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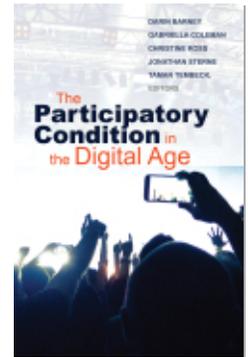
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# The Participatory Condition

## An Introduction

*Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross,  
Jonathan Sterne, and Tamar Tembeck*

THE PARTICIPATORY CONDITION names the situation in which participation—being involved in doing something and taking part in something with others—has become both environmental (a state of affairs) and normative (a binding principle of right action).<sup>1</sup> Participation is the general condition in which many of us live or seek to live (though, to be sure, not all of us, and not all in the same way). It has become a contextual feature of everyday life in the liberal, capitalist, and technological societies of the contemporary West. It could be argued that there is no place or time in human history where and when people did not “participate” by living together and acting in their world. Participation is, after all, the relational principle of being together in any civilization, society, or community. However, the fact that we have always necessarily participated does not mean that we have always lived under the participatory condition. What is distinctive about the present conjuncture is the degree and extent to which the everyday social, economic, cultural, and political activities that comprise simply being in the world have been thematized and organized around the priority of participation *as such*.

The generalization of participation is concomitant with the development and popularization of so-called digital media, especially personal computers, networking technologies, the Internet, the World Wide Web, and video games. These media allow a growing number of people to access, modify, store, circulate, and share media content. The expansion of participation as a relational possibility has become manifest in the variety of fields media participation embraces, including: participatory democracy (from representative to direct democracies and on to the development of

collaborative commons and the Occupy movements), citizen journalism, social media communication, the digital humanities, digital design, smart cities, gaming, and collaborative art. But what does it mean to participate? How and why is it that we believe that we now participate more? What are the main features of participation today? And why has it become so important?

Participation is not only a concept and a set of practices; fundamentally, it is the promise and expectation that one can be actively involved with others in decision-making processes that affect the evolution of social bonds, communities, systems of knowledge, and organizations, as well as politics and culture. Tied to this promise and belief, as well as to the structures of the media technologies (Internet forums, blogs, wikis, podcasts, smartphones, etc.) that appear to facilitate increased participation, are the possibilities of communication linked to social change. But while possibilities represent desire, they can also be understood as rhetoric, as a set of empty habits, or as failed opportunities. This tension—between the promises and impasses of participation, its hopes and disappointments, its illusions and recuperations—is at the forefront of recent social, cultural, and political assessments of participation in relation to new media. Attending to this tension, *The Participatory Condition* critically probes the purported participatory nature attributed to media, and unearths other forms of participation that might be obscured by excessive promises of digital utopias.

Henry Jenkins's work on "participatory culture" helps to clarify the specificities of the present conjuncture. Jenkins first coined the term in 1992 to describe the cultural production and social interactions of fan communities.<sup>2</sup> The term has since then evolved in his coauthored publications, namely *Convergence Culture* (2006), *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture* (2009), and *Spreadable Media* (2013)—studies that account for the relations between the development of participatory culture, the evolution of new media technologies, the expansion of the various communities invested in media production and circulation, and the decentralization of decision-making processes. Key to Jenkins's understanding of participatory culture is its articulation as not only emergent but also expansive, owing largely to the "spreadability" of emerging media—a paradigm that "assumes that anything worth hearing will circulate through any and all available channels."<sup>3</sup> We would agree, adding that the expansive quality of participation demands a shift in terminology. The proposition of this book is that the normative and environmental qualities of participation

that Jenkins and others have assigned to culture have now been generalized across multiple social domains such that it becomes possible—perhaps even necessary—to start talking and thinking about a “participatory condition” whose operations and implications exceed the boundaries of a single culture.

This volume has three main objectives. First, it collects the work of key scholars of participation and new media, across a wide range of disciplines, in order to disentangle the tensions, contradictions, and potentialities of new media participation. Second, each of its essays seeks to assess the role of new media in the development of a relational possibility—participation—whose expansion has become so large that it represents the very condition of our contemporaneity. Third, it affirms that, while in recent years the term participation has come to be associated with digital media and the social web (or “Web 2.0”) in particular, the concept has a long history that predates and informs the digital age. The contemporary participatory condition relies upon a number of historical “preconditions” across the fields of politics, art, and media. This complex history includes a range of ideas, practices, and artifacts that cannot be reduced to, nor wholly accounted for by, technological changes alone. While a detailed look into the many interrelated layers of that history is beyond the scope of this introduction, our brief examination of these preconditions helps to better situate contemporary participatory practices and their evolution into what we identify as a *condition*.

## Participation as Interpellation

Across a broad range of social domains, our expectations to participate are matched with expectations that we will participate. Participation has become a measure of the quality of our social situations and interactions, and has come to stand in for virtues that, under other conditions, might have names like equality, justice, fairness, community, or freedom. Participation is normal; a lack of participation seems suspicious, strange, and disappointing—an impoverishment of democratic forms of citizenship which normally involve “equality as participation.”<sup>4</sup> Participation has become a tremendously valuable social, political, and economic resource. In this sense, the participatory condition names a particular instance of what Louis Althusser described as interpellation, the process whereby we become the subjects we are by responding to the hail of ideological formations that

structure our social environments. In his 1970 essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” Althusser describes the primary scene of interpellation as the hailing and hearing of a lawful exclamation: A police officer shouts out in public, “Hey! You there,” prompting an individual to turn around, whereupon, “by this mere one-hundred-and-eight-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*.”<sup>5</sup> In the present condition, we are hailed as participants by multiple elements of our environment across the domains of culture, politics, and social life. Recognizing ourselves in that hail, we act accordingly: We participate.

That participation has evolved into a leading mode of subjective interpellation in the contemporary period is the central assumption of this book. Participation is one of the most prominent means by which individuals and publics (at least in the contemporary West) become subjects and inscribe themselves in the social order. We participate in the process of becoming participatory subjects, but an element of contingency persists in any situation where human agency is at play. This is another sense in which participation is conditional: What it means depends upon what we become as participatory subjects, and this is not simply given in advance. The participatory condition is what we live with, with all the constraints and possibilities that living-with implies.

Participation is not a quality added to some other thing or activity, not one hailing process among others, but a condition that is constitutive of the social itself. The present volume explores the multiple, complex, and sometimes contradictory elements of the participatory condition across the domains of politics, art, and social life. Considered together, the essays in this volume specify what makes participation a condition today—what makes it such an interpellant force: its generalization (it extends in a growing range of societal fields and has become an umbrella for diverse practices and phenomena); its strong compatibility with neoliberalism as a political economy; and its refraction in contemporary media environments. Moreover, as the collected essays suggest, it becomes increasingly clear that contemporary participation has become a *pharmakon* of sorts, to borrow one of the key concepts from Bernard Stiegler’s philosophy of technology: both a poison and a remedy, a benefit and a problem, a promise of emancipation as well as a form of subjection.

