouraging, with over 28,000 unique users taking advantage of the platform in its fourth year of existence.

1 See engagementgamelab.org

2 See bostonarearesearchinitiative.net

3 See newurbanmechanics.org/project/streetbump

4 See newurbanmechanics.org/project/discoverbps

ES: To ask a higher-order question: how do you understand the relationship between the design work you're doing and politics? How is your work connected with the political sphere: do you see it changing politics itself in any way, for example by opening up new political possibilities in terms of relationships between departments, or different members of government, or among citizens themselves? Is there any evidence that design-led work in relation to government can improve not just service provision, but citizen engagement, or even the policy-making process itself? Are the new forms of relationships that you are creating between residents and government influencing the political sphere in more general or pervasive ways?

NJ: I think that we've had at least a couple of different impacts on politics and political discourse in Boston. One of the things we're trying to do is to build greater trust between all the different entities you mention: between residents and government, between different government agencies, between external institutions and local government offices, and so on. The way that we attempt this is by enabling cooperative partnerships that are built around shared values. Ultimately our work is about how we can serve residents better, but it's also about making sure that all the participating organizations can get something out of the collaboration, and I think we have enabled a different kind of interaction, across these different institutions and sectors. I would say that in a political sense, we can now talk about engagement in more specific ways. By developing these different tools and approaches, we can see that we're giving the concept of engagement more teeth, in the sense that you can now actually look at the evidence, and the results, of particular kinds of engagement in greater detail than previously. An experiment like Citizens Connect, one of our first projects, was all about facilitating this sort of engagement between residents and local government. This project involves the development of a mobile app that allows citizens to identify issues and place work orders directly from their cell phones.[5] Today, the platform has been developed to the point where it can be seen as a way of "personalizing" government: it promotes the sense that it's not a faceless bureaucracy which is fixing the roads, or whatever the issue may be, but it's, you know, Steve and Mike on the roads crew who came and fixed our pothole today. We're hoping that these very different kinds of tools can help build trust and a more relational mode of interaction between residents and government, moving away from the more transactional conception that has dominated the dynamic for so many decades.

We try to build trust and a more relational mode of interaction between residents and government, moving away from the more transactional conception that has dominated the dynamic for so many decades.

5 See newurbanmechanics.org/project/citizens-connect

Another similar engagement initiative we developed is City Hall to Go, in which we retrofitted a truck to take a large number of common city services and transactions into neighborhoods where they would be easier for citizens to access.[6] One of the things that people have assumed, I think, in all of the rhetoric around "smart cities" is that what this phrase means in terms of city services is simply that you put everything online. Certainly there is a strong case for a lot of things to be online; but there's also a range of things that people want to talk to another human being about. Sometimes you want to have a face-to-face dialogue with somebody, be able to read their body language, and all that kind of thing. So instead of requiring people to come downtown to city hall and wait in a line to get a dog license or pay their taxes, the idea was to create a mobile approach to being where people actually are, taking the government to the people, so to speak. The truck looks like a food truck, right down to the menu of services painted on the side, and it has that whole food truck vibe. We can be a little bit playful while, at the same time, making sure that we're delivering services in a format that our residents are asking for, on their own terms.

6 See newurbanmechanics.org/project/city-hall-to-go

I believe there is a future in which government services become examples of good design and not bad design.

ES: A final question: how do you see the future of this unit?

NJ: We still have to figure out how to do this exactly, but I believe there is a future in which government services become examples of good design and not bad design. When I look at the people that are coming to work in local government now—young people especially—these are folks that are driven by making services better, and looking at the experience that people have when they engage in these services. If we have helped establish this ethos, then I see a bright future both for the New Urban Mechanics in particular, and for design-driven government service provision more generally.

HOW PUBLIC? HOW COLLABORATIVE?

Chelsea Mauldin

The Public Policy Lab is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public services for low-income and vulnerable communities across the United States. We partnered with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and Parsons DESIS Lab when developing our inaugural initiative, Public & Collaborative: Designing Services for Housing,[1] which launched in 2012. This paper briefly outlines our organization's mission and approach, describes the Public & Collaborative project, and concludes with some critical questions that emerged from the work.

OUR ORGANIZATION'S APPROACH

Our mission is grounded in two beliefs: We believe that services provided by government agencies are crucial tools for ensuring the well-being and success of individual Americans and our society as a whole. And we believe that methods and approaches from the design professions have the potential to greatly improve the delivery of these public services. Designers specialize in making things work well, while also making them feel good. By collaborating with design professionals, we're convinced that government agencies can better understand how a public service is used and experienced by the public and by agency staff—and then apply that knowledge to create, test, and refine service delivery, making improvements while lowering risks and costs. We are fortunate that some of the world's most talented researchers, designers, and policy strategists are based in New York City, and that many of them share a desire to put their skills to work for the public good. The Public Policy Lab is delighted to have connected with some of these experts at HPD and at Parsons, to investigate ways to enhance how New Yorkers engage with the housing agency and access housing services.

1 The Public & Collaborative project was made possible through the generous support of a New York City Cultural Innovation Fund grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

For this initiative, the Public Policy Lab's fellows included Liana Dragoman, an experience and service designer who focuses on participatory design and systems thinking; Kristina Drury, a service designer specializing in social sector clients; Yasmin Fodil, an expert in public engagement strategy and public-sector digital innovation; and Kaja Kühl, an urban planner with a focus on community-based design. Other fellows included Benjamin Winter, a service designer and researcher affiliated with Parsons' DESIS Lab, and HPD's Andrew Eickmann, at that time the agency's Director of Strategic Planning, who served as the team leader.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Beginning in 2012, the team of fellows worked to develop proposals for expanding HPD's profile in the community, and enhancing the mechanisms the agency employs to engage with current and potential residents. The project's primary research methods were qualitative and participatory in nature. Interview sessions and co-design workshops were organized to identify information gaps, areas of confusion, and other pain points in the current process, and to gather insights to inform and inspire design solutions.

