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Reframing American Democracy:
the Role of Research in the Interpretation of Redesigned Election Artefacts

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Background

In November 2000, a poorly designed "butterfly" ballot in Palm Beach County, Florida, of the United States of America, changed election history. Mostly African American and older voters believed that they had mistakenly voted for Pat Buchanan instead of Al Gore because they misread or misinterpreted the instructions on the ballot that had candidate names on both pages and punch-holes down the middle (Brady et al, 2001). While some institutions and individuals wrote reports (Caltech-MIT Voting Technology Project, 2001; Wand et al, 2001) and dissected the problems with the butterfly ballot (Scher, 2001), few people or groups sought to redesign the ballot. In 2001, AIGA Chicago chapter members developed an interdisciplinary group of information designers, industrial designers, and social researchers to understand and redesign the voting experience[i]. This group became Design for Democracy, an organization that seeks to increase civic participation by making the experience clearer, understandable, easier to accomplish, and more trustworthy. Through partnerships between professionals and undergraduate students at University of Illinois at Chicago, over three years, the organization conducted ethnographically-based research and redesigned the election experience in Cook County Chicago, the Vote-By-Mail experience for the State of Oregon, and a get-out-the-vote campaign for culturally and linguistically disenfranchised voters in Chicago.

The research and the redesigned election artefacts created in these collaborations have been presented in three major contexts:

1. Professional design and research conferences, notably those of AIGA, the professional design association,
2. Pitches to the federal government officials to gain government contracts, and
3. International museum exhibits, notably the George Pompidou Centre in Paris.

This paper explores the role of research, particularly ethnographic research, in the interpretation of the "meaning" of redesigned election artefacts within the discourses of American democracy following the 2000 Presidential election. In particular, it focuses on the shifting discourses of American democracy as framed by the contexts of American professional design and usability organizations, international museums, and American federal government officials. I argue that the research enables people to reframe the negative view of American politics following the November 2000 election to one of politics of inclusion, complexity, and transformation. This reframing has significant impact on individuals' and groups' perceptions of their active roles as potential positive change agents in civic life.

Research question and approach

My exploration seeks to address two specific questions about the relationship between research narratives, design artefacts, and their intended audiences:

1. How are discourses about American democracy framed by their contextual milieu and the related allowances for counter-discourses?
2. How does research, which informs the creation of design artefacts, also serves to frame the interpretation of those artefacts in multiple contexts?

My approach to these questions is auto ethnographic. As defined by Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) auto ethnography "…synthesizes both a post-modern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a post-modern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question" (p. 7). My unique position as the individual responsible for the planning and execution of research, as well the active framing of the interpretations of the redesigned election artefacts, makes this approach the most relevant for the understanding of the project's intentions and outcomes. As a classically-trained "design anthropologist," I vacillate between fragmented roles of observer- participant of the election redesign phenomenon. In some contexts, I played the core inside participant and creator of the phenomenon as anthropologist/researcher and organizational pitch person. In other, and sometimes the same contexts, I played core observer and critic as administrative director and project "success" assessor.

More important from a methodological perspective, my roles provide privileged access to direct primary data, documented in notes and emails, of my experiences and interactions with others encountering the American election research narratives and design artefacts. I combine this data with the frame and discourse analysis of the media discussions of the 2000 Election, reports on the activities of Design for Democracy in the media, and the expressed intentions of other core participants in the organization. The outcome of this approach is a self-reflective dialogue between the original framing of post-November 2000 American democracy by the narratives of the media, professional organizations, museums, and government officials; and the reframing of American democracy through the researcher/administrator's counter-narrative made manifest by the actual redesigned election artefacts.

Why "framing American democracy"

The concept of "framing" is important in the fields of political science and the media studies (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cappella & Jamieson, 1996; Druckman 2001). Although there are many definitions of frames and framing, it is not within the scope of this paper to explore all of them. The one I find most useful for my analysis is that of Todd Gatlin's as cited in Druckman (2001), "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 227).