The participatory condition requires us to think beyond accounts that would simply equate it with the rise of digital technologies. It goes with-

out saying that the participatory condition is intimately bound up with these technologies, and their extension into and across multiple domains of social, political, economic, and cultural practice. Scholarship that has focused on the correlation between participation and digital media—namely, Jenkins et al.'s work on “participatory culture” (1992–2013), Nico Carpentier's *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle* (2011), and Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson's *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (2013)—recognizes the central role of the digital in the expansion of participatory cultures, but also stipulates that the latter are not determined by and do not result from the development of the former. The essays in this volume confirm this sense that new media are a necessary but insufficient condition of the broader participatory condition. In *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture* (2009), Jenkins et al. characterize communication technologies as one element within the complex ecology of participation: “Rather than dealing with each technology in isolation, we would do better to take an ecological approach, thinking about the interrelationship among different communication technologies, the cultural communities that grow up around them, and the activities they support. Media systems consist of communication technologies and the social, cultural, legal, political, and economic institutions, practices, and protocols that shape and surround them.”<sup>6</sup> The interdisciplinary essays collected here attempt to apprehend the participatory condition in exactly such an ecological manner. Another characteristic of ecologies is that they exist in time—they develop from something and into something. From what, if not *only* media (but yes, *also* from media) has the participatory condition developed? Before speculating on where the participatory condition might be going, it is necessary to consider where it came from.

## A Political History of Participation

The identification of politics with participation has a long history in the Western tradition, a history that has prepared us to both expect and accept participation as definitive of political experience itself. This long history has primed us to receive the hail of the participatory condition. In the classic Aristotelian definition, a citizen is one who participates, specifically, “in the administration of justice and the holding of office.”<sup>7</sup> By contrast, modern understandings of citizenship emphasize membership or

belonging, the status of being a recognized part of a political community. From late eighteenth-century modernity on, participation has referred to citizenship in both senses: To participate is to be a part and to do your part. Already this signals a structuring tension at the core of citizenship, as it is understood in the West, which can be figured as the nonidentity between participation as acting and participation as belonging. Put simply, not everyone who participates in a political community by belonging to it participates in that community by actively taking part in its political life. Many who belong would prefer not to participate, and liberalism makes this their right (even as emerging technologies hollow out this right by making participation compulsory).<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, the actual history of liberal democratic societies is one in which active participation in political life for some members of the community rests upon the structural exclusion of other members of the community from participation in political institutions and the public sphere. The material reality of a class of *participants-who-cannot-participate* was already present in Aristotle's classic formulation of citizenship, whereby slaves and women who "belonged" to the household—and, by extension, to the *polis*—were excluded from "the administration of justice and the holding of office" as a condition of the possibility of participation by Greek male citizens. Women and slaves were, to borrow the phrasing of Jacques Rancière, the "part that has no part."<sup>9</sup> Participation as membership does not guarantee that one qualifies as a participant in the more active sense, a reality that persists materially even as formal rights to participate are extended to more and different classes of citizens. Indeed, as Rancière observes, much of the substance and history of politics can be attributed to the never-ending struggles of participants-who-cannot-participate—that is, the part that has no part—to rearrange the distribution of parts.

This structural tension has placed participation at the center of the Western political imaginary. On the one hand, what is understood to define liberal democratic societies is their institutionalization of political participation by citizens in forms that include: constitutional protection of free speech, association, and assembly; citizen suffrage and eligibility for office; responsible government and elected legislatures; political parties; citizen initiatives, recall, and referenda; stakeholder consultation and public regulatory hearings; and mandated public access to state information. On the other hand, expectations regarding participation have also motivated critiques of these very institutions as insufficiently democratic, whether

because various classes of people have been denied access to them on account of not being recognized as qualified participants, because the mechanisms of representation make for a political life that is insufficiently participatory, or because a robust democratic life demands extension of participatory principles beyond the limits of institutional politics into those social and economic domains in which power is actually organized. In each case, participation is confirmed as central to what politics actually is. Thus, participation has been a core value that traverses several diverse and sometimes contending categories of political thought and practice in the West.<sup>10</sup>

Participation has also figured centrally in twentieth-century philosophical accounts that locate politics not in the formal institutions of democratic government but rather in the informal settings and interactions of the democratic public sphere. In Hannah Arendt's account of the Athenian *polis*, one becomes political not by occupying office but by participating in public life, appearing before others as an equal, and committing to action in speech.<sup>11</sup> In Arendt's view, such participation is not validated instrumentally by the ends it achieves but is sufficient unto itself for the realization of a distinctive human excellence: Participation is its own reward. In his influential account of the modern, liberal democratic public sphere, Jürgen Habermas casts politics as participation by private persons (i.e., nonholders of public office) in the formation of public opinion through rational-critical debate in the public sphere.<sup>12</sup> Here, participation has the specific, democratic purpose of justifying shared norms and testing the legitimacy of state authority. Such theories of the public sphere exhibit two important tendencies that bear on the place of participation in the Western political imagination. The first is an explicit figuring of participation in terms of communication and the privileging of speech, rational argument, and dialogue as its definitive modes—against which other modes of communication and forms of participation are either reduced to analogues or condemned as irrational, deformed, or regressive. The second is a preoccupation with mass mediation as either enabling or corrupting the sort of communication required to fulfill the political promise of participation. Both tendencies figure participation as something that needs to be defended from damage or substitution by the many diminished forms that threaten its integrity, and as something whose prospects and reach might be enhanced by media technologies that improve the quality and quantity of horizontal communicative interaction between citizens in multiple and expanded public

spheres. The participatory condition is definitely marked by these anxieties and these hopes, even as the activities that characterize it far exceed the somewhat limited frame of rational public debate concerning common affairs or the legitimacy of state authority.<sup>13</sup>

As prospects for a revolutionary transformation of capitalism began to dim in the 1960s, New Left thinkers and movements of the post-1968 generation turned to advocating more direct and participatory modes of democratic practice—extended across an expanding range of social, economic, and political domains—as a way to combat inequalities stemming from categorization by class, race, and sex.<sup>14</sup> Even contemporary anarchist and autonomist movements that promote exodus from participatory engagement with state forms and institutions considered illegitimate and unredeemable enact their abstention through highly participatory modes of political organization, hopeful that these might sustain an alternative, postcapitalist future.<sup>15</sup> Thus Jenkins et al. describe the origins of participatory culture in twentieth- and twenty-first-century struggles by grassroots communities and countercultural movements that fought and continue to fight “to gain greater control over the means of cultural production and circulation.”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the declining character of participation in public life—figured variously as occasioned by alienation, massification, atomization, privatization, bureaucratization, depoliticization, civic illiteracy, apathy, and a deficit of social capital—has been a dominant theme in Western social criticism and social science.<sup>17</sup>