During and subsequent to these engagements, the project team developed a suite of pilot proposals and supplemental resources. Multiple rounds of design research, creation, presentation, and revision ensured that the informational materials, implementation plans, and related strategies were fully vetted by HPD and received input from other stakeholders, including housing developers, community-based housing organizations, and applicants for and residents of affordable units.

The final pilot proposals put forward by the team are intended to help New Yorkers more successfully navigate the affordable housing application process. These proposals are designed for collaborative implementation by housing developers, community-based organizations, and HPD along with its sister agency, the New York City Housing Development Corporation. The proposals seek to generate efficiencies for service providers and, above all, to extend the reach of the City's affordable housing program to a greater number of eligible New Yorkers. The pilot proposals include:

- creating new, human-centered informational materials;
- encouraging hyper-local marketing by developers;
- supporting community-based "housing ambassadors";
- and forming a street team for in-person HPD outreach.

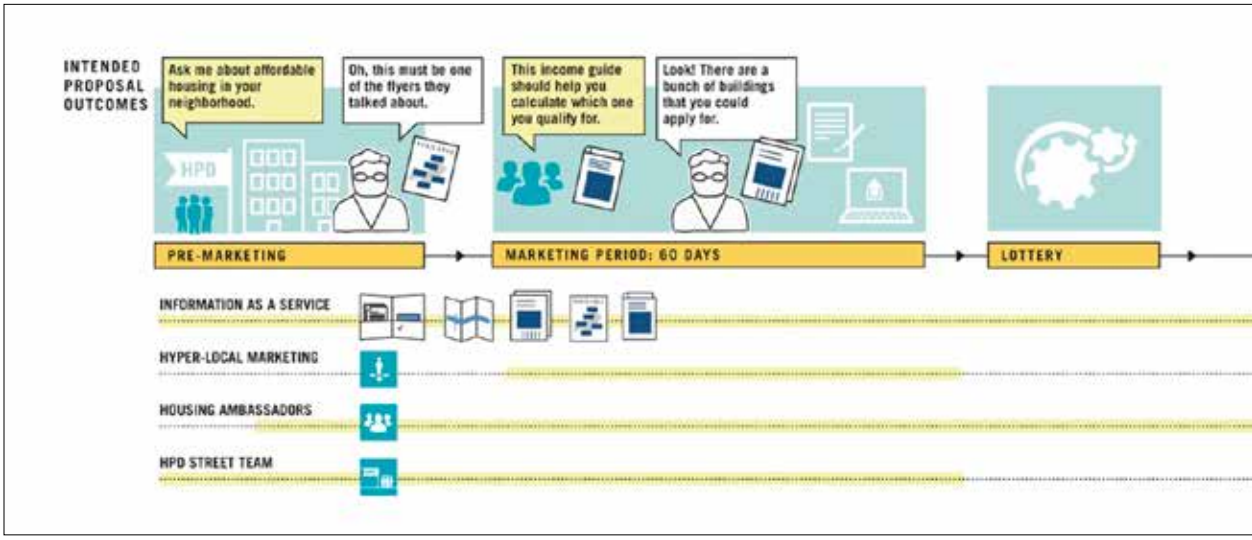


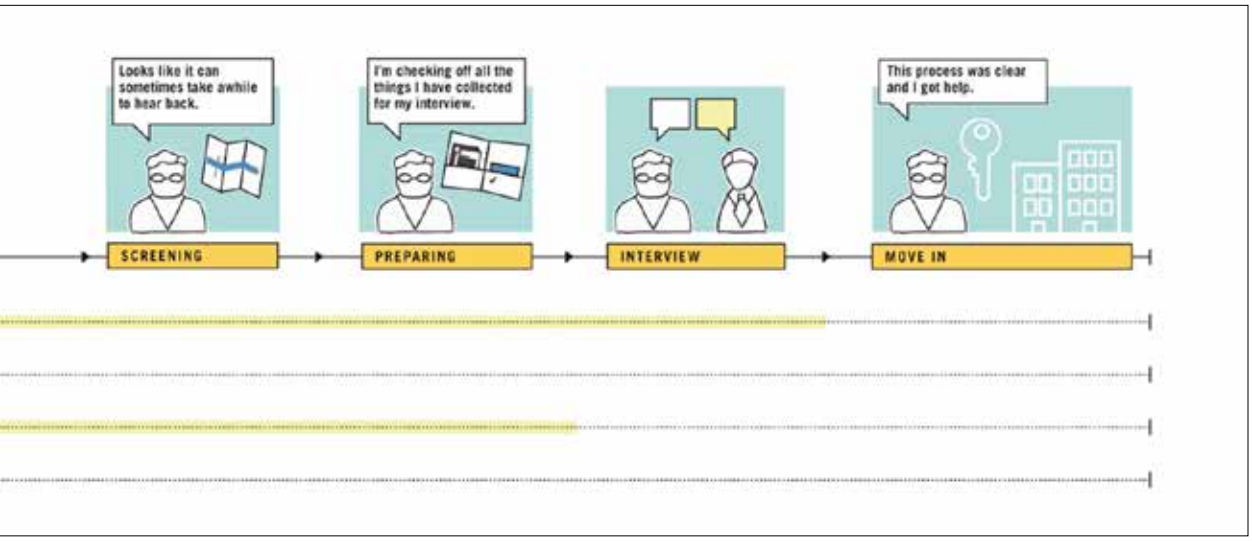
FIGURE 1: The four design proposals seek to provide timely and useful information to housing applicants, and to encourage peer-to-peer information sharing.

