

Conjunctions: Introducing Cultural Participation as a Transdisciplinary Project

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Introduction

In November 2013, editors of this journal co-hosted the conference RETHINK Participatory Cultural Citizenship. The conference was a joint event between Aarhus University and the city of Aarhus, Denmark, and a part of the latter's preparation to become the European Capital of Culture in 2017. The European Capital of Culture project and project manager at the time, Trevor Davies, focused on democracy, diversity, and sustainability and understood civic participation as crucial for developing viable solutions for global challenges. One of the objectives of the conference was to create connections between the university and the city's various cultural, political, and social agencies. The conference was thus set to be a venture into new collaborative practices and it was an indicator that both the university and the city recognized a need to re-situate themselves as agents in a field of cultural participation – and to blur institutional boundaries between for instance academics, politicians, businesses, and cultural agents in order to create a shared understanding of and engagement in participatory cultural citizenship.

The focus on cultural participation and citizenship, which provided the backdrop for the conference, reflects the fact that the concept of participation is currently flourishing in public discourses, institutions, and in academic disciplines. Participation has become a highly valued 'currency'. Or as one of the keynotes of the conference puts it (with a host of references that also serve to indicate the amount of academic interest this notion has attracted lately): 'Government agencies, corporations, philanthropic organizations and especially scientific infrastructures must increasingly legitimate themselves by being open to public involvement and by enabling more participation (Cornwall, 2011; Delwiche, 2013; Fung and Wright, 2003; Irwin and Wynne, 1996; Joss and Durant, 1995; Rowe, 2005; Wynne, 1996, 2007)' (Kelty et al. 2014: 2). While there is an outspoken concern about a form of elusive civic participation (Habermas 1998, Touraine 1997, Dahlgren 2009) evident in e.g. low voter turnouts and a 'crisis of political legitimacy' (Castells 2007: 244), high hopes are invested in participatory arenas outside traditional political institutions – for instance the internet – in terms of democratic activation and empowerment of non-institutional voices (Jenkins 2006, Benkler 2006, Fenton 2008, Bruns 2008, Gauntlett 2011, Lievrouw 2011). Axel Bruns, for instance, argues that social media is characterized by the combination of production and use, and he foresees a 'produsage-based democratic model' (Bruns 2008: 372). Accordingly, the

question of participation is embedded in a double process in which the support of and engagement in traditional political institutions are dwindling, while ‘the range, forms, and targets of political expression’ (Rosanvallon 2008: 19) as well as commercial and everyday creativity and participation are diversified.

The goal of *Conjunction: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation* is to investigate, consolidate, critique, and discuss this increasing interest in participation, and in the following we will introduce 1) the aim of the journal, 2) the journal’s conception of transdisciplinarity as an important precondition for understanding contemporary processes and dilemmas of participation, 3) three important trajectories in the existing literature on participation that focus on participation as linked to technological changes, to democratic processes of transferring power, and to complex social situations calling for analytical and evaluative frameworks able to grasp multiplicity and competing interests, and 4) the theme and articles of the this special issue: cultural participation and citizenship.

Aim of the journal

Participation is a complex matter, and it is certainly not limited to questions of political expression. On the contrary, it has given rise to a diverse set of notions of the end of what was previously known as the passive audience/spectator, emergent collaborative working processes and to concepts such as participatory culture, public involvement, DIY-culture, DIY urbanism, co-creation, produsage, creative place-appropriation, everyday creativity, participatory planning, participatory design, social production, and social entrepreneurship. These different concepts all concern participation, and they often share the idea that a ‘participatory culture is one in which members believe their contribution matter, and feel some degree of social connections with one another’ (Jenkins et al. 2006: 3). But the numerous participatory practices and connections are also raising concerns regarding the type of democratic interaction and citizen voicing that they enable (Hess 2009, Couldry 2010; Fuchs 2011); for instance in relation to questions of structural inequality, hierarchies of ownership, and exploitation through digital labor (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012; Sholz 2013; Fuchs 2014).

Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation will serve as a transdisciplinary venue for the study of the complex processes of cultural participation and its

political implications, across a variety of social fields and participatory platforms. The journal aims to bring together studies of participation from a variety of disciplinary fields – e.g. cultural studies, media studies, health care, cultural geography, aesthetics, information science, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, design and science and technology. It is our hope to create a forum that is as transdisciplinary as its topic: cultural participation does not adhere to disciplinary boundaries, and it often requires a transdisciplinary approach to grasp the full extent of a participatory process.