Linking these opposed yet interdependent currents is a steadily evolving culture of self-realization and self-fulfillment that relates to participation somewhat ambiguously.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, the purported individualism of this “realization of the self” ethos can be construed as a cause or a symptom of the alleged withdrawal from participation in collective, civic life that communitarian critics have diagnosed as a pathology of advanced market liberalism.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, these same orientations can be credited with driving appetites for expanded opportunities to participate in a diverse range of social settings and interactions, as a means of expressing and affirming the selves we are increasingly encouraged to cultivate.<sup>20</sup> This raises the question of what counts as politically significant participation. For, despite what appears to be an unprecedented range of opportunities for individuals to participate in activities that seem to comport with longstanding ideas about what constitutes political action—gathering and publicizing information, expressing opinions, debating and deliberating

with others, signaling preferences, making choices, witnessing events, and organizing collective action—it is not at all clear that the participatory condition marked by all this activity is actually one in which the quality, intensity, or efficacy of political experience is significantly greater, or more democratic (in the substantive sense of a more equal distribution of power and resources), than it was before participation became a routinized part of most every aspect of social life.<sup>21</sup>

## An Art History of Participation

The questions pertaining to what constitutes effective participation in the field of politics extend into the areas of art and culture. Because of its constanciality with democracy, the aesthetic regime initiated in the late eighteenth century can be considered as the regime that has prepared and still prepares us for the participatory condition. Following Rancière's definition, the aesthetic regime is a regulated system of visibility and invisibility in art, as well as "a mode of interpretative discourse that itself belongs to the forms" of that system, whose main novelty is its principle of equality.<sup>22</sup> In postrevolutionary Europe, art ceased to exclusively represent the values of its rulers (the Church, the monarchy, the aristocracy, etc.) and increasingly became the manifestation of a sensibility—a combination of perceptions, sensations, and interpretations—toward events and objects of ordinary life. That new sensibility broke with the established hierarchy of genres and accelerated the constitution of an undifferentiated public. From then on, anything—the mundane, the unexceptional, the unidealized, the ugly, the mass cultural, the uncanny, the *informe*, and the excluded—could potentially be performed, depicted, and circulated in artistic practices. Even today, this "anything-ness" is a constant source of discontent—a discontent as old as aesthetics itself. How can anything be art? And how can art, as it increasingly attempts to bridge aesthetics and life, propose *new* forms of life? Yet it is precisely this anything-ness that presupposes and reinforces a democratic deployment of aesthetics, and that ultimately confirms the possibility of equal participation by all actors (artists, spectators, curators, etc.) in the aesthetic regime.

Underlying the rise of the participatory condition is the belief that "cultural participation" represents the full expression of the rights and capacities of human beings in democratic societies—a democratic underpinning promoted by the aesthetic regime from the start. It remains manifest today

in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that: "Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."<sup>23</sup> A democratic government is understood to be one that promotes the access and inclusion of its citizens in cultural life, supporting them in the full exercise of citizenship. Cultural participation effectively defines what "we" refer to as "our" culture, so in this regard, it is performative at once of our sense of belonging and of the state or community's fulfillment of its democratic ideals.

A number of participatory art practices are guided, in principle, by the promise of equality that the idea of participation seems to carry: from the historical avant-gardes (Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism) to post-war happenings, installation art, relational aesthetics, community art, and collaborative art. Across disciplines, specific frameworks have been proposed to orchestrate collaborations between diverse publics in the hopes of giving flesh to "the possible" that is roused in the very idea of participation.<sup>24</sup> Of the better-known attempts at participation in the live arts in the twentieth century, we can count the modernist avant-garde's calls for provocative awakenings of the bourgeois audience;<sup>25</sup> the development of non-Aristotelian dramatic techniques, or epic theatre, by Erwin Piscator and most famously Bertolt Brecht, who sought to rouse the audience's critical faculties through processes of defamiliarization;<sup>26</sup> Augusto Boal's elaboration of methods to interpellate the "spect-actor" in more overt manners;<sup>27</sup> and subsequent forms of "postdramatic theatre" that straddle the traditions of the visual and performing arts.<sup>28</sup> In most of these practices, the exploration of emerging media (from novel forms of performance, to innovative investigations of sound, music, movement, voice, and light, and the aesthetic exploration of kinetic and cybernetic techniques, painting, film, photography, video, and the Internet) plays a significant role in the renewal of participatory aesthetics. Yet, just as participation alone is not a guarantor of the renewal of sensibilities, neither is an aesthetic renewal solely guaranteed by the integration of emerging media. The recent development of post-Internet art, which uses nondigital media to reflect upon the digital age, is an indication that art can sometimes benefit from media anachronisms.

While the names attributed to participatory practices have varied in the history of contemporary art, scholars have developed more or less stringent terminologies and criteria to identify the nature, scope, and

operational parameters of participatory practices.<sup>29</sup> Among them, Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* and Grant Kester's writings on "dialogical art" are the most prominent examples of contemporary scholarship that sees the artistic processes of participation as primarily characterized by dialogue, exchange, and interpersonal connection; their positions, however, bare the unspoken assumption that all participants have the freedom to meet on equal grounds. For Anna Dezeuze, participatory aesthetics have the potential to extend into the political realm. "The do-it-yourself artwork," she writes, "can also serve as a catalyst for change, whether through self-consciousness and self-transformation, or through social interactions and exchanges. Participatory works are often premised on the belief that participation will encourage individuals and groups to take control of their own social and political existence," either "by offering alternative models for social or political participation" or "by acting as a means to empower participants."<sup>30</sup> Beryl Graham adds to this discourse a functional distinction between participatory and interactive practices as they are deployed specifically in the context of new media art: Whereas in "participatory art" participants are expected to *produce* content themselves, in "interactive art" content that was originally developed by an artist is only *refashioned* or reorganized by participant-users, thereby suggesting differing depths of creative engagement.<sup>31</sup>

