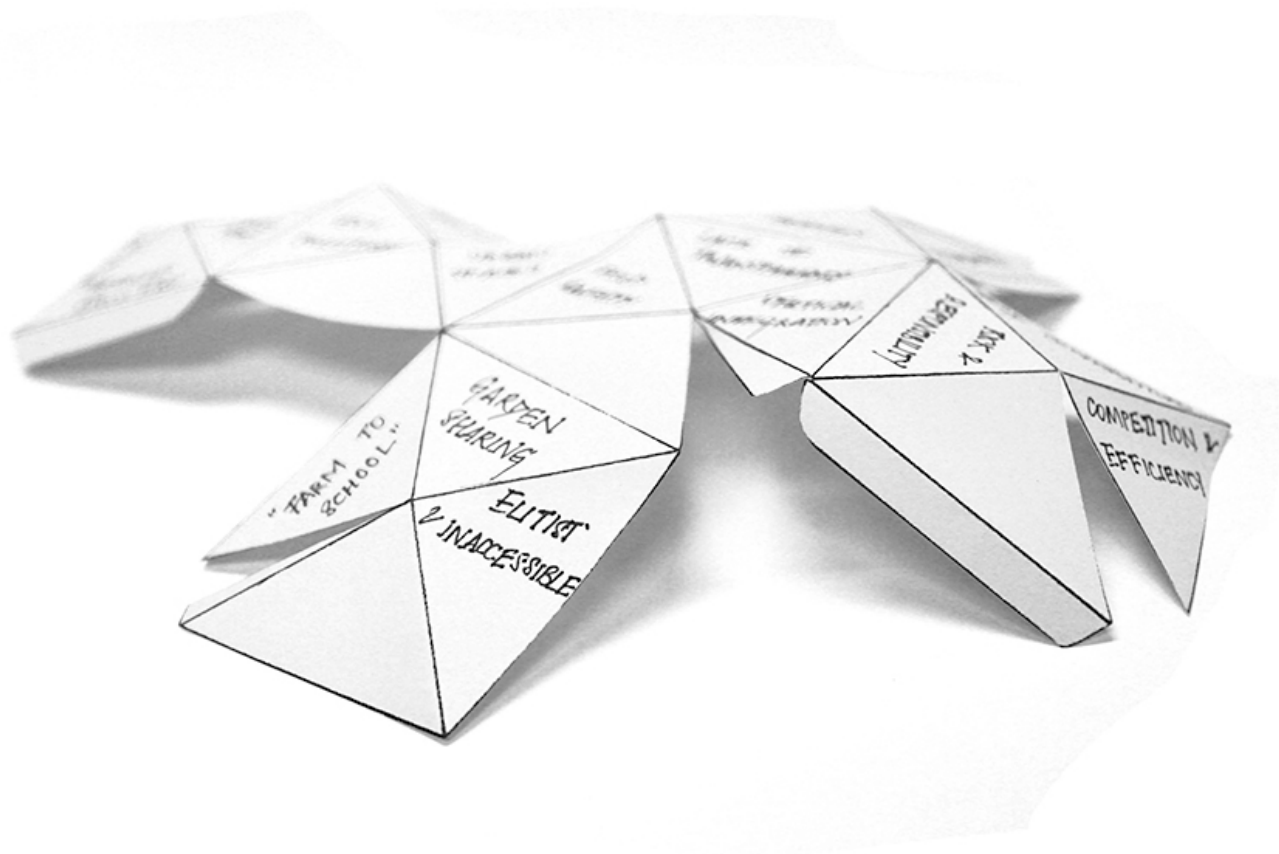
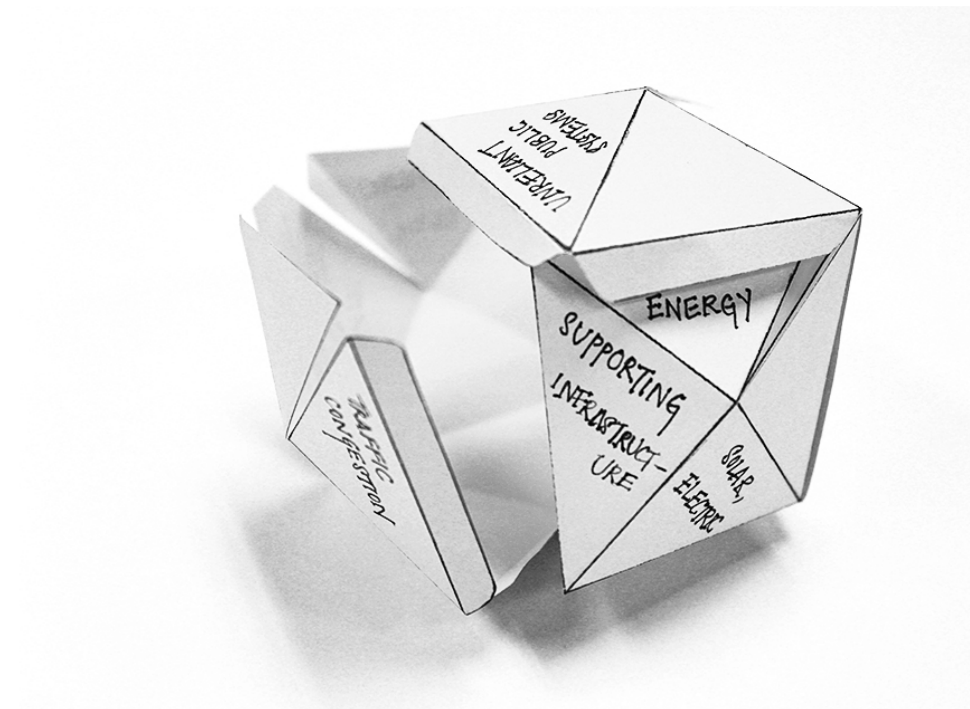