The journal's overall focus is to explore the socially transformative and democratic potential and limitations of cultural participatory processes, to consolidate the academic understanding of what 'cultural participation' is and what it involves, and to discuss the complex relations created between user-generated material and established institutions. The main focus of the journal is not to investigate participation as an end in itself, nor do we restrict the study of participation to areas of creative cultures or political participation. Furthermore, the aim of the journal is not to study certain participatory technologies, but rather the ways in which these technologies transform relations between individuals, societies, states, communities, companies, institution etc. The journal will therefore continuously seek contributions that investigate and question the extensive transformations of the way in which we inhabit the world accommodated by cultural participation.

Transdisciplinarity

Participatory and collaborative processes can be found and have increasingly emerged within the diverse fields of online fan production (Jenkins 2006), negotiations about cultural heritage (Giaccardi 2012), community oriented art practices (Kestner 2011 and 2013; Bishop 2012; Crehan 2011), participatory design (Bjerknes et al. 1987; Simonsen and Robertson 2012), urban spaces and planning (Arnstein 1969; Cuff and Sherman 2011, Chase, Crawford and Kaliski 2008), activism and cultural resistance (Duncombe 2002; Lievrouw 2011), development studies (Cornwall 2008; Cohen and Uphoff 1980; White 1996), branding (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser 2012; Fill 2013), event culture (Bowdin et al. 2010), and health care (Handberg et al. 2013). It is characteristic that these participatory processes rarely are restricted by disciplinary boundaries. Cultural participation is more often than not a transversal practice, and user-generated forms of production and participation

are played out across social fields. This focus on cultural participation as established in a range of complex networks obviously calls for a transdisciplinary approach.

Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation frames participatory and collaborative processes as inherently transdisciplinary, although not necessarily against disciplinary traditions per se. Hence, transdisciplinarity involves ‘moving back and forth between disciplines as well as moving across and beyond disciplines to engagement with the rest of the world, to a new state or a new place’ (McGregor 2014: 219). The journal’s focus is therefore not necessarily just on how different disciplines handle questions of participation, but predominantly on how specific processes of participation move between and beyond disciplines. Following Julie Thompson Klein, we therefore aim to transgress a multidisciplinary and ‘encyclopedic’ encounter between disciplines in favor of a process of integration, which is both theoretical: by creating a common conceptual language around participation; and methodological: by developing common tools to evaluate and develop participation (Klein 2012).

Lottridge and Moore argue that “[i]nterdisciplinarity” is the term most often used to describe activities in which individuals from two or more disciplines are engaged. Used this way the term not only masks what scholars generally agree constitutes this specific form of disciplinary crossing, but confines to the shadows other forms of disciplinary crossings that are fundamentally different’. Furthermore, ‘[t]rue interdisciplinarity leads to increased specialization, even to the formation of a new discipline’ (Lottridge and Moore 2010: 2738). This focus on increased specialization and the formation of new disciplines are abandoned in the notion of multidisciplinary. Here each discipline makes a different contribution, and ‘the goal is to explore complex and often systemic issues from multiple perspectives where each discipline is relatively autonomous’ (Lottridge and Moore 2010: 2738-2739). Accordingly, the disciplines remain disintegrated.

Approaching the difference between interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinarity, Sue L.T. McGregor argues that interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary are restricted by a Newtonian approach to the world that ‘leaves no room for novelty or creation because it is presumed that the building blocks for everything already exist, just waiting for someone to reconfigure them’ (McGregor 2014: 203). Transdisciplinarity is more radical because it replaces the Newtonian approach with inspirations from quantum physics, chaos theory, and living

systems theory (Nicolescu 2010). The offset in living systems theory results in transdisciplinarity focusing on ‘the generative potential of the interaction of individuals from different disciplines working together in the context of a specific problem or application. Diversity matters. The context matters. Transdisciplinary collaboration transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries and may transform disciplinary identities to some degree’ (Lottridge and Moore 2010: 2739). This also suggests that transdisciplinarity is tied to the notion of iterative interactions. ‘It involves taking down boundaries among disciplines and taking down boundaries between the university and the rest of the world, leading to cross-sectoral problem solving’ (McGregor 2014: 204-208).

This emphasis on cross-sectoral problem solving is, however, not generally agreed upon as a part of transdisciplinarity. As noted by McGregor, there are two dominant approaches to transdisciplinarity. One approach emphasizes problem solving (Gibbons et al. 1994; Klein et al. 2001; Nowotny 2003); the other focuses on dissolving boundaries between academia and the rest of the world (Nicolescu 2010; McGregor 2014: 201-202). *Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation* does not restrict the focus to one of these approaches but maintains that transdisciplinarity that takes an empirical interest in cultural participation must follow the participatory processes where they may go: whether it is between and beyond disciplinary boundaries or between academia and the rest of the world. We thus maintain that there is productive potential in developing and studying transdisciplinary encounters, because cultural participation is often a transgressive practice, which therefore necessitates an expansion of what academic studies require and what disciplines can do.

