

Obscuring Austerity
The Politics and Practice of 'Citizen-Centred' Design

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Abstract

Design has increasingly become the face of public sector innovation in Canada. Concepts such as design thinking, co-creation, product management, and user testing are quickly displacing more traditional public administration practices, values, and approaches to work.

Despite this intensification of design activity and the new demands placed upon public servants, there are few scholarly texts within the fields of design studies, political economy, political theory that examine the potential political effects that may be associated with introducing design — a discipline born out of industry to “lend eye appeal” to products — to public sector contexts in Canada. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature by examining the accounts of 23 public servants and consultants who specialize in public sector design and innovation and who described their work in the form of case examples, reviewing policy and project documentation, and analyzing two case studies.

The analysis concludes that design, when carried out in service of public sector innovation, acquires its legitimacy as a valid public service practice by promoting an ethos of “citizen-centredness”: a set of values and practices that conflates the desires of individual citizens (e.g., more efficient service delivery), who are construed as consumers with market-oriented needs, with large-scale sociopolitical public issues (e.g., ending youth homelessness). Applying a critical theory lens, this study concludes that design performs the work of neoliberal governance — subtle techniques employed to imbricate the values of neoliberal rationality within public sector institutions — by neutralizing the politics of austerity. In so doing, this variant of neoliberal encroachment erodes the “collective-ness” that is demanded of democratic life, resulting in a diminished political subjectivity.

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INTRODUCTION

Public Sector Innovation in Canada

“Design needs to acknowledge the specificities of its place,
to locate itself as one (albeit multiple) figure and practice of change.”

– Lucy Suchman (2002, p.1)

I received the message less than an hour before the meeting was scheduled to start. I scrambled to download the project plan and jumped into a cab to race across the city to take part in the first meeting that marked the next phase in Budget Talks. The program was piloted in 2015, when then Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne made a commitment to open up the budget-making process, part of the government’s broader Open Government initiative that was launched in 2013.¹

Budget Talks is a platform that allows Ontarians to submit, discuss, rate, and debate policy proposals online. In-person sessions are used to whittle-down the list of ideas and the final list of proposals is placed back online where Ontarians vote on their favourite. A total of five proposals can be selected, but they cannot exceed a combined total of \$5 million (for reference, the 2017 provincial budget amounted to \$141 billion). Previous successful projects have included enhanced Wi-Fi in rural libraries across Northern Ontario and a commitment to explore a digital health card. For Mark, who headed up digital strategy in the premier’s office, Budget Talks was a fusion of user experience design, technology, and deliberative democracy. Projects like this, he said, showcase the government’s capacity for innovation. His vision is to transform Budget

¹This introductory section is based on field notes created while observing a meeting on Thursday, October 26, 2017, at the Ontario Cabinet Office, Whitney Block, 99 Wellesley Street, in Room 1619 A. The names and identity of attendees have been anonymized.

Talks into a platform that can be used to engage with Ontarians on a range of policy-related issues.

I arrived for the Budget Talks meeting 15 minutes early and made my way to the security desk located at the entrance to Whitney Block. After looking for my name in the visitor log, the security officer told me I was not pre-registered. Perhaps an oversight? Things were moving pretty fast. The security officer handed me a name badge and reminded me to wear it at all times. “Where are you going, anyway?” he asked.

“I have a meeting with Rob from ODS (Ontario Digital Service).”

“Oh, the group in front of you is headed to the same meeting,” he said. They were representatives from the vendor who were selected to execute the in-person deliberation portion of Budget Talks. Having just skimmed the project plan they put together, I learned that they were hired by the City of Toronto to evaluate the city’s first participatory budgeting pilot that took place in 2015.

The room was located in the Northwest corner of the building. It was a cramped space, filled with an eclectic mix of office hand-me downs. The walls were covered with whiteboards, each featured handwritten notes and technical diagrams. When I entered the room, I was greeted by Rob, “Oh you were able to make it.” He was not sure I received the Twitter message letting me know the meeting was a go. We had been going back and forth for several weeks to arrange a time for me to meet the project team. This was the first in-person team meeting I was invited to.

Seven of us crowded around a long wooden table. Mark was dialing in from the road, where he was attending an event with the Premier. We were behind schedule and, judging by the looks on the project team members’ faces, there was a sense of urgency to get moving as quickly as possible.

Brianne, who was leading the project on the vendor side, kicked-off the conversation: “We’re ready to get our marching orders,” she said. She was concerned

that the timelines proposed were a bit aggressive. With less than three months to start recruitment, find venues, and send out invitations, this was cutting it close. Mark jumped in to say it needs to be all hands-on deck and the project team was willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

“No four-corner meetings required?” Brianne asked.

“That’s right,” Mark said.

The conversation quickly turned to recruitment. Brianne wanted to know if users who had signed up for Budget Talks online had provided any data that might help identify where they live and their willingness to participate in an in-person workshop. She stressed the importance of determining if participants are “literate” enough to participate in the event as the objective should be to “maximize the impact to participate.”

“What about an honorarium to increase participation?” she asked.

“Would that look like we’re paying people to participate?” Rob said. He was concerned that this might undermine the civic nature of the project. The vendor team said that because the amounts being invested are relatively small (\$5 million), there would be little incentive for people to take part.

“There will likely not be enough public interest to give up a full day without some form of compensation,” said Brianne. “It’s jets at the waterfront or a stop sign that affects people in their day-to-day life. We’re best to treat this like jury duty; no one is getting rich off of this,” Jack, a member of Brianne’s team, said.

The back-and-forth exchange outlined above offers a glimpse into the everyday realities of public administration. It is in situated contexts like this that public servants balance the pressures of public administration with the demands of citizens, industry and, to a lesser extent, academia, to break with tradition and embrace so-called “new ways of working.” More and more, public servants across Canada are being called upon to

embrace the promises of public sector innovation: to think like entrepreneurs, act like designers, and lead like product managers. A report recently published by the Government of Canada Deputy Ministers Task Force on Public Sector Innovation paints an even more telling picture:

Governments around the world face the reality of addressing increasingly complex and horizontal challenges (e.g., climate change, migration, social cohesion, inequality, economic growth, etc.) in measurable and concrete ways. Simultaneously, they are being asked to be more responsive to citizens, accomplish more with the same or fewer resources, and be more accountable in administering public funds. This reality is forcing governments, in turn, to confront deeply rooted cultural norms in an effort to enact innovative approaches to overcome system barriers and deliver results to citizens. (Privy Council Office, 2019, p. para 1)

As further evidence of the intensification of public sector innovation across Canada, the Centre for Policy Innovation and Public Engagement at Ryerson University estimates that at least 41 innovation labs (at the time of writing) are in operation in government, academia, and not-for-profit organizations (B. Evans, 2019). The inventory offered in this report provides a useful starting point to assess the innovation lab landscape in Canada; however, it does not account for all types of innovation, particularly those that are design focused, which are also being used to operationalize public sector innovation, but may fall outside the remit of a specialized innovation office, department, or lab. For instance, since 2013, the Service Design Department located in the Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) branch of the Government of British Columbia has been “changing how citizens access government services by bringing innovation and a human-centred approach to the BC Public Service” (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). Similarly, the Ontario Digital Service (ODS), which was established in 2017 as part of the Government of Ontario’s continued effort to demonstrate how “digital approaches can be more efficient and effective, bend the cost curve and speed up time to market” (Ontario Digital Service, 2018, p. 12), is committed to delivering “simpler, faster, and better ” digital services to Ontarians.

At the forefront of this public sector innovation trend is an increased awareness of design-based approaches to service planning, delivery, and measurement. This has been bolstered by the publication and circulation of grey literature emanating from several sources, including Canadian private sector consulting firms (e.g., Fjord, Bridgeable, Doblin, and Akendi), think tanks (e.g., Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship, apolitical, MaRS Solutions Lab), governmental bodies and institutions (e.g., Alberta CoLab, Insight and Innovation, Ontario Digital Services, Canadian Digital Service,) and academia (e.g., OCAD University and Ryerson University). For instance, a report published by the management-consulting firm Ernst & Young in 2017, claims, “Governments need to reinvent themselves to meet higher expectations with scarce public dollars. Innovation can enable this. Specifically, innovation in internal processes, policy design and implementation, service delivery and regulatory approaches will be critical if government is to simultaneously and successfully deliver services and meet budgets” (Ernst & Young LLP, 2017, p. 3). The implication is that innovation may be one route forward for public servants struggling to deliver services, programs, and develop policy in an environment of protracted austerity. The report concludes, however, that governments lack the “corporate culture required to embrace and exploit innovation” (p. 12). The increased demands placed upon public servants who lack the instincts needed to “exploit innovation” has resulted in a lucrative market for consulting firms, who like Ernst & Young, have carefully staked out positions as arbitrators of innovation best practices and who advocate for what is perceived as the inherent positive benefits of design.

The Impetus for this Research

Much to the detriment of the profession, the possibilities of design — that is to say the capacity of the design professional to solve vexing societal problems — have largely been overstated. Optimistic slogans such as “design can save the world” have and continue to be used by the profession to position itself at the forefront of social change (See for example, Shea, 2012). One example of such sloganeering is seen in the

business activities of IDEO — one of the largest private design and innovation consultancies in the world. The organization has based its business model on the notion, “We create positive impact through design” (IDEO, 2020). The implication here is that design is doing “good” work and by extension organizations who employ designers from IDEO are engaged in similar acts of “goodness.” I recognize that a profit-seeking organization such as IDEO would never commit to a mission of delivering “negative impact.” Instead this virtuosic sleight of hand — that design can deliver “positive impact” — has proven to be a lucrative business proposition. In 2013, for instance, *Fortune* reported that IDEO had approximate revenues of \$130 million U.S. (Eng, 2013).²

This claim of “goodness” draws upon a narrative that designers are inherently “good” at solving problems; a belief which is situated within a broader history in which design and industrial capitalism have become bound together through discourses that position the profession at the forefront of “innovation” (Suchman, 2011) and, by extension, “modernity” (Wylant, 2010) and “progress” (See for example, Simon, 1996). I draw these conclusions not just as a scholar concerned with critically analyzing the work of the design profession; I do so, as a practicing designer who has at times made such claims in order to sell my services to potential clients.

The challenge, as I see it, is that when design is used as a problem-solving process — to deliver positive impact that results in social change — it reduces social phenomena to “problems” for which practicable solutions can be sought. While design is often referred to in generative terms, in so much as the outcome of design-focused activities are *new* ideas; the design process itself collapses social phenomena — with all their complexities, contradictions, and controversies — in on itself, resulting in homogenous and superficial problem statements that erase how such issues are enmeshed within complex discourses and systems of power, privilege, and oppression.

² IDEO is a private corporation, which means there are few publicly available financial disclosures. The figure cited here is based on an article *Fortune* written in 2013 by Dinah Eng.

These personal reflections have led me to ask: Can design do bad things, too? The answer of course is yes. No practice or profession is inherently good. And yet, I have been hard pressed to find the sort of critical reflection from within my profession that I feel is required to address this question. There are also few scholarly texts within design studies, political economy, and political theory that engage in the type of sustained critique that is necessary to interrogate the assumptions, ideologies, and values that undergird contemporary articulations of design practice, such as the notion of positive impact that firms like IDEO purport to deliver.

To that end, I have taken up this research project to address what I perceive as a gap both within scholarship and design practice: a critical examination of the entanglement of design and neoliberalism, which includes an account of the energies that sustain and promulgate public sector innovation. This analysis entails examining the taken-for-granted status of “citizen-centred”³ design — a term and approach to design that has become prominent within public sector contexts across Canada since at least 2008 — which has come to be perceived by public servants as inherently “good,” given its purpose of devising solutions to citizen “problems.”

My study examines the first-hand accounts of public servants engaged in design activity who are associated with public sector innovation agendas by applying a critical theory lens to articulate how the practices of “citizen-centred” design materialize neoliberal rationality within Canadian public sector institutions. I have proposed four questions to guide this analysis:

³ I use the term “citizen-centred” here and throughout to capture the emergent discourses within Canadian public sector contexts that are focused on engaging design practice that are said to be in the best interest of individuals for whom the state now perceives as a customer of public services. “Citizen” as a term and concept is problematic given its associations with colonial practices designed to separate, isolate and other certain individuals within a particular community. I use the term to illustrate slippage in terms of its meaning, which was historically used to denote participation in the demos to its current articulation as citizen-consumer.

1. Why and how is design being used in public sector organizations in Canada?
2. How is design understood by public sector organizations in Canada?
3. How does the use of design effect governmental and public sector institutions' conceptions of democracy?
4. What political values are mobilized and/or activated when design practices, techniques, and knowledges are used within and across public sector institutions?

The Argument

Increased reliance on design, as part of a broader agenda of public sector innovation, raises important political questions: Why has design been chosen to take on the challenge of operationalizing the agenda of public sector innovation? What are the assumptions that underly the design professions perceived privileged position at the forefront of social good and transformation? How does the introduction of design methods, knowledge and work approaches affect what has historically constituted public administration? What political values are mobilized as a consequence of the importation of design in public sector contexts? As I contend throughout the subsequent chapters, the answers to these questions lie in the conditions that constrain and facilitate public administration: namely the politics of neoliberal austerity.

From new public management to public sector innovation, a path can be drawn between the desire of industry to discipline and “conduct the conduct,” to borrow from Michel Foucault (Foucault, 2010), of public servants and the aims of neoliberal rationality to remake all spheres of life in the image of the marketplace. Design, a profession born out of industry, plays an important role in this work in the sense that it is through the practices, techniques, and methods of design that proponents of public sector innovation endeavour to maximize public value by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery; (re)designing public services to facilitate self-service; construing public services as consumer services and, in so doing, recast the citizen-state relation according to an economic register. Design, when used in these contexts,

has a dual role of achieving the pragmatic aims of public sector innovation, while at the same time circulating, safeguarding, and materializing the values of “citizen-centredness” as an index of desirable public sector conduct.

It is at the conjuncture⁴ of public sector innovation, design, and neoliberalism that the politics and practices of “citizen-centredness” emerge. The “responsibilizing” aims of neoliberalism, coupled with public sector innovation’s insistence on value maximization, and design’s focus on foregrounding the individual needs at the expense of broader collective social needs, function concomitantly to obscure the effects of austerity. This occurs by redirecting the attention, efforts, and resources of the public service towards technical problems that concern the individual (i.e. consumer-oriented) needs of citizens, while eliding the political subjectivity that necessitates membership within broader social and political formations. Simply put, the use of design to secure and promote the aims of public sector innovation erodes the political content of citizenship in order to reconstitute the citizen-subject as an entrepreneurialized market actor – which is the principle aim of neoliberal rationality. As a consequence, the capacity of the state to promote and defend the democratic ideals and values upon which public sector institutions are based, are fundamentally undermined by efforts to promote public sector innovation that in turn seek to thwart collectiveness in favour of individualism, diminish investment in public goods at the behest of efficiency and streamlining, and neutralize public debate to secure consensus in defense of the political status quo. The values of citizen-centredness, then, which are circulated through practices of design, energize and activate neoliberal rationality within and across governmental and democratic institutions.

⁴ The term conjuncture refers to Stuart Hall’s work and is used here to describe what Stuart Hall describes as, “a number of forces and contradictions, which are at work in different key practices and sites in a social formation, come together or ‘con-join’ in the same moment and political space” (Hall, 2011a, p. 705).

Key Concepts and Ideas

Before proceeding, the next section outlines three important concepts that will be used throughout my analysis: “citizen,” “politics,” “design.” Each of the definitions advanced in this introductory section is woven throughout the successive chapters.

Citizen: Consumer, activist, subject

In its most basic form, the term citizen refers to any subject who is entitled to particular rights that are safeguarded and enforced by the state. The assumption underlying this definition is that a citizen “belongs” or is endowed membership to a particular political body in exchange for certain obligations (e.g., military service) (Yarwood, 2014). Stuart Hall and David Held argue that there are three “notions” to citizenship: “membership; rights and duties in reciprocity; real participation in practice” (Hall & Held, 1989, p. 17). They contend that the concept of membership is perhaps the most politically fraught of all of these dimensions because it inevitably involves establishing boundaries denoting insiders (those that belong) and outsiders (those who exist outside the collective body). Boundaries of this sort have historically been marked by categories such as gender and race; thus, guaranteeing rights to a select few, namely white men, of a particular class, and educational status. Outside subjects, in comparison, exist in “a zone of indistinction” (Agamben, 1998, p. 177), in which they are denied the protective layers and institutions of the modern nation-state.

The recent right-wing backlash witnessed in the United States offers material evidence of this phenomenon and lends credence to calls to interrogate the politics of inclusion. Migrants seeking refuge in the United States are detained at the border and caged for extended periods of time. The subjects captured in these zones are denied rights and lack access to any form of reliable legal recourse. Since announcing *Executive Order 13767* (“Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements”) in January 2017, the average daily population of immigrants in detention centres in the United States has increased by 23.34% (Reyes, n.d.). These events are emblematic of

the recent slippage in the use and meaning of the term citizen and coextensively citizenship to mark the “immigrant other” as existing outside the normative frame of the American nation-state. This is rhetorically expressed through the phrase, “Make America Great Again”— a discursive, and quite literal, physical barrier used to demarcate spaces of exclusion.

To that end, I concur with Chantal Mouffe’s assertion that “the way we define citizenship is intimately linked to the kind of society and political community we want” (Mouffe, 1992a, p. 25). Notwithstanding the need for a sustained critique of the notion of citizenship, particularly in these politically polarizing times; the forthcoming analysis, however, will avoid weighing into the messy political controversies of citizenship as a matter of inclusion /exclusion. Instead, the term “citizen,” henceforth is mobilized to assist in drawing a contrast between two competing subjectivities. This entails examining how the “citizen,” a contested political subject position, has exhaustively been rearticulated as *homo economicus* — a subject that exists in response to and in service of the marketplace and whose capacity to engage in political life has been undermined by the circulation and dissemination of neoliberal values, practices, and ideals. Ong (2006) describes this discursive conjunction as, “a new synergy between global capitalism and commercialized citizenship [which] creates milieus where market-based norms articulate the norms of citizenship” (p.501). The aim here is to investigate how neoliberal rationality, in particular, erodes the “collective-ness” that is demanded of democratic life and the political subjectivities that are neutralized as a consequence of its reproduction within and across democratic institutions. The assumption underlying this definition is a fundamental concern with what is lost when neoliberalism erodes the value of public goods, such as citizenship. As Brown contends, “when there is only *homo economicus*, and the domain of the political itself is rendered in economic terms, the foundation vanishes for citizenship concerned with publics and the common good” (p. 39). This is a process of subjectification⁵, in which the subject is unbound from any

⁵ This is a concept inherited from Foucault, which refers to the process by which an individual becomes a “subject.” This process is the by-product of a particular form of power, which Foucault (1982a) contends,

social body that exceeds the self — the so-called collective or public good — and is recast as an individualized agent of the marketplace or “citizen-consumer.” It is this emergent subject position that is the focus of the forthcoming analysis.

Design: With, for, and against

Design has been defined through various epistemological frames, including a practice of form giving for commercial and non-commercial purposes (R. Buchanan, 1992; Whiteley, 1994), a structured process of problem solving (Simon, 1996), an ontological position in which one sees and acts in the world in designerly ways (Cross, 2006; Willis, 2006), among many other interpretations. The professional design field has historically been concerned with matters related to profit maximization through commodity production and advertising (Innes, 2005; Norman & Hellegers, 2018; Raizman, 2003; Sparke, 1983), but since at least the 1980s, the design process itself has been commodified and branded as a reliable route for industry to maximize as-yet to-be realized economic value (Julier, 2014). This transformation, as Julier (2017a) argues, is the consequence of the design industry’s propensity to “‘follow the money’ by inventing new specialisms to exploit technological and business opportunities” (p.45). In response to these market pressures there has been a proliferation of design specialisms concerned with finding, maximizing, and materializing future value, such as interaction design (Jacko & Sears, 2003; Löwgren & Stolterman, 2004; Winograd, 2009), service design (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011; Stickdorn et al., 2018), design thinking (T. Brown & Katz, 2009; Kimbell, 2011).

Unlike consultant design that emerged in the early and mid-20th century in response to the need to organize and align the activities of engineering and styling for the purposes of commodity production (Sparke, 2013), design disciplines today represent a paradigm shift in terms of the type of design objects produced and the

“categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (p.781).

processes undertaken to give form to these artifacts. Firstly, design artifacts are becoming increasingly dematerialized. That is rather than producing durable artifacts, such as refrigerators, telephones, and automobiles that possess a strictly physical form, design today is concerned with the production of networked “fluid assemblages” (Redström & Wiltse, 2019). Take, for instance, the iPhone, while users interact with a physical device to call up and access information, its functionality is made possible through material and immaterial networks: services, data protocols, legislation, fiber optic cables, data warehouses, interfaces, etc. All of these objects are designed in some way, and each requires a specialized set of design skills and knowledge.

Secondly, the processes used to give form to these objects have become decentralized. A variety of terms have been proposed to account for the participatory nature of this work, including “produsage” (Bruns, 2008), “crowdsourcing” (Brabham, 2013), “collaborative media” (Löwgren & Reimer, 2013). At the heart of this phenomenon is an enfolding of production and consumption, in which so-called end users of products, services, and environments are actively involved in the design, production, and distribution process associated with innovation that have historically been the domain of industry (von Hippel, 2005). Design theorist John Thackara characterizes how this shift has affected the role of the proximate (professional) designers: “Complex systems are shaped by all the people who use them, and in this new era of collaborative innovation, designers are having to evolve from being the individual authors of objects, or buildings, to being the facilitators of change among large groups of people” (Thackara, 2005, p. 7). By denouncing the designer as a heroic, creative genius — a dominant feature of early and mid-20th century design culture — the co-creative paradigm demands that so-called end users be enrolled in processes of co-design wherein solutions are sought that mutually satisfy the needs of consumers, while achieving the profit motive of industry (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). This opening up of the design process has been labeled by some scholars and practitioners as a welcome expression of democratic life (see for example, Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Manzini, 2014). However, others (see for example, DiSalvo, 2010; Tonkinwise, 2014)

have criticized the purely instrumental aims of this work, to improve existing mechanisms, systems and process of governance, while failing to “express the range of democratic action and critique available to practicing designers or design scholars” (DiSalvo, 2010, np). Nonetheless, the opening up of and emphasis on involving non-experts in the design process is a defining feature of emergent design specialisms.

The promises of co-creation and value maximization that characterize contemporary design practices have found resonance with public sector environments. In response to the pressures of austerity, for example common appeals to do more with less, and the demands to deliver public services in a manner and format that is akin to the private sector, public servants have sought out the advice and expertise of the design industry. There has been an intensification of design activity within public sector contexts globally, since at least the Great Recession of 2008 (Julier, 2017a; Julier & Moor, 2009). This work is emboldened by a network of think tanks, design studios, and innovation labs that are focused on circulating and disseminating discourse that attempts to demonstrate the virtues of public sector design and innovation (see for example, Christian Bason, 2014; G Mulgan et al., 2007). Among the arguments made in favour of using design in public sector contexts is the insistence that “wicked”⁶ social problems can only be adequately addressed when public servants abandon traditional public administration techniques and practices and instead view the work of public administration as what it really is: design (Junginger, 2017). This thinking has been extended to a range of public sector techniques and activities including policy development (Bason, 2014; Kimbell & Bailey, 2017; Sørensen, 2016), service provision (Buchanan, Junginger, & Terrey, 2017; Mager, 2016), and governance more broadly (Christian Bason, 2017; Mintrom & Thomas, 2018). Coupled with this desire to convert

⁶The concept of “wicked problems” was first proposed by Horst Rittel who argued, “class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing” (Rittel, 1967 as cited in R. Buchanan, 1992, p. 16). Richard Buchanan contends that design is well suited for such problems because the practice is concerned with “indeterminate problems,” those which lack “definitive conditions or limits.” (p. 16). He further argues that designs lack of subject matter, it can be applied to can be applied universally to a range of human experiences (p.16).

public administration activities into design activities is a desire to measure the effect of such strategies. Liz Moor argues, “Although sophisticated measurement and auditing techniques are usually associated with private sector institutions seeking reassurance about return on investment and ‘value added,’ the spending of public money on design solutions increasingly demands even greater levels of accountability and proof of ‘effectiveness,’ and design agencies have had to respond to this” (Moor, 2009, p. 26). To that end, sophisticated customer experience metrics customarily used to measure service quality in the private sector have been imported into public sector contexts and are used to justify ongoing investment in public sector design.

The sheer range of design specialisms, some of which have been listed here, makes arriving at a unified definition challenging. However, Richard Buchanan provides a useful starting point to compose a formal definition of design, or at the very least, identify some of design’s epistemological overtones. As he argues, “Design is the human power of conceiving, planning, and making products that serve human beings in the accomplishment of their individual and collective purposes” (R. Buchanan, 2001, p. 6). The use of the term product is important because, for Buchanan, it does not strictly refer to objects that are intended for commercial use or consumption. A *product* is the outcome of any design process and suggests that human energies and resources are required to give form to these aspirations. Also, of note, is the social dimension of this work, which Buchanan terms “collective purposes.” He suggests that design is an entirely human endeavour, a way of making our way in the world, or the “The Sciences of the Artificial,” to quote the title of Herbert Simon’s classic text.

Lastly, design is a form of power in the sense that those who give form to the environments, places, services, objects — all manner of materiality that constitutes the Life World — do so according to preconceived agendas, imaginaries, political leanings, and ideologies. Design renders the world “sensible,”⁷ to borrow from Jacques Rancier

⁷ The term “sensible” is used here to refer to the role of aesthetics in making issues sense-able, that is to say when a particular issue registers sensorially and becomes a matter of concern for a knowing subject.

(Rancière, 2006), and in so doing dwells in the sphere of the political. As design historian and critic Victor Margolin, argues “[w]hen history, theory, and criticism are marginalized within design thought, the social conditions of design practice recede in importance” (Margolin, 2002, p. 240). Design without critique unwittingly reproduces the status quo.

Politics: Meanings and practices

Perhaps the easiest way to define politics is to consider what it is not. As a starting place, Chantal Mouffe contends, “the political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 3). For Mouffe, this entails struggle and contestation in pursuit of collective imaginaries and future ways of living and being with one another (Mouffe, 2013). In contrast, politics constitutes “the ensemble of practices and institutions whose aim is to organize human coexistence” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 3). It refers to the machinations, tactics, and practices used to order society, allocate resources, and carry out the functions of governance. Mouffe (1993) further contends that the practice of politics unfolds “within a terrain of conflictuality informed by ‘the political’”.

Building on these assertions, politics, then, are used to operationalize political hegemony — the *raison d'État* or “governing rationality” (Foucault, 2010). As Brown argues, Foucault’s conception of political rationality is concerned with, “the conditions, legitimacy, and dissemination of a particular regime of power-knowledge that centres on the truths organizing and the world it brings into being” (Brown, p.116). Politics, with its focus on the practicalities of governance, is used to operationalize these political aims. For instance, when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously declared, “there

These are political encounters because, as Rancière (2006) argues, “politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time” (2006, p.13).

is no alternative,” she was making a political argument in favour of the perceived moral and economic virtues of market-based societies, which stood in direct opposition to the Keynesian social welfare model that had been the dominant political rationality for much of the 20th century. By all accounts, this was a decisive rallying cry for proponents of neoliberalism. As David Harvey argues “neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (p.22). As political rationality, neoliberalism is concerned with the production of entrepreneurial subjects who are skilled at self-management and maximizing their human capital potential, while diminishing the capacity of the state to care for citizens (more on this in “Chapter 1: Democracy Today”). Therefore, the politics of neoliberalism are concerned with matters of deregulation, privatization, devolution, financialization, and austerity to limit the scope, scale, and capacity of the state (Harvey, 2011). And so, the actions or practices taken up in support of a particular political regime, are of interest to scholars concerned with questions of power and authority.

Understanding how neoliberal values are operationalized within and across democratic institutions, means examining the often mundane and taken-for-granted practices of public administration. Wendy Brown argues that “governance has become neoliberalism’s primary administrative form” (p.122); it is through the lens of governance, then, that the forthcoming analysis endeavours to reveal the energizing political values that undergird practices of public sector innovation, and design, specifically. This analysis draws from Anthony Giddens’ contention that “the basic domain of study of the social sciences [...] is [...] social practices ordered across space and time” (p.2). Social practices that are enacted in situated and local contexts of public administration thus serve as the basic unit of analysis for this study. A practice, as Andreas Reckwitz defines, “is a routinized type of behaviour that consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding,

know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz, 2002a, p. 249). In conceptualizing politics as practice, this study interrogates the taken-for-grantedness of public sector design activity as a mode of governance (practice) that functions to imbricate neoliberal rationality within governmental, democratic and public sector institutions, contexts, and spaces.

Structure

This thesis unfolds over two sections and six chapters. The first section, “Design, Industry, and Social Innovation” is concerned with developing the theoretical and historical scaffold needed to critically examine design as a social and political practice. This extended analysis of literature is necessary because there are few scholarly sources that I could draw upon that link design history, politics, consumer culture, and neoliberalism for the purposes of assessing how the profession both contributes to and is a by-product of capitalistic expansion. Therefore, this in-depth analysis draws together literature needed to assess the status and role of design in public sector contexts. This was particularly useful when devising a coding framework, which was used to identify themes related to the concept of “citizen-centredness” in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 1, “Democracy Today: Technique of Neoliberal Governance” begins by proposing a formal definition of neoliberalism. Drawing principally from the work of David Harvey, Michel Foucault, and Wendy Brown, this analysis traces the genealogy of neoliberalism as an economic policy proposed by the likes of Friedrich August von Hayek and Milton Friedman, an ideology used to reestablish class relations, and as governing political rationality in which all spheres of life are subjected to the logics of the marketplace. This analysis offers insight into the discourses, events, and practices that have led to neoliberalism acquiring a hegemonic political and economic status. While neoliberalism seeks to delegitimize the state, it also implicates the state in safeguarding and reproducing neoliberal rationality: a logic that reduces collective participation in the *demos* to a perpetual state of competition between economic actors. Neoliberalism is

operationalized within democratic institutions through and by the circulation of managerial techniques of governance, including best practices, benchmarking and quantitative measurement. This chapter draws an important link between a theory of neoliberal rationality and the practices of governance used to operationalize its political intentions. I will use this link in my analysis of the deployment of design as a technique of neoliberal governance that can, in turn, be used to serve political purposes.

Chapter 2 identifies the conditions which resulted from design's transformation from an aesthetic practice deployed to support commodity production to a strategic process used to design experiences and services, making it increasingly available as a technique used to exploit as yet-to-be-realize future economic value. The argument advanced is that the design industry is skilled at responding to changing market and political demands. The 20th century, in particular, is marked by several important ruptures within the design community, in which the profession was reimagined and re-organized to accommodate the needs of industry. These periods include: First, the rise of "consultant design" in the interwar period; second, the "participatory turn" in the early 1960s, the globalization of design professional firms throughout the 1980s; and third, the recent rise of specialized disciplines dedicated to socially-oriented design agendas. Each of these turns evidences the propensity of the profession to respond to capitalistic pressures for expansion — to find new markets, exploit unrealized value, and establish new dependencies on managerial techniques for service provision. Having secured a hegemonic position as the facilitator of private sector innovation throughout the early and mid 20th century, the design profession was able to quickly adapt to the demands of neoliberalism, while at the same time finding and creating markets for design that hitherto had not yet existed, such as corporate branding, strategic design, and service design, among others. This analysis foregrounds how design practice has historically been used to secure and promote specific economic and political agendas, namely neoliberalism.

In Chapter 3, “Design for Social Good: Responding to Neoliberal Hegemony,” the analysis turns to examining a particular type of design that has emerged in response to neoliberal austerity: social design, which is an umbrella term used to describe a range of disciplines that seek to relocate design along a trajectory of “social good.” While Guy Julier concludes that social design emerged in response to the 2008 financial crisis — what some scholars and commentators at the time believed was the death of neoliberalism — its origins date back to at least the 1970s, when participatory design emerged in response to excesses of capitalism (what I call the participatory turn in Chapter 2). It draws a contrast between two types of social design, the “pragmatic” and “critical” approaches, with the former concerned with defining and solving discrete problems and the latter focused on political critique and contestation. This chapter locates these two approaches to social design in relation to the current economic/political climate and specifies how design has moved from a material practice concerned with form-giving to a set of procedures used for rational decision-making within social and public contexts. It considers how each approach defines what constitutes “social good” in order to understand the politics and political values that energize social design. This chapter draws into dialogue the concepts of neoliberalism (Chapter 1) and design-for-industry (Chapter 2) by way of identifying emergent design specialisms that either seek to reject neoliberalism or reproduce its logics, thereby extending its reach to new social and political geographies, including public sector contexts and governmental institutions. The literature analyzed in Section 1 is used to establish a link between the design professions desire to find new markets for its work and the expansion of neoliberal rationality. This is best summarized by Guy Julier’s assertion, “Just as designers ‘dodge and weave’ to find new marketplaces for their skills, creating new needs and desires, so neoliberalism is constantly on the move, finding new territories and combinations” (Julier, 2013, p.220).

The empirical analysis carried out in “Section 2: Public Sector Innovation and Design in Context” is used to identify case examples of neoliberal encroachment by way of the expansion of design activities within public sector contexts in Canada. To that

end, section two presents the findings from an analysis of in-depth interviews ($n=23$) of public servants and consultants who specialize in public sector design and innovation, along with an examination of related policy documents. These interviews were used to identify 12 case examples and two in-depth case studies,⁸ which serve to illustrate the link between neoliberal rationality and design by way of the intensification of design activity within public sector organizations in Canada, while demonstrating how this work functions to obscure the long-term effects of neoliberal austerity. Chapter 4, “Methodology and Results” describes the procedures undertaken to collect and analyze data and presents the results. Thematic analysis, an inductive approach used to code qualitative data, was used to identify themes across the interviews.

To be clear, I approach this analysis as a researcher concerned with the critical questions posed earlier, but also as a practitioner, who has at times participated in projects intended to advance the aims of public sector innovation. This unique role of research/practitioner has proven useful when reflexively analyzing data and evaluating research findings, as I have knowledge of the practice that would otherwise be difficult to acquire as an external researcher. I am, however, aware of the challenges that this position as insider-researcher can pose. I have taken steps to protect the integrity of the research, including maintaining detailed records, practicing intentional reflection, and following standardized ethics protocols. In terms of recruitment, I have relied upon purposive sampling because finding individuals employed by public sector organizations who are engaged in this work is challenging.

Chapter 5, “Thematic Analysis: ‘Citizen-Centred’ Design in Canada” analyzes four themes that emerged from the interviews: public participation in design, valorization

⁸A “case example” is a detailed account of a particular designed-based project, as described by one or two interview participants with first-hand knowledge of the event. An in-depth “case study,” in contrast, is a more exhaustive account wherein multiple (more than four) interview participants describe the same project. These accounts, along with project-related documentation that substantiate the perspectives of interview participants, are used to reconstruct events leading up to and surrounding the project. A case study, is a single entity of analysis, in other words, a time-bound phenomenon with a start and end point that is used to illustrate how themes identified in participant interviews manifest in situated and local contexts of public sector innovation.

of value, narratives of change, and embedding design. The analysis concludes that design, when inflected through the procedures, discourses, and practices of democratic institutions, produces a variant of design that employs discourses of “citizen-centredness” to obscure the neoliberalization of public service delivery in Canada. This design specialism is focused on identifying the individual needs of citizens (who are construed as consumers) and addressing these needs by making public services more “effective” and/or “efficient.” The ultimate aim, though, is to reduce the cost of service delivery by redesigning services to support digital self-service. This process of streamlining services, which is not that dissimilar to the practice of “streamlining” employed by consultant designers in the 1930s and ’40s, has the secondary effect of smoothing out the political issues that circumscribe and necessitate design activity in the first place — namely the demands placed on public servants as a consequence of prolonged austerity.

Chapter 6, “Case Study Analysis: The Politics and Practice of Citizen-Centredness,” discusses the conjunction of citizen-centredness, innovation, and austerity. Using two (related) in-depth case studies, I illustrate how the discursive and material effects of this work are obscuring the long-term austerity. This occurs in two ways. Firstly, design is used as an “innovative workaround” for those public servants who are struggling to deliver public service within the restrictions of austerity. Design is offered up as antidote to the “red tape” and “bureaucracy” that is said to plague public sector institutions, and where austerity is positioned as the only reliable remedy. Techniques and processes associated with public sector innovation and design are in turn used to reduce the cost of service delivery, while simultaneously responsabilizing citizens through appeals of self-service. Secondly, design is used as a discursive platform to circulate the values of citizen-centredness through and across public sector institutions in order to neutralize the political controversies associated with austerity policies.

The concluding chapter returns to the four research questions that guided my study, along with literature laid out in Section 1, to discuss how design within public sector contexts functions to obscure neoliberal austerity. Citizen-centred design, whilst purporting to focus on human needs, in fact functions to (de)legitimize public administration practices that do not conform to neoliberal logics of innovation, which are premised upon private sector models of innovation. This displacement of so-called “old ways of working” in favour of innovative approaches to governance that are imported from the private sector are made durable through design activity. This discussion concludes by considering how these imported practices, which are used intentionally and unintentionally to obscure austerity politics, undermines the very foundations upon which Canadian democratic institutions are based.

Conclusion

Citizen-centred design is a specialism that has emerged in response to the demands of public sector innovation. Yet there are few scholarly texts within design studies, political economy, and political theory that examine how this approach is being implemented in public organizations, as well as the everyday work practices of public servants. While design’s cultural and even economic roles have been studied, the role of design as a political technique has not received the same level of critical attention.

Design as a cultural, political, and social practice has largely evaded critique and gone unexamined within the academy, and yet everything that exists in the built environment is designed to some degree, including the public goods that are made on offer by the state. The forthcoming analysis attempts to fill this gap in the literature by examining the first-hand accounts of public servants engaged in variations of citizen-centred design. These situated assessments provide important insight into the methods, techniques, and practices of governance used to operationalize the values of neoliberal rationality. To that end, this analysis contributes to the fields of governmentality studies, design theory, and political economy by demonstrating how design methods, tools, and knowledge are being actively employed to (re)configure democratic institutions in the

image of the marketplace and in so doing advancing the aims of neoliberal rationality. This work, however, also makes a valuable contribution to practice. It provides some clarity on a question that has plagued the profession since the rise of consultant design in the 1930s: What role should design play in society today?

Section 1

Design, Industry, and Social Innovation

CHAPTER 1

Democracy Today: Practices in Pursuit of Neoliberal Rationality

“The very design of neoliberal principles is a direct attack on democracy.”

–Noam Chomsky (2010, p.75)

Over the last 30 years, neoliberalism⁹ has reached hegemonic¹⁰ status, becoming the global political and economic orthodoxy. For proponents of neoliberalism, such as American economist Milton Friedman, the market is perceived as a “natural” arbiter of human affairs to which individual freedoms are inextricably linked (Harvey, 2011, p. 7). As such, state intervention in the marketplace must be limited so as not to interfere with these immutable rights. David Harvey (2011) describes neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills with an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p.2). Neoliberal policies have historically drawn upon Adam Smith’s oft-cited phrase, “the invisible hand of the marketplace” to claim that the market must be left to its own devices if it is to do the work of regulating supply and demand. To that end, neoliberal policies have historically been designed to deregulate markets, industries and currencies; reduce government expenditures on social programs; privatize government assets; disrupt and displace labour protections; outsource core functions of the state to

⁹ The term was first popularized in the work of German sociologist Alexander Rüstow in 1938 at a colloquium held to discuss Walter Lippmann’s text, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society* (Denord, 2015).

¹⁰ Hegemony is an active process in which particular discourses, practices, histories and intentions are mobilized in support of specific issue-oriented ideologies (Mouffe, 2013). To that end, it is not a static state of being, but as Stuart Hall (2011b) contends, must “constantly be ‘worked on’, maintained, renewed and revised” (p. 723).

the private sector — among a host of other policies that attempt to limit the size, scope, and function of the state.

Today, neoliberalism is used pejoratively to describe a range of political outrages. Those on the political left have claimed the term as a safe refuge to displace their outrage of the perceived negative effects of late-stage capitalism, namely climate change, precarious labour practices, and persistent global income inequality. Journalist Stephen Metcalf (2017) writes, “Over the past few years, as debates have turned uglier, the word [neoliberalism] has become a rhetorical weapon, a way for anyone left of centre to incriminate those even an inch to their right.” However, a resurgent right-wing populism predominant within, but not exclusive to Euro-Atlantic nations, has come to reject the term neoliberalism as liberal pessimism that risks thwarting the progress of capitalism and its perceived liberating capacities. Ironically, this variant of populism, which rejects global trade, immigration, and seeks to maintain white supremacy, has coalesced in part because of the dysfunctional nature of the capitalist system the right seeks to safeguard (Vance, 2016).

Within academia, neoliberal critique has found a home in a range of epistemological camps, including geography and urban studies (Harvey, 2011; Jamie Peck et al., 2013), political science (Biebricher & Johnson, 2012; M. Cooper, 2017), cultural studies (Chomsky, 1999; Feher, 2018; Hall, 2011b), gender and queer studies (L. Duggan, 2002; Richardson, 2005; Sender, 2006); however, scholars differ on its usage and usefulness for examining contemporary phenomena. Given these varied meanings and interpretations, neoliberalism is best understood as a contested discursive site comprising multiple formations, expressions, and territories: an economic orthodoxy that has led to income inequality and the financialization of public goods (Brantlinger, 2018; Harvey, 2011); a political ideology, set of practices, and values that has relinquished the state of its duties to protect, nurture, and sustain democratic life (Couldry, 2010; Giroux, 2005); and a political rationality that has come to govern every

sphere of human life according to the logics of the marketplace (W. Brown, 2015; Dardot & Laval, 2013; Foucault, 2010).