Occupy by design



Occupy by design

Sneha Raman



Occupy by design

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Preface

“ **CIVIL** resistance is the clearest present evidence of an emergent new form of political and social agency that is beginning to take its place alongside the mechanics of state power ... as a means by which the people can organise and compel the redress of their grievances and the achievement of the public well-being of their societies.”

Jack DuVall (2013)

It is nearly three years now since Occupy Wall Street, which started in the summer of September 2011. I first became interested in the movement and its precedent the Arab Spring, as India took to the streets as part of the India Against Corruption campaign around the same time. The resemblance in tactics in the form of occupying public spaces and the creative use of social media was striking. There was also one significant difference. While it may seem like they shared similar motivations born out of the ill effects of capitalism, as Arundhati Roy (2012) has argued,

unlike the movement on Wall Street the movement in India did not bring up privatisation or corporate and economic reforms while formulating its demands. This is true to many other parallel movements, both autonomous as well as those functioning under the Occupy banner. Nevertheless, there seems to be a shared motivation among citizens to reclaim a democracy that no longer serves them adequately.

As more citizen-led movements continue to spring up around the world it, therefore, seems relevant to ask this question –

What are the failures in the current institutionalised methods that have driven citizens towards contentious politics, and how can these gaps be addressed?

Contentious politics



Occupy by design

“**REINVENTION** of politics, revolution, and utopia in the twenty-first century.”

Jose Pedro Zuquete (2011)

The Occupy movement has arguably been the most noticeable citizen-led movement in recent times, which brought the discussion about global capital and democratic reforms into the mainstream through its momentous global outreach. According to The Guardian (2011), there have been protests in over eighty cities all around the world, where citizens took to the streets to fight against social and economic inequality. And, three years since its inception, while the media attention and citizen participation have seemingly thinned, there is continued interest

within academia and governments to study these movements to better understand the motivations, reach and consequences.

The movement has been popularly referred to as mass protest, civil resistance and beginning of a revolution among other things – all together, or often interchangeably. For the purpose of this project, I am referring to it as a social movement.

Social movement is a distinct social process, which engages citizens in collective action to work towards a shared purpose.

According to Donatella Della Porta (2006), it is characterised by –

Conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents
Dense informal networks
Distinct collective identity

“ **SOCIAL** movements tend to invent new disruptive forms of action – challenging the State on issues of law and order .. (It) is still to a large extent “politics in the streets.” The use of protest as a major source of pressure has relevant effects on the structure and strategy of social movements.”

Donatella Della Porta (2006)

While recognising protests, resistance, revolution et al as integral tactics and a catalyst for creating conditions for change, I will be focusing on its potential long term impacts on society, culture and politics. I will, therefore, time and again ask the question –

If the revolution were to happen, what will happen the day after? How will society have changed?



Aim

To map the philosophies, structures and platforms for direct democracy those have emerged through social movements such as the Occupy movement, and to identify opportunities for curating new cultures in democracy and citizenship.

“ **OCCUPY** democracy. Our democracy has been hacked. It no longer works to serve the best interests of the people of this country.”