Following these perspectives on cultural participation as a set of practices that often transgress conceptual, disciplinary, and institutional barriers, the journal will create a transdisciplinary forum in which methods and theories can be developed and tested by being joined in the critical study of cultural participation. In this spirit, the journal will publish articles that address social, technological, political, economic, cultural etc. transformations related to the increasing focus on participation and study the opportunities as well as the limits of these transformations. This will, we hope, provide continuous insight into the ways in which participation unfolds as complex networks that transform how we interact, both with each other and with our institutional, technological, and material settings (Verbeek 2005, Marres 2012).

Trajectories of participation: Technology, democracy and multiplicity

Defining the concept of ‘participation’ is a challenge due to its various uses in different disciplinary settings and its tendency to be articulated both as a theoretical concept with very specific content and as a more floating everyday concept used to designate all sorts of collaboration, collective production, human activity etc. Or as argued by Andrea Cornwall, ‘an infinitely malleable concept, “participation” can be used to evoke – and to signify – almost anything that involves people. As such, it can easily be reframed to meet almost any demand made of it’ (Cornwall 2008: 269). To map some of the most important uses and understandings of the concept we will focus on three, often intersecting, theoretical and cultural trajectories (Dahlgren 2009), which focus on participation as linked to technological or digital transformations, as linked to the transfer of power to create equal decision-making processes, or as a concept designating multiple processes and interests, which should not be overlooked through non-reductionist approaches and theories.

Trajectory 1: Participation, technological changes and the internet

Cultural participation research often emphasizes the explosion of participatory processes and practices that have occurred since the middle of the 1980s, in particular following the increasing consumer use of the internet. This ‘participatory culture’ is often celebrated as blurring the lines between media producers and consumers and creating multidirectional conversations (Mandiberg 2012: 1). Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green likewise argue that the internet facilitates a hybrid model of circulation where ‘a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures’ (Jenkins et al. 2013: 1). Geert Lovink and Wayne Rash agree that the web-based user-to-user services have empowered the rise of participatory culture: ‘The emergence of apps and web-based user-to-user services, driven by an explosion of informal dialogues, continuous uploads, and user-generated content, has greatly empowered the rise of “participatory culture”’. Yet they also maintain that ‘monopoly power, commercialization, and commodification are on the rise as well, with just a handful of social media platforms dominating the social web’ (Lovink and Rasch 2013: 12). Thus, despite varying understandings of the consequences, there is a widespread understanding of the importance of new digital media technologies, in particular the internet, in facilitating cultural participation.

Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson argue that scholars have focused primarily on the implications of participatory creative cultures, but that this is merely one aspect of the ways in which our ‘world is being transformed by participatory knowledge cultures in which people work together [...] collectively’ (Delwiche and Henderson 2013: 3). They elaborate on the importance of new global media technologies and distinguish between four phases of participatory culture.

In the first phase, during the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, ‘[p]ersonal computers had found their way into the living rooms and offices of ordinary citizens and networking these machines with one another was the next logical step’ (Delwiche and Henderson 2013: 4). This suggests that global media technologies were transforming the routes of communication and generating an increasing global complex connectivity (Tomlinson 1999). The transformations of the routes of communication increasingly changed the notion of users. Within a variety of fields, users were increasingly understood as active agents and participants. John Fiske, for instance, declared that the audience is active (1987), rather than passive, and Denis McQuail later claimed that ‘the audience concept in many ways is outdated’ (McQuail 1997: 142).

In the second phase ‘waking up to the web (1994-1998)’, the internet began to have public impact, and browsers emerged making it possible for people to easily search the internet. It was also in this phase that the digital revolution generated the ‘second wave of do-it-yourself practices’ (Deleuze 2010: 4), and researchers such as Manuel Castells, Stephen Duncombe, Nancy Baym, and Sherry Turkle ‘kicked the door off’ to participatory cultural studies (Delwiche and Henderson 2013: 5-6). While in the second phase, browsing became accessible, ‘the mystique surrounding computer programming frightened many people’ (Delwiche and Henderson 2013: 6). In the third phase, however, this was altered by so-called ‘Push-button publishing (1999-2004)’. The invention of user-friendly web publishing systems ‘almost completely obliterated remaining barriers to entry, increasing the numbers of potential participants by orders of magnitude’ (Delwiche and Henderson 2013: 6). In this third phase, optimism regarding the emancipatory potential of the internet dominates studies of cultural participation. Pierre Lévy famously wrote that ‘no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity’ (Lévy 1997: 13-14).

