

**DEMOCRACY  
HOW 8 WE  
CONNECT**

**BEN BARKER**  
**FINAL PROJECT OUTLINE**

## INTRODUCTION.

Democracy is the corner-stone of everything we hold to be virtuous and great about western society; a firmly held belief that we have the best political system in the world, and those who don't adopt it in one form or another are barbaric or backwards. As David Held says in Models of Democracy (third edition p.260):

**“Part of the attraction of democracy lies in the refusal to accept in principle any concept of the political good other than that generated by ‘the people’ themselves.”**

So what is democracy? A mentality, a principle of governance or a rigorous political system? Clearly it is different things to different people and in truth is probably all of these in different ways.

My question is then, why when democracy is completely about the people, for the people and run by the people, do we feel so disconnected, or to phrase it another way: Democracy, where are we connected?

This brief and my interest in this project have stemmed from two stories. The first is a massive one; Tony Blair's decision to take Britain to war, against the wish of the tax payer and breaking UN law. An incredibly un-democratic action that seemed to bring the contradictions of democracy sharply into focus. The other was a story of government officials in the US refusing to review new laws which meant people could buy golf carts almost entirely using tax payers' money, or through a deal with the retailers, buy and sell in a single action and receive \$2000 for doing close to nothing during one trip to the show room. They both seem in their own way to make us question the notion of how our money is spent and who decides.

## **FEELING DEMOCRACY.**

Here I outline my interest in this project. I feel that this is important both as a context for exploration and also as an anchor for myself when (and it is inevitable) I lose belief in why I am doing it and what I want to get from it. People seem disconnected from politics and decision making. When we hear that the country is in debt, we don't see it as our responsibility. When we see a new project being built in our area that is funded by the government, we rarely see it as our project. This seems weird considering the amount of money that we give and the (financially in)vested interest we have in it. So my starting point lies in finding ways of connecting people better, observing and understanding the processes involved, and most of all understanding why democracy doesn't feel better.

YES  
WE  
CAN



## **SUBJECTS**

In exploring objects, an initial area of exploration must be the tools and processes used in governmental elections, be they local, council or if the chance presents itself, General. This includes all parts of the system of objects that make up the process, from campaigning and flyers, through to the machine/voting cards used in the process.

A good point of reference here is the CHAD debacle in the 2000 Presidential Election of America. Here, the machines that counted the votes were unable to determine in some case whether a card had been punched completely or not. This very possibly was the deciding factor in who was elected to office.

Another area of objects must be the communication and documentation involved in Tax and Council tax collection: the letters, forms and websites used in communicating money transfers. I assume an important part of democracy is in this money exchange and so must explore how connected we feel through this.



**GORE**  
**2000**

## **SUBJECTS**

An interesting group of people to engage with would be Italians. They are currently in process of moving from a democracy back to a fascist state, where Berlusconi owns the media and is able to bribe and bully his way to whatever ends he wants. So as a study in why Democracy might fail, or where people have failed to connect with democracy, Italy may be an interesting exploration point.

Here, we can start to draw parallels between Berlusconi's control of the media and ideas expressed around control of thought by Orwell in 1984:

**“Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct; nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary.”**



## SUBJECTS

When discussing technologies the influence of the Internet with regards to facilitating discussion and empowerment of the individual is very important. Opinion has never been so cheap and accessible before. Many recent elections have cited the Internet as either responsible in part or integral to their success, notably Obama's skill in managing his online presence and the recent stories from Iran where Twitter and other networks helped to mobilise opposition to the election results.

*[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/world/middle-east/16media.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/world/middle-east/16media.html?_r=1)*

Another issue that arises from the Internet and networking technologies is around direct democracy, whether it be online referenda as is implied by Nasdaq vice president:

“If we consider the advances made in information flow, in the rise of consumer and investor sovereignty through the growth of small-cap stock markets and Internet technologies, what is more remarkable is the extent to which our political market has remained unchanged. It may be that those very forces which have revolutionized the world economy, will soon lead to demands for a comparable increase in the responsiveness of our institutions of government.”

*[http://www.adti.net/ddis/IsSwitzerlandDemocracysWave\\_031203.htm](http://www.adti.net/ddis/IsSwitzerlandDemocracysWave_031203.htm)*

Or in the form of Hungary's fascinating 'Internet Democracy' party who aim to effectively make MEPs the spokespeople of an entire community: The party's website will allow voters to debate issues discussed in the European Parliament online. The results of these discussions would then be reflected by the party's MEPs in Brussels.

*<http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/hungary-internet-democracy-party-takes-web/article-181818#>*

We can not  
remain silent  
any more

اتحاد مبارزه  
سرو

## **SUBJECTS**

There are a number of systems that exist to question and push democracy, most notably in the UK: Unlock Democracy is continuing to campaign for democratic reform and has been instrumental in a number of the changes that have come about in fundamental aspects of Parliamentary law. They continue to push for a British constitution.

*<http://www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk>*

A project that is interesting when viewed in conjunction with this is the Voicebox project: a robot that enters the House of Commons and expresses ideas of 16-25yr olds. It aims at giving them a real say in the House of Commons.

*[http://voicebox.vinspired.com/our\\_robot](http://voicebox.vinspired.com/our_robot)*

Local councils are also running more initiatives to give people a better say on how things are done. Two councils that I found during my brief discussion with them that were doing good work in London were Southwark and Lambeth.

*<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/home.htm>*



## QUESTIONS

My over-arching question is: Democracy, how do we connect?

However in attempting to better understand that, I think that a series of smaller questions need to be posed.

What separates Democracy from other forms of Governance and do the principles and the reality match up?

What sections of Society connect better with Democracy and why?

What is the strength of the word Democracy? Is it used more as a moral tag rather than actually being superior in a practical sense and we are just content to say we live in a Democracy and not question it further?

‘There go my people. I must find out where they’re going so I can lead them’. This quote, usually attributed to French politician Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin is often used as an example of bad leadership, however I would question that and say: Who’s responsibility is it in a democracy to generate ideas and set an agenda?



## **RESOURCES**

### **e-democracy.org**

Mission is to expand participation and build stronger democracies and communities through the power of information and communication technologies and strategies.

### **Stewart Munn**

A friend working for Peter Mandelson who has offered time and possible contacts to help with the project.

### **Local Councils**

Most specifically Lewisham as it is an interesting and diverse local council as well as being one that I have a vested interest in.

## **AREAS OF INTEREST** (separate to this topic but worth consideration)

The Noise of Choice.

Technology in new Realms. Extending the discourse between man and machine.

Human Nature: What are we really striving for.

The English explored through their Language.

The Past Perfect: “We possess nothing truly, except the past.”

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