Al Gore (2012)

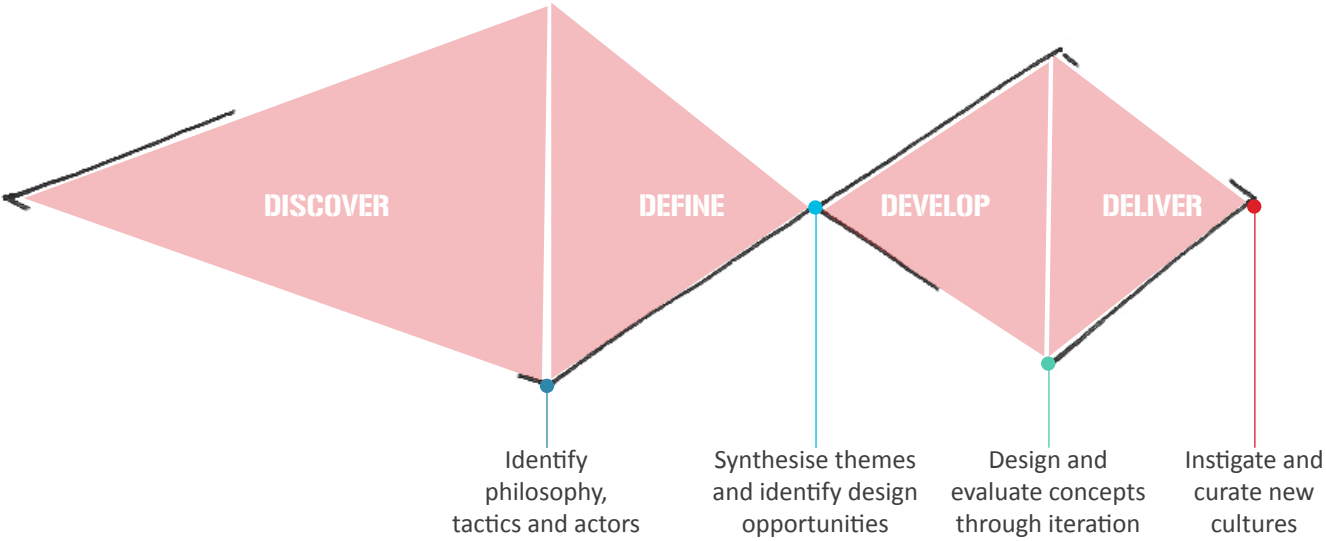
In order to achieve the above aim, I also ask how the design practice needs to change to deal with complex social, economic and political phenomena.

What role can design play to rethink democracy and citizenship for the common good?



Direct democracy

Analytic frames were developed for the key stages of the project, namely discover, define, develop and deliver.



Discover

Identifying main philosophy, tactics and actors by mapping –

What is it that is occupied?
Scale, Sites, Goals

How is it occupied?
Platforms, Methods, Outcomes

Who & what is it for?
Participation, Motivations, Endurance

Define

Synthesising key themes and analysing using interpretative frames – diagnostic, prognostic, motivational – to identify design opportunities.

Develop

Using an iterative approach to design and evaluate new concepts based on their impact on the three main components of the contextual framework, namely – democracy, citizenship and capitalism.

Deliver

Recommending new frameworks based on their potential value to instigate and curate new cultures within democracy, citizenship and design.

Emerging themes

Based on the key insights from desk research, some thematic triggers that were influential in setting the course of the movement were identified.

Inequality

The impact of global recession that significantly affected especially the middle class made evident the disproportionate distribution of wealth and social inequality, and was at the crux of the movement.

Despair

The measures taken for economic revival were not perceived to be in favour of the majority of the citizens, and this had led to a sense of despair and growing mistrust towards the State and corporations.

Apathy

The general perception of citizens merely as consumers of public services have led to lack of participation and political apathy, resulting in a disconnect between the State’s policies and citizens’ expectations.

Defuturing

Unsustainable ways of consumption continue to damage our ecosystem. While its impact is not often directly recognised by all individuals, movements such as Occupy bring these topics into mainstream discussion.

Conformity

Capitalism continues to be the dominant ideology as, in spite of its repeated failure to deliver in the interest of public welfare, there has been a lack of social imagination to come up with alternatives.