It is only in the fourth phase – ‘Ubiquitous connections (2005-2011)’ – that optimism regarding the capacity of cultural participation to generate collaborative and emancipatory practices has begun to be challenged. Phase four is simultaneously characterized by the advent of YouTube

(2005), so-called Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005), and ever-present smartphones enabling an even further complex level of connectivity as well as increasing monopolization (cf. Lovink and Rasch 2013) of the networked structures. It is thus in this phase that 'researchers have tempered their hopes about the positive potential of participatory culture with an acknowledgement of the many challenges that characterize our increasingly networked existence' (Delwiche and Henderson 2013: 7).

As demonstrated in the development outlined above, global media technologies are important in accelerating processes of participation and integrating them into our everyday lives. As argued by Noortje Marres, technologies, which for instance help citizens to make sustainable choices, to an increasing degree 'codify' or 'materialize' participation by connecting everyday practices (like boiling water) to larger collective projects or agendas (sustainability) (Marres 2012). Here technologies are not mere tools that humans use to participate in this or that, but rather formative elements of social situations, which are turned into arenas of everyday participation due to the way technologies change the logic and meaning of activities not normally understood as participatory. However, cultural participation does not exclusively depend on media and technology. When we have chosen to use the term cultural participation, rather than for instance participatory culture, it is to signal that when we wish to investigate participatory processes, we realize that these processes are part of a history that also occurred before the rise of global media technologies. The term realizes the impact of media technologies by creating a space for participation, but insists that cultural participation is not inherently tied to these media technologies?. Rather, the term signals a historical awareness and acknowledges that, for instance, everyday creativity also constitutes cultural participation.

Trajectory 2: Citizen participation, democracy, and power

Cultural participation does not solely depend on global media technologies. Following Cohen and Uphoff, the interest in participation as a political concept can be traced back to Aristotle's writings about the ancient Greek city states (Cohen and Uphoff 1980), while Carole Pateman focuses on classical authors like Rousseau, Mill, and Cole as important for an understanding of politics as based on citizen participation (Pateman 1970). Drawing a line from the ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris, to the Art and Crafts movement and the twentieth century DIY culture, David Gauntlett furthermore grounds the analysis of contemporary forms of participation in a philosophy

of craft. Important to his argument is that ‘the power of making, and connecting through creating, extends well beyond the online world to all kinds of activities in everyday life’ (Gauntlett 2011: 1). Making is a participatory process that generates connections between humans and objects, and this provides a new way of looking at things, ‘and potentially to a real political shift in how we deal with the world’ (Gauntlett 2011: 19).

While David Gauntlett focuses on everyday creativity, Nico Carpentier insists that participation must be understood through theories of democracy. Despite these different starting points, both scholars emphasize that participation is not solely dependent on global media technologies. Carpentier provides a framework in which participation is understood through the lenses of democracy, spatial planning, development, arts and museums, and communication, and he anchors this in an historical context of democratic theory ranging from Marxists perspectives to anarchist, new left, deliberative, and radical theories on democracy. Through these perspectives on participation as rooted in democratic theory, he positions participation in ‘the always present balance between representation and participation’ (Carpentier 2011: 16). Participatory politics is, however, not limited to institutionalized politics. Participation in this perspective is always balancing between maximalist and minimalist versions of democracy, and it is a historically recurring theme in which the focus is continuously negotiated: ‘the more maximalists versions of participations played a significant role in the 1960s and 1970s, while the 1980s were characterized by the dominance of the more minimalists versions. It seems that it took decades to recover from the legacy of participatory amnesia left by this period’ (Carpentier 2011: 126).

