



THE ART  
OF  
TAKING  
PART

**ARKEN**

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ARKEN BULLETIN,  
VOL. 7, 2017

**The Art of Taking Part:  
Participation at the Museum**

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Front page: Detail from AVPD, *Gazebo*, 2015

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ISSN 1602-9402  
Published in Denmark 2017

With the exception of the introduction, all articles in the  
publication are peer reviewed.

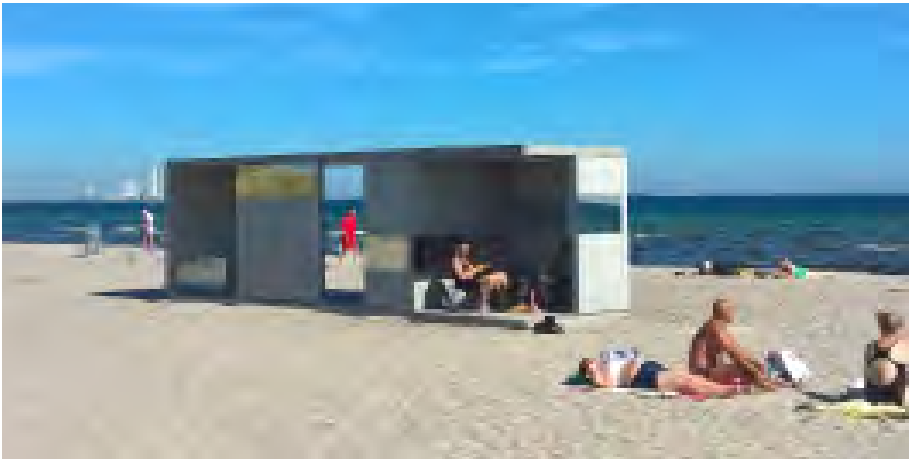
# Introduction

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By Camilla Jalving |

You have to go all the way down to the beach to see *Gazebo*, an artwork by the Danish artist group AVPD. But once there, you cannot avoid seeing it. Standing as it does like a foreign element of glass and concrete between the dunes and the sea. A stringent, formal, modernist structure built in 2015 on the man-made shore as part of the exhibition *Art in Sunshine* at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art. It has no apparent function. It is just there – like a shed, a place you can go into, sit inside, find shelter or shade, change your clothes, look out of and be looked at. There are mirrors on the walls of the pavilion that reflect the sky, the lyme grass, the sand, the sea and the other people on the beach. A glass section functions – depending on how the light falls and how close you are – as a mirror or window that either reflects the gaze or extends it.

In the two-way mirror you see yourself but also your surroundings – observe yourself *in* the world. A viewing machine and generator of gazes, views, reflections and motifs. You can also see it – especially with the art museum ARKEN on the other side of the dunes – as a model of a museum, posing in the midst of the busy summer beach as a meeting place between people, gazes and an inside and an outside. A place that can be used but that is completely different to other places. A place where you participate imperceptibly, becoming a co-producer as soon as you enter the stage it forms, as soon as you look out, are mirrored, sit down to tie your shoelace, or go into a corner to squeeze into your swimsuit.



AVPD, *Gazebo*, 2015

This could be one way to begin a publication on art and participation. With an artwork that, although speechless and silent, creates a situation for participation by presenting itself as an open invitation to activity, exploration and exchanges of gazes. And with an understanding of the museum as a site of meetings and participation: a place that can be used without defining a specific purpose. The artwork also comes under the broad concept of participation that forms the basis for this publication, an understanding of participation that ranges from concrete action to the situational exchange of gazes, from doing something to watching and imagining something.

This peer-reviewed publication is an extension of ARKEN's research project *Deltagerisme: Dogme og mulighedsfelt* ['Participationism: Dogma and Realm of Possibility'], which was funded by the Danish Ministry of Culture's Research Committee. Thanks to this support it has been possible to fund the time necessary for ARKEN's Chief Curator Stine Høholt, the curators Dorthe Juul Rugaard and myself, as well as head of ARKEN EDUCATION Lise Sattrup to research participation as a general cultural phenomenon as well as a strategic and methodological tool for art museums. As part of the research project, in 2015 ARKEN organised the seminar *Deltagerisme: Seminar om kunst, subjektivitet og viden i en deltagelseskultur* ['Participationism: Art, Subjectivity and Knowledge in a Participatory Culture'], which addressed the concept of participation from a range of cultural theoretical and museological perspectives. This is the concluding publication, exploring the concept of participation with a focus on art and the art museum. Through eight articles, the concept is analysed as a strategic tool for museums, as an art practice, as analytical alertness, as part of the exhibition situation and institution of the museum, and as an approach to learning. They take us through artworks by artists including Palle Nielsen, Karoline H Larsen and Jesper Just, as well as ideas about the engaged museum, participatory models, the commons, co-production, democracy, affect and performativity. Each article is introduced in more detail below, but first some more general observations on participation.

### **A New 'Ism'?**

The word participation itself raises a number of questions. When do people participate? How do they participate? What do they participate in? And to what end? In the arts and humanities the concept of participation has been analysed and used extensively, not least during the past five-ten years. Not always with the same intention, let alone the same understanding of the concept, something that could be due to the extreme pervasiveness of the term. Participation as a strategy and practice has entered so many fields – from political theory to the arts all the way into our daily lives – that it apparently defies clear-cut definition. Its prevalence has inevitably generated criticism. The foreword to a special

edition of the Danish culture journal *Kultur&Klasse* describes participation as *sine qua non* for contemporary productions, interactions and experiences – a socio-cultural paradigm and norm – and in his book *Bad New Days*, the art historian Hal Foster writes:

“Activation of the viewer has become an end, not a means, and not enough attention is given to the quality of subjectivity and sociality thus affected. Today museums cannot seem to leave us alone; they prompt and program us as many of us do our children. As in the culture at large, communication and connectivity are promoted, almost enforced, for their own sake. This activation helps to validate the museum, to overseers and onlookers alike, as relevant, vital, or simply busy, yet, more than the viewer, it is the museum that the museum seeks to activate.”

And the normative nature of participation is certainly evident if we look at the culture currently on offer. Hal Foster mentions museums, where we are increasingly positioned as ‘users’ and ‘participants’ and co-creators of content, or are at least invited to express our opinion by ranking artworks, taking part in the dramatized museum experience, or simply by answering questions in exhibition materials deliberately aimed at audience involvement. Participation has become a key attraction in other aspects of our lives too. We participate in food festivals with communal dining and open-air philosophy festivals, the news is no longer something we consume but also content we shape and produce ourselves by sharing, liking, tweeting, instagramming and blogging, preferably as and when it happens since instant status updates are the ultimate proof of participation.

As a result, participation has become part of our daily lives as well as a structuring principle of cultural consumption and production. From the surprising and stimulating, to the predictable and prescriptive. The increasing role of participation is linked to new technology and new forms of art practice, but also to new cultural policies, the experience economy, and increasing demands on cultural institutions to justify their existence, as discussed in several of the articles in this edition of *ARKEN Bulletin*. Participation is therefore not as simple as ‘taking part’. On the



contrary. To participate is *also* to take part in new forms of consumption and behaviour that are firmly anchored in the politics and ideology that form us as subjects.

### **The Democracy Discourse**

The ways in which participation is articulated in different fields varies. With the risk of oversimplifying, three dominant discourses within the field of art and museology can be outlined: a ‘democracy’ discourse, a ‘museum’ discourse, and an ‘art’ discourse. In the democracy discourse participation is seen as a key tool in developing democracy and the individual citizen. This occurs with terms like active citizenship and multivocality, where the level of power and decision-making are key parameters. The media researcher Nico Carpentier uses this as a basis for differentiating the concept of participation, distinguishing as he does between access, interaction and participation. In doing so, he articulates a radical concept of participation that not only requires access or interaction, but where users can also influence the kind of content that is produced, who produces it, what technology is used, and what the organisation behind the production should look like.

In many ways Carpentier’s criteria make him a hardliner compared to other discourses of participation. Indeed, his concept of participation is something of a rarity in art museums where – if we stick to Carpentier’s terminology – participation largely takes the form of ‘access’ and ‘interaction’, and where the power relations are rarely as egalitarian as required to meet his demands for participation.

### **The Museum Discourse**

Compared to a hardliner like Carpentier, the museum researcher Nina Simon is a pragmatist, and her book *The Participatory Museum* from 2010 has become a virtual textbook on participatory forms at museums. Within the museum discourse, Nina Simon’s voice is far more hands-on than the political theories and ideas of democracy Nico Carpentier represents in this context. Nina Simon bases her work on the assumption that as a strategy and design technique, participation is crucial if museums are to demonstrate their relevance and value to a modern audience. Nina

Simon's call for participation represents an extension of the ideas of participation and relevance of museologists and learning researchers like Graham Black, George Hein, John Falk and Lynn Dierking, and is perhaps best summed up in Stephen E. Weil's famous 1999 dictum on the changed role of the museum: "From being about something to being for somebody." In practice this has been realized in audience development focusing on 'active' participation, as well as in educational and outreach strategies that emphasise user involvement, constructive pedagogy, and dialogical and situational learning. Here participation is seen as a tool that makes the museum relevant to new groups of users, and as a way for the museum to acknowledge its responsibility in terms of democratic development.

### **The Art Discourse**

Also in art criticism, participation has become a theme in relationship to art and its manifestations, a perspective Michael Birchall develops in this publication. Here the discourse is rooted in the relational aesthetics and socially engaged art analysed by people like Nicolas Bourriaud and Grant Kester. With publications like *Participation* (2006) and the book *Artificial Hells* (2012), the art historian Claire Bishop has been at the forefront of shaping the way what she calls 'participatory art' is talked about in the art world. For Bishop, participatory art is where the artistic material and medium are 'people' – viewers, participants, co-agents – who use participation "as a politicised working process". Bishop sees this participatory art as part of 'the social turn' in art, which as well as being oriented towards social and political realities, also implies the desire to turn established categories like art/ artist/ audience upside down, or as Bishop writes:

"To put it simply: the artist is conceived less as an individual of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant."

This art often takes the form of workshops or other forms of art practice that do not adhere to established concepts of art and may not even always be recognisable as art projects. Bishop is far from uncritical of this kind of art and the power attributed to it, just as she criticises the use of art as a socio-political tool, especially in a British context where during the 1990s art was claimed to be a means of generating social inclusion. As she writes: "Participation became an important buzzword in the social inclusion discourse (...) for New Labour it effectively referred to the elimination of disruptive individuals." This is a point worth considering given the current interest in participation in a Danish context, where as Maj Klindt's article reveals utility value has become an explicit element of the rhetoric of contemporary cultural politics.

### **An Art of Participation?**

The list of dominant discourses relating to participation could doubtless go on, yet the contours of a democracy discourse, a museum discourse and an art discourse emerge clearly. Whilst they might use different concepts, these discourses apparently share the view that participation (what is considered 'real' or 'the right' participation depends on the individual theorist) strengthens democracy, makes things relevant, and generates the possibility of political change. In the democracy discourse, participation has been linked to the idea of actual decision-making. In the art discourse, it has been used about a specific kind of art where participation is manifested in a concrete, physical activity involving the audience. In the field of museology, on the other hand, it has been regarded as something that develops through specific communicative and curatorial methods, like co-creation and consultation groups, or less radically through different ways of involving visitors, such as letting them choose their favourite artwork, commenting via post-its, participating in debating events, or attending a concert or a poetry reading among the artworks. The list is long and apparently endless. Museum practice today is an activity. The goal is not only to 'show', but also to 'activate'.

But what if rather than thinking about participation as something linked to a specific art form or something achieved through specific strategies and methods, we see it as embodied in the art objects themselves and

the situation they create? Then maybe it is no longer participation – or at least not according to the terms of the existing discourses. It could, however, be a kind of participation rooted in another discourse. This discourse would focus less on tools and strategies, and more on the affective encounter and the presence of materiality. It would be a discourse where participating is what we do when we experience something, go to an exhibition, encounter art, reflect, evaluate, understand and misunderstand. Where it is the art itself that invites us to take part. Whereas the catalogue for the 2009 exhibition *The Art of Participation* raises the rhetorical question "Is there an art of participation?" we could polemically claim that there is, in fact, no other kind of art, since the exhibition situation and art encounter always have – to a greater or lesser degree – a participatory element. Art has an effect – on us – in different ways and in different situations, and we in turn have an effect on the situation it is shown in.

This issue of *ARKEN Bulletin* unpacks participation: both the direct participation of the three discourses above, *and* the less obvious participation that occurs through sensing and affect. In doing so, it examines the ways in which participation has been formulated, conceptualised and used by museums, and surveys the ways art itself can create spaces for different forms of participation. It analyses existing discourses in depth, but also invites us to explore new ways of thinking about participation. It does so on the basis that precisely because the concept of participation is so prevalent today – because it has, to some extent, become the norm – then we need to interrogate our knowledge of the concept so participation continues to be a productive field of possibility, instead of being reduced to a meaningless dogma. And most importantly of all, so that participation continues to be based on what this publication takes as the heart of the art museum: the artworks themselves and the materiality, presence and situations they offer.

The publication is divided into four sections: *Strategy*, *Co-Creation*, *Affect* and *Democracy*. The first section, *Strategy*, outlines the challenges posed by participation and the different ways in which the concept is verbalised and used in the fields of cultural politics and museology. This section begins with Stine Høholt's article 'The Art Museum Today: Participation

as a Strategic Tool' in which she provides an overview of the broad field of participation in acknowledgement of the fact that the key to the success of cultural institutions lies in increased visitor orientation. Whereas in the past the role of museums was to form and educate the nation, today the focus has shifted to the individual citizen. Drawing on the 2014 exhibition *The Model* at ARKEN, Høholt outlines the different ways participation and the participant are formed in relationship to the museum as a cultural institution, public institution and economic institution. One of Høholt's central points is that a balanced understanding of participation is a precondition for the success of the cultural institution today. In her article 'When and How Do We Participate?' Maj Klindt builds on Høholt's overview. Klindt identifies and discusses the contexts for a museological and cultural-political use of the concept of participation, and the extent to which these contexts overlap with a third context of market orientation. By introducing Nico Carpentier's concept of participation, Klindt argues that 'low-effort' forms of museum participation can still be meaningful for visitors, even though they do not enable decision-making in the way that Carpentier defines it.

The *Co-Creation* section focuses on socially engaged art practices and how these can invite different kinds of participation. In his article 'Situating Participatory Art Between Process and Practice', Michael Birchall outlines how the art museum as an institution has become a site for production and 'participatory models' where the exhibition visitor is co-producer. As Birchall writes, participant-observers emerge "as galleries seek to widen their participation in the gallery itself." It is no longer solely about "learning in the museum" but also about "learning through the audiences." Based on the project *Art Gym* at Tate Liverpool in 2016, Birchall exposes the artistic and political background for and development of socially engaged art and 'the educational turn', and the ways in which socially engaged and situated practices manifest themselves within and beyond the museum.

The focus on socially engaged art continues in the article 'Co-creation and Affect in Karoline H Larsen's *Collective Dreams*'. Here Dorthe Juul Rugaard analyses the two different kinds of participation that took place in Karoline H Larsen's art project *Collective Dreams* at ARKEN in 2015,

i.e. the co-creation that unfolded during the process of making the work, and the affective participation that emerged due to the work's performative, situational presence. The article builds on concepts like performativity and affectivity to identify an affective form of participation that offers a way out of the 'means-and-ends' thinking participation is often embedded in.

The *Affect* section addresses affective participation and the involvement that takes place in the actual art encounter and the viewer's performative exchange with the materiality of the artwork. In her article 'The Affects of the Artwork', Mette Thobo-Carlsen shifts the discourse of participation away from 'active participation', or what she calls 'well-intentioned' participatory projects where the rules are laid down in advance. Instead she focuses on the ability of art to create participatory objects that enable a social and material form of audience participation that is undirected. Taking the works of Yayoi Kusama as a case, and using affect as a theoretical lens, Thobo-Carlsen uncovers an affective and bodily form of participation that is based on a 'participatory gaze'.

In 'Affect and the Participatory Event', I extend this perspective on participation with an analysis drawing on theories of affect and performativity. Taking two total installations by the artists Jesper Just and Randi & Katrine as cases, the article delineates a concept of participation based on 'the participatory event' and the sensory and physical experience of the art work, thus challenging preconceptions of 'active participation'. As the article argues, this kind of understanding of participation is relevant partly because it can inform the exhibition practices of museums, and partly because it is based on the artwork and thus occupies a strategic position by representing a defence of participation on the terms of art itself. The fourth and final section *Democracy* deals with participation, democracy and the production of knowledge. Informed by Jacques Rancière's understanding of democracy, in her article 'Democratic Participation in the Art Encounter' Lise Sattrup analyses the democratic participation of children in educational activities at the art museum, as well as in general museum communication. On the basis of a series of cases and the role of 'stops', 'gaps' and 'cracks', she explores processes of participation and knowledge acquisition in the teaching situation, arguing for a shift from

the view that participation has to be learned to the assumption that everyone can participate.

In the concluding article, ‘Public and Commons: The Problem of Inclusion for Participation’, Helen Graham turns to the paradox of museums having to limit certain actions and uses to ensure that they continue to be available for the public good. Graham uses the concept of ‘commons’ to put forward a model for participation at the museum that rethinks ideas of access, use and participation. This is explored specifically in the context of cultural history museum conservation, an issue that is equally relevant for art museums. How can conservation be seen as a participatory practice that prevents the object from not only ‘running out’ materially, but also running out of people’s interest? How can the museum be understood as a new form of commons that has a material-social rather than physical form?

We hope that this publication can contribute new approaches and ideas to the wide and continually growing field charted by ‘the participatory turn’, approaches and ideas that we welcome you to explore, reject, criticise, pursue, add to, like or share either analogously, digitally, in your notebook, on your laptop, in the exhibition, at the museum, or on SoMe. The invitation is hereby issued. Please take part!

## **Camilla Jalving**

MA and PhD in Art History, University of Copenhagen is a curator at ARKEN. She has been the manager of ARKEN’s research project *Del-tagerisme – Dogme og mulighedsfelt* [‘Participationism as Dogma and Realm of Possibility’], and has contributed to a wide range of journals, exhibition catalogues and anthologies on contemporary art and theory. She is the author of *Værk som handling: Performativitet, kunst og metode* [‘Art as Action: Performativity, Art and Method’, 2011] and co-author (with Rune Gade) of *Nybrud: Dansk kunst i 1990erne* [‘New Departures: Art in Denmark in the 1990s’, 2006]. Recently she has contributed to the anthology *Kulturteori og kultursociologi* [‘Cultural Theory and Cultural Sociology’, 2016] with an article on performativity and culture.

## NOTES

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- 1 The seminar was held on June 19th, 2015 at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art. The speakers were Anne Scott Sørensen, Dan Zahavi, Niels Righolt, Camilla Mordhorst, Bjarki Valtýsson and Henrik Holm.
- 2 Mikkel Bolt et al., 'Foreword', *Kultur & Klasse: Deltagelsens æstetik*, year 42, no. 118, 2014: p. 5.
- 3 Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, New York: Verso, pp. 134-135.
- 4 Nico Carpentier, 'The Concept of Participation: If they have access and interact, do they really participate?', *Communication Management Quarterly*, no. 21, Year VI, Winter 2011, pp. 28-30.
- 5 Carpentier, p. 31.
- 6 Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010, p. ii.
- 7 Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (2005) and *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-first Century* (2011); George Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (1998), John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (2012).
- 8 Stephen E. Weil, 'From Being About Something to Being For Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum', *Daedalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 128, 1999: pp. 229-258.
- 9 This thinking is evident in the Danish project 'Museums and Cultural Institutions as Spaces for Citizenship' (2009-2013) in which ten participating cultural institutions investigated how they could contribute to cultural citizenship through their exhibitions, performances, teaching and organisation on the basis of the concepts of 'multivocality', 'participation' and 'self-reflection'. The project was funded by the Danish Arts Foundation under the Danish Ministry of Culture, and as such reflects the prevailing orientation towards 'participation' and 'user involvement' – also by politicians.
- 10 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) and Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2013).
- 11 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, New York: Verso, 2012, p. 2
- 12 Bishop, p. 2.



**13** Bishop, pp. 13-14.

**14** Boris Groys et al., *The Art of Participation*, Thames & Hudson, 2008, p. 12. The exhibition *The Art of Participation* was held at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2009, and included works ranging from the historical avant-garde, Dada and Marcel Duchamp, to the concept art of the 1960s, the performance art of the 1970s and Fluxus, Joseph Beuys' social plastic, and the relational and media art of the 1990s. Or, as the curator Boris Groys put it in the catalogue: "What we are concerned with here are events, projects, political interventions, social analyses, or independent educational institutions that are initiated, in many cases, by individual artists, but that can ultimately be realised only by the *involvement of many*." P. 19 (my emphasis).

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):

The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# STRATEGY

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# The Art Museum Today: Participation as a Strategic Tool

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By Stine Høholt

The article provides an overview of the broad field of participation. Drawing on the 2014 exhibition *The Model* at ARKEN, it outlines the different ways participation and the participant are formed in relationship to the museum as a cultural institution, public institution and economic institution.

I sit at the computer ready to write my article on the increased interest in participation at art institutions, but it is Friday, still summer and the weekend awaits ... Here on the second-last weekend of August my Facebook feed tempts me with a veritable flood of the kind of participatory events I am about to write about. Kunsthal Charlottenborg is hosting *Chart*, an art fair that brings the Nordic gallery scene together and that is also arranging *Chart Social*, a Nordic performance programme taking place in different parts of the city. Another cultural initiative, *Copenhagen Art Week*, is hosting a performative canal tour where people are blindfolded. The celebrity curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist is joining an informal conversation about contemporary art in a private apartment, but I could also choose to spend my evening with the young culture vultures

at *SMK Fridays*, what Denmark's national gallery call their 'intelligent get-together' with talks, beer, a burger bar and a boat trip. Then again, I could head into town and experience sensory art on a grand scale when the new bridge connecting the inner city with Christianshavn opens as a Copenhagen event with the artist Olafur Eliasson as a guest. And beyond the capital I could participate in the big open-air meeting on the island of Mors, where Denmark's politicians have invited citizens to join a dialogue on the conditions for art and culture today.



Performance in connection with Cph Art week, 2015. Photo: Jenny Selldén



SMK Fridays. Photo: Janus Engel

This impressive range of events on a single weekend in August tells me that the participatory format has definitely arrived in the world of arts and culture. Participation has become 'so ein Ding', a trend so powerful it warrants the name 'participationism', and a phenomenon so striking that it needs further examination, luring as it does cultural producers and consumers alike. Has it become an uncritically followed dogma, or is it a

realm of future possibility? It is clearly a broad concept, where the boundaries between participating and experiencing can be hard to draw. The events listed above can be placed on a kind of participation scale, with participation as a public, democratic dialogue (like the open-air meeting on Mors, where participation is part of a political process) at one end, and the blindfolded canal tour, which is closer to an experience-based event at the other. Here participation is more about interaction and inclusion (anyone can take part), two key ways for museums to practise participation. But not all participants in these events are *active* participants: some are spectators, guests, friends or commercial partners, and only a small portion are co-producers, ‘prosumers’ or co-creators.



Performance by Lea Guldditte Hestlund with the title *WOD by plaster casts* at SMK Fridays. Photo: Magnus Kaslov, SMK

This article addresses the broad field of participation as a format, strategic museum tool, and realm of possibility. My approach to the relationship between the art museum and participation is museological, charting how participation has come to the fore as a principle of cultural consumption and production in a museum context over the past 15 years. The aim of the article is to examine the ways cultural institutions can approach the public, in order to clarify our understanding of visitors to cultural institutions and the ways participation is structured and facilitated

by those institutions. The thesis of the article is that the key to the future success of cultural institutions lies in increased visitor orientation, and that participation is central to this orientation. I argue that a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of participation is a prerequisite for cultural institutions to continue to be successful in terms of audience development, visitor engagement, and curation.

### **The Role of Participation in Cultural Production**

It might well be that many museum professionals work with national heritage, art treasures and listed buildings, but the past 30 years have taught us museums themselves are no longer a ‘listed’ category. Museums are no longer seen as essential to society, but as a tax-financed amenity everyone should find relevant. Politicians emphasise the role of the museum as a key social motor, local lever, democratic binder, and driving force for innovation and experiences. The challenge the Danish Cultural Agency’s director Jesper Hermansen issued to cultural institutions shortly after being appointed was: “It is important that all cultural institutions ask themselves this question ... How do we become accessible to everyone?” The transformation the category of ‘museum’ has undergone since the early 1980s has been a steadily rising wave that has apparently reached its peak (at least so far) today. Museums have fundamentally changed their focus from objects to visitors. The current situation should be seen in the light of a series of radical changes to society over the past three decades. Many of them have been made possible by technological developments in computing, telecommunication, etc., which with digitalisation have resulted in an increased democratisation of cultural institutions, which has in turn contributed to an increased visitor orientation based on both communication and commercialisation. The communication researchers Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Pille Runnel summarise these development as follows:

“The development and spread of the many variations of the democratic worldview along with new technological facilities has also affected museums, influencing them to become more communicative. Two core processes in museums, digitization and democratization,

lead museums to focus on the dialogue with its audiences – providing more information is no longer considered sufficient.”

During recent years, museums have gained a lot of experience with audience development, visitor involvement, and participation. Shifting our gaze from museum objects to museum visitors has increased understanding of the surrounding society, and at the same time working with visitors has challenged the same institutions professionally, structurally and organisationally. One shared lesson is that it is only possible to commit whole-heartedly to the audience agenda if people are willing to be challenged in their core competence, their own self-perception, their priorities, and their concept of quality. In addition, digital developments have had a rapidly increasing impact on museums as an extension of the increasing digital ‘disruption’ of society at large.

### **Utility Value, Relevance and Participation**

I would now like to turn to some of the expectations of museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the ways almost all of these expectations are related to the idea of increased participation. Museums were originally defined as national treasuries of cultural historical and art objects. Their culture-preserving function is still intact, but today they have to do more than just conserve culture, they have to create culture, i.e. function as a driver of cultural and social development. Museums are to be meeting places for communities and accessible to everyone (physically, financially, intellectually and culturally). They are to be relevant to society as a whole, and thereby have a significant social effect. They are to support cultural diversity, create social cohesion, and increase the cultural capital of society. There is a political expectation that museums contribute to social, ethnic and educational inclusion, just as there is an expectation that they actively support the local area and contribute to urban regeneration. Parallel to this, one of the main tasks of museums today is to cultivate new audiences. Museums in Denmark are an important resource for structured learning, and are an integrated part of the educational and school system. On top of which, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century museums have become key tourist attractions that contribute to city identity, just as

the Louvre – on an equal footing with the Eiffel Tower – does in Paris. Alongside the cultural, social and public-oriented expectations of museums, there is also a range of economic expectations. Contrary to the past, museums today are expected to generate income, and the money earned is expected to adhere to the International Council of Museum’s guidelines, but also give the public value for money and a high level of visitor service.

According to the museum researcher Graham Black, the above expectations are the most explicit demands made on the institution of the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They make clear that today’s museum is a broad-spectrum institution that serves many purposes in complex interaction with numerous different spheres, including the public, the professional, the artistic, the economic, the political, the legal and the communicative. Whereas in the past museums primarily served one (ideological) purpose, i.e. *nation building*, today the focus is on *utility value*, *relevance* and *participation* – resulting in a more citizen-oriented instrumentalisation of cultural institutions. Today it is no longer the nation museums are ‘building’, but the citizen. Our expectations of Western museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century almost all imply that museums take a participatory approach. Today the primary interest of the arts and culture industry and politicians is how to get the public involved in the museum, and how the museum can serve the public interest. This approach to museums was founded with ‘the experience economy’, which became the buzzword of the 2000s and is a good match for what I would call the market-oriented museum. There are clear political, societal and philanthropic expectations of utility value connected to the market-oriented museum, which is often seen as a lever for ‘something else’ beyond the pure contemplation of art, be it health, urban renewal, education, cultural tourism or regional branding. Cultural policies for museums have focused on the market-oriented museum throughout the 2000s, with a focus on more visitors, more funding by private foundations, and more collaboration with the private sector. During the 2010s a new buzzword has been added, i.e. ‘participation’, which with a focus on co-creation and outreach links to a more public-oriented museum with an explicit demand of relevance.



## **The Role of Participation for the Museum Visitor**

In Denmark – a country with a population of only five million – museums have sixteen million visitors a year. This represents an increase of 65% over the past 30 years. This increase alone is a sign that participation plays an increasing role for visitors. People want to participate in cultural events, and therefore seek out the cultural events offered by museums. We meet an increasing number of visitors at museums themselves, but also in the mediated reality of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. These new social media have, also for cultural institutions, been a key game changer. Interaction and expressing opinions are natural behaviour on social platforms, and the opportunity to like, Tweet, share and organise that they provide creates new expectations and habits, also among museum visitors. At the same time, social media encourage an emphasis on the *styling* of everyday life: the museum selfie has rapidly become a genre of its own with an annual day to celebrate it, and today we see exhibitions, like Louisiana Museum of Modern Art's 2015 exhibition *Yayoi Kusama – In Infinity*, where for many visitors social media start to dictate an authoritative, photo-based exhibition experience, a development in which the museum selfie becomes not only a feature, but the ultimate goal of a museum visit.