But while participation is at times equated with the possibility of inner or outer change, its transformational value is not a given. Claire Bishop contends that participatory works operate as platforms through which antagonistic relations ought to unfold. Without antagonism, the participatory aesthetic loses its political potential—its capacity to generate new forms and, in so doing, question the social status quo. Antagonism is the means through which "the vicissitudes of collaborative authorship and spectatorship" and the merger of participation with cultural industries and spectacle can be defeated.<sup>32</sup> At times, participation simply functions as entertainment. This evolution follows the notion of cultural participation as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where participation includes "enjoying" culture, attending exhibitions, and being present in sports arenas or concert halls. Such an understanding of participation increasingly informs business models in the cultural sphere, as is the case with the new, audience-friendly museology by which museums have been securing their economic survival over the last two decades or so.<sup>33</sup> In some cases, cultural participation is forced; in others, it remains

invisible. Like the new museology, art practices since the avant-gardes have often involved lay publics, who may or may not be informed of their planned participation, or even be willing to take part in the artistic event, in contrast to other forms of participatory art that build upon the consensual meetings of individuals or self-defined “communities.”<sup>34</sup>

Even Kester, a strong supporter of collaborative practices in art, has cautioned that “a specter haunts th[e] utopian vision” of participation in the context of aesthetic experience.<sup>35</sup> He reminds us that modern and contemporary art’s emancipatory potential has always been under threat—whether through the encroachment of mass culture and market forces or the cooptation of art as a tool for propaganda.<sup>36</sup> With the rise of art as participatory social practice at the turn of the twenty-first century, we risk finding ourselves in a similar position once again. In order to ensure its survival, art must follow the rules of the market or those of the state, whose cultural policies increasingly demand the justification of public support in the form of a foreseen *social* return on investment. In the current conjuncture, the emancipatory potential of aesthetic experience remains entangled with the political trappings of participation: With an art oriented toward social practice, there is always the risk of moving “from the *action of fiction*” in the creative process “to the *fiction of action*” in the world.<sup>37</sup>

## A Media History of Participation

At least in the culture the authors of this introduction inhabit, participation is more prevalent than ever before, and more deeply tied to media. But as with the historical precedents of contemporary participatory politics and art, the media logics we are now living have deep historical roots. Each media age restages a century-long conversation about the possibilities, problems, and peculiarities of participation. Alongside its conceptual relatives—interaction, dialogue, and engagement—participation has been a major axis by which media have been heralded, described, evaluated, and criticized. Communication via media as the basis of participation is an ancient theme—as John Durham Peters notes, Plato’s complaint about writing and painting was that they did not talk back; they were poor participants in dialogue.

Communicative participation took on a more explicitly political stake in the modern era. Alongside Habermas’s eighteenth- and nineteenth-century coffee shops, the postal roads of the revolutionary era in the United

States were imagined as cultural infrastructures of participation, where mail and newspaper circulation was said to make possible a democratic citizenry, a trope later repeated regarding telegraphy and electricity.<sup>38</sup> If hopes for participation through media were connected to hopes for greater democratization, anxieties about too much participation were closely connected to issues of power and control. British and American moral panics over cheap newspapers and novels during the 1830s were tied to anxieties about the newfound power of a literate working class. We find similar anxieties around the circulation of *David Walker's Appeal* (1829)—perhaps the first document to address a black American public—where greater participation in a print public was seen as a direct challenge to white supremacy.<sup>39</sup> Women's participation in modern cultural and political public spheres follows a similar political topography, where the salon and the novel, and eventually public speech, print culture, and commerce, challenged patriarchal relations. Yet women's participation could also be tied to continued subjugation, as in the Victorian middle-class housewife's connection to the piano as a form of domestic entertainment.<sup>40</sup>

The era of technical media, to use Friedrich Kittler's term for the electrical and mechanical devices that emerged in the late nineteenth century, introduced a new range of sensorial and political controversies around participation. A crucial set of concerns grew around the distraction and disengagement effects of media—the ways in which they construct (or fail to construct) nonparticipatory participants. Composer John Philip Sousa's famous lament over the loss of live music in the age of sound recording—"What will become of the national throat?"—captured a more general intellectual anxiety that technical media would make their audiences passive consumers where before they had been active cultural producers. The retrospection was indeed expressed and perhaps experienced but, insofar as anxieties also circulated around *too much* participation, it was somewhat of a romantic recall.

The idea of media as generators of passivity remained a powerful thread in twentieth-century media theory. The concerns about media—that they short-circuited participation, or provided false or inauthentic modes of participation—were tied to more general anxieties about twentieth-century modernity. In his 1907 book *The Philosophy of Money*, sociologist Georg Simmel argued that the money economy required its subjects to become more calculating, to reduce everything to a standard of utility and exchange, and therefore tended to dull judgment and blunt aesthetic

sensibilities, leading to a calculating, affectless subject who replaced authentic feeling with the search for temporary and replaceable sensations.<sup>41</sup> Simmel's theory of participation is thus double-edged: Successful participation in the money economy, which was obligatory for the modern subject, led to subjects' inability to participate authentically in their own cultural or psychological lives.<sup>42</sup> Of course, distraction did not always take on a negative valence. Most famously, Walter Benjamin wrote that the condition of cinema would lead the working classes to be able to apprehend themselves in their totality, echoing Georg Lukacs's theory of reification, where class consciousness—and the collective action that would spring from it—was only possible after capitalism objectified social relations, rendering them sensible. The Situationists' practices of *détournement* (the deviation of a previous media work, whose meaning is antagonistic to the original) also built on Lukacs's account of consciousness and action—explicitly in Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and implicitly in their attempts to turn urban distraction and alienation against itself.<sup>43</sup>

Another strand of theory argued that media intensified modes of participation. In his 1909 *Social Organization*, sociologist Charles Cooley identified four major characteristics of modern media that were so transformative as to “constitute a new epoch”: expressiveness, permanence of record (“or the overcoming of time”), swiftness (“or the overcoming of space”), and diffusion (“or access to all classes of men”).<sup>44</sup> For Cooley, these changes touched every aspect of modern life and led to monumental new possibilities for participation: “Never, certainly, were great masses of men so rapidly rising to higher levels as now,” he wrote optimistically of mass education and public opinion. “The enlargement [afforded by new media such as the mass daily newspaper] affects not only thought but feeling, favoring the growth of a sense of common humanity, of moral unity, between nations, races and classes. Among members of a communicating whole feeling may not always be friendly, but it must be, in a sense, sympathetic, involving some consciousness of the other's point of view.”<sup>45</sup> For Cooley, media participation enables new forms of collective feeling and action, and in his writings we find a waypoint, remarkable in a roughly two-hundred-year span, where a single set of claims is repeatedly attached to very different circumstances. Echoes of his claims can be found in twentieth-century assessments of telephony, broadcasting, satellite communication, computers, and the Internet. They were also alive in the cultural programs

attached to early radio and television programming, which often followed explicitly nationalist agendas.<sup>46</sup>

Policy and engineering also played a role in twentieth-century debates around the distractive and potentially nonparticipatory impact of media, as well as their emancipative possibilities. Policy rulings throughout the 1910s and 1920s restricted access to radio, which had been a many-to-many medium. This changed by the 1930s, with radio largely becoming a one-to-many broadcast medium (with some notable exceptions). Engineers built technologies that conformed to policies once they were in place, but they also developed their own aesthetic theories and practices of participation and operationalized them in new media. In the 1930s, working on experimental versions of television, engineers assumed that the domestic audience would be watching while doing other things—to this day the conventions of the television soundtrack are designed to call the audience back to the television set, in case it is doing something else. The designs of portable, public, and low-definition audio and video media, from color television to transistor radios, Walkmen, MP3 and YouTube codecs, and Twitter apps for computer desktops, also assume an audience that may or may not be paying full attention, and allow for multiple levels of aesthetic engagement—a quality of participation that flows from rapt attention and engagement to rapid switching of attention, distance, and ambiance.

