Mathias Denecke, Anne Ganzert,
Isabell Otto, Robert Stock (eds.)

ReClaiming Participation

Technology – Mediation – Collectivity

From:

Mathias Denecke, Anne Ganzert, Isabell Otto, Robert Stock (eds.)
ReClaiming Participation
Technology – Mediation – Collectivity

March 2016, 296 p., 34,99 €, ISBN 978-3-8376-2922-4

This volume unravels the debates on the »Participation Age«: Instead of perpetuating visions of social »all-inclusion« or the »digital divide«, the collection reclaims collectivity as an effect of technological and historical conditions.
Thinking of participation both as promise *and* duty, the contributions analyse the attractions and impositions connected to the socio-technical formation of collectivities. The constraints of participation are addressed by focusing on the mutual shaping of user practices and technological environments. It is hence a relational thinking that allows specifying the manifold interconnections of technology, practices and discourses.
With contributions by Erin Manning, Erich Hörl and Claus Pias.

Mathias Denecke is a PhD student at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany.
Anne Ganzert is a PhD student at the University of Konstanz, Germany.
Isabell Otto (PhD) is junior professor for Media Studies at the University of Konstanz, Germany.
Robert Stock (MA) coordinates the DFG-Research Group »Media and Participation. Between Demand and Entitlement« at the University of Konstanz, Germany.

For further information:
www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-2922-4

Table of Contents

PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

MATHIAS DENECKE/ANNE GANZERT/ROBERT STOCK

Participation has become the key issue in popular, economic, and academic notions of New Media. This book and its contributors seek to examine and unravel the debates of the 'Participation Age', while rejecting a mere appraisal of the impact of contemporary media on participation. Instead of perpetuating euphoric visions of social all-inclusion and web democracy and collaboration as well as pessimistic views of exclusion, top-down hierarchy, and the "digital divide", collectivity and participation are discussed as effects of technological, historical and political conditions and practices. This publication presents revised versions of the papers presented at the 2014 conference "ReClaiming Participation".

1 MEDIA AND PARTICIPATION

The collection of papers can also be considered the first product from the Research Group "Media and Participation. Between Demand and Entitlement", which has officially started in July 2015, and is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The research group consists of several subprojects with principal investigators from universities in Hamburg, Konstanz, Lüneburg, and Zurich. Leading scholars from the fields of media studies, sociology, and art history are taking part in a compelling interdisciplinary research where 'medial participation' as a key concept is scrutinized in order to enable a differentiated debate about processes of participation located in media-cultural exchange processes. This reconceptualization is founded on a processual understanding of media, which allows the descrip-

tion of the relations between demand and entitlement in the assemblages of subjects, technological objects, practices, and communities. In order to fill the unmet need of grasping the relations between media and participation, the full scope of its socio-political and cultural implications has to be considered in order to enrich and differentiate the current approaches, which are mainly application oriented, with an analysis of participation from a media theoretic perspective.

2   CONFERENCE RECLAIMING PARTICIPATION

The international conference took place at the Zurich University of the Arts from May 7th – 9th, 2014 and was a cooperation of the University of Konstanz (Germany), the Institute for Critical Theory, Zurich University of the Arts, and the international research network "Media of Collective Intelligence", funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). From the many submissions, the organization committee chose papers that offered a wide array of perspectives and encouraged in-depth discussions.

The three-day event started with the workshop: *Micropractices* by Wiktoria Furrer and Sebastian Dieterich (ZHdK Zurich). Over the course of the program Erin Manning, Claus Pias, and Erich Hörl gave keynote lectures, each relating to a thematically organized session which followed. An expert in the respective field chaired each of these sessions, giving a short introduction into the thematic horizon of the contributions on 'Art and Media: Theory of Partaking', 'Participatory Practices and Digital Media', and 'Participation and the Claims of Community'. The contributors were drawn from all over Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Great Britain, Portugal, Lithuania, North America, and Canada. One speaker attended via Skype, while another presented a movie documentary. In a round of short presentations, members of the scientific network "Media of Collective Intelligence" discussed their research results under the title *Curiosities of Collective Intelligence*; namely, Nacim Ghanbari, Asko Lehmuskallio, Erika Linz, Sabine Niederer, Isabell Otto, Samantha Schramm, Marc Spaniol, and Tristan Thielmann.

The organization committee (Beate Ochsner, Isabell Otto, Mathias Denecke, Anne Ganzert) would like to take this opportunity and thank all the people involved for making this conference a success as well as for giving

great papers and facilitating intriguing discussion:[1] Christina Friesch, Amelie Heinle, Christian Kleinwächter, Andrew Philipps, Veronika Pöhnl, Michel Schreiber, Markus Spöhrer, Robert Stock, and Katrin Stowasser. We warmly thank the DFG, the University of Konstanz, and the ZHdK for funding the conference. Furthermore, the editors of this collection thank Julia Ihls and Nikola Plohr for their help finalizing this volume. Finally, we thank the Young Scholar Fund of the University of Konstanz for generously funding the publication of this book.