In combination, the proposals create a knowledge-sharing infrastructure that enables the dynamic and reciprocal exchange of information between residents, community-based partners, housing developers, and HPD leadership and front-line staff (see Figure 1).

All four of the proposals were adopted by HPD, and pilot testing and evaluation were completed by the end of 2014. The findings from the evaluation of design objectives and outcomes suggest that the proposals met their intended goals. A coordinated approach to providing information through a variety of channels does appear to improve the service experience for New Yorkers during the affordable housing application process. As a result of the pilots, HPD adopted the informational materials, translated them into multiple languages, and began using them as critical components of their housing outreach; the materials have now been accessed hundreds of thousands of times. In addition, the agency has moved forward with training housing ambassadors and street team members, and coordinating information exchange between diverse community organizations providing on-the-ground housing support to low-income New Yorkers (see Figure 2).

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

It's gratifying that the efforts of the project team and many other supportive stakeholders have resulted in largely successful outcomes. Those positive outcomes don't excuse us, however, from the responsibility to critically assess the project's process and aspirations. A possible critical approach might be to ask, *were we public*



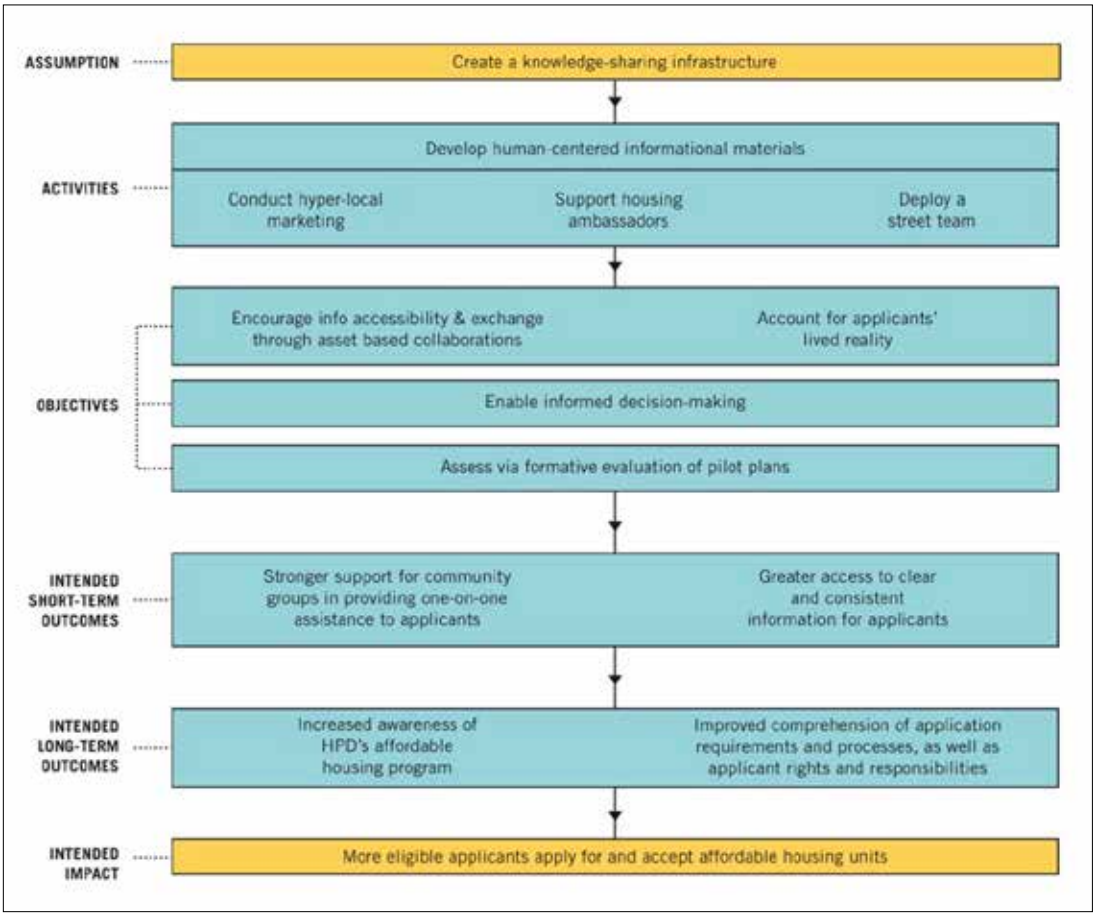


FIGURE 2: Proposals were evaluated against a theory of change developed to specify the activities, objectives, and outcomes of the project.

and collaborative enough? Two key responses to this question may be valuable for other organizations, practices, or labs attempting to do design-based innovation work in a public sector context: First, the legal and regulatory requirements of working in the public sector are often at cross-purposes with a fully transparent and "public" work process—an irony lost on none of the participating team members. It can be difficult, for example, to gain appropriate approvals for iterating and testing potential design solutions quickly with members of the public. Truly engaged project participation by agency staff is enormously helpful in responding to the various legal requirements, but does not resolve the inherent challenge. One possible solution, beyond even more explicit upfront agreement about work processes and dissemination, might be to find opportunities to engage earlier and more comprehensively with agency staff who are tasked with gatekeeping roles.

As a result of our pilots, the City adopted our informational materials, translated them into multiple languages, and began using them as critical components of their housing outreach; the materials have now been accessed hundreds of thousands of times.