The twentieth-century participatory/nonparticipatory anxieties that sustained debates around the role of media in politics, culture, communication, cognition, sensoriality, policymaking, and engineering became more urgently ambivalent when set against the darker parts of what Alain Badiou has called the “short century,” beginning with World War I and closing with the collapse of the USSR. Following World War I, Walter Lippmann argued for a class of experts to manage public opinion, to keep an unruly population on the proper course. The idea of propaganda captured the imaginations of militaries, governments, radicals, and critics for the next thirty-odd years. In a propagandistic world, involvement in media leads inexorably to mass mentalities—in fantasies and research around propaganda. Some scholars imagined media participation as leading to ideological injection, while others saw participation as a kind of entanglement where audiences came to move collectively, but dangerously. The legacies of fascism and a range of other authoritarianisms follow closely here. During the 1940s, Allied intellectuals worried about the Nazi propaganda

machine. But the idea that media participation is the basis of a polity is still with us today, seen in NATO's bombing of broadcast infrastructure during its air raids on Serbia and the use of radio broadcasts as evidence of incitement to genocide in the trials that followed the Rwandan genocide.<sup>47</sup>

## Understanding the Participatory Condition

Historical preconditions, including those outlined above in the areas of politics, art, and media, prepare us for the hail of the contemporary participatory condition. Modernity, especially the development of democracy it promotes, shapes itself around the promise of participation as well as the anxieties, power struggles, ambivalences, and failures that accompany such a promise. Today, the popularization of digital media reactualizes the participatory thrust of modernity across the realms of politics, art, and media, as well as beyond. The following question must then be raised: In what ways and to what extent have digital media in particular become a structuring feature of the contemporary participatory condition? This is the main question addressed in the contributions to this volume. The answers to that question are articulated within the confines of specific disciplines, including political science, sociology, communication studies, anthropology, law, philosophy, design, museology, and art. But, in light of the commonality of some of their deliberations and findings, these contributions also reach beyond their respective disciplines. An interdisciplinary assessment of the participatory condition is essential insofar as participatory culture has expanded across all societal fields.

The essays collected here also share a common concern: the need to be critical about the participatory condition. The common conclusion is that, although certain attributes of digital media facilitate participation, these attributes alone do not encompass the possibilities, promises, or deceptions of participatory practices. Rather, digital media offer environments that are ripe for the unfolding of the participatory condition. As anthropologist Tim Ingold has argued in his study of materiality, the properties of materials "cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational."<sup>48</sup> Participants in new media environments (engineers, policymakers, investors, branders, employers, users, workers, thinkers, hackers, activists, players, dreamers, propagandists, educators, artists, and so on) shape the media as they are being shaped through them. These essays, therefore, all aim to analyze what, why, how,

and when participation takes place within the new media environments of the contemporary participatory condition.

Although the participatory logic of contemporary media is indebted to the past, current conversations around participation have been articulated through new vocabularies and under distinct circumstances. A gloss of dominant terms used to convey the nature of online sharing—ad hoc, the commons, peer-to-peer, prosumer, user-driven innovation, spontaneity, creativity, empowerment, crowd-sourcing, and especially openness—bolsters a now-entrenched notion that the Internet is ideal for “organization without organizations,” to cite the subtitle of Clay Shirky’s influential book *Here Comes Everybody*, a de facto bible for this sort of thinking.<sup>49</sup> What is ostensibly distinct today is how the Internet allows humans to bypass institutions and hierarchies while encouraging direct connection and participation. As the anthropological record attests, humans—across time and in different societies—have engaged in radically distinct forms of participation; why would the manifestation of online participation express itself through just a singular format? As it turns out, it does not. Bart Cammaerts’s essay in this volume clearly shows that information and communications technologies (ICTs) can facilitate mutual cooperation—the sharing of material goods, services, skills, and knowledge—between citizens, but the social ties consolidated by online cooperation is extremely varied, ranging from weak to strong, manifest to latent, and enduring to ephemeral. Moreover, the notion that online participation is incommensurable with the organizational styles of traditional institutions has proven to be spectacularly false. Many of the more lasting forms of participation—free and open software projects, Wikipedia, radical technology collectives, and crisis mapping groups such as Ushadi—were once informal or driven by charismatic authority but have, over time, routinized, to borrow from Weberian terminology.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, the vision of digital participation as coterminous with flexible, nonhierarchical, and extrainstitutional endeavors continues to grip the public imagination. Recently, a cohort of theorists have insisted that we should bring more categories to bear in order to evaluate claims about novelty, political effects, and cultural significance: “Without a guide to identifying differences in participation,” writes media studies scholar Adam Fish, “all forms look the same, and every instance confirms a theory rather than testing it. A field guide would allow one to observe, compare and contrast forms of participation; to ask when and where different forms

occur; . . . to ask what forms of participation are emerging, what forms are going extinct, and with what consequences?"<sup>51</sup> In light of this, the essays in this volume help us to evaluate the place of new media in the participatory condition along four axes—politics, openness, surveillance, and aisthesis—helping us to better situate the common workings of the participatory condition across distinct fields.

1. *Politics*. In his recent study of media and participation, Carpentier focuses on the relationship between participation and decision making, and notes that the meaning of participation varies across the several fields to which this relationship pertains.<sup>52</sup> Notwithstanding this variety, Carpentier finds that what is at issue in these relationships remains relatively consistent across their diversity: a struggle over the distribution of power, and whether it tends toward or away from equality. The chapters in this section of the book, including Carpentier's own, all reflect on this core attribute of the relationship between participation and politics, even in cases that are not organized primarily around decision-making processes. The struggle for equality haunts the politics of participation.

