

The background of the entire page is a complex, abstract pattern. It consists of numerous blue, jagged, star-like or gear-like shapes that are irregular and somewhat chaotic. These blue shapes are interwoven with a dense network of red, squiggly, and curly lines. The overall effect is a busy, textured, and somewhat chaotic visual field, which serves as a backdrop for the text.

Trump is the world's worst designer.

Manon Lambeens

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*Designers are the sculptors of society.*¹

People don't have any idea what it is like to be a designer. And if they think that they know what it is like, most of the time they are wrong. At least the people I asked. When I questioned them about what they think what design is or, what it is that designers do, most of them answered: "*making objects look nice*" or "*expensive furniture.*"—These answers are an example of our over-consuming society that we experience today. However, I think this is all wrong. Design revolves around function and not aesthetics—but out of good function will flow a good form.

The truth is, I can't blame them for thinking these things about the concept of design. If you look up the definition of the word design, you'll see an explanation that is so outdated, it doesn't fit the word nowadays. It even gets me confused sometimes. There is no simple explanation of what design is, it exists in so many forms and comes in all different kind of shapes. People will recognize these forms but are not aware that this is design. Design is the foundation of our society, but we are so used to this, we take these designs for granted.

'non-lethal' design

*The act of protest is shaped by design and vice versa—the design is shaped by the action of the protest.*²

Design can be anything. It can be something materialistic but, it can also be an idea—it just needs to have a certain function. Design can be seen as the origin of a tool. Because it creates not only a materialistic object, but also a function and purpose.

This function can be anything, I will give you some examples to define what a function can be. The function of a chair is to sit on it, if you can't sit on the chair it is a badly designed chair. If you have back pain after one minute, it is a badly designed chair. Actually, it isn't design at all then due to the bad functionality it has.

The function can be an idea—something non-materialistic. A political opinion can be a function, black lives matter is a function an idea to change society is a function. A protest or a demonstration is an example of a non-materialistic design because a protest has a function. This is the type of design is part of the area that we call social design. Often in social design participation itself can be the function.

Out of these different statements, we can conclude that a protest is a design. If we look at the protest it fulfils different parts of design, the materialistic part and the non-materialistic part.

*It's difficult not to ask, on whose side is design?*³

Let see, the materialistic design can be a lot of stuff. If your protest is a march—which is one of the most common ideas of a



1 Hilde Bouchez, A Wild Thing

2 Mariangela Beccoi, Everyday Resilience

3 Mariangela Beccoi, Everyday Resilience

protest— you have loads of design objects. The most common object are the signs that people hold while marching. Most of the time the sign is meant to spread the message of the demonstration. The signs reveal the reason why people are demonstrating. Sometimes you can link a whole merchandise on these marches. In the 2017 Women's march, most of the protesters wore a pink hat that had cat ears. The march was organized after the inauguration of President Donald Trump. The former president made some woman unfriendly statements while he was campaigning. During the election, there was a videotape circulating on the internet of Trump telling a reporter to 'Grab them by the pussy'. This sentence became one of the reasons for the protests and created the idea for the pink cat hats, so the hats had function. The hats made it clear for outsiders what the protest was about.

There is also another version of materialistic design objects that we see during demonstrations. Sadly, protests are



often linked to violence. Some design objects that are the cause of these violent actions are so-called 'non-lethal weapons'. Designers made guns with rubber bullets, pepper spray, ... They are made with the intention to keep

the protests safe and to keep the peace—for me, I never connect the words gun and peace. Unfortunately, they often have the opposite effect. During the Black lives matter protests police shot with these rubber bullets on peaceful protesters. This revolved in a counter-reaction by protesters who already were sick and tired of police violence. Especially with the Black lives matter protests where they demonstrate against police violence.

Like or dislike

Design can and must become a way in which young people can participate in changing society.⁴

You can't ignore that there was violence at the BLM demonstrations, especially in the United States. There were a lot non-violent BLM demonstrations. The problems was that some individuals took action in a violent way during these peaceful protests, but these were only a hand full of people or law enforcement itself. The sad part is that these individuals created an opportunity for the media to shift the focus. Instead of highlighting that most protests were non-violent, to spread the message of the protest, the fact that the violence often came from law enforcement or from people who were against the movement. This is how the bigger meaning of the protest gets lost. Media influence is a big part of the protests. Louise Van Assche shows this in her documentary *The Conversation*. She shows all different parts of the demonstrations. She also shows that a march can be one type of demonstration. It can also be a person speaking in a microphone or people dancing, ... We will discuss these

⁴ Victor Papanek, Design For The Real World

different kinds of demonstrations a bit further, first the media influence.

