

**SOCIAL**

**THE**

**DESIGN**

**READER**

EDITED BY **ELIZABETH RESNICK**

B L O O M S B U R Y

# THE SOCIAL DESIGN READER



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*Edited by*  
*Elizabeth Resnick*

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of my colleague, mentor, and friend*

**Albert J. Gowan** (1934–2017)

*Professor Emeritus, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston  
Author of “Victor Papanek: Path of a Design Prophet”*



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## PREFACE

*The Social Design Reader* is an anthology<sup>1</sup> of key writings written over the past fifty-five years by leading proponents, researchers, and practitioners shaping the emergence of socially responsible design as a concept, as a nascent field of study, and as a developing discipline within professional design practice.

During the past thirty-five years, there has been a tsunami of books published on the subject of design—expounding on its critical nature, its history, its technology, and its continuously evolving culture of professional practice and significant practitioners. Art and design libraries (typically housed in colleges and universities) have archived many of the important international design magazines and academic journals from the early twentieth century to the present day. With the rise of the internet and the demand for easily accessible research materials to build a history of design culture and activity, there has been a vigorous movement toward anthologizing historically significant texts and articles previously published in design magazines and academic journals that are simply not accessible to the public, as many such publications are either out-of-print or housed in private libraries or collections that are very expensive to access.

An anthology is above all, a collaborative work. My aim with this compilation is to bring together a group of authentic voices—theorists, scholars, writers, and designers—who are building a canon of informed literature that documents the genesis and rapid development within this field of study. In concert, these texts build upon the notion that *social design is design with a conscience*, and, as such, can help the reader understand how design can be employed as a catalyst for social change. Editing an anthology of this nature can be quite a daunting task, especially for someone without experience in this genre and format.

There are many restrictions when framing a compilation of this kind: contracted word count; the stringency of academic permission fee budgets; the availability of key texts; and the ensuing economic and physical challenge to gain permission to republish them. Another contributing factor to the framing of this anthology is its bias for language preference—the

decision to collect texts written (or translated) in English (the editor's sole language)—which impedes a wider variety of writing from alterative economic, cultural, or political perspectives.<sup>2</sup> All pivotal criteria that contributed to the selection of what texts to publish.

The crucial advantage to this type of anthology is its ability to feature texts emphasizing the theoretical and discursive dialogue threads from multiple perspectives current within mainstream academic and professional discourse, and those from the margins of the status quo. The texts were reproduced as they had been first published—written in either British English or American English.<sup>3</sup> A unique aspect that emerges from such a diversity of voices is the different and distinctive writing styles that should be embraced by the reader.

## STRUCTURE OF THE READER

*The Social Design Reader* is divided into three sections:

**Section 1: Making a Stand: A New Social Agenda for Design** includes the introduction to the term *social design* and papers that explore its historical underpinnings to build a foundation to support the expanding dialogue and embody the social design movement.

**Section 2: Creating the Future: Defining the Socially Responsible Designer 1964–99** feature papers that document the emergence of *social design* as a concept, as a nascent field of study, and as a rapidly developing professional discipline.

**Section 3: A Sea Change: The Paradigm Shift from Objects to Systems 2000–20** feature papers that acknowledge *design* as a firmly established professional discipline. As such, there is an increased need for both quantitative and qualitative research that utilizes strategic and critical thinking as designers are now being challenged to tackle complex social problems during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

Contextualizing section introductions are provided to assist readers in understanding the nature of the material discussed along with summary messages that articulate how each text fits within the larger milieu of social design theory, methods, and practice.

## KEY FEATURES

- *The Social Design Reader* brings together *previously published* seminal papers, essays, articles, and excerpts with a laser focus on the social nature of design to provide the reader with a solid overview of the trajectory and key advancements toward a more human-centered profession.
- *The Social Design Reader* draws from a wide range of writing published in academic journals—publications that are not easily accessed by students and working practitioners and are often behind a pay wall.
- *The Social Design Reader* assists the reader in comprehending the ever changing nature of design practice while encouraging an active understanding of social design thinking and its role in preparing more empathetic, creative leaders for society's challenges.

- *The Social Design Reader* is the first anthology on this topic to be produced by an editor who has experience—both professional communication design practice and university-level teaching—in organizing meaningful social design interactions with local community groups within the university classroom environment.<sup>4</sup> The goal is to encourage the reader to think about design as an agent of social change.

## NOTES

1. An anthology is a book or other collection of selected writings by various authors, usually in the same literary form, of the same period, or on the same subject. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/anthology>.
2. “Within the current landscape of design academia, non-Western epistemologies and practices have not been taken seriously, and this has a history going all the way back to the need to develop design methods as a reaction to what was seen as craft-based design—incidentally associated with pre-industrial, non-European cultures.” Ahmed Ansari, *What a Decolonisation of Design Involves: Two Programmes for Emancipation*, April 12, 2018. At <http://www.decolonisingdesign.com/topics/actions-and-interventions/publications/> (accessed August 28, 2018).
3. British and American people often spell the same word differently. A good example would be “colour” in British English and “color” in American English. Both “dialects” of English often feature different terms to describe the same thing. A good example would be “mobile phone” in British English and “cell phone” in American English. A good read on the history of these differences can be found at <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150715-why-isnt-american-a-language> (accessed August 28, 2018).
4. *Developing Citizen Designers* (2016) by Elizabeth Resnick is a book containing international university-level case study assignments and pedagogical texts aimed at students, educators, and designers in the early stages of their careers, to learn and practice design in a socially responsible manner. It responds to the rise of academic debate and teaching in the areas of social design, sustainable design, ethical design, and design futures.



## SECTION 1

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# Making a Stand: A New Social Agenda for Design

Social design ... with its growing range of genres and practices, has seen an exponential expansion in the last decade. Design is no longer a twentieth-century studio-based practice confined to the authorship of given individuals, or the strictures of a purely profit-driven design management team working to a fixed brief and a crude consumer profile. Models of the autocratic design guru behind his drawing board appear today as anachronistic as the notoriously misogynistic advertising industry of the 1950s. As user groups, co-design and participatory methods increasingly shape the practice, and as a renewed focus on people, their relations, beliefs and practices comes to the fore, we are witnessing a seismic shift to the “social.”

—Alison J. Clarke, *Émigré Culture and the Origins of Social Design*, 2015



## CHAPTER ONE

---

# Introduction

ELIZABETH RESNICK

*Social Design* is the practice of design where the primary motivation is to promote positive social change within society. As both a discipline and a professional practice that has experienced dramatic growth in recent years, Social Design remains nascent in its teaching, research, and community-oriented practices. Initially inspired by the writings of Victor Papanek and many others, social design’s “social” agenda is to encourage designers and creative professionals to adopt a proactive role and effect tangible change to make life better for others—rather than to sell them products and services they neither need nor want, which has been the primary motivation for commercial design practice in the twentieth century.

The term “social design” has continued to gain momentum within academia, business, and governmental organizations over the past twenty years. But what does this term actually mean? When linked together, the two words social design seem to simulate a state of ambiguity. It is no wonder that there seems to be no consensus on the meaning of this term! If we separate the words “social” and “design,” we discover that both words are nouns.<sup>1</sup> As a noun, the word social is defined as “an informal social gathering, especially one organized by the members of a particular club or group.” As a noun, the word design is defined as a “purpose or planning that exists behind an action, fact, or object.”<sup>2</sup> The word social is also an adjective which is “a word naming an attribute of a noun”; and the word design is also a verb which is “a word used to describe an action, state, or occurrence, and forming the main part of the predicate of a sentence, such as hear, become, happen.”<sup>3</sup> For example: “Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situation into preferred ones.”<sup>4</sup>

A *term* is a “word or phrase used to describe a thing or to express a concept, especially in a particular kind of language or branch of study.”<sup>5</sup> In the *term* social design, the use of the word social functions as an adjective naming a particular attribute of design or “a synonym for ‘highly problematic condition’, which poses the need for urgent intervention, outside normal market or public service modalities” as suggested by eminent researcher and educator

Ezio Manzini.<sup>6</sup> However, what do we have in mind when we use the term social design? Isn't all design understood as social by nature? "Design is the enactment of human instinct and a construct that facilitates the materialization of our world."<sup>7</sup> I would agree with this statement. Design gives shape and form to the material and immaterial products and services that can address problems and contribute to the well-being of humankind. *Wikipedia* defines the term social design in this way: "Social design is design that is mindful of the designer's role and responsibility in society; and the use of the design process to bring about social change. Within the design world, social design is sometimes defined as a design process that contributes to improving human well-being and livelihood."<sup>8</sup>

And on the use of the term itself:

The term social design is also increasingly used to describe design of the social world. This definition implicates a perception of a man-made reality, which consequently can only be changed by humans, and *is* changed by humans all the time. In this view social design is inescapable, it is there whether people are aware of it or not. The social reality is created as a result of the sum of all our individual actions. There is an emerging discussion of this concept of social design, which encompasses all other definitions of the term.<sup>9</sup>

In 2010, the Winterhouse First Symposium on Design Education and Social Change was convened to form the basis for a collaborative network with the goal of providing students with the tools and training to explore and address social-design problems:

The diffuseness of social-design educational efforts can be partly attributed to vagueness in definition. The phrases "social change," "social innovation" and "social design" appear frequently in academic and journalistic discourse, but rarely with precision. At the same time, the meaning of "design" has expanded beyond the creation or arrangement of objects and communications to describe such conceptual approaches as systems design, service design and design thinking . . . The concept of "social design" is still in its infancy. Social design needs to be defined more clearly in relation to social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and social innovation.<sup>10</sup>

In 2012, the Social Impact Design Summit was convened at the Rockefeller Foundation headquarters in New York to address the challenges and opportunities within the field today. A white paper based on the summit titled "Design and Social Impact: A Cross-Sectoral Agenda for Design Education" was published and widely disseminated. One of the major stumbling blocks that emerged was that "summit participants singled out the lack of a clear understanding of what the term means. Greater clarity, they proposed, would lead to better-defined goals and would boost appreciation of the value of the field."<sup>11</sup>

They identified socially responsible design [as] an overarching term for design that is socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable—three quality-of-life pillars defined and addressed by an international community. The field is also known as public-interest

design, social design, social impact design, socially responsive design, transformation design, and humanitarian design. In this report, the terms social impact design and socially responsible design will be used interchangeably.<sup>12</sup> Laura Kurgan, one of the thirty-four summit participants offered:

Socially responsible is often the wrong term to define what it is trying to address. Often, socially responsible design implies a) solving the problem of poverty, or b) prioritizing people and use in a design problem rather than design itself, or c) sustainable design, which is equally hard to define. Being socially responsible—or solving urban problems through design—means addressing politics, globalization, health, education, criminal justice, or economics among others.<sup>13</sup>

In 2014, a report was commissioned by the UK-based Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and published by the University of Brighton that presented the findings of a nine-month study of opportunities and challenges for research in the social design arena. This report offered a cogent description of the term social design:

The term “social design” highlights the concepts and activities enacted within participatory approaches to researching, generating and realising new ways to make change happen towards collective and social ends, rather than predominantly commercial objectives. Social design can therefore be understood to encompass a broad set of motivations, approaches, audiences and impacts. For instance, these may be embedded within government policies or public services extremely critical of and divergent from these. Social design may be carried out by people who think of themselves as designers or who studied at design schools, or it might be an activity of designing that takes place involving people who are not professional designers.<sup>14</sup>

## IS SOCIAL DESIGN A THING?

To continue the exploration of the meaning of the term social design, design academic Cameron Tonkinwise posits important questions we should all consider and contributes a “schema of the different meanings of the ‘social’ in Social Design” in his 2015 rumination “Is Social Design a Thing?” He concludes (thankfully) that Social Design is indeed a “thing” in its own right.

## SOCIAL DESIGN: FROM UTOPIA TO THE GOOD SOCIETY

“I believe we are at a global turning point. Design now has to be for social good and I’m shaping a vision of what a ‘good society’ could be and how design and designers could help to bring it about.”<sup>15</sup> Eminent design historian and scholar Victor Margolin shapes his vision of the “good society” in his 2015 paper “Social Design: From Utopia to the Good Society.” Design has a long history of commitment to addressing social issues in the design

movements of the late nineteenth century that sought to improve working conditions to the mid-twentieth-century designers critical of consumerist society. Surveying social design's historical roots, Margolin connects its origins by examining influential utopian visionaries such as designers William Morris, Walter Gropius, and Richard Buckminster-Fuller. Margolin concludes that such a study of their foresight, ethos, and values could be very beneficial in visioning the future of social design—"utopian thought is a particular kind of proactive thought that is removed from the constraints of the real world. It provides an opportunity to imagine an ideal place that can serve as a beacon towards which to strive." While Margolin does recognize the aspirational value of utopian ideals, he argues that the "good society" project<sup>16</sup> should move beyond these ideals to address real world situations realized by real world actions.

In evaluating the importance of Victor Papanek's 1971 book *Design for the Real World*, Margolin acknowledges that Papanek "was one of the first designers to call attention to ways that design could be practiced outside the market." But Margolin is also critical that Papanek did not "recognize the problems he identified as part of a dysfunctional social and political system that itself was badly in need of redesign" when he argues that "when the mechanisms to engender change from within the 'real-world' are flawed, we need to address these mechanisms themselves and develop an alternative 'action frame.'" To this end, Margolin advocates that designers should come up with a new "action frame" for the world: "We need to rethink the way we organize our lives at every level from the local to the global." He concludes by asking "whether the international community of design educators and designers can recognize its own power as a collective agent of change and undertake a radical rethinking of how we could live, a rethinking that this community, better than anyone, can translate into propositions for projects that inspire people to carry them out."

## ÉMIGRÉ CULTURE AND THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL DESIGN

In her influential paper "Émigré Culture and the Origins of Social Design," design historian and social anthropologist Alison J. Clarke explores the genesis of social design through the focused lens of the Austrian and Central European émigrés and exiled designers who established influential networks within the United States—to promote a more progressive humanist culture encompassing new strategies—for a socially inclusive design culture that continues to influence contemporary design practice. Clarke examines the significance of the 1970s political activism and also cites (as Margolin does) the important contribution of American-Austrian émigré Victor Papanek as "the best known and pioneering proponent of social design" whose ground-breaking and best-selling 1971 book *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* coincided with "the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s and 1970s [which] gave rise to counter design and anti-design movements pitted against the hierarchies, environmental negligence and technological determinism of the design industry."

## NOTES

1. A noun is a word (other than a pronoun) used to identify any of a class of people, places, or things (common noun), or to name a particular one of these (proper noun). <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/noun>.
2. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/design>.
3. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/social>.
4. H. A. Simon, "The Science of Design: Creating the Artificial," *Design Issues* 4, nos. 1 and 2 (1988), pp. 67–82.
5. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/term>.
6. Mapping Social Design Research & Practice, *Social Design Rant 4—Ezio Manzini*, 2014, <https://mappingsocialdesign.wordpress.com/2014/06/16/social-design-rant-4-ezio-manzini/> (accessed August 26, 2018).
7. A. Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World* (London: Earthscan, 2009), 152.
8. *Wikipedia*, "Social Design," 2018, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_design](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_design).
9. *Ibid.*
10. In 2006, graphic designers William Drenttel and Jessica Helfand established The Winterhouse Institute to explore the value of design education for Social Impact (<http://www.winterhouseinstitute.org/>). William Drenttel and Julie Lasky, *Winterhouse Symposium on Design Education and Social Change: Final Reports*. <https://designobserver.com/feature/winterhouse-first-symposium-on-design-education-and-social-change-final-report/22578>.
11. *Design and Social Impact*, 2013, 1st ed. (New York: The Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 2014), 6.
12. *Ibid.*, 8.
13. *Ibid.*, 20.
14. Leah Armstrong, Jocelyn Bailey, Guy Julier, and Lucy Kimbell, *Social Design Futures: HEI Research and the AHRC. Project Report* (Brighton/London: University of Brighton/Victoria and Albert Museum, 2014).
15. Victor Margolin quoted in the interview with Don Ryun Chang in 2015, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/special-interview-5-victor-margolin-idc-gwangju/> (accessed August 28, 2018).
16. "Design's entitlement is grounded in its contribution to the creation of 'the good society.' A society that ensures that everyone has access to the goods and services needed for a decent existence. 'The good society' is a dream of a world that is fair and just, a utopian concept, which provides direction and enables us to join forces. By virtue of their powers of imagination and expertise, designers are well placed for expressing this dream of 'the good society' in an appealing way and to help translate it into practice." From the Utrecht Manifesto 2015, <http://www.utrechtmanifest.nl/files/doc/026/utrechtmanifesto.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2018).



## CHAPTER TWO

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# Is Social Design a Thing?

CAMERON TONKINWISE

© *Cameron Tonkinwise, 2015*

During a workshop that was part of the UK AHRC funded Mapping Social Design Practice and Research project (<http://mappingsocialdesign.org/>), Ezio Manzini cogently insisted that there is no such thing as ‘social design,’ nor should there be. At best, argued Manzini, there is designing—the more or less conventional forms of (material) designing with which (modern[ist]) design schools and design professionals are already familiar—applied to contexts that you might characterize as ‘social.’

If we take for granted that our societies today face complex social challenges that demand new kinds of responses, is the task merely to lend the existing practices of designing, which have hitherto served mostly commercial clients, to these ‘social’ contexts? Or are we in need of a different kind of designing when it comes to these contexts? To what does the ‘social’ in ‘social design’ refer? Is it just the context for designing or is it a qualifier for distinct forms of design?

I want to try to defend the idea that Social Design, if not yet a ‘thing,’ should be a thing, something that entails a different, though still related, kind of designing than that with which we are familiar. To do this, I would like to contribute something like a schema of the different meanings of the ‘social’ in Social Design.

### 1. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGNING AS A SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Talk of design frequently has recourse to the modernist myth of the genius individual artist, alone in his [sic] studio with his (asocial) things. The adjective ‘social’ is therefore an important corrective, insisting that all designing is collaborative. In addition to almost always involving a team, designing is inseparable from negotiations between sponsoring clients, representative

users or their mediating researchers, material and component suppliers, manufacturers and coders, marketers and retailers, sometimes regulatory agencies and legal counsel, etc.