When arguing that questions of participation are inherently tied to questions of democracy, Carpentier follows a theoretical tradition that criticizes participation theory for taking its legitimacy for granted. Participatory theory, he argues, tends to ignore underlying conditions and to assume that participation is always for the good, which is problematic ‘because it de-contextualizes participatory practices, and disconnects them from a very necessary articulation with democratic values such as equality, empowerment, justice and peace’ (Carpentier 2011: 22). This is anchored in Carole Pateman’s famous distinction between partial and full participation. Whereas partial participation is ‘a process in which two or more participants influence each other in the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only’, full participation is ‘a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the

outcome of decisions’ (Pateman 1970: 70-71). Sherry Arnstein visualizes a similar ideal in her famous ‘ladder of participation’ (Arnstein 1969, 217) ranging from ‘manipulation’ and ‘therapy’ at the bottom, which are masked forms of non-participation, to ‘informing’, ‘consultation’, and ‘placation’ as higher, but nevertheless still problematic, forms of participation – to the most developed forms of participation named ‘partnership’, ‘delegated power’, and ‘citizen control’. Therefore, according to Arnstein, ‘(...) citizen participation is a categorial term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future’ (Arnstein 1969: 216). This argumentation emphasizes that a focus on decision-making, influence, and power is crucial for understanding participation.

The centrality of this nexus is also illustrated in this simple Google Ngram search (illustration 1), which shows the other politically entangled nouns that appear alongside ‘participation’ in the Google Books English corpus, namely nouns that have to do with labor, work, and employer/employee relations; community, citizens, and force; as well as gender (plus education: student and pupil). In fact, it is also quite remarkable that the term media does not pop up. However, this could perhaps be explained by the fact that 2008 is the last year included in Google Books, which means that it does not incorporate most of the literature on web 2.0.

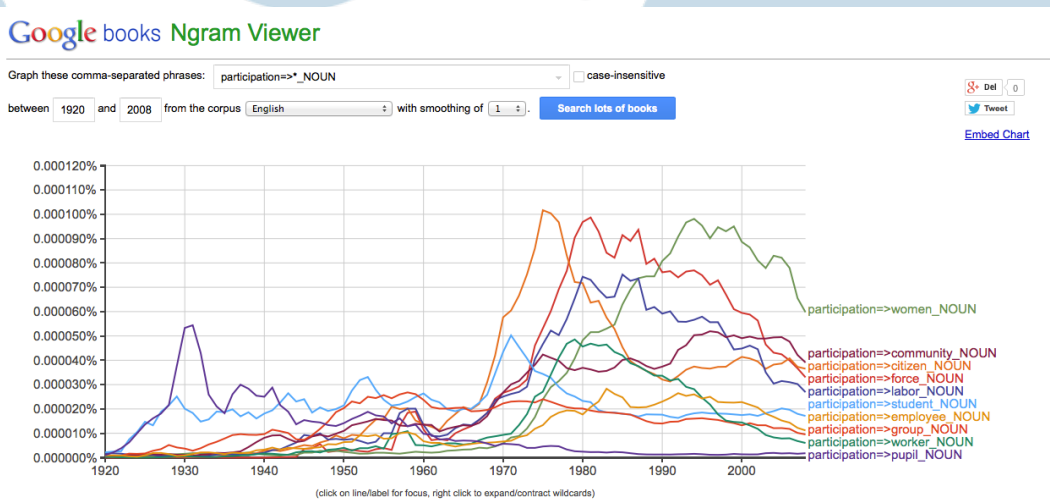


Illustration 1

While it is obviously necessary to acknowledge the historical and conceptual link between theories of democracy and participation, the focus on equal power and decision-making also limits the range

of what can be understood as participation. Many scholars understand participation broadly, ‘from highly skilled time-consuming forms of participation such as writing a software device driver for Linux or organizing a multi-city protest, to low-effort forms such as making a comment on a blog, tagging a document with a keyword, or strengthening a search algorithm simply by using it’ (Kelty et al. 2014: 1). Scholars such as Carpentier do however, not recognize the numerous low-effort forms of participation as participation, exactly because low-effort forms of participation do not involve equal power and decision-making. In this framework, participation cannot be a matter of access or interaction because, while these categories ‘do matter for participatory processes in the media – they are actually its conditions of possibility – but they are also very distinct from participation because of their less explicit emphasis on power dynamics and decision-making’ (Carpentier 2011: 69).

Cultural participation is thus embedded in a conflict related to its conceptual ties to democracy theory. Some scholars firmly distinguish between access, interaction, and participation in order to increase ‘the focus on power and (formal or informal) decision-making in the definition of participation, and [...] protecting the more maximalists approaches to participation’ (Carpentier 2011: 129). Yet other scholars do not require that equal access to power structures and decision-making are a necessary prerequisite for participation. These scholars often emphasize the importance of participation as a means to create connections between people in various forms of everyday creativity (Jenkins 2006; Gauntlett 2011). *Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation* is not based on the idea that successful participation always requires equal access and decision-making. However, we would certainly suggest that it generally seems highly relevant to investigate the power structures in which participation emerges as well as the participants’ often divergent goals of engaging in a participatory process.