*We want to psychologically figure out how to manipulate you as fast as possible.*⁵

In 2016 Alexander Nix gave a lecture in New York where he talked about psychographics.⁶ In other words, how to use your data, data that he collected throughout social media. Cambridge Analytica (Nix's Company) didn't use data for commercial gains, they used it to influence the 2016 United States election. The company needed to testify in the US Congress about the data abuse. The company used the data of Facebook users and influenced the election in this way. This is a violation against the democratic process and the privacy of the people.⁷ During the testimonies in congress, Britney Kaisers former employee of CA said: *"After all, data is a commodity more valuable than oil and gas", Brittany Kaiser, Cambridge Analytica whistleblower, and co-founder of Own Your Data foundation, reckons. "Our data, our most personal information, has now become the world's most valuable asset, more valuable than oil and gas."*⁸ It is not only happening in the United States, we see the influence that social media has on politics all over the world. Think about Bolsonaro in Brazil or Europe. If we look at the last election Belgium had the extreme right political party had the largest increase in the number of votes. It was also the same political party who had spent the most—like really, far out the most—on social media advertising. This influence social media has on politics is the cause of the polarization that we see today.

Trump is the world's worst designer

*"Social media is a marketplace that trades exclusively in human futures."*⁹

⁵ Chamath Palihiapitiya, *The Social Dilemma*

⁶ The Great Hack

⁷ The Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal was a political and ethical scandal in which the personal data of millions of [Facebook](#) users were acquired without their consent by British consulting firm [Cambridge Analytica](#), predominantly to be used for [political advertising](#).

The Netflix documentary *the social dilemma* shows the manipulation machine that social media is. A couple of the designers who worked for big tech companies like Google, Facebook... speak out on the problems that are caused by social media. They talk about awareness, to make people aware of the dangers that exist within social media. A phrase that is regularly used in the sector is: *"If you're not paying for the product, then you're the product."*¹⁰ This sentence confirms what we have seen with the CA example. We are influenced without being fully aware of it. Social media is spreading fake News like never before, the king of fake news—for me—is Donald Trump. With his famous argument: *"You're fake news"*. We saw it during this pandemic that fake News is stronger than ever. Social Media knows who to target with this fake news, who will believe this fake news. News like: *5g has created the coronavirus or Bill Gates Did it!*

I am going to give examples of how politics, social media, redesign, fake news and protests are connected to one. I will do this with an event that only happened a few days ago but started a few weeks ago. On the 7th of November, all the votes were counted of the US election, the outcome was a new president: Joe Biden. Bernie Sanders made a pretty good prediction about the election:

"Here is my worry. What polls show, and what studies have shown is that, for whatever reason, Democrats are more likely to use mail-in ballots, Republicans are more likely to walk into polling booths on Election Day.

It is likely that the first votes that will be counted will be those people who came in on Election Day, which will be Republican," he said. Here is the fear—and I hope everybody hears it. It could well be that at 10 o'clock on election night, Trump is winning in Michigan,

⁸ Britney Kaiser, *The Social Dilemma*

⁹ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Social Dilemma*

¹⁰ Tristan Harris, *The Social Dilemma*

*he's winning in Pennsylvania, he's winning in Wisconsin, and he gets on the television and he says, 'Thank you, Americans, for re-electing me. It's all over. Have a good day.' But then, the next day, and the day following, all of those mail-in ballots start getting counted, and it turns out that Biden has won those states, at which point Trump says, 'See? I told you the whole thing was fraudulent. I told you those mail-in ballots were crooked. And we're not going to leave office.' That is a worry that I and a lot of people have ... people should be aware of that possibility.'*¹¹

This is no fake news; this is exactly what happened. This is what Trump designed. He started tweeting that he won the election and that it was all a fraud. That the Democrats stole the election from him etc. He is spreading this message throughout social media for the next months. He knows that he will get a reaction out of it. This type of communication, this isn't just a toddler who doesn't get his way, this is Trump carefully picking his words is a design technique.. His way of communicating the function, his function to still be the president of the united states. Earlier discussed was that influence social media had on politics. How can they fix this? The creators of social media didn't want to create polarization or to influence politics. Facebook was not made with the intention to do this; it was made to connect people. When there is a good intention with the designer, there is hope. When you see that your design is creating chaos it is time to redesign. It is time to take responsibility for the mess that has been made, and for the problems that are only are getting worse.