This socially collaborative quality to designing is not merely pragmatic. Since designing involves making decisions about preferred futures, its validity lies only in the social, in people sharing a commitment to materialize those kinds of futures. Design, especially Design Thinking, is often feted for its ability to have insights into creative breakthrough ideas. But these are worth nothing unless supported by diverse social networks that enable them to become real—and this is the real work of Design.

Given this, you might expect that designers are highly accomplished persuaders or politicians, and that facilitation and negotiation are core to design education. To some extent, this is the role of ‘crit’ in designing—where ideas are comprehensively stress-tested—an aspect of the process that often makes non-designers uncomfortable. However, it is nevertheless true that designers frequently try to let their designs argue for themselves. Material things, like prototypes, are powerful rhetorical devices. But then the question becomes, what is a persuasive prototype of a social design?

As such, design in the context of complex societal challenges requires quantitatively greater and perhaps qualitatively new forms of ‘design as a social activity.’

## 2. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGN WORKS WITH THE SOCIOMATERIAL

Design emerged out of craft and is usually characterized as the skilful material practice of making things. The icons of design are seemingly timeless physical forms. However, the real aim of the designed products are to be ‘of use.’ A successful design enables new ways of doing things and so becomes a habitual part of how we live. Rather than standing out like museum pieces, designs become part of the dynamic fabric of our built environments supporting our everyday activities.

Counter intuitively, designed things enable everyday activities not being inert tools, but being ‘alive’ to the everyday needs and desires of their users. Designing involves the development of forms and mechanisms that can activate material products to people’s tasks. The essence of a design are its affordances, the ways in which a product or system actively offers uses to people whose attention is focused on accomplishing a goal rather than searching for a means. These sociomaterial forces are most evident in digital devices which can literally ‘call out’ to someone how they might be helpful; but they are also present in the way analogue devices indicate how they should be handled without needing instruction manuals.

Designers have always worked with this kind of socio-materiality. What is perhaps new to ‘social designers’ is the obverse implication. All that we value and do, what we normally call the social, is structurally dependent on those material products that make up our built environments. To paraphrase, Bruno Latour (1990), ‘Design is Society made Durable.’ The argument here is not a materialistically determinist one; merely that designs are a force promoting certain ways of living and working, by making them more efficient or effective or pleasurable to do.

The conclusion should be, as Allan Chochinov (<http://www.manifestoproject.it/allanchochinov/>) is fond of saying, ‘designers are not in the artifact business, but the consequence business.’ All design is the design of lifestyles and work practices.

And this is even more apparent when designing in the contexts of complex societal challenges. Designers bring to the social a focus on materiality, the ways in which things can promote, sustain or obstruct certain types of social life. To do this responsibly, designers need to be much more critically articulate about their role in making social affordances.

### 3. SOCIAL DESIGN = ALL INNOVATION IS SOCIOTECHNICAL

If designers are often portrayed as lone creatives, designs are often thought of as lone artifacts. However, every product functions only within particular environments and systems. This is most apparent with products that require power to operate. They must not only be near to a power source (which in turn is connected to entire energy infrastructure), but must be designed to fit, literally, in with that power supply. This is also evident for any aspect of information and communication technology whose functionality depends on being successfully networked. However, this locationality and connectivity is also the case for any designed product, even static ones. To function as designed, products must be situated within an appropriate milieu analogous to species adapted to particular niches. An office chair does not work with a kitchen table; an electric kettle is of little use when camping; without paper and something to lean on, pens are hard to use. Successful design is always contextually sensitive design.

This presents a challenge for design innovation. It is not enough to innovate a disruptive design: you must also design how that design connects to existing infrastructures and/or establishes its own new environments. The Segway promised to be a breakthrough transport technology but did not fit either on the sidewalk or in the street; in the end, its appropriate ecosystems seem only to be the private ‘roads’ of shopping malls, airports and industrial parks. By contrast, iPad appears to have successfully changed the couch into a workspace, at least insofar as working has also become more a practice of browsing-reading with only brief amounts of writing.

Designers have always thought about these sociotechnical systems, often citing Eero Saarinen’s maxim to always design something with respect to its next larger context—the chair in a room, the room in a building, the building in a street, etc. At the other extreme is the way modernist designing strived for ‘total design,’ that is, the attempt to control the design of every single thing in a particular environment: furniture, flatware and light fixtures.

Social design would therefore signal this kind of contextual design directed at the creation of systems and places that support particular kinds of social activities. We take for granted that social practices are similarly place- and context-based. Laws can only be enacted in a parliament; sports require particular sets of equipment and marked fields; good restaurants are rarely designed purely for calorific intake but instead for enabling conversations, whether casual or intimate. The challenge of online learning for instance is not merely technological, but the creation of the right kinds of sociotechnical ensembles in which learning can take place.

A contemporary challenge for social designers is securing times and spaces for social innovations in a world of increasingly overlapping and competing networks and activities.

#### **4. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGN OF SYSTEMS WITH SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL MEDIA ASPECTS**

The term ‘social’ is frequently these days a metonym for ‘social software.’ ‘Social Business’ for example tends to mean the value propositions derived from online service delivery, or digital platforms for peer-to-peer interactions, or the social media aspects of a business’ marketing and public relations.

There are arguments as to whether these kinds of digital sociality displace or enhance what is sometimes characterized as more authentic face-to-face sociality. More likely is that these digital platforms afford different forms of sociality, new ways of interacting with people, some of whom you would have been unlikely to find, or find value in interacting with, in off-line everyday life. Certainly, the way in which online exchanges have developed their own terminology—flame, friend, like, snark, sext, etc.—suggests that there are distinct forms of communication and collaboration occurring.

Interaction design of these social platforms—what could be called ‘social design’—remains a nascent field. The rapid evolution of, and frequent missteps by digital social systems, evidence the fact that patterns let alone principles are yet to be found for these kinds of designing.

A complexifying factor is that digital platforms are not just neutral media for social exchanges but increasingly agents participating in those exchanges. The design of these systems structure how people are able to present themselves—the database and form design behind a profile page for example. It is increasingly apparent that the algorithms serving the business models underwriting some platforms are used to curate what aspects of other people’s online contributions you get to see. Contributions are prompted rather than spontaneously arising in people. In each of these cases, the digital domain, as designed, has a sociomaterial force, affording, scripting and prohibiting particular kinds of social interaction.

Therefore, while social (media-based) design presents social (change-oriented) design with powerful opportunities, the interrelations between the two are worryingly larger than the current ‘build an app for that’ mentality that is predominant. For instance, the always-on-anywhere notifications trend in mobile and now wearable device design runs counter to the place-based tendencies discussed in 3 above.

#### **5. SOCIAL DESIGN = SOCIAL SCIENCE BASED PROJECTS CONDUCTED AS/WITH/BY DESIGNERS**

As design has established itself as a discipline, with an increasing research output, and as the profession of design has expanded its remit through strategic design thinking, designers are being asked to be on transdisciplinary teams tackling complex social challenges that are not directly design-related.

There seem to be three ways in which this happens. The first is when a designer is merely one other member of a team, offering a distinct perspective. It might be a designer's disposition toward sociomateriality that makes them relevant, but the project remains led by its original non-design professional domain. The second is when the designer is more prominent on the team, but as a process enabler rather than a content expert. By this I mean when designers are brought in to do facilitation or brainstorming. The project remains a non-design project, but design skills are used as a means of coordinating the team's response to a situation in ways that are not normally available to the other experts involved. The third is when the project is done in designerly ways with or without designers on the team, as when there was a recognition that management could be conducted 'as a kind of designing.' [Boland & Collopy, 2004]

In any of these cases, there tends to be an important motivating assumption: that existing professional expertises, on their own, are proving incapable of negotiating current social challenges. Social design often represents merely an optimistically creative alternative, valued precisely for its lack of expertise, its amateuristic ability to ask naïve questions and approach problems from unconventional perspectives.

But it is important to note that design also signals a challenge to existing professions. Its attentiveness to the sociomaterial and sociotechnical structure of activities and their contexts foreground things—i.e., material products—that disciplines of social research have overlooked. As Bruno Latour (1992) argues, the exclusive focus on the social by anthropology, philosophy and sociology to date resulted in inadequate accounts of our societies, missing the ways in which we depend on a range of physical things for maintaining civility—alarms that prompt us to wake and work; traffic lights that orchestrate turn-taking for us; phones that bring us news of our community's decisions and events.

This suggests that social design is not merely a helpful partner to other social professions, but could, if it took itself seriously a distinct new (trans)discipline, perhaps even be a replacement.

## 6. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGN OF/FOR SERVICES

Design is a recent profession birthed by industrialization. Mass producing identical items as part of the project of modernization demanded a new art and science that could interface between the needs of manufacturing and the needs of the consumer class.

For at least 50 years, design thinkers have spoken about post-industrial design. What might designing be if it is no longer merely outputting more material stuff? Service design is one of the most explicit examples. As indicated in 2, design's objective has always been social even if its direct object has been material. Service design shifts the emphasis more directly toward designing people, though as a practice it still does so through existing material design disciplines—scripting the activities of service providers and recipients through interior design, communication design, web design, etc.