People have become accustomed to being the editors of their own life through photos, updates, links and tips, and they are equally accustomed to getting their news and information elsewhere than through traditional channels. These social platforms are heavily visual. At the same time, there is a cultural, commercial development with an increasing over-all design focusing on sensory and symbolic value. Not that this is new. According to the cultural journalist Virginia Postrel, writing in 2003, it is a defining feature of post-industrial society that all products, spaces and surfaces are designed with a highly sensory appeal. From user surveys we know that visitors expect sensory experiences, and if we look at the Danish museum landscape, it is striking how fast art exhibitions have changed to become increasingly theatrical with a focus on design appeal, the senses, and an immersive exhibition experience. This can be seen in Louisiana Museum of Modern Art's recent exhibitions with *Olafur Eliasson* (2014), *Arctic* (2014) and *Yayoi Kusama – In Infinity* (2015). It is also

true of ARKEN's exhibitions with *Bjørn Wimblad* (2015) and *Niki de Saint Phalle* (2016), as well as Aarhus Art Museum ARoS' exhibition *Monet – Lost in Translation* (2015). Internationally the same trend has been visible at the V&A's exhibitions *David Bowie Is* and *Tomorrow* in London (both 2013), as well as the exhibition *Proportio* at Palazzo Fortuny in Venice (2015), which invited visitors to delve into a sensual, immersive exhibition experience. In his book *The Engaging Museum*, museum researcher Graham Black describes young visitors (35 and under) as a group with higher quality standards than previous generations looking for active and sensory museum experiences. They live hectic lives and are "cash rich, time poor", as Black describes them in his book. Personal involvement, individual service, individualisation and customisation are some of the demands they have, because they want to see themselves reflected in the world of the museum, and expect the museum to deliver user-generated content. In other words, they expect to be central to museum communication, and even to be given the opportunity to influence the museum at a more fundamental level, for example in programming. New kinds of visitors and a participatory agenda can prove a challenge for the classical exhibition format and for art that is characterised as going beyond the individual to present a 'wider view'. Elitist art practises, complex art theories, radical political currents, 'art for art's sake', the concept of the sublime, etc., are all phenomena and movements that can be a difficult fit with the desire for a democratic approach to art, a broad relevance criteria, and an invitation to everyone to participate or even see themselves reflected in the work of the museum. As a result, these new visitors raise a number of issues in terms of cultural production, because how does the museum retain its role as transcendent of everyday life as the same time as meeting people at eye level? How do we combine the original educational and cultural ideals with this new group of self-exhibitionists who would rather see themselves centre stage? And does the category of spectator still exist in an era when everyone would apparently rather create the spectacle than look at it?

### **Three Museums in One**

The goals and manifestations of participation can also change depending on which view of the museum we operate with. We could posit three

views of the museum: 1) The museum as a *cultural institution* that collects, conserves, interprets and communicates cultural heritage; 2) The museum as a *public institution*, i.e. as a professional agent in society that contributes to cultural development and serves a democratic, educational purpose; and 3) The museum as an *economic institution*, i.e. as part of the creative industries operating on the terms of the free market and located in the broad field of leisure activities. Seeing the museum as either a cultural, an economic or a public institution implies three different frameworks for what we mean by ‘participation’ and the meaning we attribute to ‘participation’ – and there is often an inbuilt conflict between the different views of participation in all three.

To stand in front of Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of Mona Lisa at the Louvre is a very bodily experience of the conflict between the views of participation attributed to each ‘type’ of museum. Whilst a high number of visitors (and thereby a high level of accessibility – one extreme of participation) might be a goal for the museum as an economic institution, it can be inconvenient or even a real risk for the museum as a cultural institution. Crowds of people, who see a museum visit as a consumer choice where they breath on, flash their cameras at, and want to get closer and closer to vulnerable artworks, pose a challenge to museum security, conservation, any classical contemplation of art or any ambition of an actual learning process taking place. Month-long exposure to light and humidity destroys delicate works, and transporting them is a critical risk factor. The risk of damage or theft requires a large number of guards and security measures, which in turn limits the public’s opportunity to interact with the works. Anyone who has stood in front of the Mona Lisa knows the feeling of hardly being able to see the woman with her enigmatic smile behind the thick armoured glass and crowds of visitors. One consequence of these different types of museum is the different ways museum visitors are framed depending on the lens they are seen through. The visitors we have in our online and off-line museum environments can be divided into multiple categories that are not solely limited to market segments, but include ‘visitors’, ‘users’, ‘citizens’, ‘co-creators’, ‘consumers’ and ‘prosumers’ who are either the buyers or co-producers of a series of products or services (tickets, food and refresh-

ments, a product, events, an exhibition experience, a seminar, a workshop, etc.). From a public-oriented point of view, however, they are also citizens to be educated and empowered. A central form of participation takes place when the museum uses a relational, participatory artwork to invite the visitor to join in as a citizen and co-creator – the form of participation I introduce briefly in what follows.

### **The Potential of Participatory Art**

Based on the definition of the museum visitor as a citizen and co-creator, and of participation as active participation in an artwork, in 2014 ARKEN invited the artist Palle Nielsen to ‘re-enact’ his vast, interactive artwork *The Model*, which was originally created for Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1968. As an art museum we wanted to show one of the earliest examples of relational art – what Palle Nielsen himself called ‘social aesthetics’ – and to interact with our visitors in new ways on the basis of his artistic vision that the creativity of children be given better and different opportunities for development, and his political vision of creating an anti-capitalist zone in the art museum. The exhibition, which ran for ten months, and where the artist requested that the price of entry was halved for adults (the exhibition was free for children) had many repeat visitors. One child came eleven times, a record number of visits per person. During the same period, we received a flood of letters from children and adults expressing their thanks and pleasure in experiencing *The Model*. The exhibition was constantly staffed by five to seven ‘play hosts’, who supported the children’s creative development and the communities that were formed in the 1,500m<sup>2</sup> artwork. Both the artist and museum had numerous positive experiences with the exhibition, including: 1) That the interactive work made the museum more inclusive, made art more accessible, and made visitors feel more welcome; 2) That the experience was so significant for our visitors that they subsequently (without the intervention of the museum) continued to work with and develop the pedagogical vision of the exhibition. In one case, a kindergarten transformed an entire section of their institution with inspiration from *The Model* because they were so convinced by the results they had seen with children visiting the exhibition. As the nursery school teacher said:

“Last year we’d taken some of the children on a trip to the art museum ARKEN. Here they encountered the work of the Danish artist Palle Nielsen, who had made an art exhibition where ‘children were allowed to do everything’ [...] It was, quite simply, a fantastic experience for the children, so we went home then took another group of children to the exhibition [...] We saw how the children flourished. So we decided to try to follow the same concept back in the kindergarten.”



Children playing in *The Model* by Palle Nielsen, 2014

*The Model* is an example of an artwork aimed at raising the awareness of its visitors and exercising an anti-capitalist critique of society. Judging the extent to which the work was successful in fulfilling these ambitions is not my task here. But using *The Model* as an example provides proof that the museum can be a driver of new communities that continue the visions of an artwork beyond the confines of

the museum itself. It shows that participatory contemporary art can be a realm of possibility where participation – understood as a pedagogical, social-political process – can evolve, and is an example of the museum practitioner Nina Simon’s idea of a participatory format that continues, also without the museum or artist as an active partner. At the same time, the example also makes clear that there are differences depending on who issues the call for participation. Whereas the artist might use participation as a way to engage in social criticism, for the museum the participatory work or exhibition format is often part of a strategy to make

the museum more open, to be accessible to everyone, and to empower museum visitors. Here the question that arises is whether these two strategies for participation can co-exist, or whether the one excludes the other. ARKEN's experience shows that the two strategies can be compatible. The work is a radically different place than the society outside, a critical space that due to both context and content is very different to a play area in a shopping centre, for example. At the same time, it was accessible and open to everyone in almost every way.

### **For a Better Understanding of Participation**

What have we learnt? We have learnt that the participatory behaviour of museum visitors is generated by technological, societal developments, and therefore unlikely to be a passing craze. We have also learnt that 'participation' and 'the participant' are not clear-cut categories, which makes a nuanced approach to participation key to the continuing success of art museums.

Museums should be open to everyone, and inclusion is an important aspect of participation. Here the success criterion for museums is not that everyone participates. What is crucial is that museums work with how accessible their institutions are so everyone has the opportunity to take part, and that they work with different participation formats so that those who might not be interested in participation still encounter a museum they find relevant. The participatory format represents an opportunity for cultural institutions to have a greater impact at a time when the demand for relevance is greater than before, and when many individual citizens have an increasing amount of leisure time, an increasing level of education, and when an increasing number of them live longer. Does this make participation the new *raison d'être* for museums? Hardly, because not everyone wants to participate, and not all art is made to involve visitors. Participation is, however, one of several tools to realise the *raison d'être* of museums as either cultural institutions, economic enterprises or public institutions. The participation paradigm does not necessarily express a new democratic culture, because the participation paradigm we see today is the product of technological, social developments created within communicative capitalism. As such, as the Danish art historian

Mikkel Bolt points out, participation is “always ‘formatted’ in advance and only enables the production and circulation of a relatively narrow spectrum of opinions. The possibility of tampering with the system is minimal, and all opinions that circulate in the system validate the system.” A pretty dogmatic statement we might add, since we can never know what actually ‘happens’ in the minds of our visitors, let alone what the long-term effect of an active art encounter might be. However, Mikkel Bolt’s perspective should be taken into account as an inbuilt challenge to the participation paradigm, at the same time as holding on to participation – especially in its broadest form, where the museum increases its inclusiveness, increases its accessibility and increases its general interaction with visitors – because of the possibilities it offers art museums in the current political, cultural and artistic situation. Participation is first and foremost a way for us – as art museums in a democratic, capitalist system – to create a space for generating meaning, empowerment and change for the benefit of the people we share society with.

## **Stine Høholt**

MA and PhD in Art History, is chief curator and Head of the Art Department at ARKEN, where she draws on her professional experience in exhibition programming, curating, leadership and project development. She also serves as a board member of New Carlsberg Foundation, and is a member of the Panel for Museum Research in Denmark. She has written articles on art and culture for a wide range of journals, anthologies and exhibition catalogues. Her PhD thesis ‘*Easier Living? Amerikansk Streamline-design og den friktionsløse hverdag, 1930-1960*’ [‘Easier Living? American Streamline Design and Frictionless Everyday Life, 1930-1960’] was published in 2006. She is co-editor of the book *Utopia & Contemporary Art* (Hatje Cantz, 2012), and has recently published articles on Abdoulaye Konaté and Elmgreen & Dragset, as well as interviews with Palle Nielsen and Julie Nord.

## NOTES

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- 1** This article was written on research leave in August 2015 as part of the research project *Deltagerisme – dogme og mulighedsfelt* [‘Participationism – Dogma and Realm of Possibility’] supported by ARKEN and the Danish Ministry of Culture’s Research Committee.
- 2** The concept of ‘prosumer’ (a contraction of ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’) was used by Camilla Mordhorst, Vice Director of the National Museum of Denmark, at the seminar *Deltagerisme: Seminar om kunst, subjektivitet og viden i en deltagelseskultur* [‘Participationism: Art, Subjectivity and Knowledge in a Participatory Culture’] at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art on June 19th, 2015. The term comes from the futurologist Alvin Toffler’s 1980 book *The Third Wave*, where he used it to predict the combination of the role of producer and consumer in the future.
- 3** Cf. Jacob Nielsen, ‘Participation Inequality: Encouraging More Users to Contribute’, 2006, available on <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/participation-inequality/> (last accessed 09.01.17) and Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010, Chapter 1.
- 4** Cf. cultural communicator Niels Righolt’s presentation at the seminar *Deltagerisme: Seminar om kunst, subjektivitet og viden i en deltagelseskultur* [‘Participationism: Art, Subjectivity and Knowledge in a Participatory Culture’] at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art on June 19th, 2015.
- 5** Cf. video presentation at the annual conference of the Danish Ministry of Culture’s Agency for Culture and Palaces, September 2015, <http://slks.dk/presse-nyt/styrelsen/2015/kulturstyrelsens-aarsmoede-2015/> (last accessed 04.03.2016).
- 6** Pille Pruuilmann-Vengerfeldt and Pille Runnel, ‘When the museum becomes the message for participating audiences’, *Communication Management Quarterly*, Winter 2011: p. 161.
- 7** The capacity to change, update, adapt and develop processes and products has become increasingly central to the success of companies, corporations and industries. The concept of ‘disruption’ has become particularly widespread in describing companies’ capacity for innovation – or lack thereof – and is a concept that has been heavily debated in recent years, especially in the context of management theory and the significance of digitalisation in social development. The concept was introduced by Bower, J. L., and C. M. Christensen, ‘Disruptive Technologies: Catching the Wave’, *Harvard Business Review* 73, no. 1 (January–February 1995): pp. 43–53.
- 8** The American museum researcher Stephen E. Weil argued for the social effect of museums in his book *Making Museums Matter*, Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2002.
- 9** See [[http://icomdanmark.dk/wp-content/uploads/ICOM\\_etiske\\_regler\\_denmark.pdf](http://icomdanmark.dk/wp-content/uploads/ICOM_etiske_regler_denmark.pdf)] (last accessed 28.06.2016).



- 10** For Graham Black's lists of expectations of the 21st-century museum, see Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 4.
- 11** One example of this was a conference arranged by the Danish online newspaper *Altinet* at Designmuseum Danmark on October 19th, 2015 to discuss the distribution of arts and culture funding and the parameters for its allocation. One of the contributors was Professor Christian Hjorth-Andersen, a cultural economics expert at the University of Copenhagen's Department of Economics. In his conference paper he asked: "How do we organise funding so it is of greatest benefit for society? What can culture contribute to local areas, and what economic role does it play in our society?"
- 12** With Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) and J. Pines & J. Gilmore's *The Experience Economy* (1999) as interpretative horizons for this understanding of culture and museums.
- 13** Figures drawn from Statistics Denmark in 2016.
- 14** In 2014, January 21st was appointed 'International Museum Selfie Day' during which museums visitors and art professionals worldwide take photos of themselves with their favourite work and share it on Instagram and Twitter. According to CNN, it was London-based Mar Dixon who invented the viral, user-driven campaign with her daughter after they had visited a series of museums and wanted to register their experiences. As Mar Dixon explained to CNN: "My goal with my daughter when we go to the museum is to learn one new thing. It doesn't have to be about art though. It can be that the museum sells good carrot cake (...) The hashtag is about the museum, but it's really about the people who are going to the museum. You took that picture, and you will remember that picture." Jareen Imam, 'Selfies turn museums into playgrounds for a day', CNN, 21.01.2015.
- 15** See David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014.
- 16** Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003.
- 17** Black, p. 38
- 18** Black, p. 38
- 19** Black, p. 38
- 20** For a Danish discussion of this issue see Rune Lykkeberg, *Alle har ret – demokrati som princip og problem*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2012
- 21** Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel, p. 165.
- 22** Christian Gether, Stine Høholt, Camilla Jalving and Dorthe Rugaard (eds.), *The Model*, ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, 2015 [uk.arken.dk/research-projects/](http://uk.arken.dk/research-projects/)

- 23** Stine Høholt, "'My Art is Not Made for the Art World": An interview with the artist Palle Nielsen' in *The Model*, eds. Christian Gether, Stine Høholt, Camilla Jalving and Dorthe Juul Rugaard, ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, 2015, pp. 54-68. <http://uk.arken.dk/research-projects/>.
- 24** Dorthe Brandborg, 'Her får børnene frit spil', *Brønshøj-Husum Avis*, 23.06.2015, p. 9
- 25** Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010.
- 26** Mikkel Bolt, 'Grænser for deltagelse', *Kultur & Klasse*, no. 118, 2014: pp. 199-200.

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):

The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# **When and How Do We Participate?**

## **On Participation from a Museological and Cultural-Political Perspective**

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By Maj Klindt

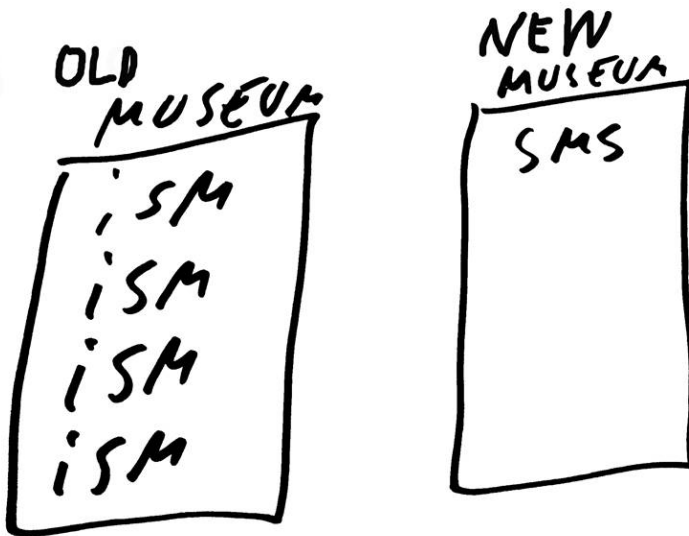
The article identifies and discusses the different contexts for a museological and cultural-political use of the concept of participation, and how these contexts overlap with the context of market orientation. By introducing Nico Carpentier's concept of participation, it makes an argument for the meaningfulness of 'low-effort' forms of museum participation.

According to the museologist Kenneth Hudson in his 1999 text 'Attempts to Define 'Museum', 'participation' is just another fashionable museum term "used in the same loose and largely meaningless way" as other 'jargon terms', like 'experience' and 'communication' that have gained ground in the attempt to define the contemporary role of the museum. He refers to the communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, who at a 1967 seminar at the Museum of the City of New York outlined the contours of "the participating museum" that

"would ask visitors questions, rather than give him answers. It would encourage visitors to touch objects. It would give equal value to understanding through the ear and understanding through the eye. It

would assume that communication was both complex and untidy, that the person 'who lives in an oral world, that is where the primary method of communication is by mouth to ear, lives at the centre of a sphere where communication comes into him simultaneously from all sides, banging at him.'

Hudson continues: "Dr. McLuhan's ideas of what a museum can and should do are clearly very different from those current in the museum



Dan Perjovschi, *Old-new museum*, 2015

Courtesy the artist and Galerija Gregor Podnar, Berlin. *Radical Museology*, 2013. Drawings for the publication *Radical Museology* by Claire Bishop, published in 2013. Set of 24 drawings on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm each and 10 drawings on paper, 30,5 x 22,8 cm.

world thirty or forty years ago. They are possible only as a result of new electronic tools and they illustrate how museums need to be continually re-defined, within the context of new technical and new social demands." This redefinition of the museum in relationship to technological and social change continues to provide a basis for museological reflection. According to a 2010 report on the art museum of the future by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, museums today are in crisis because the tradi-

tional model of the museum reflects a culture that no longer exists. As a result, one of the most urgent tasks facing museums today is to make their social value apparent, as well as their relevance and actual contribution to society. Catchphrases like "[f]rom Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody" and the shift from "collection based institutions to visitor-centred museums" that "instead of being "about" something or for "someone" [...] are created and managed "with" visitors" – to quote the popular and influential experience designer and director of Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Nina Simon – reflect the fact that it is not the objects in the museum, but museum visitors and their relationship to the objects that have become central to how museums and museologists answer questions about the relevance of the museum. These museum visitors are increasingly referred to as participants, co-creators, co-owners and citizens, something reflected in book titles like *The Participatory Museum* (Nina Simon 2010), *The Engaging Museum* (Grahma Black, 2005) and *The Interactive Museum*, which show that the 'participating museum' of Marshall McLuhan is once again a popular and heavily debated concept. In what follows, I analyse the use of the concept of participation and its relevance for museology and art museums today. Using the media researcher Nico Carpentier's political and democratic view of participation, I identify two contexts for a museological and cultural political use of the concept: the first a cultural educational context, and the second a media-based context. In a media context, I address the expanded concept of participation used by theorists like Nina Simon. I then move on to a third, market-orientated, context for the concept of participation, using examples drawn from the museum world. Here I also touch on the difficulty of separating these different contexts in concrete museum projects. Finally, I discuss the meaning a narrower concept of democratic and political participation has had for the development and openness of museums, as opposed to working concretely with the potential of a broader concept of participation.

### **An Expanded Political Perspective**

As Carpentier emphasises, the concept of participation is central to democratic theories, discourses and debates on the participation and inclusion

of citizens in decision-making processes. In this context, Carpentier distinguishes between a minimalist understanding of democracy, as exercised during general elections when participation is limited to electing political representatives to act on our behalf, and a maximalist understanding of democracy, associated with a broader concept of politics and a broader political field. Here, participation, the distribution of power, and the possibility of influence play a more central role – both implicitly and explicitly – in a range of political practises and social and cultural spheres that are often located beyond the boundaries of institutionalised politics.

The democratic significance and political character of the concept of participation is relevant for developments in both a broader cultural and more specific museum context. The idea of the participating museum proposed by McLuhan in 1967, came at a time when the concept of participation was popular and widespread in a broad range of social fields. By exposing them as political, democratic movements, activists strove to create broad social change by challenging social structures and practises that had previously been taken for granted. The realm of the political expanded to include social and cultural arenas, which were subsequently subject to demands for democratisation and increased participation. The art museum became part of these developments. Influenced by feminism and the civil rights movement, the anti-institutional art movements of the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s problematized the self-perception and self-representation of the museum, including the myth of the art museum as an autonomous sovereign site for neutral aesthetic experiences. The museum was exposed as being saturated by social, cultural, political and economic relationships that shaped the art museum and its contents. Declaring that "all representation is political" these artists challenged the exclusivity of the museum through their art and practise.

## **Democracy and Cultural Education**

As the cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen argues, this critique and the location of the museum in a broader political and cultural context has not been without effect in the art museum and the field of museology. On the contrary, it has contributed to tearing down the walls of the museum

and to its democratisation. This was expressed in a change in the perception of museums, which went from being seen as shrines or temples, to becoming more open and democratic institutions where the borders between the formerly non-public spaces where knowledge was produced and the public spaces where visitors were granted a share in that knowledge were broken down. By allowing new voices to be heard and stories to be told from new perspectives, the former power relationship between the museum and its audience was open to debate. According to the museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, writing in 2000:

”Museum professionals are not always conscious of the power that they wield, but this power is very real in constructing ‘reality’, in shaping consciousness. It is time for museum professionals to acknowledge and address the power of museums, to accept that museums are necessarily implicated in cultural politics, and that, therefore, professional practises and decisions have political dimensions.”

These ideas led to new models for museum communication. Hooper-Greenhill describes a shift from a model where the museum poured its knowledge into visitors, who were seen as ”empty vessels to be filled”, to a model where visitors play an active role in the construction of knowledge, bringing experiences and knowledge with them that they use to interpret the objects on display. This thinking is currently gaining ground at museums in the form of new communication strategies and concepts of cultural education, as well as in perceptions of outreach work and citizenship. In ARKEN Museum of Modern Art’s report on the museum of the future, visitors and non-visitors are described as co-owners of the museum offered as a platform for participation. Here, the museum is a place for debating issues that the public, society and citizens are interested in. This view is also reflected in cultural-political rhetoric, where the dominant perception of communication is based on a dialogue-based or interactive concept where it is no longer about delivering established truths from the institution of the museum to a marvelling, inquiring or unwilling general public, but more about looking for partners in processes of realisation that increase the understanding

of similarities and differences between people, generations and historical periods in the history of society. Or when the Danish Agency for Culture's publication *Museums: Knowledge, Democracy and Transformation* states that: "Education is citizenship that presupposes participation and the individual citizens' obligation to reflect critically. Education is the prerequisite for us to be able to handle the challenges we face as individuals and as a society."

### **Media Orientation**

The democratic and educational context for the use of participation in museums is also linked to a technological and media context. The idea of more open and democratic museums is often accompanied by high expectations of the potential of new media and digital technology as an open platform that can offer museums more democratic participation, involvement, multiple voices and transparency. Via new media, visitors can play a more active role as 'citizen curators' who can have a voice and contribute in ways that can challenge the authoritarian voice of the



School children at ARKEN. Photo: Sofie Amalie Klougart



museums of the past so the museum becomes "a marketplace of ideas offering space for conversation, a forum for civic engagement and debate, and opportunity for a variety of encounters among audiences and the museum."

On her blog *Museum 2.0* and in the book *The Participatory Museum* (2010), Nina Simon emphasises how the role of new technology continues to be a driving force in relationship to contemporary perceptions of participation. One of the contributory factors to the idea of a participatory museum has been developments in web 2.0, which she argues has transformed participation from something for a small, select group of people, to something available to everyone, everywhere, at all times. The different forms of participation she analyses reveal an expanded field of participation that includes content production, sharing, tagging, rating, commenting, and collecting and organising content and is directly inspired by the possibilities offered by social technologies like YouTube. In an interview, Simon describes how her own work is heavily inspired by the possibilities these media can offer the physical museum: "

"Web 2.0" is a term that was coined in 2004 to describe all the tools online that allow people to create, share, and interact around content. In the mid-2000s, people in the museum field started asking, "What would it look like if a museum worked like a wiki?" "How would things change if museums functioned like YouTube?" I wasn't that interested in how museums engage in the digital world, but I became obsessed with the question of how participatory culture online might influence how we design exhibits and programs in the real world. As a designer, I want to create museum experiences that invite visitors not just to consume content but to comment on it, argue with it, add to it, and discuss it ... which is why it's called Museum 2.0."

### **Access and Interaction**

Even though in her book Simon repeatedly identifies participation as providing an opportunity to produce and contribute to content, as well

as to comment on and debate political and cultural issues, on some fronts her expanded view of participation can be seen as symptomatic of what the media researcher Nico Carpentier calls ‘over-stretching’ the concept. More than any real opportunity to influence power relationships and decision-making processes, participation is an invitation to socialise and interact with others around the content and resources of the museum: an opportunity to be creatively expressive, learn something new, and relate to the contents of the museum. To emphasise these aspects of the concept of participation, Carpentier therefore distinguishes between participation and concepts like access and interaction. He does not consider access and interaction unimportant – they are, after all, preconditions for participation – but he sees them as being too frequently conflated with the concept of participation.

‘Access’ covers access to technology, content, people and organisations – to the museum, its collections, and its knowledge. Access was a key part of the 2006 Danish Museum Act, which included directives for museums to make their collections and documentation accessible and available to the public. Access was also seen as a key element of museum communication by early public museums, which were characterised by a transmission of knowledge and information from the museum to the public.

In the introduction to the Danish anthology *Det interaktive museum* (2011), which focuses on the potential of new media to change interaction with the museum audience, the editors write that it is difficult to imagine a museum that is not interactive, i.e. a museum that has no exchange with others than itself. But according to Hooper-Greenhill, even if visitors play an active role in interpreting the exhibits and the information the museum provides, the communication of many museums with their audience has primarily been one way. The audience has been seen as a generalised mass, the opportunities they have had for feedback have been limited, and their prior knowledge or experience has only rarely been taken into account.

In this context, new technologies, a changed cultural-political context, and a series of political initiatives have led to major changes in how museums communicate with their audience. As well as passing on information, there is now a major emphasis on (social) interaction with

other people, exhibits or with technology in the construction of meaning. The concept of the ‘object’ has taken a back seat to a focus on visitors, their experiences, and their knowledge processes. “The museum becomes a catalyst for users to engage, generate content, share it with others and comment on their contribution” just as “familiar forms of museum information have an added dialogic layer,” the editors of *Det interaktive museum* write. This development is also reflected in the most recent Danish Museum Act of 2012, which stipulates that museums, in addition to the interconnected tasks of collection, registration, preservation, research, exhibitions and communication, not only have to be accessible and make their material available, but also have to make their collections and resources relevant in a contemporary context, and develop the use of culture and natural heritage for use in the future.

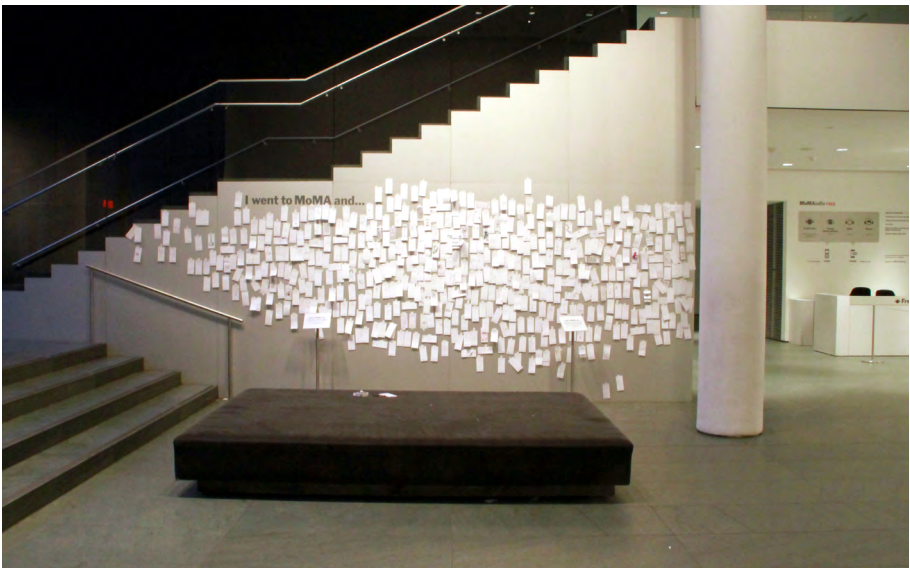
### **Market Orientation**

As Carpentier writes, interaction and participation often get conflated. In the context of actual museum programmes and initiatives, this might seem like a dispute about mere words, but the distinctions between access, interaction and participation and the democratic aspects of participation seem important to preserve if we look to a third context for the concept in today’s museum. The concept of participation is often used in the context of creating more open, democratic institutions, but it is also key to increasing commercialisation, market orientation and the focus of the 2000s on the experience and culture economy, something that often surfaces in discussions of the social value of museums. In a Danish context, the concept of the experience economy, which is based on the increasing demand for experiences by consumers, was granted a high degree of cultural-political power in the 2003 strategy paper *Danmark i kultur- og oplevelsesøkonomien* [‘Denmark in the Cultural and Experience Economy’], which argued for increased collaboration between cultural institutions and business. The Danish Ministry of Culture’s 2008 *Reach Out* catalogue also sees audience participation and inclusion in relationship to the experience economy’s appeal to the needs of “users – dare I say customers?” as then Minister of Culture Brian Mikkelsen rhetorically asked. An audience that is seen as willing to pay for the experiences institutions have to offer.