*Apartheid was a social design; it's former presidents are even referred to as the 'architects of Apartheid'.*¹²

Twitter did this. They did it before the US election. They knew Trump was spreading fake news and all kinds of things that were very questionable. Twitter made a blue icon with an exclamation mark. They putted it under certain tweets of Trump with different warnings such as *"manipulated media"* or *"fake news"*. After the election when Trump tweeted that *"he won the election and it was stolen from him"*, Twitter used the same icon but with: *"This claim about election fraud is disputed"*.

So, Twitter is trying to fix the fake news problem. Now, how has this anything to do with protests, I hear you thinking? The day of the counting of the electoral college votes there was a march in Washington DC. A march of Trump supporters who listened to the speech of the president that the election was stolen. The message he has been spreading for several weeks on his social media accounts. Now he spoke to a big mass who was physical there, he said:

*"We will never give up. We will never concede. It will never happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved. Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore." So we are going to--we are going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, I love Pennsylvania Avenue, and we are going to the Capitol, and we are going to try and give--the Democrats are hopeless, they are never voting for anything, not even one vote but we are going to try--give our Republicans, the weak ones because the strong ones don't need any of our help, we're trying--going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country. So, let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue.*¹³

The protesters marched to the capitol as the President told them to. Later during the protest, they fought against police officers and

¹¹ Bernie Sanders during an interview with Jimmy Fallon

¹² Nadine Botha, The Design Of Waste

¹³ Speech of Donald J. Trump before the protesters invaded the Capitol during the counting of the votes.

invaded the Capitol. President Trump, who attacked peaceful protesters a few weeks earlier during the BLM demonstrations, did nothing. But now, when there was an invasion of the Capitol of the United States, he did nothing. He Tweeted nothing. And as they say: *Whoever is silent, agrees*. Mike Pence was the one who called for extra forces. Later in the evening Trump posted a week tweet. This demonstration was a build-up from months. A build-up that happened on social media. Luckily Twitter and Facebook are working on their redesign and blocked the president from their platforms for a certain time. Trump's design was one with the worst possible intention. The intention to undermine democracy, an egocentric intention. The bad attitude that he has had during his whole presidency. Good design starts with good intentions, not with bad ones. Trump is the world's worst designer.

Participation as a new way of designing

I suggested that it was up to the designer to knock on doors that have never opened before.¹⁴

We saw that social media— and the mass media in general— influences what people rely on when establishing their opinion on certain things. With the Black lives matter protest in Brussels during the Pandemic, the march received a lot of criticism. The whole march was peaceful, except—you always have these— for a few individuals who started smashing windows. These were a hand full of people, the headlines the next day? Black lives matter protesters smash windows. Now people associate the Black lives matter protest with violence and that they are the cause of spreading the virus. This whole media caused perception is a blockade of the message the movement wants to spread. You

will always have people who don't march in demonstrations, but that doesn't mean that they don't care about



these topics. Sometimes these people don't know very well what it is all about—you have people who just aren't interested in the newspapers. So now the message that they see on their Facebook page is a mix of fake news and the truth. So, how can we as designers redesign the way of protesting?