However, it is important to register what has motivated the recent emergence of Service Designing. Services were 'designed' prior to the creation of the discourse of service design; they were 'engineered' by managers with an emphasis on back-office logistic efficiency. The introduction of design to service management comes with a prioritization of the front-line

service experience, especially on enabling customization. This means that what is being designed by service design are people in all their tricky variability. This makes service design quite distinct from more material design practices. To put it crudely: it is hard to steam-bend wood into a chair, but this is nothing compared to sculpting customizable-yet-not-anarchic service interactions between people.

## 7. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGNING FOR/OFF GOVERNMENTS

Governments can be understood as sociotechnical systems/places (3) that collaboratively design (1) the structures of our society (2). However because governments are normally considered a sector unto themselves (as opposed to the commercial private sector and the voluntary/informal third sector of nongovernmental civic society), thinking of government as designing appears to be an example of 5. An example is initiatives in the areas of Policy Design, bringing designers' optimistic creativity based on quick empathetic social research to the process of creating policies. These days, designers often have a seat at the table of governmental projects, such as policy making, because governments are keen to make use of the sociality afforded by digital platforms (4).

Another driver for social design in relation to governments is the reconception of government as service provision (6). Lending design to government services is often seen as a creative opportunity to increase their efficiency and effectiveness. However, the service design of government agencies meets many obstacles as a process that was created to generate commercial value is applied to a deliberately non-market organization. These difficulties suggest that service design in government contexts be a quite distinct expertise.

## 8. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGNING FOR/WITH NON-COMMERCIAL CONTEXTS

Though design is the child of industrial commerce, it has always been focused on enabling wider social change. The products of design afford not just enhanced effectiveness in relation to this or that task, but allow consumers to buy into the wider universalizing modernization of humanity, accelerating progress toward ideal ways of living and working. However, these wider effects of design have mostly depended upon such products being more or less affordable to individual consumers.

Victor Papanek (1971) famously argued that designers have an obligation to lend their skills to segments of the population who normally cannot afford to be design clients. This call created the most widely accepted understanding of 'social design:' design to improve the quality of life of those without the financial capital to buy quality products.

For Papanek, these projects deployed the same design processes as those in commercial design, just now redirected at the challenges faced by those outside the consumer class. However, the resulting products tended not to look like those generated for market-based clients. This was often not just because of budgetary constraints, but because of what was considered 'appropriate' to such contexts. When Papanek was writing, the 'alternative

technology' movement explicitly developed less sophisticated versions of existing products so that they might be better suited to what was thought to be the 'intermediate' sociotechnical contexts of developing nations. The organizing assumption then was that is only one inevitable development path.

By contrast, social design, if authentically serving the challenges of groups of people not large enough to constitute markets worth commercial investment, should result very different kinds of products (and services), not just less sophisticated ones. The outcomes of such social designing challenge one of the fundamental tenets of the modernist social value of design: universalism. Social design products demonstrate that different kinds of people demand different kinds of products. If these are to be more than customizations, then the process of designing for non-commercial contexts must be different too.

## **9. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGN IN THE CONTEXT OF UNMET NEEDS**

When pressed to define the 'social' of social design, Manzini (2015) talks of situations with 'unmet needs,' that is, services and resources that communities need for their well-being but which are not and will not be provided by commercial markets or government services. In Manzini's 'Theory of Change,' some in a few communities will feel so compelled that they will heroically innovate ways of meeting their needs themselves, making use of the alternative economies and organizations of social capital, volunteer labor and perhaps local under-utilized resources. The task of the designer is not to innovate in response to social needs, as in 8 above, but instead to find these already existing social innovations, and lend them design expertise (6, perhaps 7) so that those innovations become more robust over the longer term. By collaborating (1) with those unmet-need-fulfilling pioneers, designers will also learn models for community need fulfilment that might be translatable to other sociotechnical contexts.

Increasing numbers of community needs are becoming 'unmet' as austerity agendas cause governments to wind-back welfare provisions. According to neoliberalism, the free market will step in where needed, such as when government services are withdrawn. The work of social designers such as Manzini makes clear that there are limits to commerce's capacity or willingness to meet all needs; there are significant gaps into which communities and then social designers must step. In servicing unmet needs, social designers can appear to be validating the politics of small government, demonstrating that something will step up. As with 7 above, is design merely an agent of marketization? How can social designers' processes be distinct enough from conventional commercial designing to guarantee that social design is not an apologist for, if not agent of, neoliberalism?

## **10. SOCIAL DESIGN = DESIGN-ENABLED SOCIAL CHANGE**

Social Designing with respect to unmet needs (9) that is more than remedial (8), that resists the danger of being a kind of marketizing service design (6) of government (7) and non-government

sectors, must afford significant social change. Its outcomes must be substantial sociotechnical innovations (3). These are political acts (1), but ones that make use of design's particular transdisciplinary research-led (5) expertise with respect to the socio-material (2), even and especially in social media contexts (4). The scale of this challenge, precisely in its negotiation of design's commercial genealogy, demands that Social Design be undertaken as a thing in its own right.

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## CHAPTER THREE

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# Social Design: From Utopia to the Good Society

VICTOR MARGOLIN

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## INTRODUCTION

In the August 2002 edition of *Design Issues*, my wife, Sylvia, and I published an article entitled “A ‘Social Model’ of Design: Issues of Practice and Research.” In that article, we posited social work intervention as a model and discussed product design within that framework, limiting our focus to “people with low incomes or special needs due to age, health, or disability.”<sup>1</sup> In developing our model, we looked at various domains within what social workers call the ecological perspective—biological, psychological, cultural, social, natural, and physical/spatial.<sup>2</sup> Of these domains, we identified the physical/spatial as the one where designers could make the most significant interventions. This domain as we conceived it “is comprised of all things created by humans such as objects, buildings, streets, and transportation systems.” We recognized that “Inadequate or inferior physical surroundings and products can affect the safety, social opportunity, stress level, sense of belonging, self-esteem, or even physical health of a person or community.”<sup>3</sup>

While I still believe in the validity of the social work intervention model, in the years since we published the *Design Issues* article, I have expanded my thinking to recognize a far broader terrain for social design. This has been prompted not only by the worsening of large-scale ecological and social problems such as climate change and the grossly unequal distribution of wealth but also by the recognition that a time of crisis provides a stellar opportunity

to think about change at the largest possible level. The latter is an alternative to confining social change strategies to situations that systemic disorders and injustices will perpetuate despite well-meaning interventions. For the sake of this essay I will focus on this issue of large-scale change. With reference to various precedents for envisioning a new world based on fairness, justice, and equality, I suggest a way forward that can involve large numbers of people, particularly designers as well as design educators and their students, in imagining a world that could be. I begin by recognizing that what designers do and what they might do are absolutely crucial to making the world as it is and as it could be. Here I would like to use design in its widest possible sense to include non-material things such as institutions and social systems.<sup>4</sup> Such a broad definition is entirely consistent with the way many people are thinking about design's possibilities today. A definition of this magnitude helps us to recognize the wide range of designed products—whether material or non-material—among which we live: objects, graphics, systems, services, and even political and legal structures. The latter were shaped for particular purposes and constitute frames for how we may be inspired to act and what we are actually able to do. When all these entities function well, design is a productive activity that enables positive action. When they do not and design leaves the fundamental reasons for this dysfunction untouched, it becomes an obstacle to meaningful change.

In recent years, the interest in design for social good or social change has been growing within the design professions and the design education community. A recent article by Cinnamon Janzer and Lauren Weinstein foregrounds “situation-centered design” as a way to expand the idea of social design practice. “In designing social situations as social design aims to do,” they write, “a different set of processes and research methodologies must be used than those employed in designing objects.”<sup>5</sup> Complementing the article by Janzer and Weinstein is a far more extensive survey of social design examples and possibilities. Funded by several British government agencies including the Arts & Humanities Research Council, the survey, which focuses on Britain, presents different approaches to social design including design for social innovation, socially responsive design, and design activism, while also addressing issues of research, funding, and professional opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

Design for social good is not actually a new idea but its definition as a distinct form of practice is. Victor Papanek was one of the first designers to call attention to ways that design could be practiced outside the market. In his book *Design for the Real World*, published first in English in 1971, he discussed opportunities for designers to work in the developing world and also to design for people in need, essentially the same population that the social work intervention model recognizes. Papanek's book made a great impact and led many designers and design students to think about populations with needs that design could address beyond the standard consumerist model. What Papanek did not do, however, was to recognize the problems he identified as part of a dysfunctional social and political system that itself was badly in need of redesign.