Gatlin's definition analytically enables me to speculate about the processes of selection, emphasis, and presentation in describing American democracy after the November 2000 election. Who was responsible for the selection and presentation of theories of disenfranchisement? Why was there an emphasis on the experiences of people of color and older Jews? The definition also enables me to address the processes of selection, emphasis, and presentation in the actual activities and intentions of the research narratives and redesigned artefacts by Design for Democracy. Why did I select and present mostly theories of inclusion and participatory design? Why was there, organizationally, an emphasis on participatory inclusion without specific reference to races or ethnicities? Also, by extending the "framing" metaphor to include the practices of research and design, I attempt to accomplish two goals:

1. Put human-centered research and design into direct dialogue with political science and media studies and,
2. Endow research narratives and design artefacts with the same persuasive powers afforded to media narratives and artefacts in affecting civic participation.

The necessity of understanding of the complexity of the issues regarding the American election experience drives my desire to open dialogue between political science, media studies, anthropology, and design. As "the study of governments, public policy, and political behavior," political science provides the content expertise of the processes and issues of the elections (American Political Science Association, 2006). The field of media studies helps analyze the power of the television, radio, and the Internet in communicating and shaping perceptions of the election experiences (Carpini, 1998). Anthropology provides the overarching methodological framework for shifting the focus on the "meaning" of the election experience through examination of the attitudes, behaviors, and actions of voters themselves, through ethnographic fieldwork. Design provides the creative problem solving tools, processes, and artefacts that make concrete the dynamics of the election experience.

Media such as TV, newspaper, and the Internet are, of course, designed artefacts. But what I am referring to are the more intimate ballots, polling stations and signage, manuals, and brochures of election design. Although lacking the mass-communicative reach of newspaper, television, and Internet media, the interactions between audiences, research narratives, and election design artefacts can have the same individual affect on political thought and action. Thus, it is just as important to explore the impact as those interactions as the impact of television and the radio.

The framing of Post-November 2000 American discourses of election experience

The immediate mainstream media reporting of the November 2000 American election problems in Florida focused on several major themes:

– The closeness of the call between Bush and Gore and the role of absentee ballots

– The legal suit over the ballot

– The process of counting votes

– Need for alternative voting systems

– Gore, the recount, and the state and federal courts

– Fault of voter's own error

– Fault of ballot layout and design

– Older persons' disenfranchisement

– African American's disenfranchisement

These themes cluster into sets of what Druckman (2001: p. 241) describes as dispositional and situational frames. In the dispositional framing of the 2000 Election in Florida, blame is placed on the individuals (i.e. African Americans and older persons) and political parties (i.e. Democrats and Republicans) for the problems. In situational framing, blame is placed on the legal system, electoral process, and/or the ballot layout itself. I argue that each framing characteristic has a specific affect on people's perception of their competence to participate in civic life. The situational frames most frequently appeared in media reports following the election.

Legal frames

The most frequent situational frame was that of the legality of the ballot counting and recounting processes (Alden & Spiegel, 2000; Biskupic, 2001; Homes & Judd, 2000; Marinucci, 2000; Mason, 2000; Milligan, 2000; Mulvihill, 2000; Peltier, 2000; Widermuth & Marinucci 2000; Williams, 2000). Other legal framings were stories about the legal suits themselves (Glaberson, 2000; Miller, 2000; Simpson, 2000; Usborne, 2000). The selection of the legal issues as the primary framing effect, while providing Law and Order drama (Brady et al, 2001), excludes active citizen participation in informed civic debate about the electoral processes. According to Ilya Somin (2004, p.8) of the Cato Institute, nearly one-third of people who took the 2000 National Election Survey scored in the category of know-nothings, those who got less the 8.5 correct answers on the 31 question test of basic political knowledge. Topics of this survey included issues debated in the 2000 campaigns, holders of Chief Justice office of the Supreme Court, or House of Representative candidates in own state. While awareness of an issue, having a position on the issue, and knowing alternatives positions are classically considered enough for basic democratic participation, Somin argues (2000):

In addition to awareness of the existence of relevant issues and of candidate positions on them, informed voters must have at least substantial understanding about which of the available policy options are most likely to advance their goals. Unless the value voters attach to policy in a given area is purely a matter of symbolic "position taking," they cannot use the ballot to force elected officials to serve their interests without knowing what the likely effects of alternative policy options are (p. 3).