Trajectory 3: Analyzing and evaluating participatory multiplicity

Despite the fact that the explosion of user-generated material and the numerous processes oriented towards participation often provide the participants with agency and contain democratic potential, these developments seem to be accompanied by the dangers of an increasing monopolization of power and a commercialization that has consequences for cultural participation. It will thus be a core function of *Conjunctions* to investigate the ways in which cultural participation is shaped in

and between institutional and commercial relations. This focus involves understanding the complex relation between emancipation and exploitation in participatory processes, for instance in social media (Olsson 2013), in which participants simultaneously gain agency and provide free labor to companies and institutions (Fuchs 2013; Scholz 2013).

Within participation theory there is general agreement that ‘participation means being able to speak in one’s own voice’ (Fraser 1990: 69). Yet, there is no agreement on questions of the relation between having a voice and the ability to impact decision-making: ‘It remains problematic that giving voice may not affect real decision-making and power relations in society, but only give the illusions of participation’ (Livingstone and Lunt 1996: 175). This relation between voice and decision-making impact is often framed in terms of micro and macropolitics. In their conversation in this issue, Gauntlett and Holroyd emphasize the importance of small steps and argue that ‘*any* small step can be a good and powerful step! I mean where a person is taking a small step into the world of creating and making and sharing, rather than just being a consumer of stuff.’ For them, small steps cannot be understood as isolated acts, rather ‘these small steps made by different people add up, and pile higher and higher, until you’ve got a huge amount of meaningful activity’. In this understanding of micropolitics, individual small steps potentially pile up and impact the way people connect and act in the world.

Christian Fuchs has a rather different take on participation. In his perspective, participation must be understood through the lenses of macropolitics. He extensively criticizes theories of participation that do not adequately address the term participation’s conceptual ties to political science and, in particular, notions of participatory democracy. In his critique of Henry Jenkins’ studies of participatory fan culture, he argues that ‘Jenkins’ definition and use of the term “participatory culture” ignores aspects of participatory democracy; it ignores questions about the ownership of platforms/companies, collective decision-making, profit, class and the distribution of material benefits’ (Fuchs 2014: 55). Through this focus on structural inequalities, Fuchs argues that one should forget about ‘the vulgar and reductionist notion of participation (simply meaning that users create, curate, circulate or critique content) and focus on rediscovering the political notion of participation by engaging with participatory democracy theory’ (Fuchs 2014: 65).

Despite their diverse approaches to the politics of participation, it is worth noticing that Gauntlett, Holroyd, and Fuchs appear to agree that politics and the ability to impact societal

structures, whether through micro or macro steps, are at the core of participation. Although this might often be the case, participants can also have other, more personal goals for participating. They might, for instance, participate in programs and exchange experiences in order to improve their own health or gain more knowledge or experience, but without seeking impact on decision-making or power structures. We must thus keep in mind the multiple motivations for engaging in participatory processes, and this involves understanding cultural participation as a multidimensional concept. This point has for instance been raised in discussions of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation in a health context. Tritter and McCallum have criticized Arnstein – and with her, the tendency to conflate proper participation with citizen control – for underestimating the complexity of the forms of participation that often coexist in participatory processes; for downgrading the emotional, therapeutic, and interactional dimensions of participation; for overestimating users' ability to take control over any kind of decision; and for defining an absolute goal of participation for all participants instead of respecting their different needs (Tritter and McCallum 2006). Sarah White, writing from a development perspective, has also stressed the complexity of the concept by arguing that specific participatory processes will often serve as a convergence point of various competing or intersecting interests and intentions (e.g. bottom-up or top-down), which implies that participation often means different things and becomes a hypercomplex phenomenon if we begin looking at the specific contexts where it is performed (White 1996). And Cohen and Uphoff have argued that the only way to create clarity about what participation is, is to 'get specific' by analyzing the complexities of particular processes instead of scrutinizing participation in general (Cohen and Uphoff 1980).

Christopher Kelty et al. (2014) also argue against understanding participation as a one-dimensional concept and define it in the following way: '(...) participation concerns collective actions that form something larger so that those involved become part of and share in the entity created' (Kelty et al. 2013: 5). By proposing this broad definition, the authors argue that 'participation is not a simple parameter, and that as a result, it is not its presence or absence that is important (...)' (Kelty et al. 2013: 41). To evaluate the potential of a participatory practice, Kelty et al. outline seven normative dimensions: the educative dividend of participation; access to decision-making and goal setting in addition to task-completion; the control or ownership of resources produced by participation; its voluntary character and the capacity for exit; the use of metrics for

understanding or evaluating participation; and the collective, affective experience of participation (Kelty et al. 2014: 2). By understanding participation as a multidimensional concept, you avoid the temptation of reducing participation to a simple binary: taking part or not taking part (Kelty et al. 2014: 5).