The essays examining the political ramifications of the participatory condition in this volume reveal how participation operates as a promise of democratic emancipation, one that is only contingently—not necessarily—linked to egalitarian intentions or outcomes. For example, when participation takes the form of uncompensated labor that generates value for powerful corporations (Trebor Scholz), or mere consultation that applies a veneer of legitimacy to elite decision making (Carpentier), or accumulated data that enables the expansion of commercial and governmental surveillance (Julie Cohen, Mark Andrejevic), it is no longer clear that participation equates with democracy or equality. But, in line with early work on cyberfeminism arguing that through new media forms of participation new gender identities and relations would emerge, and in line with Henry Jenkins's work, some essays are more confident in their analyses of participation in relation to social and political change.<sup>53</sup> There are instances where media participation has indeed played a significant role in effecting such change.

One can find that potentiality in discussions of open source software movements (Alessandro Delfanti and Salvatore Iaconesi), Twitter's role in the Arab Spring (Jillian York), Tumblr's role in Occupy Wall Street (Cayley Sorochan), the role of participatory design in augmentative communications (Graham Pullin), and the promises of engaging university undergraduates in multimodal forms of education (Stiegler).<sup>54</sup> But even these more positive accounts agree on the insufficiency of participatory media alone in the aspiration for political or social transformation.

2. *Openness.* The stakes for insisting on a more diverse taxonomy to assess the participatory potential in new media environments can be clarified by probing the interrelations between expertise, openness, and institutions. If questions pertaining to expertise and institutions are rarely applied in attempts to understand participatory collectives online, openness, on the other hand, has been one of the privileged terms used by practitioners and commentators alike to describe many online participatory projects.<sup>55</sup> Popularized by the success of open source software development, its heritage lies in the modern cultures of institutional science.<sup>56</sup> Today it has migrated into distinct fields, stretching from the humanities to government, and has experienced a renaissance in the contemporary sciences where, as Delfanti has shown, commitments to the ideal are reinvented in response to shifting economic contexts.<sup>57</sup> Like participation, openness tends to be rhetorically invested with such a positive valence that it stands resistant to critique. "Openness is a philosophy that can rationalize its own failure, chalking people's inability to participate up to choice," observes cultural critic Astra Taylor.<sup>58</sup> And many participatory projects claim—loudly and proudly—their openness.

This openness can certainly be a superb mobilizer for producing and sharing knowledge, as Delfanti and Iaconesi's account of the "open source cancer" project, included here, affirms. After being diagnosed with cancer and in an attempt to demedicalize his condition, Iaconesi codevised a website called *La Cura* with his partner Oriana Persico. He converted all of the medical records related to his brain tumor from proprietary and

professional to user-friendly standards and made them accessible on the website, asking people to reply with “cure” scenarios. The multiform response—the website received hundreds of thousands of contributions from physicians, patients, artists, activists, and others—is but a testimony to the possibility of using the Internet as a means to sharing information otherwise inaccessible to laypersons, as well as a means to create rituals of bio-empowerment. Pullin’s essay also shows how it is indeed possible to codesign augmentative communication devices with people living with speech disabilities who rely on speech-generative devices to communicate. “What if speech technology,” he asks, “were conceived of as an open source medium in a deeper sense, in which myriad tones of voice are crafted, exchanged and appropriated by the very people who use it in their everyday lives?” His essay examines different participatory projects in augmentative communication, which seek to enrich expressiveness of speech and tone of voice *with* (as opposed to *for*) people with disabilities.

Openness, however, is not a straightforward—much less a singular—state of being. And success stories like those above require a high level of expertise in design, programming, or hacking processes. While numerous participatory media projects rely on a colloquial understanding of openness—simply allowing anyone to participate—in practice, openness is operationalized distinctly as an endeavor. As media scholar Nathaniel Tkacz has carefully shown, openness can refer to a procedure internal to a project or it can concern general access to goods. The problem with a term like openness arises when it is used alone or in association with concepts that are too closely related (like transparency and participation). However, by putting multiple categories into play, such as expertise with openness, we gain the necessary conceptual traction to more clearly see power dynamics at work. And indeed, expertise—commanding particular sets of skills—is necessary for any form of participation; it limits some and enables others to engage interdependently, as Christina Dunbar-Hester’s essay in this collection powerfully demonstrates. A cadre of experts—programmers, designers, system administrators, technically minded

journalists, and policymakers—have risen to become prominent actors in various fields of endeavor. These experts are now important brokers, bridging between existing institutions (such as newspapers or software firms) and newly emergent ones (such as the free software project or citizen-led journalism sites). Thus theories of brokerage and trading zones are also essential for any understanding of contemporary digital participation.<sup>59</sup>

3. *Surveillance*. In the emerging media environment, participation has become an engine of commerce, consent, and control.<sup>60</sup> Contributors, especially those influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, argue that new media participation leads to new forms of cooptation and surveillance by governments, corporations, and other users. Another version of this critique focuses on labor conditions in digital culture, where participation often means that participants provide new media companies with value, either in exchange for “free” entertainment or in exchange for often subminimum wages, as discussed in Scholz’s essay in this volume. Andrejevic’s essay describes the “passive-ication” of interactivity as the phenomenon whereby communications technologies effectively force people to “participate” in real time with their data—in spite of themselves—while Kate Crawford’s essay traces similar dynamics on the scale of urban surveillance systems.

As the essays included in the “Participation under Surveillance” section of this book demonstrate, the stakes of moving away from singular, blanket categories like openness become particularly salient in light of the dominance of corporate platforms like Facebook, whose interest in encouraging sharing, participation, and openness is directly linked to a privacy-violating profit model based on harvesting and reselling personal data for advertising. “If people share more, the world will become more open and connected. And a world that’s more open and connected is a better world,” Mark Zuckerberg (one of the cofounders of Facebook) famously announced in 2010.<sup>61</sup> Discourses based on sharing and openness in these circumstances occlude—and in a way that uncannily resembles Enlightenment colonialist logics<sup>62</sup>—just how many “acts of communication are now, by definition, acts of surveillance

meshed within an economy that aggregates even the affective, non-representational dynamics of relation.”<sup>63</sup> It is for this reason that anonymous organizing and piracy, which are proliferating today, have become paramount sites of participatory struggle, where citizens can escape the logic of extraction and surveillance.<sup>64</sup>