3   CONTENT OF THIS BOOK

The selected papers in this collection focus on relational processes rather than a priori assumptions of politically, economically, culturally, and socially separated participants and communities. Many refer to concepts and theories by the likes of Jean-Luc Nancy, Gilbert Simondon, Louis Althusser, or Bernard Stiegler in order to reflect on the reciprocity of participatory processes or the possibilities and conditions of participation. At the same time, the methodological approaches vary: Some contributors consider theories and terminologies. Some describe promises of inclusion, exclusion, integration, and disintegration in participatory processes regarding their relational constitution, connection or separation; other articles present case studies on mechanisms of participation in the context of new media. Regardless of the method, each author discusses the role of media in affecting, enabling, or disabling participation, exclusion, or inclusion in the formation of particular (digital) communities.

The conference's three main panels also serve to structure this volume. The main part of the book is therefore divided into three sections which mirror the program of the conference. Each section is introduced by a text from the respective conference chair, followed by the keynote text and the corresponding case studies.

---

1   "Thank you." ReClaiming Participation, https://vimeo.com/94965326 (August 16, 2015).

Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam) opens the first section of the book by outlining the "logic of participation" as discussed by Bruno Latour, Noortje Marres, and Jyri Engeström. Claus Pias (Lüneburg) picks up this thread by comprehensively describing the relation of "Connectives, Collectives, and the 'Nonsense' of Participation". This discussion on media theory is followed by three different case studies. Sebastian Vehlken (Lüneburg) asks for the specific intermingling of technological condition and user practices in his text on "Multimodal Crowd Sensing". Arseli Dokumacı's (Montreal) contribution as well as the text by Pablo Abend and Benjamin Beil (Cologne) both approach participatory practices within a stronger ethnographical focus, each by putting a particular case study in the foreground. Dokumacı's "Blindness, Techno-Affordances, and Participation in Everyday Life" focuses on the relation between digital media, blindness, and "spatial problem-solving activities", while Abend and Beil take a closer look at the behavior of different groups of game players and the co-creative practices of editor games.

The second section puts the emphasis on "Participation and the Claims of Community" and is introduced by Christina Bartz (Paderborn). Erich Hörl's (Lüneburg) "Other Beginnings of Participative Sense Culture: Wild Media, Speculative Ecologies, Transgressions of the Cybernetic Hypothesis" therefore draws on the descriptions of 'animistic sense cultures' and Simondon's general ecology of participation with the background of our contemporary 'technological condition' in mind. Under the headline "Partial Visibilities, Affective Affinities: On (Not) Taking Sides" Arnoldas Stramskas (Kaunas) discusses whether political movement emerges from specific places where people meet and organize special activities, or vice versa. Nina Franz (Berlin) presents her findings from analyzing military text documents regarding their implicit notion of the human-weapon-relation in "'Man in the Loop': The Language of Participation and the New Technologies of War". Anne Kaun's (Södertörn/Pennsylvania) chapter "Crisis and Critique: Histories of Protest Media Participation" addresses the change from the age of "mechanical speed to digital immediacy in media practices", which she demonstrates via two different American protest movements. Also situated within the wider political framework is Martin Dege's (Konstanz) text "Liquid Democracy and Other Fixes to the Problem of Democracy", which refrains from the immediate rejection of the Inter-

net's effects on the public. Instead, he suggests understanding technology as a consequence of social developments.

The last section "Art and Media: Theory of Partaking" is introduced by Samantha Schramm (Konstanz). There, the final keynote by Erin Manning (Montreal) is concerned with "Artfulness: Emergent Collectives and Processes of Individuation". Manning argues for an understanding of artistic practice and its relation to "new modes of existence". In "Art and Design as Social Collaborative Praxis. Engineering the Utopian Community or the Implosion of Techno-Aesthetic Reason", Maria Teresa Cruz (Lisbon) indicates that there is a "new contributive economy" on the horizon. Heading in another direction is Eva Axer's "'Choir of Minds'. Oral Media-Enthusiasm and Theories on Communal Creation (18th–20th Century)". Axer reviews a historic discourse and its specific relations of "oral media, communal creation, and the idea of a 'spirit of a people'". Seeking to explain contemporary phenomena and modes of participation is "Web Memes and Mobilisation: The Contagious Socio-Aesthetics of Participation", in which Sascha Simons (Lüneburg) analyzes these objects regarding the processes between "technology, sociality, and aesthetics". Christine Mitchel (Montreal) closes the third section with a text on "Who Will Translate the Web? Machines, Humans, and Reinventing Translation as a Participatory Practice". She discusses the promises and impositions regarding the translation chains of the 'sociocultural' and the 'technical'.

The edited volume is closed by an outlook, including remarks on the horizon of research goals and main lines of inquiry that have to be addressed in discussing media participation. Elke Bippus, Beate Ochsner, and Isabell Otto introduce some of the essential foci of the discourse and the research group. The resulting research questions are exemplified in case studies that each contributes to the reclaiming of participation for art and media studies through contemplating and critical reflection of co-existence (Mitsprechen), promise (Versprechen), and dissent (Widersprechen). The wide spectrum of approaches and contributions will hopefully contribute to the discussion about media and participation and add to futures debates in all the related areas.