I believe that most people, including myself, had difficulty understanding the policy implications for themselves of the legal issues of the recount. In fact, most were drawn more to the reports on the competitive election tally than the mechanism by which the tally was computed.

Media reports that focused on electoral processes, such as the roles of absentee ballots (Branch-Brioso, 2000; Cornwall, 2001; Times – Picayune, 2000) or the process of counting votes (Battenfeld & Guarino, 2000; Holmes, 2000), also required basic political knowledge that most Americans lack. Thus, the framing of the November 2000 election in Florida as an issue of legal and process technicalities places technical experts in the roles of change agents in the political process. Not informed about the immediate issues to them, lay citizen's participation was reduced to protesting outside of court houses. The one group, whose protests were widely noted, was African Americans.

Deliberate disenfranchisement or voter incompetence?

Media reports on the effects of the 2000 Election on African American Floridians focused on the call for the investigation of legal discrimination by high-profile African American leaders such as Jesse Jackson and Kwame Mfume of the NAACP (Cooper, 2000; Parker, 2000; Usborne, 2000). The purging of felons from the voting rolls, poll station irregularities, and misleading instructions by Get-Out-the-Vote workers were all evoked as possible violations of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. While the reports situationally framed the issue as one of civil rights, the tacit theory behind the issue was that Republicans had conspired to disenfranchise African American voters, which polls indicated would vote over 90% for Gore instead of Bush (Usborne, 2000). But again, the legal framing of the issue offers political protests as the primary participatory option for lay citizens. While the history of blatant discrimination of African Americans made them subjects of a situational framing of civil rights, older persons were subjects of a dispositional framing that implied that they were too incompetent to vote anyway.

The media reports on older persons whose votes were affected by the butterfly ballot were not framed as seriously as that of African Americans. In fact, the media commented more on the lampooning of older persons in the press than the issues of disenfranchisement that older persons raised (Baker, 2000; Silverman, 2000; Vejnoska, 2000). Many members of the Republican party blamed the situation on voter incompetence. Then Florida Election Supervisor, Theresa LePore was quoted in Nov 7, 2000 Sun-Sentinel, "I was trying to make the print bigger so elderly people in Palm Beach County can read it …We sent out sample ballots to all registered voters, and no one said a word."

Adhering to practices of fair reporting, the media often balanced statements by Republican representatives about voter incompetence with Democrat's statements of systemic problems (Bonner & Barbanel, 2000; Knight Ridder News Service, 2000; Sawyer, 2000). Yet, Republican's framing of the problems with the 2000 election in Florida as the fault of voters themselves is part of the party's core principles of individual accountability (Republican National Committee website, 2006). But, this framing offered few solutions for citizens to address the immediate issue of the 19,000 invalidated ballots besides reviewing sample ballots next time.

Information Design and Usability

Relatively new to popular political discourse was the framing of the ballot event as an issue of information design and usability. As early as 1966, there had been studies that address ballot design issues. Partisan bickering led to studies of the voter bias built into office block versus party column layouts (Walker, 1966). Later studies correlated the position of the candidate's name at the top of the ballot to higher incidence of vote selection (Taeble, 1975). In her scholarly paper, "Disenfranchised by Design," Susan King Roth (1998) identified the importance of the usability and design of election ballots. But these were all academic studies. It wasn't until the 2000 Election that ballot design became a story of interest to the mainstream press. Some media reports emphasized the call of prominent usability experts, like Jacob Nielson, and technologists for new voting mechanisms (Carolan, 2000; Jordan, 2000; News Services, 2001; Vikcers & Diemer, 2000). The tacit theory implied by the experts in these reports was that through some usability testing or even an overhaul of the punch card system the problems in Florida could be prevented. The last call for an overhaul of the punch card system proved very effective because the Help American Vote Act of 2002 made punch card systems virtually obsolete.