Participation is key to the experience economy. According to the founders of the concept B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, the experience economy is not only about adding entertainment to existing activities, but about engaging the audience through new kinds of experiences that are entertaining, as well as educational, aesthetic and escapist. This kind of experience engages visitors as either active or passive participants (a role determined by whether visitors have a direct influence on the activity), and describes the relationship of visitors to their surroundings in terms of ‘absorption’ and ‘immersion’. There are thus parallels between Pine and Gilmore’s proposals for creating good experiences and Nina Simon’s expanded concept of participation, which is perhaps not surprising given that Simon often draws on commercial examples in her writings.

### **Participatory Intersections**

From a cultural perspective, it can therefore be difficult to identify the boundary between democratic and market-orientated contexts for participation, since the two often co-exist and intersect. In 2011, for example, MoMA initiated a project that was an instant hit. Visitors were given a



I went to MoMA and... Project, 2011 designed by the The Department of Advertising and Graphic Design, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 2017 Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Brigitta Bungard. Scala/Florence

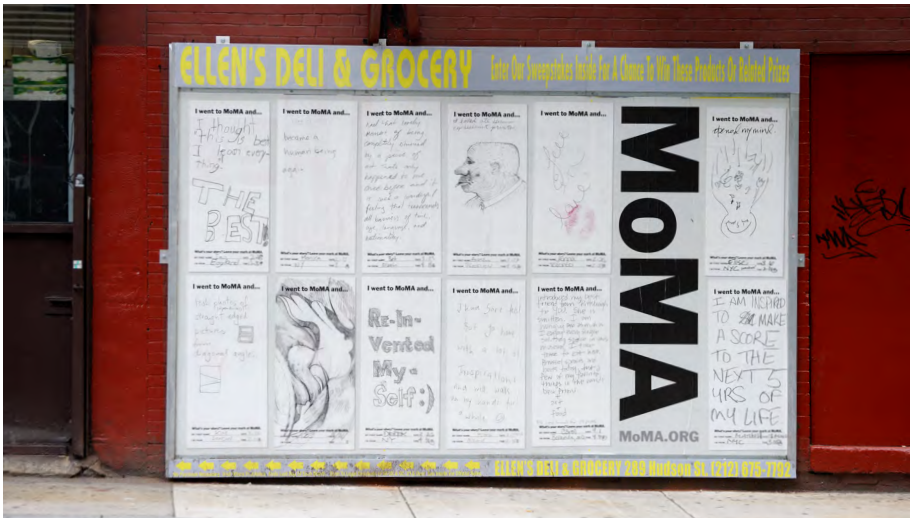


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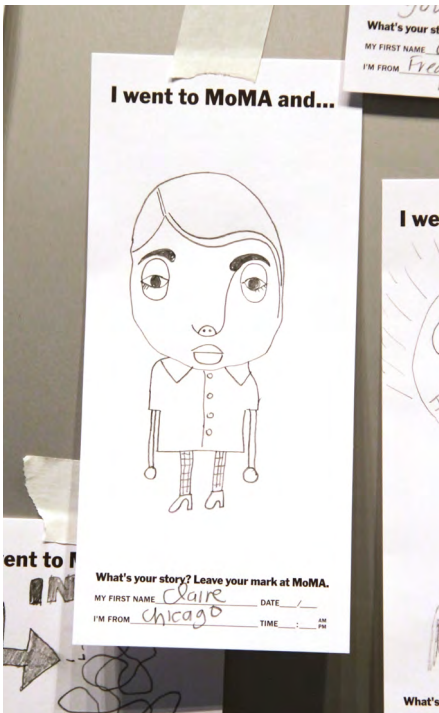


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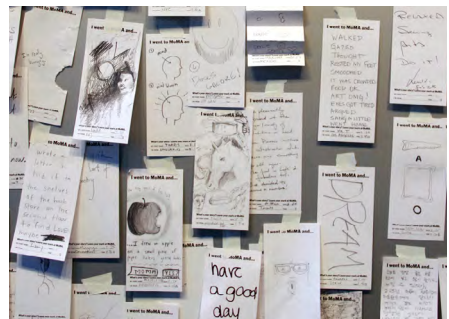


Photo by Brigitta Bungard. Scala, Florence

I went to MoMA and... Project, 2011 designed by the The Department of Advertising and Graphic Design, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 2017 Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

card with the words "I went to MoMA and..." where they could draw or write their own impressions, experiences and opinions. These could then be shared by being hung on the wall in the museum lobby. The project was later digitalised: the cards were scanned and projected onto the wall and via an URL code people could find their own words or drawing on a website, tag it, see the contributions of others, search using keywords, and share their contribution on Facebook and Twitter. The staff have since blogged about the contents on MoMA's blog *Inside/Out*, under headlines like "I went to MoMA and...: The Kids Are All Right", "I went to MoMA and...: Love is in the Air", "I went to MoMA and...: Deep Thoughts, Deep Talks", "I went to MoMA and...: It Looks Like This Mr Picasso!"

Another example is the National Gallery of Denmark, which in 2013 took out an ad in several newspapers where as part of the rebranding of the museum they asked people in Denmark to join a wordplay on the museum's initials SMK ("Statens Museum for Kunst"). "What's SMK to you?" they asked, providing a number of self-ironic answers posing as questions and inviting people to come up with their own alternative answers as to what the museum was and stood for on Facebook.

Both of the examples above look like open, inclusive activities that allow public opinions about the two museums to be shared and seen by others, as well as for the individual visitor to have a say. But since the contributions of the public subsequently appeared as campaigns in magazines or on posters, banners and busses in the city, we need to ask whether the projects should not primarily be seen as creative marketing?

Here we can turn to the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe, who has criticised postmodern museums for abandoning their educational role to become sites of entertainment where participants and users are consumers, and where success is measured in visitor numbers. As she writes: "The type of 'participation' they promote is based on consumerism, and they actively contribute to the commercialization and depoliticization of the cultural field." Precisely because museums occupy a strategic place at a time when the art world has been virtually colonised by the market, and when 'the creative industries' have reduced cultural institutions to 'entertainment centres', museums – according to Mouffe – are one of the few

places still open to ‘counterhegemonic politics’ and can therefore be used to reformulate the social. Mouffe argues that: ”By staging a confrontation between conflicting positions, museums and art institutions could make a decisive contribution to the proliferation of new public spaces open to antagonistic forms of participation where radical alternatives to neoliberalism could, once again, be imagined and cultivated.”

### **Popularity and Problematisation**

In a theme issue entitled ‘The Museum Revisited’, *Art Forum* writes:

“Nearly from its beginnings, the public museum has been recognized as a reflection of the social order – with modes of display (and the objects housed therein) steeped in both the ethos and economy of the day. What, then, should we make of the museum now, when the audience for art is, inarguably, larger than ever, and the distinctions between art and other creative industries increasingly subtle?”

The museum has always mirrored technological, social, economic and cultural change, and therefore, as the media researcher Michelle Henning argues, has to be seen in the context of a much larger ‘exhibitionary complex’, i.e. other institutions whose techniques and technologies influence museum practises and also shape their audiences, their expectations and their modes of attention. But the question of the quote also indicates the pressures museums are under today, pressures that come from ideas generated throughout history alongside expectations that museums justify their existence and demonstrate their contribution and value to society. Participation has become one of many tools to meet these demands and expectations. The use of the concept often has greater consequences when it appears as a demand or expectation from political or other supporting bodies that museums demonstrate their legitimacy through participation and the involvement of the public. The Danish foundation Nordea-fonden, for example, supports “activities that communicate and inspire public participation in the world of art and culture.” Participation has, as the editors of the journal on cultural participation *Conjunctions* write, become ”a highly valued “currency”, something that

also impacts on the way the concept is used in practise. Participation has therefore also been criticised as justifying what can be seen as the economic and social instrumentalisation of art and the museum. Here participation is about providing solutions to economic or social issues, and is used by politicians as a form of financial or social policy to justify the use of public funds on art. In their report, ARKEN warns that “The role of the art museum cannot be to operate as an economic or social lever in society, since this would result in the long-term legitimacy of the museum being subsumed by short-term solutions.”

Which is precisely why it is important to investigate, probe, clarify and specify the concept of participation, as well as its possible meanings and its uses – also within the museum, where we have to be clear about why we should participate and what it is we are invited to participate in. Not to define the concept once and for all and thereby shut down the meaning it has or could have, but to continue to be aware of the contexts and frameworks we use the concept in. When is it about education? When is it about marketing? Not to find any unequivocal answer, but to be clear about the possibilities and potential, but also the more problematic aspects of the widespread use of the concept of participation in the broader field of culture, including the museum, art, and not least in relationship to museum visitors.

### **Participation as an Option**

In this article I have identified the ways in which the concept of participation is expressed in the educational, media and market orientation of art museums today. As shown by the campaigns run by MoMA and the National Gallery of Denmark discussed above, these often overlap in concrete projects, revealing the complexity of participation in a museum context, where it can operate across numerous platforms, producing a plethora of meanings that are not always possible to distinguish from each other. Due to the diffuse boundaries of the concept, and to counterbalance the propensity for market orientation where participation serves other purposes, it remains important to acknowledge the historical and conceptual connections between democracy and participation. Not necessarily something that can be realised in a museum context. As Carpentier



points out, equal access to decision-making processes has proven difficult to put into practise. Plus, it is not necessarily desirable or compatible with the museum's other duties and obligations to entirely demolish the distinctions between museum professionals and visitors. As Carpentier writes, the concept of participation should not necessarily be used to remove those distinctions, but rather to open up for more expansion in and variation of professional roles so a more diverse range of people have access to the production or interpretation of museum narratives, exhibitions and exhibits. In this sense, the democratic significance of the concept of participation has played and continues to play a key role in opening the museum to the public.

The question, however, is whether this narrow, democratic perception of participation is not of most relevance in the context of academic analysis? And whether, in actually working with a democratic and political concept of participation in the museum, it is more important to focus on the potential of expanding the concept to include 'low-effort' forms of participation that are easier to work with because they do not demand a restructuring of the entire institution, but only affect parts of the museum? These forms could co-exist with more traditional forms of museum communication, as 'both and' rather than 'either or', and therefore be more compatible with the needs of many visitors who express no desire to participate, seeing the museum as a respite from everyday life instead. 'Low-effort' forms of participation can be more meaningful for visitors who are not necessarily looking for a chance to influence decision-making processes and power structures, but have more personal reasons for participating. These can include doing something meaningful with their friends and families, learning something new, having a good experience, or having the opportunity to express themselves creatively with inspiration from the museum's exhibitions. These activities can provide an experience of being actively engaged with the museum and make it a more social and lively place, as well as having relevant long-term effects. From a museum perspective, small steps can be of great value, providing the institution with feedback and having an influence on more far-reaching decisions and considerations, which when taken as a whole can change museums and the way they operate.

Simon writes partly against the background of a disappointing American survey showing falling visitor numbers and homogenous audiences. In ARKEN's report on the art museums of the future Phil Knowlen, director of the Getty Leadership Institute, writes that museums today are clearly in crisis, because they reflect a culture that no longer exists. Many museums, he claims, are starting to become "federations of self interest" that appeal to a narrow audience of peers and thereby risk becoming superfluous. Even though visitor numbers have risen in Denmark in recent years, Danish surveys show that art museums attract a narrow segment of visitors with an overrepresentation of women, senior citizens and people with higher education compared to the general population. In this context, the idea that different forms of participation can make museums more relevant, multivocal, dynamic and responsive community spaces that are not only 'nice to have' but 'must-haves' addresses more general issues about the social value, relevance and justification for the existence of museums. Here participation offers if not the only answer, then at least a realm of possibility we should continue to explore.

## **Maj Klindt**

Holds an MA in Modern Culture and is currently completing her PhD on the social and cultural-political role of museums of modern art. She has been a researcher on ARKEN's research project *Deltagerisme – Dogme og mulighedsfelt* ['Participationism as Dogma and Realm of Possibility'], and a member of the cultural political staff of the Danish Association of Art Centres as well as the educational staff of Copenhagen Contemporary Art Centre. She completed her Masters thesis 'Museets rammer – fortid, samtid og fremtid' ['Framing the Museum – Past, Present and Future'] in 2008.

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- 1 Kenneth Hudson 'Attempts to define Museums', in *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, eds. David Bosswell and Jessica Evans, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 377.
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- 3 Hudson, p. 378.
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- 6 John Andreasen and Ane Hejlskov Larsen, *Blockbusterudstillinger, om blockbuster-genren og dens værdigrundlag – diskussion af danske eksempler*, in *Ny dansk museologi*, eds. Bruno Ingemann and Ane Hejlskov Larsen, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005, pp. 279-309. They refer in this context to Gail Anderson, who presents a series of oppositions between the traditional museum and the 'reinvented' museum. See Gail Anderson, 'A Framework: Reinventing the Museum', in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson, Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2012, pp. 1-9.
- 7 As Nina Simon writes, based on a popular citation from Stephen E. Weil "instead of being "about" something or for "someone", participatory institutions are created and managed "with" visitors". Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010, p. iii.
- 8 The Danish title of the book is *Det Interaktive Museum* by Kirsten Drotner, Christina Papsø Weber, Berit Anne Larsen and Anne Sophie Warberg Løssing, København: Samfundslitteratur, 2011.
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- 16** Hooper-Greenhill, pp. 16-25.
- 17** Sasja Brovall Villumsen, Dorthe Juul Ruggard and Lise Sattrup (eds.), *Rum for medborgerskab*, København: National Gallery of Denmark, 2014.
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- 21** See, for example, Merete Sanderhoff, 'Om åbenhed og deling på Statens Museum for Kunst', in *Sharing is Caring: åbenhed og deling i kulturarvssektoren*, ed. Merete Sanderhoff, København: National Gallery of Denmark, 2014, and the Danish Agency for Culture, *Digital formidling i et bruger perspektiv*, København, 2009.
- 22** Nancy Proctor, 'Digital: Museum as Platform, Curator as Champion, in the Age of Social Media', *Curator* 53/1, January 2010: p. 36.
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- 24** Geoffrey Dunn, 'Museum 2.0', *Santa Cruz Good Times*, August 24th 2011.
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- 27** Kirsten Drotner, Berit Anne Larsen, Anne Sophie Warberg Løssing and Christina Papsøe Weber, 'Introduktion, Interaktive museer: Hvordan og Hvorfor?', in Drotner, Larsen, Løssing and Weber (eds.), *Det interaktive museum*, pp. 11-13.
- 28** Hooper-Greenhill, pp. 15-18.

**29** In Denmark these initiatives include the cultural-political strategies set out in state and ministerial publications like *Danmark i Kultur- og oplevelsesøkonomien – 5 nye skridt på vejen, Vækst med vilje* (2003), *Kultur for alle – Kultur i hele landet* (2009) and *Strategi for småbørns, skolebørns og unges møde med kultur* (2014).

**30** Carpentier, pp. 27-29.

**31** Drotner, Larsen, Løssing and Weber, pp. 11-13.

**32** Marstine, p. 11. See also ARKEN *Fremtidens kunstmuseum*, pp. 5-35.

**33** The Danish Ministry of Culture, *Reach Out! Inspiration til brugerinddragelse og innovation i kulturens verden*, København: 2008, pp. 6-7.

**34** B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy, Work is Theatre and Every Business is a Stage*, Harvard Business School Press, 1999, pp. 29-32.

**35** [http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/category/i-went-to-moma](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/category/i-went-to-moma) (last accessed 26.04.2016).

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**37** Chantal Mouffe, 'The Museum Revisited', *Art Forum*, summer 2010: p. 327. In relationship to the social, political and cultural changes of the 20th century Hooper-Greenhill sees changes in the museum as a shift from 'the modernist museum' to 'the postmodern museum'. Hooper-Greenhill links the concept to democratic processes, whereas Mouffe sees the postmodern museum in the light of the increased market orientation and commercialisation of museums.

**38** Mouffe, p. 384.

**39** *Art Forum*, Summer 2010, p. 274.

**40** Michelle Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006, p. 3. The term 'the exhibitionary complex' comes from Tony Bennett, for example in his book *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995. In the book, Bennett describes the relationship between and exchange between a range of institutions like museums, department stores, modern fairs, international exhibitions and amusement parks in the 1800s and 1900s. This kind of institution symbolised urbane modernity, and with their ostensible openness and public character were seen as places where behavioural norms could spread to the rest of society. Media plays no role in these early descriptions, but it makes sense to include it in the contemporary 'exhibitionary complex', because it is via mass media that the values and norms of today spread.

**41** <http://nordeafonden.dk/det-stoetter-vi/kultur> (last accessed 31.03.2016).

**42** Camilla Møhring Resstorff, Louise Fabian, Jonas Fritsch, Carsten Stage and Jan Løhmann Stephensen (eds.), Introduction to *Conjunctions, Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014: pp. 3-23.

**43** Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2012, p. 5-18 and pp. 187-191.

**44** ARKEN, *Fremtidens kunstmuseum*, p. 16.

**45** See the Danish Agency for Culture, *Museums: Citizens and Sustainable Solutions*, København: 2015, pp. 15-16. The publication presents the results of a national survey from 2014, where 23% of museum users say they use the museum to recharge their batteries and find the peace and time for contemplation.

**46** Simon, pp. i-v.

**47** ARKEN, *Fremtidens kunstmuseum*, p. 36.

**48** See, for example the Association of Danish Museum's newsletter *ODM nyt*, 20.04.2015.

**49** Jakob Thorek Jensen and Ida Brændholt Lundgaard, 'Museums' Users and Users' Museums', in The Danish Agency for Culture *Museums, Citizens and Sustainable Solutions*, København: 2015, pp. 18-58.

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):

The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# CO-CREATION

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# Situating Participatory Art Between Process and Practice

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By Michael Birchall

Based on the project *Art Gym* at Tate Liverpool in 2016 the article outlines how the art museum as an institution has become a site for production and 'participatory models'. Doing so it exposes the artistic and political background for socially engaged art and 'the educational turn', and the ways in which these practices manifest themselves within and beyond the museum.

As artists have moved towards models of post-studio practice, in which the art object is no longer privileged above other forms, the gallery itself becomes a site for production, interaction and debate. This turn, of sorts has seen the museum and the curators who programme exhibitions turn their attention to "user experience". As such, the contemporary museum is quickly moving into a site of production and gravitating towards participatory models. The conventional exhibition – the survey exhibition, or solo presentation – may still be favoured by museums, however it is being challenged by participatory, project-led activities that not only challenge viewers' expectations but also the museum as a site of learning and co-production. The demands of the viewer in these spaces constitutes a new level of engagement for museums, as, often the emphasis is placed on *process* rather

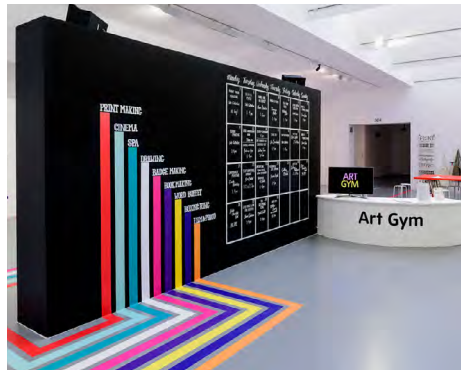


than outcomes, the viewer may become an active collaborator, spectator or enactor; as the limits for practices such as that of Tino Seghal, Francis Alys and Santiago Sierra, may traverse the boundaries of the participant led process, their engagement is still dependent on the museum as the site of execution. Therefore, how might socially engaged, durational and situated practices manifest in and outside the museum, and what are the legacies associated with this? This essay will consider the contemporary museum as a site of active collaboration, as the project-based model has overtaken forms of artistic practice with an emphasis on knowledge production. At this precise moment the contemporary art world is undergoing significant shifts to widen participation in the gallery, and extend the commissioning process to include participatory projects. Thus, the position of the museum has shifted the emphasis towards project-based work. The standard exhibition format, in which a range of works are selected based on their thematic, scholarly, or aesthetic reasons, has been dropped by many contemporary art institutions in favour of the project – which allows for a variety of activities under one umbrella, such as symposia, talks, screenings, and artworks. It provides the curator, and the institution with an open format, which can easily be adapted. In the context of *Art Gym*, a participatory project led by Assemble with Tate Collective in 2016 at Tate Liverpool, this model will be discussed along with relevant examples that are illustrative of this transformative practice.

## **Art Gym**

Tate Liverpool has actively been generating new projects with community groups and collectives, through the community, family and young person's collectives. In 2016, Tate Collective together with Assemble formed an alliance in a project that 'held the gallery hostage' and produced a series of participatory projects. Tate Collective is a collective comprised of 16-25 year olds based at Tate Liverpool since the 1990s. Work with young people was pioneered here and later exported to other Tate sites, namely Tate Modern and Tate Britain. The group has previously programmed special events at Tate Liverpool, including activities during the school holidays. Assemble used their expertise as community organisers to negotiate a set of terms with directors at Tate Liverpool. These

“ransom notes” formed the basis of the project and led to the execution of a series of projects held at Tate Liverpool from 7 March – 31 March 2016. The gallery was transformed into a series of stations resembling a fitness studio, and as such the project was aptly named *Art Gym*. Visitors to the gallery could therefore enroll on a series of courses and activities centered on art making, with titles such as: ‘Build a Pinhole Camera’, ‘Small Cinema for Young Children’, ‘The Wellmaking Clinic’ and ‘Let’s Make a Zine for Art Gym: Editorial Workshop’. In addition, a comprehensive range of guest-led events, lectures, talks and workshops took place throughout the duration of the exhibition; offering the chance to artists to present their work and practices. The gym format allowed for a range of activities to take place at Tate Liverpool, as it used a familiar format of a gymnasium, where physical activity takes place. One could say this project followed a conventional model of participant



*Art Gym*, Tate Liverpool, 2016 © Tate Liverpool. Photo: Roger Sinek

led activity in the gallery that has a history in art education, whereby activities are created in response to visitor interaction. For example, activities centered around stations that take place in museums, such as building a puzzle from a series of paintings, or completing a sculpture challenge. However, in this context, the collaboration between Assemble and Tate Collective created a new set of conditions, and enabled Tate Collective to enter into a curatorial process – planning, executing, delivering and developing the concept – which transfers the conventional power structure of the institution; whereby the programme is usually devised by curators and the vision of the artistic director. Through *Art Gym*, the museum became a site of co-production, learning and participation in which an emphasis was placed on *process* rather than actual outcomes, in the form of formalised complete artworks. Visitors to the gallery engaged in a series of activities, such as badge making or shooting films, in order to become part of the exhibition. The space created by Tate Collective allowed for this experience to manifest. It is worth noting the exhibition attracted a range of audiences from all age groups during the period it was open.

It is important to note that the global political economy of the art world is driven by the post-studio, ‘responsive’ artist, and the roving global curator. Both areas of practice are based on the project-model, shaped in turn by the successful connections. Although the project may be an all-encompassing model, used to link together a range of practices, it becomes applicable to curatorial labour, and a strategy for creative individuals under the uncertain conditions of neoliberalism. Thus, further participants can be included in the ‘project’, working across multiple sites and locations and delivering a variety of projects that may suit multiple audiences and groups.

Therefore, the boundaries associated with exhibitions and public programmes become increasingly blurred, as museums move more into a project-based model of programming. Both artists and curators favour the project model as it provides a context from which they are able to situate their practices, irrespective of spectatorship or participation; both of these distinct models no longer matter in the *project* model. In *Art Gym* Tate Collective members became the enactors and the programmers

of the project. Consequently, it becomes evident that as museums move towards participatory models to engage with new audiences, at the same time they enter a new relationship with their audiences as co-producers of the projects they are willing to present. In *Art Gym*, the expertise of the learning and exhibition curators was used to facilitate the project, yet the programming of activities remained in the domain of the collective. In effect, this was a transfer of skills and empowerment on behalf of the institution; providing an opportunity for collective members to learn about curatorial processes. The collectives' involvement with the project allowed for a range of practices to be included in *Art Gym* that perhaps would not have otherwise been shown. As the collective has links with other young peoples groups, this also provided an opportunity to offer shared sessions with other partners in the UK.

### **Socially Engaged Art in Context**

In order to consider the rise of socially engaged and participatory art in the last twenty years, it becomes apparent to look at the history of community art. The role of community arts in the UK and North America have allowed artists to engage with a variety of community groups with the support from institutions. The arguments outlined in this essay are positioned in this context, and build upon a connection from a range of institutional contexts. A range of community arts projects took place from the 1980s onwards with the support of local and national government initiatives and, in the 1990s, as a means of creating social harmony in problematic areas. The history of community arts is crucial to understanding the development of socially engaged art today. However, it is often excluded from a socially engaged art trajectory, as it appears to be unfashionable and disconnected from the art world's hype. Community arts projects in the UK and North America allowed a group of artists to work directly with people and later incorporate this into a language with which the art world is familiar. Suzanne Lacy coined the term *New Genre Public Art* in 1995. This term relates to the public art projects in which Lacy was involved. This allowed her, and others, to discuss the role of public art in the United States, which until then had largely been about public sculpture.

Crucially, notions of direct democracy through art, the initiatives of new genre public art, and outreach projects of the early 1990s were all important resources in the development of contemporary socially engaged art. These practices acted as a precursor to the interventionist claims of socially engaged art, and provided artists and curators with new strategies for engagement. Indeed, Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* is also indebted to this legacy. But, of particular importance from this period, however, is how community arts, activism, and public art undergo a fundamental re-orientation that is mostly lost or rejected in relational aesthetics with its gallery-based ethos. Bourriaud's curatorial theory relates to activity happening inside the white cube, as in the work of Rirkrit Tirvanija. There remains no discussion in his writing about projects occurring outside of this context, that may enact a relational work. Rather, what emerged in the 1990s under the 'New Genre Public Art' and the new community practices is part of a new language of social engagement. During this period (1990-2000) a number of projects emerged that focus on *sustainable* community art projects, operating over an extended period of time. The exhibitions *Culture in Action* in Chicago, and *Sonsbeek 93* in the Netherlands, are exemplary of this shift (as is Suzanne Lacy's project *Full Circle* from 1993 with its hundred commemorative boulders). *Culture in Action* and *Sonsbeek 93* were two of the first major exhibitions to a focus on community art and the social as an ambitious and experimental space of activity. They placed an emphasis on place and locale; resulting in a range of projects, that addressed social and political concerns at the time. Most of the works in these exhibitions were produced by artists in collaboration with local groups, and in close communication with curators, opening up artists, curators, and collaborators to the demands of project-based work. For example, Mark Dion created an intervention in Bronbeek, a museum attached to the Royal home for retired veterans, whose collection comprised objects (such as taxidermy) that Dutch soldiers and sailors had brought from overseas' missions. Dion worked with the retired veterans. Miwon Kwon has argued how the primary target of this community-specific work during this period is the assumption that public art is the presentation or display of objects in public spaces ('heavy metal' public art). Indeed,

the issue of the public in this work links site-specificity and art to the production of 'social' rather than the production and consumption of objects within a formal or phenomenological framework. Projects are produced that focus on the process and engagement with an audience in favour of actual objects. In these projects the presentation of art in a given space of itself is overtaken by an emphasis on the project as a medium of artistic investigation. The material of the artist is the process (as it intersects with the social relations of collaboration). Thus, the artist becomes the intellectual and empowered subject who is able to enter into dialogue or exchange with a specific community, either via their own initiative or through an institutional affiliation.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of artists and art collectives developed approaches to community-based work along these lines: Mark Dion, Gran Fury, Simon Grennan and Christopher Sperandio, Group Material, Ha ha, Jenny Holzer, Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, Daniel Martinez, Amalia Mesa-Bains, REPO-history, Tim Rollins and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

This work shares the same cultural and intellectual framework of collaboration as *Culture in Action* and *Sonsbeek 93*. But by the beginning of the 2000s the specific social demands of collaboration in *Culture in Action* and *Sonsbeek 93* become more explicitly about artists' engagement in specific contexts and how they might share their skills with a community in order to transform a particular state of affairs or context. Consequently new community art thinking has had a transformative impact on both what remains of community art and how socially engaged art is produced within communities. The distinction between community art and socially engaged art, therefore, may institutionally still exist (community art exists outside museums, in community centres, schools and social centres; socially engaged art may take place in the same locations, but it is often verified by an art institution such as a museum or gallery, who has directly commissioned the work), but, intellectually and culturally, community art and socially engaged practice are mutually defining.

However, there are models that traverse these boundaries, in that they may have an institutional valorisation or a commissioning role, and still remain an autonomous project, this is exemplified in Jeanne van Heeswijk's *2Up-2Down/Homebaked* (2012-) project in Liverpool, commissioned by the

Liverpool Biennial. This project features many of the characteristics of Grant Kester's 'dialogical aesthetics', in so far as the artist was invited by the biennial to create the project in a rundown area of the city, away from the regenerated centre. The major premise of Grant Kester's 'dialogical aesthetics' is that twentieth century avant-garde practices are mistrustful of the communicational model of dialogue and therefore resort to various anti-discursive means to radicalise art production, notably shock and abstraction. As Marc James Léger notes, Kester's model tacitly assumes that modern aesthetics can do more to contribute to progressive social change if class struggle (and a politics of negation) is replaced with social interaction. Kester's dialogical aesthetics offers, then, a counter argument to *Relational Aesthetics*, on precise social democratic terms, bringing an American pragmatism to a new community art ethos. Dialogical artists are interested, first and foremost, in what a given community, in a given locale, might share and exchange. They favour these engagements over gallery-led activity, and expand the notion of what an engagement might be.