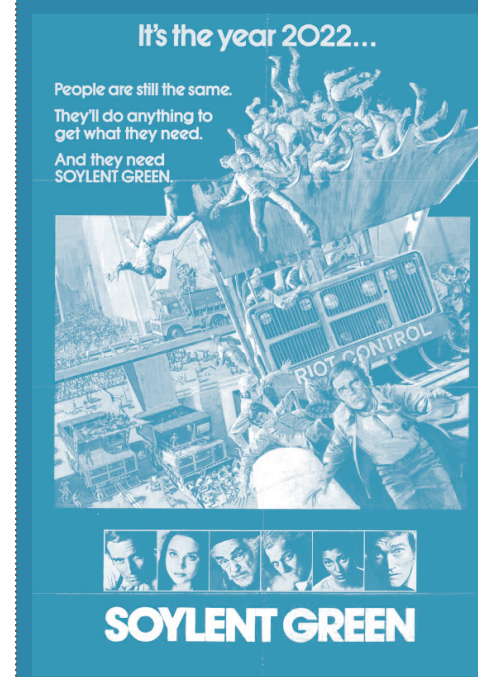
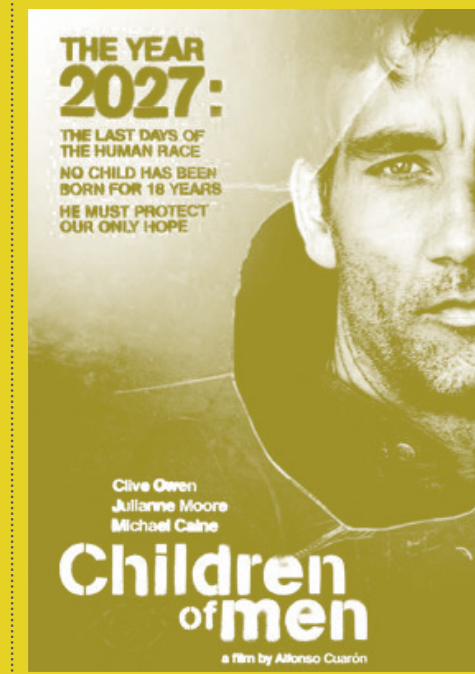
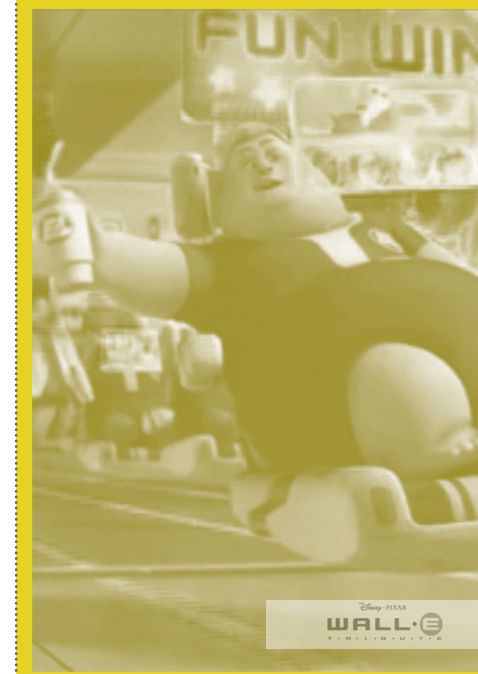
Food crisis

One of the significant impacts of the global climatic change has been on food systems, affecting people directly in their everyday lives and urging them to act.

Provocation cards

For the conversations, in addition to key discussion points, a set of provocation cards were developed based on themes from desk research. These were intended as thought experiments for mapping alternatives, opportunities and emerging trends in line with the research objective at this stage.

The design of the cards was inspired by Zizek's argument that we should assume that the catastrophe has happened, and then work backwards to figure out what could have been done to prevent it (Micah White, 2014). In order to amplify the triggers, themes were contextualised using dystopian futures depicted in popular cinema, followed by the research questions. The provocation cards are presented in the following pages.



Cut along the dotted lines

Triggers dominantly ●Economic ●Ecological ●Social ●Technological in nature, although they overlap in many cases.

“ **IT** was their hands that built this city of ours, Father. But where do the hands belong in your scheme?”

“In their proper place, the depths.”

INEQUALITY

Who are the 99% & how can the gaps between the 99% and 1% be addressed?

Occupy by design

“ **I** can’t really remember when I last had any hope, & I certainly can’t remember when anyone else did either .. what’s left to hope for?”

DESPAIR

How can citizens’ motivation to protest be channelled to nurture hope & participation?

Occupy by design

“ **WELCOME** to day 255,642 aboard the Axiom. As always, weather is a balmy 72° & sunny. I’m sure our forefathers would be proud to know that 700 years later we’d be doing the exact same thing they were doing.”

APATHY

How has consumerism contributed to political apathy, & how can it be overcome?