Other media reports focused on the layout of the ""butterfly" ballot itself (Barbarisi, 2000; Bonner & Barbanel, 2000; Chang 2001; Natta Jr. & Canedy, 2000; Whitaker, 2000). These reports mostly featured anecdotal quotes of individual voters' confusion with the ballot. Television media in particular conducted man-on-the-streets reports of people trying to use the ballot design in other cities like New York (CNN, 2000). Some media reports featured the perspective of information design experts. The New York Times ran two major stories including Paula Scher's Op Ed (2000) that broke down the design faults of the butterfly ballot and Emily Oberman and Bonnie Siegler's redesigned ballots (Williams, 2001). USA Today featured five "star" graphic designers' redesigned ballots.

The presence of usability and design experts in the framing discourses of the election experience marked a new era in the importance of those disciplines to civic life. Situational framings of the butterfly ballot problem based on the law or dispositional framings that is the fault of voter incompetence all contribute the cynicism and alienation of many citizens from American democracy. In his study of political cynicism and third party support in the USA, Jeffery Koch (2003, p. 51) analyzed the American National Election survey's and found that American cynicism ranged, from 1980 to 1996, between 3.80 to 4.19 points, on a 5-point scale, with 5 meaning high cynicism. The processes of human-centered design and a sense of design empowerment open the possibility of a political framing that is inclusionary and optimistic.

The framing of contemporary American discourses of design

Design's ability to enter popular political discourse of the 2000 Election is based on significant shifts in the framing of design in the U.S. and designers' understanding of their role in civic society. Design historian, Victor Margolin (2002) points out that, "Design is most understood by the public as an artistic practice that produces dazzling lamps, furniture, and automobiles" (p. 28). Or as Tucker Viermeister (2001) states, "Most people see design as style or decoration, not as better "function" or "communication" (p. 231). Having worked intimately with designers for over seven years, I can attest to their frustration with being seen as people "who

make things look pretty." Strategies to combat this image by professional design associations, in particular AIGA and IDSA in the United States, include, first, direct engagement with business and society, and secondly, the highlighting of the thinking processes behind the creation of design artefacts. AIGA positions itself as, "AIGA, the professional association for design, is committed to furthering excellence in design as a broadly-defined discipline, strategic tool for business and cultural force" (AIGA website, 2006). Through its GAIN: Design for Business conferences and publications, AIGA has put information design at the forefront of American business. It's Design for Democracy initiative strives to put design at the forefront of public service as well. The IDSA mission states that its first objective is to "Promote the benefits, awareness and value of design in business and society" (IDSA website, 2006).

Designers have had to become more conversant with their roles in public life. In industrial design, public service finds it form in the issues of sustainability. Green product design is the hallmark of global responsibility for industrial design and a lucrative business in and of itself. Graphic designers possess awareness of their roles at the intersection of commerce and social responsibility since the 1964 First Things First Manifesto, signed by twenty-two of the prominent visual communicators at the time. The revision of the manifesto in 2000 by prominent "graphic designers, art directors, and visual communicators" reinforces the field's commitment to "pursuits more worthy of our problem solving skills…environmental, social, and cultural crises…" (FTF, 2001, p. 123). While designers like Katherine McCoy (2003) nurture "a crop of active citizens – informed, concerned participants in society who happen to be graphic designers" (p. 8), others critique the focus on commenting about social issues as opposed to doing something directly about it. David Sterling and Mark Randall (2001) of Worldstudio Inc., sums up that perspective:

> The nature of graphic design often leads designers to fulfil the role of social commentator rather than true activists. The operative word is act. You can design a poster about literacy or you can teach a kid to read. While the poster may be valid and important part of the equation, we wanted to act more and comment less (p. 55).

What distinguishes the designers of Design for Democracy was that they were not content to comment, but they wanted to act. The action that demonstrated the power of design was Marcia Lausen's redesign of the Cook County Chicago's own butterfly ballot. The intentions of that action were to provide a civic project that would demonstrate the power of design thinking. (See figure 1: Before and after image of Cook County butterfly ballot)

I am most intimate with the efforts of AIGA in making "visible" the thinking that goes behind design decision-making. The publishing of the "Design Framework" and the "What every business needs" booklets by AIGA codified the idea that design has a process. In fact, the booklets outlined a 12-step process of defining a problem, innovating, and generating value (AIGA, 1999). Part of the message of design thinking is that designers need to work with other experts. In the AIGA "Design Framework" booklet, it states, "True power as a designer comes when we realize that to solve many problem we will work with many partners, collaborators, and co-conspirators" (AIGA, 1999, p. 7). Thus, the action that set the stage for the reframing of