Neoliberalism persists as multiple territories each with fuzzy edges, interfacing, rejecting, co-opting adjacent discursive fields and political topologies. This marks both neoliberalism's strength, as an adaptive and productive regime of political and economic reason, and its destructive character pockmarked with contradictions, crises, and dysfunction. Wendy Brown (2015) argues:

In its [neoliberalism] differential instantiations across countries, regions, and sectors, in its various intersections with extant cultures and political traditions, and above all, in its convergences with and uptakes of other discourses and developments, neoliberalism takes diverse shapes and spawns diverse content and normative details, even different idioms. (p. 21)

Surely, the effects of neoliberal policies, such as deregulation, austerity, and flexible work arrangements, warrant examination; After all, they have had a devastating impact on individuals and communities (e.g., Blanton & Peksen, 2016). However, neoliberalism as a *mode of reason* — our very sense of the world and how we act within it — also requires examination and critique. Despite its inconstancy, how has neoliberalism maintained its hegemony? How have neoliberal values, such as responsabilization, entrepreneurship, and competition, found resonance within institutions that have historically been impervious to private sector interference? How does neoliberal reason produce new subjects and subjectivities? The task here is to figure the various edges and formations of neoliberalism so as to explicate its productive qualities and examine its persistence as *the* dominant form of political reason today. This analysis will provide the theoretical underpinning required to examine the relationship between neoliberalism and the design industry — the subject of inquiry in the forthcoming chapters.

Beginning with a brief account of the work of Ordoliberals in Germany, and the Chicago School, in the United States, the first section of this chapter examines how neoliberalism took on an institutional form following the Second World War. This section

will go on to explore the crisis of Keynesianism that unfolded in the latter half of the 1970s, and how proponents of neoliberalism (principally Milton Friedman), were well-positioned to exploit this situation in order to offer up an economic alternative to the status quo. This shift in orthodoxy marks an important ideological rupture not just in the United States and Britain, but in Canada as well. This rupture would later coalesce into the discursive formation known as the “Washington Consensus” (Williamson, 1996); a set of economic, political and social dictates that captured all aspects of statecraft starting in the 1990s (see Appendix 1 for a detailed map of discourses and world events that contributed to the current neoliberal formation).

The second part of the chapter will examine Marxist critiques of neoliberalism, with particular emphasis on the work of anthropologist and geographer David Harvey. Harvey argues the state is implicated in safeguarding and reproducing neoliberal policies, even though these activities may harm the public that lends legitimacy to state power. In this way, neoliberalism functions ideologically to mystify its propensity for exploitation and alienation. The real aim of neoliberalism, according to this account, is to reestablish class relations and facilitate capital accumulation under the guise of economic liberty.

The final section introduces the work of Michel Foucault who, in 1978, began to articulate what he perceived as a “new art of government” (Foucault, 2010, pp. 2–5). He formulated that the economization of all spheres of life, wherein the human subject is exhaustively articulated as an economic actor (*homo oeconomicus*) devoid of any political content, is what resulted from 18th-century liberalism. This account is supplemented with the work of Wendy Brown, who draws upon Foucault’s theory of neoliberal rationality to examine how neoliberalism produces new subjects and subjectivities in the image of the marketplace — so-called “human capitals.” Brown argues managerial techniques of governance, such as “best practices and

benchmarking,” have increasingly been used to “economize”¹¹ every sphere of life, and that such techniques undermine the values and norms of democracy.¹² These practices have coalesced into the politics of austerity, which has resulted in the state working against the public interest and in service of market aims.

Converging Discourses of Discontent

To begin, let us lay down some historical guideposts to orient the discussion. These events should by no means be taken as axiomatic but guardrails to consider the various political, social, and economic threads that have tangled together to figure contemporary notions of neoliberalism, or what theorists term “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). This analysis considers three important moments that have played a decisive role in the ascendancy of neoliberal rationality, each with its own historical precedents and trajectories: the rise of Ordoliberals and the Chicago School in the 1930s, the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s, and the collapse of left resistance in the 1980s.

The rise of neoliberal thought

In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx provides a detailed account of how the capitalist mode of production is marked by periods of boom and bust. This crisis theory argues that excess capital accumulation can have devastating material and social effects: deep recessionary periods marked by high rates of unemployment, starvation, disease, despair, and hopelessness. These circumstances leave the public vulnerable to the populist appeals of proto-fascists (see for example Arendt, 1973). This was of particular

¹¹ The term “economize” describes, “the processes that constitute the behaviours, organizations, institutions and, more generally, the objects in a particular society which are tentatively and often controversially qualified, by scholars and/or lay people, as ‘economic’” (Çalışkan & Callon, 2009, p. 370).

¹² Democracy is used here, and throughout, to mean rule by the people. This definition is derived from the Athenian concepts *demokratia*, proposed by Cleisthenes in 507 B.C. Borrowing from Brown (2015), this analysis takes democracy to be constitutive of particular characteristics that are representative of a variety cultural, social, and political institutions, such as, emphasis on improving civic practices for maintaining and stewarding public goods, and a reasonably educated citizenry capable of discerning critical issues of representation and justice (p.179).

concern to a group of sociologists, economists, and philosophers located in Austria and Germany, known as the “Ordoliberals,” or the “Freiburg School” (Ptak, 2015). The Ordoliberals maintained that the state should play a role in facilitating competition in the marketplace and that conservative social and cultural values should be safeguarded through “indirect regulation” (Van Horn, 2015).

At the same time, a distinctly American variant of neoliberalism was emerging at the University of Chicago. The group’s efforts were initially led by three key figures: philosopher Frank Knight, Canadian-born economist Jacob Viner, and economist Henry Simons. Milton Friedman, who is most-often associated with the school and the chief architect of American-style neoliberal policies, joined the group in 1946 (D. S. Jones, 2012). As Foucault (2010) describes in the Collège de France lectures, the Chicago School emerged as a critique of Keynesianism that sought to advance a theory of human capital — a logic of competition applied to all activities and spheres of human life.

In 1947, these two schools of thought coalesced at a special meeting in Vevey, Switzerland. The event was arranged by Austrian economist Friedrich August von Hayek and was made possible by a grant received from Volker Fund of Kansas City (Burgin, 2012). There had been previous attempts to gather advocates of neoliberalism, most notably a colloquium that took place in Paris, France, in 1938 to discuss the merits of Walter Lippmann’s book, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society* (Denord, 2015). This was, however, the first serious international gathering of proponents of neoliberalism. Attendees included Milton Friedman and philosopher Karl Popper, among others. As historian Angus Burgin (2012) writes, the “room was filled with journalists, businessmen, and academics from across the Atlantic world” (p. 102), which suggests there was a diversity of opinions that sought to shape early formulations of neoliberal thought.

The event marked the start of the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), an international neoliberal organization founded on the belief that “the central values of civilization are in danger.” This failing, according to MPS members, was precipitated “by a decline of belief in private property and the competitive market; for without the diffused power and initiative associated with these institutions it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved” (MPS, Founding Statement). The group was reliant on the financial support of industry, which was used to set up a network of think tanks, fund research, and train economists in neoliberal theory (Cockett, 1995).¹³ Despite the optimism that surrounded the early founding of MPS, the neoliberal movement was slow to gain traction within mainstream economic and political theory and remained a relatively marginal discourse throughout the 1950s and ’60s.

By 1970, the Ordoliberal approach was absorbed into the individualistic ideology of free markets preferred by Friedman and others of the Chicago School. This marked a formal convergence of the two schools of thought,¹⁴ which was later solidified with the appointment of Friedman as President of MPS in 1970.¹⁵ Any vestige of collectivism that may have once been present in the Ordoliberal tradition had been abandoned. Friedman’s insistence on open, free markets, and the entrepreneurialization of the individual — a theory of human capital — emerged as the dominant discourse advocated by neoliberals in this period. It would serve as the bulwark for neoliberal thought, which politicians and public administrators adopted in the early 1980s, namely U.S. President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

¹³ Throughout the 1950s the University of Chicago trained Latin American economists in neoliberal economic theory. These Chicago School trained economists were later brought in to impose neoliberal structural adjustment policies to “modernize” the Chilean economy (for an in depth account see, Kornbluh, 2013).

¹⁴ This is not to say that alternative neoliberal economic theories have not persisted. Instead neoliberal doctrine took on a new character that was more closely aligned with the aims of Friedman and the Chicago School (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015).

¹⁵ There is some debate as to whether Friedman appropriated the good will and intellectual rigour of Hayek when formulating and advancing the American neoliberal project (Burgin, 2012).

The Keynesian crisis

Starting in the 1960s, de-industrialization began to erode the economic base of the U.S. Feeling pressured to take action, President Richard Nixon withdrew the U.S. from the Bretton Woods agreement — a historical moment referred to as the “Nixon Shock” (Muirhead, 2004).¹⁶ Practically, this resulted in the end of fixed exchange rates, and the unbinding of global currencies from the gold standard. By 1975, U.S. cities were feeling the effects of these new economic policies. For instance, between 1975–77 national banks refused to finance the City of New York’s debt, essentially forcing the city into a technical bankruptcy. President Gerald Ford refused to offer assistance. The City was forced to accept the same draconian structural readjustment policies that had been forced on Chile two years before. City services were cut, labour unions were broken up, and the city crime rate increased. By 1979, the economic situation in the U.S. was dire. Under the direction of President Jimmy Carter, Paul Volcker, then Chairman of U.S. Federal Reserve, proposed a dramatic shift in monetary policy, including raising interest rates to stop the negative effects of stagflation (Harvey, 2011). The results were devastating. What remained of the North American manufacturing industry was effectively hollowed out, exacerbating the process of de-industrialization.

These early instances of neoliberal experimentation were accelerated with the election of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1980. Under President Reagan, government services were cut, state assets were sold, and the overnight lending rate was raised — reaching nearly 20% in 1981 (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (US), 2018). The virtues of Keynesianism had fallen out of fashion, and a neoliberal alternative had taken hold.

¹⁶ The implementation of these economic policies, namely a 10% import surcharge, had a significant effect on U.S.- Canada relations. As Muirhead (2004) describes, it was the first time since the Second World War that the United States had not extended special protections to Canada. This move signaled that the “special relationship” that Canada and the United States once enjoyed had lost its importance. The United States was willing to sacrifice this goodwill in order to bolster its global economic standing.

The Canadian response to neoliberalism

Canada was not immune to this global economic and political transformation. Under the leadership of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, the government of Canada experimented with three policy innovations, including the National Energy Program, tax reform to address the negative effects of the recession that persisted since the start of the 1980s (Lindquist, 1997). While Trudeau was concerned with the economic wellbeing of Canada, he did not share, at least publicly, the neoliberal aims of Regan and Thatcher.

The election of Brian Mulroney, however, in 1984 marked Canada's early experiments of neoliberal reform. Evert Lindquist characterizes this period as "managerialist" expansion, wherein the federal government looked to the private sector for strategies to improve the business performance and efficiency of public service activities. Clark (2002) describes several initiatives during Mulroney's tenure that attempted to advance the aims of market liberalization, including the Nielsen Task Force on Program Review, which was set up in 1984 to explore strategies to improve the efficiency of government service delivery (p.782). In 1985, the MacDonald Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects, which was established by Trudeau in 1982 to identify opportunities to improve Canada's future economic prospects, released its findings. One of the recommendations was that Canada should enter into a free trade agreement with the United States (D. Clark, 2002). This provided the political and policy justification for Mulroney to negotiate an aggressive form of market liberalization, which later became known as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This agreement had the effect of eroding protections for unionized labour in Canada (Johnson & Mahon, 2005).

It was not until Jean Chrétien became prime minister in 1993 that the federal government began experiment with neoliberal structural reforms. For instance, in 1994, then Minister of Finance Paul Martin, proposed the first in a series of aggressive austerity budgets. By 1995, Martin pledged to reduce the federal deficit to \$29.4 billion

in two years — the most significant reduction in government expenditures in modern Canadian history (Martin, 1995, p. 25). The budget proposed a total saving of \$15.6 billion of which \$13.4 billion was attributable to spending cuts (85% of total savings) (p. 4). The effects were felt across all orders of government, including, for instance, a \$7 billion reduction in federal-provincial transfer payments (MacFarland, 2003). In the 1995 Budget Speech, Martin made it clear what the Liberals believed was the role of the state going forward, signifying the federal government's commitment to enacting neoliberal reforms:

If our purpose is to get the economy right — and it is — then the best thing we can do is to get government right — and this budget does.

We need to redesign the role of the government in the economy to fit the size of our pocketbook and the priorities of our people.

What is that role?

It is to provide a framework for the private sector to create jobs — through responsible policies on inflation, on taxation, regulation, trade, and the labour market. (pp.7-8).

Through this budget, Chrétien and Martin signaled their intent to usher in a new era of neoliberal reforms, which had far-reaching consequences not only for provinces and territories, but for First Nations, as well.

In many respects, 1993 represented a turning point in Indigenous and state relations. After two decades, the Chrétien liberals reached a land claim settlement with the Inuit that resulted in Nunavut, a third territory; however, as Jack Hicks argues, this deal was born out of neoliberal austerity. “Eastern and Central Arctic never had a period of ‘normal’ Keynesian welfare state development prior to the period of fiscal restraint introduced by the Chrétien/Martin Liberal in the mid-1990s — the precise historic moment when Nunavut was being design and implemented” (Hicks, 2018, p. 317). The federal government's commitment to and interest in First Nations self-determination had

as much to do with acknowledging and addressing Canada's shameful history of colonialism as it did with advancing the Liberal government's agenda to create a competitive business environment for global investors. Rather than investing in Indigenous-focused social services (e.g., healthcare, housing, and mental health support), the government prioritized funds for job training programs, supported Indigenous-run enterprises, and made funding available for land development projects (Slowey, 2008). The health and well-being of First Nations was framed exhaustingly through the lens of economic development, with little to no emphasis placed on the psychological, spiritual, and physical well-being of Indigenous people more broadly. According to the neoliberal calculation, Indigenous people were viewed as a yet-to-be-exploited source of human capital. The role of the state, then, was to realize this value through programs aimed at economic wellness, entrepreneurship, and granting access to global financial markets. This approach is consistent with Paul Martin's vision to transform the Canadian state to be more market friendly.

Collapse of the left

Throughout much of the 1980s, neoliberal policies persisted unabated. Deregulation of financial markets and industries became the norm, deep cuts to social programming, such as employment insurance, were viewed as good policy, and labour protections were characterized as antithetical to the aims of the post-industrial economy. Neoliberal policies exacerbated the very conditions they claimed to eliminate. By the end of the 20th century, the share of income of the top 1% in the U.S. grew by as much as 15%, suggesting that neoliberal policies, which promised to create a more equitable society, in fact returned income inequality to historic highs (Harvey, 2011, p. 16). The vast majority of U.S. citizens received no material benefit from the hardships they endured as a result of neoliberal policies.

By the 1990s, neoliberalism had become the economic and political orthodoxy used to guide all state decision-making. This became known as the "Washington Consensus." Facing pressure from the media and public, the political left in the United

States and Britain acquiesced to the neoliberal orthodoxy. In Britain, the Labour Party under the direction of Tony Blair, a party that less than a decade before fought for Keynesian economic policies, tacked to the political right in hopes of rebranding “New Labour” as market-friendly (Steger & Roy, 2010). Under a policy agenda described by Blair as the “The Third Way,” they attempted to soften the sharp edges of neoliberal austerity and embraced market liberalism while promoting social progressivism. The Third Way was an attempt to maintain the status quo, whilst acknowledging the demands of the citizenry, namely dealing with skyrocketing unemployment, poverty, and stagnating wages, among others. To borrow a phrase from Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, governing states successfully acquired the “consent” of masses in pursuit of neoliberal hegemony.¹⁷ In other words, the state recognized it had to address public concerns that had arisen from a decade of outsourcing, deregulation, and austerity, but only insofar as these efforts could be used to legitimize state authority to carry out its true function: to wield the “coercive power required to sustain security and markets” (Harvey, 2011, p. 51).

In claiming hegemonic status, neoliberalism exceeded the category of policy to become an ideology in which the market — not the state, as had largely been the case for two centuries — was viewed as the natural arbiter in choosing winners and losers and administering individual freedoms. It had become the natural site of truth, or “a site of verification-falsification for governmental practice” (Foucault, 2010, p.32). Competition was good, socialism was bad. Markets were rational, humans were not. The private sector was competent, whereas the state was bloated and bureaucratic. Neoliberalism acquired a stranglehold on political thought. As David Harvey (2005) argues, proponents of neoliberalism, sought to “dissolve all forms of social solidarity in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values” (p.

¹⁷ Gramsci describes, consent, in the context of hegemony, as follows, “given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) that the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production” (p.145)

23). On the one hand, neoliberalism was a response to the dire economic situation of the 1970s, on the other it was a concerted attempt to re-establish class relations wherein elites became the sole benefactors of capital accumulation (Duménil & Lévy, 2013). By this measure, it has proven to be an effective model for reconfiguring social relations in accordance with the aims of the marketplace, and, more specifically, to establish that “individual freedoms [were now] guaranteed by freedom of the market” (Harvey, 2011, p. 7).

The Logic of Capital

If neoliberalism causes the very social, economic, and political ills it purports to eradicate, why has there not been more public outcry? Why has the marketplace persisted as the dominant logic for organizing a range of human affairs that are not themselves concerned with economics? The answer, according to Marxists such as Harvey, lies in the paradoxical role of the state: limited market intervention, while at the same time being held accountable for market performance. Neoliberal doctrine states, “the neoliberal state should persistently seek out internal reorganizations and new institution arrangements that improve its competitive position as an entity vis-à-vis other states in the global market” (Harvey, 2011, p. 65). This plays out in myriad ways, from limiting trade barriers and ensuring the free flow of global capital, to reducing taxes to give people more discretionary income to spend on goods — including on the provision of what would otherwise be public goods — protecting property rights, and creating markets where markets do not yet exist (Harvey, 2011, pp. 65–68).

Each of these activities, according to Harvey, “creates the paradox of intense state interventions and government by elites and ‘experts’ in a world where the state is not interventionist” (p. 69). In other words, according to neoliberal doctrine, the state is to maintain a peripheral role in the management of the marketplace, and yet, by all accounts, it has taken a lead role in maintaining neoliberal authority. For instance, the Government of Canada recently invested \$955 million in the Innovation Superclusters initiative. The project is designed to forge deep relationships between industry,

government, and post-secondary institutions, and is part of a broader economic strategy to signal “a significant commitment to partnering with industry and supporting the success of leading domestic and global companies that choose to innovate in Canada” (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2018). The myth, as it were, is that the state ought not be involved in the marketplace. Yet, as the example above illustrates, the market could not exist without the state support. For Marxists, neoliberalism is merely an extension of capitalism, albeit a late stage mutation that is premised on accelerated capital accumulation. The state is mobilized as an instrument of industry, helping to fortify and shelter markets, corporations, and elites from public backlash, and in so doing, manufacture the consent required to maintain neoliberal hegemony (e.g., populist rhetoric that suggests strong markets lead to healthy societies).

Marxists tend to overstate the role of the economy in stabilizing neoliberal hegemony (Dardot & Laval, 2013, p. 14). They remain committed to a reductionist account of class-consciousness, in which antagonisms are held constant, without appropriately considering how such positions have changed over time. For instance, the material conditions of a laborer in the late 18th century were considerably different than what a computer programmer might experience today. Thus, the intersectional identities of workers in neoliberal economies go unaccounted for within the Marxist perspective. To put it simply, Marxists contend that neoliberalism is an ideology deployed by elites in order to re-inscribe class relations. The state has been captured by the logic of capital so as to carry out the political and economic agenda of elites. While there is merit to these claims, namely an increase in the role of private capital in political campaigns¹⁸, Christian Laval and Pierre Dardot (2013) insist the transformation has been more subtle:

¹⁸For a detailed account of entanglement of neoliberalism and jurisprudence see, Michan Connor's (2015) extended analysis of the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. 310 ruling.

The neo-liberal society we live in is the fruit of a historical process that was not fully programmed by its pioneers. Its constituent elements were assembled gradually, in interaction with one another, and in the consolidation of some by others. Just as it is not the direct result of a homogeneous doctrine, so it is not the reflection of a logic of capital that creates the social, cultural and political forms corresponding to it in the process of its expansion (p.14).

The Marxist critique has proven useful for exposing the effects of capital accumulation; however, it has fallen short in providing a nuanced account of the various forms of neoliberalism that exist outside the economic sphere. Rather than claiming capital is the basis from which all cultural and social forms emerge, in other words Marx's insistence on a base and superstructure, what is required is a close reading of the state, subject, economy relation, and the productive work undertaken to reconstitute this ontological triad according to a mode of reason that renders all spheres of life, including those where no profit is to be made, as a site of competition (W. Brown, 2015). There is no trickery at play, no mystification, as Marxists would have it. Instead, what emerges are new subjects and subjectivities rendered as human capitals whose principal aim is to maximize future value (W. Brown, 2015).

Neoliberal Rationality

Michel Foucault's analysis of neoliberal rationality provides a useful theoretic to consider how neoliberal practices, knowledge, policies, values and discourse produce subjects, not as a political actor endowed rights and liberties, but as economic agents that exist in a perpetual state of competition. His analysis is developed by way of an examination of the limits of sovereign power that formed the basis of various historical modes of political rationality, or a "regime of truth," or "power-knowledge" focused on ordering and organizing the relations between state, subject, and economy (Lemke, 2001). A governing rationality exceeds discourse, becoming not only the lens through which state decisions are made, but also the dominant worldview used to interpret one's ontological positioning within the world. Political rationality, thus, "always comes in a particular form, secures and circulates specific norms, and posits particular subjects and relations" (W. Brown, 2015, p. 115). Take for example the tenets of liberal political

rationality: human subjects are viewed as possessing inalienable rights — freedom and liberty. In neoliberal rationality, this same subject is free only insofar as they are able to access and participate within the marketplace. The market becomes the site from which freedoms are derived, or as Foucault (2010) contends, neoliberal rationality renders the market as the “site of veridiction” or “natural” place of truth (p.32).

Foucault’s historical analysis of political rationality is based on what he identified as a shift in the purpose and meaning of the market. From the Middle Ages through to the 17th century, it was perceived as a site of “justice” that required government regulation to ensure “what had to appear in exchange and be formulated in the price was just” (Foucault, 2010, p. 31). Through this period, commerce was a “privileged governmental practice” in the sense that it was through direct intervention in commercial affairs that the state demonstrated its power and authority. By the mid-18th century, however, Foucault argues the market took on a fundamentally different purpose: to arrive at a “just price” through “natural” processes of supply and demand. Thus, the market came to be perceived, not as a site of justice, requiring direct government intervention, but a site of “truth” that should be used to “falsify and verify governmental practice” (p.32). There is no single cause for this transformation; however, Foucault does identify several linked phenomena, such as the relative stabilization of currencies and an influx of gold reserves, economic and population growth, and enhanced agriculture output. These events marked a change in the purpose of government — *raison d’état* — which shifted from direct control and domination of the subject through physical force and violence, to political economy, the “new art of government” concerned with the “least” or “frugal” government (Foucault, 2010, p.28). Foucault’s analysis draws forward the contradiction of liberalism: while subjects are born free on the one hand, this freedom must be exercised according to various forms of conduct revealed through governmental techniques of power. Subjects are “governed”¹⁹ not

¹⁹ Foucault attempts to return the term governance to its original meaning: directing or guiding one’s affairs, not just the capacity of a particular institution to assert dominance over an individual through direct

through direct force or violence, but from a distance or by the “conducting of conduct” (Lemke, 2016), a form of power that he termed, “governmentality.” To that end, political economy, with its focus on managing the relations between the subject, state, and economy, became the purpose of government and its main technique for exercising control, authority, and domination.

Foucault’s analysis of governmentality can be distinguished from more traditionally Marxist critiques in that it insists neoliberalism is concerned not with eliminating the state to allow for market freedoms, but instead reprogramming it to facilitate and orchestrate competition that results in the “economization” of the social sphere or the “general regulation of society by the market” (Foucault, 2014, p.145). As Lemke, defines it, “neo-liberalism is a political rationality that tries to render the social domain economic and to link a reduction in (welfare) state services and security systems to the increasing call for ‘personal responsibility’ and ‘self-care’” (Lemke, 2001, p. 203). The emphasis here is on the responsibility of the individual to become an active agent in the management of their social, economic and political life. To be clear, Foucault does not contend that neoliberalism is born out of a crisis of capital accumulation but emerged out of liberal governmentality and the perceived sense, starting in the 1930s, that Fascism, and Nazism in particular, posed an immediate existential threat to economic and individual freedoms (Foucault, 2010). Central to Foucault’s argument is a question of “whether a market economy can in fact serve as the principle, form and model for a state” (Foucault, 2010, p. 145). Foucault’s analysis has several implications for the relation between state, subject, economy, which Brown (2015) summarizes as follows:

The first implication is that competition and inequality become necessary for maintaining state authority. What has historically been viewed as a fair exchange of goods in an open marketplace is replaced by competing needs and actors who seek to

force. As Lemke states (2001), “Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as ‘the conduct of conduct’ and thus as a term which ranges from ‘governing the self’ to ‘governing others’” (p.2).

maximize their own interests (p.66). This logic of competition demands inequality, in the sense that there must always be winners and losers. The role of the state in such an arrangement is to promote and safeguard competition and establish it where it does not yet exist (p. 63). In promoting competition, the state comes to rely on exponential economic growth as the basis for improving the standard of living of the citizenry and to promote social mobility (p.64). Economic growth, and the use of markets to promote competition, becomes the basis from which all social policy is derived (e.g., Rankin, 2010). The state becomes responsible for the market, ensuring it remains competitive, even if these actions come at the expense of the social and material well-being of citizens, or if the state lacks the necessary means to safeguard the market from speculative fluctuations (p.68).

As competition, not exchange, becomes the dominant logic that governs the marketplace, the subjects that participate in such an arrangement are also transformed. The result is that human capital supersedes labour power, which renders producers, labourers, and individuals as bits of capital whose value it is to be maximized in a market of competition (p.65). Through this process of subjectification, that is the process whereby an individual becomes a subject, the individual is transformed into a “entrepreneur” whose body and self are rendered as assets to be managed like financial investments through techniques (p.66). The political subject is reconstituted as a purely economic actor engaged in a perpetual state of competition with other individuals who are vying to have their personal needs satisfied. Rendered as human capital, the individual loses attachment to any particular social grouping or class and becomes a heterogenous actor untethered from any collective body (p.66).

According to this analysis, the liberal conception of a free, rational subject is conflated with one’s capacity to participate in the marketplace, and thus, they are responsabilized to care for their own needs. The political and the economic become one and the same, with the economic coming to refigure political life according to the logic of

competition. Public goods²⁰ are reduced to the private needs of individuals, irrespective of how satisfying these needs may negatively affect the commons. As Dal and Soss (2014) argue, neoliberal “[c]itizens are decentred in the political process, recast as collective consumers of public value and shareholders in governance rather than active civic agents creating a shared future” (p. 502). At stake here is a question of public value and the ends to which public servants will go to maximize and secure this value. Public goods, such as safety, well-being, and stability, are deprioritized in favour of the needs of individual citizens, which are in turn indexed according to the virtues of “high-value” private goods. While public servants may endeavour to act in the best interest of the public, the model upon which they determine what constitutes public value has been thoroughly compromised by the importation of a market logic. By extension, the purpose of governance is recalibrated to serve an entirely instrumental aim: to maximize citizen-consumer value at the expense of more pressing political, economic, and social concerns (Dahl & Soss, 2014, pp. 501–502).

The argument here is not simply that neoliberalism contaminates democracy by introducing private capital into an otherwise public activity, namely politics. Instead, techniques of governance are used to actively suture together the values, practices, and logics of neoliberal rationality through, for example, best practices and benchmarking (practices found within the private sector), rendering institutions that have historically acted as the defence against the negative effects of capital accumulation as incapable of safeguarding public goods (Brown, 2015). Public administration, which has historically entailed managing the affairs, activities, and machinations of government, is being transformed according to virtues of value maximization that inhere in private sector conduct. Clark (2002) describes this process as involving two concomitant elements starting with the importation of “techniques, values and practices of private

²⁰Defined here as any good that is made universally accessible and has historically been administered by the collective who benefits from its use. A “good” does not necessarily refer to a service or physical thing, as in the case of commonly held natural resources, but can also constitute a state of being that is safeguarded and managed for collective benefit, such as safety or healthfulness.

sector organizations,” followed by the introduction of “public choice theory” as an organizing ethos (p.774). Together, this approach to public administration subtly transforms the art of government from one of managing people and resources to attending to the consumerist demands of citizens, all the while displacing the values of public good upon which governmental institutions are based.

Techniques of Neoliberal Governance

Neoliberal rationality similarly is operationalized through subtle techniques of governance that seek to (de)legitimize market-oriented conduct. In fact, “governance has become neoliberalism’s primary administrative form, the political modality through which it creates environments, structures constraints and incentives, and hence conducts subjects” (W. Brown, 2015, p. 122). Governance is not a distinct feature of neoliberalism but has become fused with it. It is characterized as a movement away from centralized, top-down forms of management, in favour of prescribed rules and procedures that are enacted in localized contexts (Jamie Peck & Theodore, 2015). Governance is “governing which is networked, integrated, cooperative, partnered, disseminated, and at least partly self-organized” able. The role of the state in such an arrangement is to assist in “coordinating different forms of governance and ensuring a minimal coherence among them” (Jessop, 1995 as cited in Walters, 2004, p. 39). Through this approach, power is not attributable to a particular body or agency, but instead is enacted each time one adheres to the rules as they are prescribed by central dictates.

New public management and public sector entrepreneurship

In the case of public sector governance, public policy is carried out across jurisdictions and increasingly in partnership with the private sector, which is aimed at facilitating “horizontal management of public policy” (B. Evans et al., 2005, p. 77). This approach to managing public goods is premised on the belief that the market should be used to produce and circulate public value. This shift towards governance (decentralized forms of managerialism) is best witnessed with the emergence of “New Public Management”

(NPM) in the mid-1980s. NPM is intended to address persistent political pressures to reduce government costs, respond to the increasingly consumerist demands of the public, and balance the need to improve government services while simultaneously limiting its size and capacity to intervene in social affairs (Lynn, 2006, p.106). NPM focuses on disintegrating policy planning and/or strategy from implementation by establishing “a collection of independent service units, ideally in competition with each other,” while seeking to legitimize “intra-organizational processes and management and it emphasizes the economy and efficiency of these service units in producing public services (conceptualized as the outputs of these processes)” (Osborne, 2006, p. 382). Critics of NPM (e.g., Connell et al., 2009) argue these practices are further evidence of neoliberal encroachment.

Canada’s adoption of NPM practices is tame in comparison with other Westminster systems, such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, (Aucoin, 1995). Nonetheless, the federal government bears many of structural, cultural, and practice-related scars of neoliberal governance, including the creation of agencies whose sole purpose is service delivery, the devolution of decision-making authority to lower levels of government, and a greater emphasis on service delivery (Glor, 2001, pp. 122–123). For example, Scott Prudham (2004) examines how the neoliberal reforms, premised on a decentralized model of governance, proposed by Premier Mike Harris resulted in a massive *E. coli* outbreak in Walkerton, Ontario, in 2000. Justice Dennis O'Connor, head of the Walkerton Public Inquiry, concluded that “Government cuts at the province's Environment Ministry made it less capable of identifying and dealing with problems at Walkerton's water utility” (CBC News, 2010). Harris’s insistence on reducing regulation and the number of public servants available for water inspection were exacerbating circumstances that led to the death of seven people. As Prudham (2004) concludes, “this tragedy is an example of broad regulatory failure and the systematic production of environmental risks by neoliberal governance reforms” (p. 344). NPM-related practices remain the subject of public sector consternation today,

and act as a restrictive discursive frame through which public policy decisions are routinely filtered (Jamie Peck, 2001).

This emphasis on “governance” over “government” “reconceives the political as a field of management or administration” wherein “public life is reduced to problem solving and program implementation” (Brown, 2015, p. 127). This can be witnessed in the Ontario Government’s recent announcement that it would cut funding for a three-year guaranteed income pilot, which was already underway. Nearly 4,000 Ontarians took part in the project. The rationale given for ending the program by former Minister of Social Services, Lisa MacLeod, was that it was failing to create “independent contributors to the economy” (Gollom, 2018). Experts were critical of the government’s decision, arguing that the pilot — which was supported by parties on both sides of the political spectrum — could have yielded important data about the merits of social assistance reform. Instead, the government ended the program and, in so doing, shut down political debate. Rather than let the facts of the pilot be debated within the public sphere, the government sought to neutralize any and all critique, once again limiting the purpose and intent of the state to matters of a programmatic nature.

As the previous example illustrates, techniques of governance are often employed to limit contestation, deliberation, or dissent — hallmarks of political life — in favour of consensus, solutionism, and uncritical optimism that promotes an anti-political democratic culture in which citizens are treated as stakeholders and shareholders with individual needs that must be managed and satisfied (W. Brown, 2015, p. 127). This consumerist disposition is exacerbated by discourse and appeals for greater public participation in decision-making. These forms of “participation became one of the main discursive resources used in the neoliberalization process of the ’90s” (Moini, 2017, p. 133). This is consistent with Nick Couldry’s (2010) argument that in neoliberal democracies voice is offered to the citizenry and simultaneously denied. By this he means there are ever more forums and methods to register public disagreement; however, the inclusion of more voices does not necessarily correlate with more

meaningful (informed) public participation. This occurs because, as Moini (2017) contends, when participation is redefined as a “technical algorithm,” overemphasizing the *how* of participation (e.g., creating more outlets for people to submit their opinions), the political meaning and import of such engagements is neutralized (p. 135). Instead, participation is systemically appropriated as a “governing technology” (Blakely, 2010) that gives the illusion of mass participation and unity, while simultaneously de-politicizing decision-making, stabilizing the existing hegemonic order, and downloading responsibility for complex social, economic, and political decision-making to citizens (Moini, 2011, 2017). In the end, such forms of public engagement privilege the volume of voice over quality forms of participation.

Empowerment, participation, and ‘responsibilizing subjects’

Read through the lens of neoliberal governance, these superficial forms of participation conflate notions of agency, empowerment, and personal responsibility as one and the same through an “appeal of freedom” (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017, p. 217). An exchange of responsibility occurs wherein the “subjecthood” of citizenship, taken broadly to mean membership in a social and/or political formation, is transmogrified into, and above all else, a *free* enterprising subject who becomes solely responsible for managing one’s own affairs. This process of “responsibilization” results in a new “form of subjectivity or self-hood — such as an ‘enterprising self’” (p. 216). It is through incremental “self-investments” that the individual produces the necessary resources to oversee one’s own affairs (W. Brown, 2015). According to this logic, individuals are held personally responsible for their own social and economic affairs, regardless of the systemic constraints, such as a racism and misogyny, that may limit social mobility (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017).

More recently, this has played out in a form of economic development referred to as “social innovation,” in which socially isolated or marginalized communities are encouraged to take on an entrepreneurial disposition to identify local knowledge and forms of craft that can be exploited for economic gain (Fougère et al., 2017). The

Toronto-based social enterprise known as Me to We, run by Craig and Marc Kielburger, is emblematic of this approach. With endorsements from celebrities such as Nelly Furtado, the Jonas Brothers, and former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin, Me to We describes itself as, “an innovative social enterprise that provides products that make an impact, empowering people to change the world with their everyday consumer choices” (ME to WE, 2019). The organization further states, “A social enterprise is an organization that employs a business model to tackle the world’s social and environmental challenges.” A portion of the proceeds goes to the artisans, another portion goes to funding “charitable activities,” and the remaining funds are paid out as profits to directors. The aim of this scheme is two-fold: firstly, to convert so-called non-productive human subjects into active economic agents who are “empowered” to take control of their own affairs; secondly, to facilitate the creation of new markets, which can be exploited for future value. These practices of social innovation promote “neoliberal agency,” which entails enrolling economically marginalized individuals as entrepreneurs, a subject-position in which the self is constituted as “a collection of skills or traits that can enter into alliances with other such collections” (Gershon, 2011, p. 539). This process of identifying yet-to-be-realized value in pursuit of economic development is precisely how neoliberal rationality neutralizes the social and political subjectivity of individuals and “remakes the human being as human capital, an earlier rendering of *homo economicus* ... a formulation of the subject as both a member of a firm and itself a firm, and in both cases appropriately conducted by governance practices appropriate to firms” (Brown, 2015, p. 34).

Austerity as Policy and Morality

A defining feature of neoliberalism is its capacity to render the state incapable of attending to the collective needs of the citizenry. This is made possible through policies that seek to curtail state investment in public goods and infrastructure, but also through the circulation of moral appeals of self-sacrifice. Often described as fiscal consolidation (i.e. reducing government expenditures on public services), austerity is in fact a “composite of policies” that also includes “structural reforms of the public sector, and

flexibilization of labour markets” (Evans & McBride, 2017, p. 1). For example, the Progressive Conservative government in Ontario is poised to cut \$133 million in legal aid funding as part of its broader efforts to identify \$6 billion in government “efficiencies” required to reduce the province’s deficit. As a response, Legal Aid Ontario announced that it would no longer provide funds for accused persons to hire a lawyer to represent them at bail hearings (Crawley, 2019). Instead, this work will be taken up by duty counsel, or full-time staff members, who report already having a full caseload. Implementation of this austerity policy could mean that innocent people will be imprisoned because they are unable to pay out of pocket for professional representation. It also means that refugees with claims before the court may be subjected to undue harm because they may lack access to qualified legal representation (Toronto Star Editorial Board, 2019). By any measure, these are unjust actions that have grave consequences for human well-being. As this example illustrates, policies associated with austerity have real material and lasting consequences on people and their lives.

These policies, though, are also used to reconfigure public sector organizations. This is a process that Peck (2001) describes as both a “roll-back” and “roll-out” resulting in a “*reorganized state apparatus*” (p. 447, emphasis appears in original text). Such actions ultimately inscribe new sets of “*relations* between different levels/scales and branches/departments of the state apparatus, such that the relationship between the form and functions of the state is often altered in quite fundamental ways” (ibid). Austerity, then, while focused on reducing government expenditures, also redefines the purpose and intent of state functions, namely through the circulation and promotion of market-friendly modes of conduct, such as practices associated with NPM (Hood, 1991a) and, more recently, “New Public Governance (NPG)” (Osborne, 2006). As Evan and Fanelli (2018) argue, subnational states, such as provinces and territories, play an important role in advancing austerity agendas:

In an era of permanent austerity, where public expenditures are to be controlled and the role of the state is limited and/or transformed, the subnational state has a

pivotal role to play in the marketization of public goods and services and in creating the conditions necessary for the construction of labour-capital alliances and the weakening of trade union and working-class means to resist such transformations. (p.10)

Subnational states are able to exercise autonomy over certain areas of public policy; however, they would not survive without the fiscal capacity of the national state. In Canada, this means that there are often strings attached when it comes to the fiscal arrangements between provinces, territories, and the federal government.

There is also a moralizing dimension to austerity. As “a discursive regime that transcends fiscal policy,” consent for austerity-related policies is often sought through moral appeals to “individual responsibility, sacrifice, discipline, the future, and reduced consumption” (Mitrea, 2017, p. 38). Brown’s (2016) concept of the “sacrificial citizen” demonstrates how this consent is obtained by stripping away social and political bonds that tie citizens to one another in order to produce compliant subjects who are willing to endure the hardships of austerity out of a sense of moral duty and responsibility. This is achieved through civic appeals that demand citizens accept responsibility for the nation’s “moral failings” — in the form of debt and deficits — to avoid burdening future generations with these poor (i.e. morally delinquent) fiscal decisions. For example, the following passage taken from a speech given by former Ontario Minister of Finance, Vic Fedeli, illustrates the type of rhetoric often used by politicians to gain consent for the use of austerity policies:

Interest payments on this debt are more than the entire budget of most Ontario ministries and are currently forecast to be \$13.3 billion this fiscal year. Every dollar that goes to interest is a dollar that can’t go to another home-care worker, fixing another school or reducing taxes. Every single day, the people of Ontario are paying for the excesses of the past in a very real and painful way.

This grave situation needs to be addressed. We will direct any unused money from the reserve and the contingency fund, as well as any unspent dollars at the end of the year, towards debt reduction. (Ontario Minister of Finance, 2019)

This statement was used to persuade Ontarians that austerity policies are needed to address the “grave situation” they found themselves in. The antidote for “the excesses of the past,” of course, is austerity. It is the only way, as the speech lays out, to stop the “very real” pain that Ontarians experience “every single day.” It is no coincidence that appeals such as these draw upon religious themes, such as redemption, purification, pain, among others, when trying to persuade citizens of the need for sacrifice. Debt has long served as a means of political control (see for example Graeber, 2011). To be in a perpetual state of obligation, that is to say to owe a debt in some form or another, renders the debtor as a morally deficient subject in need of forgiveness. Sacrifice, then, is the only means through which these sins can be absolved. Because neoliberal rationality demands that the market is the single source of truth, the site of veridiction, market-aligned institutions are the only moral authorities deemed capable of administering such judgments. Thus, it is the private sector, not public institutions, that becomes the arbiter of what is in the public interest.

This last point is noteworthy because as Brown argues, “[c]onversion of the worker, the consumer, the activist citizen — all entities capable of linking together into a social force — into isolated bits of self-investing human capital both makes them more governable and integrates them into a project: economic growth, to which they may potentially be sacrificed” (W. Brown, 2016, p. 8). Sacrifice in the name of the “common good” is mobilized for the purposes of dislocating and responsabilizing subjects for the health of the economy, which is prioritized over the well-being of the self. In so doing, the individual is charged both with shouldering the full burden of economic wellness, while being denied any form of political recourse that could be used to challenge the conditions under which austerity policies have become the norm. There is a contradiction at play here: on the one hand citizens are called upon to do the morally just thing (i.e. sacrifice) by consenting to the imposition of austerity to signify their commitment to the health of the nation; yet, the very institutions that support and sustain collective good (e.g., the state) are fundamentally undermined by these actions. Thus, austerity, when operationalized through moral appeals, not only undermines the capacity of the state to safeguard citizens from the most extreme effects of austerity,

such as homelessness and unemployment, it demands that the state work against the collective interests of the citizenry. Without any political alternative on offer, citizens are left vulnerable to the appeals of neo-fascist populism — precisely the future that early proponents of neoliberalism, such as Hayek, feared.