Occupy by design

“ **BUILDING** is a symbol, as is the act of destroying it. Symbols are given power by people. Alone, a symbol is meaningless, but with enough people, blowing up a building can change the world.”

DISRUPTION

How can disruptions enable society to reorient its focus towards creative solutions?

Occupy by design

“ **A** hierarchical society is only possible on the basis of poverty & ignorance. War is waged by the ruling group .. its object is not victory over Eurasia, but to keep very structure of society intact.”

HIERARCHIES

How can we redistribute power to make citizenship & governance complementary?

Occupy by design

“ **CANCEL** Operation Recolonize. Rather than try & fix this problem, it’ll just be easier for everyone to remain in space. Go to full autopilot. Take control of everything & do not return.”

BUREAUCRACY

How can we reinvent democracy to give power back to the citizens?

Occupy by design

“ **IT** ’s a new morning. The old cynicism is gone. We have faith in our leaders. We’re optimistic. It really boils down to our ability to accept. We don’t need pessimism. There are no limits.”

CONFORMITY

What could be the tipping point for the end of capitalism?

Occupy by design

“ **TOO** much garbage in your face? There’s plenty of space out in space! BnL StarLiners leaving each day. We’ll clean up the mess while you’re away.”

DEFUTURING

How can citizens take action against current unsustainable forms of consumption?

Occupy by design

“ **OCEAN** ’s dying, plankton’s dying... it’s people. *Soylent Green is made out of people.* They’re making our food out of people. Next thing they’ll be breeding us like cattle for food.”

FOOD CRISIS

What will an economy that ranks sustainability & citizen needs as its priority look like?

Occupy by design

“ **APRIL** the 4th, 1984. To the past, or to the future. To an age when thought is free. From the Age of Big Brother, from the Age of the Thought Police, from a dead man... greetings.”

SURVEILLANCE

What would 2041 be?

Occupy by design

“ **A** new era was born. But freedom has a cost. The lone victor, bathed in riches, would serve as a reminder of our generosity and our forgiveness. This is how we remember our past. This is how we safeguard our future.”

RETRIBUTION

How do people in power respond to resistance & how does this impact democracy?

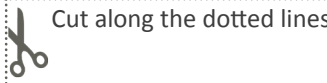
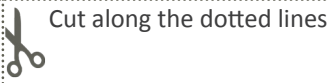
Occupy by design

“ **THE** matrix is a system. That system is our enemy. But when you’re inside, what do you see? The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, they are still a part of that system & that makes them our enemy.”

WIRED

How can the tools used for exercising control be adapted instead to challenge it?

Occupy by design



Key quotes

Patrick Harvie

“ **IF** 21st century is going to be renewably powered ... that lends itself to decentralisation. At the same time you’ve got a transformation in communications, which is ... vastly more proliferated throughout our society ... These are the changes from which new economic systems will emerge.”

Laura Gonzalez

“ **OCCUPYING** without really ‘occupying’ is an interesting concept.”

David Ness

“ **WHILST** it (Transition Movement) resists the dominant ideology that exists, it still works with the State.. engaging with governance of capitalism, rather than dropping out.”

Emma Balkind

“ **THAT** side of things, the speed of how that (markets) works, I think, is something that we are not very used to and don’t quite know how to deal with.”

Ewan Morrison

“ **CONSEQUENCES** of the panacea politics ... has discouraged local people with local agendas from coming up with pragmatic solutions.”

Tim Hughes

“ **IT** is important to look for points in people’s lives that encourages participation.”

Edward Andersson

“ **SOCIETY** is moving away from hierarchical structures and is run much more through networks ... This hasn’t quite come through in politics, and it’s much more resistant to change. But the concept of risk is important in a networked system and for democracy.”

#demtec

“ **DON’T** treat participation as the end, but as the means (for democracy).”

Small is beautiful

Redistributing power and creating opportunities for self-governance at local levels while continuing to function within a global context.

Occupy by design

Co-existence

Creating plurality to keep dominant ideologies in check and providing space for experimentation through mutual trust and tolerance.

Occupy by design

Reciprocity

Reappropriating consumption and reviving the economic system through sharing, co-intelligence and appreciation.

Occupy by design

Speculation

Nurturing a positive attitude towards risk and hope through creation of new forms of value.

Occupy by design

Acceleration

Encouraging creative disruptions to constantly develop and promote new conceptions of use.

Occupy by design

Resilience

Continuously adapting tactics and tools to achieve the desired outcome even in altered or adverse conditions.