American Democracy as engaged with practices of inclusion, complexity, and transformation was the introduction of ethnographically-based research into the election design process.
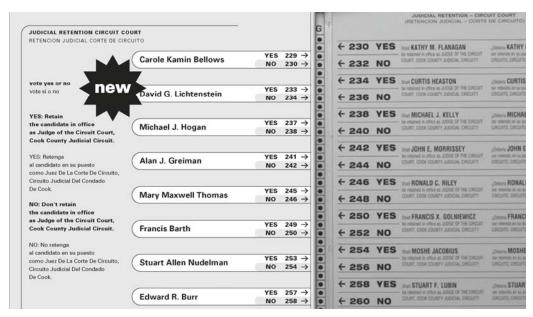

Figure 1: Before and after images of Cook County Chicago's butterfly ballot

How is that? A symbiotic relationship exists between systematic research methodologies and the creation of design artefacts. Some design researchers, Ranulph Glanville (1999), consider "…(scientific) research to be a subset of design, not the other way around" (p. 89). Others, such as Bruce Hanington (2003), while recognizing the role of research in design process, believe that design needs to learn "… models of research adapted from other human-centric fields such as anthropology and ethnography, and those developed through our own innovation, [that] correspond more adequately to the requirements of design both as a creative process and in holistic content inclusive of emotive human concerns" (p. 18). In my experience, ethnographic research, in particular, provides the deeper contextual understanding and intimate content expertise to inform the design process and the selection of appropriate forms and functions for design artefacts. Design provides tangible and accessible forms that communicate the relevance of ethnographic insights and understandings to specific audiences. In addition, design can temper the highly theoretical and obtuse communications of anthropologists and ethnographers. As Buchanan (1998) states, this function can explain the wider appeal of design today:

> Perhaps the focus on the concrete and objective is one reason why design attracts increasing attention in the contemporary world and is given broader scope than at any time in the past: there is hope that design thinking, applied in many new areas, can serve as an alternative to the old forms of technocracy based on scientific specialization, where experts in narrow areas of learning once believed that they could improve and enrich life merely by applying technical knowledge to solve the problems of everyday life (p. 18).

The combination of ethnography's understanding of the deep experiences of everyday life and design's concrete pragmatism enables a counter discourse about American that is inclusive and empowering. Buchanan (1998) continues, "In contrast with technocracy, design increasingly seeks to include in its processes of deliberation and decision-making all of those who will be affected by a new product" (p. 18). Ethnographically-based research ensures that those affected by a new product or communication are brought into the deliberation and decision-making processes systematically, skilfully, and represented from their own perspectives.

4.0 The Anthropologist's experience of the voting experience and the voter

With the new understanding of the power of design and research, the voter experience redesign team quickly realized that user research was necessary to understand the breadth and depth of the election experience problem. As Coyne and Snodgrass (1995) describes, "What are the problems of design? The theme dissatisfaction with design products is a common one" (p. 34). In February 2001, they contacted colleagues at Sapient Corporation, a high-tech consulting company, which at the time was one of the top private employers of anthropologists with PhDs. The head of the AIGA Chicago chapter at the time, Lance Rutter, had understood the value of Sapient's systematic approach to human-centered design methodologies.

Unable to get much funding from the Chicago Board of Elections, the proposal came to Sapient as a pro-bono project. As a senior member of the Experience Modelling (XMod) team in between projects and known for my quick turn-around, Martha Cotton, a director of Experience Modelling, asked me to write a cheaper, revised, research plan and lead the research. We assembled a core- team of three XModellers: Anna Choi, a designer and the required AIGA member; Joan Afton; and myself. In less than three weeks, the project research needed to be planned and executed as well as design the communication artefacts to share the research with others. The research plan consisted of secondary research on all the media reports on the failures of the 2000 Election in Florida and primary research with up to six individuals. Through the Sapient networks and those of the voting redesign designers, we recruited six people across of sample of ages, voting experience, and political affiliations. We conducted in-home interviews with them and on March 4, 2001, shadowed them as the voted in their suburban Cook County polling stations. We documented the voter information materials they had read and discarded at home, the locations where they kept voting materials, their route to the polling place, the signage on that route, the polling station way finding guides, and the layout of the polling station.