Conclusion

As the analysis undertaken in this chapter demonstrates, neoliberalism has thoroughly undermined democratic institutions. This has occurred through the circulation of practices, discourses, and values that valorize private sector conduct, such as the adaption of NPM, at the expense of more traditional approaches to public administration. At the same time, the normalization of austerity politics has rendered the state incapable of protecting and administering public goods and the values of democracy upon which public institutions are based. Coupled with neoliberal policies aimed at undermining labour unions and fortifying protections for global capital, at the expense of domestic production, citizens have been left susceptible to populist appeals. For instance, in Canada, the rhetoric of the People's Party, under the leadership of former MPP Maxime Bernier, bears a striking resemblance to the anti-immigrant, anti-globalization, anti-intellectual populism that is energizing support for President and former reality television celebrity, Donald Trump.

This new variant of populism draws upon a toxic mix of misogyny, white supremacy, and class insecurity (W. Brown, 2017) and is expressed discursively through nativist appeals such as “Make America Great Again.” Brown (2017) asserts, neoliberal rationality “has helped foment an anti-democratic populist revolt that calls simultaneously for freedom and authoritarianism — market-style freedom, secured by statist authority to protect, to exclude, to secure as necessary on the basis of business principles” (n.p.). Nancy Fraser, though, contends that this formation has as much to do with global economic insecurity, as it does with the failed attempts of liberals to soften the rough edges of capitalism through “progressive neoliberalism” (Fraser, 2017). In addition to the very real material effects of neoliberal policies, including the erosion of

local and regional manufacturing throughout much of the global west, “the injury of deindustrialization was compounded by the insult of progressive moralism, which routinely cast them [Trump supporters] as culturally backward” (Fraser, 2017, n.p.). Resentful of the moral finger-wagging of cosmopolitan elites, such as presidential candidate and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s characterization of Trump supporters as “deplorables,” adherents of these populist appeals have opted to destroy any institution that bears a resemblance to the liberal democratic project. This formation is a telling example of how neoliberalism consumes, appends, and co-opts adjacent discursive fields in support of its broader political project to reconfigure the state, subject, relation, and to reinforce Margaret Thatcher’s famous claim that “there is no alternative.”

Neoliberal rationality — a mode of governmentality that seeks to exhaustively articulate human subjects as human capital — gives form to new subjects and subjectivities whose relationship to state and market is articulated through competition and entrepreneurialism. It is this latter characterization that is most useful for the analysis that will unfold over the next several chapters. I will demonstrate how the design industry is implicated in various material and discursive instantiations of neoliberal rationality: from consultant design to the era of corporate branding to more recent attempts to appropriate design practice for activist ends (namely to resist neoliberal austerity), and to recast the social sphere as a site requiring (re)design.

CHAPTER 2

20th Century Entanglement: Design, Innovation, and Industrial Capitalism

“Everyone, or at the very least all thinking people, need to grasp that it is not possible to comprehend the worlds of human existence without design, its agency, function and presence, being adequately understood in both historical and contemporary terms.”

– Tony Fry, Clive Dilnot and Susan C. Stewart (2015, p.6)

Speaking to a room full of graduate students at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in November 2013, pop-star icon Kanye West jumped on a desk to proclaim, “I really do believe that the world can be saved through design, and everything needs to actually be architected” (Chang, 2013). He went on to say, “I believe that utopia is actually possible.” And that such a vision is made possible by way of the work of architects and designers willing to, “hone your craft, and not be lazy about creation.” For a growing cohort of design professionals, West’s comments are further evidence that professional designers are endowed with superhuman abilities to “save the world.” A simple Google search of the terms “power of design” or “design will save the world” reveals just how deeply interwoven and persistent this discourse has become within mainstream design practice. The notion of the “heroic designer” is not a particularly new phenomenon. Much of 20th century design culture has been marked by the rise and fall of celebrity designers, such as Norman Bel Geddes and, more recently, Michael Beirut. This cultural fascination with design is born out of a broader history in which design, capitalism, and consumer culture are closely linked.

As historian Penny Sparke (1983) argues, starting in the early 20th century, design acquired a “unique position at the interface of consumption and production by its

ability to relate both to the irrational behaviour of consumers and the increasingly rational process of mass manufacturing” (p.21). Those who were skilled in the art of styling commodities for mass consumption were in high demand during this period. These “heroic” 20th-century designers, including the likes of Raymond Lowey and Norman Bel Geddes, cast “capitalist values in material form” (Margolin, 1989, p. 26), thereby mediating the spheres of art, technology, and culture. Today, it is this entanglement that defines the “design-for-industry” hegemony: a set of discourses and practices that reproduce a worldview in which everything is “always lagging, always in need of being brought up to date through the intercessions of those trained to shape it: a world, in sum, in need of design” (Suchman, 2011, p. 5).

There are several historical threads that have knotted together to create this hegemony. The first being the rise of “consultant design” in the interwar period (1918 – 1939),²¹ in which American designers sought to commodify the aesthetic appeal of modernism for commercial gain, as well as professionalize the discipline of design in order to profit from their work. Consultant design was refashioned in the late 1970s to be more responsive to the needs of late stage capitalism, including a shift away from the design of physical goods to services, surging global capital markets, the rise of large multinational organizations, outsourcing of production to emerging markets, automation and containerization, and an integrated media landscape (Jameson, 1991 p. xix). The second period that has led to this conjunction, can loosely be called the “participatory turn” (1966 – 1984).²² This democratic approach to design arose out of a need to protect labour in the face of workplace automation and to counteract the perceived excesses of capitalism, namely the alienation of labour and environmental degradation. As I will argue, both of these approaches were responses to the ascendant politics,

²¹ While arts and crafts were heavily involved in the fashioning of commodities throughout the latter half of the 19th century, it was not organized as a professional practice until at least 1914 (Sparke, 2013).

²² This timeline is marked by the rise of the Italian Anti-Design movement in 1966 and the completion of the participatory design project, UTOPIA, in 1984. Much of the discourse and practice that emerged during this period has informed the contemporary participatory design movement (e.g., Simonsen & Robertson, 2013), and particularly, discussions of design for social innovation (e.g., Pelle Ehn, Nilsson, & Topgaard, 2014).

policies, and ideology of neoliberalism: acceptance and adaption to the demands of a new economic orthodoxy on the one hand, and political resistance to these changes on the other.

This chapter provides a socio-cultural sketch of 20th-century design practice that is foregrounded by Clive Dilnot's assessment that "industrial capitalism has defined the practice of design" (Fry et al., 2015). This analysis will not yield a unified definition of design because design histories are configured by divergent and competing practices and discourses that unfold in situated contexts. Historical accounts of design can be viewed as place markers used to denote changing economic, political, cultural, and social conditions. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to provide several historical moorings that will later be used in Chapters 3 and 4 to locate emerging practices of design, such as social design, in relation to a broader genealogy: a discipline, set of discourses, and practices that are born out of, contingent upon, and at times, functions in opposition to capitalism.

Laying the Groundwork for the Rise of Consultant Design

The world changed dramatically following the end of the First World War (1914 – 1918). The values and aesthetic markers of the Victorian Age — an orientation towards tradition, sentimentalism, and decoration that is exemplified in the European Art Nouveau movement — fell out of fashion (Leslie & Reimer, 2003). Historian Christopher Innes characterizes this decline as follows:

As its name declares, Art Nouveau looked on itself as a radically new movement, opening a new age. But in fact it became identified with *fin de siècle*, the end of an era. Elitist, exotic, and subtly erotic. It suggests decadence associated with the final stage of a civilization. (p.9)

In response, modernism, as an aesthetic and ideological movement, took hold across Europe and North America. Modernism is by no means a singular or unified aesthetic, but instead "manifests itself across a wide range of mediums including literature, art,

architecture, and design and is a complex and variegated phenomenon subject to a range of internal inconsistencies and contradictions” (Leslie & Reimer, 2003, p. 297). Despite this inconstancy, modernism in France, Russia, Denmark, Germany, and to a lesser extent, United States, shared a similar interest in expressing a break from tradition through a modernist vernacular that emphasized rationality, masculine forms, and functionalism (Hochman, 1997; Leslie & Reimer, 2003; Sparke, 2010). Leslie and Reimer argue that modernism as an aesthetic and ideological movement was premised on the negation of “binary Others” (e.g., sentimentalism) that were in turn “mapped onto a masculine/feminine distinction” (p.295). Drawing attention to the Otherness that modernism demands is important to consider because as a movement, it “continues to rely upon precisely those which it excludes” (p.299). During the interwar period, for instance, American designers endeavoured to present modernism as a viable aesthetic alternative; they did so by expressing a desire and need to control and dominate — nature, the gendered and racialized Other, machines etc. — all in an effort to express the transformations occurring in technology, culture, and society. Despite the promise of progress, modernism transposed the entrenched gender and racial relations of the 19th century onto a techno-futurist cultural imaginary that simply reproduced white heteropatriarchy, albeit with a patina of progress. A growing list of designers and architects in Europe and North American played a decisive role in redesigning cultural, social, economic, and political institutions according to these interpretations of modernism.

With its rigorous commitment to simplified forms, creative use of steel, glass, and concrete as materials for form-giving, and industrial methods of production, Bauhaus is often regarded as typifying “pure modernism” (Kentgens-Craig, 2001, pp. 37–38). In the United States, however, the markers of modernism were interpreted against a backdrop of social, cultural, and economic ascendancy. What became known as the “American style,” which Innes (2005) contends exuded a sense of spectacle and theatricality, was used to express the economic and cultural superiority of the U.S., which emerged from the First World War relatively unscathed. This was expressly achieved by strategically

linking design, capitalism, and technological innovation in order to bolster growing domestic and international demand for U.S. manufactured goods (Fry et al., 2015; Sparke, 2013). Much to the dismay of Walter Gropius, who had long rejected the notion that “good design” could not be reduced simply to an aesthetic, the clean lines and geometric forms that were closely associated with the visual language of Bauhaus was taken up and interpreted by an emergent consultant design profession in the latter half of the 1920s. This aesthetic was applied to a range of manufactured goods intended for mass audiences in the U.S. and around the world.

This analysis focuses on the explicit and implicit influence the school had on early 20th-century design culture in the U.S. It goes without saying that it is difficult to draw a straight line between Bauhaus and American-style modernism. Albeit distinct in execution and purpose, there are several notable examples of cross-pollination between European and American modernist thinking and work during the 1920s and '30s. No doubt these interactions influenced early efforts to establish design as a professionalized craft in the U.S. and cement a uniquely American modern design aesthetic. The key here is how modernist design in the U.S., specifically during the interwar period, interpreted the aesthetics of European modernism for the purposes of commodity production, including the standardization of forms to streamline industrial production. It is the link between production and consumption that is essential for understanding the rise of professional design and its close linkage to industry and innovation today.

Bauhaus and European approach to modernism

At the forefront of the European modern design movement was Bauhaus (1919 – 1933), the arts and crafts collective that was founded in 1919, by Walter Gropius (1883 – 1969). Over the course of the school’s 14 years of operation, it changed locations in Germany between Weimar (1919-1925), Dessau (1925-1932), and operated briefly in Berlin (1933). The school was relatively small compared with other art colleges of the time. Enrolment was open to both men and women. Gropius remarked, there is “No

difference between the beautiful and the strong sex. Absolute equality but also absolute equal obligation to the work of all craftsmen” (p. 9). This statement is a telling example of Gropius’s commitment to traditional gender roles and the type of patriarchal thinking that informed administrative decision-making at Bauhaus. In *Bauhaus Women* Ulrike Müller (2009) writes that, by 1922, the number of women enrolled at Bauhaus started to decline. She attributes this decline to a shift in pedagogy, from craft-related activities, which had initially been a draw for women, to technical experimentation. This decision signaled Gropius’s and the other male administrators’ intentions to distance the school from what they considered to be women’s work.

Part aesthetic movement, part political ideology, Bauhaus advocated for a variant of social democracy that could be realized by way of functionalist design (Hochman, 1997). Inspired by the work of medieval craft guilds, the humanist values that guided the Enlightenment, and technological advancements in production, the school encouraged its students to create “type-forms for all practical commodities of everyday life” (Kentgens-Craig, 2001). These type-forms, or “good objects,” as former Bauhaus student Anni Albers called them, were optimal solutions to functional problems. This modernist agenda promoted by Bauhaus rejected the notion of individual tastes and preferences. Choice, in terms of the variety and styling of products, was not necessary, “because science, technology, and the dynamics of the 20th-century condition would provide people with choice and variety in their daily lives” (Whiteley, 1994, p. 7). Uniformity, as expressed through simplified type-forms, was a necessary condition for the progressive egalitarian collectivism envisioned by the followers of this movement.

While Bauhaus publicly advocated for a socialist ideal, the schools’ secondary, and perhaps more lucrative agenda, was to build alliances with industry. As Robin Schuldenfrei (2018) describes, Gropius wrote to capitalists Henry Ford, John D. Rockefeller, and William Randolph Hearst, to appeal for financial support for the school. In return, students would help industry realize the financial benefits of design and circumvent what Gropius described as, “the threatening danger of superficiality” brought

on by the serial reproduction of cheap goods (Weber, 2009, p. 30). He told his students that design was capable of remedying this situation:

The artist possesses the ability to breathe soul into the lifeless product of the machine, and his [sic] creative power continues to live within it as a living ferment. His collaboration is not a luxury, not a pleasing adjunct; it must become an indispensable component in the total output of modern industry. (p.30)

Gropius set out to formalize this “new unity” between art and technology by forging a closer relationship with industry. Student workshops were refashioned as laboratories for industrial production and new business practices were introduced, including the creation of a production department that was run by a business manager who oversaw a network of sales representatives who sold the objects made by students to a limited number of domestic and international customers (Rowland, n.d., p. 155). This shift toward “commodity fetishism” marked an important shift in European modernism. Rather than a democratizing force, the modernist objects produced by Bauhaus students and teachers became highly aesthetic signifiers of status and the high-minded ideals of the modernist utopia advocated the movement’s proponents.

Bauhaus ultimately closed in 1933, facing pressure from the ruling Nazi party who claimed that students were publishing anti-Nazi propaganda and supported communism. Several of the school’s most well-known students fled to the United States, transporting the values, thinking, and methods of the school with them. The Bauhaus pedagogy was taken up by American institutions and taught by some of the school’s most esteemed students and instructors. For instance, in 1937, Walter Gropius was given a post at Harvard University, while László Moholy-Nagy (1895 – 1946), a former student, established the “New Bauhaus” in Chicago (Kentgens-Craig, 2001). Soon after, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886 – 1969) was appointed the head of the architecture school at Armour Institute in Chicago. While these figures would go on to become associated with American mid-century modernism, the pure modernism that they had

long advocated for in Germany, in the end, was not translated in any direct fashion to the American context.

American-style modernism

There is no direct link between Bauhaus and American modernism. While the ideas of the European avant-garde were known to a select group of architects, artists, and intellectuals in the U.S., public consciousness of modernism was not yet pronounced. Despite this initial lack of interest, particularly among the first wave of American industrial designers, Kentgens-Craig (2001) argues that the circulation of films and periodicals, such as that representing the work and thinking of the European avant-garde's artists and designers, influenced, however superficially, early attempts at establishing an American modernist style. Professional magazines, such as *American Architecture* and *The Journal of American Institute of Architects* reproduced photographs, illustrations and sketches of European modern architecture. While these representations did not necessarily reference Bauhaus by name, they nonetheless played an important role in fomenting a public consciousness of the modern vernacular.

As further evidence of the influence of European modernism on the United States, in 1925, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover appointed a commission to visit the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, France. The event was intended to showcase the very best in emerging modern art and design. The supplementary report that was produced by the U.S. delegation praised the commercial potential of the modernist movement. Margolin (2015) summarizes this optimism as follows: "Speaking in the language of marketing and trade, they wrote that the nation that could best adapt the principles and aesthetic practices of the modern movement to conditions of mass production and consumption would gain a distinct trade advantage" (pp. 369–370). Similarly, the 1927 *Machine: Age Exposition* that took place in New York City was another important moment in the cross-pollination of American and European modernist thinking and design. The public exhibition

demonstrated for the first time that the machine could be used as “a formal aesthetic code” (p.71).

Despite a growing awareness of modernism, American professionals showed little interest in differentiating between Danish, German, and Russian variations (Kentgens-Craig, 2001). These movements were largely viewed as a homogenous aesthetic. To that end, the ideological aims of European versions of modernism were subsumed into the decidedly more commercial concerns of the first generation of American industrial designers, such as Norman Bel Geddes and Joseph Urban, who perceived the modernist aesthetic as aligned with their commercial agenda to reproduce ready-made moderns suitable for any household and at any price point. Volkmann & de Cock (2006) characterize this interpretation as follows:

Through images of furniture and fixtures (moderately priced copies available at a store near you!), typography, and modernist architecture the Bauhaus serves as an aura for the transfiguration of a modernism interpreted rather monolithically, and thus saturates the perception of what modernism can signify. Arguably this move helped make modernism “acceptable” and integrate it unproblematically into the capitalist system. (p. 134)

In the end, it was the modernist aesthetic, and not the high-minded values of European modernism, that proved most useful for the American design project. In other words, it was the commodity aesthetic of modernism — which had become a signifier of progress — that lent “eye appeal” to generic mass-produced products that were in high demand by the burgeoning American middle class.

Burgeoning consumer culture bred American-style

An important pretext for early American modern design was a widespread increase in middle-class conspicuous consumption. While there are debates about the precise period in which conspicuous consumption became a significant cultural practice, Sparke (2013) argues that at the very least a more affluent middle class that emerged in the

19th century contributed to an increase in demand for manufactured goods. In 1899, Thorsten Veblen published *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* as a critique of conspicuous consumption. The text concluded that individuals attempt to improve their social standing by emulating the consumptive habits of the so-called leisure class. Demand for manufactured goods only increased throughout the first part of the 20th century and up until the start of the Great Depression (1929 – 1939). The United States, which emerged from the First World War as an economic global power, was well positioned to take on a lead role in satisfying domestic and global demand. Pivotal to achieving this goal, were the deep investments in research and development made by American corporations, such as General Electric, DuPont, and Kodak, throughout the 1920s. For instance, there were 1,000 industrial laboratories in operation across the U.S. by 1929 (Margolin, 2015, p. 365). The scientists and engineers working in these labs invented a range of synthetic materials, such as Formica, nylon, fiberglass, all of which would prove useful for industrial production. Margolin argues, “the intensification of research activity resulted in exceptional productivity and created a surplus of goods” (p.365).

Alongside this period of consumerist expansion, individuals trained in visual arts, including engineers, craftspeople, architects, and fine artists, were employed to add decorative touches to advertisements, packaging, window displays, and interior spaces (Innes, 2005). Architects focused their energy on designing building exteriors and interiors but also on the objects that were placed in these environments. And while decorative artists were employed to style luxury items for elites, everyday commodities lacked eye appeal and were rendered in generic, crude forms. Similarly, large technology objects such as automobiles were styled by the engineers who created them. By 1918, a new breed of creative practitioners broke with the rarefied European values and traditions that informed the work of architects, who up until the 1920s dominated the world of product design. Instead, their work was driven exclusively by the needs of industry. As Penny Sparke (2013) argues, “Their task was to determine what was fashionable, to both reflect and form public taste and to keep the public informed

about the multiple products and services available to them” (p.55). These initial instances of the entanglement of art and industry were early signals of what was to come.

By 1920, it became increasingly difficult for consumers to differentiate between the range of generic commodities that were on offer in the marketplace. Despite the intensification of design-like activities in the years leading up to 1920, design, in any formal sense, continued to be carried out on an ad-hoc basis; the methods and approaches to this work were tailored according to the needs of specific manufacturers or the context of work. However, manufacturers sought a more systematic approach to organizing the various tasks associated with linking production and consumption (Sparke, 1983). This work demanded the artistic skills of commercial artists who had risen in stature since the turn of the century, but also a new perspective “that enables practitioners to look across a wide range of industries” (p. 56). In essence, industry was demanding a more stable partnership with the world of commercial art. The modernist aesthetic would play a decisive role in differentiating generic commodities as expressions of class and taste, but also linking 20th-century production and consumption.

Design historian Christopher Innis attributes the modern American aesthetic, which was referred to as the “American style,” to two individuals in particular: Norman Bel Geddes and Joseph Urban. As he contends, “they did more than anyone to create what has been called the golden age of American culture in the 1940s and 1950s, when everything came together in a coherent American style” (p.4). Their designs became iconic fixtures of early and mid-century American consumer culture, touching everything from curtains to wallpaper to office equipment. Together, they transformed American visual culture and in so doing “were responsible for an overwhelming amount of the physical ambience of America, from which cultural attitudes flowed, at a crucial time in the development of modern society” (p. 7). This formal linking of design and capitalism is an important moment in the formation of consultant design. It signaled, perhaps for

the first time, a desire to eschew the progressive ideals underpinning modern architecture in favour of a pragmatism aimed at advancing the commercial aspirations of 20th-century capitalism.

Introducing Consultant Design to the world

On June 23, 1927, the Executive Committee of General Motors (GM) agreed to a request submitted by then Vice President Alfred Sloan to set up an “Art and Colour Department” with the mandate to improve the aesthetic appeal of the company’s automobiles (Gartman, 1994, p. 13). Under the direction of Harley Earl, GM committed to using a systematic approach to add “eye appeal” to their portfolio, in an effort to differentiate their products from competing firms, including Ford Motor Company. Earl went to great lengths to standardize this process so that it could be taught and objectively evaluated. Insisting, for instance, that every car have a “through-line”— a horizontal line that stretched from the front to the rear of the car and was intended to accentuate the length of the car (p.24). They referred to the department as the “beauty parlour,” where the “pretty-picture boys’ dressed up the auto-mobiles that came off the engineers’ drawing boards” (p. 3). For the men of Motor City, the introduction of design, perceived as fussy and superficial, was at odds with the hegemonic masculine values that informed the work of engineers. Earl was highly sensitive to the gendered “rough-and-tumble, masculine world of the auto industry” and as such initially only hired men to work in his department. However, he later recognized the limitations of this decision and began to hire women starting in the 1955. Referred to by the media as the “Damsels of Design,” the women employed by Earl were responsible for designing car interiors, as well as working with GM-owned Frigidaire (Caspers, 2016). The group included Suzanne Vanderbilt, Marjorie Ford, Ruth Glennie, Sandra Longyear, Peggy Sauer, and Jeanette Linder.

At the urging of Sloan, the department was officially renamed in 1937 to the “Styling Department,” making GM the first U.S. automobile manufacturers to systemize the practice of styling, an aesthetic that was greatly influenced by the modernist

vernacular that had been gaining momentum thanks in part to the work of Geddes and Urban. As Gartman reports (1994), Earl was known to bring the latest fashionable good to the office and ask staff to emulate styles seen in areas such as a fashion, interior decoration, and architecture. The practice of styling proved so effective that it was quickly emulated by other manufacturers, who either set up their own internal styling departments or relied on the expertise of external consultants. The uniquely American style, which borrowed the clean lines and geometric forms from the modernist international style, became known as “streamlining” (Innes, 2005). It was applied to a host of everyday products, including toasters, radios, refrigerators, even pencil sharpeners. Objects rendered in the American style appealed to consumers’ desire to find “life style models” (Belk & Pollay, 1985) that were in keeping with their aspirations to lead a modern life — one which embraced the individualism of consumer culture and rejected the collective sentimentalism that persisted a half-century before. As Sparke (2013) argues, “design became everyone’s bridge to their own brand of modernity” (p.7). The aesthetic of modernism, with its association with progress and futurism, was treated like a fashionable accessory, allowing consumers to try on identities according to each new product purchased.

A growing list of celebrity American consultant designers carefully curated the commodity aesthetic associated with the streamlining, and, in doing so, built their reputations as stalwarts of modernity. Henry Dreyfuss, Raymond Loewy, Walter Dorwin Teague, Norman Bel Geddes, and Joseph Urban were perhaps the most versatile of all the designers of the time — if not the most recognized for their work. They collectively designed a range of consumer electronics, including cameras, radios, and cooking appliances. They were also responsible for the design of American public transportation infrastructure including buses, steamships, and locomotives. Lesser-known designers at the time, such as Eva Zeisel, Russel Wright, and Donald Deskey, specialized in ceramics and hard and soft interior furnishings. By all accounts, consultant design was a male-dominated profession that rarely acknowledged the work of women designers. Historian Cheryl Buckley argues this is because “[w]omen are

considered to possess sex-specific skills their design abilities [...] These skills mean that women are considered to be naturally suited to certain area of design production, namely, the so-called decorative arts” (p.5). At the same time, the consultant design profession went to great lengths to systematically erase any trace of the feminine from public view, which could be perceived as corrupting the masculine aesthetic of American modernism (Buckley, 1989; Hughes, 1998; Rothschild & Cheng, 1999; Weisman, 1994).

The foundations of contemporary design practice

This brief socio-cultural sketch, which depicts important moments in the rise of 20th-century professional design, is used to illustrate the link between American modernism and industrial production. There are two important developments that emerged throughout the interwar period that can be attributed at least in part to the rise of consultants, who have continued to shape successive evolutions of the profession to this day. Notably this period solidified the link between industrial, capitalism, design, and technological innovation.

The first important development relates to the role design came to play in directing attention away from production towards efforts to promote consumption. After all, as Sparke argues, “[a]s a modern concept, design developed as a direct result of expansion of the market for consumer goods and the democratization of taste” (p. 12). The use of streamlining, in particular, was used to redirect the consumer’s gaze away from the innerworkings and mechanics of an object, towards its surface, where the subtlest of changes in colour or appearance registered as “innovative.” Thus, design was used in this regard to manufacture obsolescence and induce demand. At the same time, public recognition of design grew with each new product, interior or building rendered in the modern style. And given their close association with modernism, the names of consultant designers, became valuable commodities in their own right (Innes, 2005; Sparke, 2013). Purchasing a product designed by a celebrity designer, such as Raymond Lowey, signified one’s taste level and social standing. Thus, “[d]esign’s

relationship with the culture of consumption had become its dominant face” (Margolin, 1989, p.107). In claiming this privileged position at the interface of production and consumption, the consultant design profession had proven itself capable of responding to the needs of industry while seeking out new markets to sell the specialized craft.

The second development stems from the first, in the sense that the separation of production and consumption fueled demand for the systemization of the design process. In keeping with the modern ethic — to dominate, to separate, to break down problems into discrete components — the design process was perceived by a growing group of engineers and designers as a valuable commodity in its own right. Since at least the 1920s, there was a strong desire to “scientise” the practice of design (Cross, 2001). The work of Buckminster Fuller and Herbert Simon, in particular, starting as early as the late 1950s, is emblematic of this desire to transform design into a rational process for defining problems and arriving at suitable solutions. The Design Methods Conference that took place in London, England, in 1962 played a decisive role in this work, namely by gathering together a growing community concerned with establishing “design science”²³ as a practice. The publication of *Science of the Artificial* by Herbert Simon in 1968 was yet another example of the desire to establish design as a distinct mode of problem solving. It was in this text that Simon declared everyone is a designer who desires to “devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones” (Simon, 1996, p. 111). He advocated for a value neutral and rational approach to design in which he viewed “all aspects of the design process in terms of quantifiable, codifiable information and the designer as a type of expert computer coder” (p.35). This approach, however, became the subject of critique in the late 1960s. Horst Rittel published a critique of *Science of the Artificial* that concluded that design could not be systemized in the manner envisioned by Simons, but instead should be viewed as a political undertaking — a foreshadowing of the participatory design movement that would arise in the late 1960s. Despite these disagreements, there was growing

²³Cross (2001) defines design science as, “explicit organized, rational, and wholly systematic approach to design” (p.53).

consensus that the design process itself, and not just the objects that were produced through it, could be appropriated to serve commercial and political ends.

These two developments that emerged from the consultant design period ultimately established the hegemonic role of design and industry and demonstrated the profession's ability to "bob and weave" to the pressures and demands exerted by industry. This proved particularly useful in the 1970s as commodities became increasingly dematerialized, and as the design profession became the subject of public ridicule and critique.

Competing Visions of Design

Responding to the neoliberal call

In the 1970s, consultant design faced its first major transformation. Anemic economic growth, surging inflation, and historically high levels of unemployment were taking a toll in the United States and Britain. At the same time, the residual effects from the civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War were contributing to widespread distrust of liberal institutions, traditional source of authority, and expertise. For instance, Lipset and Schneider (1983) conclude that anti-government sentiment in the U.S. in 1974 was as high as 62%. Political elites in both countries faced increased pressure to take decisive action to stabilize the economy. To that end, the neoliberal policies favoured by the likes of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and U.S. President Ronald Reagan, including an emphasis on deregulation, privatization of state-owned assets, the opening up of global capital markets, and an intensification of competition premised on entrepreneurial activity, reconfigured the spheres of production and consumption (Harvey, 2011). These economic shocks coupled with a destabilized social order laid the groundwork for a new breed of politics to take hold: neoliberalism. At the heart of this movement was a promise that individual freedoms could be guaranteed through the neutrality of the marketplace (p. 7). This was a particularly appealing proposition for those working to secure human rights, or for those who felt that their

rights had been compromised by an overbearing state. At the same time, neoliberal economic policies promised to restructure the global economy to support the flow of global capital — which was positioned as a necessary precondition to kick-start economic growth. The design profession, which throughout the 20th century had depended on the health of industry, played an important role in materializing this transformation.

In *Economies of Design*, Guy Julier argues that design responds to the demands of neoliberalism in two fundamental ways. Firstly, design creates the material objects that are taken up and circulated to support neoliberal processes of marketization. In other words, the design of products, environments, and services, are used to establish and fortify markets in order to extract further value from existing and new consumer groups. Secondly, design “plays a semiotic role in making change appear reasonable” (Julier, 2017a, p. 3). By giving a durable form to future value, through prototypes, simulations, and or speculative design artifacts, design lends support to the future-orientation of neoliberalism, which is concerned with realizing future (i.e. speculative) value in the present. A range of design specialisms have emerged in response to the changing needs of neoliberalism (see Table 1). From corporate identity development to digital experience design to service design and social design, the early work of consultant designers, has been adapted and evolved to lend discursive and material support to neoliberal expansion.

Neoliberal Phase	Policy Components	Design Industry Response	Purpose
Early 1980s Deregulation	Removal of market regulations, outsourcing government services, privatizing state-owned assets	- Retail design Corporate identity	- Materialize intangible value (i.e. physicalize assets) - Visualize competitive positioning (e.g., logos) - Visualize financial data (e.g., annual reports)

Mid 1980s New Economy	Global supply chains, just-in-time production, New Public Management	- Branding - Digital design - Experience design - Place branding	- Identify and maximize unrealized value (e.g., cultural corridors)
1990s – Early 2000s Financialization	Increased profits through financial markets (i.e. not production), Emphasis on enhanced shareholder value	- Urban design - Strategic design	- Using design processes and methods (i.e. “design thinking”) to exploit new commercial opportunities
Mid 2000s – Present Austerity	Decrease in size of welfare state, accelerated income inequality	- Social design - Design for policy - Design activism	- Create more efficient (i.e. cost effective) public goods (e.g., social innovation) - Communities create their own public goods (e.g., hackathons)

Table 2.1 Features of neoliberalization and relevant design disciplines framework. This modified version of Guy Julier’s framework, depicts the relation between each neoliberal period and corresponding set of design specialisms.

From the *Economies of Design* by Guy Julier, p. 12. Copyright © 2017, Guy Julier.

Design, industry, and neoliberalism

The deregulation of markets and limited capacity of states to intervene in the economic affairs throughout the 1980s led to a proliferation of new consumer products, experiences, and entertainment, resulting in new territories for the consultant designer to exploit (Julier, 2013). In contrast to the previous work of consultant designers, who were focused primarily on the styling of products and physical objects produced through industrial production, the focus shifted to designing the experiences in which these things were consumed, “it became difficult to separate the real from the designed

experience” (Sparke, p.110). The need to craft these virtual experiences and worlds posed new challenges for designers.

By the mid 1990s, the design firm itself became a publicly traded corporation bought and sold on the global stock market. This process of financialization re-configured the consultant design firm to mirror the corporation: with shareholders to please, costs to strictly manage, margins to improve, and profits to make. As Julier argues, as a result of these transformations, design firms invented “new specialisms to exploit technological and business opportunities” (Julier, 2017a, p. 24), such as user-centred design, urban design, and experience design, to name a few. Each was a response to industry calls to find new sources of value that could be exploited — and nothing was off limits. Aware of the need to deliver quarterly earnings to shareholders, executives at design firms implemented repeatable design processes in order to carefully manage and eliminate inefficiencies (Best, 2010). This included controlling the labour costs of the designers through outsourcing and freelancing and insisting that timesheets be completed to ensure every minute of a project could be accounted for. At the same time, projects were subjected to tight timelines and focused on expediency to satisfy the demands of clients to respond to changing market pressures as quickly as possible. As clients took more of an interest in the design process, proprietary diagrams and models were developed to assist them in navigating project milestones (Julier, 2013). Each of these approaches to design was used to differentiate one firm from another. As such, these proprietary processes were viewed as assets that possessed intrinsic financial value that should be managed accordingly. Aided by advancements in telecommunications, it was also in this period that international design conglomerates emerged.

In response to the effects of neoliberalism, a new market for public sector design services also emerged. Forced to compete for scarce public resources, public institutions employed the services of design firms to help improve their visual image with complex branding schemes intended to differentiate and attract the attention and

financial support of donors and philanthropic organizations (Julier & Moor, 2009). Similarly, cities that had experienced urban blight due to a prolonged period of de-industrialization hired urban designers to reimagine public spaces to improve land values and attract creative talent. As Rachel Weber argues, “states have developed mechanisms to make the built environment more flexible and responsive to the investment criteria of real-estate capital” (Weber, 2002, p. 520). This aestheticization of public space was extended to creative districts and cultural corridors set up by city councils and districts keen to display their cultural capital to prospective international investors, tourists, and the so-called “creative class” (Florida, 2005).²⁴

Finally, the free-flow of global capital had created a demand for documents to satisfy the risk-averse skepticism of international investors and/or identify new investment opportunities (Julier, 2013). Here, the design industry took a leading role in producing annual reports, quarterly earning sheets, investment brochures, and other investment collateral. The important distinction between this work and the earlier work of consultant designers, who had also created promotional materials, is that design was used to establish an aesthetic that rendered complex financial data — historically intended for a limited expert audience — into a comprehensible format through diagrams, charts, and illustrations. Thus, data, and financial data in particular, increasingly became a commodity that required the same aesthetic care as more traditional products. Financial products, such as stocks, bonds, futures etc., all needed to be differentiated from one another to indicate their speculative value to prospective investors. As Julier (2017) argues, design practice was used to quite literally instantiate the otherwise abstract and speculative nature of financial markets and render this data sensible to the expert and non-expert public.

²⁴ As Barbara Jenkins (2005) reports, deep investments in the late 1990s by Ontario's Progressive Conservative government, first Mike Harris followed by Ernie Eves, was part of deliberate strategy to “brand” Toronto, and by extension Canada, as an “international cultural attraction.” The buildings designed to support this initiative, e.g., the Four Season's Centre for Performing Arts, can be “understood as both participants in, and reflections of, contemporary patterns of global economic competition and the changing role of culture in capitalist production” (Jenkins, 2005, para. 3).

The Canadian context

Canada was by no means immune to the pressures of neoliberalism. In the 1990s, the design and creative industries garnered the attention of national and subnational governments as potential partners in economic development strategies to address massive unemployment brought about by an ailing manufacturing sector that was feeling the pressures of more competitive global wage labour. In many respects the proposed strategy harkened back to earlier efforts to monetize Canadian industrial design as part of Canada's Second World War reconstruction efforts. For instance, an exhibition hosted by the National Gallery of Canada in 1946 titled, "Design in Industry," was used to showcase industrial design as a future area of employment. Other initiatives, such as the establishment of the National Industrial Design Council in 1953 (later to be renamed the National Design Council), and passage of the Industrial Design Act of 1961, all signaled the federal government's interest in realizing the commercial potential of design. Collins (1988) characterizes these efforts as "an acute awareness of the fact that without planning, and conscious attempts to utilize the new industrial processes and materials developed during wartime, Canada would have great trouble adapting to peacetime condition" (p.28)

In 1976, Design Canada, an arm of National Design Council, was established to promote design as a national asset. The organization quickly gained a reputation as a leader in the promotion of design in North America. It oversaw and executed a robust program of activities, including offering scholarships to students pursuing industrial design, promoting design within public sector contexts, and issuing a variety of reports about the state of the industry in Canada, among others (The National Design Alliance, 1996). Perhaps the organization's greatest contributions were its commitment to advocating for a robust design curriculum in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Despite these successes, both the National Design Council and Design Canada were disbanded in 1985 as design was no longer viewed as a national strategic priority. Soon thereafter, the federal government cut all funding to design promotion initiatives.

The cuts to provincial transfer payments that followed the 1995 federal budget forced provinces and territories to actively seek out alternative sources of revenue to fund public services. This meant identifying untapped sources of value, which for several provinces, including British Columbia and Ontario, meant returning to the design management strategies that were abandoned 10 years earlier. In 1995, the Design Exchange, Canada's design museum, produced a report titled *Design for a Strong Ontario: A Strategy for Ontario's Design Sector*.²⁵ While advocating on behalf of those working in traditional design professions, such as graphic design, the report also served to advance the neoliberal agenda of the newly elected Progressive Conservative government, led by Premier Mike Harris. Like other governments around the world, Harris was keen to realize the value of the creative sector, an essential aspect of transitioning to a knowledge economy. To give some indication of the perceived value of the creative industries at the time, a report published by Vinodrai and Gertler argued that between 1991 and 2004, "Ontario's creative and cultural industries outpaced that of the overall labour force, with compound annual growth rates of 2.8% and 1.8% respectively" (Vinodrai & Meric, 2006, p. 5). What distinguishes these efforts from the design strategies employed by the federal government from the 1940s to the '80s, was the focus on appropriating the idea of "creativity" for the purposes of branding provinces as "innovative" places to do business. This focus contrasts with earlier strategies that focused on promoting designed objects. Thus, the image of design, and the aura of creativity that surrounded those who work in creative industries, became a source of untapped value that provinces and territories used to stave off the effects of austerity.

Participatory Turn: Rejecting Neoliberal Hegemony

While the design profession remained committed to advancing the aims of industry throughout the 1970s and '80s, a design countermovement was also emerging. In response to the perceived excesses of capitalism and complacency of the design profession in facilitating this activity, Victor Papanek wrote *Design for the Real World* in

²⁵A similar report was produced by Tara Vindorai, on behalf of the Martin Prosperity Institute in 2009 titled, *The Place of Design: Exploring Ontario's Design Economy*.

1971. The text was, in many respects, a call to arms for designers to engage more critically with their work, to consider and accept the social, cultural, and ecological effects of designed objects. As Papanek states quite pointedly about the modernist designer, “Unblushingly, industrial design in America has elected to serve as pimp for big business interests” (p.278). At the time, Papanek’s criticisms were rejected by the mainstream design community as cynical, idealistic, and unrealistic (Twemlow, 2018). Perhaps one of the harshest criticisms came from the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) who demanded that Papanek withdraw his membership from the organization and who publicly boycotted a special exhibition of his work in Paris. This rebuke, nonetheless, was emblematic of a deeper rupture that was emerging within design theory and practice: Should design continue on its current trajectory of servicing the needs of industry by adapting to the economic conditions of neoliberalism? Or should designers re-channel their efforts towards social good? This emergent practice of participatory design, emerging out of the Scandinavian design tradition, was decidedly more democratic: committed to equality and expertise as constituted through one’s lived experience. It is this tension, between profit and public good, that has come to characterize contemporary design discourse and practice.

The roots of the participatory movement

In contrast to consultant design, participatory design (PD) is decidedly more political. Its place within the field of design, albeit marginal, is born out of a confluence of factors that emerged in the 1970s: the decentring of traditional sources of expertise in favour of marginalized voices articulated through gender, race and sexuality (Buckley, 1989), the widespread use of technology in the workplace to improve the working conditions of employees (Bannon & Ehn, 2013), and a renewed interest in the potential of radical participation in political life bolstered by the aims of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970). While working alongside Norway-based trade unions, Kristen Nygard, developed a body of work that came to be known as “knowledge strategy” (Bannon & Ehn, 2013) — an early predecessor of PD. Underlying this work was a belief that rights are not something given to those in a position of power, they must instead be secured by

drawing upon knowledge “on the ground” from those with first-hand experience of, and those who stand to be the most effected by, design decisions. This is at odds with the purely financial focus of consultant design. To that end, workers required a knowledge base to draw upon if they were to negotiate with management on the role of technology in the workplace and effects on their lives.

A classic example of PD is the Scandinavian-based UTOPIA project (1981 – 1984), which examined the feasibility of workers prototyping technology for graphic layout software used in the publishing industry (Ehn & Sjøgren, 1992).²⁶ The project was intended to demonstrate the feasibility of having workers be involved in the design and development of workplace software. In the end, though, the prototypes were never commercialized due to internal constraints and competing organizational priorities. However, the laboratory-style environments set up by organizers, used by designers, researchers, and end users to mock up and prototype technology solutions, have had a lasting impact on PD tools and practices. Today PD is still guided by this ethos of participation: “to go beyond just ‘involving’ users in design, to bring about more equal power relations and genuinely emancipatory participation in actual design projects” (Simonsen & Robertson, 2013, p. 11). Therefore, participation in PD can and should be approached as an ideology that engages with issues of political economy, politics, and empowerment (Bannon & Ehn, 2013). As Kensing & Greenbaum (2013) argue, “participatory design as an emancipatory approach has little regard for approaches that solely involve users as informants through interviews, focus groups or other one-way techniques in a process otherwise controlled by information technology designers and their clients/managers” (p. 27). Instead, proponents of PD centre the experiences of marginalized voices whose opinions and experiences have not historically been viewed as legitimate sources of expertise. These individuals have a valuable role to play in developing design proposals to address pressing human problems.