Second, current participatory design practice rarely achieves the ideal of full and informed collaboration with end-users—that is, members of the public and front-line service providers—that motivates this approach. The difficulty is partly one of resources and partly one of method. Meaningful engagement requires time; time comes at a cost; and current investments in public-sector design efforts rarely support a sustained, hands-on working model where designers were able to collaborate with end-users for days or weeks, rather than hours at a time. Furthermore, common co-design practices do not yet fully resolve the tension between public as opposed to professional "authorship" of solutions. It is to be hoped that future efforts will more deeply embed design teams within community contexts, and more specifically focus on questions of community ownership of design proposals.

THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION (TACSI): BUILDING PUBLIC SYSTEMS IN AUSTRALIA

Chris Vanstone

> *Really my job is to implement the minister's ideas and make sure they look good.*

This remark, from a frustrated public servant at a recent TACSI workshop, is an indication of what is driving the development of many public systems in Australia today. What's considered good is decided by "the top," through a combination of ideas, gut intuition and political imperative. Policy makers struggle to realize what people on "the bottom"—not only lower- and mid-level government functionaries but also the intended recipients of government services—consider to be of value.

> *We only measure to show success; we don't really measure to find out if things aren't working.*

This comment, from another public service workshop, indicates a lax approach to experimentation in the Australian public service. New, "innovative," policies and programs are regularly implemented and maintained, but without much effort to collect specific evidence that a particular solution is actually effective. While the public services often describe themselves as "risk-averse," in reality the government regularly places big bets on national programs and policies that are untested in context.

Australia invests over $200 billion annually on social programs, interventions and policy. A significant portion of this money is spent on the implementation of new policies and programs. But despite this investment, there has been little progress on serious social challenges, such as the decade difference in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians,[1] the increasing number of children being removed from their homes into out-of-home care,[2] and the high rates of depression among people caring for others.[3]

TACSI is trying to shift these statistics by helping government institutions to develop public systems that work better for people. Rather than trying to promote change through coercive top-down mechanisms, we believe public systems will be more effective if they enable people to choose to change. Practically speaking, such "bottom-up" social change can be achieved through public institutions adopting a new approach to innovation, one that works "with the grain" of everyday life and that embraces rigorous experimentation—an approach that to some extent inverts the typical power divide between providers and recipients of public services.

To realize these goals, TACSI is spreading a co-design approach to innovation, in which professionals and end-users work side by side, each bringing specific kinds of knowledge or expertise to the development of services, systems and strategies. Working assumptions are continually tested through contextual research and iterative prototyping.[4] A methodology that starts with people and embraces iteration—a thoroughly un-radical proposition to a design audience—also sits well with current Australian policy rhetoric of person-centeredness, co-creation, co-delivery and innovation. But in practice, starting with people and testing ideas goes against the grain of government culture and what's taught in schools of public policy. As one civil servant told us,

> *We're government: we can't ask people—we're meant to know. People expect us to get it right the first time, all the time.*

Public institutions must adopt a new approach to innovation, one that works with the grain of everyday life and that embraces rigorous experimentation.

When government does engage the public, it is often through town hall meetings or discussion papers: methods that privilege the literate, articulate and those with an agenda—and that often fail altogether to reach the vulnerable groups that social policy is most intended to serve. By contrast, TACSI tries to demonstrate practical ways for government and people to work together in developing policies and programs that create positive outcomes for citizens and for government alike.

1 "Factsheet: Life expectancy and mortality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737419014&libID=10737419013.

2 "Child abuse and neglect statistics," Australian Institute of Family Studies, aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/factsheets/a142086

3 Robert A. Cummins et al., "The wellbeing of Australians: Carer Health and Wellbeing," Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, 2007, carersaustralia.com.au/storage/Wellbeing-Index-Special-Report-October-2007.pdf.

4 See tacsi.org.au/our-approach.

TACSI is a national and independent non-profit organization, originally seed-funded by the South Australian government as a space separate from government and with a mandate to champion ideas, methods, and people that might make a constructive impact on intractable social challenges. Since 2009 we've grown from a small team in Adelaide to 30 people based in two states. Through our practice, we've developed a design-led innovation approach specifically geared to the public sector, drawing on service design and design thinking as well as business innovation and social science.

TACSI's early work focused on designing programs independent of existing institutions; we then we became the provider of the resulting services, hiring the teams to run them and nurturing their growth. These solutions were developed in collaboration with end users, and nearly always relied on harnessing the target communities' own resources to enable change. For example, our Family by Family initiative finds and trains families that have been through tough times to support other families going through tough times.[5] What started in conversations with families five years ago is now a functioning service running in two states and reaching over 200 families a year, with evidence that it is making a real difference for some of our most vulnerable citizens, while also saving public money by keeping children from out-of-home care.[6] Programs like Family by Family are practical demonstrations of the value of designing "with the grain" of everyday life, building systems that leverage and grow already-existing community resources. They have also enabled us to uncover some of the limits of existing policy—for example, how current funding and measurement systems often incentivize something other than the kinds of outcomes that people actually value or need. (Foster care agencies, for example, may benefit financially from keeping children in foster care as opposed to reunifying them with their birth families, even if reunification would be a better long-term outcome for the children themselves.)

Initiatives such as Family by Family have now led to invitations for TACSI to work inside government institutions, specifically in policy development, commissioning and service redesign, and in embedding co-design capability within offices

Our initiatives have enabled us to uncover some of the limits of existing policy—for example, how current funding and measurement systems often incentivize something other than the kinds of outcomes that people actually value or need.

5 See familybyfamily.org.au

6 Community Matters Pty Ltd, *Family by Family Evaluation Report 2011-12*, tacsi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/TACSI-FbyF-Evaluation-Report-2012.pdf; see also the video posted by TACSI: tacsi.org.au/project/family-by-family

and agencies. Now in our sixth year of operation, we can see evidence that our design-led approach to social innovation is indeed gaining traction within public institutions in Australia. Among our successes are the following:

We're helping policy makers identify the best problems to tackle.
In a recent project for the Australian Attorney General's Department, we worked alongside young people who had grown up in foster and residential care to identify opportunities for reshaping the services and systems around them.[7] The findings helped shift the discussion from better service coordination to reinvention of the care system itself at the local, state and national levels.