Occupy by design



Cut along the dotted lines

Design principles

Six key principles were identified based on the insights and opportunities –

Small is beautiful, Co-existence, Reciprocity, Speculation, Acceleration, Resilience.

The definitions are presented here in the form of ‘disruption cards’, the purpose of which is explained in the next chapter where I introduce the concept of ‘contentious frames’.

These design principles offer new directions to address existing gaps and to imagine alternative systems that can provide an improved experience of democracy and citizenship.

Designing (re)NEWD

The Occupy movement has been criticised for its failure to offer an alternative in place of the system that it challenges. In line with the key motivations behind the movement, I make an attempt here to construct this alternative future, and to provide a vision for designing and living in the new context. This is explained in three parts –

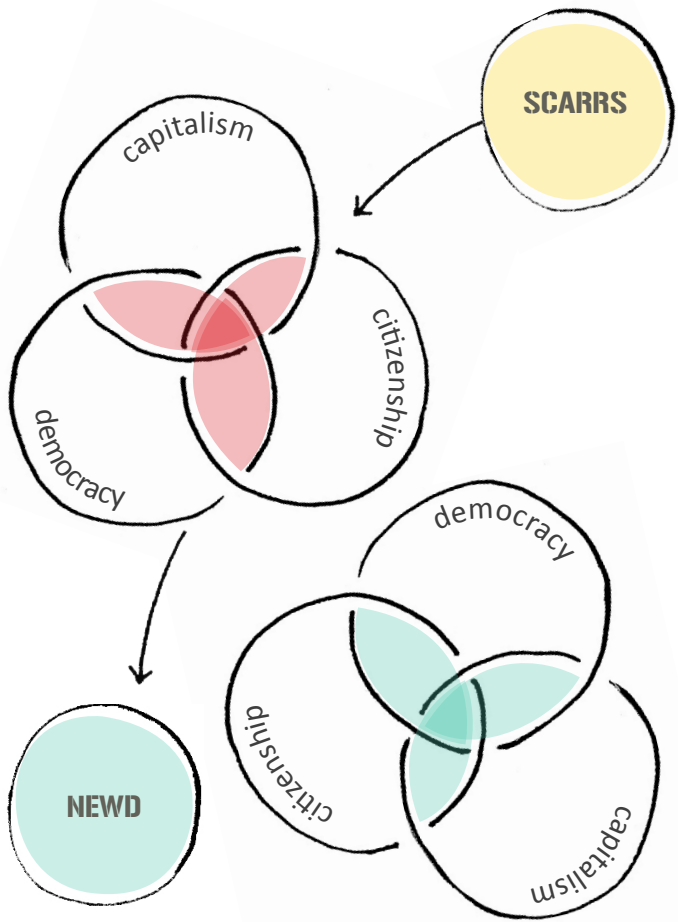
- 1. Imagining the alternative
- 2. Disrupting the dysfunctional
- 3. Creating the alternative

NEWD – Imagining the alternative

Discussing the relationship between capitalism and democracy today, Noam Chomsky (2013) describes a system that he calls the “really existing capitalist democracy” or RECD – ‘pronounced “wrecked” by accident,’ he notes.

I propose an alternative in its place called the “now emergent wholesome democracy” – NEWD, and pronounced similar to “renewed” by no accident.

NEWD is a form of direct democracy and has six key principles at its core – Small is beautiful, Co-existence, Acceleration, Reciprocity, Resilience, and Speculation (or, SCARRS).