²⁶ Binder, Löwgren, & Malmborg (2009) have written a comprehensive study of these projects in an attempt to revive a Digital Bauhaus as first envisioned by Pelle Ehn (For the original text, see Ehn, 1998).

PD's rejection of traditional sources of expertise and forms of knowledge produced by privileged authorities is reflective of the broader societal rebuke of modernism that was well underway in the late 1970s. The grounds, or metanarratives of modernism (Lyotard, 1984), such as "progress through instrumental reasoning," used as a referent to legitimize knowledge as "truth," were called into question (Margolin, 2002). The boundaries of human/artificial and nature/society that modernists had relied on to advance their utopic visions of society and the requisite type-forms needed to realize these imaginaries, had become the subject of critique of scholars in PD, but also science and technology studies and philosophy. This was particularly true at the height of the participatory turn when knowledge about modernist distinctions of humans and technology were blurred. This ontological shift in thinking is captured succinctly in Donna Haraway's, *Cyborg Manifesto*, first published in 1984. Haraway argues, "no objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language" (D. Haraway, 2013, p. 163). These new hybrid beings, or Cyborgs, created new possibilities for design, not just as a means to reproduce the status quo through pervasive commodity culture, but as a place to (re)consider and articulate political imaginaries and the variety of subjectivities that might also emerge from such encounters.

Locating Design Today

The tensions born out in the 1970s continue to shape design theory and practice today. This best evidence is the rise of social design. It is designed as "a set of concepts and activities that exist across many fields of application including local and central government and policy areas such as healthcare and international development" (Armstrong et al., 2014, p. 15). This design specialism, which is also referred to as "social innovation," emerged in response to the perceived failings of markets and states to address social challenges (Ehn, Nilsson, & Topgaard, 2014).

Unlike traditional forms of design, where experts developed ideas to satisfy consumer demands, social innovation occurs at the “margins”²⁷ by citizens, community groups, artists, entrepreneurs, and public servants (Manzini, 2015). These actors draw upon local knowledge, practices, skills, and material resources to create organizations, services, programs, and other community-oriented interventions that address communal problems.²⁸ In Ezio Manzini’s (2014) assessment, designers should (re)channel their skills to amplify the efforts of local communities engaged in social innovation by designing the services, products and experiences that make these interventions durable. Manzini (2014) draws a linkage between democratic and community-minded aims of participatory design and design for social innovation in that they are unfolding practices geared towards building consensus around controversial public issues. Social innovation, therefore, is premised on “co-creation,” either by way of crowdsourcing (Brabham, 2013), co-production (Leadbeater, 2006), or co-design (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Sanders and Stappers (2008) argue, “Over the past six decades, designers have been moving increasingly closer to the future users of what they design” (p.5). In other words, end users (non-designers) play a vital role in generating solutions to complex design problems that would have traditionally been the sole responsibility of the expert (consultant) designer. In the co-design model, those who eventually benefit from the design process are regarded as the “expert of his/her own situation” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). These individuals are encouraged to be active in the knowledge development phase that characteristically occurs at the beginning of a design project.

While proponents of social design are committed to concepts of community, co-creation, and participatory democracy, commercial models of innovation continue to

²⁷ The use of the term “margins” illustrates the epistemological bias in Euro-centric design theory underpinned by modernist values, and by extension colonialist logics of exclusion, such as centre–periphery (Fiss, 2009).

²⁸ Examples of community interventions include: collaborative housing arrangements that match homeless youth with ailing elders in need of homecare, community gardens used to promote sustainable urban agriculture, and local participatory budgeting campaigns. As Pelle Ehn (2016) reminds us, we should remain skeptical of these objects which may appear as social goods, but are in fact, just commodities by another name.

dominate. Julier argues that alongside a scholarly interest in and promulgations of socially oriented design discourse, a professionalized social design practice has also emerged. Consultant social design is a response to politics of austerity that emerged immediately following the 2008 Great Recession, as national and subnational states sought to rein in spending on public services (Julier, 2017b). Design firms specializing in public sector innovation, and design emerged in response to help governmental organizations redesign public services according to austerity policies. Design methods and tools, such as co-creation and prototyping, were used to enrol citizens and public actors in processes focused on streamlining service delivery. Julier characterizes the role of the professional designer in this work as follows:

Designers' skills in problem-solving and problem-processing confront demands for financial savings, outsourcing and the pursuit of 'best-value' inherited from New Public Management, the pragmatic 'loosening' of administrative structures and the prioritization of 'user-needs' in service delivery. However, their design techniques invariably emphasize individual use and choice. This leads to the paradox that the *social* is, in fact, frequently absent from consultant social design. (Julier, 2017b, p. 814)

This work has expanded to include a variety of new specialisms, including behavioural economics (Wendel, 2013), systems design (P. H. Jones, 2014), and design-thinking (Kimbell, 2011, 2012).

The emergence of social design in many ways is reflective of the broader tensions that have persisted within the design profession since at least the advent of consultant design in the interwar period. To that end, competing orientations and perspectives — a set of tools, methods and approaches to produce and extract value on the one hand, and/or a platform for political participation and expression on the other — continue to shape, define, and constrain design practice, discourse, and research today.

Conclusion

To return to the discussion that set off this analysis: How should we make sense of the shifting and at times conflicting dimensions of design? As the preceding summary has illustrated, design and industry have converged at several points throughout the 20th century; with the consultant designer playing a lead role in mediating and facilitating these moments of economic and social transformation. And yet, these histories are also marked by disjuncture wherein competing visions emerged in response to the design-for-industry status quo; a participatory model of design based on inclusion and values of social democracy. These competing visions of design, and the tensions therein, have territorialized a variety of spaces where design flourishes; assemblages that are configured according to situated local knowledge, practices, and histories. The edges of these spaces appear blurry, bleeding into and through different design frames (e.g., the overlap between social innovation and participatory design). Thus, rendering design as a contested, conflicted, and pluralist geography with multiple points of entry and places from which it may or could be enacted.

This chapter has elucidated the tensions inherent in design history, and in so doing, presented multiple points of entry to consider the entangled relationship between design and industry, and particularly neoliberalism. While design-for-industry may retain its hegemonic status, it does so by way of its relation to competing, even counterhegemonic, forms of design that exist in response to the status quo. It is the pluralist character of design that presents an appealing, and perhaps even optimistic, platform to (re)consider alternative forms of future-making that depend upon material practice as central to political and democratic reform: design that questions established institutional power arrangements (DiSalvo, 2012), disarticulates fixed categories of otherness (Story et al., 2017), and intervenes materially in the democratic affairs of everyday life.

CHAPTER 3

Social Design in Pursuit of Social Good: A Response to Neoliberal Austerity

“Public space is not a harmonious, open and democratic playground, a commons, but rather a contested terrain—frequently dominated today by regimes of new public management, but also shaped by softer practices like human-centered design, user-driven innovation, and open sourcing.”

– Pelle Ehn (2016, p.13)

A sociologist by training, Sara Schulman turned to design out of frustration. Having devoted most of her life to improving the conditions of those who have experienced persistent poverty and inequity, she began to realize that social policy alone was not sufficient for addressing barriers that impede upward social and economic mobility. At InWithForward, the social design firm she co-founded with Jonas Piet, Schulman uses social theory and design to prototype solutions to improve people’s experience with the welfare system. This work is described as, “turning social safety nets into trampolines” (InWithForward, 2018). Schulman is aware of the enormous responsibility that comes with this type of work. In her view, designers must be aware of the moral dilemma that comes with designing in social contexts (Schulman, 2012 as cited in Ehn, Nilsson, & Topgaard, 2014). In other words, designers are free to pick and choose the projects they work on by responding to social challenges from the privileged position of an expert outsider, unencumbered by the realities that design participants will face long after a specific design project ends.

At the 2016 Canadian Service Design Conference, Schulman and Pieta introduced attendees to Kudoz — an online adult learning platform for people with

developmental disabilities, such as autism and Down syndrome. The following vignette is a synopsis of their presentation that took place in Toronto, Ontario, at the University of Toronto, Rotman School of Management on December 1, 2016.²⁹ Working with a variety of partners in the B.C. social services sector, the team developed a problem statement that asked: How do we reduce social isolation among adults living with cognitive disabilities? Their initial research showed that young adults with developmental disabilities were avid users of drop-in day programs. While these initiatives ensured that the physical needs of participants were being met in a safe and stable social environment, these programs did little to contribute to their social development. Program participants ended up doing the same repetitive activities day-in and day-out, which Piet argued is a model that does not necessarily lead to personal development or community inclusion.

To better understand the lived experience of adults living with developmental disabilities, the InWithForward team moved into Vancouver community housing. For three months, they lived alongside residents in an effort to build relationships with neighbours and better understand their experiences. Through their observations and interactions with residents, the research team learned that many residents were not socially isolated at all. In fact, throughout the day neighbours regularly received visits from family and social services providers. As Piet stated, people would “help you put your dinner in the microware but will not stay to have dinner with you” (Jonas & Schulman, 2016). These encounters were entirely transactional with little new or genuine forms of social interaction. For instance, when the project team talked to Fay, a resident living in the community housing complex, about her last enjoyable social experience, she told the team about her experience attending the 1986 Vancouver Expo. She fondly remembered the floating McDonalds, affectionately known as the “McBarge.” Stories like these, led the team to conclude that existing support programs were not sufficiently contributing to the personal growth and development of

²⁹ A full video recording of the presentation can be viewed online at: <https://youtu.be/aJfEVOz1T5w>

participants. In response, they re-oriented the project around a refined problem statement: How can we bring development to the lives of adults with developmental disabilities?

For 15 months, the InWithForward team prototyped individual elements of Kudoz, or as they call them “touchpoints”— service design jargon used to describe discrete moments in which a person interacts directly with a service, such as using an ATM to withdraw cash from their bank account — with well over 300 stakeholders, including front line staff, adults with cognitive disabilities, and government officials. Users selected from a variety of structured learning opportunities that were uploaded by volunteers. For instance, one experience invited program participants to learn more about current events. Working with a volunteer, participants were taught how to use the Internet, scan newspaper headlines, and verify the authenticity of news sources. Each experience provides important life skills centred around authentic social interactions.

Schulman and Piet recognized early on that Kudoz was not just about design; it was about building the necessary infrastructure to enable social service providers to engage in innovation. Unlike the private sector, there is a real disincentive for social service providers to allocate scarce resources to experimental projects. If the experience of Jay, one Kudoz user, is any indication, design-oriented approaches to social innovation may become the norm. When interviewed about his experience using Kudoz, Jay, an adult male living with a cognitive disability, reported that he felt like a “much better person since joining Kudoz, much more outgoing and happier (Jonas & Schulman, 2016).” Brad, Jay’s outreach counsellor, agreed. Together they have practiced going to and from different activities, which they both say are important experiences in their own right. Jay has learned how to navigate the city using public transit and maps, experiences that in the past he may have not had the confidence to do on his own.

Despite the success of Kudoz, InWithForward has faced several setbacks, including projects that have not achieved their desired goal and cuts to project funding. As Schulman stated, “it’s very hard to do systems change on the ground.” As she puts it, the typical approach to social policy involves experts developing frameworks that are then used to award funding to not-for-profits who in turn develop programs to address these challenges (Jonas & Schulman, 2016). This top-down approach is based on a social services model oriented towards programs, which Schulman feels fails to account for how people live in practice. What is needed instead is a “values-based approach” to design wherein designers engage critically with social policy and prototype, test, and translate theories of change within situated contexts (Schulman, 2010 as cited in Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2017).

Relocating Design for Social Good

The work of InWithForward is an example of social design. This emerging specialism is part of a broader design movement that focuses on non-commercial projects that aim to address economic, political, and social challenges that have arisen out of efforts to diminish the capacity of the welfare state to address social problems (Armstrong et al., 2014; Julier, 2013; Kimbell, 2012; Le Dantec, 2016; Markussen, 2017b). In Canada, for instance, the federal government stopped investing in social housing in 1993, as part of a suite of neoliberal policies that were enacted to contain government expenditures. As a consequence of this policy, today, at least 235,000 people experience homelessness in Canada every year (Gaetz et al., 2016, p. 12). Lack of access to affordable housing and homelessness more generally are examples of the types of challenges that social design attempts to address.

This call to foreground the “social” in design can be situated within a broader history in which designers have routinely questioned the ethical moorings of their practice. In 1965, for instance, Victor Papanek was calling for design practitioners to critically examine their role in capitalist reproduction. He argued:

If design is a problem-solving activity, this kowtowing to the lowest common denominator has no reason for existence. It is only when the designer abrogates his responsibilities to himself and others and operates as a pimp for the sales department that he finds this creation of warmed-over 'soul food' palatable at all. (Papanek, 1972, p. 64)

Although he did not use the phrase “social design” to describe his work, Papanek is nonetheless referenced by practitioners and scholars in the field for his commitment to drawing attention to matters of relationality and entanglement — “the specialized *extensions* of man” — that characterized his vision of an integrated design (Chen, Cheng, Hummels, & Koskinen, 2015; Margolin & Margolin, 2002). It is these attachments, connections, and dependencies that are important concerns for social designers. Cameron Tonkinwise characterizes Papanek’s vision of “social” design as: “design to improve the quality of life of those without the financial capital to buy quality products” (Tonkinwise, 2015, p. 8). The key is that these design interventions are not intended to serve a commercial purpose but rather a social aim.

Another important contribution to social design is the participatory design (PD) movement that took hold in Scandinavian countries in the early 1980s. With its emphasis on collective action through processes of participatory democracy, PD centred the political possibilities of design when carried out to fulfil social, as opposed to financial, goals. It also provided a model and series of methods to support co-creative activity within and between communities. Ezio Manzini and Francesca Rizzo contend that the agenda of participatory design and social innovation overlap and align in a fundamental way: the so-called end user, those for whom design things are intended, are recast “as active and collaborative co-designers and co-producers: social actors endowed with creativity, organizational capabilities and entrepreneurship, and therefore capable of figuring out, enhancing and managing new solutions” (Manzini & Rizzo, 2011, p. 201). Actors who are most affected by design outcomes are, according to this formulation, construed as creatively endowed innovators skilled at negotiating the situated complexities of social life.

It is not surprising, in light of current global political, economic, and social instability, such as the surge in right-wing populism and the climate crisis, that the professional design community is once again examining its role and relationship to questions of social good. Drawing upon Bruno Latour's assertion that design is the social made durable, Tonkinwise (2015) contends that "Designers bring to the social a focus on materiality, the ways in which things can promote, sustain or obstruct certain types of social life" (p.3). Harkening back to Victor Papanek, the implication here is that design can channel new social and political possibilities, or as Tonkinwise terms, "social affordances." Take for instance the now ubiquitous use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The large-scale adoption of these platforms has facilitated a range of new social affordances and corresponding cultural practices, including the rise of platform capitalism (Srnicek & De Sutter, 2017), the scoring and rating of social interactions (Feher, 2018), and economies of human capital (van Doorn, 2014). The point, is that the intentional design of digital mobile devices, platforms, and networks that make Facebook and Twitter possible simultaneously (re)constituted the relation between individuals, objects, and environments and in doing so shaped, formed, and instantiated alternative social relations. This work of designing the social brings several critical questions to the fore: How is design implicated in contemporary public problems? What should (or not) designers do to address these concerns? How is "social good" — the so-called desired outcome of social design — constituted according to, and as a consequence of, differing design specialisms?

Chapter 2, "Twentieth Century Entanglement: Design, Innovation, and Industrial Capitalism" introduced a modified version of Guy Julier's framework that mapped design specialisms onto political, economic and cultural changes that he attributes to four distinct phases of neoliberalism: Deregulation, the New Economy, Financialization, and Austerity (Julier, 2017a, p. 12). According to this model, social design emerged in the mid-2000s in response to austerity policies adopted by a variety of states, including Canada. These policies have limited the state's ability to plan, fund, and deliver high-quality public services that have historically been associated with the welfare state

(Harvey, 2011). Today, two dominant categories of social design exist: “one has been for service designers to specialize in helping local, regional, and national governments develop cheaper and more user-focused services; the other has been in a strengthening of political, activist design practices propose alternative economic and social frameworks for austerity” (Julier, 2013, p. 11). Table 3.2 provides a more refined version of this description that distinguishes between what I have classified as the pragmatic approach, in which design is used as a deliberate problem-solving process to improve the efficiency of government service delivery, and the critical approach, wherein design is recast as an emancipatory platform for (re)configuring existing socio-material arrangements in pursuit of alternative political futures and imaginaries.

	Pragmatic (Problem-Solution)	Critical (Counterhegemonic)
Purpose What the approach aims to achieve	Improving existing public services through codified tools and practices that reduce the risk associated with policy implementation and service provision	Creating a platform for critical reflection, contestation and co-articulation of plausible political futures
Outcomes The desired outcome of the design process	Efficiency, user-centredness, consensus, public value	Contestation, critique, co-articulation of public issues
Fields The various subdisciplines associated with each approach	Design-for-Policy (e.g., (Christian Bason, 2014); Service Design (e.g., Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2017); Public Sector Innovation (e.g., Windrum & Koch, 2008)	Adversarial Design (e.g., DiSalvo, 2012); Democratic Design (e.g., Binder, Brandt, Ehn, & Halse, 2015); Design Activism (e.g., Fuad-Luke, 2009)

Public The role of non-designers in design encounters	Sources of expertise in which they are implicated in the co-creation of service and policy solutions	Co-articulators of controversial public issues
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Table 3.1 Comparing and contrasting two categories of social design.

To be clear, the discursive boundaries between each of these approaches to social design are not rigid. There is slippage both in of terms of the language used and design practices employed by proponents of each. This fuzziness is in part due to the way in which social innovation, social entrepreneurship and social design are often conflated as one and the same (Rodgers et al., 2019). For the purposes of this analysis, however, I have intentionally exaggerated these boundaries in order to draw forward the political qualities, values and dimensions that undergird each. When social designers attempt to address the social, economic, and political needs of particular constituents, public groups, and individuals, they do so by making calculated value judgments about which projects are appropriate for design intervention and which are not. Therefore, the analysis taken up in this chapter is concerned with examining the political values that are instantiated when design activity is carried out in service of so-called “social good.”

Understanding these two approaches to social design is necessary for interrogating the political values they instantiate. In particular, design for policy, public sector innovation, democratic design, and political design — subdisciplines of both approaches — function in relation to one another, drawing upon similar methods and tools initially intended for commercial use, while simultaneously intervening to address the economic, social, and political challenges that are exacerbated by neoliberal policies. In addition to familiarizing the reader with approaches to social design, this chapter brings into dialogue the concept of neoliberalism (as examined in Chapter 1) and the design industry’s long-standing entanglement with capitalism (as discussed in Chapter 2). The purpose of this discussion is to open up a space from which a series of

critical questions can be posed about the taken-for-granted status of social design as complicit in and a response to the promulgation of neoliberal rationality within public sector contexts, environments, and places of work.

The Pragmatic Approach

Traditional forms of design, such as graphic design, have long been used by states to, among other things, promote desirable healthy behaviour (Kotnowski et al., 2016), galvanize public support for particular public policy issues (Weiss, 1993), and create desirable brand images of neighbourhoods and places (Cleave & Arku, 2015). More recently, however, newer design specialisms have been used in public service and democratic contexts to prototype public policy (Blomkamp, 2018; Kimbell & Bailey, 2017b), co-design a range of public services (Alves, 2013; Donetto et al., 2015), and increase public servants' aptitude for innovation (Bason, 2017; Torfing, 2016). The introduction of these new design specialisms comes in response to a perceived lack of innovation from within the public sector (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). Put simply, the implication is that governments are ill equipped to address systematic economic, political, environmental, and social challenges. Jacob Torfing argues, this is in part because "social and economic relations can no longer be assumed to be congruent with the bureaucratic forms of command and control associated with the formal institutions of government" (Torfing, 2016, p. 6). Furthermore, he contends that new models of governance must be envisioned that incorporate "formal and informal governance mechanisms" (ibid). These may include, for instance, best practices, procedures, toolkits, and measurement frameworks that modify, improve, and enhance public policy and service delivery. The recent adaption of and focus on socially oriented design practices within public sector environments are emblematic of the types of governing techniques advocated by Torfing, as they are intended to promote innovation practices within localized domains of expertise through formal and informal networks of collaboration.

The work of promoting design has been aided by a growing body of grey literature emanating from think tanks (e.g., NESTA) and from within governments (e.g., The Alberta CoLab, The Canadian Digital Service, and U.K.), as well as from a growing list of private sector consulting firms that specialize in public sector innovation and design (e.g., Doblin, a design and innovation company owned by Deloitte who has a specialized public service practice). An example of this discourse is found within a recent report published by U.K.-based think tank Design Council. The report titled, *Design for Public Good*, proposes a three-stage “Public Sector Design Ladder” to support public servants in their efforts to help “diagnose” the barriers that may be leading to a lack of adoption of design thinking. One of the recommendations offered up in the report is to “build design thinking into government and public policy practice” (p.76). It goes on to conclude, “This should not be a sudden or expensively engineered change but start small, with short designer-led workshops or training sessions showing teams how to apply design thinking to existing challenges.” The notion of “embedding” design is a common theme found across the public sector innovation and design literature as it is said to result in the kind of “culture change” required to transform public servants into “change agents (not solely analysts) responsible for enabling and processing political intentions” (Christiansen, 2016, p. 58). Blomkamp concludes, “embedding design into government is not just about upskilling policy workers on designerly methods, but also about bringing other disciplinary knowledge into the design process and will likely require cultural and structural change to enable different approaches to be applied” (Blomkamp, 2018, p. 738). These alternative disciplinary sources of knowledge emerge principally from, and draw upon, practices found within the private sector and include, for instance, corporate strategy (Martin, 2009), information technology management (Brooks, 2010), and product development (Brown & Katz, 2011).

The emphasis placed on “embedding” designerly ways of working is not, however, focused exclusively on ensuring public servants are competent in the use of design tools and methods. An additional aim is to foster an “entrepreneurial disposition”

in which public servants gain an aptitude for risk taking (A. F. Clark, 2016), spotting opportunities to “offer more public choices and benefits” (Kim, 2010, p. 782), and eliminating inefficiencies. Leadbeater and Goss argue that public sector innovation, which they term “civic entrepreneurship,” entails more than simply using private sector practice or downsizing state activities and functions. “Civic entrepreneurship is about creating a public consensus about how to reconfigure resources, often public and private, to deliver better social outcomes, higher social value and more social capital” (Leadbeater & Goss, 1999, p. 68). The notion of producing and measuring social value is a defining characteristic of public sector innovation. This is largely because public institutions must justify why scarce public resources should be invested in a specific innovation activity at the expense of another notable public project. Thus, these organizations rely on hard data to quantify the impact of the investment and reassure stakeholders. This poses a challenge as Geoff Mulgan argues, in which “social value” is perceived as something that is objective and can be measured according to objective measures. To remedy this situation, he contends that social value should be viewed as:

... arising from the interplay of [...] *effective* demand and *effective* supply. Effective demand means that someone is willing to pay for a service or an outcome. That “someone” may be a public agency, a foundation, or individual citizens. Effective supply means that the service or outcome works, is affordable, and is implementable (Geoff Mulgan, 2010, p. 42).

Apart from the obvious insistence that value can only be construed through a market logic, the framing offered by Mulgan views public institutions as shareholders for whom a return on investment must be a requisite component of public sector innovation funding arrangements.

States of Change — an international collective of public sector innovators, lead by social innovation think tank, NESTA — is a recent case example of how public sector innovation as entrepreneurship and design have become entangled in pursuit of “social good.” The organization states that its mission is to, “enhance the quality, coherence and reach of public innovation learning, and to ultimately improve lives for citizens

across the world” (States of Change, 2019). The Government of Canada is a sponsor of the program through the Impact and Innovation Unit in the Privy Council’s Office. Starting in 2018, 18 public servants from across government who identified as “government entrepreneurs”³⁰ were selected to take part in a 12-month training program administered by Nesta and local design partners “to challenge existing ways of working on persistent policy and structural challenges” (Oyon, 2018). By introducing participants to various socially oriented design techniques, government entrepreneurs intended to “build the capability and culture of governments to practically deal with the complex problems they face, and to strengthen the community of practice around public innovation” (States of Change, 2019). States of Change is emblematic of the types of innovation programs governments around the world are funding in order to promote design as a legitimate public administration activity. Allocating scarce resources to initiatives such as this, particularly in this period of prolonged austerity, signals that the Government of Canada views design and innovation as a priority.

Prototyping and co-creating public policy

Public sector innovation practices are increasingly being used to not only improve public services, but for public policy development as well. Drawing from methods of co-design and prototyping, policy design is characterized as an open, collaborative, and iterative approach that stands in contrast to traditional approaches to policy development (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016). Design thinking “holds the promise of bridging the common gap in public administration between the goals of policymaking and the experiences of citizens as they interact with government services” (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016, p. 2).³¹

³⁰ The Government of Canada Entrepreneurs (GCEs) program falls under the direction of the Deputy Ministers Task Force on Public Sector Innovation. In the mandate letter issued to the task force, Chief of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, instructed the group to recruit and employ full-time policy entrepreneurs (Wernick, 2017).

³¹ Designing thinking is a concept that was developed by Herbert Simon in *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1969). Simon argues that the thinking process used to create physical artifacts could similarly be applied to other domains and spheres of life, such as social planning. It is the experimental nature of design to create an artifact, test its usefulness, and refine based on usage, that Simon finds most appealing. This is a positivist interpretation of design that views the process as rational, repeatable, and thus a reliable

As Clarke and Crafts (2019) contend, the introduction of such techniques marks a departure from the “analytical-logical mindset” in which policy makers attempt to approach sociopolitical issues as neatly bounded phenomena that can be dealt with “rationally, logically, and through deductive reasoning” (p. 9). Instead, design-thinking offers an “interpretative-intuitive” mindset in which system-thinking is used to analyze policy issues from an inter- and multi-disciplinary perspective. For instance, this might result in the creation of a systems map that identifies the relationships between different actors involved in the delivery of social services. Mapping relationships is useful for identifying the “root causes of problems and their underlying interdependencies” (Bason, 2014, p. 5). To be clear, though, the ultimate aim of this design work is to arrive at a mutually agreeable definition of public problems and to gain consensus on which problems are best suited for design intervention.

Co-design is employed to support this design-for-policy activity by inviting individuals who are directly affected by public problems to co-create solutions alongside public servants. In this “co-creative paradigm,” end-users — those who will eventually use a product or service — are actively involved in the process of coming up with ideas that will address their needs (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). In other words, end users (non-designers) participate in generating solutions to complex design problems that would have traditionally been the sole responsibility of the expert. In the co-design model, those who eventually benefit from the design process (end users) are regarded as “expert[s] of his/her own situation” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). They are encouraged to be active in the knowledge development phase that characteristically occurs at the beginning of a design project. Within the context of public policy

approach to bounding problems and proposing solutions. However, it is at odds with Nigel Cross’ interpretation of design thinking, as outlined in *Designerly Ways of Knowing* (2001). For Cross, design is viewed as a wholly constructivist endeavour, in which designers possess unique tacit knowledge about the world. Thus, design cannot be treated as a rational process that is easily replicated by non-experts. Instead it is a highly specialized skill and way of being in the world that must be developed and nurtured over time. In the context of policy making and public sector innovation, design thinking, as I contend, oscillates between these competing visions, but endeavours to assist public servants in defining problems and devising solutions.

development, this results in a “shift in the locus of responsibility and control so that ‘clients’ or users of services become active partners in designing, shaping and resourcing services, rather than being passive recipients” (Burkett, 2017, p. 7). This co-creative process both recognizes the expertise of “end users” and implicates them in the process of developing solutions to problems in which they are inextricably entangled. This movement away from imagining end users as passive consumers of services to seeing them as productive, active agents is characterized as more “democratic,” “open,” “empowering,” and “fun” (e.g., Lerner, 2014). In theory, the co-creation approach to public policy development is intended to challenge traditional consultation processes that are concerned with simply asking citizens their opinion on a range of pre-selected policy options, without necessarily involving them in the process of generating the initial list of options (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016). A design approach to policy making also differs from techniques associated with deliberative democracy (e.g., Goodin, 2012) in that emphasis is placed on co-generative activity, such as creating physical mock ups, roleplaying, or drawing, as opposed to dialogic encounters between rational stakeholders concerned with reaching consensus on particular issues.

Prototyping is another technique employed in service of policy design to pre-figure and test policy options in advance of implementation. This practice can be carried out in a structured co-creative process, or independently by an expert practitioner. In both cases, prototypes serve as provisional objects that present possibility without giving into finality, meaning they possess a visual form, such as a sketch of a desirable user interface, without over determining how such a solution will be enacted in situ (Jiménez, 2014). In policymaking, prototypes are used to give material form to otherwise abstract dictates, helping public servants better assess how the policy will be interpreted and enacted in local contexts. Lucy Kimbell and Jocelyn Bailey (2017) argue that prototyping helps to close the gap “between policy intention,” desired outcomes, and “deliver” how and to what degree policy is materialized in local and situated contexts (p.222). For instance, Vancouver-based design consultancy OXD, worked with the British Columbia Transit Authority, TransLink, to prototype policy changes to the

existing public transit fare structure (Kahin, 2018). The proposed policies called for an increase in the number fare zones. In addition to interviewing TransLink customers, the project team codesigned a series of artifacts that were intended to simulate how the policy would be implemented in localized contexts, including posters, maps depicting the proposed fare zones, and station signage. Transit riders were asked to interact with the artifacts and describe how this new fare structure might affect their transit experience. The project team analyzed feedback from these sessions and proposed recommendations to TransLink that would improve the fare policy and rider experience. In essence, the project team was simulating how the policy would be implemented across the transit system through physical prototypes in order to better understand how transit riders (end users) might be affected.

The Critical Approach

The second category of social design is decidedly more political in character and is best expressed through “democratic design” (Pelle Ehn et al., 2014; Hillgren, 2013; Manzini, 2015), “political design” (DiSalvo, 2012; Fry, 2011; McCarthy & Wright, 2015) and “design activism” (Fuad-Luke, 2009; Julier, 2013; Markussen, 2013; Thorpe, 2012). This approach to social design is focused on contestation, disruption, and critique that rejects the pragmatic and functionalist sensibilities that have captured contemporary design practice (DiSalvo, 2012; Julier, 2013). Instead, design is envisioned as a platform for “prefiguring” political imaginaries (DiSalvo, 2016; Fry, 2011), publics (Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013; Le Dantec, 2016), and ontologies (Willis, 2006), with an aim to reconstitute the design-for-industry status quo along a trajectory of social good and political critique.

The critical approach to social design views the design process as a series of political interventions or “democratic experiments” in which actors (individuals) gather and debate controversial issues, such as climate change, that in turn coalesce as “publics,” which are constituted by various agendas, interpretations, and perspectives of controversial public problems (Binder et al., 2015; Karasti, 2014). The formation of

publics results in a contestational space in which plausible futures can be imagined, including “other ways of managing our economic lives and relationships among state, market, citizens, and consumer” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 9). The concept of social good, when viewed through the critical approach to social design, is defined by its ability to critically engage with the taken-for-grantedness of neatly bounded (i.e. rationally scoped) public problems, and to render them as emergent and relational.

Counterhegemonic practices of cultural production

Alternative forms of media production have long been associated with calls for a more just, equitable, and sustainable world, including “Culture jamming” (Cammaerts, 2007) and “hacktivism” (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). These counterhegemonic practices seek to supplant existing economic, political, and social arrangements in order to circulate alternative discourses and ways of living and being in the world (Mouffe, 2014). As Matt Ratto (2014) argues, material practice, in the form of what he terms “critical making,” “parse[s] the world in ways language alone cannot, and disseminate the results of these explorations through embodied, material forms” (p. 227). For Ratto, critical making is not an exercise in solving instrumental problems but is viewed instead as an extension of critical thinking, wherein the body, the mind, and materials engage in a sociotechnical interplay “to improve the quality of our conceptualizations of our world” (p. 227).

Design has also been used for counterhegemonic purposes as evidenced in the rise of the Italian radical design movement in the 1960s (Didero, 2017). Design firm Superstudio, for instance, experimented with kitsch, “which emerged as a reaction to narrow-minded middle-class mores; in pursuing what had traditionally been regarded as ugliness, the Radicals suddenly perceived the exact contrary” (p.71). They reworked extant cultural objects and forms in order to “banish any sense of status anxiety” (Elfline, 2016, p.70). A 1971 essay written by Superstudio articulates these efforts as an attempt to destroy any form of status attributed to objects by “those in power,” in order to live “with objects” and “not for them” (Lang et al., 2003, p. 120). Through their design work, Superstudio, along with other advocates of the radical design movement, signaled

a refusal to participate in capitalist reproduction, instead choosing to produce objects, images, and media that served alternative, counterhegemonic purposes that called into question taken-for-granted assumptions about labour, capital, and taste.

More recently, critical design has informed fields such as discursive design (Tharp & Tharp, 2018) and speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013). In each of these cases, design is used for activist and political purposes wherein “the design of objects – and the scenarios that they exist in can be employed to create a descriptive comprehension of complex issues” (Malpass, 2017, p. 42). Critical approaches to social design attempt to build on this work by subjecting taken-for-granted public problems to critical inquiry and contestation, thereby rendering these problems as pluralistic and emergent encounters with fuzzy edges that are co-constituted by publics with agonistic agendas.

Democratic design: Public issues and design things

Democratic design is an example of the critical approach to social design. This approach imagines the uses and meanings of designed objects as constantly being re-negotiated and adapted in situ to accommodate the specific needs of end users, referred to as design-in-use or design-after-design (Pelle Ehn, 2008). It follows then, that the boundaries of an artifact are not circumscribed by its visual appearance, but “are shaped by the practices of its use” (Bjørn & Østerlund, 2014, p. 6). Thus, what appear as objects, physical artifacts that one can pick up and touch, “are constantly changing as the artifact emerges as part of different sociomaterial practices” (p.36). Thus the object of design is not merely physical artifacts that exist in the world, but is “socio-material public assemblies evolving over time” (Pelle Ehn, 2016, p. 12). These assemblies are what Binder et al., (2015), borrowing from Hieddeger, describes as “design things” or “events in the life of a community” (p. 52).

Democratic design, therefore, is concerned with the socio-materiality of design encounters and the resultant relations between actors that engage in such activity.

Building and sustaining long term relationships with partners results in a mutual appreciation for prototyping as a platform for experimentation (Pelle Ehn, 2008) to “raise questions, controversies and dilemmas” (Hillgren, 2013, p. 76). These encounters, or “democratic design experiments” (Binder et al., 2015), are premised on three criteria: collaborative design processes where people with complementary skills can work together in a mutually respectful environment; long term relationships based on trust; prototyping as early as possible and in situated contexts to identify challenges that would otherwise be difficult to anticipate in a studio setting (Pelle Ehn et al., 2014, p. 19). The work of the designer, as Pelle Ehn (2008) contends, becomes a matter of “identifying, designing and supporting social, technical and spatial infrastructures that are configurable and potentially supportive of future design-games³² in everyday use” (p. 96).

As an example of democratic design in practice, Medea, a transdisciplinary “Living Lab” located at Malmö University, in Sweden, engages in various “democratic design experiments.” One specific project, Blue Bus, began by reaching out to a variety of actors working in cultural production to establish a network of interested research partners. As part of these efforts, lab researchers were introduced to RGRA, a youth hip-hop collective comprised of first- and second-generation immigrants living in the suburbs of Malmö. Through a series of initial conversations and workshops, the collective identified that RGRA members were struggling to find suitable distribution channels for their music, an issue exacerbated by their perceived sense of being outsiders in Swedish society. The collective opted for a series of design experiments that used public buses as a platform to distribute RGRA’s music through Bluetooth.

Drawing from the network of partners established early on in the project, Lab researchers found a media and technology company, Do-Fi, that agreed to provide the Bluetooth software needed to transmit files between mobile devices. They also

³² “Design game” is a phrase that borrows from Wittgenstein’s concept of language-games” (Telier, 2011).

contacted Skånetrafikenout and Veolia, two local transportation companies that manage bus routes in Malmö, to get permission to carry out the experiments on public transit. They travelled on buses and used the software to give commuters access to RGRA's music through the local Bluetooth network.

The project laid the groundwork for project partners to imagine future opportunities: RGRA gained access to new publics and platforms for disseminating their work, Skånetrafikenout and Veolia saw the potential to develop a new service for customers, Do-Fi gained valuable feedback and insights on their product, and Lab researchers identified possible new research areas and themes. From a democratic design perspective, this case study is a concrete example of “infrastructuring design things” inasmuch as it demonstrates how an open-ended design inquiry led to the formation of a Thing: the project itself (establishing partnerships, securing funding, having conversations, making proposals, workshops, etc.) comprised of multiple publics, including RGRA, The Stage, Do-Fi, Skånetrafikenout, Veolia, commuters, all with competing or agonistic points of view, such as: How to improve cultural production? How to overcome marginalization? How to distribute our music? How to develop new mobility services? How to make commutes more enjoyable?

Adversarial design: Agonism and the pursuit of contestation

Adversarial design goes a step further than creating and aims to expose and examine the political qualities and values of designed objects — expressing or enabling the political perspective of “agonism” (DiSalvo, 2012, p.11). It borrows from Chantal Mouffe's (1999) notion of “agonistic pluralism” that argues a healthy democracy is founded upon disagreement and confrontation, contestation and dissensus. It stands in opposition to deliberative democracy, which calls for rational debate and reasoned agreement; “democracy is not simply order and rationality displayed in voting, structured decision making, and legislating, but that it also and necessarily is contentious affect and expression” (DiSalvo, 2012, p.4). This political perspective accepts that disagreement and confrontation is forever ongoing. Mouffe (2000) calls this the

“paradox of democracy.” In order for democracy to succeed it must create spaces of confrontation. Thus, adversarial design, like democratic design, attempts to open up these spaces by way of designerly interventions and enactments.

In expanding Chantal Mouffe’s (1993) definition of “adversary,” DiSalvo reconsiders the agonistic relations between people and designed objects. As he argues, “by revealing the conditions of political issues and relations, adversarial design can identify new terms and themes for contestation and new trajectories for action” (p. 13). DiSalvo distinguishes between “design for politics,” which is concerned with designing artifacts and processes that facilitate existing structures of governance (e.g., redesigning voting ballots), and “political design,” which seeks to expose the agonistic qualities and dimensions of particular designed objects. He offers Laura Kurgan’s project, *Million Dollar Blocks* (2006), as an example of the role political design can play in counterhegemonic critique. Using spatial data software, Kurgan and her team at Spatial Information Design Lab at Columbia University,³³ mapped publicly accessible crime data in order to identify previously overlooked patterns and relations. Rather than identifying where crimes were taking place, the project focused on mapping which neighbourhoods the prison population came from. These mapping activities revealed that “in many places the concentration [of incarcerated persons] is so dense that states are spending in excess of a million dollars a year to incarcerate the residents of single city blocks” (Kurgan, 2006). This project is an example of political design because its aim was to circumvent standard approaches to data modeling in order to reveal structural and hegemonic forces at play in urban communities. Adversarial design, as envisioned by DiSalvo and evidenced in the *Million Dollar Blocks* project, renders alternative narratives “sensible”³⁴ in order to call into question the taken-for-grantedness

³³ The lab changed its name in 2014 to the Center for Spatial Research at Columbia University.

³⁴ The term “sensible” is used here in reference to (Rancière, 2006) political aesthetics, “what presents itself to sense experience” (p.13). This refers not just to the way things appear to the eye (appearances), but the manner in which things become knowable to the senses.

of design objects, such as criminal justice datasets, by revealing, questioning, and challenging existing orders and the inscribed meanings of social institutions.

Social Good in Context

There is a stark conceptual contrast between the two approaches to social design examined in the preceding sections. The pragmatic (problem-solution) approach is concerned with drawing upon the design profession's associations with private sector innovation in order to address near-term problems, whereas the critical (counterhegemonic) approach is more closely aligned with cultural and political critique. Each approach attempts to address the calls of neoliberal rationality — be faster, more entrepreneurial and self-sufficient — by working in what is perceived as the public interest, such as creating more efficient public services to save citizens time or prototyping low- or no-carbon policy options to stave off the effects of climate change. These efforts to instantiate “social good” by way of designerly interventions and activate, knowingly or unknowingly, political values that inhere in the designed solutions that are proposed in response to interpretations of what constitutes social good in the first place.

Before comparing and contrasting how social good is interpreted according to each approach to social design, let us first unpack why it is important to differentiate between these interpretations. If social good is the desired outcome of social design, then the image of good around which design activity is mobilized constitutes a future political imaginary — the range of political possibility that is afforded through design intervention — as it is this imaginary that serves as the end point of design activity. It is the so-called desired outcome. The degree to which this image is prefigured, in other words, if design is used to simply remedy situations according to existing political, economic, and social arrangements or is used to expand one's political aperture, determines the field of possibilities that can be drawn upon to arrive at novel or “innovative” solutions. If, for instance, one's imaginary remains committed to the existing political and economic hegemony — neoliberal rationality — then the range of design

solutions that will be proposed through design activity will reflect back the political and economic values design solutions are intended to address. This is based on the assertion made by proponents of social design, that social good is marked by the capacity to address undesirable “social problems,” such as income inequality, through intentional acts of creativity and innovation that exists in response to market and governmental failures to deliver social value (Manzini, 2015, p. 64).