Creativity is our real capital.¹⁵

We saw the traditional design objects that we still see with marches today. Like the signs with the messages on, or the pink cat hats. The sings, for example, lend themselves perfectly for the marches, but maybe we need to alternatives? In the Documentary *The conversation* we see a group called *Just America*. The group organizes marches but also other types of protesting. Public lectures are one of them. One person speaking in the streets with a microphone. It is hard when you are spreading a message about police violence when you are talking to a little girl in the streets to use violent designs—such as the non-lethal weapons—to stop the protest. If you do this the protest won't be received as bad but these violent designs will be. This is one way of doing a protest. Another type showed in the documentary was a projection. Photographs of victims who were killed due to the police violence were projected late at night on the building of the Austin police department. People were just watching the pictures of the victims. There is nothing wrong with these types of protest, no need for violence. You can have no excuse for violence. And it is easy for people to join

¹⁴ Victor Papanek, Design For The Real World

¹⁵ Daan Roosegaarde, Daan Roosegaarde in perspectief

the protest, to get to know what the movement stands for. Only by projecting pictures on a building, a building that is linked to the message of the movement.

Another example—that I think is great— of a BLM protest is one I saw in Leuven at the Ladeuzeplein (a big square in the City centre). I didn't even know it was a protest, or what the event was about. I didn't hear of it beforehand; I walked by it and was intrigued about what was happening. I walked along the square while going to work. I saw people with chalk writing things and making drawings on the square. I didn't pass by it without looking—what I maybe would do if it was a march. I went closer to look at what they were doing. I wanted to see what this big participatory event was. As I came closer, I saw what it was: a protest. It wasn't only me who was intrigued, I saw a lot of people looking, reading and starting conversations. No media can say now that it was vandalism because the protest got the permission of the mayor. No media can say it was violent. No media can say it wasn't respecting the rules of the pandemic. It was a great protest. Also, because it was accessible, anybody could join. The accessibility opened a way for dialogue, with people who maybe didn't had a lot of information about the movement.

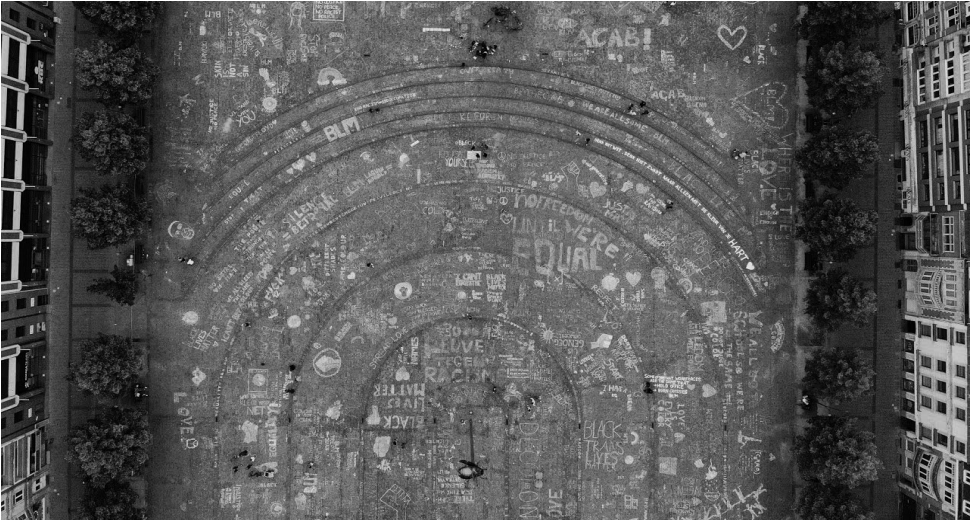
*Play can be very serious.*¹⁶

Creativity combined with participation and good intentions are tools to provide good and accessible design. We need to play more. Play with people, play for the social. Play as a way to make design. It is especially interesting when there is a cross-fertilization of different disciplines. Designers, politicians, teachers, plumbers, ...

If we change the protest and redesign the protest maybe then can we make the message clearer? Because the function of a