In extension of this, it is necessary to note that we understand cultural participation as neither inherently emancipatory nor as a system of exploitation. Although cultural participation can be closely connected to both emancipation and exploitation, and we are very interested in exploring those connections, we understand cultural participation as embedded in complex networks in which participants coexist with established media, political, and commercial institutions where participation takes a variety of forms that must be accounted for and critically examined.

Thus, when the journal has chosen to focus on cultural participation, it is because it works as a collective term for the numerous processes oriented towards participation. Cultural participation is also the overall framework because it is not, we argue, restricted to questions of media or political democracy. And most importantly, cultural participation is not to be conceived as a simple either/or parameter or a matter of presence or absence, but ‘the configuration of dimensions which render it “participatory”’ (Kelty et al. 2014: 12). Following the above-mentioned perspectives, the focus of the journal is not cultural participation in and of itself, but the social, political, economic, technological, and cultural transformations that follow participation and the ways in which cultural participation is configured between and beyond spheres such as established media, political and commercial institutions, and organizations.

Participatory cultural citizenship

In this first issue of *Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation*, we address matters of participatory cultural citizenship. Carpentier argues that the 1990s mainstreaming of the notion of participation, particularly in the area of development, has received harsh criticism. The criticism, he argues, is directed against ‘the reductionism that is embedded within the mainstream articulation of participation, which reduces the maximalist nature of participation. Participation is seen as “domesticated away from its radical roots” (Cleaver, 1999: 608), because of its disconnection from a (radical) political process and because of its affirmation (instead of balancing out) of power imbalances’ (Carpentier 2011: 54). This has in turn led to an increased focus on

participatory citizenship – ironically – aimed at the ‘weak connection between participation and institutionalized politics’ (Carpentier 2011: 54). Gaventa, for instance, argues that in demanding participatory citizenship, participation becomes the right that makes other rights real (Gaventa 2004: 29; Carpentier 2011: 55).

While some scholars have maintained that participation should challenge the worldviews of organizations and researchers (Chambers 1997), others have understood it to undermine political autonomy and simply serve to legitimize projects that ought not to be legitimized (Rahnema 1997; Henkel and Stirrat 2001). As argued by Williams et al., the research in the field has matured and both opponents and defenders of participatory citizenship now understand that civil society is to some degree malleable in the face of intentional designs to promote participation: ‘whether participants take up their roles sincerely, reluctantly or instrumentally, these designs can change the ways in which they express their political agency, and their everyday interactions with the state and in the public sphere’ (Williams et al. 2011: 1262-1263). Williams et al. thus argue that it is not sufficient to either disavow or defend participatory citizenship in relation to organizational structures. Rather, there is a need to investigate how participatory processes ‘shape performances of citizenship at an individual level, but in addition show how attempts to engineer participatory citizenship are located within (and co-constitutive of) multi-layered political contexts’ (Williams 2011: 1263). Participatory citizenship will always manifest itself in ‘patterns of formal and informal political power’ and ‘programmes aiming to foster “active citizenship” always need to be opened up to scrutiny. In short, we must always ask what it is that people are being encouraged to participate in’ (Williams et al. 2011: 1278).

The articles in this issue all address the question of participatory citizenship, yet they do so from very different perspectives. They all ask what people are being encouraged to participate in, but they do not necessarily agree on how to evaluate cultural participation and how to take into account formal and informal power structures. Several of the articles in this issue confront the relation between minimalist and maximalist understandings of participation. In their article ‘On making, sustainability and the importance of small steps: a conversation’, David Gauntlett and Amy Twigger Holroyd emphasize the importance of small steps towards creativity. These micro steps, they argue, combined together at the macro level, become significant in contributing to social change. By focusing on design as a process of action, change, and creativity, they argue that

amateur making offers an alternative to the mass consumption model and builds a sense of engagement with the world.

In 'Stories on the go: Mobile, digital cultural heritage and participation on 1001 stories of Denmark', Karen Hvidtfeldt Madsen likewise investigates amateur making. Her article studies 1001 Stories of Denmark: an internet site and a mobile app that collects and displays stories and visual material connected to places all over Denmark. Her focus is the relation between museums and cultural institutions and the participants that they encourage to participate. While Gauntlett and Holroyd emphasize the importance of micro steps, Madsen argues that in the case of 1001 Stories of Denmark, the dissemination of expert knowledge overshadows the amateur participants' productions and limits their willingness to participate. Following Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation, Madsen argues that 1001 Stories of Denmark lacks 'co-creation' and primarily works as symbolic participation or therapy and thus qualifies as 'nonparticipation'.

