Track 2.b Introduction: Design & Democracy

TASSINARI Virginia\(^a\); MANZINI Ezio\(^b\); HUYBRECHTS Liesbeth\(^c\) and TELI Maurizio\(^d\)

\(^a\) LUCA School of Arts, Belgium
\(^b\) ELISABA, Spain
\(^c\) University of Hasselt, Belgium
\(^d\) Aalborg University, Denmark
doi: 10.33114/adim.2019.2b

The issue of design and democracy is an urgent and rather controversial one. Democracy has always been a core theme in design research, but in the past years it has shifted in meaning. The current discourse in design research that has been working in a participatory way on common issues in given local contexts, has developed an enhanced focus on rethinking democracy. This is the topic of some recent design conferences, such PDC2018, Nordes2017 and DRS2018, and of the DESIS Philosophy Talk #6 “Regenerating Democracy?” (www.desis-philosophytalks.org), from which this track originates. To reflect on the role and responsibility of designers in a time where democracy in its various forms is often put at risk seems an urgent matter to us. The concern for the ways in which the democratic discourse is put at risk in many different parts of the world is registered outside the design community (for instance by philosophers such as Noam Chomsky), as well as within (see for instance Manzini’s and Margolin’s call Design Stand Up (http://www.democracy-design.org)). Therefore, the need to articulate a discussion on this difficult matter, and to find a common vocabulary we can share to talk about it. One of the difficulties encountered for instance when discussing this issue, is that the word “democracy” is understood in different ways, in relation to the traditions and contexts in which it is framed. Philosophically speaking, there are diverse discourses on democracy that currently inspire design researchers and theorists, such as Arendt, Dewey, Negri and Hardt, Schmitt, Mouffe, Rancière, Agamben, Rawls, Habermas, Latour, Gramsci, whose positions on this topic are very diverse. How can these authors guide us to further articulate this discussion? In which ways can these philosophers support and enrich design’s innovation discourses on design and democracy, and guide our thinking in addressing sensitive and yet timely questions, such as what design can do in what seems to be dark times for democracy, and whether design can possibly contribute to enrich the current democratic ecosystems, making them more strong and resilient?