After the analysis and synthesis of the research through affinity diagramming and modelling, we summarized the results in four communication artefacts in the form of posters:

1. A voter typology made up of avid voters, issue voters, civic voters, the excluded, and the apathetic (See figure 2: Voter typology);

2. A voting experience model that outlined four steps of the voting process including registering, getting information, voting, and monitoring choices (See figure 3: Voting experience model);

3. A polling place experience model that diagrammed the way finding systems of the polling place and the role of the election judge as gatekeeper of the experience (See figure 4: The Polling Place);

4. And an opportunity map that, in a matrix structure, identified the problems of each of the five voter types through each phase of the four-step voting process (See figure 5: the Opportunity Matrix).
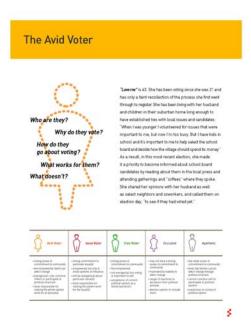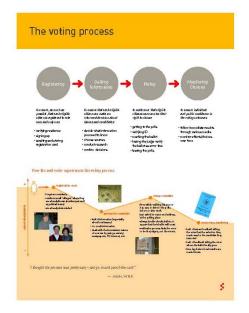

Figure 2: Voter typology
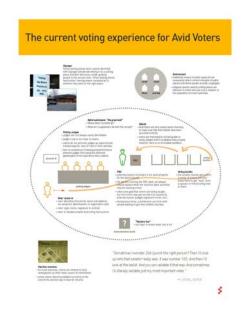

Figure 3: Voting experience model

Figure 4: The Polling Place

Figure 5: The opportunity map

The research posters were presented to the voter experience redesign designers. They used the opportunity map to identify potential design projects that meet the needs of voters and identified projects that were out of scope of design. For example, one of the key strategic decisions was to focus on the Avid Voter (i.e. voters most engaged and evangelical about the voting process.) At the time, I framed the decision to the group using the discourse of commerce – that as the election experiences most "loyal" customers, the Avid Voters are the ones that the election official, the ultimate client for the potential designs, cannot afford to have negative experiences and become disengaged. While voters are not "customers" in the commercial sense, the analogy

within the context of human-centered design reinforced the necessity of meeting the needs, expectations, and desires of the voters that resonated with commercial backgrounds of the designers. This had in indirect impact on the approach that the designers took in formulating their design solutions. They relied upon the approaches they used everyday to persuade people "into a useful encounter with a message" (McCoy, 2000, p. 81). In fact, one of the first ideas was to create a better logo for voting. In addition, the insight about the role of election judges as gatekeepers proved particularly interesting to the group and led to the next professional prototyping project of redesigning the judge's manual for elections (See figure 6: Judge's manual).
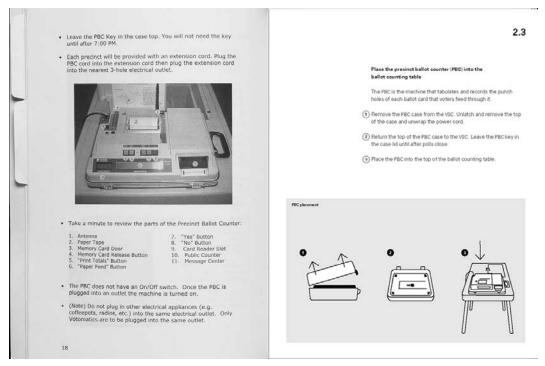

