Open Letter to the Design Community: Stand Up for Democracy

1. We are in difficult and dangerous times. For many years, we lived in a world that, despite its problems, was nevertheless committed to principles of democracy in which human rights, fundamental freedoms, and opportunities for personal development, were increasing. Today, this picture has changed profoundly. There are attacks on democracy in several countries - including those where democracy had seemed to be unshakable.

2. Faced by these developments, we believe the design community should take a stand, speak out, and act: practitioners, researchers, theorists, students, journalists, publishers and curators - all who are professionally involved in design-related activities.

We do not have to share exactly the same idea of what democracy is: to defend it as a core value, it is enough to recognize the strong convergence between democracy and design in four respects: (1) *design of democracy* - improving democratic processes and the institutions on which democracy is built; (2) *design for democracy* - enabling more people to participate in the democratic process, especially through the use of technology; (3) *design in democracy* - building access, openness and transparency into institutions in ways that assure equality and justice; (4) *design as democracy* - the practise of participatory design so that diverse actors can shape our present and future worlds in fair and inclusive ways.

The development of democratic forms and processes has always involved design, and should continue to do so. But we need to do more, now, than designing as normal.

The best way to resist these negative trends is by conceiving, developing and connecting *new possibilities* for democracy and wellbeing. In every possible arena where design has a voice, this means conceiving highly visible and effective actions that address today's crucial challenges: job creation, welfare reform, environmental sustainability. As these threads of action interact and support each other, they can become dynamic form of *proactive resistance*.

3. Beyond expressing and sharing our concern, this letter aspires to help deepen and amplify actions in which the design community, with all its richness and diversity, is already taking a stand. These discussions and initiatives deserve more visibility.

We are therefore sending this letter to friends and colleagues who play different roles in the design community: design associations, design schools, research centers, design publications and media, design-related cultural institutions.

To those members this community who agree with the spirit of this letter, we propose three actions:
- write a personal statement of less than 500 words;
- circulate the statement in your networks;
- organize an event in the next few months

The two of us are committed to collect these statements, plus information about events as they are organised, and make them visible in all ways possible.

How effective we can be in this work depends on how this letter is received, and what new energies it generates. We *hope* that it will stimulate designers to stand up and fight for democracy in their own communities and throughout the world.

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Please, send your feedback to: ezio.manzini@gmail.com.