Over the past decade, a number of exhibitions have called attention to the social needs that design might address. Perhaps the highest profile of these shows in recent years is *Massive Change*, organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2004. Graphic designer

Bruce Mau curated it with Jennifer Leonard and the Institute without Boundaries, whose efforts were directed by Greg Van Alstyne. *Massive Change* had the virtue of looking at design from a global perspective that consisted of large systems but its espousal of the market economy as the framework for change, especially through the agencies of many corporations who would be seen by progressives as part of the problem, prevented the arguments in the exhibition from being translated into a program that would radically challenge the status quo.<sup>7</sup>

Another approach to exhibitions about social need emphasizes design for developing countries. *Design for the Other 90%*, shown at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, in 2007, exemplifies this type.<sup>8</sup> Victor Papanek was a leader in promoting such a practice in *Design for the Real World* as well as in his work with the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID). He inspired designers like Reinder van Tijen, who founded ‘Demotech’ to provide low-tech DIY designs to be constructed locally by inhabitants of developing countries. Van Tijen’s 1976 *Rope Pump for Burkina Faso* is a case in point.<sup>9</sup> In the discussion that ensues, I will consider design within what I call an ‘action frame’—a set of assumptions of how the world is or could be that animates our human activity. The action frame is the source of the values that guide our actions as well as the source of the worldviews that justify our behavior. The way design contributes to the action frame is crucial because it is that frame that provides both the opportunities and constraints for the activities of everyone.

Thus, existing political and economic systems and institutions, rules and laws, and also customs and habits are all part of an action frame that makes them possible, while rendering alternatives less possible or even not possible at all. The question before us is whether the action frame that has produced the world we live in is adequate to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. I don’t believe it is. Consequently we need to rethink the way we organize our lives at every level from the local to the global. I claim that the ultimate purpose of design is to contribute to the creation of a good society. By a good society, I mean one that is fair and just. It insures that all citizens can receive the goods and services they need to survive with dignity. I use the good society as a construct or prototype of a society that could be and in fact one whose contours are already being shaped by myriad activities around the world. The purpose of envisioning such a prototype is to help make sense of the many forces of positive change that are currently in motion and to aid in imagining how they could contribute to forms of shared social life at a large scale.

In this essay, I aim to demonstrate that the desire to think about the world in an entirely new way is not strange for designers and therefore my proposal to take it up again is not such a radical proposition. After tracing a relatively brief history of global worldviews to show both the potential and limitation of building on those views to pursue the good society project, I explain why I believe the existing action frame is inadequate. Then I describe the specific challenges that a new action frame has to meet, and I mention some initiatives that are already underway. Finally, I consider the implications of the good society project for designers and for design education, emphasizing in the latter both curriculum development and a collaborative research effort to move a prototyping process forward.

## DESIGNERS ENVISION THE FUTURE: UTOPIAN THOUGHT

Utopian thought is a particular kind of proactive thought that is removed from the constraints of the real world. It provides an opportunity to imagine an ideal place that can serve as a beacon towards which to strive. Some utopian visions have been formulated in such detail that we can even envision what the home furnishings look like, while others are more abstract, crystallizing urges for a better world in statements that express values rather than pictures of how that world might appear. Within design there has been a trajectory of ‘utopian thought’ that extends at least as far back as the Greeks. As Frank and Fritzie Manuel note in their monumental history of utopia in the Western world:

“The Greek philosophical utopia was concretely embodied in the architectural design of ideal city plans from the classical through the Hellenistic periods of which only cursory notices survive...”<sup>10</sup>

I could follow this utopian strain through the *città ideale* of the Renaissance and beyond but instead I will pick up the discussion in the late nineteenth century with William Morris, a prodigious designer and thinker whose vision of how the world might be is still relevant today.

For some years Morris was deeply engaged in socialist politics in Britain. He was a member of the Socialist Democratic Federation and a founder of the breakaway Socialist League. In a speech entitled ‘The Society of the Future,’ that he gave to the Hammersmith (London) branch of the Socialist League in 1887, he referred to ‘dreams for the future’ that “make many a man a Socialist whom sober reason deduced from science and political economy and the selection of the fittest would not move at all.”<sup>11</sup> For many utopian architects and designers on the European continent after World War I, Morris was a strong influence because of his interest in an ideal society that was set in an earlier time when craftsmanship was more important than technology and the devastation of the environment seemed less than the Industrial Revolution and a harsh factory system had brought about. Henry van de Velde’s residence, Bloemenwerf, may well have been inspired by Morris’s residence, the Red House, while the various workshops in Vienna, Munich, and elsewhere were surely influenced by the practices of Morris’s firm, Morris & Co. A nostalgia for the past such as Morris enunciated in his novel *News from Nowhere* was evident in Bruno Taut’s visionary book *Alpine Architecture* as it was in Walter Gropius’s *Bauhaus manifesto of 1919*. That year Gropius became the director of the Bauhaus, then an experimental design school in Weimar that continues to exert an influence on design education today.<sup>12</sup>

For the founding manifesto of the school, Gropius chose the image of a cathedral, which he called the ‘Cathedral of Socialism’.<sup>13</sup> Like William Morris, he envisioned a return to the cooperative work practices of the Middle Ages that characterized the construction of the great European cathedrals. Apart from representing the ‘unified work of art’ in which Gropius strongly believed, we can be reasonably sure that the cathedral image, created as a woodcut

by the artist Lyonel Feininger, was also a metaphor, perhaps for a good society based on cooperative practices. At the same time we see that Gropius imagined the Bauhaus itself as a utopian community grounded in curricular organization and social relations that were radical departures from the other schools of applied arts in Germany. Though Morris's distaste for industrial culture was likely a precedent for Gropius's choice of the cathedral as a metaphor for the Bauhaus goals, within several years, Gropius had, like Taut, moved beyond Morris's vision of a utopian past and began to advocate a relation between art and industry, which resulted in some important designs such as Marcel Breuer's chromed steel Wassily chair, his modular nesting tables, and Marianne Brandt's Kandem table lamps. Although these objects are now icons of elite taste, they arose from a vision that posited modernity as a socially progressive condition, fostered by large-scale industrial production. Similarly inspiring was an event of a very different sort, the Russian Revolution, which began in 1917 and was completed by 1920. Whereas Morris and other visionary thinkers of his day had to inject their idealistic visions into a society that was for the most part resistant to them, the Russian artists, designers, and architects who created new building types, furniture, graphics, textiles, and fashion after the Revolution did so in the belief that they were designing for a new society that had never before existed and would therefore adopt their ideas. Hence, they were free to embody the imagined revolutionary values of this new society in artistic forms that likewise were totally new.

After World War I, when artists, designers, and architects in Europe were imagining ways to rebuild a battered continent, the Russian Revolution was an inspiration to the Workers' Council on Art in Berlin and to architects in the Netherlands like Mart Stam and in Germany like Ernst May and Hannes Meyer, who went to Russia to help build entire new cities. Some members of the Workers' Council on Art such as Bruno Taut moved beyond their nostalgic visions and went on to build Socialist-inspired housing developments like the horseshoe-shaped Britz apartments in Berlin.

The utopian impulse was marginalized during the late 1930s and it remained dormant in the early postwar years when European nations were concentrating on rebuilding after the devastation of World War II, while some Americans were busily consuming all the new houses, cars, and appliances that postwar industry in the United States could offer. The impulse surged again in the 1960s, taking several forms. One was the struggles for human rights and environmental justice and the other embraced new ways of living and celebrating such as communes, music festivals, and experimentation with design and architecture by such "counter-design" groups as Archigram in Britain, Ant Farm in the United States, the Utopie group in France, and Superstudio, Archizoom, and Global Tools in Italy. All of these groups shared a focus on design as a driving force behind social change from large-scale urban innovation to rethinking the very relationship between humans and technology. During this decade, Ken Garland and a group of designers in Britain issued the *First Things First Manifesto*, which reacted against British consumerist culture of that time and urged a more humanist and socially-oriented practice of graphic design.<sup>14</sup>

Since the 1920s and particularly in the 1960s, Richard Buckminster Fuller was a major force in rethinking the potential of design for creating a better world. A brilliant American

engineer and inventor, he was the opposite of William Morris. He believed in technology that was rationally and democratically applied and he actually produced a spate of technological inventions, the most widely adopted of which is the geodesic dome. Another was his Dymaxion World Map, which was created in 1943, patented in 1946, and reissued in 1954. Fuller attracted many adherents to his project of a World Resources Inventory and his inauguration of a World Design Science Decade. His legacy to designers was to think in large systemic terms unencumbered by the political and social obstacles that might prevent such big thoughts from turning into realized projects.<sup>15</sup>

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPACESHIP EARTH

Just as the end of World War I spawned a movement of utopian visionaries who produced designs for worlds or places that were free of political constraints, so did the termination of World War II result in seeds that sprouted in the form of reflections on how diverse peoples could live together on earth in a world of justice and peace. Among these initial postwar globalists was the British economist Barbara Ward who began to think about global issues by first considering the problems of what were called in the 1950s and 1960s underdeveloped countries. Her 1962 book *The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations* was an early attempt to connect the problems of these underdeveloped countries with the economic power of their wealthier counterparts and consider how changes in the economic policies and practices of wealthy nations could affect policies that would benefit countries in less developed parts of the world.<sup>16</sup>

Ward's 1966 book, *Spaceship Earth*, was among the first to describe the impact of new global problems such as pollution, urbanization, and resource consumption on what she called the 'planetary economy.' Her title also preceded Buckminster Fuller's use of the term in his short book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, which was published in 1969. Ward was realistic in creating her inventory of problems that had a global dimension and she had no recommendations for easy solutions. Nonetheless her book was useful in providing a rudimentary example of a global problem statement that others would address after her.<sup>17</sup> This 'problematique' was addressed when the Italian industrialist, Aurelio Peccei, convened a group of international colleagues from different disciplines, who shared a recognition that the world was heading for a crisis. As a response, they created a Project on the Predicament of Mankind. At a conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1970, MIT professor Jay Forrester, who had been a pioneer of methods for analyzing technical systems during World War II, presented a model that would enable an analysis of global factors that limit growth. These included population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production, and pollution. When completed and published in 1972, the ensuing report titled *Limits to Growth* challenged previous visions in the developed countries of limitless resources and argued that a series of trade-offs would henceforth be required if the planet were to survive.