Social good can thus be construed in one of two ways: Firstly, social good can be viewed as arriving at solutions to problems that exist in the here and now and according to the economic, political, cultural, and social resources that are currently on offer. This first formulation is consistent with Ezio Manzini’s articulation of social innovation vis-à-vis social design as dealing “very pragmatically” with situations as they are. While calling for “new social and economic formations” to address contemporary issues, he does so by asking who will pay for this work? He concludes that “social design is intrinsically a complementary activity: a design that, to exist, asks for someone else who can and will generously pay for it” (Manzini, 2015, p. 65). The implication here is that design remains wedded to economic situations as they are and to a large extent remains confined by an imaginary that interprets design through the lens of the consultant or at least that social innovation requires the assistance of professional designers, despite how distributed their activity may be. Secondly, social good can be viewed as critical distance that is afforded through designerly actions. While these efforts may be rooted in the present, the solutions that are sought are utopian-esque in that the answers to contemporary challenges exist in an as-yet-to-be realized future. The critique that is often lobbed at this vision of social good is that it is idealistic and risks “over exaggerating the expectations of what can be achieved” (Markussen, 2017a, p. 161). However, it is this “space of possibility” that is a necessary input for counterhegemonic critique.

To provide further clarity, let us consider how these interpretations manifest within the work of the critical and pragmatic approaches to social design. Both of which offer political opportunities and challenges that warrant further examination.

Social good as critical distance

The critical approach to social design endeavours to render the public sphere as a site of contestation. To be clear, though, this is not a Habermassian view in which the public sphere is a place for rational debate and consensus building. Instead, design opens up public spaces to allow for a plurality of agendas, perspectives and discourses in order to critically question the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life, and to consider that which might otherwise be possible (Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013; DiSalvo, 2010; Fry, 2011; Julier, 2013). In practice these “design things” fuse social events, such as potlucks and other social gatherings, with generative activities such as co-design (Pelle Ehn, 2008; Telier, 2011). The purpose of these events is to open up neatly bounded public problems, viewed as “common sense,” to critique and debate, thereby rendering them as contestational “issues” or political objects to be reconfigured (Le Dantec, 2016). This is an important feature of the counterhegemonic approach in that its proponents avoid reducing situations and issues to problems. Framing controversial public issues as “problems” applies a normative frame in the sense that these issues are treated as bad, defective, and in need of immediate remediation, instead of emergent, contestational, and situated. What might appear as a “problem” in one situated context could vary in another. And so, to render controversial issues as normatively bad is to bracket off the competing opinions and perspectives — in other words differences — that are a necessary part of political life. At the same time, those who are skilled at finding solutions, in other words, designers and the work they perform, must, according to this binary, be inherently “good” because their work is focused on solving problems (which are construed as normatively “bad”). Von Busch and Palmås (2016) characterized this valorization of “good design” as follows:

Designers are often spoken of as “agents of change,” under the proposition that design changes things, it makes things better, and if it somehow does not live up to our expectations, we usually say that it is bad design. [...] From the perspective of designers, good design is never corrupt, it has a sense of function, honesty and transparency that politics can never have. (p.18)

This notion of political neutrality, or the perception that design is inherently good, is situated in and emerges from the broader history of design in which the profession has maintained a privileged position at the interface of consumption and production (Sparke, 2013). Since at least the interwar period in the United States, the design profession has carefully carved out a role for the “heroic designer,” an individual who is endowed with the requisite skills to give shape to the “good life”— or to make 20th-century modern life as accessible to the greatest number of people through products and services that were shaped by the hand of the designer. While social design has emerged in response to the perceived failings of the design-for-industry hegemony, namely the industry’s failure to appropriately attend to broader social concerns, it nonetheless gains its legitimacy and energy from underlying assumptions about its inherent goodness: to solve problems, correct wrongs, and smooth out rough edges.

Design, however, is not the only discipline and practice implicated in social change. DiSalvo (2015) argues that design is just one practice among many needed to bring about what might be defined as “social good.” He describes this as follows:

The problem is that design itself, as it is currently practiced and studied, is simply too limited to be of value to the notion of transition. Even when design is future oriented (and it usually is), the future is limited and the role of design in that future is as a prop. This is, in and of itself, not a problem. Props are important. They are needed for narrative and for action. But what is being called for here is more than props. What is being called for here is engagement and organizing. (p. 53)

While design activity may contribute to these efforts, it is not a replacement for the contentious affect and disagreement that Mouffe (1999) argues is characteristic of the

meaningful political participation. Social change through design requires, “informed propositions for how and what we might design differently, so as to achieve the desired conditions of a given prefigurative politics” (DiSalvo, 2016, p.33). This means, as DiSalvo contends, using design for purposes other than marketing and promotion, but instead to “design in the service of producing, or contributing to the production of, the conditions, relations, or values desired” (pp. 31–32). Thus, when design is mobilized for political action, it lends a degree of material heft to these counterhegemonic efforts by instantiating a plurality of artifacts in support of competing visions of social good. These physical markers of plausible political futures “make political speculation easier to experience, to experiment with, and ultimately to enact” (p. 34) because they provide concrete evidence of what might otherwise be. Social good is realized by first giving form to these artifacts, and secondly, using them as a means to cede the physical and conceptual ground from which one might realize the political and social possibilities these objects signify.

Social good as public value

In contrast, the pragmatic approach to social design is chiefly concerned with defining problems and proposing solutions. The sense of immediacy that flows from this work may be a by-product of the environment in which it is carried out. Governments face unrelenting pressure to show results and take immediate action to address the pressing challenges that are before us — climate change being chief among them. In the face of such appeals, public servants desire a reliable root to innovation. Thus, “design is positioned as a problem-solving faculty, coming to the aid of the public sector at a time of crisis” (Bailey & Story, 2018, p. 246). More specifically, design assists in locating, extracting, and realizing value (Julier, 2017a). This may, for instance, come in the form of rooting out inefficiencies that impede citizens from consuming public services in a timely manner. In solving such problems, the policy-expert-cum-designer are said to be acting in good faith and protecting the public interest by designing away inefficiency, which results in the creation of public value — the perception that a problem has been adequately resolved.

The term value, as used here, is indexed according to an economic register, or is at least framed according to a market logic in which shareholders desire a return on their investment. This is best articulated through Horner and Hazels (2008) assessment of public value in which they argue:

Public value is a correlate of private value, which is measured by shareholder return. Think of citizens as shareholders in how their tax is spent. The value may be created through economic prosperity, social cohesion or cultural development. (p.5)

This definition treats citizens as the beneficiary of value as it is their investment, in the form of taxes, that is put to work delivering and managing public goods. Moore (1995) characterizes the role of public managers in this work as akin to the managerial duties one might find in the private sector, which entails “defining publicly valuable enterprises as well as producing that value” (p.55). The emphasis placed on value creation and extraction found within the pragmatic approach to social design is consistent with entrepreneurial aims of New Public Management (NPM), a set of neoliberal practices that were introduced to the public service in the mid-1980s and persisted throughout the 1990s (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed analysis of NPM). NPM calls for active management of public resources, cost containment wherever possible, greater accountability through specific performance measures, increased competition to drive down costs, and the adoption of private sector models for managing personnel (Hood, 1991b, pp. 4–5). Public sector innovation functions in similar ways, but draws upon rhetoric of empowerment (K. Duggan et al., 2017), democratization (Bruce, 2018), and transparency (Mager, 2016). For example, a report published by the British Broadcaster, BBC, titled “Public Value in Practice Restoring the Ethos of Public Service” examines the role of public sector managers in fulfilling the goal of public value creation. In summarizing the work of Moore (1995), the report concludes that public service in the U.K. has largely viewed its role as administrators, who follow rules and carry out orders, as opposed to entrepreneurs concerned with value maximization. As a consequence,

public servants lack the entrepreneurial instincts to go above and beyond their regular duties to deliver public services in a manner, format, and style that adequately addresses the needs of citizen-consumers.

This work, though, often obscures what is really occurring, namely the promotion of particular political values and agendas that public servants are not able to contend with as part of their regular work. By participating in the design of services and policies that correspond to the aims of NPM and by extension neoliberalism, including “doing more with less” and “enabling self-service,” public servants are, knowingly or unknowingly giving these values a material and durable form. For instance, designing seamless, intuitive, and digital services that facilitate self-service has the dual effect of reducing the costs associated with service delivery, as less paid labour is required. At the same time, service delivery is outsourced to citizens who in turn are responsabilized to oversee and administer these services. This shift in responsibility from the state to the individual is marketed as a *more* customer-friendly experience, which Alford (2009) describes as: “making it easier for the customer to co-produce, both by reducing the ambiguity or complexity of the task and by enhancing the customer’s capacity to perform it” (p. 48). The value, or perceived return on citizen-shareholder investment, of these experiences is evaluated according best practice customer experience frameworks imported from the private sector, such as “net performer score” (Laitinen, 2018). These best practices legitimize what constitutes “good service” insofar as anything that cannot be measured is not counted towards the notion of public value, and thus is deemed unworthy of public investment.

Conclusion

As the preceding analysis illustrates, over the last decade, there has been a concerted effort to (re)direct design on a path towards “social good.” How this term is defined depends on one’s orientation to social design. The pragmatic approach concerns itself with defining problems and designing solutions, the resulting value is deemed social good. This work is carried out often without considering the broader sociopolitical landscape in which such problems are

defined, and actions are taken. On the other hand, the critical approach attempts to draw forward the political values that undergird so-called public problems. But more importantly, this work is concerned with envisioning plausible political and social futures — alternative design contexts — and creating artifacts that signify these desired futures.-The next section of this thesis will mobilize the ideas explored here to examine social design in context of the Canadian public service. This analysis reveals an alternative design specialism that is closely linked to the efforts and values of the pragmatic approach to social design, and is evidenced through empirical research of design activity carried out in public sector institutions across Canada.

Section 2

Public Sector Innovation and Design in Context

CHAPTER 4

Methodology and Results

This chapter marks the start of the second section of my thesis. It builds and contributes to the notion that design and neoliberalism are linked in two fundamental ways. Firstly, the forthcoming analysis evidences the adaptive nature of the design profession to bend and contort to the demands of the marketplace by inventing new specialisms, such as citizen-centred design, and its ability to locate the profession within contexts in which the designer has no expertise. Secondly, the case studies examined in this section illustrate how the importation of design approaches and knowledge to public sector contexts is made possible by the perceived sense that designers are “good” at solving problems. This is consistent with the conclusions drawn in Chapter 3 that the pragmatic approach to social design is positioned as “social good” and that this work is construed as “good” because it is concerned with solving problems (which are bad) in pursuit of solutions (which are good).

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data related to my study, along with the results of this analysis. The research analysis is situated within a constructivist paradigm inasmuch as participants are seen as experts of their own world. Constructivism acknowledges that meaning and reality are socially constructed and subject to reinterpretation over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Unlike positivism, which argues there is a single objective truth, constructivism takes the position that there are multiple legitimate ways of viewing a situation, topic, or event that arises in a situated context (Guba, 1990). The role of the researcher is to reconstruct these interpretations and identify patterns across the accounts given.

Data was collected throughout the summer and fall of 2017. In total, 23 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with public servants and design consultants who specialize in public sector innovation. I also analyzed project and policy documents related to the design projects cited by interview participants. The results described in

the concluding section illustrate the common ideas present within each cluster of coded data, or what I refer to as summative statements. These statements, which represent common ideas found within the data, are grouped thematically, which are examined in more detail in Chapter 5. In addition, Chapter 6 presents two in-depth case studies that illustrate how the four themes manifest in situated contexts and are linked to the concept of “citizen-centredness”: a term used within the public service to describe innovation activities aimed at solving citizen problems in pursuit of public good. The ideas examined in these chapters demonstrate how design and neoliberalism are enmeshed in discourses and practices of innovation that function to discipline the conduct of public servants to obscure the politics of austerity.

Recruitment

An initial list of 490 public servants from across Canada was compiled by searching for the word “design” in the job titles of publicly available governmental phone directories. The provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, along with the territories of Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut were excluded from this initial list because these locales did not have a public-facing employee directory at the time of recruitment, or the publicly available job descriptions that were available did not contain the word design. The phone directories of local (e.g., municipal governments) and regional (e.g., county level) governmental organizations were not assessed because of the number that exist in Canada. Lastly, because I am an Anglophone, the study was limited to English, and so the Government of Quebec was excluded from the sample.

The initial list of 490 participants was culled further to exclude individuals whose job titles related to more traditional forms of design, including “engineering design,” “mechanical design,” “program design,” “industrial design,” “interior design,” and “graphic design,” and “web design,” as these professions are not representative of the pragmatic approach to social design that this study is concerned with. The remaining list totaled 64, representing a range of fields, including “strategic design,” “service design,”

“design thinking,” “user experience design,” and “systemic design.”

For ease of recruitment, I started by contacting participants with whom I have a professional relationship. Following each interview, participants were asked to suggest colleagues who may also be interested in taking part in the study. This snowball sampling method was used to limit researcher bias by expanding the recruitment pool beyond the initial list into networks of which I was unaware. This process resulted in five additional names being added to the recruitment list. In total, 35 participants were contacted to take part in interviews, which represents 50% of the total sample. In the end, 23 respondents agreed to take part in an interview, representing the Government of Canada, Government of British Columbia, Government of Alberta, City of Calgary, and Government of Ontario. In addition, representatives from two non-profit and one for-profit organizations specializing in public sector design were invited to take part in an interview because of their experiences working on public sector design projects. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to involve participants from the Government of Nova Scotia and Manitoba. Participants were asked to complete an informed consent form and given a \$5 Tim Horton's gift card for taking part (see Appendix 3). Not all participants accepted the honorarium.

Each research participant has been assigned a key informant identification number to protect their identity. For ease of reading, pseudonyms will be used in place of participants' real names. Special care has been taken to select pseudonyms that are consistent with the ethnic identity of each participant's name. Several participants have changed jobs, or their job title has changed since interviews were conducted. Additionally, there has been a change in government in Ontario and British Columbia since this research was conducted. As a result, the names of ministries and departments that appear in the forthcoming analysis may not be the same as those listed on public-facing government websites. Table 4.1 lists participants in the order they were interviewed and includes details relevant to their job, ministry, and department at the time interviews were conducted.

ID	Pseudonym	Government	Province	Job Title
KC-1	Bryan	Government of British Columbia	British Columbia	Director, Business Transformation & Training
HD-2	Kaima	Government of Ontario	Ontario	Manager Planning & Design
NH-3	Fana	Government of Ontario	Ontario	Manager Public Engagement and Education
IG-4	Selene	Government of British Columbia	British Columbia	Director, Strategic Design and Transformation
JV-5	Tim	City of Calgary	Alberta	Innovation Lead
JK-6	Randy	–	Ontario	Director Systems Innovation Lab
ES-7	Charity	Government of Ontario	Ontario	Team Lead
CM-8	Celeste	Government of Ontario	Ontario	Policy Advisor
RD-9	Yasmin	Government of Alberta	Alberta	Systemic Designer
GR-10	Mark	Government of Ontario	Ontario	Director Digital Strategy and Communications
SS-11	Adam	–	Ontario	Senior Program Manager, Transportation and Energy
TM-12	Chris	–	Ontario	Associate, Social Scientist
HL-13	Sarah	–	Ontario	Associate, Designer
ZW-14	Ella	–	Ontario	Associate, Designer
KA-15	Khari	–	Ontario	Associate, Designer
NI-16	Miray	Government of Canada	Ontario	Design Researcher & Strategist
SM-17	Gabriella	Government of British Columbia	British Columbia	Director, Strategic Policy & Project

				Management
DP-18	Dan	Government of Ontario	Ontario	Advisor, Digital Government
JM-19	Josh	–	Alberta	Service Design Consultant
AM-20	Lex	Government of British Columbia	British Columbia	Executive Project Director, Road Safety Initiative
JD-21	Adie	Ryerson University	Ontario	Senior Project Designer
DY-22	Marcy	Government of British Columbia	British Columbia	Team Lead, Service Design Specialist
MM-23	Catherine	Government of Canada	Ontario	–

Table 4.1 List of research participants. This listing represents the location and job titles of participants at the time interviews were conducted. Pseudonyms have been used in place of participant's real names to protect their identity.

Ethical Considerations

All research participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 3) prior to taking part in an interview. Information that could identify participants has been anonymized. Interview participants were asked if they want to be identified with the project and in what capacity. Confidentiality has been maintained by means of securely storing data on a password-protected digital archive. Participants were advised that they can withdraw from the study at any time. Any and all data related to their involvement would be destroyed. In instances, where I had a professional relationship with the participants, I advised them that they did not have to take part if they were not comfortable given our relationship. I have been careful not to disclose the names of individuals who took part in studies and avoided talking about the interviews when the topic was brought up in professional contexts.

Data collection

Throughout the summer and fall of 2017, I conducted a total of 23 in-depth, semi-

structured interviews with public servants and design consultants who specialize in public sector innovation. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. Participants were given the option for the interview to take place in-person (in cases where the participant lived in Toronto), by Skype or telephone. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using a paid transcription service. The audio recordings were compared against the transcriptions and corrections were made where inaccuracies existed.

Interview questions focused on specific projects that participants were in the process of working on or had recently completed (see Appendix 2 for a list of the interview questions), including the types of methods used, the project scope, detailed descriptions of their role and the role of other stakeholders, and specific challenges that were encountered throughout the project. Four participants provided detailed project documentation to supplement their project case examples. In addition, an archive of documents was assembled to provide further context and background about projects. These documents included press releases, industry and government issued reports, videos, news, and blog articles. Documents were included in the analysis when referenced directly by interview participants. For instance, when interviewing individuals about Budget Talks, a project managed by the Ontario Digital Service, it became clear based on the statements of interviews that the project was part of the broader Government of Ontario Open Government strategy. Because the interview participants referenced this strategy, I sought out the original strategy published in 2013. To be clear, I did not conduct an exhaustive archival search of all background material related to each project. Instead I confined my search only to those documents referenced by participants in order to provide sufficient context and background to understand the conditions under which the project was conceived and carried out. A total of 52 background documents were examined.

Participants often mentioned more than one project when being interviewed. However, only projects that were the central focus of the interview, and for which

participants could provide a highly detailed account, were categorized as a case example. Minor references or examples of other projects were left in the interview transcripts but were not written up as formal case example. In some cases, interview participants provided differing accounts of the same case example (e.g., different start dates for a project). In these instances, I relied on public-facing documents or project documentation to clarify conflicting points of view. In total, 12 case examples were identified across all interviews (see Table 4.2 for the list of case example).

The initial scope of this research included using participant observation to examine projects as they unfolded in situ. Only one organization agreed to take part. I observed and documented three internal project meetings related to Budget Talks (see Table 4.2 for project description) before the arrangement ended. The project team cited logistical constraints as the reason for stopping my participation in the project. I was later hired by Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship to write a qualitative assessment of the program (for the full report see, Do, Russek, & Story, 2018). The reason given by participants for declining to take part in observation was the perceived political risk of having an external party scrutinize their day-to-day work activity. Given the limited interest in and willingness of participants to have their work observed, the research analysis focused on the interview component of the original proposal. Having spoken with other researchers interested in institutional ethnography, risk aversion is a common theme that the much of the rhetoric surrounding y suggest can be overcome with an auto-ethnographic approach. This is a perspective and methodological approach I may consider for future research.

ID	Organization	Stakeholders	Project Name	Type of Design	Outcome	Project Summary
1	Government of Ontario	Ministry of Housing Homelessness Secretariat	Youth Labs	A series of Innovation Labs structured according to the Stanford d.School	Journey maps representing the lived experience of youth who have experienced	Three Innovation Labs were hosted, youth councils located in Timmins, Hamilton, and

		Open Government Office		Design Thinking Process	homelessness and suggested service improvements.	Ottawa. The purpose of these sessions was to get youth who have experienced homelessness to create a journey map of their homelessness experience and co-design program supports and services that could be used to prevent youth homelessness in the future.
2	Government of British Columbia	Service Design Team, Government Communication and Public Engagement	Service Design Playbook	Service Design	A detailed playbook that specifies how to plan and manage service design projects.	A comprehensive set of design guidelines, tools, and best practices published in the form of a “playbook” designed to aid B.C. public servants in the planning, design, and delivery of efficient (i.e. cost-effective), citizen-centred services.

3	Government of Ontario	Open Government Office Community Hubs Secretariat	Community Hubs Lab	Design thinking in the form of a Design Lab (also referred to as a Change Lab)	Four service prototypes intended to improve the transfer payment process for community hubs.	A six-week design engagement structured in the form of a “design lab” aimed at improving the transfer payment process between front-line social service agencies operating within community hubs and the Government of Ontario. In addition to prototyping improvements to the existing transfer payment system, the Open Government team used this project to test components of a new open government public engagement model.
4	Government of British Columbia	Service Design Team, Government Communication and Public Engagement Ministry of Health	Medical Services Applications Redesign	Service Design User Experience Design (UX) Agile	A more efficient digital process for signing up for the Medical Services Plan.	A service design project that focused on redesigning the sign-up process of the Premium Assistance component of

						the British Columbia Medical Services Plan (MSP), which British Columbians identified as notoriously cumbersome based on a six-week public consultation intended to reduce government “red tape.”
5	Government of Ontario	Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Ontario Digital Service, Cabinet Office	Environmental Registry Redesign	User Experience Design	An enhanced interface for uploading submissions to the Ontario Environmental Registry.	A two-part user experience design project intended to improve the digital process of submitting comments to the Ontario Environmental Registry.
6	Government of Alberta	CoLab Ministry of Human Services Ministry of Advanced Education and Training Ministry of Culture and Tourism	Alberta Social Innovation Mapping	Systemic Design (a mix of human-centred design methods and systems thinking)	An interactive system map that identifies where social innovation activities are occurring in the province.	A multi-stakeholder systemic design project aimed at mapping the social innovation landscape in Alberta. This work “acted as a catalyst” for other social innovation work in the province, including the

						creation of the “Alberta Social Innovation Connect.”
7	City of Calgary	Civic Innovation YYC, Corporate Analytics and Innovation, Deputy City Manager's Office	Innovation Lab	Design Lab that draws upon crowdsourcing and design-thinking	An online and offline innovation platform where Calgarians can work with designers to prototype solutions to civic problems.	A dedicated innovation lab focused on identifying civic challenges and working with citizens to prototyping solutions to these challenges, and testing solutions in situ. City staff post challenges online and citizens propose solutions. The top ideas are subjected to a design thinking process and tested in community. Successful projects are presented to political officials in order to receive pilot funding.
8	Government of Alberta	Ministry of Health	Healthcare System Reform	Hybrid model that used a design thinking approach for policy	A new business model for delivering healthcare in Alberta.	A multi-stakeholder project designed to redesign the existing health care delivery

				development		model in Alberta according to health outcomes associated with five socio-geographic use cases.
9	Government of British Columbia	Deputy Attorney General's Office, Court Services Branch, Policy and Service Reform Unit, Court Innovation	Online Divorce Assistant	User Experience Design	A new digital product that automates the process of completing forms required to file for a joint divorce in British Columbia.	A three-month user experience design project focused on digitizing the existing joint divorce process to be more efficient.
10	Government of Ontario	Open Government Office Ontario Digital Services	Budget Talks	User experience design and crowdsourcing project	A crowdsourcing platform used to collect, rank, and comment on ideas to be included in the Government's annual budget.	A user experience design project that resulted in the creation of an online platform where Ontarians could submit ideas for consideration in the Government's annual budget. Users could rank ideas and submit comments.
11	MaRS	Data Catalyst Solutions Lab	Urban Mobility Design Camp	Service Design	A report featuring service solutions and recommend	Stakeholders from across the mobility sector in the Greater Toronto Area

					ations to design future mobility services.	(GTA) were invited to take part in a one-day co-design workshop. Participants discussed pressing issues related to current and future transit needs and worked collaboratively to generate solutions to create a more integrated mobility experience, including partnering with private sector actors, such as Uber.
12	MaRS	Data Catalyst Bridgeable (design consultant)	The Future of Urban Mobility	Service Design	Three fictional mobility services designed to help suburban commuters access regional transit. A series of storytelling artifacts used to persuade political and governmental stakeholders to consider investing in	A four-month service design project focused on understanding the suburban commuter experience and prototyping micro-transit services to encourage more people to use public transit when commuting to work from suburban locations from across the Greater Toronto Area.

					micro transit options.	
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Table 4.2 Listing of public sector case example. These are a distillation of case example analyzed as part of this research.

Data analysis

Data were coded using thematic analysis, which is “a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). Unlike Grounded Theory (GT), it “is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81), and as such, is well suited for research that is situated within an constructivist research paradigm, such as the present study. The views, experiences, and perspectives of participants interviewed for this research are taken as “realities [that] are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Thematic analysis, as Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) contend, can be used to “unpick or unravel the surface” of these realities (p.81). The differing accounts of research participants are analyzed in relation to one another in order to identify patterns and themes, “highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2).

This approach has been selected because the phenomenon under investigation requires research participants to be able to provide first-hand accounts of their everyday work activities. These accounts rely upon research participants’ interpretations of their lived experience, as well as their recollection and interpretations of events surrounding projects. These perspectives constitute the reality of the participant. My role as researcher in these situations is to articulate this reality in written and narrative form (e.g., case studies) through dialogic methods (e.g., interviews and observation).

Coding process

A three-stage inductive³⁵ process was used to code data. Firstly, I read through all transcripts from the interviews, documents collected from participants or through research, and field and interview notes in order to familiarize myself with the data. Through this pre-reading, an initial list of five codes was identified based on ideas, concepts, words, and phrases that appeared repeatedly within the data. In keeping with best practice, each code was assigned a definition in order to maintain “explicit boundaries” and to ensure they were “not interchangeable or redundant” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 391). Code definitions were also informed by literature examined in Section 1 of this thesis. The final list of codes totaled 12 (see Table 4.3 for the coding framework). The documents were reviewed three times to ensure that codes were applied consistently and to reduce researcher bias. Secondly, I reviewed each coded cluster of data to identify common patterns, concepts, and issues. I created memos that described the connections between data and distilled these descriptions into summative phrases (see Table 4.5 for list of summative statements for coded cluster of data). Thirdly, I created diagrams and textual memos to articulate patterns and connections across coded clusters of data in order to identify four general themes that are related to the concept of “citizen-centredness” (see Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis).

Code	Definition
End Users	An individual or group of people for whom a design intervention is intended. These individuals may or may not be involved in the formal design process.
Innovation	A new or novel approach, activity, product, service or idea.
Design	A discipline that draws from other fields, areas of expertise, and best practices in order to conduct research and create digital and material artifacts that address specific individual needs and/or group needs. It is both a noun (a thing that results from design activity) and a verb (a

³⁵An inductive approach to qualitative data analysis is premised on allowing “research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). In contrast, deductive approaches to analysis focus on testing or validating a pre-existing hypothesis.

	process through which people complete a series of generative activities). As a discipline, it is comprised of many specialisms and subfields.
Solution	The final concept, idea, product, service or thing that is produced as a result of a structured design process. A successful solution solves a problem or directly addresses the needs of a specific individual or group of people.
Change	A sudden or gradual shift away from the current state of affairs, which may result in positive or negative consequences.
Tradition	A perception that public administration techniques associated with 20 th -century models of governance are ill equipped to address present-day public problems.
Publics	Stakeholders who are intentionally or unintentionally affected by governmental decisions and who form a collective body in response to the consequences associated with these decisions.
Storytelling	The use of images, words, text or video to persuade or convince someone or group of people about a particular topic. Storytelling may take place in a variety of forms, including through videos, pictures or visualizations, in-person presentations, or case studies.
Experts	Individuals, organizations and institutions that maintain a privileged and authoritative position vis a vis a particular body of knowledge.
Value	The perceived benefit(s) of a specific project outcome. Certain types of value, such as economic value, are easily quantified whereas others, such as social and public value, are difficult to identify because they require subjective assessments that differ according to context and the type and number of actors effected by specific project outcomes.
Efficiency	Increasing the effort required to complete a particular task, which may result in cost savings or a reduction in time.
Austerity	Policies intended to reduce investment in public service delivery that may result in structural changes to public sector institution (e.g., a culture of cost containment).

Table 4.3 Coding framework. A listing of definitions used when coding interview transcripts, fields notes, and documents.

Why and how is design being used in public sector organizations in Canada?
How is design understood by public sector organizations in Canada?
How does the use of design affect governmental and public sector institutions' conceptions of democracy?

What political values are mobilized and/or activated when design practices, techniques, and knowledges are used within and across public sector institutions?

Table 4.4 Research questions. The questions used to guide this research.

Limitations

Conclusions drawn in this study are not generalizable to an entire population because the sample used is not representative of the entire Canadian public service (i.e. all orders of government in Canada) that may be engaged in design activity, given the nascence of the profession. Instead, the findings are indicative of public sector and innovation design activity found in other jurisdictions and within the literature (see Chapter 3). Because interviews rely upon the first-hand accounts of participants, there is the potential that some participants may be more likely to over-state the positive aspects of a project or their work in order to avoid embarrassment or a sense of failure. To address this concern, participants were asked to reflect on the unintended consequences of their work (the good and the bad). Similarly, project documentation and other publicly available documents, such as policy briefs and reports, were used to verify statements and claims made by participants.

Results

The following represents the results of the coded data (interview transcripts, project documents, and notes) from across the 12 case examples examined and 23 interviews conducted. In total, 38 summative statements describe the key ideas found within each cluster of coded data. The second level analysis, which is examined in Chapter 5, focuses on drawing connections between each cluster of coded data to arrive at themes and concepts.

Code	Results Summative statements that describe the main ideas within each cluster of coded data.
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Austerity	1. There are fewer resources being allocated for public service design and delivery, forcing public servants to make due with less. This is exacerbated by changing demographics that will increasingly draw upon public services. 2. Access to funding is seen as a lucrative incentive for internal departments and ministries considering taking part in a design project or innovation programs. Design projects are often viewed as a “catalyst” for accessing more reliable and sustainable funding. 3. Governmental decision makers feel comfortable funding projects where outcomes and risks are known in advance in order to avoid public political controversies. 4. Government services are increasingly benchmarked against the performance of services procured in the private sector (e.g., through the use of customer experience metrics).
Change	5. Formal processes are being put in place to compel public servants to engage in systematic processes that challenge the way technology has historically been procured and implemented or how services have been conceived and delivered. 6. There is a perception that governments need to change the way they plan and execute work in order to be more receptive to the needs and ideas of citizens. Traditional public administration activities are perceived as producing “band-aid solutions.” 7. Public servants and project participants require and demand access to tangible examples and resources that demonstrate what change looks like.
Innovation	8. There is a perceived resistance to new ideas. Bureaucracy and hierarchy in particular are perceived to thwart innovation from taking hold in public service contexts. 9. Innovation is viewed as the ability to create something new— an idea, product, service, or practice — that is deemed valuable according to different stakeholders and actors. 10. Open Government agendas and User Experience Design (UX), which is associated with technology modernization, are often used as the “trojan” horse or platform to mobilize innovation.
Publics	11. A variety of policies and procedures and cultural norms prevent public servants from interacting directly with publics. Engaging with citizens directly usually requires Cabinet approval, a time-consuming and laborious process that is avoided. 12. Public servants rely on strategic partnerships, third party representatives or well-known networks of concerned citizens to speak on behalf of affected publics or to put public servants in touch with these individuals. Other times, these third-parties’ carryout the work of identifying public needs and providing this information back to public servants. 13. Public servants use workarounds to access different stakeholders, often relying on their own personal networks or engaging in gorilla-style tactics, such as “counter intercepts,” showing up service centres and asking people for their opinion on particular issues.
Experts	14. There is some sense that design is not rigorous or lacks rigor. To that end, public servants often rely on external source of expertise, such as management consulting firms to issue reports and provide expertise to senior executives that validates or legitimizes the perspectives of advocates of public sector design and innovation.

	15. While participants of design processes, are often viewed as experts of their own lived experience. These opinions do not always carry the same authority as traditional sources of expertise, such as academics.
Efficiency	16. Efficiency refers to saving time for citizens and public servants by making services easy to access. It also means reducing the cost of public service provision. 17. As stewards of public funds, public servants perceive their job as delivering services as efficiently as possible. This may include changing people's behaviour to rely less on government services. 18. More efficient services allow governments to redirect scarce resources to "highest need areas." 19. Innovation programs that demonstrate or emphasize efficiency are more likely to be considered a priority by government decision makers.
Storytelling	20. Tangible tools and evidence are needed to support change management activities within government. Storytelling artifacts, such as case studies and videos, are important for circulating and transferring information throughout and across departments. 21. It is incumbent upon advocates of public sector design to create narratives that position new approaches to work as being aligned with public servants' perceptions of what the government expects of them as public administrators. Public servants must see parts of their existing work practice as complimentary to new approaches to work, such as service design. 22. Storytelling is as much about persuading people to consider these new approaches to work as it is about recruiting senior stakeholders within government to collaborate on projects. 23. Videos and other creative storytelling devices are often used to give the illusion that a solution is real. This is done to capture the imagination of stakeholders, helping them to envision that proposed solutions can be implemented.
End Users	24. Traditional processes tend to focus on extracting information from participants as opposed to identifying solutions with them. Thus, proponents of public sector design suggest there is a need to engage with end users in new or novel ways, while being sensitive to the particular needs and experiences of these individuals. 25. There is a sense that in order to gain an "accurate" or "real" account of what end users experience when using government services, public servants must observe them "close up".
Value	26. Value is perceived as a matter of commercial potential wherein existing government assets, such as datasets, are made accessible to citizens and commercial actors to create products and services that address peoples' needs. 27. There is a sense that internal departments that are associated with special projects and initiatives must constantly justify their purpose for existing (e.g., the BC service design department). Thus, value is associated with having a sense of purpose with respect to one's work. 28. Design is perceived as a new way of working that better enables public servants to identify what is valuable. This means creating programs and services that are address the specific needs of individuals. Thereby value is about materializing opportunity. 29. The creation of value is the perceived benefit of innovation, which can be defined as containing costs, creating revenue, or achieving a predefined set of outcomes. However, value is interpreted differently for

	each person and depends on how an innovation addresses a particular need.
Tradition	30. Each agency, department, and ministry operate as an independent organization, with independent budgets, systems, policies, and approaches to work. This results in a lack of coordination and cooperation across departments and ministries and makes navigating hierarchy difficult. 31. Public servants tend to be personally invested in their work, which means they can be reluctant to adopt new approaches to work without definitive evidence that these new approaches to work will advance their personal agendas 32. Proponents of new approaches to public administration see it as their job to “sell” the benefits of these “new ways of working.” This requires a careful balance of acknowledging the work public servants have done, while at the same time criticizing these approaches to as being ill equipped for dealing with complex problems.
Solution	33. Solutions are deemed successful if they address specific needs, solve a problem, or inspire action in support of a specific organizational agenda. 34. Instructions and principals often accompany prototypes to assist those charged with putting them into practice. These may include, for instance, a series of “must-have” criteria that have been identified as critical to the success of a solution, regardless of the final form it may take.
Design	35. Designed is treated as an amalgam of “best practices” used to inform a structured process of change, in which new services, programs and policies are devised to “better” address the needs of people. 36. Design is perceived as beneficial for talking to people directly and observing people in situ in order to better understand their needs. Thus, design is associated with the creation of value, both materializing value that does not yet exist and improving existing sources of value. 37. Design is described as desirable and positive. 38. There is a desire to create consistency across government with respect to how design is carried out. Recently, governments have sought to codify design best practices and approaches to service development and delivery through detailed guidelines, toolkits, and policies. This includes identifying work practices that share similar qualities and characteristics of design and defining it as such.

Table 4.5 First Level Analysis. Summative statements for coded cluster of data.

Conclusion

The next chapter draws links between each of the clusters of coded data presented. Four themes emerged from this analysis: Third-Party Decision-Makers, the Valorization of Values, Narratives of Change, and Embedding design. These themes are related to the concept of “citizen-centredness”: a distinct approach to public sector design that draws from discourses of innovation found within the private sector. The political

implications of citizen-centred approaches to public sector design are examined in closer detail in Chapter 6 through two in-depth case studies.

CHAPTER 5

Thematic Analysis: ‘Citizen-Centred’ Design in the Canadian Public Service

Waiting in line to renew your driver’s license can be a daunting and incredibly frustrating process. What seems like a simple task can quickly devolve into miles of paper work and hours of headache. These bottlenecks have pejoratively come to be known as “bureaucracy.” Slow, inefficient, and lacking in value, bureaucracy is the “friction” that exists between citizens and the state, and something that proponents of public sector innovation contend “hampers civil servant’ entrepreneurship” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017, p. 19). Public sector innovation, in contrast, seeks to eliminate the so-called red tape associated with bureaucracy. For instance, a report published by UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence, argues, “[d]esign labs try to disentangle the dominant bureaucratic culture informing the public sector and create free spaces where new behaviour can emerge” (p.16). These “new behaviours,” as the forthcoming analysis will show, are intended in large part to (de)legitimize traditional public sector conduct, which can be conceived of in the Weberian sense of objective and rational application of state statutes and policies (R. Weber, 2002, pp. 978–979), with “new ways of working” that emulate practices found within private sector organizations, such as design firms (e.g., Mager, 2016), and technology start-ups (e.g., Brantley, 2014).

The concept of bureaucracy, when used pejoratively to refer to a “bloated public service” in need of fiscal reform, has long been used as rhetorical cover to justify the imposition of austerity policies (J. Peck, 2014). These measures amount to strict limits placed on public finances, felt notably as cuts to public services including a reduction in the number of fulltime public servants administering such services (B. Evans & Fanelli, 2018). By all accounts, public servants are feeling the crunch of having “fewer resources to meet growing expectations from citizens” (Government Communications

and Public Engagement, 2016, p. 7). Public sector innovation is offered up as a set of policies and practices that can be used to reduce the cost of delivering services, while at the same time satisfying the needs of citizens. Reconciling these tensions is a difficult undertaking. As Bernardo Zacka argues, “street bureaucrats” (public servants acting as the public face of the state), are regularly called upon to give “practical content to hierarchical directives that are often vague, ambiguous, and conflicting” (Zacka, 2017, p. 124). The realities of frontline service provision are fraught with anxiety, frustration, and dismay. Inside the walls of government, though, the situation is not much better and the challenges faced by public service managers are just as acute. Their work entails navigating the messy politics of public administration that today is fundamentally constrained by the demands of austerity (B. Evans & Fanelli, 2018). Citizens, too, report feeling disconnected from a public service that seems out of date in terms of the methods and approaches used to design and deliver public services. Josh, a public sector design consultant who was interviewed for this research, summarizes these tensions as follows:

... workers are frustrated often by policy that seems to be disconnected from their world and citizens are often frustrated when policy doesn't seem to match the reality on the ground (JM-19).

Be innovative, open to risk, and reduce costs, all the while navigating the often-restrictive realities of everyday public administration — to make slow, evidenced-based decisions that ensure institutional stability and contain political risk. These competing demands characterize the state of public administration in Canada today.

This chapter examines the first-hand accounts of public servants ($n=23$) from across Canada who have turned to design, a method of public sector innovation, out of frustration, excitement, and in other cases, from a perceived sense that the public service lacks the requisite skills needed to address socially oriented wicked problems. The aim here is to examine an emergent design specialism, known as “citizen-centred design” that is most closely aligned to the pragmatic approach to social design as

examined in Chapter 3. Thus far, we have examined the rise of the neoliberal state and the attendant techniques of governance that are used to imbricate neoliberal rationality in democratic institutions (see Chapter 1), of which, design has played an important role in stabilizing this governing rationality (see Chapter 2 and 3): first through consultant design, which served as an arbiter of industry-led innovation (Sparke, 2013); and more recently, as an emergent set of practices used within democratic institutions to redress the externalities of austerity through practices associated with design (Julier, 2017a). In this chapter, I go a step further to examine four themes – “third-party decision makers”, “valorization of value,” “narratives of change,” and “embedding design” – that are related to the specific and often mundane ways in which “citizen-centred” design is shaped by and shapes public administration practices in Canada.

Examining ‘Citizen-Centredness’

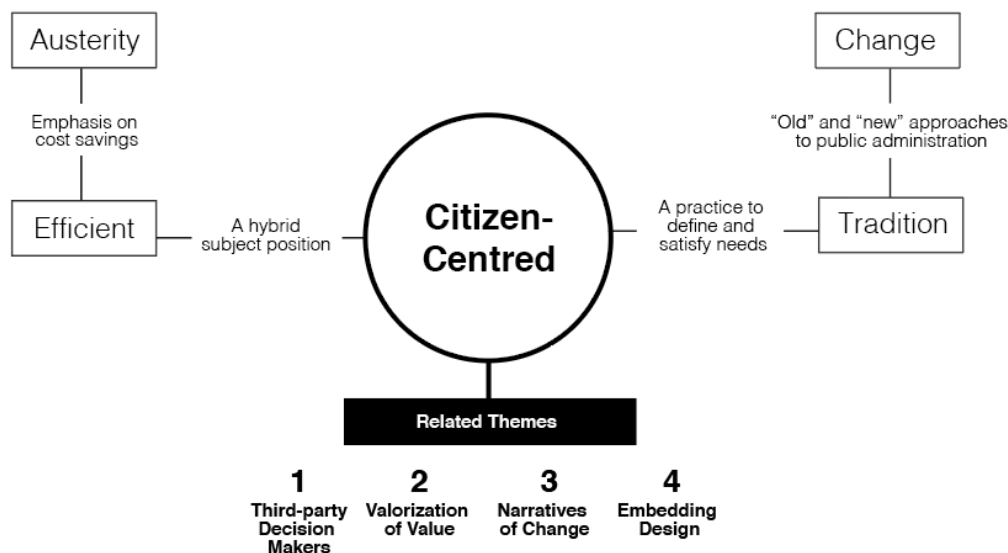


Figure 5.1 Concept Map. Illustrates the relationships between coded data and the four themes that emerged from the concept of “citizen-centred.”