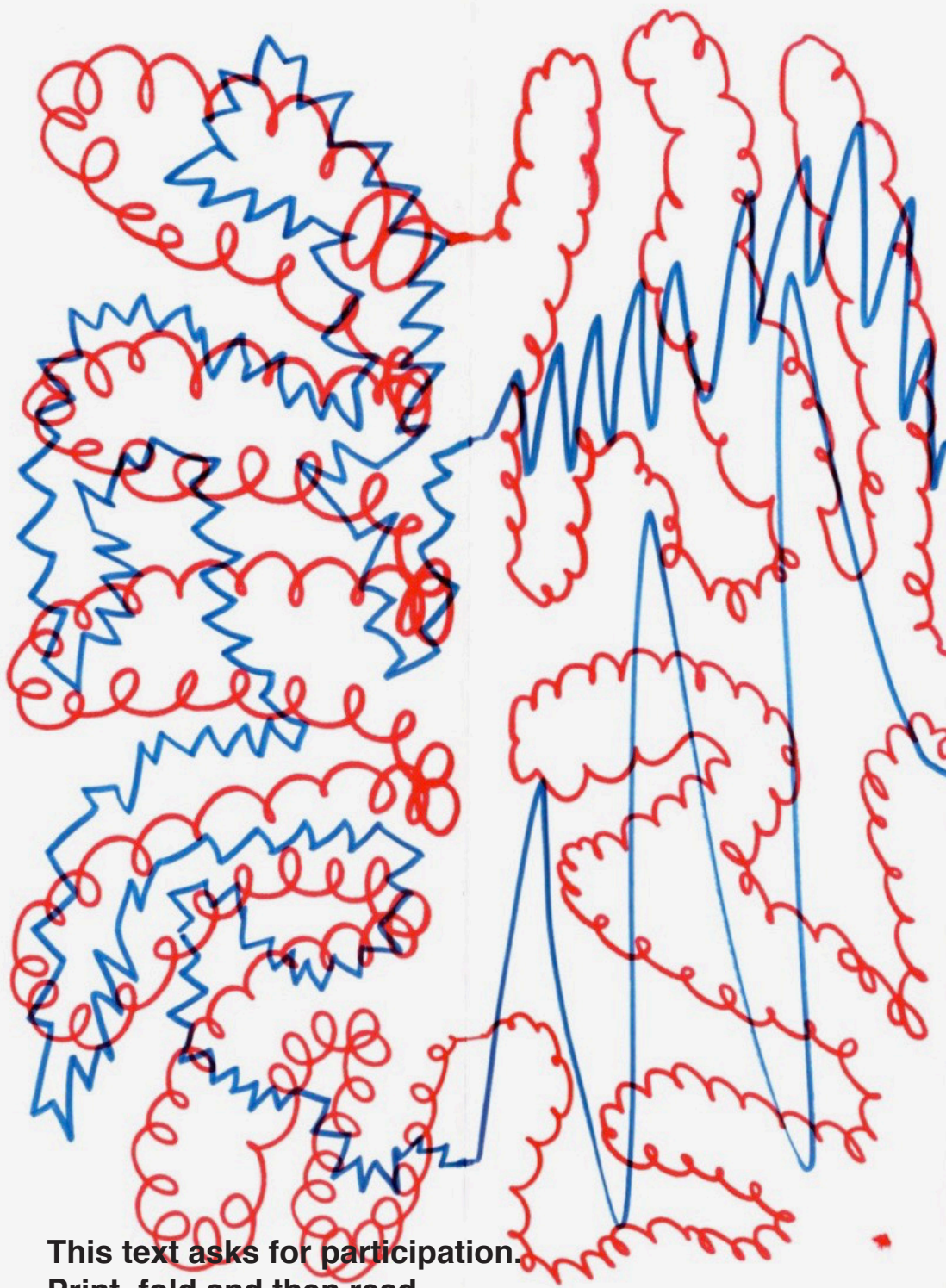
protest is often to spread a message. How can we use social media to do this? The media often disrupts the message. How can we shift this? For BLM there was black Tuesday on Instagram. Specific in Belgium there was a big protest to remove the statues of King Leopold. The statues got vandalized, so the protest had a bad name. The message got lost. Maybe a protest against the statues could have been that everybody wears a mask of Leopold and perform a standstill on a square for 5 minutes. Maybe we can project images all over Belgium about his actions? There are a ton of creative solutions. How can we use public space as a canvas for these different protests? Like the square in Leuven was, it was a blank canvas for the protest. Maybe a protest can be a huge event? An event with musical performances, readings, street art, ... something festival alike. People can participate in these different activities. The city becomes a place to spread a message. The city becomes a protest. If we would use this way, a way of thinking differently, a way of thinking about how we can participate differently and use this in all kinds of parts in society. Give some more power to the designers but only to the the ones with good intentions.

¹⁶ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*



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**This text asks for participation.
Print, fold and then read.**