The growing catalog of problems coupled with the Club of Rome's claim that resources were finite, began to generate a new mindset among a few politicians and scholars who

realized that new ways to think about managing the planet were drastically needed. Such concern prompted the United Nations to create the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983. It was intended on the one hand to produce a thorough survey of environmental resources and issues, while on the other to add a new factor, social well-being, to the definition of *sustainability*. The now oft repeated definition was enunciated in the introduction to the Commission's report, *Our Common Future*:

“Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable—to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>18</sup>

Though its report was filled with helpful analyses of different factors that contributed to the dire situation it recognized—population, industry, energy, food security, urban affairs—the Commission did not make any recommendations that would have seriously challenged the world's most powerful industries. Nor did it confront the idea that economic growth might have to be limited in order to insure the availability of resources for the future generations that it purported to safeguard.

In the trajectory of United Nations conferences on environmental issues, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Rio Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, produced a compelling report, *Agenda 21: The Earth Summit Strategy to Save Our Planet*, replete with optimistic though non-enforceable resolutions for environmental improvement.<sup>19</sup> One outcome of the conference, the Earth Charter, has codified a set of environmentally and socially sustainable principles, yet translates none of them into policies that could result in concrete actions. Consequently, it enunciates a 16-point code of conduct that any well-intentioned and reasonable person would agree with but stops short of confronting any obstacles to the massive and necessary environmental and social changes it advocates.<sup>20</sup> Among its principles are a respect for the diverse life on earth, caring for the global ‘community of life’ with compassion and love, building just democratic societies that are participatory, sustainable, and peaceful, and protecting the integrity of the Earth's environmental systems. In its own way, the Earth Charter is as idealistic as the avant-garde manifestoes of the early twentieth century and consequently makes its greatest impact as a statement of ideals rather than a blueprint for action. By the time of the Rio Summit in 1992, global politics had begun to harden into opposing camps such that subsequent summits on climate change and environmental issues ceased to reach any conclusions that were uniformly endorsed by all the delegates, despite the fact that environmental conditions have worsened considerably. Likewise, neo-liberal policies that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have imposed on developing countries have stifled many valuable initiatives and facilitated the entry of large global corporations into countries that should have been given the means to ameliorate their own situations first. The United Nations continues to hold meetings on the Millennium Development Goals, but it has been unable to garner sufficient support to reach them nor has it shown any capacity to stem the tide of corporate privatization that is spreading around the globe.

## A NEW ACTION FRAME

The mountain of crises that the world faces today is a clear indication that the action frame that has shaped the world's development for the past six hundred years is no longer adequate to address them. While the frame was in place, many positive results were achieved. The middle class was created and large numbers of people entered it. Models of entrepreneurship were created and these delivered new goods and services that have enriched the lives of millions of people. Diseases have been cured and overall the health of the world population has improved immensely. Within this frame, whose primary actors are nations, and more recently international and transnational entities like the United Nations and global corporations, capitalism has been the dominant economic system, having weathered a brief challenge from the command economies of the Soviet Union and its former Eastern bloc satellites and China, all of whom have by now embraced variants of capitalist economics and production. The tide has now turned and a new set of conditions calls for a very different action frame that would not only better enable the thousands of small to medium scale initiatives that are challenging the values of the old frame but also provide a new set of global and national institutions to counter the sharp divide between rich and poor individuals and nations that capitalism has fostered. We need to recapture the utopian impulse that was so strongly present in the thought and feelings of such great designers and visionaries as William Morris, Walter Gropius, and Buckminster Fuller, while also reviving the perspective of Spaceship Earth, which established a clear set of global problems that need to be addressed.

To invent a new action frame is not only a matter of changing values. It is necessary to change strategies as well. I would like to mention here eight conditions that call for a new strategy of action on a global scale.

*First:* Population growth. More people on the planet require more resources and a different means of distributing them.

*Second:* More older people who require care and financial support.

*Third:* Climate change.

*Fourth:* Increased consumption of natural resources.

*Fifth:* A global financial system that is out of control.

*Sixth:* An unacceptable gap between the rich and the poor worldwide.

*Seventh:* A reduction of jobs due to new robotic and expert systems technology.

*Eighth:* Fundamentalist religious beliefs that divide the world's peoples.

Even in the midst of the current crises, millions of people are actively seeking alternatives to unsustainable lifestyles and institutions. Projects range from food production, to banking, skills bartering, altering patterns of land ownership, and new means of energy production and means of transport. Some of these projects are microcosms of what larger sustainable systems might look like, while others isolate sustainable practices within systems that are difficult to change. The projects cut across many disciplines and institutions, raising fundamental questions about how we organize our life on earth.

Designers have been involved in quite a number of them. A particularly forceful organization is the DESIS Network, originated by Ezio Manzini, who has led the charge for many years

to promote social sustainability through citizen action. DESIS is working across numerous areas around the world including aging, transport, food production and distribution and strengthening relations between urban and rural populations. In general, DESIS works through laboratories that have been established at more than thirty design schools and new labs are continually being proposed.<sup>21</sup> The lab network is closely affiliated with Cumulus, the international association of design schools, and lab representatives meet regularly at Cumulus gatherings. In September 2014, Cumulus held a major conference, ‘Design with the Other 90%: Changing the World by Design’ in Capetown, South Africa, as part of Capetown’s designation by the International Council of Design Associations (ICSID) as the 2014 World Capital of Design.

Besides the design activism of DESIS, Cumulus, and many other organizations including Designers Without Borders, Architects for Humanity, and the Rural Studio at Auburn University, numerous economists and social theorists have been writing about new options for social organization. The American political scientist Gar Alperovitz has introduced a concept called The Pluralist Commonwealth, by which he means a new system of wealth production made up of diverse components, many of which are already in place. He describes the Commonwealth as a model that “projects the development over time of new ownership institutions including locally anchored worker-owned and other community benefitting firms, on the one hand, and various national wealth-holding, asset-based strategies, on the other. These ultimately would take the place of current elite and corporate ownership of the preponderance of large-scale capital.”<sup>22</sup> Alperovitz is one of many people doing research on the ‘New Economy.’ Their ideas range from radical to reformist but all agree that the prevailing model of capitalism has failed.<sup>23</sup>

Pursuing some of the ideas that have arisen in the ‘New Economy’ movement would lead to a complete rethinking of the money system and its place in the distribution of goods and services. Even a simple analysis will make clear, for example, how much wealth is squandered in the casino sector of the Wall Street economy or else on cleaning up the messes engendered by unsustainable financial and environmental practices. It should be no surprise that various writers on the ‘New Economy’ describe the monetary system as something that is designed, making clear that it is the product of strategic thought and conscious construction and can be changed if there is sufficient rationale.

I could go on to discuss other sectors such as food production, health care, or transport where the results of small to medium sized projects could easily lead to deeper reflection on how to change large-scale systems that address such issues. There is also a relatively recent impulse by governments and municipalities to employ designers to develop policies, programs, and products that address social problems. MindLab in Copenhagen is one example. Funded jointly by several Danish ministries, the group has addressed a number of social issues and problems. Beginning in September 2011, MindLab sponsored several conferences entitled ‘How Public Design?’ which brought together participants now working in this emerging sector to compare experiences and ideas. The major emphasis of the 2013 conference was on how design can address the kinds of problems that governments face today. The challenge that some participants saw was to introduce significant changes in how governments operate by creating new institutions that, as one of the participants put it, are “more experimental and hybrid.”<sup>24</sup>

The emphasis on governments as objects of design represents a considerable advance in what some designers believe they are capable of doing. As progressive as the ambitions of the MindLab conference participants may appear, however, they do not in my own view go far enough to lay the groundwork for a radical rethinking of how human beings can organize themselves in a global society to insure a fair distribution of wealth and the delivery of rights such as education, food, and housing to insure the well-being of everyone. What I am calling for is an investigation of the contours that would shape an innovative action frame. Such a frame could help to conceptualize a common denominator for many positive change initiatives that are currently underway and it could create an opportunity for prototyping new large-scale systems that might successfully address some of the crises I have outlined above. While economics is a central discipline for the construction of a new action frame, numerous other disciplines and fields such as environmental science, energy production, and housing design can and are making changes that represent new modes of social organization that would make sense within such a frame. Consider the many projects that involve sharing. These include the sharing of rides, facilities, tools, and food production. Consider also projects that reduce the need for ownership such as bicycle and car rental systems; projects that distribute profits more equitably such as cooperatives and reduce excessive banking fees such as credit unions and micro-lending; and new forms of distributing goods through the internet that allow more people to sell their products directly to their customers, while Airbnb has enabled individuals throughout the world to earn extra income by renting out rooms to travelers. One could criticize many of these initiatives—and especially their online facilitators—for merging capitalist economics with ancient bartering models, but at the very least they represent a departure from the corporate one-to-many model of production and distribution. For the distribution of waste, there is also the Zero Waste initiative that has been adopted by communities and cities in different parts of the world. Some of these projects are still in the early stage but others are fully developed and are being widely adopted. Many have been taken up by established enterprises, which have created new models of positive but gradual change without, however, challenging the economic premise of capitalism. As one example, I can cite the American grocery chain Whole Foods, which is teaming up with Gotham Green to build a new store in Brooklyn, N.Y. with a greenhouse farm on the roof. The farm will produce vegetables that will be sold in the store. This project is one of the many initiatives of ‘urban farming’ that flourish in New York City.

## STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Today, we often hear the word *design* being used to characterize the thought processes behind the conception and planning of not only manufactured products and graphic communication but also far less tangible entities like commercial services, corporate organizations, social activities, government policies, and even systems of laws. In short, design for many people, has come to mean a process of envisioning an activity—rather than a product—that leads to a specific outcome which is useful to many. While this broad definition is confusing for some, it is an opportunity for others to expand what was once a discipline limited to market

commodities and branded public communication. There is a chance to develop many new ways to think about designing as a way to organize what Sir Geoffrey Vickers has called ‘human social systems.’<sup>25</sup> The network of design schools around the world, as one source of ideas and activities, could be the site of a noble experiment to see whether a group of project-oriented research centers could generate a new social vision for the twenty-first century—a Good Society that makes use of all forms of design activity, both established and new. Another site would be the local, national, and international organizations of designers in connection with active citizens worldwide.

To address the question of why a global network of design schools and design organizations would be the appropriate place to launch a sustained reflection on a new global action frame, I offer four thoughts:

*First:* design is a propositional activity—its thought can proceed unhampered by disciplinary rules that restrict its content.

*Second:* designers are good at analyzing situations and extracting from them projects that can lead to improvements.

*Third:* designers are skilled at integrating the knowledge of others as numerous examples of managing multidisciplinary or even transdisciplinary design teams show.

*Fourth:* design is changing radically as it expands to include many new forms of activity.

The Good Society as a project could also provide a framework for putting into practice some of the new forms of design. If students and practicing designers were simultaneously working to understand the characteristics of a good society, there could also be a valuable confluence of methodology and values. In May, 2013, Virginia Tassinari and I taught a workshop at the Milan Politecnico on Design for the Good Society. Participants were service design students who were eager to work on a project they perceived to be a valuable social contribution. The workshop was conducted with only a few lectures as a prior research base but the students were extremely resourceful in imaging how a different way of thinking about social possibilities could be converted into design projects.<sup>26</sup> Each of the ten teams created a project related to a different sector such as transportation, education, care of the elderly, food distribution, and lodging.

What was particularly noteworthy about the projects is that the students looked in a thoughtful way at the potential of unused human capital to help deliver much needed services. In one project for an urban education exchange, students envisioned a role for immigrants to teach something about their cultures of origin or a skill such as playing a musical instrument. Another project focusing on elder care identified people in communities who might be willing to spend time with older people. Since the students were from many different countries, the plight of immigrants was a theme that surfaced for some and one project in particular explored ways that the immigration experience could be made much easier through helping to guide immigrants through the morass of bureaucracy that they have to face in establishing themselves in a new country.

Both design practice and design education are in a situation today that calls for bold new initiatives. On the one hand, many of the activities for which designers were traditionally trained have disappeared or at have at least vanished from the high wage industrialized

societies, having been outsourced to countries where designers with comparable skills work for a fraction of the cost. Or else, the activities themselves have been automated and human skills are no longer required, even if those skills were once a guarantee of better quality than can be achieved with automated services.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, there are many initiatives underway that are becoming established as alternatives to prevailing capitalist market models. Some of these are detailed in a recent book by Jeremy Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society*, where the author posits the emergence of the Creative Commons, which he characterizes as exemplary of a Third Industrial Revolution. For Rifkin, such phenomena as 3D-printing, open source software, and free internet access are democratizing consumption and creating a society where the market is undermined by the availability of goods or services free or at a low cost.<sup>28</sup> Rifkin is correct in the catalog of trends he provides but he skirts the issues of how a new form of social organization will address issues of income inequality, financial speculation, and the equation of wealth with political influence, which are still inherent qualities of capitalism even if some aspects of its market model are undermined.

## CONCLUSION: FROM UTOPIA AND SPACESHIP EARTH TO THE GOOD SOCIETY

As I have demonstrated, the history of design is no stranger to utopian projects. I argued that the value of such visionary projects has been to provide a space for aspirations that have no other locus for expression. While recognizing the aspirational value of utopian ideals, the Good Society project should move beyond them. Though energized and animated by utopian thought, it addresses real world situations and could be realized by real world actions. However unlike the image of Spaceship Earth, which is one of a closed entity, the Good Society is open and is being shaped by thousands of people and not just a group of experts who are piloting the spaceship. The question I pose is whether the international community of design educators and designers can recognize its own power as a collective agent of change and undertake a radical rethinking of how we could live, a rethinking that this community, better than anyone, can translate into propositions for projects that inspire people to carry them out.

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## NOTES

1. Victor Margolin and Sylvia Margolin, "A 'Social Model' of Design: Issues of Practice and Research," *Design Issues* 18 no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 25.
2. Ibid. 25–26.
3. Ibid. 26.
4. For a discussion of the latter see Sir Geoffrey Vickers, *Human Systems Are Different* (London: Harper & Row, 1983).

5. Cinnamon L. Janzer and Lauren S. Weinstein, "Social Design and Neocolonialism," *Design and Culture* 6 no. 3 (2014): 328.
6. Leah Armstrong, Jocelyn Bailey, Guy Julier, and Lucie Kimbell, *Social Design Futures; HEI Research and the AHRC* (n.p.: University of Brighton and the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2014). <http://www.mappingsocialdesign.org/2014/10/09/social-design-futures-report> (accessed December 18, 2014).
7. See the exhibition catalog, *Massive Change* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2004). For a critical review of the exhibition see Lauren Weinberg, "Massive Change: the Future of Global Design," *Design Issues* 23 no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 86–92.
8. See the catalog *Design for the Other 90%* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 2007). See also my article, "Design for Development: Towards a History," *Design Studies* 28 no. 2 (March 2007). Other publications that address the issue include Tim Coward, James Fathers, and Angharad Thomas, eds. *Design & Development: Seminar Proceedings*, Cardiff 11–12 July 2001 (Cardiff: UWIC Press, 2002), and Åse Kari Haugeto and Sarah Alice Knutslien, eds. *Design Without Borders: Experiences from Incorporating Industrial Design into Projects for Development and Humanitarian Aid* (Oslo: Norsk Form, 2004). Most recently, Cumulus the international association of art, design and media schools, published the proceedings of a 2014 conference entitled *Design with the other 90%*. Available from <http://www.cumulusjohannesburg.co.za/index.php/conference-theme-2/> (accessed December 18, 2014).
9. See <http://www.demotech.org/d-design/presentation.php?p=14>. Accessed January 20, 2015.
10. Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 65.
11. William Morris, "The Society of the Future," in *Political Writings of William Morris*, edited and with an Introduction by A.L. Morton (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 189.
12. I have discussed these and other utopian avant-garde movements in my essay "The Utopian Impulse," in the exhibition catalogue edited by Vivien Greene, *Utopia: Matters: From Brotherhoods to Bauhaus* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2010), 24–32.
13. "Walter Gropius, Programme of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar," in Ulrich Conrads, ed. *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. Translated by Michael Bullock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1975, c. 1970), 49–53.
14. The original manifesto and a brief description of it can be found at <http://www.designhistory.com/1960/first-things-first>. Accessed January 20, 2014. A new version of *First Things First* entitled *First Things First 2000* was drafted in 1999 and published the following year in *Adbusters* as well as other magazines. Matt Soar discusses the relation between the two manifestoes in his article, "The First Things First Manifesto and the Politics of Culture Jamming: Towards a Cultural Economy of Graphic Design and Advertising," *Cultural Studies* 16 no. 4 (2002); 570–592.
15. Fuller's writings are numerous. Among them are *Nine Chains to the Moon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1971, c. 1938, 1963), *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), *Utopia or Oblivion; The Prospects for Humanity* (Toronto, New York, London: Bantam Books, 1969), and *No More Secondhand God and Other Writings* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1971, c. 1963).
16. Barbara Ward was more than likely guided by the work of the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal who addressed the disparity between rich and poor nations in his 1956 book, *An International Economy: Problems and Prospects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).
17. Barbara Ward, *Spaceship Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