Contentious design – Disrupting the dysfunctional

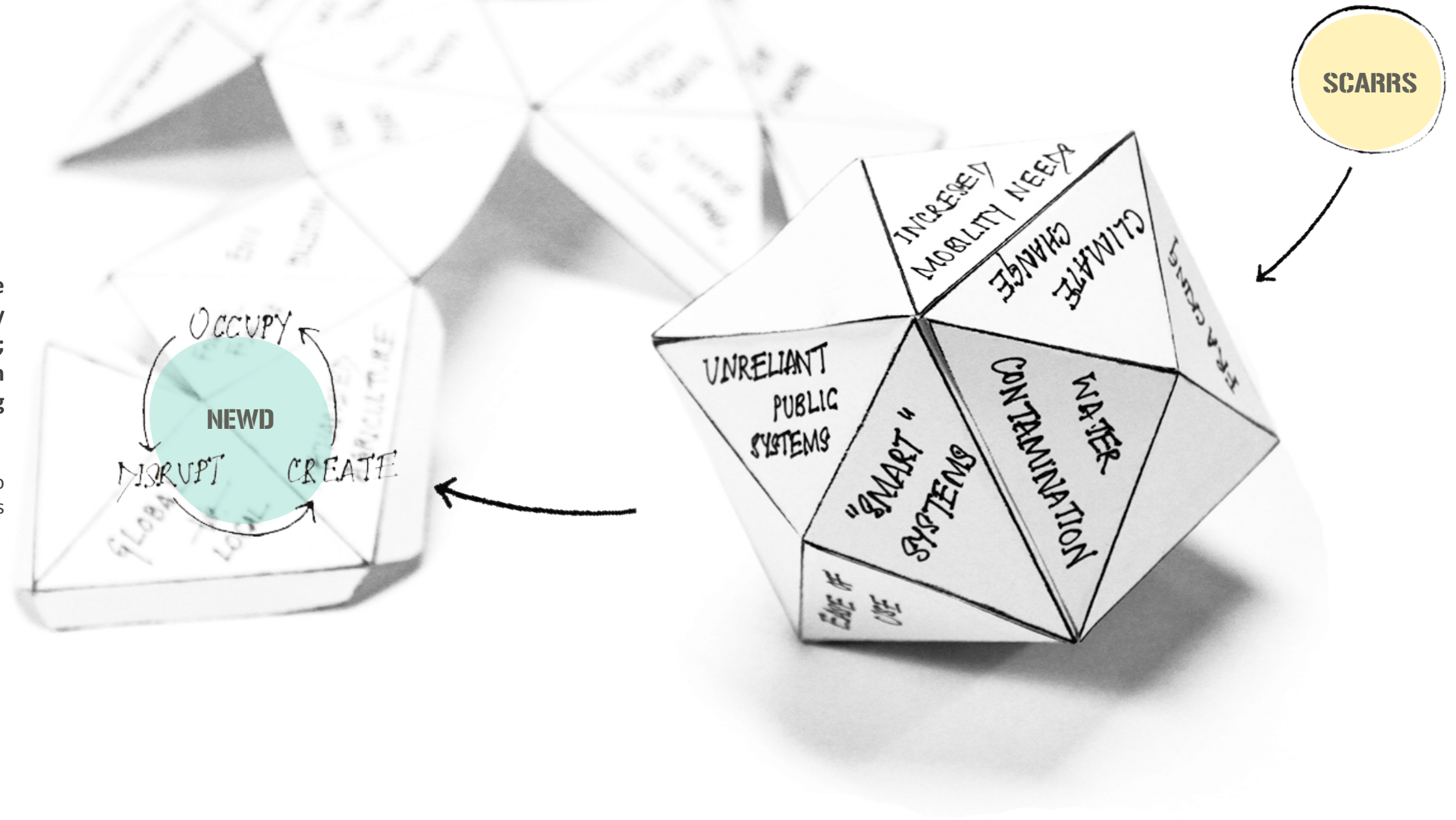
To enable the creation of NEWD, I propose a form of ‘contentious design’, which I will describe as –

Creative use of disruptive techniques for the purpose of deconstructing and (re)designing ‘things’ for the common good.

SCARRS act as a ‘contentious frame’ – a tool for contentious design, which in this case is applied to things within the contextual frame (of democracy, citizenship and capitalism) to yield new things that form a part of the NEWD.

Contentious frame helps to deconstruct the existing systems within RECD to identify the various components that constitute it; and to analyse gaps and failures that can potentially inform new directions using SCARRS.

Existing things may be challenged in this way to improve them, and new things created by using this framework.



The day after the revolution –
Creating the alternative

Having developed the contentious frame, the next step was to start developing scenarios that will seek to answer –

What has happened the day after the revolution? How has society changed?