We're helping service providers build business and service models that put people first.
We've worked with child protection services, research organizations, NGOs and digital entrepreneurs to help them develop business models that create change in accordance with community wants and needs, and that are financially sustainable—which often means diversifying funding models beyond government.

We're helping develop models of procurement that champion rigorous innovation.
We partnered with VicHealth, the health promotion agency in Victoria, to redesign their approach to commissioning so as to encourage innovation. The VicHealth Seed Challenge invested in ventures that could improve access to fruits and vegetables.[8] And now we are supporting the winners, including 3000 Acres, a new social enterprise that is turning Melbourne's unused green spaces into public vegetable gardens.[9]

We're helping government make people-driven innovation business as usual.
We've recently started work with the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services to embed a co-design capability within a government department, and apply a co-design approach to the development of interactions, roles, services and systems.

Rather than trying to promote change through coercive top-down mechanisms, we believe public systems will be more effective if they enable people to choose to change.

Gaining insight into real lives, designing new service models, running innovation challenges and embedding innovation capability: these are four practical ways TACSI is working with government to develop public systems that work better for people. Having been created by government to exist outside of government, we now find ourselves working inside it after all—or as Dana Shen, Director of Family by Family, puts it, "walking with one foot on each side of the fence." But in doing so, do we risk aligning too closely with incumbent systems?

7 See tacsi.org.au/project/transitions-from-care-and-custody.

8 See vichealth.vic.gov.au/seedchallenge.

9 See 3000acres.org.

In Australia as in most parts of the industrialized world, government is the major player in public service provision. Innovations that spread through large government systems can reach many more people than any independent project, no matter how effective. This is obviously attractive to the social innovator keen on promoting progressive social change, but sometimes the paradigm within which those public systems operate limits the degree to which significant change can realistically be achieved. We've come to see this most clearly through our work with child protection systems across Australia. Despite the billions spent on reform and redesign, many government programs and systems continue to be informed by a number of assumptions that were more true in the 1960's than they are now. Accordingly, TACSI will continue to develop new ways of working simultaneously *within* and *without* public systems—disrupting the paradigms that limit peoples' ability to choose to change, and government's ability to achieve the outcomes for which it strives.

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A PERIODIC TABLE FOR SYSTEM CHANGE[1]

Joeri van den Steenhoven

Around the world, public and social innovation labs are increasingly seen as vehicles to help solve complex social and economic challenges requiring system change. Individual companies, non-profit organizations and even government agencies cannot solve intractable problems such as youth unemployment, chronic illness, and food insecurity on their own; addressing them requires collaboration across systems. The complex nature of these challenges also makes it impossible to predict whether or not a given solution will work prior to its implementation: potential solutions must be prototyped and rolled out on an experimental basis. This is where public and social innovation labs can help. MaRS Solutions Lab, based in Toronto, Canada, is one such lab.[2] We bring together stakeholders from across society to develop, test and scale solutions to complex challenges. In this article I reflect on some of what we have developed in the first several years of its existence.

The field of these labs has grown significantly since I co-founded Kennisland, a public and social innovation lab based in the Netherlands, in 1999.[3] Starting up the MaRS Solutions Lab in 2013 provided an opportunity to leverage my own experiences and that of many others, as well as the growing literature bearing on the subject—from systems thinking to design thinking, organizational change and innovation management, business strategy and public policy theory. I've come to realize that, in order to change systems, public and social innovation labs need to combine three kinds of strategies: advocating for policy change, developing new solutions, and building capacity for change. Traditionally, organizations aiming to promote societal transformations have tended to focus their energies on just one of these strategies.

1 Thanks to Satsuko van Antwerp for help in writing this article.

2 See solutions-lab.marsdd.com

3 See kl.nl/en

Individual companies, non-profit organizations and even government agencies cannot solve intractable problems such as youth unemployment, chronic illness, and food insecurity on their own; addressing them requires collaboration across systems.

In particular, the primary emphasis of many change agents has been on policy innovation—that is, on framing a problem, building a sense of urgency and advocating for relevant policy changes. Think tanks and advocacy organizations concentrate primarily on this type of activity, with the goal of influencing governments. While this route remains an important and powerful approach to system change, it has its limits, especially when challenges are too complex and interconnected for governments to solve on their own. The notion that simply by changing policies we can change the world no longer holds water; today, we know that we have to do more. So in addition to changing public policy, we need to propose and develop new solutions, or novel arrangements of existing solutions. This is where design thinking and user-centered design enter the equation. With a thorough understanding of the problem from a user perspective, we can experiment, develop and prototype new solutions, making specific potential changes concrete and tangible. However, even a great solution often struggles to reach scale on its own. In most cases, we need to build sufficient capacity in order for solutions to reach scale. The third strategy for creating system change, then, is capacity building—at first among a limited or pilot population, and eventually among the rest of the stakeholder groups. One way of achieving this goal is to create support systems and learning networks, in order to enable people to create the change they seek for themselves. In the digital world, these activities can be pursued with comparative ease. Relatedly, leveraging the "wisdom of crowds" can be a powerful change strategy. Yet by themselves, these capacity-building strategies will usually yield little more than a series of good conversations and inspiring insights.