In Liverpool, this regeneration project is able to fulfil a purpose by strengthening a community's sense of itself by promoting 'feel-good' social values. Initiatives such as this are often aimed at marginalised groups in poor areas and aim to empower the community overall, or at least ameliorate some of its difficulties. Suzanne Lacy defines "interactive, community based projects" of this kind as particular kinds of transformative-centred social practice. Her use of the term 'New Genre Public Art' reveals an interest in artworks that have a practical value and that make an immediate political impact. The art's response to local contexts is focused on the creation of a collaborative process that develops the consciousness of the artist and co-participants.

### **The legacy of Community Art**

It is important to note that in the 1980s, however, community arts became the victim of government-led funding which resulted in projects being led by funding as opposed to being artistically led, through the notion of 'welfare arts'. In the UK, art institutions such as the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, the Arnolfini in Bristol, the Serpentine Gallery, and

Tate Liverpool became Arts Council, “centres of excellence.” These galleries, contributed to by publically funded organizations, focused on developing a modern and contemporary programme of art. Gallery education became linked to individual artists’ positions. Some public galleries at the time, however, retained their link with the community art legacy. The Whitechapel Art Gallery in London’s East End became a centre for community education opportunities as well as placements for artists. These placement projects were linked to a remaining legacy of community arts in the borough of Tower Hamlets, including ‘THAP’, ‘The Art of Change (Formerly the London Docklands Poster Collective)’ and ‘Camerawork’. This kind of approach ends, however, under New Labour, where ‘gallery education’ and ‘outreach’ take over from community art projects. However, many practices have been adopted, and owe a great deal to the community art movement. The Showroom Gallery in London has been running a long-term programme (2015-2017) looking at communal knowledge. The visual artist, Ed Webb-Ingall has been leading community groups in workshops to create community videos, as part of the series, ‘People Make Videos: UK Community Video from the 1970s to now’; this project appropriates community video techniques from the 1970s.

This change is evident in museums outside of London, such as Walsall Museum and Art Gallery, and the Middlesbrough Institute for Modern Art (MIMA), where audience interests are integrated into the programme rather than seeking audience involvement beyond the gallery. The role of the participant-observer emerges as galleries seek to widen their participation in the gallery itself. Public art commissions, solo exhibitions, and new models for collaboration see curators and educators emerge as the new producers of gallery ‘outreach’. A new paradigm of curating has thus brought about a range of engagement in art. As the socially engaged curator has emerged in this field, his or her investment in art as a socially transformative tool has become omnipresent. At the same time, these practices place an emphasis on the welfare state and social democracy as it once was, and as such become active decision makers in the future of projects that engage in social discourses across community rebuilding, activist networks, and regeneration.



In parallel with this shift, the participatory values of ‘New Genre Public Art’ began to find a place within this new gallery-centred community remit in the UK, Europe and North America. Curators and institutional directors sought to engage art in ‘real’ non-art places, and facilitate the participation of artists and curators in ‘unique’ or ‘authentic’ locales, thus increasing the chance for real community engagement. The people involved in this process can, according to Miwon Kwon, “install new forms of urban primitivism over socially neglected minority groups.” In these terms, the question of community (its involvement, transformation) becomes crucial to art’s move from art context to non-art context. The Serpentine Gallery’s *Edgware Road Project* (2005-2010) remains a key example of this shift. The project manifested as a range of projects on the Edgware Road in London, working directly with community schools and community groups, the work involved the majority of the members of this community: a busy, multi-ethnic London Street. By taking place in a circumscribed geographical context, the artists were able to intervene directly within the fabric of the community, and as a consequence its community problems and alienation.



*The Edgware Road Project*, 2012. Photo: Peter Erni

The *Edgware Road Project* emerged out of a desire from the public programmes curator, Sally Tallant, to create a long-term project that extended over a period of five years. With the support of a team of curators and artists who had the expertise and desire to work with community schools and community groups, the work involved the majority of the members of this community: a busy, multi-ethnic London Street. By taking place in a circumscribed geographical context, the artists were able to intervene directly within the fabric of the community. This complex interaction, therefore, avoided some of the concerns of older community practice and ‘New Genre Public Art’ idea of representing/working with ‘neglected’ or ‘minority’ communities. The community, in its totality, was constructed as a heterogeneous unity, in which all who engaged in the project, contributed. Similarly, Superflex’s *Tenantspin*, commissioned by FACT in Liverpool, allowed local residents living in a high-rise development to film, program, and edit their own local TV show, without recourse to ‘well meaning’ guidance. Superflex provided the groups with the resources to engage with TV, and used the institutional affiliation – FACT, one of the UK’s largest media arts centres – to facilitate this process.



SUPERFLEX, *Tenantspin*, Liverpool 2002. Photo: SUPERFLEX

Facilitating community involvement, in these terms, is of course no given thing. It is dependent on the willingness of the participants and their desire to learn and acquire new skills. The role of the curator, then, in this ‘new community’ socially engaged art, is about first and foremost constructing and enabling a free space of engagement for participants. That is, in mediating between the artist and the community group, the curator seeks to secure the condition for participant autonomy. Kwon puts forth the view that in many social engaged practices the opposite applies: participation is predicated on the assumption that communities are coherent and unified. The problem is not that artists and curators construct an ideal image of the community, but that a socially engaged project often carries with it an inflated social imperative that is promoted by funding bodies, curators, and city administrators.

Both *Tennantspin* and *The Edgware Road Project* took place outside the walls of the museum, although some of the activity may have taken place inside the gallery, the process and collaboration existed within the community groups. In opposition to this model of engagement in the community is the concept of co-producing projects with communities, whether this is at the museum or in a specific locale. Museums such as Tate Liverpool may seek to expand the idea of learning in the museum by “learning through audiences” and as such this presents a range of new challenges. As the educational turn in curating has been debated in the ways in which the curator appropriates educational models in his or her practice, the new model of co-productions present a wider set of challenges and debates. Rather, the institution itself needs to undergo changes to facilitate these projects, hierarchies and boundaries have to be corroded and essentially more of us (curators) have to take bigger risks.

### **Producing Knowledge**

Curators have responded to the challenges associated with art making by producing projects that rely on educational models, and ultimately they seek to educate audiences. These would include: alternative art schools, reading groups, lecture series, and mobile teach-ins. As Kristina Lee Podesva notes, “Educational formats, methods, programs, models, terms, processes and procedures have become pervasive in the praxes

of both curating and the production of art and in their attendant critical frameworks.”

Within the art world, the knowledge producers – mostly curators and artists – are able to engage in projects that encompass educational methods, or even through the most simple of means, such as an artist’s talk. As John Roberts has observed, this pattern is highly prevalent in the biennial structure: The world of the biennale – and its links to various public galleries around the globe that see themselves as commissioning ‘research centres’, rather than simply exhibition spaces – has become one of the few large public arenas still able to function as a space of open dialogue, in which artists and intellectuals and the public can participate. The rise of the philosopher-speaker and political activist at such events since the 1990s is a case in point.

Roberts views this as one of the few places where dialogue can take place, and indeed he is right. The demand for discussion-based events in the contemporary art world is indeed very high. Curators and artists alike are able to engage in the system of knowledge production whether or not it is dependent on a specific exhibition. Increasingly there is a demand for discussion-based events; audiences are increasingly willing to take part in events that provide a framework around a set of ideas or a topic. Attending a talk at a museum or gallery does not require as much commitment as enrolling in an accredited course does, yet it can provide as much stimulation for the attendee.

Increasingly within the education sector, museums are offering education programmes on a short and long-term basis. The museum itself has become a centre for education, and while the shift in emphasis has seen an increase in those who take up places in more educational environments, the demand for education in art institutions has coincided with this. The educational turn – has emerged at the same moment in the political economy, where the demand for ‘creativity’ seeks an outlet in further education, and this is not only limited to artists themselves.

In addition, the educational turn has provided curators and educators with the opportunity to present a set of ideas under a general theme and predicate other practices and research topics into these constellations. The transfer of art teaching to museums and art centres allows for a

greater shift. Every institution that has an educational department has put resources in place to further support this, using a hybrid format of lectures and seminars as presentations. The presence of the curator has allowed the educational turn to be used for productive ends. Nevertheless there remains a clear distinction between the educational turn in the institutional context, in relation to pre-existing learning roles, where projects have been established, and in artistic praxis, where artists use pedagogical mechanisms with an open workshop format. Curators produce educational programmes in collaboration with artists, and are able to seize on a variety of networks and expertise to conduct these initiatives. The mechanism of the art-knowledge-programme alters art's relationship to production, in that artists and curators who are involved in the delivery of art activities do this in the form of knowledge and pedagogical programmes, which may not produce art objects. In this re-functionalised role, the artist becomes a researcher, involved in both participatory strategies and knowledge production. Their practice is not dedicated to the studio – as an object-making mission – but rather to the form of a planning role, as is usually associated with that of the educator. In this model, artistic practice and curatorial practice interact with the pedagogical and become practices delinked from their institutional associations. The pedagogical function offers an alternative methodological possibility where people can learn about a specific topic. However, this also develops into a “socio-spatial, participatory activity”, in that it is removed from additional market objects of education – schools, universities and colleges – in these spaces learning is seen to be “instrumentalised and disciplined.”

Projects, which take on pedagogical elements, such as talks, screenings, and lectures, are able to operate in a flexible way, and thus attract different audiences at each iteration. Although the overall project may be connected under one theme, the audience may elect to only attend one part of it, which is appealing to them. The diversity of the audience may also reflect the different needs of the project, which require experts who are present in the audience to contribute to and change the dialogue that is going on. What remains at stake in this new regime of knowledge and production is far beyond what is known as “the social turn” in art.

Participatory practices engage audiences beyond the short-term aims of the projects outlined earlier in this debate, and instead allow for co-productions and the sharing of knowledge with audiences. Socially engaged art has moved into other areas in society, operating outside of art institutions and indeed the art world. It moves beyond the norms of artistic production and into service providing, social commentary, activism, community organisations, urban design, and ecology. Twenty-five years after Suzanne Lacy coined the term ‘New Genre Public Art’, the art practices that constituted these practices are no longer “new” and instead they function in a system of convergence between society and art.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, artists and curators have responded to the challenges associated with art making by producing projects that rely on educational models, and ultimately they seek to educate audiences. Pedagogical projects offer a break from conventional art school learning as well as providing organizing structure for artists and curators. Part of the legacy established by community art projects in the 1960s and early 1970s was the collective learning-*through* process. In many ways projects such as *Art Gym* are indebted to this legacy, they build upon the processes identified during the period, and co-exist under the new regime in the museum. Throughout the last decade these projects have taken on a public and civil-society role, given the cuts in education (particularly adult education) and cuts generally to state provision for the arts (and to outreach). Thus the growth of self-organized structures outside of mainstream institutions have convened themselves as sites of *alternate* learning, inadvertently collapsing the divisions between formal sites of education and non-formal sites, such as creative practice, performance, and activism. When knowledge production becomes the focus of activities in the art world, it becomes a field of critical potentiality, and a potential place for free exchange.

## Michael Birchall

MA and PhD is curator of public practice at Tate Liverpool and senior lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University in Exhibition Studies. His interests include: socially engaged art, participatory practices, queer history, community art, exhibition histories from the 1960s onwards, and new forms of creative labour in the arts. Previously he has held curatorial appointments at The Western Front (Vancouver, Canada), The Walter Phillips Gallery at The Banff Centre (Canada) and Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (Germany). Forthcoming curatorial projects include a socially engaged commission at Tate Liverpool to take place in Spring 2017; a series of projects at Tate Exchange around Queer genealogy, access and mediation; and a series on the crisis of overproduction in the arts. He has co-edited the journal *After the Turn: Art Education Beyond the Museum* (On Curating), and his writing has appeared in *Art & the Public Sphere*, *Frieze*, *Modern Painters*, *On Curating*, *C-Magazine*, and various catalogues.

## NOTES

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**1** *Assemble* are a collective who work across the fields of art, architecture and design, to facilitate the production of projects with communities. In 2015 they won the Turner Prize for their project in the Gramby Four Streets, Liverpool. This project included a major refurbishment of derelict housing and the creation of community led activities.

**2** <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/display/art-gym> (last accessed 05.05.16)

**3** Michael Birchall, 'On Kristina Lee Podesva's Colourschool', *C-Magazine*, no. 100, 2008, pp. 14–17.

**4** In museums in Europe, other models of co-production are emerging including Tensta Kunsthall's 'Tensta Museum', and the Queens Museum's 'Immigrant Movement International'. These projects, commissioned by institutions, usually focus on a specific locale and engage in that context for a set period. The artists become part of an unfolding research process in the embedded community, with the curators working as temporary liaisons between institutions, artists, local councils, and national governments.

- 5** Claire Bishop, 'Performative Exhibitions: The problem of open-endedness', in *Timing: On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, eds. Beatrice von Bismarck et al., Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014, pp. 239–256.
- 6** Owen Kelly, *Community, Art, and the State: Storming the Citadels*, London & New York: Comedia Publishing Group in association with Marion Boyars, 1984.
- 7** Suzanne Lacy devised this term as a response to the range of practices she became involved with as an artist, and as a facilitator. See: Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1994.
- 8** Rosalyn Deutsche, 'Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy', *Social Text*, Vol. 33, 1992: pp. 34–53.
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- 11** Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Presses du réel: Dijon, 2002.
- 12** See Joshua Decker, Helmut Draxler and Joe Scanlan, 'Culture in Action,' in *Exhibition as Social Intervention: "Culture in Action" 1993*, eds. Joshua Decker, Helmut Draxler and Joe Scanlan, London: Afterall Books, 2014, pp. 164–74.
- 13** For further reading, consult: Michael Birchall (ed.), *On Artistic and Curatorial Authorship*, Zurich: On Curating, 2012 and Decker and Draxler (eds.), *Exhibition as Social Intervention: "Culture in Action" 1993*.
- 14** Moody.
- 15** Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Calif. & London: University of California Press, 2004, p. 127.
- 16** Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*.
- 17** Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics*, Ropley: Zero Books, 2012, p. 40.
- 18** Léger.
- 19** Helguera.
- 20** Lacy.
- 21** Kester.



- 22** Anna Harding, 'Participation art and the gallery', in *Out of Here: Creative Collaborations Beyond the Gallery*, ed. Claire Doherty, London: Ikon Gallery, 1998, p. 80.
- 23** Tate Liverpool distinguished itself in the 1990s as space for contemporary art, which placed an emphasis on community engagement at its core.
- 24** <http://www.theshowroom.org/exhibitions/communal-knowledge-at-work> (last accessed 05.05.16)
- 25** Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, Steven Lavine, and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (eds.), *Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.
- 26** Moody.
- 27** Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002, p. 151.
- 28** Janna Graham and Serpentine Gallery (eds.), *Art + care: a future: [published on the completion of the Serpentine Gallery project Skills exchange: urban transformation and the politics of care 2007 - 2012]*, Köln: König Books, 2013.
- 29** Michael Birchall, *The Curator as Producer in Socially Engaged Art, 1993-2016*, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2016.
- 30** Kristina Lee Podesva, 'A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art', *Fillip*, Vol. 6, 2007.
- 31** John Roberts, 'The Psychopathologies of the Bourgeoisie', in *The Psychopathologies of Cognitive Capitalism: Part 2: The Cognitive Turn*, ed. Warren Neidich, Berlin: Archive Books, 2013, pp. 1000–1100.
- 32** There remains a growing amount of literature on the educational turn in art, this would include: Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London & Amsterdam: Open Editions, De Appel, 2010; Michael Birchall and Philipp Sack (eds.), *After the Turn: Art Education beyond the Museum*. Vol. 24. Zurich: On Curating, 2014; Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', *Eflux*, 2008. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/> (last accessed 16.01.17).
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- 34** Andrea Phillips, 'Education Aesthetics', in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, eds. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, pp. 83–96.
- 35** Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 178–183.

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):  
The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# **Co-creation and Affect in Karoline H Larsen's *Collective Dreams***

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By Dorthé Juul Rugaard

Taking its point of departure in Karoline H Larsen's art project *Collective Dreams* at ARKEN in 2015, the article analyses the two different kinds of participation that took place in the work, the co-creation that unfolded during the process of making it, and the affective participation that emerged due to the work's performative, situational presence.

In March 2015 a group of immigrant women are gathered in a small workshop furnished with samples of their traditional handicrafts. They know each other and meet regularly. They have all chosen a large or small circle of electrical cable, and are now busy filling it with the acrylic string, ribbons and beads that cover the tables and floors. Some weave the strings carefully between each other, others make wild and spontaneous tangles, and a couple of the women use their forearms as knitting needles. A woman attaches a piece of embroidery to the middle of her circle. She has embroidered portraits of her grandchildren, and now it is to be part of her dreamcatcher. Some chat as they work, others concentrate in silence. Also present are the two ethnic Danes who run the group on a daily basis, as well as me and the artist Karoline H Larsen, who has

initiated the process and is already in full swing. We knit, weave, wind and plait our personal dreamcatchers for a large, joint installation.



Workshop with Karoline H Larsen. Photo: Mette Schwartz

Three months later I see a small group of morning runners jogging down towards the dunes of Ishøj beach. They slow down to take in the sight of hundreds of dreamcatchers. Each one is mounted to form a colossal net between the trunks and leaves of five trees. They are like moving soap bubbles, pulled by the wind and gravity. One of the runners points out a detail to the others. They continue on their way, and I notice that the colours and movements are very different to yesterday, when heavy clouds and a strong westerly wind blew the ‘captured dreams’ of the installation across the landscape. Today it is summery, and the net rocks gently back and forth behind a group of schoolchildren, who have left their bikes in the grass. The installation interacts with the landscape, changing according to the wind and light. It stimulates the senses of those that see it, generating new awareness of the site’s scenic qualities and the social acts that take place around it.

### **One Artwork – Two Kinds of Participation**

In the summer of 2015 the area between Ishøj Station and the beach park behind ARKEN was filled by the works of ten contemporary artists



Karoline H Larsen, *Collective Dreams*, 2015. Photo: Miriam Nielsen

with diverse approaches to participatory art in public space. Under the umbrella of the exhibition title *Art in Sunshine*, they established a series of situations where everyone, including locals walking their dogs, visitors to the beach park, and the art audience could participate. The exhibition encouraged co-creation, movement and play. One of the artists was Karoline H Larsen. She made three performances in her *Collective Strings* series, and produced the temporary, site-specific installation *Collective Dreams* (2015). This article analyses the two forms of participation embedded in *Collective Dreams*: the co-creation that unfolds during the process of making the work, and the affective participation that emerges due to the work's performative, situational presence in Ishøj beach park. The analysis of the two forms of participation focuses on the open and

performative character of the work. I will therefore start by turning to Umberto Eco's poetics on the open work as a realm of possibility where formal features invite a participatory, performative and moveable reception. I draw on discourses that relate to both the 'social turn' and 'affective turn' in contemporary art, examining how through the participants' and its own 'performance' a work like *Collective Dreams* can connect elements of both.

Methodologically, the article explores the relevance of embracing the elasticity of the concept of participation. My role as the curator at ARKEN who invited Larsen to develop a site-specific project on the basis of participation, has given rise to reflections on how the art institution creates possibilities for but also limitations on the artistic development of her project. What role, for example, do the funding, resources and time the institution can offer play in the artistic process? And what is the significance of the artist using the institution's pre-existing relationships to local environments during the co-creative process, instead of working independently of them? Several issues arise concerning the implications of this kind of collaboration for the social role of the artwork, its aesthetic dimensions, and the participation of the audience. Here I focus on the relationship between the work, the participants and the artist, drawing on my privileged access to the process of creating the work.

### **The Open, Performative Work**

*Collective Dreams* is an interesting case in the perspective of critical debates on participation and the 'social turn' in art, where the art historian Claire Bishop is currently a key figure. The work has a clear duality, and can be seen as both a social and aesthetic practise, consisting as it does of equal parts collective co-creation and a site-specific installation that does *not* invite co-creative participation. These two aspects of the work are successive, existing in phases that in different ways embody a high degree of performativity and participation.

Umberto Eco develops his poetics on "works in motion" in his classical text *The Open Work* from 1962. Here he argues that it is possible to experience any artwork as incomplete and open, because it is first completed by the viewer during reception: "Hence, every reception of a work of art

is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself.” The open work is a field of possibility for communicative and social relationships between the artist, the audience and the artwork, which opens the potential for co-creation or what he calls the ‘performance’ of experiencing the artwork. One of the examples Eco uses is the composer Henri Pousseur’s music, which consists of sections that the musician playing it structures themselves and that advanced listeners – once-removed – unravel and rearrange. Another example is the mobiles of Alexander Calder, in which Eco discovers “a kaleidoscopic capacity to suggest themselves in constantly renewed aspects to the consumer.” The individual parts of the mobile move constantly, assuming new positions in relationship to each other. Here Eco assigns ‘performance’ to the work due to its incompleteness, which is maintained by the viewer sensing the movement from changing positions and in changing situations, something “which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal *performance*.”

In the light of the ground gained by performativity theory in numerous art practises during recent years, Eco’s ideas on the aesthetics of reception in the early 1960s were pioneering. This invites a parallel to *Collective Dreams*, which like music is interpreted by the co-creating participants, and which with its *movable* and *moving* form is experienced by the audience from their individual social and cultural context. *Collective Dreams* is an open situation. With elements like movement and spatial changeability, the work creates an affective ‘performance’ by the audience, generating new meanings both socially and in the landscape. Here, Eco’s formulation of how the poetics of the open work establish a new relationship between aesthetic experience and the social utilisation of art is worthy of note:

”Certainly this new receptive mode vis-à-vis the work of art opens up a much vaster phase in culture and in this sense is not intellectually confined to the problems of aesthetics. The poetics of the ‘work in movement’ [...] sets in motion a new cycle of relations between the artist and his audience, a new mechanics of aesthetic perception, a different status for the artistic product in contempo-

rary society. It opens a new page in sociology and in pedagogy, as well as a new chapter in the history of art. It poses new practical problems by organizing new communicative situations. In short, it installs a new relationship between the *contemplation* and the *utilization* of a work of art.”

The same quote is to be found in Bishop’s article ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, where she points out that whilst Eco’s poetics can be seen as precedent for Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, there is a difference between – like Eco – being interested in an(y) artwork as a *reflection* of social conditions of existence and – like Bourriaud – seeing a (relational) work as *producing* these conditions. Due to its duality as co-creative process and aesthetic object, Karoline H Larsen’s *Collective Dreams* offers the space to consider both the producing and reflective/representative potential of the artwork.

### **Performativity, Situation and Action**

According to the art historian Camilla Jalving, in her book *Værk som handling* [‘Art as Action’], the concepts of performance, the performative and performativity come from discourses ranging from the aesthetic field of theatre and speech acts to post-structuralist gender theory, and therefore embody highly diverse and even conflicting elements. My use of the concepts, like Jalving’s own, is fluid and overlapping. I use performativity as concept for the fact that *Collective Dreams* ‘does’ something, that it works through participatory situations, and that its participatory practises stimulate the production of identity, sociality, affect and new meanings. The work is not a performance in the sense of a time-based production or performance on a stage for and with an audience, but it has performance-like or performative features because the artist’s and participants’ production of the physical components of the work are *part* of the work’s performativity. Here the performative is a concept for the situational and for agency in the analysis of *Collective Dreams* as a social, relational process and an installation with its own agency in relationship to both the audience and the site. The work spans a broad, dynamic field from collective performance to the installational situation, which does not solely



represent the performing community's productivity, but is also productive in and of itself. Whereas Bishop can be seen to use Eco's poetics on the open work to critique Bourriaud's promotion of the reality-generating, relational work at the expense of the representational work, I would argue that both forms of participation in *Collective Dreams* are relevant, aesthetic practises with the potential to generate meaning and experiences.

### **Participation as Co-Creation**

I will now take a closer look at collective participation in relationship to the co-creation process of *Collective Dreams*. What realm of agency do the artist and participants in the group construct together? What characterises the communities that arise around the creation of the work? And what relationships arise between the co-creating individuals, the agents surrounding them, and the audience, which in Ishøj beach park become key participants in the performativity of the installation? (The last question presupposing that the work itself is seen as performative). The work creates a myriad of positions, situations, manifestations and relationships. In what follows, I limit my analysis to the central agents in the co-creation stage of the work, i.e. the artist, the participants, the participating social organisations, and the art institution.

In March 2015 Karoline H Larsen conducted a series of workshops with different groups. Some of workshops held were with women from the employment scheme and integration project 'In Line With the World' at their own premises in Vejleåparken, Ishøj and Rødovre. The rest were community meetings with the residents of the housing estate Vejleåparken, where the team responsible for the urban regeneration of the area invited local card clubs, knitting clubs, parents' networks, young dancers from the local Urban Academy, and other residents. More than 100 people made dreamcatchers, and the names of most of them could be read on a sign next to the work in Ishøj beach park. Several of the women from the integration project in Ishøj helped Larsen to create the final composition of *Collected Dreams*, which they laid out on the grass as large mosaics before it was hung between the trees.

The artist used the dreamcatcher as a readily accessible form capable of overcoming the language barriers within the group. Using drawings

and sketches, body language, laughter and participants who interpreted for each other, in a matter of hours she turned a sensitive situation of scepticism about working with an artist on an improvised work made with rough materials for an art exhibition, into an experience full of intensity, trust and enthusiasm. Larsen asked the women if they knew the place where the work was to be installed. It emerged that only a few of them had ever been to Ishøj beach park or ARKEN Museum of Modern Art just two kilometres away, despite the fact that they had lived close by for years.



Installation of *Collective Dreams* by Karoline H Larsen, 2015

If we view *Collective Dreams* as an open, performative work where the co-creative process is an expression of the community's co-interpretation of the artistic concept, it becomes clear that this process takes place on the basis of creative play, with the simple symbol of the dreamcatcher as a motivational tool for each individual to participate. At the same time, the process establishes a complex collectivity in relationship to creative

processes, inclusion and exclusion, power relations and intentionality. Plurality and heterogeneity are a condition of this community – basically, what the participants have in common is their mutual social and cultural differences. They also form mutually exclusive micro communities *within* the co-creative community, whether as women from the ‘In Line With the World’ initiative, as a passing group of teenagers from local immigrant families, or as an ethnic Danish family making a dream-catcher together. Larsen steers the process, but is also open, curious and alert, ensuring that her artistic intention is maintained, at the same time as allowing the artwork to be permeated by subjective interpretations of that intention. But what does this mean for the art practise in *Collective Dreams*? Is the co-creative process, which swings between authoritative intentionality and collective participation, an expression of artistic utopian thinking? Is it about the individual’s personal potential for development in the creative process? Or is it about facilitating democratic citizenship and integration?

### **Utopia, Creativity and Communication**

In her article ‘Mellem kommunikation og kreativitet – deltagelse som æstetikens missing link’ [‘Between Communication and Creativity – Participation as the Missing Link of Aesthetics’], the cultural theorist Birgit Eriksson analyses participation with a critical view of contemporary culture. At a discursive level, she asks whether participation can represent a solution to the reduction of art’s privileged access to the utopia of democratic citizenship. Inspired by the French philosopher Yves Michaud, she argues that this crisis in art is a consequence of the increased social and cultural focus on art as a catalyst for individual creativity, devoid of any ideal of anti-authoritarianism or subversion. Instead, the differences between strong, self-realising individuals has become a condition for creativity. In this context, participation (as an ideal) can offer the possibility of building bridges between creativity and the artistic drive of communication and sociality.

It is precisely this creativity and communication (verbal, bodily and visual) that are core concepts in Karoline H Larsen’s co-creative art practise and collaboration with, for example, the ‘In Line With the World’ initia-

tive. But it remains impossible to see the workshop situations that develop in the co-creation of the dreamcatchers as *either* subjective creativity – understood as the individual/asocial arbitration of taste in the face of insurmountable social disparity – *or* as positive, inclusive citizenship promoting equality. It was, for example, apparent at the workshop I attended that among the group of women sitting side-by-side with materials in their hands there were multiple small identity and language groups where each individual woman's creative acts took place in relationship to other participants, and where there were varying degrees of adherence to the artist's concept. According to Karoline H Larsen, my own participation in the co-creative process as a representative of an art institution was valuable for the other women, because they saw it as an expression of the art museum wanting to be part of their world. I, on the other hand, found it difficult to be part of the communication between them.



Workshop with Karoline H Larsen. Photo: Mette Schwartz

## **The Dual Agenda of Participation**

According to the artist herself, *Collective Dreams* is not an integration project with the naïve, utopian hope of helping specific groups of citizens establish new relationships to the surrounding society. The co-creation is to a larger degree about contributing to a temporary community with material, bodily and communicative experiences that lie closer to personal development than any intention of social change, the relevance of which is open to question in the context of artistic intention. The artist uses affective terms to describe the co-creative process as something “moveable, soft and sensory”, a kind of game with fluidity between subjects. These aspects were something I experienced when, for example, the intensity in the room shifted when some women left early, or when one of them suddenly had a good idea for a creative technique or colour combination and drew some of her co-participants into the flow. There is also a dynamic in which individual agency and temporary groups influence each other in the specific social context, from the individual creative and aesthetic choices incorporated in the production of each dreamcatcher, to the linguistic and bodily conversations generated by their production. Here the work inscribes itself in Eriksson’s formulation of the dual agenda of participatory art: while the public participate in the work, the work participates in the social realm. According to Eriksson, the ‘success’ of a participatory artwork is conditional on it being able to go beyond its own utopias to deal with the inequalities, exclusions and conflicts of participants’ lives. Here she draws on Claire Bishop’s critique of participatory practises that suppress their own inherent conflicts and exclusions. Karoline H Larsen acknowledges such conflicts and inequalities in direct dialogue with the participants. For example, she invites the participants to be co-creators of the object that is the work, but does not surrender aesthetic authorship. This represents a conflict and unequal power relationship, something she makes clear in the workshops, for example by saying, “I’m the artist and I’ll get the most credit. That’s how the art world works. But you have my respect and attention, you make your own choices during the process, and I’ll make sure your name is on the artwork in the beach park too.” In doing so, she enters an agreement with the participants, granting them a central role in both the production

of the work and its final installation, where all the participants are made visible in public space. She navigates the difficult terrain of inclusion and exclusion by inviting specific groups like ‘In Line With the World’ to participate, as well as inviting organisations like the urban regeneration team of the local housing estate to collaborate – who in turn invite a wide range of other social groups.