Ubiquitous surveillance facilitated by ICTs—what Crawford designates as “algorithmic listening”—and the gathering of personal data currently operated by web-based corporations (commercial surveillance) and governments (the NSA program, for example) are not simply matters of privacy but also of scale and lack of accountability. In her case study of the Boston Calling pilot—a surveillance system used for crowd detection in public spaces following the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013—Crawford discloses that these types of pilots, used to test law enforcement scenarios, “began in off-site locations, military bases, and custom-made environments, but they are now moving to the lived environments of millions of people.” More problematically, these scenarios are moving into urban public spaces without the consent of citizens, justified by a rhetoric of “permacrisis.” As Andrejevic and Cohen maintain, Internet participation (involving activities such as searching, purchasing, communicating, socially exchanging, or open sourcing) has become a new mode of surveillance beyond any participant’s control. This is one of the ultimate paradoxes of what Cohen calls “the participatory turn in surveillance”: The more we participate, the more data is gathered about us, and (to paraphrase Andrejevic) the less participatory participation becomes. The participatory condition—in which participation begets surveillance—can be compared to philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s definition of the apparatus: It constitutes us as subjects, but also robs us of subjectivity in the process. Even if one does not agree with the austerity of this assessment, it is important to point out that Agamben sees *profanation*—“the restitution to common use” or “the free use”—as a means to make apparatuses work correctly.<sup>65</sup>

4. *Aisthesis*. In the aesthetic regime, the irruption of equality collapses hierarchies of genres and styles. As Jean-Philippe

Deranty has pointed out in his analysis of Rancière's argument, equality not only "reshapes the very modes of perception and thought" of the previous representative regime of art, it more importantly "opens the entire field of *aisthesis*, the world itself as something to be sensed, perceived and thought, for modes of expression to be reinvented."<sup>66</sup> The essays in this volume that investigate the *aisthesis* (αἴσθησις, the faculty to perceive by the senses, as well as by the intellect) generated in participatory media art rekindle debates around the aesthetic regime, especially its manifold contestations of the separation of art and life. They also pose more pragmatic questions, relevant to participation in other spheres, regarding who can take part in the creative process, what constitutes the nature of a creative collaboration, and what specific forms these practices generate.<sup>67</sup> These essays all insist on the need to revisit participatory practices through the reinvention of dialogue—interperception, transmission, and storytelling. The main argument here is not that participatory processes in the field of art constitute a form of political action that can change the world, but that they might in certain circumstances generate new perceptions of, in, and about the world—since an element of contingency always persists in any situation where human agency is at play.

For his major curatorial retrospective on "The Art of Participation," Rudolf Frieling notes that while the participatory artwork "requires your input and your contribution," "you watch others and others watch you."<sup>68</sup> The spectacle of participation becomes intrinsic to the work. In his essay for this volume, he turns his attention to a recent work by Dora García to show how collaborative art can be productively refashioned when watching others and being watched by others becomes the very subject of the work. How are such environments aesthetically innovative? And how can a perceptual dialogue between participants be inventive and nonformulaic? The revisiting of dialogue as a form of conversation is common to all of the essays concerned with *aisthesis*. Jason E. Lewis's essay describes the activities of the Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTec) Lab he codirects with Skawennati. AbTec seeks to integrate traditional indigenous storytelling to new media sites

and video games. Working in collaboration with a younger generation of indigenous storytellers, Lewis and Skawennati have produced narratives that counter the phantasm of the “imaginary Indian” to build what they call a “future imaginary.” Bernard Stiegler’s essay also centers on the question of transmitting knowledge across generations. He argues that universities must learn to use new media in order to ensure a form of transmission that does not simply consist in the reproduction of knowledge, but that generates an *anamn sis* (a transformative reminiscence of knowledge) through transindividuation—the transmission of knowledge through dialogue and debate between protagonists who have learned to think by themselves and to deliberate accordingly.

We have chosen to close this section, as well as this volume, with a portfolio of a work by the artists Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Krzysztof Wodiczko. *Zoom Pavilion* (2013), an augmented reality interactive installation initially conceived for the Fifth China International Architectural Biennial, relies on the assumption that participation becomes successful only when it is “out of control.”<sup>69</sup> As people walk into the illuminated public space of *Zoom Pavilion*, they are detected by computerized tracking systems that establish their position, velocity, and acceleration. Their image is immediately projected on the ground next to them at a normal scale of 1:1, but then amplified (with up to 35× magnification) by robotic cameras as they zoom in. Making full use of surveillance mechanisms, the installation operates an aesthetic *d tournement* of that technology, disorienting the public’s relation to its own image. The public space that is envisioned in this work is one in which human participants coexist with mutating abstractions of themselves that they must learn to converse with. To this date, their project remains unrealized.

## Participation in the Age of Consensus

It might well be that participatory practices have generated a condition not only because of their expansion throughout societal fields, but more decisively because participation today hails individuals and publics as subjects in the social order of *consensus*. This order represents the waning of

the political as an activity of the possible—a process that has been evolving at a global scale since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the related dissolution of communism as one of the last political narratives of emancipation. In line with what Erik Swyngedouw has said about sustainability, participation—whether taken as a concept or as a practice—is now so bereft of political content and so elevated as a moral value that it is impossible to disagree with its formulation, goals, and promises of a better life.<sup>70</sup>

One thing that seems clear is that established holders of economic and political power (i.e., capitalist corporations and the state) have adapted very well to the participatory condition and actually thrive under it. In the emerging media environment, participation has become a preferred engine of commerce, consent, and control.<sup>71</sup> The cunning of participation is that it seldom feels like any of these, because it is what we, as free liberal individuals and self-governing democratic citizens, have come to expect. As Andrew Barry has observed, participation—here styled as “interactivity”—is a technique that aligns perfectly with the rise of neoliberal practices. Individuals are interpellated as self-regulating subjects who don’t just participate in politics but, rather, govern themselves by participation. In this case, participation ceases to be a check on political power and instead becomes a model for its exercise. “Active, responsible and informed citizens have to be made,” Barry writes. “Today, interactivity has come to be a dominant model of how objects can be used to produce subjects. In an interactive model, subjects are not disciplined, they are allowed.”<sup>72</sup> The question is: allowed to do what? For it is not at all clear that being allowed to participate amounts to being allowed to appear as one wishes to appear, to have an equal share, to think, to disagree fundamentally, to oppose, to abstain, to dissent, to deliberate, to judge, to decide, to organize, to act, to create something new, or to do any of the other things we might suppose a political being ought to be able to do. If intellectuals in the 1950s challenged the ways media institutions invited audiences to watch, to listen, and to engage through consumption, today the tables have turned. We must challenge media institutions’ constant demands to interact and to participate, as if those activities were seen as fulsome by dint of their very nature.

This suggests the deep political ambiguity of the participatory condition. It is always disorienting when something you thought you loved becomes loved by those whom you do not love so much. We have loved participation for a very long time, and have fought fiercely to gain and secure it. Now we (or, at least, some of us) have managed to attain it.