Indeed, in today's highly complex world each of the strategies in isolation has only a limited effect. In my work as director of the MaRS Solutions Lab, therefore, I have tried to combine these three innovation activities, aligning them with the traditional lab process of creating innovation: formulating a hypothesis, conducting research and developing new ideas, testing these new ideas and bringing to the market what works. Our Periodic Table of System Change represents a theory of societal transformation that reflects my experiences in running public and social innovation labs (see Figure 1).

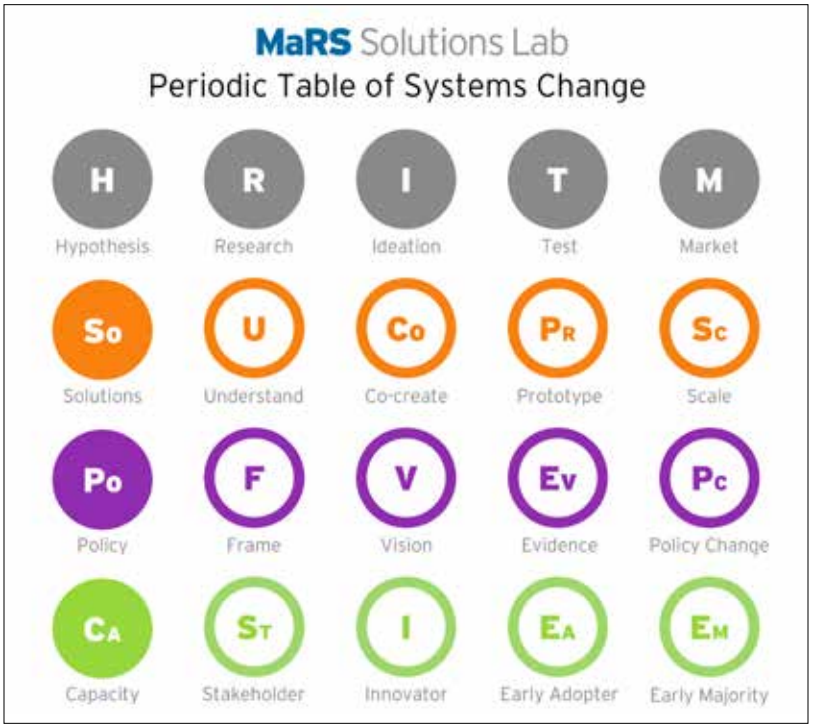

FIGURE 1

The table itself represents a hypothesis, based on our best understanding of the work and value of public and social innovation labs as demonstrated to date. Through the projects undertaken by the MaRS Solutions Lab, we continually aim to test the theory's validity—experimenting with it, adjusting it, and translating it into new tools and methods. We have had many valuable learning experiences in our first several years of this testing. To illustrate, let's look at one of the elements: U: Understanding the Problem.

There are many ways to understand complex or wicked problems. As humans, we often tend to see them through a personal bias or institutional perspective. We translate the problem into a form that we can comprehend. As the saying goes, when you have a hammer in your hand, every problem looks like a nail. Of course, a biased perspective is not the only way to understand a given problem, and rarely the best way.

Design thinking helps us to understand problems from the user perspective. Using ethnographic research methods, in particular, has enabled us to better understand what is going on for end users, what their experience is. Many institutions have discovered to their dismay that the actual experience of their intended users was

completely different from what they had expected. By contrast, the careful application of ethnographic methods in design-driven research contexts has yielded some spectacular results.

For example, our Tender Fruit Lab, which sought to support healthier and more sustainable food systems in Canada, started with over 70 user interviews. We listened both to individuals with a stake in Canadian food provision—such as small-scale farmers, activists, academics, and small business owners—as well as to institutional actors including commercial growers, processors, distributors, foundations, and major retailers. Not surprisingly, these conversations uncovered a wide range of different user perspectives, and correspondingly divergent diagnoses of the problems. The Design Brief for this lab reflects these diverse perspectives on this particular challenge.[4]

In addition to various user perspectives at both individual and institutional levels, a system perspective is required to understand and define truly complex problems. System thinking helps to accomplish this. When many different institutions and players are involved, it is important to understand the different factors and issues, and also the linkages among and the drivers behind them. Using tools like system mapping, simulation and modeling, we can understand how a system operates, and identify the most critical needs or opportunities for intervention.

In order to understand complex problems, we need to combine individual, institutional, and systemic perspectives.

With our Youth Employment Lab, for example, we changed our typical process somewhat. Instead of doing all of our user research in the first stage, we did only a part of it. Then we organized an initial workshop with stakeholders and users on "Seeing the System." We mapped barriers, tensions and opportunities related to tackling youth unemployment. After that first session, we continued with our user research, checking our findings and developing an understanding of the challenge that would help us create change.

What we've learned from initiatives like these is that, in order to understand complex problems, we need to combine all three perspectives: user, institution, and system. Fitting this conception of "Understanding the Problem" into our more comprehensive theory of societal transformation, in each of these initiatives we went on to develop five interventions to be prototyped in the real world, while also looking at how to create policy innovation and build capacity to support change. The journey continues, as we proceed with testing and developing the other elements of our Periodic Table of System Change.

4 See marsdd.com/systems-change/mars-solutions-lab/future-food

THE RISE OF INNOVATION LABS: THREE STUMBLING BLOCKS ALONG THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Christian Bason

A heart is not judged by how much you love; but by how much you are loved by others.