As a starting point, let us consider the concept of “citizen-centred” as articulated by interview participants. The term is derived from discourses commonly found within the

fields of private sector innovation and product design, more specifically. Use of the term is a conscious attempt on the part of public sector practitioners to create services and policies that address the specific needs of individuals who are construed as “citizens.” It is important to note, that citizen is not used here strictly in the sense of a political subject who claims membership in the demos. Instead, the term citizen, when used in the context of public sector innovation, is a stand in for the concept of a “user,” an individual whose “unmet” needs are deemed the primary concern of public servants tasked with satisfying them. These needs, which are defined as problems to be solved, are the subject of concentrated public design activity. The citizen, as user, is also, and perhaps most importantly, a consumer of public services that are designed to satisfy their wishes and needs, much like the actions and activities of a consumer in the marketplace.

It goes without saying that employing the term “citizen” as a place marker for “user” is problematic. The term citizen derives its discursive weight by relying on an implied outside-other (Hall & Held, 1989). The needs of the Other – persons experiencing homelessness, refugees, those who are imprisoned, for instance – are neglected in favour of the “citizen” whose needs are perceived as a market priority. Picking and choosing which citizen needs to satisfy, or in market-oriented terms selecting the most viable consumer segments, is a political act akin to the sorting and filtering that is associated with determining one’s status as a citizen. The citizen-user-consumer configuration that is articulated through these actions is a hybrid subjectivity that expresses the dynamics of neoliberalism. Flexibility, choice, with an emphasis on maximizing self-interest underly its character (Ong, 2006). This new figure trades political subjectivity, which at least in part was traditionally concerned with matters of democratic participation and agonistic struggle, for the freedom to pick and choose public services that are adorned with the signifier, “citizen-centred.” This is a neoliberal subject through and through, whose personal concerns, desires, and needs exceed those of any collective body that may be bound up with expressions of collective will.

At the same time, “citizen-centredness” is viewed as practice used by public servants to define citizen needs and delivering services that is at odds with “old ways” or “traditional approaches” to public administration. Interview participants characterized “tradition,” as the term is used here, as existing public administration habits, rituals, policies, and approaches to work that are perceived as risk averse, hierarchical, and slow to respond to changing circumstances, such as adopting new technologies to deliver public services. In contrast, the private sector is held up as the model for “the way that it [design and delivery of public services] should be done” (DP-18). This means rebalancing how public servants perceive risk, adopting an experimental mindset, and being more responsive and adaptable to changing conditions and circumstances, while at the same time ensuring the continuity and stability of democratic institutions.

This “shift,” as characterized by interview participants, demands that public servants “deliver services that are shaped more by the needs of citizens than by our own administrative priorities” (Where Ideas Work, BC Government Corporate Plan, 2016 p.14). The ethos of citizen-centredness is premised on making government services more efficient and reliable by reducing the friction between citizens and public service, which more often than not, results in the digitization of government services that facilitate “self-service” (i.e. doing it yourself service delivery).

In the case of the Government of British Columbia, this shift began with the release of a report in October 2010 entitled, *Citizens @ The Centre: B.C. Government 2.0 (C@C)*. In it, Deputy Minister to the Premier and Head of the B.C. Public Service (BCPS), Allan Seckel laid out a government-wide strategy, to “move beyond the traditional practices that have resulted in the consistent implementation of Band-Aid solutions to maintain and modify existing systems rather than taking a more thoughtful, long-term approach” (p.14). The strategy outlined “how the government of B.C. can use the power of technology to meet the changing expectations of citizens” (B.C. Government Internet Strategy, 2012, p.6.). Marcy (DY-22), a public servant working for

the Government of British Columbia at the time C@C was released, described the shift towards citizen-centred ways of work as “freeing”:

It was the thing that was missing in my work the whole time. And, I’m like, ‘Yes, let’s go and talk to people.’ And, ‘Yes, let’s, does that fit, sort of usable and amazing’... It was a different way of working, and it was sort of atypical to what regular B.C. public servants, the way that they worked. (DY-22)

All interview participants shared Marcy’s enthusiasm for citizen-centred design. Another participant, Tim (JV-5), described the importance of using the opinions of citizens to inform service design and delivery. He said that within his department they are using “citizen points of view and citizen ideas as a new kind of data.” (JV-50).

However, participants also indicated that their enthusiasm for citizen-centred design and its associated practices is not a view that is consistently held by other public servants. This is evidence in the comments of one senior public servant from the Government of British Columbia who described the resistance that he regularly encountered when promoting service design tools and methods to public servants who had developed a department- or ministry-specific website:

These people [public servants] had developed them [websites] off the side of their desk. They have put love and sweat into them. They had often gotten resources, and commitment from executives. Sometimes they had developed their own brands. Some of them had won awards for their work. People are personally invested in these things, right? (AM-20)

This resistance to change is caused in part because design departments are brought in at the last minute to provide guidance and support when a project has failed to secure executive support or funding (DP-18). Charity (SM-17), a public servant working for the BCPS, recalled situations in which she had to explain to her colleagues in the public service, “You haven’t always been doing good job of understanding needs, and letting some people self-determine and openly tell you what they need, in a way that works for

them. It actually kind of rattled them.” Participants felt a sense of responsibility to promote and teach public servants about the benefits of citizen-centred ways of working, including the use of design techniques to improve the quality and efficiency of public services.

This tension between traditional approaches to public administration and so-called “new approaches” premised on the values and practices of citizen-centred design are born out in several distinct ways, which will be the subject of the following analysis: reliance on third-party decision makers to define citizen needs; a change in what and how public servants perceive value; a shift towards decision-making processes that are focused on end user needs; a concerted effort to embed design across and through governmental institutions; reliance on aesthetics to persuade public servants and citizens of the need to change and increased reliance on external benchmarks to assess the quality and performance of public services and practices.

Third-Party Decision Makers

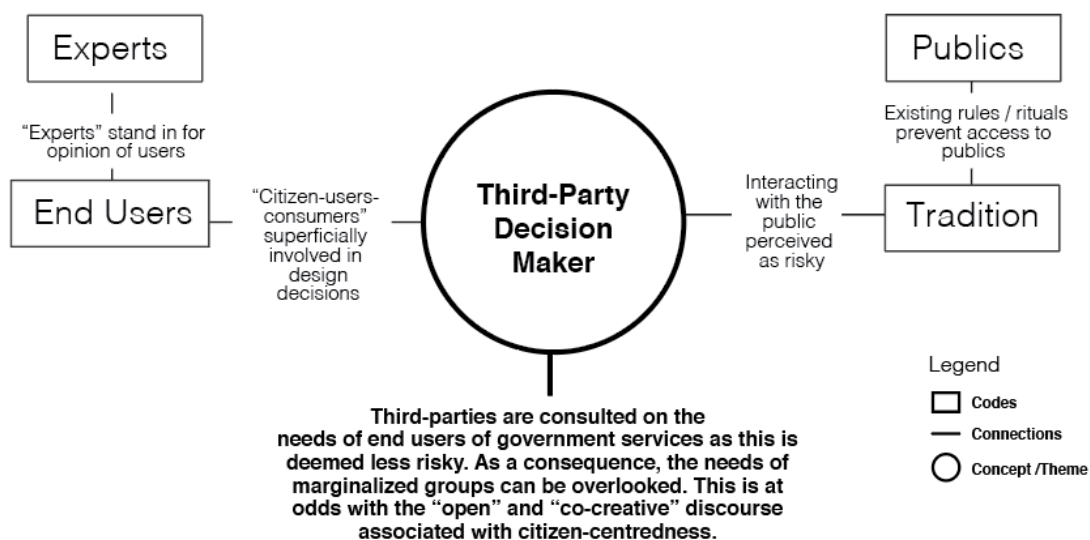


Figure 5.2 Theme Cluster. Illustrates the relationships between coded data and the theme of “Third-Party Decision Makers” its relationship to the concept of citizen-centred.

According to citizen-centred discourse, more voices need to be incorporated into government decision-making processes. The thinking goes that government decision-making should be made more transparent and that additional opportunities to solicit public feedback must be created in order for public servants to design programs and services that more directly address people's needs. For instance, as part of its effort to support Open Government initiatives, the Government of Ontario has committed to making it "easier for people to participate in, and provide input on, government decisions by bringing our work into the open" (Government of Ontario, 2019). This statement is consistent with the efforts of other jurisdictions in Canada, including the Government of British Columbia (Office of the Chief Information Officer, 2011) and Government of Canada (Treasury Board, 2018), which have also committed to adopting open government policies that require public servants to engage directly with citizens when designing and delivering public services, programs, policies, and products.

However, as the accounts of research participants suggest, citizens are often only tangentially involved in these projects, typically through formal public consultations, which were characterized as highly scripted events that require weeks or months of preparation and approvals. In other cases, user testing was used to validate assumptions and decisions that had already been made by public servants and political stakeholders. In the end, there were very few instances where the views, opinions, and ideas of citizens, the so-called "end users" of public services, were actively involved in the design process. And while interview participants insisted that end users should take on a prominent role in any design project, this has proven to be very difficult due to formal and informal institutional barriers, namely as sense of political risk, that shield public servants from accessing citizens.

Instead, public servants tend to rely on town halls and surveys, highly structured events, or will seek the advice and feedback from friends and family as a workaround (KC-1). One public servant designer who works for the Government of Ontario

characterized the reluctance as follows:

The notion of sitting down in the coffee shop or going to somebody's house and just having an informal conversation with them, where the questions aren't structured in advance and the wording of the questions that you're going to ask hasn't been vetted and approved by 10 layers of management, is just absolutely frightening for them [public servants]" (DP-18).

As this statement suggests, there is a culture of "risk aversion" associated with interacting directly with citizens. In fact, public servants are encouraged to avoid situations that may result in negative political consequences that "end up in the local newspaper" (DP-18). This is a point reinforced by the comments of an executive public servant working in the Government of British Columbia, who suggested that the culture of risk aversion is in part due to public servants' belief that they need to manage the expectations of citizens about how public input may or may not inform government decision-making:

[There is a] sense of risk in the organization about talking to citizens. That was ingrained in policy. It was ingrained in practice ... the initial reaction is, 'Well, we can't go and talk to people about this, because then we might set false expectations, and then we won't meet those expectations, and then they'll be upset, and there will be political risk' (AM-22).

Despite being at odds with public-facing policies that call for more open and transparent government decision-making processes, public servants are often instructed by senior public servants to avoid making promises to citizens that may result in political risk.

At the same time, internal policies and procedures intended to limit the scope and ability of public servants to contact citizens directly, without first getting political approval, were perceived by interview participants as interfering with their ability to accurately assess the needs of end users of public services. This includes, for instance, strict rules about how to compensate people for taking part in design projects.

You can't just go grab a couple hundred bucks and then give them to somebody, and there's a lot of strange rules about what you can use money for. So compensating users for research time is actually something that's incredibly challenging." (DP-18)

Similarly, getting approval from political stakeholders can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Yasmin (RD-9), a public servant in the Government of Alberta, describes how her team relies upon "strategic partnerships" in order to circumvent the burdensome process of obtaining Cabinet approval in order to interact with citizens:

One of our challenges is that any kind of engagement with ... Albertans, is considered to be an engagement and that requires Cabinet approval... what we do is we create strategic partnerships with people that have access to people that we don't have access to. And then they can be the ones with the relationship and they're doing that, and we're just kind of part of it. (RD-9)

The Youth Labs project (case example 1) is an example of a project that relied on third-party decision-makers to represent the views, opinions, and experiences of young people who have lived experience of homelessness. The project focused on working with young people with lived experience of homelessness to create journey maps to help identify intervention points where service design could be used to reduce the length of time the young person experiences homelessness. The project was carried out by the Ontario Homelessness Secretariat worked directly with local Youth Councils and relied upon third-party decision-makers, such as the Premier's Youth Council and the Ontario Nonprofit Network, to both represent the opinions and experiences of young people, but also to facilitate dialogue across stakeholder groups. These third parties included a range of expert organizations, social service agencies, and think tanks that claim to represent the interests and perspectives of various constituencies.

The challenge with this approach, as described by interview participants, is that it risks overrepresenting some perspectives at the expense of historically marginalized voices. In other words, a more localized account of the socio-political realities of

citizens, such as the myriad ways in which personhood is constituted by and through institutional settings and environments, is often abstracted in public policy debates and discussions because public servants are required to rely on third-party accounts that are mediated through outside experts. Fana (NH-3), who participated in the Youth Labs project, says that while she often relies upon the opinions of academics and researchers — who provide an important and necessary perspective — these accounts can be distanced from the everyday realities faced by racialized youth. As she puts it:

We're not going to racialized youth ... We're going to researchers, academics, and advocacy organizations. And there is a perspective there... that gets... that is representative of citizens. But it isn't the citizen's perspective. (NH-3)

Reliance on third parties may be viewed as a less risky alternative to interacting directly with so-called end users of government services and programs; however, the conclusions drawn from these engagements rely heavily on personal opinions and assumptions, and only represent an aggregate view of public concerns. Dan (DP-18) says this is a concern that he encounters regularly within the Ontario public service, “These are all things [strategic decisions] that are happening today without talking to people. They're being made based on assumptions. They're being made based on an individual's perceptions of what should happen. But very, very little in government is based off of informed research and observation. And I think that's really what I'd most like to see changed” (DP-18).

The Valorization of Value

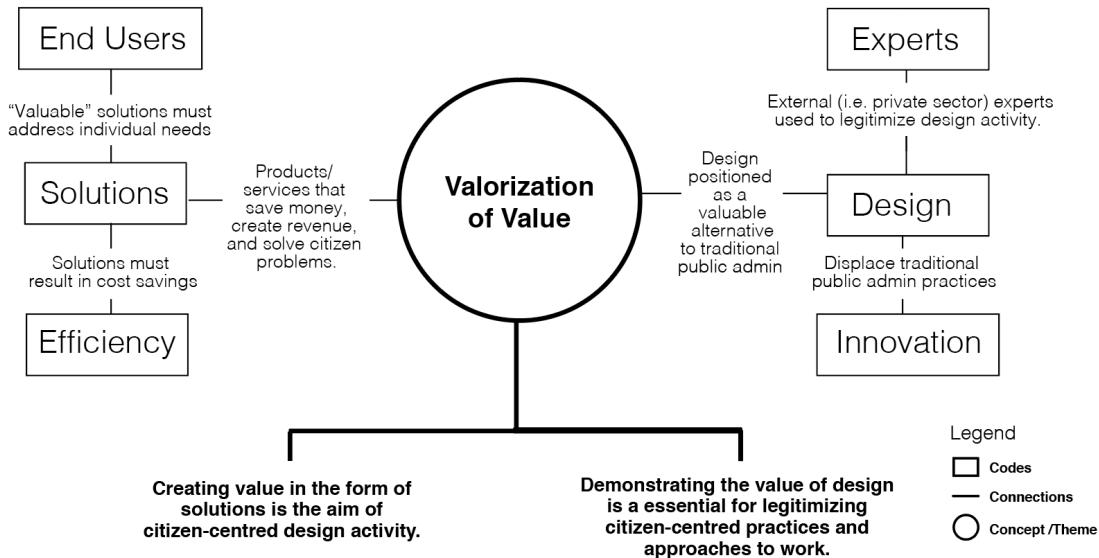


Figure 5.3 Theme Cluster. Illustrates the relationships between coded data and the theme of “Valorization of Value” and its relationship to the concept of citizen-centred.

Citizen-centred design practices are intended to produce public services, programs, policies and products that address citizens’ needs and save governments money. Accordingly, interview participants stated, “solutions” are deemed successful, and thus valuable, if they solve a problem, inspire action in support of a specific organizational agenda, or create additional revenue to support other government activities and/or services. One of the benefits of design, as described by interview participants, is its focus on talking to people directly and observing people in situ in order to better understand their needs. By extension, citizen-centred approaches to design can be construed as “value creation” because they are premised on uncovering the needs of citizens and devising solutions to address these needs.

The concept of value, as described by participants, has two overlapping dimensions: Firstly, proponents of citizen-centred design feel compelled to “demonstrate

the value” of their work as an indispensable part of government innovation efforts. Secondly, the solutions that emerge from sustained design effort, which were described as “solutions,” “create value” in as much as they save money, address a particular citizen need, or result in a new source of revenue.

Demonstrating value

In terms of demonstrating the value of their work, research participants reported that they go to great lengths to secure new projects. In some cases, they require drawing upon one’s personal relationships with colleagues and the social capital they have built up over the course of their career to operationalize innovation agendas within government. Research participants who work within specialized departments dedicated to some variant of citizen-centred design report having to regularly justify the value of their work to other public servants who remain skeptical of the promises of design. For example, Yasmin (RD-5) described the work she and her team regularly engage in to secure new projects, or as she describes it, the need to “feed the beast”:

Which is kind of funny, because externally, everyone we work with is like, ‘You’re wonderful.’ And internally, they’re like, ‘What value do you bring?’ We constantly just have to try and feed the beast that we have, but also try and find the spaces to do the kind of work that we want to.’ (RD-9)

The challenge of securing new projects is exacerbated by a view held by some public servants that design lacks rigour, compared to more established disciplines within government such as human resource management and finance. In response, proponents of citizen-centred design enrol external sources of expertise, such as management consulting firms and consultants that specialize in public sector design and innovation to issue reports and provide guidance to senior executives in order to validate and legitimize public sector design and innovation practices. This external validation is viewed as necessary for articulating the value of these alternative approaches to public administration. For instance, when trying to establish a set of codified service design practices in the B.C. Public Service, Gabriella (SM-17) and her

team commissioned a report from Deloitte, a management-consulting firm, to validate the service design approach they were recommending as part of a broader innovation strategy (case example 2):

...we had ... Deloitte do some crazy study, and I got a 38-page PowerPoint that's telling me you have to do it this way. We had to get external advisors and to be like 'this is a good idea,' even though they were like 'What is service design?' (SM-17)

As this example suggests, the private sector plays an important role in lending legitimacy to citizen-centred design practices by making assessments about which public sector practices will yield the greatest value (in economic terms) for governments and, in turn, the citizens they serve. These interpretations of value, however, are based on private sector models of innovation that focus on the creation of new products and services that are intended for consumption in the marketplace. Private sector actors are less skilled at measuring non-economic forms of value that are not as easily quantifiable. When describing her work as part of the Alberta Social Innovation Mapping project (case example 6), Yasmin (RD-9) stated:

It's [social value is] not something that two guys make in their basement and they patent, and they get the money from. Or it's not something that a company develops, and they sell on the marketplace. It's something that's created, and the value is, it doesn't improve one individual inventor or one company, it's something that benefits the breadth of society. (RD-9)

Distinctions in value (social, public, and economic) was not easily discernable among the accounts offered by research participants. However, measuring the value of this work is often reliant on private sector measures. For instance, the Budget Talks project (case example 10), used the services of a private sector polling company to conduct satisfaction surveys to gauge the usefulness of the project. This data was supplemented by the project teams' internal digital analytics (e.g., website traffic).

Creating value

Interview participants also described the design process itself as a source value by way of the “solutions” that result from sustained design effort. These solutions are only deemed valuable, though, if they result in a change to the status quo. As Gabriella, a B.C. public servant described, “It’s a matter of taking it [a design solution] to the next steps and actualizing and realizing what that change looks like” (IG-4). Use of the term “change” here, is in reference to the likelihood that a design solution will either solve a discrete service-related problem, save resources associated with service delivery, or achieve a particular program outcome.

The first step in this process of change is to “to narrow down exactly what you’re trying to change” (CM-8). In recounting the Youth Labs project (case example 1), Celeste (CM-8) said an important and difficult part of the project was determining what was in and out of scope, or what particular issues the project team was allowed to address as part of the engagements. In design terms, this refers to deciding on the “problem space.” Celeste explained it as follows:

We had to put a box around what are we gonna talk about in terms of youth homelessness. We wanted to leave the process very open, but we also wanted to come out with tangible ideas and tangible starting points. (CM-8)

The “tangibility” of solutions, or the ability of a solution to “realize change,” as described by participants, is a criterion that is used to scope and evaluate the viability of projects, or the likely future value that a project will yield in terms of saving money or addressing specific citizen needs. Interview participants emphasize the importance of selecting projects that can create value in the eyes of the stakeholders they serve — namely senior public servants and citizens.

Narratives of Change

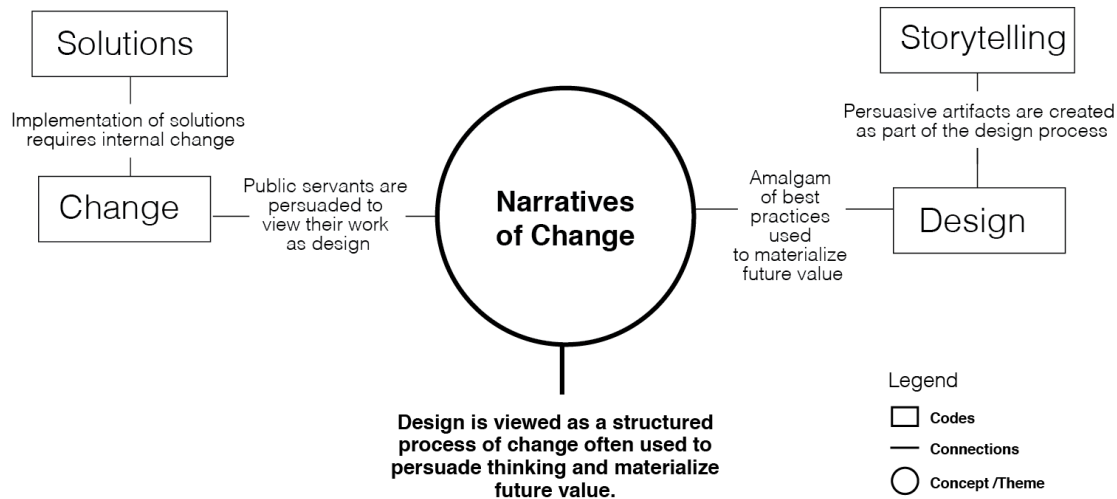


Figure 5.4 Theme Cluster. Illustrates the relationships between coded data and the theme of “Narratives of Change” and its relationship to the concept of citizen-centred.

This analysis was not able to arrive at a unified definition of design. However, based on the accounts of interview participants, a common theme did emerge. There was a sense that design can be characterized as an amalgam of “best practices” that have been appropriated from a range of disciplines, including business, behavioural economics, and psychology. For example, when Dan (DP-18) was asked to describe service design, he said:

It kind of brings so many best practices from other field of practice together into one methodology. It just makes so much sense to me. You know, maybe we'll find out 10, 15 years down the road. Something new will come that's better able to work in this environment. But right now, it's the thing that I know of that can have the biggest impact when you're trying to deal with big, complex problems. Where the path forward is very unclear and there's many ways that you could build. (DP-18)

These best practices are strung together into a structured process intended to bring about change, or as research participants described “impact.”

In addition to the tangible solutions that result from this change process, including physical artifacts, digital products or enhanced service experiences, interview participants also described various persuasive artifacts that they produce in order to support narratives of change. These persuasive artifacts, which include video case studies, process photos, blog articles, and visual reports, serve two purposes: first, to support adoption and usage of their proposed solutions. Second, to persuade citizens and senior public servants that design is a valuable practice deserving of public investment. Adam (SS-11), a manager at a government-funded innovation think tank, stated design is about “capturing our partners and stakeholder’s imagination on what is the art of the possible is based on what users want, based on what’s already happening in the marketplace” (SS-11). “Catching” stakeholder’s attention is an important part of securing much-needed — and scarce — funding.

Aesthetics are used throughout the design processes to not only create solutions that address particular citizen needs, but to articulate persuasive narratives of change. For instance, in the case of the Future of Urban Mobility project (case example 12), the design team created non-functioning prototypes to simulate a future mobility system in which the private and public sector partner to deliver transit services to citizens. Because transit services are a governmental responsibility in Ontario, the project team created a variety of artifacts, including video prototypes, service cards, and a detailed project summary report, to persuade senior public officials to consider allowing the private sector to play a role in transit delivery. Khari (KA-15), one of the service designers on the project, described the purpose of the project as simulating an ideal future state:

Our role specifically, was less about designing services and interventions that would actually be implemented. Like a bit more about designing things that would act as things that all those stakeholders can look at as a potential ideal future

state of what should mobility look like, and so, having that as something that acts as a guide to ... point towards the future, as opposed to something that we actually invent right now. (KA-15)

Persuasive artifacts offer tangible evidence in support of government-led change management activities by “materializing” and “simulating” ideal future states. In some cases, the persuasive quality of these artifacts is as important as solutions that can actually be implemented.

Interview participants described a need to construct narratives of change that supported their efforts to promote design-oriented approaches to public administration. This means, for instance, persuading public servants to abandon “outdated” or “traditional” approaches to work that are perceived as ill equipped for addressing contemporary challenges. These narratives, though, must be aligned to public servants’ perceptions of their role as public administrators. These perceptions are often based on unwritten rules that require public servants to maintain distance from political officials in order to appear politically neutral. Lex (AM-20), as senior executive in the B.C. Public Service put it, he sees his job as “helping position this [service design] for people in a way that they could understand it within the public service and could feel good about it” (AM-20). When promoting design practices in the B.C. public service, he characterized his conversations with skeptical public servants as follows:

Listen, there’s a new way of doing this. It aligns with the philosophies that you talk about around personal education. Here’s how we can do it. Here’s how it aligns. We know this will be different for you, but we’re asking you to take a leap of faith. (AM-20)

This means striking a careful balance between encouraging public servants to abandon current work practices in favour of practices associated with public sector innovation, while at the same time, helping public servants see that their existing knowledge and skills can easily be modified to conform these new ways of working, which have been deemed innovative and, thus, desirable.

Embedding Design

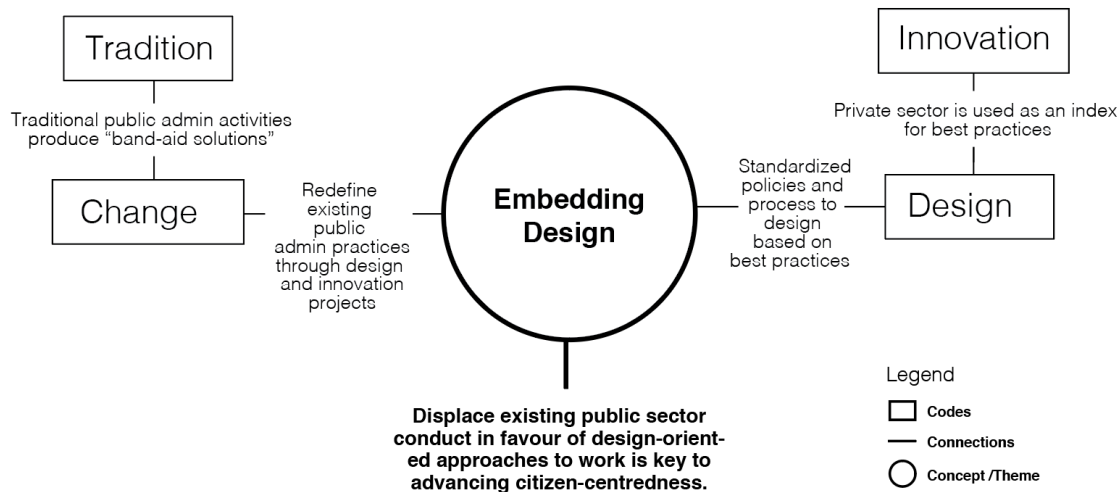


Figure 5.5 Theme Cluster. Illustrates the relationships between coded data and the theme of “Embedding Design” and its relationship to the concept of citizen-centred.

Design goodness

Interview participants characterized design in positive terms — solving problems, creating value, and facilitating collaboration. In fact, throughout the course of these interviews, none of the participants considered instances when design should *not* be used. Instead, there was a perceived sense of “goodness” associated design inasmuch as it was viewed as “doing good” by way of solving problems that were deemed “bad.” In casting design in normative terms, interview participants arrived at a general consensus that all public servants should be engaged in design and that design tools, methods and approaches to public sector work should be “embedded” in public sector contexts. For instance, Gabriella (SM-17) described how she and her colleague sought to covertly promote service design techniques within the B.C. Public Service (case example 2):

I think what has shifted from the last couple of years ago is, it [service design] is well-established now, right... Initially we actually tried to be quite covert about it [promoting design practices], because the thing about the public service, it has a knack for killing good ideas. We were all literally stealth. (SM-17)

Gabriella's attempts to promote service design "covertly," so as to avoid killing a "good idea," are consistent with other interview participants' accounts of protecting design projects from internal politics and the perceived sense of risk aversion that pervades within the public service.

Design governance

To operationalize agendas to embed designerly ways of working, governments from across Canada have adopted design governance protocols. Governmental institutions are enacting these rules, policies, instructions, and performance measures, to ensure public servants are consistently using design tools, methods, and techniques according to private sector design and innovation best practices. For instance, Charity (ES-7) (case example 10), a member of the Ontario Digital Service (ODS), described how her team created a digital service design playbook — inspired by the *Service Design Playbook* published by the B.C. Public Service — to ensure ministries and departments were complying with the digital service standards established by the ODS. She described this set of policies and guidelines as follows:

We've combined all of the good, what we see as good, principles of service design from the different government jurisdictions that have already pushed theirs live. So that's going to go out ... It's standards that we live but also standards we're expecting ministries to live by, even when they're not working directly with us. (ES-7).

Like other forms of governance, design governance is intended to ensure that public servants are engaged in compliant behaviour even when they are not working directly with sources of authority who are responsible for enforcing such rules.

Design governance also requires public servants to view their work in designerly terms. As Josh (JM-19), co-author of the B.C. *Service Design Playbook*, characterized the document that serves as an example of design governance, it was about “tapping the latent design capability of the public service and being able to foster and develop and support that” (JM-19). This entails reclassifying existing public administration work, such as policy development and analysis, as design — even if public servants themselves do not view their work in this way. Proponents of public sector design often use financial incentives to encourage compliance. For instance, those departments and ministries that are able to reclassify or interpret ongoing projects as examples of design or innovation, can often access funding that would otherwise be off limits. When promoting the B.C. *Service Design Playbook*, for instance, one executive said, the fact they could tell skeptical ministries and departments that they would receive funding if they took part in a service design project, “incredibly greased the wheels in an organization that was struggling to find resources to do any of this work” (AM-20). For government departments and ministries that have experienced prolonged austerity, there is an incentive to take part in these programs in order to get access to funding.

At the same time, the outcomes of these funded design projects are used as best-practice examples of citizen-centred approaches to design that can be shared across and within departments and ministries. For example, Lex (AM-20), described how he actively sought out project partners who were willing to commit some resources to service-design related project in the B.C. public service (case example 2):

We also ran projects with different ministries. Part of the deal within those projects were [that] we were not a vendor. We were a partner ... and they had to actually get a certain amount of skin in the game, and actually have people that were on the ground who were going to work with us on projects, so that they could be exposed to the method and champion those back in their own ministries. (AM-20)

There is a perceived dual benefit to these types of design projects. Firstly, public servants learn about design methods and tools associated with design while working on

a real project, with some expectation that these approaches to work may influence their everyday approaches to public administration. Secondly, because departments are required to assign dedicated personnel to projects, ensuring they have some “skin in the game,” there is a greater likelihood that projects will succeed because senior executives who agreed to dedicated resources to the project will be held accountable.

Foregrounding the Politics and Practice of Citizen-Centred Design

Across Canada there has been an intensification of design activity in public sector contexts and governmental institutions. As the research themes that were discussed here — representing the perspectives of public servants from across 12 case examples — suggest, public sector design in Canada draws heavily from discourses, tools and approaches to innovation that are found within the private sector; however, they are inflected through the institutions in which this work is carried out resulting in a design practice that is rooted in a sense of “citizen-centredness.” While having much in common with the pragmatic approach to social design as examined in Chapter 3, “Social Design in Pursuit of Social Good: A Response to Neoliberal Austerity,” there are several unique dimensions to this design practice that are noteworthy.

Firstly, citizen-centred design draws upon a consumerist logic that construes public problems as “citizen needs” that must be addressed through large-scale programs of change, such as open government initiatives and technology modernization efforts, such as the work of Ontario Digital Service. Satisfying the needs of citizens is the principle concern of public sector designers because in doing so they are creating “public value” in the sense that they have designed away any friction between citizens and the state — pejoratively referred to as bureaucracy — that may be impeding a seamless citizen service experience. By extension, the citizen-centred nature of public sector design is viewed as normatively “good” because it is focused on solving problems, which are viewed as “bad.” This good/bad dichotomy is an important feature of citizen-centred design as it serves as the discursive centre for the practice — the place from which this “new” approach to public administration acquires its legitimacy. To

challenge, contest, or question the merits of design is to call into question the inherent “goodness” it purports to deliver to citizens. By this logic, public servants who take up an oppositional stance to public sector design could be said to be working to undermine the public interest and undermining social good. The perceived goodness that is inherent in citizen-centred design has created an institutional culture in which it is difficult for public servants to critique so-called “new” approaches to public administration that attempt to advance innovation agendas.

Secondly, while much of the rhetoric surrounding citizen-centred approaches to design, as evidenced in the context of the interviews analyzed in this section, call for openness, transparency, inclusion, and empowerment, can at times be replaced by the opinions, perspectives, and ideas of third-party decision maker who are called upon to represent the accounts of groups of individuals who are most affected by governmental decisions. As Obar (2016) argues, reliance on third parties as an “intermediary bridge,” to support and advocate on behalf underrepresented publics, may prove useful in overcoming the types of structural and rhetorical subordination that contribute to the “technocratic divide.” The views of these third parties serve as one input into traditional processes of technocratic decision-making, but are not necessarily weighted equally vis a vis the opinions and ideas of so-called technical experts, such as policy professionals. There are a number of reasons, Obar (2016) argues, why individuals may rely on intermediaries to represent and advocate on their behalf, including a lack of understanding of the subject matter under consideration (i.e. rhetorical subordination), time, access, and geographic distance (i.e. structural subordination) (pp. 5869 – 5870).

However, “consulting” third-parties as a technique to uncover the needs of a particular group of individuals, could be construed as a form of “tokenism,” according to Arnstein’s (1969) “Ladder of Citizen Participation.” This model, which has been adapted by a number of provincial governments, including the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario (see for example, Treasury Board of Ontario, 2015), demands power showering in the form of partnerships, delegation, and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). For

instance, the Government of Ontario's Public Engagement Framework (PEF) describes four types of participation: 1. Sharing information with the public with no or few options to participate in dialogue with public officials; 2. Consultations that are designed to support the submission of ideas and views that advocate for a specific position; 3. Deliberative processes that facilitate Ontarians participation in the policy decision-making process; and 4. Collaboration, which represents the highest form of engagement, in which individuals define issues of public concern, co-develop solutions, share decision-making authority, and support the implementation of solutions (Open Government, 2016).

Fana (NH-3), who worked in the Government of Ontario's Open Government Office, said this last category is the most challenging. The Community Hubs Lab project, which she led, was created, in part, to allow the Open Government team an opportunity to experiment with methods and techniques to meaningfully co-create solutions alongside citizens, which would allow them to achieve the government's vision of "collaboration," as described in the PEF. A design-thinking process was used to organize the project in order to overcome the technocratic divide, to borrow from Obar, by providing a participatory and generative alternative to the traditional policy development process that attempts to achieve forms of power sharing. Proponents of design thinking contend that design can be used to supplement, and in some cases, replace the traditional policy development processes (Christian Bason, 2014; Blomkamp, 2018; Junginger, 2017; Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016).

However, as Fana (NH-3) and other interviews participants described, including Dan (DP-18), who works for the Ontario Digital Service, there are few examples of public servants co-designing solutions alongside citizens. Instead, third parties continue to be the main source of information used to define "user needs." Formal and informal institutional policies, rituals, habits, and processes that are intended to prevent public servants from directly interacting with citizens, were cited by interview participants as the main barrier to using a co-design approach. The accounts of interview participants,

suggest that the notion of citizen-*ness*, or the needs and perspectives of individual citizens that are said to sit at the heart of citizen-centred approaches to public administration, may be less pronounced than proponents who call for the use of design in public sector contexts contend.

Thirdly, citizen-centred design is a carefully guarded practice that is legitimized through deliberate governance mechanisms, such as directives, policies, procedures, funding arrangements, and annual planning schemes that are enacted through best practice reports, how-to guides, playbooks, and training sessions. While the purpose of these efforts is to ensure consistency across the public service with regard to the use of design, they have the secondary effect of (de)legitimizing traditional public administration work practices, values, and knowledge. The government departments who are charged with formulating these governance instruments often rely on the opinions and expertise of outside experts in the private sector to provide external validation. For example, Gabriella (SM-17) described the actions taken by the B.C. Public Service procured Deloitte to publish a report that concluded service design was a pursuit worthy of government investment. This example illustrates that best practices, at least in the context of the case examples referenced by interview participants in this research project, are often indexed according to private sector best practices. The conclusion that I draw here, and which is consistent with other assessments of neoliberal encroachment, such as New Public Management (see for instance, Aucoin, 1995; Connell et al., 2009; B. Evans & Fanelli, 2018), is that the public sector increasingly acquires an image of itself that is refracted back through the assessments, perceptions, and discourses produced by the private sector. Reclassifying and categorizing public administration activities as variations of design has created a situation in which a private sector epistemological lens is used to articulate how, under what conditions, and according to what measures of success public servants *should* perform public sector innovation.

Conclusion

The four themes analyzed in this chapter reflected the situated accounts of public servants engaged in public sector design. Regardless of the subject — from mapping social innovation to designing a digital platform to support public participation in the policy development process to streamlining the process of filing for a divorce — the themes examined here are united by a common ethic of “citizen-centredness,” a commitment to and understanding of the importance of identifying the individual needs of citizens and devising solutions to meet those needs.

The analysis conducted in this chapter will be taken up in the Chapter 6 through two in depth case studies that examine the politics and practice of citizen-centred design in situated contexts.

CHAPTER 6

Case Study Analysis: The Politics and Practice of ‘Citizen-Centredness’

“[T]he finality of government resides in the things it manages and, in the pursuit, of the perfection and intensification of the processes which it directs; and the instruments of government, instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiform tactics”

– Michel Foucault (1991, p.95).

As articulated in the previous chapter, “citizen-centred” design is principally concerned with identifying citizen needs and creating solutions that address those needs through structured processes of change. If successful, this design activity is said to “produce value” both for the people who consume public services (citizen-consumers) and for the institutions who administer those services (the state-producer). Value is determined according to two criteria: efficiency, which includes time savings associated with service delivery and/or a reduction in the costs of designing and delivering a service, and effectiveness, the degree to which a need successfully satisfies an individual desire, or a government objective. At the same time, governmental intuitions and public sector organizations across Canada have enacted policies and strategies that are aimed at transforming the public sector in accordance with the work practices, aims, and intentions of private sector innovation, which discursively is articulated as abandoning “traditional,” “old,” and “outdated” ways of working in favour of work practices that are viewed as “new,” “consumer-oriented,” and “technologically savvy.” This is evidenced in the following passage taken the citizen-centred strategy published in 2016 by the Government of British Columbia:

Traditional ways of working are inadequate to solving today's complex public policy challenges. It is the role of the public service to solve those challenges, and so we must adopt and apply new approaches to tackle them. (Where Ideas Work: A Corporate Plan for the BC Public service)

"New approaches" as described in this statement are emblematic of broader efforts that can be witnessed across all order of government in Canada to "transform" the everyday work practices of public servants according to the principles, values, and discourses associated with private sector innovation.

The interplay between the everyday activities carried out by public servants and governmental strategies intended to promote, safeguard, and enforce citizen-centred ways of working, function to reconstitute the public-servant–citizen relation — historically concerned with stewardship and safeguarding the public interest — according to the principles that undergird private sector models of innovation, which demand risk-taking and value maximization. It is at this discursive conjunction — between politics and practice — that a unique mode of neoliberal governance has emerged that seeks to discipline public sector conducts according to the aims of private sector innovation models.

By appealing to the "latent design potential" (JM-18), to borrow a phrase from one interview participant, the public-servant-cum-designer is interpellated as a subject charged with solving discrete problems aimed at maximizing citizen value. This process of subjectification, by extension, renders the state as smooth, frictionless, and unencumbered by the messy political controversies that necessarily accompany democratic decision-making. Reducing complex sociocultural political issues into neatly bounded technical problems is precisely how neoliberal governance functions to efface the democratic values of public administration, leaving in its place a managerial state consumed by problem solving.

Chapter 5, “Thematic Analysis: ‘Citizen-Centred’ Design in Canada,” examined four themes that emerged from interviews of participants who have worked on citizen-centred design projects in Canada. In the forthcoming analysis, we will consider how two of those themes — embedding design and narratives of change — contribute to and sustain a politics and practice of citizen-centred design. Politics refers to deliberate actions undertaken by different orders of government to enact strategies according to the ideals of citizen-centredness, which may include, for instance, allocating resources and issuing directives to public servants to ensure they comply with these instructions. This agenda is operationalized through the everyday practices of public servants, which are defined as the set of routinized behaviours, actions, and norms that are carried out by public servants in accordance with directives issued by political actors and senior public officials.³⁶ Thus, politics flows through practice, inasmuch as it is the everyday activities of public servants that give a material and discursive form to the strategic directives issued by senior governmental officials and political actors. This assessment is consistent with Tony Fry’s contention that “design gives material form and directionality to the ideological embodiment of a particular politics” (2011, p. 6). Design, thus, regardless of its intent — to create products or solve citizen problems — is carried out in service of particular political and ideological agendas.

This chapter unfolds by first providing an account of the relationship between governmentality and governance. These concepts will be used to support the analysis of two interconnected case studies, referred herein as Part 1 and Part 2, that demonstrate how design was used to institutionalize the practice of citizen-design in the B.C. Public Service. These two case studies will demonstrate how design, when used to service calls to adopt citizen-centred ways of working, functions as a form of neoliberal governance that softens and smooths out the rough edges of neoliberal austerity, in

³⁶ This definition is based on Reckwitz’ distinction between “practice” (praxis) and “practices,” which are defined as “a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz, 2002b, p. 249).

other words, the externalities of prolonged austerity in Canada. At the same time, public servants are responsibilized for designing and delivering services that are said to be “citizen-centred,” while lacking the requisite resources — financial and political — that are required to meaningfully address complex sociopolitical public issues that necessitate state intervention in the first place.

