

Participation, Exhibited

Paradigmatic Bibliography

We are open, they are crowdsourced, you are engaged, we are the media. I moderate, he likes, they dig, she tweets and retweets. @everybody Here we come! I no longer simply consume, I democratize innovation, she prosumes, and he produces. We are what democracy looks like. You are fans who write your own fiction, they are users who hack and mod their technologies, we are civic scientists who produce our own knowledge. She is a maker. He revolts, you critique, they revolutionize, we democratize the Middle East. We are filled to the brim with civic enthusiasm and collaborative power never before known. We are in the age of direct citizen participation, she is in the epoch of user-generated content, we are convergence culture. You are the people formerly known as the audience, I am a peer producer, he is at the end of gatekeeping. We are the People.

You are closed, we are proprietary, they are poorer, she is more idle, he is fatter, we are more disengaged and more disempowered, they are less equal and less happy. He lives in the time of bastard culture. She is net-deluded. I can't focus, we live in the shallows, you are all amateurs, you are a gadget, he is inauthentic, they are evil, I click to save everything, she is unemployed, underemployed, and freelanced to death. We don't vote. We live in filter bubbles. She moves fast and breaks things; I am the sucker of attention merchants; we bowl alone. Online. He is addicted, they are alone together, we are :(.

Zuccotti Park, 27 September, 2011

"Mic check!" "Mic check!" yells The Participant. Her back is to the speaker, facing a crowd of a thousand. "Mic check!" yell those who can hear her, then those who can hear them repeat it.

Something like elation washes over The Participant—the sense of being absorbed into something large and powerful, if temporary. She might describe it as a sense of belonging, or whatever emotion comes from “the sum being greater than the parts.” She might describe it as “the colossus

who writes history with her feet and crumples governments with her bare hands.”¹ Or maybe not. She looks around. The people around her don’t look colossal: there’s a predictable, dreadlocked youth sporting something Central-American-ish; that guy looks like a banker; next to him sit three wispy-bearded, geeky boys, one set of knees balancing a laptop with a sticker that says “Come Back with a Warrant”; then there’re the cops along the edge of the crowd.

But each time The Participant repeats a phrase and the entire crowd follows suit—then they are suddenly colossal: something *more*, something *also*, something *in addition to*, something *at the same time as*.

This *experience* of participation is what seems so valuable, so needed, and so difficult to sustain. But in the end, “people want to see, like, actual results.”²

Contents of The Participant’s Tool Kit

A ladder	A policy instrument
Objects and plans for a cooperative	A Scanlon plan
The Port Huron Statement	Open data
Some industrial democracy	A <i>Gesamtkunstwerk</i>
An agricultural extension employee from the Tennessee Valley	A DIY democracy
An essentially contested concept	Several pieces of candy
Voice	A script
A budget	A crowdsourcing app
A public involvement manual	A plebiscite
A focus group	One dictator
A designer democracy	Two radicals
Two trade unions	Twelve neoliberals
Astroturf	An ungovernable democracy in crisis
A scrivener	Dissensus
Civic virtue	A machine-learning algorithm for sorting and matching participants
A social climate	Another participation
A divi at 31 Toad Lane	An experience
	Perplexity
	A tool kit