L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

Schumpeter, the business columnist for British weekly *The Economist*, has characterized the rise of innovation labs in the public sector under the heading "test tube government."[1] With some surprise, he notes that certain public institutions are now "liberating" key staff from their daily routines and encouraging them to invent the future. Quoting a range of examples from around the world, including the U.K.'s Behavioural Insights team, the New Orleans Innovation Delivery Team and Denmark's MindLab, the columnist discusses whether what is happening is merely a fad and the teams ultimately "jargon-spouting irrelevancies." The piece concludes, however, that the efforts of innovation labs may yet be worthwhile: "Reforming government is hard and often boring work. The innovation labs are making it a bit faster and a lot more interesting."[2]

It is the chance to contribute to the "interesting" work of government service redesign that is a key part of the underlying motivation one senses in the contributions to this volume, in which a range of the world's foremost innovation lab practitioners share their experiences, learnings and challenges. Between the lines, the lab work comes across as adventurous, exciting and, dare I say it, cool. I am happy

1 *The Economist*, September 6th, 2014; economist.com/news/business/21635620-governments-are-borrowing-ideas-about-innovation-private-sector-test-tube-government.

2 *The Economist*, December 6th, 2014.

to have contributed to this ethos and image myself during my eight years heading up MindLab in Copenhagen. The team there had, and to my knowledge still has, a feeling of being on a very special mission. I remember our first job posting in 2007, the headline reading: "Do you want to revolutionize the public sector from within?" Not surprisingly, we attracted a lot of smart and dedicated people. Similarly, as I read Sarah Schulman's article about the work of her social service co-design agency InWithForward, I wonder who would not find it meaningful to "understand and reshape lived realities" in the course of making social welfare systems really work for people?

AN EMERGING PHENOMENON

There is no doubt that government innovation labs and studios are on the rise. Despite a few setbacks in recent years, most significantly the closing of the ambitious Helsinki Design Lab and the discontinuation of the Australian government's DesignGov initiative, the tendency is clearly toward a proliferation of dedicated units, teams and spaces for systematic work on public and social innovation. It is not so surprising that reformist and "modern" governments like those in Denmark or Britain are leading the experiment with innovation labs. These two countries have in various ways always been pioneers, for instance in driving digital public services (Denmark's taxation office has for decades been a front-runner in the development of fully automated tax administration, and the U.K. was already a global leader in this field in the late 1990s, with its Strategy and Delivery unit housed in the central Cabinet Office).

It is perhaps more striking that the European Commission's scientifically-minded Joint Research Centre has established a behavioral insights team, or that that German Chancellor Angela Merkel is reportedly recruiting senior sociologists and psychologists to run a high-level team embedded in her Cabinet. Meanwhile, the OECD has also begun to play a constructive role in providing an infrastructural backbone for labs to interact at a global level, with the authority and resources which its Observatory for Public Sector Innovation brings to the table. It appears that innovation labs are emerging in the most unlikely of places.

Notwithstanding their general bias in favor of predictability, stability and control, some governments are taking active steps to create facilities which, ideally, will help develop new solutions to social problems—but without decision-makers knowing in advance what those solutions might look like.

What is perhaps most surprising about all these developments is that, notwithstanding their general bias in favor of predictability, stability and control, some governments are taking active steps to create facilities which, ideally, will help develop new solutions to social problems—but without decision-makers knowing in advance what those solutions might look like. As Zaid Hassan, a strong advocate of the "lab revolution," rightly suggests, "we cannot generate new systems, new structures, and new realities that are verifiable prior to their coming into being."[3] Leading government administrations worldwide, in other words, are effectively betting that if they build the labs, the solutions will come. Like Dorothy, the Kansas girl spirited away to the Kingdom of Oz, the government sponsors, leaders, and staff members of the new cadre of innovation labs are walking merrily along their Yellow Brick Road toward a destination still unknown.

From my own experience at MindLab, and building on my research and writings on the topic, I believe that labs do in fact have a chance not only to help address current complex problems, but also to contribute to shaping visions of desirable futures. We are seeing evidence of impacts ranging from much more powerful digital user experiences for citizens, to more empathetic and outcome-oriented health services for patients, to precise "nudges" that shape large-scale behavior while reducing costs to taxpayers. However, if the almost limitless promise of labs is to be realized in the years and decades to come, I believe there are at least three critical stumbling blocks which they must address, and which if left unchecked may disrupt innovation teams and undermine their work.

A key issue for many labs instituted on the premise of "challenging" or "disrupting" the system of which they are simultaneously a part is how to maintain this delicate position, neither failing to contribute anything novel, nor being too radical for the system to accept.

BETTING ON PERSONALITY

"There is a mysterious aspect to the act of creation," argues Zaid Hassan.[4] And there is a corresponding risk that the individuals running innovation labs may be cast as superhumans, embodying the lab's mission as much or more through their personal image or brand than the quality of their team. As Nigel Jacob of Boston's New Urban Mechanics suggests in his interview, a particular profile and style of leadership—or more generally, an entrepreneurial spirit—is needed to run labs effectively. But this need for energetic leaders raises the risk that labs may become too reliant on one or a few individuals, and struggle to maintain momentum once the founder or current leading figure departs. There may be insufficient appreciation of the need for the "subject matter expertise and in-house leadership" flagged in this volume by Abby Wilson, director of the Lab at the U.S. Government Office

3 See Zaid Hassan, *The Social Labs Revolution* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2014).

4 See Hassan, *The Social Labs Revolution*.

of Personnel Management. Lab leaders as well as sponsors need to keep questions such as the following in mind at all times:

- What are appropriate organizational designs for the labs themselves, if one wishes to ensure their continuity and sustainability?
- What is the optimal team configuration, given the particular tasks the lab is charged with carrying out?
- How can innovation labs ensure space and opportunity for new leaders to emerge as next in line?
- How can the founding leaders themselves be motivated not to leave the lab prematurely?

