

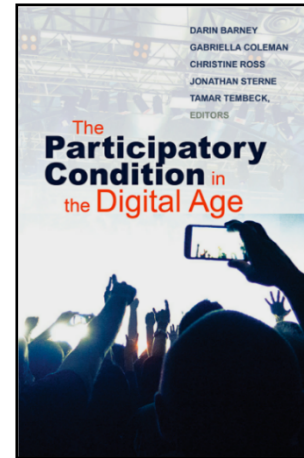
Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne, Tamar Tembeck (Eds.), **The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age**, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 352 pp., \$94.50 (hardcover), \$27.00 (paperback).

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Darin Barney and his co-editors posit the generalization of participation from discrete cultures across social, political, economic, and aesthetic domains into a normative condition. Building on insights from “The Participatory Condition,” an international colloquium at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal in 2013, this edited collection aims to go beyond linear assessments of the emancipatory promises and impasses of participation that have dominated foundational research on the topic. Instead, this volume takes an “ecological” approach to the role of new media in participatory practices across intersecting contexts and over time. The contributors range from established to emerging researchers in cognate fields of political science, sociology, communication studies, anthropology, law, philosophy, design, museology, and art. Their contributions use qualitative and textual methods and range from case studies of social movements and open-source art interventions, to critical and typological analyses of worker cooperatives and mutual cooperation in the platform economy.



The essays in *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age* engage with participation as expectations and practices of active involvement in decision-making processes, which simultaneously extend promises of emancipation and exert forms of subjection. 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” (p. xxii). This conclusion echoes other edited collections on the topic that position digital media as central but not determinative of participatory culture. However, while collections such as Delwiche and Henderson (2012) examine discrete cultures of fandom, activism, and peer production, *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age* considers how the technologies and ideologies that underlie these networked practices are being generalized into a cultural condition. This approach is imperative as participatory processes integrate with media ecologies and institutional infrastructures into forms that are vastly divergent from the science fiction fan communities from which Jenkins (1992, 2014) originally coined the concept “participatory culture.”

The introductory chapter expertly contextualizes this genealogy of participatory concepts by highlighting their historical continuities with democratic institutions in politics, audience-friendly museology

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in art, and dialogic expectations around technological innovations in media. The subsequent essays are organized according to four axes used to evaluate the role of new media in the participatory condition: politics, openness, surveillance, and aisthesis or sensual perception. The chapters on politics examine struggles for equality in decision-making processes, and its complications not just by digital media but also by ideologies about participation, neoliberal policies, and geopolitics. The essays by Carpentier ("Power as Participation's Master Signifier") and Scholz ("Think Outside the Boss") refine their previous work on how to think multidimensionally about participation as minimally or maximally distributing decision-making power, and how to collectivize against platform companies through technical and organizational innovations. Sorochan's ("Participation as Ideology in Occupy Wall Street") rich case study stands out for explicating how participation is a composite of competing definitions of democracy and mechanisms for deliberation that can hamper a movement's stated political goals.

The articles under the heading of openness continue this problematization of participation's ideals and asymmetries. For example, Dunbar-Hester's ("Paradoxes of Participation") ethnography of a radio activist organization illustrates contradictions between the egalitarianism of participatory politics and the hierarchy of expertise in technical cultures. Delfanti and Iaconesi's ("Open Source Cancer") chapter suggests how data-sharing rituals can cultivate digital solidarity to reclaim and reappropriate medicalizing narratives that abstract persons into patients and reduce them to their disease. Poignantly interweaving emotional and logistical concerns, the authors reflect on how the politics of open source and hacking were ineluctably skewed by the asymmetries of access and attention they enjoyed as artists and intellectuals. They also consider the agenda-setting power of the popular media to instrumentalize rituals of data sharing as technical solutions instead of as political acts.

The chapters on surveillance situate human participation within vast systems of cross-platform data gathering and analysis. As a result of this scope, this section presents the best examples of the volume's stated goal of understanding participation as ecological processes. Crawford ("Big Urban Data and Shrinking Civic Space") discusses how technologies of simulation for law enforcement and big data systems for urban efficiency are converging in Smart City infrastructures. When this process is accelerated by terror-induced crises, the usual norms of civic participation and standards of institutional accountability are suspended. The author concludes that this convergence between urban simulations and statistics foist the city and its inhabitants into a perpetual experiment that operates according to a circular logic. This logic justifies any system of greater data collection, processing, and analysis without the scientific standards of verification or the democratic requirements of accountability. While Crawford is concerned with state-imposed surveillance, Cohen ("The Surveillance-Innovation Complex") investigates crowdsourced surveillance that users voluntarily perform when they use location-based mobile apps such as Foursquare. By employing game mechanics to entice users into reporting their physical locations, such apps frame commercial surveillance as part of autonomous, democratic choices by free market actors. The author cautions that as surveillance transitions its focus from industrialism to innovation, it is no longer tolerated as a necessary evil but is hailed as a positive force for good. This is a discursive shift with insidious societal consequences.

Andrejevic's ("The Pacification of Interactivity") contribution rounds out the section on surveillance by refining a distinction between participation and interactivity that has been central to discussions on the topic since Web 2.0's normalization of user-generated content and social media. The author emphasizes

that while people interact online according to coded protocols, they participate by collaboratively constructing those protocols. This distinction resonates with Carpentier's ("Power as Participation's Master Signifier") framework on degrees of decision-making power in the volume's section on politics. Andrejevic argues that participation generates information about itself in the form of data that is passively and inferentially collected by platform companies. This feedback is not collaborative or reflexive, and therefore should not be considered participation but a form of interactivity. This distinction must be upheld in the face of the interactive media economy's attempts to brand the provision of feedback with the political weight of participation.

The concluding essays on aisthesis explore how the spectacle of participatory processes in the field of art are intrinsic to artworks and generate new perceptions about the world. Frieling ("Participatory Situations") uses the case study of Dora García's *Instant Narrative* to review how structured and unstructured activity are used for the participation of performers, writers, and audiences in museums and art institutions more generally. Lozano-Hemmer and Wodiczko ("*Zoom Pavilion*") document their panoptic audiovisual installation that tracks people's movement and projects their scaled reflections back to them in public squares. It was initially conceived for the Fifth China International Architectural Biennial and has since been exhibited in Basel. True to the editors' goals for this section, many of the essays on aisthesis approach the politics of participation in exploratory rather than analytical ways.

Overall, this edited collection fulfills its goals of analyzing the role of digital technologies in the participatory condition from multiple disciplinary angles and across varied social contexts. In particular, it advances research on participation beyond familiar arguments about its promotional rhetoric and flawed implementation to question the ideologies and mechanics of participation itself. However, as the concept matures, it may be necessary to speculate on the limits of the participatory paradigm in increasingly datafied media ecologies. For example, the chapters on surveillance, openness, and politics could benefit from further reflection on whether forced and surreptitious participation in smart cities, or peer-to-peer marketplaces that support the gig economy should be considered participation at all. Similar discussions have, for example, been curated by a special issue on the topic of participation in this journal (Allen et al., 2014). Nonetheless, researchers of digital culture and media audiences will find this volume especially useful for its interrogation of the participatory condition's tensions and contradictions as a catchall for equality, fairness, community, and freedom. This volume will also be helpful to students seeking an overview of the current research on the topic.

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