Governmentality, Governance, and Techniques of Power

Let us return to two important concepts first encountered at the start of this thesis — governmentality and governance. To understand what each of these concepts entail, we must first examine the idea of power. Michel Foucault (1982b) argues that power does not emanate from a single individual, institution, or authority; nor is it singularly thrust upon subjects through rational means. As he states, “The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individuals, or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others” (p. 788). To be clear, Foucault is not suggesting that technologies of dominance, or “disciplinary technology” as examined in *Discipline and Punish* (1995), cannot be used to enforce normative standards of conduct. Aggressive regimes and actors regularly use violence, defined as an overt form of aggression exercised by one subject upon another, as a disciplinary technique. However, behind such actions is something much more complex. Removing the “mask,” to borrow Foucault’s phrase, will ultimately reveal power relations as “a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others” (p. 789). Power, as such, is construed as a process by which the conduct of subjects are governed from a distance and over time through “subtler strategies of normalization, which produce self-regulating individuals” (Häkli, 2009, p. 629). This distinct form of governmental reason or rationality, which has pervaded since at least the mid-18th century, is what Foucault terms “governmentality.”

Practices of governance

If governmentality functions as “practical power,” in the sense that it is dispersed, distributed, and operationalized through practices of self-management, the question emerges: how are individual subjects enrolled in such processes and activities? The answer, as examined in Chapter 1, lies in the use and promotion of techniques of governance. Walters (2004) contends that over the last 10 years, governance has become the preferred model for institutional decision-making and has proliferated through corporate and non-corporate institutions. This has occurred in response to a perceived sense that “as societies have become more complex, and social demands have proliferated, political authority has become polycentric and multileveled” (p. 27). Thus, there is a desire for traditional sources of authority to delegate decision-making to localized bodies and actors. Brown (2016) describes this transference of responsibility in the following way: “‘guidelines’ replace law, ‘facilitation’ replaces regulation, ‘standards’ and ‘codes of conduct’ (disseminated by a range of agencies and institutions) replaces overt policing and other forms of state coercion” (W. Brown, 2016, p. 10). These mechanisms are intended to not only responsabilize local agents, by holding them accountable for decisions that are made according to predetermined “performance measures” and “benchmarks”; they are also intended to normalize modes of conduct according to external referents that are imported from other jurisdictions and sectors, which are referred to as best practices.

In examining the political implication of governance, Walters concludes, “[w]here many political discourses seek to articulate a field of antagonistic forces as agents of political transformation, governance seeks to implicate them as “partners” in a game of collective self-management and modulated social adjustment” (p.35). They are, in other words, implicated, enrolled, and responsabilized as inputs into ongoing process of problem-solving. By eschewing the political questions of struggle and contestation that are inevitably born out of processes that result in the gathering together of stakeholders who represent different perspectives, agendas, and positionalities, governance instead “displaces talk of politics as struggle or conflict” (Walters, 2004, p. 36). This occurs by

focusing on pragmatic concerns that “eliminates from discussion politically, ethically or otherwise normatively inflected dimensions of policy, aiming to supersede politics with practical, technical approaches to problems” (p. 10). Politics transposed as problem-solving, endeavours to neutralize political controversy, while subsuming difference into procedures of technical solutioning.

Case Studies: Design Governance in Practice

The following two case studies are based on in-depth interviews with public servants involved in or who have knowledge of the topic in question. These interviews were also analyzed in the previous chapter. The two case studies described in this chapter were selected because they provide an acute and detailed example of the connection between public sector innovation, design, and neoliberalism in Canada. Efforts taken to embed service design techniques throughout the B.C. public service by way of the publication of *the B.C. Service Design Playbook* is emblematic of the types of policies used by government to displace traditional public service practices with those favoured by proponents of public sector innovation. These accounts are supplemented, where available, with project documentation, reports, statements, and news articles. Together they are illustrative of efforts underway at all orders of government to recast the work of public servants in the image of the marketplace — to link citizen experience with customer experience and, by extension, to legitimize “service innovation” as a desirable set of public administration practices that exist in opposition to “traditional ways of work.” This work is carried out by “embedding design” and mobilizing “narratives of change”— two themes that emerged in Chapter 5 — to gain “buy in” for and to legitimize desirable public servant conduct.

Part 1

The Service Design Playbook: Adopting Innovative Practices to Citizen-Centred Design

Standing in front of a crowd of tech enthusiasts at the 2014 Code for America Conference in San Francisco, Josh posed the following questions: “What happens if we think about citizen experience with the same design tools, we use for the customer experience? Where would that take us?” (Code for America, 2015). These were not just speculative inquiries but cut to the heart of Josh’s practice as a consultant who specializes in citizen-centred design. His work started in 2010, when he was hired by the Government of British Columbia to work on a number of large-scale “transformation” and “modernization” projects. The primary focus was on fundamentally rethinking how the B.C. Public Service (BCPS) designed, delivered, and measured digital products and services. This work was part of a broader governmental strategy that was published in October 2010. Titled, *Citizens @ The Centre: B.C. Government 2.0 (C@C)*, the strategy was the first attempt to present a coherent articulation of the government’s interpretation of and intention to become more citizen-centred. It was followed by successive policies, strategies, and projects that actively sought to embed design in the BCPS.

The political and economic context surrounding the launch of the strategy is worth considering because as interview participants described, it likely influenced its timing and content. Immediately following the global economic recession (“The Great Recession”), which lasted from 2007–2009, the government enacted a range of austerity policies intended to address the province’s budget deficit, which stood at \$2.775 billion at the end of fiscal year 2010 (B.C. Public Service, 2012, p. 7). The government was also grappling with a loss in revenue due to a decline in the output of the province’s oil and gas sector and a flailing housing market. During this period the government expanded investment in public infrastructure, health, and education. However, these expenditures were offset by cuts to discretionary spending, or what was termed as “streamlining” (Whiteside, 2018, pp. 37–38). This resulted in layoffs, cuts to

public services, the restructuring of government agencies and departments, and wage freezes for public servants (Fanelli & Paulson, 2010).

To give some sense of the scale of these initiatives, in April 2010, the government announced a third round of job cuts. In total, 294 B.C. public servants were slated to be laid off. Allan Seckel, the head of the BCPS at the time, characterized these losses as an, “unfortunate and difficult outcome of the government’s continued efforts to responsibly manage through the impact of the economic downturn” (Harnett, 2010). In the letter, Seckle committed to “limit external hiring and manage through attrition” to minimize job losses where possible. There was one exception, however. Departments were permitted to hire user-experience designers who were skilled at digitizing public services, which was necessary for reducing costs associated with service delivery. One interview participant characterized this decision as follows: “If you want to be saving money through digital tools, you need to actually have the tools work well. There was a direct tie to fiscal objectives of government to that role” (JM-19). From the very beginning, design was interpreted through the lens of austerity and cost containment.

It was also during this period that then Premier Gordon Campbell was attempting to contain the political outcry surrounding his decision to replace the GST and PST with a 12% harmonized sales tax. By all accounts, it was an unpopular decision. A public opinion poll conducted by Angus Reid in June 2010 concluded that 76% of British Columbians were opposed to the harmonized tax (Wintonyk, 2010). The controversy surrounding the decision had eroded public trust in Campbell’s government. On November 4, 2010, he stepped down as the Premier of British Columbia and was succeeded by Christy Clarke who won the B.C. Liberal leadership race based on a promise to make government more open and transparent. Immediately following her swearing in as the 35th Premier of British Columbia, Clarke issued a press release that stated, “We want British Columbians to have the opportunity to be more engaged with government decision-making,” said Premier Clark. “We will work with citizens to find

solutions to problems, set priorities openly and explain why we make the decisions we do” (Office of the Premier, March 2011).

Putting citizens at the centre

The four years between 2008–2012 were, by all accounts, a period of economic and political instability in British Columbia. The government, under the leadership of Liberal Gordon Campbell and later Christy Clark, were feeling pressure to reduce the costs associated with service delivery and demonstrate that they were committed to listening to and involving British Columbians in government decision-making. The *Citizens @ the Centre* strategy was a response to both of these challenges. First, it was a way to demonstrate the government’s commitment to listening; second, it outlined how the government would deliver services in a manner, format, and location that was most convenient for citizens, while reducing the costs associated with service delivery in order to reduce the provincial deficit. The strategy hinged upon three “shifts” required to transform the BCPS into an organization that could “bridge the apparent gap between the complexity of government and the need for more accessible services to citizens by using 21st-century tools to do our work in the 21st century” (BC Public Service Agency, 2010, p. 3). The three shifts outlined in the strategy included:

1. **Involve Citizens:** encourage, invite, and create opportunities to involved British Columbians in government decision-making. This included making government data and information widely accessible.
2. **Digitize Services:** take further steps to modernize (i.e. digitize) existing digital and non-digital services to create more opportunities to facilitate citizen-self-service “so they are shaped less by the structure of government and more by citizen needs.”
3. **Adopt Business Practices:** find opportunities to use “a more corporate approach to technology planning and innovation” to support an enhanced citizen service experience and help public servants improve their ability to adopt more

innovative approaches to work.

(BC Public Service Agency, 2010, p. 12)

Interview participants who were involved in drafting the strategy stated they urged leadership to include references to “user design” in the document because, as they argued, design was a necessary input for achieving the government’s transformation agenda. One interview participant said that use of the term “design” in C@C was the catalyst that informed the formation of the user experience design team (later becoming the service design team), which was located in Government Communications & Public Engagement (GCPE). It also provided the political cover and executive buy-in needed to introduce the practices of user experience and service design to a skeptical public service.

More fundamentally, though, the strategy marked a stark departure from the way services had traditionally been planned and administered. It was by all account the first clear indication of the government’s commitment to adopting a “citizen-centred” approach to public administration. Lex (AM-20), who was a senior executive in the public service at the time C@C was published and who had first-hand insight into the conversations surrounding the strategy, characterized the transformation in the following way:

The big shift in the *Citizens @ the Center* [...] was a deliberate decision that if we’re making services for citizens, we better know what they actually need in order to meet their needs, and thus we better talk to them. There are probably some good methods out there from the private sector that we should be applying as best practices, rather than just making it up.

The language, goals, and policy directives outlined in the strategy informed successive attempts to define and embed design activity across and throughout the government. In many respects, C@C signaled the government’s willingness to borrow from and, where

appropriate, emulate the actions and models of innovation found within the private sector.

The Deputy Minister's Committee on Transformation and Technology (DMCTT) was established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations outlined in C@C. In July 2011, the committee issued a memo directing Ministry of Citizens' Services and Open Government (CITZ), who oversaw the Open Government strategy, to take control of the government's main public-facing website (gov.bc.ca) and "become the central body for strategic web governance including development of the Internet Strategy" (B.C. Public Service, 2012, p. 7). It also stipulated that CITZ would "would establish a Centre of User Design Leadership to design the user experience for government, and to perform enterprise level research to guide service design" (p.7). This work was carried out by a small team of designers and business strategists located in Government Communications & Public Engagement (GCPE), many of whom had never been involved in the type of enterprise transformation that C@C called for. The UX team, as they were called by interview participants, was tasked with making user experience design (UXD) more accessible to B.C. public servants and a standard part of the process of planning, designing, and developing websites:

What they were really doing was the hands-on design work. Figuring out tools that made sense in the B.C. government around user experience design, how to run a user experience design project in government, and really delivering the design product and process. (AM-20)

One of their first projects was the design and launch of the B.C. UX Toolbox in the Fall 2011 by the GCPE branch. This online library of resources was an attempt to document and systemize a more citizen-centred approach to digital web design and development. An external contractor who had been partnering with the UX team wrote this toolkit. It distilled all the best practices the team had learned since they first start working on UX-focused projects starting in 2010, including user testing, journey mapping and prototyping. These concepts and tools were unfamiliar to B.C. public servants so the team also offered in-person and online training.

It was also during this time period that the government released its Open Government policy, which was founded upon the principles of C@C. The policy focused on “strengthening government’s commitment to engage and empower citizens by creating an environment in which citizens can access, use, adapt, and create value from Data” (Office of the Chief Information Officer, 2011, p. 5). It represented yet another plank in the government’s attempt to promote an ethos of citizen-centredness throughout the public service by making data and information transparent and open for public use.

While progress was being made throughout 2011 to realize the ambitious goals set out in C@C, these initiatives felt fragmented and disconnected from one another. To that end, a more precise plan of action was required. In response, the *B.C. Internet Strategy* was released in September 2012. Its purpose was to stitch together the goals set out in the C@C, directives issued by CITZ, and to enact the Open Government Policy through a unified approach for planning, designing, and delivering government websites that meet citizen needs. The strategy describes the need for a formal approach to managing the government’s web presence in more stark terms:

It is government’s job to provide service to citizens. When people can’t find the services they need, it is the responsibility of government to respond. A common strategy for government was required to align resources and focus efforts in a way that could lead to a citizen-centric web presence for government.

From comprehensive web standards to shared development and design resources to access to planning and designing citizen-centred web services, the strategy laid out the government’s deliberate intention to use design to improve what was perceived at the time as a flawed, broken, and inefficient citizen-service experience. Interview participants who participated in the creation of strategy characterized it as a way to introduce UX work into the way the public service approached digital projects.

Launch of the strategy signaled to public servants that they would need to change the way they had historically approached web design projects. One interview participant, who was working in the Ministry of Education at the time the strategy launched, said it was very rare for public servants to go out and talk to citizens about what they wanted. Instead, websites were built according to what managers in the BCPS believed to be the needs of citizens. As she put it:

If the DM [Deputy Minister] or the ADM [Assistant Deputy Minister], said that they want this thing, essentially, it's a go and build it, and just make it happen ... I was always of the mindset of, 'Do we really need this? Have we gone out and asked people? What do they actually need?' (DY-22)

Growing demand and complexity

By 2013, demand for the UX team's services increased, as did the complexity of the projects they were working on. Rather than simply designing website interfaces, the team was encouraging ministries to address larger gaps in service delivery, which extended beyond technology to include policies and operations. As several interview participants described, while the team got its start in digital strategy and design, this was always meant to be a starting point, "a sort of Trojan Horse" (DY-22) to introduce the ideas of service design to the senior executive team. "Otherwise it was just like, you're taking crappy PDF forms and putting them on the Internet and we've been trying to do that for at least 15 years, and we still know it doesn't work" (SM-17). There was growing appetite within the team to broaden their mandate to focus more holistically on the design of services. At the same time, one of the lead architects of the government's user experience design practice had accepted a job in another ministry. This change in leadership, coupled with increasing pressure to take on more complex projects, lead the team to conclude that they needed to use this opportunity to document and codify what they perceived to be the BCPS approach to service design. "This was kind of her sense of legacy of saying, okay, I want there to be a proper way of doing things or at least a way of doing things as a default, not necessarily the right way but a way" (JM-19). To that end, the decision was made to create a "handbook" or a "framework" that explained

to public servants “how to do this kind of work in government” (DY-22). Much of this work was built upon the initial efforts of the B.C. UX Toolbox.

There was a sense that writing down the process would give it the formality and legitimacy that some public servants had suggested was missing from the group’s efforts. Gabriella, a member of the GCPE, recalled:

We had to write it down [the service design methodology] and gospelize it so that the public service believed it was actually something that had rigor, and not just something we had dreamed up. We had to do that so that they could actually begin to understand where they were in a process, but also that this wasn’t a crazy idea. (SM)

To support these initial efforts, Deloitte, a global management-consulting firm, was brought in to produce a report about the impact and importance of using a service design approach. “We had to get external advisors and to be, like, this is a good idea, even though they [Deloitte] were, like, “What is service design?” (SM-17). There was perception that external actors could be used to validate the work that was already underway within BCPS and provide a measure of its value to the public service. The opinions expressed by Deloitte were also used as evidence for continued financial investment in design-related initiatives. While the austerity measures experienced from 2009–2010 had eased, the public service had grown accustomed to viewing every decision through the lens of cost savings and return on investment. The GCPE was feeling pressure to demonstrate the value of their work, as well as how design could create value for the BCPS. Marcy (DY-22) described the team’s desire to demonstrate the value of their work as follows:

It was almost a way of trying to get permission to do this work in government, and then we could show where the value was in doing that. That became the leverage point and it just sort of morphed from there. (DY-22)

It was during this period that the team worked to build buy-in within BCPS for their work, including trying to find ministry partners willing to work with them on service-design related projects to again prove the value of this approach.

Building on many of the ideas, concepts, and tools contained within the B.C. UX Toolbox, the first full draft of what would become known as the *Service Design Playbook* was authored by three people: an external contractor who was part of drafting the B.C. UX Toolbox, the Director of Web and Service Design in GCPE, and a newly hired head of the GCPE service design team. Writing the playbook coincided with the completion of four proof-of-concept projects to demonstrate the benefits of a service design approach. These included, for instance, a project with the Residential Tenancy Branch to improve the residential tenancy dispute process. Journey mapping was used to help locate “pain points,” essentially moments of friction between the state and the citizen.

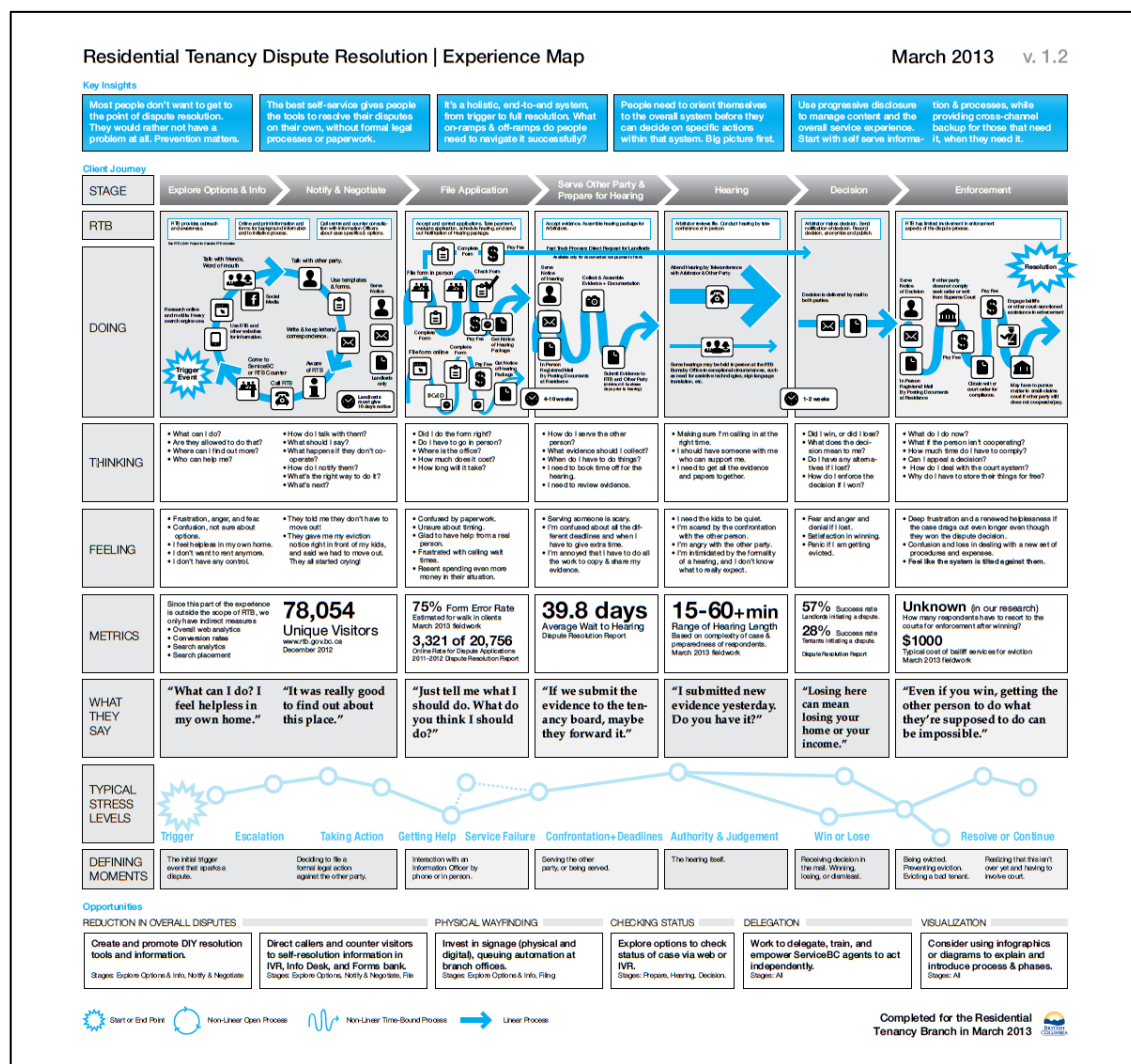


Illustration 6.1 An experience map that is used to visualize the emotional state of citizens when going through the tenant dispute process. The purpose of this artifact is to identify ideal moments within the current experience, typically stressful moments such as having to complete complicated paper work, where design can be used to smooth out friction any friction between the state and citizen.

From the *Service Design Playbook (Beta)* by Government Communication and Public Engagement (GCPE) Branch, Government of British Columbia, p. 100. Copyright © 2016, Province of British Columbia.

As each proof-concept-project was completed, the team documented what they learned and included these findings in the preliminary drafts of the *Playbook*. This

process of learning by doing was useful for validating which elements of the service design process were well suited for the BCPS. As one interview participant recalled, “We spent a lot of time in that phase with ministries, because if we don't get that right, then it can be really challenging as we start working through a project if not everybody's on the same page” (DY-22). For instance, while working on a project with the Ministry of Forest, Land and Natural Resources, the team learned that they needed to add an entire step in the process, which they called “alignment.”

We only got halfway through that project because they were not ready, they didn't understand what they were getting into. They weren't ready, they couldn't handle it, their leadership didn't know what to do with it. We opened Pandora's box and they were, like, “What?” (SM-17).

These conversations allowed the team to identify and address the concerns of public servants, who were generally skeptical that design had any meaningful role to play in public administration. In a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Health, for example, the GCPE team learned that the concept of prototyping — creating partially completed products to test features with end users — was perceived by many public servants as wasteful. In fact, the iterative approach suggested by the team was at odds with what public servants believed was a core part of their job: to safeguard public funds. The team used this feedback to draft content that addressed these concerns in order to increase the likelihood that public servants would follow the guidelines laid out in the *Playbook*.

Several interview participants described the documents as long and too detailed; the initial draft was very detailed; it included guidance on how to do everything from using sticky notes to a detailed history of design thinking. The team initially thought this level of detail was required to stave off criticisms that the approach being proposed was not rigorous enough. However, the document became cumbersome and difficult to navigate. Two additional people were brought on to the team to edit the document to make it more readable, understandable, and consumable for public servants. This process of editing and revising took several months and was eventually published in the

fall of 2015. The team had initially intended to create an online version of the document, essentially a website, but the team was feeling pressure from senior executives in their department to polish the draft and make it available to the rest of the BCPS. Instead, the pair worked with the GCPE graphic design team to create a PDF version of the document that could quickly be made available to public servants.

Launching the Service Design Playbook

The first version of the *Service Design Playbook*, a hefty 130-page document, was published by GCPE in 2015. It represented the first comprehensive set of guidelines for service design published by any governmental institution in Canada. The opening preamble described the context and rationale for its publication:

Customer-centred design has made everyday activities like shopping and banking responsive to people both online and in person. Applying thoughtful, consistent design approaches to service can help the BCPS realize the improvements seen outside government. BC public servants bring compassion and program expertise to the job. The *Playbook* is intended to help ensure they have the necessary tools and corporate support to make change (Government Communications and Public Engagement, 2015, p. 7).

In many respects, the *Playbook* was a distillation of the BCPS's efforts to promote, nurture, and enforce the ethos of citizen-centredness. In incredible detail, it evidences the "value" of design in creating citizen-centred experiences. As one interview participant put it, "the irony is that it's a public service. It has a discipline around finance. It has a discipline around HR. It has a discipline around all these things. It doesn't actually have a discipline around how we design service" (SM-17). The *Playbook* attempts to address this perceived gap, by laying out a standardized approach to service design and delivery. "The thing about the *Playbook* is that it takes practices that have been around for 20 years [in the private sector] and it translates it into a public service context." The document also addresses public servants' concerns about the need to effectively manage public funds by arguing, "to ensure that the investment and

effort [in public programs and services] is justified by a real citizen need” (p.13). It also stated:

Compared to budgets for significant capital and ongoing transformation projects, service design is a relatively small investment to ensure that outcomes and needs have a foundation of evidence and insight to guide project decisions and strategy. (p.7)

It was imperative to demonstrate that service design could be used to save costs across government, and thus was worthy of further ministerial investment and support.

The document is structured according to each phase of the “The BC Methodology and Project Approach” and features detailed instructions, process diagrams, case studies, and fill-in-the-blank templates that public servants can use to do everything from scoping, delivering, designing, and measuring citizen-centred services. The phases include: Alignment (scoping internal political buy-in), discovery (researching the problem under question), opportunity (explore possible service solutions), prototype and test (create service solutions and test them with citizens and public servants), roadmap (create common vision for implementation), and implement (improve the service overtime).

From the *Service Design Playbook (Beta)* by Government Communication and Public Engagement (GCPE) Branch, Government of British Columbia, p. 18. Copyright © 2016, Province of British Columbia.

As much as the actions and directives outlined in the *Playbook* were intended to support the design of services that better meet citizen needs and reduce the costs of service delivery, it had another important function. It was also intended to transform how B.C. Public Servants approach their day-to-day work by helping them “find new areas of personal growth — new skills and the excitement of being involved in service innovation” (p.15). This approach to service innovation “extends government’s traditional practices” (p.9) by incorporating human-centred design methods and tools, such as journey mapping, prototyping, service blueprinting, and co-design into service provision (Government Communications and Public Engagement, 2015). It was intended to encourage public servants to reimagine their work through the lens of

design and, by extension, to become an active agent in realizing the government's innovation agenda. Marcy (DY-22) described the desire for this intention as:

Trying to ensure that we can hit the executive audience as well as practitioners who are in their ministries and who need to do this work. Providing them with tools and methods that they can implement into their work and help guide them along a process that includes citizens and staff and the front end, the back end, all the users involved. (DY-22)

'Socializing' the Playbook

The *Playbook* was distributed to all ministries and presented to senior executives throughout government. The team also "socialized," to borrow a phrase used by interview participants, the *Playbook* at special events, such as the annual technology conference hosted by the Office of the Chief Information Officer. While there was general support for many of the ideas advocated in the document, the GCPE encountered resistance from ministries that were not accustomed to interacting directly with citizens. One interview participant recalled a project in which an executive director had made specific commitments to a minister without knowing the full scope of the project. When the project eventually kicked-off and the team began conducting user research, they discovered that the commitments made by the minister did not align with citizen needs:

He [the executive director] was terrified, he was, 'Oh my God, how do I tell my minister that what you've just pledged to publicly is wrong.' We're like, 'Let's figure that out.' He went, and to his credit, he went to the minister, and was like, 'You need to stop talking about this, because the research says that that's actually not what people want.' She [the minister] did.

Situations like this are emblematic of the politics of citizen-centred design. In an effort to challenge "traditional" or "old ways of working," public servants inevitably butt up against entrenched power relations in which decisions are made in an intentionally hierarchical fashion.

Governmental institutions are not designed to support this type of risk, interview participants explained. For instance, the concept of iteration, in essence being able to quickly adjust to changing sociopolitical circumstances, or as participants described “fail quickly,” was very much at odds with the epistemology of public administration. As part of their work, the GCPE service design team acted as a coach, in situations where departmental staff had to navigate internal politics, helping ministries better understand the legal, policy and regulatory implications of their work.

As the reputation and trust in the GCPE team increased, they were asked to administer complex service design projects that overlapped with policy development. In addition to streamlining government services, the team began to work directly with policy professionals from across government to create and eliminate rules and regulations that were perceived as burdensome or inefficient. In reflecting on how her practice has shifted since the launch of the *Playbook*, one GCPE team member stated:

When we are doing projects... any and all projects... we're looking at the opportunity space, after doing the discovery and finding out the insights. It's usually policy, legislation, technology, sometimes even people or space that are attached to whatever opportunity. We're looking at policy as a way of, like... a catalyst for change. And actually, having it in our work. (IG-4)

As the team saw it, policy professionals were “gatekeepers” who “make sure that people follow rules” (IG-4). This could have easily been construed as an impediment to the design process, but instead they began to view policy as a necessary part of creating a more citizen-centred culture within the BCPS. For instance, if they spotted what was believed to be burdensome regulations or policies as part of a project, they would notify the Ministry of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction to investigate.

The Service Design Playbook

Since launching the *Service Design Playbook* in 2015, a second version (beta one) has been launched that includes more detailed guidance on how to implement the service

concepts developed. A refreshed corporate strategy was also launched as a follow up to C@C. The strategy titled, *Where Ideas Work*, and published in 2016, took up the goals outlined in the original corporate strategy but added one additional goal: “Enhancing Service to Citizens.” To do this, the strategy called upon public servants to continue to understand the needs of citizens, including finding even more avenues for them to submit feedback, such as the government Red Tape initiative; use design to deliver services to citizens that are “accessible, consistent and relevant”; and use data to test and improve services. In the area of enhancing services to citizens, the strategy proposed several initiatives including “Adopting the *Service Design Playbook* and other citizen-centred service design principles and practices consistently in the development and delivery of public services” (p.12). These efforts though were situated within the BCP’s broader innovation strategy that called for improved collaboration with the private sector, “to take advantage of shared expertise and partnerships.” It also called for the setting up an Innovation Hub to “create a new innovation hub to provide access to the resources and expertise needed to support a culture of innovation across the B.C. public service” (p.21).

In reflecting on the changes that have taken place since the *Playbook* was first published, including the adoption of BCPS-wide innovation strategy, interview participants characterized their early work as seeding the ground for a culture of design and innovation to take hold. They also admitted, that design alone will not address underlying structural issues.

... if you want to change the service you need to fundamentally change your policy, and so that just takes a long time ... Or you need to fundamentally change how you're spending your money in this program ... that's just too, almost too much right now, and there's political reasons for that and all those different things affected, but when I think about what makes good service policy, infrastructure operations culture, we're not there yet. (SM-17)

The political elements of their work, whether that be hierarchy or a politics of austerity, inherently shapes how design is conceptualized and used within public sector contexts.

More importantly, perhaps, these political realities configure how and through what lens citizen-centredness is defined.

Part 2

The Medical Services Plan: Cutting Red Tape to Streamline Public Services in British Columbia

Having now established the origins and intent of the *Service Design Playbook*, Part 2 will provide an account of how the principles, process, and tools contained within it were used in the context of a ministry-led project. The project, titled “Medical Services Application Redesign,” was one of the pilot projects that was completed alongside the writing of *Playbook* and informed its content.

In May 2015, the Government of British Columbia made a pledge to “streamline services and eliminate the burden of excessive and unnecessary red tape for B.C. business and citizens” (Regulatory Reform BC, 2016, p. 1). As part of this process, the public service launched a province-wide public consultation to identify red tape. The six-week engagement took place between October 22 and December 3, 2015. In total, 5,900 people took part and 280 ideas were identified through the process. The ideas were crowdsourced online. Fifty of the ideas submitted affected the Ministry of Health, 25 of which were focused on improving the Medical Service Plan (MSP) — British Columbia’s public health insurance scheme, which is administered by Health Insurance B.C. (HIBC). The insurance plan covers the cost of necessary medical procedures, but “New B.C. residents, existing residents applying for financial support through Premium Assistance, and residents changing marital status, are all required to enroll with MSP in order to receive coverage” (Government Communications and Public Engagement, 2018).

The sign-up process was notoriously cumbersome (Government Communications and Public Engagement, 2018). Citizens had to complete complicated paper forms and physically mail them to the HIBC. Selene (IG-4), one interview participants who led the project for the service design team, said internal data that showed that 30% to 40% of forms submitted were incomplete, with applicants not finding out until months after they were submitted. This made the process slow and frustrating. New Canadians, in particular, found the process confusing. In response, the Ministry of Health decided to create a “digital self-service product,” essentially an online enrolment form (IG-4). In addition to improving the citizen experience and reducing the numbers of errors associated with enrolment, the project was designed to save money, as well. The hope was that digitizing the experience would reduce service costs, as fewer staff would have to be dedicated to reviewing and revising erroneous forms.

To support them in these efforts, the ministry sought the expertise of the service design team located in GCPE. While the *Service Design Playbook* had yet to be officially published, executives from GCPE had been socializing the contents of the guide with their colleagues in other ministries. Senior representatives at the ministry found the principles of service design laid out in an early draft of the *Playbook* appealing. One of the project team members described the process of gaining buy-in as being at odds with the way projects were typically managed:

The process was actually socializing ADMs...Assistant Deputy Ministers, on what service design is ... and then actually getting that buy in [from senior leadership], to say, ‘OK we actually approve of this approach to solve the problem.’ (IG-4)

This was an important project for the team as they had done previous work in healthcare that “didn’t land very well” (DY-22). Ministry of health stakeholders were pretty skeptical of the process. They wanted to know how the services design approach advocated in the *Playbook* was any different from the work they had done in the past. Marcy believes that the process used by the service design team challenged some of

this skepticism. “I think, what I see is people, the folks that we worked with, going from, “No, you can't do that, we won't let you do that.” To, “Okay, now how can we get more of that? We want you to. We see value in this and we want to do more of this.” After many back and forth meetings, executive staff signed off on the project plan. In reflecting on the project, Marcy believed they were willing to take a leap of faith because the GCPE team committed to seeing the project through to implementation.

Finding opportunities to create value

In December 2015, the project officially kicked off, marking the start of one of the first successful examples of the *Playbook* being used in practice. The process began with internal “discovery” sessions. They interviewed Assistant Deputy Ministers and Executive Directors, as well as “front-counter staff” who administered the MSP to identify “challenges, opportunities, and barriers” associated with the experience. This process, which took two months to complete, resulted in a large data set, primarily composed of qualitative data. This information was translated into several “opportunity areas” through a process of clustering Post-it notes. Opportunity areas were defined as moments within the existing experience where design could be used to improve the sign-up process without having to make a significant investment in resources, so-called high value moments to intervene. Selene (IG-4) described the conversation she had with senior project stakeholders in the Ministry of Health when it came time to present back their findings from the discovery phase as follows:

‘Okay guys ... this is going to hurt [because there was a lot of critical feedback from citizens]. These are some opportunities that are worth pursuing that we can actually make a lot of progress on MSP. There are lots of different things that we do, but this is a great area to focus on. And also, within scope of this project.’ (IG-4)

The GCPE team who worked on the project, said that this initial step, called “discovery,” was important for gaining the trust of senior leaders, who in turn gave the project team permission to go out and speak directly with citizens to try and better identify their

needs. As part of their research process, the team conducted face-to-face and phone interviews with citizens. The purpose of these interviews was to better understand the citizen's perspective of the medical services experience. They also wanted to get ideas for how to improve the service. Selene said it was important to work with both staff administering the service and citizens: "When we're working with citizens, we're also working with staff because what we noticed in our journey is that gap... they're typically service providers or they have such close insight into how ... and where improvements can be made." (IG-4)

The interview data were transcribed to Post-it notes and analyzed using a process called "affinity grouping," a technique described in the *Playbook* as "clustering" together Post-it notes with similar content. The aim is to identify different categories of knowledge, such as "insights," "tasks," and "pain points." This data was then visualized as a journey to help identify areas on which to focus design activity. All of this information was packaged into a presentation and presented to government "decision makers" along with the supporting evidence from the interviews. In the end, this process identified the need to create two new digital experiences for citizens, both of which were related to the "premium assistance and enrolment." For context, the process of enrolling for premium services required citizens to find forms (everything was paper-based), fill out forms, which were complicated to start with, and physically mail forms to a third-party service provider called HIVCs. Marcy who led the project on behalf of GCPE said it was difficult at times to demonstrate to the ministry staff how legislation and policy had negatively affected citizens.

It was quite a challenge working with the ministry ... pushing back to say, 'It might be written in legislation, but really, from a user's perspective, they shouldn't need to have to do this. We're only asking for that [information in the original cumbersome form] because it makes our [public servant] job easier, not the citizen's job easier.' It was quite difficult to have those conversations and be challenging legislation and policy, especially in the health space where it's pretty risk averse to begin with.

Prototyping and implementing

The team spent one month prototyping the new digital experience. They used an agile approach, working alongside the development team to quickly turn paper prototypes into working concepts that citizens could interact with. These prototypes were shared with citizens. Each new piece of feedback was brought back to the design team who updated prototypes to accommodate this feedback: “We started to build and iterate on design and go back out and test with citizens; and come back in and build, fix, improve, and go back out” (IG-4). This project did not include co-design activities with citizens — which is at odds with the guidance laid out in the *Playbook*. Instead, the project team codesigned with ministry staff. They worked with “intercultural groups” who worked with specific citizen groups. In this case, these organizations work directly with “newcomers to B.C.,” helping these them overcome language barriers. “In terms of a test case, they [intercultural groups] were a great audience to work with. They also helped people fill out the forms, so they're almost like a front counter for these forms” (IG-4).

The final prototypes were made live in March 2017. The form completion error rate dropped to 8% Selene (IG-4). “People can submit online. They don't have to find stamps. They don't have to fill out these crazy forms and receive it back. They can submit online. If there are errors, they are notified in a very timely period” (IG-4). This was coupled with ongoing training and support of ministry staff to ensure that they are able to continuously improve the experience. As one project team member from GCPE stated, “There needs to somebody that can be there to sustain the change and continue with the improvement” (IG-4). At the same time, this desire to train ministry staff in the methods and tools of service design is consistent with the goals and objectives laid out in the *Playbook*, namely, to displace outmoded approaches to public administration, which are perceived as bureaucratic, inefficient, and do not adequately address the needs of citizens.

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Illustration 6.3 Revised Premium Assistant online application form. A screen shot of the interface.

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Demonstrating the value of service design

In reflecting back, Marcy (DY-22) said that this was a challenging project. “These are folks that in the past we haven’t had necessarily had good working relationships with.” Part of the success, as she sees it, is that they involved the ministry throughout the project.

I think by bringing them along and challenging some of their assumptions and sort of the status quo, we were kind of able to show them how, by doing that, it’s okay, we can negotiate a little bit, but it’s like, ‘This is what’s going to help to make it better for your citizens.’ (DY-22)

Third-parties who administer, and who were also skeptical of the process and potential outcomes, in the end commended the group for their efforts. “The third-party contractor was, like, again, ‘We want to do more of this. We see value in it. We see that this is actually going to help us move in the direction of more efficient services, which frees up time to be able to focus on other things’” (DY-22). The team characterized their work as valuable and they expressed a desire that it “should be easy enough for everybody to be able to do this” (DY-22).

Politics in Practice: Techniques of Neoliberal Governance

The two case studies presented in the preceding section are emblematic of the types of design related activities found in the public service across Canada. The *Service Design Playbook*, though, is unique in that it represents the first formal set of guidelines for how to do service design in Canadian public sector contexts. It has since been emulated by other jurisdictions, including Ontario. It is also held up as an exemplary case study for how to systemically embed design practices within a public service environment. The Observatory on Public Sector Innovation, funded by the OECD, features the *Playbook* as a best-practice example of how to embed service design in government (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, n.d.).

However, the development of this strategy is also an example of “design governance.” The combination of policies, procedures, and methods used to embed design practices, knowledge, and tools throughout the BCPS, performs a disciplinary function in the sense that these measures encourage, and in some cases, through punitive measures, enforce what constitutes desirable public servant conduct. The purpose of enacting these governance measures was to encourage B.C. public servants to take a “customer-design lens,” when planning, creating, and delivering public services. Secondly, publishing the strategy in the form of a playbook signaled to public servants and British Columbians more broadly that the government was committed to adopting a consumer-oriented approach to public service delivery, which was consistent with efforts underway in other jurisdictions, including the United

Kingdom, Australia, Denmark, and to a lesser extent, the United States (see for example Aberbach & Christensen, 2005). As authors of the *Playbook* recalled, there was a sense that writing down the frameworks and guidelines associated with service design would signify the importance of realizing the government's commitment to delivering citizen-centred services or the "proper way of doing things." Adopting this approach to service delivery, meant drawing upon private sector models of innovation that have historically been associated with product management and user experience design, and which have been characterized as democratic (Christian Bason, 2017), entrepreneurial (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011), and with a greater emphasis on creating value for end users or service consumers (Crosby et al., 2017; Osborne, 2018). The work of Deloitte was used to lend legitimacy to these efforts by applying a private sector epistemological lens that was perceived as rigorous and valid.

This shift towards a consumer model has required a change in mindset, what some interview participants described as "culture change." This change entails reorienting how the public servant views their work and their relationship to citizens. To support this shift in perspectives, the *Playbook*, employed "narratives of change" that were used to persuade public servants that this work was needed. The second case study, for instance, illustrates how the governance measures outlined in the *Playbook* are interpreted in the context of a specific project. It highlights how citizen-centred design is concerned with eliminating friction, characterized as "red tape," through structured processes of change. The perceived antidote to this friction is "efficiency," which is achieved by streamlining the process of submitting forms associated with the MSP Premium Benefit. More than anything, this project was used as a tangible example of citizen-centred design in context and was regularly cited by advocates of the *Playbook* as a best-practice case study and used to persuade other public servants of a design-based approach to public administration.

Together, these case studies provide a useful context for considering how themes of embedding design and narratives of change, which were first discussed in

Chapter 5, manifest in situated and local contexts. More specifically, the case studies provide an empirical basis to interrogate the intersection of design and neoliberal governance, and how this entanglement may serve to obscure austerity politics in Canada through appeals of citizen-centredness.