LACK OF CONNECTIVITY

When the Australian one-and-a-half-year "prototype" of a lab, DesignGov, was discontinued in December 2013, one of the officials involved conducted a thorough review, concluding that the loss of a key sponsor at the highest level of government was a major contributing factor in the lack of durability.[5] A key issue for many labs instituted on the premise of "challenging" or "disrupting" the system of which they are simultaneously a part is how to maintain this delicate position, neither failing to contribute anything novel, nor being too radical for the system to accept. A case of the latter was the British Department for Education's Innovation Unit, which was probably too far ahead of its time when it was established, and was shortly thereafter expelled from the ministry as "a foreign body," according to one close observer. In recognition of this kind of risk, several of this volume's contributors point to the need for labs to work systematically on communications. For instance, MaRS Solutions Lab Director Joeri van den Steenhoven proposes that labs must work simultaneously on policy change, on new concrete solutions, and on building capacity for change among the lab's key stakeholders. These issues raise questions such as:

Innovation labs demonstrate that government can in fact not just be "cool again"; they offer hope that change for real people and real communities is possible.

- What should be the nature of the interactions and relations between labs and the internal and external environments of which they are a part and/or where they are expected to make an impact?
- What kinds of lab governance structures may connect them sufficiently—although not too much—into the existing decision-making arenas and processes within their host organizations or sponsors? What is the "not too hot, not too cold," "goldilocks" governance style that will make the fit feel right, both within the labs themselves and within their wider organizational settings?

5 Alex Roberts, "Establishing, running and closing a public sector innovtion lab—a reflection on the DesignGov experiment," innovation.govspace.gov.au/2014/07/01/establishing-running-and-closing-a-public-sector-innovation-lab-a-reflection-on-the-designgov-experiment.

- What concrete lab activities can enable system-wide connectivity, and what is the appropriate balance to strike between "deep" engagements with a few stakeholders as opposed to "wide" engagements involving larger numbers of unique constituencies or stakeholder groups?

LACK OF LEGITIMACY

Guy Julier, a professor of design studies at the University of Brighton, reflects on the blog "Mapping Social Design Research and Practice" that the design-for-policy discourse risks promoting design as an end in itself rather than as a set of sensibilities, approaches and tools which can be applied in particular, more or less useful ways in various public, organizational, and policy-making contexts. To many of its proponents, he says,

> *design somehow has its own agency, regardless of the people, things and environments in which it is enacted. A long history of design promotion has struggled to explain what designing is on the one hand, while describing design as a value-added quality on the other. The latter always runs the risk of mythologizing and over-generalizing what it is.*[6]

If we understand legitimacy as a matter of perceived desirable, proper, or appropriate actions, then the overall question is whether innovation labs can hope to survive if they are not able to articulate what they do and why in language understood by public decision-makers. However, it is one thing to lose legitimacy through a lack of clarity or precision in explaining typical "lab" terms such as "innovation," "design" or "prototype" in ways that are meaningful in the context of public administration. As my former colleague and Deputy Director of MindLab Kit Lykketoft suggests, it is also possible to lose legitimacy by failing more generally to recognize that the way in which a lab conducts its activities (the "how") may well matter more than whether those activities generate tangible results (the "what").[7] Provocative as it may be to state, in the context of government initiatives and policymaking perceptions of right and wrong, good and bad, success and failure are not necessarily deeply anchored in empirically observable, real-world change. In his contribution to this volume, Chris Vanstone of the Australian Centre for Social Innovation quotes a civil servant acknowledging precisely this point: government performance measurements need a priori to show success—and precisely for this reason are not themselves strong sources of legitimacy. Thus, "trust-building," as Abby Wilson suggests in her article, is often more important to the success of an innovation lab than a

By showing that public leaders are ready to put resources into something uncertain and experimental, but often powerful at engaging with citizens and stakeholders, public innovation labs may contribute to rebuilding some of the trust between governments and their citizens that has been lost in recent decades.

6 Guy Julier, "Promoting vs. Researching Design for Policy," mappingsocialdesign.org.

7 Kit Lykketoft, "Designing Legitimacy: The Case of a Government Innovation Lab," in Christian Bason, ed., *Design for Policy* (Farnham: Gower, 2014).

demonstration of predefined "results." For those labs struggling to demonstrate long-term impact at scale, this fact may actually come as a relief: what really matters is whether a significant proportion of the officials in a position to shut down the lab actually remain committed to its mission. The long-term survival of a public innovation lab may well turn on how much it is "loved by others."

LABS: JOURNEY OR DESTINATION?

I started this article by suggesting that governments are investing in innovation labs in order to help them arrive at unknown (indeed, unknowable) destinations. I conclude with two caveats to that generalization.

First, perhaps the destinations are not in every case so unknown. There seems to be an emerging and already widely-shared agreement that future governments need to be more adaptive, flexible, individualized, and citizen-centered; and that a more networked and "co-productive" form of governance is likely to replace or at least supplement universal, top-down policy-making, and to ameliorate the negative aspects of its modern variants such as new public management. So we do have a general sense of the shape, or at least the underlying characteristics, of the systemic solutions governments are asking labs to help build.

Second, I cannot help but feel that innovation labs in and of themselves will also prove to be part of the solution. To paraphrase *The Economist's* Schumpeter with some help from U.S. President Barack Obama, innovation labs demonstrate that government can in fact not just be "cool again"; they offer hope that change for real people and real communities is possible. An inspiring example is Sarah Schulman's illustration that labs can actually help catalyze social movements. Another indicator is the suggestion by Nigel Jacob that "we still have to figure out how to do this exactly, but there is a future in which government services become the examples of good design and not bad design." By showing that public leaders are ready to put resources into something uncertain and experimental, but often powerful at engaging with citizens and stakeholders, public innovation labs may contribute to rebuilding some of the trust between governments and their citizens that has been lost in recent decades. If nothing more, innovation labs, positively interpreted, show that governments do care about us. At best, they help transform our lives.

CONTRIBUTORS

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