### **‘We’ and the Artwork**

The general public can also participate in *Collective Dreams*, not in the form of co-creation and communication, but through their spectatorship and bodily experience of the work as an installation. Karoline H Larsen sees it as problematic that the work precludes co-creation by the broadest possible audience in this way, but for me this conflict is precisely where the potential of the work lies, opening as it does the possibility of a broader understanding of the concept of participation and the possibilities it has to offer.

A useful parameter to examine community and community participation in the open work is Irit Rogoff’s critique of the collective ‘we’, i.e. the performative situation that arises when we gather to participate in cultural activities like viewing art. Here I draw on two texts: ‘Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture’ and ‘WE - Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations’. Rogoff encourages us to turn our critical attention away from the object (artwork, object of study, cultural field), because the dichotomous relationship between, for example, the viewer and the work make it difficult for us to find alternative ways to participate in the culture surrounding us and experience other, equally significant manifestations and events: “The diverting of attention from that which is meant to compel it, i.e. the actual work on display, can at times free up a recognition that other manifestations are taking place that are often difficult to read, and which may be as significant as the designated objects on display.”

Through this ‘looking away’, we can distance ourselves from the established, normative and hierarchical structures of society that support cultural capital’s fixed categories like class, communities of taste and political affiliations, and instead experience “the ongoing processes of low key participations that ebb and flow at a barely conscious level”.

In this unknown terrain, another ‘we’ emerges, which being free of categorisations – including the art world’s exclusive categories of ‘viewers’, ‘art lovers’, ‘critics’, etc. – has the potential to productively change the formation of meaning in the situation we are immersed in when experiencing contemporary art.

Meaning is thus something that emerges and circulates relationally between subjects and their bodies and actions. It is perhaps a form of co-created meaning, which in the case of *Collective Dreams* occurs not only in the creative process of making the work, but also due to its presence in public space as an installation the viewer does not solely observe but also experiences as part of a space they navigate with an awareness of other social actions.

I would therefore like to qualify Rogoff’s challenge to the viewer to turn their back on the artwork to see the world. I would claim that *Collective Dreams* does not stand outside, but is part of the alternative ‘we’ she draws our attention to. The agency of this ‘we’ unfolds in our speech and actions, and it lasts as long as the power constituted through it. *Collective Dreams* participates in this ‘we’ and this space by virtue of its performativity. As viewers we act in this ‘we’ together with the work and the many subjects who have created it – in the physical space of the landscape, as well as in the fleeting, abstract space of spoken, performed and felt actions.

### **Affective Participation in *Collective Dreams***

The cultural theorists Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe the essence of affect as an “open-ended in-between-ness”, a question of “force-relations”, “passages of intensity”, “becoming and emergence”. In this “muddy, unmediated relatedness” that characterises affect as bodily experience, there is a close relationship to social agency, because affect can make us act differently and have an impact on others. *Collective Dreams* simultaneously activates the subject’s affective sensory perception and stimulates a form of social action or agency. The individual’s bodily exploration and sensing of the work is, however, tied to the social context they bring with them. As Camilla Jalving argues in her article here, herein lies an affective form of participation. I participate by virtue of what the work does to me and what I do in the vicinity of the

work. The dreamcatchers of *Collective Dreams* are not only aesthetic testimony to or a representation of the co-creation that took place prior to the installation. They also constitute an anthropomorphic body with an affective materiality of its own – an accumulation of connections and passages, a membrane that expands and contracts in continuous movement under the influence of its surroundings.

And of what use is all of this, beyond arguing that there is more to participation in art than meets the eye, or rather, that co-creation and affective participation can be identified as relevant and productive ways of practising and experiencing art? And what does it mean to say such forms of participation are ‘relevant’ and ‘productive’? Any reflection on this has to be based on an awareness that participatory contemporary art renounces or at least no longer attempts to stand under the promising banner of utopia, but can, at the most, be plotted onto the everyday landscape of the micro utopias of relational events and acts. I take inspiration from Rogoff’s argumentation for connectedness between subjects rather than between the subject and the artwork, and with affect theory’s understanding of the aesthetic experience of the body’s fluctuating connectedness with aesthetic and social realities. Both forms of participation can be understood as methods enabling participants to experience their own presence and agency as forces that enter meaning-generating connections with all the fleeting communities they slip into and out of. The contours of a strange parallel and tenuous promise emerge between the fleeting community and the space of affect, something I would like to end by outlining.

### **The Social Aesthetics of Affect**

As mentioned above, Rogoff describes the ‘ongoing processes of low key participations that ebb and flow at a barely conscious level’, which is part of the other ‘we’ she advocates for. This is hazy territory, where we are *in* our opinions and actions rather than *having* or *doing* them, and that we need to explore in the hope that this can result in a new social and political consciousness that goes beyond the singularity of the individual and closed communities. Parallel to this, Gregg and Seigworth point out that affect theory’s “casting illumination upon the ‘not yet’ of a body’s doing” contains a hopeful yet fearful promise of an “emergent futurity.”



This is an indication that affect – something we *are* in, not something we *have* – has the potential to not only generate an understanding of the processes of experiencing, but also to move us so we can participate in new, intersubjective social and aesthetic encounters. This parallel being *in* action and affect is important in relationship to the co-creation of an artwork, because this form of participation can thereby be understood as a practise where fleeting communities emerge not only to interact socially and bodily in an artistic context, but where the participants have the hope of sliding out of these actions and into new ones with a heightened awareness of the small shifts and new realisations they can generate. The cultural theorist Ben Highmore uses the term ‘social aesthetics’ as a kind of umbrella term for the crossmodal investigations of affect theory, a term otherwise associated with the Bourriaudian discourse of relational aesthetics and criticism of ‘the social turn’. Highmore asks directly whether politics has a place in the world of affect. His answer is yes, but not politics with a clear, progressive goal, rather politics as a possible performative transformation, “a form of experimental pedagogy, of constantly submitting your sensorium to new sensual worlds that sit uncomfortably within your ethos.” He argues for liberation from the perception of aesthetics as a normative, Kantian discourse of ‘fine art’ that suppresses “the fullness of human creaturely life” by focusing on encountering an aesthetically distilled end product instead of understanding ‘aesthetics’ in the original sense of the word – as a focus on the meeting between the body and the world and the sensing of everyday life and all its vital, incomplete experiences. Because this enriches affect as “the messy *informe* of the on-goingness of process” with the potential to establish shared dreams in the form of small counter-measures against the structures of social reality. Highmore’s ‘social aesthetic’ pursuit of “a critically entangled contact with affective experience” is a challenge to participate in art as an open field of possibility with a heightened awareness of the bodily processes we thereby become part of.

### **A ‘Third Way’ for Contemporary Art?**

*Collective Dreams* incorporates co-creative practise and an installational form that invites spectatorship rather than production. Nevertheless,



Karoline H Larsen, *Collective Dreams*, 2015. Photo: Miriam Nielsen

the artwork activates several forms of participation, which despite their discursive and practical differences hold a similar potential to support the micropolitical agency of the participants in the social intersection between the individual and the collective. I started by presenting the work using Eco's vitalisation of the category of the open work. The co-creative process of the work, which unfolds around concepts of creativity, collectivity and performativity, has been analysed as an art practise and form of participation, which in its installation phase is replaced by affective participation in the work. Affect thus provides a



Karoline H Larsen, *Collective Dreams*, 2015. Photo: Miriam Nielsen

framework for proposing that *Collective Dreams* as an aesthetic form itself participates performatively in the space together with the viewers. Since in her work as an artist Karoline H Larsen is not driven by any utopian idea of participation in the project generating direct social change, no programmatic politics can be extracted from the work. What can, however, be identified is a field of possibility for micro-political agency – continuously emerging, continuously arriving.

In his book *Bad New Days*, Hal Foster warns against participatory art that bases its political practise on "a shaky analogy between an open artwork and an inclusive society". He argues polemically against what he sees as a muddy glut of performative and participatory art, where the activation of the viewer in cultural collaborations has become an uncritical end instead of a means. As he writes: "This is to suggest that collaboration threatens to become autonomous as well as automatic; collaboration, like activation, is encouraged for its own sake", and in the same breath this collaborative practise establishes an expectation of collectivity as a similarly automatic benefit. Following this logic, participatory art risks cutting the bough it sits on, and in the fall participation and collaboration are reduced to formal aspects of the work devoid of social relevance. There are, of course, examples of this kind of uncritical approach to participatory communities, just as there are examples of the opposite. Eriksson's analysis of the dual agenda of participatory art cited above – that while the public participates in the artwork, the artwork participates in the social realm – acknowledges that the artwork also works 'the other way' or, to be more precise, in a third way, out there in fluctuating social spaces. With this analysis I hope to show that a third way beyond 'means-and-ends' thinking exists. The view of relational-aesthetic, participatory art as 'better' or 'superior' because it produces rather than reflects the world, should be challenged by an awareness that the experience of all the contemporary art we are not invited to co-create, activate or climb on – a significant portion, after all, of the art we see – has an equal and equally relevant social potential.

## Dorthe Juul Rugaard

MA in Art History, is a curator at ARKEN where she has curated exhibitions of modern and contemporary art, including *Palle Nielsen: The Model* (1968/2014), *Art in Sunshine* (2015), and the co-curation of *My Music* (2017). She was co-editor of the exhibition catalogue *The Model* at ARKEN (2015), as well as the anthology *Rum for medborgerskab* ['Spaces for Citizenship', 2014], published as part of the Danish cross-institutional exhibition and research project 'Museums and Cultural Institutions as Spaces for Citizenship'. Her latest article on the social-aesthetic role of the artist in Palle Nielsen's relational, performative and participatory work *The Model* is pending publication in the peer-reviewed journal *Periskop*.

## NOTES

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**1** The ten artists were AVPD, Søren Behncke a.k.a. Papfar, Eva Steen Christensen, Jesper Dalgaard, Thomas Dambo, Thilo Frank, Gudrun Hasle, Jeppe Hein, Karoline H Larsen and Marianne Jørgensen. The exhibition ran from May 3rd – September 13th 2015.

**2** Umberto Eco, 'The Poetics of the Open Work', in *Participation (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, ed. Claire Bishop, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006, p. 22.

**3** Eco, pp. 20-21.

**4** Eco, p. 30.

**5** Eco, p. 38. Author's emphasis.

**6** Eco, p. 39. Author's emphasis.

**7** Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, eds. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung, Malden, Oxford, and Carlton: Wiley and Blackwell, 2013, p. 174.

**8** Camilla Jalving, *Værk som handling: Performativitet, kunst og metode*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2011, p. 62.

- 9** *I Tråd Med Verden* ('In Line With the World') is a creative, socioeconomic employment scheme and integration project where unemployed immigrant women join development and production collaborations with places like design companies to improve their situation.
- 10** Vejleåparken is a large, ethnically diverse housing estate in Ishøj with around 5,000 residents.
- 11** Birgit Eriksson, 'Mellem kommunikation og kreativitet. Deltagelsen som æstetikens missing link?', in *Kultur & Klasse*, vol. 118, 2014: pp. 39-40.
- 12** Karoline H Larsen in conversation with the author on January 5th 2016. See also David Gauntlett's argument supporting the social and communicative potential of crafting as a creative, political act in David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting – The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*, Cambridge, Oxford and Boston: Polity Press, 2011, pp. 17 ff.
- 13** Mail from Karoline H Larsen to the author, May 13th 2015, in which the artist criticises a draft of a museum text that emphasises the workshops as instrumental rather than sensory and poetic.
- 14** Eriksson, p. 42.
- 15** Eriksson, p. 46.
- 16** Karoline H Larsen at the first workshop. She is not quoted verbatim, since she had to formulate herself in simple terms to overcome language barriers.
- 17** Karoline H Larsen in conversation with the author, January 5th 2016.
- 18** Irit Rogoff, 'Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture', in *After Criticism. New Responses to Art and Performance*, ed. Gavin Butt, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 119.
- 19** Irit Rogoff, 'WE. Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations', in *I promise it's political. Performativität in der Kunst*, eds. Dorothea Von Hantelmann and Marjorie Jongbloed, Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 2002, p. 127.
- 20** Rogoff, p. 131. See also Jalving, p. 159, where she elaborates on Arendt's concept of 'action' as social acts that are not solely existential, but also ethical and political because they take place between people and have an impact on the world.
- 21** Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 2-4.
- 22** For a historical review of installation art as an 'immersive space' where the subject – as an 'embodied viewer' – experiences heightened perception, not only of the artwork and the space it is in, but also of their own sensory perception see Claire Bishop's chapter 'Heightened Perception', in Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, London: Tate Publishing, 2005, pp. 48-101.

- 23** See this publication pp. 115-131
- 24** Gregg and Seigworth, p. 4.
- 25** Ben Highmore, 'Bitter After Taste. Affect, Food and Social Aesthetics', in Gregg and Seigworth (eds.), p. 135.
- 26** Highmore, p. 122.
- 27** Highmore, p. 123.
- 28** Highmore, p. 119.
- 29** Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, London and New York: Verso, 2015, p. 136.
- 30** Foster, p. 136.

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):

The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# AFFECT

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# The Affects of the Art Work

## On the Material Art Object and the Affective Encounter in the Art Exhibition

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By Mette Thobo-Carlsen

Taking the works of Yayoi Kusama as a case, and using affect as a theoretical lens, the article presents an affective performative analysis of Yayoi Kusama's *Accumulation Sculptures* (1962). By shifting the discourse of participation away from 'active participation' it focuses on the ability of art to create participatory objects that enable a mode of undirected participation.

The active participation of the public is seen by many museums as a means to create a democratic platform with and for all, which can build bridges between different social groups and give them a voice. Well-intentioned participatory projects, however, often end with the visitor being cast in the role of the 'good' citizen in a democratic game, the rules of which are established in advance. Critics call this approach to such projects 'interactive' and not actually participatory, since it is not possible for the participants to question or change the rules of the game itself. They argue that for participatory strategies to make a difference, i.e. have a political impact, they should not only analyse established social values and knowledge, but also have the potential to transform them. In this article I aim to analyse a series of artworks entitled *Accumulation*



*Sculptures* (1962) by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), viewing them as ‘participatory objects’ that enable a social and material form of audience participation. I draw inspiration from the sociologists Noortje Marres and Javier Lezaun’s theory that not only subjects, but also the everyday objects and materials we surround ourselves with have political potential, because they participate actively in the formation of political collectives or communities. I argue that Kusama’s *Accumulation Sculptures* can similarly be seen as participatory objects, since they set the stage for a sensory participation in art that can create connections here-and-now among the audience.

My analysis of *Accumulation Sculptures* draws on Kusama’s own curatorial experiments in the 1960s, when she used her studio in New York to exhibit her sculptures and installations. In Kusama’s curatorial experiments, the works were not exhibited as autonomous art objects representing a specific artistic value or intention. The accumulations were instead arranged as a collection of participatory objects that with a political force of their own were capable of bringing the audience together in a shared, affective art experience.

Theoretically the article is based on the performative aspect of the art exhibition in the sense of “the work that exhibitions themselves do, on and through audiences.” My main focus is on understanding how an artwork in an exhibition context can be framed as an object with a material agency of its own that can work in this way. I will therefore analyse Kusama’s *Accumulation Sculptures* as what the political theorist Jane Bennett calls “vibrant things with a certain effectivity of their own.”

In her political philosophy, Bennett uses the concept of ‘thing-power’ to redefine the relationship between nature and culture, and between humans and their environment, i.e. the materiality surrounding them. Materiality cannot be understood as a passive, manipulable, neutral entity, as in poststructuralist theory, where discourse alone is seen as being active in creating the framework for the generation of meaning. Humans and materiality, human and non-human bodies, are fundamentally entangled in a shared, ontological network structure, and therefore exist in a mutual, constituent relationship. I see Kusama’s sculptures as material objects that actively intervene in the world of things, in the social and political

everyday materiality that people are part of. I will use Jane Bennett's concept of 'thing-power' to analyse how Kusama's Accumulation Sculptures are shaped by this material force and are capable of converting traditional power and knowledge structures into a social space for collective experience and alternative knowledge production. The sociologist Bruno Latour also considers society to be constituted by more than people and their actions. Objects also can act on and react to other things, people, spaces and situations: "They too act, they too do things, they too make you do things." Latour's theory on the social and political agency of objects, which Jane Bennett's neomaterialist theory also draws on, is used in this analysis to clarify the political potential I consider Kusama's participatory projects and exhibition environments to possess. Here the point of the article is that her accumulated sculptures anchor the viewer in a 'potential space' where the boundaries between subject and object and body and things is blurred, and where the individual has the opportunity to renegotiate their position in the world. Here I draw inspiration from the art historian Jo Applin's analysis of Kusama's installation *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field* from 1965, which Applin sees as creating "a 'potential space' in which viewers, as subjects, experimented with new modes of being and living."

I see Kusama's accumulated objects and exhibition environments as creating similar, potential spaces, which open up for alternative ways to be engaged and be together in the public realm.

The audience's participation in an art exhibition can take cognitive, linguistic, affective and bodily forms. Most exhibitions prioritise the written and spoken word in didactic communication with their audience. All forms of participation, however, have a material or sensory dimension that is not about communicating institutional knowledge or a pre-established social opinion to the audience. Methodologically, I use the analysis to project a so-called 'participatory gaze' on Kusama's works that both involves and risks the body and the social space the viewer shares with the work, as well as with other viewers.

The article refers to the exhibition *Yayoi Kusama - In Infinity*, which was shown at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark in 2015. This was the first time I experienced Kusama's art. In the exhibition cata-

logue, the curator of the exhibition Marie Laurberg writes in her essay 'Deep Surfaces' that: "Kusama's art practice from the 1960s to the present cultivates an aesthetic revolving around the affective."

Laurberg uses the concept of affect to "illuminate the intensification of the relationship between the works' emotionally charged surfaces and the viewer's body that distinguishes her art."

This article is not an analysis of the exhibition and its thematic focus on Kusama's affective aesthetics as such, being based instead on Kusama's accumulated sculptures and environments from the 1960s in order to address their affective capacity to gather diverse objects, materials and bodies in a collective environment that can act with a political agency of its own.

### **Kusama's Accumulation Sculptures**

Yayoi Kusama is a Japanese artist and author born in 1929 and based in Tokyo. During her long-standing career in both Japan and New York she has worked in numerous media, including painting, film, photography, sculpture, literature, performance and installation art.

Kusama's *Accumulation Sculptures* (also called Aggregations), the earliest of which is from 1962, consist of a series of sculptures where commonplace, everyday objects (found on the streets of New York) are covered with hundreds of stuffed, hand-sewn, white fabric phalluses, some small and thick, others firm and long or bent. These soft, flexible fabric penises grow and spread in clusters like fungus growths on the hard surfaces of a ladder, an ironing board, an armchair and a sofa, etc.

In these sculptures, the otherwise powerful, phallic form seems empty of content, appearing almost like living, organic material. According to the art critic Chris Kraus, Kusama incorporates the psychoanalytical and gender-political discourses of the 1960s in these works as if they were a material – a piece of fabric or a lump of clay that can be modelled, divided and folded ad infinitum. In this way – according to Kraus – Kusama gives physical form to a critical investigation of society's psychosocial discourses and structures, which Kusama feels limit the social and sexual lives of women. It is, in other words, the cultural and gender-political representations of the material body as a passive, dead and manipulable object able to be controlled, sold and consumed that is sub-

ject to critique here. It is, however, important to note that the repetition and accumulation of the phallic form also gives the works an ambiguous sense of embodiment, which makes them appear as both dead and living objects that can fascinate and repel, join and divide, as both organic and natural objects and inorganic and synthetic objects, as soft (feminine) and hard (masculine), as homogenous and heterogeneous.



Installationview Yayoi Kusama – *In Infinity*. 17.09 2015 – 24.01 2016, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Poul Buchard / Brøndum & Co

In the exhibition *Yayoi Kusama – In Infinity* at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, a selection of the accumulation sculptures were arranged on a round white platform in the middle of the gallery. The surfaces of the sculptural objects extended three-dimensionally into the space like arms that would grab you if you got too close. The installation of the objects on this elevated platform invited the audience to move around the works and view them from different angles. In this way, the curatorial framing sets the stage for a visual meeting between the audience and the work, where the focus was on the physical experience and visual decoding of the objects' aesthetic forms and possible meanings. But the objects themselves seemed to want to activate the viewer's sense of touch, thus shift-

ing attention from what the works meant to how they would be to touch, and how it would feel to move in the social space they seemed to create together. Since the works could not be touched, and visitors were not allowed to step onto the platform and move among them, we can only imagine how it would feel to physically sit in the chair and run our hands over the furniture. The curatorial framing of the works set the stage for the representation of tactile contact, i.e. an imagined sensing and experience of how the objects affective materiality would feel against the skin, and what effect this physical sensation would have on our bodies, thoughts and emotions.

'Affect' is a concept that comes from the Latin term *affectus*, meaning passion or emotion. Since the mid 1990s, affect theory has been a central and much-discussed area of research in many fields of art and culture. Today scholars in disciplines like museology and curatorial studies are interested in understanding how art (exhibitions) can produce and circulate affect through the interaction of works, people and spaces, and how these can be analysed. Spinozian and Deleuzian inspired affect theory distinguish between the concepts of affect and feelings or emotions. Affect is not the same as definable feelings like happiness or sadness, which are felt and articulated by an individual. Feelings include something more than affect, since they presuppose an interpretation of an often barely perceptible bodily change. For a Deleuzian affect theorist like Brian Massumi, this distinction between affect and feelings also implies that affect has no specific content or even meaning. They are "energetic intensities" or "forces", as Deleuze calls them.

Kusama's accumulated sculptures strive to have an impact on my sensory, living body. The works' affective capacity to create relationships and influence other objects and bodies does not, however, seem controlled by the intention to produce and circulate specific feelings, thoughts and knowledge among the participating viewers' bodies. On the contrary, the works seem to generate effects at a more immediate and almost imperceptible level. The juxtaposition of different kinds of soft and hard forms and surfaces seems to create a form of friction or tension, or release a kind of affective energy into the space that can make other objects and bodies vibrate and engage. For Massumi, affect is linked to the small

shocks, the almost imperceptible small changes that occur in our bodies when we are confronted by our social and material surroundings:

”Affect is for me inseparable from the concept of shock. It doesn’t have to be a drama. It’s really more about micro-shocks, the kind that populate every moment of our lives. For example a change in focus, or a rustle at the periphery of vision that draws the gaze towards it. In every shift of attention, there is an interruption, a momentary cut in the mode of onward deployment of life.”

Affect is thus best defined as a biological or physical change in the body, a vague or indefinable bodily shift that can feel like trembling excitement for one person and uneasiness for someone else. A group of people can therefore have a shared affective experience of something like an artwork, but the experience can generate many different feelings and thoughts. Van Alphen explains:

“Affects can arise within a person but they can also come from without. They can be transmitted by the presence of another person, but also by an artwork or a (literary) text. They come from an interaction with objects, an environment, or other people. Because of its origin in interaction, one can say that the transmission of affect is social in origin, but biological and physical in effect.”

As Van Alphen emphasises, affects – unlike feelings – do not belong solely to the subject, because they arise in social interaction or friction with an artwork, other people or environments. Which is why I do not see Kusama’s affective artworks as psychosomatic expressions of the artist’s personal traumas, feelings or thoughts, an interpretation suggested by many art critics, curators and Kusama herself: ”I began making penises in order to heal my feelings of disgust towards sex. [...] It was a kind of self-therapy.”

I consider Kusama’s use of psychoanalytic discourse as a more or less conscious attempt by the artist to thematise a powerful discourse’s ability to (per)form the experiential material it tries to explain.

The coupling of different objects and materials in the accumulation

sculptures represents an attempt to establish a new affective connection between the audience and the world of things, i.e. the physical world that surrounds us. The works make visible that in this sensory tension things are given a life of their own, an affective agency, which whilst it may not change the body of the audience can set it in motion. In this way, Kusama's affective objects – curatorial framing permitting – can activate and mobilise the audience to participate, i.e. sense, feel, think and act in the exhibition space as social agents on an equal footing with the exhibited art objects.

The sculptural objects thus have their own material-affective agency, which has the potential to generate physical changes in viewers and set bodies, feelings and thoughts in motion. The objects can produce such affects and effects, not because they are endowed with any specific intention, spirit or meaning, but because as Jane Bennett writes "they are alive in their complex relationships, entanglements" with other objects and bodies. Their 'thing-power' consists precisely of "the curious ability [...] to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" in the objects and bodies they interact with.

The accumulation sculptures therefore stand as assemblage works, where the body is connected to a 'thingness', and the 'thing' with a sense of embodiment. On the round platform at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art the sculptures were grouped so as to make it clear that the body and the thing are connected in a shared 'vibrating' materiality that seems to grow and extend with its own unpredictable and uncontrollable energy.

### **Affective Bodies**

Throughout the 1960s, Kusama continued to cover found objects like high-heeled shoes, an armchair, dresses, a boat and a shop dummy with hand-sewn phallic forms, plastic flowers or macaroni. Here Bruno Latour's concept of the body is an interesting angle to explore what kind of body/embodiment is (per)formed in Kusama's accumulation sculptures. Latour is less interested in defining what a body 'is' (e.g. biologically or physically), than how a body emerges in interaction with the world and is thereby "moved into action". He describes the body as "an interface that be-

comes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements.”

Usefully in the context of Kusama’s sculptures, he understands the living, sensing body as an accumulation or the accumulated effect of numerous large and small affective encounters or clashes between the human and non-human ‘bodies’ that fill our everyday lives. In this sense, the body emerges in an infinite, accumulative process of affects and effects. As he writes: “to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning ‘effectuated’, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans. If you are not engaged in this learning, you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead.”

Kusama’s *Accumulation Sculptures* are also not formed as autonomous, self-constituted objects subject to the distant gaze of the viewer, but vibrate in the room as almost human, affective ‘bodies’ – open, amassed and receptive to the affective gaze of other bodies. Jane Bennett, drawing on the work of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, defines this affective body as a social body ”in the sense that each is, by its very nature as a body, continuously affecting and being affected by other bodies.”

These thoughts are also reflected in some receptions of Kusama’s practise. Marie Laurberg writes that Kusama’s *Accumulation Sculptures* transform ”the surface of the objects into an erotically loaded “skin” that meets us in the space, as a body. It is in the play between this body and ours that meaning emerges.” The art historian Jo Applin also identifies this almost erotic desire in Kusama’s art to – momentarily – merge with unfamiliar bodies and become one with the material world surrounding them: ”A moment of unity, of coming together and blending with other bodies and the surrounding environment.” In other words, the works materialise a longing to create a social space where new connections between the subject and the material environment – the world of things – is made possible.

### **The Exhibition as a Participatory Environment**

From the mid 1960s Yayoi Kusama started to use exhibition spaces – often her studio in New York – to create experimental and immersive spatial ‘environments’, as she called them. It was in these exhibitions



that she started to stage the works as objects that create a social situation the viewer can participate in. In a 1962 interview, she no longer identifies as a painter but as an 'environmental sculptor', i.e. an artist whose works include and shape the physical space that surrounds us in an exhibition. In her studio she created an exhibition situation where her accumulation sculptures were gathered in a cluster, a densely packed assemblage, which in contrast to the display at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art physically showed how the active materiality of the works extended into the exhibition space, which became a complex, enveloping, sensory space for the shared bodily and social actions of the artist and the audience. The sculptures' sculpting of the exhibition space as a performative zone for bodily and social action was entirely absent from the museum's mounting of the works, where the exhibition space remained a traditional, modernist white cube in which the work and the viewer had separate social and material lives.

In the photograph from her studio, Kusama also dramatizes her own artist's role as an anonymous, insignificant bodily figure, which with no conceptual distance intervenes in and virtually merges with the rampant exhibition environment. Through this curatorial framing, Kusama puts the status of the artist as a powerful subject on the line. Here, in



Yayoi Kusama with soft sculptures at her studio in New York, 1964.  
Photo: Lock Huey. Courtesy Yayoi Kusama.

the midst of the installation, she peeps out as the figure of an artist who stands neither above nor beyond the physical world of objects she has created. She is apparently without complete control of the living materiality that surrounds her and that she apparently consists of herself. The body of the artist appears on the one hand to be naturally connected to and 'at home' among the protrusions and proliferations of the exhibition environment, but on the other strangely trapped or confined.

Kusama's blank expression in the middle of the installation encourages me as a viewer to take her place or enter the material assemblage on the same terms as the artist. As a viewer, however, it can be difficult – visually – to find your bearings in the overcrowded exhibition space and identify where the human subject begins and the almost human objects end. Kusama's curatorial staging creates a participatory environment that should ideally be experienced from within. The material objects' vibrating surfaces call for a subject that is capable of letting their body sink into, be immersed by, touched by and moved by the shared, vibrating materiality of the works and the space. In other words, Kusama's curatorial framing opens up for a direct and immediate physical experience of being intimately connected to and anchored in the exhibition space – as an object among other objects. Kusama's accumulations of things and materials facilitate a bodily sense of no longer being at a distance to the world of things, but of instead being both captured and strangely energised or empowered by the vital energy of things. Here it becomes clear that the affective art object has the social energy to establish an open and dynamic network, a social web where different elements can enter, merge and shift in an increasing number of material connections. When, as here, the objects are arranged in groups, it becomes clear that their compound materiality also sparks a new social (dis)order or infrastructure in the exhibition space, because in their affective encounter with the works, the audience are also given an opportunity to experience how each of them is already entangled in the social community or collective of affective bodies established by the exhibition.