And just as we have begun to exercise it intensively and ubiquitously, it turns out that others love it too: bureaucracies, police forces, security and intelligence agencies, and global commercial enterprises, among others. This is the political agony of the participatory condition: It can be neither embraced nor disavowed without considerable loss. We are not happy with participation, but were we to lose it, we would be sad. It is thus the name of our collective melancholy, a condition marked by what Wendy Brown described, in reference to liberal democracy more generally, as “a dependency we are not altogether happy about, an organization of desire we wish were otherwise.”<sup>73</sup> It might be best to begin the hard work of discerning and materializing that otherwise, but we are not yet in a position to do so. For now, there is Gayatri Spivak’s suggestion that such situations demand “a persistent critique of what we cannot not want.”<sup>74</sup> Such a critique is necessary, but it is hardly satisfying. It reflects the impasse to which the participatory condition brings us: In the prevailing language and practice of our democratic convictions and aspirations, “participation” becomes a security against the possibility of their substantive realization. Under the participatory condition, democratic politics turns against itself, fulfilling the diagnosis made by Rancière in *On the Shores of Politics*: “Depoliticization is the oldest task of politics, the one which achieves its fulfillment at the brink of its end, its perfection on the brink of the abyss.”<sup>75</sup> What the participatory condition finally demands of us is that we struggle to think and act our way beyond this abyss.

## Notes

1. Definitions of the term “participation” in Indo-European languages are generally anchored in the idea of shared action, invoking notions of *taking part* or *effecting an action with* something or someone else. For instance, the French definition of the verb *participer* reads as *prendre ou avoir part à*, and finds a direct equivalent in the German verb *teilnehmen*, which literally means to take (*nehmen*) part (*teil*), while the verb’s synonym, *mitmachen*, transliterates in English as “doing with.” Like the Latin *participare*, derived from a combination of words declined from *pars* (part) and *capere* (to take), the Greek *συμμετέχω* combines the prefix *σύν* (with) and the verb *μετέχω* (to take part).

2. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

3. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University, 2013), 7.
4. Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Society of Equals*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10.
5. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 174.
6. Henry Jenkins with Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice J. Robison, eds., *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 7.
7. Ernest Barker, ed. and trans., *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 93.
8. On the preference not to participate, see Herman Melville's iconic "Bartleby, The Scrivener," in *The Piazza Tales* (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856). For a critical treatment of the political implications of Bartleby's apparent passivity, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1998). See also Nathalie Casemajor, Stéphane Couture, Mauricio Delfin, Matt Goerzen, and Alessandro Delfanti, "Non-Participation in Digital Media. Toward a Framework of Mediated Political Action," in *Media, Culture & Society* 37, no. 6 (2015): 850–66.
9. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.
10. See Nico Carpentier, *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 15–38.
11. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).
13. See Matt Ratto and Megan Boler, eds., *DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014).
14. C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985); Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
15. David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (London: Penguin, 2013).
16. Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, 160–61, 193.

17. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956). Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (New York: Rebel, 1983).

18. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

19. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1983); Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

20. Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

21. Darin Barney, "Publics without Politics: Surplus Publicity as Depoliticization," in *Publicity and the Canadian State: Critical Communications Approaches*, ed. Kirsten Kozolanka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 70–86.

22. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), footnote 6, 11.

23. UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 10, 1948, 217A (III): Article 27.

24. For instance, all of the live arts traditions, from music to theater and dance, have developed their own sets of conventions for group improvisation, essentially establishing guidelines for participation in a common, though as of yet undefined, aesthetic project. Cf. Keith Johnstone, *IMPRO: Improvisation and the Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979); Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere, eds., *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

25. For Claire Bishop, the idea that "art should be useful and effect concrete changes in society" (see: *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* [London: Verso, 2012], 52) finds its source in the Russian Proletkult theater, as well as in Futurist *seratas* and in the performative excursions and trials of the Paris Dada (see chapter 2 in *Artificial Hells*). Grant Kester also acknowledges the relevant "legacy of modernist art" in examples of contemporary dialogical art, such as WochenKlausur's *Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women*. For Kester, the "relevant legacy of modernist art" is to be found "not in its concern with the formal conditions of the object, but rather in the ways in which aesthetic experience can challenge conventional perspectives . . . and systems of knowledge." Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Conversation in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 3.

26. Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* relies on specific aesthetic strategies: dropping the convention of the theatrical "fourth wall"; using the principle of montage as a structuring element, and including frequent interruptions as well as contradictory elements within the primary narrative; asking actors to rehearse their dialogues in the third person or in the past tense in order to reinforce their distance from the characters portrayed; having the stage directions spoken aloud; using placards to announce the action in scenes to come; and further devices, such as the use of nonillusionistic sets and the inclusion of music so as to disrupt any sense of naturalism that might be conveyed onstage. See Bertolt Brecht and John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

27. In Boal's conception of the theatre, "there are no *spectators*, only *active observers* (or spect-actors). The center of gravity is in the auditorium, not on the stage." The aims of the techniques developed for his "Theater of the Oppressed" are twofold: "(a) to help the spect-actor transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives for his situation, so that he may then be able (b) to extrapolate into his real life the actions he has rehearsed in the practice of theatre." Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1995), 40.

28. Term introduced by Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1999 to describe "the profoundly changed mode of theatrical sign usage" since the 1960s, referring in particular to the rise of new theater forms that rely on neither plot nor character. The characteristics of postdramatic theater overlap with some of the conventions found in performance art and experimental theater, as well as physical theater and dance. It is suggested that, as compared to narrative-driven theater, in postdramatic theater a greater demand is placed on the audience to participate in the meaning-making process. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006), 17.

29. Some of the most prominent terms for these practices include: *arte util* or "useful art" (Tania Brughera); collaborative art; community art; conversational art (Homi Bhabha); cultural activism; dialogical art (Grant H. Kester); do-it-yourself art (Anna Dezeuze); *médiation culturelle*; new audience development; new genre public art (Suzanne Lacy); placemaking (Ronald Lee Fleming); public practice; relational aesthetics (Bourriaud); socially engaged art; social practice; and social sculpture (Joseph Beuys). See also Nico Carpentier, "The Arts, Museums and Participation," in *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 55–64.

30. Anna Dezeuze, ed., *The "Do-It-Yourself" Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 15.

31. Beryl Graham, "What Kind of Participative System? Critical Vocabularies from New Media Art," in *The "Do-It-Yourself" Artwork*, ed. Anna Dezeuze, 281–305.

32. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 8.

33. Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012); and Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Museum 2.0, 2010).

34. Though the idea of community remains ambiguous in the context of “community-based collaborations,” Miwon Kwon observes that it generally falls within one of the following four typologies: “community of mythic unity; ‘sited’ communities; temporary invented communities; and ongoing invented communities.” Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 6–7.

35. Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 29.

36. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

37. This is the critique Tony Fisher puts forward regarding Augusto Boal’s conception of “metaxis.” Tony Fisher, “The Arraignment of Power: Augusto Boal and the Emergence of the Radical Democratic Theatre Subject,” *Performance Research* 16, no. 4 (2001): 20.

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