The focus on the relations between institutions and participants is also the center of attention in Brian Benjamin Hansen and Carsten Høj Gemal's article 'Co-creating with the homeless? Postmodern administration and participatory citizenship'. Hansen and Gemal study the case of a group of homeless people, who in the fall of 2013 occupied a central site in the Danish town of Aarhus, and they cast light on a movement in public administration from the paradigm of New Public Management to a focus on activating and engaging citizens. They investigate the ways in which citizens are treated as partners in co-creating welfare services, as well as in co-creating the community itself as brand. In this framework, participatory citizenship requires a new understanding of value. Participatory citizenship should not only be treated as 'added value' to administration bodies, but rather as emerging in a dynamic and conflict-ridden field between citizens and administration bodies.

Audrey Yue and Rimi Khan also focus on the question of 'value'. In their article 'Accounting for Multiculturalism: The Utility of Cultural indicators and the Politics of Diversity and Participation', based on fieldwork conducted in the growth corridor outer suburb of Whittlesea in Melbourne, Australia, they study the ways in which multiculturalism has become a charged arena in which proponents and critics focus on the value of its utility. Whereas existing models measuring the outcome of multiculturalism attempt to assess the degree of intercultural integration through cultural indices on ethnicity and tradition, Yue and Khan argue that arts impact studies and

emergent cultural indicator frameworks provide a more robust arena for considering the utility of multiculturalism to claims of social, cultural and economic wellbeing. They thus propose a new framework that highlights a bi-directional theory-based approach to cultural citizenship and develop an understanding of participatory citizenship as it is played out in the context of people's everyday cultural lives.

Several of the articles in this issue elaborate on the importance of people's everyday cultural lives and connect this to questions of personal stories and experiences. These personal stories are, from different perspectives, pursued as meaningful political manifestations. In 'Mediating Influences: Problematising facilitated digital self-representation', Sonja Vivienne investigates the possibility of facilitating Digital Storytelling workshops and web spaces. Vivienne defines digital stories as short autobiographical documentaries, often illustrated with personal photographs and narrated in the first person, typically produced in group workshops and increasingly distributed online. She studies how digital stories might offer 'ordinary people' the opportunity to represent themselves to audiences of their choosing. This kind of 'authentic' self-representation is, however, not straightforward. It is highly mediated, and this has implications for the questions of voice, identity and social participation. Vivienne considers strategies derived from anthropology and narrative practices and proposes tools for a nuanced and sensitive facilitation of Digital Storytelling workshops and web spaces.

Through studies of Invisible Children and the Harry Potter Alliance – two media-centric, youth-oriented, participatory organizations – Neta Kligler-Vilenchik and Sangita Shresthova consider participatory culture civics. In their article 'Feel That You Are Doing Something: Participatory Culture Civics', they study young people's civic engagement through online communities and peer networks and propose that participatory culture civics support organized collective action towards civic goals. Arguing that organizations struggle to strike a balance between the creative and community-based tenets of participatory culture, and the focused, product-driven goals of a civic engagement organization, they outline a framework that describes three innovative PCC practices: Build Communities, Tell Stories, and Produce Media. This framework allows them to elaborate on the ways in which organizations' ability to combine civic goals with the pleasures of participatory culture determine whether or not they successfully engage young people.

Finally, Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen investigates journalist Nagieb Khaja's documentary film *My Afghanistan. Life in the Forbidden Zone* (2012) and the webpage <http://myafghanistan.dk> in which local men and women produce footage documenting their personal stories of life in a war zone in Helmand in Afghanistan. By analyzing the complex relations between participants in Helmand, the filmmaker, and the Danish high schools students that use the web page as an educational platform, Thomsen introduces the Deleuzian concept of 'the intercessor' (using the camera as a kind of 'shifter' that fuses 'subject' with 'object'). With its special production background, the film examines the transformative power of the camera in relation to what citizenship means and under what conditions you could judge the lives of others. In this perspective, the camera is seen as a creative intercessor that actively 'produces' the life of individuals. Each story can become 'legendary' in a collectivity of individual, yet different, voices. The haptic images and affects laid bare in this mix of ethnographic, political, and global activism, is similar to the first generation of anthropological camera researchers, who left behind the idea of documenting the 'raw real', discovering instead the inventive and creative forces of the camera.

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