In this kind of performative exhibition situation, where new social relationships between the work, the body and the space are established, what Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel call "a field of enactment" is constructed,

in which not only human bodies but also material objects can act and interact as social agents: "the things themselves are also actors for action. The object options and objects fields serve as the medium for actions. Art as a social construct helps construct the social."

Kusama's material objects construct a social space where the traditional relationship between an active subject and passive object is replaced by a new material reality where the subject and object are experienced as different bodies interwoven in one, boundless, ontological 'flesh' – what Bennet calls "a dense network of relations [...] a web of vibrant matter."

### **The Affective Gaze**

In another photograph of Kusama in her studio, she nestles in the sculpture *My Flower Bed* (1962). Wearing matching clothes, she lies in the red heart of the sculpture, allowing herself to be enveloped by the work, safe like a foetus in its womb. Yet at the same time, the sculpture rises threat-



Peter Moore, Photo of Yayoi Kusama with her piece, *My Flower Bed*, 1965. © Barbara Moore/ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

eningly above Kusama, like a flesh-eating plant in the process of devouring her. Kusama thus inserts the female (artist's) body as an almost organic part of the carnal body of the work, and here too performs the sculpture as a social event where the boundaries between the body and the thing, between the person and the material environment, almost dissolve. In this photograph Kusama performs the sculpture as a 'participatory object', and in doing so challenges the audience to enter a similar performative exchange with the materiality of the work, opening their bodies to its affective force and form.

In the photograph, the work is framed by the artist-performer

directing a detached yet intense gaze at the viewer. It is a gaze devoid of any illusion of psychological content that the viewer can immerse themselves in or identify with – “I am here – but nothing” to use the title of another of her works. In a way, it is only the work that looks back in an empty gesture that corroborates the material reciprocity the work assumes between the subject and the object, between the one looking and the one being looked at. In this way, the artist’s calm gaze mediates the dream of carnal unity between body and thing, the self and the other, the subject and the object. Kusama performs the dream of the affective encounter in which the artist and the viewer meet as equals who are born and die, appear and disappear as subject and object before each other’s gaze.

In Kusama’s curatorial framing, works like *Accumulation Sculptures* and *My Flower Bed* are presented as objects that mediate what the cultural analyst Mieke Bal calls ‘the participatory look’. Bal describes the participatory look as a ‘democratic’ look involving and risking the body and the social space two people or a person and an object share.

In Kusama’s own framing, the viewer’s (in my case, the interpreter’s) distant and rational gaze is replaced by a participatory look in which the body has to be involved to feel the affective force of the work. My material body has to be involved to become what Jane Bennett calls “caught up in it” and become part of the work’s vibrating, carnal materiality – on the same terms as the artist. Kusama’s affective works thwart the analytical gaze through the lack of objective knowledge and subsequent lack of control over the object of its analysis. The gaze is blurred and unfocused, and fails to reveal any clear-cut meaning that can confirm what I already know or think about the artist as a person, for example. It is an affective gaze that in a way disturbs or distorts the picture of what I think I see and know about the world.

### **Affective Forms of Knowledge**

Kusama’s participatory exhibitions construct a social and material environment that can seem intimate or unfamiliar, safe or disturbing – or both at once. The affective encounter with the works does not appear as a meeting with the intention of generating specific, identifiable

feelings and thoughts for the individual subject, but rather as striving to bring the audience together in a shared art experience that each of them might feel and think very differently about. In doing so, the works construct – to the extent that we have access to them – a democratic space open to everyone to sense, feel, think and act within. Kusama’s New York studio represented the ideal setting for the formation of such an alternative social environment, since as a physical place it was both public and private. It is as if Kusama’s staged ‘environments’ manage to break down the inner infrastructure of both private and public space, creating instead a collective site for experiences where the inner and the outer, the singular and the common, the affective and the discursive, the personal and the social, are juxtaposed as two active materialities that interact with each other and mutually (per)form each other.

This could be described as a potential arena of experience and knowledge where we can sense what we cannot yet imagine, and experience what we do not yet know. Van Alphen sees affects as opening precisely this virtual space for “the not yet known.” In this sense, affectivity can be seen as a non-conscious and bodily way of knowing what can still only be sensed or felt. As Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write: “Affect [...] is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing.”

The proliferation of the material phallus form, which threatens to spread and cover every surface of Kusama’s accumulation sculptures and exhibition environments, creates an infinite space for experience and insight where social meaning is not yet readable, but only sensed in its fluctuating, unpredictable material form. Kusama’s accumulated works and environments therefore challenge me as an interpreter, alongside the other participants, to dare to enter and lose myself in this ‘virtual’ realm of knowledge and feel how the affective force of art can shake the epistemological foundations beneath my feet. The meaning of Kusama’s affective works should, as I see it, remain a potent and indomitable material energy, the affects and effects of which might well accumulate in my body, but which cannot be represented – also not in an analysis like this.



Installationview Yayoi Kusama – *In Infinity*. 17.09 2015 – 24.01 2016, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Kim Hansen

## **Exit**

Kusama's participatory objects and environments thus invite social and material audience participation, but without dictating how we as participants should experience, feel, think and act. In other words, the accumulation sculptures create the setting for a form of audience participation, which with a term used by Irit Rogoff and Florian Schneider is 'undirected', i.e. without artistic or curatorial control or social rules to be adhered to. On the contrary, in the affective encounter with Kusama's objects and installations, the subject is on shaky ground and has to renegotiate the relationship to themselves and their surroundings.

In his essay on Kusama's art 'Love Forever', the art critic Olivier Zahm writes that the affective meeting between the work and the viewer is not an erotic encounter in which  $1+1$  equals 2, but a meeting where  $1+1$  equals many: "the Deleuzian artist made the 'I' flee, exploding into a cloud of coloured dots," as he writes. For Kusama, the affective art experience provides an opportunity to momentarily sense how the individual body can connect to the world and become one material object among many, one subject among many, one polka dot that can circu-

late freely and aimlessly in an infinite multitude of teeming polka dots. In the installation *Obliteration Room*, the audience are encouraged to stick coloured polka dots on the white walls and surfaces of the gallery, making the contours of the room and the objects in it disappear. The installation thus dissolves the modern white cube, transforming it into a dizzyingly boundless environment in which the established social structure of subject and object dissolves. *Obliteration Room* creates an affective environment that reaches out to viewers to unite them in a chaotic joint and self-organised movement or swarm in which the individual viewer (or polka dot) is given the opportunity to enter a multiplicity of relationships to the other viewers (and polka dots). In this affective encounter with the art object, a political situation is created in which all bodies, artists, curators, works, viewers, etc. can function and interact as social agents in the same social and material network.

Kusama's art and her curation of it possess this force to create affective alliances that can embrace different bodies, emotions and thoughts, and unite them here and now in a shared experience. In this way, art and the art exhibition have the political capacity to transform the hierarchical power and knowledge structure of the public realm, and create an alternative space where the body can be set in motion, interact and function in multiple ways.

## **Mette Thobo-Carlsen**

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## NOTES

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- 1** Nora Sternfeld, 'Playing by the Rules of the Game: Participation in the Post-Representative Museum', 2012, [https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/cummapapers1\\_sternfeld1.pdf](https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/cummapapers1_sternfeld1.pdf) (last accessed 08.09.2016), p. 3.
- 2** See Noortje Marres and Javier Lezaun, 'Materials and Devices of the Public: An Introduction', *Economy and Society*, 40:4, 2011: p. 493.
- 3** Bruce W. Ferguson, 'Exhibition Rhetorics: Material Speech and Utter Sense', in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, Oxford: Routledge, 1996, p. 178.
- 4** Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, p. xvi.
- 5** Bennett, p. xvi.
- 6** Bennett, p. xvi.
- 7** Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', in *Critical Inquiry*, 30, Winter 2004: pp. 242-43.
- 8** Jo Applin, *Yayoi Kusama Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field*, London: Afterall Books, 2012, p. 80.
- 9** Here I draw inspiration from the cultural theorist Mieke Bal's concept of the participatory look: "It is a participatory look that is different from 'participatory observation' – the long-standing ideal of anthropology [...] The difference between participatory observation and participatory seeing is [...] the difference that art can make. To put it bluntly, the former remains objectifying, the participation disingenuous; the latter is self-risking." See Mieke Bal, *Endless Andness: The Politics of Abstraction According to Ann Veronica Janssens*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 8.
- 10** Marie Laurberg, 'Deep Surfaces: Yayoi Kusama In Infinity', in *Louisiana Revy, Yayoi Kusama*, vol. 56, 1, p. 10.
- 11** Laurberg, p. 28.
- 12** Chris Kraus, 'Accumulations', in *YAYOI KUSAMA*, (eds.) Louise Neri and Takaya Goto, New York: Rizzoli, 2012, p. 108.
- 13** Here I refer to Ernst Van Alphen's explanation of Deleuzian affect theory in the article 'Affective Operations in Art and Literature', *RES* 53/54, Spring/Autumn 2008, pp. 21-30.
- 14** Alphen, p. 23.



- 15** Brian Massumi quoted in Camilla M. Reestorff, 'From Artwork to Net-Work: Affective Effects of Political Art', in *Affective Methodologies, Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affects*, eds. Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 211.
- 16** Van Alphen, p. 23.
- 17** Chris Kraus, p. 108.
- 18** Jane Bennett defines a social agent as "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman, it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make difference, produce effects, alter the course of events", Bennett, p. viii.
- 19** Bennett, p. 6.
- 20** Bennett defines assemblages as "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements of vibrant materials of all sorts." Bennett, p. 23.
- 21** Bruno Latour, 'How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies', in *Body & Society*, vol. 10 (2-3), 2004: p. 209.
- 22** Latour, p. 206.
- 23** Latour, p. 205.
- 24** Bennett, p. 21.
- 25** Laurberg, p. 14.
- 26** Applin, p. 66.
- 27** Latour writes that the social "does not designate a thing amongst other things, but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social." See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling of the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 5.
- 28** Kusama is thereby one of the first artists to work with installation as an art form, something called 'environments' at the time.
- 29** Kusama is quoted as saying: "The nets I have painted had continued to proliferate until they had spread beyond the canvas to cover tables, the floor, the chairs and the walls. The result of the unlimited development of this obsessional art was that I was able to shed my painter's skin and metamorphose into an environmental sculptor." See Applin, p. 33.
- 30** Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, 'Experimenting with Representation: Iconoclasm and Making things Public', in *Exhibition Experiments*, (eds.) Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 107.

**31** Bennett, p. 13.

**32** Even though the sociologists Marres and Lezaun do not address the art object and art space in their analysis of the political agency of things, Kusama's affective art objects seem to open up for precisely this material from of participation in striving to transform the modernist white cube of the gallery into a political stage, and the passive spectator into a participant in a collective, political movement.

**33** Bal, pp. 8-9.

**34** Bennett, p. xv.

**35** Van Alphen, p. 30.

**36** Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 1.

**37** Irit Rogoff and Florian Schneider, 'Productive Anticipation', in *Cultural Transformations/ Cultural Politics in a Global Age: Uncertainty, Solidarity and Globalization*, eds. David Held and Henrietta Moore, Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2008, p. 9.

**38** Olivier Zahm, 'Love Forever', in *YAYOI KUSAMA*, eds. Louise Neri and Takaya Goto, New York: Rizzoli, 2012, p. 154.

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):

The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# Affect and the Participatory Event

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By Camilla Jalving

Taking two works by Jesper Just and Randi & Katrine as cases, the article delineates a concept of participation based on 'the participatory event' and the affective, sensory and physical experience of the art work. In this way it challenges preconceptions of 'active participation' by representing a defence of participation on the terms of art itself.

I remember the transformer towers standing in the landscape. Like markers on the hilltops. A bit scary, with their humming and a danger sign on the side: high voltage, watch out! We watched out, and always cycled past them. Today most of these transformer towers have been demolished. The silence of the electric chip has drowned out their buzz. They were, however, temporarily resurrected in the total installation *Between Towers*, created by the artist duo Randi & Katrine for ARKEN Museum of Modern Art in 2015. A parade of 11 transformer towers recreated in plywood, meticulously painted and patinated, then installed at ARKEN.

This is where this article begins. In a total installation of towers, which was not only monumental in the imposing exhibition hall, but also invited forms of participation that are relevant in the context of this publication.

In what follows I will explore these different forms in the hope of delineating a concept of participation based on the exhibition encounter – what I call ‘the participatory event’ – and the sensory and physical experience of the artwork. This concept of participation draws on theories of performativity and affect and – I argue – thereby expands the usual discourses of participation outlined in the introduction to this publication. These discourses are linked to the field of museology and specific understandings of democracy and participatory art. In this context, my contribution could doubtless be viewed as being on the edge of – if not going over the edge of – what can be defined as participation. Nonetheless, I find the approach relevant, partly because it is based on the actual practice of art as it unfolds in art institutions, and partly because it might have the potential to inform the exhibition practices of such institutions in a productive way. First and foremost, my contribution represents a defence of participation on the terms of art itself. It is a defence of the very objects of art and the agency they have, i.e. what they do and what they can make us do, think and reflect on – maybe before we are even aware that we are participating.



Installation shot from *Between Towers* by Randi & Katrine, 2015 Photo: Torben Eskerod

Back to the 11 towers. Some were grey and others were reddish, just as in real life, where the history of building transformer towers in Denmark extends over almost a century. The early towers were built of brick. Later they were constructed using steel plates, before disappearing entirely as high-voltage power cables went underground and the transformation of electricity was transferred to small boxes. In the exhibition the towers were positioned as sculptural objects, vast physical presences you could relate to bodily as you moved through the exhibition hall. The further you went into the exhibition, the smaller the towers became. The scale changed as you moved, like Alice in Wonderland crawling down the rabbit hole.

This obvious presence and physicality are not, however, the only elements of the vast installation. By entering the realm of memory, I argue, the 11 towers operate as much in a mental as a physical space. *Between Towers* invites not only physical participation, but can also invite participation of a more imaginary kind. For me personally, a trip down memory lane to the hilly landscape of my childhood where transformer towers were highly-charged markers – frightening and fascinating structures. For others they probably conjure up something different, or maybe nothing at all, given that transformer towers have a clear historical expiry date. The point here is not what is experienced by who, but that this form of ‘imaginary participation’ is generated by the works themselves, i.e. by the physical and material presence of the towers and the space they frame, the atmosphere they create, the scenography they provide, and the situation they create. In short, what they are and what they *do*.

### **The Performative Space**

Everything the towers *do* can be seen as part of their *performativity*, a theoretical concept rooted in the linguistics of the 1950s, with the idea of the performative speech act and the power of language to constitute reality. Since then, performativity has also become a concept in art theory, applied to the actions and ‘performance’ of the artwork. It is therefore not primarily what the artwork ‘represents’ (its semiotic or iconographic content) but what it ‘presents’, i.e. what it ‘does’ and the situation it creates on the basis of its context and its viewers as the co-producers of

meaning. In theories of performativity, the meaning of an artwork – any artwork, given that the concept of performativity is not limited to a specific art form, but constitutes a methodological approach – is dependent on who sees it, when, and in what context. On the one hand, this makes any conclusive interpretation impossible, but on the other it creates space for the viewer's own performative engagement and for a view of art that takes its engaging character into account.

Analysing participation in the context of performativity theory as I do here opens up for a much broader conceptualisation in which participation can be physical, phenomenological, or simply action based. The artwork is 'created' by the viewer through use, like a bench by Jeppe Hein, a smoke tunnel by Olafur Eliasson, or in this case when I walk through



Jeppe Hein, *Modified Social Bench U*, 2008. ARKEN Museum of Modern Art.



Installation shot, *Your blind passenger* by Olafur Eliasson, 2010. ARKEN Museum of Modern Art.

a row of transformer towers and bring the work 'to life' performatively through my memories, associations and bodily movements. Here participation is both a function of the processual installation of the towers, and their presence as objects that I can relate to physically. But it is also a mental process: I remember, add something to the story, imagine another world, imagine myself as someone else, or simply participate in the imaginary world of the work – the space between the towers, also

implied by the title of the installation. In other words, the work's performativity and thereby its participatory element consists of what the work does, the situation the towers create, and the way I as a viewer contribute to the creation of the situation through my presence and physical as well as mental engagement.

### **The Active Viewer**

The premise for including the performativity of the artwork in a discourse of participation is to reformulate the very concept of participation, but also to challenge the division of 'active' and 'passive' often central to discourses of participation. When participation or the participant is referred to in such discourses, there is frequently an implicit 'non-participant', a passive consumer usually formed according to a modernist template of the disinterested viewer that relates to the autonomous artwork in the Kantian sense of being distanced and disinterested. In his seminal essay 'The Emancipated Spectator', the French philosopher Jacques Rancière poses an interesting challenge to this active/passive dichotomy. Rancière's main concern is 'democracy', which he links to sensory perception and the sites where we reproduce inequality (see Lise Sattrup's article, pp. 133-149). 'The Emancipated Spectator' takes theatre and the ways it has related historically to the spectator as its point of departure. Rancière draws on Berthold Brecht's concept of *verfremdung* and Antonin Artaud's idea of 'The Theatre of Cruelty' as different ways of challenging concepts of 'the spectator'. However, he sees both relationships with the audience – the one based on alienating distance, the other on excessive proximity – as being centred on a false opposition between a passive spectator and an active participant, which in turn assumes that the spectator has to be 'activated'. In place of this dichotomy, Rancière suggests that the act of spectatorship is in itself an activity, and that interpretation of the world represents a way of "transforming it", of "reconfiguring" it, as he puts it. As he writes: "The spectator is active, just like the student or the scientist: He observes, he selects, he compares, he interprets. He connects what he observes with many other things he has observed on other stages, in other kinds of spaces." And, he continues:

“Spectatorship is not a passivity that must be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know, as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamed [...] We don’t need to turn spectators into actors. We do need to acknowledge that every spectator is already an actor in his own story and that every actor is in turn the spectator of the same kind of story.”

The performance theorist Matthew Reason puts forward a similar argument based on his experience of theatre. In the article ‘Asking the Audience: Audience Research and the Experience of Theatre’ he argues that members of the theatre audience, who to a large degree can be compared to visitors to a ‘traditional’ art exhibition, are active participants. They participate in an act, even though it is not a literal act. Reason draws on Jean-Paul Sartre’s idea of the act of looking as a reflexive act, writing: “[T]he ‘doing’ of the spectator experience is a perceptual and imaginative doing, a cognitive act which is often accompanied by awareness of the act of cognition. Spectatorship, in other words, is a form of active perception, where we are often (but not always) aware of ourselves looking.” Reason does not address participation directly, but his ideas add nuances to the dichotomous division of active/passive. If experiencing theatre is a “perceptual and imaginative doing”, then it does not make sense to talk about the spectator as active or passive, but rather to talk about different kinds of activity that are all based on different kinds of participation – physical, mental and cognitive.

### **The Agency of the Artwork**

But why introduce an alternative participation discourse, when so many already exist? Primarily because existing discourses of participation – focusing on strategies for and tools of participation – do not always take into account the participatory element of the encounter with the artwork and the exhibition situation itself, i.e. the encounter with the materiality and affectivity of objects. Cultural history museums would appear to be a case in point here, since the principle of participation in the form of interactivity has apparently triumphed



over anything the objects themselves are capable of communicating. The museum researcher Michelle Henning comments on this development in her book *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*. She argues that the emphasis on experience – based on an aesthetically focused model of experience – she sees as prevalent in cultural history museums, has resulted in a reduced focus on the artefact: "The emphasis on experience displaces the emphasis on artefacts. This is a curious aspect of aestheticizing displays – the aesthetic originates as a discourse concerned with the concrete and the particular, with the sensuousness of the world – yet the concern with producing a life-changing impact overrides that encounter." She continues: "As museum design becomes about setting the stage for transformative experiences, objects become little more than props or stimuli", a development that has only gained ground since she described it in 2006.

In other words, participation risks becoming an 'external' activity instead of being located in the artworks themselves. I write 'artworks' fully aware that the art museum and cultural history museum are different contexts for the museum experience, and that the objects they house are referred to as artworks and artefacts respectively, and are in turn met with different expectations. This influences how participation can be practised. But this only increases the need to insist on the agency of the artwork and its capacity to establish a space for participation. Because the artwork does 'something else' than other kinds of objects, partly because it appears in a different context and is received with different expectations, and partly because it operates with its own language and materiality. Like the transformer towers in the exhibition hall. Whilst they might just be standing there, they also determine my path. They bring memories to life. They touch me as I touch them. The gritty surface, the changing patina, the soft vibration of the electric hum. The idea of the agency of objects inserts another dimension between the artwork and the viewer, where it is no longer only the 'user' that participates, but also the artwork itself. Rather than being a passive object to be looked at, it is given an active role via its 'performance' and presence and the way it configures the space and my movements within it.

## **The Affective Turn**

The concept of agency is closely linked to the concept of affect, and thus also to the concept of participation I want to explore here. One way of understanding affect is as somatic experience, for example when we get goosebumps, get dizzy, feel nauseous or are overcome by laughter. When agency and affect are so closely linked, it is because the agency of an object is dependent on the affects it produces, i.e. how it influences its surroundings. According to the art historian Ernst van Alphen "visual images not only function as providers of content or messages, but also are indispensable in raising feelings and working through them. When images function in this way, they are active agents, transmitting affects to the viewer or reader." A central hypothesis in the study of affect is that affects, as opposed to emotions, are not something we have, but something we are 'in'. This difference reflects two ways of understanding emotions, which form the cornerstone of what has been termed 'the affective turn'. Whereas one understanding sees feelings as inner, psychological phenomena belonging to the subject, the other sees emotions as outer phenomena, as contexts and events that contribute to the generation of subjectivity. As the literary theorists Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup write in the anthology *Structures of Feeling*:

"According to this distinction – now structuring much work within the field of affect studies – affect constitutes a dimension of bodily experiences and encounters, a dimension that remains, significantly, non-semantic and non-representational. In contrast, emotions are considered as somehow translated, signified and subjectified version of the elusive, pre-discursive affective matter."

Focusing on affect therefore involves a shift from what they call "the stable and acknowledged" towards "the immediate and emergent." In the current context, this corresponds to a shift in analytical focus from the transformer towers as culturally historical relics, to the situation they create. In many ways this shift corresponds to the shift in performativity theory from symbols and meaning to event and performativity, in this context to everything that is present in the encounter with the artwork.

## **The Affective Efficacy of the Towers**

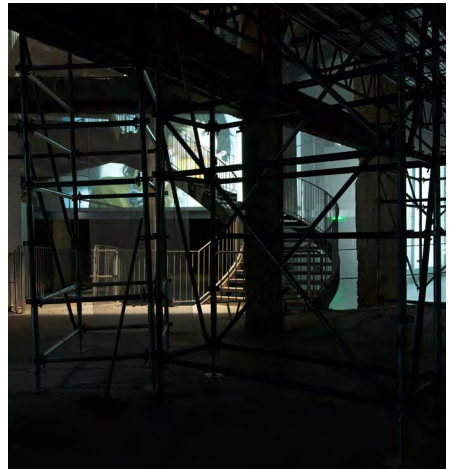
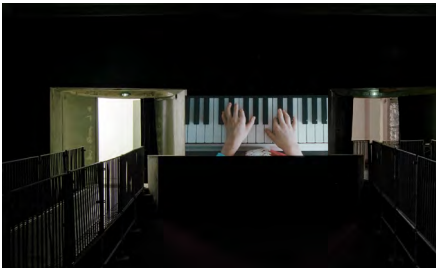
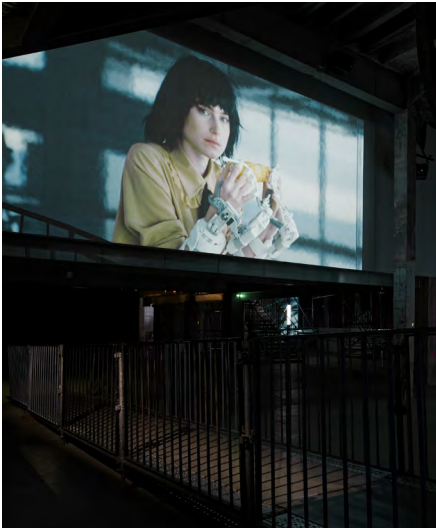
One thing is to identify affect, but to attribute qualities to it is something else. What happens to us when we are brought into affect? What happens to our surroundings? What happens to our actions? Something can definitely happen – or at least that is the idea that runs through most of the literature on the subject. If we return to Ernst van Alphen's article, he distinguishes between affective reading and allegorical reading. Whereas allegorical reading usually draws on familiar and conventional meanings, affective reading opens up for what we do not yet know, or as he writes: "affective operations and the way they shock to thought are what opens a space for the not yet known." 'Shock to thought' is the Deleuzian idea of the potential for something new to emerge in the affective encounter. Or as Sharma and Tygstrup write: "When somebody is affected, this somebody is likely to change agency as well, producing new agency, affecting the environment in turn." Being affected is "being struck by something that makes you change your direction or composure ever so slightly."

This 'ever so slight' change might seem far removed from the ideas of participation, democracy and empowerment that pervade participation discourses. And it is. It is vague and indefinable. But that is precisely because this is another kind of participation, which nevertheless is significant for the efficacy of artworks and for what art can do. I will now turn to another example of an art practise that can maybe point in the direction of what happens – or can happen – in the affective encounter.

## **Moments of Intensity**

I am not sure where the ramp takes me. If this is the right way. If this is the direction I should be going in. Or if it even leads anywhere. But I put one foot in front of the other. Onwards. Upwards. The ramp is part of a large scaffolding system of bridges and steps installed in the basement of Palais du Tokyo in Paris as part of the Danish artist Jesper Just's exhibition *Servitudes* (2015). As well as the ramp, the artwork consists of a series of video projections shown directly on the bare, concrete walls.

A young woman wearing mechanical 'robot arms' tries to eat a corn cob. It is clearly difficult for her to control the mechanical movements, so she



Exhibition view of *Servitudes* by Jesper Just, Palais de Tokyo, 24.06 – 13.09 2015.  
Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Perrotin (Paris, New York, Hong Kong) & Anna Lena Films.  
Photo: Aurélien Mole.

keeps dropping it. It lands on the table, after which she tries again. A girl stands at the foot of the One World Trade Center. The camera pans up the vast building, standing like a monumental column. With gnarled fingers, the girl struggles to remove a stone from her pocket and starts scratching the glass façade of the building. In close up. Then from a distance. The camera zooms in and out. Zooms in on the girl's face, her skin, her hand against the glass. Then the façade. Then the sky. High up. From the gnarled fingers to the soaring, straight lines of the building. In another video on a different wall, a beautiful young woman stands inside what is presumably the One World Trade Center. She is high up in the building. The New York skyline lies ahead of her. The gaze from above versus the gaze from below. If this woman is anyone, she is the perfect woman, caressed by the camera. The perfect body versus the crooked fingers. She speaks, but it is difficult to hear what she is saying. It is her face that dominates. As expression, as presence. Maybe. And maybe I am wrong. Maybe something else is going on. During World War II the basement of Palais du Tokyo was used to store pianos that had been confiscated from Jews in France. There is thus a historical context that can make itself felt, if you know about it. There are also stories about the One World Trade Center. Built on the site of the first World Trade Center, it houses the memory of terrorism and loss, what the artist calls "a phantom limb" representing something that paradoxically no longer exists. But all this belongs to the realm of representation, and is less relevant here. Because this is not an attempt to analyse, but a process to identify some of the effects the video installation uses and that generate affect in me as I look, move on, look down, look up, try to find my bearings and lose my bearings, again.

The affect is the product of a specific atmosphere in the work, which primarily stems from the work's tactile surfaces, postures, looks, freeze frames, zooms and especially its soundtrack – a quiet piece of piano music. This can of course be translated into emotions and experiences like longing, sadness and loss, but key here is that it is not *my* sadness, not *my* loss, but rather the feeling of it that the work generates in me. The music has been recorded in the exhibition space and is played by the girl with the gnarled fingers – not without difficulty. In the last room of the

installation she is seen playing the piano, like a full stop, an interweaving of the sound of the work and the site of the work. *Servitude* addresses issues of the body and disability, something underlined by the ramp, which in the words of the artist is precisely to "force the abled body to take a route typically reserved for the disabled." My body's usual patterns of movement are challenged and brought out of balance as I move around the scaffolding in the dark space, through which the artwork allows me to feel it on my own body. As a 'user' I am denied my usual navigational ability and movements. I am disabled. But the video installation is also affective at the visual level, in that the representations become states, perceptions or atmospheres that are deposited in my body. The use of close-ups of hands, faces and skin creates images that in the first instance do not 'signify' (or 'represent') but instead 'touch' (or 'present') through proximity and tactility: I sense how something feels in that through the act of vision, with the eye as a translating medium, I feel it myself. The hardness of the glass, the crispness of the corncob, the inside of the trouser pocket. A form of synaesthesia whereby an impression on one of my senses triggers a sense impression in another of my senses. I do not, in other words, *read* another's body, I *feel* it on my own body. Feel how it could be to be that body – not just as a symbol or representation, but as a physical, sensory presence.

This could be seen as part of a general aesthetic experience. When, however, I also characterise it as a form of 'participation' it is to insist on everything that takes place in the encounter with an artwork that takes the form of intensity or heightened awareness. Because affect is precisely something that takes place *in between*. Between the agency of the work and my own agency. Or as Ernst van Alphen writes: "The fact that affects should be seen as energetic intensities implies that they are *relational* and that they are always the result of an interaction between a work and its beholder. It is within this relationship that the intensity comes about." To talk about affect as participation is obviously far removed from the ideas of decision-making often associated with the concept of participation. On the contrary, in the affective encounter I am to a large degree steered by and subject to the aesthetic impact of the work. Because even if, in theory, I can choose which direction to walk in and how I overcome

the challenges of the scaffolding, affect is something imposed on me. My emotions do not belong to me, but come from without. I am influenced rather than influencing. This does not, however – and this is a key point, which in this context refers back to Rancière’s critique of the active/passive dichotomy – mean that I assume a position of passivity. On the contrary. Through the affective encounter I enter a relationship with my surroundings through active, bodily and mental awareness.