18. "From One Earth to One World: An Overview by the World Commission on Environment and Development," in *Our Common Future: World Commission on Environment and Development* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8.
19. Daniel Sitarz, ed, *Agenda 21: The Earth Summit Strategy to Save Our Planet*. Introduction by U.S. Senator Paul Simon (Boulder: Earth Press, 1993).
20. The Earth Charter can be downloaded in any one of multiple languages on the website of The Earth Charter Initiative, <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org>. Accessed May 29, 2014.
21. For more information on DESIS, see <http://www.desis-network.org/>. Accessed October 16, 2014.
22. Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty, & Our Democracy*, 2nd ed. Takoma Park MD: Democracy Collaborative Press and Boston: Dollars and Sense, 2011, c. 2005), 71.
23. There is a rich literature on the "New Economy." Books on the subject include James Robertson, *Future Wealth; A New Economics for the 21st Century* (London and New York: Cassell Publishers, 1990), Lester R. Brown, *Eco-Economy: Building an Economy for the Earth* (New York; W.W. Norton, 2001), Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver with Keith Helmuth, Robert Howell, and Steve Szeghi, *Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy*. Foreword by Thomas E. Lovejoy (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), David C. Korten, *Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco; Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), and James Gustave Speth, *America the Possible; Manifesto for a New Economy* (New Haven and London; Yale University Press, 2012). A pioneer in this field is the economist Herman E. Daly, whose numerous books and articles include *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston; Beacon Press, 1996).
24. A brief summary of the first conference was published on the Internet at <http://www.issue.com/copenhagendesignweek/docs/howpublicdesign>. Accessed on November 7, 2014. Comments on the second conference by Joeri van den Steenhoven, one of the participants can be found at <http://www.marsdd.com/systems-change/mars-solutions-lab/news/design-innovation-government>. Accessed January 11, 2014.
25. Geoffrey Vickers, *Human Systems Are Different*.
26. The final student projects were documented but unfortunately no report of the workshop was published.
27. Concerns that a point will come when automation will not create new ancillary jobs are emerging. See Claire Cain Miller, "Rise of Robot Work Force Stokes Human Fears," *The New York Times* (December 16, 2014), A1, A3.
28. Jeremy Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society; The Internet of Things, The Collaborative Commons, and The Eclipse of Capitalism* (New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

## CHAPTER FOUR

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# Émigré Culture and the Origins of Social Design

ALISON J. CLARKE

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In recent years the concept of design has extended its ubiquity to the point of provoking some critics into questioning the utility of the term altogether. Contemporary design practice has transmuted into multitudinous sub-disciplinary branches (design anthropology, design thinking, design studies, design culture, etc.). Once a transformative practice, design seems to have devolved to such an extent that its hyper-inflation may render it impotent: it is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. So has current design become so amorphous as to have lost its critical capacity? Taking a more optimistic stance, is design's contemporary lean to pluralism and its shift to social inclusion just an inevitable outcome of its original humanist vision? As design becomes ever more deeply inculcated into a neo-liberal and free-market expansionism, the need for a sharpened critical perspective regarding its capacity for dissent is surely intensifying.

Social design in particular, with its growing range of genres and practices, has seen an exponential expansion in the last decade. Design is no longer a twentieth-century studio-based practice confined to the authorship of given individuals, or the strictures of a purely profit-driven design management team working to a fixed brief and a crude consumer profile. Models of the autocratic design guru behind his drawing-board appear today as anachronistic as the notoriously misogynistic advertising industry of the 1950s. As user groups, co-design and participatory methods increasingly shape the practice, and as a renewed focus on people, their relations, beliefs and practices comes to the fore, we are witnessing a seismic shift to the 'social'.

Arguably design, by nature, is inherently social. At its best it is a practice of empathy, whose main task is to imagine and facilitate the 'other' (the user). Some critics have even gone so

far as to suggest design matches the classical anthropological definition of the ‘the gift’ in the sense of its acting as a non-obligatory expression of an ideal reciprocal social relation; the perfect counterpoise to the rational, asocial, form of the commodity.

[The design] object, no matter what its mundanity, is like a collective gift: it is issued for all of us, and its function or work is giftlike in that its form embodies recognition of our concrete needs and desires ... the designer-maker knows, and has understood, recognized, affirmed, and sought to concretely meet our most intimate and human needs and desires. (Dilnot 2003: 58)

Theoretical definitions of the discrete nature of ‘the gift’ and ‘the commodity’, originally derived from nineteenth-century models of political economy, have shifted dramatically since design theorist Clive Dilnot’s commentary on the role of design. In neo-liberal economy in which even barefaced selling takes on the mantle of the social, should this shift be treated with cautious cynicism? What to think, for example, of the US university, which recently promoted a Positive Marketing Centre ‘dedicated to upholding market as a force for satisfying the interdependent needs of organizational stakeholders, individual citizens and society at large’?<sup>1</sup> How does this turn to ‘the social’, and the blossoming of social design as a specific area of expertise, actually affect change in the real world?

The commonsensical notion of the designer as envisaging and ‘making’ the future is at once clichéd and pertinent. The history of design, and most significantly its social agenda for the transformation of lives, has generally relied on this preposition. What is less discussed, and conspicuous by its absence, is any sense of the historiographical origins of the various rubrics of the social in design.

The best known and pioneering proponent of social design was the American-Austrian émigré Victor Papanek, who put socially responsible design firmly on the mainstream design agenda in the 1970s with his best-selling book *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*, published in English in 1971. Papanek’s populist polemic acted as a manifesto for design activism; advocating co-design, anthropologically inspired models of non-professional design, ‘social’ object that undermined the logic of commodity capitalism and defied commercialism. *Design for the Real World* has remained in print consistently for over four decades, initially spawning uprisings and dissent in design institutions across Europe during the 1970s by calling to account a profession that stymied grassroots change and boosted corporate profit-making. ‘Design’, declared Papanek in one of the opening pages of *Design for the Real World*, ‘is a luxury enjoyed by small clique who form the technological moneyed, and cultural “elite” of each nation.’

By the early 1960s design had already been identified as a principle mechanism in the perpetuation of material inequality and social elitism, its collusion with capitalist machinations placing it on a par with the much reviled advertising industry. In 1964, British graphic designer Ken Garland with twenty-two colleagues launched *First Things First*, a manifesto calling on their counterparts in the advertising and communication industry to devote their skill and imagination to better causes than ‘cat food, stomach powders, detergent, hair restorer, striped toothpaste, aftershave lotion, before shave lotion, slimming diets, fattening diets,

deodorants, fizzy water, cigarettes, roll-ons, pull-ons and slip-ons.<sup>22</sup> And in 1968, the May opening of the 14th Milan Design Triennale, titled ‘The Greater Number’ in clumsy gesture to political correctness, was ransacked by students protesting against its apolitical attitude and unembarrassed display of rampant first-world materialism. On the back of the a group-swell of international student activism, the humanitarian horrors of Vietnam and the Biafra-Nigerian civil war, the notion of ‘design for need’ emerged as an ever more potent theme completely at odds with the extravagant design exposition world of the Triennale. Tapping into this unrest, Victor Papanek critiqued a design culture that celebrated unbridled consumer culture with its endless expos, society meetings and international congresses, provoking fellow designers with barbed taunts aimed directly at the design establishment; ‘Watching the children of Biafra dying in living color while sipping frost-beaded martini can be kicks for lots of people, but only until *their* town starts burning down.’

*Design for the Real World* depended on a broader context of critique, in which the societal and environmental impact of late-industrial development brought into question the role of design as part of a broader network of indices including neo-colonialism, labor rights, feminism, development and user-centered technologies. The book sat alongside titles and genres including Rachel Carson’s environmental treatise *Silent Spring* (1962), Teresa Hyter’s critical *Aid as Imperialism* (1971), and E.F. Schumacher’s highly influential *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as If People Mattered* (1973), in which design had taken on a new prescience in addressing social inequality and challenging ‘top-down’ solutions. Significantly, the upsurge in design activism was not confined to the art school—it was directly linked to Worker’s Unions, ecological groups, pedagogic reform, NGOs, the social landscape movement, ergonomics, alternative and appropriate technology, community activism, disability rights, alternative transport activists, health design, occupational therapy and humanitarian relief.

Neo-Marxist sociologist and philosopher Wolfgang Haug has castigated design as the ‘hand-maiden of capitalism’ in his *Kritik der Warenästhetik* published the same year as *Design for the Real World*. But by the mid-1970s students in design schools, inspired by Papanek’s easily quoted polemic, were engaging in overtly social projects: corn mills for Africa; toys for disabled pre-school children; medical apparatus; appropriate technologies for ‘developing countries’. By 1976, the ‘design for need’ agenda had penetrated the upper echelons of the design establishment it had originally set out to dismantle when London’s Royal College of Art hosted an international conference on the social contribution of design, featuring leading figures of the manufacturing industry and government policy-making.

The revolutionary spirit of the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to counter design and anti-design movements pitted against the hierarchies, environmental negligence and technological determinism of the design industry. Most recently dubbed ‘Hippie Modernism’ (invoking an alternative utopianism built on the socialist modernism of the previous design generation) this loosely networked movement of design counter-cultures experimented with alternative configurations of contemporary material life.<sup>3</sup> In 1972, radical Italian architecture design group Superstudio famously posited a vision of a ‘life without objects’ in their installation *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at the MoMA in New York. In the UK, architecture group Archigram honed a neofuturist, pro-technological vision unpicking conventional ideas of