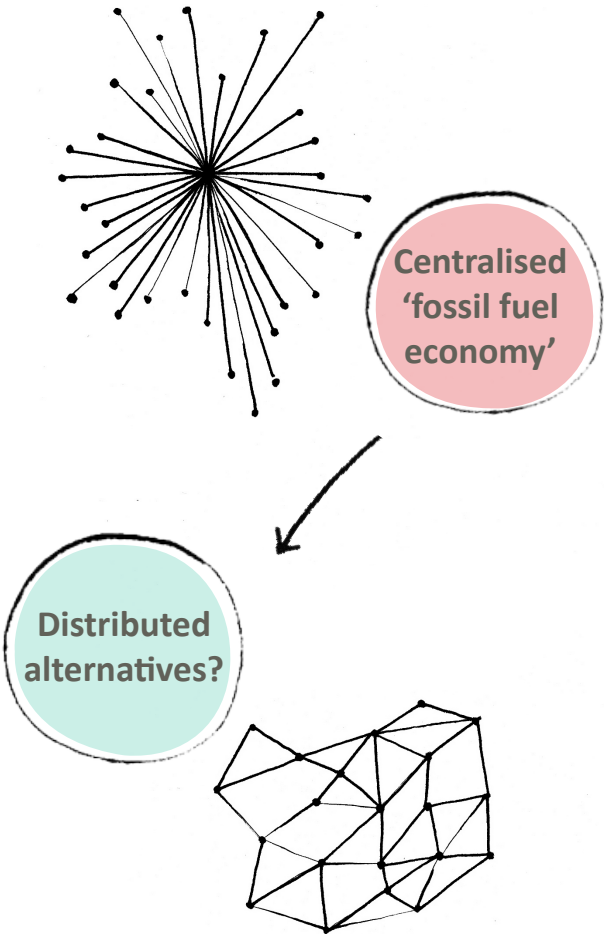
To contextualise the question and to explore hypothetical yet plausible futures, two systems were identified – food and energy, along with touchpoints within each of these from the perspective of an everyday citizen experience. The final contexts were – food and urban spaces; and energy and mobility.

Plausible futures

The main reason for choosing these systems were because of their high level of dependency on fossil fuels. The rigid centralised structures existing today is mainly due to our ‘fossil fuel economy’ and, therefore, in order to create decentralised alternatives it is important to tackle this dependency at a systemic level.

In addition to exploring how these systems may change by applying the contentious frame to them, the purpose of choosing two different systems was also to test the versatility of the contentious frame to function within varying contexts. This proved to be successful, and the initial concept seeds for both are presented here.

Specifications such as the environment, people, platforms and interactions, and the values within this alternative system, were further developed in the context of energy and mobility. This is illustrated as a hypothetical scenario for Scotland in 2020.



Value of NEWD

The potential benefits for democracy and citizenship within the NEWD system are –

1.
It **reinforces trust and tolerance** between the State, citizens and other agencies through creating pathways for collaboration and collective decision making.
2.
It **distributes power and accountability** for planning, creating and managing the systems among the stakeholders, and promotes a sense of collective ownership.
3.
It **creates spontaneous and resilient systems** operating autonomously and addressing issues at a local level, while having a national and global impact.

4.
It **encourages citizen participation** by recognising issues close to everyday citizen experiences, and creates pathways through such participation to engage them with bigger systemic issues.

Scope for further development

The concept is outlined to illustrate one of the many ways in which the six design principles could manifest into a functional system, and how this impacts the social, economic and political systems within this reimagined context. The scenario in this case is hypothetical.

There is potential to explore different applications of these principles within the current framework; and to explore ways in which the same principles could manifest into the design of ‘things’.

Horizon scanning

There are ongoing and emerging efforts on small scales that experiment with alternative systems that deviate from the dominant systems, and are more desirable in the long term.

Initiatives such as the transition towns reflect some of the aspects of the concept discussed here, such

as resilience and localisation, in their philosophy and operations. There is opportunity to consider how these networks might grow, and what impact this will have on the dominant systems if they are successfully scaled up to gain a significant level of social, economic and political autonomy.

In a recent report, The Guardian (2014) presented Helsinki’s future plans for a ‘mobility on demand’ system that integrates all forms of shared and public transport in a single payment network, with the aim of making private cars eventually obsolete. This offers a new direction for urban mobility tailored for the age of ‘networked commuters’, and has potential to be explored further in different contexts.

The design principles offer a potential framework to explore how these efforts may be amplified or redirected to achieve more widespread and long term impact.



Design and citizenship

Social movements play a significant role in ensuring that democracy safeguards and serves the common good, and allows citizens to point out the gaps when it fails to do so.

What design can do in this context is to redirect democracy and citizenship – to help imagine the alternative futures, and to develop the systems and tools that will empower the citizens and stakeholders alike to participate collaboratively in its creation and execution.

This also requires rethinking of the role of design, and by extension the role of the designer. Through the concept of contentious design and the contentious frames, I propose that designers need to take a more critical and philosophical approach to design; in order to play a more active role in shaping the societies of the future. In the context of the Polity Co-lab, I have described the role of the future designer as that of a curator, a disruptor and a creator; and through the process of this work I have demonstrated this approach.

Credits

Project supervision

Ian Grout

Review and feedback

Irene Bell

Brian Dixon

Iain Reid

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For further information on the project or to share your thoughts please contact –

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