### **From Art Practise to Exhibition Practise**

Both Jesper Just and Randi & Katrine’s installations create affective spaces with high levels of intensity in which it is the artwork itself that generates the space for participation, and where participation is therefore not an external strategy added by the exhibiting art institution. The works, however, have very different approaches to the creation of such a space. Randi & Katrine work with memory and atmosphere, and Jesper Just with tactility and bodily sensation, but also with a conscious disorientation of the viewer. This disorientation is interesting in a participation perspective, because it articulates the moments when the works offer resistance, when you cannot find yourself, when participation is made difficult, when identification maybe becomes disidentification, and when what the work projects is precisely what you are *not*.

The question is how we can transfer the participation of art forms to the exhibition space? How can the practise of art inform, as I implied in the introduction to this article, the practise of making exhibitions? How can it not only create, but also inspire the art institution to create a framework for intense and affective encounters? There are, of course, a number of means available in the exhibition design toolbox. Scenography, light and sound are just some of the effects used in the production of exhibitions today, where the shift away from the sterility of the white cube has become standard in exhibition practises. There is also the conscious use of rhythm, including the concentration and dispersal of works, the modulation of the exhibition visitor’s movement with obstructions and openings, as well as the conscious use of the exhibition’s own ‘rhetoric’ and approaches, all of which can contribute to the cultivation of affective encounters. The issue, of course, is how to succeed in doing so. The experience economy

waits, as always, in the wings, ready to embrace the exhibition experience and make it part of its logic – and in doing so paper over the cracks, tone down any resistance, and grind the sharpest edges flat.

### **The Participatory Event**

Just as important as asking ‘how’, is asking ‘why?’ Why work strategically with affect? Why not just let art generate affect – which I clearly think it has the ability to do, given my encounters with the works of Jesper Just and Randi & Katrine described above. Why also try to establish intensive encounters with artworks through exhibition design, flow and communication? Part of the answer lies with relevance. Affective participation in the exhibition encounter – the actual ‘participatory event’ – is one of the ways the museum can establish meaningful relationships with new as well as existing visitors. Another part of the answer, which I would like to emphasise here, is in a way about the exact opposite. About *not* attributing affective participation any specific efficacy, like generating ‘empowerment’ or stimulating ‘critical thinking’. It is possible that it has the potential to foster these and even other ideals. What remains, however, most important, is that we feel affect and let ourselves be affected and thereby create a realm of possibility for “the not yet known”, as van Alphen is quoted as calling it above. This is where affect and ‘the participatory event’ relate differently to the discourses of social relevance that pervade the concept of participation. Not because affect aims to make us do *something* in particular, but because it lets us feel that there is something that can *do* something, and that something could potentially happen.

### **Camilla Jalving**

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tion: Performativity, Art and Method', 2011] and co-author (with Rune Gade) of *Nybrud: Dansk kunst i 1990erne* ['New Departures: Art in Denmark in the 1990s', 2006]. Recently she has contributed to the anthology *Kulturteori og kultursociologi* ['Cultural Theory and Cultural Sociology', 2016] with an article on performativity and culture.

## NOTES

**1** The project is also discussed in Camilla Jalving, 'The floor is yours', in *Randi & Katrine: Follies & Faces*, (ed.) Anna Louise Manly, Køge: KØS Museum of Art in Public Spaces, 2015, pp. 142-153.

**2** The term agency is currently used in a range of different theoretical contexts. Jane Bennett writing on affect uses the term 'material agency' to signify the active powers issuing from non-subjects, whereas Bruno Latour uses the term 'actant' as that which has efficacy and can do things. See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, pp. viii-ix. Here the word should be understood in its most basic sense as a derivative of the Latin *agere* (to do) and thereby as linked to action.

**3** The key text is the work of the English philosopher of language J.L. Austin, who in the posthumously published collection of lectures, *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), introduces the idea of the performative speech act and the power of language to 'constitute' reality. See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975 (1962).

**4** See, for example, Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2002, pp. 174-212; Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things With Art: The Meaning of Art's Performativity*, Zürich: JRP Ringier and Dijon: Les presse du réel, 2007, and Camilla Jalving, *Værk som handling: Performativitet, kunst og metode*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2011.

**5** The art historian Amelia Jones characterises the disinterested viewer as follows: "While most art historians would prefer not to admit it, the practice of art historical analysis most often assumes certain values determined via an art historical model of a 'disinterested' judgment practiced by a learned interpreter who veils his investments in the service of objectivity." See Amelia Jones, 'Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning', in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, (eds.) Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 39.

- 6** Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Artforum*, March 2007: p. 277.
- 7** Rancière, p. 277.
- 8** Rancière, p. 279.
- 9** Matthew Reason, 'Asking the Audience: Audience Research and the Experience of Theatre', *About Performance*, no. 10, 2010: p. 20.
- 10** Michelle Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006, p. 112.
- 11** Henning, p. 112.
- 12** Ernst van Alphen, 'Affective operations of art and literature', *RES* 53/54, Spring/Autumn 2008: p. 27.
- 13** See Frederik Tygstrup, 'Affekt og rum', *Kultur & Klasse*, year. 41, no. 116, 2013: p. 19.
- 14** The phrase is attributed to Patricia Ticineto Clough, who in 2007 identified such an affective turn in the humanities. See Patricia Ticineto Clough's introduction in *The Affective Turn*, eds. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 1-33.
- 15** Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup (eds.), *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015, p. 7.
- 16** Sharma and Tygstrup, p. 5.
- 17** Van Alphen, p. 30.
- 18** Sharma and Tygstrup, p. 15.
- 19** Sharma and Tygstrup, p. 16.
- 20** 'Servitudes: A conversation between Jesper Just and Katell Jaffrès', in Jesper Just, *Servitudes*, Palais de Tokyo, Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2015, p. 69.
- 21** Just, p. 70.
- 22** The music played is Éliane Radique's *Opus 17, Étude* from 1970.
- 23** Just, p. 71.
- 24** Van Alphen, p. 26.
- 25** For example by Nico Carpentier. See the introduction to this publication, as well as Maj Klindt's contribution.

**26** Here I am thinking of Nina Simon's more hands-on methods for participation in her book *The Participatory Museum*. See Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010.

**27** See J. Pine and J. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999.

**28** The relevance criterion, also outlined in the introduction, is one of the criteria addressed in more recent museology as part of the changed role of the museum, perhaps best summed up in Stephen E. Weil's famous 1999 dictum: 'From being about something to being for somebody'. Stephen E. Weil, 'From Being About Something to Being For Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum', *Daedalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 128, 1999.

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):

The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# DEMOCRACY

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# Democratic Participation in the Art Encounter

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By Lise Sattrup

Informed by Jacques Rancière's understanding of democracy, the article analyses the democratic participation of children in educational activities at the art museum, as well as in general museum communication. On the basis of a series of cases and participant observation, it argues for a shift from an understanding of participation as something to be learned to the assumption that everyone can participate.

Participation is associated with democracy, but the issue is not only how we understand and practise participation, but also how we understand democracy. I start this article by exploring the scope for children's *democratic participation* in educational contexts at art museums, before moving on to the potential for addressing democratic participation not only in a teaching context, but also at the of more general level of exhibition communication. Inspired by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, I see democracy not as a system of government or way of life, but as something sporadic that happens and emerges in specific situations where dominant understandings of who can participate and how they should participate are challenged. I subscribe to Rancière's broad concept

of participation, which includes not only *doing*, but also *sensing*. As a result, I argue that when – and if – the goal is democracy, a shift from teaching children and others to participate to assuming that everyone can participate is key. I begin with a short description of a teaching situation at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, which raises some fundamental issues about the ways we understand and practise democratic participation at art museums. These are issues I elaborate on using a second case incorporating Jacques Rancière’s thinking on democracy and participation. I conclude with some perspectives on a specific communication strategy at ARKEN that develops some of the potential offered in educational contexts.

### **A Teaching Situation**

*After looking at some other artworks, we (the 5th grade pupils, their teacher and I) are positioned in front of a video work. The work is hanging on a small hook at ARKEN, and in front of it is a bench with space for about 6 children. The rest of us sit on the floor around the bench. The museum educator asks us to watch the screen for a few minutes. The video work Mirror by Elina Brotherus is playing on the small screen.*



Elina Brotherus, *Mirror*, 2001

<https://vimeo.com/92389420>

*On the screen we see a woman in a bathroom. We see her from behind as she looks at herself in a mirror. We can see her wet shoulders and blond, bobbed hair. The lighting is cold, like strip lighting. The mirror is steamy, but slowly the steam evaporates and the mirror image of the woman’s upper body and face appear. She looks blankly into the mirror. Breathing calmly and deeply so her shoulders rise and fall. It’s almost as if I*

*can hear her breathing, but the work has no sound. Maybe it feels that way because I'm standing so close to her? Does she know that I'm standing here looking at her? Is it ok that I'm standing here? Slowly it changes, and now she's the one looking, but what is she looking for? Is she looking at me? Who is the viewer – her or me?*

*Shortly after we've sat down to watch the work, one of the boys in the class asks: "What should we look for?" Shortly afterwards he asks again, this time slightly louder: "But what should we look for?" Total silence. Nobody reacts. Neither children nor adults. Which seems strange, because I think it's a good question. Because what should we look for? What does the museum educator or their teacher want us to see? And what does the artist want? What's the right thing to see? Is there any 'right' thing to see? Or does the situation basically challenge the ways we usually see? Maybe because we're so close to her that it feels intimidating? Maybe because she's staring at us? Maybe because she's naked and we're sitting here with the whole class? Maybe because the video disrupts the pace and narrative structure we know from films based on a Hollywood model? Nothing much happens here, there are no edits, and it's really slow. It's not like watching a film, so how should we watch it? It's not like looking at a photograph either, because we can see her breathing, see the steam slowly disappearing. These signs of life, of time, intensify the situation for me. There's also something about her gaze. What's she thinking about? What's she looking for? The boy asks a third time, now more irritated and insistent: "But what should we look for?" Still no reaction or response. His never gets an answer to his question. Afterwards, there's a short dialogue where the museum educator asks what we experienced, and contributes by linking the video work to the theme of identity. So maybe 'identity' was what we should have been looking for? The question "What should we look for?" is not addressed. But it's left hanging in the air ... The teacher catches me on our way to the next artwork and says: "Sorry, he has Asperger's."*

The boy's question can be understood in several ways. If we read it as wanting help and advice on how he *should* look, then the task of art museums could be to teach children and the uninitiated how to look. If we read the boy's question as asking whether all ways of looking are recognised, the question can challenge the 'master' interpretations of artworks by art museums. I do not see the boy's question as being based on lack of competence or the art museum's interpretations of the work, but as a critical reflection on how we look or *should* look. I have chosen

to start this article here, because for me the situation challenges the view that children and others should be taught how to participate, as well as pointing to the possibilities for democratic participation in the art encounter.

The account above is part of the empirical material produced during my Ph.D. The field of my research was educational programmes at art museums that focus on participation strategies in planning educational programmes and developing exhibitions.

Inspired by the Danish childhood researcher Hanne Warming, I studied the educational programmes as a participant observer from the constructed position of 'least-possible adult'.

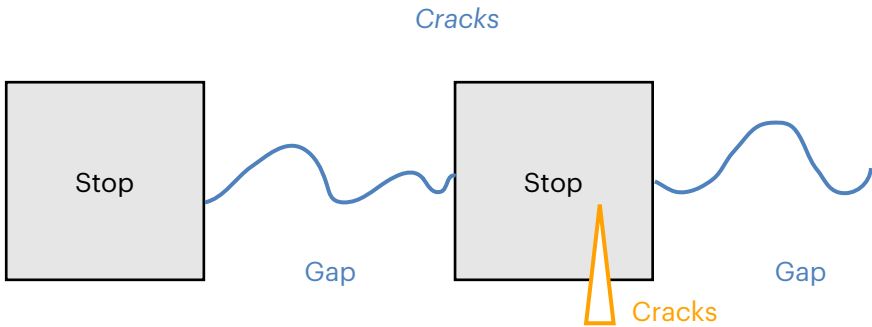
This methodological approach made it possible for me to see something different than I usually see from a teaching perspective. The method helped me to see that from a child's perspective educational activities do not only take place when a museum educator stops at specific artworks or conducts specific workshops, but also take place between 'stops' (gaps) or in situations when the children do something unexpected that challenges the teaching (cracks).

### **Teaching as Stops, Gaps and Cracks**

On the basis of participant observation, in my thesis I developed the three empirically generated concepts of *stops*, *gaps* and *cracks* to show how from a child's perspective educational programmes can be seen as three different kinds of situations that make different forms of participation possible.

- 1) *Stops* I limit to situations where children are gathered around an artwork or an educational activity, i.e. situations that are seen as educational from the perspective of the teacher.
- 2) *Gaps*, on the other hand, are characterised as being transitory and social, as well as taking place in the movement between stops.
- 3) *Cracks* are specific situations during stops when children do something unexpected but not intentionally disruptive.





The diagram shows educational activities as taking place in the interaction between stops and gaps, and that cracks can emerge during the stops. I see gaps and cracks as being as central as stops in understanding the scope children have to participate democratically during educational activities. In an art educational context, this understanding is a direct extension of the visual culture theorist Irit Rogoff's emphasis on not seeing formal teaching situations solely as learning situations, as well as the educational philosopher Gert Biesta's focus on 'democracy learning' as not being limited to teaching activities.

### **The Opportunities for Participation during Stops, Gaps and Cracks**

To investigate the opportunities children have to participate during stops, gaps and cracks, I used a case that provides a good example of how stops, gaps and cracks make different forms of participation possible.

The case is not presented as being representative of museum teaching in general or the activities any museum in particular, nor used to provide an analysis of either. What it can, however, show is the relationship between different situations in a teaching activity (stops, gaps and cracks) and the different opportunities they give children to participate.

The case involves a third-grade class and Nikolaj Recke's video installation *Looking for 4-Leaf Clovers* (1998). The case is reconstructed using the data gathered during my participant observation: field notes, transcribed sound recordings of the group activity, and photographs.

## A Case of Stops, Gaps and Cracks



Nikolaj Recke, *Looking for 4-leaf Clovers*, 1998

The museum educator Hanne introduces the work with the words: “*And then we’re going to go in and look at this artwork with all our senses.*”

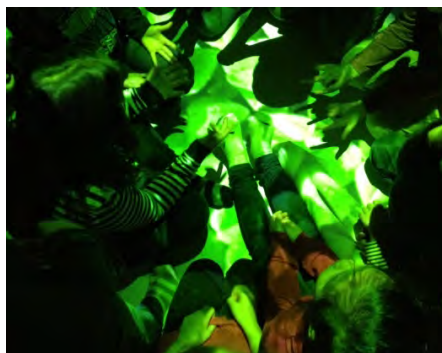
The first thing that happens when me and the children enter the installation is that several of them immediately start to interact with the work, touching the clover leaves and experimenting with how the projections hit their bodies and form new images. Hanne tells the children that they can sit around the work. They sit down and several of them immediately start using their hands and bend over the work. They are told to sit up. So they can sit around the artwork and look, but not touch.

Since *Looking for 4-Leaf Clovers* is a video projection made to be touched, the situation is not about teaching children not to touch the art, but maybe more about teaching them how art should be experienced? And maybe about teaching children to *see* with all their senses? Hanne clarifies this special way of looking as follows: “*The exercise now is to look at this artwork and try to imagine what it’s like to be in this field. Can you hear something, smell something ...?*”

So the children are to see the artwork as an illusion of a field of clover, and then imagine what they would experience with senses other than sight. A little later Hanne says: “*Now you can come in three at a time and lie here for a minute. We’ll start with you ...*”

Three of the children lie inside the installation, and the following exchange takes place between them and Hanne:

Hanne: *What does it feel like, lying in there?*



William: *Normal, like lying on the floor.*

Hanne: *So it's not soft?*

Emilie: *No, there should be a duvet and mattress.*

Frida: *I think I thought it would be soft.*

Hanne: *Does it make you think anything?*

William: *Yes, it hurts.*

## How to Participate

There are three different situations that make three different ways of participating possible:

**1** A bodily exploration of the work (where the children explore the work with all their senses).

**2** A visual investigation (where the children see the work from a given position).

**3** An abstract investigation of the work (where the children do not look directly at the work, since they're lying on their backs).



Situation 1, 2 and 3. Nikolaj Recke, *Looking for 4-leaf Clovers*, 1998

The first situation, where the children explore the work and in doing so open up for the use of all their senses, occurs in the gap. In my field notes I describe how several of them use the gap to investigate the work through touch, but also

by experimenting with how the projection hits their bodies, creating new images. This is another way of participating than that made possible by the stop, where the children first sit around the work and look at it, and then lie on it.

## Participation as Sensing

But is it about the difference between participating physically and looking? Or about something else? By identifying seeing or hearing as actions, Jacques Rancière eliminates the distinction between sensing and doing:

”The spectator is active, just like the student or the scientist: He observes, he selects, he compares, he interprets. He connects what he observes with many other things he has observed on other stages, in other spaces.”

Rancière challenges the idea that knowing precedes seeing by pointing out that equality is not created by teaching people to see, but by presuming that they *can* see. His point is that to *see* is to interpret, and thereby also to generate change. As he writes:

”Emancipation starts from the principle of equality. It begins when we dismiss the opposition between looking and acting and understand that the distribution of the visible itself is part of the configuration of domination and subjection. It starts when we realize that looking is also an action that confirms or modifies that distribution, and that “interpreting the world” is already a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it.”

Thus for Rancière, *looking* is an action that either validates or challenges established understandings of who can participate and how they should participate.

Following Rancière’s line of thought means we cannot restrict specific realms of knowledge to a given field (like art history, for example) but only to former experiences. Being able to choose what to look for (cf. the boy I started with) and compare it with something else and interpret what we see requires previous experiences, something we all have, so in that sense we are all equal. But only if we give equal status to the different kinds of experience that can provide a basis to *participate* at art museums. Rancière connects participation to democracy by showing how our ways of participating are subject to established understandings of who can participate and how they should participate. Rancière rejects the idea that democracy is a system or system of government, seeing it instead as something sporadic that occurs in the moment when an ac-

tion challenges established understandings of who can participate and how they should participate. For Rancière, it is breaking with the idea of dividing people into those that can and those that cannot that constitutes democracy: "It does not simply presuppose the rupture of the 'normal' distribution of positions between those who exercise power and the one subject to it. It also requires a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions 'proper' to such classifications."

### **Democratic Participation in Stops, Gaps or Cracks?**

The situation in the gap (situation 1) shows how the children explore the work in different ways. It also shows that participation is not limited to something children cannot see until they have been taught how. When the children experiment with their own shadows, I see it as a way of producing new images and possible new meanings, meanings that are not based on any kind of 'right' way of looking at art.

The example shows that the stop, on the other hand, is directed at teaching the children to 'see with all senses' as a more 'correct' way of participating where the sense of sight takes precedence, and where art is seen as the illusionary form of something else – in this case a landscape. It is this illusion (the landscape) that the children are subsequently invited to experience using different senses. So even though the artwork is a video installation that the children can enter and experience using multiple senses, a traditional work/spectator position that reduces the artwork to a passive object is established. The children are to look at the video projection and then imagine how they can feel, hear and smell the field of clover. The example also shows how cracks can challenge the ways children learn how to participate. When William says "*Normal, like lying on the floor*" he punctures the illusion of the work as a field of clover, and thereby also the 'right' way of participating that the class are being taught.

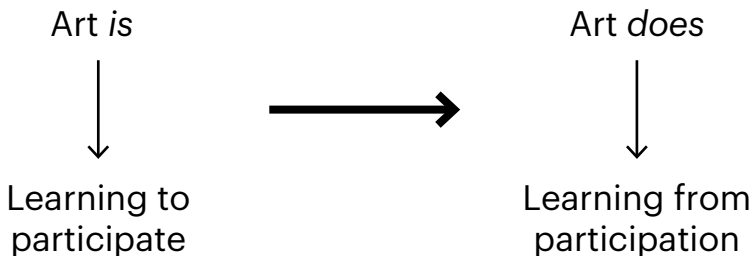
### **Conclusions of the Case**

During the analysis above I have identified the educational activity as being comprised of three different kinds of situations (stops, gaps and cracks), as well as how all three of them make different kinds of participation possible. The stop was based on the assumption that you have to know how

to participate before you can participate, and was therefore focused on the children learning the ‘right’ way to participate: from a distanced position and prioritising vision to see the work as an image of something else.

The gaps, on the other hand, made it possible to participate without having to be taught how first, and the cracks provided an opening for ruptures in the ‘right’ way of participating. It is in these gaps and cracks that the opportunity for democratic participation arises, since it is here that established understandings of how to participate and who can participate are challenged (cracks) or circumvented (gaps).

In this example, the crack emerged due to the invitation to participate and through a paradoxical understanding of knowledge and art: paradoxical because the children were invited to interact with the work by lying on it, but at the same time with an understanding of art as something to be approached through looking and from an objective distance. The paradox emerged when the children were invited to participate without their participation having any impact on the view of knowledge and art. The case shows how the possibility of democratic participation emerged in the crack, but also how democratic participation can be shut down by established ideas of what art *is* and what children *can do*. Even in an educational activity developed with a focus on participation and democracy, the conditions for democratic participation are challenged. In the described case this is due to narrow understandings of what art *is* and what children *can* – for example that art is an illusion of a landscape, or that children *can* have to learn how to participate before they can participate. I therefore propose a shift from ideas of what art *is* to what art *does*.



This is a shift with implications for how we work with participation, because it does not claim that there are any ‘right’ ways to participate. It is the shift from focusing on teaching children and others how to participate, to seeing everyone as capable of participating and learning from that. In this broad understanding of participation, which also includes the use of the senses, participation is not only currently a condition of society, but also a key concept in creating a framework for art encounters. This thinking also challenges the distinctions between participation in an art discourse and participation in a democracy discourse delineated in the introduction to this publication, since using Rancière’s links between sensory perception and democracy participation is simultaneously connected to both art and democracy.

Instead, this understanding of democratic participation critiques participation practises at art museums that are based on any segmentation of visitors based on ‘giving the people what they want’. This kind of understanding of democratic participation is not about creating relevance through any kind of ‘representative’ logic, but about challenging that logic and therefore being open to diversity.

Creating the space for democratic participation at art museums means basing them on equality. In other words, we need to abandon the idea that selected population groups do not, for example, have the right cultural capital and therefore cannot *participate* until they have developed it. In my analysis, I seek to disrupt the inclusion and communication strategies of art museums that are based on social and psychological differentiations between people with the goal of making the work of museums relevant, since these participation strategies reproduce ideas of who can participate and how participation should take place.

## **Perspectives**

The analysis points to the possible scope for democratic participation in educational situations, but also offers perspectives on other museum contexts, like exhibitions. But how can a shift in focus from what art *is* to what art *does* make exhibitions at art museums more open to democratic participation?

This became a concrete challenge during the development of the

communication strategy for ARKEN's 2016 outdoor exhibition *Art in Sunshine*. The curator Camilla Jalving and I decided to conceptualise communication of the exhibition so that the different formats used did not, as is usually the case, form a single overall 'story'. Instead, we worked explicitly with how an exhibition folder, for example, complemented an art walk or workshop. At the time of writing, I do not know how the communication materials functioned in practise, so will instead conclude with some reflections on the challenges that arose and the choices we made. I will use two specific communication forms as examples – a museum folder and an 'art hunt'. At several levels the folder can be compared to the wall texts in exhibitions, since it also provides an introduction and texts about the artworks. This is how it starts:

“This guide tells you what's on and where the art is. But apart from that, this is not your usual guide. Instead of explaining the works and describing what they are about, it makes suggestions of other 'works' – a poem, a picture, a dictionary entry – that maybe have the same theme, but use it in another way. Maybe. That's up to you to decide. The only thing for certain is that the art is here – ready to be explored, connected and brought into play. There's no recipe to follow, but don't forget to add a healthy portion of curiosity.”

What the folder articulates is a shift from explaining the works and telling visitors what they are about, to providing a perspective on them through the use of other 'works'. The point of this shift is to break with an understanding of artworks as having inherent meaning. We chose a broad range of illustrations and texts (poems, dictionary entries, models and documentary photographs) that we related to the artworks. This broad range was an important way of supporting the thesis that experiencing art does not demand any specific kind of knowledge, and that new juxtapositions can generate new meanings. But in choosing to juxtapose the artworks with other 'works', how do we avoid being explanatory? And can an artwork ever be juxtaposed with something else without that juxtaposition becoming an explanation of the artwork? I actually see it as a way of shifting focus from what Irit Rogoff calls 'the good eye' to 'the

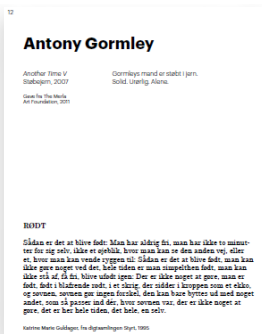


curious eye’, i.e. a shift from the idea of there being a ‘right’ way to look at art to an exploratory approach to art, but where the direction of the exploration is shaped by materiality.

We were the ones who chose the texts and images for the works, which represents a break with participation practises where user involvement is seen as the key to developing something relevant, and where focus groups are identified to represent a given group’s tastes or interests.

The juxtapositions are not intended to ‘represent’ anyone, but to present a wide range of perspectives that can maybe open up for different and new ways to explore the works. By making the selection of texts and images ourselves, we step forward as a museum with the intention of shifting focus from the good eye to the curious eye. But what happens when we at the museum shift the gaze? Does the curious eye then become the ‘new’ good eye? It is a possibility that cannot be ruled out, but I would claim that the curious eye is essentially different to the good eye, since it encourages an exploratory approach with more openness as its starting point than any single ‘right’ way, like seeing, for example.

The other communication format I will present is an ‘art hunt’, which via close-ups of the artworks provides a basis for seeing the works from new angles or in new ways.



Spread from the guide to *Art in Sunshine*, 2016



Detail from *Another Time V* by Antony Gormley, 2007

Whereas in the folder another kind of work has the potential to introduce something new, in the art hunt it is a detail or a particular perspec-

tive on the same work. In the following I use Antony Gormley's sculpture *Another Time V* (2007) as an example of museum communication using the two formats.

The two examples can be seen as two different kinds of stop at the same artwork. Where one of the stops is framed with the words "Gormley's man is cast in iron. Solid. Inviolable. Alone," and a poem by Katrine Marie Guldager, the other stop is framed by a close-up of the sculpture. The art hunt encourages a visual investigation of the materiality and details of the work, whereas the folder encourages a thematic and multimodal reading in which the text has an influence on the artwork and the artwork has an influence on the text. The work is thus activated through two different juxtapositions, and may in turn impact on them. And it is precisely the simultaneity of the two approaches to communication that can maybe create the basis for a 'crack'. The communication strategy was intended to challenge the dominant view that art has an inherent meaning that can be explained by knowledge of the artist, for example. We wanted to focus on what the work *does* rather than what it is, to return to the distinction I raised earlier. In this way the different formats – like the cracks in the educational activity – have the potential to challenge established understandings of who can participate and how people participate at art museums, and in doing so can momentarily create openings for democratic participation.

## **Lise Sattrup**

Head of ARKEN EDUCATION and visiting assistant professor at Aarhus University's School of Educational Theory and Curriculum Studies (Material Culture). She has a PhD on the democratic role of art museums from Roskilde University. At ARKEN she is responsible for the development of the museum's educational activities, as well as communication for all age groups. She was a project manager and researcher for the Danish cross-institutional exhibition and research project 'Museums and Cultural Institutions as Spaces for Citizenship', where she also co-edited the anthology *Rum for medborgerskab* ['Spaces for Citizenship', 2014].

## NOTES

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- 1 Jaques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, London: Verso, 2006.
- 2 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury, 2006.
- 3 This article is based on my PhD thesis. Lise Sattrup, "But What Should We Look For?": *An Analysis of How Art Museums Enable the Active Citizenship of Children*, Roskilde University, 2015 [<http://www.arken.dk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ph.d.-afhandling-lise-sattrup.pdf>].
- 4 Inspired by the childhood researcher Hanne Warming, I chose to investigate children's perspectives on educational activities through participant observation from a hypothetical position. I use the pronoun 'we' to underline my participatory role in the activity.
- 5 The educational activities were an integrated part of a larger cross-museum development project researching the creation of space for citizenship via participation, polyphony and self-reflection.
- 6 Hanne Warming, 'Deltagende observation' in *Teknikker i samfundsvidenskaberne*, eds. L. Fuglsang, P. Hagedorn-Rasmussen and P. Olsen, Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 2007, pp. 314-332.
- 7 Lise Sattrup, pp. 164-166.
- 8 Irit Rogoff, 'Education Actualized', *e-flux* no. 14, March 2010.
- 9 Gert J.J. Biesta, *Learning Democracy in School and Society: Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011.
- 10 According to Bent Flyvbjerg, case studies are useful in researching connections – here the connections between different situations and the possibilities children have to participate. See Bent Flyvbjerg, *Samfundsvidenskab der virker*, Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 2009.
- 11 I chose an extreme and paradigmatic case. Extreme cases are, according to Bent Flyvbjerg cited above, useful in generating more information about a given phenomenon, in this case how children's opportunities to participate differ in the three situations. In addition, the case is paradigmatic and therefore useful in showing how children's opportunities to participate are limited during stops.
- 12 Transcribed sound recording, 29.11.2013.
- 13 Transcribed sound recording, 29.11.2013.
- 14 Excerpts from transcribed sound recording, 11.12.2013.