Figure 6: The Judge's manual

In Autumn 2001, the research posters were also presented to a group of nearly 40 University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) undergraduate graphic and industrial design students. This was the first example of the research helping to frame a new discourse of inclusion, as the students realized that they could directly contribute to American democratic processes. According to Mark Lopez, Emily Kirby, and Jason Sagoff (2005) of The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, although youth voting participation rebounded by 11 percentage points in the 2004 election, it had declined by 16 percentage points between 1972 and 2000 (p.2). Following the final presentation of their design artefacts to Cook County election officials, students commented on how happy they felt being able to "make a difference." The research enabled students and designers to engage in the complexity of the election experience, while making it accessible through the designs of the research posters. The opportunity map was framed as a tool to ensure a wide variety of design ideas were generated across the registering, getting information, voting, and monitoring choices phases of the voting process. Most design solutions coming out the 2000 Election problems focused only on the voting experience. The models and prototypes designed by the students reflect the breath and

depth of the ideas generated (See figures 7, 8, and 9: Election design prototypes and templates 1, 2, and 3). Most importantly to the students, the information design models were implemented by the Cook County Clerks office:

- Vote logo
- Voter education materials
- Polling place signage
- Forms and envelopes
- Document storage and organization
- Pollstar and Vote-a-matic
- Universal voting booth
- Voting supply carrier.

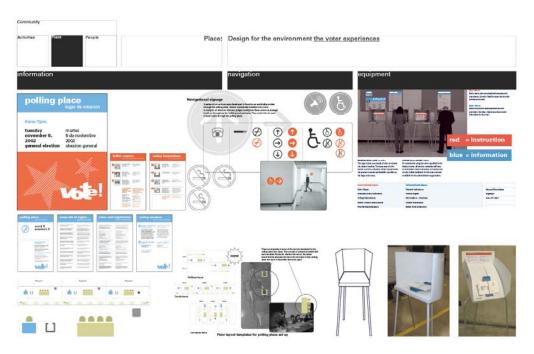Figure 7: Election design models and prototypes template 1

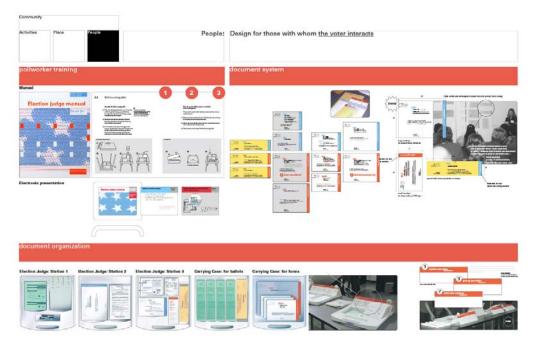**Figure 8**: Election design models and prototypes template 2

Figure 9: Election design models and prototypes template 3

In Spring and Autumn 2002, two more research and design projects were held with UIC undergraduates. This time with only graphic design students. Both courses used visual story techniques and direct observations to gain an intimate understanding of the Vote-By-Mail process in the state of Oregon and the experiences of culturally and linguistically disenfranchised voters in Chicago. Visual story is a self-documentary technique that allows participants to frame their experience in response to a protocol. Participants are given disposable cameras and asked to capture aspects of an experience on film and annotate each photo in a logbook. It allows participants to 'narrate' their own experience and interpret protocol questions without researchers present. It's good for gathering native categories and language. But, the main reason why I use it with design students is that it is highly visual, so they respond better to the data. For the Vote-By-Mail project, students designed voter education pamphlets, ballots, maps, voter registration form with self-attached envelope, and a design system to support the ballot processes in the postal center. For the disenfranchised voter project, students design culturally and language appropriate get-out-the-vote posters for Mexican American, Polish American, Chinese American, Korean American, and Puerto Rican youth voters in Chicago.

Selections from the models and prototypes designed by the undergraduate students became the designed artefacts exhibited in professional conferences, government client pitches, and the Pompidou Centre. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the research narrative behind the artefacts helped frame the interpretation of the artefacts and the discourse about American democracy in those venues.