Embedding design: Disciplining desirable public sector conduct

The concept of embedding design, as analyzed in Chapter 5, is defined as deliberate, and systematic efforts promote the use of design practices, techniques, processes, and tools in public sector contexts. It results in the active (de)legitimization of existing public sector practices in favour of those that are perceived as more aligned with the aims of private sector innovation. The process of embedding is carried out in mundane ways, such as through voluntary training sessions and subtle shifts in everyday public administration discourse that draw principally from the vernacular of business and product management. Thus, it is principally a practice of displacement and persuasion that manifests in discursive and material ways.

Prior to drafting the *Service Design Playbook*, the GCPE team commissioned a private sector consulting firm to write a report that outlined best practices in terms of public sector innovation. Among the recommendations outlined in the report was a call to use user-centred design methods more frequently in the day-to-day work activity of public servants. This example demonstrates the shift in terms of the referent used to denote what constitutes innovation and, more specifically, judgment in terms of what practices B.C. Public Servants ought to emulate. Foregrounding private sector models of innovation in this way, with a particular focus on the need for user-centred design, represents a discursive shift in the sense that the language used to describe public sector innovation practice is refracted through discourses of customer experience management. For instance, the strategy of various documents, such as C@C, that were published in the lead up to the launch of the *Playbook*, used consumerist appeals to encourage public servants to recast their work as that of identifying individual needs and

channeling resources to address these needs. This passage found in the introduction to the *Playbook* illustrates the shift in discourse:

This is a new approach to service innovation that extends government's traditional practices. It relies on direct, behavioural, systemic research with citizens and other stakeholders to understand context and opportunities. These insights lead to rapid prototyping and iteration to try out new ideas and manage risk. To be successful in government's service transformation work, public servants need evidence in order to recognize the real challenges and confidently propose opportunities to enhance how government delivers services to citizens. Government needs to try out opportunities quickly and inexpensively before committing to full implementation. A service design project allows staff to do that, and the *Playbook* gives guidance and support for these activities. (Government Communications and Public Engagement, 2015, p. 9)

This call to “extend” traditional practices of working marks a discursive breakpoint: a perceived rejection of the bureaucratic ways of the past in favour of the streamlined, agile, and entrepreneurial methods intended to “try out new ideas” and “manage risk,” all the while reducing expenses associated with public service provision.

To be clear, the public service has historically been charged with coming up with schemes to address complex social problems. Take, for instance, the 1987 Montreal Protocol, a global treaty to ban ozone-depleting Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). At the time, CFCs represented a major threat to public safety, and therefore, can be defined as a social problem. It was addressed through collective action. In contrast, the calls for innovation laid out in the *Playbook* are concerned not with addressing collective needs, but instead, individual needs. This subtle discursive shift is noteworthy because it suggests that the demands of individual citizens should be prioritized over the collective needs that have historically been attributed to the demos. When the public interest is recast according to the individual consumerist demands, the public servant, who by way of their oath to protect and serve the public interest, is compelled to take up private sector techniques of innovation, namely design, as it is positioned as the only reliable route to satisfy this market pressure.

Emerging neoliberal subjectivities

In the context of neoliberal governance, this shift in positioning — from public servant to service provider and from citizen to consumer — is an example of the type of subjectification that Wendy Brown argues is broadly associated with neoliberal rationality, in which techniques of governance are used to legitimize particular modes of market-oriented conduct. The *Service Design Playbook* is intended to do just that — promote public servant conduct that is deemed desirable according to the BCPS corporate strategy, which is based on a consumer-oriented approach to service delivery. In so doing, design is used to re-inscribe the relations between public servants and citizens; public servants are recast as designers responsabilized for identifying individual citizen needs and proposing solutions that address these needs through techniques of design. Design methods, such as experience mapping, are productive forms of governance in the sense that each time they are employed by public servants to improve the citizen service experience, they give a material and discursive form to the consumerist appeals that undergird the *Playbook*. This may include, for instance, the creation of a persuasive business case by a ministry to secure funds to run a service design project. It could also take on a material form, such as the user testing of a new interface as part of a new digital product to ensure it satisfies the desires of citizens.

All of these instantiations are akin to the techniques of governance that Brown (2015) argues operationalize neoliberal rationality in contexts and institutions that have historically resisted market-oriented conduct. It is telling that several participants used the terms “Trojan horse” and “stealth” to characterize some of the techniques they used to promote design practices within the BCPS. It suggests that they felt pressure to overcome internal resistance to the use of design as a means to strategically shift the discourse within the public service to align more closely with the consumer-oriented vision of service excellence advocated by C@C and the directives issued by Deputy Minister’s Committee on Transformation and Technology (DMCTT). The acknowledgement that the GCPE team often acted as a coach helping ministry staff navigate the internal politics to get “buy in” for projects and that they actively sought out

partners who were willing to “put skin in the game,” lends credence to Brown’s contention that neoliberalism is operationalized through subtle techniques of coercion — co-opting, supplanting, displacing extant practices and discourses that are deemed incompatible with the economizing aims of neoliberal rationality. It is in these mundane social interactions, meetings with potential project partners, project plans, funding requests, synthesis sessions — all of the machinations associated with the scoping and delivery of design projects in service of the aims of citizen-centredness — where neoliberal values are carefully and subtly sutured together with the everyday practices of public administration.

This work is also positioned as professionally beneficial to those public servants who are willing to “take the leap.” For instance, the *Playbook* states that service design can help public servants “find new areas of personal growth” through the “excitement of being involved in service innovation” (p.15). These appeals are used to enrol public servants in efforts to make design “common” within public sector environments. In so doing, the so-called early adopters, those who are interested demonstrating their entrepreneurial instincts, are able to claim the label of “thought leader” given their newfound expertise in public sector design — knowledge that is still relatively obscure within public sector contexts but is highly coveted by industry-specific conferences (e.g., SD in Gov), publications (e.g., Touchpoint: The *Journal of Service Design*), and meet ups (Global Gov. Design Jam). The point is that by positioning design as a platform to improve one’s career prospects — or human capital potential to use the language of neoliberal rationality — makes it challenging for public servants to take up a critical stance in relation to its methods, techniques, and approaches because such a position could potentially undermine their personal and professional interests.

Narratives of change: Showing value and avoiding controversy

To encourage public servants to recast their work according to the values and principles laid out in the *Playbook* required a fundamental discursive shift in terms of how BCPS talked about and envisioned public administration. To achieve this goal, a variety of

persuasive texts were created to represent narratives of change wherein citizen-centred design was positioned as necessary for realizing the broad changes called for in the *Playbook*. The concept of narratives of change is defined as the production of persuasive artifacts, which can take on a variety of material and discursive formats, including videos, visualizations, and written documents, among others, which are intended to promote design as a valuable process of change. Design's capacity to give a physical form to abstract ideas, concepts or imaginings, through prototypes, simulations, and other artifacts is precisely why it is viewed by proponents of citizen-centered design as a necessary part of any "change management process."

Not surprising then, the team who drafted the *Playbook* relied on case studies, photographs, and other visualizations to help "sell," to borrow a phrase used by interview participants, the merits of their work to other public servants. For instance, proponents of the *Playbook* described the need for "culture change" within the BCPS, by which they meant the need to persuade public servants that they should adopt the methods, tools, and practices outlined in the document. This was accomplished by sharing case studies used to portray the positive outcomes of citizen-centred design throughout the BCPS. For instance, in the case of the MSP project, design artifacts from other service design related projects, were used in initial "scoping" conversations with Ministry of Health staff to demonstrate the value of using a citizen-centred design approach to address inefficiencies in the Medical Services Plan sign-up process. Without evidence of previous successes, it would have been difficult to secure this partnership.

Design as rhetoric: Evading the possible to satisfy the present

Design theorist Richard Buchanan (1985) argues that design is a rhetorical practice in the sense that the very act of giving form to an artifact is an argument in support of its existence – that somehow this object deserves to be in the world according to a set of decisions made by its creator, the designer. He further argues, "Design is an art of thought directed to practical action through the persuasiveness of objects and,

therefore, design involves the vivid expression of competing ideas about social life” (p.7). Design is, therefore, a political act by way of its capacity to create artifacts that embody narratives that advocate for a desired future. In the case of the MSP case study, the prototypes used to represent what a desirable, efficient, and intuitive public service experience should look like, functioned rhetorically to persuade public servants that design is required in order to create and deliver services that are based on the needs of citizens. And because the MSP project was held up as a best-in-class example of how to use the *Playbook*, all of the artifacts associated with the project were by extension given the status of best in class, reinforcing the narrative that design is required to bring about the kind of change that senior public servants and political actors demanded.

Absent from the MSP project design process, though, was any attempt to envision a future in which some other variant of public health insurance might be possible. In fairness, this was not the intended scope of the project. However, the very possibility of envisioning a future, in a meaningful sense, other than what currently exists was bracketed off. Instead, the design process was used to demarcate a distinct problem space for which solutions could be proposed according to existing political agendas and constraints. The resulting “design solution” in the MSP project simply streamlined an experience that replicated the existing policies, processes, and approaches to health care provision in British Columbia. Reducing contentious political issues to bounded problems is precisely how neoliberal governance functions to transform politics into technical processes of problem solving. While the GCPE project team did try to “push back” on policy and legislation that they believed was leading to an undesirable citizen experience; Ministry of Health staff were wedded to the status quo and expressed little desire to change structural elements of healthcare in order to make the citizen experience better. This commitment to the status quo that often emerges from design projects is consistent with McCarthy & Wright critique of participatory activities taken up in public service contexts. As they argue, “Participatory ideals are often constrained in practice by institutional contexts that require bureaucratic goals to

be met” (McCarthy & Wright, 2015, p. 7). This approach to design does not afford space to contest existing political structures, institutions and discourses, and instead defines problems according to the taken-for-granted views held by those individuals who are charged with deciding which issues are deemed worthy of intervention. This shorthand knowledge negates critique and by extension elides any attempt to question the principles upon which issues are defined as problems in need of solution. Is “red tape,” as defined in the context of the MSP project, a symptom of bureaucratic largess or a necessary feature of state-run institutions? Perhaps inefficiency as friction is a necessary part of democratic life insomuch as it inserts a degree of critical distance to allow, however limited, a moment to reflect on the authority and power entrusted to the state.

The work of designing away friction can have other political effects as well. By making the MSP sign-up process more efficient and effective, and thus, desirable according to heuristic described in the *Playbook*, citizens who use these redesigned services are enrolled as entrepreneurial subjects that are responsabilized for administering public services to themselves, which is described as “self-service.” The emphasis placed on self-service eliminates the need for other individuals to take part in what has historically been a collective act of service provision. Despite how inefficient, slow or bureaucratic traditional public sector service provision may seem, it is nonetheless based on an intersubjective encounter that necessarily binds both parties — citizens and public servants — to a larger collective body. Eliminating the need for such an encounter reproduces an ethos of self-management — the ultimate aim of neoliberal rationality. The MSP and *Service Design Playbook* case studies demonstrate that when the everyday activities of public servants are recast as design activities, concerned with need-finding, efficiency, and citizen value maximization, they can intentionally and unintentionally inscribe neoliberal values, such as self-management, within the everyday interactions between public servants and citizens.

When carried out in public sector contexts, design is used as a form of governance to enforce desirable public sector conduct, reconfigure institutions to emulate private sector models of innovation, and to articulate subjects and subjectivities that are in the marketplace. This is consistent with Brown's argument that "contemporary neoliberal governance operates through isolating and entrepreneurializing responsible units and individuals, through devolving authority and decision-making, and through locally implementing norms of conduct" (p.5). Taken together, the importation of design practices as a means of conducting the conduct of public servants from a distance, to draw from Foucault's definition of governmentality, and the use of narratives of change to foreground the need for design in processes of social change, meet the standards of neoliberalism offered up in Brown's definition. Thus citizen-centred design, as examined in this chapter, functions politically to activate neoliberal values within Canadian governmental contexts, such as the case of the work undertaken in the BCPS to promote a consumer-oriented model of public service delivery. This work has political effects, which may not be readily apparent to those who have enthusiastically employed the practices associated with public sector innovation.

Conclusion

Sitting at the conjunction of the politics and practice of citizen-centred design emerges an instance of neoliberal governance that functions to obscure the negative effects of austerity. Use of the term austerity refers not only to the normalization of state sanctioned policies concerned with reducing government expenditures on public services that have historically been associated with the welfare state. It also refers to the entanglement of discourses related to public sector innovation, design, and citizen-centredness. Together they actively unbind the individual subject from a social body and, in so doing, obscure the political character of citizenship and advance the values of neoliberal rationality. Furthermore, such actions reduce the possibility of political resistance as the institutions set up to protect the well-being of the citizenry have been compromised.

Discussion and Conclusion

Obscuring Austerity: The Changing Role of the Public Servant in the Age of Public Sector Innovation

I try to follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial for staying with the trouble in real and particular places and times.

– Donna J. Haraway

Design, industry, and politics have long been entangled. This is, as Penny Sparke argues, because of the design profession's unique position at the interface of consumption and production (Sparke, 2013). As a practice, it has responded to market pressures to find new sources of value for industry to exploit (Julier, 2017a). And as rhetoric, it has served an important role in giving a material body to political values and modes of expression (R. Buchanan, 1985). In its most recent configuration, design has taken on a lead role in public sector innovation. As my research demonstrated, across Canada, all orders of government have sought to “embed” designerly techniques, methods, and approaches to public administration in an effort to promote “citizen-centred” ways of working. While public servants have remained cautiously open to the idea of adopting new approaches to work that are better suited to addressing “wicked problems,” these activities and initiatives have largely gone uncontested and have not received the critical scrutiny they warrant.

My research has focused on critically examining the accounts of 23 of professionals working in the fields of public sector design and innovation, which yielded 12 case examples, along with two in-depth case studies of public sector innovation from across Canada. This chapter returns to questions that informed my research design and

analysis:

- Why and how is design being used in public sector organizations in Canada?
- How is design understood by public sector organizations in Canada?
- How does the use of design affect governmental and public sector institutions' conceptions of democracy?
- What political values are mobilized and/or activated when design practices, techniques, and knowledges are used within and across public sector institutions?

Taken together, these questions attempt to interrogate the politics and practice of the work of design within public sector contexts.

The role of design in Canadian public sector contexts

As the case studies identified as part of this research evidence, design when used as part of a broader public sector innovation agenda most closely aligned with the pragmatic approach to social design. Design, when used for the purposes of public value creation, is concerned with delivering efficient public services and realizing sensible solutions to questions to the problems that exist in the present. To that end, the practices of design, with their close relationship with product management and commerce, are well positioned to support public servants in adopting the entrepreneurial disposition demanded by public sector innovation. The aim therefore, is not to address underlying political controversies, but instead arrive at solutions to neatly bounded problem, which articulated through statements such as, "How might we streamline the process of applying for extended medical coverage?" The projects examined here range in complexity and scope – from enhanced digital interfaces to more co-creative processes to address transit congestion – yet they carry with them a similar aim, to create services that result in a "streamlined," efficient" and "desirable" citizen-customer experience.

On a material level, design methods are being used to involve both citizens and public servants in the controversial work of deciding how to streamline public services to conform to the demands of austerity policies, which often entails reducing the labour associated with service delivery. This work is positioned as necessary for improving the “citizen experience”— shorthand for how citizens find out about, access, and consume public services. Participants of such design projects are reassured that by taking part in such processes they are helping to make public services more user friendly, efficient, and effective. This work is often presented as a noble democratic act in the sense that fellow citizens will benefit from their investment in time. Consequently, these processes rarely contend with the underlying political questions that surround the need for such interventions, such as: Why do services need to be made more efficient? What are the consequences of self-service? How will the processes of streamlining affect the work of public servants? And so, the design process in these instances is used to subsume political questioning into co-creative activity intended to redirect participants’ attention towards issues deemed “in scope,” which generally serve a superficial aesthetic purpose, such as providing feedback on the “look and feel” of digital interfaces.

This assessment of design activity within public sector contexts in Canada, which is chiefly concerned with defining problems and proposing solutions, has adjacencies with Julier’s (2017) contention that design functions today principally to extract and realize value. This may occur in a variety of ways, including rooting out inefficiencies (i.e. “red tape”) and/or appealing to the individual needs of citizen-consumers. This approach to design, attending to the individual needs of citizens, which is akin to the strategies used for private sector innovation, is referred to within public sector contexts as “citizen-centred.” This term has the air of civic-mindedness, in the sense that the term “citizen” is mobilized to present an image that public servants are acting in good faith to advance the public interest. Instead, however, citizen-centeredness exhaustively articulates citizens, a term that itself is controversial, as consumers with competing market needs. This discursive shift in meaning, from citizen to consumer, is noteworthy because it has the effect of obscuring the social relations that may bind individual

subjects to a broader collective body, such as the demos. When design is used as a platform to promote citizen-centred approaches to public service delivery, it fails to contend with the broader social needs of individual subjects and how such needs are constituted by and through the social relations that bind them to other subjects. Citizen-centeredness is linked to austerity in the sense that it is offered as an antidote to the red tape and bureaucracy that has necessitated the need for belt-tightening (i.e. austerity) in the first place. Therefore, citizen-centered services are said to be both in the interest of citizens and the state. To question this premise is to question the very needs upon which these services are based and by extension the wishes of the citizens for whom the state relies upon for legitimacy. By enmeshing the promise of citizen-centredness with the political aims of neoliberal austerity, design actively reduces the political subjectivity of citizens to mere market actors.

Perceptions of design within public sector contexts

The analysis that took place in Chapter 5 and 6 revealed that “citizen-centred” approaches to social design work are energized by the aims of neoliberal rationality and is supported governance techniques intended to (de)legitimize desirable public servant conduct according to private sector models and approaches to innovation. This is by no means the first attempt to embed market-oriented conduct within public service New Public Management, a business-friendly set of public administration practices, was introduced at the provincial and federal levels throughout the 1990s. “Its value base is contained within its belief that this market-place, and its workings, provides the most appropriate place for the production of public services” (Osborne, 2006, p. 382).

However, this most recent effort is unique in that design softens the decidedly cold demeanour of NPM through appeals to citizen-centredness and co-creation. In a sense, design lends discursive legitimacy to neoliberal policies and activities of divestment, devolution, and austerity by rebranding them as designerly interventions that require the full participation of citizens and public servants in finding solutions to pressing social problems together. The conclusion drawn here is such that design, when deployed within public sector contexts, functions to mobilize the faculties of an entrepreneur

coupled with the form-giving acumen of a designer to maximize citizens' investment in the form of public value.

This is most apparent in the implementation of government-wide policies and strategies (otherwise referred to as “Design regimes”) that are focused on embedding design techniques, knowledge, and practices. As the case studies in Chapter 6 evidence, these design regimes encourage public servants to abandon public administration practices that have been deemed outdated or obsolete by private sector practitioners, such as professional design firms and management consultants. Instead, public servants are encouraged to experiment, iterate, and prototype solutions that address the individual needs of citizens. Adaption and conformity to these approaches to work are in response to appeals from the private sector consulting firms to behave and perform as designers do, according to the wishes and aims of the marketplace.

Public servants are incentivized to focus their efforts on addressing problems that can improve the customer experience in the near-term and avoid problems that are systemic in nature that may not yield immediate results or where public value is difficult to quantify. At same time, given the political nature of systemic issues, such as racism and income inequality, public servants are encouraged to avoid wading into political controversies that conflict with their oath to remain politically neutral at all times (Conliffe et al., 2018). However, in “diverting attention away from the political by a focus on politics, i.e., a focus on the improving the mechanisms of governance, can endanger the practice of democracy because it draws us away from engaging in the contestation necessary for democracy” (DiSalvo, 2010, p. 3). The citizen-centred approach to design is aligned with the pragmatic approach to social design (as examined in chapter 3), because of its focus on directing attention to neatly bounded problems as they exist in the present, this works takes for granted extant political, economic, social arrangements for granted, treating them as givens. This is consistent with the aims of neoliberal rationality, which functions by eliding contentious political dialogue and advocates for building consensus around technically defined problems that maximize value in the

short-term without contending the political, economic, or social externalities of such actions. Political debate, in the context of public sector innovation, is perceived as slow, bureaucratic, and inefficient, and must be avoided so as not to contaminate the productive work of innovation.

The political effects of “citizen-centredness” on demonstrated institutions in Canada

If public sector innovation, as expressed through citizen-centred design, is becoming a normative practice, what are the organizing political dimensions of this work? In other words, what are the political effects of citizen-centred design and the corresponding strategies used to enforce such an approach to public administration? Posing these questions returns us to the very heart of this research project. If, as I have argued heretofore, that design is anything but apolitical, in the sense that it gives a material form to political values and modes of conduct: what is the political nature of this work when carried out in public sector contexts and in such close proximity to discourses of public administration? To answer these questions, we must first assess the political conditions that necessitate the need for such interventions, the origins of which can be traced back to the period of neoliberal austerity that began in 2008 following the Great Recession. Neoliberalism reincarnated in the post-recession period took on a new discursive, material, and geographical formation that called for collective self-sacrifice in the form of austerity (W. Brown, 2016).

To be clear, neoliberal austerity is not expressed nor are its effects felt evenly across geographies. Variegated neoliberalization — a term proposed by Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, (2010) — best describes this uneven articulation. As they contend, “Across all contexts in which they have been mobilized, neoliberalization processes have facilitated marketization and commodification while simultaneously intensifying the uneven development of regulatory forms across places, territories and scales” (Brenner et al., 2010, p. 184). Processes of devolution, a distinct characteristic of the federated model of governance in Canada, have facilitated and accelerated the expansion of neoliberal techniques of public administration (Albo & Evans, 2019, p. 10). Such policies

are inflected through the distinct socioeconomic histories, local and regional cultures, and social practices found throughout Canada (Bryan Mitchell Evans & Fanelli, 2018). This is also expressed in the variegated set of techniques and practices that are deployed across institutions in Canada.

The phrase austerity is most frequently associated with state sanctioned fiscal policies that are intended to reduce government expenditures on the provision of services historically associated with the welfare state. These goals can be achieved through a series of structural and fiscal reforms and may include, for instance, placing a greater emphasis on balanced budgets through spending cuts; downsizing the size and composition of the public service by relying on outsourced labour and private-public partnerships; and a loosening up of labour standards to promote a “flexibilized labour market” that results in higher instances of contract labour (Blyth, 2013; Harvey, 2011). The origins of such an approach to state management are, as Evans and McBride contend, “informed by neoclassical economics and New Public management theories that served as a transmission belt bringing neoliberal ideas and practices into state administration (Evans & McBride, 2017, p. 3). In Canada, austerity measures have persisted since at least the 1990s (Bryan Mitchell Evans & Fanelli, 2018). There is also a moral dimension to austerity in which citizens are called upon to endure the hardships; what Whyte and Cooper (2017) describe as “institutional violence,” that accompanies austerity policies as a show of virtue and civic responsibility. These appeals are positioned as collective sacrifice and are said to be in service of the well-being of the state.

Obscuring Austerity: the changing role of the public servant in the age of public sector innovation

The “shift” in public servant conduct, from “gatekeeper” to “innovator,” as evidenced in accounts of participants who took part in my research, has transformed governmental institutions in Canada to become more amenable to the appeals of private sector innovation. To be clear, citizen-centred design, a practice of public sector innovation, is

part of a broader effort to reform the Canadian public sector according to the principles and aims of neoliberalism. However, what distinguishes this approach from other attempts, such as the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1990s, is that design used to soften the rough edges of austerity by mobilizing the values of citizen-centredness: a focus on individual citizen needs through activities focused on “building empathy,” increasing transparency through calls for “co-design,” and prototyping public services according to private sector heuristics of what constitutes a “good service.” This work, though, obscures the discursive, democratic, and material effects of austerity by appealing to the inherent “goodness” of design.

One such example of this shift is in the use of the term “citizen” as expressed in the compound phrase, “citizen-centred.” As a discursive category, citizen refers to an individual who has acquired the status of a subject who is bound to a collective body that exceeds the self (Yarwood, 2014). Historically, this body has been referred to as “society” or “demos,” and denotes a particular configuration of social relations that assumes both collective rights and responsibilities (W. Brown, 2015). However, the term is problematic given its discursive proximity to colonialism and the modernist project that was used to demarcate boundaries denoting “insiders” and “outsiders”. I concur with Hall and Held’s contention that the politics of citizenship rests largely on questions of membership or the processes undertaken to bestow such rights on certain, chosen subjects who are deemed “worthy” of citizenship (Hall and Held, 1985). More substantively, the purpose of introducing the term citizen here is to draw attention to a shift in meaning that has occurred over the last decade in Canada. Citizenship, once used to denote the binding together of social actors to a collective body (see Introduction), however problematic this formulation may be, stands in stark contrast to the current articulation of “citizen,” in which the individual subject is unbounded from any sense of the “social,” resulting in a disconnected sense of belonging. This is evident in the very use of the term “citizen-centred” advocated in processes of public sector design focused on defining citizen needs to mark subjects, not as political actors, but as individual consumers guided by competing market-oriented needs.

By calling attention to the need for collective “belt-tightening,” austerity discourse serves to both gather up individual subjects and mark them as responsabilized agents for the health and performance of society, while at the same time, distributing the material, economic and social burdens associated with such policies to local and individualized contexts. In a sense, the individual subject inherits all of the responsibilities that may have historically been associated with citizenship, while relinquishing any of the entitlements of the welfare state, including universal access to public goods and erasing the potential for collective action. As Brown (2016) argues, “this citizen releases state, law, and economy from responsibility for and responsiveness to its own condition and predicaments, and is ready to sacrifice to the cause of economic growth and fiscal constraints when called to do so” (p.12). Instead, attention is redirected towards matters of self-reliance and entrepreneurialism, which is exacerbated when public services are redesigned to support, encourage, and facilitate “self-service.” The introduction of intuitive and easy to use web interfaces, are examples of disciplinary technologies that condition citizens to expect “quick,” “efficient,” and “easy to access” services that are available on demand without having to interface directly with the state, while simultaneously recasting citizen-subjects as market actors, or the “citizen-user-consumer.” This example demonstrates how citizen-centred design plays an important role in the process of responsabilization by smoothing out friction and subtly enrolling citizens in service provision.

In addition to the material effects of neoliberal austerity, the imposition of austerity as a discursive frame through which all public sector decisions are examined has fundamentally altered how public servants approach their work in Canada. This is a sentiment that is consistent with austerity literature examined in Chapter 1, in which austerity politics is used to undermine the capacity of the state to adequately address the needs of the very publics for whom they rely on for legitimacy. By ordering and confining decisions through the guise of “cost recovery,” “efficiency,” and “impact,” public servants are forced to find “workarounds,” framed as innovation, to carry out their

day-to-day activities. The introduction of practices such as design are perceived as useful for achieving these goals because its tools, methods and techniques can be mobilized to subsume otherwise controversial political issues into processes of change that are positioned as co-creative and citizen-centred.

Thus, design when mobilized by, and in, public institutions has two underlying political effects. Firstly, it is used to enroll citizens in processes of change and co-creation which are intended to reconfigure public services according to the aims of austerity policies, namely to reduce costs associated with public service delivery. In participating in such processes, citizens are, in a sense, consenting to the implementation of these policies. In turn, political actors can claim that they have faithfully executed the wishes of citizens who participated, thereby neutralizing any political critique that may accompany the implementation of redesigned services that eliminate the need for human-to-human interaction. Secondly, using design to promote citizen-centred values discursively unbinds individual subjects from a collective social body by demanding that public servants focus their effort on addressing individual citizen needs (e.g., more efficient sign up processes) as opposed to broader collective concerns (e.g., income inequality). At the same time, while the consumerist demands of citizens may be satisfied through streamlined services, the ability to mobilize in opposition to austerity is compromised because the citizen-subject has been transposed as a consumer whose means of political resistance are hampered by the very institutions that have been smoothed out to facilitate citizen-centred experiences. The friction, or any critical distance that may have existed between state and citizen, which was categorized as “red tape,” has been eliminated. What remains is an institution that is only capable of serving market interest and needs.

Contributions to the Field of Study

This study offers an empirical examination of the intercession of socially-oriented design and neoliberalism. There are still few scholarly texts that examine the political dimensions of design through the axis of neoliberal rationality (see for example Julier,

2017; Stern & Siegelbaum, 2019; Williams, 2019). Fewer still, draw upon the work of Foucault as a critical scaffold to support this analysis (e.g., Hepworth, 2018; Prinz, 2010; Tunstall, 2007). This work provides both a methodology for carrying out research of a similar scope and purpose, specifically how design functions materially and discursively to imbricate neoliberal values in institutions that have historically resisted pressures placed upon them by the private sector.

Design, like other modes of governance, functions to manage the conduct of particular subjects from a distance and, in so doing, disciplines them according to what is deemed desirable behaviour. The case studies taken up in this analysis are tangible evidence of neoliberal governance in practice and provide a detailed account of how such scenarios come to be. It challenges the taken-for-grantedness of design that is occurring in public sector contexts and offers up a vocabulary and critical framework for practitioners to articulate how power flows through their everyday work practices, however altruistic these intentions may be, and to interrogate the resultant political effects.

New Research Directions

This investigation has surfaced questions and issues that deserve consideration and further research. One area that I have found particularly intriguing is how neoliberal work registers affectively. More specifically, how does neoliberalism enroll subjects through affective appeals? There is something exciting about innovation as a form of neoliberal work — a perspective that was widely expressed by the individuals I interviewed for this thesis. It appeals to individuals at a visceral level, allowing them to explore their childlike desire to play and make a mess of ideas and materials. But this effort is all in support of the very rational aim of solving problems and creating value. It is this conjunction between play and rationality that makes neoliberal work an interesting area of future research. Design provides an ideal subject of study to critically examine how these tensions intersect in practice. This is evident in the desire of organizations, particularly within the public sector, to redesign workspaces to mimic

design studios: large open spaces, flanked by panels of glass, featuring brightly coloured furniture, and whiteboards. One cannot help but feel a sense of excitement, energy, and delight in watching creative minds tackle complex problems. More than spaces of work, these elaborate environments are designed to support the performance of innovation, wherein design is transformed into a spectacle that should be consumed. I have done some preliminary work with my research partner Jocelyn Bailey at the University of Brighton to examine the aesthetic and affective dimensions of design work and the political agendas that are mobilized in support of this activity. This area of study offers a rich vein of inquiry for scholars and practitioners who may be interested in questions of affect theory, political theory, and design theory.

A second area of investigation that emerged from this research concerns the recent emphasis within the professional design community to speed up design. Industry has been placing pressure on the professional design community to consolidate what would otherwise be a multi-week or month design process into just a few weeks. Referred to within the industry as “design sprints,” this accelerated work style raises important ethical, political, and economic questions. Where does this desire for acceleration come from? How does this intensive work transform design labour and the subjects that perform it? How does this speeding up and consolidation of activity alter the global economy of design? It also serves as yet another instance of the design industry responding to the needs of industry by bending and altering work practices according to the demands of capitalism to work faster, cheaper, and more efficiently, while at the same time maximizing value. Design sprints and the general desire to speed up design work provides an interesting area of research for those interested in the socio-geographic overlaps between professional design and the global pressures of capital. Ultimately, these are worthy questions that are well-suited for researchers in the fields of political economy and human geography.

Patterning Practices of Future-Making

Throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis, former colleagues and fellow practitioners have asked: What does your research have to contribute to the practice of design? Implied in this question is a tension I have encountered many times throughout the course of my career: between theory and practice. There is a perception, at least within my practitioner community, that theory has little to contribute to design, a field that has traditionally and primarily considered itself to be practice-based. I have long advocated that the field needs both critical reflection and practices that can serve more than pragmatic or technical ends if we are to adequately address the pressing social challenges that are before us. As theorist John Thackara (2005) contends, we need to “design macroscopes, as well as microscopes, to help us understand where things come from and why: the life story of a hamburger, or time pressure, or urban sprawl” (p.6). Design needs to be both critical and practical, which means contending with the political consequences of intervening in matters which are deemed “social problems” and weighing the desire to intervene against the benefits of not designing at all (Tonkinwise, 2014). Designers, regardless of their specialism, must be attuned to the political orientations of their work and the political and social forms that may emerge from these efforts. This includes dispensing with the belief that the world is “always lagging, always in need of being brought up to date through the intercessions of those trained to shape it: a world, in sum, in need of design” (Suchman, 2011, p. 5). This problem-solution orientation, fails to see the world from the perspective of emergence or a perpetual state of becoming.

My analysis has traced a line through history, political economy, philosophy, and the practice of design itself. Together these threads form a string figure, to borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway, patterning subjects and their relations to the state, economy, and one other. In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtuchlence*, Haraway, drawing upon the work of Marilyn Strathern, argues:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (D. J. Haraway, 2016, p. 12)

At stake in this argument is a question of future-making. In essence, what Haraway demands are thinking subjects that exist in contrast to the thoughtlessness that she contends marks this perilous moment of “being in the world.” Thinking our way through this perilous time encourages us to be subjects in relation with one another and to practice kinship: care as a means of mutual coexistence on this damaged planet.

I argue that Haraway’s assertion should be extended to include the practices of form-giving or design. This particular conjuncture is marked by an overwhelming need for (re)design in the sense that our very way of being in the world is at stake in the face of the climatic epoch that has been termed the Anthropocene. But this requires a fundamentally different type of design — a thoughtful design, in the way Haraway demands — that is capable of patterning different sorts of relations. Lenskjold, Olander, & Halse, (2015) provide some guidance in this regard through a process they refer to as “minor design activism.” As they contend, “minor activism is one that, rather than proclaiming a critical distance from the existing conditions, tries to move the internal organizational structure through design interventions that alter the perceptual outlook of decision makers about possible futures” (p.78). The sentiment expressed in this passage is one of dwelling, or to remain situated within the troubled institutions that are in need of remediation and to rework these places in pursuit of something materially better. Dwelling in this way, in a place of uncertainty and ambiguity, serves to highlight designer’s greatest competency: not just form-givers and problem solvers, but sense makers attuned to the subtleties of human experience. It is from this position that designers can make a contribution to the collective acts of future-making that the current times demand of us. This entails a design practice that is less committed to the aims of commerce and capitalism and focuses instead on prefiguring alternative political possibilities or, at the very least, seeding the ground for critical conversations to unfold.

Despite the productive possibilities of introducing design to territories of social, political, environmental, and economic justice, we would do well to heed Haraway's advice. Unthinkingly applying design to "social problems," is precisely the kind of thoughtlessness that has historically confined the design profession to the sphere of commerce, patterning practices such as "citizen-centredness." It matters what designs are used to design other designs — to extend Haraway's neologism. This means tinkering and toying with critical practices that are necessarily engendered in processes of future-making: to find the fault lines, the fissures, and aberrations within extant systems, structures, and hegemonies. It means picking at the edges to reveal something unexpected, and yet entirely possible.

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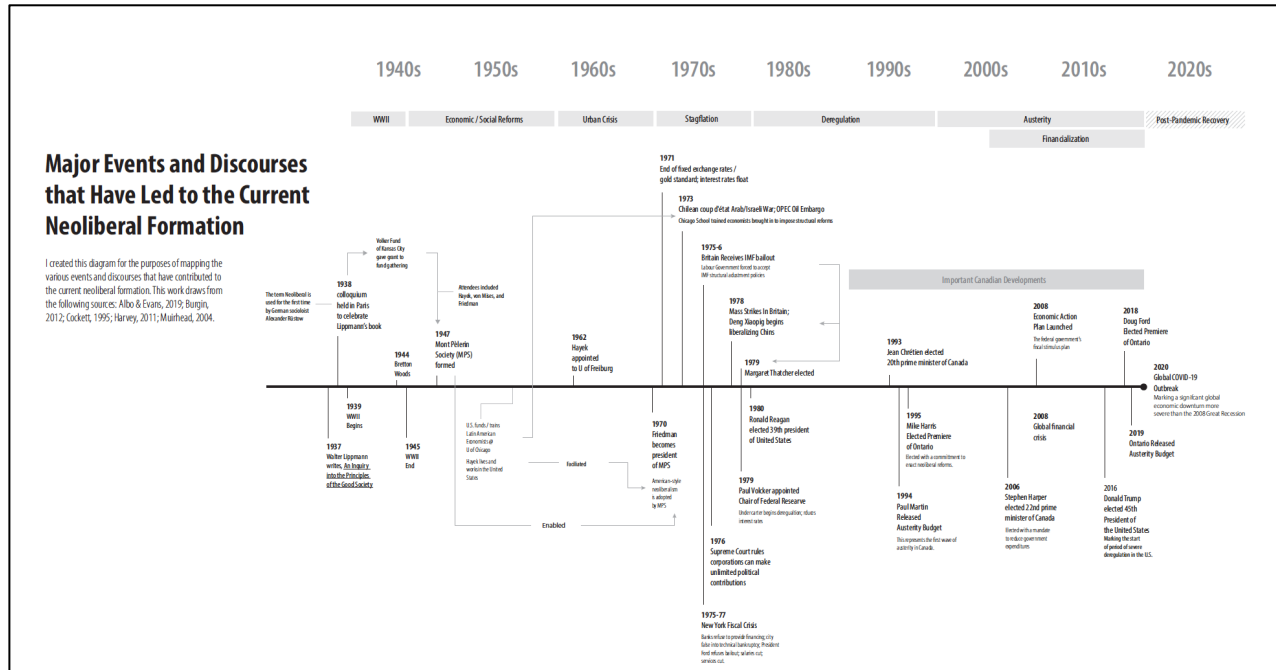
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Appendix 1: A Timeline of Neoliberal Discourse and Events



Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Hi [Name]. I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Chad Story, I'm a PhD Candidate in the Communication & Culture Program at York University.

I would like to talk to you about your experiences using design in your day-to-day work. Specifically, I'm interested in hearing you discuss your experiences co-designing policies, procedures, services, etc. with non-expert citizens. The interview shouldn't take more than 60 minutes.

As a reminder, I'll be taping the session in order to ensure our conversation is accurately documented. I may also take some notes as we're speaking. You're welcome to choose not to respond to any of the questions. You can ask to stop the interview at any time.

Interview Questions

Section 1: Warm Up

Before we dive in, please...

... tell me about your job here at [name of organization]?

How long have you been working here?

Section 2: Projects and Work

I'd like to learn more about some of the work that you do and how you might use design. Design can be defined in a variety of ways, here I'm looking to see how activities that might not traditionally be used in public policy development, such as mapping, prototyping, or drawing, are being incorporated into your project work.

What projects have you worked on that involved the participation of citizens/community members?

How do you identify projects that are well suited to citizen participation?

Do you use design in your work? What design strategies or tools do/have you used?

Can you explain how you have been using design tools (such as personas) in your work?

Are there any upcoming projects where you will be using design with citizens that you would be comfortable with me observing?

Have you seen or heard of any projects, perhaps outside your organization, that you think might be valuable for me to know about?

Appendix 3: Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chad Story a PhD candidate, under the supervision of Professor Jan Hadlaw, in the Communication & Culture program at York University. The data collected will be used as part of the principal investigator's doctoral dissertation. The data may also be used for additional publications and conference presentations. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and feel free to contact either Chad Story or Prof. Hadlaw with any questions you may have before deciding whether you will participate or at any time during the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to observe and document the use of design methods and tools for public consultation and participation in the production of democratic objects (e.g., budgets, policies, services, etc.) in which citizens participate as equal co-designers of these objects. Example design activities, include: mapping and prioritizing ideas, drawing concepts, or creating physical prototypes.

In-depth interviews of government employees will first be used to identify up to three design projects currently taking place in either the federal, provincial, or municipal governments. Ethnography will then be used to observe projects as they unfold, including: workshops, team meetings, and prototyping sessions.

These two methods will be used to assess how these projects come into being, what tools are used and by whom, and how citizens choose to participate in these encounters. The purpose of this study is to examine how design might be used by citizens in order to participate more regularly in political decision making

PROCEDURES

There are three ways you can volunteer to participate in this study:

Firstly, government employees will be asked to take part in an in-person or Skype interview that will last between 40 and 60 minutes in order to discuss their experiences using design in the public service. They will also be asked to identify current, past, or future government projects that do/will use design tools or methods.

Secondly, citizens and government employees will be asked to consent to having their interactions observed while working collaboratively on the production of democratic objects. The purpose is to examine the various types of practice that emerge in these collaborative encounters, such as how citizens and government employees might develop custom language to describe public concerns.

Thirdly, citizens will be asked to take part in follow up interviews to discuss their impressions of the project and the likelihood that they would take part in similar projects in the future.

Interviews and workshops will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transcribed for the purposes of analysis. Participants will not have access to the research data, nor will they be able to review analysis upon final coding.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is minimal risk for taking part in this study. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

By taking part in the study individuals will be making a contribution to the study of design and democracy. The findings from this study may be used to develop tools that

facilitate greater public participation in political decision making. Interview participants will receive a \$5 Tim Horton's gift card as a token of thanks for taking part in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of securely storing data in a password-protected digital archive that will be managed by the principal investigator. The principal investigator and supervisor will be the only parties who have access to this information. Data, including field notes, photographs, audio recordings, and transcripts, will be permanently stored in a password-protected digital archive. Six (6) years after the completion of the study, any records with data identifying individual participants will be destroyed, only anonymized data will be retained.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may withdraw at any time without penalty, or consequences of any kind, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In the event you chose to withdraw your participation, all data collected in relation to your participation, digital and physical, will be destroyed.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Chad Story, PhD Candidate (Principal Investigator)
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 jhadlaw@yorku.ca
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QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH?

The York University Ethics Review Board has reviewed my request to conduct this project. If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact Manager, Office of Research Ethics, York University, 309 York Lanes, phone 416-736-5914.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

LEGAL RIGHTS AND SIGNATURES:

"I _____ (Name of Participant) consent to participate in *Designing Democracy: Towards a Sociomaterial Practice of Political Life in Canada* by Chad Story. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Ethnography

[] I am a government official and I consent to being observed throughout the duration of a project where design will be used to co-design democratic objects.

[] I am a citizen and I consent to being observed throughout the duration of a project where design will be used to co-design democratic objects.