- 15** Excerpts from transcribed sound recording, 11.12.2013.
- 16** Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Artforum*, March 2007: p. 277.
- 17** Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p 277.
- 18** For Rancière, representative democracy is undemocratic because it is based on the inequality of some people being chosen to represent others.
- 19** Rancière uses the concept of 'le partage du sensible' (most often translated as 'the distribution of the sensible') to describe the system that defines what is visible and what is not.
- 20** Jacques Rancière 'Ten Theses on Politics', *Theory & Event*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2001.
- 21** Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, London: Routledge, 1996.
- 22** This critique of the 'right' ways of participating at art museums is based on that put forward by Carol Duncan in *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London: Routledge, 1995.
- 23** Sasja D. Willumsen, Dorthe J. Rugaard and Lise Sattrup (eds.) *Rum for medborgerskab*, Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2014.
- 24** Gert J.J. Biesta, *Learning Democracy in School and Society: Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011.
- 25** Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, New York: Verso, 2009
- 26** Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel and Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*. Cambridge, Polity Press 1997 [1966]
- 27** George Hein, *Progressive Museum Practise: John Dewey and Democracy*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 1998.
- 28** Camilla Jalving, *Værk som handling: Performativitet, kunst og metode*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2011.
- 29** *Art in Sunshine* is a recurrent project at ARKEN and in 2016 consisted of nine works from the museum's collection that were placed in the area surrounding ARKEN for the summer.
- 30** Camilla Jalving and Lise Sattrup, *Kunst i Sollys*, ARKEN, 2016: 4.
- 31** Irit Rogoff, 'Studying Visual Culture' in *The Visual Culture Reader*, eds. N. Mirzoeff, 2002 and Helene Illeris, 'Museum Education and the Desiring Eye', *Synnyt/Origins* 4, 2008, pp. 1-12.

**32** Hein.

**33** The poem 'Rødt' from the poetry collection *Styrt*, 1995.

**34** <http://www.arken.dk/udstilling/kunst-i-sollys/>

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):

The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

# Publics and Commons: The Problem of Inclusion for Participation

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By Helen Graham

The article uses the concept of ‘commons’ to put forward a model for participation at the museum that rethinks ideas of access, use and participation. This is explored specifically in the context of cultural history museum conservation, arguing for an understanding of conservation as a participatory practice that prevents the object from not only ‘running out’ materially, but also running out of people’s interest.

A central purpose of museums is to enable people to use their collections in ways which do not stop others also using them. Objects are placed in glass cases. Security measures ensure that art works are not stolen. Watercolours are rotated regularly. Textiles are kept out of direct light. Touch is discouraged. To put it in terms drawn from economics, it is precisely the aim to ensure that use by one person does not preclude use by others that makes it possible for museums to describe their collections as ‘public goods’. If ‘private goods’ are *excludable*, in the sense that an owner can prevent others using their property and dispose of it at will and *rival*, in the sense that use by the owner precludes use by others, ‘public goods’ have to be non-excludable and non-rival. While museum collections are best considered ‘quasi’ public goods – as light, movement

and touch have an impact, collections are sometimes disposed, entrance fees might be charged, you might not be able to see the Mona Lisa through the crowds – it is illuminating to recognize the desire to be able to include all, and through this to act as a ‘public good’, as crucial to museums’ political form and their contemporary political legacy.



Crowd looking at the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre. Photo: Victor Grigas. 2014 [CC BY-SA 4.0]

The role of museum professionals in generating the public political form has very often been framed in terms of stewardship. The job of the museum steward has been to look after and protect the collections. Museums have done this by holding the rival and always potentially excludable material culture in trust and by deploying a variety of methods and regulations – such as those mentioned above – to make the collection as close to a ‘public good’ as they can. Yet in working ‘on behalf of’ the public and ‘in the general interest’ to achieve the public political form, more interpersonal or reciprocal relationships with specific people have tended to be sacrificed. The desire to ensure museums are for all, has meant holding at armslength specific people that want to use, to touch, to make work or to play. When read in this way, it is possible to see the participatory turn that this publication is seeking to explore, as a testa-

ment to an ongoing trend to test the legitimacy of the public political form more generally.

In the current proliferation of participatory methods, the re-emergence of the idea of ‘commons’ has been notable and has found particular currency in activism concerning urban space and privatization and digital culture and copyright. As the examples to which ‘commons’ is being applied suggest, ‘commons’ has become so widely used due to its potential to articulate not simply ‘taking part’ but more specifically a participative use of shared resources. For example, Creative Commons, the digital platform that has created off-the-peg copyright licenses, is a mechanism that enables authors to avoid defaulting to full copyright and instead to enable others not simply to view their work but to more actively use, chop up, sample, collage and re-edit. What legal scholar and founder of Creative Commons Lawrence Lessig has referred to as the remixing ‘hybrid economy’.



Ducketts Common, London Borough of Haringey, 2012. Photo: Ewan Munro [CC-BY-SA-2.0]

Users of the term ‘commons’ – even in its digital iterations – tend to cite as inspiration what Lewis Hyde calls ‘traditional English commons’: “lands held collectively by the residents of parish or village: the fields, pastures, streams, and woods that a number of people [...] had a right to use in ways organized and regulated by custom.”



The crucial words in Hyde's definition are 'a number of people'. Not everybody. Not a public. This has been reemphasized by other key theorists of the networked and digital commons. In Lessig's terms, "the commons is a resource to which anyone *within the relevant community* has a right without obtaining the permission of anyone else." Or as Yochai Benkler puts it,

"The salient characteristic of commons, as opposed to property, is that no single person has exclusive control over the use and disposition of any particular resource in the commons. Instead, resources governed by commons may be used or disposed of by *anyone among some (more or less well-defined) number of persons*, under rules that may range from "anything goes" to quite crisply articulated formal rules that are effectively enforced."

When thought of in terms of museums and their collections, a participatory commons approach to their rival resources is clearly of use. It has the very real potential to recognize certain 'relevant communities' as active participants in using and managing specific objects and collections. Yet, crucially, thinking museums-as-commons also clearly calls into question the fragile achievements of museums as a public political form. The very idea of commons – use by a defined number of people – requires generating inclusion of some, 'the relevant communities', through excluding others from the same rights of use. This article will explore how the political forms of public and commons might be re-staged in contemporary museum practice. How might museums act as both commons and (quasi) public goods? One line of argument – developed through a participatory research project with people who very much wanted to actively use the collections in question – will be that museums need to reclaim the legitimacy of commons 'use' and reread ideas of public 'access' through a living and dynamic reading of collections 'conservation'. As such a key question for community participation in museums today seems to be: How might we imagine productively generating inequalities of *use* of collections – collections as commons – while retaining equalities of *public access*?

### **Use to access: From Commons to Public**

Commons are usually theorized with reference to Garrett Hardin's 1968 highly influential article 'Tragedy of the commons'. Hardin argues that we live in a world of finite resources and if all 'men' [sic] are 'rational actors' they can be expected to want to 'maximize their gain'. As population growth continues, Hardin reasons, common use of land can no longer stand and other forms of management are required. Hardin deploys the examples of US National Parks and of cattle grazing. In terms of cattle grazing – what Hardin refers to as 'the herdsman's commons' – a rational actor economic approach is deployed where the only course of action for farmers to take is to constantly increase the size of their herd: "ruin is the destination towards which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in commons brings ruin to all." In terms of National Parks – an example with much in common with museums – Hardin diagnoses that being 'open to all, without limits' sees visitors also "grow without limit." As a result, Hardin argues, "the values that visitors seek in the parks are steadily eroded." Hardin argues that both the Herdsman's Commons and the National Parks fail to manage their resources effectively because they are neither fully private nor public goods. Yet Hardin's argument ignores that the history of National Parks, museums and heritage generally has been about making rival resources of various kinds into public goods through transforming *use* into *use-as-access*. For example, a museum without an entrance fee transforms rival material culture into public goods through the use of display cases and climate-controlled conditions. Access is secured through sight. Anyone (who is sighted) can see the object without damaging it or precluding others from doing the same so, it could be said, a (quasi) public good is generated. In an outdoors context, the codes of behaviour such as the Countryside Code are another mechanism for transforming rival into (quasi) non-rival goods. You are encouraged to use stone paths that will degrade more slowly and prevent muddy patches. You are supposed to not leave rubbish. You are supposed to not take wood from the forest or pebbles from the beach. In the famous maxim, you are supposed to 'take only memories, leave only footprints'. Both offer *access as a form*

*of use* rather than *use* in the traditional ‘commons’ sense of the term. To make the object available to touch – or the woods to be used for the old common right of estovers (to pick up firewood) – would tip it back from being a public good to being rival. The management of use-as-access has offered remarkable successes. The techniques challenge Hardin’s assumption by suggesting that if people – even many people – are careful when they visit the US National Parks, then the parks can be for anyone. If we all consent not to touch or use museum collections and access them through sight, then all visitors can. However, these techniques deployed to solve the problem of heritage as rival and excludable create other equally significant problems. Making rival resources quasi-public goods through use-as-access requires that art, culture or nature are held at arms length so that all can potentially be included and have equal and non-excludable access. This has certainly become a more problematic dynamic as museums have sought to be more participatory.

### **No longer scarce and rival?:**

#### **From Public and Commons to *Common***

Needless to say, since its publication in 1968 many people have taken issue with Hardin’s analysis. For example, David Harvey has pointed out that if the cattle were also owned collectively rather than privately then the very issue Hardin outlines in relation to the Herdsman’s Commons would simply not arise. However, one recent way in which Hardin’s ‘tragedy of the commons’ thesis has been challenged is to question whether the rivalry and scarcity of resource – which underpin the political logics of Hardin’s analysis – apply to today’s dominant forms of economic and political production. Marxist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have sought to reimagine ‘commons’. Fundamental to their argument is a rereading of ‘commons’ in the light of the post-Fordist economic shift from mass production of material goods to a greater emphasis on the production of information, knowledge, affects, experience and relationships. Hardt and Negri argue the results of capitalism are increasingly not material but immaterial and take “common forms” which are “difficult to corral as private property.” While Hardt and Negri recognize that expropriation and enclosure remain key

ways in which contemporary capitalism operates, they emphasize the non-rivalry of these common forms – like that of *common* sense and *common* knowledge – rather than ‘commons’ in ‘the English sense’, bound up with the logics of scarcity. In the case of museum collections, Hardt and Negri’s argument finds some productive connections with recent thinking which has argued that heritage is best thought of as a process not a thing and that, in Laurajane Smith’s terms, ‘all heritage is intangible’ because it is primarily about what we value. As such, when brought into a museological context, Hardt and Negri make room for an argument that we need not focus so much on the scarcity of materiality culture but focus on the common ideas, knowledge and social relations that can be generated from use-as-access.

For Hardt and Negri this ‘common’ – that is being constantly reproduced – is crucial because it also leads to alternative political possibilities which allow them to take issue not only with private forms of management but also the public political form. Hardt and Negri identify a link between the Roman idea of *Res Publica*, the root of the word ‘republic’, and private property. Drawing on the political wranglings which followed both the American and French revolutions, they argue that “the concept of property and the defense of property remain the foundation of every modern political constitution.” They then draw a line between the relationship between ‘public’ and certain forms of representational government which seek to transform, what was often known in early modern political tracts as ‘the multitude’ as a collection of individual people (Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ‘will of all’), into ‘a people’ (or Rousseau’s ‘general will’). Through this conflation of property with the state and the state with ‘the people’, “the concepts of public goods and services were developed in the light of a legal theory that considered the public as patrimony of the state and the principle of general interest as an attribute of sovereignty.” Nineteenth-century European national and civic museums emerged from this political move which linked institutional forms of ownership and governance on behalf of the ‘general’ or ‘public’ interest. In the place of ‘the public’ – bound to property and state – Hardt and Negri seek to cultivate, through the capacities of post-Fordist economy, the premodern idea of ‘multitude’. As such the political domain of the

multitude is neither property nor the state but rather: a new form of sovereignty, a democratic sovereignty (or, more precisely, a form of sovereignty which replaces sovereignty) in which social singularities control through their own biopolitical activity those goods and services that allow for the reproduction of the multitude itself. This would constitute a passage from *Res-publica* to *Res-communis*.

Evoking the idea of participatory democracy and self-organizing management of the common resource, they ask:

“How can people associate closely together in the common and participate directly in democratic decision making? How can the multitude become prince of the institutions of the common in a way that reinvents and realizes democracy? [...] Every social function regulated by the state that could be equally well managed in common should be transferred to common hands.”

The moves Hardt and Negri have made are compelling; that the crucial insight that new economic forms, affective labour and the precarity of work and housing, also make for common participative management. Or, to put it another way, because economic production is immaterial and nonrival there is less requirement for either private property forms or state forms of government. But it does seem that in speaking of common not commons Hardt and Negri side step the hard questions we face in the 21st century: the management of material resources at worldwide scale. They also – significantly for my purposes here – effectively elide ‘common’ with public good in the economic sense and, through this, the productive distinction between commons and public as political forms are lost.

The relationship between rival materiality, scale in terms of number of people involved and forms of governance is the crucial issue at stake in the difference between commons and public political forms. Harvey notes a certain squeamishness about scale in the debates about contemporary commons, “to avoid the implication that some sort of nested hierarchical arrangements might be necessary, the question of how to manage the commons at large as opposed to small scales ... tends to be evaded.”

In her ground breaking book *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Elinor Ostrom recognizes that commons cannot be free-for-alls, exist without clear boundaries, decision-making structures and modes of regulation. Ostrom here identifies some key principles:

- 1 Clearly defined boundaries
- 2 Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions
- 3 Collective-choice arrangements allowing for the participation of most of the appropriators in the decision-making process.
- 4 Effective monitoring by monitors who are part of or accountable to the appropriators
- 5 Graduated sanctions for appropriators who do not respect community rules
- 6 Conflict-resolution mechanisms which are cheap and easy of access
- 7 Minimal recognition of rights to organize (e.g. by the government)
- 8 In case of larger CPRs: Organisation in the form of multiple layers of nested enterprises, with small, local CPRs at their bases.

Notable here is the need for the clarity of who is inside and outside the commons, clear rules and their regulation with sanctions, and recognition of the commons from other forms of larger scale government forms. Through these principles Harvey sees Ostrom as indicating – if not entirely delivering – a way of navigating the exclusion of commons and with larger-scale constituencies:

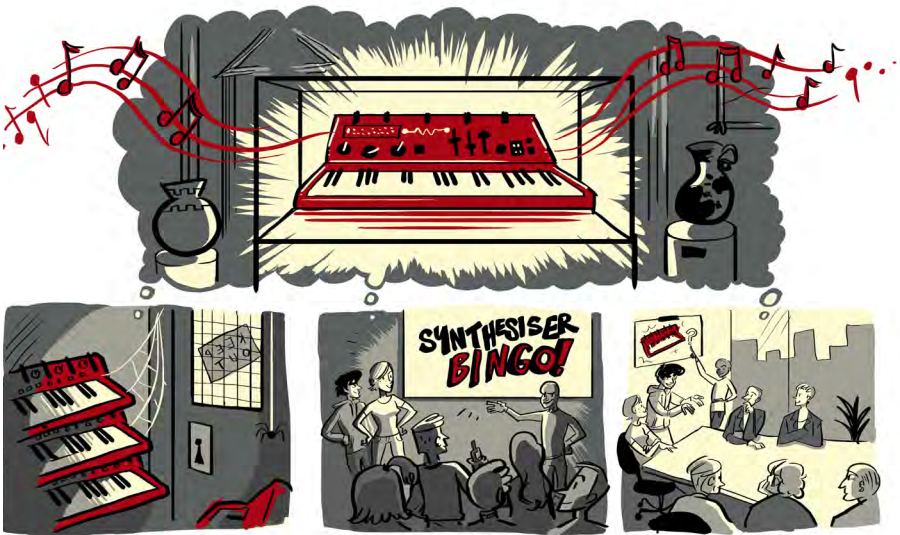
“The ‘rich mix’ of instrumentalities’ that Elinor Ostrom begins to identify – not only public and private, but collective and associational, nested, hierarchical and horizontal, exclusionary and open – will all have a key role to play in finding ways to organize production, distribution, exchange, and consumption to meet human wants and needs on an anti-capitalist basis.”

This debate lays the way for approaches in museums governance where commons, managed by a community with exclusionary *use* of rival

resources, might be interrelated with public forms of open, inclusive, non-rival information and access-orientated modes of management.

### **Restaging Publics and Commons**

My desire to understand better the differences between public and participatory political forms comes from having worked on co-production projects in and with museums. My first chance to fully explore the genealogies and potentials of the differences came through a recent participation research project. Between 2013 and 2015 I was part of a collaboratively designed and implemented research project ‘How should heritage decisions be made?’ which involved a team of us – including researchers, practitioners, funders and community activists – working together to explore participatory approaches to heritage and its governance. One of our strands of work was based at the Science Museum in the UK – coordinated by Tim Boon, Head of Research and Public History – and focused on how decisions about what to collect can be made collectively



At the Science Museum a group of curators, researchers, musicians, composers and fans gathered to advise the museum on how to expand their electronic music collection. Yet the discussion always came back to the question: What is the purpose of collecting if it means the instruments stop being used for their intended purpose – to make music?

with knowledgeable communities. In conceiving the project we hoped we could use a relatively practical task, exploring what the Science Museum should collect in order to enhance its electronic music collection, as a way of also exploring the conceptual dynamics of the task. To do this we worked with a group of composers, musicians, researchers and fans: Jean-Phillipe Calvin, Composer and Researcher, Richard Courtney, a researcher based in Management Studies, University of Leicester, David Robinson, Technical Editor and Musician, John Stanley, Writer and Electronic Musician and Martin Swan, Musician and Educator. As we started to explore the ostensible question – what is already in the Science Museum collections and what might be added – the discussion led very quickly to a more fundamental discussion, with the group questioning the purpose of collecting and ‘preservation’. As John Stanley, one of the group put it in our final project booklet:

“I ended up feeling very strongly that some of the objects in the Science Museum stores, particularly the rarer synthesizers, needed to be powered on again. The longer they sit in the dark with the capacitors slowly failing, the less likely they were to ever make sound again, and ultimately, the less meaning could be assigned to them.”

We explored the arguments – introduced above – that the Science Museums has tended to make against turning the synths on and letting them be played. The old ‘public good’ argument that if everyone is not able to touch it without significant damage then no one should and that use of the object now should not prevent access to people in the future. To put it another way, in the context of museum collections, the logic of scarcity that Hardt and Negri are keen to relegate to past forms of production still very much persists.

While the idea of ‘commons’ has only rarely been actively applied in a museum and heritage context, it is of course the case that the word ‘community’ – especially in the context of participatory practice – has been widely deployed for many decades now. Yet while now in very common usage in job titles and as a descriptor for projects and programmes, the full implications of the political differences between



‘community’ and ‘public’ are not always apparent. The etymology of community share a root with ‘common’ and ‘commons’. In Latin the words community / commons / common land / in common derives from *communis*. *Communis* is made up of *com*, which means ‘together’ and *munis*, which means ‘under obligation’. Specifically – in the case of community – this means being *together* in a way which draws those included into an *obligation to each other*.

It is therefore worth noting how different the political form of community is from other very widely used terms in museum practice such as Visitor, Audience and Public. To draw out the differences. *Visitor*, tends to evoke the idea of people who are welcome to come as long as they eventually leave. It is not their place to make ‘home’ or to actively use anything without permission. *Audience*, is the term often used for people watching or visiting a show. There is a strong sense of a shared moment – you are an audience with others – yet the shared moment is often imagined as ending with the performance. The idea of a *public* in Michael Warner’s terms, public is never specific people but rather a necessarily abstract idea, it is a “social totality” and a “relation between strangers.” None of these terms – visitors, audience, nor public – imply a sense of *holding something* in common. Nor do they imply a thoroughgoing *sense of obligation* to each other (beyond the usual obligations of use of public space). Rather you can see the deployment of ideas of publics, audiences and visitors as the social imaginaries that have enabled museums to produce themselves as quasi-public goods. The collections can only be public goods if people agree to see themselves as members of the public and as visitors. This is why the turn towards ‘community participatory’ has both been so desired – many people do not want to be treated as visitors to their own cultures and heritages – but also why seeking to practice community participation has been no simple or straightforward political task for museums.

The urgency of this challenge for museums – to find better ways of relating communities and publics – was beautifully articulated during the Science Museum co-collecting project. Another of the co-collecting team Martin Swan, who is a musician and educator, suggested that what the museum needed was ‘a community’ around the electronic music collec-

tion which could put “a curatorial head on” and would actively ‘look for’ items for the collections. As with John’s immediate feeling that the synths should be powered on, Martin shows that the very possibilities of developing a community around the collection depended on a more flexible approach to conservation. Martin argued that the problem is that

“as soon as you stop playing them, synths start to decay. They become less and less the thing that made them worth collecting. As they become less and less viable as instruments, they also become less and less interesting to the geeks, the very people who would want to enthuse about the objects to other people. And these are also the people who could maintain them and could get them going again.”

Here Martin offers a very full evocation of the common in Hardt and Negri’s terms – social processes of culture and heritage – but this is intrinsically linked to the need to use material, rival resources. At the same time Martin’s words indicate that if you add ideas of ‘community’ to ideas of ‘conservation’ some quite different political potentials are offered. While it is true that dictionary definitions of conservation often fall back on the idea of preservation as ‘keeping unaltered’ in their explanations, etymologies of conservation also contain other meanings: ‘to limit how much of a resource you use’, ‘wise use’ [not *no use*; *wise use*] and ‘to keep something from running out’.

In his comments quoted above Martin pointed to the ways it might be possible to reimagine what it might be for something to be ‘preserved’: specifically questioning what is the ‘*it*’ being sustained. The synths were collected for a specific reason (they are electronic musical instruments) which the methods of their preservation (by no longer being used) itself degrades. Also, more powerfully, the very community that enthuses about the collections themselves lose interest as the objects are no longer allowed to be what originally gave them purpose. This brings out the different nuances offered by the richer connotations of ‘conservation’, not as ‘keeping unaltered’ but as ‘not running out’. Martin comments reframes ‘running out’. Instead of conservation meaning the work of preventing running out materially – as in being broken or degraded –

conservation could mean the prevention of running out framed both materially and socially, using the collections enough to prevent damage but also enough to prevent a *running out* of people's interest. This material-social practice seems like a very good description of what ideas of commons might offer to museums.

Community participation in a commons requires exclusions. The synths cannot be on open display in the gallery – being banged and played – without being ruined, in Hardin's sense. If they were to be on display they would need to be made into quasi-public goods using the usual means of glass cases and regulation of touch. Yet these exclusions can create more meaningful bounded inclusions for communities of people to actively use collections, people who have something to bring and to share. What we need to do in order to *conserve well* – to stop things running out *materially-socially* – is some kind of mix between use and management of collections by groups of people that are the collection's community *with* some form of accountability to a wider public. To describe this in terms of my feelings as I was standing in the Science Museum's stores with the musicians, composers and fans; I don't need to use or play the synths, I am happy to be 'a visitor' with only *use-as-access* to the Science Museum's electronic music collection. However, it is also very clear that exhibitions and programmes about electronic music for the wider public as visitors will be much better if they are generated by those for whom those things are *in use* vibrant and active parts of their lives. A public purpose of access for anyone can be renewed through the necessarily exclusive nature of commons use.

### **Constructing a rich mix: Directions for museum practice**

Ostrom indicates the need for a 'rich mix' of instrumentalities in governance of commons. As discussed above her principles include a clear consistency, boundaries of resources, decision-making structures to agree use and regulations of use. To develop this thinking a bit further, when thinking of museums and collections we might think of a specific community of people who take on the responsibility of managing the collection and in return have the right to put that collection to use (powering on the synthesizers). This could be thought of like any membership or-

ganization (co-operatives/ clubs) where people have to join and play an active role in the maintenance of the community. The rights to use might be regulated through collectively agreed rules (the class Annual General Meeting would for a membership organization be a way of doing this) and monitored by the group. As part of the collective decision-making process, a method for addressing conflict would need to be built in. One of Ostrom's principles – the seventh – is: 'minimal recognition of rights to organize'. I think this is where the public dimensions of the political form and governance form of museums needs to be brought in. The museum – in making a commitment to a participatory and community-led management of collections as commons – would need to recognize the rights to organise of the commons community. Yet, in turn, one of the conditions of the community and commons would need to be a commitment to public access to the objects and to the new knowledge and means of interpretation generated. As part of this governance, the museum structures might need to play a role in supporting any conflict resolution that arises and might, at times, need to assert public rights to access as part of the decision-making processes.

What I have offered here is a very simple sketching of a 'nested form' of governance for museums, one which enables active participation in collections as commons and renews museums' status as a 'public goods'. Achieving this requires a shift which sees the material and the social as fully interconnected in the processes of heritage. Part of this is a re-reading the aims of 'conservation' materially-socially to enable 'wise use' and 'not-running-out', as we have here. In a museums context, commons might be read as precisely this material-social form.

When I have shared these ideas in presentations I'm very often asked about how it might be ensured that the participatory commons do not become too closed? Or whose responsibility it is to calibrate the relationship between exclusive and inclusive forms? While some of this can be sketched out on the page, through the delineation of political logics, much of this will be down to how such ideas are enacted and reformed through practice and experimentation. There are many experiments underway. From enthusiasts working with museums to keep industrial collections working to figuring art galleries as new places for exchange.

To close with Harvey once more: “This rich mix is not given, but has to be constructed.”

## **Helen Graham**

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## NOTES

- 1 This has been noted and critiqued in museum and heritage studies: Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology*, London: Duckworth, 2009, 11; Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 278, 286.
- 2 Helen Graham, ‘The ‘co’ in co-production: Museums, community participation and Science and Technology Studies’, *Science Museum Group Journal*, 2016, p. 5.
- 3 For example, Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making art and commerce in the hybrid economy*, London: Bloomsbury, 2008; Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. Available at: <http://www.benkler.org/wonchapters.html>; David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London: Verso, 2012.
- 4 Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making art and commerce in the hybrid economy*, London: Bloomsbury, 2008.
- 5 Lewis Hyde, *Common as Air: Revolution, Art and Ownership*, London: Union Books, 2010, pp. 26-27.
- 6 Lawrence Lessig, *The Future of Ideas: The fate of the commons in a connected world*,

New York: Random House, pp. 19-20. My emphasis.

**7** Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 61. My emphasis.

**8** Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, 13 December, 1968: 1244.

**9** Hardin, p. 1244.

**10** Hardin, 1245.

**11** For example, the updated UK Countryside Code released in 2004 includes: "Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home" and "Consider other people". Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code> (last accessed 18.01.17)

**12** The origin of this phrase is disputed but it is widely used in US National Parks as part of the 'Leave No Trace' ethos. A key aspects of this is: "4. Leave What You Find. All plants, animals, rocks, and artefacts are protected in Shenandoah National Park. Preserve the sense of discovery for others by leaving all natural and cultural artefacts as you find them. Take pictures, write poetry, or sketch to help you remember what you discover here." Available at: <https://lnt.org/>

**13** David Harvey, 'The Future of the Commons', *Radical History Review*, 109, Winter 2011: 101.

**14** As Jeremy Gilbert has put it, "the classic model of the post-Fordist enterprise is [...] characterized by flat management, dynamic networking and valorization of creativity amongst staff at all levels." Jeremy Gilbert, *Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism*, London: Pluto, 2014, p. 157.

**15** Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 138, 136.

**16** Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, pp. 137-8.

**17** David C. Harvey (2001) 'Heritage pasts and heritage presents: Temporality, meaning and the scope of heritage studies', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7(4): pp. 319-338; Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 3, 56, 57.

**18** Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, p. 15.

**19** Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, London: Penguin, 2005

**20** Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, p. 206.

**21** Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, p. 206.

- 22** Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration*, New York: Argo Navis Author Services, pp. 44, 79.
- 23** In his engagement with *Commonwealth*, Harvey's suggests that scarcity cannot be wished away quite that easily: "But there is one serious problem with all this. While the form of the common is not subject to the logic of scarcity, it is subject to the logic of debasement and enclosure. And it is hard to see how or why it is that the singularities that compose the multitude would by definition support rather than degrade, corrupt to debase the common that is the city, the common that is the world of affects, signs, information and codes." David Harvey, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Commonwealth: An Exchange', *Artform*, November 2009: p. 261.
- 24** David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London: Verso, pp. 2012, 69.
- 25** Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990, p. 90.
- 26** Ostrom, p. 90.
- 27** Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, p. 87.
- 28** The Heritage Decisions team are: Martin Bashforth, Mike Benson, Tim Boon, Lianne Brigham, Richard Brigham, Karen Brookfield, Peter Brown, Danny Callaghan, Jean-Phillipe Calvin, Richard Courtney, Kathy Cremin, Paul Furness, Helen Graham, Alex Hale, Paddy Hodgkiss, John Lawson, Rebecca Madgin, Paul Manners, David Robinson, John Stanley, Martin Swan, Jennifer Timothy, Rachael Turner. The project website is: <http://heritagedecisions.leeds.ac.uk/>
- 29** Heritage Decisions, *How should heritage decisions be made?: Increasing participation from where you are?*, 2015, available [heritagedecisions@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:heritagedecisions@leeds.ac.uk)
- 30** A recent example is: Henric Benesch, Feras Hammami, Ingrid Holmberg and Evren Uzer, *Heritage as Common(s) Common(s) as Heritage*, Gothenburg: Makadam, 2015.
- 31** Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven Levine, *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, Washington DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 1992; Sharon Watson, ed., *Museums and their Communities*, Routledge: London, 2007; Vic Golding and Wayne Modest, *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- 32** Michael Warner 'Publics and Counterpublics', *Public Culture* 14 (1), 2002: p. 55.
- 33** Heritage Decisions, *How should heritage decisions be made?: Increasing participation from where you are?*, 2015, available [heritagedecisions@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:heritagedecisions@leeds.ac.uk)
- 34** Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, p. 87.

*ARKEN Bulletin*, vol. 7 (2017):  
The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum

ISSN 1602-9402

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*ARKEN Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed research journal  
published by ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark