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**Jonas Löwgren & Bo Reimer:
*Collaborative Media. Production, consumption,
and design interventions.*
Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2013**

MedieKultur 2016, 59, 155-157

Published by SMID | Society of Media researchers In Denmark | www.smid.dkThe online version of this text can be found open access at www.mediekultur.dk

With new media come new use practices, which, in turn, affect individual media users as well as established media producers and societal institutions. Several concepts have been offered which may serve to accommodate the changes to practices of communication in the contemporary media landscape: cross-media, participatory media and – as with this book – *collaborative media*. These media concepts have mainly been associated with the production of media content for multiple platforms. This applies to the term collaborative media, which dates back to e.g. LaRose and Rafaeli's concept of *collaborative mass media*, in which the audience functions as both the source and the receiver of the message.

The intention of this book is to take on the task of studying the new ways of media users: 'With many new forms of digital media – including popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr – the people formerly known as the audience no longer only consume but also produce and even design media'. The book falls in three parts, as stated by the overview (pp. 11-12): The first part – Starting Points – defines collaborative media and positions the authors' work in the landscape of new media scholarship and design. The media in focus and the user practices they enable have some distinct characteristics (p.14): 1) These practices are based on media services and tools that a) are easy to use; b) can be used creatively and pleasurably in many different ways. 2) The practices are to a great extent collaborative. People work together to create things that are not possible for the single user to create. And this occurs not only face to face; to a great extent, the collaborations take place online on a potentially global scale. The first part of the book outlines a

trans-disciplinary research approach to collaborative media which combines analysis and design. The method described here is termed *design intervention* and relates to participatory design, for instance, however with a specific focus on interventions set up from the point of view of the researcher/research team. This methodological approach is exemplified in the second part of the book – Interventions –, which consists of ten case studies; these describe research projects in collaborative media, either carried out by the authors themselves or made accessible to the authors by close colleagues. The final part of the book – Insights and Conclusions – reflects the experiences acquired in the various cases and situates these in the contemporary scholarly landscape. It includes reflections on the specificities of collaborative media practices and addresses the practice of trans-disciplinary collaborative media research.

A key theoretical and empirical issue addressed by this book is the redefinition of ‘users’ (the people formerly known as the audience) and the relationship between ‘users’ and ‘producers’: in one sense, every user of collaborative media is potentially a producer of content for other users. However, important aspects might have been discussed in more detail: Most ordinary users lack the resources and competences to match those of established media organizations. As pointed out by Jenkins, *not all consumers are created equal*: some are more capable of making use of the possibilities of participation provided by the Internet and various types of creative software tools. It is also important to acknowledge that corporate media still exert much more power than does any individual consumer. The media, in their turn, seek to involve and recruit users in ‘user-driven’ production and innovation – for corporate purposes.

In *Collaborative Media*, these new production logics are embedded in the idea that not only do collaborative media enable the user to produce media content, they also enable them to modify or even (re)design the very infrastructure of the media: the programs, software components and web services that can be used for media production. It is stated that collaborative media are ‘open to infrastructural modifications due to the prevalence of open source media software, open APIs, and components that can be combined at will into constellations known as mashups’. This infrastructural modifiability has been part of digital technologies for many years, e.g. within computer games. But as stated by Jenkins above, media scholars are well-advised to be skeptical towards the users’ possibilities of appropriating the media production. It is fair to say – as do the authors – that features like the hashtag and retweet-function in Twitter, are the product of users rather than of the original producers. Still, the producers decide what will be implemented (on Twitter, Facebook, Google) and set the terms for use, thus claiming ownership of user contributions. This fact is addressed rather sporadically by the book, even though issues concerning intellectual property rights are touched upon in some of the case studies.

The primary strengths of the book are its case- and practice-based chapters, which concretize and clarify the collaborative aspects of today’s media as well as design interventions such as the methodology for studying the characteristics of these media. Here

the authors' contributions as regards useful conceptual and methodological rethinking are embedded in elaborated analyses of ten cases, which are examples of projects in collaborative media, ranging from small research experiments to large commercial projects. These analyses describe the potential of design intervention as research method as well as its design-oriented knowledge production method, integrating analysis and intervention in collaborative media research embedded in the legacy from MIT's Living Lab, for instance. The book provides productive insights into and perspectives to media studies (2.0, 3.0...) by performing these case studies at three different levels of analysis: Chapter 4 addresses the level of society and particularly the role of collaborative media in societal changes. Chapter 5 focuses on existing media structures and their relations to collaborative media. And finally, chapter 6 – which is one of the most inspiring parts of the book – introduces a 'level of tribes' (in line with Maffesoli's thinking) to highlight the potential of collaborative media to nurture communality within a plethora of social structures coexisting within the same technical infrastructure. *Collaborative Media* adds important food-for-thought to media and communication studies, which are being constantly challenged by an ever-changing media landscape.

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