5 Research and the (re/de)contextualization of design artefacts

In design research studies, scholars often focus on how research informs the design ideation process (Glanville, 1999; Hanington, 2003; Heaton, 2002) Yet, I have always proposed that the true value of research is in its ability frame the interpretation of the design artefacts when communicated to others through storytelling. In particular, my role as the former administrator of Design for Democracy was to use storytelling to "spark action," in the words of Stephen Denning (2006). In this case, the action was imagining social transformation through people's inclusion/participation into election experiences based on an understanding of its complexity and existing solutions. But the context of performance makes a difference to the effectiveness of this approach. In professional conferences and client pitches, the research narratives can be emphasized to frame the interpretation of the artefacts. In museum exhibits, research narratives are muted as part of wider emphasis of artefacts over context in curatorial practices.

Professional conferences: AIGA National 2003 and designer inclusion
Although the election design artefacts had be presented at AIGA's education conference, my first conference with the artefacts was the 2003 AIGA National Conference: the Power of Design in Vancouver, Canada. The first day of the conference, I told my husband that designers complain that no one values what they do. Main-stage presenters discussed the need for design to do more interdisciplinary work that matters. This became the frame for the counter-narrative of how designers do interdisciplinary work that matters. During our breakout session the second day, the design artefacts were not physically displayed at the conference, although they were presented via a digital presentation tool. The format for the presentation was the story of the research and the student's designs for all three projects and a question and answer session.

Other panellists spoke about lobbying in Washington DC, redesigning the ballot, and the challenges of working with election officials. I was to talk about research and emphasized two points:

1. The creative synergy resulting from research and design collaboration, and
2. How research can help one define what really matters within the complexity of the election experience.

Although it was not a large crowd, maybe 15-20 people, many came up afterwards and expressed how excited they were that this work was happening and how they would like to get involved. Effectively framing the artefacts as not just beautiful designs, but representations of an interdisciplinary process with real impact, sparked an action to get involved by those who felt their work did not matter.

Client pitches and selling the understanding of complexity

Design for Democracy has taking the election design work and used it pitch to state and federal election government agencies to implement the work. One of the organization's board of directors, John Lindback, is an election official. He describes his interactions with advocacy groups, as they never understand the complexity of the election experience. Thus in our communication with government officials, we frame the research to demonstrate our understanding of not just the complexity of voter types, but the "entire" election experience and how design artefacts can support it. In pitches, the design artefacts demonstrate that we can provide a solution, while the research narratives demonstrate that we actually know what the problems are. But the complexity we frame is a "managed" complexity that does not paralyze election officials or voters. As a counter-discourse to media's framing of the election experience as too complex to be understood, the research communicates the empathy and partnership that needs to exist between "the government and the governed", with the organization as the mediator of that partnership.

The Pompidou Centre: translating transformation?

But while the research narrative can empower the design artefacts within the conference and client pitch setting, it is constrained by the context of the museum. Museums emphasize the artefacts over narratives, especially those outside the curatorial voice. The only time for authorial narrative is during the exhibit opening when you can interact with the visitors. The old Cook County and redesigned Design for Democracy voting booths, punch card ballots, vote logos, and disenfranchised voters posters were exhibited at the D-Day Exhibit on June 28, 2005. While the designers sat in the café outside of the exhibit, I felt compelled to provide more "context" for our artefacts in spite of my limited French. The main attraction to our exhibit was the "Vote" buttons, which people took in red and blue. While most visitors understood the better experiences of the before and after voting booths and punch cards, yet in the moments when I did tell the story about the research and the process, people expressed surprise to hear that something had been done in the United States to underline actually improve the situation. By framing the artefacts as grounded in research and process, the discourse opened beyond "better design" to one of perhaps I hope transformative processes.

Conclusion: Research and reframing American democracy

I return to my exploration of framed discourses of American democracy, contextual milieu and how research can frame the interpretation of election design artefacts to tell stories about that democracy. The 2000 Election resulted in framing discourses that imagined American democracy as exclusionary, contemptuous of voters, and untrustworthy, with the effect of inciting voter cynicism and apathy. American design's repositioning itself as a cultural and social force made the election experience an issue of not just law, but design. The field's focus on human-centered design enabled research to not just inform design solutions, but to help frame them in ways that spark actions counter to the prevailing cynicism and apathy. In particular, research narratives engage people in the inclusive, realistically complex, and transformative imaginings of participation in the solution. An important reframing of American democracy, if the 200 plus year experiment will survive.

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